"this was here procreation"
The Storie of Asneth and
Spiritual Marriage in the Middle Ages

Including

A Suggestion of the Patroness and Poet
of the Later Middle English Verse Translation

A Discussion of Late Antique Typology

by

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ABSTRACT

The Storie of Asneth survives in Later Middle English Verse in just one manuscript dating from the early fifteenth century. The story was translated from Latin and is originally a Jewish Hellenistic romance dating from around the first century BC. Asneth is sometimes spelled Aseneth or Asenath in English. Chapter One of this thesis discusses the possible identity of the unknown Middle English patroness and poet alluded to in the Prologue and Epilogue. Specifically, I propose that Elizabeth Berkeley commissioned John Walton to translate *Asneth* in the Middle Ages, a hypothesis supported by John Shirley's ownership of the manuscript. Chapter Two is a literary discussion of the medieval text. The Late Medieval poem may have been translated in the historical context of the practice of Spiritual Marriage, and some discrepancies in the translation may be owing to the promotion of this ideal. Contrasted with an implicit sense that the characters, Joseph and Asneth, are chaste, is an erotic visionary encounter between Asneth and the "Man from Heaven." Asneth seems to have been endowed with many of the same divine characteristics that may have informed the Virgin Mary and Miraculous Conception, though the story is originally pre-Christian. The visionary sequence in *Asneth* also seems to have much in common with accounts of women visionaries of the Middle Ages, partly because of what appears to be Marian iconography. Chapter Three is a discussion of ancient icons that may have informed the story, but have remained a mystery. There is a discussion of Egyptian myth in the context of the Sacred Marriage associated with harvest rituals, astronomy and temple theology, that unite the Moon Goddess with the Sun God. I propose that the "Field of Our Heritage" spoken of in *Asneth*, may be a reference to the Egyptian "ancestral field," the Underworld of the Soul. Other associated icons, such as the honey bees, may reflect funerary and fertility expectations from the Ancient Near East, specifically Egypt, that may have informed Judaism and, in turn, Christianity. In any case, paradigms of chastity and fertility, particularly where they inform concepts of conversion and renewal, seem to be supported by the marriage theme in the text, from the Hellenistic Near East, up until the Middle Ages.

Abstract – p2 – "this was here procreation" *The Storie of Asneth* and Spiritual Marriage in the Middle Ages

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Contents

For Amanda and Grant Fletcher

Preface

I first became interested in *The Storie of Asneth* during a Medieval Literature course I attended at University of Victoria, taught by Kathryn-Kerby Fulton. The poem was presented as a significant but less specific part of a graduate course on "Publishing in a Manuscript Society." Our version of *Asneth* comes from the Ellesmere Manuscript, 26.A.13, now located in the Huntington Library. The working copy I use is in Russell Peck's compilation, *Heroic Women from the Old Testament in Middle English Verse.* Medieval Institute Publications: Kalamazoo, 1991.

Perhaps because of my own non-professional knowledge of Biblical myth, which came of being educated in a Judeo-Christian subculture, perhaps also because of its form as a romance novel, *Asneth* quickly became as comfortable to me as some of the more classic Old Testament stories have over the years. There is only a small mention of Potiphar's daughter, who was given to the patriarch, Joseph, in marriage, in the Old Testament Canon. However, this brief account gives the Egyptian, Asneth, a place in the genealogy of Israel. Asneth's story, originally a Hellenistic Jewish romance written around the first century BC, is part of the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. The story is so full of mythological and religious allusion that, even before I knew *Asneth* had gained relatively recent status among Old Testament scholars, I saw that it occupied an important place in religious and literary narrative.

I thank Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, my thesis supervisor, for helping me begin to organize the "reverberations" I was having with respect to Asneth, and suggesting I look at the poem's potential significance to the practice of "Spiritual Marriage" in the Later Middle Ages. She put in my hands Dyan Elliot's *Spiritual Marriage*: *Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock*, Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1993, for study of Spiritual Marriage. I also thank my committee member, Margot Louis, whose guidance and suggestions, especially in the area of myth, is greatly appreciated. As with anything worth looking at, this study has been rewarding and humbling, and an experience that has taught me more than the sum and substance of what has ended up on the page.

Introduction

Though recent Old Testament scholarship has focused its attention on *Joseph and Aseneth*, a pseudepigraphal version of a first century B.C. Hellenistic Jewish romance,[1] little attention has been given to a Late Medieval English translation published in Peck's *Heroic Women from the Old Testament in Middle English Verse,*[2] entitled, *The Storie of Asneth*. The initial research of this thesis focused on a comparison of the story's implicit promotion of sexual abstinence between the two main characters to the practice of marital chastity in the Middle Ages known as Spiritual Marriage. This sensibility is made stronger in the story when the couple's standoffish behavior is juxtaposed to the eroticism of Asneth's encounter with an angel in a mystical vision, that appears to bear aspects of the Miraculous Conception of Jesus.

This thesis began as a study of Spiritual Marriage in the Middle Ages, but necessitated a look at the Pseudepigraphal story from the perspective of Old Testament scholarship. When read as a Jewish Hellenistic romance, a curiosity and frustration as to the story's symbolic and iconographic meaning drove me. For despite what medieval readers would perceive as strong Christian images and ideologies, the Hellenistic story pre-dates Christianity. Old Testament scholarship has not yet discovered the key to the numeric and astrological aspects of Asneth, nor to other prominent symbolic aspects of the story, though current research continues to add relevant pieces to this puzzle. This fact prompted me to do some preliminary research into Egyptian mythology, theology and temple traditions that I feel may be implicit in the text. Egyptology, through what may have been its influence on Judaism, may inform a Christian reading of the story. When some of these ancient mythologies and traditions begin to be brought to light, it is my belief that it may help us to further understand why medieval Christian readers of the tale understood the story as an exemplum of post-procreative marital chastity. They may

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[1] The story is variously referred to in studies as a romance, and though anachronistic, also as a novel or *novella*. There is a wide consensus that the story was written by Hellenistic Jews living in Egypt.

[2] Russell A. Peck, ed., *Heroic Women from the Old Testament in Middle English Verse*, TEAMS Middle English Texts Series. (University of Rochester Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University: Kalamazoo, 1991): 1-68. As of the date of this thesis submission, a full text edition of *The Storie of Asneth*, edited by Peck, is also online at: http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/asnint.htm. The only other previously printed version of the poem is Henry Noble MacCracken, ed. "The Storie of Asneth: An Unknown Middle English Translation of a Lost Latin Version," *JEGP* 9 (1910): 224-64.

have read the poem in this way partly because of what appears to be (though anachronistic) Marian iconography, itself directly informed by Egyptian iconography.

In addition, I sought clues to the story's medieval readership and usage, examining current information available about the medieval manuscript, as well as the medieval book owner, John Shirley. This information was largely available to me because of Margaret Connolly's recent study of John Shirley. Though I was not expecting it, I was able to piece together information that possibly identifies both the patroness and the poet of the Middle English verse translation of *Asneth*, who have been previously unaccounted for.

I offer the evidence of possible authorship and patronage at the beginning of the thesis as Chapter One. In Chapter Two, I offer a literary discussion of the medieval text. It focuses on the importance the poem may have had in Medieval England based on its dissemination as women's devotional reading and its proposed example for the medieval practice of post-procreative marital chastity, a specific category of Spiritual Marriage. In Chapter Three, I discuss iconography and some of the story's possible connections to Egyptian mythology and the influence this may have had on *Asneth*'s Jewish writers (writing in Egypt) as well as on a later Christian understanding of the poem. Specifically, I propose the Pseudepigraphal story may have allusions to Egyptian fertility celebrations that conjoin the aristocratic couple in an enactment of "The Sacred Marriage." In Hellenistic Heliopolis, the evolution of the sacred marriage tradition was popularly known by the myth of Isis and Osiris. If seen in this fertility context, the couple, Joseph and Asneth, may be seen as having a chaste marriage during the seven years of famine that follows the seven years of plenty when their children were conceived and born. That is, if informed by aspects of the archetypal couple of the sacred marriage, Joseph and Asneth themselves may be seen as living out the metaphor of the fertility and famine of the land of Egypt recorded in *Genesis*. In any case, aspects of Egyptian temple traditions and theology appear manifest in the story. They may offer a possible avenue into the story having to do with conversion themes and the metaphor of marriage that has not yet been fully addressed by current research in the field of Old Testament Pseudepigraphal

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MacCracken includes Vincent of Beauvais' version of the tale in Latin at the bottom of the page, a redaction popular in Europe in the Early Middle Ages.

Studies.[3] Though it cannot be fully explored here, my theory that Jewish writers used Egyptian icons may also be relevant to research regarding the Egyptian-Judeo-Christian chronological connection in the evolution of western religions.

The Text:

In this study, I predominantly use the medieval version of the poem found in Peck. It is a copy of the only known surviving English manuscript, which is in the Huntington Ellesmere 26.A.13[4] once owned by John Shirley. I refer to this version as *The Storie of Asneth*, or the Shirley *Asneth*, and the story generally as *Asneth*. The Shirley *Asneth* is a copy of the poem that was translated into Middle English from a twelfth century Latin version[5] in the fifteenth century. It was commissioned by a woman of upper-class standing according to the translator's own prologue. However, before its transformation into the language of the people, there is evidence that it enjoyed the perusal of monastic societies and is found listed in library records specifically in the first half of the fifteenth century in at least two locations in England.[6] The poem was also known by the poet, Lydgate, who compares Asneth to Mary, the Queen of Heaven, in a poem of the same name. However, because of Lydgate's spelling of Asneth, "Assenech," it is believed he knew of the poem through one of the redactions made popular by Vincent of Bouvais in which the same spelling occurs.[7]

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[3] Burchard looks at the story's influence on New Testament practices, but not from the perspective of Egyptian mythology. In this respect, I offer preliminary evidence that supports his theory further.

[4] 26.A.13, fols. 116-27. Manuscript of *The Storie of Asneth*, a romance in Middle English (933 lines). The Middle English story occurs as items 13-14 (beginning of Vol. II of a composite volume). See Peck, p. 17.

[5] The Latin survives in two Cambridge manuscripts, Corpus Christi 424 and Corpus Christi 288. See Peck and Dwyer.

