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Septuagint and Reception

Essays prepared for the Association for the Study of
the Septuagint in South Africa

Edited by

Johann Cook



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THE STRANGE WOMAN IN PROVERBS, LXX PROVERBS AND *ASENETH*

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This paper contains two main sections. The first deals with the depiction of the so-called "Strange Woman," "Woman Wisdom" and "Woman Folly" in Proverbs, and especially the way the LXX translation treats the "Strange Woman" and "Woman Folly." The second discusses *Joseph and Aseneth*. The connection between the two sections is that *Joseph and Aseneth* is one of the many instances where we find later use of these images, in particular in this case in relation to the depiction of *Aseneth* as "Strange Woman," who in the course of the narrative becomes with her seven virgins a reflection of Wisdom herself and her seven-pillared dwelling depicted in Proverbs 9.

1. *Proverbs*

The reader of Proverbs meets the personified figure of Wisdom already in 1:20-33, after the author in Solomon's persona has warned against bloodshed and greed. "Wisdom cries out in the street, in the squares she raises her voice. At the busiest corner she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks" (1:20-21).¹ She confronts the simple ones and scoffers for their refusal to listen, warning them that their waywardness will be their death. She makes a reappearance in persona in 8:4-36, similarly described as raising her voice at the crossroads and city gates. There she promises prosperity to the wise, reports her unique role from before creation, promising life. Her third appearance has her build a seven-pillared house, prepare a feast and have her maids invite the simple to the feast (9:1-7). By contrast, "the foolish woman" of 9:13-18 is loud and ignorant, sits at her door or on high places in the town offering forbidden food, luring the ignorant to death and Sheol. Thus, the so-called Woman Folly is the counterpart of Woman Wisdom. As

¹ Translations are taken from the NRSV and NETS, unless I have made modifications, in which case I indicate this with an asterisk.

Wisdom's teaching repertoire is wide, so Folly's enticements may be seen to cover all wickedness.²

The images are not without their precedents. Various goddesses of wisdom may have parented the development of wisdom's personification, here.³ Depicting her as calling out in the public places may be a deliberate reversal of the wayward woman, frequently the prostitute who hits the streets.⁴ We may, indeed, be seeing a complex development where imagery from street women, which generates the Strange Woman, is made also to serve the depiction of Woman Wisdom, who in turn, in 9:13-18, serves to generate her counterpart, Woman Folly, who now follows the stance of Woman Wisdom in calling from her house. The development only works, in relation to both Wisdom ironically and Folly typically, because of concern with the quite concrete phenomenon of the other or strange woman. It is clear as we read Proverbs that this specific concern has not been left behind in such development, but remains prominent in Solomon's advice, not least in the warnings about adulterous women and their husbands, which are too concrete to be dissolved into metaphor.

Thus 2:16-19 already warns against the "strange woman" (מאשה זרה), set in parallel to "the outsider woman" with her smooth words (המכבירה אמריה התלקוה) who forsakes the partner of her youth and forgets her sacred covenant^{5,6} and whose ways lead to death.⁷ In 5:3-20 these

² So Claudia V. Camp, "What's so Strange about the Strange Woman?," in *The Bible and the Politics of Exegesis: Essays in Honor of Norman K. Gottwald on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (ed. David Jobling, Peggy L. Day and Gerald T. Sheppard; Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1991) 17-31: "a single figure the greatest evil imaginable..." (27).

³ On the origins of personified wisdom see the discussion in Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1-9* (AB 18A; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 331-41.

⁴ So Athalya Brenner, *The Israelite Woman: Social Role and Literary Type in Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985), 44; Mark Sneed, "'White Trash' Wisdom: Proverbs 9 Deconstructed," *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 7/5 (2007): 2-10, here 7.

⁵ I translate "outsider woman" rather than the interpretive "adulteress" on grounds discussed below and partly to leave open its application.

⁶ Matthew Goff, "Hellish Females: The Strange Woman of Septuagint Proverbs and 4QWiles of the Wicked Woman (4Q184)," *JSL* 39 (2008): 20-45, notes an allusion to the covenant of marriage in 4QInst^r4Q415 2 ii.4. See also William Loader, *The Dead Sea Scrolls on Sexuality: Attitudes towards Sexuality in Sectarian and Related Literature at Qumran* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming, 2009), 300-301. Camp, "What's so Strange?," notes the reversal of initiative compared with Mal 2:14 which also speaks of abandoning one's spouse and one's marriage covenant, but as a male initiative (26).

⁷ As noted by Carol A. Newsom, "Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom: A Study of Proverbs 1-9," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* (ed. Peggy L. Day; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 142-60, the MT of 2:18, which reads ביתה (also preserved in the LXX) and is usually emended on grounds of parallelism to נתנתה ("for her way

warnings are elaborated, where again the strange woman (זרה; 5:3) whose "speech is smoother than oil" (ותלק משמן חכה) is identified as an adulteress (5:20) and her ways as leading to death (5:5). Other dangers include the loss of one's wealth and possessions to strangers (5:9-10), presumably not foreigners but husbands demanding compensation.⁸ The image of water serves as an exhortation to chastity: "drink water from your own cistem" (5:15) means engage in sexual relations with your own wife. Scattering one's springs abroad (5:16) is about engaging in sex with others. In 5:18-20 one's fountain is one's reproductive organ, blessing indicates offspring, and rejoicing indicates sexual pleasure in fondling your own wife's breasts in intoxicated passion, not those of another man's wife.

The theme of the adulteress returns in 6:24, where the commandments can "preserve you from the evil woman (מאשה רע), from the smooth tongue of the outsider woman (מכבירה לשון נכריה)"* (cf. 2:16-17). The cost of doing so and so arousing a husband's ire receives further attention in 6:24-35 where it far exceeds the mere loaf of bread one might pay for a prostitute so that you can be lucky even to come away with your life (6:26), if you sleep with your neighbour's wife (אשת רעה) (6:29). In 7:4-5 the author suggests seeing Wisdom as one's wise sister, who will help protect one from the strange woman (מאשה זרה), then reports a typical scene of a loud and wayward woman, dressed like a prostitute,⁹ in the street, the squares, the corners, public places, seizing and kissing the pass-by, enticing him to a night of sex while her husband is away, and so snaring him into her house of death (7:6-27). The intrinsic evidence favours taking both זרה and נכריה in these warnings as referring not to ethnicity,¹⁰ or association with foreign cults,¹¹ but sexual impropriety, women outside the licit range.¹²

[rather than "her house"] leads down to death"), may be original and would convey the notion of her house as a devouring womb (148-49).

