WOMEN IN GRECO-ROMAN JEWISH NOVELS (300 BCE-100 CE)

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By KATHARINE L. FITZGERALD, B.A., M.A.

A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy

McMaster University DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (2023) Hamilton, Ontario (Religious Studies)

TITLE: Women in Greco-Roman Jewish Novels (300 BCE-100 CE)

AUTHOR: Katharine L. Fitzgerald, B.A. (Nazareth College), M.A. (Saint Bernard's School of Theology and Ministry)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. Hanna Tervanotko

NUMBER OF PAGES: xii + 268

LAY ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyzes the portrayal of women in Jewish novels of the Greco-Roman period (300 BCE-100CE): *Greek Esther, Judith, Susanna,* and *Aseneth*. I question how women's representation in the Jewish novels can inform scholarship on how authors depicted Jewishness during this period. The analysis of women is organized around four categories of Jewishness centered on the representation of the female protagonists and their relationships in the narratives: 1) the representation of women's sexuality, 2) the preservation of foodways, 3) kinship ties, and 4) the role of the protagonist in their broader Jewish community. This dissertation contributes to the scholarly discussion by providing a systematic examination of depictions of Jewish women found in these texts and demonstrates that the authors of the Jewish novels depict women playing active roles in maintaining and defining Jewishness.

ABSTRACT

My dissertation analyzes the portrayal of women in Jewish novels of the Greco-Roman period (300 BCE-100CE): *Greek Esther, Judith, Susanna,* and *Aseneth*. During the Greco-Roman period, the female heroine frequently became the focus in Jewish novels. This innovation coincides with a concern over maintaining Jewishness. Several areas surrounding the maintenance of social identity appear in the Jewish novels, including dietary restrictions and the preservation of the family. Although a great deal of literature exists regarding the above texts, there are currently no systematic examinations of the portrayal of women's Jewishness in regards to the Jewish novels. My dissertation examines the portrayal of women in the Jewish novels through a literary critical approach and questions how their representation can inform scholarship on how authors depicted Jewishness during this period. This dissertation treats the Jewish novels collectively and contributes to the scholarly discussion with a systematic examination of depictions of Jewish women in these texts.

Following a brief introduction in Chapter 1, where I provide an overview and assessment of earlier treatments on the Jewish novels and the topics of women and Jewishness, Chapters 2 through 5 examine the portrayal of women in the Jewish novels. These chapters are organized around four distinct aspects of Jewishness which center on the representation of the female protagonists and their relationships in the narratives: 1) the representation of women's sexuality, 2) the preservation of foodways, 3) kinship ties, and 4) the role of the protagonist in their Jewish community. In Chapter 6, I use a comparative approach to examine the depiction of women's Jewishness in the novels, which demonstrates women's active roles in maintaining and defining Jewishness. Chapter 7 concludes the dissertation with a summary and recommendations for future work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is the culmination of my ever-evolving interest in the people and texts of the Jewish Late Second Temple period. When I began my studies at McMaster University, I had only a vague idea about continuing my studies on Paul and Jewishness in antiquity. My interests in ancient Jewish women developed when I was assigned as a TA for Hanna Tervanotko's "Women in the Biblical Tradition" course (Fall 2017). It was here that I discovered the wonderful and often mysterious world of Jewish women of antiquity. I have yet to lose this interest and continue to be amazed at both what we do and do not know about women in antiquity.

It goes without saying – but I will say it anyways – how thoroughly indebted I am to my wonderful supervisor and committee. Hanna Tervanotko continues to be my mentor and role-model. She was (and is!) my cheerleader and supporter, always going to bat for me. I will be forever thankful that you came to McMaster. I am also beyond grateful for Matthew Thiessen and Sara Parks, both of which provided thoughtful comments and insights on this project. I would not have been able to complete this dissertation without your endless support and guidance. It has been a great joy to work with each of you during my time at McMaster.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to express my profound appreciation for my husband, son, and daughter. You were my light during the darkest days of the COVID-19 pandemic, my greatest supporters, and biggest fans. This dissertation would not have been possible without the selfless support of Andrew, my husband and best friend, who worked tirelessly to support our family. This dissertation is for all the little girls out there who dream of bigger and better things – taking the less traveled path really does make all the difference.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations of primary sources follow those in the SBL Handbook of Style, 2nd ed. For all other abbreviations, see below:

AABNER	Advances in Ancient, Biblical, and Near Eastern Research
AB	Anchor Bible
AGJU	Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
ALGHJ	Arbeiten zur Literatur und Geschichte des hellenistischen Judentums
ANES	*Ancient Near Eastern Studies*
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BEATAJ	Beitrage zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentums
BibInt	*Biblical Interpretation*
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
BLS	Bible and Literature Series
BN	*Biblische Notizen*
BTB	*Biblical Theology Bulletin*
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CurBR	*Currents in Biblical Research*
CEJL	Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature
ChrLit	*Christianity and Literature*
DCLS	Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Studies
EJL	Early Judaism and Its Literature
ESCJ	Studies in Christianity and Judaism

FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible
FJB	*Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge*
HBAI	*Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel*
HCS	Hellenistic Culture and Society
HThKAT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
HvTSt	*Hervormde teologiese studies*
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
JAAR	*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*
JAJ	*Journal of Ancient Judaism*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JFSR	*Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*
JHebS	*Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*
JIBS	*Journal for Interdisciplinary Biblical Studies*
JSHRZ	Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit
JSJ	*Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods*
JSJSup	Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods Supplement Series
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JSP	*Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha*

JSPSup	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
LCBI	Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation
LHBOTS	The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LSTS	The Library of Second Temple Studies
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
OTE	*Old Testament Essays*
PVTG	Pseudepigrapha Veteris Testamenti Graece
ResQ	*Restoration Quarterly*
RB	*Revue biblique*
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SCI	Scripta Classica Israelica
ScrB	*Scripture Bulletin*
SCS	Septuagint and cognate studies series
StPB	Studia Post-biblica
SVT	Supplements to the Vetus Testamentum
SVTP	Studia in Veteris Testamenti Pseudepigraphica
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WGRWSup	Writings from the Greco-Roman World Supplement Series
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

In the present study, I analyze the portrayal of female protagonists in Jewish novels of the Hellenistic age[1] (300 BCE–100 CE) and question how these representations of women can further inform scholarship on how ancient authors depicted Jewishness during this period. During the Hellenistic period, the female heroine frequently became the focus in Jewish novels. Through an analysis of the portrayal of the female protagonists and their role in various aspects of Jewishness, I conclude that the Jewish novels present both a varied and complex understanding of women's roles in defining and maintaining Jewishness during the Hellenistic age.

Shaye J.D. Cohen first coined the term Jewishness in *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties*. Cohen's thesis that Jewishness is a construct of the mind, being both fluid and thereby escaping simple definition, serves as a principle of the present study.[2] The use of the term "Jewishness" is a conscious choice to not use the more commonly used term "Jewish identity" which implies there was a singular monolithic way of being Jewish in antiquity.[3] This dissertation makes this distinction to denote the complexity of Jewish expression and belief, as well as to signify the instability of "Jewishness." Rather than being a stable category, Jewishness was a flexible and adaptable category.

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[1] I use the term Hellenistic age/era/period, here and elsewhere, to point to the shared intellectual heritage of texts written during this period. In the scholarship of Jewish literature, scholars commonly refer to this period as the late Second Temple period. I utilize the term "Hellenistic" to note that these texts interact more broadly with foreign culture, particularly Hellenistic culture, and grapple with Jewishness in the context of the Hellenistic world. I also assume that the Hellenistic era continued culturally and intellectually from the beginning of the fourth century BCE through at least the first century CE.

[2] Shaye J.D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties*, HCS 31 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 25–68. See also the discussion on Jewishness in Cecilia Wassen, "The Jewishness of Jesus and ritual purity," *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 27 (2016): 11–36. Wassen argues that "Jewish identity is not a stable category, but changes from the viewpoint of different groups" (18).

[3] E.P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief. 63 BCE–66CE* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), which proposes a "common Judaism," continues to influence works on ancient Judaism and the study of Jewishness. See for example, Wayne O. McCready and Adele Reinhartz, eds., *Common Judaism: Explorations in Second-Temple Judaism* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008).

The present study focuses on the following texts: *Greek Esther* (Add Esth), *Judith* (Jdt), *Susanna* (Sus), and *Aseneth* (Asen.). This dissertation follows the standard forms for these texts found in the SBL Handbook, with the exception that I italicize their titles when I refer to the text. I have done this to differentiate between the narrative and the protagonist. Furthermore, *Susanna* is more commonly known as Susanna and the Elders and *Aseneth* is traditionally known as Joseph and Aseneth. I, following scholars such as Patricia D. Ahearne-Kroll, use the title *Aseneth* rather than the traditional one because the text focuses on the female protagonist rather than on Joseph.[4]

I have organized my analysis of the portrayal of the female protagonists around four categories which aim to bridge the gap between scholarly discussions on Jewishness, on the one hand, and gender and women's studies in ancient Judaism, on the other. In examining the depictions of women in these texts, I focus on four distinct ways in which the authors portray female protagonists negotiating Jewishness: 1) the preservation of eating customs through foodways, 2) the representation of women's sexuality, 3) the portrayal of kinship ties, and 4) the role of the protagonist in the broader Jewish community as portrayed in each text. I use the term foodways to denote more than eating practices. Foodways encompasses eating habits, practices, diet, and other behaviors associated with food and eating, as well as the use of these behaviors in the conception of membership both socially and culturally. Foodways refers to "the connection between food-related behavior and patterns of membership in cultural community, group and society… In [more] specific usage, 'foodways' refers to those food-related behaviors that are believed to identify the primary cultural attributes of an individual or group of individuals."[5]

[4] See for example, Patricia D. Ahearne-Kroll, *Aseneth of Egypt: The Composition of a Jewish Narrative* (Atlanta, Georgia: SBL Press, 2020).

[5] See the discussion in Solomon H. Katz and William Woys Weaver, "Foodways," in *Encyclopedia of Food and Food Culture, V. 2: Food Production to Nuts*, Scribner Library of Daily Life (New York: Scribner, 2003), 29.

While a great deal of literature has focused on the above texts, no studies have systematically considered this collection in the scholarly conversation regarding depictions of Jewishness. My dissertation, by treating these works collectively, contributes to the scholarly discussion by examining the way in which the Jewish novels depict women's roles in defining and maintaining Jewishness.

1.1 Scholarly Context

The topic of Jewishness has been the subject of considerable research, but as of yet such scholarship has not adequately dealt with Jewishness and *women*. There appears to be a divide – or lacuna if you will – between scholarship that focuses on the study of Jewishness and more specific gender studies.[6] My study aims to bridge these two areas of scholarship by examining the portrayal of Jewish women in the novels listed above. As such, this study builds on previous research by examining aspects of Jewishness in early Jewish literature in a way that is inclusive of women.

The study of Jewishness is rich and varied. Large scale studies relating to the concept of Jewishness flourished in recent decades, many noting the varied ways in which Jews from diverse locations and contexts identified as Jewish.[7] Many of these studies have sought to

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See also the work of Carol Meyers (*Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1991]) who has also written extensively on food practices and women. For another example of the usage of the term "foodways" see Avery Robinson, "Kugel and Pudding: Tasting Jewish American Foodways" (MA thesis, The Horace H. Rackham School for Graduate Studies of the University of Michigan, 2014).

[6] Although the present examination focuses on women, this study has implications for masculine studies as well, since much of the approach taken could also be adapted to examine similar aspects of Jewishness in male characters.

[7] See for example, John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE–117 CE)* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1996); Shaye J.D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 3rd ed. (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014); Peter Schäfer, *The History of the Jews in the Greco-Roman World: The Jews of Palestine from Alexander the Great to the Arab Conquest*, rev. ed. (London: Routledge, 2003); Martin Hengel, *Jews, Greeks and Barbarians: Aspects of the Hellenization of Judaism in the Pre-Christian Period* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980); Sanders, *Judaism*; Seth Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 BCE to 640 CE* (Princeton University Press, 2001); John J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora*, 2nd ed., The Biblical Resource Series (Grand Rapids, MI:

complicate and elucidate the modern constructs and concepts traditionally used in scholarship to describe Jews and their religious practices in antiquity. For example, scholarship has reconsidered the use of "Judaism" to describe the beliefs and practices ascribed to Jews of antiquity, with many now noting the problematic use of modern religious categories on religious practices of ancient peoples.[8] Moreover, many scholars have moved away from a unified view of "Judaism" in the ancient world, noting geographical and historical differences.[9] There has also been a drastic reevaluation of the use of "Jew" in scholarship, leading to what Adele Reinhartz has called the "vanishing Jews of antiquity."[10]

Eerdmans, 2000); Lester L. Grabbe, *History of the Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple Period 2: The Coming of the Greeks: The Early Hellenistic Period (335–175 BCE)*, LSTS 68 (London: T&T Clark International, 2008); Martin Goodman, *Judaism in the Roman World: Collected Essays*, Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 66 (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Erich S. Gruen, *The Construct of Identity in Hellenistic Judaism: Essays on Early Jewish Literature and History*, DCLS 29 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016).

[8] More recent scholarship has approached the subject by making distinctions between race, ethnicity, and cultural identity. For example, see Gruen, *The Construct of Identity*, 7–75, who views Hellenistic Judaism as a cultural identity. Whereas Cohen (*The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 69–106) discusses the interplay of Jewishness as an ethnic, political, geographical, cultural, and religious identity. Cohen's work illustrates the complex relationship between these various facets of Jewishness. See also Shaye J. D. Cohen, "Religion, Ethnicity, and 'Hellenism' in the Emergence of Jewish Identity in Maccabean Palestine," in *Religion and Religious Practice in the Seleucid Kingdom*, eds. P. Bilde, T. Engberg-Pedersen, L. Hannestad, and J. Zahle (Aarhus: Aarhaus University Press, 1990), 204–23. Numerous scholars have also pointed out that the study of Judaism has many times been untaken using a "Christian" lens. For a discussion on how Pauline literature has flavored the scholarship on Judaism see, Cynthia Baker, *Jew* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016), 33–46. See also Steven Weitzman, *The Origins of the Jews: The Quest for Roots in a Rootless Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); Leora Batnizky, *How Judaism Became a Religion: An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); Kerstin von der Krone and Mirjam Thulin, "Wissenschaft in Context: A Research Essay on the Wissenschaft Des Judentums," *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 58 (2013): 249–80.

[9] Several scholars have differentiated between Jewishness in populations located outside of the land of Palestine verses Jewishness as it appeared in those living in Palestine. For example, Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, and Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, both focus on the practices and identity of those calling themselves "Jews" in the diaspora. For a focus on Jewishness in Palestine, see Sanders, *Judaism*; Lester L. Grabbe, *Judaism from Cyrus to Hadrian* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1992). Much of this scholarship rests on studies that have illustrated the influence of Hellenism on Jewishness during the period following the rise of Alexander the Great. See for example, Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in Their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974); idem, *Jews, Greeks, and Barbarians*; Erich S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition*, HCS 30 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

[10] Steve Mason's article "Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History," *JSJ* 38 (2007): 457–512, has radically dissuaded scholars from translating *ioudaios/ioudaioi* as "Jew/Jews" and instead suggested that these terms refer to "Judeans." See the similar argument in Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 69–106. See Adele Reinhartz, "The Vanishing Jews of Antiquity: How Should One Translate the Greek Term *Ioudaios*?," *Marginalia Review of Books* (June 24, 2014), https://themarginaliareview.com/vanishing-jews-antiquity-adele-reinhartz/, who has addressed this trend in research. Reinhartz persuasively argues for the continued

Perhaps more than others, Shaye J.D. Cohen's work on "Jewishness," which denotes the complexity of Jewish expression and practice, has fundamentally changed our understanding of Jewishness in antiquity.[11] Jewishness, as Cohen argues, is "the conscious affirmation of the qualities that make Jews Jews" and fundamentally "presumes a contrast between Us and Them."[12] As such, Cohen uses insights from the field of sociology and argues that "Jewishness" is inherently a construct of the mind.[13] Furthermore, Cohen has countered the long held belief in the firm dichotomy between Jews and non-Jews, suggesting instead "the thinness of the boundary between Jews and gentiles in antiquity."[14] For Cohen, the boundary between Jews and non-Jews consisted of "a combination of religion or 'culture' and ethnicity or birth."[15]

While there is a robust scholarly conversation on the topic of Jewishness, a consistently overlooked aspect is the inclusion of women.[16] Cynthia Baker has written on the "problem about women" in the study of Jewishness, noting that under all the discussion regarding categories such as ethnicity, religion, birth, or belief, there is a lack of recognition "that these categories,

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use of "Jew" in translations of ancient texts. While there might be geographical differences in some instances of the use of *ioudaios/ioudaioi*, Reinhartz cautions against the complete removal of "Jew" from translations as it may result in the invisibility of Jews and Judaism in antiquity.

[11] Cohen (*The Beginnings of Jewishness*) is the first to coin the term "Jewishness" and to use it as a way of signifying the variety of expression of Jews in antiquity. Scholarship has taken note of this perspective. An example is Erich S. Gruen's "Hellenism and Judaism: Fluid Boundaries," in *Follow the Wise: Studies in Jewish History and Culture in Honor of Lee I. Levine*, eds. Z. Weiss, O. Irshai, J. Magness, and S. Schwartz (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 53–70, that illustrates the awareness of the fluidity and variety of Jewishness in antiquity.

[12] Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 341.

[13] Ibid., 5.

[14] Ibid., 67 n. 175. On pp. 342, Cohen notes that this imagined boundary was relatively easy to cross. See Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 429 n. 40, who disagrees with Cohen's earlier assessment. Here, Barclay argues for the importance of social networks in maintaining the distinction of Jewish communities from non-Jewish ones.

[15] Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 343.

[16] Numerous scholars note other marginalized groups that scholarship has consistently overlooked. See for example, Nyasha Junior, *Reimagining Hagar: Blackness and Bible* (Oxford University Press, 2019), who questions the history of interpretation of black figures, specifically Hagar, by covering the racial interpretation of Hagar in biblical studies and in popular culture. See also Kimberlé Crenshaw, Luke Charles Harris, Daniel HoSang, and George Lipsitz, eds, *Seeing Race Again: Countering Colorblindness Across the Disciplines* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2019).

like Jew itself, are and always have been deeply gendered."[17] Moreover, Bernadette J. Brooten, although focusing on early Christian women, noted in the 1980s the general lack of interest in "the history of women" in scholarship.[18] As such, much of the scholarship on the topic of Jewishness has ignored women, treated them differently from their male counterparts, or subsumed them awkwardly under men.[19] For example, John M.G. Barclay's *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, which provides an extensive overview of the various aspects that comprised Jewishness in the diaspora, only mentions women explicitly a handful of times. In his concluding statements, which summarize the fundamentals of Jewishness, Barclay never explicitly mentions women:

> The fundamental bond of ethnicity was reinforced each time Jewish distinctions were maintained as τὰ πάτρια, as customs passed down from previous generations and requiring faithful transfer to the generations to come. In the education of children and the regulation of family life, the law functioned to bind Jews to one another as an ἔθνος, while circumcision served to keep marriage partnerships within the community. Whenever Diaspora Jews encountered fellow Jews as pilgrims, and every time they abstained from alien cult or the table-fellowship of non-Jews, their distinctive ethnic identity was further confirmed. Thus the ethnic bond, the central thread of Jewish identity, was protected and preserved in the daily habits of Diaspora Jews. Similarly, the Scriptures, the precious legacy of Moses, pervaded every aspect of Jewish life – as the topic of communal Sabbath

[17] Baker, *Jew*, 32. Baker quotes Daniel R. Schwartz who argues that Josephus allows conversion for men but not women because women could "do" like Jews without "becoming" a Jew. As such, the problem of Jewishness "is a problem about women." See Daniel R. Schwartz, "Doing Like Jews or Becoming a Jew? Josephus on Women Converts to Judaism," in *Jewish Identity in the Greco-Roman World*, eds. Jörg Frey, Daniel R. Schwartz, and Stephanie Gripentrog, Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 71 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 108.

[18] Bernadette J. Brooten, "Early Christian Women and their Cultural Context: Issues of Method in Historical Reconstruction," in *Feminist Perspectives on Biblical Scholarship*, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985), 66.

[19] Baker takes the study of Ruth's "conversion" as an example of the various issues regarding women in the study of Jewishness. For example, Kraemer argues that Ruth's acceptance of Naomi's god means that she too shares Naomi's "Judean" ethnicity (Ross Shepard Kraemer, *Unreliable Witnesses Religion, Gender, and History in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2011], 194). Meanwhile, Cohen argues that interpreters understood Ruth to be "a foreigner whose foreignness remains even after she has attempted to adopt the ways of her surroundings" (*The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 122 n. 36). Seth Schwartz agrees with Cohen by comparing the portrayal of Ruth to the portrayal of Antiochus (2 Macc 9:12–17) and Achior (Jdt 14:10). Schwartz argues that Ruth remained a Moabite despite her acceptance of Elimelekh's god whereas Antiochus and Achior "came to recognize the power of the God of Israel (and no such moment is recorded in the case of Ruth), they actually *became ioudaioi* (Seth Schwartz, "How Many Judaisms Were There?," *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 2 [2011], 233). Baker notes several issues with Schwartz's arguments (*Jew*, 30–31). See also Schwartz's treatment of Ruth in Josephus' works ("Doing Like Jews," 99).

> instruction, and as the 'constitutional' basis for all the Jewish distinctives. Each Sabbath bound Jews by association with one another, and dissociated them from others; their peculiar marking of time and their use of this day for synagogue teaching revived each week their sense of ethnic difference. Indeed each custom we have observed was linked with others to support the social fabric of Diaspora Judaism, and it is surely the combined strength of this fabric which explains the survival of Diaspora communities in the diverse conditions which we have surveyed.[20]

Furthermore, the lack of explicit mention of women occurs throughout his work, even in situations where we know that they had a distinct presence (e.g., household economies, ritual practice, political activism and leadership, family life, and child rearing).[21]

Conversely, a common approach for those scholars who do explicitly mention women is to equate depictions of women with lived reality, an approach that inevitably leads to the othering of women's Jewishness. Similarly, Brooten argues that the reliance on prescriptive literature, rabbinic literature for example, results in erroneous conclusions about women's Jewishness by confusing depictions of women as literary motifs with reflections of women's reality.[22] "Women's Jewishness" often becomes a separate subject in works on Jewishness. For example, in his work *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, Cohen devotes roughly six pages to a separate section on women's Judaism, arguing that women are excluded from sources on Jewishness which detail "a man's life:" "a life of study and prayer, commandments and

[20] Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 443. Similarly, Cohen's *The Beginnings of Jewishness* appears to be gender inclusive by referring to women when necessary and speaking about the "Jews" in a way that implies the inclusion of both male and female Jews.

[21] Barclay mentions women explicitly only a hand full of times throughout this work. See Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean*, 117–118; 312, n. 74; 411–412; 416; 419. Barclay relies mainly on *Aseneth* for his information about women, even though his section on *Aseneth* does not comment specifically on women (204–216). Barclay uses the following primary texts: Aristeas, Aristobulus, Artapanus, Ezekiel the Tragedian, Joseph and Aseneth, Josephus, 3 and 4 Maccabees, Paul, Philo, Pseudo-Phocylides, the Sibylline Oracles, and Wisdom of Solomon for much of his work. Moreover, Barclay also only refers to Tobit once (410, no. 15) where he cites Tob 4:12–13 as evidence for opinions regarding intermarriage. Tal Ilan, *Integrating Women into Second Temple History*, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 76 (Mohr Siebeck, 1999), VII, addresses the common scholarly perspective which confines women to "the home, the marriage institution and in bed." Instead, the work illuminates the diverse roles women played in a variety of settings, including "social, political, economic, intellectual and religious" (VII).

[22] Brooten, "Early Christian Women," 73.

observations, synagogue and school."[23] The basis of Cohen's argument rests on his assumption that ancient Judaism was androcentric and as such, women were not only excluded from Jewish public life, but that our sources do not preserve records of their Jewish way of life.[24] Analogously, Erich S. Gruen implies a similar sentiment by noting that the authors of preserved literature were likely male and by highlighting the incompatibility of ancient portrayals of women and scholarly perspectives on the status of women in antiquity.[25] Here, Gruen argues that "the subordinate position of Jewish women in this period… is marked and clear… They were expected to maintain a chaste and modest demeanor, remain for the most part at home, stay out of the sight of strangers, and hold as first priority the reputation of the household."[26] The manner in which such authors have examined women's Jewishness, in the words of Baker, "reveals more about reigning paradigms and the concerns of those doing the classifying than about the "nature" or "substance" of the object/subject labeled."[27] Therefore, there is a prevailing approach among scholars of Jewishness to rely on prescriptive literature that highlights the otherness of women's Jewishness.

[23] Cohen, *From the Maccabees*, 72. See pages 72–78 for Cohen's treatment of "women's Judaism." Cohen grounds his assessment of ancient Judaism in the Torah and the practice of circumcision. He claims that circumcision was "a significant marker of Jewishness during the Second Temple period" and concludes that, since "circumcision discriminates between men and women," "only men are full members of the people of God" as "only men are signed by circumcision" (73). I find Cohen's statements regarding circumcision rather interesting in that he notes in his earlier work (*The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 39, 48-49) the impracticality of the inclusion of circumcision as a distinct feature of Jewishness. He notes that circumcision only applies to half of the Jewish population. As such, he argues that circumcision was not a method used to detect other Jews and that, "from the Jewish side circumcision was not a useful marker of Jewishness" (49).

[24] Cohen, *From the Maccabees*, 73–75. Cohen assumes that women remained in the household and were subordinate to their husbands. Such a treatment of women enforces the assumption that women's studies are a separate field of study from that of ancient Judaism. Brooten, "Early Christian Women," 73, points out that much of the scholarship regarding the history of women relies on literature that is prescriptive, in particular rabbinic literature in which women are "treated as a literary motif."

[25] Gruen, *The Construct of Identity*, 59. Gruen mainly refers to the attitudes of Ben Sira regarding the status of women in antiquity. The contrast between the portrayal of an ideal woman in Sirach and the narratives of the Jewish novels is striking. This of course is the basis of Gruen's insistence that the Jewish novels are not representative of women's Jewishness.

[26] Ibid., 59.

[27] Baker, *Jew*, 44. Brooten shares similar sentiments; Brooten ("Early Christian Women," 82) argues "that the topics chosen and the questions asked assume that men's activities and thoughts are more important than women's."

As I alluded to above, scholarship on Jewishness has almost unanimously rejected the use of texts that portray Jewish women as conduits of knowledge for representations of female Jewishness.[28] For example, Cohen disregards texts that feature female characters claiming that they are unable to provide any information on women and their role in defining and maintaining Jewishness. Cohen argues that "virtually all the texts produced during these periods [Hebrew Bible, Second Temple, and rabbinic periods] place men at the center and assume throughout that the model Jewish citizen is male."[29] As such, Cohen rejects portrayals of Jewish women as evidence of expressions of women's Jewishness by arguing that texts such as "Tobit, Esther, and Judith, do not question or undo the androcentric assumptions of society."[30] According to Cohen, these texts illustrate nothing beyond what the texts of Philo and Josephus tell us about women and their relationship with Judaism: women were relegated to the household and were subordinate to their husbands. Although Cohen does indeed provide numerous examples of women who fall outside of this specific assumption, he concludes that, despite recent scholarship, questions regarding "the nature of women's Judaism" and how women expressed Jewishness remain elusive.[31]

Likewise, Gruen acknowledges that several texts feature heroines that counter this view, particularly Esther, Judith, Susanna, and Aseneth, but disregards these texts as sources of

[28] Few scholars include the Jewish novels in studies on Jewishness. In particular, *Greek Esther*, *Judith*, and *Susanna* can rarely be found in these discussions. Meanwhile, the only novel that does focus on a male figure, Tobit, appears more frequently. See for example Cohen, *From the Maccabees*, 70, who includes Tobit as an example of Jewish opinions regarding rituals and ethics. Cohen argues that Tobit mentions several ethics, such as "honesty, integrity, generosity, industry, temperance, etc.," while also ignoring ritual laws during his deathbed instructions.

[29] Ibid., 73.

[30] Ibid., 74.

[31] Ibid., 74. Much of the recent scholarship regarding women and Jewishness that Cohen questions comes from female authors asking specific gender questions. Cohen treats this scholarship as separate from his own endeavors.

information on women's Jewishness.[32] Gruen argues that "women, in sum, figure prominently in the fictional compositions of Hellenistic Jews. But these creations do not serve to challenge the conventions of society; they manage, in fact, to reinforce and confirm them."[33] As such, scholarship tends to view Jewish texts from antiquity as adulterated products of the androcentric context of their Jewish authors and conclude that they are poor sources for information regarding women's Jewishness.[34]

Despite the above exclusion of women in the discussion on Jewishness, a number of scholars, particularly in the fields of gender studies and feminist/women's studies, have contributed to our understanding of women during the Hellenistic period.[35] An example can be found in Amy-Jill Levine's article, "Hemmed in on Every Side: Jews and Women in the Book of Susanna," which examines the depiction of Jewish women in Hellenistic narratives, particularly the narrative of *Susanna*.[36] Another example is Sidnie Ann White's work, which connects the figure of Esther to the cultural context of the work, arguing that Esther represents the minority Jewish population living in the diaspora.[37] In a similar vein, Adele Reinhartz connects the representation of constructed space in *Judith* and *Susanna* to the community's understanding of

[32] Gruen, *The Construct of Identity*, 60–66. In fact, Gruen does not appear to consider these texts a source of information regarding Jewishness in general. An examination of his work reveals that he mainly relies on the works of Josephus and Philo, as well as texts from the Hebrew Bible. Moreover, Cohen confines most references to *Greek Esther*, *Judith*, *Susanna*, and *Aseneth* to the section called "Women in Fiction and Fact" (59–66).

[33] Gruen, *The Construct of Identity*, 66.

[34] An excellent article on the omission of evidence on women in broader scholarship is Sara Parks' article on what she has coined the Brooten Phenomenon. See Sara Parks, "'The Brooten Phenomenon': Moving Women from the Margins in Second Temple and New Testament Scholarship," *The Bible and Critical Theory* 15 (2019): 46–64. See also Mika Ahuvia, "Reimagining the Gender and Class Dynamics of Premodern Composition," *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 14 (2023): 1–34.

[35] Many of these studies, if not all, argue for a metaphorical understanding of the female protagonists in the Jewish novels. Few, including myself, attempt to argue that these texts reflect actual lived experiences of women. While it is possible that they may reflect women's experiences, it is impossible to say so with any certainty.

[36] Amy-Jill Levine, "Hemmed in on Every Side': Jews and Women in the Book of Susanna," in *Reading from This Place, Vol. 1: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States*, eds. Fernando E. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 175–90.

[37] Sidnie Ann White, "Esther: A Feminine Model for Jewish Diaspora" in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy L. Day (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 161–77.

its place in the diaspora; the feminine figures of Susanna and Judith represent the fragile Jewish community who felt threatened in their tents and gardens of the diaspora.[38] Although scholarship has isolated *Aseneth* from other texts with female protagonists, likely as a result of it transmission outside of the Christian canon,[39] the character of Aseneth has also caught the attention of scholars in the field of early Jewish literature.[40]

Similarly to the present study, in his work *The Jewish Novel in the Ancient World*, Lawrence M. Wills treats ancient Jewish novels as a collection, but his work specifically focuses on placing these novels within the ancient genre of novel and comparing them to the classically understood Greek novels.[41] He argues that these texts belong to the genre of the novel on the basis of a number of common characteristics, such as the specific focus on a female protagonist, the sexual degradation of the protagonist, and the theme of changing identities. While Wills' monograph touches on some of the themes that I explore in the present study, his work does not focus on the representation of women and their connection to Jewishness. As such, there are currently no systematic examinations of the portrayal of women's Jewishness in regards to the Jewish novels or other texts.

1.2 Materials and Method

The primary texts for this study are *Greek Esther, Judith, Susanna,* and *Aseneth*. These works constitute part of the genre known as the Jewish novel. Wills, one of the first scholars to

[38] Adele Reinhartz, "Better Homes and Gardens: Women and Domestic Space in the Books of Judith and Susanna," in *Text and Artifact in the Religions of Mediterranean Antiquity: Essays in Honour of Peter Richardson*, ed. Stephen G. Wilson and Michel Desjardins, ESCJ 9 (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2000), 325–39.

[39] See the forthcoming article, Katharine Fitzgerald and Hanna Tervanotko, "Jewish Novels as Romance Literature," in *The Second Temple Period: Its Contribution to Understanding the NT*, eds. Ron Hermes, Loren Stuckenbruck, and Archie Wright, The New Testament in its Second Temple Period Context Series (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2024).

[40] Susan H. Doty, "From the Ivory Tower to City of Refuge: The Role and Function of the Protagonist in 'Joseph and Aseneth' and Related Narratives" (PhD diss., Iliff School of Theology and The University of Denver (Colorado Seminary), 1989).

[41] Lawrence M. Wills, *The Jewish Novel in the Ancient World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995).

categorize these texts, defines it as a group of entertaining narratives that focus on fictitious situations or events.[42] He includes five texts, Greek *Esther*, *Susanna*, *Judith*, *Tobit*, and *Joseph and Aseneth* as examples of the genre. These texts share several techniques and motifs: 1) they all evoke historical situations or events, but the inclusion of historically inaccurate details suggests a fictional narrative; 2) the authors often place the main characters in dangerous situations; 3) there is an emphasis on depicting the emotions of the characters and their inner lives, and 4) women protagonists are prominent.[43]

My dissertation includes *Greek Esther*, *Judith*, *Susanna*, and *Aseneth* for three primary reasons. First, these works belong to the genre of Jewish novel and focus on a female heroine. These aspects allow for an analysis of the representation of women within ancient Jewish novels. Second, although it is impossible to determine their dating with exactitude, it is safe to conclude that these works were composed during a period of four hundred years, from 300 BCE to 100 CE (the Hellenistic period), thus sharing a similar historical context.[44] Third, the different provenances of these texts, such as diaspora Egypt for Aseneth and Palestine for Judith, provide a variety of specific social contexts throughout the Hellenistic world, allowing for a more complex understanding of the representation of women.[45] These works, though from different communities and thus different perspectives, can be treated collectively because they share similar concerns. By reading the Jewish novels as products of their specifical historical contexts,

[42] Wills, *The Jewish Novels*, 1. See also the discussion in Sean A. Adams, *Greek Genres and Jewish Authors: Negotiating Literary Culture in the Greco-Roman Era* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2020).

[43] Wills, *The Jewish Novel*, 26–27. While Tobit highlights a female protagonist, the narrative lacks a sustained treatment of Sarah's character and mainly focuses on Tobit and his son Tobias. For this reason, the present study does not include Tobit in any systematic way.

[44] For a more thorough discussion on the dating for these texts, see the sections below detailing the primary texts used in this study. Scholarship regarding *Greek Esther*, *Judith*, and *Susanna* agrees that these texts date to this period. Scholarship on *Aseneth* is less united; several scholars have argued for varying dates and for both Jewish and Christian provenance.

[45] See for example, George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature between the Bible and the Mishnah*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 101, for the location of *Judith* and pp. 337 for the location of *Aseneth*.

I assert that they reflect social norms and attitudes about women's Jewishness in the Hellenistic era.[46]

1.2.1 Method

The goal of this study is to add to the scholarly discussion by using a literary critical approach formatted as a comparative analysis to examine and compare the depiction of women's Jewishness in the texts of *Greek Esther*, *Judith*, *Susanna*, and *Aseneth*. I read these texts as a historian, assuming them to be products of a particular time and culture which reflects and contests a spectrum of common viewpoints on gender, ethnicity, society, and Jewishness. I recognize that these narratives are literary texts of a prescriptive kind that make ideological and theological claims, as well as portray women in ways typical for their historical contexts. I also assert that in their effort to portray women, the authors of these texts also describe certain ways of understanding women's roles in defining and maintaining Jewishness. The concept of Jewishness in the Jewish novels, like other Jewish texts written during the Hellenistic period, is inherently implied in the portrayal of their protagonists. As such, a fundamental assumption of this study is that the Jewish novels portray Jewish women. In this dissertation, I strive to examine the authors' descriptions of Jewish women to integrate women into the conversation about expressions of Jewishness.

The study of Jewishness highlights several assumptions, many of which I have discussed above, that inevitably precludes women's expressions of Jewishness. The basis of my examination rests on four important assumptions that lead to an inclusive approach to

[46] Francis Borchardt ("CSTT and Gender #2: A Gender Theory Critique of the Historical-Critical Method," *Changes in Sacred Texts and Traditions*, 7 July 2017, https://blogs.helsinki.fi/sacredtexts/2017/07/06/cstt-and-gender-a-gender-theory-critique-of-the-historical-critical-method/) provides a short discussion on the pitfalls and limitations of the use of the historical-critical method and gender. Borchardt notes that scholarship using historical-critical methods is highly masculinized. As such, male scholars and male-centered questions tend to dominate historical-critical research.

Jewishness: first, gender and hegemony are part of a complex and fluid androcentric system;[47] second, women are an integral part of this system; third, in order to find women's expressions of Jewishness, we cannot look only in places that are gendered masculine; and fourth, male expressions of Jewishness cannot be upheld as the only *or even primary* standard of Jewishness, nor should we compare male and female expressions.

Masculinity studies have paved the way for a more nuanced understanding surrounding the connection between gender and hegemony in both the modern and ancient worlds. Chief among them is Raewyn Connell and her work on hegemonic masculinity. In *Masculinities*, Connell explores the intricate connection between masculinity and social structure. [48] She notes that, since masculinity and gender is, in more general terms, fluid, there arise a complex interplay of masculinities in male centered society.[49] This interplay creates a social system that can best be defined by the following three points: 1) a minority group of men inhabit the most dominant position in society over most other men and women; 2) the dominant men create the illusion of an idealized masculinity that supports their "natural and necessary" position; and 3) all men and women in society participate, either consciously or unconsciously, in this system, meaning that some people willingly participate "in their own oppression."[50]

[47] Scholars have referred to this system as the patriarchy, the heterarchy, and the kyriarchy depending on the author and their field of study (see below for specifics). I am not concerned with defining the androcentric system to which the Jewish novels date and therefore simply denote the male-centered worldview which the Jewish novels inevitably reflect. See the various articles, particularly those by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Carol J. Dempsey, and Carol Meyers, in *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Approaches to the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Susanne Scholz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

[48] Raewyn Connell, *Masculinities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 45, argues that the concept of masculinity derives directly from men's bodies in most cases. Similarly, Todd W. Reeser (*Masculinities in Theory*, [Newark: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2010], 91) argues that the cultural notion of masculinity derives from the male body due to the close connection between the male body and culture, as well as discourse.

[49] R. W. Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics* (London: Polity, 1987), 183. Therefore, masculinity is not linear and transgressions of masculinity are part of the varied expression of gender.

[50] See Jessica M. Keady, *Vulnerability and Valour: A Gendered Analysis of Everyday Life in the Dead Sea Scrolls Communities*, LSTS 91 (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 47–48, who provides a discussion on Connell's work. See also Donald P. Levy, "Hegemonic Masculinity," in *International Encyclopedia of Men and Masculinities*, ed. Michael Flood (New York: Routledge, 2007), 253-55.

Connell's understanding of hegemonic masculinity, particularly the inclusion of women and their role in this system, is a helpful counter to the common belief that women did not participate in the androcentric Jewish society of antiquity. Although it is important to note that ancient Jewish depictions portray society as male centered, I do not think it is helpful to equate Jewish society in antiquity with misogyny or a general devaluation of women.[51] Such an assumption can lead to the conclusion that women are not included in our texts since women had no public or visible role in society.[52] Instead, by grounding my literary analysis in the perspectives of hegemonic masculinity, I view the narratives of this study to have originated from a society in which both men *and* women participated in a male oriented society. As such, I assume that these narratives reflect a social reality in which men and women had agency (although surely limited at times) and importance in maintaining or submitting to hegemonic masculinity logics.[53] The question arises then, how are women portrayed as playing a role in this system? The foundation of hegemonic masculinity, that all people are part of this system, sets this study on firmer ground when including women in the discussion on Jewishness.

[51] Current views of male orientated society in antiquity are anachronistic in that as scholars we inevitably take our own biases with us when we read these texts. Carol Meyers has made a similar argument against the usage of *patriarchy*. See Meyers, *Discovering Eve*, 26; idem, "Hierarchy or Heterarchy? Archaeology and the Theorizing of Israelite Society," in *Confronting the Past: Archaeological and Historical Essays on Ancient Israel in Honor of William G. Dever*, ed. Seymour Gitin et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 249–51; idem, "Was Ancient Israel a Patriarchal Society?," *JBL* 133 (2014), 8–27. Here, Carol Myers challenges the use of "patriarchy" in scholarship concerning the ancient world, proposing instead "heterarchy" as a more useful term in understanding the dynamic position of ancient women.

[52] There is a tendency in some scholarship to counter the views regarding women in antiquity to remain politically correct by the standards of our own society. This is not meant to negate the much-needed research that has focused on the darker side of a male centered antiquity, aspects such as violence against women or rape, nor the necessary work of guiding readers in navigating and understanding these texts in our own society. See the discussion regarding the usage or lack thereof of feminist biblical scholarship/methods by scholars of other disciplines in Shawna Dolansky and Sarah Shectman, "What is Gendered Historiography and How Do You Do It?," 3–18, in "Gendered Historiography: Theoretical Considerations and Case Studies," eds. Shawna Dolansky and Sarah Shectman, *The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 19 (2019): 3–18.

[53] See Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 123, who coined the term "kyriarchy" as an alternate term for the androcentric system of the biblical world. She uses kyriarchy to point to the complex intersection between dominion and submission found in the power systems of the ancient world.

Noting the role women played in the social and cultural contexts of Jewish antiquity also requires scholarship to take seriously the unique ways in which authors portray women having a role in expressions of Jewishness and to validate those expressions. To do so means that scholarship must forget the assumptions made about the female gender or where one might find women's expressions of Jewishness. Sara Parks' article titled "The Brooten Phenomenon: Moving Women from the Margins in Second Temple and New Testament Scholarship" exposes many of the assumptions made about women in antiquity, as well as the materials that refer to women. Pointing to Bernadette Brooten's work on women leaders in the synagogue, Parks notes how scholarship has consistently dismissed the inclusion of women in the study of synagogues purely on the assumption that women had no role in synagogues.[54] For example, Salmon Reinach dismissed an inscription referring to a female leader of the synagogue and instead interpreted the inscription to mean she was the wife of the leader, "for women have never held an office in a Jewish community, and certainly not a synagogue office."[55] As Parks suggests, in order to adequately examine women, scholarship must take seriously the instances where women *are* mentioned.[56] Furthermore, as Brooten and Parks both suggest, women are not likely to be found in the same places or in the same ways that men can be found in texts. For example, Brooten suggests:

> that a "shift of emphasis" that places women "in the centre of the frame" may necessitate the delineation of new boundaries, and that 'the categories developed to understand the history of man may no longer be adequate, that the traditional

[54] Parks, "'The Brooten Phenomenon.'" See also Sara Parks, Shayna Sheinfeld, and Meredith J.C. Warren, *Jewish and Christian Women in the Ancient Mediterranean* (London: Routledge, 2022), 101–102.

[55] Bernadette Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue: Inscriptional Evidence and Background Issues* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1982), 6. See also the discussion in Sara Parks, "'The Brooten Phenomenon,' 48–49.

[56] Parks, "'The Brooten Phenomenon.'" See also Hanne Løland Levinson's recent article, which addresses the persistent issue of ignoring women in biblical texts, highlights the divide between feminist biblical studies and other fields within biblical studies. See Hanne Løland Levinson, "Still Invisible after All These Years? Female God-Language in the Hebrew Bible: A Response to David J. A. Clines," *JBL* 141 (2022): 199–217. I also recognize that certain forms of material, such as inscriptions, are presumably more factual than say novelistic representations which are presumably more flexible in nature.

> historical periods and canons of literature may not be the proper framework, and that we will need to ask new types of questions and consider hitherto overlooked sources.[57]

In line with Brooten's comments, this study takes seriously the portrayal of Jewish female protagonists as reflections of views on women's Jewishness.

In this study, I consider specifically how the authors of the Jewish novels portray their female protagonists in roles that define and/or maintain Jewishness. Fundamentally, Cohen argues that Jewishness is a concept of the mind; Jewishness is an imagined social construct. Referring to the field of sociology, Cohen further notes that Jewishness is inherently an identity that distinguishes between "us" and "them."[58] Following Cohen's view that Jewishness was based on Jewish distinctiveness, the basis of the literary analysis of this study is the examination of the interpersonal relationships of the female protagonists. Therefore, in this study I examine four aspects of Jewishness – foodways, sexuality, kinship ties, and community. I chose to focus on these aspects for this study because they so clearly apply to the female protagonists and are helpful categories to examine Jewishness in the portrayal of female characters.[59] These aspects form a matrix of overlapping features of the protagonists' Jewishness and highlight each character's inter-personal relationships. The term "aspect" implies a flexibility that allows for the inclusion of less tangible expressions of Jewishness and provides a more nuanced understanding of the abstract concept of Jewishness as portrayed in the Jewish novels. Instead of focusing on

[57] Brooten, "Early Christian Women," 65.

[58] Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 5. For some relevant sociological studies, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991); Frederik Barth, ed., *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference* (Bergen: Universitets Forlaget, 1969); Sacha Stern, *Jewish Identity in Early Rabbinic Writings*, AGJU 23 (Leiden: Brill, 1994); Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988).

[59] These expressions of Jewishness are not necessarily specific to women. For the purposes of this study, I have focused solely on their expression in the portrayal of the female protagonists of the Jewish novels.

the typical understanding of Jewishness (i.e., practices and/or beliefs), I question how authors may have expressed Jewishness differently in female characters.[60]

1.2.1.1 Four Aspects of Jewishness

Foodways – the food and eating practices of a group – is the first aspect of Jewishness that I examine in chapter two.[61] Broadly speaking, foodways can be understood as the examination of "the connection between food-related behavior and patterns of membership in cultural community, group and society… In specific usage, 'foodways' refers to those food-related behaviors that are believed to identify the primary cultural attributes of an individual or group of individuals".[62] Foodways, as an aspect of Jewishness, is already well established in scholarship, which has mainly focused on specific eating practices or dietary restrictions.[63] In contrast to the other aspects of Jewishness studied below, this aspect of Jewishness is the most tangible and a well-known defining feature of Jewishness from the second century BCE onward.[64] In this study, I specifically focus on the portrayal of interpersonal relationships in terms of foodways rather than examining specific eating or dietary practices. While certain dietary practices have become associated with Jewishness, recent scholarship has shown that

[60] See for example, Sanders (*Judaism*) who defines Judaism through markers and practices. See also Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean*; Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*.

[61] I have not included the narrative of *Susanna* in the discussion regarding foodways simply because the author of *Susanna* does not include mention of any food or food practices. Nevertheless, I begin my examination with foodways because it is the most tangible aspect of Jewishness included in this study.

[62] Katz and Weaver, "Foodways," 29.

[63] Jordan Rosenblum has written extensively on the matter. See for example, Jordan Rosenblum, *The Jewish Dietary Laws in the Ancient World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); idem, *Food and Identity in Early Rabbinic Judaism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). See also Nathan MacDonald, "You Are How You Eat: Food and Identity in the Post-exilic Period," in *Not Bread Alone: The Uses of Food in the Old Testament* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008), 196–218; Naomi S.S. Jacobs, *Delicious Prose: Reading the Tale of Tobit with Food and Drink*, JSJSup 188 (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

[64] See Yonatan Adler, *The Origins of Judaism: An Archaeological-Historical Reappraisal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022), 25 – 49, who argues that it was only during the Hasmonean period that dietary laws became widely accepted by Judeans (49). His analysis suggests that there is no archaeological or literary evidence to suggest the maintenance of dietary restrictions by Jews before the second century BCE.

foodways consisted of prescribed and prohibited foods, as well as the conscious contrasting of dietary practices with others.[65]

My study seeks to include women in the discussion, since most scholarship does not recognize the role of women in foodways in Jewish literature or only focuses on the dietary practices as observed in texts. I question how we might gain a better understanding of Jewishness through the examination of the roles the female protagonists play in the practice of foodways in the Jewish novels. I assert that an examination of foodways, particularly the protagonist's role in foodways, can uncover new insights into the concept of women's Jewishness in the Hellenistic period.

Sexuality, the second aspect that I examine in chapter three, specifically explores how the female protagonists navigate relationships in terms of their sexuality. Following the definition outlined by Natalie Boymel Kampen, this study pays particular attention to "the representation of the body, of the way social categories and individuals are defined by sexual identity as well as sexual conduct."[66] Since sexuality is a modern term, I use this term in a rather broad manner in this study, mainly pointing to the protagonist's portrayal as a sexual object (e.g., the use of beauty to describe the protagonists), in terms of sexual activity, or in instances where legislation regarding sexual matters is implied.[67] While gender obviously plays a role in both this study and the portrayal of the protagonists, my examination is not limited to a gendered understanding of sexuality, nor does it discuss theoretical social constructions of sexuality. Instead, I focus on how

[65] See also Nathan MacDonald, "Food and Drink in Tobit and Other 'Diaspora Novellas,'" in *Studies in the Book of Tobit: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, ed. Mark Bredin, LSTS 55 (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 169.

[66] Natalie Boymel Kampen, "Introduction," in *Sexuality in Ancient Art: Near East, Egypt, Greece, and Italy*, ed. Natalie Boymel Kampen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1.

[67] See also the definition of sexuality in William Loader, *Making Sense of Sex: Attitudes towards Sexuality in Early Jewish and Christian Literature* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2013), 2. The chapter on sexuality does not focus on such broad material, such as marriage, divorce, or attitudes towards sex, as Loader does in his work. Although some of these topics occur elsewhere in this study, the focus of the sexuality chapter is the bodily portrayal of female sexuality and the use of sexual language to describe the actions and portray the female protagonists in the Jewish novels.

the author portrays the interpersonal relationships of the protagonists in terms of their sexuality. More specifically, this study will pay close attention to how the female characters' sexuality affects the relationships they have with other characters. Scholarship has extensively studied sexuality in ancient Jewish literature,[68] but not as an aspect of Jewishness despite its connection to intermarriage, the bearing of offspring, and the continuation of Jewish culture. Therefore, I seek to answer how the authors portray the Jewishness of the female protagonists of the Jewish novels through their sexuality.

Kinship ties is the third aspect examined in the fourth chapter of this work and focuses on the main character's role as part of a kin-group.[69] While the topic of kinship overlaps with some areas of sexuality, this study considers kinship ties as a separate aspect of Jewishness since sexuality and kinship can appear mutually exclusive in Jewish novels. Although a great deal of biblical scholarship has focused on the topic of kinship or family, little attention has been given to the role of kinship in the texts at hand.[70] The present study focuses on a broad understanding

[68] For example, see William Loader, *The Pseudepigrapha on Sexuality: Attitudes towards Sexuality in Apocalypses, Testaments, Legends, Wisdom, and Related Literature* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2011); idem, *The Septuagint, Sexuality and the New Testament: Case Studies on the Impact of the LXX in Philo and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2004); idem, "The Strange Woman in Proverbs, LXX Proverbs and Aseneth," in *Septuagint and Reception: Essays Prepared for the Association for the Study of the Septuagint in South Africa*, ed. Johann Cook, SVT 127 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 209–23. For a more thorough list on relevant research, see Loader, *Making Sense of Sex*, 2 n. 1.

[69] Scholarship has traditionally viewed kinship in the Hebrew Bible and early Jewish literature as blood relations. Many texts appear to suggest that kinship, particularly in regards to endogamy and exogamy, was based on blood relations. See the discussion in Michael L. Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 133–147. Intricately connection to kinship and blood relations is the Jewish concepts of purity and impurity. Christine E. Hayes (*Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities: Intermarriage and Conversion from the Bible to the Talmud* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002]) has extensively covered the boundary between Jews and non-Jews based on purity/impurity. See also Matthew Thiessen, *Contesting Conversion: Genealogy, Circumcision, and Identity in Ancient Judaism and Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), who illustrates that genealogy was of upmost importance in the conception of Jewishness in antiquity. Thiessen argues that the author of *Jubilees* found the "conversion" of non-Jews to be problematic and instead asserted a strict genealogical understanding of the boundary between Jews and non-Jews.

[70] Patricia Dutcher-Walls. "The Clarity of Double Vision: Seeing the Family in Sociological and Archaeological Terms," in *The Family in Life and in Death: The Family in Ancient Israel*, (London: T&T Clark International, 2009), 1. See also, David T. Tsumura. "Family in the Historical Books," in *Family in the Bible: Exploring Customs, Culture, and Context* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2003) ProQuest Ebook Central, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/mcmu/detail.action?docID=5247241; Kimberly D. Russaw.

of "family," and examines the relationships of kin as they are portrayed in the novels. The family, as defined by Nesta Anderson, "is a group of kin-related people (including fictive kin) who may or may not reside together and whose primary function is to reproduce members biologically."[71] The helpful sociological categories of kinship – consanguineal or blood relatives, affinal or those brought into the kinship group through marriage, and fictive, "which encompasses the adoption of nonrelatives into kin-like relationships" – are all considered in this study.[72] I argue that the kinship groups portrayed in the Jewish novels, as well as how the female protagonists function within that framework, emphasize the maintenance of Jewishness through the preservation of kinship ties and the exclusion of outsiders. An examination of kinship ties in the Jewish novels reveals an important role for women in protecting both the maintenance of the kinship group itself and its future offspring.

Community, the fourth aspect of Jewishness explored in this study, specifically questions how the author portrays each protagonist in relationship to the imagined Jewish community of the text.[73] For the purposes of this study, I have adapted the term community from the field of sociology. From a sociological perspective, the term community is used "to describe a certain type of social organization in which there is a strong sense of *identity* among individual members

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Daughters in the Hebrew Bible. (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018); Shawn W. Flynn, *Children in the Bible and the Ancient World: Comparative and Historical Methods in Reading Ancient Children*, ed. Shawn W. Flynn, 1st ed. (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2019); Julie F. Parker and Sharon Betsworth, *T&T Clark Handbook of Children in the Bible and the Biblical World*, ed. Julie F. Parker and Sharon Betsworth (London, UK: T & T Clark, 2019).

[71] Nesta Aderson, "Finding the Space Between Spatial Boundaries and Social Dynamics: The Archaeology of Nested Households," in *Household Chores and Household Choices: Theorizing Domestic Sphere in Historical Archaeology*, ed. Kerri S. Barile and Jamie C. Brandon (Tuscaloosa, Ala: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 111.

[72] Charles A. Ibsen and Patricia Klobus, "Fictive Kin Term Use and Social Relationships: Alternative Interpretations," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 34 (1972), 615.

[73] Community, although a separate theme, shares some overlap with the theme of kinship – kin are also portrayed as members of the community. Where overlaps occur, I instead focus on the specific aspects of that theme (e.g., kinship ties or community) as it occurs in each relationship.

of the community."[74] According to Tony Lawson and Joan Garrod, sociology can further define community as 1) a locality, 2) a local social system, or 3) a type of relationship.[75] Community can be defined, at its most basic level, as a group of people inhabiting a particular geographical area, but for the purposes of this study, which focuses on interpersonal relationships, I refrain from using such an informal definition. Even the concept of community as a local social system poses challenges for this study. While broader in that it refers to relationships not restricted to a specific locality, this definition is not helpful since not all the Jewish novels give much detail about the imagined community and its locale. The final example, "a type of relationship," is the most beneficial understanding of the term for the purposes of this study. For the purposes of this study, I engage with the community in each text not as a historical community, but as the authors depict each community in relation to its female protagonist. My goal is not to determine exactly how the author defines Jewishness in terms of the community they envision. Instead, I am interested in how the author structures the Jewish community in comparison to other groups (i.e., how does the author portray a "Jewish" community) and how the author imagines the female protagonist in relationship to that Jewish community. I do not use the term Jewish here to denote a specific religious or ethnic identity, but as the self-identification found in each text. In this way, I examine the role of the female protagonists in their own communities as outlined in each text, an examination that allows for the discovery of how the author understood these characters to play a role in the definition and maintenance of their community's Jewishness.

[74] Tony Lawson and Joan Garrod, "Community," in *Dictionary of Sociology* (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), 39.

[75] Ibid., 39. There is not an exact term in Hebrew that means "community." Two rather frequently used words that represent the idea of "community" are אמה (e.g., Gen 25:16) and לאם (e.g., Gen 27:29) both of which translate as "a people," "community," "tribes," or "nation." Similarly, there is no exact word for "community" in Greek either. The term κοινός, meaning "common" or "communal," is the closest term to our usage of the term "community." In my analysis, I do not focus on these specific words as they appear infrequently and I am more concerned with examining the *concept* of community as portrayed in the texts of the Jewish novels.

My examination of the aspects of Jewishness in the following chapters relies on the following three premises. First, I assume that women were active participants in the androcentric system reflected in the narratives of the Jewish novels. As such, my starting point is to view the female protagonists as equal participants in that system; I do not view them as subordinate. Second, I take the portrayal of the female protagonists seriously and view them as portrayals of female gendered expressions of Jewishness.[76] Third, I do not concern myself with comparing these expressions with male gendered expressions of Jewishness or with the ideal male, nor do I place a value judgment on one expression over another. Therefore, I examine the portrayal of the female protagonists as the author portrayed them without comparing them to other male characters or with other male gendered expressions of Jewishness, such as circumcision. In this way, I place female expressions of Jewishness in the center of this study.

1.2.2 Introduction to the Primary Texts

Scholars have only in recent decades begun to treat the Jewish novels collectively and note the similarities between the Jewish novels and a group of texts known as the Greek novels.[77] Like the five preserved Greek novels, the Jewish novels feature prominent female protagonists.[78] The focus on female characters in the Jewish novels separates the novels from the texts of the

[76] I propose that by listening to what the Jewish novels tell us about women, we can gain a better understanding of the portrayal of women in ancient literature. Although this is not an exact portrayal of lived experience, these portrayals can tell us about how authors depicted women's expressions of Jewishness in antiquity.

[77] The Jewish novels appear to mostly predate the Greek novels and suggest that both collections formed from a widespread shared cultural interest in the themes and topics prevalent in both corpuses. See Wills, *The Jewish Novel*, 16–7, who discusses a possible shared *Zeitgeist*. For further information on the similarities between the Greek and Jewish novels see also Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 39–46 and Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*; Adams, *Greek Genres and Jewish Authors*, 165–8. Moreover, the Jewish novels were not viewed as a collection in antiquity and instead circulated separately. It is also likely that there were other novel-like works now lost.

[78] The five main Greek novels are Chariton's Chaereas and Callirhoë, Xenophon's Anthia and Habrocomes (An Ephesian Tale), Achilles Tatius's Leucippe and Clitophon, Longus's Daphnis and Chloe, and Heliodorus's Theagenes and Charicles (An Ethiopian Story). For the text of these narratives see B.P. Reardon, ed. *Collected Ancient Greek Novels* (Oakland, California: University of California Press; 2019); see also Tim Whitmarsh, *Narrative and Identity in The Ancient Greek Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 5–21.

Hebrew Bible, where women rarely take center stage.[79] The Jewish novels also share parallels with the Greek novels in terms of their plot lines.[80] In both collections, the female character typically finds themselves in a threatening situation due to factors that fall outside of their control. Furthermore, the main thrust of the plot line comes in the protagonist's ability to overcome the threatening situation.

Moreover, relationships feature prominently in both the Greek and Jewish novels. [81] In particular, familial relationships are a large focus for these texts. Whereas the Greek novels display romantic relationships, the Jewish authors do not place such a focus on romance.[82] More broadly speaking, both collections display an interest in engaging with foreign cultures. For the Jewish novels, the texts reflect a desire to define different social, political, and religious boundaries; a theme that is not as present in the Greek novels.[83] As such, the Jewish novels highlight important social issues faced by Jewish people, specifically those in diaspora communities, as they attempted to define Jewishness in the face of an increasingly interconnected world. Finally, apart from engaging with themes present in the Greek novels, the authors of the Jewish novels also address key religious and moral themes in their texts.

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[79] See Wills, *The Jewish Novel*, 10–16. Wills discusses the focus on the protagonists in both the Jewish and Greek novels, the similarities in their depiction of women, and the general rise in interest in women in literature of the period. For the rise of female protagonists, see Parks, Sheinfeld, and Warren, *Jewish and Christian Women*, 239–45.

[80] For similarities in plotline, see Wills, *The Jewish Novel*, 16 and 26–27. Wills notes that even the Greek novels do not have commonly shared plotline. There are also important differences between the plotlines of the Greek and Jewish novels. See also Bruce MacQueen, *Myth, Rhetoric, and Fiction: A Reading of Longus's "Daphnis and Chloe"* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), who also argues for a stable genre despite differences in basic plotlines.

[81] Much of this section makes use of our article (Fitzgerald and Tervanotko) "Jewish Novels as Romance Literature" where I discuss further the differences between the Jewish and Greek novels.

[82] Aseneth is the exception to this rule; Aseneth is most like the preserved Greek novels in that the obvious focus is the relationship between Aseneth and Joseph. Although, the focus is not entirely on the romantic relationship between the protagonist and her future husband. See Wills, *The Jewish Novel*, 26–27, for the differences between these two groups of texts. See also Whitmarsh, *Narrative and Identity*, 6, who proposes two central themes contained in the Greek novels – heterosexual love and the theme of travel and return. These themes do not feature prominently in the Jewish novels.

[83] Adams, *Greek Genres and Jewish Authors*, 173.

The complex transmission history of the Jewish novels has significantly impacted the study of these texts. Their preservation in Greek through the hands of later Christian scribes has inextricably associated many of these texts with Christianity.[84] Although many were likely originally written in Semitic languages, *Greek Esther*, *Judith*, and *Susanna* were preserved alongside other Greek texts in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, rather than the MT corpus.[85] The text we know as *Aseneth* was preserved and transmitted separately from other Jewish texts and is now considered one of many texts that fall under the modern label of Pseudepigrapha.[86] While *Aseneth* has clear Jewish origins – the author interacts with both Jewish literature and concepts – it has also likely seen later Christian scribal changes; a feature of the texts that not only makes it difficult to date, but has also significantly impacted scholarship.[87] The present study reads the four texts of the Jewish novels as originating from Jewish origins outside of Israel during the Hellenistic period (300 BCE – 100 CE).[88]

My analysis primarily focuses on the Greek version of *Esther*, which preserves six passages known as the Additions to Esther that expand the original Hebrew narrative.[89] *Greek Esther* narrates the story of a young girl taken from her uncle to become the queen of Susa where

[84] This is particularly true for Aseneth. See the discussion in Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 336–38. See also Robert A. Kraft, *Exploring the Scripturesque: Jewish Texts and their Christian Contexts*, JSJSup 137 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 55, who notes that only within Christan contexts was *Aseneth* preserved.

[85]These texts have been accepted by various groups as canonical. For example, Roman Catholics accept the texts of the Septuagint as authoritative books. In this context, the texts of the Septuagint that have no corresponding book in the Jewish canon are known as deuterocanonical books. Meanwhile, these texts do not appear in the Protestant canon. Instead, they are known as the Apocrypha. See also, Wills, *The Jewish Novel*, 27–28, who discusses some of the language features of the Jewish novels.

[86] See Annette Yoshiko Reed, "Modern Invention of the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha," *JTS* 60 (2009): 403–36.

[87] E.g., Gideon Bohak, *Joseph and Aseneth and the Jewish Temple in Heliopolis*, EJL 10 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), reads Joseph and Aseneth in a Jewish context. For an example of understanding Aseneth as a Christian text, see, e.g., 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). As a result of its preservation by Christian scribes, *Aseneth* contains at least some later Christian interpolations.

[88] See below for more specific dates and potential provenance for each text.

[89] All translations of *Greek Esther* are my own unless otherwise noted. I have followed the NRSV chapter and verse system for this study.

she later saves the Jews from impending destruction.[90] The Greek additions supplement the Hebrew text and give the narrative of *Greek Esther* a more romantic and novelistic feel than the MT version. Unlike many works, *Greek Esther* preserves a colophon, or a publisher's postscript, that attributes the Greek translation to "Lysimachus son of Ptolemy," one of the residents of Jerusalem, and explains that the text was sent to Egypt "in the fourth year of the reign of Ptolemy and Cleopatra" (Add Esth 11:1). As there were three different Ptolemys who married a woman named Cleopatra, we can only say that the Additions were likely composed during the second to first centuries BCE.[91]

The present study relies solely on the Greek version of the *Judith* narrative which recounts the heroic deeds of a widow named Judith who single handedly defeats the Assyrian general Holofernes and sends his army into retreat.[92] The inclusion of quasi-historical features in the text has led to a variety of suggestions regarding dating and geographical origin.[93] Scholars

[90] For the relationship between the Greek versions of *Esther*, see Tyler Smith and Kristin De Troyer, "The Additions of the Greek Book(s) of Esther," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Apocrypha*, ed. Gerbern S. Oegema (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 387-396; Kristin De Troyer, *The end of the alpha text of Esther: Translation and Narrative Technique in MT 8:1-17, LXX 8:1-17, and AT 7:14-41*, SCS 48 (Atlanta: Society of the Biblical Literature, 2000). See also, Lawrence M. Wills, *Ancient Jewish Novels: An Anthology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 27, who attributes the additions to the hand of a different author. There is evidence to support the conclusion that the original language of at least some of the additions was Hebrew or Aramaic, although there is no evidence of the transmission process. Beyond the additions, the text of *Greek Esther* varies little from the Hebrew version. The minor changes appear to be due to harmonization rather than major editing. For further discussion, see Nicklesburg, *Jewish Literature*, 203.

[91] See E.J. Bickerman, "The Colophon of the Greek Book of Esther," *JBL* 63 (1944): 339–362, who argues that the year of the arrival of the translation to Egypt was 77 BCE. Bickerman's dating suggests that *Greek Esther* was a complete work by this time. See also Carey A. Moore, *Daniel, Esther and Jeremiah: The Additions – A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 44 (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 250, who attributes the translation to the reign of Ptolemy IX and therefore gives the text a date of c. 114 BCE.

[92] All translations of *Judith* are my own unless noted otherwise. Chapter and verse numbers follow the NRSV translation.

[93] Scholars disagree over the dating of *Judith* to the Persian or Hasmonean periods. For evidence of Persian influence on *Judith*, see André-Marie Dubarle, *Judith: formes et sens des diverses traditions*, 2 vols., AnBib 24 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1966), 1:131–132; Robert H. Pfeiffer, *History of New Testament Times: with an Introduction to the Apocrypha*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper, 1949), 294; Yehoshua M. Grintz, *Sefer Yehudith: A Reconstruction of the Original Hebrew Text with Introduction, Commentary, Appendices and Indices* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1957), 15–55. For a discussion on the similarities between *Judith* and the Maccabean wars, particularly to the figure of Judas Maccabeus, see Pfeiffer, *History*, 294–295; Carey A. Moore, *Judith: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 40 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 67–70; Benedikt Otzen, *Tobit and Judith* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 132–134. I am more inclined to accept

have also variously explained the inclusion of blatant historical inaccuracies in the narrative. [94] For the purposes of this study, I follow others who have suggested that *Judith* was likely composed in the first century BCE.[95] Latin and Hebrew versions also preserve this narrative, but they originated in a later period than the Greek text.[96] The relationship between these versions is difficult to determine, as the Latin text overlaps with only half of the material contained in the Greek text and the Hebrew version is dependent on the Latin text. Therefore, some scholars have proposed that another textual tradition underlies the Latin version.[97]

Susanna, a narrative about a married woman who faces a death sentence because two elders attempted to blackmail her into having sex with them, is by far the shortest of the Jewish novels considered in this study.[98] This short narrative consists of only sixty-four verses and represents one of several texts that became associated with the Daniel tradition. These "additions" likely preserve part of the living Daniel tradition that was associated with MT Dan 1-6. As such, *Susanna*, along with two other additions, became part of the Danielic collection

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Nickelsburg's suggestion that the tale of *Judith* originated during the Persian period and later rewritten during the Hasmonean period (*Jewish Literature*, 101).