[6] R. Sharpe, et al, eds., *English Benedictine Libraries: The Shorter Catalogues*, Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues 4 (The British Library in Association with The British Academy, 1992): Glastonbury, Somerset, Abbey of the BVM, B45.16 (p.240) *Historia Assanekis sponse Ioseph.* Select list of books noted by John Bale c 1550 Bodl. MS Selden supra 64 Fol. 191r, "lost register may have dated from the second quarter of the 15th cent."(p. 238); David N. Bell, ed., *The Libraries of the Cistercians, Gilbertines and Premonstratensians*, Corpus of British Medieval Library Catalogues 3 (The British Library in Association with The British Academy, 1992): Titchfield, Hampshire Prem Abbey of St. Mary and St. John the Evangelist P6, Catalogue of the Library, 29 Sept, 1400. BL MS Add. 70507 Fol. 24v, .N.VII. p. *Historia qualiter Ioseph accepit filiam Putifaris in uxorem* (p. 233).

[7] R.A. Dwyer, "Aseneth of Egypt in Middle English" *Medium Aevum* 39 (1970): 118-122. "One of the Latin manuscripts (C.C.C.C. 424) consistently calls the heroine *Asenech* and belongs to the same stemma which provided Vincent of Beauvais with the name Assenech. MS. Trinity Coll Camb. 1440, on the other hand, refers to her as Aseneth, and this tradition apparently supplies our translator with the form Asneth.

Edith McEwan Humphrey, in her study of *Asneth*, states:

> Before the modern reader can hope to begin a nuanced critique of any piece of ancient literature, she or he must engage in a more-or-less sympathetic reading. It is evident that such a reading will proceed from certain social, political and religious presuppositions, but an attempt to waive these must at least be made so that the text may be heard, and not simply reacted against.[8]

Attempting to read the poem solely in light of recent Old Testament scholarship would be anachronistic. Clearly our fifteenth century translator did not have the resources scholars have today. The very premise of this thesis is that the medieval poet or the poet's patron had certain social, political and religious presuppositions. I perceive these presuppositions to be focussed precisely on widely held forms of religious idealism—Spiritual Marriage for one—and a medieval Christian reading of the poem. However, as already noted, in its earliest forms, the poem pre-dates Christianity and is even thought to have influenced some well-known Christian traditions such as the Eucharist and the sign of the cross made by priests in blessing.[9] It is important to compare recent thought on the poem as well as a recent variant translation from the perspective of Old Testament Pseudepigraphal scholarship, to a historically medieval "unwaived" perspective from which a translator no doubt wrote.

I use as a comparative text Burchard's translation with variant readings of the poem based on all known Greek manuscripts to date, and cite the Latin text in certain key places. Burchard's translation is entitled *Joseph and Aseneth.*[10] This text most closely

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Lydgate, who used the *Speculum historiale* as a source for *The Serpent of Division*, seems also to have received from it his knowledge of Asenath of Egypt." Corpus Christi 424 is one of the Latin manuscripts that *The Story of Asneth* is believed to have been translated from, yet according to Dwyer, does not support the spelling "Asneth."

[8] "The Ladies and the Cities: Transformation and Apocalyptic Identity in Joseph and Aseneth, 4 Ezra, the Apocalypse and The Shepherd of Hermas," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series* 17 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press 1995): 9-190.

[9] Christoph Burchard, "The Importance of Joseph and Aseneth for the study of the New Testament: A General Survey and a Fresh look at the Lord's Supper," *New Testament Studies* 33 (1987): 102-34.

[10] English versions I looked at include: Christoph Burchard, "Joseph and Aseneth: A New Translation and Introduction," *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha,* ed. James A. Charlesworth, vol. 2. (New York: Doubleday, 1985), a compilation and variant reading of all known Greek versions to date; Philonenko. ed. "Joseph and Aseneth," *The Apocryphal Old Testament* ed. H.F.D Sparks, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), based on the "d" grouping of manuscripts—see Burchard; Henry Noble MacCracken, ed. "The Storie of Asneth: An Unknown Middle English Translation of a Lost Latin Version," *JEGP* 9 (1910): 224-64, the only previously published version of the medieval poem in modern day; Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews,* vol. 2 (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 11th Im. 1980): 170-178, subtitled chronologically, "Asenath," "The Marriage of Joseph," Kind and Unkind Brethren," and "Treachery

resembles the group of Latin manuscripts, L1, widely read in England in the Middle Ages.[11] I also compare the Middle English version to a printed version of what scholars believe to be the Medieval Latin original from which the poet translated.[12] The two English translations I compare are quite consistent, apart from some abridgement, consistent with both the Latin original and the Shirley *Asneth*. And, of course, wording is rearranged for the purpose of alliteration and rhyme in the Middle English Verse translation. For instance, among other small abridgements, the prayer and song of Asneth, as well as the "bee scene" are slightly shorter in the medieval versions. The *Psalm of Asneth* is incorporated in just thirty lines of verse, whereas in Burchard's translation it is fifty-three lines, though the sentiment remains essentially the same. The last lines of the *Psalm of Asneth* in Burchard read:

> I have sinned, Lord, I have sinned;
> before you I have sinned much
> And I spoke bold (words) in vanity and said,
> "There is no prince on earth who may loosen the girdle of my virginity."
>
> I have sinned, Lord, I have sinned;
> before you I have sinned much.
> But will be the bride of the great king's firstborn son.

Punished." The only endnote (n.432) within these pages states that it is Jewish in origin, and pseudepigraphic (comp. Schurer, *Geschichte*, fourth edition, III, 399-400); Burchard's compilation is based on the "b" grouping of texts, which is the same group to which the Latin origin of the Medieval English version of *Asneth* belongs. I also looked at the Latin printed edition of *Asneth* which was based on the Corpus Christi manuscripts 288, and 424 found in *Studia Patristica*, (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1889) ed. James Battifol.

[11] The L1 (Latin 1) version, circa A.D. 1200: "Nine manuscripts are known, possibly all of them written in England." Burchard explains that the L1 versions are part of the b grouping of manuscripts which "houses our oldest witnesses (Armenian, Syrian) and is the largest and most widely distributed group; readings offered or supported by it (versions included) are very often superior to their competitors on internal grounds" (in Charlesworth 180). Burchard bases his preliminary text on b unless a variant reading proves superior. In *Untersuchungen zu Joseph and Aseneth* (1965), Burchard lists the L1 manuscripts as follows: 1) Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Peniarth 335 A, f. 166r-182v; 2) Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 288, f. 88r-97r; 3) Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 424, o.f.; 4) Cambridge, Trinity College, B. 1. 30, f. 11r-23v; 5) Cambridge, Trinity College, O. 9. 28, f. 47r-54r; 6) London, British Museum. Add. 18210, f.49v-54v.; 7) London, British Museum, Cotton Claud. B. IV, f. 61v.; 8) London, British Museum, Egerton 2676, f. 53r-65r; 9) Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawl. G. 38, f. 90r-96v; 10) Paris, Biblioteque Nationale, Lat. 14656, f. 151r-162v; Kurzfassung [a friend interpreted this as "shortened"]:11) Luttich, Biblioteque de l'Universete, 184, f. 112v-118v; 12) Oxford, Bodleian Library, Add. C. 108, f. 17v-20r; 13) Wein, Nationalbibliothek, 13707, f. 201r-202v; 14) [Middle English Listed] Mittelenglische Versubertragung: San Marino, Calif., H. E. Huntington Library, EL.26.A 13, f. 121r-132r.

[12] The Latin version I use is: P. Batiffol, ed. "Le Livre de la Priere d' Aseneth." *Studia Patristica.* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1889): 89-115. It is a variant reading of both Corpus Christi 424, and 288. It is believed the Medieval English translation of *Asneth* was made from one of these two sources.

I have sinned, Lord, I have sinned;
before you I have sinned much,
until Joseph the Powerful One of God came
He pulled me down from my dominating position
and made me humble after my arrogance
and by his beauty he caught me,
and by his wisdom he grasped me like a fish on a hook,
and by his spirit, as by bait of life, he ensnared me,
and by his power he confirmed me,
and brought me to the God of the ages
and to the chief of the house of the Most High,
and gave me to eat bread of life,
and to drink a cup of wisdom
and I became his bride for ever and ever.[13]

In *The Storie of Asneth*, this portion of the poem reads:

Synned, Lord, I have synned in presence of Thi face,
For I saide there was no prince, with glorie that was veyn,
That the girdel of my maydenhed was worthi to unbrace
I willed to marie the kyngis sone, so proud was my trace.
Synnyng, Lord, I have synned contynuynge in Thi presence,
Til Joseph the myghty man of God tok me with excellence;

"For as the fyssh by the hook ys take by distresse,
So ys beaute drow me to hym by vertuus provydence,
And ladde me to Almighty God with gret gentynesse,
And did me taste of the drynke of the eternal sapience,
And now I am mad his conthorall by his advertence
Ay to dwelle an byde with hym in worlde withoute ende.
Synned, Lord, I have synned; remission thu me sende.[14]

The Medieval Latin[15] *Asneth* reads:

--peccavi...--et dicebam quoniam non est vir princeps terre qui dissolveret mihi cingulum virginitatis, --peccavi...--sed ero sponsa filii magni regis primogeniti,--peccavi...--usquedum veniret Ioseph fortis dei, qui comprehendit me sicut piscem per hamum pulcritudine sua, et sapientia sua, et virtute sua extraxit me, et adduxit me deo viventi et altissimo, et dedit mihi calicem sapientie et facta sum ei sponsa in secula seculorum.[16]

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[13] In Charlesworth, p. 237

[14] ll. 708-716. Note the Later Medieval Christian inclusion in the English version that has Asneth asking for remission of sins. This is consistent with the theory that the poet may be a cleric, and conservative from a religious perspective. See my section, on Patroness and Poet.

[15] A variant reading of Corpus Christi 424, and 288 in *Studia Patristica*, p. 110.

[16] Note the abridgement and succinctness of the Latin version in these lines.

These lines represent the prayer Asneth gives after she has procreated with Joseph and ends the first half of the story that takes place during the seven years of plenty. While there are few differences in the entire text compared to Burchard's translation, and even fewer compared to the Latin, there are some noteworthy exceptions that will remain important evidence of the "social, religious and political presuppositions" held by the Middle English translator. There are some small elaborations the poet makes which embellish the story compared to even the Latin version which show Later Medieval Christian interpolations of the story significant to this study.