⁸ So Hilary Lipka, *Sexual Transgression in the Hebrew Bible* (Hebrew Bible Monographs 7; Sheffield: Phoenix, 2006), 157.

⁹ She is therefore not a prostitute. It is possible that she is plying her trade on a temporary basis, as suggested by K. van der Toorn, "Female Prostitution in Payment of Vows in Ancient Israel," *JBL* 108 (1989): 193-205, here 199. This could make sense if she were poor, as Sneed, "White Trash," argues (4), but the context indicates otherwise, as Gale A. Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Women as Evil in the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), notes (156), and makes no mention of payment. Her likeness to a prostitute relates to her intent to seduce. As Goff, "Hellish Women," observes, זנה need not in itself imply prostitution, but simply a woman acting immorally (27).

¹⁰ Cf. Yee, *Poor Banished Children*, 135, 143, 149, 151, who sees the fear as alienation of Jewish property; similarly Harold C. Washington, "The Strange Woman in the LXX" on Proverbs 1-9 and Post-Exilic Judaeon Society," in *A Feminist*

These rich accounts supply detail for the brief description of the woman of foolishness (אִשָּׁת כְּסִילִית), when she then arrives in 9:13-18.¹³ Sexual wrongdoing will certainly be part of her repertoire, though juxtaposed to Woman Wisdom she symbolises much more.¹⁴ We have then in Proverbs both a symbolic image of Folly, depicted as a wayward woman, and at the same time specific warnings concerning the dangers which wayward married women pose to young men through adulterous liaisons, a danger also threatening patriarchal society as a whole.¹⁵ The symbolism of Woman Folly still leaves concrete warnings about

Companion to Wisdom Literature (ed. A. Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 157-84; Joseph Blenkinsopp, "The Social Context of the 'Outsider Woman' in Proverbs 1-9," *Biblica* 72 (1991): 457-73, who sees the concern as preventing intermarriage (457, 467).

¹¹ Gustav Boström, *Proverbienstudien: Die Weisheit und das fremde Weib in Spr. 1-9* (Lund: Gleerup, 1935); Richard J. Clifford, *Proverbs* (Old Testament Library; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 27. The allusion to sacrifice and paying vows in 7:14 appears best understood as referring to Israel's cult. On this see Camp "What's so Strange?," 21-22.

¹² So Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, who outlines the major alternative views (134-41); Goff, "Hellish Females," 26-27, "not the addressee's wife" (27); Camp, "What's so Strange?" writes: "it is difficult to construe this particular text as representing anything other than an Israelite wife who is faithless to her husband" (26). Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs Chapters 1-15* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) emphasises her negative intent, concluding that she must be seen as more than just an adulteress; she is "a lustful apostate to the godly community" (124).

¹³ So Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 262; R. N. Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs: A Survey of Modern Study* (History of Biblical Interpretation 1; Leiden: Brill, 1995), 141.

¹⁴ Goff, "Hellish Females," rightly notes: "Woman Folly (or foolish woman; אִשָּׁת כְּסִילִית), who only appears in Prov 9:13-18, is not exactly the same as the Strange Woman" (28), whose counterpart is the man's wife, whereas folly's counterpart is wisdom. "Unlike the Strange Woman, Woman Folly does not lurk through city streets or lay (sic) in ambush for her victims. She calls out to passers-by and invites them to her house, as does Woman Wisdom (8:5; 9:5; vv. 15-16)" (28). She also makes no explicitly sexual statements except to quote a proverb about stolen bread tasting sweeter (cf. 30:20) (28). On the other hand, as Gale A. Yee, "'I have Perfumed My Bed with Myrrh': The Foreign Woman (*isṣā zārā*) in Proverbs 1-9," in *A Feminist Companion to Wisdom Literature* (ed. A. Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 110-26, shows, and as more than a single hearing would conclude, there is one woman, Woman Folly, who incorporates the Strange Woman, just as there is one Woman Wisdom, who both calls from her house like Woman Folly and walks the streets like the Strange Woman. The concrete danger which the Strange Woman poses is representative of the overall danger posed by Woman Folly, symbolic of all such foolish ways.

¹⁵ On this see Newsom, "Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom," 142-160; and also Gail Corrington Streeter, *The Strange Woman: Power and Sex in the Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 105-13; Camp, "What's so Strange?," 26-28.

adulterous women, which help shape it, intact.¹⁶ This is then also how we see Proverbs being heard and interpreted in subsequent generations.

2. Proverbs LXX

When we turn to the innovative translation of Proverbs into Greek, we notice that the image of Wisdom in 1:20-21 has been lifted to a higher level of respectability.¹⁷ From simply crying out in the street, raising her voice, crying out on the corner of the top of the walls, and speaking at the city gates, she "sings hymns (or: is feted with hymns)* in the streets" (ἐν ἐξόδοις ὑμνεῖται), "leads frankly" (παρρησιᾶν ἀγει) in the squares, "proclaims" (or "is proclaimed")* (κηρύσσεται) "on the top of the walls" (ἐπὶ ἀκροῶν δὲ τευχέων), "waits" (παρῆδρεύει) "at the gates of the powerful" (ἐπὶ δὲ πύλαις δυναστῶν) and "speaks boldly" (θαρροῦσα λέγει) "at the gates of the city" (ἐπὶ δὲ πύλαις πόλεως). This renders the image's origin in the street woman perhaps less visible.

Where 2:16-19 introduces the adulteress, LXX make no mention of her, focusing instead on being removed from "from the straight way" (ἀπὸ ὁδοῦ εὐθείας) and "righteous opinion" (τῆς δικαίας γνώμης) and espousing "bad counsel" (κακῆ βουλή) which forsakes "the teaching of youth and has forgotten the divine covenant" (διδασκαλίαν νεότητος καὶ διαθήκην θεῶν ἐπιλελησμένη) – nothing about a strange woman, a smooth-talking outsider woman (הַיְרֵיבָה זָרָה מְנַכְרֵה מֵאִשָּׁה) and her marriage covenant, but about "bad counsel,"¹⁸ now not leading to

¹⁶ Thus Claudia V. Camp, "Power, Powerlessness, and the Divine: New Inquiries in Bible and Theology," in *Woman Wisdom and the Strange Woman* (ed. Cynthia L. Rigby; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), writes of her as "a portrait of idealized evil in its multiple dimensions" (219). Newsom, "Woman and the Discourse of Patriarchal Wisdom," speaks of a "curious slippage between the literal and the symbolic" (155).

