

# Emotion, Gender, and Greco-Roman Virtue in Joseph and Aseneth<sup>1</sup>

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Anger, courage, and *philanthropia*—three important elements of Greco-Roman civic life—figure prominently in the book of Joseph and Aseneth and help us uncover the book’s message. One view within Greco-Roman culture valorized manly anger—at least where appropriate—and manly courage, but, according to Joseph and Aseneth, Jews instead privileged the emotion of pity and the related virtue of *philanthropia*. The author strategically developed his plot around the experiences of a female convert, whose views on anger, courage, and *philanthropia* highlight both the distinctiveness and subversiveness of the Jewish position. His message served an important polemical goal, one which highlighted the premium that Jews place on *philanthropia* and challenged contemporary accusations of Jewish misanthropy.

Keywords: Joseph and Aseneth; emotion; anger; courage; Philo of Alexandria; Hellenism

## 1. Introduction

Joseph and Aseneth, generally regarded as a Jewish work composed during the late Second Temple period or shortly thereafter, is often invoked as a key text about conversion in antiquity.<sup>2</sup> Scholars have unpacked the basic plot’s suggestions about attitudes to the ambient Greco-Roman culture, as it records Aseneth’s transformation from polytheist to monotheist.<sup>3</sup> I will argue that, in

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<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank Chaviva Levin and Gillian Steinberg for their feedback on earlier drafts. All remaining errors are my own.

<sup>2</sup> On the identity of the book’s author as Jewish, see, e.g., Christoph Burchard, *Untersuchungen zu Joseph und Aseneth* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1965), 99–107; Randall D. Chesnutt, *From Death to Life: Conversion in Joseph and Aseneth*, JSPSup 16 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 36–37; Edith M. Humphrey, *Joseph and Aseneth* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 28–31. Kraemer’s suggestion that the author may have been Christian has generally not won acceptance; see her 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), 245–85, and the opposing arguments in John J. Collins, “Joseph and Aseneth: Jewish or Christian?” JSP 14 (2005): 97–112. On conversion in the book, see Chesnutt, *From Death to Life*.

<sup>3</sup> Scholars are divided as to whether the book reflects positively or negatively on Greco-Roman culture. For the view that the author of Joseph and Aseneth rejected Greco-Roman culture wholesale, see John M. G. Barclay, who reads the text as expressing a “strong sense of alienation between Jews and non-Jews” (*Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan [323 BCE to 117 CE]* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996], 211). Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr, “Ethik und Tora: Zum Toraverständnis in Joseph und Aseneth,” in *Joseph und Aseneth*, ed. Eckart Reinmuth (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 187–202, similarly concludes that the polemic against idolatry, sexual contact, and dining with gentiles demonstrates that the book espouses an exclusionary ethos. By contrast, Joseph Méléze Modrzejewski, *The Jews of Egypt: From Rameses II to Emperor*

scrutinizing the author's outlook on that culture, we must pay close attention to the role of emotions in the book. The experiences of the book's protagonists are described throughout in emotional terms.<sup>4</sup> While the use of emotions provides depth to the characters and heightens the book's drama, the particular configuration of emotions suggests that their significance goes beyond those literary considerations. The emotions attributed to the characters are deeply counter-cultural and signal a broader lesson that the author sought to communicate to his audience about the place of Jews in the Greco-Roman world.

The message of *Joseph and Aseneth*, I will argue, centers upon the definitions of courage (ἀνδρεία) and humaneness (φιλανθρωπία), two Greco-Roman virtues intimately bound up with the emotion of anger (ὀργή). In the words of Philo of Alexandria, “most people” (οἱ πολλοί) defined courage as “the rabid war fever which takes anger (ὀργή) for its counselor.”<sup>5</sup> The virtue of humaneness, on the other hand, was generally understood as incompatible with anger. The leading characters in *Joseph and Aseneth* express their opposition to anger in order to provide a definition of courage that would facilitate, rather than undermine, humaneness—a virtue that ancient Jews were accused of violating.<sup>6</sup> The book's author thus engages one of the primary accusations leveled at Jews by their ancient opponents.

Without anger as its guide, *andreia* does not lead to conflict but to peace. The courageous person, according to *Joseph and Aseneth*, awaits divine protection while simultaneously behaving with mercy toward one's adversaries. Defined this way, courage promotes the virtue of *philanthropia*. The ideal Jew embraces the virtue of courage but, by repudiating anger in favor of the fear of God,

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*Hadrian* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1995), 67–72, believes that the book reflects positively on Jewish acculturation to their Greco-Roman surroundings. In a similar direction, John J. Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 238, believes that “it makes little sense to speak of ‘cultural antagonism’ in *Joseph and Aseneth*,” a view accepted by Chesnutt, *From Death to Life* (254–55). Noah Hacham (“*Joseph and Aseneth: Loyalty, Traitors, Antiquity, and Diasporan Identity*,” *JSP* 22 [2012]: 53–67 [62]) adopts an intermediate position, suggesting that the book's message is that “despite their obvious separatism and their rejection of idolatry and idolaters, this has no bearing on Jewish attitudes toward the regime.”

<sup>4</sup> See Patricia D. Ahearne-Kroll, “*Joseph and Aseneth* and Jewish Identity in Greco-Roman Egypt” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2005), 92–111; Françoise Mirguet, “And Aseneth Saw Joseph...: Body Language and Emotions in *Joseph and Aseneth* 6,1,” in *La surprise dans la Bible*, ed. Geert van Oyen and André Wenin, BETL 247 (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 403–13; B. Diane Lipsett, *Desiring Conversion: Hermas, Thecla, Aseneth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 86–121.

<sup>5</sup> *Virt.* 1. All translations of *De virtutibus* are based on the LCL edition (trans. F. H. Colson; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1939), with modifications. On the link between anger and courage in other ancient sources, see below, p. ??.

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., the characterization of Jews by Apollonius Molon (first century BCE) as “atheists and misanthropes (μισανθρώπους)” (Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.148). See a survey of sources in Peter Schäfer, *Judeophobia: Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 15–33. Schäfer lists the writers Hecataeus, Manetho, Apollonius Molon, Diodorus Siculus, Pompeius Trogus, Lysimachus, and Tacitus, authors of compositions from the third century BCE through the second century CE, who described the Jews as misanthropic. On the charge of *misanthropia* and the related accusation of *misoxenia* (hostility to foreigners) by Apion, see Schäfer, *Judeophobia*, 58–65.

necessarily defines it differently. In offering a distinctive definition for courage, however, the author embraces the virtue of *philanthropia*, casting Judaism in a positive light and pushing back against anti-Jewish sentiment.

Aseneth, the female convert, is the mouthpiece through which the author reflects on anger, courage, and *philanthropia*. In the final section of the book, she rejects anger-driven, vengeful, and violent displays of courage by some of Joseph's brothers in favor of a merciful form of courage that promotes *philanthropia*. In a wide range of Greek and Latin sources that extend back to the Homeric epics and forward into late antiquity, anger, as an emotion, and *andreia*, as a virtue, are associated particularly with men.<sup>7</sup> In repudiating anger in favor of divine worship as the basis for courage, Aseneth, not the men, acts courageously, thereby redefining a central Greco-Roman virtue.<sup>8</sup> My focus on the role of gendered emotion and virtue in Joseph and Aseneth takes in a hitherto unexplored direction the burgeoning scholarly interest in the role of gender as well as the message of the book in its historical context.<sup>9</sup>

The book traces Aseneth's attitude toward anger alongside her religious journey. She did not always appreciate the destabilizing role that anger-driven courage plays. As a polytheist earlier in the

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<sup>7</sup> See the collection of essays in Ralph M. Rosen and Ineke Sluiter, eds., *Andreia: Studies in Manliness and Courage in Classical Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> I do not wish to imply that the author of Joseph and Aseneth was alone in rejecting the legitimacy of anger and its connection with courage; numerous non-Jewish Greco-Roman writers made similar arguments. In a similar vein, I am not homogenizing one thousand years of Greco-Roman culture extending back to the Homeric epics. Instead, I simply assume that the view about the legitimacy of anger and the link between that emotion and the virtue of courage persisted as one view in the Greco-Roman consciousness. Indeed, according to William V. Harris ("The Rage of Women," in *Ancient Anger: Perspectives from Homer to Galen*, ed. Susanna Braund and Glenn W. Most [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004], 121–44 [125]), "while throughout classical antiquity many Greeks and Romans advocated the reining-in or the elimination of the 'strong-anger' emotions ... much of this criticism was less than absolute; in other words, it admitted the existence of legitimate *orgē*, *ira*, and so on—for men." In that context, we should take seriously Philo's statement that "most people" defined manly courage as "the rabid war fever which takes anger for its counselor," if not for "most" then at least for "some" people. In other words, my claim in this paper is that, like other Greco-Roman writers, the author of Joseph and Aseneth took issue with one long-standing, popular view about courage and its relationship with anger.

<sup>9</sup> For representative scholarship on gender in Joseph and Aseneth, see, e.g., Angela Standhartinger, *Das Frauenbild im Judentum der Hellenistischen Zeit: Ein Beitrag anhand von 'Joseph und Aseneth'*, AGJU 26 (Leiden: Brill, 1995); Kraemer, "Why is Aseneth a Woman? The Use and Significance of Gender in the Aseneth Stories," in *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 191–221; Patricia D. Ahearne-Kroll, "The Portrayal of Aseneth in *Joseph and Aseneth*: Women's Religious Experience in Antiquity and the Limitations of Ancient Narratives," in *Women and Gender in Ancient Religions: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Stephen P. Ahearne-Kroll, Paul A. Holloway, and James A. Kelhoffer, WUNT 263 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 41–58; Lipsett, *Desiring Conversion*, 86–121; Humphrey, *Joseph and Aseneth*, 64–79. On the construction of masculinity in the book, see Hanna Stenström, "Masculine or Feminine? Male Virgins in Joseph and Aseneth and the Book of Revelation," in *Identity Formation in the New Testament*, ed. Bengt Holmberg and Mikael Winnige, WUNT 227 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 199–222; Jessica Lyn Tinklenberg Devega, "A Man Who Fears God" Constructions of Masculinity in Hellenistic Jewish Interpretations of the Story of Joseph" (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2006), 57–88.

book, Aseneth, who hated all men, responded furiously to her father's suggestion that she marry Joseph (4:9–12). Aseneth's religious conversion takes place alongside—or, perhaps, generates—her repudiation of anger later in the book, as a misanthropic, angry female polytheist evolves into a philanthropic, courageous, and merciful devotee of God.<sup>10</sup> According to the book, only a monotheist—an outsider—can identify genuine courage, that is, an anger-free display of *philanthropia*. The author makes that point forcefully by portraying the monotheist as the ultimate outsider: a *female* who had voluntarily *abandoned* polytheism. The female convert thus teaches the male polytheists about the true definition of manly emotions and virtues, with both gender and religion highlighting the inversion of values. In other words, “characteristics previously denigrated and associated with the feminine become valued and masculinized,” a process that entails “both a transference and an inversion of values.”<sup>11</sup>

My argument about the interrelationship between anger, courage, and *philanthropia* has implications for one of the most vexed questions concerning the book's structure. The relationship between chs. 1–21, which recount Aseneth's path to monotheism and marriage, and chs. 22–29, which narrate internecine conflict centered upon the crown prince's plot against Joseph and Aseneth, has perplexed scholars. Many, in fact, assume that the book's two sections are only marginally connected.<sup>12</sup> My analysis instead suggests that the book chronicles Aseneth's emotional and virtuous journey—from an angry misanthrope early in the book to an even-tempered champion of *philanthropia*-oriented courage by its conclusion—alongside her religious transformation.