Chapter One

The Fifteenth century Patroness and Poet of *The Storie of Asneth*: A Possibility

Unique to the surviving Middle English version of *Asneth* are both a prologue and epilogue to the story that gives us clues as to its patronage, and states clearly that the patron was female and that she died at what seems to be a prime age in life. Likewise, the poet describes himself as old, his abilities no longer as sharp as they once may have been. What is accepted is that the female patron would have been aristocratic and presumably had some sort of connection to the book owner John Shirley. With this in the back of my mind as I read Margaret Connelly's book on John Shirley, the vast number of possibilities of female patrons of the fifteenth century became a more exclusive group. In this chapter, I offer preliminary evidence that Elizabeth Berkeley and John Walton may be the patroness and poet of *The Storie of Asneth*. I believe these two people fit the timing, location, theme, motivation, and most importantly of all, the connection to John Shirley. For it is Shirley's volume, now Ellesmere 26.A.13 in the Huntington Library, that holds the only known surviving Middle English manuscript of the story.

Elizabeth Berkeley was the only child of Thomas IV, Lord Berkeley of Gloucestershire (1368-1417), literary patron of John Trevisa. John Trevisa, Lord Berkeley's "Chaplain and man of letters,"[17] was educated at Oxford and died in 1402. According to Connelly, John Walton was Trevisa's successor, and a 1408 English translation of *De re miliatri* by Vegitius is attributed to Walton's authorship and Thomas Berkeley's patronage.[18] Elizabeth Berkeley's patronage of John Walton is confirmed in 1410[19] with his translation of *Boethius* into English Verse. This is accepted by scholars due to the naming of the two in an early printed edition of the text in 1524.[20] Walton's name, as well as that of Elizabeth Berkeley, is infused within the ending of the printed

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[17] See Fowler.

[18] In *The Life and Times of John Trevisa, Medieval Scholar*, David Fowler names John Bonjon as Trevisa's successor in 1402, p. 104. See Connolly, p. 111 on Thomas Berkeley's patronage of Walton where in a footnote (47) she says it is discussed by Hanna, 1989, pp 878-916. 'Sir Thomas Berkeley and His Patronage" (*Speculum*, 64).

[19] See Mark Science: "It will be noticed that all of the manuscript colophons agree in putting the date of the translation as 1410" (xliv, Intro).

[20] 1525 edition printed by Thomas Richard of Tavistock; see Science.

text by way of acrostics in three verses that make up a sort of epilogue subtitled: NOMEN Transferri procurantis, COGNOMEN and NOMEN Translatoris.[21]

According to information in Margaret Connolly's book on John Shirley,[22] Shirley's connection with Elizabeth's husband, the Earl of Warwick, Richard Beaucamp, was a years-long association. Shirley served the Earl as his squire for several years, accompanying him on various political and war campaigns, as well as personally serving him in business matters until the Earl's death in 1439. Shirley, according to Connolly, benefited from a "prolonged and continuous" association with Beaucamp. In addition, the household book of Elizabeth Berkeley Beaucamp for 1420/21, just before her death in 1422, lists John Shirley's first wife, Elizabeth, as one of Elizabeth Berkeley's ladies-in-waiting.

Connelly suggests that Shirley's association with the Earl may have been one that began with the Berkeley's and was established with Elizabeth's marriage to Richard Beaucamp in September, 1397, when she would have been just eleven or twelve years old. Shirley's name is not listed in any records in association with Beaucamp before 1403, the same year Richard Beaucamp reached his majority at the age of 21. It seems possible that after the marriage, or after the couple came out from under the legal guardianship of others,[23] Shirley devoted himself to Berkeley's only heir, Elizabeth, and her new husband. In any case, Shirley transcribed other works commissioned by the Berkeley's, and a literary connection is apparent:

> The connection with the Berkeley's is also potentially interesting because of the literary interests of the Gloucestershire family. Thomas Berkeley was the patron of the cleric John Trevisa, and Elizabeth herself commissioned John Walton's verse translation of Boethius in 1410. Shirley copied Trevisa's translation of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* into the first section of MS BL Additional 16165, where it follows his copy of Chaucer's *Boece*; he notes the Berkeley connection in the rubric, stating that the text was translated 'at þe instaunce of Thomas some tyme lord of Berkley'.[24]

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[21] See Ian Johnson, "New Evidence for the Authorship of Walton's Boethius." *Notes and Queries* 241 (March 1996): 19-21. Also see Mark Science, (p. xliii, Intro.), Wogan-Brown et al, and Margaret Connolly.
[22] *John Shirley: Book Production and the Noble Household in Fifteenth century England.* (Brookfield: Ashgate, 1998).
[23] See Connolly, p. 15, "She was under the age of seven at the time that their marriage was covenanted in September 1392, but she and Richard were married before 5 October 1397, when, following Thomas Beauchamp's exile, they were placed in the custody of the Duke of Surrey."
[24] Connolly p.15.

While Shirley chose to include Chaucer's *Boece* in BL Additional 16165, it should be noted that he was also familiar with and admired Walton's popular verse translation of *Boethius*, for he "repeatedly" copied a stanza of it into different manuscripts including into the section of Ellesmere 26.A.13 that holds *The Storie of Asneth*. Connolly believes, because of its frequency, that Shirley may have copied the stanza from memory rather than transcribing it. It reads as follows:

> For right as pouert causeth sobirnesse,
> & febilness enforceth continence,
> Right so prosperite and sekirnesse
> **P**e moder is of vice and necligence.
> And pouer also causep goode **p**ewes;
> **P**ere is none more parelouse pestilence
> **P**an hyhe estates gyffen vnto schrewes.[25]

John Walton certainly fits the description of the nameless West Midlands poet of *The Storie of Asneth* that Henry Noble MacCraken suggests, "might be a cleric, a chaplain, perhaps, living not far from Warwickshire and not long after the death of Chaucer."[26] Walton was an Augustinian Canon of Osney, from Oxford,[27] but his origin is unknown. Most records of him occur in documents from Oxford.[28] It is possible that Walton could have been known by either aristocratic family, originally hailing from anywhere in the Midlands, including near the Beaucamp home in Warwick.

If Walton succeeded Trevisa after 1402, and Elizabeth Berkeley died in December 1422, the possible date of her patronage of the poem is consistent with what scholars speculate is the date of the composition of *Asneth* in English. It is put anywhere from 1400 to 1450 or 60, but it has been estimated closer to the beginning of the fifteenth century by A. I. Doyle.[29] Because of the epilogue to the aristocratic patroness of the poem that appears at the end almost as a separate entity, and also because of the translator's

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[25] Bk. 1, st. 2, in Mark Science, p. 4.
[26] Peck, p. 6.
[27] "John Waltoun had been a canon of Oseney Abbey, a religious house confined to Augustine Canons, the site of which is at present occupied by St. Frideswide's Church Oxford." Science, (xlvii, introd.). Mark Science also indicates that Walton was known by the name "Johannes Capellanus" (xlviii).
[28] See Mark Science.
[29] See Peck, p. 5n3, where A. I. Doyle comments, "I would remark with relation to the possible date of composition of the poem(s), on the very strong alliterative style, which to a large extent over-rides the stanzaic rhyming quality. The syntax and accentuation are not polished post-Chaucerian in their effects. Some of the vocabulary supports this impression. It inclines me to push the composition back to earlier in the fifteenth century...."

mention of his old age in the prologue, the translation may have taken place just before Elizabeth's death, and perhaps just before or during the time Elizabeth Shirley served as her lady-in-waiting. I would estimate a date from 1420 to 1422, or early 1423, around ten to twelve years after Walton's translation of *Boethius*. If the epilogue was written immediately in sequence with the translation, then it is feasible that Elizabeth Berkeley commissioned the poem and died before it was completed. In that case, the poem could be dated 1423. At any rate, the Shirley copy in Ellesmere is not a holograph copy. It is transcribed from some as yet undisclosed original source and I estimate not before 1423, owing to the epilogue.[30]

The difference in poetry styles between *Boethius* and *Asneth*, from one that is in the rhyme royal tradition of Chaucer,[31] to one that goes back to a more alliterative Midlands tradition, may also be accounted for in the ten year or more time span between the two verse translations. If Walton proves to be the poet of *The Storie of Asneth*, his slight change of style and harking back to an alliterative use of language in this work may be studied in the context of the "Alliterative Revival" going on in England, and specifically the West Midlands, around this time.[32] In a comparison of *Boethius* to *Asneth*, though *Boethius* is said to be in a strong Chaucerian tradition, Mark Science

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[30] See also Connelly, p. 105 where she describes John Shirley's signature in Ellesmere 26.A.13 to be the closest in resemblance and style to that of "the Beaucamp letter of 1424." Also, "...the leaves which now form the opening gathering of Ellesmere 26.A.13 might originally have been those which stood at the beginning of the Trinity volume; the dimensions of the pages in both cases would allow for this possibility, and the early 1430's date suggested for this codex would accord with the similarities noted between the inscription in Ellesmere 26.A.13 and Additional 16165." The timing for the transcription of the Shirley copy in Ellesmere, therefore is consistent with the timing following Elizabeth Berkeley's death at the end of December, 1422, whether 1423, 1424 or slightly later. See also R. A. Dwyer where in a footnote, 8, p. 122, he says that the word "conculcacioun" used in *Asneth*, l. 396 is "first recorded in the *MED* c. 1425."

[31] See Ian Johnson in Wogan Brown, et al., p. 35: "By rendering Boethius poetically (in the rhyme-royal stanza made fashionable by Chaucer), he aims to surpass Chaucer and Gower, if not in the eloquence he says he lacks... then in the purity of his morality and shunning of 'pagan' classicism derived from 'olde poesyes derke.'" See also Mark Science where he informs us that not only is Walton's *Boethius* in a Chaucer tradition, but that Walton, in many instances, plagiarizes Chaucer's translation of *Boethius* over a more accurate translation from the Latin original. For a list of specific plagiarisms, see p. liii, in Mark Science's introduction.