¹⁷ On the issue of the extent to which LXX Proverbs reflects a different Hebrew text or a rather free translation with additions, see Emanuel Tov, "Recensional Differences between the Masoretic text and the Septuagint of Proverbs," in Emanuel Tov, *The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint* (VTSup 72; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 419-32; Johann Cook, *The Septuagint of Proverbs: Jewish and/or Hellenistic Proverbs? Concerning the Hellenistic Colouring of LXX Proverbs* (VTSup 69; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 29-36; Goff, "Hellish Females," 22-25.

¹⁸ Cook, *Septuagint of Proverbs*, noting that the passage has "nothing to do with sexual issues" (132), suggests that κακῆ βουλή may be an allusion to the "evil inclination" (יצר הרע), which he then argues is best understood as a reference to foreign wisdom (137). See also Johann Cook, אִשָּׁה זָרָה, here 464-65. Against this Goff, "Hellish for Foreign Wisdom?" *ZAW* 106 (1994): 458-76, notes that Goff's "Hellish Females," notes יצר הרע normally denotes an inner disposition and nothing in the passage suggests the counsel is foreign (30). He concludes: "The LXX translator presumably understood her core value not as representing a real and wicked woman but in her function

death, but housed beside it and Hades.¹⁹ The author has clearly understood the image symbolically and chosen to represent what it symbolises in his translation, dropping the image itself.

The warning against the adulterous woman in 5:3-20 has also been significantly rewritten. In 5:3 the LXX warns against “a worthless woman” (φάυλη γυναικί), not a “strange woman” (זרה), identifying her as a “prostituting woman, who for a period pleases your palate” (γυναικὸς πόρνῃς ἢ πόρῃς καιρὸν λιπαίνει σὸν φάουγγα), having no equivalent in the Hebrew text. LXX probably intends a specific warning, here about immoral women,²⁰ but then reverts to the abstract in 5:5, where it renders “her feet” by “the feet of folly” (τῆς γὰρ ἀφροσύνης οἱ πόδες). This probably turns the warning in 5:8 about keeping away from the adulterous woman into a warning about folly: “Make your way far from her; do not go near the doors of her houses” (μακρὰν ποίησον ἀπ’ αὐτῆς σὴν ὁδὸν μὴ ἐγγίσῃς πόρῃς θύρας οἰκῶν αὐτῆς), the plural better suited to the abstract notion of “folly.”²¹ In the image of water which follows (5:15-16) it appears that LXX does not envisage a reference to chastity and promiscuity. Now the son is to drink from his own vessels (plural, so not his wife) (πῶτε ὕδατα ἀπὸ σῶν ἀγγείων καὶ ἀπὸ σῶν φερέτων ποτηρίων) and not to keep his well water to himself but share it with others (μὴ ὑπερκεχεῖσθω σοι τὰ ὕδατα ἐκ τῆς σῆς ποτηρίας εἰς δὲ σὰς πλατείας διαπορευέσθω τὰ σὰ ὕδατα), the opposite of what it meant in the original metaphor! LXX deletes the allusion to one’s penis as a fountain, replacing it with: “Let your well of water be solely your own” (ἡ ποτῆρὶς σου τοῦ ὕδατος ἐστὼ σοι ἰδία; cf. ברוך מקורך ידך) (5:18), but then retains reference to one’s wife (5:18), neatly rendered by Cook: “the fawn of your love and the foal of your favors” (5:19), and in whose love one is to indulge, but gone are the references to breasts and intoxication. The erotic has been minimised.

as a symbol for ideas and attitudes that are immoral” (31). See also Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 376.

¹⁹ So Goff, “Hellish Females,” 30, who sees in the relocation a mythologising of the figure (32). Cook, *Septuagint of Proverbs*, notes that the Greek of 2:18 uses μετὰ τῶν γυναικῶν to describe the location of “bad counsel,” which could mean “with the shades” (1:40-41). This might be an allusion to the Watcher myth or to Greek notions of Tartarus. See also Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 375.

²⁰ Like its Hebrew equivalent, זרה, πόρνη is best understood in a broad sense of any immoral woman, rather than narrowed to prostitution. On this see Goff, “Hellish Females,” 39 n. 61.

²¹ So also Goff, “Hellish Females,” 31. But see Fox, who suggests it refers to “a residential complex,” noting a similar plural in 7:8 (*Proverbs 1-9*, 390) and 31:27 (404), in both of which it is literal.

Warnings not to be intoxicated with another woman or embrace the bosom of an adulteress (5:20) become simply: “Do not be for long with a strange woman, nor be held in the arms of someone not your own” (μὴ πολεῖς ἰσθί πρὸς ἀλλοτριῶν μὴδὲ συνέχου ἀγκάλας τῆς μὴ ἰδίας). In this passage we find further evidence that the translator is reading the image symbolically, but here he appears also to retain the concern about the concrete dangers of the strange woman, but moving freely between the woman and the broader danger she represents though still embodies. As Goff notes, “In this chapter descriptions of a promiscuous female are side by side with a depiction of her as personified folly.”²²

In 6:24-35 the translator reproduces the warnings against adultery with minimal change, probably because they did not lend themselves easily to symbolic treatment. The warnings about the offended husband’s vengeance best suit a literal, not a symbolic interpretation. Thus the section begins by warning that adultery is likely to cost far more than the loaf of bread which you pay for a prostitute, and ends with the outraged husband, who will not be bought off with a bribe on the day of reckoning (6:27-35).²³ There are, nevertheless, some minor changes. In 6:24 the words “from the evil woman, the smooth tongue of the outsider woman” (הריהו לשון נבריה רע מהלקה רע מאשת רע מאלוטריות) become “from a married woman and from the slander of a strange tongue” (ἀπὸ γυναικὸς ὑπάνδρου²⁴ καὶ ἀπὸ διαβολῆς²⁵ γλώσσης ἀλλοτριῶν).

The change to ἀπὸ διαβολῆς γλώσσης ἀλλοτριῶν (“slander of a strange tongue”) may indicate that the translator is using ἀλλοτριῶν to indicate “foreign” and so might have understood הרי similarly. At a literal level, which the immediate context with its emphasis on the husband’s response assumes, the translator would have envisaged adulterous relations with foreign women, possibly acting as prostitutes. If so, then the reference to slander might well refer to slander coming from the husband (perhaps even from the foreign community). This makes better sense than to envisage the woman herself engaging in the slander. Alternatively one could understand ἀλλοτριῶν as meaning what it meant in 5:20, where it simply refers to a woman “not your own” (τῆς μὴ

²² Goff, “Hellish Females,” 31.

²³ There is no need to see in ἐν ἡμεῶν κείμενος a reference to eschatological judgement. So Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 402.