[94] Nebuchadnezzar is the king of Assyria in *Judith*, even though historically he was the Babylonian king who destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BCE and brought many Jews to Babylon in exile. Several scholars have suggested that the blatant historical inaccuracies present in Judith not only suggest intent to write fiction on the part of the author, but also points to the artistry of the author in the narrative. See Toni Craven, *Artistry and Faith in the Book of Judith*, SBLDS 70 (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1983), 65–74, who specifically attributes this feature as part of the author's art. Similarly, Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews Amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 162–64, views these inaccuracies as humor. See also Moore, *Judith*, 58 n. 33; Wills, *Jewish Novel*, 134–35; Otzen, *Tobit and Judith*, 81–90.

[95] Wills, *Ancient Jewish Novels*, 89, argues for a dating during the second century BCE in either Hebrew or Aramaic. See also Claudia Rakel, *Judit-Über Schönheit, Macht und Widerstand im Krieg: Eine feministisch-intertextuelle Lektüre*, BZAW 334 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 33–40; and Jeremy Corley, "Septuagintalisms, Semitic Influence, and the Original Language of the Book of Judith," in *Studies in the Greek Bible: Essays in Honor of Francis T. Gignac, S.J.*, ed. Jeremy Corley and Vincent Skemp (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2008), 65–96.

[96] For the transmission process see, Barbara Schmitz and Lydia Lange, "Judith: Beautiful Wisdom Teacher or Pious Woman? Reflections on the Book of Judith," in *Early Jewish Writings*, eds. Eileen Schuller and Marie-Theres Wacker, The Bible and Woman. An Encyclopedia of Exegesis and Cultural History 3.1 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 29–47, 30.

[97] Schmitz, "Judith," 30.

[98] All translations of *Susanna* are my own unless otherwise noted. My study mainly relies on the Theodotion text and refers to the Old Greek version when necessary.

alongside Dan 1-6.[99] Later, a Jewish proselyte named Theodotion expanded the original Greek translation of Daniel 1-12, commonly referred to as the Old Greek text, at some point in the second century CE. [100] As such, the *Susanna* narrative survives in two Greek versions: the Old Greek and longer Theodotion version. Although the narrative of *Susanna* differs in many ways from the other Jewish novels, it provides another opportunity to examine the representation of female protagonists during this period.[101]

Aseneth, a text which was inspired by Gen 41:45 and narrates the process through which Aseneth, the daughter of an Egyptian priest, becomes Joseph's wife, is the final novel examined.[102] Scholarship generally agrees on the genre of this text, but most other issues related to *Aseneth* are disputed.[103] For example, *Aseneth* may have been written in Egypt or Syria possibly between the second century BCE and second century CE, but no consistent consensus

[99] Like Esther, the LXX preserves several "additions" to the book of Daniel not found in the MT corpus. These additions are known as the Prayer of the Azariah and the Song of the Three Jews (occasionally also called the 'Song of the Three Young Men'), Susanna, and Bel and the Dragon. See Adams, *Greek Genres and Jewish Authors*, 195–8; Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 22-27. There are also several other texts preserved in the Aramaic DSS that, more broadly speaking, are associated in the Daniel tradition. For these, see Józef T. Milik, "Daniel et Susanne à Qumrân?" in *De la Tôrah au Messie: études d'exégèse et d'herméneutique bibliques offertes à Henri Cazelles pour ses 25 années d'enseignement à l'Institut catholique de Paris, Octobre 1979*, ed. Maurice Carrez, Joseph Doré and Pierre Grelot (Paris: Desclée, 1981), 337–359.

[100] Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 22-23. See also, Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, 168. Collins, *Daniel*, 8–9, has suggested a date of c. 100 BCE for the Old Greek version of *Susanna*.

[101] Traditionally, scholarship interprets the individual additions as oral folktales and not as novels. Wills has argued quite successfully for the inclusion of Susanna as a novel on the basis that the narrative provides a window into "the interior life of protagonists who are in a state of psychological jeopardy…in much the same way that the reader of Greek novels has access to the emotions of the protagonists." Wills, *The Jewish Novel*, 53. See also his larger discussion on pages 45-53. Joseph Scales, "Susanna and Callirhoe: Female Bodies, Law, and Novels," *Lectio Difficilior* (2022): 1–26, has also recently discussed the parallels between Susanna and the Greek novels.

[102] Out of all the Jewish novels, *Aseneth* most closely resembles a Greek romance novel. See Wills, *Ancient Jewish Novel*, 170; Adams, *Greek Genres*, 168; Catherine Hezser, "Joseph and Aseneth in the Context of Ancient Greek Erotic Novels," *FJB* 24 (1997): 1–40; Erich S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism*, 93–94.

[103] See Angela Standhartinger ("Recent Scholarship on *Joseph and Aseneth* (1988-2013)," *CurBR* 12 [2014]: 353–406), who has extensively covered the scholarship on *Aseneth*, including the various viewpoints and scholarly divisions. See also Edith M. Humphrey, *Joseph and Aseneth* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 17–79, who also covers issues in scholarly reading and interpretation of *Aseneth*.

has arisen.[104] Perhaps the most well-known controversy regarding *Aseneth* is whether or not the narrative can be called a Jewish or Christian work.[105] The narrative's focus on Jewish relations with Egyptians best reflects its Jewish origins and composition during the late Hellenistic period (first century BCE-CE).[106] As such, I treat *Aseneth* as a Jewish text and argue for its inclusion alongside the other narratives of the Jewish novels.[107] Another major point of contention is the

[104] See Randall D. Chesnutt, *From Death to Life: Conversion in Joseph and Aseneth*, JSPSup 16 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 76–80; Humphrey, *Joseph and Aseneth*, 28–37; Christoph Burchard, *Untersuchungen zu Joseph und Aseneth*, WUNT 8, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1965), 140–3.

[105] Scholarship has historically read *Aseneth* as a Jewish text. An example of both arguments is the work of Ross Shepard Kraemer who originally suggested a Jewish origin, but has since revised her former position on the matter. For her arguments on *Aseneth's* Jewish provenance, see Kraemer, "Women's Authorship of Jewish and Christian Literature in the Greco-Roman Period," in *'Women Like This': New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World*, ed. A.-J. Levine, EJL 1 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 221–242; idem, *Her Share of the Blessings: Women's Religions Among Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greco-Roman World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 110–113. For a reconsideration of her position, see Kraemer, "The Book of Aseneth," in *Searching the Scriptures: A Feminist Commentary*, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Shelly Matthews (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 859–888; idem, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*. See also Robert M. Price ("Implied Reader Response and the Evolution of Genres: Transitional Stages Between the Ancient Novels and the Apocryphal Acts," *HvTSt* 53 [1997]: 909–38) who argues that the author's use of phrases such as "son of God" and "bride of God" are evidence for the inclusion of Christian allegory in the work (931–935); and Rivka Nir (*Joseph and Aseneth: A Christian Book* [Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012]) who also reads *Aseneth* in a Christian context, arguing that only then can the symbols and metaphors properly be understood.

[106] Several scholars have noted the narratives presentation of a shared context between Jews and non-Jews. See Humphrey, *Joseph and Aseneth*, 48-62; John J. Collins, *"Joseph and Aseneth:* Jewish or Christian?" *JSP* 14 (2005): 97–112. In particular, see Ahearne-Kroll, "Introduction," in *Aseneth*, 1–23, who also extensively argues for a Jewish origin. Recently, scholars have pushed back in general against the notion of a strict Jewish/Christian dichotomy in the early centuries of the Common Era and, as a result, most scholars now view the pursuit of specific boundaries, including conversion from one or the other, as anachronistic. For works discussing the problematic defining of Jewish/Christian boundaries see, Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983). For a discussion on the problematic use of religion as a category in the ancient world, see Carlin A. Barton and Daniel Boyarin, *Imagine No Religion: How Modern Abstractions Hide Ancient Realities* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016); Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990). See also Zeba A. Crook, *Reconceptualizing Conversion: Patronage, Loyalty, and Conversion in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), for a discussion of the issues associated with "conversion" language in regards to the ancient world.

[107] I find Ahearne-Kroll's arguments for a Hellenistic Egyptian date and location particularly compelling. Specifically, her comments regarding the similarities between the narrative of *Aseneth* and the writings of Artapanus demonstrate that *Aseneth* fits best in the intellectual tradition of Greek-speaking Judeans living in Egypt during the early Roman period. See Ahearne-Kroll, *Aseneth of Egypt*, 187–210. Moreover, Ahearne-Kroll illustrates the use of royal Ptolemaic imagery in the portrayal of Joseph and Aseneth and that much of *Aseneth* echoes the interests of Judeans living in Hellenistic Egypt (idem, 210–241).

emergence of two critical translations which contain significant differences in content and length.[108] The present study uses Christoph Burchard's longer text for content and numbering.[109]

1.3 Overview of the Following Chapters

The present study is composed of four analytical chapters, a comparative chapter, and a brief conclusion. In the analytical chapters, I analyze how the authors portray the female protagonists of the Jewish novels in relation to others through the four aspects of Jewishness described above. These aspects, as it will become apparent in the analytical chapters, are difficult to separate and treat individually. Therefore, there is a method behind the order of the analysis chapters. More specifically, chapter 2 focuses on the use of foodways as part of the portrayal of the female protagonists' relationship to others. The first analytical chapter focuses on foodways primarily because foodways are a more tangible aspect of Jewishness with clear connections to the discussions of Jewishness. In chapter 3, I analyze the theme of sexuality in the novels and examine the ways in which the authors use the protagonists' sexuality to separate or connect these female characters with other characters in the narratives. This study examines the theme of sexuality secondly to highlight its interconnectedness with the theme of foodways. The final two analytical chapters, which focus on kinship ties (chapter 4) and community (chapter 5) occur in this order due to the related nature of these aspects: chapter 4 details the portrayal of the protagonists as members of a kinship group, whereas chapter 5 examines the protagonists'

[108] Most scholarship prefers Christoph Burchard's "long text" which contains 13,403 words. See Christoph Burchard, Carsten Burfeind and Uta Barbara Fink, eds., *Joseph Und Aseneth*, PVTG 5 (Leiden: Brill, 2003). Marc Philonenko's version, commonly referred to as the "short" text, is significantly shorter at 8,256 words. See Marc Philonenko, *Joseph et Aseneth: Introduction, text critique, traduction et notes*, StPB 13 (Leiden: Brill, 1968). All translations in the present study rely on Burchard's version for numbering.

[109] All translations of *Aseneth* are my own unless otherwise noted. For further information regarding the complex transmission history of *Aseneth* see, Christoph Burchard, "Introduction," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1983), 177–201. See also the recently released fabula of *Aseneth* in, Ahearne-Kroll, *Aseneth of Egypt*, 139–58. Ahearne-Kroll's fabula came to my attention after a significant portion of this study was complete.

relationship with the broader community as described in each text. The structure of each analytic chapter follows the same order of texts – *Greek Esther*, *Judith*, *Susanna*, *Aseneth* – to simply maintain the chronology of dating for these texts.[110] The comparative chapter, chapter 6, provides a sketch of the representation of women's roles in creating and maintaining Jewishness in the Jewish novels, focusing on the similarities and differences, and suggesting ways in which the Jewish novels portray women's Jewishness. In the final chapter I briefly discuss the impact of this study on our understanding of Jewishness in the Hellenistic period and suggest further areas of study.

[110] For specific dating, please see above.

CHAPTER 2: The Theme of Foodways in the Jewish Novels

In this chapter, I focus on how the authors of the Jewish novels portray the female protagonists as having a role in the context of foodways. More specifically, I examine how the authors use foodways to characterize the protagonists' interpersonal relationships.[111] I begin my examination with an analysis of foodways and their general portrayal in each text.[112] I then move to examine how the authors portray each protagonist in relation to foodways. The authors of the Jewish novels portray female figures that were not only capable of participating in Jewish foodways, but actively engaged in maintaining Jewish identity through the maintenance of Jewish food practices.

2.1 Foodways in Greek Esther

The usage of foodways, particularly the use of banquets and drinking parties, are an important aspect of the narrative of *Esther* and the portrayal of the female protagonist. There are two major celebration scenes in *Greek Esther*; the first occurs at the beginning of the narrative and is dominated by the consumption of wine and Vashti's refusal to join the king when he orders her to attend in order to display her (Add Esth ch 1), while the second occurs when Esther hosts two drinking parties for Artaxerxes and Haman in which she negotiates the safety of her people (Add Esth chs 5 and 7).[113] The author of *Greek Esther* not only uses foodways to portray the female protagonist as remaining separate when in a foreign context, but more importantly uses these scenes to contrast the characters of Vashti and Esther. The consumption of alcohol, specifically within the context of these events, features prominently in the text. In the scene involving Vashti (Add Esth ch 1), the author characterizes the Persian king and his advisors as

[111] See the introduction for my understanding of the term foodways.
[112] This chapter will not examine *Susanna* as there are no references to foodways in the narrative.
[113] While the drinking parties Esther hosts are two separate scenes (an entire chapter separates them), I am consciously treating them together because the author presents the second party as an extension of the first.

excessive and overindulgent to a fault. Vashti, portrayed as another displayable object of the king, refuses his order to come to the banquet and is subsequently dispatched as queen. The author therefore establishes a gender specific model of action in the character of Vashti in the opening party which later contrasts to the character of Esther. The setup of the celebration in chapter one contrasts with the drinking parties that Esther holds for Artaxerxes and Haman later in the narrative (Add Esth chs 5 and 7). The author portrays Esther as strategically commanding the dinner party and using the Persians' inability to moderate their consumption of alcohol. Esther, who like Vashti refuses to join her husband at the dinner table (Add Esth 1:12), instead wields the dining table as the venue to negotiate Haman's fate and her people's victory.

2.1.1 Excessive Persians and Vashti's Refusal

The initial celebration scene consists of several events that take place directly following the marriage of the king to Queen Vashti and portray the Persians, particularly Artaxerxes, as out of control and shameful. The author tells us that:

> In the third year of his reign, he gave a banquet for friends and other nations… After this, when he had pointed out to them the riches of his kingdom and the splendor of his wealthy celebration during one hundred eighty days. When the days of the wedding celebration were completed, the king gave a drinking party for the nations who were found in the city. [It] (the drinking party) [was held] over six days in the courtyard of the king's house, which was adorned with fine linens and fine flax, on cords of purple linen [fastened] on gold and silver cubic rings for hanging on pillars of marble and stones. Gold and silver couches [sat] on a mosaic of emerald stone, mother-of-pearl, and marble stone, and transparent bedding of various kinds adorned with flowers all around [and] embroidered with roses. The cups were of gold and silver, and a small cup made of carbuncle, [valued at] thirty thousand talents, was set out, [as well as] abundant and sweet wine which the king himself drank. The drinking party was not according to the appointed law; that is, the king wished to have it so and he commanded the stewards to carry out his desire and of the men [his guests]. Also, Queen Vashti gave a drinking party for the women in the palace where King Artaxerxes [dwelt]. (Add Esth 1:3-9)

There are several points in this scene that are important to note. First, there is an overall emphasis on the consumption of wine at Artaxerxes' celebration. The author separates the initial banquet (Add Esth 1:3) where Artaxerxes provides for his friends and dignitaries from the "drinking party" (Add Esth 1:5) he hosts following the banquet. The Greek version emphasizes the consumption of wine at this event by using a greater variety of terms than the Hebrew text.[114] For example, the author of the Greek version refers to both the king's and Vashti's celebrations as "drinking parties" (πότος, Add Esth 1:5, 8, 9), specifically distinguishing them as events where the consumption of wine occurred. While the consumption of wine is clearly present in the Hebrew of Esther, the use of a specific term for these events suggests that the author of *Greek Esther* intended to somehow highlight the consumption of wine and its consequences.[115] Second, there is a clear distinction made in this scene between the two drinking parties and the genders of their participants. Vashti and the women of the palace are clearly not in attendance at her husband's party. This separation aligns with other examples of Persian dinners where wives of participants could be present at the dinner portion of the evening (Neh 2:6), but left before the drinking portion began.[116]

[114] Takamitsu Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, rev. ed. (Louvain: Peeters, 2009), 177. The Greek term δοχή, "which refers to a reception where guests are entertained," replaces the Hebrew noun משתה. There are nineteen instances of משתה in MT Esther (1:3, 5, 9; 2:18; 5:4, 5, 6, 8, 12, 14; 6:14; 7:2, 7, 8; 8:17; 9:17, 18, 19, 22) and appears to be a general term for feasting and/or drinking. This noun also occurs in other texts in the context of feasts and celebrations. See for example Gen 19:3; 21:8; 26:30; 29:22; 40:20; Judg 14:10, 12, 17; 1 Sam 25:36; 2 Sam 3:20; 1 Kgs 3:15; Job 1:4, 5; Prov 15:15; Eccl 7:2; Isa 5:12; 25:6; Jer 16:8; 51:39. Only a handful of examples appear to use this term to refer to "drink" outside of a celebratory context. See Dan 1:5, 8, 10, 16 (where it refers to the wine given to Daniel and his men); see also Ezr 3:7. The Greek author supplies a wider array of terms in that there are only six instances of the generic term δοχή in *Greek Esther* (Add Esth 1:3; 5:4, 5, 8, 12, 14). I discuss the usage of other Greek terms with replace the Hebrew term משתה in detail below.

[115] David J. A. Clines (*The Esther Scroll the Story of the Story*, JSOTSup 30 [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984], 36) notes the author's emphasis on the consumption of wine and concludes that "banqueting has been presented to us as the Persian pastime *par excellence*" in Esther.

[116] Lillian R. Klein, "Honor and Shame in Esther," in *A Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith and Susanna*, ed. Athalya Brenner, FCB 7 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 155. See also, Trisha G. Wheelock, "Drunk and Disorderly: A Bakhtinian Reading of the Banquet Scenes in the Book of Esther" (PhD diss., Baylor University, 2009), for a thorough discussion on the use of banquets in the Hebrew version.

An important feature of the Greek text of Esther is its expansion of the lavishness of Artaxerxes' party and in particular his unrestricted offering of wine. The Hebrew text portrays the King's palace and his wine offerings, listing both the extravagant furnishings of the palace, the offering of the palace reserves, and the king's command to allow all to consume as much wine as they might like (MT Est 1:6-8). The Greek's addition of further details provides a greater depth to the lavishness of the king's party. For example, the miniature ruby cup costing thirty thousand talents on display does not occur in the Hebrew text (Add Esth 1:7). While the king and his palace are most certainly part of a literary trope in Esther, there is also truth to these descriptions. [117] The splendor of both the Assyrians and Persians were well-known in the ancient world. Greek and later Hellenistic Jewish authors frequently stereotype the Persians as excessive.[118] Meanwhile, the theme of excess or excessiveness also occurs frequently in Greco-Roman literature. For example, numerous Greco-Roman authors criticized the flamboyance of unrestrained frivolity that occurred at banquets during their lifetime.[119]

The ways in which the author portrays the Persians becomes clearer when one considers the portrayal of the Jews in the narrative. Whereas the author consistently portrays the Persians as excessive, the Jews on the other hand appear as the epitome of moderation and are many times presented as fasting or abstaining from the consumption of food. More specifically, Jewish fasting is particularly juxtaposed with Persian feasting in *Greek Esther*.[120] For example, the author presents Esther's order for a three-day fast among the Jews (Add Esth 4:16) in the context

[117] See MacDonald, "Food and Drink," 169–174, who discusses the portrayal of the Persian feast in other cultural works.

[118] Kaori O'Connor, *The Never-Ending Feast: The Anthropology and Archaeology of Feasting* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 56–61, 63–65. See also the discussion in Johnny Miles, "A Tale of Two Purims: Food-Identity Ideology and Purim Reception from the Late Persian to the Byzantine Christian Era," *BibInt* 28 (2020): 303–26. Miles argues that the Persian stereotype of excessiveness which appears frequently in Greek literature also appears in the work of later Hellenistic Jewish authors.

[119] See Petronius, *Satyricon* 26.7–78.8; Seneca, *Epist.* 89.22 and *Dial.* VII.11.4, XII.10.2–5.

[120] MacDonald, "Food and Drink," 172, notes how this was a common feature of Jewish literature; authors portray outsiders as excessive over and against the moderate Jews.

of another drinking party hosted by the king (Add Esth 3:15). David Clines notes the severity of the fast ordered by Esther, which includes abstaining from the consumption of both food and water for three days.[121] This severity further highlights the contrast between the excessive consumption of the Persians and the modest consumption of the Jews.

Whether or not the excessiveness found in Esther has any historical bearing, the Greek version clearly strives to portray Artaxerxes as uncontrolled and atypical. Lillian R. Klein also notes that the king's behavior at his own banquets is inconsistent with his own status as king. Klein states that "the honor sought in relating the costly accoutrements of the palace is subtly undermined by the excessively protracted banquets (1.6-7) – which fail to mention food – and by the emphasis on drink (1.7-8)."[122] Furthermore, by placing no restrictions on his guests' consumption of wine, Artaxerxes further undermines his own authority and status.[123] Michael V. Fox also notes this inconsistency, arguing "that *this* was the king's 'law' or edict: to let everyone do as he wished (v.8b)."[124] Therefore, the emphasis on drink rather than food consumption portrays the Persians, Artaxerxes in particular, as both excessive and out of control.

Moreover, Artaxerxes' excessiveness, lack of control, and drunkenness feature in his request for Vashti's presence at the drinking party (Add Esth 1:10-11). The protracted celebration leads to:

> On the seventh day, the king, being merry [from drinking] said to Haman, Bazan, Tharra, Boraze, Zatholtha, Abataza, and Tharaba, the seven eunuchs, servants of King Artaxerxes, to lead in (εἰσαγαγεῖν) the queen to him to enthrone her and to place (περιθεῖναι) the diadem on her and to show (δεῖξαι) her beauty to all the rulers and the nations, because she was beautiful. But Queen Vashti would not obey him to come with the eunuchs. This insulted the king and he became angry. (Add Esth 1:10-12)

[121] Clines, *The Esther Scroll*, 35–36.
[122] Klein, "Honor and Shame in Esther," 154.
[123] Idid., 154.
[124] Michael V. Fox, *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, 1991), 17.

While the emphasis seems to be on Vashti's refusal to join her husband, Artaxerxes' command itself warrants further examination. No other women are mentioned in this scene, but the implication of a drinking party was the attendance of concubines.[125] In fact, as Elias Bickerman has argued, Vashti's compliance with this request would result in her demotion to the status of a concubine.[126] Artaxerxes' command then appears to be irrational and at odds with the social norms of the day – why would the king demand his new wife attend a party that only men and female concubines would have attended? [127] Interestingly, both the Hebrew and Greek versions attribute Artaxerxes' command to his drunken state (Est 1:10).[128] Fox also notes this, stating that the text "shows that the author views the behavior as not fully rational."[129] The emphasis again then is on Artaxerxes' drinking habit and his lack of control over both his guests and his wife.

Vashti's character and her actions in this scene are important. Vashti's portrayal in the initial celebration scene sets up the rest of the narrative and creates a specific expectation for what can be expected at both a drinking party and for anyone married to Artaxerxes.[130] Similarly,

[125] See Klein, "Honor and Shame in Esther," 155, who discusses the honor and shame aspects of this scene. Klein particularly notes the shameful consequences that would have resulted if Vashti had followed her husband's orders. There is no reference anywhere in the Hebrew text to concubines or other women except Vashti in this scene. The explicit separate party for women matches descriptions of similar parties from the period. Moreover, Artaxerxes' request and Vashti's refusal, along with the emphasis on her beauty, suggest to me that Artaxerxes intended to show her off for the sexual enjoyment of himself and his friends.

[126] Elias Bickerman, *Four Strange Books of the Bible: Jonah, Daniel, Koheleth, Esther* (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), 185–86.

[127] Klein, "Honor and Shame in Esther," 155–56, comes to a similar conclusion, although they do not interact with the original language of the text. Klein notes that honor and shame are at the heart of the portrayal of Vashti and the king in the first chapter of the narrative. The use of περιτίθημι is significant, because it is the same word used in Artaxerxes' decree regarding how women should treat their husbands; "thus all women will give honor to their husbands" (οὕτως πᾶσαι αἱ γυναῖκες *περιθήσουσιν* τιμὴν τοῖς ἀνδράσιν ἑαυτῶν).

[128] The language used here is comparable to Tob 7:10–11 where the consumption of wine and merry making is also clearly implied.

[129] Fox, *Character*, 19. Fox further notes that Est. Rab. V 1 addresses this section by discussing at length "the evils of drunkenness" (19, no. 9). Clearly even later interpreters understood this section as pointing to Artaxerxes' inebriation and loss of control.

[130] See Bea Wyler, "Esther The Incomplete Emancipation of a Queen," in *A Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith and Susanna*, ed. A. Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 111–135; Timothy Beal, *The Book of Hiding – Gender, Ethnicity, Annihilation, and Esther* (London: Routledge, 1997). Both scholars argue that the

Sarojini Nadar argues that "the reader can only understand the absolute nature of the power relations operative in the text because of the story of Vashti."[131] The king's command presents Vashti as another example of Artaxerxes' property.[132] This can best be seen in the author's use of the term δείκνυμι in *Greek Esther* 1:11, which was used previously in 1:4 when the king displays his wealth. The text tells us that the king "had pointed out to them the riches of his kingdom" (μετὰ τὸ δεῖξαι αὐτοῖς τὸν πλοῦτον τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ, Add Esth 1:4). By using δείκνυμι again, the author connects Vashti to the king's other signs of wealth. Macdonald has argued that while "the feast [in Esther] is an exercise in conspicuous consumption," the food is not the only thing meant to be consumed; Artaxerxes "also wants his guests to feast their eyes on his wife" (Add Esth 1:11).[133] Vashti then is portrayed here as one of the king's many possessions; she is a mere item waiting to be led in, displayed, and then consumed.

Most importantly, the Queen's refusal to attend the party, despite the irrational nature of the request, results in her dismissal and formulates a certain expectation of who would replace Vashti. Vashti's refusal to obey the king's demand to display her directly impacts the officials view of the king – her actions bring the king's command into question and set a precedence of disobeying men – and explains why the eunuchs suggest addressing the possible disrespect of husbands by their wives in *Greek Esther* 1:17.[134] Vashti's refusal and subsequent dismissal

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conflict between Vashti and the king at the beginning of the narrative directly impacts how the reader understands the ethnicity conflict found in the rest of the narrative.

[131] Sarojini Nadar, "Gender, Power, Sexuality and Suffering Bodies in the Book of Esther: Reading the Characters of Esther and Vashti for the Purpose of Social Transformation," *OTA* 15 (2002): 120.

[132] See S. Philip Nolte and Pierre J. Jordaan, "Esther's Prayer in Additions to Esther: Addition C to LXX Esther – An Embodied Cognition Approach," *Acta Patristica et Byzantine* 20 (2009), 299, for a discussion on viewing women as property in biblical and Greco-Roman literature.

[133] Macdonald, "Food and Drink," 170. See also Fox, *Character*, 20, who argues that we do not necessarily have to assume that Vashti's refusal is due to the practice of separating sexes during Persian banquets. I agree with Fox's argument that the demand to be displayed "is enough to explain her refusal." While Fox does not explicitly state this, the connection between being displayed and being consumed, even visually, by the drunken men seems to lie at the heart of Vashti's refusal.

[134] Klein, "Honor and Shame in Esther," 155, notes that Artaxerxes again does not take control of the situation and instead relies on his officials to handle the situation with Vashti.

suggests a particular role for the one who would fill her position: they must be just as beautiful, just as displayable, and obey the king's commands.

What we find in *Greek Esther* then is an exaggerated portrayal of the lavish and excessive foodways of its Persian characters. Moreover, the author parallels the portrayal of male consumption of the female body to the consumption of food in *Greek Esther*. Vashti, who is simply another item belonging to the king, is consumable in the same manner as the other banquet items. As I discuss below, the author outlines these expectations to contrast with the character of Esther, who, although she may be beautiful, does not participate in any of the king's banquets. Instead, Esther hosts both Artaxerxes and Haman, and negotiates the safety of her people.

2.1.2 Esther in Command at the Drinking Table

Esther's portrayal in terms of foodways comes as a mirror image of the portrayal of Vashti and the situation in which she finds herself. Whereas Aratxerxes summons Vashti and she later refuses his demand to attend the drinking party, Esther organizes and hosts a drinking party, summoning both Artaxerxes and Haman to attend. The author carefully keeps Esther separate from the foodways of the Persians throughout the narrative, an aspect of the narrative that leads up to the drinking parties which she hosts for the two men. In this way, Esther can continue to remain separate while also taking control of the situation. In a reversal of fortunes, it is not Esther who is at the king's command, but Artaxerxes who submits to his wife.

The author of *Greek Esther* consistently distances Esther from the eating practices of her captors. While the Hebrew explicitly mentions food that Esther received when she arrived at the

palace, the Greek translation does not include such an explicit reference to food. [135] For instance, the Greek author tells its readers that Esther received "ointments and her portion (τὴν μερίδα)" when she arrived at the palace (Add Esth 2:9). The term μερίς or portion does not necessarily refer to a portion of food as is implied in the Hebrew version. In fact, it occurs elsewhere in *Greek Esther* where it clearly has no connection to food. For example, Mordecai beseeches his god during his prayer to "not overlook your portion" (Add Esth 13:16, C; μὴ ὑπερίδῃς τὴν μερίδα σου) suggesting the author makes use of this term to refer to the covenantal promises made by Mordecai's god. Moreover, μερίς occurs elsewhere and refers to a present or gift (e.g., Add Esth 9:19, 22).[136] There are also several notable uses of this term outside of *Greek Esther* where the author does not refer to food. For example, μερίς refers to portions of land or inheritance (e.g., Gen 31:14; Deut 12:12; Jos 22:25; Ruth 2:3, 3:7, 4:3). As I discuss below, the author of *Greek Esther* places a greater emphasis on the abstention of Esther from foreign food practices than the Hebrew version. As such, the author's use of μερίς in Add Esth 2:9 may not refer to the acceptance of foreign food.

Another possible example of the author's efforts to distance Esther from the eating practices of her captors comes during her wedding feast when the author makes no reference to Esther's presence at this celebration. In fact, the text explicitly states that the king placed the queen's diadem on Esther and "the king gave a drinking party for all his friends and the powerful ones over seven days, and he greatly celebrated the marriage of Esther" (Add Esth 2:18). Unlike the initial celebration scene in which Artaxerxes wanted to coronate Vashti, Esther appears to be

[135] See Fox, *Character*, 32, for a discussion regarding the Hebrew which does appear to point to food. In fact, the Hebrew word used here (מנה) also occurs in Dan 1:5, 10, where Daniel refuses the portions given to him in order to remain kosher. It also appears in Neh 8:10 to refer to portions of food and in Est 9:19, 22 in reference to feasting.

[136] Muraoka, *A Greek English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, 449. See also MacDonald, "Food and Drink," 169, who suggests that the MT portrays Esther having no issues eating food from the palace. Clines, *The Esther Scroll*, 169, argues that the author of *Greek Esther* reworked the material "to a scriptural norm," thus showing Esther's rejection of the king's table and food.

absent at her own wedding feast, having been coronated prior to the event. While Fox does not explicitly come to this conclusion, they note that in the Hebrew text this feast appears to be *for* Esther.[137] It is not clear in the Hebrew whether Esther attended, but the Greek seems to imply that this feast was not for Esther but for the king's friends. Although the author does not explicitly state whether Esther attended, the author's silence on the matter aligns with their overall separation of Esther from her captors.

While the author of the Greek version may suggest Esther's separation from the foodways of her captors early in the narrative, this separation appears explicitly in her prayer in Addition C. Esther claims "your servant has not eaten at Haman's table, and I have not honored the king's feat or drunk the wine of libations" (Add Esth C, 14:17). In this verse, the author portrays Esther refusing to participate in foreign dining practices in three specific examples: 1) eating at Haman's table (καὶ οὐκ ἔφαγεν ἡ δούλη σου τράπεζαν Αμαν); 2) honoring the king's symposium (καὶ οὐκ ἐδόξασα συμπόσιον βασιλέως); and 3) drinking wine for libations (οὐδὲ ἔπιον οἶνον σπονδῶν). There are a few important details here to note. First, the author places more emphasis in this verse on eating from Haman's table than from the king's. Since Haman is the enemy, it is more important to indicate that Esther did not eat from his table before mentioning the king. Second, the author makes it explicit in the addition that Esther did not participate in the king's symposium. Third, the author distances Esther from foreign cultic practices by including the reference to wine libations.

Although we find Esther participating in table practices with Haman and Artaxerxes later in the narrative, I suggest that the author maintains Esther's separation, and specifically portrays

[137] Fox, *Character*, 38. The MT specifically calls the banquet "Esther's Banquet" (משתה אסתר, Est 2:18), while the Greek version entirely omits this phrase (καὶ ἐποίησεν ὁ βασιλεὺς πότον πᾶσι τοῖς φίλοις αὐτοῦ καὶ ταῖς δυνάμεσιν ἐπὶ ἡμέρας ἑπτὰ καὶ ὕψωσεν τοὺς γάμους Εσθηρ καὶ ἄφεσιν ἐποίησεν τοῖς ὑπὸ τὴν βασιλείαν αὐτοῦ, Add Esth 2:18).

her in a way that she can maintain her Jewishness, by having her host drinking parties instead of banquets. The insistence of the author that Esther did not eat at Haman's or the king's table continues in their portrayal of Esther's "dinner" parties in *Greek Esther* 5–7. In chapter five, the author uses the terms δοχή and πότος again to refer to Esther's first and second parties. Esther appeals to the king saying:

> "if then it seems [good] to the king, let him and Haman come to the banquet (τὴν δοχήν) which I will make today"…, So they both came to the banquet (τὴν δοχήν) of which Esther had spoken. At the drinking party (ἐν δὲ τῷ πότῳ), the king said to Esther, "What is it, Queen Esther?"… She said… "If I have found favor in the sight of the king, let the king and Haman come to the banquet (τὴν δοχήν) which I will prepare tomorrow and tomorrow I will do the same as today." (Add Esth 5:4-8)

While the more generic δοχή or banquet appears when referring to these events, the author becomes more explicit of what is involved during Esther's "banquets." After chapter five, the author places significant emphasis on the consumption of wine, especially during the final banquet.[138] First, the author refers to the second feast as a τὸν πότον (drinking party) when the eunuchs arrive to summon Haman to the party (Add Esth 6:14). Moreover, the author records that "the king and Haman went in to drink (συμπιεῖν) with the queen" (Add Esth 7:1). The author then calls the meeting a "drinking party" (τῷ πότω) when the king seeks clarification about Esther's request (Add Esth 7:2).[139] Finally, the author refers to their meeting as a "symposium" (τοῦ συμποσίου) after Esther reveals Haman's evil plans to the king (Add Esth 7:7). The emphasis in all these instances is on the consumption of wine and/or drinking rather than on the consumption of food. In this way, the author of the Greek version appears to have found a clever

[138] See Leann Pace, "Feasting and Everyday Meals in the World of the Hebrew Bible: The Relationship Reexamined through Material Culture and Texts," in *Feasting in the Archaeology and Texts of the Bible and the Ancient Near East*, eds. Peter Altmann and Janling Fu (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2014), 183–84, for a discussion regarding the debate over what constituted a feast in the ancient world.

[139] The term משתה occurs in the MT text here and elsewhere. This term does not carry the same connotation of excessive drinking as the Greek terms do (see Gen 19:3; 1 Kgs 3:15; Job 1:4-5).

means to portray Esther as maintaining her separation from foreign foodways while also meeting Artaxerxes and Haman at the dining table.

The inclusion of the term "symposium" (συμπόσιον) in the description of Esther's drinking party is vital to the portrayal of Esther's character in the narrative. The author portrays Esther as the one entirely in control of the situation by commanding Artaxerxes through his propensity to drunkenness. The symposium, while it appears infrequently in Jewish literature, occurs frequently as a specific narrative device in the works of Greco-Roman authors. The *symposium* followed a meal, such as a banquet or feast, and consisted of conversation over the consumption of wine.[140] There are a number of instances of the usage of συμπόσιον in Jewish literature which appear to imply that excessive drinking sometimes took place at these events (e.g., 1 Macc 16:16; 2 Macc 2:27; 3 Macc 4:16; 5:36; 6:33; Sir 31:31; 32:5, 49:1).[141] Most importantly for our understanding of its use in *Greek Esther,* the symposium was specifically the venue for men to discuss issues pertaining to governance.[142] Contrary to other texts in which women take a passive role, the author of *Greek Esther* portrays a female character taking the leading role in a specifically masculine social construct.[143] The use of the term συμπόσιον in Esther then appears to suggest that Esther brought together the king and Haman specifically to discuss the governance of her people.

The emphasis on drinking alcohol rather than eating at Esther's "dinners" not only conforms to the author's emphasis that Esther did not participate in foreign eating practices, but

[140] See the discussion on consumption of wine at symposiums in Charles H. Cosgrove, "Banquet Ceremonies Involving Wine in the Greco-Roman World and Early Christianity," *CBQ* 79 (2017): 299–316.

[141] Sir 31:31; 32:5; 49:1 refers to wine (οἶνος) in the context of the συμπόσιον and 1 Macc 16:16 specifically refers to drunkenness (μεθύσκω) in the same context.

[142] See Matthias Becker, "Plutarch's *Septem sapientium convivium*: An Example of Greco-Roman Sympotic Literature," in *T&T Clark Handbook to Early Christian Meals in the Greco-Roman World*, eds. S. Al-Suadi and P. Smit (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 33.

[143] Fox, *Character*, 69, also notes that Esther "proceeds to create a situation that will secure her goal."

it also portrays the female protagonist in a particularly clever and commanding role.[144] The author of *Greek Esther* includes a specific detail in chapter three which Esther appears to take advantage of later in the narrative. Following Haman's decree announcing the imminent extermination of the Jewish people, the Greek text tells its audience that "the king and Haman drank to excess but the city was thrown into confusion" (Add Esth 3:15). While the Hebrew certainly includes mention of the king and Haman "drinking" here, the Hebrew word used (שתה) does not necessarily refer to alcoholic drinking (והמלך והמן ישבו לשתות, "they sat down to drink," Est 3:15).[145] Meanwhile, the Greek text, which uses the verb κωθωνίζομαι, undoubtedly refers to the excessive drinking that would include drunkenness. [146] The Greek text then portrays both the king and Haman as drunks that have so little self-control that they drink to excess while the city of Susa succumbs to social upheaval.[147] With Artaxerxes' Achilles' heel clearly depicted in chapter three, it is little wonder then that Esther chooses a drinking party to negotiate the surrender of Haman's plans. The symposium was the most well-known wine consuming ritual in the Greco-Roman world. At the symposium, the Greeks were famous for orchestrating "the social dynamics in the group through controlling levels of alcohol-induced consciousness."[148] The author of *Greek Esther* appears to purposefully use the word συμπόσιον to portray Esther as the instrument of this coup d'état.[149] This small detail sheds further light on the portrayal of

[144] See Joshua Joel Spoelstra, "The Function of the יין משתה in the Book of Esther," *OTE* 27 (2014): 285–301, who argues for a similar assessment of the portrayal of Esther in the Hebrew. I think it is important to note that the cleverness of Esther's character is indeed present even in the Hebrew version.

[145] The Hebrew verb שתה is a generic verb used for drinking liquids (e.g., water) and occurs frequently throughout the Hebrew Bible and early Jewish literature.

[146] Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, 420. Muraoka also points to 1 Esd 4:63 which also appears to refer to heavy drinking in a celebratory context (καὶ ἐκωθωνίζοντο μετὰ μουσικῶν καὶ χαρᾶς ἡμέρας ἑπτα, "they drank hard [to the point of drunkenness] with music and joyfulness for seven days"). See also the use of κώθων, a related noun, in 3 Macc 6:31. Muraoka suggests that both nouns refer to heavy drinking.

[147] MacDonald, "Food and Drink," 172, also notes this emphasis on the king's excessive drinking habits.

[148] O'Connor, *The Never-Ending Feast*, 103.

[149] Fox, *Character*, 200–1. Fox outlines the cleverness of Esther's plan throughout their work, but clearly discusses the facets of her actions here.

Esther. Esther cleverly chooses her tool – the dining table – to make both the king and Haman vulnerable.

Furthermore, the author includes a final reference to celebration after Mordecai's decree that adds a further layer to Esther's portrayal. In chapter eighteen, upon hearing that their lives were safe, "the Jews had joy and gladness, drinking and gladness" (Add Esth 8:17).[150] The Greek word used here (κώθων) comes from the same root as the term used in *Greek Esther* 3:15 when Artaxerxes and Haman drink to excess while Susa is in chaos. It is interesting then that Esther's actions enact a complete reversal of the fates of everyone involved; although it is Haman and the king who carouse when the decree to exterminate the Jews initially goes out to the kingdom, it is the Jews who will ultimately celebrate their victories over Haman and their other enemies (Add Esth 9). The irony this reversal emphasizes adds to the portrayal of Esther as both clever and strategic. Esther uses the king's and Haman's excessiveness to her and her people's advantage.

The author of Esther portrays the female protagonist as a mirror image of Vashti. Whereas Vashti refuses the king's demand to attend the party and finds herself deposed, Esther summons, takes charge, and hosts drinking parties to negotiate the victory of her people. Esther maintains her separation by not partaking in the foodways of her husband or Haman. The author instead provides a model for the gender specific role of queen through their portrayal of Vashti, a role readers expect Esther to fulfill. Instead, the author portrays Esther as flipping this model on its head. Instead of consuming or being consumed, Esther uses the excessive drinking habits of her husband to bring about the downfall of Haman and the rescue of her people. In *Greek Esther*

[150] The term Ιουδαῖος occurs frequently throughout Add Esth (1:1; 2:5; 3:4, 6, 10, 13; 4:3, 7, 13, 14, 16; 5:9, 13; 6:10, 13; 8:3, 5, 7, 9, 12, 13, 16, 17; 9: 2, 3, 6, 10, 12–16, 18–20, 22, 23, 25, 27, 29; 10:3. For a discussion on the various issues with defining and translating this term, see Mason, "Jews, Judaeans;" Lawrence Wills, "Jew, Judean, Judaism in the Ancient Period: An Alternative Argument," *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 7 (2016): 169–193.

then, the author portrays a female protagonist capable of working within the foreign system of the Persians and presents her as actively maintaining her Jewishness using foodways.

2.2 Foodways in Judith

Scholars have frequently argued that the author of the book of *Judith* portrays its main character as maintaining identity boundaries by remaining separate from non-Jews in the consumption of food.[151] Food and eating are themes that occur in numerous places throughout *Judith*, but the majority of references can be found in chapters ten, eleven, and twelve – the chapters that narrate Judith's actions leading up to and immediately following the beheading of Holofernes. In these chapters, the author of *Judith* portrays an intricate connection between the themes of food, consumption, deception, and killing. Furthermore, the author portrays a female protagonist who not only actively maintains her separateness from foreigners through eating practices, but also uses foodways in her deception of Holofernes. Judith not only conquers Holofernes with a sword, Judith conquers Holofernes by bringing the domestic space to him; Judith seals Holofernes' fate when she initially packed her food bag in her house in Bethulia.[152]

2.2.1 Excess and Moderation: Consumption in Judith

The author of *Judith* uses foodways throughout the text to underscore a distinct difference between the Assyrians and the Israelites. Whereas the author portrays the foreigners as

[151] Nicole Duran, "Having Men for Dinner: Deadly Banquets and Biblical Women," *Biblical Theology Bulletin: Journal of Bible and Culture* 35 (2016): 117–24," comes the closest to addressing many of the aspects of foodways in Judith, but misses several important points I make below. For another article that applies to a medieval text related to the Judith tradition, see Susan Weingarten, "Food, Sex, and Redemption in Megillat Yehudit (the 'Scroll of Judith')," in *The Sword of Judith: Judith Studies Across the Disciplines* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishing, 2010), 97–125. See also, Athalya Brenner-Idan and Jan Willem van Henten, eds., *Food and Drink in the Biblical Worlds* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), particularly the editor's introduction for a discussion on the lack of interest regarding foodways and the Hebrew Bible.

[152] Much of the material regarding *Judith* comes from Katharine Fitzgerald, "Judith and the Health Crisis in Bethulia: An Examination of Ritual in Judith 9-10" (paper presented at the Annual International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Salzburg, Austria, 19 July 2022). I am grateful to the participants of the session for their helpful feedback and support.

excessive, the author portrays the Jews as more moderate.[153] Furthermore, the themes of excess and moderation reoccur in the characters of Holofernes and Judith. Food also becomes a fundamental part of the crisis facing the Bethulians, although lack of food does not directly contribute to the crisis. The author portrays excessive consumption as an offense to Judith's god, a point that becomes fundamental to Judith's deception.

Reference to foodways occurs early in the narrative and highlights the distinct differences between the invaders and the Israelites, as well as lays the groundwork for Judith's character in the second half of the narrative. Food first occurs in *Judith* in chapter two when the author describes Holofernes' army (Jdt 2:17–18). Holofernes brings with him "a vast number of camels and donkeys and mules as baggage, and innumerable sheep and oxen and goats as food [for the troops] (παρασκευὴν); also ample food (ἐπισιτισμὸν) for all, and a great quantity of gold and silver from the house of the king" (Jdt 2:17–18). The use of παρασκευή (Jdt 2:17), which is typically used in the context of the Jewish day of preparation before the Sabbath (Mt 27:62, Mk 15:42, Lk 23:54, Jn 19:14, 31, 42), and ἐπισιτισμός (Jdt 2:18) are the same words used to describe the actions taken by the Israelites in Judea in preparation for Holofernes' arrival: "they preemptively seized all the highest points of the hilltops and fortified the villages on them and stored up food in preparation for war (ἐπισιτισμὸν εἰς παρασκευὴν πολέμου) – for the plains were recently harvested" (Jdt 4:5).[154] The author of *Judith*, even before they introduce the female protagonist, presents Holofernes as excessive, particularly in comparison to the Israelites. Holofernes, who brings both lavish and excessive amounts of food and goods with him, stands in sharp contrast to the Israelites who store their recent harvest to prepare for the coming war. The

[153] See MacDonald, "Food and Drink," 170, who also notes the theme of foreign excess in Judith.

[154] I refer here to New Testament texts which refer to the Sabbath in third person narratives. In my view, the texts of early Christian and early Jewish groups reflect similar concerns and topics as they originate from a shared social and cultural context.

author takes this contrast further by including more details later in the text. While the Israelites are fasting as part of their preparation in calling on their god (Jdt 4:13), the reader can only imagine Holofernes relaxing in his tent, "resting on his couch under a canopy that was of purple and gold, interwoven with emerald and very expensive stones" (Jdt 10:21).

The excessiveness of Holofernes also lies in stark contrast to the suffering of the Bethulians in chapter seven: the people of Bethulia are collapsing in the streets from exhaustion and thirst (Jdt 7:22, 25) after being surrounded by the Assyrian army and cut off from their water supply. [155] The author never portrays the Israelites running out of food, although the lack of access to food is a major part of Judith's deception of Holofernes later in the narrative. In fact, the author portrays the Bethulians as having more than enough food to sustain themselves: they just had a harvest (Jdt 4:5) and they are fasting (Jdt 4:13), an action that would keep them from using up their food stores. Instead, the author portrays several characters telling the Assyrians that the Bethulians have run out of food. First, "the rulers of the Edomites and all the leaders of the Moabites and the praetors of the [place by] the seacoast" (Jdt 7:8) come to Holofernes and tell him to take control of the water supply to Bethulia, and reassure him that the Bethulians will fall to famine – "they and their wives and children will waste away with famine (λιμός)" (Jdt 7:14). The term λιμός specifically refers to hunger or a crisis involving the lack of food and does not point to a crisis stemming from a lack of water.

Second, Judith reiterates this falsehood to Holofernes, but includes more specific details that echo Achior's warning in chapter five. Judith reassures Holofernes that he will soon be victorious:

[155] Amy-Jill Levine, "Sacrifice and Salvation: Otherness and Domestication in the Book of Judith," in *A Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith, and Susanna*, ed. Athalya Brenner, FCB 7 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 212–216, notes that Judith's own fasting contrasts with the starving of the Bethulians. Judith in many ways appears to stand outside the normal circumstances when it comes to food.

> "Since their food supply has failed and their water has almost run out, they have planned to kill their livestock and they have determined to use all that their God commanded by his laws not to eat. They have decided to use the first fruits of the grain and the tithes of the wine and oil, which they had consecrated and set aside for the priests who stand in the presence of our God in Jerusalem – [things] which no one of the people, not even the hands, is it proper to touch. For they sent [messengers] to Jerusalem because the inhabitants there were doing these [things], transporting to them a pardon from the council of the elders. When the report returns to them and they carry it out, on that very day they will be given to you into destruction." (Jdt 11:12–15)

Judith's statements touch on several points made by Achior in chapter five. Achior warns Holofernes about the Israelites and their god, arguing that:

> "As long as they do not sin before their god they prospered, for the god who hates iniquity is with them. But when they fell away from the way he had decreed for them, they were utterly destroyed in many battles and were taken captive to a land not [their]own. The temple of their god was brought to the ground and their cities were possessed by their adversaries …so now, master and lord, if indeed there is a sin committed in ignorance in this people and they sin against their god and we find out their offense, then we can come up and excite them to war. But if there is no lawlessness in their nation indeed pass by them my lord, for their lord and god will protect them and we will become a disgrace before all the earth." (Jdt 5:17–21)

One could argue that the author's inclusion of the falsehood that the Bethulians are starving is simply a literary feature that further explains the main storyline of the narrative; it underlines the hubris and miscalculation on the part of the Assyrians, and perhaps explains why Holofernes did not view Judith as a threat – he assumed the Israelites were not a threat. On the contrary, the polemics around eating practices and its connection to Judith's deception should not be underappreciated. As I discuss below, foodways play a major role in Judith's deception of Holofernes. Furthermore, the themes of food, consumption, deception, and death which occur in the first half of the narrative become manifest in the portrayal of Judith.

2.2.2 Deception at the Dining Table

The concentration of references to food, eating, and feasting that occurs in the chapters that lead up to Judith's subsequent beheading of Holofernes should denote the importance of these subjects on the representation of the female protagonist. The author's use of foodways in the representation of Judith portrays her as the epitome of moderation, as well as explicitly showing her upholding the Jewish dietary rules in a way that maintains her Jewishness. In both cases, the author portrays Judith as remaining separate even while in the enemy's camp. Furthermore, I explore the author's intricate play on food words. The author includes specific ironic reversals of fate which both center on Judith and are at the expense of Holofernes. This wordplay reveals a great deal about how the author envisioned the female protagonist.

In *Judith*, as we saw in *Greek Esther*, the author portrays the hero of the story as the epitome of moderation in contrast to the excessive outsiders.[156] Unlike Judith who takes with her only what is necessary, Holofernes is depicted as bringing excessive amounts of food and wealth with him even though he is in the middle of a military campaign (Jdt 2:17–18; 10:21–22; 12:1–3, food and luxury items). The luxury with which Holofernes travels, which I have already discussed above, sharply contrasts to the necessities with which Judith travels. Judith gives to "her personal servant a leather canteen of wine and a flask of oil, and she filled a leather pouch with pearl-barley, dried fig cake, and loaves of pure bread and packed up all her containers and laid them upon her (the servant)" (Jdt 10:5). These items were common everyday food items found in most homes.[157] Although the author does not explicitly state the quantity of these items, the reader must assume that she brought only enough food to sustain her while in Holofernes'

[156] MacDonald, "Food and Drink in Tobit," 172–174.
[157] See Pace, "Feasting and Everyday Meals," 179–198.

camp.[158] The author has Judith say as much, if we read past the double meaning – "your slave woman will not use up the supplies I have with me" (Jdt 12:4). The author's portrayal of Judith as moderate, especially when compared to Holofernes, highlights several aspects about her character. First, the author uses this to highlight her faith; she trusts her god to work through her and only brings enough food to sustain her while in the enemy's camp for three days. Second, like David who shows up to fight Goliath with a sling and a rock (1 Sam 17), Judith proceeds to the threat only equipped with the most basic of tools – food to sustain herself.[159]

The contrast between Judith and Holofernes also extends to their portrayal in terms of their sexuality, a theme that the author interweaves with the theme of consumption. The author of *Judith* consistently paints Holofernes as excessive, a trait that Judith exploits throughout the narrative. Judith's plan of deception relies on feeding into the unrestrained desire of Holofernes by presenting herself as sexually available and vulnerable. After Judith's prayer, the author outlines how Judith prepares physically. Firstly, she removes her sackcloth, bathes, and anoints herself before dressing (Jdt 10:3). She then covers herself in jewelry, thus making herself exceedingly beautiful so that "every man who might see her" would find her appealing (Jdt 10:4). Another example occurs when Judith prepares herself to go before Holofernes; she does so by dressing in her finest garments (Jdt 12:15). When she arrives at Holofernes' tent, the narrative states that, "And Judith came in and lay down and the heart of Holofernes was amazed over her and his soul was shaken and he was extremely eager to have sexual intercourse with her" (Jdt 12:16). The connection between sex, slaughter, and consumption occurs in several narratives,

[158] The author does not record whether Judith packed food for her servant or what this woman ate while in the camp.

[159] József Zsengellér, "Judith as a Female David: Beauty and Body in Religious Context," in *Religion and Female Body in Ancient Judaism and its Environments*, ed. Géza G. Xeravits, DCLS 28 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 186–210, notes the many similarities between the portrayals of Judith and David.

particularly in reference to female characters.[160] For example, Susan Niditch illuminates the similarities between Judg 4-5 and Judith, particularly how both juxtapose the themes of "slaughter and sex."[161] In many ways, Judith prepares to serve herself to Holofernes on a silver platter, but readers know that Holofernes will never be able to consume her.[162]

While the author of the book of *Judith* blurs the lines between food, sexuality, and deception in the narrative, the author carefully portrays Judith as remaining separate from outsiders, particularly in terms of foodways. Although it is clear from the text of Judith that the author viewed Judith and Holofernes' interaction as potentially defiling, the author clarifies that Holofernes did not defile Judith.[163] For example, after returning to Bethulia with the head of Holofernes, Judith declares that "I swear that it was my face that deceived him to his destruction, and that he made no sin with me, to defile and shame" (Jdt 13:16). Furthermore, Judith either dines alone or, when in the presence of foreigners, is sure to consume only that food which she brought with herself. When Judith first arrives in the camp, she turns down food offered to her

[160] See for example the stories of Jael and Sisera (Jud 4–5), Esther (Est 4–7), and Herodias (Mark 6:14–30).

[161] Susan Niditch, "Eroticism and Death in the Tale of Jael," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy Day (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 51.

[162] Esther Brownsmith comes to a similar conclusion regarding the story of Tamar in 2 Sam 13. Brownsmith argues that Tamar's preparation of food in this narrative acts as a metaphor for the preparation of body, in which Tamar serves herself to Amnon. See Esther Brownsmith, "Getting Steamy in Amnon's Chamber: Philological and Metaphorical Observations on 2 Samuel 13," *VT* 72, (2022): 355–85; idem, ("To Serve Women: Jezebel, Anat, and the Metaphor of Women as Food," in *Researching Metaphor in the Ancient East*, eds. Marta Pallavidini and Ludovico Portuese, Contributions to the Study of Ancient World Cultures 141 [Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2020], 29–52) furthermore examines female figures who consume rather than becoming food themselves.

[163] Matthew Thiessen, "Protecting the Holy Race and Holy Space," *JSJ* 49 (2018): 165–188, illustrates how the author of Judith relied heavily on the narrative of Gen 34 LXX to portray her actions in terms of potential defilement. The language used in Gen 34 LXX, which refers to the rape of Dinah in terms of defilement (three times, μιαίνω, vv. 5, 13, 27), also occurs in *Judith* when the author claims that Simeon took "revenge on those strangers who had torn off a virgin's clothing to defile her" (Jdt 9:2). As Thiessen explains, the use of the language of defilement and its reference to the Rape of Dinah reveals a specific understanding of sexual relations between Jews and non-Jews in the book of *Judith*: because there is "an ontological distinction between Jews and non-Jews," the sons of Jacob were successful in their revenge on the Shechemites because they "abhorred the pollution of their blood" (Jdt 9:4).

by Holofernes – "I cannot eat of them, or it will be an offense" (Jdt 12:2).[164] Again, when Holofernes sends Bagoas to "persuade the Hebrew woman… to join us and to eat and drink with us" (Jdt 12:11), Judith only "took what her female slave had prepared and ate and drank opposite him" (Jdt 12:19). Nicole Duran has also noted that Judith only *appears* to dine with Holofernes; she in fact remains separate from Holofernes by consuming her own food.[165] Despite placing herself in a vulnerable position, the author of Judith portrays the female protagonist as consistently maintaining separation and identity boundaries with others.

Outside of the obvious uses of the theme of food and eating in *Judith*, there are two curious connections that the author makes that require further examination. The first of these connections occurs in Jdt 11:12 and 13:10, and stems from the use of βρῶμα. The first occurrence of the word appears in Judith's lie – "since their food (τὰ βρώματα) supply has failed and water is scarce, they have planned to kill their livestock and have decided to use all that god by his laws has commanded them not to eat" (Jdt 11:12). As I have already discussed above, Judith's statement is a falsehood, because the Bethulians appear to have enough food. The narrative suggests that the army's actions only threaten their water supply (Jdt 7:19–22). The term βρῶμα occurs throughout the texts of the Hebrew Bible, later Jewish works, and in texts of the New Testament as an unspecific term for "food." While its usage is widespread, it only occurs in one other place in *Judith*, despite the many references to food in *Judith*. This term appears again after Judith has beheaded Holofernes. The author describes how Judith rolled Holofernes' body off his bed and tore down his canopy (Jdt 13:9). Judith then takes his head and gives it to her servant who "threw it into her leather pouch of food (τὴν πήραν τῶν βρωμάτων),"

[164] Luzia Sutter Rehmann, ("Abgelehnte Tischgemeinschaft in Tobit, Daniel, Ester, Judit: Ein Plädoyer Für Differenzierung," *Lectio Difficilior* [2008]: 1–24) questions whether Judith's refusal to eat from Holofernes' table is a result of Jewish dietary restrictions and concludes that the lack of explicit regulations in the narrative makes it difficult to determine the exact motives of the author.

[165] Duran, "Having Men for Dinner," 119.

before the two depart from the camp and make their way back to Bethulia (Jdt 13:10). The food bag in *Judith,* while a somewhat obscure reference, is quite intriguing due to its connection to the domestic space.[166]

The subject of how Holofernes' head ends up in Judith's food bag has escaped scholarly attention which has relegated it to a footnote or passing comment. Even Holofernes' canopy, his bed covering which Judith removes and includes alongside his head, has garnered more attention.[167] The lack of attention is likely due to the simple explanation that Judith smuggled her enemy's head out in the one item she had on her, her food bag. Even so, for a text so concerned with the boundaries created by eating practices and the theme of defilement, the author chose to include the detail that Holofernes' head ends up in the very bag Judith brought with her to maintain her identity boundary through eating practices. As I discuss more thoroughly below, the author highlights the vulnerable position Judith places herself into and underscores the severity of the situation – what is at stake is not simply the rape of Judith or the defeat of the Israelites, but the defilement of the temple in Jerusalem (Jdt 9:8). This aspect of the narrative emphasizes that a major concern then for the author of *Judith* is maintaining the separation of Judith from Holofernes and other outsiders.

The climactic scene in the book of *Judith,* where Judith attends a banquet held by Holofernes, is a subtle reference to the Rape of Dinah in that it portrays the banquet as the place where Holofernes will sexually conquer Judith. The author makes the sexual implications for the climactic scene in *Judith* explicit:

[166] Duran discusses the possible play on kosher food in Judith. First, the Bethulians face the possibility of eating non-kosher food should they run out of food stores. Second, Duran argues that since Judith places Holofernes' head in the bread bag, his head is now a *kashrut.* See Duran, "Having Men for Dinner," 119–120.

[167] See Barbara Schmitz, "Holofernes's Canopy in the Septuagint," in *The Sword of Judith: Judith Studies Across the Disciplines*, eds. Kevin R. Brine, Elena Ciletti, and Henrike Lähnemann (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2010), 71–80, who examines the identity of the canopy in Judith.

> And it happened on the fourth day Holofernes a drinking party for his personal attendants only, and did not summon any of his officers. He said to Bagoas, the eunuch who was standing over all his things, "Go and persuade the Hebrew woman who is in your care to come to us and to eat and drink with us. For it would be a disgrace if we let such as woman go without having intercourse with her. If we do not draw her near, she will laugh at us." (Jdt 12:10–12)[168]

The use of ἐπισπάομαι in this passage (lit. to draw towards oneself/to seduce) is the same verb used in the story of Joseph and his master's wife in Gen 39.[169] In this narrative, the wife of Joseph's master "caught hold of his garment, saying, 'Lie with me!'" (Gen 39:12). In both situations, the verb refers to pressuring another, possibly physically, into sexual relations. Holofernes' eunuch Bagoas continues to use sexual language that paints Judith as the submissive character who will be sexually conquered by Holofernes. When Bagoas finds Judith, he addresses her as ἡ παιδίσκη ἡ καλη (Jdt 12:13). In the NRSV, this phrase has a meaning of "pretty girl," but παιδίσκη is the word for "female slave." This phrase could be translated as "beautiful prostitute" in the sexual context that it is found, a translation that places further emphasis on the implications for Judith should she fail.[170] Furthermore, Bagoas later makes reference to the king's harem when he tells Judith to "become in this day as a daughter of the sons of Assyria, the ones present in the house of Nebuchadnezzar," suggesting Judith join these women (Jdt 12:13).The implication present in these verses is the notion that Holofernes expects

[168] Jan Willem van Henten, "Words and Deeds: Seduction and Power in *Judith* and *Death Proof*," in *Tobit and Judith: The Feminist Companion to the Bible*, 2nd series, eds. Athalya Brenner-Idan and Helen Efthimiadis-Keith (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 235. Henten points out that what is at stake in this passage is the male honor of Holofernes and that the passage can suggest nothing other than Holofernes discussing his desire to have sexual intercourse with Judith. Feasting occurs in several places in Judith (6:21, 12:10, 13:1), not all of them include the sexual innuendo as in this instance. For example, Achior becomes a Jew through sharing a meal with the leaders of Bethulia (6:21) and later participating in the practice of circumcision. See Amy-Jill Levine, "Character Construction and Community Formation in Judith," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1989 Seminar Papers*, ed. David J. Lull (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 568.

[169] See also the usage of ἐπισπάομαι in the Testament of Reuben. The author argues that women are evil because "they use deception with [their] outward appearance in order to draw him (a man) to themselves," δολιεύονται ἐν σχήμασιν ὅπως αὐτὸν πρὸς ἑαυτὰς ἐπισπάσονται, T. Reu. 5:1).

[170] Henten, "Words and Deeds," 235. See for example the use of παιδίσκη in Isaeus, *Philoctemon* 6.19; Plutarch, *Per.* 24, *Cat. Ma.* 24; and Herodotus, *Hist.* 1.93, all of which use παιδίσκη to refer to prostitutes. See also Barbara Schmitz and Helmut Engel eds., *Judit*, HThKAT (Freiburg: Herder, 2014), 348.

Judith to become submissive, particularly sexually. Moreover, the expected outcome is sexual intercourse between Judith and Holofernes. For the readers of *Judith*, the author portrays the banquet as the arena in which Holofernes could potentially conquer Judith.

Despite all the odds that favor Holofernes, his purportedly superior gender, position, and strength, it is Holofernes' head that ends up in Judith's food bag. The food bag, the one Judith so diligently packed in Bethulia to carry her precious food stores, now becomes the transportation mechanism in which she hides his severed head and escapes from the enemy's camp with her enslaved maid (Jdt 13:9–10). The author does not give specific details and readers must wonder about the significance of the food bag (or whether it has significance at all). Duran has argued that the author portrays Judith's killing of Holofernes as a kosher slaughter, thus making his head a kosher item, but I would suggest an alternate interpretation of the figure of Judith and her use of the food bag.[171]

Instead of envisioning Judith in the guise of a warrior or seducer as others have,[172] I suggest that we look beyond the character's use of sexuality and seduction and see instead Judith's use of domestic space in her defeat of Holofernes. Judith begins the text as a pious widow and does two things before leaving Bethulia: first, she "dressed herself in the garment of gladness that she used to put on while her husband Manasseh was living" (Jdt 10:3) and second, "she gave her personal servant a leather canteen of wine and a flask of oil, and she filled a leather pouch with pearl-barley, dried fig cake, and loaves of pure bread and packed up all her containers and laid them upon her (the servant)" (Jdt 10:5). Judith leaves town in the clothes she used to wear when her husband was alive: she dresses herself in the items that she used to wear in the domestic space of her married life. Furthermore, the location and method in which Judith

[171] See Duran, "Having Men for Dinner," 120.

[172] Margarita Stocker, *Judith: Sexual Warrior – Women and Power in Western Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

defeats Holofernes is also noteworthy. Judith, of course, defeats Holofernes by beheading him, but one could also argue that Judith sealed his fate when she packed her food bag. The author has Judith say as much, "your servant will not use up the supplies I have with me" (Jdt 12:4). Moreover, Judith renders Holofernes useless at the dinner table. He is already as good as dead when he acts upon his unrestrained desires and passes out drunk (Jdt 13:2).

Despite initially thinking that Judith's food bag had something to do with the theme of defilement in the book of *Judith*, I suggest that the food bag functions in a humbler way. While she wields Holofernes' sword, Judith was and remains a woman of her home. She removes her clothing of widowhood and dons the attire she wore when her husband was alive. She takes with her provisions from her home and returns to that home at the end of the narrative (Jdt 16:21). The author does not portray her as a warrior, but a woman of the home and his head ends up in the humblest place of all, her food bag.

A second connection concerning food appears to continue the irony found in the author's use of the food bag. During the dining scene involving Judith and Holofernes, the author states that "Holofernes was enjoying himself with her (καὶ ηὐφράνθη Ολοφέρνης ἀπ᾽ αὐτῆς), and drank a great quantity of wine" (Jdt 12:20). The term εὐφραίνω occurs only one other time in the novel.[173] After Judith arrives in Jerusalem and offers Holofernes' canopy as a votive offering (Jdt 16:18–20), the people celebrate – "for three months the people were merry in Jerusalem before the sanctuary, and Judith remained with them" (Jdt 16:20). This usage of εὐφραίνω reverses the assumed outcome of the narrative – despite Holofernes' rejoicing over the beauty of Judith, in the end it is the Israelites who rejoice when Judith conquers him.

[173] The Greek verb εὐφραίνω occurs throughout Psalms and Proverbs where it refers to general rejoicing or celebration. See for example, Ps 5:12; 20:7; 42:4; 68:33; 103:34; Prov 15:13; 23:25; 29:2. It also occurs with relative frequency throughout the Hebrew Bible. See for example Lev 23:40; Deut 30:9; Judg 9:19; 1 Sam 2:1; 1 Kgs 8:65; 1 Chr 16:31; 2 Chr 15:15; Tob 8:16; 1 Macc 12:12.

The author's use of these terms and their connection to the reversal of Holofernes and the Assyrians' fortune shines a new light on the character of Judith. It is only through Judith's cleverness and cunningness that the Israelites succeed. The blatant lie that Judith tells Holofernes, that the Israelites have run out of food and are on the verge of abandoning the laws of their god, is the exact opposite of what happens in the narrative; the Israelites are not running out of food and even Judith is able to continue upholding Jewish dietary practices while in his camp. Furthermore, Holofernes does not consume Judith. In fact, she beheads him and, while not explicitly becoming food, his head becomes equated with food when she places it into her food bag. In a multitude of ways, through her dress, sexuality, and use of food, Judith conquers Holofernes with the hallmarks of her domestic space, particularly at the dining table.

2.3 Foodways in Aseneth

Foodways become an important aspect of the portrayal of the female protagonist and her relationship to others in the narrative of *Aseneth*. In this narrative, foodways functions on two levels. First, the author uses foodways to make distinctions between proper and improper food practices. The author connects these practices to certain groups of people and foodways become a defining feature for each group. It is clear from *Aseneth* that the narrative originates from a perspective which knew foreign food practices, particularly those in connection to idol worship, and frames their understanding of proper foodways within the context of foreign practices. Second, the author portrays Aseneth in terms of her ability to participate in various foodways. Before her transformation, the author portrays Aseneth as participating in foodways that linked to idolatry. It is not until after her transformation that she is able to participate in table practices with Joseph. In this section, I outline how the author uses participation in certain foodways to

delineate and define groups in *Aseneth*, before turning to examine the portrayal of the female protagonist's relationship to others regarding her participation in specific foodways.