Because I seek to understand the message of Joseph and Aseneth in its original, Greco-Roman context, it is important to acknowledge one additional problem in the study of the book, namely its transmission history. Scholars distinguish two general recensions, the so-called “short” and “long” versions of the book. A number of commentators over the past twenty years have

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<sup>10</sup> Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 151, correctly notes that Aseneth is nowhere depicted as observing Jewish law, and Erich S. Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 94, adds that the book never mentions “Jew” or “Gentile.” Nevertheless, the book clearly distinguishes between two forms of religious devotion, so using the language of conversion to describe her transformation would appear justified.

<sup>11</sup> Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 204, commenting on the role of sexuality in the Apocryphal Acts of the second and third centuries CE. Kraemer here builds upon the analysis of Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 54–56.

<sup>12</sup> See discussion in Hacham, “*Joseph and Aseneth*,” 54–55. Sabrina Inowlicki, *Des Idoles Mortes et Muettes au dieu vivant: Joseph, Aséneth et le fils de Pharaon dans un Roman du Judaïsme Hellénisé* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), 83–96, views the portrait of the crown prince as a foil for the recently transformed Aseneth. Though our analyses differ, I believe that the contrast between Aseneth and the crown prince is indeed central to the message of chs. 22–29. I also sympathize with the view, suggested by Collins (*Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 109) and elaborated by Hacham (“*Joseph and Aseneth*”), which regards chs. 22–29 as “evidently paradigmatic of Jewish-Gentile relations in the Egyptian Diaspora” (Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem*, 109). However, we part ways in our understanding of that paradigm, which, in addition, I believe ties the two sections of the book together.

chipped away at the long-standing consensus that the latter recension comprises the original text.<sup>13</sup> In order to circumvent this debate, Ahearne-Kroll proposed that scholars consider the motifs and formulations common to both recensions as reflecting the original composition, with each recension representing independent developments of that core.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, the texts that I will focus on are attested in both of the recensions.

## 2. Anger and Courage in Their Ancient Context

Anger is characterized as a gendered emotion whose legitimate expression was reserved for men throughout a vast array of Greek and Latin sources that span a millennium.<sup>15</sup> Anger served an important role in public life—one overseen by males—as an explicit motivation for and justification of punishment.<sup>16</sup> The link between anger and punishment spotlights a fundamental dimension of anger according to Aristotle: the desire for revenge.<sup>17</sup> Legitimate displays of anger were therefore reserved for groups who were in positions to exact revenge; powerless groups, such as slaves and women, did not have access to legitimate forms of anger.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, excessive, uncontrolled anger was described as typical of women.<sup>19</sup> Immoderate anger in men could thus be

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<sup>13</sup> The defense of the longer recension was initially made by Burchard, *Untersuchungen*, resulting in an eclectic text published as *Joseph und Aseneth: Kritisch Herausgegeben*, PVTG 5 (Leiden: Brill, 2003) and translated by him in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1985). Marc Philonenko mounted the first argument in favor of the shorter recension in *Joseph et Aséneth: Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction et Notes*, StPB 13 (Leiden: Brill, 1968), translated by David Cook in *The Apocryphal Old Testament*, ed. H. F. D. Sparks (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984). Several scholars have picked up the strands of his argument, most notably Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 50–88, 206–10, and Angela Standhartinger, “From Fictional Text to Socio-Historical Context,” *SBL Seminar Papers 1996*, SBLSLP 33 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 302–18; eadem, *Frauenbild*, 219–25. Burchard has recently responded to his critics in “The Text of *Joseph and Aseneth* Reconsidered,” *JSP* 14 (2005): 83–96.

<sup>14</sup> Ahearne-Kroll, “*Joseph and Aseneth*,” 61–87.

<sup>15</sup> See Christopher A. Faraone, “*Thumos* as Masculine Ideal and Social Pathology in Ancient Greek Magical Spells,” in *Ancient Anger: Perspectives from Homer to Galen*, ed. Susanna Braund and Glenn W. Most (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 144–62; Harris, “Rage of Women,” 121–44. Although Greek sources often argue for the need to rein in anger, it is equally clear that anger was regarded as a legitimate emotion for men; see Harris, “Rage of Women,” 125–28.

<sup>16</sup> See Danielle S. Allen, “Democratic Dis-ease: Of Anger and the Troubling Nature of Punishment,” in *The Passions of Law*, ed. Susan A. Bandes (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 191–214.

<sup>17</sup> David Konstan, *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks: Studies in Aristotle and Classical Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 41–76.

<sup>18</sup> See *ibid.*, *Emotions of the Ancient Greeks*, 57: “Anger, according to Aristotle, requires not just pride but power.”

<sup>19</sup> See, e.g., Plutarch, *Cohib. ira* 8, 457A–B: “Just as with the flesh a swelling results from a great blow, so with the weakest souls the inclination to inflict a hurt produces a flaring up of temper as great as the soul’s infirmity is great. That is also the reason why women are more prone to anger than men...” (LCL; trans. W. C. Helmbold); Seneca, *Ira* 1.20.3: “Anger is a most womanish and childish weakness” (LCL; trans. J. W. Basore).

described as feminine, and women were encouraged to avoid anger entirely.<sup>20</sup> The link between anger and masculinity intersects with the stereotype surrounding feminine anger: since anger represented such an important masculine emotion, men tried to suppress female anger entirely by arguing that women were extremely prone to irascibility.<sup>21</sup> In addition, since anger served an important role in public life, depriving women of the right to display anger also functioned to exclude them from public life.<sup>22</sup>

The manly emotion of anger is associated with courage, identified throughout Greco-Roman literature as one of the cardinal virtues.<sup>23</sup> Courage, according to Polybius, was “nearly the most important virtue in every state ... especially in Rome.”<sup>24</sup> Courage, too, was generally reserved for men.<sup>25</sup> The passion that necessarily fueled courage could equally generate excessive anger, and anger often surfaces among Greco-Roman writers as the dark side of courage. Philosophers as early as Socrates recognized the importance of “spiritedness” (θυμός) for facilitating courage but sought to temper that spiritedness so that it would not lead to excessive anger. He acknowledged that spiritedness, a type of “fierce indignation,” makes one “in the face of everything fearless and unconquerable” and therefore makes one “willing to be courageous.”<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, he worried that excessive spirit—a leading example of which is anger—will cause one to be “savage to one another and the rest of the citizens.”<sup>27</sup> Spiritedness for Socrates blinds reason, and hence “because courage requires recognition of the dangers one faces, spiritedness cannot be the same as courage.”<sup>28</sup> Philo

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<sup>20</sup> William V. Harris, *Restraining Rage: The Ideology of Anger Control in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 264–82.

<sup>21</sup> See *ibid.*, 274; J. H. D. Scourfield, “Anger and Gender in Chariton’s *Chaereas and Callirhoe*,” in *Ancient Anger*, 163–84 (181).

<sup>22</sup> See Konstan, *Emotions of the Ancient Greeks*, 58. Elizabeth V. Spelman, “Anger and Insubordination,” in *Women, Knowledge, and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*, ed. A. Garry and M. Pearsall (Boston: Routledge, 1989), 263–73, observes that the element of judgment associated with anger explains why dominant groups often exclude subordinate groups from the domain of legitimate anger.

<sup>23</sup> On the four cardinal virtues, which included wisdom, temperance, justice, and courage, see Helen F. North, “Canons and Hierarchies of the Cardinal Virtues in Greek and Latin Literature,” in *The Classical Tradition: Literary and Historical Studies in Honor of Harry Caplan*, ed. Luitpold Wallach (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966), 165–83.

<sup>24</sup> *Hist.* 31.29.1

<sup>25</sup> See Philo, *Virt.* 18–21. Consistent with the Socratic conception of virtues as gender-neutral, Plato allows for the possibility that women could possess *andreia* (*Resp.* 451c–457c), though his descriptions of that virtue and the means through which one acquires it seem to envision a generally male audience; see Angela Hobbs, *Plato and the Hero: Courage, Manliness, and the Impersonal Good* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 244–48. Aristotle (*Pol.* 1260a20–24) explicitly criticizes Socrates for taking that stance.

<sup>26</sup> Plato, *Resp.* 2.375b (LCL; trans. Paul Shorey). On *thumos* as fierce indignation in *Republic*, see Hobbs, *Plato and the Hero*, 207. Aristotle as well speaks of “spirit” as a necessary element of courage while distancing excessive anger from courage; see *Eth. nic.* 8.10–11: “Spirit or anger is also classed with courage. Men emboldened by anger, like wild beasts which rush upon the hunter that has wounded them, are supposed to be courageous, because the courageous also are high-spirited ... But those who fight for these motives ... are not courageous” (LCL; trans. H. Rackham).

<sup>27</sup> *Resp.* 2.375b.

<sup>28</sup> Linda R. Rabieh, *Plato and the Virtue of Courage* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 99.

wrote that “most people” define courage as “the rabid war fever which takes anger for its counselor,” a definition that, as we will see below, he regards as deeply misguided.<sup>29</sup>

As a virtue, courage was an essential component of a good life.<sup>30</sup> For that reason, courage was not simply a private virtue. Philosophers such as Socrates and Cicero sought to extrapolate from the paradigmatic case of military courage a definition that could also apply in the context of civic life.<sup>31</sup> In his comprehensive account of the virtue of courage, Philo of Alexandria paid particular attention to the non-martial manifestation of courage, which he defined as “render[ing] the highest service to the commonwealth by the excellent advice which they put forward ... [to] restore what had broken down in the personal life of each individual and in the public life of their country.”<sup>32</sup> As we will see, Philo’s conception of courage will prove especially useful in analyzing that virtue in Joseph and Aseneth.

The link between manly emotions and manly virtues becomes important when we turn our attention to the portrayal of Aseneth, who, as I describe below, sought to combat the legitimacy of manly anger and redefine the contours of manly courage.