²⁴ Cook, *Septuagint of Proverbs*, attributes the change to the translator’s noting that the woman is married according to 6:29 (186). He sees her foreignness as in 2:17 as indicative of her having lost touch with her tradition, but here as having become a total stranger (186). On the likely reading by the translator of γυναικῶν in 6:24 as referring not to evil but to neighbour see Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 401.

²⁵ Goff, “Hellish Females,” notes that, despite the reference to honey dripping lips in 5:3, LXX tends to mute the woman’s seductive smooth talking (cf. 2:16; 7:5, 21) (39).

ἰδέας), since they belong to another husband, similarly in chapter 7,²⁶ rather than because they are foreigners. Από διαβολῆς γλώσσης ἀλλοτριῶν ("slander of a strange tongue") could simply refer to their verbal pitch not their language, but it would still not be clear why we would have a reference here to slander. On balance, an allusion to foreign language may well be the author's intention here.²⁷ Reference to foreign language might indicate that the author also has a symbolic intent, namely foreign wisdom, as Cook suggests, though this would be in addition to the obvious literal concern about actual adultery and the dangers of the outraged, probably foreign, husband.²⁸

The translation rewrites 6:25 to emphasise the danger of being overcome, supplemented with a reference to being captivated not just by her eyelashes, as in the original, but also through one's own eyes, typical in warnings against sexual wrongdoing.²⁹ Then instead of contrasting payment to a prostitute with paying with one's life for adultery in 6:26b, LXX replaces the latter with: "a men's lady hunts for precious souls" (γυνὴ δὲ ἀνδρῶν τιμίας ψυχὰς ἀγρεύει). Except for the possible allusion to foreign wisdom, which is tenuous, the translator does not appear to have dealt with the warnings about the dangers of adultery, especially from the offended husband, in anything other than a literal sense, but has probably adjusted them by adding a reference to the possibility of slander from foreigners.

In the following chapter LXX retains the allusion to making Wisdom one's sister (7:4), but less directly (εἶπον τὴν σοφίαν σὴν ἀδελφὴν εἶναί "Say that wisdom is your sister"; cf. *אמר לרַחֲמָה אַחֲתָא תא* "Say to wisdom, 'You are my sister'"), and then transforms 7:6-9 from the author spying what foolish young men do, to the "strange and sinful woman" peeping out onto the streets "from a window out of her house" at a young man and then in 7:10 going to meet him. To the comment that she looked like a prostitute, it adds the words: "who causes the hearts of young men to flutter" (7:10). Instead of "loud and wayward," "she is excited and debauched" (ἀνεπτέρωμένην δὲ ἔστιν καὶ ἄσσοτος). Her pitch (7:13-20) is much as in the Hebrew, but with fewer spices, as is the

²⁶ Goff, "Hellish Females," notes that the image in Proverbs 7 makes no mention of ethnic background but is explicit about her being married (40). Cf. Cook, "אשה זרה," 466.

²⁷ Cf. Goff, "Hellish Females," 40.

²⁸ Cook, "אשה זרה," 466.

²⁹ *συνεπαρσασθῆς ἀπὸ τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἵπτα φάλακρον* ("Do not let desire for her beauty overcome you nor be captivated by your eyes nor be captured by her eyelashes"); cf. *אל תחמד פיה אל תחמד פיה בלִבְבְךָ ואל תקור בעֵינֶיהָ* ("Do not desire her beauty in your heart, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes"). Cf. NETS, which translates: "Let not her desire for beauty conquer you."

account of his entrapment (7:21-23) and the final exhortation (7:24-27).³⁰ In 7:18 LXX renders *נחלתם באהבה* ("let us delight ourselves with love") with *ἐγκυλιθῶμεν ἑαυτοῖς* ("let us embrace in love"), which could also mean: "Let us roll ourselves in love,"* significantly more suggestive. There are no indications here of a symbolic reading on the part of the translator. The focus remains on the concrete danger which the woman presents rather than the abstract danger she can also represent.³¹

In its rendering of the passage about Woman Folly in 9:13-18, LXX has transformed the text, including by additions which frame the image.³² Thus 9:12 now has the addition:

(a) ὅς ἐρεῖδεται ἐπὶ ψεύδεσιν, οὗτος ποιμανεῖ ἀνέμους
ὁ δ' αὐτός διώξεται ὄνεα πετομένα

(b) ἀπὲλιπεν γὰρ ὁδοῦς τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ ἀμπελώνας
τοὺς δὲ ἄξονας τοῦ ἰδίου γεωργίου πεπλάνηται

(c) διαπορεύεται δὲ δι' ἀνύδρου ἐρήμου
καὶ γῆν διατεταγμένην ἐν διψώδεσιν
συναγείδῃ χερσὶν ἀκαρπίαν

(a) He who supports himself with lies will as well herd winds,
and the same person will pursue flying birds,

(b) for he has forsaken the ways of his vineyard

and has caused the axes on his own farm to go astray.

(c) Yes, he travels through an arid wilderness

and a land destined for drought,

and gathers barrenness with his hands. (9:12a-c)

The imagery depicts adultery: its inevitable lies,³³ its chasing birds, its abandonment of one's own vineyard,³⁴ its destabilising one's household,

³⁰ In 7:27 the author translates *מתי חדרי אלה ירדה אלה* ("Her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the chambers of death") as *ὁδοὶ ἄδου ὁ οἶκος αὐτῆς καταγοῦναι εἰς τὰ τομιαῖα τοῦ θανάτου* ("Roads of Hades are her house leading down to the chambers of death").

³¹ So also Goff, "Hellish Females," 36. He notes that in 7:18 both the Hebrew and the Greek, in particular, "depict the woman as an unapologetically erotic figure" (36 n. 60).

³² Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, sees 12ab as having existed in Hebrew, but c and 18a-d as additions (419-20); but see the critical assessment in Johann Cook, "The Text-Critical Value of the Septuagint of Proverbs," in *Seeking Out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays Offered to Honor Michael V. Fox on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (ed. Ronald L. Troxel, Kelvin G. Friebe and Dennis R. Magary; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 407-19, here 414-16; Tov, *Greek and Hebrew Bible*, who sees 12a and b as "intranslational pluses" (423).