2.3.1 Foodways as Boundary in Aseneth

There are many references to individual food items and food practices linked to both Jewish and Egyptian characters in *Aseneth*. There are two important features of the use of food in *Aseneth* that I will highlight in this section. First, the use of food reveals a strict distinction between the foodways of Jews and others (e.g., Asen. 7:1; 8:5-7; 10:13). While other texts share a similar aversion to the foodways of outsider (Dan 1; Jdt 10:5, 12:1–3; Est 14:16; Tob 1:10–11), *Aseneth* provides a more detailed picture for this aversion through the actions of multiple characters. Second, the narrative systematically warns against Jews eating food meant for idol worship or food that is in any way connected to the worship of foreign gods (e.g., Asen. 11:16; 12:5). Thus, the author of *Aseneth* explicitly links table fellowship with outsiders to the consumption of food sacrificed to idols (e.g., Asen. 8:5–7). While this explicit warning occurs in other narratives in the Hebrew Bible as well as later Jewish literature, here we find a fuller picture regarding this ideology.

Aseneth uses dining practices to demarcate between people from different ethnic backgrounds, particularly between Jews (Joseph) and others (the Egyptians and Aseneth).[174] The first mention of table fellowship occurs in chapter three, after Pentephres learns that Joseph will stop at his house to refresh himself (Asen. 3:2). Pentephres instructs the "steward" of the house to prepare a meal for Joseph (Asen. 3:4). The author notes that upon Joseph's arrival, a table was

[174] Ahearne-Kroll, *Aseneth of Egypt*, 15. Ahearne-Kroll argues that the portrayal of identity in *Aseneth* uses ethnic terms. For a helpful discussion on ethnic identity and the use of *ethnos* (ἔθνος) see, Mason, "Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism," 457–512. Mason argues that we should not use the term "Jew" but rather use the term "Judean." While his argument is an important one to consider and may be helpful in certain circumstances, I do not find it helpful to add a blanket geographical distinction to every reference to the "Jews" in antiquity. I share similar concerns to Reinhartz ("The Vanishing Jews of Antiquity"). I agree that the removal of references to Jews in the texts of antiquity does more harm by making Jews hidden in the historical record.

"set before him a table by itself because Joseph never ate with the Egyptians since this was an abomination to him" (Asen. 7:1).[175] Joseph's explicit rejection of commensality with foreigners is like the sentiments expressed in the narratives of Daniel, *Judith*, *Greek Esther*, and Tobit, where various characters refuse to consume foreign food (Dan 1; Jdt 10:5, 12:1–3; Add Esth 14:16; Tob 1:10–11). As MacDonald notes, there is not a clear rationale in these narratives for the rejection of eating with or from foreigners. [176] There is no explanation given, but one must wonder whether the concern was over the possible consumption of food stuffs dedicated to idols or simply that the food may not have been prepared according to the standards set out in the Torah (e.g., Deut 14).[177] Within the context of the exile, MacDonald raises the possibility that this was one way in which the authors of post-exilic texts portrayed a rejection of assimilation.[178] It is possible that the motivation behind *Aseneth* and other texts was an effort to demarcate themselves from outsiders. In either case, the author of *Aseneth* clearly links idolatry to the Jewish rejection of commensality with foreigners.

The author of the text is clear that the reason behind the prohibition of eating and drinking with foreigners is due to their idol worship. This connection becomes explicit in the repetitive usage of the bread, cup, and ointment formulation.[179] As I noted above, Joseph's

[175] Howard Clark Kee, "The Socio-Cultural Setting of 'Joseph and Aseneth,'" *NTS* 29 (1983): 394–413, notes that there is a complete absence of references to the kosher food laws. Kee argues that this lack of references suggests that *Aseneth* does not address legal piety in the traditional sense.

[176] MacDonald, "Food and Drink," 169. MacDonald points to Dan 1 as an example. The author remains rather ambiguous as to exactly why Daniel refuses the food from the royal table.

[177] Given the emphasis on not participating with idol worship, there is the possibility that there was also the concern over consuming food used as a sacrifice for foreign gods. For information regarding the complex relationship between idol worship, food, and impurity see, Hayes, *Gentil Impurities and Jewish Identities*, particularly pages 45–67. Hayes outlines the various opinions regarding contact with food from Gentiles.

[178] MacDonald, "Food and Drink," 169.

[179] The bread, cup, and ointment (and sometimes honey) formula has a long history of interpretation in Aseneth studies. Some scholars suggest that it is an allusion to a ritual meal. See the discussion in Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 128. See also R.T. Beckwith, "The Solar Calendar of Joseph and Aseneth: A Suggestion" *JSJ* 15 (1984): 90–111; T. Holtz, "Christliche Interpolationen in 'Joseph und Aseneth,'" *NTS* 14 (1968): 482–497.

address to Aseneth, where we find the first usage of this formula, occurs in the context of the dining table. He rejects Aseneth's kiss because:

> It is not fitting for a God-fearing man who blesses with his mouth the living God and eats blessed bread of life and drinks a blessed cup of immortality and anoints himself with blessed ointment of incorruptibility to kiss a strange woman who blesses with her mouth dead and dumb false gods and eats from their table bread of strangulation and drinks from their libation a cup of insidiousness and anoints herself with ointment of destruction. But a God-fearing man will kiss… whoever blesses with their mouth the living God. Likewise, it is not fitting for a God-fearing woman to kiss a strange man, because this is an abomination before the Lord God. (Asen. 8:5–7)

The formula focuses on commensality and highlights that idol worship was the issue at the heart of table fellowship with foreigners. Chesnutt rightly highlights the importance of this passage in this narrative; Joseph's statements establish a clear dichotomy between those who worship the god of Israel and those who worship idols.[180] Some scholars argue that the meal formula present in *Aseneth* points to a Jewish meal in general or, as I have suggested here, the Jewish way of life.[181] The table below better demonstrates the author's comparison of the two lifestyles outlined in Asen. 8:5:

One who is God-fearing blesses with their "mouth the living God"	One who blesses with their "mouth dead and dumb false gods"
"eats blessed bread of life"	"eats from their table bread of strangulation"
"drinks a blessed cup of immortality"	"drinks from their libation a cup of insidiousness

Table 1: Lifestyles of those who bless the living god vs false gods in Asen. 8:5–7.

[180] Chesnutt, *From Death to Life,* 98, writes: "even at this early stage… the reader can scarcely fail to see that the 'man(woman) who worships God' is the Jew, that the 'strange man (woman) who worships dead and dumb idols' is the idolatrous Gentile, and that from the author's perspective there must be no intimacy between the two." Recent scholarship has argued that there is not necessarily such a clear distinction between Jew and Gentile in Aseneth. See Ahearne-Kroll, *Aseneth of Egypt*, 13–15.

[181] See for example, Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*; Barnabas Lindars, "'Joseph and Aseneth' and the Eucharist," in *Scripture: Meaning and Method: Essays Presented to Anthony Tyrrell Hanson on his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. B.P. Thompson (Hull: Hull University Press, 1987), 181–99. Chesnutt examines the ritual elements in Aseneth's transformation ("Formal and Conceptual Features of Aseneth's Conversion," in *From Death to Life*, 118–150). Chesnutt concludes that there is nothing in the narrative to warrant the conclusion that this is a ritual initiation practice (149).

Therefore, the author equates the worship practices of foreigners, specifically eating and drinking from the food and drink meant as sacrifices to their gods, to their physicality: Jews cannot kiss or share a dining table with a foreigner because they could become physically contaminated by their potential consumption of food stuffs connected in any way to foreign sacrifice.[182] Moreover, the work of Emily Gowers further illuminates this passage. Gowers observes that lips "were as much organs of taste as the tongue," particularly in instances where ingestion might be dangerous.[183] Perhaps *Aseneth* reflects this notion: Joseph is legitimately concerned that he will "taste" the idol food should he kiss her.

When the bread-and cup-formula returns after Aseneth's transformation when the angelic man confirms her as Joseph's bride, the author again connects her idol worship to the defilement of her body. During her three soliloquies, Aseneth identifies her consumption of idol sacrifices as the act that has defiled her body. She cries out to the god of Joseph saying that she "ate from their [her gods'] sacrifices and my mouth is defiled from their table" (Asen. 11:9). A second time she expresses self-humiliation that her "mouth is defiled from the sacrifices of the false gods" (Asen. 11:16). Finally, Aseneth states that she has committed a sin against the god of Joseph, because her "mouth is defiled from the sacrifices of the false gods and from the tables of the gods of the Egyptians" (Asen. 12:5).[184] It is only after these soliloquies which mirror her actions that the angelic figure confirms that she "will eat blessed bread of life, and will drink a blessed

[182] Nir, *Joseph and Aseneth*, 145–47, who views Aseneth as a Christian work, argues that the kiss is associated with the Eucharist ritual. Furthermore, Nir argues that "Joseph refuses to kiss Aseneth because she, like Christian catechumens, has not yet undergone baptism, nor has she received the bread and the wine, and idolatry pollutes her mouth" (147). While I do not see any "Christian" aspects to this scene and thus do not share Nir's opinion, I agree that Joseph is concerned about contamination from Aseneth. As I discuss later in this study, I understand Aseneth's interaction with the angelic figure to be a confirmation of her transformation. Therefore, I do not see the consumption of the honeycomb or later bread and wine as having any effect on the idol pollution in her body. In my view, Aseneth's transformation is what "removes" the contamination from her body, not any food item.

[183] Emily Gowers, "Tasting the Roman World," in *Taste and the Ancient Senses,* ed. Kelli C. Rudolph (New York: Routledge, 2018), 96.

[184] The bread-and-cup formula occurs a final time in Aseneth's Psalm at the end of the first half of the narrative. Again, the negative formula of bread of strangulation and cup of insidiousness connects to idol worship and the eating of sacrificial food (Asen. 21:13–14).

cup of immortality, and will anoint herself with blessed ointment of incorruptibility" (Asen. 15:5). This of course occurs when the angelic man feeds Aseneth the honeycomb (Asen. 16:15–16) and again when Joseph meets Aseneth following her transformation (Asen. 19:5).[185] Aseneth's words at the very end of the first part of the narrative sum up the author's views on the chasm between Jews and non-Jews:

> I have sinned, Lord, I have sinned;
> before you I have greatly sinned,
> until Joseph the Mighty One of God came…
> and by his power he established me in a firm position,
> and brought me to the God of the ages,
> and to the ruler of the house of the Highest,
> and gave me bread of life to eat,
> and to drink a cup of wisdom,
> and I became his bride for ever and ever. (Asen. 21:21)[186]

It is clear from these statements that it is only through Aseneth's rejection of the gods, fasting, and the throwing out of her idol sacrifices that she becomes Joseph's bride.

Although the text does not explicitly state that Joseph rejected Aseneth over his prohibition of eating with the Egyptians, there is evidence to suggest that commensality underscores his initial rejection of her. When Joseph initially meets Aseneth, he addresses her using several nouns and verbs associated with commensality (e.g., eating, drinking, bread, cup, table, and libation; Asen. 8:5-7). Moreover, their meeting occurs in the context of his meal. For example, he just sat down to consume the food brought to him by the steward when Aseneth

[185] Bohak (*Joseph and Aseneth*) has suggested that the honeycomb and bees represent an additional temple to the one in Jerusalem, built in Heliopolis at some point during the second century BCE. While there is no evidence for such a temple outside of Aseneth, Martina Hirschberger, "Aseneths erstes Brautkleid: Symbolik von Kleidung und Zeit in der Bekehrung Aseneths (JosAs 1-21)," *Apocrypha* 21 (2010): 179–201, argues similarly. While I agree that the appearance of the bees was likely meant to remind readers of the priestly attire worn by those working in the temple in Jerusalem, I am not convinced that the narrative of *Aseneth* records the existence of a second temple.

[186] The multiple references to "sin" in this passage may suggest a Christian interpolation, but the author's high estimation of Jews in this passage and elsewhere, particularly in reference to Joseph, instead highlights the shared philosophical and intellectual beliefs behind both Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity. See Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 106, for further discussion on this passage. See for example the usage of ἁμαρτάνω ("to sin or do wrong") in Gen 20:6, 9; Exo 9:27, 34; Lev 5:1, 4; Num 6:11; Deut 20:18. See also Jonathan Klawans, *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), for a detailed discussion on the concept of sin in ancient Judaism.

arrives (Asen. 7:1). It is no coincidence that Joseph rejects Aseneth in the context of the dining table. In fact, the author frames Aseneth and Joseph's relationship with commensality practices – Joseph rejects her initially due to her contamination with idol food and then dines with her following her transformation. Joseph's initial rejection of Aseneth is even more emphasized when one considers that Aseneth is the only person portrayed as sitting and eating with Joseph anywhere in the narrative (Asen. 20:6). The text tells us that "they ate and drank and celebrated" following Aseneth's transformation (Asen 20:8). Therefore, Aseneth transforms from the one rejected at the table to the one accepted by the end of the narrative, but only after her transformation.

Furthermore, Aseneth has a meal prepared and then serves Joseph a meal. While her father Pentephres controls the family complex at the start of the narrative, Aseneth issues the instructions to prepare a meal for Joseph following her transformation (Asen. 18:2, 11). Moreover, it is Aseneth that takes an active role in serving Joseph his meal. The author describes it as follows:

> And Aseneth said to Joseph, "Come my Lord and enter into our house, because I have prepared our house and made a great meal." And she grasped his right hand and led him into her house and seated him on her father Pentaphres' throne. And she brought water to wash his feet. (Asen. 20:1–2)[187]

Later in the narrative, Aseneth argues that Joseph is now her lord and she is his maidservant when he objects to her washing his feet (Asen. 20:4). The author appears to be making a connection between the occupation of maidservant in the context of the dining table and Aseneth's active role as maidservant over the character of Joseph. While we might typically

[187] I cannot help but think that there is an element of spacial or geographical transformation happening in this section of the narrative as well; the transformation of Aseneth is not the only transformation that occurs. Both Steve Mason and Fritz Graf argue that there was a strong connection between spaces and deities in the ancient world. The usage of "our house" in this section of the narrative may denote a similar understanding. See Mason, "Jews, Judaeans," 484, as well as Fritz Graf, "Sacred Times and Spaces: Introduction," in *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide*, ed. Sarah Iles Johnston (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 243–244.

view the role of a maidservant as secondary, particularly in the patriarchal context of these texts, it is interesting that the author openly portrays Aseneth in control in this scene. Despite her title as maidservant, Aseneth appears both competent and in charge.

The transformation of Aseneth and Joseph's acceptance of her at the table becomes clearer when one considers Joseph's continued reluctance to share the table with the Egyptians. For example, Joseph rejects Pentephres' offer to give Joseph and Aseneth a marriage feast (Asen. 20:8). Instead, Joseph chooses to ask the Pharaoh for the wedding feast (Asen. 20:9), a request that the Pharaoh fulfills: "Pharaoh made a marriage celebration and a great dinner and a great drinking party for seven days" (Asen. 21:8).[188] Although Joseph's insistence that Pharaoh be the one to provide the feast may appear at odds with the rest of the text, Joseph does not appear to share a meal or table with Aseneth's family or the Pharaoh at the wedding feast; the author only records that the Pharaoh provided him with a feast.[189]

The author of *Aseneth* presents a consistent division between proper and improper food practices, practices that both define and divide Jews from non-Jews. Randall Chesnutt has persuasively argued that what we find in *Aseneth* is exactly this: Aseneth presents "the totality of Jewish eating in contrast to heathen meals defiled by idolatry, and more generally to the entire Jewish way of life in contrast to heathen conduct."[190] Joseph's rejection of Aseneth early in the narrative in the context of a meal, but later acceptance of her at the dining table suggests that the

[188] Judith Perkins argues that the broader genre of romance literature specifically focuses on the maintenance of male power through the transmission of women from fathers to husband. This allowed for the creation and further development of bonds between males. See Judith Perkins, *Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (London: Routledge, 1995), 73. Also see the discussion in Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 201–2, where Kraemer suggests that we see this very transmission of male power in the characters of Joseph and the Pharaoh. See also Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 76–78, where Kraemer argues that the author of *Aseneth* addresses why it is that the Pharaoh gives Aseneth to Joseph in the biblical narrative when presumably Aseneth's father would have given her to Joseph and provided the wedding feast.

[189] Warren points out that, because the Pharaoh marries Aseneth and Joseph, Aseneth has not completely abandoned non-Jewish rituals. See the discussion in Meredith Warren, *Food and Transformation in Ancient Mediterranean Literature*, WGRWSup 14 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2019), 83.

[190] Randall Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 178.

author uses the dining table as a reflection of Aseneth's status within the Jewish community in the narrative.

2.3.2 From Error to Truth: Aseneth's Transformation through Foodways

The portrayal of Aseneth and her role in foodways is complex in this narrative. The author portrays the female protagonist as going through a transformative process in which she adopts a particular foodway that reflects her new embodiment of the truth. Aseneth acknowledges the error in her ways by throwing out her idol sacrifices and food. Her transformation culminates in the protagonist's consumption of the honeycomb given to her by the angelic figure. Aseneth's consumption of the honeycomb is not the vehicle for her transformation, but is a sign of confirmation that she has already transformed. The complex portrayal of Aseneth and her use of foodways presents a female character who is both capable of making the decision to not only adopt Jewish foodways, but to also understand and maintain those foodways.

The fundamental distinction made between Jew and non-Jew is the issue at the heart of Aseneth's narrative, a feature that plays out in Aseneth's transformation through food.[191] As I discussed above, the author of *Aseneth* outlines the connection between Jewish foodways and worship of a foreign god. The lifestyle and foodways of the Egyptians are stressed as immoral and destructive, particularly in comparison to Jewish lifestyle and foodways.[192] Aseneth acknowledges this truth by beginning her transformation with a seven-day fast (Asen. 10:2, 17;

[191] Ahearne-Kroll, *Aseneth of Egypt*, 15, and Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 103, both note that the issue at hand is idol worship and the contamination that arises from such practices. The issue then is not the adoption of specific foodways, but the contamination that has already occurred.

[192] Cohen points out that the author of *Aseneth* does not appear to be concerned with the legal aspects of Jewishness, a point that may further support the notion that *Aseneth* portrays a general view of the lifestyle of Jewishness rather than a reflection of actual practices or legal concepts. See. "Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew," in Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 150–55.

13:9). [193] Fasting was a common practice to purify or atone for one's mistakes and occurs in a number of texts, particularly in narratives with female characters.[194] The fast is quickly followed by the removal of Aseneth's idols and the throwing away of "her royal dinner and the fattened animals and the fish and the meat of the heifer and all the sacrifices of her gods and the vessels of the wine of their drink offering" (Asen. 10:13). Ross Shepard Kraemer notes that Aseneth's food is a direct representation of her idolatry, arguing that "her food is impure at the very least because of its associations with her gods, if not for its implicit violation of the 'future' kosher laws."[195] The author is clear in the text that since Aseneth's food signifies her commitment to the Egyptian gods, she must throw away those items for her to become an acceptable bride for Joseph. In the world of the narrative, the author portrays Aseneth as understanding, initiating, and fulfilling this requirement.

After Aseneth renounces the Egyptian gods and completes her three prayers, the author portrays her serving the angelic figure. Following a lengthy discussion between the angelic figure and Aseneth, the protagonist encourages the man to sit on her bed and she explains to him that she "will place beside you a table and carry in bread and you will eat, and carry in to you from my storeroom aged and good wine" (Asen. 15:14).[196] Although it is the angelic figure who will eventually feed her (Asen. 16:15), the figure allows Aseneth to prepare him a meal and then

[193] Matthew Thiessen ("Aseneth's Eight-Day Transformation as Scriptural Justification for Conversion," *JSJ* 45 [2014]: 229–249) suggests that the author of *Aseneth* has two time-specific processes in mind when detailing Aseneth's transformation: the circumcision of male newborns on the eighth day and the consecration of the priests in Lev 8. I agree that the length of time and the connection to the priestly class are important features of the text and for understanding Aseneth's transformation.

[194] For example, David fasts after his relationship with Bathsheba (2 Sam 12). Several prominent female figures also fast for a variety of reasons, one of which may be purificatory in nature. Judith and Esther are only two examples. I briefly discussed fasting in the section above on *Greek Esther*.

[195] Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 97. Kraemer also notes the many similarities between Aseneth's actions and those portrayed in *Sepher ha-Razim*, a Hebrew manual for the adjuration of superhuman beings. Aseneth's disposal of her food mirrors the instructions provided in the manual, which instructs the throwing away of meals in a particular direction and location. See also Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 102. Chesnutt notes the vivid detail given to Aseneth's discarding of her idols and the sacrifices made to them.

[196] For further discussion regarding the meal Aseneth sets, see Andrea Beth Lieber, "I Set a Table before You: The Jewish Eschatological Character of Aseneth's Conversion Meal," *JSP* 14 (2004): 63–77.

to set it before him (Asen. 15:15-16:1).[197] The protagonist's ability to serve the angelic figure shows that her transformation has already taken place and that her ingestion of the honeycomb is more a sign of her transformation than the actual vehicle of the transformation.

Scholarship has offered several possible explanations for the obscure reference to the honeycomb in *Aseneth*, but few have seriously considered the honeycomb as an object.[198] The honeycomb scene is frequently understood as a conversion experience in scholarship. For example, while Randall Chesnutt argues against the notion that the honeycomb scene reflects an actual Jewish ritual, he nonetheless argues that this scene represents a conversion experience.[199] Concerned that the notion of "conversion" risks anachronism for this time period, Meredith Warren instead examines Aseneth's honeycomb scene as one of many examples of what she refers to as *hierophagy* or transformative eating.[200] Warren defines hierophagy as "a mechanism by which characters in narrative cross boundaries from one realm to another… by consuming some otherworldly item."[201] As Warren argues, Aseneth's consumption of the honeycomb suggests that this scene could be considered a hierophagy – Aseneth "is invited to transgress divine-mortal boundaries by eating the heavenly food."[202]

Reading Aseneth's consumption of the honeycomb as hierophagy highlights an important feature of the text – Aseneth's consumption of the honeycomb is directly linked with heavenly knowledge in the narrative. In fact, the heavenly figure specifically equates the honeycomb to

[197] The shared meal between Aseneth and the heavenly figure highlights important ramifications for the narrative. See for instance, Andrea Beth Lieber, "I Set a Table Before You: The Jewish Eschatological Character of Aseneth's Conversion Meal," *JSP* 14 (2004): 63–77; Lyson L. Putthoff, "Aseneth's Gastronomic Vision: Mystical Theophagy and New Creation in *Joseph and Aseneth*," *JSP* 24 (2014): 96–117.

[198] For earlier scholarship on this passage, see Warren, *Food and Transformation*, 79–85.

[199] Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 118–150.

[200] Another suggestion for the use of the honeycomb is a theophagy. See Tyson L. Putthoff, "Aseneth's Gastronomical Vision: Mystical Theophagy and New Creation in *Joseph and Aseneth*," *JSP* 24 (2014): 96–117. Putthoff argues that the honeycomb scene represents a historically practiced ritual rather than a literary event. See also Meredith Warren, "'Like Dew from Heaven:' Honeycomb, Religious Identity and Transformation in '*Joseph and Aseneth*'" (MA thesis, McGill University, 2006).

[201] Warren, *Food and Transformation*, 2.

[202] Ibid., 87.

divine knowledge. The figure tells Aseneth that he has shown her "the forbidden mysteries of the Highest" in reference to the honeycomb (Asen. 16:14).[203] The connection between honey and the heavenly realm is common in the Hebrew Bible, early Jewish literature, and later Christian literature.[204] In particular, the use of honey in Ezek 3:3 shares many similarities with Aseneth's experience. During Ezekiel's vision, a heavenly figure instructs him to eat a scroll which tasted "as sweet as honey" (Ezek. 3:3).[205] By consuming the scroll that tastes like honey, Ezekiel receives prophecies from his god. The honeycomb in *Aseneth* likewise appears to connect her to the heavenly realm. Aseneth attributes the honeycomb to the heavenly figure (Asen. 16:11) and the heavenly figure attributes it to the "paradise of God" (Asen. 16:14). [206] Aseneth also appears to receive divine information after consuming the honey. The heavenly figure asks her whether she understands what she witnessed (Asen. 17:1). As a result of consuming the honeycomb, Aseneth appears to contact the divine realm as her physical transformation, which includes her change in attire, mirrors the description of other divine figures.[207] Warren points to her shining radiance (Asen. 18:3) as "indicative of her new association with the divine realm as a result of

[203] Others, such as John C. Poirier, working from the shorter text, have argued that Aseneth did not consume the honey, but that the figure only touches her lips with the honeycomb. See John C. Poirier, "Apicultural Keys to *Joseph and Aseneth*: An Argument for the Priority of the Shorter Text" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the SBL, Boston, MA, 19 November 2017. Meanwhile, Warren argues that Aseneth's consumption of the honeycomb is directly linked to what happens to her and her association with the heavenly realm later in the narrative. See the discussion in Warren, *Food and Transformation*, 78. See also page 87, for a thorough discussion regarding the honeycomb's connection to the divine; Ross S. Kraemer, "Aseneth as Wisdom," in *Wisdom and Psalms*, eds. Athalya Brenner and Carole R. Fontaine, FCB 2nd series (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 219–239.

[204] See for example Ps 19:10; 119:103 which equates honey to the words of the god of Israel; and Prov 24:13; 25:16 which equate the consumption of honey to the acquiring of wisdom. See also Greg Schmidt Goering, "Honey and Wormwood Taste and the Embodiment of Wisdom in the Book of Proverbs," *HBAI* 5 (2016): 23–41, who suggests that the author of Proverbs understood the process of acquiring wisdom to be a bodily process as well as a mental one.

[205] Sweet things, particularly honey, also had a strong erotic connotation. See Anathea E. Portier-Young, "Sweet Mercy Metropolis: Interpreting Aseneth's Honeycomb," *JSP* 14 (2005): 133.

[206] See also the discussion on the heavenly identification of the honeycomb in Patricia D. Ahearne-Kroll, "*Joseph and Aseneth* and Jewish Identity in Greco-Roman Egypt" (PhD diss., University of Chicago Divinity School, 2005), 250–62.

[207] Aseneth's change in attire does not indicate her status as acceptable bride to Joseph. Instead, her change in attire is purely a reflection of her ability to receive the divine knowledge given to her by the figure; her ability to accept the honeycomb is confirmation that she is already heavenly-like.

her honeycomb experience."[208] The honeycomb scene then is one in which Aseneth receives heavenly knowledge and is then associated with the divine realm.

The reliance of Aseneth on the heavenly figure applies only to the divine knowledge that is bestowed upon her and not on her knowledge of Jewish lifestyle practices, foodways in particular. I agree with Warren's claims that what the author of *Aseneth* portrays in the honeycomb scene is the exchange of divine knowledge. As in the example from Ezekiel above, honey and honey related items have a strong connection to wisdom traditions.[209] These traditions specifically refer to male figures receiving divine knowledge, as in the example from Ezekiel. R. Gillian Glass has recently shown that some versions of *Aseneth* explicitly masculinize the main character during the honeycomb scene.[210] Aseneth's receiving of divine knowledge from the heavenly figure may be the reason behind the masculinization of the female protagonist. Warren's work convincingly suggests that the honeycomb scene does not represent participation in a Jewish lifestyle, but rather draws from a tradition that occurs in other texts that share the category of hierophagy.[211] Although Aseneth's transformation illustrates someone undergoing a physical and ontological transformation that makes them an acceptable bride to Joseph, meaning they are accepting of the Jewish lifestyle envisioned in *Aseneth*, I caution against viewing the honeycomb scene as indicative of how the author understood the connection between gender and the ability to transmit Jewish knowledge. Instead, the author of *Aseneth* shows both the

[208] Warren, *Food and Transformation*, 97.

[209] See Tova Forti, "Bee's honey: From Realia to Metaphor in Biblical Wisdom Literature," *VT* 56 (2006): 327–341, for a thorough discussion on the usage of honey in wisdom literature.

[210] R. Gillian Glass, "Aseneth among the Prophetesses: Second Temple Greek Literary Depictions of Women's Visionary Experiences" (Paper presented at the Annual International Meeting of the SBL, Salzburg, Austria, 21 July 2022. For another example of the masculinization of female figures, see Elizabeth A. Castelli, "'I Will Make Mary Male': Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Women in Late Antiquity," in *Bodyguards: The Cultural Contexts of Gender Ambiguity*, eds. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (New York: Routledge, 1991), 29.

[211] Warren, *Food and Transformation*, 75–100.

transmission of the knowledge of the facets of Jewish life and, specifically within the context of the honeycomb scene, the transmission of heavenly knowledge.

If we consider the honeycomb as a scene involving divine knowledge, what we find in *Aseneth* is a consistent portrayal of a female character understanding and capably participating in Jewish foodways as well as receiving divine knowledge. The author portrays a character that, on her own, initiates the destruction of her impure food and is later capable of practicing Jewish foodways with Joseph.

2.4 Conclusions

There are several key conclusions to note from the portrayal of the female protagonists in the Jewish novels in regards to foodways. First, foodways act as a way for Jews to remain separate from outsiders, particularly within the context of foreign lands. Second, women appear as persons who knew and actively participated in Jewish foodways. Third, there appears to be a strong connection between dining and consumption in the portrayal of women. This final point further underscores the historical possibility that women were active (and acknowledged as such) in terms of foodways and the maintenance of Jewish identity.

Foodways present an important practice used by Jews to remain separate. The usage of foodways as a method of remaining separate from outsiders finds further emphasis in contexts that involved foreign lands or settings. In the Jewish novels, excessiveness is a consistent characterization applied to foreigners, while the portrayal of the Jewish people highlights their moderation and restraint. In fact, the female protagonists become the embodiment of moderation, an aspect that appears alongside their refusal to consume foreign food. The authors also make a clear distinction between food associated with foreign practices, particularly food used in the worship of foreign gods, and those practices in which the Jewish people participate.

Women play a major role in the portrayal of food ways in the Jewish novels, appearing as both knowledgeable and capable participants in Jewish food practices. In the Greek version of *Esther*, we find a female character who, despite her removal from her Jewish setting, maintains her dietary restrictions while in the Persian palace. Although the text does not explicitly state how she does this, we must assume that Esther understood dietary Torah observance when she states that she hadn't dined at the king's table. Furthermore, the author presents Esther as a character who uses both ritual activity in the form of fasting and dining practices to negotiate the rescue of her people. In a similar fashion, Judith, who hands herself over to Holofernes' army, maintains her dietary practices by actively preparing for her foray into the enemy's camp. In *Judith*, a female character packs and transports food for herself to maintain the boundary between herself and foreigners. Judith, who does dine with Holofernes, does so by not consuming anything from his stores. Finally, the greatest transformation comes in the form of Aseneth who moves from an idolatrous woman into the heavenly sanctioned bride of Joseph. In the narrative of *Aseneth*, the author highlights the concerns around dining with and consuming food from foreigners. The main concern is clear – both come with the possibility of encountering food connected with idol worship. Furthermore, the author of *Aseneth* portrays a female protagonist who, despite her origins, serves and dines with a Jewish character by the end of the narrative.

A final point I wish to make is the strong connection between dining and sex in the Jewish novels. This occurs the most frequently in the narratives of *Greek Esther* and *Judith*, where both female characters use the dining table to negotiate the outcome of their people. Esther expertly uses her husband's drinking problem to maneuver him into a position where he cannot say no to her. Although she doesn't necessarily use sex to negotiate her demands, the

underlining sexual tension that occurs throughout the work should denote the inclusion of a sexual aspect to the dinner as well. Similarly, Judith uses the implication of sexual consumption to seduce Holofernes. The female protagonist uses the supposedly powerful man's apparent desire to deceive him by lying to him about the state of the Israelites. Contrary to what Holofernes believes, the Israelites are not starving and Judith will not starve before she defeats him. Although the narrative of *Aseneth* does not include any seduction or negotiation, the dining table also appears to mark the boundary between Joseph and Aseneth; it is not until after she transforms that she dines with him.

In this chapter, I have uncovered a variety of ways in which the authors of the Jewish novels portray the female protagonists and their relationships in terms of foodways. The striking similarities and differences provide insights into how the female protagonists play a role in terms of foodways in these texts. The Jewish novels portrays capable female characters that knew, understood, and maintained relationships through foodways to maintain their Jewishness.

CHAPTER 3: The Theme of Female Sexuality in the Jewish Novels

In this chapter, I analyze the bodily portrayal of female sexuality which includes the use of sexual language and the perception of the female body (i.e., women's beauty) in the Jewish novels. [212] Moreover, I examine how the authors portray each female protagonist in terms of their sexuality specifically in relation to other characters in the novels. The Jewish novels present female characters with complex sexualities who use their sexuality as part of the plot of the narrative. Additionally, although female sexuality is one aspect of femaleness that requires protection in these texts, it is also a powerful tool used to maintain boundaries with outsiders.

3.1 Sexuality in *Greek Esther*

While the Hebrew text characterizes Esther in a sexual manner through explicit sexual language that results in Esther's sexual seduction of the king, *Greek Esther* furthers this language in four specific sections.[213] Firstly, in chapter two, which introduces Esther in the context of a sexual contest for the queenship, *Greek Esther* expands the sexual language of the MT by highlighting Esther's beautiful appearance and portraying Esther as adept at sexually pleasing Artaxerxes (Add Esth 2:8-17). Secondly, *Greek Esther* Addition C provides a rare view into Esther's receptivity of sex with her foreign husband through her prayer in which she bemoans having sex with the uncircumcised king (Add Esth 14:15-19). This addition responds to the impossible situation in which Esther finds herself in chapter two; the author clarifies in her prayer that Esther only does what is necessary and, as such, maintains some separation from her foreign spouse. Thirdly, the Greek text again expands the MT's emphasis on Esther's beauty in the scene when the protagonist goes before the king unannounced (Add Esth D, 15:1-15). I

[212] Please refer to the introductory chapter for a more thorough discussion on my use of "sexuality" in this chapter.

[213] I discuss the relationship between the MT Esther and *Greek Esther* in the introductory chapter.

suggest that *Greek Esther* Addition D builds off Esther's portrayal as a sexually competent character (Add Esth 2:9, 17), and shows her sexually seducing the king once more (Add Esth 15:5, 8-14). Fourthly, chapter seven of *Greek Esther* continues language found in MT Esther that evokes another important theme in the narrative of *Greek Esther*: the fine line between Esther's sexual exploitation and use of her sexuality to influence certain men in the narrative. In chapter seven there is evidence to suggest that Esther is either almost raped by Haman or that she possibly uses her beauty to influence him (MT Est and Add Esth 7:8). As such, chapter seven continues to portray the protagonist as a character who wields her sexuality. Throughout *Greek Esther*, the author portrays a female character who is not only in control of her sexuality, but who also uses that sexuality to influence the foreign men around her. The female protagonist does so while still maintaining her Jewishness.

3.1.1 Esther and the Sex Contest

Esther's appearance and her sexual availability are important features of the protagonist's portrayal in both the Hebrew and Greek versions, particularly in chapter two of the narrative. Chapter two, which introduces Esther within the context of a sexual contest in which she eventually partakes, describes her as beautiful in appearance (MT and Add Esth 2:7).[214] It is noteworthy that the initial characterization of Esther relies solely on the fact that she was beautiful ("her name was Esther… and the girl was beautiful in appearance," Add Esth 2:7); the reader is given no other details about her appearance.[215] The phrase found in *Greek Esther* is closest to the description of Rachel (Gen 29:27) and her son Joseph in Gen 39:6 where the

[214] The MT reads: "the girl was fair and beautiful" (והנערה יפת־תאר וטובת מראה).

[215] The Hebrew phrase והנערה יפת־תאר וטובת מראה contains several adjectives and nouns used throughout the Hebrew Bible to describe women of beautiful appearance. For example, Tamar (2 Sam 13:1) and the female lover found in the Song of Songs (e.g., Song 1:8; 2:10) are simply "beautiful" (יפה), Sarai (Gen 12:11), Abigail (1 Sam 15:3), and Tamar (2 Sam 14:27) are "beautiful looking" (יפה/ת מראה/תאר), and Rebekah (Gen 26:7) and Vashti (Esth 1:11) are "good looking" (טוב/ת מראה/תאר). For more instances see Athalya Brenner, *The Intercourse of Knowledge: On Gendering Desire and 'Sexuality' in the Hebrew Bible*, BibInt 26 (Boston: Brill, 1997), 43–45.

Hebrew is also repetitious (יפה/ת תאר ויפה/ת מראה) and signifies exceptionally good looks.[216] The Greek meanwhile uses a common term (καλός) to describe Esther.[217] David Konstan has written on the broad cultural meaning of καλός in ancient Greco-Roman society. In some contexts, the term can refer to what we think of as beauty, referring to clothes or people, but can also have moral connotations such as in the adjectives of "noble" or "honorable." Furthermore, καλός can also refer to abstract ideas, such as laws or knowledge, giving them a meaning of "well-wrought."[218] Therefore, καλός was a broad term used in many possible ways and contexts.

Male characters also appear in texts described as beautiful, but, as Hanna Tervanotko demonstrates, there are key differences between how authors portray beautiful men and women. While the application of "beauty" to male characters was commonly used as a means to distinguish male figures from each other and emphasize their exemplary nature, beauty appears to be the most important characteristic applied to women.[219] The importance of characterizing women as beautiful can be seen in the fact that for many female figures, such as Esther, beauty is one of the only personal details provided in the text regarding their characterization.[220] Since the narrative of *Greek Esther* also does not provide further details regarding Esther's character, we

[216] Brenner, *The Intercourse of Knowledge*, 45.

[217] The Greek of the Old Greek and Alpha text versions maintain the basic idea of the Hebrew text; the Old Greek simplifies the text while the Alpha appears to remain more faithful to the Hebrew.

[218] David Konstan, "Biblical Beauty: Hebrew, Greek, and Latin," in *The One Who Sows Bountifully: Essays in Honor of Stanley K. Stowers*, ed. Caroline Johnson Hodge, et al. (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2013), 130. Similarly, the Hebrew Bible uses language that appears to connect notions of beauty and ugliness with good or bad moral or emotional implications. For example, טוב, which can also mean "good," occurs as the counterpart of רע, which can mean "ugly" or "bad." See the discussion in Saul M. Olyan, "Constructions of Beauty and Ugliness," in *Disability in the Hebrew Bible: Interpreting Mental and Physical Differences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 22.

[219] Hanna Tervanotko, "Gendered Beauty: On the Portrayal of Beautiful Men and Women in the Hebrew Bible," in *So Good, So, Beautiful: Studies in Psalms, Ethics, Aesthetics, and Hermeneutics*, eds. Peter Tomson and Jaap de Lange (Gorichem: Narratio, 2015), 4. Tervanotko notes that beauty is a term used to describe both male and female characters. Whereas "beauty" appears to be an extension of other positive male attributes (e.g., strength or high status), "beauty" appears to be a physical attribute of female characters. Beautiful women add to the prestige and status of their men. For another excellent work on the problematization of beauty in male and female characters, see Stuart Macwilliam, "Ideologies of Male Beauty and the Hebrew Bible," *BibInt* 17 (2009): 265-287. See also Olyan, "Constructions of Beauty," 15–17, who notes that the same terms used for female characters also describe "beautiful" male characters.

[220] Tervanotko, "Gendered Beauty," 8–9.

must assume that the text uses "beauty" in a similar fashion to other ancient Jewish texts – Esther was physically beautiful.

Esther's description as physically beautiful is significant when one considers the context of this description. Beauty, as a physical feature, features prominently in the context of the competition suggested by the king's officials earlier in chapter two of the narrative (Add Esth 2:2-4). Following Queen Vashti's disobedience, the king's officials suggest that "beautiful and virtuous girls" be selected from all the provinces and be brought to the harem in Susa (Add Esth 2:2-3). Furthermore, the initial description of the competition, which tells the reader that "the woman who pleased the king" (ἡ γυνὴ ἣ ἂν ἀρέσῃ τῷ βασιλεῖ) would be made queen (Add Esth 2:4), contains sexual connotations not present in the Hebrew of Esther.[221] The Greek verb ἀρέσκω, meaning "to please or serve," suggests a sexual meaning given the context in which it occurs; these girls were to make themselves attractive in order to sexually please the king.[222] Likewise, Randall C. Bailey argues that the author portrays the "beauty contest" as a competition "to see who can sexually please the king best."[223] A similar usage occurs in Job 31:10, which uses this verb in the context of adultery: "'If my heart has gone forth after another man's wife, and if I laid wait at her doors; then let my wife also *please* another, and let my children be brought low" (Job 31:9–10).

Although the author connects Esther to the females taken alongside the protagonist to Susa through the term καλός, the Greek words used to describe the sexual inexperience of these girls does not occur in the description of Esther. For example, the author explicitly describes the

[221] The Greek renders the Hebrew idiom "to find favor" (תיטב בעיני). There does not appear to be a sexual dimension in this verse in the Hebrew. Moreover, the Greek verb ἀρέσκω has a range of meanings and can mean "to be found acceptable" as in Num 22:34 or with a specific subject as in Jud 14:1. A final option is the meaning "to make oneself attractive to somebody."

[222] Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 90.

[223] Randall C. Bailey, "'That's Why They Didn't Call the Book Hadassah!': The Interse(ct)/(x)ionality of Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Sexuality in the Book of Esther," in *The Bible, Gender, and Sexuality: Critical Readings*, eds. Rhiannon Graybill and Lynn R. Huber (London: T&T Clark, 2021), 175.

girls as virgins (ἄφθορα) and as παρθένοι, a word most scholars translate as "virgin."[224] While we cannot assume Esther's sexual experience or inexperience at the beginning of the text, she is at least compared later in the narrative to the other *parthenoi* (τὰς παρθένους): the text narrates that "the king loved Esther and she found favor beyond all the virgins" (Add Esth 2:17). Tivka Frymer-Kensky explains that the Greek word *parthenos* implies the cultural expectation of virginity for young girls.[225] The fact that the author of *Greek Esther* never uses these words to describe the protagonist suggests they treat her differently in the narrative.[226] As I discuss further below, Esther appears to excel during the competition and emerges victorious over the other girls.

The author's focus on the sexual inexperience of the *parthenoi* continues in the sexual language used to describe the beautification process that precedes the sexual competition (Add Esth 2:12-14). *Greek Esther* 2:12 narrates a beautification process that lasts a period of twelve months (Add Esth 2:12).[227] During this time, the women undergo a process of anointing with

[224] In both verses, the author emphasizes the virginal status of the girls who will participate in the competition and their physical appearance. These girls are "beautiful young virgins" (ἄφθορα καλὰ τῷ εἴδει, Add Esth 2:2; and κοράσια παρθενικὰ καλὰ τῷ εἴδει, Add Esth 2:3). This is the only instance of the usage of ἄφθορος in the LXX and other early Jewish literature.

[225] See Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Virginity in the Bible," in *Gender and Law in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East*, eds. Victor H. Matthews, et al., JSOTSup 262 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 80, where the author details how the word for "'young girl' and 'virgin' are the same" in both Greek and Hebrew. Throughout the ancient world, there was a strict distinction between young girls and married women. For example, the wearing of veils, regardless of their exact purposes, publicly marked married females from non-married ones. See Everett Ferguson, "Of Veils and Virgins: Greek, Roman, Jewish, and Early Christian Practice," *ResQ* 56 (2014): 223–243, for a more thorough discussion on the distinction between married and non-married females and their virginity status. Even here, the author assumes the sexual inexperience of these non-married females, an aspect that coincides with their lack of requirement to wear a veil.

[226] The term "virginity" is itself a problematic construct often used alongside the sexualization of women and in the context of sexual violence toward women. Despite its widespread usages as a form of patriarchal control, "virginity" is a social construct rather than an actual condition. See the conversations in Michael Rosenberg, S*igns of Virginity: Testing Virgins and Making Men in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Julia Kelto Lillis, *Virgin Territory: Configuring Female Virginity in Early Christianity*, Christianity in Late Antiquity 13 (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2023).

[227] The Hebrew text adds an interesting dimension, noting that there was a decree of women that required them to remain in the first harem for exactly twelve months (כדת הנשים שנים עשר חדש). This phrase does not occur in the Greek text. Kristin De Troyer, "An Oriental Beauty Parlour: An Analysis of Esther 2.8-18 in the Hebrew, The Septuagint and the Second Greek Text," in *A Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith and Susanna*, ed. Athalya

spices and salves – six months with oil of myrrh and six months with unnamed spices and ointments (Add Esth 2:12). The use of anointing with such cosmetics may suggest that this preparation was a process used to sexually prepare the girls for their night with the king. [228] For example, Athalya Brenner has argued that "aromatic plants are associated… with female lovers" in the Song of Songs. For example, Song of Songs presents female sexuality, in particular the genitalia, as connected to perfumed substances, especially myrrh.[229] The connection between these types of cosmetics and female sexuality suggests that the days of preparation prepared the female body, possibly the genitalia, for sexual intercourse with the king.[230]

Moreover, the use of myrrh and oil may suggest that this preparation had a contraceptive dimension. In Dioscorides' *De material medica* (Materials of Medicine), a five-book medical text dating to the first century CE, myrrh is one ingredient listed as having contraceptive properties, used to expel the embryo/fetus.[231] Additionally, writing shortly after Dioscorides (late 1st to early 2nd cent. CE), Soranus in his *Gynaecology* also lists myrrh as one of the ingredients in a vaginal suppository used to produce an abortion.[232] Although the author implies a sexual encounter between Esther and the king, the lack of concern regarding conception, and the reference to myrrh and other possible ingredients that could have been used in contraceptive concoctions may suggest that the use of these cosmetics had a contraceptive purpose.[233]

Brenner, FCB 7 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 52, briefly discusses the usage of "law" language in *Esther*.

[228] Bailey, "That's Why," 177, points out that the entire process of beautification and subsequent contest revolves around the sexual exploitation of the young women. Moreover, De Troyer, "An Oriental Beauty Parlour," 47–70, compares the similarities and differences in the texts of the Hebrew and both Greek texts through an examination of Esther's preparation "for the royal bed" (49).

[229] Brenner, *Intercourse*, 87. See Song 4.6.

[230] The text of *Greek Esther* appears to suggest this: the period of preparation takes place before the girls go in to the king (Add Esth 2:13).

[231] John M. Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 32. See also Dioscorides, *De material medica*, 3.7 (2.7).

[232] Riddle, *Contraception*, 47. See Soranus, *Gynaecology*, 1.65.

[233] This is not to say that contraception should have been on the mind of the author in the narrative of *Greek Esther*. If we interpret Esther's character as a sex slave, as I do highlight here in the text, we should not assume that

Regardless, the narrative of *Greek Esther* clearly describes the beautification process as a process that occurred prior to the girls' sexual encounter with the king (Add Esth 2:13).[234] After the twelve-month process is complete, the text explains that each girl goes from the harem to the palace, "then she goes into the king" (τότε εἰσπορεύεται πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα, Add Esth 2:13). In Greek texts, the verb εἰσπορεύομαι occurs elsewhere to refer to sexual relationships.[235] There can be no confusion that what the author of *Greek Esther* describes is a sexual competition to determine who will be the new queen. The text describes a process by which each girl arrived at the palace where she would enter in (εἰσπορεύομαι) the evening and depart to the second harem in the morning (Add Esth 2.14).[236] *Greek Esther* implies that the girls were evaluated on their sexual abilities when the text narrates that the girls "no longer go into the king unless she is called by name" (οὐκέτι εἰσπορεύεται πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα ἐὰν μὴ κληθῇ ὀνόματι) (Add Esth 2.14).

The author of *Greek Esther* maintains the protagonist's silence regarding the entire process, but portrays her as sexually compliant and competent. Esther accepts the help given to her, particularly by the attendant Gai. For example, the narrative states that when it was Esther's turn to go in to the king, "she rejected nothing which the eunuch, the one who was the guard of the women, had commanded" (Add Esth 2:15). Several scholars have focused on this verse as

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the author would have been concerned with contraception. Though, as Brenner, *Intercourse*, 88, suggest in regards to the lack of concern regarding the risk of pregnancy in the Song of Songs, it seems likely that contraception is at least referred to in the physical preparation of the girls since there is also no concern given to the topic of unintended pregnancies in *Greek Esther*. Brenner argues that since intercourse in *Song* never results in pregnancy, even though the two lovers are not married, the text must contain references to birth control practices.

[234] In MT Ester, the twelve-month period of preparation follows the phrase "the turn came for each girl to go in to King Ahasuerus" (לבוא אל־המלך, Esth 2:12). The Hebrew verb used here, "to go/enter into" (בוא אל), often occurs as an explicit sexual idiom for sexual intercourse. See Brenner, *Intercourse*, 22. Elsewhere in Ester, בוא אל occurs seven times (Est 1:12; 2:12, 13, 15; 4:2, 8, 11).

[235] For instance, in Gen 6:4, where the sons of God "go into" the daughters of humans, the Greek verb εἰσπορεύομαι clearly refers to a sexual encounter, as the daughters later bear children. Another reference occurs in Amos 2.7, which refers to an inappropriate sexual relationship in which both the father and son εἰσπορεύομαι the same girl. This encounter results in the profanation of the holy name (Amos 2.7).

[236] MT Ester emphasizes the sexual preparation of the girls in 2:13 by narrating that: "when the girl went in to the king, she was given whatever she asked for to take with her from the harem to the king's palace" (MT Est 2:13). The specific reference to taking things with them is absent in the Greek text.

referring to Esther's self-assertion, but have missed the explicit sexual connotations that are implied and the relationship between Esther and Gai more broadly in the text.[237] The statement in verse fifteen seems to suggest that Gai instructed Esther (and the other girls) on the sexual preferences of the king. Moreover, the text appears to suggest that Esther may have sexually pleased Gai earlier in the narrative (Add Esth 2:9).[238] When the author first introduces readers to Gai, they describe how Esther "pleased him and found favor before him and he hastened to give her ointment" (Add Esth 2:9). The use of the Greek verb ἀρέσκω ("to please"), used earlier to describe the sex competition in *Greek Esther* 2:4, presents a pattern of Esther's use of her sexuality to control the men around her.

The author of *Greek Esther* portrays the protagonist as the subject in phrases that contain sexual terms. In *Greek Esther* 2:9, Esther is the one who pleases Gai (καὶ ἤρεσεν αὐτῷ τὸ κοράσιον (Add Esth 2:9). Similarly, the text uses another sexual Greek verb εἰσελθεῖν (the aorist active infinitive form of εἰσέρχομαι, Add Esth 2:15) when describing her encounter with the king.[239] The Greek verb εἰσέρχομαι is frequently used to refer to sexual intercourse.[240] In most instances, the subject of the verb εἰσέρχομαι is a male, indicating that it is the male who goes

[237] See Fox, *Character and Ideology*, 198, who argues that Esther fully accepts her participation and also does not refuse help, showing a lack of self-assertion. Conversely, White, "Esther," 167, argues that Esther's participation highlights her active character. White argues that Esther actively works to place herself in the best position in the narrative.

[238] The verb ἀρέσκω appears elsewhere in Add Esth (1:21; 2:4, 9; 5:13, 14), where it obviously does not have a sexual connotation (e.g., in 1:21 where Muchaeus tells Artaxerxes that Vashti must be accountable for her rejection of his command; his "speech pleased the king").

[239] Here, Bailey, "That's Why," 177, argues that the Hebrew text is clear that Esther wins the king over by "sexing" him better than the other girls. Bailey directly links her winning to her interactions with Gai, who Bailey claims knew what would sexually please the king. Several other scholars have variously dealt with Esther's participation, many of which skirt the issue of the sexual implications of the text. For example, Naomi Wolf, "The Beauty Myth," in *Race, Class and Gender: An Anthology*, eds. Margaret L. Anderson and Patricia Hill Collins, 2nd ed. (Boston: Wadsworth, 1995), 421, argues that Esther's winning of the context commodifies her into an object. Wolf concludes that Esth is full of "men who want objects and women who want to be objects." Wolf's comments do not touch on the sexual implications of the narrative. Similarly, Fox, *Character*, 37, argues that Esther only accepted the beauty treatments given to her. Here, Fox argues that Esther only passively participates in the contest. Likewise, Kenneth Craig, *Reading Esther: A Case for the Literary Carnivalesque*, LCBI (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 94–95, assumes Gai's help only included providing Esther jewelry and clothing.

[240] For instance, in Gen 16:4 Abram "goes into" Hagar and she conceives. Another instance occurs when Laban tricks Jacob into having intercourse with Leah and not Rachel; Jacob wishes to "go into her" (Gen 29.21).

into (has sex with) the female.[241] Instead, the author of *Greek Esther* presents Esther as the subject of the verb; when it was time for Esther "to go in to the king" (Add Esth 2:15).[242] The text suggests that Gai also found Esther sexually appealing and thus singled her out, giving her more attention than the other girls, and providing better odds that she might please the king as well.[243] This treatment from Gai is a direct result of her pleasing him (Add Esth 2:9).

Esther's pleasing of Gai is only one example of her sexual competence in *Greek Esther*. Another example appears in Add Esth 2:17, commonly translated as "the king loved Esther" (ἠράσθη ὁ βασιλεὺς Ἐσθήρ).[244] The verb ἐράω can mean "to desire intensely," as in sexual passion. The use of ἐράω links Esther's sexual abilities to her becoming queen by detailing how the king found Esther sexually pleasing.[245] Furthermore, the text continues, stating that Esther "found favor beyond all the virgins" (εὗρεν χάριν παρὰ πάσας τὰς παρθένους, Add Esth 2:17). The Greek phrase "εὑρίσκω χάριν" is an idiom which means "to find favor" or "to win favor." [246] An examination of notions of Greek sexuality may help to illuminate the idiom εὑρίσκω χάριν. Konstan explains that the Greeks viewed sexual encounters as necessarily asymmetrical, understanding them as the relation between a "male" (active) and a "female" (receiving) party,

[241] A great example of a female active subject for εἰσέρχομαι occurs in the story of Lot and his daughters. The narrative of Lot and his daughters uses εἰσέρχομαι three times to describe how the daughters had sex with their father to become pregnant (Gen 19:33–35).

[242] This occurs again in verse sixteen (καὶ εἰσῆλθεν Εσθηρ πρὸς Ἀρταξέρξην τὸν βασιλέα, Add Esth 2:16)

[243] Bailey, "That's Why," 178, points to the sexual implications of the Hebrew language in regards to the king, but not to Esther's interactions with Gai himself. Bailey does not appear to connect Gai's help with anything Esther does to Gai, but does argue that it again highlights Esther's superior sexual abilities.

[244] The NRSV incorrectly translates ἐράω as "love." The Hebrew text of 2:17 uses the term אהב, a term typically translated as "to love." While אהב is by no means restricted to either sexual or non-physical love, the usage of אהב in the Hebrew Bible narrates both sexual and emotional love when it appears in the context of a man "loving" a woman. See the discussion in Brenner, *The Intercourse of Knowledge*, 13, 17.

[245] Fox, *Character*, 28. Fox also argues that the king must have found Esther sexually satisfying because he makes her queen. Similarly, Klein, "Honor and Shame in Esther," 159, agrees that there is no doubt that these verses refer to an explicit sexual encounter between Esther and the king. Moreover, Klein highlights the loss of shame the girls would have accepted upon learning they would not become queen. As unchaste and unmarried girls, these women would have had to remain in the palace harem because they were no longer suitable for marriage outside of the harem.

[246] Bailey, "That's Why," 241, explains that the Hebrew phrase "to find favor with him" connects to the king's sexual reaction to Esther.

who was described as καλός or "the one who inspired ἔρως in the lover."[247] According to Konstan, καλὸς described a "female" who inspired erotic feelings in their (male) lover. It is therefore not a stretch that the Greek idiom εὑρίσκω χάριν (to win favor) would share a sexual implication. As this phrase appears in the context of Esther's relationship with both Gai (Add Esth 2:9) and Artaxerxes (Add Esth 2:17), I suggest that this phrase uncovers a consistent pattern of portraying Esther as sexually competent. In fact, the author states as much: "now Esther found favor (εὑρίσκω χάριν) in the eyes of all who saw her" (Add Esth 2:15).

3.1.2 Esther the Seductress: Influencing Men through Sexuality

As I have outlined above, *Greek Esther* portrays the protagonist as compliant and competent in her own sexual exploitation; Esther accepts Gai's help and uses her beauty and sexual superiority to win the favor of everyone. I suggest that the rest of *Greek Esther* specifically responds to this characterization of Esther and places constraints on her sexuality: Esther wields a "public" persona that she uses to influence the men around her. In *Greek Esther* C, the author expands the biblical book to include Esther's rejection of her husband and further emphasizes Esther's lifestyle among the foreigners as a guise. The author further develops Esther's fake persona in *Greek Esther* D, where the protagonist reestablishes her "public" persona before going before the king. Finally, building on the groundwork laid during the competition, the author portrays the protagonist as skillfully uses her sexuality to seduce the king and possibly Haman in chapter seven.

Esther's prayer begins with a description of the protagonist physically debasing herself before engaging in prayer, an act that represents her shedding of her sexual persona that is associated with the king (Add Esth 14:2). The text narrates that Esther "removed her garments of

[247] Konstan, "Biblical Beauty," 134. See also Bernadette Brooten, *Love Between Women: Early Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 6–7, 241.

glory and clothed herself in garments of distress and mourning" (Add Esth 14:2). Although the theme of changing into clothes of mourning is common for women preparing themselves for prayer,[248] I suggest that her change in attire results from her change in sexual persona. Esther removes the clothing which has been linked to her sexual experiences with Artaxerxes and Gai for clothing that does not share that connection. As the text continues, there is a juxtaposition being expressed in the comparison between her splendid body and apparel, and the state of her body as she prepares for prayer: "instead of fine perfumes she covered her head with ashes and dung, and she greatly humbled her body; she covered every part of adornment and enjoyment with her twisted hair" (Add Esth 14:2). Several scholars have noted this transition from splendid clothing to mourning clothing and have connected it to Esther's sexuality.[249] For example, Lawrence Wills argues that Esther physically debases everything that one would associate with her sexuality.[250] While I agree with Wills' conclusion, I do not agree that the author had only Esther's sexuality in mind here. Instead, the author portrays Esther as physically debasing herself to "remove" the sexual persona with which she won the competition in chapter two. As such, the author portrays Esther as physically embodying a particular sexual persona, but also portrays her as being able to remove that persona.

The author of *Greek Esther* appears to be specifically responding to Esther's apparent compliance in the sexual contest in chapter two (Add Esth 2:12–17). One of the purposes of Esther's prayer is to counter the portrayal earlier in the narrative which she appears compliant in

[248] See similar clothing changes in *Aseneth* and Jdt 9:1. General disarray was common in narratives that portray penitent people praying. See for example, 2 Kings 19:1; Neh 1:4; Dan 9:3–4.

[249] For example, see Lawrence Wills, *The Jewish Novel*, 122. Wills specifically views Esther's clothing as tied directly to her sexuality. Similarly, Adele Reinhartz, "LXX Esther," in *Early Jewish Writings*, eds. Eileen Schuller and Marie-Theres Wacker, The Bible and Women: An Encyclopedia of Exegesis and Cultural History, vol. 3.1 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 19–20, notes the sexual overtures of Esther's use of dress.

[250] Wills, *The Jewish Novel*, 122. Moreover, Wills notes that her physical debasement is significant particularly when one considers that Mordecai does not do follow suit before his prayer.

being Artaxerxes' wife.[251] The author appears to address this specific concern explicitly in *Greek Esther* C, where Esther addresses her god saying,

> "You have knowledge of all things and you know that I hate the glory of the wicked and detest (βδελύσσομαι) the bed of the uncircumcised and of every foreigner. You know my necessity that I detest (βδελύσσομαι) the sign of my proud status, which is on my head during days of my viewing (public display). I detest (βδελύσσομαι) it like a rag of menstruation and I do not wear it on the days of my stillness (leisure time) … your servant has not enjoyed myself since the day of my exchange (brought here) until now." (Add Esth 14:15–18)[252]

The phrase "bed of the uncircumcised" (κοίτην ἀπεριτμήτων, Add Esth 14:15), which is clearly a euphemism for intercourse with the gentile king, indicates the exact limitations being placed on the portrayal of Esther's sexuality.[253] Firstly, by the inclusion of the verb βδελύσσομαι ("to abhor or detest"), the author connects a number of features of Esther's life in the palace – her attire, sex with the king, and her crown –with actions that have been historically deemed reprehensible by Jews. For example, the verb βδελύσσομαι occurs a handful of times in the Greek translation of the Pentateuch, particularly in Leviticus in the context of defilement (e.g., with regard to food: LXX 11:11, 13, 43; 20:25; with regard to sexual relations: 18:30; 20:23).[254] In fact, Esther's language here is quite severe; she chastises herself by recalling the Jewish prohibition against intermarriage with foreigners (e.g., Deut 7:3–4; Ezra 10:2; Neh 13:23–27)

[251] Reinhartz, "LXX Esther," 20 also connects Esther's change in dress following her prayer to her initial beguiling of the king. For example, she states that Esther's change in dress reminds the king "of the reasons he chose her as his queen."

[252] Wills, *The Jewish Novel*, 123. Wills argues that the rationale behind these statements is to underscore Esther's motives and to emphasize her uprightness.

[253] Nolte and Jordaan, "Esther's Prayer," 302–303, come to a similar conclusion. The authors discuss the issue of purity as it occurs in Esther's prayer, arguing that Esther has become morally and physically impure from marrying a foreigner and having sex with him. Similarly, D.A. DeSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha: Message, Context, and Significance* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2002), 120–122 and D.J. Harrington, *Invitation to the Apocrypha* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1999), 53, both agree that the author of *Greek Esther* included Esther's prayer to restore her moral standing. A similar assessment of Esther appears in *1 Clement* 55.6 and *Stromata* 4.19.

[254] The connection between *Greek Esther* and LXX Lev is interesting, because the usage of βδελύσσομαι occurs in the sections pertaining to laws regarding clean and unclean foods/animals (Lev 11), sexual relations (Lev 18), and penalties for violations of holiness (Lev 20). In my view, the author of *Greek Esther* draws upon the text of LXX Lev and has these regulations in mind.

and equates her crown, "the sign of my proud status," to the defiling effects of menstruation ("I detest it [her crown] like a rag soaked in menstrual blood" (βδελύσσομαι αὐτὸ ὡς ῥάκος καταμηνίων, Add Esth 14:16).[255] Secondly, the author's inclusion of Esther's call to her god, "you know my necessity" (σὺ οἶδας τὴν ἀνάγκην μου, Add Esth 14:16), speaks to the precarious position in which the protagonist finds herself. The noun ἀνάγκην has a complex meaning and sometimes refers to a "plight with little scope for maneuvering."[256] For all purposes, Esther's appearance, royal title, and crown, as well as her relationship with the king, are facets of a persona she has adopted out of absolute necessity.[257]

Greek Esther D continues the narrative above by expanding and supplementing the MT version regarding Esther's preparations before going in front of the king. In my view, Esther's reversal of the process of debasing her body by replacing the clothes of mourning with her majestic attire reestablishes her sexual persona as sexually competent. Wills similarly argues that D narrates the return of the attire that was so clearly linked previously to Esther's sexuality when the text narrates that Esther prepared herself to go before the king by taking off "the garments of worship and clothed herself in glory" (ἐξεδύσατο τὰ ἱμάτια τῆς θεραπείας καὶ περιεβάλετο τὴν δόξαν αὐτῆς, Add Esth 15:1). [258] Moreover, Reinhartz argues that, during her preparation before seeing the king, Esther purposefully makes herself appealing. [259] I agree with both of these assessments of this passage. The author of *Greek Esther* has already established that the protagonist is a character who understands what the king wants sexually. Given Esther's opinions on the matter as revealed in her prayer, the reversal of her abasement and the re-

[255] See also Lev 15:19-24; Isa 64:4 for similar language.

[256] Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 38.

[257] White, "Esther," 166, argues that Esther unravels the plot set forth by Haman all while maintaining her ethnic identity as a Jew.

[258] Wills, *The Jewish Novel*, 122, notes the return of Esther's previous attire. Wills argues that her appearance is beautiful, erotic, and sexual in the given context.

[259] Reinhartz, "LXX Esther," 20, acknowledges that Esther's attire is meant to soften the king but stops short of calling Esther's preparations an act of seduction.

donning of her garments can only point to the character's motives to influence the king through her appearance and assumedly sexual experience.[260]

Esther's use of her embodied sexuality reaches a climax in chapter seven of the narrative. In this chapter the king and Haman arrive to a second dinner that Esther has prepared for them (Add Esth 7:1-2). Here Esther reveals her identity and Haman's plot to eradicate the Jews (Add Esth 7:3-6). After hearing about the plot, the king retires to the garden and Haman begs the queen to spare his life (Add Esth 7:7). In verse 8, the king returns to find that Haman has "thrown" (ἐπιπεπτώκει) himself upon the couch where Esther is sitting (Add Esth 7:8).[261] The king, upset by what he finds, asks "'Will he dare even assault my wife in my own house?'" (Add Esth 7:8). It is only after this interaction between Esther and Haman that Artaxerxes orders for his execution (Add Esth 7:9). In my view, this interaction highlights an important theme in the narrative of *Greek Esther*: the fine line between Esther's sexual exploitation and her use of her sexuality to influence certain men in the narrative.

The continued use of sexual language in the interaction between Haman and Esther signal Haman's final effort to save himself by possibly sexually assaulting Esther or, in line with what I suggest above, the author may portray Esther wielding her sexuality to influence the men around her by seducing Haman. Bailey argues that the king's comment in Add Esth 7:8 is the key to understanding the interaction between Haman and Esther. This is primarily because this verse

[260] Wills, *The Jewish Novel*, 122, points out how striking the reversal is as she completely reverses the process of debasing herself. The Greek text of Esther attributes the king's change in heart to the intervention of Esther's god. This is in line with another important theme that the author of the Greek translation adds to the text: since there are no mentions of Israel's god anywhere in the Hebrew tale of Esther, the Greek author introduces the theme to their translation. Reinhartz, "LXX Esther," 20, also comments on Esther's fainting spell following Artaxerxes' anger. Giving three possibilities, weakness from fasting, her god's denial of her prayer, or her god's attempt to disarm the king, Reinhartz does not attempt to answer the question.

[261] The MT uses the verb נפל.

appears to portray Haman assaulting Esther. [262] The king's question – "'Will he dare even assault my wife in my own house?'" – uses the Greek verb βιάζῃ which means "to exert force and pressure on someone" (Add Esth 7:8). [263] This verb also appears in LXX Deut 22:25, 28 to detail instances where a man sexually forced himself upon a woman. If we isolate this verse from the context in which it occurs, the Greek may suggest that Haman sexually forced himself upon Esther. Contrary to this view, I suggest that, given the consistent portrayal of Esther as a sexually competent character, the author portrays the female protagonist wielding her sexuality to implicate Haman in the assault of the king's wife.[264] Similarly, Bailey takes the matter of what is happening in this verse farther and wonders why Esther went to the couch in the first place. Bailey suggests that Esther may have been attempting to seduce Haman.[265]

While I agree with Bailey's conclusion, in my view it misses a key point in the passage. The king does not call for Haman's execution when Esther uncovers the plot against the Jews. The attempted genocide is not enough to dissuade the king and have the orders rescinded. Moreover, the Greek verb used in verse eight when Haman throws (ἐπιπεπτώκει) himself at Esther on the couch has no sexual connotations. It is only the king's interpretation of the situation that suggests Esther was violated (Add Esth 7:8). In my view, it is not difficult then to interpret this episode in the narrative as Esther's final effort to save her people; she maneuvers Haman into a situation to which Artaxerxes must respond. This interpretation is in line with how the author portrays Esther throughout the narrative – Esther is known for being sexually

[262] Bailey, "That's Why," 179, argues that Haman's reaction to the king's question – Haman covers his face because the king caught him doing something with Esther (Add Esth 7:8) – highlights the importance of the king's question.

[263] The Hebrew uses the word כבש, a word typically used as military terminology meaning to subdue or subjugate, to describe Haman's actions toward Esther.