### 3. Aseneth’s Post-Conversion Repudiation of Manly Anger

The emotion of anger and the related virtue of courage surface most clearly in chs. 22–29 of Joseph and Aseneth. In that section, which describes events following Aseneth’s conversion and marriage to Joseph, Aseneth emerges as a woman completely in control of her anger. In that regard, she stands in sharp contrast to Joseph’s brothers, who are consumed by anger. Her insistence that Simeon in particular suppress his anger needs to be viewed within the broader Greco-Roman context, which viewed anger as a manly prerogative. The book spotlights a woman as leading the campaign against anger in order to underscore the intentionally subversive nature of the book’s perspective on anger.

Overwhelmed with jealousy toward Joseph, the crown prince solicits the aid of Joseph’s brothers in a plot to kill him and take Aseneth as his bride. Simeon responds with great “anger” (ὀργῆς) to the crown prince’s plot (23:8), prompting Levi to question why Simeon is “furious with

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<sup>29</sup> *Virt.* 1. See also Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 3.8.10, who implies that many people regard anger as essential to courage. Philo’s position also shares much in common with that of Cicero, who writes that “not those who do injury but those who prevent it are to be considered brave and courageous” (*Off.* 1.65) (LCL; trans. Walter Miller). For other discussions of anger in ancient Jewish texts, see Testament of Dan and Letter of Aristeas §§253–54.

<sup>30</sup> Hobbs, *Plato and the Hero*, 50–59.

<sup>31</sup> See Plato, *Resp.* 399a–b; Cicero, *Off.* 1.74–87.

<sup>32</sup> *Virt.* 3.

anger” (ὀργῇ θυμοῦσαι) (23:9).<sup>33</sup> According to the longer text, Levi speaks to the crown prince without the “least anger (ὀργή) in him” (23:9) and, in both recensions, warns him not to proceed in his plot against Joseph.

Like Levi, Aseneth is firmly opposed to manifestations of anger. Rebuffed by Simeon and Levi, the crown prince recruits Dan and Gad as allies in his plot against Joseph. When Naphtali and Asher seek to dissuade Dan and Gad from aiding the crown prince, the latter grow “angry” (ὠργίσθησαν) (25:7). Eventually God intervenes, and “at once their (i.e., the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah) swords fall from their hands on the ground and were reduced to ashes” (27:11). At that point, they surrender and appeal to Aseneth’s mercy. Aseneth agrees to help but tells them that she will need to calm the anger (ὀργή) of the other brothers (28:7). Simeon does indeed want to exact revenge, but Aseneth sought to “save the men from their brothers’ anger (ὀργῆς)” (28:15). The shorter text makes clear that she succeeded in doing so, while the longer text, though implying it, does not make that point explicit.<sup>34</sup>

Considering the Greco-Roman context out of which this book emerged, the feminine repudiation of masculine anger is remarkable. She does not reject the grounds for their anger; the offending brothers deserve to be punished for the “insult” (ἔβρις) that they had committed (28:4, 14). However, as I observed earlier, anger and revenge were inextricably linked in Greco-Roman thought, and Aseneth reserves revenge for God alone: “By no means, brother, will you do evil for evil to your neighbor. To the Lord will you give (the right) to punish the insult (done) by them” (28:14). When God can be relied upon, neither Aseneth nor Levi allows for the legitimacy of anger *at all*.<sup>35</sup> In light of the relationship between anger and masculinity, Aseneth’s position is deeply subversive.

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<sup>33</sup> The Greek text and versification of Joseph and Aseneth is cited from Burchard’s critical edition, and translations will be based on Burchard’s translation in *OTP*, with slight modifications. I will provide the variants from Philonenko’s text when they are of consequence for my analysis; translations of the shorter text will be based on those of Cook in *The Apocryphal Old Testament*.

<sup>34</sup> The longer text adds that Levi was “afraid that in their anger (ὀργῇ) they might cut them down” (28:17). Standhartinger, *Frauenbild*, 175–76, assumes that in the longer text, Levi, not Aseneth, saved the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, though the fact that Simeon does not take further action would seem to be a result of Aseneth’s argument.

<sup>35</sup> The scope of the opposition to anger in the longer text is somewhat uncertain. Levi’s statements to Simeon in ch. 23 and Benjamin in ch. 29 repudiate anger toward *anyone*, including a gentile enemy. The sons of Bilhah and Zilpah also seem to subscribe to that view: “We know that our brothers are men who worship God and do not repay anyone evil for evil” (28:5). However, Aseneth’s argument to Simeon is narrower—“And you, spare them because they are your brothers and your father Israel’s blood” (28:11)—and might imply that pity should extend to Jews alone. Standhartinger correctly notes that that view would be at odds with the one found in the shorter text, which opposes revenge toward *anyone*; see her *Frauenbild*, 177–78. Considering that Aseneth’s mandate, even in the longer recension, is to embody a “city of refuge” in whom “many nations will take refuge” (15:7), I prefer reading Aseneth’s intervention in ch. 28 on behalf of Joseph’s brothers to be an unexpected *expansion* rather than a *narrowing* of her role; see Humphrey, *Joseph and Aseneth*, 43, who remarks that “Aseneth displays her new nature as the mother of all those who seek refuge, taking under her wings ...



Aseneth mounts two separate challenges to the legitimacy of anger. Initially, Aseneth urges the sons of Leah to substitute pity for anger, emotions that were often contrasted in the classical world as competing responses to the actions of others. Greco-Roman sources reflect two mutually exclusive views about when one might appropriately demonstrate pity.<sup>36</sup> Aristotle defined the object of pity as “an apparent destructive or painful harm *in one not deserving to encounter it*.”<sup>37</sup> Anger, on the other hand, presupposed the guilt of its object.<sup>38</sup> For this perspective, pity should be reserved for the innocent. By contrast, another view claimed that “pity looks not to the case but to the condition,” that is, to “wretchedness as opposed to desert.”<sup>39</sup> In Joseph and Aseneth, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, their cause lost, make an explicit appeal for Aseneth’s pity that relies on the latter view of that emotion:<sup>40</sup>

Have pity (ἐλέησον) on us ... And we have wickedly committed evil (things) against you and against our brother Joseph; and the Lord repaid us according to our works. And now we, your slaves, beg you, have pity on us (ἐλέησον) and rescue us from the hands of our brothers, because they arrived as avengers of the insult (done to) you ... And we know that our brothers are men who worship God and do not repay anyone evil for evil. (28:2–6)

The sons of Bilhah and Zilpah admit their wrongdoing and acknowledge that they deserve their punishment but, having already endured divine retribution, beg for pity that would spare them further punishment. Simeon, on the other hand, expresses anger because his brothers are legitimately guilty. Aseneth enters the fray as the agent of the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah and pleads with Simeon to demonstrate pity rather than anger: “I beg you, spare your brothers and do not do them evil for evil, because the Lord protected me against them and shattered their swords, and they melted on the ground like wax from the presence of fire” (28:10). Aseneth invokes their pitiable circumstance in spite of their guilt. Aseneth adds one more consideration: “And you, spare them because they are your brothers and your father Israel’s blood” (28:11). Aristotle, and numerous writers after him, suggested that “people pity those who are similar to themselves, whether in age, character, disposition, rank, family.”<sup>41</sup> Aseneth thus seeks to elicit from Simeon the emotion of pity

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not simply Gentiles (as we might have expected) but those who belong to Israel.” Alternatively, we might simply interpret Aseneth’s formulation as powerful rhetoric narrowly tailored to the context of internecine strife; the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah articulate the general principle, and she modifies it in order to present a more powerful argument to Simeon.

<sup>36</sup> See David Konstan, *Pity Transformed* (London: Duckworth, 2001), 75–104.

<sup>37</sup> *Rhet.* 2.8.2. This definition remained in force among many Greco-Roman writers; Cicero thus writes that “pity is distress arising out of the wretchedness of another who is suffering undeservedly” (*Tusc.* 4.18).

<sup>38</sup> See Konstan, *Pity Transformed*, 78–87.

<sup>39</sup> The first quote is drawn from Seneca, *Clem.* 2.5.1, the second from Konstan, *Pity Transformed*, 93.

<sup>40</sup> On the Greek terminology for pity, see Rachel Hall Sternberg, “The Nature of Pity,” in *Pity and Power in Ancient Athens*, ed. Rachel Hall Sternberg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 17–24.

<sup>41</sup> Aristotle, *Rhet.* 2.8, 1386a25–27.

by reminding him of the relationship between him and the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah.<sup>42</sup> Simeon should pity them because of the wretched circumstances in which family members are mired, even though the latter are responsible for their own downfall.

Aseneth's appeal to pity fails to convince Simeon, who asks "why does our mistress speak good (things) on behalf of her enemies?" (28:12). Simeon adopts Aristotle's view of pity, according to which only the innocent deserve pity. He further denies the affinity that makes pity possible: "They (were) first (to) plan evil (things) against us and against our father Israel and against our brother Joseph, this already twice, and against you, our mistress and queen." Aseneth had invoked the blood relations between the sons of Leah and those of Bilhah and Zilpah; Simeon's response points out that the latter had already acted in defiance of that relationship.

Aseneth therefore offers a related but distinct argument against Simeon's anger: "By no means, brother, will you do evil for evil to your neighbor. To the Lord will you give (the right) to punish the insult (done) by them" (28:14). Aseneth does not remind Simeon that, as a factual matter, the brothers have already been punished and therefore deserve his pity, nor does she seek to arouse in him pity by vividly describing them as having "melted on the ground like wax from the presence of fire." Rather, she tells Simeon that he must spare them because, as a general principle, only God has the right to punish. Aseneth here invokes an ethical proposition that transcends the particular circumstances of this case. This principle centers upon the virtue of *philanthropia*, or humaneness. Where the emotion of pity is inapplicable, *philanthropia* can nonetheless motivate someone to spare the other party.<sup>43</sup> *Philanthropia* is not an emotion which can be evoked by rhetorical argument but is rather a general disposition of mildness and humaneness.<sup>44</sup> As a general pattern of behavior, *philanthropia* leaves no room for anger.

Of course, Aseneth is not the only opponent of anger in the book's final section. In both the shorter and longer recensions of the book, Levi joins her in rejecting the legitimacy of anger.<sup>45</sup> In the longer text, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, too, eventually recognize the incompatibility of anger with worshipping God.<sup>46</sup> The book, in both of its recensions, nevertheless provides a woman with a prominent voice in challenging anger as a symbolic gesture of subversiveness.<sup>47</sup> The fact that Levi

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<sup>42</sup> Although Aristotle (*ibid.*) insists that the pitier and the pitied not be "too closely connected ... for if they are, they feel the same as if they themselves were likely to suffer," Aseneth must compensate for the fact that Simeon appears to feel *no* kinship with his brothers.

<sup>43</sup> See, e.g., Polybius, *Hist.* 15.17.4–5, who reports that Scipio told the Carthaginians that the Romans had decided to show them humaneness (*φιλανθρωπία*) even though the latter deserved no pity (*ἔλεος*).

<sup>44</sup> Konstan, *Pity Transformed*, 88.