³³ Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, suggests that it refers to "foreign doctrines and beliefs," as (420); similarly Cook, *Septuagint of Proverbs*, 271.

and its threat to future generations. The supplements to 9:18b continue the warning against the foolish woman:

- (a) ἀλλὰ ἀποπήδησον μὴ ἐγχερονίσης ἐν τῷ τόπῳ
μηδὲ ἐπιστήσης τὸ σὸν ὄμμα πρὸς αὐτήν
(b) οὕτως γὰρ διαβήσῃ ὕδωρ ἀλλοτρίων καὶ ὑπερβήσῃ
ποταμὸν ἀλλοτρίων
(c) ἀπὸ δὲ ὕδατος ἀλλοτρίου ἀπόσχου
καὶ ἀπὸ πηγῆς ἀλλοτριας μὴ πίης
(d) ἴνα πολὺν ζήσης χρόνον
προστεθῇ δέ σοι ἔτη ζωῆς
(a) On the contrary; run away; do not linger in the place;
Neither fix your eye upon her,
(b) for so you will cross strange water and pass through a strange
river.
(c) However, abstain from strange water,
and do not drink from a strange well,
(d) that you may live for a long time
and years of life may be added to you. (9:18a-d)

The additions in 9:18 call the hearer to run away, not linger, nor fix one's eyes on the woman, probably an allusion to Lot's wife and the destruction of Sodom (Gen 19:26),³⁵ with the warning: "for so you will cross strange water and pass through a strange river," probably an allusion to the river Styx,³⁶ a variation on the translator's mythologising about death (2:18; 5:5; 7:27).³⁷ The allusion to Sodom and Gomorrah probably implies an allusion to sexual sin. It then adds: "However, abstain from strange water, and do not drink from a strange well, that you may live for a long time and years of life may be added to you" (ἀπὸ δὲ ὕδατος ἀλλοτρίου ἀπόσχου καὶ ἀπὸ πηγῆς ἀλλοτριας μὴ πίης ἵνα πολὺν ζήσης χρόνον προστεθῇ δέ σοι ἔτη ζωῆς). This picks up 5:15, which in Hebrew enjoins chastity: "Drink water from your own cistern, flowing water from your own well" (**שָׁתֵּה מִמַּיִם מִבְּוֵרְךָ מַיִם שְׂהַר בְּאוֹרְךָ**); cf. LXX πῖνε ὕδατα ἀπὸ σῶν ἀγγείων καὶ ἀπὸ σῶν φρεάτων πηγῆς "Drink water from your own vessels and the from the

³⁴ Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, notes the use of vineyard as a reference to one's own wife (Cant 1:6; 8:11; Isa 5:1) (420).

³⁵ So Cook, *Septuagint of Proverbs*, 284.

³⁶ So also Cook, *Septuagint of Proverbs*, 284.

³⁷ On the translator's mythologising of death see Goff, "Hellish Females," 32. "Proverbs 9:18 can be understood as a poetic elaboration of 2:18, 5:5 and 7:27, which state that the strange Woman leads me to Sheol" (35).

cisterns of your well").³⁸ The additions thus frame the account of Woman Folly with a reinforcement of the dangers of adultery.

The invitation and consequences depicted in 9:13-18 are much the same as in Hebrew with slight variations of order. Instead of speaking of a "foolish woman" who is "loud" and "ignorant," LXX renders: "a foolish and audacious woman who knows no shame comes in need of a morsel of food" (γυνὴ ἄφρων καὶ θρασεῖα ἐνδετής ψεμὸν γίνεταί ἡ οὐκ ἐπιστάται αἰσχύνῃν). This addition about her seeking food fits the image of a desperate woman plying prostitution for food, recalling the prostitute's meagre pay in 6:26 (ἐνός ἄγρου). The frame of 9:12a-c and 18a-d implies she is married.

Thus both the translation of 9:13-18 and the additions within it and at either end of it enhance the image of the woman as an adulteress, now depicted as engaging in prostitution. However as a counterpart of Woman Wisdom, closely linked to the Law by the addition in 9:10a (τὸ γὰρ γινώσκει νόμον διανοίσκει ἐστὶν ἀγαθῆς "For to know the Law is the sign of a sound mind"),³⁹ Woman Folly also functions as a symbol, representing folly and wickedness, understood as transgression of Torah. Goff is even more specific seeing her as representing "Gentile ways of life that Jews should not wholly adopt."⁴⁰ With Fox he therefore interprets the imagery of entering strange water and passing through a strange river in the additions of 9:18 as an allusion to living in the Diaspora,⁴¹ rejecting Cook's suggestion of an allusion to Styx,⁴² because, as he argues, the reference would then be to death which would make little sense in the symbolism.⁴³ Precisely because of the reference to death, I think Cook's suggestion makes better sense of the imagery. To

³⁸ Goff, "Hellish Females," notes this as a possibility but does not embrace it (43).

³⁹ So Goff, "Hellish Females," 43-44; see also Johann Cook, "Theological / Ideological Tendency in the Septuagint – LXX Proverbs: A Case Study," in *Interpreting Translation: Studies of the LXX and Ezekiel in Honour of Johan Lust* (BETL 191; ed. F. Garcia-Martinez and M. Vervenne; Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 65-79, 75-76, who draws attention also to the expansion in 28:4 which depicts Law as a fence, as in *Arist 139* (75-76).

⁴⁰ Goff, "Hellish Women," 44. See also Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 423.

⁴¹ Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, writes: "The 'strange water/river' must represent foreign cultures, not foreign woman (in spite of the woman/water metaphor in 5:15-18), for the author would not wish the reader to 'pass through' or 'cross over' the woman in question" (422). His chief argument against Cook's identification of these with foreign philosophies is a similarly literal interpretation of the image: one could avoid these without having to pass through them (422). The interpretation proposed above presumes a double use of "strange water" for both the woman and that to which she leads and with which she is identified, namely death.

⁴² Cook, *Septuagint of Proverbs*, 284; Cook, "אשה זרה," 474.

⁴³ Fox, *Proverbs 1-9*, 422.

follow this woman, both literally, and in terms of the lawlessness she symbolises, is to follow the path to death.

Cook, however, agreeing with a suggestion of Martin Hengel, takes Woman Folly along with the earlier references to the strange woman as alluding solely to the dangers of foreign philosophy, writing: "As a matter of fact, the ladies mentioned in Prov 2:16-19; 5:1-11; and 15-23; 6:20-35; 7 and 9 are all metaphors for the foreign wisdom, ... namely Greek philosophy of the kind encountered in the Hellenistic period."⁴⁴ This might have more weight if there were evidence of using and targeting particular philosophical concepts and ideas, but this is not evident. The probable allusion to Styx suggests, on the contrary, a willingness to embrace some elements of Hellenistic culture, though Cook has shown that such influence is minimal.⁴⁵

Between the options of either arguing that the reference is solely literal or solely symbolic in the LXX of 9:12-18 is the more likely option that the image functions at both levels. The LXX's addition of reference to the woman coming in need of a morsel of food (9:13b) seems to imply something concrete, namely a woman engaging in prostitution, echoing 6:16. This implied allusion matches earlier changes which bring prostitution more into focus (5:3; 7:10). Whereas the Hebrew notes prostitution but primarily addresses the danger of adulteresses, LXX includes acts of prostitution in its depiction of the adulteress as the prime exhibit of danger and wickedness. On the other hand, the juxtaposition to Woman Wisdom clearly intimates a symbolic meaning as well. It makes best sense to see the woman as both a symbol and as a concrete instance of what she symbolises. In this way justice can be done both to the literal and to the symbolic elements. She is an instance of the lawlessness she represents.