[264] Bailey, "That's Why," 179, also suggests that Esther may seduce Haman here, but does not connect her actions to the larger theme of Esther's cleverness in the narrative. Similarly, Reinhartz, "LXX Esther," 20, has argued that the verse may suggest that Esther's beauty worked on Haman as well as the king.

[265] Bailey, "That's Why," 179.

competent, for curating her appearance to entice male desire, and for using her sexuality to influence the foreign men in her life.

3.2 Sexuality in Judith

An essential aspect of the characterization of the protagonist of *Judith* is the main character's sexuality; Judith appears to be perceptive of the sexual desires of men, particularly Holofernes, and cleverly uses those desires to save her people. Unlike other female characters who find themselves in a dangerous situation, Judith willingly leaves the refuge of her home and takes responsibility for ending the crisis. Moreover, the author of *Judith* compares the protagonist's actions to other figures in Israel's history and claims divine patronage of her actions. While the author portrays Judith as adept at using her sexuality, this portrayal also allows the character to maintain her identity as a righteous and proper Jewish woman. The author of *Judith* carefully expresses Judith's sexuality through her interactions with several male characters – she prepares herself by dressing in a way that elicits sexual desire in men and then openly encourages Holofernes' desire to have sex with her – all while maintaining a humble and pious identity as a Jewish woman. The author maintains this balance throughout the narrative, allowing Judith to flaunt her sexuality without damaging the reader's opinion of the character.

In the following sections, I analyze the portrayal of Judith's sexuality and highlight her dual personas. Judith's introduction describes her as a humble and pious Jewish woman who at times takes on the persona as an openly sexual woman who flaunts her sexuality to the men around her. My analysis begins in chapter eight where the author introduces the female protagonist. Her introduction frames the structure of the character of Judith for the rest of the work. My analysis then moves to chapter ten, where Judith takes on a new sexual persona through her changing of attire. In this chapter, Judith prepares herself and begins the seduction of

Holofernes and his army, leading to her infiltration into the enemy's camp. I then turn to chapter twelve, which contains the climax of the story. The author portrays Judith in explicit sexual terms. Finally, I examine how the author nuances this sexual characterization of Judith by buttressing chapter ten and twelve, the main chapters containing sexual language, with her prayer in chapter nine and clarification of Judith's actions in chapter thirteen. In these two chapters, the author structures Judith's sexuality and seduction in a particular way, one which maintains her identity as a pious Jewish woman and promotes her faith in the God of Israel.

3.2.1 Judith the Beautiful, Pious, and Faithful Widow

The author of *Judith* presents the female protagonist in specific terms that are important for understanding the portrayal of her sexuality in this narrative. There are three main elements highlighted in Judith's introduction: she is a widow (Jdt 8:4), she is beautiful (Jdt 8:7), and she fears her god (Jdt 8:8). As I discuss below, these three elements are vital to understanding Judith's portrayal as they function either as part of her sexuality or work alongside her sexuality to complete the plot of the narrative.

The introduction of Judith's character begins with her genealogy and the story of her husband's death, highlighting the fact that she was widowed (Jdt 8:4). The text narrates that "Judith was in her house a widower for three years and four months and she made for herself a tent on the rooftop of her house. She put sackcloth upon her waist and upon her was garments of her widowhood" (Jdt 8:4–5). As most women would not have remained widows, this detail suggests the importance of this term for Judith's characterization. Throughout the ancient world, as well as in the context of the ancient near east, the widow was viewed as a particularly

precarious status for those women who had no other relatives. [266] For example, in the Hebrew Bible, the widow or אלמנה was considered to be one of the weakest positions in society.[267] A woman who no longer had any male representative to financially support her or link her to a family was pushed outside of the normal social framework of society, leaving them vulnerable and unsupported.[268] Similarly, Mesopotamian laws dating to the late twelfth/early eleventh centuries BCE describe the *almattu* as a woman who had lost all ties to a male relative from her husband's family – such as a husband, son, father-in-law. [269] Throughout the cultures of the ancient Near East, the widow's vulnerability stemmed from their lack of any economic status which was a direct result of their loss of male kinship ties.

The connection between the lack of male kinship ties and widowhood is emphasized in several biblical narratives. For example, in the narrative of Tamar and Judah (Gen 38), Tamar becomes a widow twice; first when her husband Er, the firstborn son of Judah, dies (Gen 38:6–7) and second when Judah gives Tamar his second born son Onan in order to produce a heir, but he too dies (Gen 38:8–10).[270] Tamar eventually tricks Judah into producing twins after he refuses to

[266] Athalya Brenner-Idan, "Clothing Seduces: Did you Think it was Naked Flesh that Did it?," in *Tobit and Judith: The Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)*, eds. Athalya Brenner-Idan and Helen Efthimiadis-Keith (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 221. As Athalya Brenner-Idan notes, within the patriarchal framework of the ancient Near East, a woman lacking a husband or parents belonged to "a liminal social state."

[267] The fragility of widows also occurs in the following examples in Ps. 94:4–9; 68:6; 109:9; and 78:63–64. The Psalms are explicit that the אלמנה required protection from YHWH. Paula S. Hiebert, "'Whence Shall Help Come to Me?': The Biblical Widow," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy L. Day (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1989), 127, argues that widows required protection to not become objects of oppression by more "powerful members of the society."

[268] As Hiebert, "'Whence,'" 130, has suggested, the specific status of widow was similar to the status of the *ger* or foreigner in that the *ger* also lacked any supporting kinship ties. Similarly, Carolyn S. Leeb, "The Widow: Homeless and Post-Menopausal," *BTB* 32 (2002): 162, argues that a loss of kinship ties was an important factor in the status of a widow. See also the discussion in John Rock, "Making Widows: The Patriarchal Guardian at Work," *BTB* 27 (1997): 10–15. Rock argues that widowhood also denoted the loss of guardianship from a male relative who could control access to the woman's sexuality.

[269] Hiebert, "'Whence,'" 128.

[270] This narrative is very interesting, because Tamar returns to her father's home (Gen 38:11) and yet she is still concerned about producing a child for her husband's family. Moreover, Tamar's widowhood remains un-remedied when she initially conceives a child with Judah, as she puts her garments of widowhood back on their sexual interaction (Gen 38:18–19). It is only after Judah acknowledges his actions (Gen 38:26) and she bears him

give Tamar his final son Shelah (Gen 38:11–27).[271] Similarly, the narratives of Amnon and Tamar in 2 Sam 13, and of Ruth understand widowhood as a negative status that was applied to a woman who had lost ties to a husband's family through another male relative or a son.[272] These narratives showcase the vulnerable and desperate situation women found themselves in when their husbands died.

Judith's widowhood contrasts sharply with the above portrayals of widowhood in that, despite being childless and living on her own, Judith does not appear to be in a precarious or vulnerable position. As Michael Wojciechowski has pointed out, nowhere is it ever remotely suggested that a duty of a Jewish woman was to remain a widow, but in *Judith* this is exactly what the main character does.[273] Moreover, she not only remained a widow for three years and four months at the beginning of the narrative (Jdt 8:4), but she never remarries at the end of the narrative (Jdt 16:22) either. To this point, Levine has suggested that the specific length of Judith's mourning and widowhood stresses her otherness. Levine suggests that Judith "had to be a widow," because then her character would be "sexually experienced but unattached – in order

physical children (Gen 38:27–30) that Tamar loses her status as widow; the author never refers to her as a widow in the narrative after verse nineteen.

[271] In the Greek translation of Genesis 38, the terms χηρεύω and χηρεύσις describe Tamar's status as widow, suggesting that these words denote the status of אלמנה. These Greek terms are the exact terms used to describe Judith (Jdt 8:4–5).

[272] In the case of Ruth, neither the main character nor her mother-in-law are ever described as an אלמנה because Ruth is able to secure a new patron and household for both of them. See the discussion in Leeb, "The Widow," 161. It is clear from the narrative that Ruth and her mother-in-law are both vulnerable due to the loss of their husbands. Additionally, the Greek translation of Tamar in 2 Sam 13:20 reveals the negative connotation of widowhood to its author. For example, when the author writes "and Tamar stayed/lived as a widow in her brother Absalom's house" they use the Greek term χηρεύω as the translation from the Hebrew word שמם which means "to be deserted or desolated."

[273] Michael Wojciechowski, "Moral Teaching of the Book of Judith," in *A Pious Seductress: Studies in the Book of Judith*, ed. Geza G. Xeravits, DCLS 14 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 89, argues that *Judith* puts forth an alternate system of values which devalues procreation and places asceticism, such as that found in early Christian communities, as a better option for women. Leeb, "The Widow, 162, argues that the term "widow" may have also referred to a woman who has lost her husband and is also post-menopausal, meaning they are past their childbearing years. Leeb points to two narratives, 1 Kgs 11:26 and 1 Kgs 7:14, which describe two widows who have male children to care for them. Despite the existence of their male offspring, these women remain "widows." Leeb suggests that the term אלמנה then may also point to the women's post-menopausal age as well as their lack of secure attachment. Furthermore, Schmitz and Lange, "Judith," 38–42, explore Judith's portrayal as a wealthy and cultured woman, arguing that she is not a helpless widow.

for her to carry out her plan."[274] While I agree that Judith's status as widow highlights her otherness in the text and disconnects her from any male relatives, in my view the point to make is that, without a husband or family ties, there is no possibility that Judith's sexual exploits later in the narrative can bring dishonor on anyone but herself. In my view, Judith's widowhood connects to her agentic sexuality in this narrative because it allows her to openly flaunt her sexuality without any negative consequences.

The author of *Judith* makes a strong connection between the female protagonist's widowhood and her beautiful appearance to her dedication to her god. Although the only remarks on Judith's appearance are that "she was beautiful in appearance and [had] an exceedingly lovely outward appearance" (Jdt 8:7), the author also details how "[there] was no who pronounced an evil word about her, because she greatly feared God" (Jdt. 8.8).[275] Barbara Schmitz and Lydia Lange have argued that the point of the introduction is to show that Judith's beauty and faith in her god are reciprocally constitutive, meaning that "her beauty is an expression of her fear of God and her fear of God is an expression of her beauty."[276] While I agree that Judith's beauty is partly a manifestation of her faith, in my opinion her beauty should also be considered a part of her sexuality since it is Judith's beauty which she uses to succeed in her plan to kill Holofernes.

Additionally, Judith's faith in her god is a fundamental feature of her portrayal; Judith succeeds where others fear to venture because she alone has enough faith in her god. Several scholars have noted the author's emphasis on Judith's devotion in chapter eight. For example,

[274] Levine, "Sacrifice and Salvation," 213.

[275] Note here the author's use of καλός to describe Judith. See the section on *Greek Esther* above where I describe this term.

[276] Schmitz and Lange, "Judith," 36. Whereas Schmitz and Lange argue that Judith's beauty reflects her faith, Brenner suggests that feminine beauty could also be a way of placing women in a sexual domain. See Brenner, *The Intercourse of Knowledge*, 50. This is especially significant given the portrayal of men where beauty is a sign of their socio-political significance.

Ora Brison, who has discussed Judith's rather extreme mourning practices, specifically her extended fasts (Jdt 8:6), argues these practices display her exceptional dedication to her god.[277] Likewise, her insistence to wear sackcloth and to remain in mourning are symbols of her above-and-beyond piety.[278] Adele Reinhartz also notes Judith's exceptionally close relationship with her god, and argues that Judith's rooftop location for her mourning (Jdt 8:5) implies her "proximity to God."[279] These are important points specifically because, for the reader, Judith's widowhood, beauty, and faith are the main characteristics that the author attaches to Judith's character. These main components to Judith's character underscore aspects of her portrayal that illuminate her actions throughout the remainder of the narrative. Furthermore, as I argue below, these components are important for understanding how the author portrays Judith as a pious seductress who uses her sexuality to seduce and defeat Holofernes without bringing shame to herself or compromising her own Jewishness.

3.2.2 Sex, Lies, and Influence: Judith and her Sexual Persona

Following the author's initial description of Judith, the female protagonist sets forth to remedy the crisis by physically making herself appealing to all men. Chapter ten, which follows

[277] Ora Brison, "Judith: A Pious Widow Turned Femme Fatale or More?," in *The Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)*, eds. Athalya Brenner-Idan and Helen Efthimiadis-Keith (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 183. The customary mourning period was seven days (see Exod.22:23; Deut 24:17–21; Isa 1.23; Mal 3:5).

[278] Sackcloth appears throughout the Hebrew Bible and denotes exceptional circumstances. Sackcloth was a modest item of clothing (e.g., Isa 3:24) and frequently appears in the context of death or mourning (e.g., Gen 37:34; 2 Sam 3:31; Isa 22:12; 2 Sam 21:10). Additionally, the wearing of sackcloth, as well as the practices of fasting and praying appear to have had a preventative function during crisis situations (e.g., Ps 35:13; Isa 58:5; Add Esth 4:1; Jdt 4:10–12). Sackcloth also appears frequently in situation where people were confronted by their deity (e.g., 1 Kgs 20:31–32; 2 Kgs 6:30; 1 Chr 21:16; Add Esth 4:1; Job 16:15; Isa 15:3; 37:1; 20:2; Jdt 4:14). The author of *Judith* appears to draw from a number of these instances, particularly the use of sackcloth when praying to a deity during a crisis.

[279] Reinhartz, "Better Homes and Gardens," 328.

Judith's physical debasement and prayer,[280] details her change in dress and appearance before she leaves the village to seduce Holofernes. The text reads:

> She removed her sackcloth in which she had been clothed and stripped off the garments of her widowhood. Then she bathed her whole body with water and anointed herself with thick ointment and combed the hair of her head. She put upon herself a head-dress, and clothed herself in garments of gladness in which she dressed in the days of the life of her husband Manasseh. She put sandals on her feet and placed around herself bracelets, anklets, rings, earrings, and all her possessions (jewelry). Thus, she made herself exceedingly beautiful to allure the eyes of all the men who might see her. (Jdt. 10:3–4)[281]

Verses three and four are particularly relevant to understanding how the author of Judith portrays the protagonist in terms of her sexuality. Judith appears to take on a new identity in the form of her dress, an identity that allows her to cross over into the enemy's camp and complete her seduction of the enemy. This persona allows Judith to remain both pious and physically unadulterated.[282]

The author of *Judith* portrays the attire of the female protagonist as connected to a way/state of being. Take for example, Judith's garments of widowhood (Jdt 10:3), which she exchanges for clothing that transforms her into a woman who entices "the eyes of all the men

[280] Note the similarities between Judith's actions in chapter nine and Esther's actions in *Greek Esther* 14. For an excellent breakdown and examination of Judith's prayer, see Géza G. Xeravits, "The Supplication of Judith (Judith 9:2-14)," in *A Pious Seductress: Studies in the Book of Judith*, ed. Géza G. Xeravits, DCLS 14 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 161–178.

[281] For a thorough examination of the differences between men's and women's dress codes, see Charlotte Perkins-Gilman, *The Dress of Women: A Critical Introduction to the Symbolism and Sociology of Clothing*, eds. Michael R. Hill and Mary Jo Deegan, Contributions in Women's Studies 193 (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2002). For a comprehensive discussion on ancient attire, see Mireille M. Lee, *Body, Dress, and Identity in Ancient Greece* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Christoph Berner, et al., eds., *Clothing and Nudity in the Hebrew Bible* (London: T&T Clark, 2019).

[282] Scholarship has noted the complex portrayal of Judith's character and, depending on the interpretation scholars have explored Judith as a complex character built from several female archetypes "such as woman savior, warrior woman, *femme fatale*, wise woman and pious woman." See the discussion in Brison, "Judith,"177. For example, Tikva Frymer-Kensly, *In the Wake of the Goddess: Women, Culture and Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1992), 55–56, focused on Judith's portrayal as a femme fatale and her use of beauty as weapon against Holofernes. Similarly, Sidnie White Crawford, "In the Steps of Jael and Deborah: Judith as Heroine," in "*No One Spoke Ill of Her": Essays on Judith*, ed. James C. VanderKam (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1992), 5–16, compares Judith to Jael and highlights both characters use of sexual seduction to defeat their male counterpart.

who might see her" (Jdt 10:4).[283] Clothing was a central feature of one's identity in antiquity, where strict notions of status and group identity held higher importance than individual identity. For example, Erin K. Vearncombe has detailed how clothing was seen as a representation of social status; "the social or honor status of the individual" could not be separated from the "the groups to which the individual belonged," and dress was a public presentation of one's individual and group status.[284] Within the framework of society, one's individual identity had to be managed in terms set by the norms of the individual's social group; therefore, clothing was seen as a vehicle of identity.[285] As such, I suggest that the author of *Judith* portrays the female protagonist switching social personas, from widow to sexually available female. [286]

Moreover, the similarities between Judith's preparation and that of Esther's are striking, suggesting that the female protagonist takes on a new persona in which she uses her sexualized physical appearance to seek the attention of men. For example, Judith's used of bathing and ointment (Jdt 10:3) are reminiscent of Esther's preparation, and that of the harem girls, which

[283] Other examples of staged exchanges of clothing are Ruth (Ruth 3:3, 7), Esther (Add Esth 14:2; 15:1), and Tamar (LXX Gen 38:14).

[284] Erin K. Vearncombe, "Adorning the Protagonist: The Uses of Dress in the Book of Judith," in *Dressing Judeans and Christians in Antiquity*, eds. Kristi Upson-Saia, et al. (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 119. See also Nancy A. Rudd and Sharron J. Lennon, "Social Power and Appearance Management among Women," in *Appearance and Power*, eds. Kim K.P. Johnson and Sharron J. Lennon (Oxford: Bloomsbury Academic, 1999), 153–172, who discuss the link between appearance and women's perceived power and status.

[285] Sara M. Koenig, "Tamar and Tamar: Clothing as Deception and Defiance," in *Dress and Clothing in the Hebrew Bible: "For All Her Household Are Clothed in Crimson,"* ed. Antonios Finitsis (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 87–108, has examined the use of clothing and its connection to both the character's identity and the plot of the story in the two narratives of Tamar (Gen. and 2 Sam). Koenig concludes that clothing appears as a disguise in these narratives.

[286] Vearncombe, "Adorning the Protagonist," 119, argues that Judith challenges the established norms of gender in terms of dress found elsewhere by asserting typical male power through a redefinition of the adorned female. The theme of the adorned female seducing men occurs in a multitude of narratives; see for example, Jael and Sisera, Aseneth, and Esther. Likewise, Brison, "Judith," 190, suggests something similar, noting that Judith's process of redress appears as a "rite of passage" in that Judith moves from a life of asceticism to the public sphere. While Brison acknowledges the change in persona by connecting Judith's portrayal to that of other warrior goddesses, Brison does not elaborate on Judith's switching of identities. See also, Philip F. Esler, "'By the Hand of a Woman': Culture, Story and Theology in the Book of Judith," in *Social Scientific Models for Interpreting the Bible: Essays by the Context Group in Honor of Bruce J. Malina*, ed. John J. Pilch, BibInt 53 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 95–96, who notes the use of military terms and their connection to Judith's use of her beauty.

was undertaken before going in to have sexual intercourse with the king.[287] While the author of *Judith* does not specify what type of ointment was used, as I discussed in the section on *Greek Esther* above, the use of ointment as a means of sexual preparation suggests that this may be another reference to the use of birth control before sexual intercourse. The changing of attire in both Judith and Esther also suggests a connection between a particular persona and their actions.

Judith's exchanging of identities and her donning of a persona that seeks the sexual attention of men is apparent from the Greek used. Her new appearance, an appearance connected to the clothing which she used to wear during her husband's life, is described as "she made herself exceedingly beautiful to allure (ἀπάτησιν) the eyes of all the men who might see her" (Jdt 10:4). The Greek noun ἀπάτησιν used to describe Judith's motivations comes from the verb ἀπατάω which means "to lead astray." Most importantly, it can have sexual connotations such as "to seduce."[288] Schmitz and Lange also make note of the sexual connotations in this verse (Jdt 10:4) and suggest that the staging of her body is meant to mislead men.[289] In the context of the narrative of *Judith*, I agree that Judith's change in clothes is meant to specifically serve the function of eliciting sexual desire in men. In fact, the author uses ἀπατάω two further times, each of which have clear sexual connotations; first in 12:16, where Judith dines with the eager Holofernes who has been waiting for the moment to seduce her, and again in 13:16, where Judith

[287] See the discussion on the use of ointments for physical preparation before sexual intercourse in Brenner, *The Intercourse of Knowledge*, 87–89; see also my comments on the matter of *Greek Esther* above. Curiously, there is also a general lack of concern over a sexual relationship between Judith and Holofernes that might end in the conception of a child.

[288] Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 66. See for example, LXX Exod 22:16 which refers to the seduction of a virgin.

[289] Schmitz and Lange, "Judith," 37. Likewise, Vearncombe, "Adorning the Protagonist," 129, notes that Judith's change in dress is for the purpose of seducing Holofernes.

declares that it was only her face that seduced Holofernes.[290] Judith embodies this sexually seductive persona in a manner that does not impact her initial characterization.

Judith's beauty becomes a prominent feature in the narrative following her preparation. Her beauty appears more striking with the inclusion of the explicit visual consumption of her appearance by every man who views her. [291] For example, immediately before she departs from the town, she encounters Uzziah and the elders of the town who react in astonishment to her change in appearance (Jdt 10:7).[292] Even here the author portrays Judith as eliciting some kind of reaction from men who see her. The second instance of Judith's beauty occurs when the Assyrian patrol captures Judith and her enslaved maid (Jdt 10:14).[293] When the men hear her deceptive words (that she is fleeing the Israelites and is offering to show Holofernes a safe way to capture the hill country, Jdt 10:12–13) and see her beautiful appearance, they offer to take her to Holofernes (Jdt 10:14–16). Once Judith is inside the camp, the men gather around her and they marvel at her beauty (Jdt 10:18–19).[294] Finally, Judith deceives Holofernes and his servants when she enters his tent and they are amazed at her beauty (Jdt 10:23).[295] These passages are striking because they portray a woman traveling without male company who, rather than feeling

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[290] "Coming in, Judith lay down and Holofernes' heart was amazed with her and his soul (ἡ ψυχὴ) was moved as he was extremely eager to have sexual intercourse with her; for he had been watching for an opportunity to deceive her since he [first] saw her (Jdt 12:16)." "'As the Lord lives, who has protected me while on my way I went, that my face deceived him to his destruction and he did not carry out a sin with me to defile and shame'" (Jdt 13:16).

[291] See Henten, "Words and Deeds," 232, who, although not focusing on beauty terminology, includes the passages containing beauty language in with five passage containing Judith's seduction of various characters: 1) 10.2-5, 2) 10.11-16, 3) 10.17-12.5, 4)12.10-15, 5) 12.16-13.10.

[292] "When they saw her transformed appearance and her changed stole, they marveled at her great beauty" (Jdt 10:7).

[293] "When the men heard her words, and observed her face—she was in their eyes remarkably beautiful" (Jdt 10:14).

[294] "They marveled at her beauty and admired the sons of Israel because of her. They said to one another, 'Who can despise this people who have women such as this among them? It is not good to leave one of their men remaining who, letting them go, will be able to take by trickery all the land!'" (Jdt 10:19).

[295] "When Judith came into the presence of Holofernes and his servants, they all marveled at the beauty of her face" (Jdt 10:23).

ashamed, openly encourages men around her to view and pay attention to her body/appearance.[296]

The underlying common theme connected to Judith's beauty is her deception of the enemy. Brenner-Idan proposes ways in which authors portray female characters as seductresses.[297] Three of Brenner's enumerated ways are pertinent to our discussion on Judith's beauty, because they link her beauty and clothes to her identity as seductress. Brenner argues that 1) a seductress must be described as beautiful, 2) they must be portrayed as changing their clothes, and 3) the change in clothing typically includes a detailed description of the apparel and jewelry, but not the female figure's body.[298] This detailing of apparel, as Brenner argues, highlights the importance of the new clothing and suggests they should be seen as a uniform (that of the seductress).[299] Judith's beauty is clearly linked to her "plan" to seduce Holofernes through the comment of Uzziah in *Judith* 10:7. The author's portrayal of Judith checks off all of

[296] Judith's lack of modesty is quite surprising given what we know of modesty expectations during the period in which the text originated. Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, 229–230, although dealing with rabbinic texts, highlights the cultural expectations for a modest woman within the context of marriage. As Judith is a widow, one must wonder what the cultural expectation around modesty might have been for a widowed woman. Ela Nutu ("Framing Judith: Whose Text, Whose Gaze, Whose Language?," in *Between the Text and the Canvas: The Bible and Art in Dialogue*, eds. J. Cheryl Exum and Ela Nutu, The Bible in the Modern World 13 [Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2007], 141–142) argues that Judith is portrayed as "the ultimate phallic woman (for she subverts even the authority of the male leaders of Bethulia by accusing them of hubris" (141). Furthermore, Nutu concludes that Judith is married to her god (141). While I am not convinced that the author portrays Judith as a wife to her god, I agree that her relationships with both her deceased husband and her deity complicate how the reader is meant to view her actions; her actions appear to be both justified while also being outside of the norm. See also Hos 2:13 which appears to link the wearing of jewelry and possibly the open display of the female with sexuality. More specifically, the author of Hosea illustrates this kind of display of feminine sexuality as contradictory to a life in line with one's god ("and she put upon herself her earrings and her necklaces, and went after her lovers and forgot about me (the Lord), Hos 2:13).

[297] Brenner-Idan, "Clothing Seduces," 221–222. Brenner-Idan makes a very interesting statement regarding the visual appearance of female characters and the viewing of their bodies; there is a fine line between hiding the female body from a viewer's gaze while also portraying them as a seductress. For example, even during the explicit sexual scene at Holofernes' dinner party, Judith is fully clothed. Brenner-Idan concludes that most female characters never fully enact the sex act, are not "shamed into being naked," and thus their honor, as well as the reader, remains intact (222). The author of Judith appears to draw on the male perspective which warned against the adorned female. See for example, Horace's comments that equate women's makeup to excrement (*Epod.* 12) or Seneca's negative views of female vices that include unchastity as well as jewelry (*Helv.* 16.4).

[298] Brenner-Idan, "Clothing Seduces," 221–222. Brenner argues that changing one's clothes is an act which signals the character's transition from the private sphere to, in the case of Judith, "a would-be savior" (222).

[299] Ibid., 222.

Brenner's characteristics of a seductress, further suggesting that the author portrays Judith as a sexually available seductress through her change in dress and her beauty.

The theme of seductress/manipulation of dress figures negatively in many biblical texts. An excellent example occurs in *T. Reub* 5:5 whose author warns male readers to exercise strict control over their women or risk having them weaponize the use of adornment and cosmetics. This theme, as Vearncombe points out, commonly connects the act of a woman dressing up with the negative intent of seducing men.[300] Seduction appears as a negative action in many texts, as the deliberate manipulation of the body was a form of deception.[301] For example, the narrative of Tamar in Gen 38 portrays Tamar donning widow's garments and wrapping herself up to conceal her identity before sitting down at the town's gate (Gen 38:14). This change in her appearance leads to the deception of Judah, who assumes she is a prostitute and has sexual intercourse with her, which results in the birth of two of Judah's children (Gen 38:15–30).

In my view, underlying the negative appraisal of female deception is the theme of vulnerability which occurs alongside depictions of women's beauty in biblical narratives. Biblical narratives express vulnerability around feminine beauty, both for the women themselves and for the men around them. For example, Tamar's rape in 2 Samuel 13 is directly linked to her beauty; the narrative suggests that her beauty is the reason Amnon could not help himself and thus raped her (2 Sam 13:14).[302] An excellent example which portrays the vulnerability of both women and men from feminine beauty is the story of Abram and Sarai in Egypt (Gen 12). In the

[300] Vearncombe, "Adorning the Protagonist," 118.

[301] The deceptive woman features prominently in prophetic texts of the Hebrew Bible. Jerusalem is many times referred to as a harlot and portrayed as deceptive female. See for example, Isa 1:21; Jer 2:20; 3:1–11; Eze 16:1–43; 23. Jennie Grillo, "'You Will Forget Your Ancient Shame': The Innocence of Susanna and the Vindication of Israel," in *Women and Exilic Identity in The Hebrew Bible*, eds. Katherine E. Southwood and Martien Halvorson-Taylor, LHBOTS 631(London: T&T Clark, 2019), 7–22, argues that the author of *Susanna* takes this tradition and provides "a happy counterpart to the broken relationship between God and his people, figured as a woman" (21).

[302] Tervanotko, "Gendered Beauty," 9. See also the narratives of Abram and Isaac in Gen 12 and 26, where the beauty of the men's wives leads to potential bodily harm of their husbands. Macwilliam also discusses at length the general danger women's beauty posed to men. See Macwilliam, "Ideologies of Male Beauty," 269.

narrative, Abram directly connects his wife's beauty to the danger posed to both in Egypt: other men will attack Abram to take Sarai and make her a concubine in the Pharaoh's house.[303] Feminine beauty is then depicted as posing a significant danger to both men and women. This becomes even more apparent when one considers male beauty. While there are examples of beautiful men whose beauty places them in danger, these men remain protected and rescued (e.g., Joseph and Portiphar's wife, Gen 39).[304] This does not seem to be the case in *Judith* where feminine beauty is directly tied to the potential danger faced by the main character.

The female seductress becomes the epitome of the male "vulnerability" found in many androcentric biblical narratives which highlight the danger posed to men by beautiful women. There are several narratives which depict men as vulnerable when they allow themselves to "fall prey" to women. An excellent example is the narrative of Samson and Delilah, where Delilah's beauty is the plot device that allows for Samson to let down his guard, resulting in her cutting off his hair and turning him over to his enemies (Judges 16.4–22). Betsy Meredith argues that women are construed as having the ability to deceive men through their attractiveness, sometimes harming or even killing them.[305] Susan Niditch also discusses how eroticism and sex are connected in the Song of Songs, as well as a number of other ancient Near Eastern traditions which portray "sexually potent goddesses as violent warriors who wade through the bodies of

[303] "When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, 'I know well that you are a woman beautiful in appearance; and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, "This is his wife"; then they will kill me, but they will let you live. Say you are my sister, so that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared on your account'" (Gen 12:11–13, NRSV). See also the discussion in Fokkelien Van Dijk-Hemmes, "'Sarai's Exile: A Gender-Motivated Reading of Genesis 12:10–13:2," in *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 227–228. Dijk-Hemmes argues that Abram understands that the Egyptians will see him as a rival, the owner of a desirable woman, and will kill him to possess that object.

[304] Particularly Gen 39:21–23. See the discussion in Tervanotko, "Gendered Beauty," 10–12.

[305] Betsy Merideth, "Desire and Danger: The Drama of Betrayal in Judges and Judith," in *Anti-Covenant: Counter-Reading Women's Lives in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Mieke Bal, JSOTSup 81, BLS 22 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989), 76.

slain soldiers."[306] Judith in many ways follows this portrayal of beautiful women – Judith's beauty disarms Holofernes, leaving him vulnerable, and resulting in his death.

Unlike the biblical narratives just discussed, Judith's intentional change of clothes appears to be praised, or at least readily accepted, as seen in the initial reaction of Uzziah and the town officials in Jdt 10:8.[307] Their reaction is all the more striking when one considers that there is another common theme connected to feminine beauty: the vulnerability of the gazing male.[308] This is best highlighted in the narrative of David and Bathsheba, where David risks the displeasure of his god by sleeping with a married woman after viewing the beautiful Bathsheba (2 Sam 11–12).[309] In fact, Proverbs 2–9 warns men not to view women for this very reason; beauty can ensnare the imprudent gazer.[310] In my view, Judith's portrayal and the gazing men in the narrative are derived from this theme. The fact that Judith's change in identity allows for her eventual seduction and later destruction of Holofernes may negate any negative connotations connected to her open display of beauty.[311] Likewise, Vearncombe argues that Judith's deception "is acceptable as it is aimed at an outsider group, with the goal of the protection and maintenance of honor of the insider group."[312] While I agree with Vearncombe's assessment, Judith's identity as a pious woman is also something that must be considered in this context. I suggest that the

[306] Nidith, "Eroticism," 43.

[307] "When they saw her transformed appearance and her changed stole, they marveled at her great beauty and said to her, 'May the god of our forefathers give you favor to fulfill your plans until the sons of Israel act with a sense of pride and [the] exaltation of Jerusalem [occurs]'" (Jdt 10:7–8).

[308] See the discussion in Macwilliam, "Ideologies of Male Beauty," 270.

[309] Although David faces a threat in this passage, it is important to note the power dynamics at play. David, despite doing what is morally wrong, remains in a place of power; he has Bathsheba's husband killed and, as punishment, Bathesheba's first born son dies (2 Sam 11:15–18). See also the discussion in J. Cheryl Exum, *Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical Narratives* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 137–140.

[310] "Do not desire her beauty in your heart, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes; for a prostitute's fee is only a loaf of bread, but the wife of another stalks a man's very life" (Prov 6:25–26); "Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised" (Prov 31:30).

[311] Vearncombe, "Adorning the Protagonist," 118. See also, Ellen Juhl Christiansen, "Judith: Defender of Israel," in *A Pious Seductress: Studies in the Book of Judith*, ed. Geza G. Xeravitis, DCLS 14 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 77–78, who argues similarly, noting the focus on piety in Judith's character.

[312] Vearncombe, "Adorning the Protagonist," 130.

author allows Judith to switch identities in the narrative, taking on the identity of seductress, without compromising her identity as a pious widow. I discuss this careful negotiating between identities in more detail below.

Chapter twelve, the climax of the narrative, is replete with sexual language and further illustrates the protagonist's adoption of the identity of seductress. After arriving in the camp, Holofernes and Judith attempt to seduce each other, each to their own disparate ends. Despite declining his initial attempt to dine with her (Jdt 12:2), Holofernes sends the eunuch in charge of his personal affairs to bring Judith to dinner, insisting that "'it would be a disgrace if we let such a woman go without having intercourse with her. If we do not draw her near, she will laugh at us'" (Jdt 12:12). The author's choice of vocabulary underscores the power dynamics at play. Henten argues that Holofernes, as the dominant male, was culturally expected to enforce his supremacy over Judith by sleeping with her – rather than waiting for her to initiate sex and thus demasculinizing him – or risk damaging his honor.[313] This power dynamic is further highlighted in Bagoas' address of Judith as "pretty girl" (ἡ παιδίσκη ἡ καλη, Jdt 12:13). While the noun παιδίσκη can simply mean "young girl," in some contexts it also occurs as the female version of the Greek word for "slave." In my view, given Holofernes' previous words about seducing Judith and having sexual intercourse with her, the phrase ἡ παιδίσκη ἡ καλη could mean "beautiful prostitute."[314] The author further implies that Holofernes envisions Judith as a sexual slave in Bogoas' suggestion that Judith become like one of the "daughters of the sons of Assyria who are present in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar" (Jdt 12:13). This passage likely refers to what the

[313] The Greek verbs used in this passage, ὁμιλήσαντες (to have intimate contact/have sexual intercourse) and ἐπισπασώμεθα (lit. to draw towards oneself/to seduce), speak to this power dynamic and clearly illustrate Holofernes' intent to seduce Judith. See Henten, "Words and Deeds," 235. Henten further argues that there was a cultural expectation that men should initiate sex. Therefore, it is this cultural norm that is behind Holofernes' comments.

[314] I am not the only one to interpret the Greek of *Judith* in this manner. See also Henten, "Words and Deeds," 235; Schmitz and Engel, *Judit*, 348, who agree that Bagoas calls Judith a prostitute.

author assumed was a harem of women who would have been present at the palace of Nebuchadnezzar.[315] Whether the author of Judith was aware of the Assyrian palace policies regarding harems or not, the implication is that Judith would not only have sex with Holofernes, but that she would become one of his possessions.

Contrary to the image of sex slave that Holofernes proposes is the author's clever portrayal of Judith's use of her sexual persona to influence Holofernes. The protagonist replies to the eunuch's suggestion to become like one of the harem women by telling him, "'Who am I to deny my lord? I will hasten to do all which is, in his eyes, pleasing'" (Jdt 12:14). Judith's statement confirms that she understands what he implies in his statement and that she consents, or at least wants Holofernes to believe she consents.[316] The irony here is that Holofernes believes he is playing Judith, when Judith is really playing him by personifying the seductress.[317] Judith actively encourages the fantasy that Holofernes has created, highlighting that she is more cleaver than the foreigner.

Having laid the trap for Holofernes, the author portrays Judith as the quintessential seductress in their dinner interaction leading up to his beheading. In their final interaction, the text narrates:

> Rising up, she made herself beautiful in garments and all things feminine. Her female slave went and spread out for her the lambskins she had received from Bagoas for her daily life on the ground opposite Holofernes. Then Judith coming

[315] While there may or may not have been an actual harem at Nebuchadnezzar's palace, I suggest that this is exactly what the author refers to in this passage. See Elna K. Solvang, "The First Orientalist? – Fantasy and Foreignness in the Book of Esther," in *In the Wake of Tikva Frymer-Kensky*, eds. Steven Holloway, JoAnn Scurlock, and Richard H. Beal (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009), who examines the stereotypical harem as it is found in the narrative of Esther. Solvang argues that the harem in Esther does not represent an actual harem as it would have looked, but a biased imagining by an outsider.

[316] Thiessen ("Protecting the Holy Race and Holy Space," 176) suggests that the author of *Judith* includes a double entendre in the use of the word κύριος. The author of *Judith* utilizes this word, which is also the word used by the LXX translators for the divine name, to also refer to Holofernes. As such, the reader knows that Holofernes is not Judith's κύριος even when she calls him such. Therefore, there are several layers to Judith's deception of Holofernes. See also White Crawford, "In the Steps of Jael," 8.

[317] For the use of irony in *Judith* see Moore, *Judith*, 78.

> in lay down and Holofernes' heart was astonished with her and his soul was shaken and he was exceedingly eager to have sexual intercourse with her, for he had been waiting to deceive her from the day he saw her. (Jdt 12:15–16)

I have already discussed in the preceding chapter that, in the context of a dinner (Jdt 12:15–20), Judith prepares herself to be consumed by Holofernes; she has donned all her finery again, her lambskin, a metaphorical dinner plate, has been spread out before Holofernes, upon which she lays herself before him. The irony of this situation appears in previous scholarship. For example, van Henten argues that the bed is the perfect location for the punishment of "foreign males who dare to rape Israelite women," particularly because Holofernes had the potential to rape Judith.[318] Moreover, Holofernes is so taken by Judith's beauty that he does not detect the irony in her statement: "'I will indeed drink, lord, because today is the greatest [day] in my life from all the days since my birth'" (Jdt 12:18). Unbeknownst to Holofernes, the man who wanted to conquer the weak foreign woman, has fallen for her trap. Judith becomes the woman that Holofernes wants her to be at great personal risk to herself to manipulate him and eventually kill him. Although Judith takes on the identity of seductress, as I will discuss below, this alternate identity never jeopardizes her identity as a pious Jewish widow.

3.2.3 No Shame Here: Deceit of Divine Vengeance

Chapters ten through twelve, which portray Judith as a seductress, occur between Judith's prayer in chapter nine and the resulting consequences of Judith's seduction in chapter thirteen. Judith's prayer and her statements following her execution of Holofernes are fundamentally connected to her portrayal as a humble and pious widow, and have a direct impact on how the author portrays the protagonist's sexuality.[319] The author carefully outlines restrictions of

[318] Henten, "Words and Deeds," 240.

[319] Barbara Schmitz, "The Function of the Speeches and Prayers in the Book of Judith," in *Tobit and Judith: The Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)*, eds. Athalya Brenner-Idan and Helen Efthimiadis-

Judith's sexuality to portray her seductress persona as temporary and necessary in light of the crisis facing Israel.

Judith's prayer frames her interactions and later beheading of Holofernes in terms of rape and divine justice by including a reference to the Rape of Dinah and Simeon's revenge (Gen 34).[320] In her prayer, the author of *Judith* directly links her actions to both the situation in which Dinah finds herself and to Simeon's response:

> "O Lord God of my ancestor Simeon you gave a sword in hand to punish the strangers who loosened a virgin's womb to put [her] to shame and stripped naked [her] thigh to disgrace [her] and desecrated [her] womb to disgrace [her]; for you said, "Thus, it will not be" and it was done. Instead, you gave up their rulers to death [killed by the hands of another] and their bed, which was ashamed of their deceit, misleading [them] into blood. Thus, you struck down slaves in addition to rulers and soverigns in addition to their thrones. You gave up their wives for plunder and their daughters into captivity and all their spoils to be divided between your beloved children who are filled with zeal for you and detest the pollution of their blood and called on you as a helper. O God, my God, heed the prayer of a widow." (Jdt 9:2–4)

Judith's prayer not only connects the female protagonist to Dinah, but recalls an explicit picture of the horrors of rape, particularly those which take place during an armed conflict. Claudia Rakel takes note of this too, as Holofernes not only plans to "commit violence toward, exploit, and oppress the people," but also wants to rape Judith.[321] Judith's framing of her actions as potential rape has also been noted by Matthew Thiessen who argues that the author of Judith portrays the female protagonist as imitating Dinah, but unlike Dinah who visits "the women of the region" and later finds herself in a threatening situation (Gen 34:1 LXX), Judith appears to

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Keith (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 172, also argues that the speeches and prayers in *Judith* are key to understanding the book.

[320] For a discussion on the importance of Dinah as a figure in the Second Temple period, see Eszter Balassa, "The Consequences of Dinah's Rape," in *A Pious Seductress: Studies in the Book of Judith*, ed. Géza G. Xeravits, DCLS 14 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 188–197.

[321] Claudia Rakel, "Judith: About a Beauty Who is Not What She Pretends to Be," in *Feminist Biblical Interpretation: A Compendium of Critical Commentary on the Books of the Bible and Related Literature*, eds. Luise Schottroff, Marie-Theres Wacker, and Martin Rumscheidt (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2012), 520. The female body appears repeatedly as an image for cities or countries in the Hebrew Bible. Moreover, the raped female is a typical image for a conquered city. See Ezek 16, Nah 3, and 4Q184.

understand the risky situation in which she places herself.[322] The author's reference then to the rape of Dinah in *Judith* not only highlights the vulnerable position into which the protagonist will later place herself, but it also underscores the severity of the situation; what is at stake is the possible rape of Judith and the defeat of the Israelites.

Considering the perceived crisis in the text, Judith's prayer also frames her actions as divine vengeance. The author of *Judith* commends the slaughter of the Shechemites for their defilement of Dinah and paints Judith's actions as being in line with those of her ancestor.[323] Judith directly compares herself to Simeon (Jdt 9:3–4); like Simeon, Judith will use a sword to take vengeance on enemies.[324] Furthermore, the play on the use of deception/deceitfulness (ἀπάτη) presents Judith's identity as a seductress as only being temporary. While the noun ἀπάτη appears early in her prayer and refers to those who "loosened a virgin's womb to put [her] to shame" (Jdt 9:2), it also appears two more times in her prayer and describes Judith's actions (Jdt 9:3, 10, 13). Most explicitly, Judith paints her seduction of Holofernes in a similar light as Simeon's actions:

> "Inflict my words as a deceptive wound and a bruise on those who, against your covenant, your sanctified house, Mount Zion, and the house possessed by your children, they have planned unpleasant [things]. Make your whole nation and every tribe to know and to recognize that you are God, the God of all power and

[322] Thiessen, "Protecting the Holy Race," 183, argues that Judith goes out to the source of the threat to cause her god to act: "her imitation of the ancient deeds of Simeon and Levi with the express intention that she would provoke God to act on both her and Israel's behalf" (184–185). I agree that Judith is indeed reenacting the deeds of her ancestors. Moreover, I agree that her actions are part of the author's attempt to scripturalize the narrative. For more on the scripturalization of *Judith* see, Jan Willem van Henten, "Judith as a Female Moses: Judith 7-13 in the Light of Exodus 17, Numbers 20, and Deuteronomy 33:8-11," in *Reflections on Theology and Gender*, eds. Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes and Athalya. Brenner (Kampen, Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1994), 33–48.; White Crawford, "In the Steps of Jael;" Rakel, *Judit*; Nancy Tan, "Judith's Embodiment as a Reversal of the Unfaithful Wife of YHWH in Ezekiel 16," *JSP* 21 (2011): 21–35; Esler, "'By the Hand of a Woman,'" 64–101; Deborah Levine Gera, *Judith*, CEJL (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), 45–56.

[323] Claudia V. Camp (*Wise, Strange and Holy: The Strange Woman and the Making of the Bible*, JSOTSup 320 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000], 284) argues that the brothers' response would have been commended by some who also accepted that their actions were part of the god of Israel's plan.

[324] In one of the great ironies of Judith, it is the weak widow who will save Israel; Judith's god will make use of the oppressed to end the war in Judith. See, Rakel, "Judith," 518.

> might and there is no other who protects the nation of Israel except you!" (Jdt 9:13–14)

Judith's deceit is to make Holofernes believe he has conquered her sexually, even as she risks rape like Dinah. John Craghan argues, in a similar vein, that "the sexual element is so pronounced" in *Judith* "because it is *the* military weapon."[325] Although she takes on the identity of seductress, for the express purpose of turning herself into a weapon against the enemies of Israel, the author maintains her pious identity throughout the narrative and, like Simeon's actions, her god sanctions her actions.

Judith's use of deception and her god's role in the unfolding of her plan is a frequent theme that occurs following her beheading of Holofernes. When Judith returns to Bethulia with Holofernes' head, she insists that "'as the Lord lives who has protected me on the way which I went, it was my face that misled him to his destruction. He carried out no sin with me, to shame and disgrace" (Jdt 13:16). While interacting with this passage, Ora Brison has suggested that this passage reflects the author's downplaying of Judith's bravery and instead attributes her success to her deception of Holofernes.[326] This argument does not consider Judith's portrayal as a clever woman who uses her sexuality to influence Holofernes, nor does it fully consider the use of deceit language in the narrative.

In the passage provided above, the author clearly insists that Judith did not have sexual intercourse with Holofernes and highlights the author's portrayal of the god of Israel's role in the narrative. While Judith's god is never actually present in the work, the author implies their presence through Judith's comments which are particularly numerous in chapter thirteen (e.g.,

[325] John Craghan, "Esther, Judith and Ruth: Paradigms for Human Liberation," *Biblical Theological Bulletin* 12 (1982): 11-19. See also the discussion on the use of military language in *Judith* in Esler, "By the Hand of a Woman," 95–96.

[326] Brison, "Judith," 198.

Jdt 13:4–5, 11, 14–15, 18).[327] Henten notes that Judith recalls her god's presence and role in her people's history, as well as uses these statements to claim that her actions are derived from divine power.[328] For example, Judith comments that "'God, our God, is with us, still exercising strength in Israel and sovereignty over [our] enemies just as he has also done today!'" (Jdt 13:11). Here, she directly connects her actions both to her god and to their role in protecting Israel in the past. Moreover, Judith frequently claims her actions were divinely sanctioned. [329] Judith states "'Praise God, who has not withdrawn his mercy from the house of Israel, but has shattered our enemies through my hand on this night!'" (Jdt 13:14). The connection between Judith's actions, her sexuality, and her god's power form a consistent message first introduced to the reader in Judith's prayer.

Judith's sexuality is an important part of understanding how the author envisions the god of Israel's involvement within the narrative. The author envisions a war between her god and Nebuchadnezzar, a war which will be determined in the individual characters of Judith and Holofernes.[330] As I have noted before, the author envisions Judith's beauty as a weapon, a weapon used to seduce Holofernes and lead to his destruction. Unlike most biblical narratives, the author focuses on the god of Israel's power in the narrative to underscore how they will use the weak and oppressed to end the war. This emphasis suggests that the god of Israel will bring

[327] Several scholars have also pointed out the importance of the god of Israel's role in the narrative, but are not in agreement over its significance for Judith's portrayal. For example, Rakel, "Judith," 516-17, notes that god is portrayed as an active subject only once in the narrative (Jdt 4:1) and concludes that his character has no active role in the narrative. Meanwhile, Pamela J. Milne has argued that Judith is not actually the heroine of the story, but is a supporting character to the male figure of God. See, Pamela J. Milne, "What Shall We Do with Judith? A Feminist Reassessment of a Biblical 'Heroine,'" *Semeia* 62 (1993), 54.

[328] Henten, "Words and Deeds," 227.

[329] Each instance contains phrases which suggest that Judith acted with divine power derived from her god: "God, look on the work of my hands" and "now is the time to help" (Jdt 13:4–5), "give me strength, God," (Jdt 13:7), "God is carrying out strength in Israel, just as he has done today" (Jdt 13:11), and "God has guided you" (Jdt 13:18).

[330] Rakel, "Judith," 519.

about the end of Israel's enemies through a beautiful woman.[331] As József Zsengellér notes, the emphasis on Judith's beauty stems from her face and not her body, implying that she used her beauty as weapon to seduce but not fully engage sexually with Holofernes.[332] This view reflects Judith's statements insisting that she did not engage in sexual intercourse with Holofernes (Jdt 13:16) and suggests a specific usage of Judith's sexuality: Judith takes on the physicality of a seductress to become a weapon again Israel's enemies. Judith's character fulfills the expectations of what a male in an androcentric and patriarchal context would expect from a beautiful woman; Judith becomes a sexually available character in the narrative. Additionally, her character imitates these male expectations with all their erotic aspects "without allowing them to become her own reality."[333] Judith's persona of seductress allows her to carry out the actions that lie at the heart of the narrative, but they never threaten her identity. Judith's pious and humble identity underscores her character through her prayer in chapter nine and the statements made in chapter thirteen. Through her above-and-beyond devotion to her god, husband, and Torah, the author portrays Judith in stark contrast to the male elites among her own people; she is the best Jew in the narrative. As such, her identity as seductress is secondary and functions only as a part of the narrative.

3.3 Sexuality in Susanna

At its most basic elements, the narrative of *Susanna* is about a young woman sexually assaulted by two licentious elders (Sus vss 19–21). As such, an examination into the use of sexual language in this text can reveal a great deal about how the author portrays the protagonist. As in the texts of *Greek Esther* and *Judith*, the appearance of the protagonist of *Sussana*,

[331] Rakel, "Judith," 518.
[332] Zsengellér, "Judith as a Female David," 195.
[333] Rakel, "Judith," 523.

particularly her beauty, is the catalyst for the threat in the narrative. Unlike the other narratives I have examined above, the author of *Susanna* does not portray a protagonist who wields her sexuality.[334] Instead, Susanna appears as an almost voiceless character whose fate rests in others' hands. In my analysis below, I suggest that the author directly contrasts the beautiful and innocent Susanna with the licentious elders who seek to violate her. Whereas Susanna represents modestly and control, the elders represent uncontrolled sexual desire. Moreover, my examination focuses on the use of the male gaze in this narrative. The author, using the male gaze in their portrayal of Susanna, advocates for the importance of two specific features of feminine sexuality: the control and protection of feminine sexuality.

3.3.1 Beauty and Sexual Exploitation in Susanna: Use of the Male Gaze

The author of *Susanna* uses specific Greek terms – κάλος and τρυφερός – to highlight Susanna's vulnerability, as well as to explain how she ended up in a dangerous situation. The Greek term κάλος appears three times in the narrative (Sus vss 2, 31, 32).[335] The first instance occurs in the opening description and introduction of Susanna in the narrative. The text tells us that Susanna was "an exceedingly beautiful [woman] and one fearing the Lord" (Sus vs 2). The author of *Susanna* directly connects the elders' actions later in the narrative to her beauty by

[334] A large group of scholars highlight the importance of Susanna's character as a hero within the narrative. For example, see Toni Craven, "Daniel and Its Additions," in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, eds. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 191-94; Moore, *Daniel, Esther, and Jeremiah*, 90-91; and Jennie Grillo, "Showing Seeing in Susanna: The Virtue of the Text," *Prooftexts* 35 (2015): 261, who shows that Susanna's character does more than scholars give her credit; she actively directs the audience's attention after her attack and at her trial. Conversely, others have argued for Daniel's role as the main character/hero. See Jennifer A. Glancy, "The Accused: Susanna and Her Readers," *JSOT* 18 (1993), 292; Mitzi J. Smith, *Womanist Sass and Talk Back: Social (In)Justice, Intersectionality, and Biblical Interpretation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2018), 105.

[335] Tervanotko discusses the connection of violence and beauty in other texts in "Gendered Beauty," 9. For instance, beauty is the sole reason given for Amnon' rape of Tamar in 2 Sam 13:14. See also Ibolya Balla, "'Pillars of Gold on a Silver base:' Female Beauty as the Cause of Anxiety and Praise in the Book of Ben Sira," in *Religion and Female Body in Ancient Judaism and Its Environments*, ed. Géza Xeravits, DCLS 28 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 154–172, who discusses the cultural norms and expectations around beauty and the risks to both men and women in viewing a beautiful woman.

narrating how the elders watch her "going in and walking around [her husband's garden], and they began to long for her" (Sus v 8).[336] The term κάλος also occur during the trial scene again in the context of the elders' uncontrolled passion for her. The text narrates that, as they paraded her through the crowd on to the way to the trial, "Susanna was exceedingly delicate and beautiful in appearance. The lawless ones ordered her to be revealed so that they could satisfy [themselves] on her beauty, for she had been covered with a veil" (vss 31–32). In verse thirty-one, the author also uses the adjective "delicate" (τρυφερός) to describe Susanna.[337] In my view, the author of *Susanna* uses the terms κάλος and τρυφερός to highlight Susanna's vulnerability as a result of her beauty. As I suggest below, the lack of protection provided to Susanna further highlights her vulnerability in this situation.

The author's use of explicit sexual language throughout the narrative points to the representation of Susanna as a sexual object of the male gaze.[338] The narrative describes the reaction of the elders to Susanna in explicitly sexual terms. The Greek verb meaning 'to desire or long for' (ἐπιθυμέω) is used five times to describe the reaction of the elders to the appearance of Susanna – when the elders watch her walking daily (Sus vs 8), when they hide their feelings

[336] The theme of a beautiful woman enticing men appears elsewhere. See for example, the story of David and Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:1-5). Later rabbinic texts associate women's beauty with sinning; see *T. Reub* 3:10-4:1, as well as *T. Jud* 17:1. In a similar manner to the author of *Susanna*, several texts associate the viewing of women's bodies with male attention; see for example the narratives of Judith, Jezebel, Bilhah, and Esther. Moreover, Jennifer Glancy, "The Accused," 289, argues that the author of *Susanna* invites readers to participate in the elders' viewing of Susanna. See a similar conclusion in Moore, *Daniel, Esther, and Jeremiah*, 97.

[337] This adjective also appears in Isaiah where the author uses it to describe fallen Babylon personified as a female prisoner of war: "you shall no longer be called tender and delicate (τρυφερός)" (LXX Isa 47:1).

[338] Male gaze was a term used in Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16 (1975): 6–18, to describe the perspective of male audience members who view female characters through the lens of not only their own gaze but through the gaze of male protagonists. Mulvey proposed that men derive pleasure from the act of viewing objectified women who are passive and arranged for maximum "to-be-looked-at-ness" (11). The theory of the male gaze has been covered extensively across several fields, as well as biblical studies. See for example, Athalya Brenner, "Pornoprophetics Revisited: Some Additional Reflections," *JSOT* 70 (1996): 63–86; J. Cheryl Exum, *Plotted, Shot, and Painted: Cultural Representations of Biblical Women* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); Mary E. Shields, "Multiple Exposures: Body Rhetoric and Gender Characterization in Ezekiel 16," *JFSR* 14 (1998): 5–18; Christopher Meredith, "The Lattice and the Looking Glass: Gendered Space in Song of Songs 2:8–14," *JAAR* 80 (2012): 365–86; Caryn Tamber-Rosenau, "Biblical Bathing Beauties and the Manipulation of the Male Gaze: What Judith Can Tell Us about Bathsheba and Susanna," *JFSR* 33 (2017): 55–72.

from each other (Sus vss 11, 14), when they ensnare Susanna (Sus vs 20), and when Daniel confronts one of the elders about their claims against Susanna (Sus vs 56).[339] Moreover, the text makes the intentions of the elders explicit in two specific verses. Firstly, the text explains that the elders "were ashamed to make known their defiling desire to [have sexual intercourse with her]" (ὅτι ἠσχύνοντο ἀναγγεῖλαι τὴν ἐπιθυμίαν αὐτῶν ὅτι ἤθελον συγγενέσθαι αὐτῇ, Sus vs 11).[340] Secondly, the elders ensnare Susanna and beg her, for "we are burning with passion for you; consent to us and be done (have sex) with us" (καὶ ἐν ἐπιθυμίᾳ σού ἐσμεν διὸ συγκατάθου ἡμῖν καὶ γενοῦ μεθ᾽ ἡμῶν, Sus v 20).[341] The text makes it abundantly clear that the elders' lust is derived from their viewing of Susanna and that their intention is to have sexual intercourse with her.[342] Here and throughout the narrative, Susanna is an object with which the elder's interact; they view her and attempt to exploit her beauty in an effort to have sex with her.[343] More specifically, the text highlights the actions and intentions of the male elders, their exposure of Susanna's body, and the viewing of her body by others.[344]

[339] This verb also appears in the tenth commandment (Exo 20:17), which supplies a list of things which one should not desire (e.g., a neighbor's house, their livestock, or their wife), and therefore does not always have a sexual implication.

[340] This portion of the text only occurs in the Theodotion version. See Moore, *Daniel, Esther, and Jeremiah*, 78–80, regarding the relationship between the two versions of *Susanna*.

[341] Again, this portion of the text only appears in the Theodotion version.

[342] Grillo, "Showing Seeing," 254, also comes to this conclusion.

[343] Glancy, "The Accused," 299, also notes this. She argues that the "representation of gender in the story of Susanna rests on the gendered polarity of the gaze; actively looking defines masculinity and 'to-be-looked-at-ness' defines femininity." Similarly, Tamber-Rosenau, *Biblical Bathing Beauties*, 61–63, also argues for the objectification of Susanna.

[344] Scales, "Susanna and Callirhoe," 9, notes the multiple times that the elders expose and possibly touch Susanna's body for their own pleasure, as well as those who are at the trial. The voyeuristic nature of the narrative has been covered by Mieke Bal, "The Elders and Susanna" *BibInt* 1 (1993): 1–19; see also Tamber-Rosenau, "Biblical Bathing Beauties," 63, who notes that although *Susanna* is voyeuristic, the character of Susanna is absolved of blame in the text. Elders were highly respected leaders and wielded decision-making power in their local community. See John L. McKenzie, "The Elders in the Old Testament," *Biblica* 40 (1959), 522–540; Joseph Scales, "Who is 'Worthy of Honour'? Women as Elders in Late Second Temple Period Literature," *JIBS* 4 (2022), 113–129.

The exploitative nature of the elders' actions continues in the trial scene. The author portrays Susanna in a similar manner to the portrayal of fallen Babylon in LXX Isa 47:1-3. LXX Isaiah describes the state of fallen Babylon as

> "For you shall no more be called
> tender and delicate (τρυφερός).
> Take the millstones and grind meal,
> remove your veil,
> strip off your robe, uncover your legs,
> pass through the rivers.
> Your nakedness shall be uncovered,
> and your shame shall be seen" (Isa 47:1–3).

While the passage in Isaiah describes the fate of Babylon analogously as a female prisoner of war, it uses similar language to the description of Susanna and how the elders treat her at trial.[345] In my view, the elders' insistence to remove her veil is not simply to view her beauty as the text narrates: "so that they could satisfy [themselves] on her beauty" (Sus vs 32). The author portrays the elders as wanting to shame Susanna, akin to the description of Babylon in Isa 47 where her veil is removed and her shame is seen (Isa 47:2–3). Furthermore, the use of the Greek verb meaning "to reveal" (ἀποκαλύπτω) in *Susanna*, which carries sexual connotations, further suggests that the author portrays the elders as having more than viewing her beauty in mind (Sus vs 32).[346] For example, the verb ἀποκαλύπτω, which is used in the Greek translation of Ruth when Ruth uncovers Boaz's feet (LXX Ruth 3:4, 7).[347] I am not suggesting that the author of

[345] I have already discussed the use of τρυφερός in Sus vs 31 above.

[346] "The lawless ones ordered her to be revealed so that they could satisfy [themselves] on her beauty, for she had been covered with a veil" (Sus vs 32). The reference to her veil and being unveiled are only preserved in the Theodotion version of the narrative. Margaret Miles (*Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* [Boston: Beacon, 1989], 22) has argued that Susanna's veil is meant to represent her guilt. Contrary to this point, I agree with Tamber-Rosenau ("Biblical Bathing Beauties," 63) that portrays her as veiled so that, like Num 5:18, she can be unveiled "in order to shame her and symbolize the removal of the husband's protection from a woman accused of adultery." See Ferguson, "Of Veils and Virgins," for a discussion on veiling practices of married and non-married women.

[347] In Ruth, Ruth's uncovering of Boaz's feet is likely a euphemism for sexual interactions between the two. Several texts appear to refer to "feet" (רגל) in the context of sexual interactions. For example, King David, in 2 Sam 11:8, instructs Uriah to "go to your home and wash your feet" which appears to imply that he should go home and have sex with his wife. Isaiah 7:20 also uses רגל to refer to the feet. Here, the author warns that the Lord "will

Susanna portrays the elders' as attempting to have sexual intercourse with Susanna at her trial, but I argue that the elders' actions of "revealing" Susanna are meant to present Susanna as a sexual object upon which others act.[348] Susanna by no means initiates the encounter with the elders, nor does she make any efforts to actively seduce them; her beauty, despite her innocent position on the matter, is the feature to which the elders are drawn.

Susanna's portrayal as an object continues in the narrative as the author narrates the accusations made against her. The accusation that the elders pose to the community at Susanna's trial states that they saw "'a young man, who was hiding, came to her and lay down with her'" (Sus vs 37). Additionally, the elders explicitly state that they "'saw them embracing [having sexual intercourse]'" (καὶ ἰδόντες συγγινομένους αὐτοὺς, Sus vs 39). It is interesting to note that συγγινομένους occurs her as it did back in verse eleven ("their desire to have sexual intercourse with her," Sus vs 11); the elders accuse Susanna of doing exactly what they wanted to do with her. The elders' accusations do not claim that Susanna had sex with someone else, but that they caught a young man having sex with her. Jennifer A. Glancy highlights how the very representation of Susanna parallels this view of her; the author portrays Susanna as someone who is seen, while men view her.[349] Furthermore, since so much of the narrative is shaped by what

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shave with a razor the head and the hair of the feet (pubic hair) and the beard will be swept away." Finally, Deut 28:57 describes the afterbirth "coming out in the space between the feet (i.e., the female genitals)."

[348] Levine, "Hemmed in on Every Side," 181, also understands Susanna as an object. Also see Alice Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal in Biblical Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 65–72. Bach argues that narratives such as *Susanna* portray characters upholding socially acceptable sexual behaviors of specific communities.

[349] Glancy, "The Accused," 291. Glancy argues that it is specifically the elders' vision that dictates the narrative itself. Several scholars have concluded that Theodotion added the bathing scene for this very reason, to "fire the imagination of some readers" (Moore, *Daniel, Esther, and Jeremiah*, 97). See also Levine, "'Hemmed in on Every Side,'" 313; Susan Sered and Samuel Cooper, "Sexuality and Social Control: Anthropological Reflections on the Book of Susanna," in *The Judgment of Susanna: Authority and Witness*, ed. Ellen Spolsky, EJL 11 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1996), 50; Marti J. Steussy, *Gardens in Babylon: Narrative and Faith in the Greek Legends of Daniel*, SBLDS 141 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars, 1993), 133; and Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, "The Additions to Daniel: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, vol. 7 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), 176.

men see, Glancy suggests that the reader is naturally encouraged to participate in the elders' voyeurism.[350]

The treatment of Susanna as an object, as one whose beauty threatens her very existence, is similar in many regards to other female figures found in Biblical narratives. In her article "Gendered Beauty," Hanna Tervanotko compares the narrative of Joseph in Genesis to other narratives of female figures. While Genesis portrays Joseph in danger due to his beauty and the desire of Potiphar's wife, the narrative maintains Joseph's autonomy and ability to make his own decisions (Gen 39:23).[351] Contrary to Joseph's portrayal, the narratives of Sarai, Rebekah, and Tamar do not maintain the same autonomy. As Tervanotko argues, others decide the fate of beautiful women in these narratives.[352] Susanna in a similar way does not maintain autonomy throughout the text. Although she appears to make her own decision regarding whether she will engage in sexual activities with the two elders, she does make the choice to keep the law and face death (Sus vss 22–24), ultimately her fate rests in the hands of others. Much like Joseph, Susanna's fate comes down to divine intervention; it is only because her god moved Daniel that she is eventually acquitted of the accusations made against her.

The narrative makes a poignant statement on the vulnerability of women and the consequences when there is no active protection of women.[353] Glancy notes that the first character introduced to the reader is Joakim, a fact that highlights his importance. Glancy argues

[350] Glancy, "The Accused," 297. Meanwhile, Robert P. Dunn, "Discriminations in the Comic Spirit in the Story of Susanna," *ChrLit* 31 (1982): 19–31, suggests that it is Susanna's fault that the elders respond to her as they do because she is so beautiful.

[351] Tervanotko, "Gendered Beauty," 11. Tervanotko further develops these ideas in idem., "What is Beautiful is Good? Examining the Significance of Sarah's Beauty in Genesis Apocryphon 20:2–9," *AABNER* 2 (2022): 83–106. See also MacWilliam, "Ideologies," 274–275, who similarly argues that Joseph's beauty makes him vulnerable.

[352] Tervanotko, "Gendered Beauty," 11–12.

[353] Beatrice Wyss ("Le Suicide Est l'arme Des Faibles: Selbsttötung Und Gender in Der Hebräischen Bibel Und Im Frühgriechischen Epos," *Lectio Difficilior* [2020]: 1–21) highlights the connection between female suicide and extramarital sex in narratives of the Hebrew Bible. Wyss' work underscores the severe consequences of having relationships outside of one's marriage.

that the story then is not about Susanna's physical well-being, but specifically about "the honor of Joakim's household."[354] I agree that Joakim is an important figure in the story, a point that appears more striking when one considers that he is entirely absent from the narrative. It is only after Susanna acquittal that the author mentions Joakim again; "Hilkiah and his wife praised God concerning their daughter Susanna, along with her husband Joakim and all [her] relatives, because she was not found [to have done] a shameful deed" (Sus vs 63). Here, as before, Susanna is not the subject of the action. Her parents, husband, and relatives praise their god for her acquittal. In my view, the underlying concern in the narrative of *Susanna* is the maintenance of male honor through the protection of women and their sexuality.

3.4 Sexuality in Aseneth

The female protagonist of *Aseneth* shares many similarities to the other protagonists in the Jewish novels, particularly in terms of how the author portrays Aseneth's sexuality. The author outlines the most important aspects of Aseneth's characterization in her introduction, specifically focusing on her lack of sexual experience with men. Here, three main features emerge: Aseneth's virginity, her beauty, and an initial clear link between Aseneth and other important Jewish women (Asen. 1:5). The author, who also contrasts Aseneth's restrained sexuality to that of other women who seek to have sex with Joseph (Asen. 7:3), consistently portrays Aseneth as an acceptable bride for Joseph. At the beginning of the narrative, the author portrays Aseneth's sexuality as a part of her identity that she conceals and protects from men. It is only after Aseneth exchanges her identity as an Egyptian idol worshiper for the identity of a Jewish god fearer that Joseph accepts Aseneth's sexuality. What emerges from the author's characterization of Aseneth's sexuality is a clear concern to portray Aseneth as an acceptable

[354] Glancy, "The Accused," 292.

wife for Joseph by emphasizing her separateness from others. In this section I analyze how the author does so by examining the portrayal of Aseneth as a virgin, in terms of her beauty, and the mirroring of Joseph following her transformation.[355]

3.4.1 Aseneth, the Inexperienced but Beautiful Virgin

The author introduces Aseneth's character in chapter one in a similar fashion to how the authors of *Judith* and *Esther* introduce their female protagonists. The author introduces Aseneth as:

> And he had a daughter, a virgin of eighteen years, tall and more beautiful in appearance than all the [other] virgins in the land. And this one [was] (Gk. Literally "had") nothing like the virgins of the Egyptians, but she was in every way similar to the daughters of the Hebrews. And she was tall like Sarah and a beauty to gaze at like Rebecca and exceptionally good-looking like Rachel, and the name of that virgin was Aseneth. And a report of her beauty went out into all of that land (Egypt)… (Asen. 1:4–6)

Her introduction highlights several important points. Firstly, Aseneth's virginity appears as an important aspect of her character. Not only is Aseneth specifically described as a virgin twice in the first chapter, but the author compares her to the other virgins of the land (Asen. 1:4).[356] Secondly, the author emphasizes Aseneth's beauty by mentioning her beautiful appearance twice in this introduction. Aseneth clearly possessed positive physical features, leading to some seeking her hand as a bride (Asen. 1:6a). Thirdly, Aseneth's portrayal connects her character directly to the wives of the Genesis fathers and distances her from her own people, the Egyptians (Asen. 1:4–5). The author specifies that Aseneth possessed nothing like the Egyptians' virgins

[355] Note here that terms relating to virginity in the Hebrew Bible and more broadly in Greco-Roman culture appear to describe a medical understanding of virginity. For example, Deut 22:13–14 describes virginity as an intact hymen, referring to the bloodied bed sheet as evidence of a daughter's virginity at the time of her marriage: "Suppose a man marries a woman, but after going in to her, he dislikes her and makes up charges against her, slandering her by saying, 'I married this woman; but when I lay with her, I did not find evidence of her virginity.' The father of the young woman and her mother shall then submit the evidence of the young woman's virginity to the elders of the city at the gate." See also the discussion in Frymer-Kensky, "Virginity in the Bible," 79–81. Refer also to my comments on the matter in the *Greek Esther* section of this chapter.