<sup>45</sup> See 23:9 and 29:3.

<sup>46</sup> See Standhartinger, *Frauenbild*, 173.

<sup>47</sup> Interestingly, Joseph and Aseneth is not the only Hellenistic-era narrative work to challenge the male monopoly on legitimate anger. One of the ancient Greek novels, *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, adopts a similarly subversive attitude toward the gendered dimension of anger; see Scourfield, "Anger and Gender in Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe*." Although I would not push the link between these works too far, numerous scholars have argued for the influence of the Greek novels on Joseph and Aseneth; see, e.g., S. West, "Joseph and

and Aseneth are aligned in this regard deepens the book's subversiveness: the ideal men in the book adopt a feminine ethic, one which repudiates entirely the masculine traits of anger and courage.<sup>48</sup>

#### 4. Aseneth's Post-Conversion Repudiation of Manly Courage

In chs. 22–29, Aseneth not only rejects the viability of manly anger but also a definition of the manly virtue of courage as based on anger. In urging Dan and Gad to kill Joseph, the crown prince contrasts the (manly) courage (ἀνδρίζεσθε) associated with revenge (24:7) with a feminine death.<sup>49</sup> Dan and Gad later echo the prince's sentiment in response to the warning issued by Naphtali and Asher that, if they refuse to lay down their arms, Joseph will “cry to the Most High, and he will send fire from heaven, and it will consume you, and the angels of God will fight for him against you” (25:6). Dan and Gad grow “angry” (ὀργίσθησαν) and say that they do not want to “die like women” (25:7). Their anger thus triggers manly courage. The clear implication of the book, however, is that this outlook is rash rather than courageous. In Philo's terms, courage is not “the rabid war fever which takes anger for its counselor.”<sup>50</sup>

The line separating courage and rashness, which occupied the minds of ancient thinkers, was not an obvious one; one person's definition of courage represented another's conception of rashness.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, the importance of courage as a manly virtue meant that its definition was always contested.<sup>52</sup> Therein lies the crux of the debate between the brothers: Dan and Gad, adhering to the Greco-Roman outlook on anger, regard their own actions as brave, while Naphtali and Asher, who recognize the inevitability of divine intervention, regard them as rash. The latter appear to

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Aseneth: A Neglected Greek Romance,” *Classical Quarterly* 24 (1974): 70–81; Burchard, “Joseph et Aséneth: Questions actuelles,” in *Gesammelte Studien zu Joseph und Aseneth: Berichtigt und ergänzt Herausgegeben mit Unterstützung von Carsten Burfeind*, SVTP 13 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 223–61 (230–42); Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth*, 43–48; Catherine Hezser, “‘Joseph and Aseneth’ in the Context of Ancient Greek Novels,” *FJB* 24 (1997): 1–40; Ahearne-Kroll, “*Joseph and Aseneth*,” 92ff. On the Hellenistic novels generally, see Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (London: Routledge, 1995), 41–76.

<sup>48</sup> See Devega, “Man Who Fears God,” 84: “Just as the characters in the story, the author's audience may believe that manliness is associated with power and violence, but they are mistaken. The idealized man is meek and merciful, and he does not repay ‘evil for evil’” (emphasis in original). There were calls in the Greco-Roman world to “restrain rage,” as Harris, *Restraining Rage*, puts it. Nevertheless, the importance of Aseneth's statement is three-fold: a woman denies men the absolute right to express anger; see earlier, n. 7, for Harris's claim that even those who objected to strong expressions of anger nonetheless allowed for more moderate expressions of that emotion among men.

<sup>49</sup> See Devega, “Man Who Fears God,” 87, who observes that, in this verse, the “rhetoric of violence” is “manly.”

<sup>50</sup> *Virt.* 1.

<sup>51</sup> For a discussion of this phenomenon in the context of ancient rhetoric, see Joseph Roisman, “The Rhetoric of Courage in the Athenian Orators,” in *Ancient Anger*, 127–43.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

adopt a view of courage advocated by Socrates, who argued that it requires an awareness of consequences, while those who take action without fear are rash.<sup>53</sup> Because they insist on behaving in a manly way, Dan and Gad blur the line separating courage from rashness.

The problematic relationship between anger and courage is visible elsewhere in the book's final section. When Simeon initially grows angry at the crown prince's suggestion that he and Levi join his plot against Joseph, the book describes Simeon as a "daring man" (ἀνὴρ θρασύς) (23:7). Various ancient authors use that label to refer to angry rashness and the antithesis of true courage; in the words of Philo, "rashness" (θρασύτης) is analogous to a "counterfeit [coin] that is a likeness of the true type."<sup>54</sup> Simeon's subsequent angry response to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah elicits from Aseneth the identical rebuke delivered to him by Levi earlier (28:14), implying that in ch. 28, too, the book seeks to characterize Simeon's anger as a misguided form of courage.

Considering that courage is twice defined in these chapters as the antithesis of feminine behavior—first by the crown prince, then by Dan and Gad—we must note the irony of Aseneth intervening with Simeon on behalf of the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah. Just as she played a subversive role in challenging the legitimacy of manly anger, Aseneth offers a conception of manly courage that defies the one which, according to Philo, was adopted by "most people."<sup>55</sup> If Simeon is an ἀνὴρ θρασύς, superficially courageous but actually rash, then the true definition of courage must lie elsewhere. Courage fueled by anger is incompatible with fear of God.

Aseneth, however, did not always exhibit this perspective on courage or an aversion to anger. The book vividly describes her anger before her conversion, as we will see below, and chronicles her transformation into one who repudiates anger-based courage. Her attitude toward anger and courage evolved out of her religious conversion, a fact that only deepens the subversiveness of her message. Aseneth delivered to men a message about Greco-Roman manly emotions and virtues as both a woman *and* as one who abandoned polytheism for monotheism. In

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<sup>53</sup> See Ralph M. Rosen and Manfred Horstmanshoff, "The *Andreia* of the Hippocratic Physician and the Problem of Incurables," in *Andreia*, 95–114.

<sup>54</sup> Philo, *Virt.* 4. See also idem, *Spec.* 4.146; *Praem.* 52; Plato, *Lach.* 184b, 197b; Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 2.8.6; Plutarch, *Virt. Mor.* 445a; Josephus, *J.W.* 6.171.

<sup>55</sup> The motif of the few versus the many appears elsewhere in Philo's discussion of courage (see Walter T. Wilson, *Philo of Alexandria: On Virtues: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* [Leiden: Brill, 2011], 107), in which case he may be exaggerating the extent to which this definition of courage truly represents that of "most people." The correspondence between reality and Philo's representation of the reality is less important for my purposes than the fact that he constructed reality in this way in order to highlight the distinctiveness of his perspective. I am making a similar claim on behalf of Joseph and Aseneth. The view of manly courage as rooted in anger was certainly widespread in Greco-Roman culture even if, as Harris documents in his *Restraining Rage*, there were dissenters to that outlook. Joseph and Aseneth is thus not the only opponent of that widespread view but nonetheless sought to set up an opposition between the Jewish and Greco-Roman definitions of courage. On the other hand, the objections to anger on the part of Greco-Roman writers might imply that anger was regarded by the masses as legitimate; cf. Janine Fillion-Lahille, *Le De ira de Sénèque et la philosophie stoïcienne des passions* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1984), 8–10.

order to appreciate the impact of her *religious* conversion on her *emotional* conversion, I turn to the first section of the book. In probing the source of Aseneth's views on anger and courage, my analysis seeks to uncover the relationship between gender and religion, or, put differently, to understand why the author of Joseph and Aseneth chose a female convert as one of the chief protagonists in his story.

## 5. Aseneth's Pre-Conversion Anger

Joseph and Aseneth chronicles a transformation in Aseneth's character, from a woman who possesses the attributes that comprise misguided manly courage to a female convert who, apparently, acquires and then transmits an understanding of genuine courage to men. In the beginning of the book, Aseneth defies the Greco-Roman opposition to displays of feminine anger. She rages with fury (ἐθυμώθη ἐν ὀργῇ μεγάλῃ) at her father's suggestion that she marry Joseph (4:9). The author's description of Pentephres's response to her "daring," "boastful," and "angry" rebuke certainly conveys his disapproval of her angry outburst.<sup>56</sup> As Angela Standhartinger has argued, the arrogance described in Aseneth's response to her father as θρασύς and ἀλαζονεία was considered to be a feminine vice.<sup>57</sup> Nor was this the first occasion on which she exhibited boastfulness; the text in 2:1 characterizes her misanthropic attitude toward men generally as "boastful" (ἀλαζών).<sup>58</sup> Her inappropriate display of anger is thus connected with an overall negative disposition. Aseneth is clearly a woman in need of emotional reform, just as she is in need of a religious transformation.

Before her conversion, Aseneth expresses not only anger but also the attributes that characterize the misguided form of courage. Although the language of courage is not explicitly stated in the text, Aseneth is described as "angry," "daring," and "boastful," the three adjectives that Philo uses to describe "rashness" (θρασύτης).<sup>59</sup> The description of Aseneth's "daring" and "anger" mirrors

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<sup>56</sup> "Pentephres was ashamed to speak further to his daughter Aseneth about Joseph, because she had answered him daringly (θρασέως) and with boastfulness (ἀλαζονείας) and anger (ὀργῆς)" (4:12). The shorter text omits θρασέως and only refers to her "boastfulness" and "anger."

<sup>57</sup> See Standhartinger, *Frauenbild*, 83. Cf. Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 195.

<sup>58</sup> See Standhartinger, *Frauenbild*, 80.

<sup>59</sup> See *Spec.* 4.146: "If anyone, indulging the ignorance which comes from arrogance (ἀλαζονείαν) ... ventures to add to or take from courage, he changes its likeness altogether and stamps upon it a form in which ugliness replaces beauty, for by adding he will make rashness (θρασύτητα)..." See also *Virt.* 2–4: "By courage I mean, not what most people understand, namely the rabid war fever which takes anger (ὀργῇ) for its counselor ... For some under the stimulus of reckless daring (θράσει) ... lay low multitudes of antagonists in a general slaughter ... [a form of courage that] should properly be called reckless daring (θρασύτητα)."

that of Simeon in ch. 23.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, Joseph possesses all of the elements that comprise courage. In broaching the subject of marriage with his daughter, Pentephres refers to Joseph as “a man who worships God (θεοσεβής), and self-controlled (σώφρων), and a virgin like you today ... a man powerful in wisdom (σοφία) and knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) (4:7). Philo features all five attributes—piety (εὐσέβεια), self-control, sexual discretion, wisdom, and knowledge<sup>61</sup>—as the essential elements of courage.<sup>62</sup> He explicitly contrasts several of those attributes with those used in Joseph and Aseneth to describe Aseneth.<sup>63</sup>

In light of the role that courage will play in chs. 22–29, we should view Joseph and Aseneth as contrasting portraits of genuine courage and rashness. As we saw, such a gendered contrast appears later in the book, when the “rash” and “angry” Simeon was challenged by Aseneth and when his allegedly courageous brothers were eventually forced to rely on Aseneth’s mercy.<sup>64</sup> The book thus narrates Aseneth’s evolution from a woman who possesses the attributes that comprise rashness to a female convert who acquires and then transmits an understanding of genuine courage to men. As we will see below, by the time she has undergone her conversion, Aseneth possesses the attributes that characterize Joseph in 4:7 and which Philo lists as the tell-tale signs of courage.