[32] I would like to thank Kathryn Kerby-Fulton for pointing this potential out to me, and for suggesting I see Thorlac Turville-Petre, *The Alliterative Revival,* (Cambridge: Rowan and Littlefield, 1977), and Derek Pearsall for further studies on the Alliterative Style Revival. Turville-Petre puts the establishment of the revival (mid 14th century to beginning of 15th century) precisely in the West Midlands, and specifically in Gloucestershire, the region from which the early English alliterative works came (p. 31). From this perspective alone, further study of the possibility of John Walton's authorship of *Asneth* is important, particularly if he may be proven to have been influenced by the revival after his establishment at Berkeley, Gloucestershire.

comments also on Walton's "tinge[s] of alliterative colouring" in *Boethius*. If Walton may be proven to be the poet of *Asneth*, then the alliterative style that finds itself more naturally and prevalently manifest in the verses that comprise *Asneth*, may not be completely repressed in Walton's *Boethius*. [33]

In the epilogue itself are further clues to the patroness. Whoever she was, she would have died at what the translator considers to be an untimely age:

> And ladies likyng thu[34] sleest out of seson,
> And revest hem here ryalté with thi resprise.
> Thyn insaciable malice who may acomplise
> When that loveli ladies thu leyest so lowe
> And here bright beaute thu blemshest in a throwe?[35]
> . . . . . .
> To represse so noble, so gentille a creature
> In tendir age untymely agayn the ordir of nature.[36]

In fact, Elizabeth Berkeley would have been just thirty-five or thirty-six when she passed away on December 28, 1422. If it may be assumed that John Walton was at least in his mid-twenties[37] when he became the successor of John Trevisa, then he may have been nearly fifty or older when he translated *Asneth*, which fits the comment the translator makes on his old age in the prologue.

> For lame and unlusty now age hath me left;
> Mi spiritis are spended, I lakke sapience,
> Dulled I am with dotage, my reson ys me reft,
> Prived and departed from al eloquence,
> So my seson ys passed with langage to jape.[38]

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[33] See Science, p. lxi. Also, examples of alliteration that "tinge" the text may be seen in the following stanzas: 334 " **P**e wiche is g[o]od; *and* sothely for to seyne"; 446 "The welle of wisdome for to seke and fynde/ Thow graunt hym lord be lemyng of **pi** light"; 473 "Where **pat pis** good is founden fynally." Alliterative couplings such as "welle of wisdome" and "founden fynally" and others, may be indications of word couplings that Turville-Petre discusses in the context of collocations and set phrases of the alliterative style. See pp. 83-92 of Turville-Petre.

[34] In this part of the Epilogue, the pronoun "thu" refers to the personification of death that the poet is addressing.

[35] ll. 901-905.

[36] ll. 918-919.

[37] He was very likely older than in his mid-twenties when he translated Boethius in 1410. Mark Science shows evidence that while still at Oxford he received special dispensation from Rome in 1399 to "hold together with his Canonry, one other benefice..." and there is evidence that he was conferred the title "papal chaplain" in 1398 (Science xlvii). If it may be assumed that in order to be named a "papal chaplain" a young man would be at least in his twenties, then he could have been well over thirty when he translated Boethius, and close to sixty years old or older if he proves to be the translator of *Asneth* in the 1420's.

[38] ll. 9-13.

Elizabeth Berkeley certainly fits the description of the anonymous aristocratic female patron that Russell Peck notes:

> Whoever the lady was who commissioned the poem, to know of the Latin story of Joseph and Aseneth she would have to have been quite well educated and in contact with someone who had an unusual library, for, except in its abridged form, the story was not widely known.[39]
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Given the rich iconographic environment of *The Storie of Asneth*, it is easy to see how an intelligent woman, concerned with the raising of her household might want to have it available in the vernacular for instruction. Girls trained on the Psalter, lives of the saints, and prayers of the church would find the poem to be richly resonant with the same figural language."[40]

The unusual library that Elizabeth Berkeley would have been privy to would have been the Berkeley family's own library. They also had access to many religious houses, including the house of Augustinian Canons in Bristol[41] that the family patronized, the founding of which was "simultaneous with the establishment of the Berkeley family itself."[42] Elizabeth Berkeley's knowledge of Latin may be assumed owing to the fact that her household books were written in Latin.[43] Furthermore, Elizabeth Berkeley had three children, daughters Margaret, Eleanor and Elizabeth whom she was raising in the aristocratic household. There is also mention of a child residing in the household believed to be the daughter of one of the gentlewomen, the widow of one of the Earl of Warwick's retainers who was killed defending Calais during the Agincourt campaign.[44] These four female children, along with the six gentlewomen and Elizabeth Berkeley herself, would make a substantial female community of at least eleven upper-class women living within the Berkeley household in 1420/21, who would have had the immediate benefit of such a

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[39] p. 8.
[40] p. 11.
[41] One of the two library records I have found that housed a copy of Asneth in Latin around 1400, is just south of Bristol within easy access of Berkeley: From English Benedictine Library Catologue: Glastonbury, Somerset, Abbey of the BVM, B45 Select list of books noted by John Bale c 1550 Bodl. MS Selden supra 64 Fol. 191r, "lost register could date from the 1st quarter of the fifteenth century."
[42] Fowler, p. 87.
[43] See, p. 70, C.D. Ross, "The Household Accounts of Elizabeth Berkeley, Countess of Warwick, 1420-1," *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucester Archaeological Society* (1951).
[44] See Ross p. 92, "The child is thought to be the daughter, the only child of Sir Baldwin Strange, named also Elizabeth."

story's translation into the vernacular. Of course, this would include the lady-in-waiting, Elizabeth Shirley.

Elizabeth Berkeley is the closest logical aristocratic female link to John Shirley's family.[45] Not only does Shirley faithfully serve her husband, but Shirley's first wife serves Elizabeth herself. As a lady-in-waiting, Elizabeth Shirley would have been privy to Elizabeth Berkeley's library and would perhaps have shared in her devotions and readings. It is plausible that the story was copied for Shirley's wife as a known and loved story once belonging to, and originally commissioned by Elizabeth Berkeley, thus making its way into the Shirley household. It seems reasonable that such a thing would later be passed along to a second wife, Margaret Lynn, along with her sister Beatrice, who it is thought were once the owners of the part of Ellesmere 26.A.13 that houses *The Storie of Asneth*.[46] Regardless of this likely female connection with the manuscript, John Shirley would believably have had access to the libraries of both the Berkeley and the Beaucamp households through his connections with the Earl of Warwick.[47]

While the research into whether or not John Walton is the author of *The Storie of Asneth* will be a study that will go beyond the parameters of this thesis, I would like to point out some preliminary comparisons between his translation of *Boethius* and that of *Asneth* which may bear future criticism. This is perhaps seen best in the prologues, the truly original part of each translation. True to the widespread literary topos of humility in the Middle Ages,[48] the poet of *Asneth* likewise begins his prologue, including the justification for an effort at translation that is due to the strong insistence of a patroness who has ultimate power over her servant. However, even when we recognize the topos, this overly humble sentiment in both *Boethius* and *Asneth* seems remarkably similar. The portions of the prologue to Walton's *Boethius* state:

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[45] I had considered that Richard Beaucamp's second wife, Isabel Despenser, who patronized Lydgate, may be the patroness of the poem, but her longer life to 1439, as well as Elizabeth Shirley's death sometime also before 1440, make this connection not as likely. Further, an attributed authorship of the poem to Lydgate has already been discounted. See Peck p. 6-7.

[46] See Peck, pp. 3-5, and Connelly, p. 105.

[47] See also Connolly, p. 115, about Elizabeth Berkeley's copy of Walton's *Boethius*: "If her manuscript of the text still survives it can no longer be identified, but we can be sure that a copy of the work was available in the Beaucamp household for Shirley to consult...." Just so, a copy of *Asneth* would have been as readily available for John Shirley to consult.

[48] See E. R. Curtius, pp. 83-85 for a description of the modesty topos.

Insuffischaunce of connyng and wytte,
Defaute of langage and of eloquence
This werke fro me schulde have me holde yytte
But that youre heste hath do me violence
That nedis moste Y do my diligence
In thyng that passeth myne abilite,
Besechyng to youre noble excellence
That be youre help hit may amendyd be.[49]
. . . . . .
As fro the texte thast Y ne varye noght
But kepe the sentence in his trewe entent,[50]
. . . . . .
And eke in reverence of youre worthyness
This simple werke as for an observaunce
I schal begynne after my sympleness
In wille to do youre service and plesaunce.[51]

At the end of Book One of *Boethius*, stanza 31, Walton asks for readers to correct any faults they find with his translation:

And every Lord or lady[52] what ye be
Or clerk **p**at like**p** for to rede **p**is,
Besekyng lawly wi**p** humylite
Support where I haue [seyde] amys;
Correcte[**p**] only **p**ere **p**at nedful is,
If word or sentence be noght as it scholde.
My-self I am vnsuffishaunt I-wys
For if I couthe have bettre done I wolde.

In *Asneth*, an almost exact sentiment of humility, gentle coercion and an invitation to correct any shortcomings in translation is expressed:

And I answered, "Ma Bele, langage I lakke
To parforme youre plesir, for yt is ful straunge
That broken tuskes shold wel harde nuttis crakke,
And kerve out the kernelis, to glade with yowre graunge;
For lame and unlusty now age hath me left;
Mi spiritis are spended, I lakke sapience,
Dulled I am with dotage, my reson ys me reft,

[49] ll. 1-8.
[50] ll. 17-18.
[51] ll. 69-72. Lines from Walton's Boethius are copied from Wogan Brown et al from the prologue, and Mark Science from the rest.
[52] Note Walton's assumption that Ladies as well as Lords will read his work, and in turn have the potential ability to criticize the translation based on the Latin original. Elizabeth Berkeley, it seems, would have had this capability. In the prologue to *Asneth*, that the lady patroness can understand Latin is also implied.

Prived and departed from al eloquence,
So my seson ys passed with langage to jape.[53]

And when daunger dynusly here desire refused,
La Bele ful benignely sayde to me than,
"That servant ys not to blame, but fully excused,
That meketh hym to his maystresse, and does as he can."
Concluded thus with gentilnesse, I toke on to me the cure,
Asneth storie to translate after my cunnynge,[54]
. . . . . .
Hit is nuyus, but the sentence I schal sue in trace,
And yf ye fynde fautes, grave hem with yowr glose,
I pray yow thus, my maystresse, of your good grace.[55]

Not only does the expected sentiment of humility and insistence come through clearly, but the two prologues seem to favour similar word choices: cunnyng/cunnyng, eloquence/eloquence, violence/daunger, "But kepe the sentence in his trewe entente"/ "but the sentence I schal sue in trace," "Correcte**[p]** only **pere pat** nedful is, If word or sentence be noght as it scholde"/ "And yf ye fynde fautes, grave hem with yowr glose."