This relates in turn to the way the previous passages are to be understood. Here caution must be exercised in assessing what might have been a translator's intent, so far as that is ever recoverable. We cannot assume, for instance, that a translator operated with a uniform understanding. This means, on the one hand, that the clearly symbolic treatment in 2:16-19, which is also evident in part in 5:3-20, cannot be automatically assumed as the translator's reading of 6:24-35 with its very concrete warnings about vengeful husbands and probable slander from foreigners as the rewards of adultery or of 7:4-27 with its detailed image

⁴⁴ Cook, *Septuagint of Proverbs*, 285; similarly 138; Cook, "אשה זרה," 469; cf. Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism* (2 vols; London: SCM, 1973), 1:281.

⁴⁵ See his contribution to the current volume.

of seduction leading to death.⁴⁶ Nor, on the other hand, should such concrete warnings be taken as a basis for arguing a concrete meaning in every other instance. To see the concern as being with behaviour contrary to Torah (whether in relation to foreigners or not) of which the woman is a concrete instance, both enables one to hold the symbolic and literal reading together and makes good sense of the texts. While one might argue that those passages which deal with the concrete dangers of adultery might have been translated with little regard for their content, the additions elsewhere about prostitution make it much more likely that the translator would not have ignored such dangers.

At one level, making claims about what a translator might or might not have intended remains highly speculative. At another, the dangers posed by the fact that men married in their late twenties would have made such warnings always pertinent. It is also noteworthy, as discussed below, that those who later used Proverbs, both the original and the LXX translation, when drawing on such passages, retained their literal warnings, usually beside the symbolic meaning, and so treated the strange woman and woman of folly both as an instance and as a symbol of disregard of Torah, and not for instance as purely symbolic, whether of foreign philosophy or another such danger.

Thus while the translator at some points renders warnings about the adulterous woman (2:16-19) in ways that transform them into an abstract warning about folly, consistent with the image of Woman Folly, he still retains the specific warning about adulteresses in 6:24-35 and 7:1-27, and in a new framing of 9:13-18 shows the close relationship between the woman as both symbolic representative and specific instance. Generally, references to dangerous passions remain, a fire that can burn, but positive descriptions of sexual intimacy are more demure: breasts and intoxication do not make the cut. The translator seems more happy to reproduce details of danger.

Beyond Proverbs 1-9 the translator sometimes removes references to "the strange woman" altogether, as from 22:14 where (lit.) "The mouth of a strange woman is a deep pit" (שׁוֹחָה עֵמֶקָה פִּי זָרוּת) becomes: "The mouth of the transgressor is a deep hole" (בֹּסֶקֶס בֶּטֶחַ בֶּטֶחַ סוֹמֵא עֵינָי רָאוּ זָרוּת),⁴⁷ or can add new ones, as in 23:33, where

⁴⁶ On the issue of whether Proverbs may indeed employ Hellenistic philosophical ideas, see Goff, "Hellish Females," 42-43.

⁴⁷ Similarly in 23:27-28 the reference to the prostitute is transformed into a statement about strange houses and wells: πῖθλος γὰρ τετραπένονος ἐστὶν ἀλλοτριος οἶκος, καὶ φελακὸν στένον ἀλλοτριον ("For a pierced cask is a strange house, and a strange well is narrow"); cf. שׁוֹחָה עֵמֶקָה זָנוּת וְזָנוּת יִבְרָא צִדָּה נְכוּרִיה ("For a prostitute is a deep pit; an outsider woman is a narrow well")*, and applied to "the transgressor" (τὸς παρανομῶτος). Greek

ולבך ידבר תהפכות
 utter perverse things") becomes οἱ ὀφθαλμοὶ σου ὄταν ἰδῶσιν
 ἀλλοτριῶν τὸ σόμα σου τότε λαλήσει σκολιὰ ("When your eyes see
 a strange woman, then your mouth will speak perversely"), indicating
 that the specific remains a concern.

3. The "Strange Woman" in *Joseph and Aseneth*

The Strange Woman of Proverbs has an afterlife. In the writing of Ben Sira and in his grandson's Greek translation of it she remains the immoral woman without a symbolic superstructure.⁴⁸ In 4Q184 *The Wiles of the Wicked Woman* she also remains the immoral woman, representative of the evils of sexual wrongdoing, because of which, it claims, some sought to alter the statutes (1.25). Sexual wrongdoing featured significantly in documents of conflict apparently emanating from the early days of what probably became the Essene movement.⁴⁹ Of these the *Damascus Document* draws on Proverbs' exhortations to introduce its exposé of Israel's history as a litany of sexual wrongdoing.⁵⁰

Further afield we find *Joseph and Aseneth* where the Strange Woman of Proverbs walks again. The work, first thought to be a third- or fourth-century Christian composition, is now widely regarded on good grounds

retains references to prostitutes in 29:3 and 30:20, but 30:19 changes "the way of a man with a girl" (דודד גבר בעלמה) into "the ways of a man in his youth" (כאן ידועים ἀνδρῶς ἐν νεότητι). See also 31:3, which changes giving one's strength to giving one's wealth to women.

⁴⁸ See my paper, "'Proverbs' 'Strange Woman' in the Septuagint and Ben Sira," presented at the Septuaginta Deutsch conference in Wuppertal, 2008, to be published in the conference proceedings.

⁴⁹ On this see Loader, *Dead Sea Scrolls on Sexuality*, 326-40; also Goff, "Hellish Women," 32-39.