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<sup>60</sup> Compare the description of Aseneth as “θρασύς” and “ὀργή” with that of Simeon as “θρασέως” and “ὀργής.”

<sup>61</sup> The relationship between knowledge and courage for Philo is complex. In *Spec.* 4.145, he says that courage involves “the knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) of what ought to be endured.” His explanation of the relationship between knowledge and courage at the beginning of *De virtutibus* is a little different; as Konstan, “Philo’s *De virtutibus* in the Perspective of Classical Greek Philosophy,” *SPhil* 18 (2006): 59–72, at 69, remarks, “[r]ather than claim how courage is predicated on the knowledge of what should be endured, as Plato and Aristotle held and as Philo himself had affirmed in *On the Special Laws*, Philo appears here simply to reduce courage to wisdom, eliminating the element of danger that gives courage its specific quality.”

<sup>62</sup> *Virt.* 2: “By courage I mean ... the courage which is knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) ... These then who train themselves in wisdom (σοφίας) cultivate the true courage.” For the relationship between courage and self-control (σωφροσύνη), see *ibid.*, §§13–17 and Konstan, “Philo’s *De virtutibus*,” 70. The relationship between courage, piety, and sexual discretion emerges from Philo’s use of the story of the Ba’al Pe’or episode in Numbers 25 as the paradigm of military courage. In the words of Konstan, “Philo’s *De virtutibus*,” 72: “This, then, is courage [according to Philo—A.M.] in the personal realm: the ability to overcome the temptations of sex and other such appetites. Courage in war, in turn, resides in a single-minded dedication to defending piety, undistracted by any other concern.” The various aspects of courage listed by Philo are found among other classical authors; see below.

<sup>63</sup> *Virt.* 1–2: “By courage I mean, not what most people understand, namely the rabid war fever which takes anger (ὀργή) for its counselor, but the courage which is knowledge (ἐπιστήμη).” See *ibid.*, §4: “These then who train themselves in wisdom (σοφίας) cultivate the true courage. The courage (ἀνδρείαν) of these others ... should properly be called reckless daring (θρασύτητα).” Finally, see *Spec.* 4.146: “That courage ... is the knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) of what ought to be endured ... But if anyone, indulging the ignorance which comes from arrogance (ἀλαζονείαν) ... ventures to add or to take from courage, he changes its likeness altogether.”

<sup>64</sup> The gender contrast implied in this entire scene is suggested by Aseneth’s odd accusation that Joseph interpreted Pharaoh’s dream “just like the older women of the Egyptians interpret (dreams)” (4:11). Playing the part of an angry man, Aseneth here accuses Joseph of feminine behavior.

## 6. Aseneth the Monotheist and the Attributes of Courage

Aseneth acquires the building blocks of manly courage—according to Greco-Roman writers, piety, self-control, and wisdom—during the course of her religious conversion. For that reason, we must not lose sight of the fact that Aseneth is a *female* convert. Her gender—a woman teaching men about courage and anger—symbolizes the fact that she gained insight into a core Greco-Roman virtue only after becoming a religious “other.”<sup>65</sup> In order to identify the presence of the attributes of courage in the conversion narrative, we must dissect the various motifs and language that appear there. As we will see, wisdom, self-control, and piety figure prominently in the description of Aseneth’s conversion, suggesting that her insight into courage emerges from that experience.

As Kraemer and Standhartinger have argued, the book characterizes Aseneth’s conversion as a transition from ignorance to wisdom—one of the constitutive elements of courage going back to Plato and something already possessed by Joseph.<sup>66</sup> For example, he rejects Aseneth as a “strange woman,” echoing sections of Proverbs 1–9.<sup>67</sup> Following her week-long period of reflection and confession, Aseneth receives a visit from a heavenly man who labels her a “City of Refuge.” In her capacity as protectress of the pious, the man tells her, she resembles heavenly *Metanoia*, the female embodiment of repentance.<sup>68</sup> *Metanoia*’s attributes are those of Proverbs’ Lady Wisdom,<sup>69</sup> and Philo explicitly refers to the one who undergoes *metanoia* as wise (ὁ σοφός) and to *metanoia* itself as the movement from ignorance to knowledge.<sup>70</sup> Aseneth’s path to wisdom is thus complete.

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<sup>65</sup> Cf. Lipsett, *Desiring Conversion*, 120: “Aseneth’s gender and sexual status make her a particularly labile symbol of urgently needed change.”

<sup>66</sup> Angela Standhartinger, “Weisheit in *Joseph und Aseneth* und den paulinischen Briefen,” *NTS* 47 (2001): 482–501 (488–90); Ross S. Kraemer, “Aseneth as Wisdom,” in *Feminist Companion to the Bible: Wisdom and Psalms*, ed. Athalya Brenner and Carole Fontaine (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 218–39. Kraemer and Standhartinger were anticipated in this observation by Philonenko, who also claims that Aseneth is being identified with wisdom; see *Joseph et Aseneth*, 84–85. On the relationship between wisdom and courage in Plato, see *Prot.* 349e–350c; *Lach.* 194d–199d, and discussion in Rabieh, *Plato*, 68–94.

<sup>67</sup> See Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 24–25. Aseneth herself had previously lamented the “ignorance” that she expressed in her initial response to Joseph’s arrival (8:7). The descriptions of her clothing and arrogance also echo passages from Proverbs. See Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 22–25.

<sup>68</sup> See 15:7–8.

<sup>69</sup> Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 26–27. As Kraemer, *ibid.*, 61–62, observes, the longer text includes descriptions of *Metanoia* that appear to embellish the connection with Wisdom.

<sup>70</sup> On the penitent as wise, see *Virt.* 186. For *metanoia* as movement from ignorance to knowledge, see *Virt.* 177–179. According to Wilson, Philo’s ideal penitent is modeled on the Stoic sage; see Wilson, *On Virtues*, 359–76. On *metanoia* in the writings of Philo generally, see Jon Nelson Bailey, “*Metanoia* in the Writings of Philo Judaeus,” *SBLSP* 30 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1991), 135–41; David Winston, “Philo’s Doctrine of Repentance,” in *The School of Moses: Studies in Philo and Hellenistic Religion: In Memory of Horst R. Moehring*, ed. John P. Kenney (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 29–40.

Aseneth later transmits the wisdom that comprises genuine courage to her brothers-in-law, linking her religious transformation with her outlook on manly courage. By intervening in the standoff between Simeon and the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, Aseneth accepts her mandate to serve as refuge, thereby transmitting to her brothers-in-law the wisdom associated with true courage.<sup>71</sup> She replicates the protective role of *Metanoia* and urges her brothers-in-law to follow suit. The wisdom that characterizes those who offer protection and spurn anger is the hallmark of true courage.

In addition, *sophrosyne*—the self-control through which one overcomes irrational appetites and emotional excess, and which Philo links closely with courage—also figures in Aseneth’s conversion.<sup>72</sup> Sexual modesty was central to the definition of female *sophrosyne*, and the heavenly visitor emphasizes Aseneth’s new-found chastity.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, *Metanoia*—Aseneth’s heavenly counterpart—is described as “meek” (long version: *πραεΐα*; short version: *πρᾶος*), a word that many classical writers use in connection with *sophrosyne*.<sup>74</sup> *Metanoia*—and, by extension, Aseneth—constitutes the embodiment of *sophrosyne*.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> See Anatheia E. Portier-Young, “Sweet Mercy Metropolis: Interpreting Aseneth’s Honeycomb,” *JSP* 14 (2005): 133–57 (157).

<sup>72</sup> Plato provided the definitive understanding of *sophrosyne* as control of appetites and pleasures, with one’s rational faculties holding in check one’s irrational tendencies; see Helen North, *Sophrosyne: Self-Knowledge and Self-Restraint in Greek Literature* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966], 150–96. For those who celebrated an anger-based form of courage, *sophrosyne* and *andreia* could be seen as incompatible; this view is given its sharpest formulation by Callicles in Plato’s *Gorgias*, 491E, 492B. As with the other virtues, *sophrosyne*, according to Plato, played an important role in the welfare of the state; as North put it, “*sophrosyne* is more than self-control and obedience; it is also the harmony or symphony which exists in the soul and the State when there is perfect agreement among all parts or classes concerning which should rule and which should obey” (Helen F. North, “Canons and Hierarchies of the Cardinal Virtues in Greek and Latin Literature,” in *The Classical Tradition: Literary and Historical Studies in Honor of Harry Caplan*, ed. L. Wallach [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966], 165–83 [173]). On *sophrosyne* as encompassing emotional self-control beginning in the fifth century BCE, see Harris, *Restraining Rage*, 80–87.

<sup>73</sup> See, e.g., 15:1: “And she went to the man into her first chamber and stood before him. And the man said to her, ‘Remove the veil from your head, and for what purpose did you do this? For you are a chaste virgin today, and your head is like that of a young man.’” See Lipsett, *Desiring Conversion*, 109.

<sup>74</sup> See, e.g., Plato, *Resp.* 375C; Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* 1.13.20; 2.1.7; 5.1.14; Xenophon, *Ages.* 10.1; Plutarch, *Alex.* 4.8. See Hubert Martin, Jr., “The Concept of *Prāotēs* in Plutarch’s *Lives*,” *GRBS* 3 (1960): 65–73.