Perhaps an even stronger link to the two prologues can be seen in specific conceits that the author uses that are direct allusions to the themes within the literary texts themselves. In Asneth, the translator makes a direct allusion to the corn image in the story, for Joseph is the gatherer of corn (grain) in Egypt. I propose that Asneth, likewise, has associations to the grain goddess and the fertility of the land, which may have been understood to medieval readers. The line reads: "And kerve out the kernelis, to glade with yowre graunge." Peck comments that "the poet's phrase … which seems to mean 'to add gladly to your granary,' could be a witty reference to his patroness' library where such kernels of wisdom are stored, the metaphor also anticipates the grain motif which becomes important typologically in the subsequent poem."[56] Other allusions to typology in the story the author includes in the prologue are "sunnebemys," "the rede rose," and "Danielis dremys." These allusions are all in reference to the translator's abilities to do the story justice.

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[53] ll. 5-13.
[54] ll. 21-26.
[55] ll. 30-32.
[56] Peck, p. 7. This said, I thank Kathryn Kerby-Fulton for pointing out the fact that the motif of wisdom as "Kernel" is recognized as a standard image in Medieval Literature for the inner wisdom that one finds in, particularly, Biblical narrative. One sees this especially in Chaucer.

Likewise, the conceit in the prologue to *Boethius* having to do with the author's ability to authentically translate is a direct allusion to a theme in the story itself. The lines read:

> That hit be noght be my translacion
> Defouled ne corrupt, to God Y praye
> So helpe me with hys inspiracion
> That is of wysdom bothe lok and keye[57]

It is possible that "lok and keye," may be found to be a conventional motif in medieval literature, as is the "kernel of wisdom" motif. However, it is surely not coincidentally used here, owing to the fact of Boethius' imprisonment and the philosophical theme of moral imprisonment and freedom that is taken up in the story.

If John Walton is the author of *The Storie of Asneth*, then some other similarities in language use and phrases may bear future study. For instance, Peck mentions the phrase "without varyance" which appears three times in *Asneth*.[58] Consequently, I found the phrase or a variation of it to run throughout Walton's *Boethius*.[59] Other word choices that compare in both texts are rampant. Though one may argue that similar vocabulary and terms would occur within any works of two West Midland's poets, it may be worthy of future comparison in the context of John Walton's authorship.

Some stylistic consideration is brought to light in Mark Science's comments on Walton's translation of *Boethius*:

> Writing at the request of a lady, to whom no doubt [the belief that] the abstract and metaphysical qualities of the original proved a source of great difficulty, Walton probably realized what was expected of him. Anything which would illustrate or explain would be of service; simplicity would be helpful and paraphrase would often be preferable to literal rendering.

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[57] ll. 13-16.

[58] This is in association with Margery Hungerford's name, to which the phrase is attached in the Findern Manuscript. See p. 7 of Peck's introd. This also seems not to have an equivalent in the Latin original, see for instance, p. 98, ll. 13-16 in *Studia Patristica*, "Et memoratus est mandatorum patris sui, et ante oculos habuit ea propter quod dixerat Iacob Ioseph et universis filiis suis: 'Custodite fihi fortiter a muliere alienigena ut non communicetis ei" compared to *S of A* lines 230-233, "...but have in remembrance / The commaundementis of my fadir, and ever kepe hem wel; / For he bad me and my bretheren, withoute variaunce, / to kepe us clene fro wymmen of straunge alliance".

[59] Stanza 138, "wip no variance"; 150, "And noght suget to happes variaunce"; 164, "And vse hire most tho[u] wip hire variance"; 203, "wipoute chaungementes"; 224, "pe manner of hire kyndely variaunce"; 295, "An oper peple hap pis variaunce"; 317, "Pat weelfulnesse is freel and variande"; 321, "Acorden always in paire variaunce"; 403, "fals and variable"; 437, "pere is no variaunce"; 492, "wipouten variaunce"; 547, "pere is no variaunce"; 748, "Pat all-way is so full of variaunce"; 969, "pere is no variaunce."

> With these points in view it is easy to realize … why explanatory lines so often find a place, and why literal expression is so frequently sacrificed for simple exposition.[60]

A similar stylistic quality of translation may be argued of *Asneth*. In it, what I refer to as "qualifications" by the translator may be otherwise explained as an effort by the translator to make the "abstract and metaphysical" nuances in the text more explainable. I refer to at least two such instances (though there are many more) which occur in the Middle English version, which do not occur in the Latin. As already mentioned above, the term "without variance," can be seen to embellish the idea implicit in the Latin text for simpler understanding. Also, the qualification, "this was here procreacion,"[61] may be seen to be another such explanation for the purpose of an audience, a woman, who it perhaps was thought would not readily understand the significance of certain scenes or passages. This idea of an explanatory style in translation is further supported by Dwyer's comments[62] regarding psychological points that are made more forcefully at times in the English than the Latin with respect to *Asneth* and may support this aspect of similarity between the two translated works, *Boethius* and *Asneth.*

It is also an interesting note of comparison that when Walton was translating *Boethius*, he switched meters halfway through the work, accounting for the change he makes with a special preface to the last two books:

> Lo of hye a mater for to trete
> As after **þ**is myn auctour doth pursue,
> This wote I well, my wittes ben vnmete
> The sentence for to saue in metre trewe.

The first three books of *Boethius* retain an eight line stanza in ABABBCBC. The last two books have seven line stanzas in ABABBCC. *The Story of Asneth*'s translator translated the body of work in the seven line stanza, ABABBCC format that Walton adopted in the last half of *Boethius*.[63]

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[60] p. lxi, square brackets mine.

[61] ll. 683. The words do not occur in the Medieval Latin original the poet worked from. See my comments regardings Asneth's mystical marriage.

[62] See comments in Chapter Two.

[63] Note the prologue to *Boethius* is in the eight line, ABABBCBC meter that is consistent in the first three books. The prologue to *Asneth* is in an eight line, ABABCDCD meter, and the epilogue is in a seven line, ABABBCC meter (consistent with the body of *Asneth*) for the first three stanzas and changes to ABABACC for the last four stanzas of the epilogue. Clearly, the poet of *The Storie of Asneth*, if not

Other more intimate details of images and themes within the text may be clues to the patronage and the authorship of *The Storie of Asneth*. The prologue of the story begins with a geographic location. While it could fit any of a number of locations in England, it also fits the location of Berkeley castle which is located on a hill:[64] "As I on hilly halkes logged me late, / Biside ny of a Ladi sone was I war; / La Bele me desired in Englysh to translate / The Latyn of that lady, Asneth Putifar."[65] It follows that a family chaplain would at times be "lodged" at Berkeley Castle. C.D. Ross in his article on the household accounts of Elizabeth Berkeley for 1420/21 recounts:

> But the regular household staff (or such of them as ate in the hall) formed but a tithe of the many persons who daily sat down to meals at the countess' table. The offering of hospitality was at once a duty and a pleasure, and, by the 15th century, the lay castle and manor house had begun to rival the monastery as a place in which the passing traveler might seek food and shelter. Elizabeth Berkeley's household expenses were swollen by the flow of visitors of all ranks of society who enjoyed her hospitality. Her guests in this year ranged from a royal duke to humble carriers of wood, and from cathedral clergy to hermits. Not a day passes when the arrival of guests is not recorded. Many were casual guests, unknown travelers who benefited from Lady Warwick's hospitality: we hear constantly (especially while the household was at Berkeley) of meals and lodging given to 'two pilgrims at the castle gate,' 'two clerks of Oxford' and the like.[66]
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Elizabeth Berkeley seems to have relished the society of ecclesiastics, for some of her clerical friends lodged with the household for weeks together, while the household was at Berkeley, the prior of Langebridge and Master John Stanwey, at that time canon and later dean of the cathedral church of Hereford, were often among her visitors. There was also a friar Master of

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Walton, then like Walton, had no problem adjusting the metrical style of *Asneth*, (between the prologue and the body, as well as halfway through the epilogue) for whatever reason he saw fit.

[64] I have never visited Berkeley Castle, and I thank Linda Olson, University of Victoria, who has visited Berkeley for originally giving me this information. Additionally, a quote from Shakespeare's *Richard II* 2.3, ll. 1-5, supports that the region may have been considered "hilly" or "Hillocky": "How far is it, my lord, to Berkeley now? / Believe me, noble lord, / I am a stranger here in Gloucestershire. / These high wild hills and rough uneven ways / draw out our miles and makes them wearisome...." As a comparison, pictures of the countryside around the Earl's Warwick Castle, Warwickshire, is quite flat-looking, and Wotton-Under Edge, the place of another Berkeley residence where Elizabeth's parents were buried and where she frequently resided, is in a valley, "under the edge" of the adjacent, Wotton Hill.

[65] ll. 1-4.

[66] p. 92. See also p. 93, "A large group of the countess' visitors were people in the service of her husband, Earl Richard. We hear much of the comings and goings of the busy officials who managed the earl's estates. The supervisor and receiver general, John Baysham, the earl's chief financial officer, was often with the household; so too were his secretary, John Shirley, and his chamberlain, Richard Curson, whose wives, Elizabeth Shirley and Margaret Curson, were ladies in waiting to Lady Warwick."

> Theology from Bristol with his companion.... Wherever the countess might be staying, it seems to have been her custom to invite the local parish priest, and often the parish clerk too, to dinner on Sunday.[67]

Furthermore, Ross's article supports that the household was at Berkeley in the winter of 1420/21.[68] Is this time at Berkeley—when the local parish priest and clerk came for dinner every Sunday, when she entertained ecclesiastics from local religious houses on a regular basis, when John Shirley was reportedly often a guest, when Elizabeth Shirley resided with her as lady-in-waiting—the point at which Elizabeth Berkeley commissioned the translation of *The Storie of Asneth*, just one year before her death? Could it be that at a time when her property was threatened, and the ownership under suit by her cousin, a male heir,[69] she especially related to the story of Potiphar's daughter? I think there is room to wonder. Perhaps the story was introduced to her as an encouragement by a visiting ecclesiastic, for like Elizabeth Berkeley, Asneth also came under the threat of a male relative, the Pharaoh's son and her own brothers-in-law, Dan and Gad. Asneth came under the threat of losing, and indeed relinquished all her worldly possessions to find favor with God. Peck says of Asneth, "Even in the abduction, she teaches her audience how to behave in adverse circumstances and to forgive their enemies...."[70] While I am not suggesting that a visiting religious authority would have encouraged Elizabeth Berkeley to relinquish her worldly possessions, I do think someone may have recognized the identification Elizabeth Berkeley may have made with the heroine of the story. For her own peace of mind, Elizabeth Berkeley may have been encouraged to read and internalize the lessons learned by Asneth.