⁵⁰ This work cites Prov 7:24 "Now, my children listen to me" in 2.14, with echoes also in 1.1 and 2.2. Perhaps already raising sexual issues in its reference to those who choose the fair neck, its first named sin (1.18-19), the work follows the citation of Prov 7:24 with an exposition of Israel's history in 2.14 - 3.12a as a litany of sexual wrongdoing, from the Watchers to the monarchy. It rails against those teachers who in response to such sexual enticements shift the boundaries (of the Law), playing on the similarity between πῦρ "boundary" and πῦρ "statute" (4.12; cf. also 1.16; 5.20; 19.16; 20.20) and so revile "the statutes of God's covenant, saying, 'They are not certain'" (CD 5.12). The opposition group identified as scoffers who dispute laws (20.11), who follow the scoffer (1.14), are seekers of smooth things (also an echo of Proverbs), who seek to change the Law (CD 1.18).

as being Jewish.⁵¹ Its distinctive features of heavenly transformations, meals that mediate eternal life, and honeycomb symbolism, belong as much to the earlier as the later period. The motifs of conversion and intermarriage and its image of relatively peaceful coexistence with Egyptians suggest a date prior to the measures of Trajan (117 C.E.) and Hadrian (135 C.E.)⁵² and possibly the revolts of 38 C.E., and perhaps earlier still since no hints of Rome appear, so that we are most probably dealing with a work from the late first century B.C.E. or the early first century C.E.⁵³ Written in Greek it comes to us in a longer and shorter recension which most see as an abridgement,⁵⁴ but the material which concerns us is shared by both.

The issue of intermarriage is evident throughout, its context suggested by the author's use of *Jubilees* and apparent knowledge of literature associated with Levi which reports his visions, such as we know in the *Aramaic Levi Document*.⁵⁵ This is more significant for the work than has been recognised thus far, since in both Levi is depicted as the champion of those who oppose intermarriage to Gentiles, including proselytes, and both suppress Jacob's negative comments about his vengeance on the Shechemites (cf. Gen 34:30; 49:5-7). The work appears to be written as a response to this headline position, which is associated particularly with Levi and priestly heroes like Phinehas. Thus in *ALD* 3a / 4Q213a/4QLevi^b ar 3-4; and *Jub.* 30:5-23 we find priestly provisions against intermarriage (Lev 21:9; cf. also 16:21) have applied

⁵¹ On earlier attempts to link *Aseneth* with the Essenes or the Therapeutae, see Randall D. Chesnut, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Meal Formula in *Joseph and Aseneth*: From Qumran Fever to Qumran Light," in *The Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls: The Princeton Symposium on the Dead Sea Scrolls: Volume 2: The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Qumran Community* (ed. James H. Charlesworth; Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006), 397-425, who concludes that "the persistent claims of kinship between *Joseph and Aseneth* and the Essenes or Therapeutae emanate more from Qumran fever than from compelling evidence" (409).

⁵² So Oegema, "Joseph und Aseneth," 101; John J. Collins, "Joseph and Aseneth: Jewish or Christian?," *JSP* 14 (2005): 97-112, 109.

⁵³ So Gerbern S. Oegema, "Joseph und Aseneth (JSHRZ II/4)," in *Einführung zu den Jüdischen Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit: Unterweisung in erzählender Form* (JSHRZ 6.1.2; ed. Gerbern S. Oegema; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2005), 97-114, 100-101.

⁵⁴ See the discussion in Christoph Burchard with Carsten Burfeind and Uta Barbara Fink, *Joseph und Aseneth* (PVTG 5; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 39-46. I use this as the text edition and Burchard's translation based on it in *OTP* 2.202-47. I indicate modified translation with an asterisk.

⁵⁵ On this see William Loader, *Enoch, Levi, and Jubilees on Sexuality: Attitudes towards Sexuality in the Early Enoch Literature, the Aramaic Levi Document, and the Book of Jubilees* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 91-94, 100-104 (*ALD*); 155-96 (*Jubilees*).

to the priestly people as a whole (*Jub.* 16:15-19; 33:20; cf. *Exod* 19:6).⁵⁶ This stance is relatively widely attested in such documents as *4QMMT* (B 8-9, 39-49, 75-82; C 4-8),⁵⁷ so-called *Pseudo-Philo* (9:5; 18:13-14; 21:1; 30:1; 44:7; 45:3), and probably Addition C of *Esther*, where she claims not only to abhor the bed of "the uncircumcised" but also "of any alien" (παντός ἀλλοτρίου).⁵⁸ A loophole in such hardliners' argument, however, is Joseph's marriage to Aseneth (*Gen* 41:45), which even *Jubilees* includes, but without comment.⁵⁹ *Aseneth* exploits it playfully to defend marriage to Gentile women who become proselytes.⁶⁰

We find fairytale features throughout, typical of Hellenistic romances.⁶¹ Aseneth is the most beautiful woman on earth, a virgin upon whom no man has ever set eyes, having a bed on which no one else has sat, attended by seven virgins equally unseen and untouched, all having the same birthday, living together in a tower of ten chambers (1:4; 2:2-6, 9). The men of Egypt and not least Pharaoh's firstborn all want her, but she despises men. Pharaoh admonishes his son for wanting someone beneath him (1:6-9). The issue of appropriate marriage is well on the agenda. She has additional saving features for the Jewish audience and its concerns: she looks more like an Israelite than an Egyptian and is compared to the great beauties of their times, Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel (1:5). This makes her just one little bit more acceptable to become Joseph's wife. The marriage theme comes more directly into focus when, having welcomed her parents back from the harvest, Aseneth hears her father's proposal that she marry the mighty man of God, Joseph, who is about to make a visit (3:5 - 4:8). We reach this point in the narrative having been told of Aseneth's courtyard being full of fruiting trees, springs, and big cisterns (1:10-12), part of the author's suggestive erotic playfulness.

Here we find our first echo of Proverbs' strange woman, but in an exchange rich in irony. Aseneth is appalled at her father's proposal, to hand her over "like a captive" to a man who is "an alien (ἀνδρῶτι

⁵⁶ On this see Loader, *Enoch, Levi, and Jubilees*, 91-94, 165-75.

⁵⁷ Loader, *Dead Sea Scrolls on Sexuality*, 53-90.

⁵⁸ See also *Tob* 1:9; 4:12-13; 1 *Macc* 1:11-15; 2 *Macc* 14:3, 37-38; 2 *Bar* 42:4-5; 48:22-24; cf. 41:3-4; *T. Job* 45:1-3; *Ps.* Sol. 17:28.

⁵⁹ On the possible pro-Egyptian stance of *Jubilees* as partly explaining the anomaly see Loader, *Enoch, Levi, and Jubilees*, 292-93.

⁶⁰ A similarly tolerant stance appears to be assumed in *Theodotus* 5-6, according to which Jacob is apparently genuine in offering marriage on the basis of the Shechemites' being circumcised (similarly *T. Levi* 6:3).

⁶¹ See Oegema, "Joseph und Aseneth," who sees it as most comparable to "Amor and Psyche" (*Apul. Metam.* 4:28-6:24), but also similar to Ruth, *Esther*, Tobit, and Judith (97-98); Burchard, *OTP*, 2:183-85; Humphrey, *Joseph and Aseneth*, 39-40.