<sup>75</sup> A dispute raged among Greco-Roman authors whether *sophrosyne* had a different definition for women. Female *sophrosyne*, “throughout Greek history,” denoted “chastity, modesty, obedience, inconspicuous behavior” (North, *Sophrosyne*, 1 n. 1). Her *sophrosyne* was “to be demonstrated primarily within the social context of the household” (Annette Bourland Huizenga, “*Sophrosynē* for Women in Pythagorean Texts,” in *Women and Gender in Ancient Religions: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Stephen P. Ahearne-Kroll, Paul A. Holloway, and James A. Kelhoffer, WUNT 263 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010], 379–99 [381]), with its various manifestations expressing “one primary achievement: a woman’s uninterrupted practice of marital fidelity” (ibid., 382). According to Aristotle (*Pol.* 1277b20–23), “*sophrosyne* and *andreia* are different in a man and a woman,” with a woman being considered a “chatterer if she were only as modest (*κοσμίᾳ*) as a man.” In essence, he believed that male *sophrosyne* is “conducive to command,” while for women, it is “conducive to obedience” (North, *Sophrosyne*, 206). On the other hand, the Stoics, who contended that virtue was gender neutral, believed that the definition of *sophrosyne* should be the same for men and women, including “a single



Aseneth's cultivation of *sophrosyne* enables her to acquire an understanding of genuine courage. *Sophrosyne* in Joseph and Aseneth overlaps significantly with the book's definition of courage, namely an anger-free disposition toward others. According to Harris, *sophrosyne* "could be suspected of being the great source from which anger control flowed" throughout the classical world.<sup>76</sup> Not surprisingly, *πρᾶος* appears elsewhere in Joseph and Aseneth alongside mercy and in contrast to anger, the difference between courage and rashness.<sup>77</sup> *Sophrosyne* guides the various pious characters in the book—Aseneth as *Metanoia*, Joseph, and Levi—in championing pity, opposing anger, and displaying courage.<sup>78</sup>

Aseneth thus acquires the constitutive elements of courage that will enable her to redefine that virtue later in the book. She transmits to her brothers-in-law the knowledge that courage—a virtue that comprises true wisdom—entails a self-controlled display of pity rather than anger. During her conversion, the heavenly man imparts to Aseneth one final, pivotal lesson about courage. According to Philo, "confidence in God's aid as a result of piety [is] simply identified with courage," a fact that Aseneth's heavenly visitor clarifies for her on a number of occasions.<sup>79</sup> The conversion narrative concludes with a mysterious scene in which bees rise up out of a honeycomb. Those bees "encircled Aseneth's mouth and made upon her mouth and her lips a comb ... and all those bees ate of the comb."<sup>80</sup> The heavenly man then compels the bees to fly away. Through this episode, in which the heavenly visitor demonstrates that God will protect Aseneth, she discovers that her piety should inspire confidence in divine protection. In fact, the heavenly visitor had taught her that lesson earlier in their meeting, when he urged her four times to "have courage" (θάρσει; 14:11; 15:2, 4, 6) and "not be afraid" (14:11) because "I have heard all the words of your confession and your prayer" (15:2). Having learned that piety inspires divine protection, Aseneth—also equipped with wisdom and *sophrosyne*—possesses a comprehensive understanding of genuine courage.

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standard of sexual morality"; see North, *Sophrosyne*, 230–31. The emphasis on Joseph's chastity and Aseneth's eventual objection to anger suggests that Joseph and Aseneth does not perceive a meaningful distinction between genders in this regard.

<sup>76</sup> Harris, *Restraining Rage*, 80.

<sup>77</sup> The distinction between *πρᾶος* and anger is a commonplace in Greco-Roman thought beginning with Aristotle, who contrasted *πρᾶος* with excessive anger; see discussion in see Konstan, *Emotions of the Ancient Greeks*, 77–90; Kostas Kalimtzis, *Taming Anger: The Hellenic Approach to the Limitations of Reason* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2012), 103–24.

<sup>78</sup> For example, after rejecting Aseneth's advances, Joseph prays on her behalf because he was "meek (πραῦς) and merciful (ἐλεήμων) and fearing God" (8:8). Levi urges Simeon to jettison his anger toward the crown prince and then turns, "meek of heart" (πραότητι καρδίας) (23:10), to the crown prince.

<sup>79</sup> Konstan, "Philo's *De virtutibus*," 72. For the relevant passage in Philo, see *Virt.* 47–48.

<sup>80</sup> 16:19. In the shorter recension, the bees "flew from her feet right up to her head; and yet more bees, as big as queens, settled on Aseneth's lips."

The definition of courage that Aseneth transmits to her brothers-in-law includes this element of divine protection.<sup>81</sup> Simeon, who, as we saw earlier, subscribes to the anger-oriented version of courage, learns from Aseneth that his “anger” and his “daring” personality belie the fact that God protects the pious. Rather than reacting with anger, Aseneth tells him that he should “spare your brothers and do not do them evil for evil, because the Lord protected me against them ... and this is enough for them that the Lord fights for them against us” (28:10). Courage therefore does not entail acting out of anger but rather deferring to divine protection and behaving with pity.<sup>82</sup> Aseneth’s conversion experience thus informs her perspective on manly courage, which she transmits to the men in the story.

Aseneth teaches a similar lesson to the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah. Even before the latter confront Aseneth, Naphtali and Asher caution them that God will intervene to protect Joseph (25:5). Dan and Gad, however, dismiss that warning with an assertion of manly courage, becoming “angry” and asking, “But shall we die like women? That would be absurd” (25:8). However, after God reduces their swords to ashes, Dan and Gad (along with the other sons of Bilhah and Zilpah) repent of their wrongdoing and beg Aseneth for mercy. In a scene whose themes and language recall Aseneth’s own conversion, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah pray to Aseneth that she “rescue” (ῥύσαι) them from danger, and she reassures them that they should have “courage” (θαρσεῖτε) and should “not fear” (μὴ φοβεῖσθε). Based on the knowledge about courage that she had earlier received from her divine visitor, Aseneth here teaches men who had previously subscribed to the anger-oriented view of manly courage that, in fact, pious prayer seeking divine protection is the true path to courage.<sup>83</sup>

I have argued that, as part of her conversion, Aseneth acquired the awareness of and capacity to demonstrate genuine courage. The author of *Joseph and Aseneth* connects a

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<sup>81</sup> The link between courage and divine protection of the pious appears elsewhere in chs. 22–29. Echoing the heavenly visitor’s formulation in chs. 14 and 15, Joseph reassures Aseneth by telling her, “Courage (θάρσει), and do not be afraid, but go, because the Lord is with you, and he himself will guard you like an apple of the eye from every wicked deed” (26:2). In addition, Aseneth later turned to God in prayer, asking him to “rescue me from the hands of these wicked men,” following which “their swords fell from their hands on the ground” (28:10).

<sup>82</sup> See Humphrey, *Joseph and Aseneth*, 66: “[T]rue heroism is understood as dependence upon the offstage divine Actor.”

<sup>83</sup> The parallels between the scenes are both thematic and linguistic. The brothers beg that Aseneth “rescue” (ῥύσαι) them from the “hands” (ἐκ τῶν χειρῶν) of those pursuing them, just as she had earlier asked God to “rescue” (ῥύσαι) her from the “hands” (ἐκ τῶν χειρῶν) of those pursuing her. In the longer version, Aseneth frames her request in terms of divine pity on multiple occasions (11:10 [2x], 12, 13, 18; 12:13, 14, 15; 13:1), just as the brothers sought pity from Aseneth. Both Aseneth and the brothers make this request as part of an admission of past wrongdoing, Aseneth of her sins and the brothers of having “wickedly committed evil against you and against our brother, Joseph” (28:3). When each is granted their request, they are instructed to “take heart ... and do not be afraid” (14:11: θάρσει ... καὶ μὴ φοβηθῆς; 28:7: θαρσεῖτε οὖν καὶ μὴ φοβεῖσθε).

monotheistic worldview with his alternative to the anger-oriented definition of manly courage.<sup>84</sup> Courage is a pious form of wisdom achieved by those who seek refuge with God through *metanoia*. The concomitant belief in divine protection excludes the possibility of vengeful anger and demands instead a *sophrosyne*-oriented, pitying response. Monotheism thus plays a subversive role in re-defining one of the core Greco-Roman virtues. The author celebrates that subversiveness by narrating a story about a *female convert*, an outsider in multiple ways who nonetheless corrects the regnant model of manly courage. The author uses as his mouthpiece for a different conception of courage a *female convert*. Aseneth is thus an outsider by virtue of both her gender and her religion, and yet her role in the book is to clarify for the men the definition of the Greco-Roman virtue of manly courage. The path toward courage, Joseph and Aseneth suggests, can only come through a commitment to, or at least an awareness of, the principles of monotheism. The book thus offers a subversive message by way of a subversive character.

My reading of Joseph and Aseneth finds a rough parallel in recent interpretations of early Christian “novels” that celebrate virginity and sexual abstinence. According to Kate Cooper, the emphasis on sexual abstinence in those compositions should be understood as an extreme display of *sophrosyne* that serves to challenge the Greco-Roman view of the marital bond as a stabilizing force in society.<sup>85</sup> These Christian writers thus simultaneously drew upon and subverted a classical virtue in order to argue for their own moral superiority. Moreover, the subversive force in those works is the woman, staking her claim to understanding the authentic understanding of Greco-Roman virtue. I am making a similar claim on behalf of Joseph and Aseneth. The author of that work uses a female convert as a mouthpiece for a view of masculine courage that is rooted in *sophrosyne* and *philanthropia* rather than destructive anger. Aseneth, the former polytheist, thus models how Greco-Roman virtues should function in practice.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> In a slightly different direction, René Bloch (“Take Your Time: Conversion, Confidence, and Tranquility in *Joseph and Aseneth*,” in *Anthropologie und Ethik: Frühjüdische Literatur und Neues Testament*, ed. Matthias Konradt and Esther Schläpfer, WUNT 322 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 77–96 (88–93) traces a shift from Aseneth’s pre-conversion restlessness to her post-conversion state of tranquility.

<sup>85</sup> Cooper, *Virgin and the Bride*.

<sup>86</sup> For a stimulating comparison between the representation of sexuality in several of these Christian works and Joseph and Aseneth against the backdrop of Greco-Roman values, see Lipsett, *Desiring Conversion*. More recently, Lynn H. Cohick, “Mothers, Martyrs, and Manly Courage: The Female Martyr in 2 Maccabees, 4 Maccabees, and the Acts of Paul and Thecla,” in *A Most Reliable Witness: Essays in Honor of Ross Shepard Kraemer*, ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey et al., BJS 358 (Providence: Brown University Press, 2015), 123–32, has argued that the authors of 2 Maccabees, 4 Maccabees, and the Acts of Paul and Thecla all depict mothers in martyrdom scenes who show tremendous endurance. According to Cohick, “Devout reason reveals its remarkable power in providing mothers with manly courage,” thereby “challeng[ing] their wider culture’s enforcement of gendered status quo” (132). The subversive role that *andreia* plays in Joseph and Aseneth might thus be part of a much broader strategy used by Jewish (and Christian) authors who depict courageous, even-tempered woman in order to challenge cultural norms.