Another personal consideration of the translation may be the reference to the strange dogs to which Asneth throws the sacrificial meal from her tower window. Asneth won't burden her own beloved hounds with this abomination, yet mourns for the fact that

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[67] pp. 93-94.

[68] pp. 86, "The first six months of the accounting year, from 1 October 1420, to 28 March 1421, were spent by Countess Elizabeth in apparently peaceful routine at Berkeley. For the second half of the year she was much more active." The article gives a detailed accounting of her movement from estate to estate.

[69] See Ross pp. 81-83, for an explanation of the dispute and estates involved. Also, Ross recounts that "In July 1421 the dispute came to the notice of the king's council on a petition brought by Elizabeth Berkeley. She complained that James Berkeley [cousin and claimant] had put an armed force of soldiers and archers into the rectory house at her manor of Wotton-under-Edge to prevent her entering there, and that his men had fired arrows and shouted obscenities at her as she passed through the place." (Square brackets mine.)

[70] See section entitled *Christian Iconography and Pleasant Instruction,* pp. 10-16.

her own pets may now go hungry, "Alas how schod my houndis ete in ony wyse, of this souper of sacrifice, of fals maumettrie? / I take yt therfor to staungeris houndis...."[71] Peck comments that "Asneth's sensitivity to the moral welfare of her own household dogs ... who don't get fed, is, in its way, touching."[72] If Elizabeth Berkeley is the patroness of the story, it seems an apt personal touch on the part of the poet to accurately include such a detail, though to be sure, the ownership of dogs by aristocratic families in the Middle Ages was common.[73] Never-the-less, Elizabeth Berkeley had pet greyhounds of her own as well as a tame bear that traveled with her from estate to estate and whose care is accounted for in the household books.[74] At the least, it shows another point of similarity Elizabeth Berkeley may have had with the heroine, Asneth.

Another consideration is the well-documented modesty and devotion of the countess. In the epilogue, the patroness is described in modest and virtuous terms:

> In vertu here wommanhed was volupid many folde—
> Discreet, devoute, diligent. Deeth, thu mayst agrise
> To represse so noble, so gentille a creature[75]
> . . . . . .
> Of Lordis lyne and lynage sche was: here sche lyse,
> Bounteuus, benigne, enbleshed with beaute
> Sage, softe, and sobre, and gentylle in al wyse
> Meke, mylde, and merciful, of pite sche bar the prise.
> Comely, kynde, and curteis, in nobleye of nurture,
> Verdant in alle vertu, plesaunt and demure.[76]

While it would be incumbent upon a cleric to attribute these virtues to a late mistress whether she deserved them or not, it seems that in Elizabeth Berkeley's case the attributes would be believable. Her "pite" and kindness are seen in the great hospitality to people from every class who came to her gates that is well documented, as well as her hospitality to many ecclesiastics and clerics. The "discreet, devoute, diligent" description is also well-earned when it came to the modest and capable handling of her household. Despite her great hospitality and generosity, she is described at one point as keeping a

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[71] ll. 318-320.
[72] p. 58.
[73] This was not a deviation from the Latin version the poet worked from which reads: "Dixit enim: "Quomodo edent canes mei de cena sacrificii idolorum? Verum manducent illi canes alienigenaarium." p. 98 in *Studia Patristica*.
[74] See C.D. Ross, p. 85n, and p. 90.
[75] ll. 916-918.

The Storie of Asneth would have been an appealing one from the perspective of a conservative Augustinian Canon of Osney, John Walton, as well as a patroness whose family had a long-standing relationship with the Augustinian Canons of Bristol, Elizabeth Berkeley. Though, other than their documented long periods apart, there is no evidence that Elizabeth Berkeley and Richard Beaucamp practiced a Spiritual Marriage. It is enough to say that the conservative community that the countess patronized would have been aware of the ideal of Spiritual Marriage prominent in England in the Middle Ages, the popularization of which was largely due to Augustine's definition of marriage based on consent, not consummation.

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and not far geographically from Walton can be arguably his, however I believe there is room to study further who the author of some of these anonymous works are. Certainly given John Walton's proficiency, in the future he will be found to have translated more works than the one or two currently attributed to him.

Chapter 2

A Literary Discussion of *The Storie of Asneth* and its Relationship to the Practice of Spiritual Marriage in the Middle Ages

The Storie of Asneth: An Overview:

The Medieval poem begins with the translator's prologue, affirming his humility and sincerity in undertaking the task of translation, as well as the virtues of the great lady who commissioned the work.[80] Intermixed with his statements of his own incompetence,[81] "Dulled I am with dotage, my reson ys me reft",[82] are the paradoxical attestations to his Biblical knowledge and literary insight. He is well-attuned to Biblical imagery, pitting the owl, a symbol of the night, or the darkness associated with Satan, against the sunbeams, a symbol for Christ, or in the story, of the celestial being of Asneth's dream. Throughout the story, the dichotomy of light and dark, or sun/day and night, are integral. Similarly the red rose, the Rose of Sharon,[83] is another symbol for Christ, the mole, for Satan. "For as the oule ys unable to blasé the sunnebemys, / So ys the moselynge molle to jaile [cast forth] the rede rose, / And as able ys the asse[84] to Danielis dremys".[85] The translator certainly goes out of his way to justify the importance

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[80] See Chapter One.

[81] This is consistent with "proforma" modesty expectations of writers of this period. See E. R. Curtius, "Affected Modesty," in *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953. pp. 83-85.

[82] ll. 11.

[83] In *Song of Songs*. Also, see page 199 of the microfiche (Halligan) where Mechtild of Hackeborn refers to Christ as a rose. "Thanne sayde oure lorde to here: 'Loo, y am pat am a rose ande borne [without] a thorne ande prykkyde y am with many thornys.'

[84] Medieval bestiaries associate the wild ass, "Onager" to the Devil. See Ron Baxter: "The Onager is said to bray on the spring equinox, when the day becomes as long as the night, just as the Devil howls when he sees that the people of light, the faithful, have become as numerous as those who walk in the darkness, the sinners" (p. 37). "The wild ass...represent[s] the Devil. It will also be remembered that the specific aspect of the Devil described...is his howling over the souls of the faithful prophets and patriarchs lost to him." (p. 48). In Ginzberg v. II p. 54, when Joseph is in Pharaoh's house as an overseer, and his mistress is trying to seduce him, he once says to Zuleika, "Though belongest to a people that is like unto the ass, it perceiveth nothing. But I belong to those who can see things." This precedes Joseph's interpretation of the Pharaoh's dreams. The translator of *Asneth* may have been very educated in the typology, understanding Egypt to be "like unto the ass" in comparison to the prophets of Israel, and along with the owl and the mole, he contrasts animals typologically associated with darkness, against the theme of light, or knowing.

[85] ll. 17-19.

of the story in the context of the triumph of God, or good over evil, light over darkness.[86] The comparison of the Prophet Daniel's[87] dream from the Bible is also apocalyptic,[88] pointing to the mysterious but religiously important and everlasting quality of the forthcoming story. At the end of the prologue, the poet humbly acknowledges his occupation and prays that the Lord will "Gyde this werke … and graunte it good endynge, / Utterali the Latyn in Englyshe to transpose."[89]

The story begins by setting up the time frame as that of the beginning of the seven years of plenty according to the prophetic dream interpreted for the Pharaoh by Joseph in *Genesis*.[90] Joseph is appointed by Pharaoh to gather extra stores of corn or grain for Egypt in preparation of the seven years of famine that will follow seven years of plenty. Specifically the story begins in "The firste yeer of seven yeeris of plenteuus abundance."[91] Joseph has come to the country of Helinpoleos (Heliopolis) to gather the grain of that region, which is where Asneth is introduced. She is the daughter of the priest "Putiphar," and by heritage a priestess.[92] Much is made of her beautiful countenance, comparing her to Biblical Israelite heroines, Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel, and expounding on her virginal qualities. We are told many men have wanted her, but she has haughtily rejected them all to date, "Dispisynge eche man deynusly, and prowd of her corage."[93] She lives in a tower with her seven handmaidens, adjacent to her father's house. Much detail is given with regards to dates, numbers, geographic placement of

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[86] While a Christian understanding of light and dark would equate the former with good and the latter with evil, from a mythological perspective there is room to question whether this iconography was originally so value-laden. See Chapter Three.

[87] Additionally, the author may have understood that Joseph traditionally is often compared to Daniel who interpreted Nebuchadnezzar's dream. See Ginzberg v. II, p. 69. This is also standard reference with respect to medieval dreams (eg. Langland, Chaucer etc.). See A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry*.

[88] See Edith McEwan Humphrey, "The Ladies and the Cities…" for a critical explanation of the apocalyptic quality of *Asneth*.

[89] ll. 28-29.

[90] ch. 41:29-31.

[91] l. 34.

[92] Some Jewish folklore connects Asneth as the daughter of Dinah, Joseph's sister, after her seduction by Hamor the Hivite. The tradition (Syriac/Jewish) has it that an Eagle delivered the baby girl from Palestine to the altar of an Egyptian temple where she was found by Potiphar, who being childless, adopts her. In Rabbinic traditions it is an angel, Michael or Gabriel, that delivers her to Egypt (Ginzberg v. V pp. 336-337n97). It is thought that in this way the Jews saved the lineage of Israel from the defilement of an Egyptian marriage, by having Joseph marry his own niece. Ginzberg states that another Jewish tradition, the Old Midrashim, take Asenath to be the real daughter of Potiphar.

[93] l. 69.

windows, clothing, etc., which is indicative of the complicated symbolism and allusiveness in the story.