[356] Please see my discussion on the use of παρθενίας and παρθένος below.

(Καὶ αὕτη οὐδέν εἶχεν ὅμοιον τῶν παρθένων τῶν Αἰγυπτίων, Asen. 1:5).[357] The use of the Greek verb εἶχεν (ἔχω) when distancing Aseneth from her fellow Egyptians is telling of how the author portrays Aseneth. The Greek verb ἔχω means to literally possess a certain quality.[358] Therefore, when the text reads "[she] had nothing like the virgins of the Egyptians" (αὕτη οὐδένα εἶχεν ὅμοιον τῶν θυγατέρων τῶν Αἰγυπτίων, Asen. 1:5), the author asserts that Aseneth possessed none of the qualities of her Egyptian sisters.

Aseneth's beauty is part of the author's attempt to portray the protagonist as an acceptable bride for Joseph. In a similar manner to the authors of the other Jewish novels, the author of *Aseneth* describes the protagonist in terms of beauty. As I have noted above, the author describes Aseneth as beautiful when they introduce her character (Asen. 1:4). Moreover, the author details how male suitors attempted to seek Aseneth's hand in marriage because she became famous for her beauty (Asen. 1:6). An important theme in *Aseneth* is the rejection of suitors who are not acceptable – both Aseneth rejects those who seek her hand in marriage (Aseneth hates every man, Asen. 2:1) and Joseph rejects Aseneth when she attempts to kiss him (Asen. 8:5–7). Chesnutt argues that this is only one of the many ways in which the author of *Aseneth* works to portray the female protagonist in a similar manner to Joseph: "just as Joseph consistently rejected these annoying advances and remained a virgin…, so Aseneth was 'a virgin hating every man.'" [359] While Chesnutt does not explicitly state that the author of *Aseneth* portrays two characters waiting for the correct spouse to marry, his comments suggest as much. Aseneth's beauty then is part of the author's characterization of her being dissimilar to the

[357] We can only assume what the author intended by this phrase. This phrase may have something to do with Joseph's later statements that the Egyptian women will not leave him alone and want to have sex with him (Asen. 7:3–4).

[358] Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 310.

[359] Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 110. For a broader discussion on the parallels between Joseph and Aseneth, as well as parallels between Aseneth and Levi, see 108–112.

Egyptian virgins and being physically like the "daughters of the Hebrews" (ταῖς θυγατράσι τῶν Ἑβραίων, Asen. 1:5).[360] As I have discussed in length above, *Aseneth* portrays a female character in whom beauty and virginity are inherently linked. Moreover, as I describe in greater detail below, the author uses beauty as a characteristic to connect the portrayals of Joseph and Aseneth – both Joseph and Aseneth are magnificently beautiful throughout the narrative, although Aseneth's beauty becomes even more heavenly-like following her transformation.

Additionally, the author of *Aseneth* uses the Greek terms παρθενίας ("virginity") and παρθένος ("virgin") to describe the female protagonist no less than twenty-seven times; a feature of the text that highlights the importance of these terms for the portrayal of Aseneth:[361]

[360] The author of *Aseneth* describes the protagonist as being ontologically like the Hebrew women mentioned in the text. Refer to Thiessen, "Protecting the Holy Race," 168–169, for a discussion on a similar feature in *Judith*. Thiessen argues that the author of *Judith* understands the Jews and the non-Jews of that text to be ontologically different. See also Jill Hicks-Keaton, *Arguing With Aseneth: Gentile Access to Israel's 'Living God' in Jewish Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 67–91. While Hicks-Keaton does not use ontological terminology, she does discuss how *Aseneth* imagines the boundary between Jews and non-Jews. She argues that the author of *Aseneth* argues for the inclusion of Aseneth, a foreigner, through Deuteronomy's covenant.

[361] Note the usage of these terms (three times) in the quote above from Asen. 1:4–6a.

Translation	Greek
"every adornment of her virginity…" (referring to her garments).	Καὶ πᾶς ὁ κόσμος τῆς παρθενίας αὐτῆς… (Asen. 2:4).
"where her virginity was being nurtured…." (referring to her living quarters).	ὅπου ἡ παρθενία αὐτῆς ἐτρέφετο… (Asen. 2:7).
"'a virgin like you…'"(referring directly to Aseneth).	παρθένος ὡς σὺ… (Asen. 4:7).
"'But she is our daughter, a virgin…and there is not another man who has seen her…'" (referring directly to Aseneth).	ἀλλ᾽ ἐστι θυγάτηρ ἡμῶν παρθένος… καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ἀνὴρ ἄλλος ὃς ἑώρακεν αὐτήν… (Asen. 7:7).
"'She is a virgin hating every man…'" (referring directly to Aseneth).	παρθένος ἐστι μισοῦσα πάντα ἄνδρα… (Asen. 7:8).
"'If she is a virgin hating every man…'" (referring directly to Aseneth).	εἰ παρθένος ἐστι μισοῦσα πάντα ἄνδρα… (Asen. 7:8).
"'If she is your daughter and a virgin…'" (referring directly to Aseneth).	εἰ θυγάτηρ ὑμῶν ἐστι καὶ παρθένος… (Asen. 7:8).
"'And he is a virgin like you…'" (referring to Aseneth in comparison to Joseph).	καὶ αὐτὸς παρθένος ἐστὶν ὡς σὺ…(Asen. 8:1).
"'Praise this virgin…'" (referring directly to Aseneth).	εὐλόγησον τὴν παρθένον ταύτην… (Asen. 8:9).
"'I, the virgin…'" (Aseneth's self-identification).	ἐγὼ ἡ παρθένος… (Asen. 11:3).
"'the virgin…'" (Aseneth's self-identification).	ἡ παρθένος… (Asen. 12:5).
"'a virgin…'" (Aseneth's self-identification).	τὴν παρθένον… (Asen. 12:14).
"'being a virgin…'" (Aseneth's self-identification).	παρθένος οὖσα… (Asen. 13:13).
"'a belt (girdle)…of your virginity…'" (referring to Aseneth's garments).	τὴν ζώνην… τῆς παρθενίας σου… (Asen. 14:12).
"'the belt (girdle) of her virginity…'" (referring to Aseneth's garments).	τὴν ζώνην… τὴν…παρθενίας αὐτῆς… (Asen. 14:14).
"'Pure virgin…'" (name given to Aseneth by the angelic visitor).	παρθένος ἁγνὴ… (Asen. 15:1, 2, 4, 6, 10; 19:9).
"'You virgins…'" (referring to virgins in general, but including Aseneth as a member of that group).	ὑμᾶς τὰς παρθένους… (Asen. 15:8).
"'and was a virgin inclined to be arrogant …'" (Aseneth's self-identification).	καὶ ἦμην παρθένος ἀλαζὼν ὑπερήφανος… (Asen. 21:12).
"'the belt (girdle) of my virginity…'" (Aseneth's words, referring to her garments).	τὴν ζώνην τῆς παρθενίας μου… (Asen. 21:19).

Table 2: Virginity Terms in *Aseneth*.

In my view, the usage of παρθενίας and παρθένος in the text specifically describes Aseneth's status as a virgin, meaning that she was of young age and was sexually inexperienced. I am not alone, as Frymer-Kensky has argued that the term *parthenos* inherently implies a state of

virginity, meaning no sexual experience, specifically before marriage; the underlying cultural premise is "that unmarried girls are supposed to remain virgins until they are married to a man."[362] While *parthenos* can refer to an unmarried girl, the author's use of this term specifically points to its usage as a reference to Aseneth's virginity. For example, the author of *Aseneth* uses *parthenos* twice in reference to Joseph (Asen. 4:7; 8:1), comparing the *parthenos* of Aseneth and Joseph.[363] Since the term *parthenos* is typically only used to describe women, its usage in *Aseneth* to describe both Aseneth and Joseph suggests that *parthenos* can only refer to their shared status as virgin rather than using it to simply denote a characters age and gender; it is improbable that the author uses *parthenos* in reference to Joseph to suggest that he is an unmarried girl.

In my view, then, the author's use of παρθενίας and παρθένος must refer to Aseneth's lack of sexual experience.[364] Four indirect references to Aseneth's sexuality illustrate this:

[362] Frymer-Kensky, "Virginity in the Bible," 79. For a broader discussion on virginity in classical Greece see, Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality II*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1986); and Giulia Sissa, *Greek Virginity*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

[363] Burchard notes that this is "the first instance of masculine *parthenos* before (or beside?) Rev 14:4 (cf. 1 Cor 7:25)." See Christoph Burchard, "Joseph and Aseneth: A New Translation and Introduction," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, Volume Two: Expansion of the 'Old Testament' and Legends, Wisdom and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 1983), 206 note n. See also Burchard, *Untersuchungen*, 110, n. 1.

[364] The term "virgin" as an honorific title occurs with some frequency in Christian "virgin" martyrs beginning in the first century CE and onward. For example, see Karen A. Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); Anne P. Alwis, trans. with introduction and notes, *Narrating Martyrdom: Rewriting Late Antique Virgin Martyrs in Byzantium*, Translated Texts for Byzantinists 9 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020). The popularity of "virginity" and its equation with modesty in Christian circles stems from the early virgin birth narrative attached to Mary, the mother of Jesus. Teguh Wijaya Mulya, "Queering the Virgin/Whore Binary: The Virgin Mary, The Whore of Babylon and Sexual Violence," *In God's Image* 34 (2015), 48, argues that Mary is defined by her sexuality; "the Virgin Mary is characterized by sexlessness: asexuality, chastity, and purity" (47). See also Siân Taylder, "Our Lady of the Libido: Towards a Marian Theology of Sexual Liberation?," *Feminist Theology* 12, no. 3 (2004), 350, who also argues that Mary is the model of the absence of sexuality. While I am not arguing that the author of *Aseneth* draws from the Marian tradition, I find many similarities, particularly the emphasis on chastity and purity, between how the authors portray Mary and Aseneth as virgins.

Translation	Greek
"And a man never saw her…"	καὶ οὐδείς ἀνὴρ ἑώρακεν αὐτήν… (Asen. 2:1).
"And in this bed Aseneth alone lay down to sleep and a man or another woman never sat upon it except Aseneth alone."	καὶ ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ κλίνῃ ἐκάθευδεν Ἀσενὲθ μόνη καὶ ἀνὴρ ἢ γυνὴ ἑτέρα οὐδέποτε ἐκάθισεν ἐπ᾽ αὐτῇ πλὴν τῆς Ἀσενὲθ μόνης (Asen. 2:9).
"'Sit down a little on this bed, because this bed is physically clean and undefiled/pure and a man or woman has not sat upon it yet…'"	κάθισον δὴ μικρὸν ἐπὶ τῆς κλίνης ταύτης διότι ἡ κλίνη αὕτη ἐστὶ καθαρὰ καὶ ἀμίαντος καὶ ἀνὴρ ἢ γυνὴ οὐκ ἐκάθισεν ἐπ᾽ αὐτήν πώποτε… (Asen. 15:14).
"'And why do you say this, another virgin to wash your feet?'"[365]	καὶ ἵνα τί σὺ τοῦτο λαλεῖς ἄλλην παρθένον νίψαι τοὺς πόδας σου (Asen. 20:4).

Table 3: Indirect References to Aseneth's Sexuality.

I wish to highlight here, apart from the reference to virginity in Asen. 20:4, is the author's connection between Aseneth's virginity and her physical separation from people outside of the family complex, particularly men.[366] These descriptions of Aseneth are strikingly similar to the description of Rebekah in Gen 24, where Rebekah is described as a beautiful virgin that no man had ever known (Gen 24:16).[367]

Women's sexuality, as well as their virginity, was a commodity requiring protection in the ancient world. The commodification of women's sexuality, particularly a girl's sexual inexperience, occurs in Deut 22:28–29. This text describes the price (fifty shekels) required as payment to a girl's father if a man seized her and had sex with her. The text argues that "the man who lay with her shall give fifty shekels of silver to the young woman's father, and she shall become his wife. Because he violated her, he shall not be permitted to divorce her" (Deut 22:29). Laws, such as those in Deuteronomy, demonstrate that fathers owned their daughters to the

[365] Here, Aseneth questions her husband Joseph when he wants someone else to wash his feet. The task of footwashing was typically the task of slaves or servants and denotes both an attitude of hospitality and respect to the person one washed. See John Christopher Thomas, "Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community" (PhD diss., University of Sheffield, 1990), 37–47. Several scholars have also argued that footwashing could be a euphemism for sexual intercourse. See for example, Uriel Simon, "The Poor Man's Ewe-Lamb: An Example of a Juridical Parable," *Biblica* 48 (1967), 214; and P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *2 Samuel,* AB (Garden City: Doubleday, 1984), 286. These author's equate David's comments to Uriah, to have his wife wash his feet, with their assumption that David means for Uriah to go home and have sex with his wife (2 Sam 11:8). Thomas, meanwhile argues that "footwashing" typically does not appear as a euphemism, apart from passages such as Ruth 3:7 (33).

[366] The author does not appear to have all men in mind here, as Aseneth frequently interacts with her father and the male steward of the complex.

[367] Cf. Aseneth's comparison to the Genesis wives (Asen. 1:5).

extent that they expected compensation for the loss of value in the case of a daughter's loss of virginity. As Gail Corrington Streete emphasizes in her work, the laws of the Torah explicitly show how "the sexual functions of free women, especially their reproductively, are treated as commodities with value to the males of their respective families." [368] Moreover, as the passage from Deuteronomy highlights above, it was the duty of the father to protect his daughter's virginity until marriage. This notion features prominently in the work of Ben Sira who argues that "a daughter is a secret anxiety to her father… while a virgin, for fear she may be seduced" (Sir 42:9-10).[369] In my view, behind the author's emphasis of Aseneth's virginity is both the commodification of her sexuality, as well as the notion that her sexuality required protection and safeguarding until she became married.

The author's insistence on Aseneth's sexual purity is evident in how the author outlines the protagonist's physical isolation from men.[370] In their introduction of Aseneth in chapter two of the narrative, the author details the efforts taken to foster Aseneth's virginity.[371] An important aspect of these efforts is the physical separation of the protagonists from others.[372] For example,

[368] Gail Corrington Streete, *The Strange Woman: Power and Sex in the Bible*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 41. Streete argues that what appears to be behind these laws is the concern over regulating reproduction, particularly within a specific kinship group (see page 34). While these laws show that female sexuality was the sole property of males in the ancient world, laws concerning levirate marriage explicitly highlight this fact. It was the duty of a husband's brother to continue his family line by having intercourse with his widow in the hopes of producing a son. The author of Deuteronomy emphasizes this duty, as the text calls for the public shaming of a man who is unwilling to fulfill this duty (Deut 25:5–10).

[369] More broadly speaking, there is a cultural understanding in the Hebrew Bible that men of a household had the responsibility to protect the sexuality of their girls. See for example the narrative of the rape of Dinah, where Dinah's brothers take it upon themselves to avenge their sister's rape by killing Shechem (Gen 34:25–29).

[370] Ita Sheres, "Aseneth – From Priestess to Handmaid and Slave," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 17 (1999), 25, also notes the "pure" sexuality in *Aseneth* and connects it to a broader tradition which had roots in the literature of Qumran. Moreover, Sheres notes the paradisal quality of Aseneth's family compound and connects it to the description of the garden in Genesis (26–27).

[371] Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 197, notes that while both Joseph and Aseneth are virgins in the narrative, the author intends to stress different points for each character. For example, Joseph's virginity highlights the character's "ethic of abstinence before marriage and refusal of sexual intimacy with non-Jews, and in Aseneth's case, to stress her suitability to marry Joseph and to be received fully into the community of Israel."

[372] I discuss in more detail the seclusion of Aseneth in both the kinship and community chapters below. Several ancient sources propose that daughters should remain indoors, away from the sight of others. See for example, 2 Macc 3:19–20; 3 Macc 1:18; 4 Macc 18:7; Philo, *Spec* 3.169. In particular, *Pseudo-Phocylides* advises

the author portrays Aseneth as visually isolated from the sight of men (Asen. 2:1); she lives in the large chamber in the tower connected to her father's house (Asen. 2:7). Furthermore, the author describes how a wall surrounds Aseneth's family compound that eighteen armed-men guard (Asen. 2:10–11).[373] As such, only a select few interact with Aseneth. More specifically, seven virgins who were raise alongside Aseneth attend to her (Asen. 2:6).[374] The author tells us that these virgins were also raised in isolation from men, as they have never spoken to a male person, not even a child (Asen. 2:6). The description of Aseneth's bed further emphasizes her sexual purity. The author insists that no one except Aseneth, no "man or another woman never sat upon it except Aseneth alone" (Asen. 2:9). The inclusion of these details suggests that the author portrays Aseneth as physically separate from most people to foster and maintain her sexual purity.

The author's emphasis of Aseneth's virginity is part of the author's overall agenda to show that Aseneth is an acceptable bride for Joseph. The author does this by comparing Aseneth's appearance to that of well-known Jewish women: "she was tall like Sarah and a beauty to gaze at like Rebecca and exceptionally good-looking like Rachel" (Asen. 1:5). Additionally, the author portrays Aseneth as having the same sexual status as Joseph; both characters are chaste virgins, neither of which have before had any sexual experience. Similarly, Streete argues that Aseneth must transform from the "Strange Woman" characterized by idolatry and sexual immorality, a view that likely arose from the insufficient explanation for Joseph's

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readers to "guard a virgin in closely shut chambers, and let her not be seen before the house until her wedding day" (*Ps.-Phoc*. 215–216).

[373] Sheres, "Aseneth," 27, also notes the inclusion of the guards, but understands them to simply be a sign of the protection given to Aseneth. For Sheres, the author emphasizes the youth and power of these men.

[374] I further engage with the author's description of the seven virgins in the kinship chapter below. Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, 73–74, has argued that the seven virgins represent the seven stars in the Ursa Major constellation.

marriage to a foreigner as contained in the ancient Joseph story cycle.[375] I agree with Streete's assessment that the author's main purpose is to show how Aseneth transforms into an acceptable bride for Joseph before he can marry her. The author clearly emphasizes her virginity and separation from all men as part of their overall portrayal of Aseneth as acceptable bride.

3.4.2 Portraits of Aseneth, the Beautiful One of God

While Aseneth clearly begins the narrative as an attractive woman, the author explicates Aseneth's appearance after her transformation. This also appears to be due to the author's attempt to portray Aseneth in a manner than aligns her with Joseph. The author spends a great deal of effort describing the exquisite and heavenly-like appearance of Joseph, from his white tunic to the olive branch in his outstretched hand (Asen. 5:5).[376] Moreover, Aseneth, upon viewing the beautiful man Joseph, equates him to god, stating that, "the sun from heaven has come to us in his chariot… For who among men on earth will generate such beauty?" (Asen. 6:2-4). The author's mirrors their description of Joseph when they describe Aseneth following her transformation.

In chapter eighteen there is an explicit description of Aseneth's appearance and beauty. After her transformation, Aseneth washes her face in preparation before meeting Joseph. It is because of her washing her face that the author describes her beauty:

> And it (her face) was like the sun and her eyes like a morning star rising and her cheeks like a field of the highest/Most High and on the cheeks, (was the color) red like (the) blood of a son of man and her lips like a rose of life coming out of its

[375] Streete, *Strange Woman*, 168. See also Camp, *Wise, Strange and Holy*, who illustrates how strangeness applies to the "strange" woman's foreignness, sexuality, and religion in Proverbs. For example, Camp argues that "Woman as Sexual Stranger is inexorable linked to Woman as Ethnic Stranger and to Israel as Estranged Wife" (67). This notion of foreignness and sexual/religion strangeness appears to be behind the author use of "strange" in *Aseneth*, but this does not mean that the author of *Aseneth* portrays the protagonist as immoral.

[376] Several scholars have noted that the description of Joseph's appearance is reminiscent of the depiction of Helio, the Greek god of the sun, and Sol Invictus, Helio's Roman equivalent. See for example, Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, 82–83; Burchard, "Joseph and Aseneth," 208, n. k; Kee "The Socio-Cultural Setting," 402; Nir, *Joseph and Aseneth*, 116–124; and Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 156–166.

> rosebud and her teeth like warriors drawn up for a battle/war and the hair of her head like a vine in the paradise of God, thriving in its fruits and her neck like a variegated cypress and her breasts like the mountains of the God of the Most High. (Asen. 18:9)[377]

This description of Aseneth's post-transformation appearance and beauty are like other physical descriptions of women in Second Temple period literature.[378] Tamsyn Barton has argued that physical beauty reflects the inner life of characters in literature. The description of a woman's appearance, also known as physiognomy (φύσις "inherent nature or property" and γνώμων "one who judges") or the practice of judging a person's character on the basis of their appearance, is an important aspect to consider when examining the description of Aseneth.[379] While the author's depiction of Aseneth is not an example of a physiognomic examination, in my view it points to the author's effort to portray Aseneth in a way that reflects their earlier portrayal of Joseph and highlights the inner character of Aseneth.[380] For example, the author carefully connects some of Aseneth's beautiful features to Joseph's god; her cheeks are connected to the "Most High" and her hair is like the "paradise of God" (Asen. 18:9).

The author continues to emphasize the new beauty Aseneth has acquired after her transformation by referring multiple times to the shocked reactions of those around her. As a

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[377] καὶ ἦν ὡς ὁ ἥλιος καὶ οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτῆς ὡς ἑωσφόρος ἀνατέλλων καὶ αἱ παρειαὶ αὐτῆς ὡς ἄρουραι τοῦ ὑψίστου καὶ ἐν ταῖς παρειαῖς ἐρυθρὸς ὡς αἷμα υἱοῦ ἀνθρώπου καὶ τὰ χείλη αὐτῆς ὡς ῥόδον ζωῆς ἐξερχόμενον ἐκ τῆς κάλυκος αὐτοῦ καὶ οἱ ὀδόντες αὐτῆς ὡς πολεμισταὶ συντεταγμένοι εἰς πόλεμον καὶ αἱ τρίχες τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτῆς ὡς ἄμπελος ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐυθηνοῦσα ἐν τοῖς καρποῖς αὐτῆς καὶ ὁ τράχηλος αὐτῆς ὡς κυπάρισσος παμποίκιλος καὶ οἱ μασθοὶ αὐτῆς ὡς τὰ ὄρη τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου.

[378] See for example the description of women in Song of Songs.

[379] Tamsyn Barton, *Power and Knowledge: Astrology, Physiognomics, and Medicine Under the Roman Empire* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), argues that in Greco-Roman physiognomics, beauty reflected the inner life of a character (in contrast to Mesopotamian physiognomics which included predications of the individual's future). Tervanotko, "What is Beautiful is Good?," interacts with Barton's work and explores physiognomy in the portrayal of Sarah in Genesis Apocryphon. See also, Simon Swain, ed., *Seeing the Face, Seeing the Soul: Polemon's Physiognomy from Classical Antiquity to Medieval Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007), 556–7; and Shaye J.D. Cohen, "Beauty of Flora and Beauty of Sarai," *Helios: A Journal of Classics and Comparative Studies* 8 (1981), 42, who notes that Aristotle established physiognomy as a "science" by connecting the outer appearance of a person with their internal morals. A similar description of feminine beauty occurs in Song 4.

[380] Both Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 261, and Kee, "The Socio-Cultural Setting," 410, note that Aseneth's appearance becomes divine like or larger than life, and mirrors that of Joseph.

result of her "new" beauty, Aseneth's father is speechless and eventually falls at her feet in fear when he sees her for the first time (Asen. 18:11).[381] He responds with disbelief over her beauty: "What is this my lady, and what is this great and wonderful beauty?" (τί ἐστι τοῦτο δέσποινά μου καὶ τίς ἐστιν ἡ καλλονὴ αὕτη ἡ μεγάλη καὶ θαυμαστή; Asen. 18:11). Later, in chapter twenty, Aseneth's family responds in a similar manner to her appearance. The author describes Aseneth's appearance as being "like the appearance of light and her beauty was like heavenly beauty" (ὡς εἶδος φωτὸς καὶ ἦν τὸ κάλλος αὐτῆς ὡς κάλλος οὐράνιον, Asen. 20:6).[382] Furthermore, her family was "amazed at her beauty and rejoiced and gave glory to God, the one who gives life to the dead" (ἐθαμβήθησαν ἐπὶ τῷ κάλλει αὐτῆς καὶ ἐχάρησαν καὶ ἔδωκαν δόξαν τῷ θεῷ ζωοποιοῦντι τοὺς νεκρούς, Asen. 20:7). The Pharaoh also echoes their reaction: "and he was amazed at her beauty" (καὶ ἐθαμβήθη ἐπὶ τῷ κάλλει αὐτῆς, Asen. 21:4). This amazement at Aseneth's beauty mirrors her own amazement when she views Joseph's beauty at the beginning of the narrative (Asen. 6:1); the portrayals of Aseneth and Joseph now align.

In my view, the author uses descriptions of Aseneth's dress to highlight her transformation from idol worshiper to a heavenly beauty like Joseph. [383] The comparison of the

[381] Burchard, *Joseph und Aseneth*, 238–40, has noted the use of this reverential language and its connection to other depictions of interactions with the divine.

[382] Aseneth and Joseph appear as equals; their beauty is a direct result of their god's blessing on them. See Matthias Augustin, *Der schöne Mensch im Alten Testament und im hellenistischen Judentum,* Beitrage zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentums 3 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1983), 186–191. Similarly, the Greek novels portray their lovers as equals. David Konstan, *Sexual Symmetry: Love in the Ancient Novel and Related Genres* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), has written on the matter. Beauty is also a major theme in these works. For example, Callirhoe is well-known for her beauty (Char., Call. 1.1.2) and Chaereas is purported to be the most beautiful man (Char. Call. 1.1.3). For other similarities between the description of Aseneth and Joseph and the Greek protagonists, see Hezser, "'Joseph and Aseneth,'" 10–19.

[383] Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 125–126, instead argues that Aseneth's change in clothing is associated with her marriage to Joseph rather than her transformation. Chesnutt connects Aseneth's mourning clothes to the usage of death-to-life language and thus argues its symbolism for her conversion. Whereas Meredith Warren, "A Robe Like Lightening: Clothing Changes and Identification in Joseph and Aseneth," in *Dressing Judeans and Christians in Antiquity*, eds. Kristi Upson-Saia, Carly Daniel-Hughes, and Alicia J. Batten (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 143, argues that Aseneth's clothing is significant only for her transformation. Warren furthermore argues that the wedding is "chronologically and sartorially distinct from her transformative experience." Meanwhile, Burchard, "Joseph and Aseneth," does not comment on the matter.

description of Aseneth's dress in chapter three to the description of her dress in chapter eighteen best illustrates this point. Her identity as an idol worshiper links to her apparel in chapter three where Aseneth clothes herself in images of her idols. The text reads:

> And Aseneth…put on a robe made of fine linen of aqua-marine interwoven with gold…and put bracelets upon her hands and feet…and around her neck she put expensive ornaments and costly stones…and the names of the gods of the Egyptians were carved everywhere on the bracelets and the stones, and the faces of all the idols were impressed on them. (Asen. 3:6)

Aseneth then removes this apparel in chapter ten after Joseph rejects her. Aseneth exchanges her idolatrous clothing for mourning clothing: Aseneth exchanges her royal robe for a black tunic of mourning (Asen. 10:10), gathers the idols of her gods (Asen. 10:12), and threw everything through the window (Asen. 10:13). Later in the narrative, as Aseneth readies herself to meet Joseph after her transformation, the author tells us that she prepared herself by bringing out a robe:

> like lightening in appearance and put it on herself. And she wrapped herself in a radiant and royal belt which was (made) of precious stones. And she put on her hands golden bracelets on her fingers and for her feet golden pants, and precious adornments she placed about her neck – there were countless extremely valuable precious stones fastened [to it] – and a golden crown she put upon her head. (Asen. 18:5–6)

In this apparel, Joseph recognizes Aseneth as a god fearer and accepts her as his bride. Meredith Warren has noted the use of "lightning" in the description of Aseneth's post-transformation dress. She argues that the use of this term is evidence that the author is trying to associate Aseneth with God.[384] A similar association occurs in the work *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, a Hellenistic novel which connects the main character's light and brightness to the goddess

[384] Warren, "A Robe Like Lightening," 138. Although the *Shepherd of Hermas* 4.2.1 uses very similar language to describe the Church as a bride, I agree with Warren that the author of *Aseneth* focuses more on Aseneth's brightness and beauty (see page 141). Likewise, Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 127–128, notes the similarities between the brilliant description of Aseneth and that of other transformed figures in the Enoch tradition (e.g., 2 *Enoch* 22:8–10; 3 *Enoch* 12). Kraemer concludes that, like the figures in Enoch, Aseneth transforms into an angelic figure (page 129).

Aphrodite.[385] Warren argues that "Aseneth's transformation has less to do with conversion and more to do with her new association with the powerful God of her beloved."[386]

Underlying the author's portrayal of the female protagonist then is not a moral objection to Aseneth's sexuality, but the denunciation of idol worship. Despite Aseneth's unacceptable idol worship practices, the author also attempts to portray her otherwise. Similarly, Chesnutt has argued that, "in spite of the distance at which Aseneth stands from the people of God as the story opens, she is also carefully portrayed in such a way that her worthiness to be Joseph's wife is affirmed."[387] Moreover, Chesnutt has noted that a major theme which runs throughout the text is the "fundamental dichotomy between those who worship God and those who worship idols."[388] The major barrier which Aseneth must overcome before marrying Joseph is made clear multiple times: Aseneth must give up her idolatrous ways. This is such a major issue that the author emphasizes Aseneth's destruction and repudiation of her Egyptian gods. As Chesnutt has rightly noted, the main motivation of the author is "to exalt Aseneth and establish the propriety of her marriage to Joseph."[389] The author does this in numerous ways, comparing Aseneth to the matriarchs, downplaying Aseneth's genealogy, and depicting Aseneth transforming through several clothing changes. Moreover, the morality of Aseneth's sexuality is never in question in the narrative. If anything, the author portrays a chaste girl at the beginning of the narrative and a properly married girl at the end of the narrative.

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[385] Warren, "A Robe Like Lightening," 149. See also Wills, *Ancient Jewish Novels*, 5. Likewise, Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 10, notes that many Greek authors portray their heroines in terms of divine beauty, particularly with a shining appearance like Aseneth. Moreover, the female protagonists of the Greek novels are many times depicted as goddesses. For example, Callirhoe appears as the goddess Aphrodite in Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe* 1.1.15–16.

[386] Warren, "A Robe Like Lightening," 153.

[387] Randall D. Chesnutt, "The Social Setting and Purpose of Joseph and Aseneth" *JSP* 2 (1988), 31. Similarly, Nir, *Joseph and Aseneth*, has focused mainly on the marriage of Aseneth to Joseph and her depiction as his bride. Here, Nir argues that Aseneth as bride is a metaphor for the early Church as a bride of Jesus.

[388] Chesnutt, *"The Social Setting*," 23.

[389] Ibid., 31

3.5 Conclusions

The narratives of *Greek Esther*, *Judith*, *Susanna*, and *Aseneth* are varied, but as a group several important similarities indicate a shared understanding around sexuality and maintaining Jewishness. First, the Jewish novels present sexuality as a fundamental feature of their female protagonists. Each novel portrays a protagonist who embodies a particular view of female sexuality – they are beautiful, pious, and self-controlled characters. Additionally, some of the authors portray the female protagonists as using their sexuality to influence foreign men. Second, by placing limits on the protagonist's use of her sexuality, each author shares a general concern for highlighting proper Jewishness in terms of behavior, sexuality, and relationships.

Beauty, as in other biblical narratives, is a prominent feature of the protagonists of the Jewish novels. All the protagonists are beautiful – and this is the most important feature of their identity. Yet, their beauty does not simply denote the physical appearance of their character. Instead, beauty appears to be directly tied to the sexuality of each of the characters; it is a bodily expression of their sexuality allowing for their characters to physically attract men. While beauty is partly about aesthetics in these narratives, in my view, aesthetics do not entirely explain the emphasis on the beauty of the female protagonists. For instance, both Esther and Judith are not simply beautiful but they use their beauty to save their own people by encouraging and engaging in sexual encounters with foreign men. In the instance of *Greek Esther*, the author's aim to explain the problematic relationship between Esther and Artaxerxes connects to their portrayal of the protagonist' sexuality and beauty; Esther uses her sexuality only out of necessity. Similarly, the author of *Judith* uses the protagonist to encourage Torah observance and trust in God to deliver the faithful. Susanna's beauty, on the other hand, is directly linked to the possibility of rape. In portraying Susanna as such, the author provides an opportunity to introduce Daniel and

to portray him as a hero. Finally, the author of *Aseneth* connects the protagonist' beauty to her presentation as marriage material for Joseph as she is as beautiful as well-known Jewish women from earlier biblical texts and, later in the narrative, as beautiful as Joseph. Such a portrayal parallels with the author's aim to rectify the embarrassing story from the Torah and to reinforce endogamous marriage and separation from foreigners. In all four narratives, beauty both empowers and makes one vulnerable.

A key aspect of the female protagonist's sexuality, emphasized in all four novels, is the use of the body as an instrument of influence. In every case, each protagonist appears using her body as a tool to effect change. The narratives of *Greek Esther* and *Judith* are of course the most explicit about this; the authors depict female characters that use their bodies to influence their counterparts, Artaxerxes and Holofernes. Although the narratives of *Susanna* and *Aseneth* do not display seducing figures, the same understanding of feminine sexuality underlies these narratives as well. While Susanna appears to fall victim to the men around her, in many ways the narrative of *Susanna* highlights the perceived power women could exert on men using their body. In the example of Susanna, the female protagonist provoked the desire of the elders without actively encouraging them. Meanwhile, Aseneth becomes the epitome of proper feminine sexuality; unlike her Egyptian sisters who molest Joseph, Aseneth remains chaste and conceals her sexuality from all but Joseph.

Sexuality is not only fundamental to the characterization of the female protagonists in the Jewish novels, but is also fundamental to the author's understanding of maintaining Jewishness. Through their strategic use of the character's sexuality, as well as by placing limits on that sexuality, the authors of the Jewish novels construct clear boundaries. Although part of the Jewish novels use of the protagonist's sexuality may be for the entertainment of its readers, the

didactic purpose of the character's sexuality is to highlight and encourage particular ways of maintaining Jewishness. For instance, the authors of *Greek Esther* and *Judith* are careful to place limitations on both character's sexuality; the female protagonists do not seduce or sexually engage with their respective counterparts willingly or for enjoyment, but to deceive the enemy and fulfill their roles to save their people. In the narrative of *Susanna*, the protagonist's passive sexuality highlights the inherent threat posed by outsiders; the author illustrates the consequences of not protecting women and their sexuality. Finally, Aseneth highlights the need for strict adherence to Jewish norms and the embodiment of Jewishness. In all cases, these narratives highlight the need for exclusive sexual relationships, ones that maintain a Jewish ethnicity, and highlight the potential threat outsiders pose to the very existence of Jewishness.

The Jewish novels illustrate Jewish identities by etching narratives into the bodies of women.[390] The bodies of the protagonists embody proper sexual relations. They also symbolize the fight against the enemy and remind the audience to desire only those who society deems appropriate. Moreover, the bodies of the protagonists illustrate reasons to maintain an amount of fear toward outsiders. Most importantly, the female protagonists of the Jewish novels physically embody what it means to be Jewish; the authors use their female characters to outline Jewishness, to push against the edges of that identity, and to reaffirm the most important aspects of Jewishness.

[390] Sara Kipfer and Silvia Schroer ("Der Körper Als Gefäß: Eine Studie Zur Visuellen Anthropologie Des Alten Orients," *Lectio Difficilior* (2015): 1–26) examine the notion of embodiment and demonstrate that archaeological and iconographic evidence suggests a wide-spread notion that the female body was conventionalized as a container in the context of the Hebrew bible and the Ancient Near East.

CHAPTER 4: The Theme of Kinship Ties in the Jewish Novels

This chapter focuses on the portrayal of the female protagonists in terms of their kinship ties. My examination focuses on analyzing how the authors portray the female protagonists in relationship with members of their own household or kinship group as defined by the author of each narrative. For example, since women appear most frequently in relation to their family members as wives, mothers, daughters, and slave owners,[391] I question how they appear in these relationships in the Jewish novels. I examine not only what the authors tell us about their relationships to other kin, but also highlight areas in which the authors do not record details we might expect to find.

4.1 Kinship in Greek Esther

The protagonist of *Greek Esther* appears in two relationships in the narrative that the author portrays as kin relations; first, her relationship with Mordecai as his orphaned cousin, and second, her relationship with Artaxerxes as his wife. While these relationships occur in both the Hebrew and Greek versions of the narrative, the Greek version provides more details and portrays them differently than the Hebrew version. In particular, Esther's relationship with Mordecai is vital to her identity, while the author focuses less on the relationship between Esther and Artaxerxes. The following analysis examines the relationship between Esther and each of these characters, as well as Esther's role in each relationship.

4.1.1 Esther and Mordecai: A Redeemer for Esther?

Regardless of the interpretation of Esther's relationship to Mordecai, the importance of this kinship relationship is clear in both versions of the Esther narrative; the author introduces

[391] See for example, Russaw, *Daughters in the Hebrew Bible*; Johanna Stiebert, *Fathers and Daughters in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); and Ilan, *Integrating Women*.

Esther alongside Mordecai and their kinship ties appear in multiple places in the Greek text (Add Esth 8:1; 16:12; 9:29).[392] Esther and Mordecai appear as a pair in chapter two.[393] The NRSV translates the Greek text as:

> Now there was a Jew in Susa the capital whose name was Mordecai… And he had a foster child (καὶ ἦν τούτῳ παῖς θρεπτη), the daughter of his father's brother, Aminadab, and her name was Esther. When her parents died, he brought her up to womanhood as his own (ἐπαίδευσεν αὐτὴν ἑαυτῷ εἰς γυναῖκα). (Add Esth 2:5–7)[394]

While, as evidenced by this translation, the popular view is that Mordecai adopted and raised Esther after the death of her parents, the Greek suggests Esther was not his foster daughter but his future wife.[395]

Most translations of *Greek Esther* conceal language that portrays Esther as Mordecai's future wife, particularly the phrase ἐπαίδευσεν αὐτὴν ἑαυτῷ εἰς γυναῖκα which could indicate that Mordecai "trained her [Esther] as a woman for himself" (Add Esth 2:7). Here, the Greek suggests that Mordecai intended to train Esther as a γυναῖκα, a common Greek phrase for "woman" which also occurs in the genitive as "wife." Outside of this verse, the text never explicitly mentions Esther as Mordecai's wife or vice versa. Although this is the case, *Greek*

[392] Wyler, "Esther," 113, argues that the author only introduces Mordecai in the Hebrew text so that they can introduce Esther. Wyler notes that the Hebrew immediately shifts the reader's attention to Esther. While this may be the case for the Hebrew text in which Mordecai seems to be a secondary character to Esther, the Greek text places Mordecai as the main character with its inclusion of Addition A. Timothy K. Beal, "Tracing Esther's Beginnings," in *A Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith and Susanna*, ed. Athalya Brenner, FCB 7 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 109, asserts that both versions of *Greek Esther* highlight Mordecai as the hero of the story. Moreover, Beal argues that *Greek Esther* challenges the possibility of reading the Esther narrative as a way of positioning readers "on the woman's side within a patriarchal social order, and that, in the process, insinuates the limits and rupture-points in the order of patriarchal domination it is introducing" (110).

[393] Note that technically the author introduces Mordecai in the Greek text in Addition A which narrates his premonitory dream (Add Esth 11:2–12).

[394] καὶ ἦν τούτῳ παῖς θρεπτή θυγάτηρ Αμιναδαβ ἀδελφοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ καὶ ὄνομα αὐτῇ Εσθηρ ἐν δὲ τῷ μεταλλάξαι αὐτῆς τοὺς γονεῖς ἐπαίδευσεν αὐτὴν ἑαυτῷ εἰς γυναῖκα καὶ ἦν τὸ κοράσιον καλὸν τῷ εἴδει (Add Esth 2:7)

[395] See for example the NRSV translation quoted above. See also 4:8 which does describe how Mordecai provides for the orphaned girl; "'remember,' he [Mordecai] said, 'the days when you were an ordinary person, being brought up under my care.'" Many scholars understand Mordecai to be Esther's uncle. See for example, De Troyer, "An Oriental Beauty Parlour," 47. See also Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews, V. 4:12*. New York, 1909. Available open source at https://www.sefaria.org/ Legends_of_the_Jews, lines 49, 55 who also call Mordecai her uncle and explicates on Mordecai and his wife's caretaking of Esther.

Esther 2:7 does fit with how the text elsewhere deals with other male character's wives. For instance, the author refers to Haman's wife as "the woman of him" (τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ, Add Esth 5:10).[396] Moreover, the author never refers to Esther as the daughter of Mordecai. In fact, the Greek emphasizes the fact that Esther is the daughter of Aminadab; the text indicates that "this child [Esther] was the orphan daughter of Aminadab" (καὶ ἦν τούτῳ παῖς θρεπτή θυγάτηρ Αμιναδαβ, Add Esth 2:7).

Underlying the view that Mordecai intended to marry Esther is ambiguity in the original Hebrew of the narrative. B. Barry Levy acknowledges that the issue surrounds the Hebrew vowel pointing on the word בת which occurs in Est 2:7. Most bibles translated this passage as "Mordecai took her as his daughter" (לקחה מרדכי לו לבת). Instead of "daughter" (בת), as is usually the translation, Levy suggests that the word was "house" (בית), a common way of referring to one's wife in the ancient world.[397] This interpretation of the Hebrew of Est 2:7 is by no means new to scholarship. As early as the rabbinic period, authors read *bat* as *bayyit* and understood Esther to be Mordecai's wife.[398] More recent scholarship, such as that of Loader, has argued that Esther and Mordecai were husband and wife.[399] Similarly, I agree that *Greek Esther* portrays Mordecai raising Esther to become his wife. In my view, the Greek text linguistically focuses on Esther's young age – using the word for "child" (παῖς, Add Esth 2:7) to describe Esther – and Mordecai's efforts to teach her to become his wife (ἐπαίδευσεν αὐτὴν ἑαυτῷ εἰς γυναῖκα, Add

[396] See also Add Esth 5:14 and 6:13.

[397] B. Barry Levy, "What Was Esther's Relationship to Mordechai?: Biblical, Traditional, and Not-So-Traditional Interpretations," *The Torah.com* (2016), https://www.thetorah.com/article/what-was-esthers-relationship-to-mordechai. Levy cites later Talmudic tradition (e.g, the *Megillah*, *Ruth Rabba*, and parasha 2), as evidence for this reading of the Hebrew. He illustrates that later Rabbinic tradition understood Esther to be Mordecai's wife.

[398] R. Meir, Ruth Rabba, parasha 2 interpret *bat* as *bayyit*. The first interpretation as *bat* comes to us in Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 9:198, in which he suggests that Mordecai was Esther's uncle. This interpretation also appears in the Vulgate translation. See again, https://www.thetorah.com/article/what-was-esthers-relationship-to-mordechai.

[399] See for example Loader, *Making Sense of Sex,* 87, 121 who argues that Esther is "abducted from her husband, Mordecai, and forced to serve in a harem" (87).

Esth 2:7).[400] Moreover, unlike most translations, Esther never appears as his "foster" child.[401] While it is impossible to know for certain how the author of Greek Esther understood the Hebrew text, the lack of any references to a parental-child relationship suggests that the author may have viewed Esther as Mordecai's future wife.

Jewish kinship practices in antiquity also support the Greek author's interpretation of Esther and Mordecai's relationship as future wife and husband. As an orphan, Esther would have been without a male guardian leaving her in a precarious situation not only financially and practically speaking, but also without a male guardian to protect her sexuality especially given her young age.[402] As such, it makes sense in the context of the narrative that Esther went to live with a male family member from her father's family. Frymer-Kensky discusses the economics of feminine chastity and argues that the protection and control of women was of the utmost importance to the family. More specifically, the defilement of females directly led to the loss of male honor by demonstrating that the men of the family lacked "the qualities of real men."[403] Therefore, male family members had incentive to control access to the sexuality of their female

[400] See my comments above. Note that the Hebrew instead refers to Esther as נערה which also implies a young girl of marriageable age. Furthermore, the author never refers to Esther as Mordecai's daughter anywhere in the Greek text.

[401] The Greek term τρόφιμος occurs in several texts to refer to a foster-child. See for example Euripides' *Ion* 684 and Plato' *Pol.* 272b.

[402] Refer to my prior comments on females without male guardians in the Judith section in my chapter on Sexuality. Another example occurs in the narrative of Ruth. Although Ruth is an example of a widow, orphans, particularly female orphans, were vulnerable in much the same ways as widows. See also Frymer-Kensky, "Virginity in the Bible."

[403] Ibid., 85. See the broader discussion on pages 84-85, where Frymer-Kensky suggests that the males in families often worked together to protect their females from outside influences and, most importantly, other men. See also J.G. Peristiany, *Honor and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1965); David Gilmore, "Introduction: The Shame of Dishonor," in *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean* , ed. David Gilmore, AAA Publications 22 (Washington, DC: American Anthropological Association, 1987), 2-21; Maureen Giovannini, "Female Chastity Codes in the Circum-Mediterranean: Comparative Perspectives, in *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean*, ed. David Gilmore, AAA Publications, 22 (Washington, DC: American Anthropological Association, 1987), 61-74. The safeguarding of women, particularly their sexuality, is a common feature in most cultures in antiquity.

relatives. The results of an uncontrolled female could be disastrous to the men of a family. For example, Ben Sira warns in a diatribe about daughters to:

> Keep strict watch over a headstrong daughter,
> or she may make you a laughing-stock to your enemies,
> a byword in the city and the assembly of the people,
> and put you to shame in public gatherings.
> See that there is no lattice in her room,
> no spot that overlooks the approaches to the house.
> Do not let her parade her beauty before any man,
> or spend her time among married women;
> for from garments comes the moth,
> and from a woman comes woman's wickedness.
> Better is the wickedness of a man than a woman who does good;
> it is woman who brings shame and disgrace. (Sir 42:11-14)

Mordecai then, as a blood relative and a male, would have been able to provide the same level of protection that her father would have in terms of both financial and practical security (e.g., food, money, and housing). Furthermore, Mordecai's control of Esther would have been viewed as mutually beneficial given the honor/shame cultural context of the narrative. For example, Klein argues that

> feminine 'shame' as a positive value is characterized by deference and submission to male authority, by docile and timorous behavior, by hiding nakedness, by sexual exclusiveness, and by modesty in attire and deportment. The absence of these qualities renders a woman 'shameless' and dishonors her family.[404]

Therefore, through the control of Esther's sexuality by way of training her to become his wife, Mordecai would be able to regulate any potential impacts to his honor by protecting her shame while she would benefit from the maintenance of her shame through his control of her sexuality.

[404] Klein, "Honor and Shame in Esther," 151. See also Bruce J. Malina, *New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster Press, 1993), 51. For a broader discussion on the honor/shame system see, L.M. Bechtel, "Shame as a Sanction of Social Control in Biblical Israel: Judicial, Political, and Social Shaming," *JSOT* 40 (1991): 47–76; C. Delaney, "Seeds of Honor, Fields of Shame," in *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean*, ed. D.D. Gilmore, American Anthropological Association Special Publication 22 (Washington, DC: American Anthropological Association, 1987), 35–48.

Likewise, Jewish marriage practices also support the interpretation that Mordecai was preparing Esther to be his future wife. Endogamy, the practice of marrying within one's own kinship group, was common and valued in both the Jewish and Greek world.[405] While the maintenance of property ownership was one of many reasons families encouraged people to marry within their own kinship group,[406] the practice of endogamy also offered a means of protection for many women. The story of Ruth and Boaz best illustrates this aspect of endogamy. Ruth, without a husband or other male guardian, resorted to gathering leftovers from the harvest for her and her mother-in-law to survive. It is only because of Boaz, who was also in her kinship group, that she has someone who can claim her as their own and she can become their wife (Ruth 3:9–13; 4:1–12). It would have fallen on Mordecai as Esther's next-of-kin to provide the best protection for his cousin, including marrying the orphaned girl.

The relationship of Esther and Mordecai following her forced relocation to the palace requires reconsidered considering the interpretation I have outlined above. The Greek author does not include Mordecai's reaction to Esther being captured and taken to the harem, nor does the author give readers any sense as to Mordecai's feelings about Esther's subsequent marriage to Artaxerxes or her relationship with her husband.[407] While Mordecai is portrayed as being

[405] For example, the perfect marriage was between an uncle and his niece in the Greek world. See the discussion in Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, 143.

[406] See for example Philo's *Spec. Leg.* 2.126 which encourages the marriage of girls to those within her own family group as a means of maintaining the family's property. In the book of Tobit, marriage within the kinship group appears as compulsory (Tob 1:9; 4:2). See also Jud 8:2. There were also socio-political and economic reasons. For an overview of various views on endogamy and exogamy from biblical to rabbinic periods see, Satlow, "Endogamy and Exogamy," in *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, 133–161.

[407] Wyler, "Esther," 113 claims that Mordecai encourages Esther to participate in the beauty contest. Conversely, Klein, "Honor and Shame in Esther," 157, points out that Mordecai simply does nothing when Esther is taken. Meanwhile, Jonathan Grossman, *Esther: The Outer Narrative and the Hidden Reading*, Siphrut: Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures, v. 6 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 67 and Aaron Koller, *Esther in Ancient Jewish Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 144, have both compared Mordecai's situation to the situation Abram and Sarai face in Gen 12:10–20. They postulate that the issue of Esther sleeping with the king is like Sarai's situation in which she sleeps with the Pharaoh despite being married to Abram. Furthermore, Abram's inaction on the matter due to the mortal danger Abram faced because of having a beautiful wife, is like the inaction Mordecai appears to take when Esther is taken to the palace.

indifferent, he is also portrayed as maintaining a level of interest in his cousin, even travelling to the courtyard of the harem daily to see what would happen to Esther (Add Esth 2:11). [408] The Greek text emphasizes his concern over her and her future by including the verb ἐπισκοπέω, meaning "to look over, care for, take care of" portrays Mordecai's interest as a continued guardian over Esther.[409]

The frequency of interactions between Esther and Mordecai after her marriage to Artaxerxes, in my opinion, continues to highlight the kin relationship between the two characters. The frequency of these interactions is evident once the proclamation to destroy the Jews has been issued in chapter three, supplemented with Addition B in the Greek version. Following this news, Esther learns that Mordecai has put on sackcloth and ashes, and gone into mourning. The text seems to imply that Esther had people who regularly notified her about what was happening on the outside with Mordecai (it is her maids and eunuchs who come and tell her about Mordecai, Add Esth 4:4). This implication highlights the mutual interest between Esther and Mordecai. Esther then orders her attending eunuch to obtain further information on Mordecai and she even has clothes sent to him (Add Esth 4:4).[410] The eunuch then proceeds to go back and forth between Esther and Mordecai carrying each of their messages (Add Esth 4:5–17). As a result, the author does not simply portray Esther and Mordecai as exchanging frequent messages. More broadly speaking, the Greek author portrays Esther and Mordecai as having a significant

[408] καθ᾽ ἑκάστην δὲ ἡμέραν ὁ Μαρδοχαῖος περιεπάτει κατὰ τὴν αὐλὴν τὴν γυναικείαν ἐπισκοπῶν τί Εσθηρ συμβήσεται (Add Esth 2:11). De Troyer, "An Oriental Beauty Parlour," 50–51. De Troyer sees Mordecai's concern as a way for the narrative to flow: what happens to Esther? Mordecai's concern allows for the author to specify what happens to her. Contrary to De Troyer's views, Wyler argues that Mordecai's interest and Esther's continued obedience to Mordecai are in line with the theme of obedience found throughout the narrative. See also S.B. Berg, *The Book of Esther: Motifs, Themes, and Structure*, SBLDS 44 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), 72–82

[409] ἐπισκοπέω is also found in Deuteronomy as the word that describes god's attention and care for the land of Israel (Deut. 11:12).

[410] Klein, *Honor and Shame in Esther*, 162. Klein argues that Mordecai's self-abasement in the texts reduces his honor and portrays him as weak and feminized. As Esther's male authority figure, this self-abasement brings shame to their family. Klein argues that Esther's quick response to send clothes to him is her way of pushing him to reassert his honor and therefore restoring her honor.

relationship in that they maintain active communication even after she arrives at the palace and that their kinship relationship is an important feature in the narrative.[411]

The author's portrayal of Esther's kinship ties with Mordecai is particularly evident in Mordecai's authority over Esther, even after she becomes queen. For example, the author reveals in chapter two that Mordecai "commanded" Esther to not reveal her true identity; "now Esther had not indicated her race nor homeland, for Mordecai had ordered her not to announce [it]" (καὶ οὐχ ὑπέδειξεν Εσθηρ τὸ γένος αὐτῆς οὐδὲ τὴν πατρίδα ὁ γὰρ Μαρδοχαῖος ἐνετείλατο αὐτῇ μὴ ἀπαγγεῖλαι, Add Esth 2:10).[412] Later in the chapter, the reader is again assured that Esther has not revealed her identity to anyone in the palace (Add Esth 2:20).[413] Bea Wyler finds Esther's obedience to Mordecai surprising, given that Esther now has the security of her husband.[414] Moreover, De Troyer notes that the Greek text maintains Mordecai's authority over Esther.[415] While I agree with this assessment, I do not think the only thing at stake in this narrative is Mordecai's authority. If we understand the narrative to be about an orphaned girl taken away from her kinspeople and forced to marry an outsider rather than her relative Mordecai, his

[411] The narrative of Esther is the only Jewish narrative that expresses an account of the relationship between a man and an adopted orphaned girl. For the perspective on adoption in the Roman world, see Mireille Corbier, "Divorce and Adoption as Roman Familial Strategies (Le Divorce et l'adoption 'en plus')," in *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome*, ed. Beryl Rawson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 47–78. See also Athalya Brenner, "Alternative Families: From the Hebrew Bible to Early Judaisms," *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 21 (2010): 39–50. Although Brenner does not address adoption or adopted children, she does complicate the image of family by highlighting families that were outside the typical Jewish image.

[412] Wyler, "Esther," 114. I suggest that there is also an emphasis on the use of the theme of hiding or concealment. The name Esther itself means hidden. For information on the naming of children, see Léonie J. Archer, *Her Price is Beyond Rubies: The Jewish Woman in Graeco-Roman Palestine* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 41.

[413] Wyler, "Esther," 127, suggests that this shows how unsafe it was for her to be a Jew due to Haman's actions.

[414] Ibid., 114.

[415] De Troyer, "An Oriental Beauty Parlour," 58. See also Beal, "Tracing Esther's Beginnings," 87–110. Similarly, Beal notes that the Greek text portrays Esther as being subservient to Mordecai, particularly in comparison to that of the MT.

concern and Esther's obedience speak to the continued importance of their relationship despite their separation; their kinship relationship is also threatened in this narrative.[416]

Kinship ties are an important aspect of the portrayal of Esther and Mordecai and appear in several other places in the narrative. For example, the author refers to their kinship ties when Mordecai implores Esther to speak to the king; Mordecai argues that she cannot stay silent, as "you and your father's family will perish" (Add Esth 4:14).[417] Another reference found near the end of the narrative also associates Esther and Mordecai with kinship language. In chapter eight, following the hanging of Haman, the author describes how Esther revealed to the king how she knew Mordecai. The Hebrew version simply records that she told the king "what he [Mordecai] was to her (מה הוא־לה, Est 8:1). The Greek text is equally ambiguous, stating "that he was related to her" (ὅτι ἐνοικείωται αὐτῇ, Add Esth 8:1). Although these statements are ambiguous and give the reader no further details on the relationship between the two main characters, the language used here and elsewhere suggests that we are meant to view the two together. Whether or not the author intended to portray Esther and Mordecai as future spouses, the author in the Greek version clearly portrays their relationship as essential to the narrative.[418]

Harem politics may illuminate Esther's portrayal in the harem and her connection to outside relationships. Harems, as discussed in some detail in the *Greek Esther* section of the sexuality chapter, were a major component of royal households in many ancient Near Eastern

[416] In my opinion, there is nothing in either the Hebrew or the Greek to suggest that Mordecai turned Esther over to the authorities for the contest.

[417] Wyler, "Esther," 125, argues that the author's inclusion of kinship language sets up this dichotomy between Esther's desire to obey her Jewish heritage versus the cultural norms of the king's palace: to obey Mordecai means to risk her own life, but to not do so means to disobey her own heritage.

[418] Several narratives come to mind when discussing female and male leaders who operate next to one another. For example, the narrative of Deborah and Barak, which appears twice in Judges (chapters 4 and 5), is one example of a pair who work together – in this instance to defeat the Canaanites.

cultures.[419] The harem itself was a potential means to strategically wielding political power in the royal courts of these cultures, since the ideology around the kingship and his harem derived from the notion that these people and spaces were sacred.[420] Daughters of harem mothers became lifelines between those outside of the royal court and the king; marriage to a daughter of a harem mother provided a means to accessing the king himself.[421] While there is nothing explicit in the narrative directly stating what kind of relationship Esther and Mordecai had after she was taken to the palace, evidence from royal harems and courts suggest that networks between those in the royal and outside existed and even thrived.

4.1.2 Esther and Artaxerxes: A Marriage of Necessity

The second kinship relationship portrayed in the narrative of Esther is her relationship as wife to the king. Despite clearly indicating that Esther and Artaxerxes were married (ὕψωσεν τοὺς γάμους Εσθηρ, Add Esth 2:18), the Greek text records almost no kinship language describing the pair. The lack of kinship language for Esther and Artaxerxes may suggest that the author portrays them as individual characters rather than a pair.

The lack of kinship language for Esther and the king is evident when one considers the Greek terms for husband (άνδρός) and wife (γυνή).[422] For example, the Greek text never refers to the king as Esther's husband (άνδρός). Modern readers will note at least one usage of "husband" tied to Artaxerxes in the English translation of *Greek Esther*, but this is not accurate. In Addition

[419] Although we cannot say for certain whether the harem as the author portrays it in MT Esther or *Greek Esther* reflects a historical feature of the Persian court, the author of the Hebrew version of Esther does appear to be well versed with the Persian court. See the discussion in S. Talmon, "'Wisdom' in the Book of Esther," *VT* 13 (1963): 419–55.

[420] Beverly W. Cushman, "The Politics of the Royal Harem and the Case of Bat-Sheba," *JSOT* 30 (2006), 329–330.

[421] Ibid.," 330.

[422] There are not specific terms for husband and wife in the ancient Greek language. The general words for woman (γυνή) and man (άνδρός) typically refer to kinship relationships when they appear in the context of married couples.

D, the text narrates Esther's encounter with Artaxerxes and records the king's response to her showing up unsummoned: the king is portrayed as soothing her and stating that "I am your brother" (ἐγὼ ὁ ἀδελφός, Add Esth 15:9). While the feminine form of ἀδελφός, ἀδελφή, is used elsewhere as a term of endearment (e.g., Song of Solomon 4:9-10), the usage of ἀδελφός rather than άνδρός is telling.[423] The lack of άνδρός to describe Artaxerxes is surprising since the author uses άνδρός in Add Esth 1:18, 20; 9:6, 12, 15 – both Add Esth 1:18, 20 specifically used in the literary context of marriage (e.g., "their husbands").[424] Moreover, it is surprising that Esther is only described as the king's wife when Haman throws himself onto Esther's couch and the king finds them together (Add Esth 7:8).[425] Again, wife language appears a number of times in *Greek Esther* (e.g., 3:13; 5:10, 14; 6:13). Its usage when describing Haman's wife Zosara, who always appears as "his wife" (τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ, Add Esth 5:10; ἡ γυνὴ αὐτοῦ, 5:14; τῇ γυναικὶ αὐτοῦ, 6:13), reflects the common practice of referring to a married woman as a particular man's wife.[426]

The author's lack of usage of kinship terms for the relationship of Esther and Artaxerxes suggests that the author may have done so to maintain a level of separation between these characters. While the Hebrew text of Esther also maintains a certain level of separation between these characters, the author of *Greek Esther* paints their relationship as one of necessity. In the Greek version, the author highlights the following events in the narrative: Esther pleases the king, marries him, and is crowned queen. Moreover, Esther claims that she abhors their

[423] In the example for Song of Solomon, while the text refers to the female lover as ἀδελφή, this term of endearment also accompanies the term for bride which clearly indicates the kinship relationship (e.g., ἀδελφή μου νύμφη: my sister, oh bride, LXX Sol 4:9).

[424] Take for example the narrative of Judith where "her husband Manasseh" appears six times throughout the work (Jdt 8:2, 7; 10:3; 16:22, 23, 24). The author of *Greek Esther* resists using "husband" language when describing the relationship between Esther and Artaxerxes and instead uses "brother" language to downplay their relationship.

[425] The author only refers to Esther as Artaxerxes' wife when the king confronts Haman asking, "Will he dare even assault my wife in my own house? (τὴν γυναῖκα βιάζῃ ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ μου, Add Esth 7:8).

[426] See for example, Susanna appears as "the wife of Joakim" (Sus vs 29).

relationship and refers to their relationship as "my necessity" (Add Esth 14:16). The author of *Greek Esther* takes the plotline of the Hebrew text and de-emphasizes Esther's marriage to Artaxerxes; in the Greek text, their relationship is neither highlighted in the narrative, nor is there any evidence to suggest that the author portrays the Esther-Artaxerxes relationship in the same kinship terms as Esther and Mordecai's relationship.

4.2 Kinship in Judith

The female protagonist appears as part of three kinship relationships in *Judith*: Judith as daughter of Merari, as wife of Manasseh, and as the enslaver of an unnamed maid (ἄβρα, female personal servant).[427] The author mentions Judith's father several times in the text. This consanguineal or blood relative relationship suggests the importance of recognizing women as part of their father's household even after marriage in the narrative of *Judith*. Despite her widowhood, her relationship with her husband consistently appears in reference to the family's personal property. As I discuss below, although Judith inherits her husband's land and owns and manages this property, the author continues to portray the property as her husband's. Finally, Judith's unnamed personal servant appears as fictive kin in this narrative. While the enslaved woman does not play an active role in the story, the author portrays her as not only a part of Judith's household but also as an accomplice and co-manager of Judith's property; in several ways, the enslaved plays an important behind-the-scenes role in this narrative.

[427] See Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1. The noun ἄβρα occurs mainly in the narratives of *Greek Esther* and *Judith* (Add Esth 2:9; 4:4, 16; 5:1; Jdt 8:10, 33; 10:2, 5, 17; 13:9; 16:23). It also occurs once in Genesis (Gen 24:61) and twice in Exodus (both in Exo 2:5). The noun obviously refers to a female slave of particular importance, although exactly what the author is trying to imply by the term is unclear.

4.2.1 Judith, "Daughter of Merari"

The use of the theme of daughter by the author of *Judith* is an important aspect of the protagonist's portrayal. The word daughter occurs six times in the narrative of *Judith* and can be sorted into two main categories: 1) references to Judith which call her a daughter (Jdt 8:1; 10:12; 13:18; 16:6) and 2) references to other daughters (Jdt 9:4; 12:13), particularly ones that are vulnerable or in danger. The use of the theme of 'daughter' in *Judith* not only secures the female protagonist to her father, a male character, but also emphasizes the danger in which Judith places herself by associating her with daughters who also find themselves in dangerous positions.

The importance of Judith's designation as daughter is clear from her introduction; the author introduces the female protagonist not in relation to her husband, but to her father Merari. In fact, we are introduced to Judith through the fraternal genealogy of her father: "Judith, daughter of Merari (θυγάτηρ Μεραρι), son of Ox, son of Joseph, son of Oziel, son of Elkiah, son of Ananias, son of Gideon, son of Raphain, son of Ahitub, son of Elijah, son of Hilkiah, son of Eliab, son of Nathanael, son of Salamiel, son of Sarasadai, son of Israel" (Jdt 8:1).[428] Although Merari is only mentioned by name twice in this text (Jdt 8:1; 16:6) and plays no role in the plot of the narrative, Judith's designation as a daughter is an important aspect of the author's portrayal of the female protagonist. The extent to which daughters were associated with their fathers after marriage varies in the Hebrew Bible. For example, while some women are only

[428] There is no way to gauge the historicity of ancient genealogies, but we can note how they convey power and gender dynamics. Ingeborg Löwisch, "Miriam ben Amram, or, How to Make Sense of the Absence of Women in the Genealogies of Levi (1 Chronicles 5:27–6:66)," in *The Bible and Feminism: Remapping the Field*, ed. Yvonne Sherwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 355–370, examines the inclusion of Miriam as a "son" in the genealogy of Levi in 1 Chron 1–9. Löwisch concludes that the author does not include any mention of the Miriam tradition while still mentioning her. In the end, "not listing her might have been more controversial than slipping her in as one of the *banim* of Amram" (368). Additionally, the genealogy of Judith connects her figure to what we can assume were important and well-known male individuals; the author conveys that Judith is related to these individuals and that her family was known. Several scholars have noted the length of the genealogy found in *Judith*. For example, see Gera, *Judith*, 256-257, who warns of the fictitious nature of the genealogy. See also Loader, *The Pseudepigrapha on Sexuality*, 192; Jean Steinmann, *Lecture de Judith* (Paris: j. Gabalda, 1953), 72-74; Gruen, *Diaspora*, 165, who similarly note the length of the genealogy and argue that the author uses this genealogy to mock the genealogies of elites found in other literature.

identified through the husbands (e.g., Deborah in Judg 4:4, and Jael in Judg 4:17), it is not uncommon for married women to be identified through their father (e.g., 1 Kgs 15:2, 10; 16:31; 2 Kgs 15:33; 18:2; 21:19; 22:1; 23:31, 36; 24:8, 18; 2 Chron 11:20–21).[429] Of particular note, is the association of a woman to their father in instances of widowhood (e.g., Tamar in Gen 38). Unlike Judith who appears to remain on her husband's property, Tamar returns to live with her father after there is no one in her husband's family to redeem her (Gen 38:11). The comparison of these two examples highlights the protective nature of a woman's father, particularly after the death of a spouse. Furthermore, the author of *Judith* portrays the protagonist as the "daughter of Merari" to keep her securely attached to a male family figure as well as providing a known pedigree.

Judith's connection to her father is noteworthy when one considers the author's utilization of daughter language elsewhere in the narrative. Daughter language occurs when Judith recalls the aftermath of the rape of Dinah (Gen 34), when Simeon and Levi killed the Shechemites, in her prayer (Jdt 9).[430] Genesis 34 narrates the rape of Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, by Shechem (Gen 34:2).[431] Despite his initial outrage at his daughter's defilement (Gen 34:5–7), Jacob agrees to let Shechem marry Dinah (Gen 34:30).[432] His sons though cannot accept

[429] See the discussion in Stiebert, *Fathers and Daughters in the Hebrew Bible*, 47–48. Moreover, women are frequently designated as daughters in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Milcah in Gen 11:29; Rebekah of Bethuel in Gen 25:20; Bathsheba in 2 Sam 11:3; unnamed daughter in Judg 11). See also Stiebert's discussion on the meaning of *bat*, pages 25–29.