## 7. *Philanthropia* as the Product of Genuine Courage

Let us take stock of what we have seen thus far. The author of *Joseph and Aseneth* channeled his views on the Greco-Roman virtue of *andreia* through the protagonists in the book. He sought to repudiate one view of manly courage, according to which anger was the emotion associated with *andreia*. In that context, Aseneth's journey from angry, arrogant female polytheist to a gentle, humble monotheist looms large. Following her conversion, she advocates the view, in opposition to the crown prince as well as her brothers-in-law, that courage is associated with the emotion of pity rather than anger. Wisdom, *sophrosyne*, and a belief in divine protection will lead one to act with pity rather than out of anger. As we observed earlier, however, Aseneth does not only advance an argument on behalf of the emotion of pity but also of the related virtue of *philanthropia*, variously translated as humaneness or love of humanity. According to Aseneth, one's treatment of others must be animated by the emotion of pity and the virtue of *philanthropia*. In order to understand the intersection of Aseneth's conversion and her perspective toward courage and anger, we must now turn our attention to *philanthropia*, focusing especially on the relationship between it and *andreia* in other sources of the period.<sup>87</sup>

A long line of philosophers stretching back to Aristotle and forward to Philo defined *philanthropia* as entailing both "mildness" (ἐπιείκεια) and pity.<sup>88</sup> The meekness indicated by forms of πρᾶος—a word which we saw appears in several contexts in *Joseph and Aseneth*—"will lead to Polybian *philanthropia*."<sup>89</sup> On Philo's account, a host of laws in the Torah are meant to facilitate *philanthropia*, resulting in a remarkably universalistic ambition:

This is what our most holy prophet through all his regulations especially desires to create, unanimity, neighborliness, fellowship, reciprocity of feeling, whereby houses and cities and nations and countries and the whole human race may advance to supreme happiness.<sup>90</sup>

There is a clear link between *andreia* and *philanthropia* for Philo. His treatise on *philanthropia*, *De humanitate*, immediately follows *De fortitudine*, and the two together comprise the sum total of the

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<sup>87</sup> Philo refers to *philanthropia* as a virtue in *De virtutibus* 51, though, by that time, *philanthropia* was a "virtue term in Hellenistic literature" (Konstan, "Philo's *De virtutibus*," 66). Cf. also David Winston, "Philo's Ethical Theory," *ANRW* 21.1 (ed. Wolfgang Haase; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1984): 372–416 (394). The Roman ideal of *clementia*, an ethic of humaneness with which *philanthropia* shared much in common (see below), was listed among the emperor's cardinal virtues beginning in 27 BCE; see Melissa Barden Dowling, *Clemency & Cruelty in the Roman World* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 76–125; Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, "The Emperor and His Virtues," *Historia* 30 (1981): 298–323; North, "Canons and Hierarchies," 177–78.

<sup>88</sup> Konstan, *Emotions of the Ancient Greeks*, 215–18.

<sup>89</sup> Jacqueline de Romilly, "Fairness and Kindness in Thucydides," *Phoenix* 28 (1974): 95–100 (100).

<sup>90</sup> *Virt.* 119.

virtues he treats in his *De virtutibus*.<sup>91</sup> According to Philo, those practicing *andreia* and *philanthropia* must exhibit *koinonia*, a term that refers to “fellowship in public affairs.”<sup>92</sup> On several occasions, he explains that certain laws exhibiting courage were intended to foster *philanthropia*.<sup>93</sup> For these reasons, “[a]mong the components of courage Philo also implicates the virtue of humanity.”<sup>94</sup>

The Philonic link between courage and *philanthropia* is helpful for understanding the perspective of Aseneth. Aseneth’s opposition to anger and manly courage leads her to advocate for concord and fellowship, that is, the virtue of *philanthropia*. In Levi’s words to the crown prince, “It does not befit a man who worships God to injure anyone in any way” (23:12). Levi here echoes his earlier remark to Simeon, “Why are you furious with anger with this man? And we are men who worship God, and it does not befit us to repay evil for evil” (23:9). This sentiment, which Levi expressed in the context of an encounter with the crown prince, clearly encompasses non-Jews.<sup>95</sup> According to Aseneth, *philanthropia* must neutralize manifestations of the virtue of angry, manly courage. As in Philo, the virtues of *philanthropia* and courage are intimately linked, with both representing a religiously-mandated expression of humaneness. Joseph and Aseneth could thus be understood as expressing in narrative form ideas that Philo formulated philosophically.

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<sup>91</sup> Largely based on the statement in *De virtutibus* 51 that “the next subject to be examined is humanity, the virtue closest akin to piety, its sister and twin,” Cohn and Wendland posit a lost work, *De pietate*, which originally appeared between the sections on courage and *philanthropia*; see *Philonis Alexandrini opera quae supersunt*, ed. L. Cohn, P. Wendland, and S. Reiter (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1962), 279. However, almost all recent scholars have rejected this reconstruction and assume that Philo did, in fact, juxtapose courage and *philanthropia*; see David T. Runia, “Underneath Cohn and Colson: The Text of Philo’s *De virtutibus*,” *SBLSP* 30 ed. E. H. Lovering (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 116–34 (131); Wilson, *On Virtues*, 14–15. James R. Royse, “The Text of Philo’s *De virtutibus*,” *SPhilo* 18 (2006): 73–101 (81–94) has argued in favor of the existence of *De pietate* but concluded that it did not appear between *De fortitudine* and *De humanitate* but rather at the end of *De virtutibus*.

<sup>92</sup> Walter T. Wilson, “Pious Soldiers, Gender Deviants, and the Ideology of Actium: Courage and Warfare in Philo’s *De fortitudine*,” *SPhil* 17 (2005): 1–32 (19). On *philanthropia* and *koinonia* as parallel, see, e.g., *Virt.* 80: “We have stated the proofs of the legislator’s humanity (φιλανθρωπίας) and fellow-feeling (κοινωνίας), a quality which he possessed through a happy gift of natural goodness, and also as the outcome of the lessons which he learned from the holy oracles.” On the connections between *andreia* and *koinonia*, see *Virt.* 3: “They (i.e., those who possess true courage—AM) would never touch defensive weapons even in their dreams, through propositions based on good counsels for the greatest common utility (κοινωφελεστάταις), they often correct both the private affairs of each person and the common affairs of their homelands (τὰ κοινὰ τῶν πατρίδων) when they fail, equipped as they are with unyielding and unwavering arguments concerning what is beneficial.”

<sup>93</sup> Wilson, “Pious Soldiers,” 19.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. See also Cicero, *Off.* 1.88, who views *clementia* (the Roman version of *philanthropia* discussed below) as the genuine form of courage.

<sup>95</sup> As I stated earlier, I believe that Aseneth, too, endorses the view that Jews should behave mercifully toward non-Jews; see above, n. 35.

Greek writers such as Xenophon, Polybius, Philo, and Plutarch characterize merciful treatment of enemies as a form of *philanthropia*.<sup>96</sup> The affinity between the merciful type of behavior mandated by Aseneth and Levi and *clementia*, a Roman virtue that overlaps significantly with Greek *philanthropia*, bolsters my claim about the significance of the latter virtue in Joseph and Aseneth.<sup>97</sup> As a term popularized by Cicero to describe Julius Caesar's military policy, *clementia* refers to the sparing of citizens in war.<sup>98</sup> When he turns to Hellenistic sources to help describe Roman *clementia*, Cicero draws upon discussions about *philanthropia* and *epieikeia*, the term often associated with *philanthropia*.<sup>99</sup> Seneca, writing about the virtue to the emperor Nero, gives *clementia* its most comprehensive treatment, defining it in part as "the gentleness of a superior towards an inferior in determining punishments."<sup>100</sup> Cicero also links *clementia* with courage, opposes it to anger, and pairs it with *placabilitas* and *mansuetudo*, equivalents of Greek *praoteis*<sup>101</sup>—all features of Joseph and Aseneth that I explored above. Aseneth and Levi echo Cicero's adage that those exhibiting courage "will not indulge their anger when administering punishment or dealing with conquered adversaries, being guided instead by *placabilitas* and *clementia*."<sup>102</sup> The proximity of Aseneth's advice to the Roman virtue of *clementia* encourages us to see in this text the closely related Greek virtue of *philanthropia*.

Aseneth's path to *philanthropia* began with her religious conversion. As we saw earlier, the book characterized Aseneth as arrogant—*ἀλαζών*—a word that numerous Hellenistic writers, including Philo, contrast to *philanthropia*.<sup>103</sup> Her arrogance, moreover, assumed a very particular form: she "was despising and scorning every man, and she was boastful and arrogant with everyone" (2:1). As an expression of her misanthropy, Aseneth isolated herself in a palace, out of view of all men. As we saw, her arrogance (*ἀλαζονεία*) again surfaces in response to Pentephres's proposal that she

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<sup>96</sup> Xenophon, *Cyr.* 7.5.73; Plutarch, *Caes.* 34.7; *Cleom.* 30.1; *Alex.* 44.3–5; Philo, *Virt.* 106–115; Polybius, *Hist.* 15.17.4. See Hubert Martin, Jr., "The Concept of Philanthropia in Plutarch's Lives," *American Journal of Philology* 82 (1961): 164–75 (171, 173); Peder Borgen, "Philanthropia in Philo's Writings: Some Observations," in *Biblical and Humane: A Festschrift for John F. Priest*, ed. Linda Bennett Elder, David L. Barr, Elizabeth Struthers Malbon (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 173–88 (178).

<sup>97</sup> On the proximity of the book's doctrine that one not "repay evil for evil" and the virtue of *clementia*, see G. Oberhänsli-Widmer, "Klassiker der jüdischen Literatur: Der antike Liebesroman Joseph und Aseneth," *Kirche und Israel* 19 [2004]: 85–93 [91].

<sup>98</sup> In Cicero, see, e.g., *Pro Lig.* 1.1; *Pro Deiot.* 11.34; *Pro Mar.* 1.1. See Miriam Griffin, "Clementia After Caesar: From Politics to Philosophy," in *Caesar against Liberty? Perspectives on his Autocracy*, (ed. Francis Cairns and Elaine Fantham (Cambridge: Francis Cairns, 2003), 157–82 (162).

<sup>99</sup> Griffin, "Clementia after Caesar," 165. Josephus (*Ant.* 19.246), too, seems to render Roman *clementia* as *epieikeia* when he uses the latter word to describe the pledge that Claudius made at his succession, described by Seneca (*Polyb.* 13.2) as *clementia*. In the context of his review of Gaius's reign, Cassius Dio (*Historiae Romanae* 59.16.10) refers to the emperor's *philanthropia*, presumably rendering *clementia* into Greek. From a later period, the Emperor Julian uses *philanthropia* in describing the mercy of Constantius; see Jürgen Kabiensch, *Untersuchungen zum Begriff der Philanthropia bei dem Kaiser Julian* (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1960), 15–25.

<sup>100</sup> *Clem.* 2.3.1. See Dowling, *Clemency & Cruelty*, 201.

<sup>101</sup> Griffin, "Clementia after Caesar," 171. The relevant passage is *Off.* 1.88. Seneca (*Clem.* 2.3.2–3), too, contrasts *clementia* with anger. On *praoteis* as a Greek rendering of *clementia*, see North, *Sophrosyne*, 300.

<sup>102</sup> Wilson, "Pious Soldiers," 13.