Joseph sends word to Putiphar that he intends to take his ease at Putiphar's estate, which is an honor since Joseph is the Pharaoh's second in command. Putiphar reveals his plan to Asneth to marry her to Joseph who appears to be the most eligible man in Egypt and Pharaoh's favorite, as well as God's chosen one. Joseph is well-known for his spiritual and sexual integrity. Sight-unseen, Asneth rejects this proposal, revealing her disdain and claiming she will not be defiled by the son of a herdsman and an ex-convict![94] She claims Joseph is a fraud, stating that his ability to read dreams is of no significance because the old wives of Egypt had that knowledge, and he was not needed in the first place.[95]

Subsequent to this conversation, Joseph is announced to be at the gates. Asneth is sent to her quarters and watches from an east-facing window.[96] The porter's son is ordered immediately "the gatis up to sprede."[97] Joseph is described in symbolically pure language, his chariot being drawn by white horses, his clothing all white, and with the olive branch of peace in his hand. Joseph enters the hall and everyone honors him except Asneth, but she begins to regret this. As soon as she sees him, her attitude changes and she begins to repent of her haughtiness and acknowledge his importance, "Allas that ever I dispised hym or made hym resistance / Godis son, I wot, is ful noble of alliance, And

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[94] In the *Genesis* account, Joseph, after serving Potiphar faithfully for many years, is jailed because Potiphar's wife, after trying to seduce Joseph unsuccessfully, out of spite accuses him of sexual misconduct.

[95] The "Old Wives" may be representative of the Grain/Moon Goddess Cult which I show is associated to Asneth in this story. Theological essays on *Asneth* all agree that the story is a conversion story. I argue that further to that, it is specifically representative of a Patriarchal usurpation of a tradition that had both gods and goddesses, or the conversion of Egyptian sun cult traditions to a Jewish monotheistic patriarchy. References of Asneth to the Grain Goddess, Neith, are numerous. Peck cites, p. 19 introd., *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Kater Publishing House Jerusalem Ltd., 1972), vol. 3: "Asenath," by Nahum M. Sarna, col. 693. [Hebr. Meaning in Egyptian "she belongs to, or is the servant of [the goddess] Neith," daughter of Poti-Phera, the high priest of On (Heliopolis).]

[96] Asneth's first sight of Joseph, who is representative of the Sun, is in the East where the sun rises. Later she watches him leave to the West.

[97] If, as I later show, the gate is representative of the gate to the womb, the usage the translator chooses in the word "sprede" seems to carry additional coital significance, especially when followed by the words, "And in entred Joseph… " (l. 169) as well as the word choice "terrage" immediately following, and several lines later, "Then entered Joseph in at the gatis, and cam into the halle" (l. 182). See my comments on the concept of "entering," in the context of the Egyptian temple and theology, Chapter Three.

the saveour of al Egypt, withoute variance."[98] Asneth is immediately so taken aback that she wishes her father would now just give her to Joseph as a servant, let alone a wife.

In the meantime, Joseph asks about the girl in the window.[99] He doesn't like the attitude he perceives, thinking she is wanton, "For Joseph dred wonton wymmen, that good men do perverte."[100] "Alle faire femelis of Egipt he had in hevyness, For thei desired to slepe with hym, he was so amiable; But he dispised hem and here menis – in clennesse he was stable."[101] He then asks that the strange woman be removed so that she doesn't harm him, whereupon Putifar goes to great lengths to extol his daughter's virtue and set Joseph straight. Joseph changes his mind about her, asks for her and receives her to himself as a sister and allows her to kiss his hand only.[102] Because of his purity, he will not be defiled on the mouth by anyone who worships false gods or eats sacrificial meals. At this point in the poem, there is a page missing which some believe was a song of Joseph.[103]

Joseph departs, claiming he will return in eight days, whereupon Asneth begins lamenting in earnest her initial reception of him and repents of her position in Egypt and her pagan ways. She won't eat or sleep and goes about "knockyng here brest"[104] in mourning. She rises from her bed and goes down to the gates where the porters sleep and fills a skin with ashes[105] and returns to her room, locks herself in, to her handmaids' distress, and dons black robes and covers herself with ashes. She lays her rich robes and

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[98] ll. 198-200. That she refers to him as God's son and Savior is evidence of his comparison to Christ to Medieval readers.

[99] According to Ginzberg, there is already a tradition of Joseph being lusted after by women looking at him specifically from windows. "The women and the maidens of the nobility looked out of the windows to gaze upon Joseph's beauty, and they poured down chains upon him, and rings and jewels, that he might but direct his eyes toward them. Yet he did not look up, and as a reward God made him proof against the evil eye, nor has it ever had the power to inflicting harm upon any of his descendants" (Ginzberg v. II, p. 74).

[100] l. 218.

[101] ll. 226-228.

[102] Joseph's stand-offish behavior is accounted for in Burchard, as well as traditionally in myth, according to Ginzberg. There is a consistent juxtaposition made between Joseph being assailed constantly by women wishing to sleep with him, against his virtue and his constantly avoiding their advances.

[103] Note in Peck, p. 30 and p. 57n265.

[104] l. 277.

[105] As well as ashes being obviously an element of penance and mourning, it may also have to do with Asneth as "Earth, or Moon Goddess" and the harvest. According to Scarr (p. 160), in Egypt between 200 and 100 BC [around the time of the authorship of the Hellenistic novel], "the spread of farming through much of tropical Africa at this time saw dramatic changes in local agriculture practices…." Cleared undergrowth was "burned just before the onset of the rainy season [coinciding with the flooding of the Nile Delta]. The resulting ash was then hoed into the ground to revitalize the soil with nutrients and minerals before the grain was sown." In this sense, ash may have been fertilizer associated with the earth, Asneth.

jewelry on the floor, then throws them, along with all her Egyptian idols, out the window of her chamber. She takes her sacrificial food and throws it out, as well, for strange dogs to eat. It also states she dons a hair shirt, which is a medieval inclusion, and again that she beats her breast, all acts of repentance.[106] She is so consumed with tears that mixed with the ashes they make her face muddy. She carries on like this for seven days. On the eighth day, she rises and laments the fact that she will now be disowned by her family for rejecting all that is traditional to them, "For I have disparplid all here goodis, and cast hem underfote, / And forsake me for here doughter, and with me debate. / Who may delivere fro this daunger?"[107]

Asneth's repentance is complete when she acknowledges the "heyhe Lord God of Joseph."[108] "For He is protectour and defendour of fadirles children alle. / Therfore to His grete mercy I shal clepe and calle."[109] She then rises and stands at the East window and pledges her allegiance to the God of Joseph and beseeches him, "Take me, Lord, and calle me to the, and helpe me with Thi favoure, / For the develle, that wodlyoun, will raveshe me with erroure /… fro his mouth me draw, / Lest on happe he ravesshe me and sle me, that grett whale [leviathan]."[110] After seven days of repenting of her treatment of Joseph and asking God to let her merely be Joseph's "handmaide," on the eighth day she sees the Eastern star[111] split in two and a great light shine out of it. She falls on her face in the ashes, and when she looks again, there is a man from heaven standing in front of

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[106] The black robe she puts on is a mourning garb for a brother that died, consistent also in Burchard. It is possible that symbolically Joseph has died, and needs to be brought back to life again, hence the possible adjuration of the sun that this ritual act seems to, in part, encompass. See comments in Chapter Three.

[107] ll. 343-345.

[108] l. 349.

[109] ll. 361-362. This is an allusion to the Biblical statement of God as defender of the fatherless, but also perhaps alludes to the Jewish tradition of Asneth being the illigitimate daughter of Dinah, the adopted daughter of Putiphar.

[110] ll. 387-388, 391-392. That sin is associated with sexual sin in the story is apparent in the language "ravesshe" in association with the Devil. See also the mention under typology with respect to the Goddess' connection with the sea snake. Also, according to Katherine Kerby-Fulton, this is heavily indicated in other Medieval Biblical iconography (eg. The Winchester Psalter). However, it is consistent in other treatments of the story (Charlesworth), and therefore may be further evidence of the influence of *Asneth*, and other ancient stories on Medieval Christian iconography.

[111] In *Asneth*, the star is specifically called Lucifer, "The sterre Lucifer in the est shewed his visage" (l. 408); Peck has in brackets [the morning star]. In Burchard's version, it reads, "the morning star rose out of heaven in the east" but does not specify the name Lucifer. The latin version calls the star Lucifer as well, "ecce stella lucifer ascendit versus orientem celi" (p. 101). The OED cites that Lucifer is the morning star, the planet Venus, but also, "[Old English from Latin, = light-bringing, morning star (as Lux, *-fer* from *ferre*

her. He calls her name, but she is too afraid to speak. He calls her name again, and she gasps, "Lo, my Lord."[112] He tells her he is the Prince of God's house, and when she raises her head, she recognizes he looks almost like Joseph. She falls trembling again. He commands her to rise and not be afraid, to take off her black garment and hair shirt and wash the ashes from her face and hands with running water and to put on a new linen robe, "untouched newe, that glorious ys and and gay, / And gird the with the double cynt of thi virginite, "[113] before she returns to him. What follows is a ritualistic accounting of an erotic nature that I will address in further detail later, but also the angel reveals to Asneth that she shall be Joseph's wife.

After the man of heaven departs, Joseph is again announced and Asneth goes to meet him. Joseph reports that the angel has also visited him[114] and that Asneth is ordained to be his wife. The next day, Joseph goes to Pharaoh asking for Asneth to be his wife, and Pharaoh marries them. It is briefly mentioned that Asneth conceives and bears Manasseh and Ephraim. Afterward there is a lengthy *Song of Asneth*,[115] where she again laments her former proud ways. Then the first half of the story, which also ends the seven years of plenty, is complete.

The second part starts with the beginning of the seven years of famine, "hunger scars and chere."[116] There are, again, details with regards to numbers and dates that require future typological study. Asneth announces to Joseph that she will go to visit the patriarch Jacob, her father-in-law, and pay him homage. Israel is described as the wise old man and God-like with "His heed white as the snow, his berd to the brest right / Al

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'bring')]." From the Hellenistic romance, the theme of "light bringing" in association with the angel's visit to Asneth is made clear in the Medieval versions with the naming of the eastern, morning star "Lucifer."

[112] l. 418.

[113] ll. 437-438.

[114] We have to take Joseph's word for this as this visitation is not described in the poem. However, Christian readers would no doubt further link this fact to their knowledge of the events surrounding the Miraculous Conception, for Joseph (in the New Testament) is visited by an angel who tells him to take Mary as his wife.

[115] A close look at the *Song of Asneth*, compared to the *Song of Mary* (New Testament) and the *Song of Deborah* (Old Testament), may bear scrutiny. In an Old Testament course entitled "Former Prophets," I took from Larry Herr at Canadian University College, *Mary's Song* was seen to borrow from and be compared to *Deborah's Song*. That Asneth is associated to both Deborah (whose name means honey bee, and who received heavenly visions…she was a prophetess or seer) and Mary, through various iconography (including bees) and visionary experiences, would indicate a close reading of all three songs may show similarities and various borrowings.