[430] The name Merari also appears in Gen 34 as the name of one of Levi's sons. It is impossible to know whether the author of *Judith* refers to this specific figure or any figure from Israel's history. See the discussion in Lawrence M. Wills, *Judith: A Commentary on the Book of Judith*, ed. Sidnie White Crawford, Hermeneia – A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019), 245–247.

[431] The LXX records the phrase ἐταπείνωσεν αὐτήν which literally means to humiliate Dinah by having premarital relations without her family's consent. See Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 670. This word occurs similarly elsewhere in Deut 22:24 and 21:14. In these instances, this word specifically refers to the humiliation and dishonoring of women by men. It also appears to refer to women who face sexual violation and defilement in La 2:5 and Ezek 22:10, 11.

[432] Jacob appears to understand the marriage of Dinah to Shechem, despite how he defiled her, as advantageous to his small group. He talks about their small numbers and how the inhabitants of the land, the

this concession and decide to deceive Shechem and his father Hamor (Gen 34:13–24); the sons trick the Shechemites into being circumcised by agreeing to intermarriage with the foreigners on the condition that "every male was circumcised" (Gen 34:24).[433] While the Shechemites are recovering, and when they are still in their weakened state, the sons of Jacob marched on the city, killed all of the males, and captured the women (Gen 34:29). Judith's comment, that "you [her god] gave up their [the Shechemites'] wives for plunder and their daughters to captivity" (Jdt 9:4),[434] is a reference to a similar line found in Gen 34, "all their wealth, all their little ones and their wives, all that was in the houses, they captured and made their prey" (Gen 34:29), and specifically recalls the capture of the Shechemite women following the revenge killing of their husbands.[435] Judith's reference to "their daughters," a phrase that does not occur in either the MT or LXX versions of Gen 34, is a clever play on words.

Judith's reference to "their daughters" in its use of Gen 34 is one of the ways in which the author of *Judith* portrays the protagonist as straddling the boundary between vulnerable woman and victorious avenger; the author's use of kinship language provides an extensive intertextuality of kinship language between *Judith* and Gen 34. Like Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, Judith, the

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Canaanites and Perizzites, could gather and attack them. Jacob clearly seems the intermarriage of his people with the Hivites as a chance to increase their numbers and military power.

[433] Armin Lange has written extensively on the issue of intermarriage as a topic of great cultural interest in Jewish texts from the Persian to Hellenistic periods. See for example, Armin Lange, "'Your Daughters Do Not Give to Their Sons and Their Daughters Do Not Take for Your Sons' (Ezra 9,12): Intermarriage in Ezra 9–10 and in the Pre-Maccabean Dead Sea Scrolls," *BN* 137 (2008): 17–39; idem, "The Significance of the Pre-Maccabean Literature from the Qumran Library for the Understanding of the Hebrew Bible: Intermarriage in Ezra/Nehemiah – Satan in 1 Chr 21:1 – the Date of Psalm 119," in *Congress Volume: Ljubljana, 2007*, ed. A. Lemaire, VTSup 133 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 171–218; idem, "Mixed Marriage and the Hellenistic Religious Reforms," in *Mixed Marriages: Intermarriage and Group Identity in the Second Temple Period*, ed. Christian Frevel, LHBOTS 547 (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 205–219. See also, Christine Hayes, "Intermarriage and Impurity in Ancient Jewish Sources," *HTR* 92 (1999): 3–36. Hayes discusses the connection between Gentile impurity and concerns regarding exogamy in Jewish literature.

[434] καὶ ἔδωκας γυναῖκας αὐτῶν εἰς προνομὴν καὶ θυγατέρας αὐτῶν εἰς αἰχμαλωσίαν. A similar statement occurs in Jdt 4:12. The text of Judith reads: "And all the Israelite men, women, and children living at Jerusalem prostrated themselves before the temple and put ashes on their heads and spread out their sackcloth before the Lord. They even draped the altar with sackcloth and cried out in unison, praying fervently to the God of Israel not *to allow their infants to be carried off and their wives to be taken as booty*, and the towns they had inherited to be destroyed, and the sanctuary to be profaned and desecrated to the malicious joy of the Gentiles" (Jdt 4:11–12).

[435] The Greek of LXX Gen 34:29 is similar and refers to their wives being taken captive.

daughter of Merari, will face the possibility of being raped by Holofernes later in the narrative (Jdt 12:16–20).[436] In fact, Holofernes and Bagoas explicitly connect the sexual conquest of Judith by Holofernes to daughter language; Bagoas asks Judith to become "like a daughter of the sons of Assyria who are present in the house of Nebuchadnezzar" (Jdt 12:13) immediately following Holofernes' command to Bagoas to fetch Judith to have sexual intercourse with her (Jdt 12:12).[437] In a reversal of fortunes, Judith's character, who could end up like either Dinah or the women who are taken captive in Gen 34 by becoming "like a daughter… who are present in the house of Nebuchadnezzar," is instead strongly linked to Simeon in Judith's prayer (Jdt 9:2). The author of *Judith* appeals to the story of Dinah and the revenge of her brothers to identify the protagonist with both the avenger, Simeon her ancestor, and the vulnerable women in the Genesis story. Moreover, Judith's later comment, "I am a daughter of the Hebrews," firmly places her on the avenging side of the identity boundary (θυγάτηρ εἰμὶ τῶν Εβραίων, Jdt 10:12). Like her ancestor Simeon, Judith, the daughter of the Hebrews, strikes down the enemy "by my deceitful lips…by a female hand" (Jdt 9:10).[438] This balance between vulnerability and power highlights the complexity of Judith's portrayal.

The vulnerability of daughters and the need to protect them appears to underlie the use of θυγάτηρ language in *Judith*. While the author portrays Judith as potentially falling prey to the

[436] The Greek text of LXX Gen 34 does not explicitly use rape language to describe what happens to Dinah. Instead, both the Hebrew and Greek texts seem to focus more on her defilement from the prospective of her father who never gave permission for her to sleep with Shechem. I, along with others, read rape in this narrative due to the portrayed lack of consent on the part of Dinah in this text. See for example, Ellen van Wolde, "The Dinah story: Rape or Worse," *OTE* 15 (2002): 225–239; Balassa, "The Consequences of Dinah's Rape." See also Louis H. Feldman, "Philo, Pseudo-Philo, Josephus, And Theodotus On The Rape Of Dinah," in *Judaism and Hellenism Reconsidered*, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 107 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 272–300, who examines the various perspectives that ancient authors took on the narrative of Dinah's rape.

[437] I have already discussed in detail the sexual nature of Judith's interactions with Holofernes in the chapter on sexuality above so I will not belabor the point here. This may be a reference to the palace harem. In either case, the use of daughter language here, in my opinion, serves to connect back to the larger theme of "daughter" in *Judith*.

[438] Judith never fully embodies either trope. Even upon her victory over Holofernes, Judith never becomes the hero; she simply fades into the background of the text.

"strangers who loosened a virgin's womb to put [her] to shame and stripped naked [her] thigh to disgrace [her] and desecrated [her] womb to disgrace [her]" (Jdt 9:2), in the end she emerges victorious with her shame fully intact, having taken revenge on those who sought to defile her. The author of *Judith* portrays her as the epitome of the righteous daughter; Uzziah's comment to Judith upon her return best illustrates the celebration of "Judith the daughter": "daughter, you are blessed" (εὐλογητὴ σύ θύγατερ, Jdt 13:18).

4.2.2 "Her Husband Manasseh" – The Husband/Wife Relationship

Turning our attention to Judith's husband, we find that he plays no role in the narrative of Judith and yet the author refers to him no less than six times throughout the text (Jdt 8:2, 7; 10:3; 16:22–24). The text always lists her husband's name and follows a particular format: "her husband Manasseh." Below are the six references to Judith's husband in the narrative (Jdt 8:2, 7; 10:3; 16:22, 23, 24). I propose that these references to Judith's husband can be organized into three categories: 1) references which tie her to a particular family/kin group (Jdt 8:2; 16:24); 2) references which stipulate property that belonged to her husband (Jdt 8:7; 16:23); 3) references that remind the reader of Judith's relationship with her husband (Jdt 10:3; 16:22). The author's continued references to her husband, like the references to her father, afford the main character some protection despite her status as widow.

The first category of references makes use of Judith's husband to tie the protagonist to a particular family/kin group (Jdt 8:2; 16:24). The purpose of the first reference to Judith's husband is to not simply name him, but to carefully confirm Judith's ties to a particular kin group (Jdt 8:2). The narrative states that Manasseh was "of her tribe and father's lineage" (τῆς φυλῆς αὐτῆς καὶ τῆς πατριᾶς αὐτῆς, Jdt 8:2). The use of πάτριος is most significant, because it specifically means that Manasseh was from the same tribe and group that were bound through

paternal lineage.[439] Both φιλή and πάτριος occur in the introduction of Tobit. Here, the author of Tobit specifically makes use of these terms to signify his ancestral family and tribe (Tob 1:5).[440] Further into the chapter, the author uses πάτριος specifically in reference to Tobit's marriage with Edna (Tob 1:9).[441] The second reference to Judith's husband in this category (Jdt 16:24) similarly refers to a close kinship group. The narrative adds that Judith distributed her goods before she died "to all those nearest (next of kin) to her husband Manasseh and to those nearest to her own descendants" (πᾶσι τοῖς ἔγγιστα Μανασση τοῦ ἀνδρὸς αὐτῆς καὶ τοῖς ἔγγιστα τοῦ γένους αὐτῆς, Jdt 16:24). The way in which the author of *Judith* describes the marriage of the female protagonist to her husband in terms of kinship language is like what we find elsewhere.[442] Therefore, beyond simply connecting Judith to another male figure, the author uses kinship language to denote the transferal of property.

Several references to Judith's husband occur in connection to descriptions of property, suggesting that Judith's husband owns the property even after his death (Jdt 8:7; 16:23). For example, the text narrates how Manasseh "had left remaining to her" (καὶ ὑπελίπετο αὐτῇ) certain property and that "she remained over it" (καὶ ἔμενεν ἐπ᾽ αὐτῶν) (Jdt 8:7). Inheritance in

[439] Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 540. The use of φυλή in terms of affinal relationships also occurs in the narrative of Zelophehad's daughters: "This is what the Lord commands concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, 'Let them marry whom they think best, only they shall marry within the *clan of the tribe of their father*. The inheritance of the people of Israel shall not be transferred from *one tribe to another*, for every one of the people of Israel shall hold on to the inheritance of the *tribe of his fathers*. And every daughter who possesses an inheritance in *any tribe* of the people of Israel *shall be wife to one of the clan of the tribe of her father*, so that every one of the people of Israel may possess the inheritance of his fathers. So no inheritance shall be transferred *from one tribe to another*, for each of *the tribes* of the people of Israel shall hold on to its own inheritance'" (Num 36:6–9).

[440] "And all my tribe…and the ancestral house Naphtali of my father" (καὶ πᾶσαι αἱ φυλαὶ αἱ συναποστᾶσαι ἔθυον τῇ Βααλ τῇ δαμάλει καὶ ὁ οἶκος Νεφθαλιμ τοῦ πατρός μου, Tob 1:5). See also the discussion on the usage of tribal language in Tobit as a comparison: Amy-Jill Levine, "Redrawing the Boundaries: A New Look at 'Diaspora as Metaphor: Bodies and Boundaries in the Book of Tobit,'" in *Tobit and Judith: The Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)*, eds. Athalya Brenner-Idan and Helen Efthimiadis-Keith (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 9.

[441] "And when I became a man I married a woman from the seed of our [ancestral] family" (καὶ ὅτε ἐγενόμην ἀνήρ ἔλαβον Ανναν γυναῖκα ἐκ τοῦ σπέρματος τῆς πατριᾶς ἡμῶν, Tob 1:9). See the discussion on Tobit and endogamy in Levine, "Redrawing the Boundaries," 5. See also Gabriele Faßbeck, "Tobit's Religious Universe Between Kinship Loyalty and the Law of Moses," *JSJ* 36 (2005): 173–96.

[442] See Satlow, *Jewish Marriage in Antiquity*, 144. Philo, for example, urged women to marry into their own family when possible.

the ancient world was a complex and integral aspect of kinship relationships.[443] Richard Hiers points out that much of biblical law regarding inheritance prioritizes male heirs.[444] Many examples throughout the Hebrew Bible display precedence for a father's property to be inherited by firstborn sons. [445] The quintessential instance can be found in the story of Esau and Jacob, where Esau, as the firstborn to Isaac, is tricked out of his birthright and inheritance by Jacob (Gen 25:19–34; 27:1–46). Despite this strong preference for male heirs, there are also instances in the Hebrew Bible of women inheriting property.[446] For example, the story of Zelophehad's daughters suggests that women inherited only when no male heir existed (Num 27:6–11). Although Num 27 suggests that women could inherit property, this instance confirms the social norm for sons to inherit their father's property. Moreover, daughters were only to receive a portion; the rest becomes the property of their uncles (Num 27:7). [447]

As such, the narrative of *Judith* contains one of the few instances where biblical literature refers to the ownership of a husband's property by their widow.[448] Hiers argues that Judith's ownership over her husband's property is an example of a bequest, as "widows were not

[443] For more information on inheritance in the ancient world see: Tsumura, "Family in the Historical Books," 59–71.

[444] Richard H. Hiers, "Transfer of Property by Inheritance and Bequest in Biblical Law and Tradition," *Journal of Law and Religion* 10 (1993): 128–30.

[445] For example, Deuteronomy 21 outlines the right of the firstborn son to his father's property (Deut 21:15–17). Other instances occur in Judg 11:1–2, 2 Chr 21:1–3 and Prov 17:2.

[446] See the discussion in Hiers, "Transfer of Property by Inheritance," 128–130. The only references to women inheriting property in the Hebrew Bible occur in Gen 31, where Rachel and Leah appear to be under the impression that they would inherit some part of their "father's house" (Gen 31:14–16), and Num 27:1–7, which also appears in Joshua 17:3–6, and relates the tale of Zelophehad's daughters and their struggle to inherit their father's property.

[447] See the discussion in Hiers, "Transfer of Property by Inheritance," 124. See also, Jelle Verburg, "Women's Property Rights in Egypt and the Law of Levirate Marriage in the LXX," *ZAW* 131 (2019): 597–599. See also the Babatha archives which refer to women managing property. For more information on the Babatha archives see, Kimberley Czajkowski, *Localized Law: The Babatha and Salome Komaise Archives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[448] There are a few other references to women inheriting the property of their husbands: Ruth 4:3, where Ruth is trying to sell her husband's property and therefore must rightfully own it; 2 Kgs 4:1–7, where a woman appears to have inherited her husband's debts and appears to inherit the family house; 2 Kgs 8:1–6, which appears to show the transfer of property from a man to his widow after his death; finally, Tobit in which it is suggested that Tobias will inherit his father's property after both his father and mother are deceased, meaning that Raguel's wife would maintain the property until her death (Tob 8:20–21).

provided for in the law of intestate succession." [449] Bequests functioned as arrangements made prior to the death of a particular person in which provisions were specifically addressed that stipulated the beneficiaries and amount of inheritance each person would receive upon their death.[450] Hiers concludes that Manasseh must have made provisions which stipulated a bequest of his property to his wife prior to his untimely death (Jdt 8:2–3), because the text appears to suggest that he had other relatives that would have inherited his property through the normal channels of inheritance(Jdt 16:24).[451] Although the text does not provide details about the specifics of this bequest, it does appear to suggest that Manasseh transferred the totality of his property to his wife.[452] This type of transfer, where a widow would live out the remainder of her days with access to her husband's property, is echoed in the story of Tobit.[453] Following the wedding of Tobias and Sarah, Raguel declares to Tobias: "Take at once half of what I own and return in safety to your father; *the other half will be yours when my wife and I die*" (Tob 8:21). Tobit then appears to contain another reference to provisions made by a husband for his wife's use of his property upon his death.[454] In a similar fashion, Shimeon ben Menahem transferred his remaining assets to his then wife Miriam as part of a conditional gift; if, at the time of his death, Miriam was alive and still his wife, she would receive his property. This legal document, known as P. Yadin 7 and written in 99 CE, speaks to the exact transfer of property we see referred to in

[449] Hiers, "Transfer of Property by Inheritance," 130.

[450] Ibid., 147–152. Another example of this appears later in *Judith* when Judith distributes her property to her husband's and her kin (Jdt 16:24).

[451] Ibid., 150.

[452] Jdt 8:7 lists the following: "χρυσίον καὶ ἀργύριον καὶ παῖδας καὶ παιδίσκας καὶ κτήνη καὶ ἀγρούς" (gold and silver, male and female slaves, cattle and fields) suggesting that Judith received at least the majority if not all of Manasseh's belongings.

[453] See Babatha as an example of a similar transfer (Czajkowski, *Localized Law*).

[454] Hiers, "Transfer of Property," 134, also notes this similarity. See also the discussion in Beverly Bow and George W. E. Nickelsburg, "Patriarchy with a Twist: Men and Women in Tobit," in *"Women Like This" New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 132, who not only notes that Sarah's inheritance belongs to Tobias in the narrative, but that the text implies that Edna will inherit Tobit's property should she outlive him.

Judith.[455] Although Judith rightfully owns and maintains the family property, the author of *Judith* is careful to maintain the property as part of her husband's family, thereby preserving its continuity within the family group.

The final references to Judith's husband function to remind the reader of Judith's relationship to her husband and maintain her connection to him even after his death (Jdt 10:3; 16:22). More specifically, the author connects Judith's attire to the time when her husband was alive – "she dressed herself in the garment of gladness that she used to put on while her husband Manasseh was living" (Jdt 10:3). While this reference to her husband tells the reader nothing more about their relationship, its usage during her preparation is significant in that it again reminds the reader about her connection to her husband. Another example occurs in Jdt 16:22 where the author states that Judith never remarried; her continued seclusion from men does not coincide with what other ancient texts of the time tell us about widowed women.[456] The author appears to portray her loyalty to her husband as extending even into her death, for "they buried her in the cave of her husband Manasseh" (Jdt 16:23).[457]

In the instance of Judith's relationship to her husband, the author appears to portray Judith in such a way that highlights her piety by highlighting her loyalty to her husband and his

[455] P. Yadin 7 can be found in Naphtali Lewis, Yigael Yadin, and Jonas C. Greenfield, eds., *The Documents from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1989). The Babatha archives also contain several pertinent documents of the subject. See Czajkowski, *Localized Law*. See also the discussions in: Yosef Rivlin, "Gift and Inheritance Law in the Judean Desert Documents," in *Law in the Documents of the Judaean Desert* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 165–66; Michael L Satlow, "Marriage Payments and Succession Strategies in the Documents from the Judaean Desert," in *Law in the Documents of the Judaean Desert* (Leiden, Brill: 2005), 53–54.

[456] For example, a major concern in the book of Ruth is finding a new husband for the main character after his death. This text not only outlines the clear expectation that a widowed woman should be remarried to their kinsmen-redeemer, but also emphasizes the expectation that widows should remain within the kinship group of their husband.

[457] Judith's loyalty to her husband may highlight her piety. Brison, "Judith," 196, argues that Judith appears to "conduct the rest of her life as a spiritual facilitator, ready to be called upon to mediate between the human and the divine worlds." The reader loses sight of Judith at the end of the narrative and her only function at that point is to shore up some of the loose ends in terms of kinship (e.g., where does her husband's property go and does Judith maintain her loyalty to her husband?). Schmitz and Lange, "Judith," 29–47, also focuses on the theme of piety in the narrative of *Judith*.

kinship group, including maintaining the inheritance of land transfer from a widow back into her husband's kinship group. A major function of Manasseh in *Judith* is to maintain his ownership over the property (Jdt 8:7; 16:23). As stated above, Judith is one of only a few references to widows maintaining the property of their spouse, although we know that this was not an uncommon practice.[458] The author portrays Judith as someone who straddles both realities: Judith is a widow who owns and maintains her husband's land after he dies, but also never remarries and eventually disperses all of her property with the majority going back to her husband's family and some going to her nearest kin.[459] The key to understanding how the female protagonist is portrayed in reference to property and marriage in this text can be found in Jdt 16:22. The text states that Manasseh was "added to his people" (προσετέθη πρὸς τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ 16:22), a common phrase used to connect men to their ancestors at their death in a number of biblical texts.[460] While it is possible that there were references to women being gathered to their people, they are lost to us.[461] Levine notes a similar occurrence in Tobit and argues that

[458] See, for example, in addition to the note on Babatha above, Annalisa Azzoni (*The Private Lives of Women in Persian Egypt* [Winona Lake, IN: Esidenbrauns, 2013], 39) examines documentary evidence from Elephantine and conclusively shows that women held possession of their husband's property after his death. See also Annalisa Azzoni, "Women of Elephantine and Women in the Land of Israel," in *In the Shadow of Bezalel: Aramaic, Biblical, and Ancient Near Eastern Studies in Honor of Bezalel Porten*, ed. Alejandro F. Botta, LSTS 64 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 3–12; Bezalel Porten and H. Z. Szubin, "Exchange of Inherited Property at Elephantine," *JAOS* 102 (1982): 651–54.

[459] For a discussion on Jewish and Roman women as the heads of the household, as well as women who owned property see Kaisa-Maria Pihlava, "The Authority of Women Hosts of Early Christian Gatherings in the First and Second Centuries C.E." (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, 2016), 54–70.

[460] See for example the multiple usages of προστίθημι in Gen: 25:8 Abraham; 25:17 Ishmael; 35:29 Isaac; 49:33 Jacob. It also appears in other biblical texts in reference to men on their death bed: Num 20:26; 27:13; 31:2; Deut 32:50; Judg 2:10.

[461] Likewise, Judith does not seem to be "gathered" to her people, but is instead buried "in the cave of her husband" (Jdt 16:23). Moreover, προστίθημι also occurs in the narrative of Zelophehad's daughters, but not in reference to anyone's death (Num 36:3–4). Here, the concern focuses not on whether a daughter could inherit their father's property, as in Num 27, but on what might happen to the inheritance should the daughter marry into another tribe. The text states: "But if they are married into another Israelite tribe, then their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of our ancestors and added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry; so it will be taken away from the allotted portion of our inheritance. And when the jubilee of the Israelites comes, then their inheritance will be added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they have married; and their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of our ancestral tribe" (Num 36:3–4). Broader Jewish literature may refer to women

endogamy was a necessity as it guaranteed that future offspring would inherit family land. Furthermore, Levine argues that "by identity-determining kinship ties the land is re-obtained;" land is the result and not the origin "of community self-definition."[462] The author of *Judith* appears to have had a similar concern and is careful to state that the property of her husband was distributed to his next of kin (Jdt 16:24). Women, at least in the eyes of the author of *Judith*, could maintain their husband's property. Moreover, it suggests that it was important to maintain the significance of the husband's kinship group and the maintenance of ancestral lands.

4.2.3 "Her Maid" – The Unnamed Accomplice

Although Judith's personal servant plays no active role in the narrative, I consider this unnamed figure in this chapter for two reasons; first, the author presents her character as a companion to Judith, and second, the author would have likely considered he as kin in that she was a part of Judith's household. The text tells us that Judith set her personal servant free at the end of the narrative (Jdt 16:23), an act that may lead the reader to assume this was an intimate and mutually affectionate relationship.[463] How are we to understand her narrative role and function, and her relationship with Judith?

The unnamed woman is mentioned eleven times in the text and is most often referred to with some form of ἄβρα (seven times, Jdt 8:10, 33; 10:2, 5, 17; 13:9; 16:23), which is

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"being gathered" upon their death. See for example LAB 40:4 which describes Jephtah's daughter Seila falling "into the bosom of her mothers."

[462] Levine, "Redrawing the Boundaries," 10. Levine notes that Sarah appears as part of her father's property. Her main function is to marry an appropriate spouse, specifically someone from her kinship group.

[463] Jennifer A. Glancy, "Judith the Slaveholder," in *Tobit and Judith: The Feminist Companion to the Bible (Second Series)*, eds. Athalya Brenner-Idan and Helen Efthimiadis-Keith (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 200–211, has specifically examined the power dynamics between the figures of Judith and her personal servant. Specifically, Glancy has uncovered several ways in which Judith exploits the enslaved woman in the narrative (e.g., placing her in danger by taking her maid with her to Holofernes' camp). For more information on slavery in the ancient world, see Dale B. Martin, "Slavery and the Ancient Jewish Family," in *The Jewish Family in Antiquity*, ed. Shaye J.D. Cohen (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2020), 113–130; Keith Hopkins, "Novel Evidence for Roman Slavery," *Past and Present* 138 (1993): 3–27; and Catherine Hezser, *Jewish Slavery in Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

traditionally translated as "maid," and less commonly using the generic Greek terms for "slave" (παιδίσκη, Jdt 10:10; and δούλη, Jdt 12:15, 19; 13:3) On the surface, the references to the enslaved woman mirror what we know about the realities of enslaved people living with Jews and others during the Hellenistic period.[464] Slavery was widespread and common in the ancient world, including among Jews.[465] As Dale B. Martin states, there was nothing "particularly 'Jewish' about slavery as practiced by and among Jews of the Greco-Roman period," as slavery "did not differ from the slave structures of those people among whom Jews lived."[466] The portrayal of the personal servant's duties is typical of the duties of many enslaved people in the ancient world. Judith's personal servant appears to function as a typical domestic enslaved person. Their duties could include both common domestic tasks, such as cooking and shopping, as well as being the administrator of the household and companion of the master.[467] In the narrative of *Judith*, the enslaved woman is not only in charge of Judith's possessions (Jdt 8:10), but also frequently completes tasks for or in place of Judith herself (e.g., Jdt 10:5; 12:15, 19).

While this portrayal suggests possible companionship between Judith and her enslaved maid, it also obscures the exploitative nature of slavery. For example, much of the ancient world viewed enslaved peoples as honorless, as they lacked any recognized identity and were completely dependent on their masters.[468] It is not a mistake that this enslaved woman remains

[464] An excellent resource that examines the intersection of gender and slavery by analyzing narratives that describe female slaves is Christy Cobb, *Slavery, Gender, Truth, and Power in Luke-Acts and Other Ancient Narratives* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

[465] For example, Josephus found it remarkable and made note that the Essenes did not keep slaves in *Jewish Antiquities* 18.21. Slaves were an important and common feature of wealthy upper-class families. See the discussion in Martin, "Slavery and the Ancient Jewish Family," 127.

[466] Ibid., 113.

[467] Catherine Hezser, "The Impact of Household Slaves on the Jewish Family in Roman Palestine," *JSJ* 34 (2003), 402.

[468] Many scholars have noted the exploitative nature of slavery in the ancient world. For example, see Yvon Garlan, *Slavery in Ancient Greece*, rev. and enl. ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); Glancy, "Judith the Slaveholder," 201–202; K. R. Bradley, *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire: A Study in Social Control* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Moses Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (New York: The Viking Press, 1980).

unnamed throughout the narrative. Her character lacks any personal details and simply appears as Judith's personal servant despite having a significant role in Judith's household. As Glancy points out, this lack of personal information, such as name or genealogy, maintains the enslaved maid's disconnection from Judith and her family.[469] While the unnamed woman is responsible for Judith and her household, she also counts as another item in Judith's possession.[470]

As such, the relationship between the female protagonist and her personal servant in *Judith* reflects the system of slavery in the ancient world which was characterized by mutual dependency. For example, slave masters relied upon the loyalty of those enslaved and enslaved people depended on their master for necessities and humane treatment.[471] Careful reading of *Judith* reveals instances in which the woman's exploitation becomes apparent. For example, Judith sends her personal servant to summon Uzziah, thereby forcing the woman to negotiate a public space while protecting Judith's own honor (Jdt 8:10).[472] Since enslaved individuals were honorless, the servant's incursion into a public space could not lead to an instance where someone might question the enslaved woman's honor. A more egregious instance appears in the lack of concern for the unnamed woman who obediently follows Judith and finds herself captured by Holofernes' men. Although Judith risks not only her own life to infiltrate Holofernes' camp but the life of her personal servant as well, the text shows no concern for the

[469] Glancy, "Judith the Slaveholder," 206.

[470] The author introduces the unnamed maid as such in Jdt 8:7. See also Aaron Kirschenbaum, *Sons, Slaves and Freedmen in Roman Commerce* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1987), 15–16. Roman law categorized salves as either a *res* (thing) or a *persona* (that is, a human being). *Judith* appears to understand the personal servant and the other slaves as *res*, not *persona*.

[471] Hezser, "The Impact of Household Slaves," 391. Most enslaved people also suffered a great deal from their sexual exploitation. The use of slaves by masters for sexual purposes was widespread. For example, Beert C. Verstraete ("Slavery and the Social Dynamics of Male Homosexual Relations in Ancient Rome," *Journal of Homosexuality* 5 [1980]: 227–236), examines several examples of homosexual relationships between masters and male slaves. See also Judith Evans-Grubbs, "'Marriage More Shameful Than Adultery:' Slave-Mistress Relationships, 'Mixed Marriages,' and Late Roman Law," *Phoenix* 47 (1993): 125–154.

[472] Glancy, "Judith the Slaveholder," 210.

woman nor celebrates her actions.[473] The enslaved woman's character exists in the fringes of the narrative.[474]

Judith's final act best illustrates the exploitative nature of slavery as the author portrays it in the character of the personal servant: she sets this woman free (Jdt 16:23). The manumission or freeing of slaves was not unheard of in the ancient world.[475] Multiple sources attest to such a practice. For example, inscriptions found at Delphi indicate the manumission of a woman and two of her daughters.[476] These inscriptions suggest that at least some slaves became freed people. While the act of freeing the enslaved woman by Judith might appear to be an act of compassion, many indicators suggest that this act was not meant to be compassionate. First, Judith only frees her personal servant on her deathbed. The text states that Judith grew old (γηράσκω), to the age of one hundred five, and that she freed her (Jdt 16:23). We can only assume that Judith waited until she reached an old age to free her personal servant, an act that surely meant that the enslaved woman had also advanced in age. Manumission at such an age was neither compassionate nor kind.[477] The text suggests that Judith released from service the very woman who helped her reach acclaim at a point when the personal servant relied on her the most. The author portrays Judith as the unnamed woman's slaveholder; Judith is the master over both her household and the enslaved people who rely on her.

[473] Glancy, "Judith the Slaveholder," 206 points out the exploitative acts of Judith that do not consider the role the enslaved woman plays in the narrative.

[474] Jayme R. Reaves ("Sarah as Victim and Perpetrator: Whiteness, Power, and Memory in the Matriarchal Narrative," *Review and Expositor* 115 [2018]: 483–499) examines the intersection of white privilege and interpretation in the narrative of Hagar and Sarah. Reaves illustrates how certain characters exist in the fringes of the narrative (Hagar) while readers, particularly white women, have connected with the perpetrator (Sarah).

[475] Manumission was also not the experience of all slaves during this period. See Glancy, "Judith the Slaveholder" 208.

[476] CII, no. 709 (Delphi 170–157 BCE), found in Louis H. Feldman, *Jewish Life and Thought Among Greeks and Romans: Primary Readings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 63. See also the multiple sources contained in Martin, "Slavery and the Ancient Jewish Family," 113–29.

[477] Glancy, "Judith the Slaveholder," 208.

In contrast, the author also portrays the female protagonist as a slave in several passages. The text uses the word δούλη six times as a self-identification of Judith (Jdt 11:5, 16, 17 (2); 12:4, 6). Moreover, this term only occurs in the context of Judith's interactions with Holofernes. The use of slavery as a metaphor occurs both in the Hebrew Bible and in the Jewish literature of the Hellenistic and later Roman periods. Slavery or enslavement occurs frequently in the personal prayers in figures such as Moses or David, as well as in literature dealing with the prophets. As Catherine Hezser notes, the "patriarchs, kings, and prophets… are represented as 'slaves of God' in the Hebrew Bible, but this imagery is specifically connected to God's redemption of the Jewish people from their enslavement in Egypt.[478] The usage of the slave-master metaphor is therefore used to emphasize obedience to God and God's divine lordship. In later Jewish writings, the concept of slavery appears alongside references to the philosophical discussion of passion. For example, Philo frequently refers to the human conundrum of being enslaved to one's passions.[479] For Philo and other philosophical figures, uncontrolled desire was the epitome of slavery.

The use of slavery in *Judith* follows neither biblical precedence nor later Jewish usage; Judith does not appear as a "slave of God" nor as a character enslaved by her own passions.[480] The text portrays Judith as self-identifying as a slave to Holofernes. This self-identification functions in two ways in the narrative. First, by identifying as a slave to a foreign invader, Judith reminds the reader of her vulnerability and the real experiences of women taken as slaves during foreign conquests. These references to a master-slave relationship mirror statements made in

[478] Hezser, "The Impact of Household Slaves," 418–19.

[479] See Hezser's discussion in "The Impact of Household Slaves," 420–22. Also see Peter Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 132–38; idem, "Philo Judaeus and Slave Theory," *SCI* 13 (1994): 30–45.

[480] The overwhelming sense of sexual desire which occurs in the same passage where Judith self-identifies as a slave to Holofernes does not appear to be the same discussion we find in the philosophers of the day.

Judith's prayer where the protagonist refers to the rape of Dinah and the slaughter of the men of Shechem (Jdt 9:2–4). Enslavement would have been a likely outcome in the narrative had Judith not been successful.[481] The second function of Judith's self-identification as slave adds to the irony of the narrative of *Judith*.[482] The ironic twist is that Judith, who pretends to be an enslaved person, was never in such a position and instead needs an enslaved person to complete her mission.

Judith's relationship with her servant reveals a hidden complexity of kinship relationships in antiquity. Enslaved peoples played a vital part in many households which considered them a part of their kinship group, despite not having a status or rights. The relationship between these two women also underscores the necessity of maintaining honor for women of a certain status and reveals the exploitative nature of the system of slavery as described in *Judith*. Moreover, the author of *Judith* uses the concept of enslavement in their portrayal of the protagonist. Here, Judith self-identifies as an enslaved person in her deception of Holofernes. While Judith is clearly not enslaved, it is ironic that the protagonist who pretends to be an enslaved person relies on her personal servant in her mission to defeat the enemy. This may suggest a "slippage" on the part of the author; the author portrays a woman from a certain stratum of society and cannot conceive her managing without the help of one of her slaves.

[481] Glancy ("Judith the Slaveholder," 207) makes note of this as well; "The taking of women to serve as slaves in foreign nations is a fear that underscores the importance of Judith's mission in maintaining the integrity of the people of Israel."

[482] Many scholars note the use of irony in *Judith*. See the discussion on the matter in Wills, *Judith*, 95–100. For example, Moore, *Judith*, 212, argues that the use of irony in *Judith* derives from her lying. Moore notes that in her speech to Holofernes she makes only one true statement, that Achior spoke before the council of Bethulia (Jdt 11:9). See also Glancy, "Judith the Slaveholder," 209, who also notes this paradox in *Judith*. Glancy focuses on the irony in Judith's use of the term slave for herself when the plot of *Judith* requires that "Israel's freedom hinges on the work of a slave." Furthermore, it is noteworthy that Judith requires the assistance of a slave to complete her mission. The major irony is that a widowed woman acts as a slave to the foreign Holofernes, placing herself and her enslaved maid in danger, all to save her people from destruction.

4.3 Kinship in Susanna

The author of *Susanna* portrays the female protagonist as a wife and a daughter, as well as in relation to the maids/servants of her husband's household. In terms of kinship language, there are three notable sections to the narrative: 1) the introduction of Susanna's family and build up before her assault (Sus vss 1–14); 2) the assault of Susanna and subsequent trial (Sus vss 15–62a); and 3) the effect of Susanna's innocence on her family (Sus vss 62b–64). Susanna is almost exclusively passive in the text, an aspect of the text that may suggest the author portrays the female protagonist in a passive manner to emphasize her vulnerability. Furthermore, the focus of the narrative is Susanna's family; Susanna is not only a narrative about a particular event that happened to one woman, but is also about how this event affects her entire family and household. *Susanna* is therefore a cautionary tale about the risks faced by women and the family from outsiders.

4.3.1 Susanna, Wife of Joakim: An Introduction

The author introduces Susanna in relation to a male relative, like the narratives of *Greek Esther* and *Judith*, but unlike these narratives *Susanna* introduces the protagonist as part of the background of the narrative and focuses on the protagonist's husband and father (Sus vss 1-13):

> There was a man living in Babylon and his name was Joakim and he married an exceedingly beautiful woman named Susanna, the daughter of Hilkiah, [who] feared the Lord. Her parents were righteous and had taught their daughter according to the law of Moses. Joakim was exceedingly wealthy and had a fine garden neighboring his house and the Jews used to come near to him because he was the most honoured of them all. (Sus vss 1–4)

The way that the author begins the narrative suggests that the story is about Joakim foremost and Susanna second. Moreover, the author portrays Susanna as his wife and emphasizes the passiveness of her character: the author tells us that Susanna's parents were righteous and that

they trained her in the law (Sus vs 3).[483] The author portrays Susanna's relationship with her husband and father as intricately connected in the introduction to the narrative, and does so in order to highlight the secondary nature of the figure of Susanna.[484] The focus on Susanna's husband and father suggests that these characters are being portrayed as the responsible parties in this narrative.[485] As I explain in more detail below, at the heart of this narrative is the failure of Joakim and Hilkiah to protect Susanna from other men.

While the charge brought against Susanna is the act of adultery, her portrayal as an adulterer varies significantly from images of adulterous women in the Hebrew Bible. Jennie Grillo has illustrated the similarities between Susanna's trial scene and how the prophets portray adulterous women.[486] For example, Ezekiel condemns whoring Jerusalem saying:

> therefore, I will gather all your lovers, with whom you took pleasure, all those you loved and all those you hated; I will gather them against you from all around, and will uncover your nakedness to them, so that they may see all your nakedness. I will judge you as women who commit adultery and shed blood are judged, and bring blood upon you in wrath and jealousy. I will deliver you into their hands, and they shall throw down your platform and break down your lofty places; they shall strip you of your clothes and take your beautiful objects and leave you naked and bare. They shall bring up a mob against you, and they shall stone you and cut you to pieces with their swords. (Ezek 16:37–40)[487]

[483] This is different from how other texts refer to women as wives or to their husbands. See e.g., Bathsheba, wife of Uriah (2 Sam 11:3; 26), Zosara, wife of Haman (Add Esth 5:10). Apart from Sus vs 29, which describes Susanna as the wife of Joakim, *Susanna* refers to her husband in a similar manner to how the author of *Judith* referred to the deceased Manasseh. In my view, it is peculiar that Susanna does not appear explicitly as the wife of Joakim more frequently in the text. What exactly this implies is unclear.

[484] I am not the first to note the passive nature of Susanna's portrayal. For example, see Grillo, "'You Will Forget Your Ancient Shame'" or Bal, "The Elders and Susanna," both of which argue that Susanna is a passive character in the narrative. Contrary to how many feminist scholars read this narrative, I do not read the passivity of Susanna as solely a result of the patriarchal tendencies of the author (e.g., Bal, "The Elders and Susanna;" Glancy, "The Accused;" Levine, "Hemmed in on Every Side"). Instead, I suggest that the author deliberately portrays her as such to highlight the inaction of Susanna's kin in preemptively protecting her. This perspective of course is also a result of the androcentric world-view of the author.

[485] I have discussed the role of men, particularly husbands and fathers, in maintaining the safety of the women of the family in the Esther section above. Also see the discussion in Frymer-Kensky, "Virginity in the Bible," 85.

[486] Grillo, "'You Will Forget Your Ancient Shame,'" 8, argues that the narrative of Susanna, which follows a long tradition of using women to discuss collective guilt and shame, instead reworks the "marriage metaphor" found in prophetic texts to think about collective vindication.

[487] See Renita J. Veems, *Battered Love: Marriage, Sex, and Violence in the Hebrew Prophets* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), who discusses the problematic nature of these texts and examines the sexual

While I agree that there are similarities, particularly the stripping of Susanna and the subsequent death sentence given to her, in my opinion this comparison does not take into consideration Susanna's kinship relationships and the role that they play in this narrative.[488] While Grillo focuses on other topics outside of the scope of the present study, her argument that the author of *Susanna* reworks and revises "the shamed and failing images of women in earlier prophetic texts" and provides "a happy symbolic counterpart to the broken relationship between God and his people, figured as a woman" does not coincide with Susanna's portrayal in the narrative.[489] If Susanna is vindicated in the narrative as Grillo suggests, why then is there not more of an emphasis on her character? Moreover, what role do Susanna's husband and father have in the events leading up to her assault and later at her trial?

The author mentions Susanna's husband several times specifically in reference to his wealth or property, aspects of his description that not only portray him as important and powerful, but directly result in the elders' attempt to rape his wife. Joakim and his property appear three times in the text (Sus vss 4, 7, 28). The introduction makes it clear that "Joakim was

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metaphors used by the prophets to understand Israelite social structures. See also the depictions of adulterous women in Hos 1–4; Ezek 23; Jer 2:1–4:4. A considerable amount of scholarship covers these "pornoprophetics." See for example, Brenner, "Pornoprophetics Revisited," 63–86; Drorah T. Setel, "Prophets and Pornography: Female Sexual Imagery in Hosea," in *Feminist Companion to the Song of Songs*, ed. Athalya Brenner-Idan, FCB 1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 143–155; Fokkelien van Dijk-Hemmes, "The Metaphorization of Women in Prophetic Speech: An Analysis of Ezekiel 23," in *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible*, eds. Athalya Brenner and F. Van Dijk-Hemmes, BibInt 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 167–176; Bruno Biermann, "Männliche Herrschaft Und Körperdiskurse Zwischen Feminisierung Und Virilität in Ezechiel 23," *Lectio Difficilior* (2021): 1–35.

[488] There is some ambiguity in the text regarding whether the men strip Susanna naked. The Theodotion version appears to suggest they unveiled her, while the Old Greek may indicate a complete stripping. See the discussion in Loader, *The Pseudepigrapha on Sexuality*, 228; Wills, *The Jewish Novel*, 56–57; Moore, *Daniel, Esther, and Jeremiah*, 103.

[489] Grillo, "'You Will Forget Your Ancient Shame,'" 21. Brenner's remarks on the structure of pornoprophetics, especially in comparison to Susanna's portrayal, underscores the dissimilarity of these portrayals. Brenner explains that [in pornoprophetics] "the dual image of husband/wife… is unbalanced. The 'husband' is divine, correct, faithful, positive, voiced. The 'wife' is human, morally corrupt, faithless, negative, silent or silenced… The message… [is] 'wifely' loyalty is to be learnt through re-education and punishment, including exposure and public shaming" ("Pornoprophetics Revisited," 64). On the contrary, the author of *Susanna* portrays an absent husband and a faithful wife who is attacked and silenced.

exceedingly wealthy and had a fine garden neighboring his house and the Jews used to come near to him because he was the most honoured of them all" (Sus vs 4). Joakim is not only wealthy, but highly respected in his community.[490] The text seems to suggest that he had either a high position within the community or the community simply used his residence to conduct their daily business. In either case, it will be Joakim's position within the community that gives people access to his wife and therefore provides the opportunity for his wife's assault.[491] The text also introduces the elders as men who "were frequently at Joakim's house, and all who had a case to be tried came to them there" (Sus vs 6), suggesting that the men shared a close working relationship with Joakim.

Moreover, the author portrays Joakim's own property as the setting of not only the assault of Susanna, but her subsequent trial. The author states that: "when the people arose at noon in the middle of the day, Susanna would go into her husband's fine garden and walk around" (Sus vs 7).[492] It is in the garden that the elders first spot Susanna and begin to lust after her (Sus vs 8), as well as the location of the assault later in the narrative (Sus vss 19–27). Furthermore, Joakim's house appears to be the location of the trial, at least in the Theodotion version, as the text states that "And it happened the next day, as the people gathered to her

[490] Robin Gallaher Branch and Pierre J. Jordaan, "The Significance of Secondary Characters in Susanna, Judith, and the Additions to Esther in the Septuagint," *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 20 (2009), 395, also note Joakim's wealth and his power in the community. See also Pierre J. Jordaan, "Reading Susanna as Therapeutic Narrative, *Journal for Semitics* 17 (2008): 121.

[491] The reader must wonder if the author of *Susanna* had the story of Bathsheba and David in mind as there are several similarities between both narratives (2 Sam 11). For example, David views Bathsheba from afar and her beauty leads to his lusting for her. Moreover, Callaher Branch and Jordaan note the similarities between *Susanna* and the narrative of Joseph and Portiphar's wife (Gen 39). Like Joseph, Susanna discovers the no one believes her despite her innocence. As in the narrative of Joseph, readers must wonder whether their god will intervene. See Branch and Jordaan, "The Significance of Secondary Characters," 397, n. 29.

[492] While it is impossible to determine the type of garden referred to in the narrative, scholars have instead focused on the significance of the garden in the text. For example, Bal, "The Elders and Susanna," 14, suggests that the garden is meant to remind the reader of the garden of paradise, an interpretation that shows up in later imagery of the narrative. Meanwhile, Scales, "Susanna and Callirhoe," 9, notes that it is Susanna's *private* garden that ends up being a public "viewing gallery" (my emphasis). See also Christina Leisering, "Susanna 'Im Garten': Eine Feministisch-Intertextuelle Lektüre Der Susannaerzählung," *Lectio Difficilior* (2008): 1–27, who compares the LXX and Theodotion versions, and focuses on construction of gender and the motif of the garden in *Susanna*.

husband Joakim, the two elders"…brought forth their case against Susanna (Sus vss 28).[493] During the trial, the author describes Susanna as the wife of Joakim when the elders summon her to the trial ("'send for Susanna daughter of Hilkiah, who is the wife of Joakim,'" Sus vs 29). The author's choice to describe Susanna as the wife of Joakim at the trial scene is peculiar since there is a general lack of emphasis on her husband, the violation of his property rights, and the marital status of Susanna in the narrative.[494] This appears contrary to other portrayals of adultery cases which highlight the authority of the husband and the offence brought against him. For example, the author of Sirach brings three charges against an adulterous woman: "For first of all, she has disobeyed the law of the Most High; second, she has committed an offence against her husband; and third, through her fornication she has committed adultery and brought forth children by another man" (Sir 23:23). The concern here is that an adulterous woman might bring home another man's child. Instead, the narrative of *Susanna* is comparable to other narratives in the Hebrew Bible where adultery is "defined solely on the basis of the female partner's status" – the elders can accuse Susanna of adultery because she is married.[495] The claims of adultery brought forth by the elders only appear to mention Susanna's married status.

Since adultery was viewed as an offence against the husband, it is striking that such concerns do not appear in this narrative. [496] The final reference to Joakim, which occurs in the final verse of the narrative and states that "Hilkiah and his wife praised God concerning their

[493] The Old Greek version makes it clear that the elders take their case before the city assembly (τὴν συναγωγὴν τῆς πόλεως, Sus v. 28).

[494] Branch and Jordaan, "The Significance of Secondary Characters," 395–6, suggest that Joakim stays silent to maintain his position in the community. Instead of supporting his wife, the authors suggest that Joakim sides with the elders.

[495] Brenner, *The Intercourse of Knowledge*, 134.

[496] Ken Stone, "Marriage and Sexual Relations in the World of the Hebrew Bible," in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality, and Gender*, ed. Adrian Thatcher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 180–181. In fact, adultery is "defined solely on the basis of the female partner's status" (180). See also Brenner, *The Intercourse of Knowledge*, 134; Douglas A. Knight and Amy-Jill Levine, *The Meaning of the Bible: What the Jewish Scriptures and Christian Old Testament Can Teach Us* (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 318–320.

daughter Susanna, as well as Joakim her husband" (Sus v.63), seems to suggest that Joakim's reputation was at least somewhat in jeopardy when the accusations were made against his wife.[497] It is noteworthy that Susanna's status as the wife of Joakim is emphasized at the beginning of the story, but recedes after her assault and the claims made by the elders are brought forth. This suggests that the author connects Susanna's husband to the elders' ability to assault Susanna rather than to the accusations made against her.

4.3.2 Between Guilt and Innocence: Daughter of Hilkiah and Her Mother

Despite the importance of Joakim at the beginning of the narrative, Susanna appears as the 'daughter of Hilkiah' in much of the narrative. Although the author also introduces Hilkiah in the introduction, Susanna's parents appear to increase in importance as the narrative progresses; they are present at the trial and later at the end of the narrative. Both instances suggest that the outcome of Susanna's trial would have impacted them. Furthermore, the secondary nature of Joakim from this point forward, especially compared to his importance at the beginning of the narrative, highlights the role of the parental figures, particularly the father, in *Susanna*.

Susanna's parents appear several times in the narrative in connection to Susanna as a reflection of her moral quality. As discussed above, the author introduces Susanna in connection to her parents who are described as righteous (Sus vss 2-3). While the author names Susanna's father (Hilkiah, Sus vss 2, 29, 63), her mother is not named and only appears when the author refers to both of her parents or to her simply as Hilkiah's wife (Sus vss 3, 30, 63). The author seems to suggest that Susanna is righteous because of her parents training in the Law (Sus vs 3); Susanna is not only beautiful, but she also "feared the Lord" (Sus vs 2). The theme of righteousness occurs again during the assault when Susanna cries out that she would rather

[497] This statement only occurs in the Theodotion version of the narratives. The Old Greek version ends with a declaration celebrating young men (v. 62a–b).

"choose not to do it; I will fall into your hands, rather than sin in the sight of the Lord" (Sus vs 23).

The return of Susanna's parents at the trial and subsequent conclusion suggest that the claims made against Susanna impacted her parents. Susanna's parents do not return until the trial scene when the elders call for "Susanna, daughter of Hilkiah, who is the wife of Joakim" (Sus vs 29). This exact phrase mirrors the introduction and suggests that the author intended to portray Susanna primarily as a daughter rather than the wife of Joakim. The author's insistence on continuing to name Susanna as the daughter of Hilkiah is noteworthy because the text appears to characterize Susanna as a daughter even though she has already married.[498] There is some evidence to support the notion that women could continue to be associated with their fathers after marriage. For example, Ben Sira argues that "a daughter is a secret anxiety to her father" seemingly forever; Sira appears to suggest that an adulterous daughter would "make you a laughing-stock to your enemies, a byword in the city and the assembly of the people, and put you to shame in public gatherings" (Sir 42:9-11). It is also noteworthy that Joakim does not appear to be present at the trial.[499] The text states that "she came herself, and her parents, and her children, and all her relatives" (vs 30). In my view, Joakim's absence reflects the understanding that it was

[498] Russaw, *Daughters in the Hebrew Bible*, 31–47, in particular: pages 32–35. Marriage often seems to have represented an exchange of goods and wealth between men. Furthermore, the father-daughter relationship typically appears in the Hebrew Bible as one marked by complete control of the father over the daughter in everything from physical to legal matters. Fathers transferred both control and their daughter to her husband upon their marriage. Moreover, marriage appears to have symbolized the foundation of society to many ancient writes. See the discussion in Satlow, *Jewish Marriage*, 12–21.

[499] Susanna's alleged adultery does not appear to affect her husband, as he does not attend the trial. The fact that the elders claim to have witnessed the adulterous act may be the reason Joakim is not involved. For example, Num 5:11–31 records the law against a suspected adulterous woman by her husband when there are no witnesses. In this case, the husband is to simply bring the accused wife to a priest who will then administer a "water of bitterness that brings the curse" (Num 5:18) if she participated in adultery. For a comparison on the Sotah (adultery ritual) described in the Hebrew Bible to its description in the Mishnah, see Sarra Lev, "Sotah: Rabbinic Pornography," in *The Passionate Torah: Sex and Judaism*, ed. Danya Ruttenberg (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 7–23. In particular, Lev interprets the Sotah through the lens of pornography and argues that the Sotah is "an exertion of power upon the body of the observed" (20).

up to Susanna's parents, particularly her father, to advocate on her behalf.[500] While the author does not explicitly give a reason for Joakim's absence, the consistent emphasis on her parents suggests that in some ways, it is not simply Susanna who is on trial in this text; her parents find themselves implicated in her supposed act.

Moreover, in the longer version of the narrative, the final verses demonstrate the vindication of Susanna's parents, more so than her own husband, following Susanna's acquittal. The text states that "Hilkiah and his wife praised God concerning their daughter Susanna, as well as her husband Joakim and all [her] relatives, because she was not found [to have committed] a shameful deed" (Sus vs 63). The positioning of names in this verse seems to suggest that Susanna's parents had more to lose than her husband should the council find Susanna guilty of adultery. In reading the narrative this way, their silence on the matter speaks volumes about the possible moral of this narrative.[501] Susanna is innocent, accused of a despicable act, but unlike the lecherous men who assaulted her, no one believes her and no one speaks out against the elders. As the only voices of reason in the text are Susanna and Daniel, the reader must wonder why her parents do not speak out against the elders; in their silence they too fail Susanna.

4.3.3 The Vanishing Act: Wife, Daughter, and Mother Erased

Susanna is about a female protagonist that is both present and hauntingly absent from the narrative itself. The author portrays her as a wife, daughter, and mother at various points in the narrative, but this portrayal does not go beyond a basic naming of her status as such. For example, we know that she was a mother and that she had children but the author provides no

[500] In line with what I have discussed previously, adultery equaled a violation of a husband's rights and brought about dishonor to the woman's father. In the case of adultery, it appears that it was up to the father to advocate for a woman accused of adultery.

[501] Branch and Jordaan, "The Significance of Secondary Characters," 395, also note the silence of Joakim and her parents in this narrative. See also, Lev, "Sotah," 7–23, which highlights the emphasis placed on the woman accused rather than any concern directed toward the husband in matters of adultery. Joakim's silence is not extraordinary, but highlights the vulnerability of women, even married women.

specifics about this portrayal (Sus vs 30). In many ways, the author provides more details about the elders and Daniel than any of the other characters in the story. Although these figures appear to be the most prominent and active characters in the narrative, the family should also be recognized as a major concept in this story.

Scholars, such as Brenner and Levine have argued that Susanna represents a figurative placeholder for Israel and that the author of *Susanna* uses the common trope of whoring Israel,[502] but I would like to suggest that the story is also more than a retelling of a common trope. Brenner argues that the individual protagonists are "signifiers, representations, projections or metaphors for the Jewish community in exile, or as surrounded by actual potential enemies."[503] I agree that Susanna, as well as the other characters, are representations of the Jewish community. However, because the author crafts Susanna to represent specific familial figures, i.e., the wife and daughter, the kinship ties portrayed in *Susanna* require further consideration. In this light, Brenner's insights about the representation of potential enemies in the narrative of *Susanna* can push our understanding of this text farther. Not only does the author image the protagonist as representing familial figures, but it envisions these figures within the context of potential threats from *outsiders*.

The author of *Susanna* portrays the female protagonist as susceptible to outsiders to highlight the vulnerability of the family and its need for vigilant maintenance and protection, particularly when the men of the family do not adhere to their gendered social expectations.[504] If

[502] See Athlaya Brenner, "Introduction," in *A Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith and Susanna*, ed. Athalya Brenner, FCB 7 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 11; Levine, "'Hemmed in on Every Side; Reinhartz, "Better Homes and Gardens," 303–323; Grillo, "'You Will Forget Your Ancient Shame,'" 7–22, argues that *Susanna* takes this metaphor from the Hebrew Bible and pushes it further, suggesting that the Exile does not purify the community as in earlier works, but that "the Exile [is] the catalyst for the purification of [the] metaphor [itself]" (22).

[503] Brenner, "Introduction," 13.

[504] Faßbeck. "Tobit's Religious Universe," 175. Faßbeck also points out that we cannot assume that Jewish sources shed "light on actual families."

anything, the author critiques the men and the people in this narrative who simply believe the story that the elders tell them, rather than focusing on Susanna and her actions. The threat of infiltration of outsiders, particularly the lawlessness of outsiders, posed a distinct threat to the very foundation of the family. As Daniel's character so succinctly argues, "thus foolish sons of Israel [who] neither examine nor clearly understand [but] condemn a daughter of Israel" (Sus vs 48). Susanna, the wife of Joakim and daughter of Hilkiah, in the end faces her accusers alone and it takes the righteous Daniel to speak words of reason and wisdom that will eventually save her life.[505]

4.4 Kinship in Aseneth

The two most prominent kinship relationships of Aseneth are those of daughter and wife, but the author also portrays her using other less frequent familial titles such as sister and mother. At the beginning of the narrative, Aseneth appears as the virgin daughter of Pentephres and unwilling potential wife to Joseph. As the narrative unfolds and Aseneth completes her transformation, her portrayal shifts abruptly. Following her transformation, the author portrays Aseneth in a similar manner to the portrayal of Joseph. In the following sections, I focus on the author's use of kinship terms and their function in the portrayal of Aseneth's transformation. In terms of kinship language, Aseneth transfers herself from her Egyptian family and becomes a part of the larger Jewish family under her new father, the god of Israel.

4.4.1 Daughter of Pentephres and Unwilling Wife

The author of *Aseneth*, like the Jewish novels studied above, introduces its female protagonist in relation to her father (Asen. 1:4). In fact, the author provides details about her

[505] The author mentions Susanna by name on her own, meaning her name lacks the familiar designation of "daughter of Hilkiah" or "wife of Joakim," during the assault. Instead, Susanna appears alongside the maids/servants during the time of her assault.

father, Pentephres and his relationship to the Pharaoh even before they introduce the female protagonist. The author describes Pentephres as a nobleman, "a chief of all the satraps" who was "exceedingly rich and prudent," a counselor of the Pharaoh and a priest in Heliopolis (Asen. 1:3). The author makes explicit the importance of Aseneth's connection to her father in their use of the phrase "Aseneth, daughter of Pentephres, priest of Heliopolis" which occurs at the beginning and end of the first part of the narrative (Asen. 1:7; 21:2).[506] There are also several further instances where Aseneth appears as Pentephres and his wife's daughter beyond this phrase (Asen. 1:4; 4:1–3, 12; 5:7; 7:7–8; 8:1; 20:8). Although the portrayal of Aseneth as Pentephres' daughter stems from the work's reliance on the information provided by the author of Gen 41:45, as I discuss below, the author of the narrative of *Aseneth* complicates this picture through their use of kinship language.

Aseneth's portrayal as daughter highlights a clear concern regarding the protection of Aseneth and her status as *parthenos* and the desire of her father to transfer his daughter to a man as a bride.[507] The protection of Aseneth as a *parthenos* is the main concern of chapter two and features elsewhere in the text. The text portrays Pentephres as actively taking measures to maintain Aseneth's status as *parthenos* and, later in the narrative, even testifies to her virginity (Asen. 7:7–8).[508] For example, the text states that "Pentephres had a tower adjoining his house" (Asen. 2:1). In this tower, Aseneth lives in a big chamber "where her virginity was being

[506] Compare for example the Greek from Asen. 1:7 and 21:1 to the Greek of LXX Gen 41:45: Asen. 1:7: δός μοι πάτερ τὴν Ἀσενὲθ τὴν θυγατέρα Πεντεφρῆ τοῦ ἱερέως Ἡλιουπόλεως εἰς γυναῖκα; Asen. 21:1: δός μοι τὴν Ἀσενὲθ θυγατέρα Πεντεφρῆ ἱερέως Ἡλιουπόλεως εἰς γυναῖκα; LXX Gen 41:45: ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ τὴν Ασεννεθ θυγατέρα Πετεφρη ἱερέως Ἡλίου πόλεως αὐτῷ γυναῖκα.

[507] The author of *Aseneth* treats marriage as a transaction much like other biblical and early Jewish works. Many texts make use of transactional language, such as "giving" and "taking," as well as language of ownership. See the discussion in Stone, "Marriage and Sexual Relations," 176–177. Marriage appears as an exchange of women from one man to another in a manner that establishes both kinship and economic ties to create alliances between groups. See also Ken Stone, *Sex, Honour and Power in the Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic of Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 157–219.

[508] For a more thorough discussion on the matter of Aseneth's virginity and the meaning of *parthenos* in this narrative, see my discussion on the matter in the *Aseneth* section of the Sexuality chapter above.

fostered" (Asen. 2:7). The author even goes as far as to explain that Aseneth had a bed in which she "alone lay down to sleep and a man or another woman never sat upon it except Aseneth alone" (Asen. 2:9). Moreover, when Joseph initially meets Aseneth and is concerned that she will be like the Egyptian wives and daughters who treated him badly because of his beauty (Asen. 7:3), Pentephres defends Aseneth's virginity, telling Joseph that no man had "ever seen her except you alone today" (Asen. 7:7).

Many references to daughters in the Hebrew Bible and later Jewish literature imagine the role of the father as a protector, and illustrate the father's role in the transaction of marriage. The father, as the head of the household who "had legal authority and responsibility over the family members," was specifically responsible for approving the marriages of their children, both male and female.[509] A daughter's virginity was the most valuable commodity to a father, because chaste daughters could be married. [510] Daughters were valuable for their procreative abilities and it fell to the father to maintain and protect that ability. The father was responsible for protecting his daughter from scandal and preserving her for marriage. [511] Likewise, the author of *Aseneth* portrays the transactional nature of marriage, as well as the father's role in such a transaction.[512] Pentephres' actions demonstrate this concern; the narrative illustrates the lengths a father might go to present his daughter as a marriageable woman.

[509] Tsumura, "Family in the Historical Books," "Fathers' Roles: Patriarchy."

[510] For example, the daughters of Lot (Gen 19); Rebekkah (Gen 24); Leah and Rachel (Gen 29); Dinah (Gen 34); Tamar (Gen 38); Jephthah's daughter (Judg 11:34–39); Tamar, daughter of David (2 Sam 13); Esther (Add Esth 2); Sir 42.

[511] *Aseneth* also echoes similar beliefs regarding marriage and sex elsewhere in early Jewish literature (e.g., Tob 3:8; Deut 22:13–21). Joseph's insistence on remaining chaste until after they are married (Asen. 21:1) highlights the view to confine sex to marriage. For a broader discussion on the topic of sex and marriage in *Aseneth* as well as other literature see, Willam Loader, "Marriage and Sexual Relations in the New Testament World," in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality, and Gender*, ed. Adrian Thatcher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 192–193.

[512] This aspect occurs in the author's use of the following phrases: "give her to him" and "give me Aseneth" (Asen. 1:7); "betrothed to you" and "take for your wife" (Asen. 1:9).

The author not only portrays Pentephres as protective and concerned about his daughter's marriage prospects, but also as using kinship language to portray Aseneth as an acceptable bride for Joseph. The inclusion of "sister" (ἀδελφή) and "brother" (ἀδελφός) language in regards to the relationship between Aseneth and Joseph is noteworthy (Asen. 7:7, 8; 8:1, 4).[513] The author portrays Pentephres using kinship terms when attempting to convince Joseph that Aseneth poses no risk to him. Pentephres argues that Aseneth will come to greet Joseph, "because our daughter is like a sister to you" (Asen. 7:7). Joseph agrees, declaring that Aseneth "is a sister to me, and I love her from today as my sister" (Asen. 7:8). When Pentephres calls for Aseneth to come and greet Joseph, he again uses this kinship terminology. He instructs Aseneth to "greet your brother" (Asen. 8:1) and later to "'go up and kiss your brother'" (Asen. 8:4). This kinship language, particularly the use of "sister" (ἀδελφή), reminiscent of language used in Song of Songs and Tobit. For example, the author of the Song of Songs frequently refers to the female lover as "sister." The author exclaims, "you have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride" (Song 4:9).[514] Meanwhile, the author of Tobit uses brother and sister language when Tobit and Raguel discuss Tobit's right to marry Sarah; Raguel tells Tobit to "take your kinswoman; from now on you are her brother and she is your sister" (Tob 7:11).While the use of kinship language in *Aseneth* does not explicitly equate the protagonist with Joseph's kin, the author uses this language to make Aseneth appear more acceptable.

[513] Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 24–25, also notes the use of sibling imagery. Kraemer connects the use of "sister" language to Prov 7:4–5, which uses similar language (e.g., "say to wisdom, you are my sister), and concludes that the author portrays "Aseneth primarily as the Strange Woman, with hints of her true or ultimate identity as Wisdom intermingled" (25). For a more thorough treatment of the theme of wisdom in Proverbs see Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs*, BLS 11 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1985). Meanwhile, Burchard, "Joseph and Aseneth," 211, note m, argues that Pentephres is portrayed suggesting "that virginity makes people of different faith brothers and sisters."

[514] For further information on the use of the theme of erotic desire in the Song of Songs see, Carey Ellen Walsh, *Exquisite Desire: Religion, the Erotic, and the Song of Songs* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).

The use of kinship language to describe Aseneth and Joseph becomes more pronounced when one considers the context in which it occurs – the author explicitly states the ethnic and religious gulf that exists between the two characters. The author first portrays the incompatibility of Aseneth and Joseph when she refuses to be his bride (Asen. 4:9–12). Aseneth rejects Joseph, despite her father's insistence that he is a virgin, because he is an alien, a fugitive/criminal, and slept with a mistress:[515]

> Why does my lord and my father speak with these words, to deliver me over like a captive to a foreign man and a fugitive, and who (was) sold? Is this one not the shepherd's son from the land of Canaan and he himself was seized upon being detected sleeping with his female master, and his master threw him into the prison of darkness, and Pharaoh brought him out of prison, because he interpreted his dream? (Asen. 4:9-10)

Ironically, it is for these exact reasons that Joseph initially rejects Aseneth; Joseph compares her to a "strange woman" (Asen. 7:5) and to the daughters of the Egyptians who wanted to sleep with him (Asen. 7:3). Moreover, Joseph stops Aseneth from kissing him and calls her a "strange" (ἀλλότριος) woman" (Asen. 7:5; 8:5–7).[516] The use of ἀλλότριος is significant, because it is the same word used to describe "foreign women" in Ezra and Nehemiah's ban on intermarriage (Ezr 10:2, 10, 11, 14, 17, 18, 44; Neh 9:2; 13:26, 27). Although the author of *Aseneth* does explicitly prohibit intermarriage, it does appear that they were at least aware of such a prohibition and understood that Aseneth's "foreign" origin was an issue for many Jews.

Awareness of the prohibition of intermarriage underlies the author's careful balance between portraying Aseneth as Joseph's kin while still acknowledging her foreign origins. For example, although the author has already portrayed Pentephres using kinship language to

[515] James Kugel, *In Portiphar's House: The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 94–98, deals with various traditions that either find Joseph blameless or at least partially complicit in what happens between Joseph and Portiphar's wife.

[516] Kraemer notes that Aseneth, as the daughter of Pentephres, is a foreigner to Joseph. See Kraemer, *When Joseph Met Aseneth*, 22–27.

describe Aseneth and Joseph, the author also portrays Joseph rejecting Aseneth by outlining a kinship framework that excludes her. Joseph argues that he cannot kiss Aseneth for "a god-fearing man will kiss his mother and sister (born) of his mother and the sister who is of his tribe and family, and the wife who shares his bed, whoever blesses with their mouths the living God" (Asen. 8:6). Although Joseph appears to accept Aseneth as his sister in the examples above, the author makes it clear that Aseneth is not a part of Joseph's kinship group specifically because of her choice in deity and worship practices.

4.4.2 Orphaned Child: Adopted Child

A significant aspect of Aseneth's portrayal, particularly during her transformation, is the use of kinship language which denotes a disconnection from one's kin.[517] More specifically, the author uses orphan and adoption language during Aseneth's repentance and transformation (Asen. 10:1–17:10). This language works to outline how Aseneth, through her own actions, removes herself from her kinship group and subsequently asks the god of Joseph to accept her as one of his children.[518] The examination of Aseneth's two soliloquies (Asen. 11:3–13:15) and her acceptance by the chief of the angels (Asen. 14:1–17:10) provides new insights into Aseneth's transformation. Firstly, Aseneth alienates herself from her parents by turning her back on the gods of her parents. The author uses "orphan" and "abandonment" language to describe how Aseneth's relationship with her parents changes during her transformation. Secondly, the author portrays Aseneth as a child adopted by the god of Joseph. In this way, the author presents a

[517] Chesnutt, *From Death to Life,* 115–117, 166–168, addresses familial ostracism in *Aseneth,* but from the perspective of what he assumes is social tension underlying the narrative. Since Chesnutt assumes that Aseneth is the model for converts to Judaism, he reads "orphan" and "adoption" language within this context. Chesnutt notes connections with historical ostracism of converts as attested to by Philo. See *Spec. Leg.* 1.9, 57; 4.34; *Virt.* 20.