<sup>103</sup> See, e.g., Diodorus Siculus, XXXIV/XXXV 2.13, 2.33, 2.39; Philo, *Virt.* 161, 165, 171.

marry Joseph. Her arrogance disappears, however, once she encounters Joseph, and the process during which she acquired insight into the virtue of courage also led her to appreciate the religious significance of *philanthropia*.<sup>104</sup>

Philo enables us to understand why the author of *Joseph and Aseneth* chose to embed a message about *philanthropia* in a conversion narrative. In elaborating on the definition of humaneness, Philo discusses repentance—*metanoia*—immediately after his sketch of *philanthropia*. According to Sterling, Philo includes *metanoia* under the umbrella of *philanthropia* because *metanoia* shows “Israel’s *φιλανθρωπία* to all who practice virtue.”<sup>105</sup> In fact, Philo devotes the beginning of *De paenitentia* to a discussion of the proselyte, whom Moses embraced as an expression of his *φιλάνθρωπος*.<sup>106</sup> Elsewhere Philo, like Josephus, discusses proper treatment of converts as a form of *philanthropia*.<sup>107</sup> In *Joseph and Aseneth*, the female convert who receives the benefits of *philanthropia* urges her peers to extend it even toward those who appear undeserving. Anger-oriented *andreaia* would have precluded the type of treatment that the virtue of *philanthropia* demands. Aseneth’s role as a convert—that is, a recent beneficiary of *philanthropia*—makes her uniquely qualified to preach the importance of *philanthropia*. As presented by Aseneth, the virtue of courage does not undermine *philanthropia*, but, to the contrary, enables it to thrive.

## 8. *Philanthropia* and the Historical Context of *Joseph and Aseneth*

Having analyzed the place of anger, courage, and *philanthropia* and their connection with religion and gender in *Joseph and Aseneth*, I would like to reflect on the message of the book for its contemporary audience. My above discussion about *philanthropia* looms large in that regard. Ancient Jews were derided by Greeks and Romans alike as misanthropic; both Philo and Josephus explicitly respond to that claim by arguing for the importance of *philanthropia* in the Jewish tradition.<sup>108</sup> The author of *Joseph and Aseneth*, I suggest, joins the discourse about Jewish *philanthropia*.

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<sup>104</sup> Aseneth’s speech in 21:10–21, a passage that is not attested in all manuscripts, devotes considerable attention to her pre-conversion arrogance and post-conversion humility.

<sup>105</sup> Gregory Sterling, “The Queen of the Virtues’: Piety in Philo of Alexandria,” *SPhil* 18 (2006): 103–23 (110).

<sup>106</sup> *Virt.* 175.

<sup>107</sup> Philo, *Virt.* 102–104; Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.146, 211–214.

<sup>108</sup> See Philo, *Virt.* 141: “After this let those clever libelers continue, if they can, to accuse the nation of misanthropy (*μισανθρωπία*) and charge the laws with enjoining unsociable and unfriendly (*ἄμικτα καὶ ἀκοινωνήτα*) practices, when these laws so clearly extend their compassion to flocks and herds, and our people through the instructions of the law learn from their earliest years to correct any willfulness of souls to gentle behavior”; see also *Spec.* 2.167; Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.145–146: “Seeing, however, that Apollonius Molon ... and others ... have made reflections ... upon our lawgiver ... I desire to give, to the best of my ability, a brief account of our constitution as a whole and of its details. From this, I think, it will be apparent that we

The book, particularly in chs. 22–29, emphasizes the contribution that Jewish *philanthropia* makes to the well-being of the *polis*. In that regard, we should observe the political dimension of Aseneth’s role as “City of Refuge” (πόλις καταφυγῆς) in whom “many nations will take refuge” (καταφεύξονται ἔθνη πολλά) (15:7).<sup>109</sup> Joseph and Aseneth certainly constitutes a “stinging attack on Hellenistic religion,”<sup>110</sup> yet it does not adopt a hostile stance toward the Greco-Roman world in general.<sup>111</sup> Joseph remains on excellent terms with Pentephres and Pharaoh throughout the book.<sup>112</sup> The crown prince discloses that the king was “like a father to Joseph” (24:14), and following Pharaoh’s death, Joseph reigns as king for 48 years and becomes “like a father” to his predecessor’s younger son (29:9).<sup>113</sup> Simeon, Levi, and the other offspring of Leah and Rachel do not oppose Pharaoh but only the crown prince and his allies.

In fact, the crown prince represents a greater threat to the king than do the Jews.<sup>114</sup> The crown prince symbolizes the cycle of violence that the Greco-Roman virtue of manly courage supports, and, in a variety of ways, his actions counteract the virtue of *philanthropia* championed by Aseneth. He seeks revenge against his father for having allowed Joseph to marry Aseneth (see 24:14). He urges Dan and Gad to act with *andreia* and not die like women, and, in the process, imperils the welfare of the *polis* and even of its ruler. The ethic of anger and revenge built into the manly concept of courage thus threatens the security of the city. Even his conception of pity threatens social harmony: he, too, invokes the emotion of pity when urging Simeon and Levi “show pity (ἔλεος) to me” (23:3) and join his cause. However, in contrast to Aseneth, the pity he seeks is in service of, rather than in opposition to, revenge. The chaos that results from the crown prince’s understanding of courage confirms the superiority of Aseneth’s *philanthropia*-oriented courage. The

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possess a code excellently designed to promote piety, friendly relations with each other, and humanity toward the world at large.” See also *ibid.*, 2.261; Borgen, “*Philanthropia* in Philo’s Writings,” 179–81; Katell Berthelot, *Philanthropia judaica: Le débat autour de la “misanthropie” des lois juives dans l’Antiquité*, JSJSup 76 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 359–68. On the charge of misanthropy leveled against the Jews, see above, n. 6.

<sup>109</sup> This is not to deny the obvious biblical background of the term “city of refuge,” on which see Portier-Young, “Sweet Mercy Metropolis,” 135–38. However, it is impossible not to see the political dimension of this phrase in *Joseph and Aseneth*, where the city will encompass “many nations” over whom “the Lord God will reign as king.” Burchard, *Untersuchungen*, 119, takes Aseneth as “das Zion der Proselyten.”

<sup>110</sup> Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 204.

<sup>111</sup> See sources cited above, n. 2.

<sup>112</sup> For Barclay, who sees the book as wholly antagonistic toward gentiles, the positive relations between Joseph and these gentiles is due to the fact that “Pentephres and Pharaoh are peripheral to the story ... and their friendliness towards Joseph is to a large extent necessary for the narrative to work at all” (*Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 210). Nevertheless, there is no indication that Joseph or his brothers seek to withdraw from participation in gentile culture, and it is hard to imagine that an author interested in advancing that argument would write a story in which the Jews are so deeply embedded in Egyptian society.

<sup>113</sup> See Hacham, “*Joseph and Aseneth*,” 58.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 59–60.



male polytheist, who subscribes to the classic view of *andreia*, is thus an appropriate foil for the female convert.<sup>115</sup>

At the same time, the book does not overlook Jewish difference. As many commentators have noted, this is especially clear in Joseph's remarks about a "foreign woman, one who blesses dead and deaf idols with her mouth and eats the bread of strangers from their tables and drinks the cup of ambush from their libations and is anointed with the ointment of perdition" (8:5).<sup>116</sup> The need to maintain laws restricting table fellowship with pagans also appears elsewhere in the book.<sup>117</sup> The author of our book does not deny that Jewish laws, most notably those focused on food and sex, impede true socialization, but, in contrast to the arguments advanced by the real-life adversaries of the Jewish community, he claims that those laws do not entail Jewish misanthropy.<sup>118</sup> To the contrary: religious belief mandates that Jews conform to the virtue of *philanthropia*.

Joseph and Aseneth advances a claim on behalf of the Jewish place in the Greco-Roman world. Jewish values are conducive to the emotion of pity and the virtue of *philanthropia* and incompatible with the emotion of anger and the virtue of manly courage. Joseph and Aseneth should, in that case, be added to the list of Jewish compositions that responded to the allegations of Jewish misanthropy.<sup>119</sup> This conclusion fits well the widespread view that the book was composed in Egypt, where those allegations were especially pronounced.<sup>120</sup>

## 9. Conclusion

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<sup>115</sup> Of course, the distinction between polytheist and monotheist in the book is not an absolute one. As we have seen, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah and Simeon initially share the crown prince's view of *andreia*. They represent, for the author of Joseph and Aseneth, the improper manner of participating in the wider world, one that embraces Greco-Roman norms, defies recognition of God's sovereignty, and promotes chaos. Cf. Gordon M. Zembe, *Non-Retaliatio in Early Jewish and New Testament Texts: Ethical Themes in Social Contexts*, JSPSup 13 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 94–97, who suggests that Simeon represents "the preference for armed reaction and revenge against hostility from both Jews and Gentiles" (95) while Levi and Aseneth represent those Jews who, like Philo, "display an openness to the surrounding culture without promoting syncretism or complete assimilation" (97).

<sup>116</sup> See Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 194.

<sup>117</sup> See 7:1.

<sup>118</sup> See Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.5.2: "They sit apart at meals and they sleep apart, and ... they abstain from intercourse with foreign women."

<sup>119</sup> For treatment of various Jewish responses to the charge of misanthropy, see Berthelot, *Philanthropia judaica*, 187–383.

<sup>120</sup> For the book's Egyptian provenance, see, e.g., Gideon Bohak, *Joseph and Aseneth and the Jewish Temple in Heliopolis*, SBLEJL 10 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996); Hacham, "Joseph and Aseneth"; Collins, "Joseph and Aseneth." My analysis would not necessarily suggest a particular date of composition; with the exceptions of Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph*, 304, who dates the work to the third or fourth century CE, and Bohak, *Joseph and Aseneth*, who dates it to the second century BCE, scholars date the book sometime between the first century BCE and the early second century CE; see Collins, "Joseph and Aseneth." Allegations of Jewish misanthropy are attested throughout that period.

Anger, courage, and *philanthropia*—three important elements of Greco-Roman civic life—figure prominently in the book of Joseph and Aseneth and help us uncover the book’s message. One view within Greco-Roman culture valorized manly anger—at least where appropriate—and manly courage, but, according to Joseph and Aseneth, Jews instead privileged the emotion of pity and the related virtue of *philanthropia*. The author strategically developed his plot around the experiences of a female convert, whose views on anger, courage, and *philanthropia* highlight both the distinctiveness and subversiveness of the Jewish position. His message served an important polemical goal, one which responded to Greco-Roman charges of misanthropy by highlighting the premium that Jews place on *philanthropia*.

My analysis has implications for several thorny interpretive issues, including the book’s provenance and structure. Although Aseneth’s conversion takes place in chs. 1–21, the book’s second unit, chs. 22–29, is not an afterthought. Rather, the book narrates the transformation of a misanthropic, angry polytheist to a philanthropic advocate of pity over manly courage. Considering the history of anti-Jewish sentiment in Egypt during that period, the book would fit nicely within an Egyptian milieu, a possibility that interpreters have raised on other grounds.