ἀλλοφύλω),⁶² and a fugitive (φυγάδι), and (was) sold (as a slave) (πεπραμένω) ... a shepherd's son from the land of Canaan, and he himself was caught in the act (when he was) sleeping with the female head of the household"* (κοιμώμενος μετὰ τῆς κυρίας αὐτοῦ) and released from the darkness of prison when, like old women, he interpreted dreams (4:9-10). Her preference is to marry "a king's firstborn son" (4:11) - indeed she will! Her stance is a hard-line one: no marrying foreigners! They are immoral! In the initial description the author had already identified a flaw in her character, her arrogance (2:1), and here repeats it (4:12). It is also the implied flaw of all such hardliners.

She storms upstairs to her room full of idols only to catch sight of Joseph's arrival depicted like the sun-god coming now to Heliopolis, sun-city (5:2-7). She immediately falls in love at first sight, repents of her arrogant disdain and wants to marry him and serve him forever (6:1-8). Having greeted Pentephres her father, and ensured he had a table separate from the Egyptians, a nice touch reversing *Genesis* (43:32), Joseph looks up, sees her and wants her banned because, the author tells us, all the wives and daughters of Egypt were constantly pestering him wanting to sleep with him (7:1-3). This is entertainment, but with serious intent, for these are "strange women." The author reminds us how Joseph remains a virgin. Joseph remembers his father Jacob's words (7:4), reported as:

Φυλάξασθε τέκνα μου ἰσχυρῶς⁶³ ἀπὸ γυναικὸς ἀλλοτρίας
τοῦ κοινωνῆσαι αὐτῇ. ἢ γὰρ κοινωνοῦν αὐτῆς ἀπωλεῖά ἐστὶ
καὶ διαφθορά.

My children, guard strongly against associating with a strange woman, for association (with) her is destruction and corruption. (7:5)

This alludes to the story of his resisting Potiphar's wife in *Jub.* 39:7, but fills it with familiar content from Proverbs (cf. ἵνα σε τηρήσῃ ἀπὸ γυναικὸς ἀλλοτρίας "so that she may keep you from the strange and sinful woman"; 5:5; cf. also 6:24; 7:5, 16-17, 27; 9:18). As Kraemer notes, for its account the author assumes "the underlying framework of the traditions in Proverbs."⁶⁴ The author applies those traditions with

⁶² Possibly ἀλλογενεῖ. See Burchard, *Joseph und Aseneth*, 373.

⁶³ Possibly ἀσφαλῶς. On this see Burchard, *Joseph und Aseneth*, 374.

⁶⁴ Ross Shepard Kraemer, *When Joseph Met Aseneth: A Late Antique Tale of the Biblical Patriarch and His Egyptian Wife, Reconsidered* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 25. She argues that Prov 7:5 LXX, which merges the two figures of its Hebrew original into one, and depicts the woman as "strange/foreign" and "sinful".

subtlety. Thus Pentephres protests that she is not a "strange woman," but his daughter and, as a fellow virgin, Joseph's sister (7:7). Unlike the hardliners, he takes "strange woman" only to mean women wanting illicit sex. Joseph apparently falls for the argument that virginity makes them kin (7:8), but when Aseneth appears and is told to greet him with a kiss (8:4), Joseph placed his hand between her breasts, which, the entertainer tells us, promptly stood up like apples (8:5), pushes her away and declares that to kiss a strange woman (φύλησσαι γυναικὶ ἀλλοτριῶν) who worships idols or for a woman to do the same is an abomination (8:5-7). So here is another definition; the strange woman may be moral, but her idolatry is what defiles, though usually the two go together.

To cut a long story short, Aseneth is devastated (8:8). Joseph is moved (8:9), compassion being a core value for the author, and prays for her conversion (8:9). Seven days of "over-the-top" repentance follow: clothes, idols, food flung from windows, sackcloth and ashes gathered in the skin removed from her entrance, a symbol of first intercourse, mixed on the floor with tears making mud, followed by three sorry songs for good measure (9-13), including the confession that like the strange woman of Prov 9:13 she has been ἀφρονὶ καὶ θοῶσεια ("foolish and arrogant"). This playful but serious account of the process of her conversion is followed by an encounter in her inmost chamber with a Joseph-like man from heaven, who assures her of her acceptance into the ranks of the people of God as one who can feast on their food of eternal life, symbolised by tasting honeycomb, and he then renames her City of Refuge, symbol of all such proselyte Gentiles to come whose marriages are thus blessed (14-17). Here Woman Wisdom makes her appearance as heavenly Metanoia who intercedes for those who make this change, and then the original strange woman herself, Aseneth, emerges with her seven virgins, identified with the Woman Wisdom's seven-pillared dwelling of Proverbs 9 (17:4-6),⁶⁵ a City of Refuge blessed by Wisdom herself.

The elaborate repentance, affirmation, aetiology, identification with Wisdom's dwelling, all serve to cement the claim that marriage to foreign women who become proselytes is blessed. Indeed, Jacob himself then blesses her (22:7-9), but the climax of the author's irony, as yet not

underlies Aseneth 7.6 (25). See also her discussion on pp. 23-24; and Edith M. Humphrey, *Joseph and Aseneth* (Guides to Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 87-88.

⁶⁵ On this see Dieter Sängler, *Antikes Judentum und die Misxeriten: Religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Joseph und Aseneth* (WUNT 2.5; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1980), 73-76.

recognised in discussions to date, is what I call the conversion of Levi. For the author has the ultimate hardliner, Levi, become Aseneth's champion. This is much more than depicting him as caring for Aseneth as he did for Dinah, for the two are in opposite categories. It is precisely in this context concerned with intermarriage that the author reminds the readers of Levi and his heavenly visions, and then declares: "Levi would love Aseneth very much, and see her place of rest in the highest, and her walls like adamantine eternal walls, and her foundations upon a rock of the seventh heaven" and "Aseneth loved Levi exceedingly above all Joseph's brothers" (22:13).

Aseneth still retains the adulteress elements of the Strange Woman of Proverbs in its reinterpretation, as instanced in all the women wanting to seduce Joseph, but this version is much more strongly a foreigner engaged in idolatry, even if moral, and stands in dialogue with other streams of tradition, not least the rigorist position on intermarriage. For such women are far from a lost cause, as Aseneth, their archetype and now heavenly protector under Woman Wisdom, proves. As in Proverbs LXX Aseneth as the strange woman is not just a symbol, nor just a concrete case, but becomes both. Against the hardliners traditionally associated with Levi who will have none of it, her story with its heavenly elevation provides the warrant for the softer line, allowing all such marriages where Gentile brides convert. And Levi loves it – and her!