[518] Several scholars have written about kinship in *Aseneth*. See for example Hicks-Keeton, *Arguing with Aseneth,* 63–66, who specifically notes the authors use of kinship language, their efforts to connect Aseneth's to Joseph's kin, and Joseph's initial rejection of her, and finally the angel's confirmation that she is a daughter of Joseph's god. Similarly, Nathan Hays, "Orphanhood and Parenthood in Joseph and Aseneth," *JSP* 27 (2017): 32–40, argues that the author of *Aseneth* portrays characters as belonging to either a family of the devil or a family of God.

manner for Aseneth's inclusion into Joseph's kinship group that results in her portrayal as an appropriate spouse for Joseph.

Aseneth's transformation begins with her rejection of her parents' gods and, as a result, Aseneth's reasoning that they have rejected and abandoned her as their child. Orphan language abounds in the two soliloquys that follows Aseneth's destruction of her idols. For example, Aseneth claims that "I, Aseneth, daughter of Pentephres the priest, the virgin and queen, who [was] once proud and arrogant and prospering in my wealth above all people, am now an orphan and desolate and abandoned by all people" (Asen. 12:5).[519] The author portrays Aseneth's rejection of her parents' gods as the reason for this abandonment.[520] The author narrates Aseneth saying, "my father and my mother and all my family have come to hate me and said, 'Aseneth is not our daughter because she utterly destroyed our gods'" (Asen. 11:5).[521] Moreover, the narrative depicts Aseneth's repentance as the marker of her abandonment by suggesting that her appearance is a sign of her repentance: "[I] fled to you for refuge, Lord, in this sackcloth and ashes, naked and an orphan and entirely alone" (Asen.13:2).

The author of *Aseneth* also explicitly connects the protagonist's abandonment to her turning toward the god of Joseph. Here, the author portrays her as an orphan in several passages

[519] See also the following examples: "to who will I flee to for refuge…I the virgin and an orphan and desolate and abandoned and hated?" (Asen. 11:3); "A miserable woman I am and an orphan and desolate" (Asen. 11:16).

[520] Chesnutt (*From Death to Life*, 116) notes this language, but attributes it to what he calls the common "motif of familial and social ostracism" and suggests that this reflects the situation many converts found themselves in when they converted to Judaism. See also pages 166–168. Furthermore, see page 171–172 for Chesnutt's discussion on the "repudiation off idolatry as the quintessence of conversion."

[521] Cf. Asen. 11:4 which claims that her parents hate her "because I, too, have come to hate their gods and have utterly destroyed them." The statement above is reminiscent of Asen. 12:12. Chesnutt rightly points out that Aseneth's evaluation of her relationship with her parents does not correspond to the author's portrayal of that relationship anywhere in the narrative. In fact, Aseneth's relationship with her parents remains cordial throughout (Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 116). Likewise, Hays ("Orphanhood," 26–27) argues that Aseneth's relationship with her parents does not change after her transformation.

that appeal to Joseph's god as a caring father figure who will have compassion for her.[522] For example, in her prayer, Aseneth wonders whether the god of Joseph "will see this my desolation and have compassion on me, or see my orphanage and protect me, because he is the father of the orphans" (Asen. 11:12–13).[523] The author further develops this trope when Aseneth equates herself to a child, claiming that "for like a little child who is afraid flees to his father, and the father, stretching out his hands, snatches him from the ground… you too, Lord, stretch out your hands upon me as a child-loving father and snatch me from the earth" (Asen. 12:8).[524] Chesnutt has argued that Aseneth's pleas are similar to those of Jewish proselytes in that "her need for divine protection does not lead to, but results from, her conversion."[525] Instead, the use of kinship language, "orphan," "abandonment," and "father," is particularly noteworthy because it actively transfers Aseneth from one kinship relationship to another – from her father Pentephres to the god of Joseph – through the use of orphan language.[526] In reading these passages through the lens of kinship language, Aseneth's abandonment and later acceptance as Joseph's bride can

[522] The Greek novels commonly portray their protagonists facing a threatening situation in which they turn to a deity to ask for divine assistance. Here, the narrative of Aseneth portrays its protagonists in a similar fashion. See the discussion in Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 168; Wills, *The Jewish Novel*, 16; Fitzgerald and Tervanotko, "Jewish Novels as Romance Literature."

[523] See also: "guard me, a pure virgin having been left behind and an orphan, because you, Lord, are a sweet and good and gentle father" (Asen. 12:14).

[524] Joseph's god as father features strongly in Aseneth's plea to the god of Joseph. His god consistently appears as a father figure, see: "the father of the orphans" (Asen. 11:13; 12:13), as "a sweet and good and gentle father" (Asen. 12:14), and as "a child-loving father" (Asen. 12:8). Aseneth's language here is like Boaz's words to Ruth who tells her to take refuge under the wings of the God of Israel (Ruth 2:12). Meanwhile, Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 169, notes the theme of god's protection over proselytes in several sources on conversion to Judaism. See for example, *Gen. R.* 46.10; Josephus' *Ant.*20.2.4, and Philo's *Spec. Leg.* 1.57; 4.34. Conversely, Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 55–58, argues that Aseneth's two silent prayers (Asen. 11; 12) relies heavily on passages from Psalms and Exodus. For example, the "lengthy image of a terrified child finding sanctuary in the arms of a comforting father" brings "the text into closer conformity with the traditions we do have, particularly Ps 102:13 [LXX; NRSV 103]" (58).

[525] Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 169.

[526] Hicks-Keeton, *Arguing with Aseneth*, 64, agrees with this assessment. Similarly, Thiessen, "Aseneth's Eight-Day Transformation," 248–249, although not explicitly focusing on kinship in *Aseneth* argues that "Aseneth undergoes a transformation akin to gene therapy" and that "Aseneth leaps the genealogical gap between Jew and gentile." Meanwhile, Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 167 n.51, also notes the striking cluster of such words. Chesnutt argues that although these words may derive from biblical references that deal with the sojourner, orphan, or widow (e.g., Deut 10:18; 16:11–14; 24:17–21; 27:19), "it is their usage in a cluster to deal with the same theme that is striking" (168).

be understood not in terms of conversion but in terms of an exchange in kinship relationships. Furthermore, the author highlights this transferal when Aseneth's compares her inheritance from her father, which she describes as transient and obscure, to "the gifts of your inheritance, Lord, are incorruptible and eternal" (Asen. 12:15). The author therefore portrays Aseneth as rejecting her own kinship group, as an orphan, and as the repentant child seeking approval and refuge in the god of Joseph.[527]

Moreover, the angel's acceptance of Aseneth continues the use of kinship language to portray Aseneth as a member of the acceptable kinship group. For example, the angel tells Aseneth,

> "Your name will no longer be called Aseneth, but your name will be City of Refuge, because in you many nations will seek shelter under the Lord God, the Most high, and under your wings many peoples [who] trust in the Lord God will be sheltered and in your walls those who attach themselves to the Most High God in the name of Repentance will be guarded. *Because Repentance (*ἡ μετάνοιά*) is in the heavens, an exceedingly beautiful and good daughter of the Most High*. And she herself entreats the Most High God…because *he is (the) father of Repentance (*πατήρ ἐστι τῆς μετανοίας*) …the Most High Father loves her… I exceedingly love her, because she is my sister*." (my emphasis, Asen. 15:7–8)

Although the narrative here does not explicitly call Aseneth "Metanoia," it is noteworthy that the author refers to her as the daughter of the Most High later in the text (Asen. 21:4), the exact title given to Metanoia. While it is possible that the author portrays Aseneth as being the personification of Metanoia, it is more likely that the author portrays Aseneth with some of the same characteristics of Metanoia because they appear to be two separate characters in the

[527] The author's inclusion of Aseneth into the kinship group of Joseph using sister and brother language is unprecedented even in examples where certain people abandoned their kin (e.g., *Num. R.* 8.2; *Ant.* 20.2.4; *Spec. Leg.* 1.9; *Virt*. 20). While these texts include clear examples where proselytes left behind their kin to consummate their conversion to Judaism, I am unaware of language that speaks to their inclusion in Jewish kinship groups because of their conversion. In fact, writers, such as Philo and Josephus, instead focus on their lack of kinship relationships in these examples. Moreover, there is a lack of kinship language even in biblical passages that speak of god's compassion and mercy for those who fear him and could be understood as applying to anyone who fears god (LXX Ps 102:13; 144).

narrative.[528] In any case, the author at least connects Aseneth to the character of Metanoia and uses kinship titles to do so; both Aseneth and Metanoia are called daughters of the Most High God and, while only Metanoia is called the angel's sister (Asen. 15:8), the author suggests a close connection between the chief angel and Aseneth in the narrative (Asen. 15:8). Moreover, the angel later refers to Aseneth as "a walled *mother*-city of all who take flee to seek refuge with the name of the Lord God" (Asen. 16:16).[529] While I remain uncertain about Aseneth's equation with Metanoia in the text, the author's continued usage of kinship language aligns with their overall purpose of portraying Aseneth as aligned with the divine kinship of the god of Israel.

4.4.3 Joseph's Maidservant, Slave, and Wife

Another important avenue of examination in terms of the usage of kinship terms in *Aseneth* is the portrayal of the protagonist as a wife. Here, the author makes use of terms associated with enslavement, such as "maidservant" (παιδίσκη) and "slave" (δούλη). The portrayal of Aseneth as wife can also note the confirmation of her inclusion into Joseph's kinship family.[530] Furthermore, the portrayal of Aseneth as slave and maidservant offers insights into how the author may have understood Aseneth's portrayal as wife.

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[528] It appears that the author cannot mean them to be the same, because the angel also states that "and because she loves you virgins, I love you, too" (Asen. 15:8). Kraemer (*When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 61–62) also views Metanoia as the personified figure of repentance and as a separate character from Aseneth. The author clearly connects *Aseneth* to the figure of Metanoia. Kraemer addresses the complexity of the author's use of imagery from the Wisdom of Solomon in n. 30 on page 45.

[529] Chesnutt (*From Death to Life*) also appears to note the use of familial terms here, but again understands this language as metaphorical, as well as within the context of a proselyte. For example, Chesnutt argues that Aseneth's name change "has more to do with her special prototypical and matriarchal role than with her position as an individual proselyte" (128). Meanwhile, Hicks-Keeton, *Arguing with Aseneth*, 58, notes that Aseneth's portrayal as a mother city is one example of the author's use of her portrayal in Genesis; Aseneth is only mentioned because she bore the sons of Joseph. Furthermore, Hicks-Keeton connects the author's usage of kinship language, particularly mother language, to the use of mother-cities in Isaiah. She argues that "Aseneth is the mother-city who, patterned after Jerusalem's comfort to repentant and restored Israel, also provides refuge for repentant and re-created gentiles" (59).

[530] Thiessen ("Aseneth's Eight-Day Transformation," 247) argues that the author does not view Joseph's marriage to Aseneth as intermarriage.

The usage of enslaved language to describe Aseneth's marriage to Joseph occurs three times in the narrative. The first instance of these terms occurs immediately after Aseneth first sees Joseph and her heart "is cut" (Asen. 6:1). Joseph's beauty overwhelms Aseneth who later repents for speaking words against him. She beseeches the god of Joseph to be gracious toward her and declares "and now, let my father give me to Joseph as a maidservant and slave and I will serve him for all time" (Asen. 6:8).[531] The second instance occurs during Aseneth's third prayer. Here, Aseneth begs the Lord to "commit me to him as a maidservant and slave (παιδίσκην καὶ δούλην). And I will make his bed and wash his feet and serve him and be a slave for him (καὶ ἔσομαι αὐτῷ δούλη) and serve him for all time" (Asen. 13:15). The final occurrence happens near the end of the narrative after Joseph arrives and acknowledges Aseneth. She takes Joseph inside her house to wash his feet and to let him eat the meal that she has had prepared for him. When Aseneth attempts to wash Joseph's feet he stops her and tells her to have one of the other virgins complete the task. Aseneth insists she be the one to do it as "you are my lord from now on and I am your maidservant" (Asen. 20:4).

The Greek nouns δούλη and παιδίσκην, which typically denote a slave woman or maid, appear to be interchangeable and occur in several cases referring to women who are not slaves. For example, the author of Ruth uses δούλη in reference to Ruth when she speaks directly to Boaz and explains why she is on the threshing floor with him: "'I am Ruth, your servant (δούλη); spread your cloak over your servant (δούλην), for you are next-of-kin'" (Ruth 3:9).[532] Another example can be found in 1 Sam 25 where Abigail calls herself a servant (δούλη) when she first

[531] Καὶ νῦν δότω με ὁ πατήρ μου τῷ Ἰωσὴφ εἰς παιδίσκην καὶ εἰς δούλην καὶ δουλεύσω αὐτῷ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον (Asen. 6:8).

[532] See also its usage in Ruth 2:13.

meets David (1 Sam 25:27).[533] In particular, the example of Abigail parallels quite closely with what Aseneth tells Joseph in Asen. 20:4. Later in the narrative, Abigail tells David that she is his maid (παιδίσκην) "to wash the feet of your servants" (1 Sam 25:41).

From another perspective on slavery language, the usage of lordship language in the context of marriage is common in biblical literature. In the Hebrew Bible, the Hebrew words *baal* and *adon* are commonly used for husband (e.g. Gen 18:12; Deut 24:4; Isa 62:5).[534] In fact, Ken Stone points out that it is our English translations that hide the language of lordship; "husbands are 'lords' over their wives in the language used for biblical marriage."[535] Similarly, Ita Sheres argues that Aseneth, by claiming to be Joseph's servant, acknowledges and accepts his dominance over her.[536] Kraemer comes to a similar conclusion and argues that gender dynamics are clearly at play in Aseneth's portrayal as Joseph's servant. In the context of Aseneth's interaction with the angelic figure, Aseneth's desire to serve Joseph coincides with other narratives that portray humans as servants when interacting with divine figures. Kraemer concludes that "for a woman, then, the acquisition of wisdom appears to include recognition and acceptance of her subordinate status.[537] I concur with Kraemer's assessment. Despite all the ways in which the author of *Aseneth* portrays the female protagonist and Joseph as equals, there are still notes of gender dynamics which portray the married woman as subordinate to her husband.

[533] The example of Abigail in 1 Sam 25:27 may be an honorific title for a "submissive and respectful woman" as Muraoka (*A Greek-English Lexicon*, 177) suggests.

[534] These terms derive from Canaanite male deities and highlight the hierarchal status of husbands in the Hebrew Bible.

[535] Stone, "Marriage and Sexual Relations," 176.

[536] Ita Sheres, "Aseneth," 30, notes the use of sexual language throughout the narrative, surprisingly does not view the enslavement language in *Aseneth* as sexual.

[537] Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 196.

4.5 Conclusions

There are several commonalities in how the Jewish novels portray the female protagonists as part of a family. The female protagonists are frequently portrayed as both daughters and wives. Furthermore, several issues concerning the family feature prominently in the Jewish novels; mainly intermarriage, maintenance of kinship ties and the inheritance of land, adultery, and an ever-present concern over the possibility of an external threat to the family and, by extension, the Jewish people and Jewishness itself.

The female protagonists of the Jewish novels appear as daughters without exception. In fact, the authors introduce each protagonist in reference to their father; the author of *Judith* includes a genealogy and the author of *Esther* refers to her as part of her father's tribe. The novels share a similar view to some other literature of this period which viewed daughters as a constant source of concern. Unlike male offspring who would increase a family's sphere of influence by bringing money and further connections into the family through marriage, daughters represented the future flow of material wealth out from their father's family into their husband's family.[538] As such, daughters were both an economic and social liability. Daughters needed to be married off, a fact that was of little value to her own family, as women became the property of their husband's household. While we do not necessarily see major concern for the marriage of daughters, since many of the protagonists are already married, there are several concerns featured in the Jewish novels that were common concerns for fathers in the ancient world.

The maintenance of Jewishness through appropriate spouses is a major theme in the Jewish novels. While not every novel explicitly describes an opposition to intermarriage, it appears that underlying every narrative is an implicit concern for proper marriage within the protagonist's kinship group. Intermarriage, the act of marrying foreigners outside of one's own

[538] Russaw. *Daughters in the Hebrew Bible*. 32.

social group, was actively discouraged in both the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Ezra and Nehemiah) and later Jewish sources (e.g., Tobit) despite (or because of) the fact that intermarriage was likely a common practice.[539] A number of high profile characters in the Hebrew Bible married outside of their kinship group (e.g. Joseph and the Egyptian, Judah and the Canaanite, Moses and the Midianite).[540] The narrative of *Aseneth*, for example, specifically responds to this tension and addresses why and how Joseph married an Egyptian. Conversely, the narratives of *Judith* and *Susanna* also address this concern but do so by portraying ideal marriages; Judith is explicitly described as having married within her kinship group and Susanna remains loyal to her husband, a man who appears to be an appropriate spouse in the narrative. The situation found in the narrative of *Greek Esther* is quite different from the other narrative: Esther finds herself married to a foreigner. The author of *Greek Esther* seeks to resolve some of the issues the Hebrew narrative creates by including a prayer in which Esther bemoans her marriage to the foreign king and exclaims that she finds no pleasure in her life with him. Strongly connected to the concern over proper marriages is also a concern for maintaining land within the kinship group, at least in some narratives. This features prominently in *Judith*, but also occurs in *Aseneth*.

Another feature of the representation of the female protagonists in the Jewish novels is the lack of focus on motherhood. Despite the mention in *Susanna* of children, Susanna never appears as a mother. Furthermore, the authors of the other novels do not appear to be concerned that the portrayals of Esther, Judith, or Aseneth do not include aspects of motherhood – they do not have children. An exception occurs in *Aseneth*, where the female protagonist appears as a metaphorical mother: Aseneth is the walled mother-city who will protect those who seek refuge

[539] Many biblical figures intermarried or were associated with foreign women (e.g., David, Joseph). There are also several examples of historical rulers who also intermarried.

[540] See discussion in Helena Zlotnick, *Dinah's Daughters: Gender and Judaism from the Hebrew Bible to Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 50.

in the god of Joseph (Asen. 16:16). The lack of reference to motherhood in the Jewish novels is likely a result of the narratives' genre, although the authors give few clues to whether this feature of the text is due to the entertaining nature of the texts.

Adultery, while a broader issue within the concept of marriage, appears in connection to the role of mothers. A common concern regarding adultery centers specifically on the possibility of illegitimate offspring. In several biblical texts, children begotten outside of marriage, even a pregnancy not originating from one's husband, brought shame on the husband, his household, and the father of the child (and by extension his household).[541] Curiously, the one novel about a mother, *Susanna*, focuses on adultery.

Of all the portrayals envisioned in the Jewish novels, it is the portrayal of the protagonists as wives that the authors so clearly define. In a similar fashion to other literature from the same period, the authors portray wives are responsible for maintaining the household and presenting themselves in an attractive manner for their husbands.[542] The statement in *b. Shabb*. 118 on wives, "I have never called my wife my wife but always 'my house,'" summarizes the view of wives in the Jewish novels: women entered roles within the family context in which they were inferior to their husbands in social status, economic ability, and legal authority. Just as daughters typically had little agency in the texts of the ancient world, we also see the female protagonists struggle to exert real authority in the texts of the Jewish novels; the protagonists as portrayed as daughters and wives appear to have little agency in their textual worlds.[543] For all the power that the protagonists of the Jewish novels appear to exude, when examined carefully these characters

[541] Loader, *Making Sense of Sex*, 33.

[542] Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 78.

[543] Daughters had little agency or protection in the ancient world as Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 744 illustrates: "Hilarion to Alis his sister, heartiest greetings, and to my dear Berous and Apollonarion. Know that we are still even now in Alexandria. Do not worry if when all the others return, I remain in Alexandria. I beg and beseech of you to take care of the little child, and as soon as we receive wages, I will send them to you. *If (good luck to you!) you bear offspring, if it is a male, let it live; if it is a female, expose it.* You told Aphrodisias, 'Do not forget me.' How can I forget you? I beg you therefore not to worry. The 29th year of Caesar, Pauni 23."

still conform to the socially defined role of wife during the Hellenistic period. It is only with the removal of male characters, through widowhood, severing of family ties, kidnapping, or accusations of adultery, that the female protagonists exert some power.

Finally, the most pressing concern of the Jewish novels is the perceived threat from outsiders. Each of the authors portray female characters who are threatened by an outsider: Esther is kidnapped and forced to marry a foreigner; Judith risks being raped by Holofernes to seduce and kill him; Susanna is assaulted by the licentious elders of Babylon; Aseneth is faced with choosing between the gods of her family and her very kin, and the god of Joseph. I suggest that at the very heart of each of the Jewish novels is a concern that outside forces threaten the family.

CHAPTER 5: The Theme of Community in the Jewish Novels

In this chapter, I focus on how the authors portray the female protagonists as part of, separate from, and interacting with different "communities." The Jewish novels each present their own definitions of Jewish community. In particular, each novel presents a definition of the values, morals, and practices that define those within the Jewish community and also demarcates those outside of the community, along with the values, morals, and practices that distinguish outsiders. Furthermore, the Jewish novels portray the female protagonists as inextricably part of the Jewish community found in each text. And yet, just as each protagonist appears as part of this community, each is also, at least partially, envisioned as outsiders for reasons that result from the narratives themselves. I have divided the following analysis into two sections. I first outline how the authors envision the Jewish community in each text and then explore how the protagonist appears as a part of that community. My analysis explores how the protagonist functions within her fictional community and examines what that can tell us about how the authors of the Jewish novels use the female protagonists in each narrative.

5.1 Community in Greek Esther

Like the Hebrew version of Esther, which portrays a threatened Jewish[544] community in exile, the Greek version maintains this setting, but deepens the intensity of the threat against them by including apocalyptic language in Additions A (Add Esth 12:1–6) and F (Add Esth 10:4–11:1), as well as further outlining the condemnation of the Jewish people by including the

[544] The Greek noun Ἰουδαῖος (Jew/Jewish) is used throughout *Greek Esther* to identify Mordecai and the Jewish community living in Susa. Moreover, the Greek noun ἔθνος (nation) is also used at times to refer to the Jewish community as a whole (meaning those living outside of Susa as well). Refer to Mason, "Jews," for a thorough discussion on the interpretation of Ἰουδαῖος. See also John M. G. Barclay, "Ἰουδαῖος: Ethnicity and Translation," in *Ethnicity, Race, Religion: Identities and Ideologies in Early Jewish and Christian Texts, and in Modern Biblical Interpretation*, eds. Katherine M. Hockey and David G. Horrell (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 46–58. For a detailed discussion regarding the usage of the term *yᵉhûdî(m)* in the Hebrew narrative as an ethnic or religious designation, see Anne-Mareike Wetter, "How Jewish is Esther? Or: How is Esther Jewish? Tracing Ethnic and Religious Identity in a Diaspora Narrative," *ZAW* 123 (2011): 596–603.

supposed letter calling for their annihilation in B (Add Esth 13:1–7). While the Hebrew text portrays the Jewish people living in Susa as both exiled and threatened, it does not contain the condemning language or the stereotyping semantics, such as calling the Jews hostile, that appears in Addition B. Furthermore, the Greek version includes a counter to this stereotyping language in Addition E (Add Esth 16:1–24). Here, the author highlights the negative statements made against the Jewish community and counters them by celebrating the superiority of the Jewish people.

Addition A, which recounts Mordecai's dream, redefines the threat against the Jewish people as a cosmic struggle between the righteous nation and those nations poised to exterminate them (Add Esth 11:6–9).[545] The apocalyptic nature of Mordecai's dream has been noted by various scholars.[546] Verses five through ten of Addition A reimagine the struggle between the Jews and their enemy in apocalyptic terms: the dream foretells of great cosmic chaos (Add Esth 11:5) and a battle between two dragons (Add Esth 11:6) which represent Mordecai and Haman (Add Esth 10:7).[547] Most importantly for this study, unlike the Hebrew version, the Greek version views the entire non-Jewish world as prepared to fight against the Jews.[548] The usage of the term "righteous nation" (δικαίων ἔθνος) is used in stark contrast to the "nations" (πᾶν ἔθνος)

[545] I am convinced that the Greek version presents a far more reaching understanding of the events that take place in the narrative of Esther. I point to Addition F and its interpretation of Mordecai's dream as an example. Addition F appears to present the "lots" for which Purim gets its name as symbols of Israel's destiny over and against the destiny of the nations: God made two lots: "one for the people of God and one for all the nations;" God "vindicated his inheritance" and chose the lot of the people of God (Add Esth 10:10–13).

[546] For example, see Moore, *Daniel, Esther, and Jeremiah*, 181; Carol M. Bechtel, *Esther*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2002), 90; Jonathan A. Thambyrajah, "Mordecai's Dream in Esther – The Greek and Latin Versions, Character, and the Tradition of Interpretation," *JSOT* 43 (2019): 482–83. Thambyrajah notes the numerous parallels between Mordecai in the Greek versions of Esther and the characters of Joseph and Daniel. He particularly notes the apocalyptic parallels between these characters and the books in general; Adele Reinhartz, "Esther (Greek)," in *The Apocrypha*, ed. Martin Goodman, The Oxford Bible Commentary (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 37–38.

[547] The use of cosmic chaos also features prominently in Isa 24:17–20 and Dan 12:1, 4. See also Dan 7 and Rev 12:3; 13:2; 20:2 for similar examples of battle scenes in other apocalyptic literature.

[548] Clines (*The Esther Scroll*, 171–172) argues that *Greek Esther* widens the scope of the opposing forces to be between Israel and the rest of humanity.

who threaten the Jews with "evils" (Add Esth 11:7, 9). This contrast will become more pronounced when I examine the language used against the Jews in Addition E below.

The Greek version further develops the threat against the Jewish people by including the decree of extermination in Addition E which uses language that characterizes the Jewish people in a negative light. The letter places the Jewish people in direct opposition to the stability of the Persian Empire. The letter portrays a king who actively seeks peace and tranquility in his kingdom. For example, the author portrays Artaxerxes as a "conqueror of all the inhabited earth" who acts "with gentleness… to bring about continuous calm [upon] his subjects" (Add Esth 13:2). Meanwhile, the edict portrays the Jews as a villainous group of people who prevent the king from attaining peace. In particular, the Jews are singled out as "this people (τὸ ἔθνος) stands alone in opposition to all of humankind, following a strange way of life and laws, and is ill-disposed to our affairs, causing harm so that our kingdom may not attain stability" (Add Esth 13:5).[549] As Adele Reinhartz notes, the accusations made in Haman's decree likely sounded familiar to the audience of *Greek Esther*, particularly the complaint directed toward the Jews and their strange lifestyle.[550] This accusation seems to lie at the heart of the struggle between the fictional Jewish community and their enemies in *Greek Esther*, because the accusation returns in the edict dictated by Mordecai in Addition E. The edict exonerating the Jews states that the

[549] The edict in Addition B has been compared to other edicts found in literature and historical evidence. For example, Clines (*The Esther Scroll*, 173) notes the similarities between the letter to King Artaxerxes in Ezra 4:11–16 and Addition B. Meanwhile, Moore (*Daniel, Esther, and Jeremiah*, 199) argues that the closest comparison between the edict in *Greek Esther* is Ezra 4:17–22 which contains a reply to the letter send to King Artaxerxes by the Samaritans. Moreover, Moore compares Addition B to a letter written by Ptolemy Philopator in 3 Macc 12–29 (ibid., 159). It should also be noted that despite these similarities, it is only in Addition B that we find specific language singling out the Jews on the basis of their way of life.

[550] Adele Reinhartz, "Esther (Greek)," 40, notes the similarities between the accusations expressed in Haman's decree and those expressed by other Greco-Roman writers such as Diodorus. For more information, see the various perspectives in Menahem Stern ed., *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism, Volume 1: From Herodotus to Plutarch* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974).

empire "finds [that] the Jews not criminals/evildoers, but conduct themselves by righteous laws" (Add Esth 16:15).

Mordecai's position within both the Jewish and Persian communities of Susa contradicts the edict's portrayal of a despised people. The situation of the Jews presented in the edict stands in contrast to the situation of the Jews as it appears in the character of Mordecai. Addition A states that Mordecai was serving in the king's court (Add Esth 11:2) and later states that the king ordered him to serve in the court after he uncovered an assassination attempt and warned the king (Add Esth 12:2-5).[551] It appears that Mordecai ranked somewhat highly, at least in the Greek version, within the court of the king. For instance, the Greek version states that Mordecai was serving in the courtyard (ἐθεράπευεν ἐν τῇ αὐλῇ, Add Esth 2:19), whereas the Hebrew version simply states that he "was sitting at the king's gate" (ישב בשער־המלך, Est 2:19) when he uncovers the second plot to assassinate the king. Furthermore, the author portrays Mordecai as having a prominent position within the Jewish community in Susa and possibly elsewhere. First, after Mordecai informs Esther about Haman's edict and convinces her to confront the king, Esther instructs Mordecai to gather all the Jews in Susa and have them fast on her behalf (Add Esth 4:16). Such an instruction would require a certain social standing to complete, and the text tells us that Mordecai was successful in coordinating the fast (Add Esth 4:17) Mordecai's authority within the Jewish community becomes evident in the final chapters of the narrative. Mordecai not only personally records what had occurred and sends his record to all the Jews in the kingdom (Add Esth 9:20), but the Jews also accept this record and adopt the festival of Purim

[551] See Reinhartz, "Esther (Greek)," 38, for a discussion regarding the multiple references to Mordecai's position.

as established by Mordecai (Add Esth 9:23).[552] Mordecai's character, therefore, presents readers with a Jewish figure that thrives within the confines of a foreign setting.

Greek Esther portrays a thriving Mordecai and a threatened Jewish community living in exile in a foreign land.[553] Mordecai's character portrays the possibility of upward mobility and potential prosperity all while within a foreign system, but the condemnation of the Jewish people, which revolves around their practices as made explicit in Addition B, places limits on their potential prosperity. From a community perspective, *Greek Esther* contends that a Jewish community could thrive under foreign rule, even in a foreign land, if allowed to maintain their ancestral practices and permitted "to use (or employ) their own laws" (Add Esth 16:19).[554]

5.1.1 Esther's Relationship to the Jews of Susa: The Convenient Jew

Esther's relationship to the Jewish community of Susa and beyond is not as explicit as Mordecai's. Anne-Mareike Wetter notes that the MT portrays Esther with little to no connection to the Jewish community. For example, the authors do not refer to Esther as יהודית in the Hebrew or Ἰουδαία in the Greek. As such, "her link with her >>homeland<< is very distant at best."[555] Furthermore, the author portrays her with no direct connections to the Jewish community beyond her relationship to Mordecai. Jan Willem van Henten observes that the author includes no genealogy for Esther, but does so for Mordecai (Add Esth 2:5). Furthermore, in the introduction

[552] The Greek version of Mordecai's record omits any mention of Esther and her role in stopping Haman's edict (cf. Est and Add Esth 9:24–25). See also Joshua Joel Spoelstra, "Mordecai's Royal Vestments: Princely and/or Priestly?," *OTE* 32 (2019): 174–196. Spoelstra examines the use of clothing, specifically Mordecai's regalia in Est 8:15, and notes Mordecai's authority in the text is many times denoted by his dress.

[553] Itumeleng J. Mosala, "The Implications of the Text of Esther for African Women's Struggle for Liberation in South Africa," *Semeia* 59 (1992), 134, correctly notes that MT Ester is silent "on the conditions and struggles of the non-kings, non-office holders, non-chiefs, non-governors and non-queens in the Persian empire." This insight holds true in the Greek version as well. There is no data provided on non-elite persons anywhere in the narrative. As such, it is impossible to make broad conclusions regarding the Jewish community in this narrative.

[554] Similarily, Ayelet Seidler, "Jewish Identity on Trial: The Case of Mordecai the Jew," *JHebS* 17 (2017): 3, argues that "the Book of Esther in fact perceives the phenomenon of assimilation within a foreign society as a danger to Jewish existence in exile and suggests a way to achieve a balance between maintaining Jewish identity and integrating into the non-Jewish environment."

[555] Wetter, "How Jewish is Esther?," 598.

Esther appears as "the daughter of Aminadab" (Add Esth 2:7), a name that means "the brother of my father is generous."[556] As such, Esther's introduction only occurs in connection with Mordecai. While Esther's only link to the Jewish community is through Mordecai, the inclusion of Addition C in the Greek text directly links Esther to her people.[557] In Addition C, Esther self-identifies herself with the Jewish people who face extermination: Esther pleads with her god to "rescue us from the hand of the evil ones" (Add Esth 14:19). Despite this self-identifying link, the text does place distance between Esther and the Jewish community. Esther is a Jew by birth and heritage, but she falls outside of the boundaries of the Jewish community when she marries Artaxerxes.

Despite her lack of direct connection to the Jewish community, the author clearly identifies Esther as a Jew, although not as explicitly as Mordecai.[558] The language of *Greek Esther* includes Esther as part of the Jewish community. When Mordecai urges Esther to confront the king, he refers to her as part of the threatened Jewish community. He urges Esther to remember the time when she was with him, and presumably living as part of the Jewish community, and argues that Haman "has spoken against *us* in regards to [our] death…speak to the king about *us* and save *us* from death" (Add Esth 4:8). Furthermore, Mordecai confronts Esther and wonders if she thinks that she "alone in the kingdom out of all the Jews will escape from harm" (Add Esth 4:13). Esther continues this group language in both her prayer and appeal

[556] Henten, "Judith as a Female Moses," 35.

[557] A variety of approaches have been used to interpret Esther's prayer. See for example the grammatical-historical analysis in J. A. F. Gregg, "Additions to Esther," in *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament 1*, ed. R. H. Charles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1913), 665–684; W. J. Fuerst, "The Rest of the Chapters of the Book of Esther," in *The Shorter Books of the Apocrypha: Tobit, Judith, Rest of Esther, Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Additions to Daniel, and Prayer of Manasseh*, ed. J. C. Dancy, The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 132–168; and Carey A. Moore, "Additions to Esther," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* 2, ed. D. N. Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 626–633, who use a historical-theological approach; Harrington, *Invitation to the Apocrypha*, who uses a theological-thematic approach to the theme of the Jewish people's suffering; Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 202–205, adapts a historical-literary approach; and DeSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha*, 110–126, who combines a social-scientific with a social-rhetorical approach.

[558] See Est 11:3; 2:5; 9:29. Also see Wetter, "How Jewish is Esther?," 598–599.

to the king. In her prayer, Esther beseeches her god to stop Haman, the man "who is waging war against *us*" (τοῦ πολεμοῦντος ἡμᾶς, Add Esth 14:13), and "to make an example of the one who began [this] against *us*" (δὲ ἀρξάμενον ἐφ᾽ ἡμᾶς παραδειγμάτισον, Add Esth 14:11). She also asks her god to "save *us*" twice in the prayer (ἡμᾶς δὲ ῥῦσαι; καὶ ῥῦσαι ἡμᾶς, Add Esth 14:14, 19). Her appeal to the Artaxerxes echoes this language. Esther asks the king to "give me my life, [this is] my petition, and *my people* (ὁ λαός μου), [this is] my request. For *we* have been sold, *I and my people*, (ἐπράθημεν γὰρ ἐγώ τε καὶ ὁ λαός μου) into destruction, an object of plunder, and slavery" (Add Esth 7:3–4). The author portrays Esther as part of the Jewish community and the character self identifies as part of that community.

Although the author portrays Esther as part of the Jewish identity, the text also betrays a distancing between Esther and that community. Differences in the description of Mordecai and Esther after she averts the crisis best illustrate the distancing of Esther from the Jewish community. The text describes Mordecai as "not only *our* [the Jewish community's] savior but also [our] perpetual benefactor" (τόν τε ἡμέτερον σωτῆρα καὶ διὰ παντὸς εὐεργέτην), while the author calls Esther "the faultless royal consort of the kingdom" (καὶ τὴν ἄμεμπτον τῆς βασιλείας κοινωνὸν Εσθηρ, Add Esth 16:13). The author clearly connects Mordecai to the Jewish community while connecting Esther to the kingdom. Additionally, Esther's Jewishness appears most frequently in places that are useful for the plot of the narrative. For example, Mordecai reminds Esther of her Jewish ties when she can use her position to intervene on behalf of her people (Add Esth 4:13–14). Otherwise, the author aligns Esther with the king and the kingdom.

Esther's distance from her community is a direct result of her marriage to the king, a marriage that occurs outside of that community. Esther's tenuous link to the Jewish people originates in her forced joining of the king's palace, which most translations understand as the

royal harem. Elna K. Solvang convincingly argues against equating "the house of the women" (בית הנשים, Est 2:3, 9, 11, 13, 14) with a harem and contends that what we find in MT Esther is not a harem but a western stereotype of an eastern royal court. The author's insistence on Esther's passiveness, the lack of female authority within the supposed harem itself, and a general lack of concern for sexual boundaries, are features in the text that point to the author's biased understanding of eastern royal hierarchy, as these features would have been unthinkable in a realistic eastern harem.[559] Royal women in Near Eastern cultures, even those mentioned in other biblical literature within the context of the harem, show tremendous authority and power in political and religious matters.[560] In reality, the harem was a complex social and political structure fully supervised by women within the hierarchy of the harem itself.[561] Women created social networks within these structures, as well as political alliances, which allowed some women to wield a great deal of power in predominantly patriarchal societies.[562] What we find instead in the narrative of *Greek Esther* is an "elaborate, male only bureaucracy" that dictates the actions of those chosen to join the royal house for the sexual enjoyment of the king.[563] Esther is gathered to "the house of the women" and used alongside other young girls to please the king without any regard for her background or ability to rule. There is also no mention of any training of Esther for her position as queen; the only preparation she receives is the beautification process prior to her night with the king.

While I agree with Solvang that what we have in *Greek Esther* is a misconstrued construction of the royal structure of an eastern society, the use of harem language in the Greek

[559] Solvang, "The First Orientalist?," 199–213.
[560] See Cushman, "The Politics of the Royal Harem," 327–343.
[561] Solvang, "The First Orientalist?," 206.
[562] An excellent monograph on the subject of women's authority, particularly their use of harem politics and the forming of alliances can be found in Kara Cooney, *When Women Ruled the World: Six Queens of Egypt* (Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2018). See also Cushman, "The Politics of the Royal Harem," 329–330.
[563] Solvang, "The First Orientalist?," 209.

version has further implications for understanding the portrayal of Esther in terms of her community. Beverly W. Cushman has noted that ancient Near Eastern sacral kingship ideology viewed the "entire social order," including the harem, "as an extension of the ruler's household – and ultimately of the god's household."[564] The king and his household were viewed as sacred; the king had been chosen by their respective deity to rule and, as a result, everything around the king was understood to be sacred and "set aside for the use of the deity."[565] When *Greek Esther* is read in the context of sacral kingship ideology, the portrayal of Esther includes her removal from the Jewish community and subsequent addition to the royal household in which she would have been seen as falling under the purview of a system of another god. As such, it is not difficult to see why Esther is not directly linked to the Jewish community and instead seen as "the faultless royal consort of the kingdom" (καὶ τὴν ἄμεμπτον τῆς βασιλείας κοινωνὸν, Add Esth 16:13). In fact, Addition C appears to illustrate this dichotomy in the prayers of Mordecai and Esther. Mordecai, portrayed by the author as the ever-loyal Jew, does not apologize for initiating the possible eradication of his people when he refused to worship anyone other than his god (Add Esth 13:8–17). Instead, his prayer focuses on his god's promise to his inheritance. Meanwhile, the author portrays Esther as an outsider who must reestablish her ties to the community. She reaffirms her loyalty to her god ("you alone are our king," βασιλεὺς ἡμῶν σὺ εἶ μόνος, Add Esth 14:3), mentions that Israel was handed over to its enemies for worshiping other gods (Add Esth 14:6–7), and reminds readers that she has unwilfully joined the king's household and partaken in daily life there with no pleasure (Add Esth 14:15–18).

Consequently, Esther's character walks a fine line between remaining connected to the Jewish community and existing outside of it. While Esther appears as a Jew by birth and by

[564] Cushman, "The Politics of the Royal Harem," 329.
[565] Ibid., 329.

practice, she also falls outside of that community due to her marriage to Artaxerxes and her position as (foreign) queen. Furthermore, the Greek version includes several additions that grapple with the complexity of Esther's situation, particularly Addition C. The author portrays Esther as having ties to the Jewish community, but shares no direct connection to that community. Although Esther risks her life to save her people, in the end the Greek author views Esther as the partner to the king.

5.2 Community in Judith

The fictional Jewish community portrayed in the narrative of *Judith* lives in Bethulia, one of many Israelite communities located in Judea during the Assyrian campaign.[566] This fictional community finds itself directly threatened by the Assyrian army as it attempts to sweep into Judea. The threat extends not only to the community of Bethulia, but to all of Israel. In this way, the author connects the community of Bethulia, as well as the character of Judith, to the larger community of Israel with its center in Jerusalem.

Bethulia and its inhabitants are part of a larger Israelite community centered in Jerusalem and headed by the high priest Joakim and the senate of the people of Israel.[567] When word first reaches the officials in Jerusalem that Nebuchadnezzar and Holofernes had set their sights on Judea, Joakim not only notifies Bethulia and the surrounding area to prepare for war but he also places the entire nation into a state of mourning (Jdt 4:1–12). Bethulia sits on the front lines of

[566] The author of *Judith* typically describes the Jewish community as "the sons of Israel" (οἱ υἱοὶ Ισραηλ, e.g., Jdt 4:8; 5:1; 6:14; 7:4; 15:7) or in more generic terms that specifically refer to the "people of Israel" (e.g., 5:23; 6:17; 7:17).

[567] There are many anachronisms and historical, as well as geographical, inaccuracies in *Judith*. For example, the reference to the senate is anachronistic as it is a later development during the Hellenistic period. These problems in the narrative are widely known and the topic of a considerable research. See for example, Craven, *Artistry and Faith in the Book of Judith*, 65–74; Gruen, *Diaspora*, 162–64; Moore, *Judith*, 58 n. 33; Otzen, *Tobit and Judith*, 81–90; Wills, *Jewish Novel*, 134–35. While some scholars attempt to explain the numerous inaccuracies, such as Craven who argues that the inaccuracies result from the author's use of art, there is no scholarly consensus on the matter.

the invasion of Judea and is a strategic location to stop the invasion – the Assyrian army will need to go through the mountain pass located near Bethulia (Jdt 4:6–7).[568] Prior to the attack, Bethulia seems to be a capable town; the inhabitants capture the mountain pass before Holofernes' army arrives (Jdt 6:10–14) and they stand ready to fight (Jdt 7:1–5).

A small group of men who function as officials of the town embody the voice of the community of Bethulia.[569] The author names three men in particular: "Uzziah son of Micah, from the tribe of Simeon, and Chabris son of Gothoniel, and Charmis son of Melchiel" (Jdt 6:15). These magistrates function as the decision makers for the community, specifically taking into consideration community needs and wishes. When the Assyrian army captures Bethulia's water supply (Jdt 7:17), the situation turns dire and their courage fails when people start collapsing in the streets from thirst (Jdt 7:19–22). The people of Bethulia urge Uzziah and the leaders to surrender to the Assyrians (Jdt 7:23–28). Meanwhile, Uzziah urges the community to hold out for five more days and dismisses the people (Jdt 7:30–32).

Therefore, the author of *Judith* portrays a community under threat. Unlike *Greek Esther* though, the narrative does not contain antisemitic language. Specifically, we do not find the same language that singles out the Jewish people for their practices. Instead, the first seven chapters of *Judith* present an Assyrian army and leader that overestimate their own capabilities and strength. For example, even after Achior the leader of the Ammonites warns Holofernes about the strength and power of the Israelites (Jdt 5:5–21), Holofernes confidently declares that "their God will not save them" (Jdt 6:2). The identity markers that we so readily associate with early Judaism never

[568] While no evidence of an actual location named Bethulia can corroborate the author of *Judith*, such as setting as well as the postexilic threat may provide clues to the dating and location of the text. See the detailed discussion regarding the possible connection between the fictional setting and the dating of the text in Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 101. See also, Yehoshua M. Grintz, *Sefer Yehudith: A Reconstruction of the Original Hebrew Text with Introduction, Commentary, Appendices and Indices* (Jerusalem, The Bialik Institute, 1957), 132–135, who suggests that *Judith* was written in Samaria.

[569] The author names no other community members except Judith.

appears as part of the reason the Assyrian army attempts to quash the Israelites. In fact, the entire conflict stems from the Israelites' failure to join Nebuchadnezzar in his war against King Arphaxad (Jdt 1:5–12). The author sets up the work to juxtapose the confidence of the Assyrian army and the faithlessness of the people of Bethulia.[570] As such, the author introduces Judith in this context.

5.2.1 Judith's Relationship to the People of Bethulia: A Leader and an Outsider

Judith's relationship to her community is complex. The author portrays a female protagonist who is both integral to her community and separate from it; Judith is a community leader and authority figure. She commands the male officials of Bethulia, leads a successful expedition to assassinate Holofernes, and then plans and instructs the community on military matters. Despite these details, Judith appears separate from her community; she lives by herself, she does not associate herself with other members of the community nor does she share their dire situation at the beginning of the narrative, and she takes matters into her own hands to defeat the enemy.

Judith's introduction outlines her separateness from her community by characterizing her with details that set her apart and portray her as other.[571] When the author introduces Judith in chapter eight, they explain that Judith remained at home fasting in her roof-top tent after the death of her husband (Jdt 8:4). Levine notes that "the detailed description of Judith's mourning"

[570] The theme of overconfidence and Persian power in *Judith* is directly connected to the author's use of irony. Nebuchadnezzar's inability to grasp the seriousness of the situation he finds himself in is what Moore (*Judith*, 78–85) has called dramatic irony – where the audience perceives the incongruity in the story when at least one of the characters cannot. See also Claudia Rakel, *Judit-Über Schönheit, Macht und Widerstand im Krieg: Eine feministisch-intertextuelle Lektüre*, BZAW (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 57–58; and Philip F. Esler, *Sex, Wives, and Warriors: Reading Old Testament Narrative with Its Ancient Audience* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2011), 292–294.

[571] See Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Bantam, 1961), xvi. In her landmark work, Beauvoir argues that woman is "reference to man and not he with reference to her…she is the Other." See also James G. Williams, *Women Recounted. Narrative Thinking and the God of Israel* (Sheffield: Almond, 1982), who notes that the narratives of the Hebrew Bible view the "other" as alien and threatening.

practices stress her otherness.[572] While fasting and seclusion were a typical response to the death of a spouse, Judith's commitment to these practices extends well beyond what was expected of a widow.[573] The irregular length of Judith's seclusion suggests that it was not a result of her widowhood, but instead a sign of her piety and closeness to her god. [574] Wetter explores the ritualistic aspects of Judith's actions and argues that her lifestyle allows her to "speak with authority about God's purposes with Israel" by removing "herself from the mundane concerns occupying the rest of the people" and maintaining close contact with her god.[575] This separation from community life and association with her god is highlighted throughout the text. Levine also notes that not only do Judith's practices completely remove her from the Bethulian community, but the text consistently portrays incompetent men so that the only "fit male companion for Judith is the deity."[576]

The author furthermore separates Judith from the community of Bethulia when they describe her reaction to the crisis. First, the text implies that Judith did not attend the assembly where the people of Bethulia addressed Uzziah and that she only later heard what happened

[572] Levine, "Sacrifice and Salvation," 213. Levine also notes that Judith is "spatially superior to the rest of Bethulia… she is in a tent and is, additionally, either unaware of or unconcerned with the danger below" (Ibid., 215).

[573] See chapters two and three above. I will not go into detail here as I have covered these topics previously. Previous scholarship notes the unusual length of Judith's mourning period following the death of her husband. For instance, M. S. Enslin, *The Book of Judith* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 111, claims that Judith's mourning period continues to connect her to her husband as it "heighten[s] the picture of her loyalty and devotion" to Manasseh.

[574] Purity, piety, and ritual are important themes throughout the narrative of Judith. I have previously presented on this subject; Fitzgerald, "Judith and the Health Crisis in Bethulia: An Examination of Ritual in Judith 9–10," presented at ISBL 2022, Salzburg, Austria. See also Otzen, *Tobit and Judith*, 104–5; Anne-Mareike Wetter, "Sacrificing Judith," in *Sacrifice in Modernity: Community, Ritual, Identity: From Nationalism and Nonviolence to Health Care and Harry Potter*, eds. Joachim Duyndam, Anne-Marie Korte, and Marcel Poorthuis (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 205; Joseph Scales, "Preparing for Military Action: Judith's Purificatory Washing in Judith 12:7," *VT* 71 (2021): 687–703; Wills, *Judith*, 300.

[575] Wetter, "Sacrificing Judith," 205. Wetter more succinctly states the gravity of Judith's separateness: "after all, her [Judith's] spatial removal from the rest of the community (Jth. 8:5; 16:21) and her refusal to enter a new marriage (16:22) underline how far-removed Judith is from the mundane reality surrounding her" (215).

[576] Levine, "Character Construction," 565, explains, "Manasseh dies ignominiously; Holofernes is inept; Bagoas is a eunuch; Achior faints at the sight of Holofernes's head. Uzziah, who shares Judith's ethnicity and elevated social status and who, because he is descended from Simeon, might even be able to claim levirate privileges, is the biggest disappointment."

during the assembly (Jdt 8:1, 9). Judith's need to send her enslaved maid to fetch Uzziah and the other officials after learning what they promised the people supports the notion that Judith did not attend the assembly (Jdt 8:10). The second way in which the author portrays Judith as separate from the community is her portrayal within the context of the crisis in Bethulia. The crisis does not affect Judith, at least not in the same way as the people of Bethulia. As Wetter also notes, the author portrays Judith as either oblivious or unconcerned about the people's distress; she only reacts to rebuke the elders when they negotiate surrender with the people of Bethulia.[577] Judith's actions also do not align with the situation found in the text. Even though the Assyrians captured the water supply resulting in the Bethulians wasting away in the streets, Judith appears to be unaffected and even bathes in water (Jdt 10:3).[578] Levine further underscores Judith's separateness from her community, noting how she "is marked as other by her wealth, beauty, and religiosity…she distributes neither her wealth nor her water."[579] In fact, the author outlines her material wealth in the description of Judith's preparation (Jdt 10:3–4). Judith also does not share the situation in which her fellow Bethulians find themselves; she is wealthy to the point that she could help alleviate their distress, but instead she chooses to direct that material wealth toward defeating the enemy.

Although the author portrays Judith as the other in some parts of the narrative, they also portray her as having authority over the elders in a way that makes her integral to her community.[580] Several characters act at the instruction of Judith. For example, her unnamed maid

[577] Wetter, "Sacrificing Judith," 205.

[578] Bathing is a common theme in *Judith* and denotes a ritualistic aspect to the character of Judith. See Scales, "Preparing for Military Action," 687–703, who explores ritual bathing in *Judith,* particularly once she enters Holofernes' camp. See also Wetter, "Sacrificing Judith," who also explores the many ritualistic elements in *Judith*.

[579] Levine, "Character Construction," 565.

[580] The authority of *Judith* remains a debated feature of the text. In his First Epistle to the Corinthians, Clement of Rome argues that Judith does not simply act, but asks permission from the elders before leaving the city (1 Clem. 55:4–5). Conversely, some scholarship recognizes Judith's authority in the narrative. For example, Craven,

summons the city officials named Uzziah, Chabris, and Charmis (Jdt 8:10).[581] In this instance, the author portrays Judith as someone who wields a great deal of power in her community, as she is not only able to summon the elders in the way that she does, but that they also comply (Jdt 8:11). Uzziah and the elders never recognize Judith's authority, but they do point out her wisdom and understanding (Jdt 8:28–29), possibly alluding to personified wisdom as it appears in Proverbs.[582] Judith then tells the elders to meet her at the gate so that she may leave (Jdt 8:33). Uzziah, Chabris, and Charmis wait for her at the gate and comply with Judith's demands; Judith instructs them to "command them to open the gate of the city for me and I will go out to fulfill the things about which you have spoken with me" (Jdt 10:9). The elders instruct the young men at the gate to open them for Judith (Jdt 10:10).[583] Finally, Judith's authority again becomes apparent in the narrative when she returns with Holofernes' head. This woman, who we can

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Artistry and Faith in the Book of Judith, 91, notes that Judith summons the Bethulian officials and devises a plan (Jdt 8:10) in a similar manner to how Holofernes summons his officers and devises a plan (Jdt 2:2).

[581] Glancy, "Judith the Slaveholder," 210, notes that Judith sends her maid into a public space and essentially forces her to navigate that space without any of the protections afforded to privileged women such as Judith. See also Jennifer A. Glancy, *Corporal Knowledge: Early Christian Bodies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 24–47, for a discussion regarding corporal punishment and its consequences in the Greco-Roman world.

[582] See Prov 6. See also Williams, *Women Recounted*, 78, who observes how Judith "captivates Holofernes and the Assyrians in a fashion reminiscent of the wisdom tradition's warnings against… the 'alien woman' (Prov 6.24–25; Sir 9.8-9; 25.21)." The connection to personified wisdom then is not accidental.

[583] The inclusion of gates around the town of Bethulia suggests that Bethulia is a city, despite its clear description as a mountain village. See Wills, *Judith*, 309, who argues that "a mountain village would not have gates to speak of-yards and sheepholds might have small wooden gates to restrain animals, but no city gates." Craven (*Artistry and Faith in the Book of Judith*, 62–63) suggests that the theme of "opening gates" forms an *inclusio*. As such, there is a narrative importance to Judith's going through and coming back through the gate (Jdt 10:9–10; 13:11). Moreover, Wills (*Judith*, 310) takes note of the connection between Judith's call to open the gate and a similar call to go out to battle found in the Divine Warrior myth found in numerous texts (e.g., Exo 15; Deut 33; Judg 5; 2 Sam 22; Isa 24; 42; 51; 60; 64; Eze 38–39; Hab 3:3–6; Zec 9; Job 38; Ps 29, 46, 48, 68, 77, 89, 99, 104, 114, 148; 1 En 1:3–8; 102:1–3; Jub 31:18–20; Sir 43:9–26; Wis 5:17–23; 4 Ezra 11; 13; Ps.-Philo, *Biblical Antiquities* 11; 2 Bar 59:2–3; T. Levi 18:2–4). See Deborah Scoggins Ballentine, *The Conflict Myth and the Biblical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), for more information regarding the theme of the Divine Warrior.

safely assume has no prior military experience, directs the military strategy of Israel by telling the Bethulians to display Holofernes' head on the parapet (Jdt 14:1–4).[584]

A variety of suggestions attempt to explain the author's portrayal of Judith as an authority figure. Numerous scholars have noted the similarities between Judith's character and other notable biblical figures such as Jael, Deborah, and even Moses.[585] Philip Esler, for example, has noted numerous characteristics that connect Judith's character to the figure of David in the Goliath narrative (1 Sam 17).[586] The character of Judith does share qualities with many biblical heroes and heroines, similarities that cannot be mere coincidence, but I would like to provide a more nuanced understanding of the figure of Judith. She is not simply another exemplary figure or another hero in the history of Israel. Moreover, the author does not portray Judith as an official in the narrative; she is not an authoritative figure on par with the men around her. Instead, her authority appears humorous at some points, as if she belongs in another realm than everyone else in the narrative. How should we then understand this character?

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[584] Numerous scholars have covered the author's use of military terminology and concepts. See for example, Mathias Delcor, "Le livre de Judith et l'époque grecque," *Klio* 49 (1967), 153–163; Irmtraud Fischer and Bernd Obermayer, "Die Kriegstheologie des Judit-buches als Kondensat alttestamentlicher Sichweisen des Krieges," in *Juda und Jerusalem in der Seleukidenzeit: Herrschaft – Widerstand – Identität, Festschrift für Heinz-Josef Fabry*, eds. Ulrich Dahmen and Johannes Schnocks, BBB 159 (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2010), 227–42; Marie-Françoise Baslez, "Polémologie et histoire dans le livre de Judith," *RB* 111 (2004): 362–76.

[585] See the discussion in Gera, *Judith*, 48–52. Scholarship most frequently compares Judith to the figures of Deborah and Jael. See, for example, Jo Ann Hackett, "In the Days of Jael: Reclaiming the History of Women in Ancient Israel," in *Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality*, eds. Clarissa W. Atkinson, Constance H. Buchanan, and Margaret R. Miles (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 15–38; White Crawford, "In the Steps of Jael"; Susan Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen* (New York: Doubleday, 1998); Tikva Frymer Kensky, *Reading the Women of the Bible* (New York: Schocken Books, 2002), 45–57; Yael Shemesh, "'Yet he committed no act of sin with me, to defile and shame me' (Judith 13:16): The Narrative of Judith as a Corrective to the Narrative of Yael and Sisera," *Shnaton: An Annual For Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 16 (2006): 159–177. Likewise, others have argued that Judith represents an amalgamation of various female figures. See for example André Lacocque, *The Feminine Unconventional: Four Subversive Figures in Israel's Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 35; Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal in Biblical Narrative*; Jeremy Corley, "Judith: An Unconventional Heroine," *ScrB* 31 (2001):70–85; Sidnie White Crawford, "Esther and Judith: Contrasts in Character," in *The Book of Esther in Modern Research*, eds. Sidnie White Crawford and Leonard J. Greenspoon (London: T&T Clark International, 2003), 61–76; Rakel, *Judit-Über Schönheit*. For the similarities between Judith and Moses, see Henten, "Judith as a Female Moses."

[586] Philip F. Esler, *Sex, Wives, and Warriors: Reading Old Testament Narrative with Its Ancient Audience* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2011), 261, 274–285.

While I have outlined Judith's separation from her Bethulian community above, there is another community, that of the Jewish nation, to which Judith has traditionally been associated. The generic name given to Judith, Ιουδιθ or "Jewess," and her status as a widow have led many to view Judith as another classical metaphor for the Jewish nation.[587] For example, L. Alonso-Schökel connects Judith to the Jewish nation through her widowhood because, as such, she can better represent the people's affliction. Furthermore, "as a weak woman lacking the support of her husband, she can show and reveal better the force of God."[588] While this metaphor works to a certain degree, Levine has persuasively argued that it begins to breakdown when Judith's portrayal is carefully compared to that of the "traditional representation of Israel as a women *[sic]* in mourning."[589] Her status, wealth, and ability to act hardly fit the traditional view of a widow needing protection. In this way too, Judith's character falls into a category all its own; Judith is both a part of and separate from her community and her nation. Although she plays the part of the mourning widow, she does not represent in totality corporate Israel or Jewish women in general.

In her influential work on *Judith*, Toni Craven makes some key insights into the character of Judith. She explains:

> The characterization of Judith as a woman of great faith assumes special prominence in the context of the entire book. She differs from all the other characters, not only by virtue of her sex, but also by virtue of the quality of her

[587] Grillo, "'You Will Forget Your Ancient Shame,'" 10, argues that her name "marks her out as a representative of her people." See also Levine, "'Hemmed in on Every Side,'" 311, 319; ibid., "Sacrifice and Salvation," 17–30; Reinhartz, "Better Homes and Gardens,", 335–6; Nancy Tan, "Judith's Embodiment as a Reversal of the Unfaithful Wife of YHWH in Ezekiel 16," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 21 (2011): 21–35.

[588] Luis Alonso-Schökel, *Narrative Structures in the Book of Judith: Protocol of the Eleventh Colloquy, 17 March 1974*, Protocol Series of the Colloquies of the Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture 11 (Berkeley: The Center, 1974), 14–15. See also Craven, *Artistry and Faith in the Book of Judith*, 85. Craven outlines the common association between Judith as a holy widow and the Jewish people.

[589] Levine, "Character Construction," 563. Levine notes that not only is Judith separate from her community and therefore cannot represent Jewish women in general, she also assumes the "role of protector-avenger associated with her ancestor," an active role that was not associated with women.

> life. Unlike the Assyrians she does not threaten; unlike the Israelites she does not pray piously and then give up. She does not manipulate or imprison God, nor is she herself bound. Although acting from within a specific religious tradition, Judith follows the dictates of her own conscience. She has no guarantee or secret word of confirmation; no one, not even Yahweh, promises her success. She is independent of assured victory; yet she is most assuredly victorious.[590]

While I agree with Craven, I further suggest that Judith is not just a character of faith. Judith's inexplicable authority and separateness from her community make more sense when one considers the historical context of the narrative. The book of *Judith* likely originates in the period following the defeat of the seemingly mighty Seleucid army by the rag tag band of revolutionists known as the Maccabees. The historical context of this work may have influenced the author's portrayal of the female protagonist, even if *Judith* is not simply a metaphor for the Maccabean revolt. The unlikeliness of the Maccabean victory plays out on the pages of *Judith* – Judith, the underdog, against all odds defeats the successful Assyrian military.[591]

By examining the theme of community in the narrative of *Judith*, I have uncovered further complexities in the representation of the female protagonist. The author of *Judith* provides a complex portrayal of the female protagonist and her relationship to her community. In many ways, Judith appears disconnected from her community. Judith appears to keep to herself, living a life of seclusion of pious fasting in her rooftop tent (Jdt 8:4–6). Her piety seems to have earned her respect in her community, but that does not necessarily explain the authority she

[590] Craven, *Artistry and Faith in the Book of Judith*, 94.

[591] The parallels between the Assyrian/Babylonian and Seleucid Empires and their history of interaction with Israel are numerous. First, the Seleucid Empire included the territory that historically was the center of both the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires. Second, the rulers from all of these empires moved into and conquered Israel: the Assyrian captivity, under various Assyrian rulers, occurred during the 700s BCE; Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonia king destroyed Jerusalem in 526 BCE; and Antiochus IV Epiphanes IV of the Seleucid Empire desecrated the Jerusalem temple and launched a campaign against the Jews living in Judea in 168 BCE. Third, in every instance, a third party impacted the ability of the conqueror and changed the course of history: the Babylonians eventually overthrew the Assyrians; Cyrus the Great, the king of Persia, conquered the Babylonians; and the Romans and Parthians both played an important role in the weakening of the Seleucid Empire prior to and during the Maccabean Revolt. This does not imply that *Judith* reflects a historical situation. See the discussion in Friedrich V. Reiterer, "Religion und hellenistische Realpolitik im Buch Judit," in *Gesellschaft und Religion in der spätbiblischen und deuterokanonischen Literatur*, eds. Friedrich V. Reiterer, Renate Egger-Wenzel, and Thomas R. Elßner, DCLS 20 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), 29–54.

seems to wield in the text. Despite Uzziah's remark regarding the wisdom of Judith and the people of Bethulia's recognition of her wisdom (Jdt 8:29), the officials do not consult her before they agree to surrender, nor is she a part of the initial assembly that begs Uzziah to surrender (Jdt 7:23–28). Judith's character enters the text on her own terms and creates as well as later executes two successful plans entirely on her own that completely reverse the situation and thereby negates the plan of the officials. Judith has authority and acts decisively because she has faith, unlike her fellow Bethulians. Furthermore, as I have suggested above, the author, having the hindsight of the Maccabean victory over the Seleucid Empire, portrays Judith in an almost superhuman way. Judith is not simply another heroic figure immortalized in Jewish literature.[592] The protagonist not only invokes her ancestor Simeon, but also Dinah (the "beloved offspring who strive for zeal for you and detest the pollution of their blood," Jdt 9:4). She is both the avenger and the avenged. Therefore, Judith in many ways defies categorization.

5.3 Community in Susanna

The author of *Susanna* portrays a community in danger from within through their portrayal of the female protagonist.[593] The narrative of *Susanna* contains a Jewish community living in exile in Babylon. Some of its members, such as Susanna's husband and the elders, appear to prosper in this environment. Despite this prosperity, the threat that Susanna faces comes from within the community; two men who are supposed to be righteous and trustworthy

[592] Judas Maccabeus is only one heroic figure that became immortalized in Jewish literature. The Maccabean mother in 2 Maccabees also stands out as a heroic character in her own right. For relevant parallels between *Judith* and Maccabean texts, see Deborah Levine Gera, "Judah and Judith" [in Hebrew], in *Israel's Land: Papers Presented to Israel Shatzman on His Jubilee*, eds. Joseph Geiger, Hannah M. Cotton, and Guy D. Stiebel (Ra'anana, Israel: Open University, 2009), 30–31; Gera, *Judith*, 39; Jan Willem van Henten, "Judith as an Alternative Leader: A Rereading of Judith 7–13," in *A Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith and Susanna*, ed. Athalya Brenner, FCB 7 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 243–245; Rakel, *Judit-Über Schönheit*, 260–272.

[593] The author of *Susanna* portrays "a loose grouping of a large mass of unnamed characters" (Branch and Jordaan, "The Significance of Secondary Characters," 393). I agree with Branch and Jordaan; the author appears to refer to a single group by various titles. See my discussion on the terms used below.

individuals assault her.[594] Moreover, although the community does their due diligence legally by relying on the testimony of the two elders, their actions allow an innocent woman to be sentenced to death. As such, the author portrays the situation in which Susanna finds herself as a moral story about complacency, misguided trust, and the ever-present vulnerability of the Jewish community.

The author of *Susanna* refers to the Jewish community collectively while never naming individual characters beyond the main characters in the narrative. This community is referred to as "the Jews" (Ἰουδαῖος, Sus vs 4), "the people" (λαός, Sus vss 5, 7, 26, 28, 34, 41, 47, 50) and "the congregation/assembly" (ἡ συναγωγὴ, Sus vss 41, 60). Robin Gallaher Branch and Pierre J. Jordaan argue that the use of ἡ συναγωγὴ (Sus vss 41, 60) gives the people congregated "a moral responsibility, reminding them of their covenantal heritage and responsibilities."[595] The use of συναγωγὴ for the community suggests that the author of *Susanna* portrays the Jewish community as responsible for upholding the law. They are morally responsible for appointing judges and elders, as well as examining those accused before handing down a verdict.[596] Moreover, Susanna's husband, as the only character with some details in his description, portrays a Jewish community that at least existed comfortably in their Babylonian setting. [597] Susanna's husband Joakim is very wealthy and enjoys a high status within his community (Sus vs 4). In fact, Joakim seems to be so wealthy and respected that the judges use his house to try cases assumedly for the

[594] Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 23–24, focuses on the themes of persecution and vindication present in the narrative. He argues that Susanna, as the righteous and innocent one accused and sentenced to death, is eventually vindicated by her god.

[595] Branch and Jordaan, "The Significance of Secondary Characters," 393.

[596] For more information on the term συναγωγὴ, see Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 110–114. While it is impossible to determine exactly what type of institution this word refers to in *Susanna*, it is safe to understand it as a "congregation" or "assembly." Moreover, since the text is dealing with laws and elders, the assembled community likely played a role in the legal processes of that community.

[597] Other literature attests to prosperous Jews in Babylon. See Jer 29:5–7; 2 Esd 3:1–2. See also Elias J. Bickermann, *The Jews in the Greek Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 49–50, who offers historical insights into the context of *Susanna*, but also questions the narrative's context and how much of the narrative may be the author's imagination. I am not connecting the fictional setting of *Susanna* with actual historical circumstances.

community (Sus vs 6).[598] Beyond Joakim and the elders, little information regarding the community is present in the narrative. As readers, the audience can only assume that Susanna's Jewish community was under no active threats – there are no hints in the texts to suggest such – and some of its members were even prospering while living somewhere in Babylon.

As the narrative unfolds though, the author reveals that the elders are not the morally just judges required by the people. The author includes a peculiar passage, one that appears to be a quotation, but is not attested in any known biblical or extra-biblical sources: "Lawlessness came forth from Babylon, from elders who were judges, who were supposed to guide the people" (Sus vs 5).[599] The author is clear that the elders that feature in the narrative can be counted in this group, for the author specifically states "concerning [the elders] the Lord had said" (Sus vs 5) when introducing the elders. Meanwhile, the community seems completely oblivious of the warning about the elders and simply accepts the authority of these men over and against the innocent Susanna.[600] The narrative states that "the assembly believed them as [they were] elders of the people and judges, and they sentenced her to death" (Sus vs 41). When Daniel enters the narrative, he confronts and chastises the community for this very reason: "thus foolish sons of Israel [who] neither examine nor clearly understand [but] condemn a daughter of Israel" (Sus vs 48).

From a legal point of view, the author of *Susanna* draws from Deut 22 which places the onus on the community to do its due diligence. The author of Deuteronomy urgers readers to consider the entire case before condemning a woman to death because of adultery claims made

[598] Joakim's high status and position in the community supplies the setting in which the elders will accost Susanna.

[599] This phrase does not appear in any prophetic works. There are parallels in Jer 23:14–15 and Jer 29:20–23, but again there are no exact attestations.

[600] Branch and Jordaan ("The Importance of Secondary Characters," 393) correctly note that the people come en masse to Joakim's house to view the spectacle of Susanna's trial. While they do not focus on the theme of the male gaze, they note that it is not only the elders who feast on Susanna's assumedly naked body but the gathered crowd as well. For the topic of *Susanna* and the male gaze see, Tamber-Rosenau, "Biblical Bathing Beauties."

against her (Deut 22:13–29).[601] In fact, the very situation found in *Susanna* appears in Deut 22. According to the author, women could be convicted of adultery in instances of rape if "concerning the matter, she did not cry out in the city" (Deut 22:24). Although the community technically follows the law which requires two witnesses (Deut 19:15), it is curious in the instance of *Susanna* that no one questions the claims of the elders when multiple people inside Joakim's house heard Susanna yelling in the garden (Sus vs 26).[602] The community's persistence to trust in the two elders suggests that the author portrays their actions as a quasi-abandonment of Torah.

The author of *Susanna* portrays a Jewish community that is either ignorant or oblivious to the threats from within. Lorenzo Di Tommaso calls the narrative "an early detective story… it is a "puzzle" story, where the protagonist solves a mystery by logical deduction."[603] Although there are elements of investigation and discovery in the narrative, one should not overlook the moral element in the narrative. The lack of action taken by Susanna's father and husband, the community's trust in the elders while ignoring prophets and Torah, and Daniel's intervention provide clues to the author's focus in this work.[604]

5.3.1 Susanna's Relationship with her Community

The author underscored Susanna's relationship to her community with their inaction and her silence. While some scholars have interpreted Susanna's silence as an aspect of her

[601] Carolyn Pressler (*The View of Women Found in the Deuteronomic Family Laws*, BZAW 216 [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993], 91) notes that the Deuteronomic family laws provide an asymmetrical definition of rape. Men appear to have exclusive rights to their wife's sexuality and a violation of that right was a capital offense. As I have noted before, adultery laws protected the rights of a husband rather than showing a concern for the consent of a woman.

[602] Pressler (*The View of Women*, 38) notes that asymmetrical definitions based on gender do not imply that women were part of their husband's property. More specifically, "the wife had rights apart from her sexuality, including rights not to be sold, and not to be falsely condemned and executed (Deut 21:14; 22:25–27)."

[603] Lorenzo DiTommaso, "The Additions to Daniel," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Apocrypha*, ed. Gerbern S. Oegema (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 372.

[604] This aspect of the narrative may have been a way for the author to involve the reader in the narrative.

passiveness, I suggest that her silence is a strategic aspect of the narrative.[605] The author places Susanna in a liminal state – she has been accused despite her innocence and her life hangs in the balance – particularly by not including more of her voice.[606] This liminal state shifts the readers focus to the community and raises important questions: Who should the community believe, the elders or a woman? More importantly, will the community do what is necessary to determine what happened or will they do what is easy and trust the elders at their word?

The author records Susanna speaking only twice in the narrative, but no characters in the narrative respond or appear to hear her voice. Susanna groans when the elders trap her and she says, "[I am] completely surrounded (στενά μοι πάντοθεν). For if I do this, it is my death and if I do not, I will not escape from your hands. My choice is to not do [it], falling into your hands, rather than committing a sin in the presence of the Lord" (Sus vss 22–23). Moreover, Susanna cries out during her trial: "Oh eternal God, the one acquainted with secrets and knowing all before they come to be; you know that these men bear false witness against me. And look I am to die, having done nothing which they wrongly accuse me of!" (Sus vss 42–43). No one except Susanna's god hears her (Sus vs 44); the people in her husband's house do not hear her when she cries out (Sus vs 24) nor does the community respond at her trial (Sus vs 45). Rather than assuming the author does not give Susanna agency because she is a female character, I suggest that the author strategically uses Susanna's silence to place the responsibility of providing justice onto the community.[607]

[605] See for example Glancy, "The Accused," who interprets Susanna's silence as an aspect of the author's portrayal of her as an object of the male gaze.

[606] I use the word liminal here to highlight that Susanna is neither innocent nor guilty in the narrative; she is both at once and neither at the same time. Although she is innocent, the community believes her to be guilty.

[607] Another possible interpretation of Susanna's silence is the theme of waiting for god's vindication. For example, Ps 37 reminds readers that evildoers will one day face their fate. The Psalmist praises the righteous and instructs the readers to wait for their vindication.

This responsibility comes to the fore when the moral implications of the community's inaction become clear. The author of the text portrays a community that fully accepts that the sex act happened and the consequences of that reality emerge: "and when the elders spoke, the servants felt very much ashamed" (Sus vs 27), as well as the fact that her husband and parents do not praise "God concerning their daughter Susanna" until after "she was not found [to have committed] a shameful deed" (Sus vs 63). Susanna embodies rape in the sense that the elders threaten her, but also in that her community reifies that the supposed sex act happened.[608] Moreover, Glancy argues that "the narrative approves Susanna's assessment that woman's experience of forced sex renders her guilty."[609] This statement needs more nuance. The community assumes that Susanna has been physically penetrated and, as a result, adulterated. Due to her assumed adulterous act, the community rejects Susanna and sentences her to death (Sus vs 41). Although the community assumes Susanna's guilt, the narrative itself does not agree.

In fact, the author critiques the actions of the elders, the acceptance of the elders' testimony by the people, and their lack of insistence on justice for Susanna. The author includes a critique of the elders early in the narrative. First, the author calls the men "lawlessness" (ἀνομία, Sus vs 5) and then describes them as having "perverted their minds and turned away their eyes from looking to heaven nor to keep in mind righteous authority to judge" (Sus vs 9).

[608] Many recent scholars have focused on the portrayal of Susanna in terms of her attempted rape. In particular, see Glancy, "The Accused," who argues against the common use of the word seduction when describing the actions of the elders. Glancy argues instead to see their actions as attempted rape. Furthermore, she explores the use of gender and the theme of seeing in the narrative. See also Bal, "The Elders and Susanna," who uses Freud's psychology to examine the themes of voyeurism and rape in the narrative of *Susanna*. Bal argue that the narrative borders on fantasy, allowing the reader to participate in the voyeurism of the elders. Also see Grillo, "Showing Seeing in Susanna," who uses narratology to argue against the common assumption that *Susanna* presents a monolithic and uncomplicated view of the male gaze. Furthermore, Grillo argues that the Theodotion version provides a less voyeuristic rendition of the Old Greek version.

[609] Glancy, "The Accused," 105. Glancy further questions the author's promotion of the idea that a woman would choose death rather than rape simply on the grounds that it would bring dishonor to her husband's household.

The characters even appear to know that their actions are immoral: the elders do not tell each other how they feel about Susanna "for they were ashamed to proclaim their desire because they were wanting to have sexual intercourse with her" (Sus vs 11).[610] Moreover, the author critiques the community through the character of Daniel; he calls the community "foolish" (μωροί), for not examining the elders and getting all the facts (Sus vs 48). Only Susanna escapes critique. In fact, her actions and words find praise in the narrative – Susanna appears as an innocent and righteous person (Sus vs 53), and her kin later celebrate her for her stead-fast faith (Sus vs 60).[611]

The issue at the heart of the *Susanna* narrative is the lack of action taken by those who could have acted on behalf of Susanna. No one, not her parents nor her family, speak up in defense of Susanna during her trial. Moreover, the author does not give Susanna a voice because the community does not give her a voice. Therefore, the author portrays a one-sided accusation that her community unquestioningly accepts until Susanna's god moves to have Daniel act. *Susanna* is therefore not just a narrative about attempted rape. The work of M.J. Giovanni points to the situation that the author of *Susanna* conveys. Giovanni, who analyzes Mediterranean women as symbols of their household, argues that an important responsibility of the household was to protect female members from the sexual advances of men from outside the household.[612] This aspect of Hellenistic culture partially underscores the author's perspective that highlights the situation in which Susanna finds herself.

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[610] Glancy ("The Accused," 108) makes an important point when she argues that Daniel later reduces Susanna to an object in verse 56. Glancy argues that Daniel seems to implicate Susanna in the elders' guilt when he declares that they allowed beauty to beguile them (Sus vs 56). It raises the question of whether the author sees Susanna as partially to blame for the actions of the elders. See also Tamber-Rosenau, "Biblical Bathing Beauties," 62–63, who also comments on later interpreters and commentators who assume Susanna's partial guilt due to her beauty.

[611] Susanna also takes precautions to protect herself and her household. Not only does she instruct her maids to close the doors of the garden (Sus vss 17–18), thus attempting to protect herself, she implicitly protects her husband's honor by not engaging in sexual intercourse with the elders.

[612] Maureen Giovanni, "Women: A Dominant Symbol within the Cultural System of a Sicilian Town," *Man* 16 (1981): 408–426. Specifically, a man's prestige came from his ability to protect female members from sexual advances.

Several scholars have argued that Susanna, along with other female protagonists, were written as "metaphors for the Jewish community in exile, or as surrounded by actual and potential enemies."[613] For example, Levine also views Susanna as a "product of a community facing the threats occasioned by diaspora and colonialism."[614] While Susanna's words attest to this perspective – "[I am] completely surrounded" (Sus vs 22) – her character does not need to be understood as a metaphor. Levine notes that women's bodies become metaphors for struggling communities in Hellenistic texts; women's bodies "become the surface upon which are inscribed the struggles between the adorned and the stripped, the safe and the endangered, the inviolate and the penetrated."[615] Instead, the narrative of *Susanna* may be a cautionary tale about the threats facing the Jewish community. Susanna's body may physically become the site of that threat, but it does not erase her agency in the narrative.

As such, the female protagonist finds herself in an impossible situation, but the author also invites readers to image what they would do in a similar situation. Robert Dunn partially makes this point. Dunn argues that the author "invites the reader to consider whether [their] own responses to the descriptions of Susanna's beauty have been purely moral and disinterested."[616] This view requires further consideration. The narrative is about an innocent who stands accused because her community believes the immoral ones over the innocent. The author then invites readers to reflect on their own sources of authority and to consider how they might respond in a

[613] Brenner, "Introduction," 13. See also Levine, "Hemmed in on Every Side," 311, 319, notes the parallels between the exiled status of the Israelite community and Susanna's vulnerability; Reinhartz, "Better Homes and Gardens," 335–336; Grillo, "You Will Forget Your Ancient Shame," argues that *Susanna* is a reimagining of the much older concept of the nation as a woman metaphor. Grillo also argues that "Susanna is less obviously symbolic than is a character like Judith," but this assumption relies on the symbolic nature of Judith's name (10); See also Ulrike Mittmann-Richert (*Historische und legendarische Erzählungen*, JSHRZ 6 [Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 200], 137) who focuses on the function of Susanna.

[614] Levine, "Hemmed in on Every Side," 309. Levine also notes the warning aspect of Susanna, instead focusing on the class issues and insisting that *Susanna* warns those who "enjoy social privileges in foreign settings: no garden is safe" (312).

[615] Ibid., 309.

[616] Dunn, "Discriminations," 27. Dunn also notes that "it is possible for humans to do something to save Susanna" at least in the Theodotion version.

similar situation. As such, *Susanna* is a tale of warning which encourages readers to adhere to Torah even when living in diaspora settings.

5.4 Community in Aseneth

Aseneth, unlike the other Jewish novels, is exceptional for its general lack of community. This narrative more purposefully places the female protagonist into a liminal space between communities. For example, the author never connects Aseneth to her Egyptian community nor is there a real sense of connection to Joseph's people. In fact, the author places more of an emphasis on Aseneth's connection with Joseph's god through the angel and Joseph than with any fictional community in the text. In this section I examine how the author highlights Aseneth's lack of connection to her Egyptian people and instead re-envisions Aseneth as the inception of a new community: her "name will be City of Refuge, because in you many nations will seek shelter under the Lord God" (Asen. 15:7).

The author mentions the Egyptian community several times throughout the narrative, although not in detail. It is important to note that this community is separate from those living inside Pentephres' estate, a topic that I discuss in more details below. Readers are introduced to the Egyptian community in the first chapter, where the Pharaoh and his first-born son are introduced. These two characters, which are the only Egyptians named, appear in passing to set up the second half of the story: Pharaoh's son has fallen in love with Aseneth because of her beauty.[617] Beyond these characters, any explicit Egyptian community remains hidden in the background of the narrative; no other actors emerge within the narrative. [618]

[617] Wills, *The Jewish Novel*, 178. See also Humphrey, *Joseph and Aseneth*, 30, for a discussion regarding possible Egyptian themes in the text; and Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 78–79; 97–116, for a discussion on both the Egyptian qualities of the text and the probable social and cultural context behind the text. Chesnutt argues that Aseneth reflects actual Jewish and Egyptian tension as viewed by the community of its author.

[618] See Humphrey, *Joseph and Aseneth*, 48–62, for a discussion on various approaches to understanding the community behind the text.

The author of *Aseneth* adopts a polemic that frequently uses the Greek term ἀλλότριος to describe the Egyptian community.[619] The use of ἀλλότριος appears in several other Hellenistic era texts and specifically refers to foreign and forbidden people, activities, or practices. In the Septuagint version of the Tanakah, ἀλλότριος occurs in reference to those who are members of another ethnic group (e.g., Exo 2:22; 21:8; Deut 17:15). Moreover, ἀλλότριος specifically refers to foreigners and their pagan religion (e.g., Gen 35:2; Hos 3:1). In a similar fashion to its usage in *Aseneth*, the author of Hosea refers to the children born of foreign mothers as "strange children" (τέκνα ἀλλότρια). This may result from the opinion that foreign mothers introduced their children to foreign religious practices (Hos 5:7).[620] The author of Proverbs uses ἀλλότριος in its Greek translation, but the Hebrew version provides a clearer polemic:

> To extricate yourself from the strange/foreign/forbidden woman (מאשה זרה), from the female foreigner who speaks her smooth/false words, the one who abandons the partner of her youth and forgets her covenant with Elohim; for her house leads down to death, and her paths to the shades; all those going to her never come back, nor are they able to regain the paths of life. (MT Prov 2:16–19) [621]

The reference to the "strange woman" (ἀλλότριος) in Proverbs is important, because the author of *Aseneth* also seems preoccupied with the theme of the "strange woman." The author of *Aseneth* calls the female protagonist a "strange woman" several times in the text.[622] When Joseph first sees Aseneth, his main concern is that she is a "strange/foreign woman" (γυναικὸς

[619] Several scholars deal with the theme of "strange" in *Aseneth*, but many focus on Aseneth's character as both the representation of the "strange woman" and her antithesis. See for example, Chesnutt, *From Death*, 97–117, who argues that the strange formulation points to Jewish/Egyptian tensions; Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 22–27, who focuses on Aseneth as a representation of the "strange woman."

[620] Takamitsu Muraoka, "Hosea V in the Septuagint version," *AN* 24 (1986): 126. See also Prov 2:16 which seems to compare the "straight way" (ὁδοῦ εὐθείας) against the way that is "strange from the righteous intent" (ἀλλότριον τῆς δικαίας γνώμης) suggesting that these were opposing ways of life.

[621] See the larger discussion surrounding the differences between the MT and LXX versions in Matthew Goff, "Hellish Females: The Strange Woman of Septuagint and 4QWiles of the Wicked Woman (4Q184)," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 39 (2008): 20–45. See also Camp, *Wise, Strange, and Holy*, 323–344, who argues that the MT author understood the "strange woman" in Proverbs within the backdrop of Ezra and Nehemiah's policies surrounding intermarriage.

[622] Kraemer (*When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 22–27) also notes the connection between the usage of "strange" in *Aseneth* and its usage in Proverbs. Kraemer argues that Aseneth has both the qualities of the "strange woman" and her antithesis "woman wisdom."

ἀλλοτρίας), because Jacob used to tell him to "strongly guard yourself from associating with a strange/foreign woman. For association with her is ruin and destruction" (Asen 7:5). Joseph also later rejects Aseneth's kiss as he claims it would be improper for a god-fearing man "to kiss a strange/foreign woman who blesses with her mouth dead and speechless idols" (Asen 8:5).[623] The implication is clear in these passages: the Egyptian community is "strange" (ἀλλότριος), a characterization that denotes their participation in certain religious activities, namely idol worship, that the audience of *Aseneth* would have found foreign.

The people with whom Aseneth interacts appear as separate from the larger Egyptian community. There are multiple instances where the author portrays Pentephres' estate as walled-off from the rest of the Egyptian world (Asen 2; 5:6). For example, the author tells us that "the gates of the court were closed, and every strange/foreign man and woman stayed outside the court, because the guards of the gates drew and closed the doors and all the strangers/foreigners were closed out" (Asen. 5.6). Moreover, Aseneth appears to have been raised with a select group of girls who insulate her from the outside world. Various versions of the Greek nouns συντροφία and τροφία occur in chapters ten and eighteen in reference to one of Aseneth's maids and a male caretaker (e.g., Asen. 10:4 and 18:8). The noun συντροφία occurs in reference to those brought up or raised together and suggests that Aseneth's maid grew-up alongside her. Another indication for the special role that these maids have in protecting Aseneth from outside influence comes in Asen. 17:4. Aseneth tells the angel that the "seven virgins serving me, were brought up with me from my youth (συντεθραμμέναι μοι ἐκ νεότητός μου), born with me in one night" (Asen 17:4). The author of 4 Maccabees uses the noun συντροφί to describe the rearing of the

[623] The identification as a "strange/foreign" person applies to both females and males, as Joseph also states that "likewise, it is not fitting for a god-fearing woman to kiss a strange/foreign man, because this is an abomination before the Lord God" (Asen 8:7).

seven brothers (4 Macc 13:22).[624] For example, the author describes the brothers as "growing stronger" because they grew up together (καὶ αὔξονται σφοδρότερον διὰ συντροφίας (4 Macc 13:22).

Aseneth also has a "foster father" (ὁ τροφεὺς, Asen. 18:3, 5, 11; τοῦ τροφέως, Asen. 18:7; τὸν τροφέα, Asen. 18:2) who emerges in the narrative in chapter eighteen. The author refers to this person using the noun τροφεὺς, meaning "one who brings up (a child)" or simply a "foster-father."[625] This term does not appear in the LXX, although some texts include a similar form of this noun and refer to a wet-nurse (τροφεύω, Exo 2:7) or a woman who nurtures an infant (τροφεία, 4 Macc 15:13). Moreover, in some manuscripts of Sirach there is a similar usage of the term that also fits in with the above reading of Aseneth's foster father. Ben Sira uses this term when referring to the upbringing of children (Sir 22:7), suggesting again that this male figure had some role in the raising of Aseneth.[626]

The emergence of Aseneth's foster sister and father occurs after Aseneth's family leaves the estate (Asen 10:1). I suggest that the author's usage of "foster" language in reference to the steward and maidens aligns with the author's larger effort to create an isolated group of people within the complex with whom Aseneth has regular contact. Moreover, this group is portrayed as being cut off from the strangers beyond the gates, making them physically separate from the Egyptians beyond the walls of the complex.[627] These characters are not only fundamental to the

[624] See the usage of συντροφία in 3 Macc 5:32.

[625] This noun also occurs in Sophocles, *Philoctetes* 344 and Euripides, *Electra* 16, both of which refer to a male figure who brought up or fostered a child.

[626] Muraoka, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 688.

[627] According to Nickelsburg (*Jewish Literature*, 334), the second half of the *Aseneth* narrative is "a replay of the biblical account of Dinah and Shechem (Gen 34)." Nickelsburg notes that this is noteworthy in that later rabbinic tradition explains Aseneth's heritage away from identifying her as the daughter of Shechem and Dinah (ibid., 335). Ross Shepard Kraemer, "When Aseneth Met Joseph: A Postscript," in *For a Later Generation: The Transformation of Tradition in Israel, Early Judaism, and Early Christianity*, eds. Randall A. Argall, Beverly A. Bow, and Rodney A. Werline (Harrisburg: Trinity International, 2000), 130–131, has also dealt with the parallels between these narratives, but concludes that no appeal to rabbinic tradition is necessary. Although I see no evidence

upbringing of Aseneth, but also are important to Aseneth's transformation into Joseph's bride: Aseneth's maids become the "seven pillars of the City of Refuge" (Asen 17:6) and her foster father confirms her new identity – "the Lord God of heaven has picked you as a bride for his firstborn son, Joseph?" (Asen 18:11).[628]

The author presents the communities, both the Egyptian "strangers" and the community inside the estate, in comparison to Joseph's character and, implicitly, to the Jewish people that he represents. In examining the author's portrayal of the negotiation of these identities, these communities appear to attempt to rise to the level at which the author places Joseph.[629] For example, Pentephres confirms the authority of Joseph and his god – his description of Joseph to Aseneth highlights this feature of the text:

> "Joseph the mighty one of God is coming…Joseph is a god-fearing man and self-controlled/wise and a virgin like you are today. Joseph is an able man in wisdom and knowledge, and the spirit of God is upon him, and the grace of the Lord is with him." (Asen 4:7)

Moreover, the Pharaoh, who appears as a father figure to Joseph (Asen 20:9), confirms the authority of Joseph and his god when he marries Aseneth and Joseph (Asen 21:4). This focus on the authority of Joseph is in line with several other works from the Greco-Roman period which worked to embellish the Joseph story (e.g., Test of Jos, as well as narratives found in Josephus,

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in *Aseneth* to suggest that the author ascribed a Shechem/Dinah parentage to Aseneth, I do agree that the author distances Aseneth from her parents and aligns her with others in the text.

[628] Humphrey, *Joseph and Aseneth*, 101, also notes that it is Aseneth's foster-father who first responds to her transformation. Additionally, Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 142, notes the use of election language in *Aseneth* 17:6. Moreover, Chesnutt calls the male figure her "steward" rather than "foster-father" (ibid., 245). Meanwhile, Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 26, claims that the seven pillars of the City of Refuge reference recalls "the figure of Woman Wisdom in the book of Proverbs (e.g., 9:1)." See also Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, 187.

[629] Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 156–167, examines the use of solar language in *Aseneth* and its usage in the description of both Joseph and Aseneth. The use of Helios imagery in the depiction of Joseph further suggests the author's effort to depict him as divine like or connected to the divine. For Joseph's supernatural beauty see Otto Betz, "Geistliche Schönheit: von Qumran zu Michael Hahn," in *Die Leibhafhaftigkeit des Wortes: Theologische und seelsorgische Studien und Beiträge als Festgabe für Adolf Köberle zum sechsigsten Geburtstage*, ed. Otto Michel and Ulrich Mann (Hamburg: Im Furche, 1958), 76–79.

Artapanus, and Philo).[630] Wills argues that the narrative of *Aseneth* contains an earlier allegorical layer that took the form of "a national hero romance." Wills further hypothesizes that this layer focused on the family of Jacob – Joseph and his wife Aseneth, Joseph's brothers and their wives Rachel and Leah.[631] This suggestion has merit in that it is in line with the broader Joseph tradition found in other texts and explains the focus on Joseph in the narrative of *Aseneth*.

The author of *Aseneth* depicts an Egyptian community defined by their idol worship. Moreover, there is a strict demarcation between Joseph's people and foreigners by the term "stranger" (ἀλλότριος). The author defines major figures, such as the Pharaoh, in relation to Joseph than to an ethnicity or in connection to a geographical location. The people living alongside Aseneth in her father's estate appear as separate from the Egyptian "strangers" and in many ways are already acceptable to both the angelic figure and to Joseph.

5.4.1 Aseneth's Relationship with her Community

Although Aseneth is Egyptian, the author never calls her an Egyptian. The only details used to describe Aseneth are that she is the daughter of Pentephres, a priest of Heliopolis (Asen. 1:7; 21:2). Despite being implicitly Egyptian, the author portrays her as isolated and separate from that community. Furthermore, the author focuses on Aseneth's seclusion and connection to her foster sister(s) and her foster father. Later, following her transformation, the author portrays Aseneth as the inception of a new community.

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[630] The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs in particular present Joseph as the paradigm of virtue. See Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature*, 312–313, for specific information on the Testament of Joseph. See also Harm W. Hollander, *Joseph as an Ethical Model in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, SVTP 6 (Leiden: Brill, 1981); Eckhard von Nordheim, *Die Lehre der Alten 1: Das Testament als Literaturgattung im Judentum der hellenistisch-römischen Zeit*, ALGHJ 13 (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 1–114; George W. E. Nickelsburg, ed., *Studies on the Testament of Joseph*, SCS 5 (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1975).

[631] Wills, *The Jewish Novel*, 179. Wills proposes a second allegorical layer which focuses on Aseneth. This layer, as Wills argues, has more in common with the other Jewish novels than with their Greek counterparts. See ibid., 178–184 for the full discussion.

Although the author consistently distances Aseneth from her Egyptian identity, it does not mean that the author did not envision Aseneth as inherently Egyptian. Above, I note the distancing of Aseneth from her Egyptian ethnicity. Despite this fact, the author clearly highlights her Egyptian identity. This most readily comes in the author's description of Aseneth's religious practices, specifically in reference to her idol worship.[632] The author tells the audience that Aseneth had statues of many Egyptian gods affixed to the walls of one of her chambers; "Aseneth worshipped them all and feared them and she performed sacrifices to them daily" (Asen 2:3). In fact, even Joseph attempts to connect Aseneth to the Egyptian community upon first meeting her, assuming she must be one of the daughters of the Egyptians that annoy him due to his beauty (Asen. 7:3). Moreover, he refuses Aseneth's kiss later in the narrative specifically because she "blesses with her mouth dead and speechless false idols" (Asen 8:5).[633] Several scholars have noted that the author of *Aseneth* does not include a description of any practices that were specifically Egyptian.[634] The only link then that ties Aseneth to her Egyptian community is her obvious ethnic origin and her idol worship in the narrative.[635]

In fact, the author portrays Aseneth specifically denouncing the practices of her heritage and rejecting her Egyptian people.[636] Helena Zlotnick interprets Aseneth's isolation as part of the process of proselytism; "the "renunciation of faith also entails the severance of family,

[632] Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 22–27, notes the variety of ways that the author underscores Aseneth's Egyptian origins through the author's use of the Strange or Foreign Woman. Kraemer argues that *Aseneth* is in many ways a narrative about the transformation of Aseneth from the Strange Woman to Wisdom Woman (22). See also Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine*, for a discussion on the use of Woman Wisdom in earlier literature.

[633] Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 24–25. Kraemer argues here that the term "strange" is an indication of Aseneth's foreignness.

[634] For a discussion on the Egyptian features of the text, see Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 76–80; Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 286–287.

[635] Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*, 103, comes to a similar conclusion; idolatry is the feature that divides Jew from Gentile.

[636] Similarly, Helena Zlotnick (*Dinah's Daughters*, 95) also argues that Aseneth's commitment to her people and faith are tested by the arrival of Joseph.

communal, and social ties."[637] In a similar fashion, Chesnutt understands Aseneth's familial ostracism as part of her conversion process as a new convert to Judaism. Furthermore, Chesnutt argues that "there is nothing corresponding to [Aseneth's familial ostracism] in the story line itself;" he notes that Aseneth and her parents appear to have cordial relations.[638] Conversely, the author of *Aseneth* portrays a distant relationship between Aseneth and her family. Moreover, Aseneth's only real encounter with her parents in the text occurs marked by tension between them. When Pentephres announces to his daughter that he will give her to Joseph as a bride, the scene ends with all parties angry: Aseneth is angry with her father for suggesting the marriage and her father is ashamed and will not speak to her further because of how she responded (Asen 4:5–12).

Instead, the author portrays Aseneth fully within the context of the liminal space created by her family complex that isolates and separates her from the Egyptian community. Aseneth's seclusion in this complex also implies her interaction with a certain population; the details of the narrative support this interpretation. Aseneth never interacts with anyone outside of the family complex even though this world is right at her fingertips. During Aseneth's repentance, the author indicates how close the outside world is from Aseneth's world: on the eighth day Aseneth rises and she can hear "the dogs barking at the [people] traveling through" (Asen 11:1). The inclusion of this detail, that there were people passing through Pentephres' estate, contrasts with the group of characters that Aseneth interacts with inside the estate. It further suggests that access to Aseneth is tightly controlled. Moreover, it underscores that Aseneth's transformation occurred within the walls of the estate separate from the outside "strangers/foreigners."

[637] Zlotnick, *Dinah's Daughters*, 94. Similarly, Chesnutt (*From Death to Life*, 115–117) notes the importance of familial ostracism in the narrative of *Aseneth*. Chesnutt interprets this theme as a social tension and later connects it to examples of familial ostracism found in Jewish literature (166–168).

[638] Chesnutt, *From Death*, 116.

Another detail in the narrative, the separation of Aseneth's dogs, also serves to showcase Aseneth's separateness from the outside world. When Aseneth throws away all the items meant for her idols, she does so out a particular window so that only the "strange/foreign" dogs (τοῖς κυσὶ τοῖς ἀλλοτρίοις) should eat from these items – "in order that my dogs do not eat from my meal and of the sacrifice of the idols, but let the strange dogs devour them" (Asen 10:13). The author again highlights the extent to which Aseneth remains separate from the outside world: even her dogs appear separate from those on the outside. This is significant, because dogs are themselves commonly understood as unclean animals in biblical literature (e.g., Jer 5:6; Zeph 3:3). The dog was a scavenger (Exod 22:30), known to consume human bodies (1 Kgs 14:11; 2 Kgs 9:36), and the term "dog" (κύων) appears as a severe insult (2 Sam 16:9).[639] This negative impression of dogs in other literature, which mirrors how the author portrays the "strange" dogs in *Aseneth*, highlights the distinction made in the text – even Aseneth's dogs are separate from the unclean dogs of the "strangers."

Aseneth's separateness works to mark the protagonist as distinct and unconnected to her Egyptian background, and builds the foundation to portray her as the inception of a new community under the "City of Refuge" (πόλις καταφυγῆς, Asen. 15:7; 17:6).[640] The author of *Aseneth* not only portrays Aseneth as the inception of a new community, but stipulates who will inhabit that new community alongside of her. For example, the angelic figure who confirms Aseneth's new identity also states:

[639] See the larger discussion on the role of dogs in Daniel Berkovic, "Beware of Dogs!: The Position and Role of Dogs in Biblical Discourse," *Evangelical Journal of Theology* 8 (2014): 75–84. Furthermore, the example found in Exod 22:30 is like Aseneth's comment in Asen. 10:13. Here, the god of Israel commands the Israelites to "not consume meat caught and torn by wild beast;" instead, they are to "throw it to the dog" (τῷ κυνὶ ἀπορρίψατε αὐτό).

[640] Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 36, argues that the author's reference to "City of Refuge" is a clear allusion "to the six biblical cities of refuge designated as safe havens for those who unintentionally commit homicide." See Num 35:6–13; Deut 4:41–43; 19:1–13; Josh 20. Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, 183, argues that the author's use of "City of Refuge" is an attempt to associate Aseneth with Wisdom.

> "Your name will no longer be called Aseneth, but your name will be City of Refuge, because in you many nations will seek shelter under the Lord God, the Most high, and under your wings many peoples [who] trust in the Lord God will be sheltered and in your walls those who attach themselves to the Most High God in the name of Repentance will be guarded." (Asen. 15:7)[641]

Similar language also appears later in the angelic figure's conversation with Aseneth. The figure tells Aseneth that "she will be like a walled mother-city (μητρόπολις) of all taking refuge with the name of the Lord God" (Asen. 16:16). Similarly, the angelic figure repeats his initial words when he blesses Aseneth and her maids. The figure calls the maids the "seven pillars of the City of Refuge" and claims that "all the fellow inhabitants of the selected of that city will take rest upon you for a long time to come" (Asen. 17:6).

Scholars have variously dealt with the term "City of Refuge," offering widely different interpretations for this appellation. For example, Kraemer, who reads the narrative in light of Jewish literature, notes the similarities between the "City of Refuge" and personified Zion and Jerusalem. Aseneth's designation as a transformed city weaves together biblical imagery, such as bridal imagery, daughter Jerusalem, and personified Wisdom.[642] Furthermore, Kraemer argues that Aseneth, as the transformed "City of Refuge," functions "as a particularly efficacious intermediary between God and those who repent."[643] Conversely, Rivka Nir, who argues that *Aseneth* is a Christian text, claims that "after the Eucharist Aseneth becomes the personification of paradise, but also a 'city of refuge,' a 'metropolis,' 'a walled mother city of all who take

[641] Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 27–29, highlights the similarities between the description of Aseneth and the daughters of Zion in Isa 3:16–26. Here, Kraemer notes that "both Aseneth and the penitent in Isaiah receive new names consonant with their restorative powers" (29). Meanwhile, Chesnutt (*From Death to Life*, 127) offers a different perspective based on conversion practices for Aseneth's name change. Chesnutt claims that Aseneth's name change may recall the practice of renaming converts. See also D. Sänger, *Antikes Judentum und die Mysterien: Religionsgeshichtliche Untersuchunger zu Joseph und Aseneth*, WUNT 2.5 (Türbingen: Mohr, 1980), 179.

[642] Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 22–37.

[643] Ibid., 137.

refuge with the name of the Lord God."[644] Finally, Hicks-Keeton has instead argued "that Aseneth's position as City of Refuge imbues her character with a mythic status… more than a mere model, she is a proleptic mediator of God's eschatological renewal of (repentant) humans, both Jew and Gentile."[645] Hicks-Keeton interprets the protagonist as a part of the eschatological community as described in *Aseneth*.[646]

Although the views presented above offer very different interpretations regarding Aseneth as "City of Refuge," they share the understanding that the author envisioned a newly created community with Aseneth and her sisters at its heart. The author portrays Aseneth's "sisters" as pillars of this community (Asen 17:4–6).[647] As I outline above, Aseneth is fundamentally connected to her sisters, a group who has also been entirely cut off from outside interference. In fact, it is telling that Aseneth never renounces her "foster" family even when she rejects her own people (including her biological family). While I am unconcerned with determining the function of this community, the author connects Aseneth's transformation to her function as the initiation of a new community.

5.5 Conclusion

While the theme of community is diverse and complex in the Jewish novels, there are several similarities that provide insights into how these texts envision community and the role

[644] Nir, *Joseph and Aseneth*, 69. Nir later states that "the description of Aseneth as a city of refuge, as the heavenly Jerusalem and as paradise establishes her as a symbol of the Christian church" (Ibid., 73). Kraemer (*When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 65-66) also notes paradise language in Aseneth's new identity, although Kraemer reads this considering Gen 2–3.

[645] Hicks-Keeton, *Arguing with Aseneth*, 57–58. Like Kraemer, Hicks-Keeton also points to the book of Isaiah as the basis for much of the imagery used to portray Aseneth.

[646] See also Edith Humphrey (*The Ladies and the Cities: Transformation and Apocalyptic Identity in Joseph and Aseneth, 4 Ezra, the Apocalypse and the Shepherd of Hermas* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995], 44) who also suggests that the author has an eschatological community in mind and that Aseneth shares a particularly unique relationship with those who will inhabit that community.

[647] In reference to Aseneth's maids, Nir (*Joseph and Aseneth*, 79) argues that only virgins qualify for "entry into the city of refuge." Meanwhile, Kraemer (*When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 68) suggests that the "seven pillars" and "City of Refuge" may recall Proverbs and specifically makes use of the personification of Woman Wisdom. See e.g., Prov 9:1. See also the discussion in Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, 187.

the female protagonists play. First, the Jewish novels provide a clear, although not necessarily explicit, definition of what constitutes a Jewish community. Second, the authors clearly distinguish between the Jewish community and others. In most of the narratives, non-Jews pose the greatest danger to the community. Third, many of the female protagonists appear to straddle the community's boundaries. In fact, in some instances the author identified the protagonists with the non-Jewish community.

The first point I wish to make is that each of the Jewish novels clearly portrays a vision of Jewish community. Throughout all of these works we find evidence of the strands that tie these imagined communities together. Underscoring each of these communities is their faith in the god of Israel. Faith underscores Esther and Mordecai's prayers to their god, Judith's belief that her god will allow her to succeed, Susanna's cries for justice, and Aseneth's proclamations to the god of Joseph. Furthermore, each narrative provides specific practices which the Jewish people adhere to as part of their identity as a community. These practices include traditions from their forbearers, practices such as mourning and circumcision, the continuation of food laws, and the upholding of the Jewish law. These practices stand in sharp contrast to the practices and lifestyles of those not within the Jewish community. There is then, a clear distinction between who is and who is not a member of the Jewish community.

A second point that is worth commenting on further is the common feature of the threat from outsiders. The distinction I have mentioned above, which separates insider from outsider, also carries with it the connotation that the non-Jew poses a specific threat to the community. Each community in the Jewish novels finds themselves facing a threat from outsiders: Haman threatens Esther's community with annihilation, Judith and her community find themselves physically threatened by Holofernes and his army, the elders threaten Susanna with sexual

assault and execution, and Aseneth must face the threat of the introduction of foreign practices that come without the constant maintenance of community boundaries and ideals. In terms of community, the authors of the Jewish novels do not portray communities that must avoid interaction with foreign culture. The novels, apart from *Judith*, portray either thriving Jewish communities in foreign lands (*Greek Esther* and *Susanna*) or Jewish people prospering in a foreign setting (Joseph in *Aseneth*). The narrative of *Judith* contains similar sentiments; Judith maintains her Jewish identity even when in the presence of foreigners. It is the erosion of Jewish boundary-keeping and the inclusion of foreign *practices*, specifically those practices linked to worship of foreign gods, and the kinds of interactions (e.g., sexual or marriage) which might lead to the introduction of foreign practices, that appear as a common threat in the Jewish novels.

Finally, the authors of the Jewish novels portray female protagonists that are both a part of and separate from their community.[648] This feature occurs in each of the novels. Esther's treatment in the narrative reveals that, as the wife of Artaxerxes, there is some distance between her and the Jewish community even when they need her. Likewise, Judith maintains a level of separateness from her community, despite being vital to the campaign against the Assyrians. Susanna's community, on the other hand, openly rejects her, whereas Aseneth inhabits a liminal space between her Egyptian community and her identity as Joseph's wife. This feature is significant because it demonstrates the flexibility of the female characters in the Jewish novels. This becomes even more apparent when compared to the male characters of the texts, who, unlike the female characters, are one identity or another throughout.[649] In many ways, as I outline

[648] Reinhartz also notes the "foreignness" of Esther, Judith, and Susanna. See Adele Reinhartz, "'E. T. Nach Hause Telefonieren': Ecile Und Gender in Erzählungen Der Nachexilischen Zeit," *Lectio Difficilior* (2015): 1–11.

[649] Achior is an excellent example. The Ammonite leader is an Ammonite until he undergoes circumcision and becomes a Jew. There is no liminal identity for the male characters of the Jewish novels.

above, the female protagonists represent the distinction between groups in that their characters push against the boundaries of these identities.

CHAPTER 6: Reimagining Women Characters as Definers and Maintainers of Jewishness

In the present study, I examined the portrayal of the female protagonists in the Jewish novels using four interrelated focusing lenses, exposing ways in which the authors of the Jewish novels portrayed women in terms of some aspects of Jewishness. While the above chapters address individual aspects of the Jewishness of the female protagonists as presented in the Jewish novels, I have yet to address what the Jewish novels can tell us about perceived women's roles in defining and maintaining Jewishness during the Hellenistic period. In this chapter, I use a comparative approach and analyze similarities and differences among the female protagonists of the Jewish novels, as well as in comparison to other portrayals of women (i.e., the ideal woman and the dangerous woman). This comparison reveals the ways in which the authors of the Jewish novels portray the female protagonists as both boundary definers and boundary transgressors. I conclude by exploring how the female protagonists portray the complexity and fragility of Jewishness through their ability to inhabit liminal spaces. The female protagonists are able to exemplify both the threat to Jewishness from outsiders, as well as embody Jewishness as a concept; in this way, the female protagonists embody "boundary definition and transgression."[650] This feature, what I am calling the liminality of the female protagonists – their ability to inhabit in-between spaces – is the most important feature of the Jewish novels because it belies a presupposition that women were perceived as having the ability to play an active role in defining and maintaining Jewishness in the Jewish novels.

[650] I am indebted to Amy-Jill Levine who uses this phrase in "Redrawing Boundaries" (4) in reference to the narrative of Tobit. Here Levine focuses on the Diaspora setting of these narratives and argues that the author of this work constrains women's roles so that "the Jewish male has brought order to his Diaspora existence" (22).

6.1 Boundary Definition and Transgression in the Jewish Novels

The authors of the Jewish novels used female characters to depict boundary definition and transgression through the embodiment of gender discourses that present them as both challenging and maintaining Jewishness.[651] As the Jewish novels belong to a world defined by Hellenistic culture where Jewishness often became a target, the need to maintain and preserve Jewishness became of paramount importance for some Jews.[652] The bodies of the female protagonists become the site of the threat to Jewishness and their actions challenge at times and preserve at others the culturally defined notions of Jewishness. The physical threat to the female protagonists and the situations in which they find themselves, highlight concerns regarding the definition and maintenance of Jewishness. It is then in the liminal space in which the protagonists inhabit that scholarship can discover ways in which women were understood to play a role in the definition and maintenance of Jewishness during the Hellenistic period.

6.1.1 Ideal Jewish Women

Although Hellenistic sources suggest that Jewish women could be identified as *Jews* by few if any physical features, a number of sources portray social norms which defined an ideal Jewish woman.[653] For example, despite his many negative views on women, Ben Sira describes a

[651] Recent scholarship has considered the connection between agency and embodiment by concentrating "on the ways that Jewish women in antiquity were culturally constructed and that consider[s] how those constructions offer insights into the possibilities for and the cultural limits on women's agency." See the discussion in Benjamin G. Wright and Suzanne M. Edwards, "'She Undid Him with the Beauty of Her Face' (Jdt 16.6): Reading Women's Bodies in Early Jewish Literature," in *Religion and Female Body in Ancient Judaism and Its Environments*, ed. Géza G. Xeravits, DCLS 28 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 74.

[652] The existence of the Jewish novels, which extol the necessity of maintaining Jewishness, not only illustrates that for some Jews the maintenance of Jewishness became an important aspect of their lives, but it also illustrates that maintaining Jewishness was likely not a high priority for many Jews. See for example Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, who illustrates the wide spectrum of Hellenistic Judaism, from extreme separation and antagonism against foreigners on the one hand, to complete assimilation on the other. It is likely that many Jews fell somewhere in the middle.

[653] Cohen, working from sources such as Philo, argues that there were little to no physical features that would have made a Jewish woman identifiable. See his discussion in Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 31–33, 39. Philo records an episode during the Alexandrian riots in which both Jewish and non-Jewish women were

good wife as chaste, beautiful, quiet, and one who honors her husband.[654] This aligns with similar views regarding the subservience of women to their husbands in Philo and Josephus.[655] Likewise, portrayals of women's occupations revolved around the household and included aspects that supported their husband.[656] Erich S. Gruen includes a description of the ideal Jewish woman:

> They were expected to maintain a chaste and modest demeanor, remain for the most part at home, stay out of the sight of strangers, and hold as first priority the reputation of the household.[657]

Despite this portrayal, there is sufficient evidence supporting the notion that most women spent time outside of their home and some even held positions of authority.[658] The longstanding scholarly division of public/male and private/female assumes there was a division between public and private life in the ancient world. Such a division did not exist as homes were multi-purpose, even for elites who conducted patron-client relationships in their own homes.[659] Moreover, the consideration of socio-economic factors further dissolves any gender division between private and public life. While elite women may have had the luxury of remaining at

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arrested, implying that there were no distinctive characteristics of Jewish women in Alexandria at the time (*Against Flaccus* 96). Tertullian (*De Corona* 4.2) suggests that Jewish women were identifiable by the veils they wore, but there is little to suggest that this was a defining feature of Jewish woman as many women wore veils in public. For more on the head covering of women, see Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 129–132.

[654] See Sir. 25:8; 26:13–26; 36:27-29; 40:19.

[655] Both Philo and Josephus highlight the authority of husbands and the main role of women to assist and serve their husbands. See Philo, *Hypothetica* 7.3 in Eusebius's *Praeparatio evangelica* 8.7.3; Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.24.

[656] See Ilan, *Jewish Women*, 79–88, 122–47, 163–72, 184–190.

[657] Gruen, *The Construct of Identity*, 59.

[658] Tal Ilan covers several occupations and professions that would have taken women outside of the household. See Ilan, *Jewish Women*, 176–204. Ilan's study utilizes evidence limited to the geographical region of Palestine. What the evidence found in Palestine can tell us about Jewish women in the diaspora is unclear. See also Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue*; Angela Standhartinger, "Female Officiants in Second-Temple Judaism," in *Gender and Second-Temple Judaism*, eds. Kathy Ehrensperger and Shayna Sheinfeld (Lanham, MD: Lexington Fortress, 2020), 219–240.

[659] Parks, Sheinfeld, and Warren, *Jewish and Christian Women*, 180–181. For a discussion on distinguishing between "public" and "private," see Robert Parker, "Public and Private," in *A Companion to the Archaeology of Religion in the Ancient World*, eds. Rubina Raja and Jörg Rüpke (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 71–80.

home, most women would have been involved in supporting the household by conducting business, whether inside or outside of the home.[660]

In many ways, the authors of the Jewish novels portray female protagonists that exhibit many of the characteristics associated with the ideal Jewish woman, regardless of their marriage status. For example, the authors of the Jewish novels portray the female protagonists as securely attached to a male figure, be that a husband, a late husband, a father, or, in the case of Esther, a related male figure who has taken responsibility for the female protagonist. As I have discussed above, the continued connection between the female protagonists and their various male authority figures maintains a connection between these female characters and their families and households, as well as the broader Jewish community. In the case of Esther, the protagonist continues to follow Mordecai's instructions even after she would assumedly have had greater authority. Judith's case is markedly different. Although her husband is deceased and the narrative lacks any male authority, the memory of Judith's husband is never far from the author's mind. While Judith can act without answering to anyone, her character always returns to the realm of her husband's household. Meanwhile, the author of *Susanna* portrays a protagonist that fits the ideal woman mold perfectly: Susanna is chaste and modest; she remains within the confines of her home and attempts to shield herself from the prying eyes of those around her. Finally, the author of *Aseneth* similarly portrays a chaste and modest young woman. In this narrative the major issue with the protagonist is her idolatry. As such, the character of Aseneth does not change; it is only her practices and acceptance of foreign idols that must change before she marries Joseph.

[660] See for example, Kristina Milnor, *Gender, Domesticity, and the Age of Augustus: Inventing Private Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), who argues that several early imperial writers, writing during the age of Augustus, grappled with constructing a definition of public life that both emphasized traditional notions of feminine domestic ideals while also maintaining the prominence of women in public roles. See also the discussion in Parks, Sheinfeld, and Warren, *Jewish and Christian Women*, 180–181.

The Jewish novels though do not simply align the female protagonists to the portrayal of the ideal Jewish women; they use the female protagonists to define the boundaries of Jewishness. For example, Esther, as the counter-part of Mordecai the Jew, embodies Jewishness in a foreign context. In fact, the Greek version of the Esther narrative makes the protagonist's Jewishness more visible by including her prayers in *Greek Esther* (Add C). Here, the protagonist makes explicit statements about her situation: she does not enjoy sharing Artaxerxes' bed and she has never eaten from her husband's or Haman's table. In this example alone, the author uses both foodways and sexuality to mark a clear boundary between Esther and the foreigners. Moreover, Esther remains connected to Mordecai, her only kin. It is only through this connection that Esther maintains a connection to the Jewish community who so desperately needs her assistance. In many ways, Esther maintains her Jewishness despite being completely isolated, both physically and socially, from the Jewish world.

As the most militaristic of all the novels, Judith functions as the barrier that halts the approaching foreign enemy. In this narrative, the protagonist is the embodiment of the female warrior. Her dedication to fasting and prayer mark her as especially committed to her god. Unlike the Bethulians who have lost faith and are ready to surrender, Judith's faith never wavers. Instead, Judith takes it upon herself to defeat the enemy. It is through her commitment to her Jewish ways and beliefs that Judith emerges victorious. Judith maintains her separation from outsiders by using foodways and sexuality to maintain a boundary. The author portrays the protagonist packing her own food to consume and explicitly states that Holofernes did not shame her, meaning she did not have sexual intercourse with him. Moreover, Judith remains connected to her deceased husband and plays a vital role in her Jewish community. Like Esther, Judith is honored for her actions and celebrated as a hero who single handedly defeated the enemy.

The narrative of *Susanna* stands out from the other novels in that the threat comes into what was supposed to be Susanna's private realm. The author introduces Susanna as a woman who feared the Lord and as a woman learned in the law of Moses, her parents having trained her (Sus vs 2–3).[661] Furthermore, Susanna is married to a prominent Jewish man (Sus vss 1–2, 4). Susanna knows what society expects from her. This is clear from her comments made during the assault in which piety and knowledge of the Jewish laws appears again (Sus vss 22–23). The setting of Susanna's assault should not be underappreciated; the elders invade and violate her piety and chastity when they enter the garden. Susanna then embodies the assault on the ideal Jewish woman.

Meanwhile, the author of *Aseneth* establishes that the female protagonist is like other model Jewish women early in the narrative, although she is ethnically an Egyptian at the beginning. For example, the author's comparison of Aseneth to Sarah, Rebecca, and Rachel aligns the protagonist with Jewish women rather than the Egyptian women. More than any of the other narratives, the author of *Aseneth* presents Jewishness as an ontologically distinct identity. In many ways, the protagonist already possesses this ontology; she is like the women listed above. Even so, the author presents her transformation in death and life terms suggesting that Jewishness requires something other than adherence to practices or laws. While Aseneth does eventually maintain Jewishness through aspects such as kinship ties, foodways, and sexuality, the main thrust of the narrative highlights her idolatry and her subsequent physical purge of idolatry and later embodiment of Jewishness.

In comparison, the Jewish novels portray a certain class of women who, in the end, maintain the status quo. The authors of the Jewish novels focus on women with a status higher

[661] Susanna's piety is comparable to that of Judith (Jdt 8:7–8) and Esther (Add Esth 2:7, 20). Piety appears as a component to Jewishness in the Hellenistic era, as it also occurs in Tob 6:2.

than the lower class; they are neither from the wealthy ruling class nor do they suffer economically. In terms of foodways, the protagonists appear using food in connection to their sexuality, a connection that further illustrates how the authors portrayed these women defining Jewishness. Not only do these women use food to highlight their Jewishness by maintaining certain practices, in terms of participating in specific Jewish food practices, they bring food to situations where Jewishness confronts foreignness (apart from Susanna). The dining table often becomes the setting where the female protagonists maintain their Jewishness; the dining table often becomes the realm of powerful women and food appears as a potent way for them to uphold their identity in foreign or threatening contexts. In terms of their sexuality, the protagonists reaffirm standards of Jewishness. For instance, each character maintains certain ideals about intermarriage and proper sexual relations (even when they didn't earlier in their narrative!).[662] Moreover, the author of the Jewish novels portray the female protagonists as maintainers of their kinship groups and of their communities. At the very heart of each of the Jewish novels is a concern that the very foundation of the family threatened from the outside. The female protagonists embody this theme through the physical threats they face; the physical assault faced by the protagonists mirrors the threat the family and the community face. In each of the novels female characters confront foreignness – in Aseneth's case, her own foreignness – and through their actions, the female protagonists illustrate the boundary between Jewishness and foreignness because they have the social and economic ability to do so.

[662] For example, Esther simply fades into the background as the "blameless partner of the king;" Judith lives her final days as a widow and is eventually buried with her husband; Susanna disappears, but we can assume that everything was made right by her acquittal; and we know that Aseneth and Joseph's relationship at least produces their two sons Manasseh and Ephraim (Gen 41:45).

6.1.2 Dangerous Women: Courting Boundary Transgression

Another important feature of the Jewish novels is the embodiment of the threat to Jewishness. For each of the authors of the Jewish novels, foreignness posed the greatest threat – in *Esther* it is Haman and his edict that will exterminate the Jewish people, *Judith* portrays the threat of annihilation by Holofernes and his army, *Susanna* portrays the assault of an innocent woman by descendants of Canaan, and *Aseneth* portrays the threat of idolatry on the Joseph's bloodline. In each case, the bodies of the female protagonists are the symbolic sites where Jewishness confronts foreignness in the Jewish novels. The negotiation of the protagonist's efforts to remain Jewish all while the threat of foreignness plays out on their bodies is an aspect of their portrayal that I call the liminality of the protagonists in the Jewish novels.

The Jewish novels portray vastly different situations and contexts. For example, Esther is the only protagonist removed from her Jewish family and community. Moreover, she adapts to her life in the palace by discovering ways to charm and please her new captives, and negotiates her new setting while maintaining the ways of her father. In many ways, *Greek Esther* narrates the forced assimilation of its protagonist – Esther becomes what the king desires, a fact that goes against her own efforts to maintain her Jewishness. As such, her body becomes the site of the confrontation between Jewishness and foreignness. Judith's body also becomes the site of confrontation, but in a drastically different way. Unlike any of the other protagonists, Judith intentionally places herself amid the enemy. Like Esther, Judith uses her body to entice the weak Holofernes and place him in a state in which she can defeat him. Judith though, unlike Esther, takes a more active and militaristic approach. Whereas Esther adapts to the threat, Judith prepares and plans.

The assault of Susanna by the elders, the very heart of the narrative of *Susanna*, readily highlights how this character's body becomes the site of the confrontation between the protagonist's Jewishness and the threat of foreignness. The familiarity of the elders contrasts with the innocence of Susanna. Her family and community's obliviousness of Susanna's plight and disregard for the justice their own Jewishness demands, contrasts with their respect for the elders that represent the internal threat to the community. Finally, unlike the other Jewish novels, the narrative of *Aseneth* portrays not the threat of foreignness on a Jewish body but the removal of foreignness from the body of its female protagonist. Aseneth's body becomes the site of the transformation that leads from death to life. Her transformation removes those aspects connected to her idolatrous ways and reaffirms her as a proper bride for Joseph.

Several scholars suggest that the Jewish novels only reflect the patriarchal context in which they were written, implying that a clear picture of women's Jewishness cannot be determined from these sources.[663] Although the authors of the Jewish novels do indeed portray female protagonists that often conform to the construct of the ideal Jewish female, scholarship rarely notes the ways in which the protagonists challenge our understanding of Jewishness. More precisely, the protagonists complicate our view of Jewishness by transgressing the boundary between Jewishness and foreignness while they reaffirm that boundary.

Although the Jewish novels maintain a consistent message against sexual relations with foreigners, an important feature of the novels is the female protagonists' ability to challenge this separation. Each of the protagonists in one way or another traverse the boundary between proper

[663] For example, Cohen (*From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 74) argues that "Tobit, Esther, and Judith, do not question or undo the androcentric assumptions of society." Similarly, Gruen (*The Construct of Identity*, 66) concludes that although "women, in sum, figure prominently in the fictional compositions of Hellenistic Jews… these creations do not serve to challenge the conventions of society; they manage, in fact, to reinforce and confirm them." Gruen makes these statements about the narratives of *Judith*, *Esther*, *Aseneth*, and *Susanna*. See his larger discussion on pages 59–66.

and improper sexual relations with foreigners or others deemed outside of the community: Esther has sexual relations with a foreign king; Judith flaunts her beauty and seduces Holofernes, possibly having sexual intercourse with him; Susanna's beauty leads to her assault and, at least in the narrative, questions remain about her culpability in the matter; and the narrative of Aseneth is itself a reaction to the question of how Joseph ended up with a foreign wife. The authors of the Jewish novels deal with this transgression in various ways. In the narratives of *Esther* and *Judith*, the authors are careful to place limitations on both character's sexuality. For instance, Judith and Esther do not seduce or sexually engage with their respective counterparts willingly or for enjoyment, but to deceive and fulfill their roles to save their people. Since the reader is aware that Susanna is indeed innocent, the author uses the protagonists as the focal point of the tension between the exiled Jews and the elders who only appear to be a part of this group. Finally, *Aseneth* highlights the need for strict adherence to Jewish norms; Aseneth becomes the embodiment of Jewishness through her transformation. Even when the protagonists traverse the sexual boundary enacted in the narrative, they emerge victorious and their Jewishness is even more celebrated.

More importantly, the Jewish novels do not appear to critique the usage or open display of female sexuality. This aspect of their portrayals lies in direct opposition to the ideal Jewish woman portrayed in most other texts. In each of the Jewish novels, the authors portray exceptionally beautiful women who find themselves in threatening situations because of that beauty. For example, Esther uses her beauty to manipulate the king, Judith lures the weak Holofernes into submission, Susanna's beauty becomes the target of the elders, and Aseneth begins as one of the strange Egyptian women that molests Joseph. In none of the narratives does this appear to be a problem. Esther and Judith are never condemned for their actions; in fact, they

are celebrated as heroes. Susanna is never blamed for the elders' actions and Aseneth is rejected not for her sexuality but for her idol worship. The Jewish novels then portray women who openly display their sexuality, an aspect that often kindles temptation in foreign men. In terms of their Jewishness, it is quite surprising that the female protagonists use their sexuality to temp foreign men, potentially leading them into relationships that could destroy kinship ties and community.

Although some scholarship has noted many of these challenging features of the protagonists, scholarship regarding Jewishness has not properly recognized the complexity of Jewishness as it is portrayed in the Jewish novels.[664] Gruen, for example, is quick to note that although women figure prominently in the Jewish novels, each author firmly places the female protagonist back where she belongs:

> The uppity Aseneth becomes a penitent, and arrogance is turned into abject submissiveness. Esther's position gives her access to power and a means to save her people, but needs to be prodded, gives way to stereotypical female faintheartedness, and defers to male authority. The innocent and docile Susanna the ideal wife, is helpless in the face of injustice but is rescued by a male hero and restored to the bosom of her presumed protectors. Even Judith, the respected widow, who bursts from her privacy to eclipse inept male leadership, reverts to private life and public invisibility.[665]

I agree with Gruen's assessment; the protagonists do indeed conform to the ideal Jewish portrayal of women even when they sometimes fall outside of this portrayal. Additionally, I suggest that instead of questioning how women might or might not conform to gender norms a better question to ask is how the female protagonists complicate our understanding of Jewishness. As I have shown in my analysis above, the portrayals of the female protagonists in the Jewish novels are complex and multi-faceted. Although the authors of these works portray female characters as ideal Jewish women, they are consistently portrayed in ways that challenge

[664] For scholarship the notes the challenging aspects of these character's portrayal, see for example Brenner-Idan, "Clothing Seduces;" Brison, "Judith;" Duran, "Having Men for Dinner;" Grillo, "Showing Seeing in Susanna;" Henten, "Words and Deeds;" Klein, "Honor and Shame in Esther."

[665] Gruen, *The Construct of Identity*, 66.

our understanding of Jewishness. The protagonists complicate our view of Jewishness by removing the boundary between Jewishness and foreignness while they reaffirm that boundary. They are simultaneously able to inhabit both realms – their bodies inhabit both the maintenance of Jewishness and the threat of foreignness. The power of the Jewish novels is that they make us question just as much as they answer what it means to be Jewish.

Overall, the Jewish novels portray capable women who actively define and maintain Jewishness in a variety of contexts. These narratives present Jewish women as the heroines of their stories; each narrative recounts a direct threat to Jewishness via an assault on the female protagonist. The four aspects of Jewishness that I examine in this study are interconnected in the portrayal of Jewishness in the female protagonists. Each marker is both challenged and reasserted by the protagonists; in this way, these characters provide a complex portrayal of the boundaries of Jewishness in the Hellenistic era.

6.2 Conclusions

In her closing chapter to her monograph *Dinah's Daughters: Gender and Judaism From the Hebrew Bible to Late Antiquity*, Helena Zlotnick tackles the question of whether there is a Jewess in Judaism. Zlotnick's assessment, that "only rarely do biblical and rabbinic texts capture the fears of women as they face the uncertainties of marriage, sterility, fertility, and death in childbirth," is both astute and unavoidable.[666] The concerns and fears of everyday women simply do not appear in the literature of the Hebrew Bible and later Jewish literature. In noting the androcentric context of Jewish literature, Zlotnick suggests "it is a fair assumption that such texts… cast Jewesses as merely the name given to virgins who are also daughters of Jews, or to

[666] Zlotnick, *Dinah's Daughters*, 169.

married women who are also the wives of Jews."[667] Such an assessment holds true even in the Jewish novels; many of the protagonists are implied to be Jewish due to their genealogy or married status.[668] Moreover, upon reflecting on the treatment of women in many narratives, Zlotnick suggests that "the identity of a Jewess (or female Israelite) is like a cloth that can be acquired, adopted, and adapted but also removed and discarded."[669] This conclusion is also not wholly unwarranted, as many female characters in Jewish literature are dealt with on the fringes of their narratives, some even being discarded with little to no concern (e.g., Dinah in Gen 34; Susanna).While I do not disagree with Zlotnick's assessments of Jewish literature, I also think it it vital to consider how female characters were constructed and how their construction can offer insights into notions of female Jewishness.

In reflecting on Zlotnick's assessment of Jewish literature and the search for a Jewess, I cannot help but wonder if the endeavor to discover a "Jewess" in Jewish literature is fraught from the beginning because scholarship has not considered that the "Jewess" we have been seeking simply does not exist. As Cohen illustrates, Jewishness is a concept of the mind; it is an imaginary endeavor that is both flexible and rather thin.[670] The female protagonists illustrate both the flexibility and thinness of Jewishness. The line between what is Jewish and what is not varies historically, politically, geographically, and culturally. Moreover, as the protagonists illustrate, characters can portray both characteristics of Jewishness and foreignness in a single narrative.

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[667] Zlotnick, *Dinah's Daughters*, 167, argues: "What I have tried to trace here are the limits of patriarchy in the subtexts and the ways in which it is possible to penetrate the remarkably homogeneous discourse about women in order to recover 'truths' no longer clearly stated. For in living with women and speaking about them the 'truth' can be often lost."

[668] The best example of this can be found in *Greek Esther* where Mordecai is frequently referred to as Mordecai the Jew, while Esther is never referred to as such. Except for Judith, whose name literally means "Jewess," the female protagonists of the Jewish novels are not explicitly referred to as "Jew."

[669] Zlotnick, *Dinah's Daughters*, 167.

[670] Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness*, 5. Cohen points out the "thinness of the boundary between Jews and gentiles in antiquity" (67 n. 175).

While scholarship on Jewish identity seems to readily support the notion that ancient texts present lived experiences of men but only provide an ideal portrait of women, my examination of the Jewish novels exposes an important question: how detailed can scholarship be on the topic of Jewishness? Instead of focusing on specific identity markers, it is more helpful to understand ancient texts as presentations of a specific ideal. If both male and female characters in literature are understood as representations of ideal versions of Jewishness to a particular author or group, scholarship can place both men and women on the same level.

Moreover, scholarship must reject the idea that Jewishness is something that is quantifiable in terms of practices or beliefs. I find this to be most problematic for the study of women because the practices and beliefs typically focused upon are those more notably connected to official institutionalized forms of religion.[671] By only focusing on those aspects that are most readily apparent and conform to the institutionalized aspects of religion, scholarship will not only not find women present, but may disregard portrayals of women's religious expressions when they are included because they do not conform to the mainstream expressions found elsewhere in our texts. Should scholarship continue to reduce Jewishness to a specific set of features and not acknowledge this perspective as an idealized representation of Jewishness, the wide variety of expressions available in ancient literature will continue to go unnoticed. particularly when the portrayals of women found in texts are not compared to the material record.

This point gets to the heart of my decision to examine the four themes in reference to the female protagonists; by examining the relationship of the female protagonist to others via themes that are connected to the concept of Jewishness, I demonstrated the unique ways in which these

[671] As Susan Starr Sered [*Women as Ritual Experts: The Religious Lives of Elderly Jewish Women in Jerusalem* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992)], women typically create their own religious practices that are derived from and complementary to the institutionalized forms of their male counterparts.

female characters are portrayed expressing Jewishness, even within the backdrop of an idealized masculine understanding. This dissertation demonstrates that the authors of the Jewish novels consistently portrayed female characters both maintaining Jewishness and navigating foreignness.

Scholarship must not overlook the power given to women in the very system that deemed them subordinate. Despite their lower status, the female protagonists could do what male characters could not. It is through their ability to inhabit the spaces that fall slightly outside of the borders of Jewishness that speaks to the complexity of how both the authors and societies of these texts understood Jewishness. It is through this ability to embody both the concept itself and the threat to that concept that illustrates the limited nature of our current categories surrounding Jewishness. In every theme examined in this study, the female protagonists embody both the Jewish aspect itself and the threat to that aspect. Due to the tightly controlled and restricted masculine ideal of early Jewish literature, authors used female representations to portray complex social and identity issues during the Hellenistic era and into the first century CE. The expression of Jewishness seen in the Jewish novels via the female protagonists both supports and challenges our current understanding of Jewishness.

CHAPTER 7: Final Conclusions and Future Work

This present study has analyzed the portrayal of the female protagonists in the Jewish novels: *Greek Esther*, *Judith*, *Susanna*, and *Aseneth*. This study, by treating these works collectively, has revealed the ways in which the authors of the Jewish novels depicted the female protagonists of each work. As such, I have illustrated that the Jewish novels present both a varied and complex understanding of women's roles in defining and maintaining Jewishness during the Hellenistic age.

My analysis of the portrayal of the female protagonists was organized around four categories which aimed to bridge the gap between scholarly discussions on Jewishness, on the one hand, and gender and women's studies in ancient Judaism, on the other. Firstly, I have shown how the author's portrayed women actively maintaining both Jewishness and separation from outsiders though the use of foodways. Secondly, I examined the representation of women's sexuality in the female protagonists. I illustrated the importance of sexuality to the characterization of the protagonists, showing that the protagonists both traverse and maintain the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable sexual relations, particularly with foreigners. Thirdly, I demonstrated the extensive and varied use of kinship ties in the portrayal of the female protagonists. As I discussed above, kinship ties are a vital way for each of the protagonists to remain attached to their Jewish heritage. Fourthly, I examined the role of the protagonist in the broader Jewish community as portrayed in each text. I noted the ways in which the female protagonists both remained a part of their community while also falling outside of that community.

In my final chapter I returned to the question posed in the introduction: is it possible to find expressions of women's Jewishness in texts from antiquity? Using my analysis of the

portrayal of the female protagonists in the Jewish novels, I have demonstrated that Jewishness is not a set of beliefs or practices but a complex and varied perspective of separateness, specifically of those who identify themselves as Jews. In this analysis I have taken seriously the portrayal of Jewish women in the novels, allowing them to have a voice. Moreover, I did not compare these expressions to other expressions of Jewishness (i.e., circumcision, Torah use/study). Instead, I have presented these aspects of Jewishness as valid representations of women's Jewishness during the Hellenistic period. While the Jewish novels represent only a few authors' perspectives on women's Jewishness, I have illustrated how there are both similarities and differences in the ways in which these authors portray the female protagonists. As such, I have described the complex and varied portrayal of women's Jewishness in the Jewish novels.

Ultimately, the present study is intended to do more than simply highlight the portrayal of Jewishness in the Jewish novels. I have shown that scholarship has not adequately taken into consideration the portrayals of women's Jewishness in the Jewish novels, nor have many scholars noted this concerning lacuna in the scholarship on the subject of Jewishness. By analyzing the portrayal of the female protagonists, I have demonstrated that there is much to be gained by including portrayals of Jewish women in the scholarly discussion on Jewishness. Furthermore, my comparative approach to pursuing women's Jewishness may be useful for examining other less visible populations and less visible expressions of Jewishness. By using methodology that considers narratives and characters in ways few others have, I have shown that there are yet exciting avenues to pursue in our endeavor to understand the complexity of Jewishness in antiquity.

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