[116] l. 717

white was sittynge, and his yees schynyng as liht."[117] Asneth defers to him and accepts his blessing.[118] Joseph's brothers Simeon and Levi are in attendance. There seems to be a lack of transition here, because it states immediately within the same stanza that she is afterwards walking in Pharaoh's house,[119] where she is spied by Pharaoh's son, the prince, who later languishes in love for her and doesn't know what to do. He sends for Simeon and Levi, attempting to bribe them if they will help him overthrow his father and kill Joseph so he may rule Egypt with Asneth by this side. They refuse, whereupon he succeeds gaining the co-operation for the same from Dan and Gad,[120] but because Simeon and Levi apprise both Pharaoh and Joseph of the Prince's plan, he is not successful. He lays an ambush for Joseph and Asneth, but Benjamin, in Joseph's absence, gives chase and kills the prince, saving Asneth. Benjamin wants Dan and Gad slain for their part in the planned assassination and kidnapping, but Asneth intervenes, "And myldely with softe wordis her wrathe sche gan swage,"[121] convincing Benjamin that his father would not be able to bear the removal of two sons.[122]

The prince's bloody body is strapped to a horse and sent back to Pharaoh who mourns his son's treachery and the loss of his heir. Pharaoh dies of old age leaving Joseph to rule Egypt with Asneth by his side for forty-eight years.

The story proper is followed by a lengthy epilogue thought to be a tribute to the translator's patron, a doxology following her death.[123] "Meke, mylde, and merciful, of

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[117] ll. 733-734.

[118] In Jewish legend this visit of Asneth and Joseph to Jacob is tied to the tradition of Israel blessing the sons of Joseph. Because Levi doesn't gain a land inheritance because his is a tribe of priests, one of the other twelve sons of Jacob gets two shares of the inheritance. Joseph's two sons Ephraim and Mannaseh are blessed with this portion as inheritors of Israel. Jacob names them his own sons (Ginzberg v. II, 134-137).

[119] It is possible Jacob lives in the royal palace, but that is not made clear.

[120] In Old Testament stories of the former prophets, Dan and Gad are often the scapegoats of the stories. They are the two of the twelve sons of Israel who exhibit disappointing behavior, coming too late to battles to be of any help, and who are generally the mischief-makers. There is also a history of their hatred for Joseph having to do with their mothers' status as handmaids as well as the rivalry between northern and southern tribes (Ginzberg v. II, p. 207, 216-218).

[121] l. 863. This is also the traditional role of queen as intercessor. For a discussion of this role in the Middle Ages, see Paul Strohm, "Queens as Intercessors," *Hochon's Arrow*: *The Social Imagination of Fourteen-Century Texts,* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992) 95-119.

[122] When Joseph was sold into Egypt by his jealous brothers, they told their father Joseph was dead and tradition has it that it nearly killed Jacob. "...he refused to be comforted; and he said, For I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning" (*Gen.* 37:35, KJV).

[123] Burchard p. 247, in Charlesworth, n. "i" indicates that a doxology to Asneth may actually be traditional to the end of the story based on *Gen* 50:22-26. Nevertheless, it seems apparent that this doxology does not have a Latin precedent, and is therefore original to the Medieval English version of the story.

pite sche bar the prise. / Comely, kynde, and curteis, in noleye of nurture, / Vernant in alle vertu, plesaunt and demure."[124]

Spiritual Marriage:

The medieval practice of Spiritual Marriage, or celibacy within licit marriage, was not as widely actualized as it was idealized; however, it was a practice that had roots going back to pre-Christian cults, particularly in the Near East, and was not instituted by medieval Christians. In fifteenth century Christian Europe, however, the practice was understood to be a pious one that coincided with the seemingly impossible paradox of fulfilling the marital obligations to reproduce, while at the same time remaining sexually pure. It was well understood that Mary and Joseph, the parents of Jesus, were the ultimate model of this. Although Miraculous Conception was not a real option for lay couples, Augustine helped put specifications on marital relations that made the sexual act sinless if one subjected oneself to the duty, rather than initiating it. In this way, technically one could remain sexually "pure" and fulfill the obligation to reproduce, thereby emulating Mary and Joseph's example. In the interest of piety, couples who achieved a Spiritual Marriage were convinced after they had their families (and sometimes before) to forego sexual relations completely.

Dyan Elliot, on the practice of chastity within marriage, says, "The term *Spiritual Marriage* … has been used to describe any number of quasi-nuptial situations, including a number of different allegorically charged scenarios. The bishop's marriage with his see, Christ's union with the Church, or the mystical marriage of God with the soul are all described as Spiritual Marriages."[125] Elliot's study, my main source of comparison for this practice, however, focuses on "chaste cohabitation in the context of licit marriage." She describes the practice of Spiritual Marriage in the medieval period as "a legally binding marriage in which sexual relations have been remitted by the consent of both parties for the reasons of piety."[126] Asneth and Joseph, like Mary and Joseph, appear to have accomplished this. They appear to have fulfilled their duty to procreate during the

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[124] ll. 931-933.

[125] p. 3. *Spiritual Marriage*: *Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993).

seven years of plenty, and abstained from marital relations during the time of famine. The fertility of the land symbolically supports the understanding of the marriage act in the story, and helps the reader internalize the sensibility of sexual abstinence that the couple achieves.

The Storie of Asneth as exemplum for Spiritual Marriage can be seen on at least three levels. The first two are allegorical. The third can be seen as a practical fleshing out of a theory inherently perceived through allegory and dream. The first allegorical interpretation is Christ's marriage union with the Church. God's church, in the Old Testament, is the tribe of Israel and is described as the Bride, or the woman.[127] Asneth is described in the story as representing a "City of Refuge."[128] She is the woman in the tower, icon of penitential proselytes as well as penitential Israel.[129] The poem's similarity to the Old Testament's *Song of Songs* [130] is additional attestation to this level, as the lovers in the Old Testament love poetry are often interpreted allegorically as Christ and his church.

The second allegory, the mystical marriage of God with the soul, is so profoundly described in Asneth's vision, it is hardly distinguishable in type and theme from some medieval women's visionary experiences, whose mystical union with Christ often conjures sexually charged images, spiritual equivalents to the Annunciation and Miraculous Conception. It is in this mystical context that Marian iconography in Asneth, and by extension references to Israel and "mothers of Jesus" in the poem, becomes essential in a study of *Asneth.* It is Asneth's mystical vision, the often-unexplained center of this chiasmic work,[131] for which I will attempt a significant amount of interpretation in relation to Spiritual Marriage, for Asneth's earthly marriage is not precluded by this

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[126] p. 3.

[127] The woman/bride symbolism of the Old Testament is often one of a whore who is unfaithful and must repent and be forgiven and taken back by God, time and again. The story of *Hosea* is considered by some to be an allegory of this scenario of Israel's unfaithfulness to God.

[128] According to n. 432 in Ginzberg (see above), "city of refuge" is accounted for in the etymology of Asenath's name (Semetic), though Peck cites Encyclopaedia Judaica, where it indicates her name's Hebrew meaning in Egyptian to be "The servant of the goddess Neith." The "city of refuge" could have a very old etymology, as Deborah in the Old Testament is likewise referred to as a "mother city."

[129] See "The Ladies and the Cities...." Edith McEwan Humphrey.

[130] See Burchard and McEwan Humphrey.

[131] See McEwan Humphrey on its chiasmic relationship where she explains that the events in the first half of the story follow a pattern, where the events leading up to the vision are mirror images of events leading away from it. Also see Reymond for description of chiasmic quality of temple documents in pictographs.

event, but depends upon it. Asneth's marriage and consummate relationship to Joseph is given secondary significance to her allegorical consummation with the angel of her dream,[132] who may be interpreted to be Jesus or the representative of Yahweh in a Judeo-Christian tradition.

The third example of Spiritual Marriage in the story may be seen in the practical "sisterly" relationship Asneth has with Joseph and the lack of significance he appears to play in the action of the story, or in her bedroom. I will later show that the tradition of Joseph and Asneth as symbolically brother and sister goes back to roots in Egyptology. The sensibility that emphasizes friendship between the couple, over a sexual relationship, has been noticed by others. In his book, *When Aseneth Met Joseph,*[133] Ross Shepard Kraemer says of *Asneth*:

> Given the centrality of both male and female virginity and sexual fidelity in *Aseneth*, these issues are worth pursuing further....[134]
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> [I]t seems likely that paradigms of joint marital chastity and emphasis on concord and friendship contribute to the emergence of Christian paradigms of celibate marriage, since this is already a move away from marriage as centered on childbearing and the transmission of property to a construction of marriage as the perfect union of two like-minded souls—in which case the idea of celibate marriage is not so far away. *Aseneth*, however, is clearly not a tale of celibate marriage.[135]

I think Kraemer is correct in recognizing in *Asneth* the emphasis on friendship and implicit "paradigms" of celibate marriage. I think he is incorrect, however, in assuming that Asneth and Joseph did not practice a celibate marriage. As I will show, the tradition of Joseph's abstinence after his children are born is documented in Jewish myth and is a manifestation of the metaphor of the years of famine that plague Egypt. What Kraemer has overlooked is that celibacy in marriage, or Spiritual Marriage, may occur after procreation. Kraemer is certainly correct in connecting *Asneth* with "the emergence of Christian paradigms of celibate marriage." It is precisely this Christian paradigm that is among the ideals in *Asneth* that medieval readers would have recognized. It is with this (post-procreative) chastity of the couple in mind that I cite another observance of

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[132] Michael or Gabriel in Rabinic tradition, Ginzberg.
[133] New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
[134] p. 203.
[135] p. 219n41.

Kraemer's where he talks about the characteristics of Greek narrative in the context of the story:

> The narratives of Greek novels depend for much of their plot elaboration on an extended separation of the lovers, but in *Aseneth*, Aseneth's separation from Joseph lasts only one week, and the drama of that week is entirely an interior one [the fasting, repentance and visitation scene]. During that extended separation, the heroine is [normally] subjected to repeated threats to her chastity, and sometimes the hero is to his own as well. Clearly the theme of threatened chastity occurs in *Aseneth*, but in significantly different form. While Aseneth herself is initially presented as a threat to Joseph's chastity, only in the second part of the narrative is Aseneth herself endangered, after she and Joseph are married and after Manasseh and Ephraim are born.[136]
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> . . . . . .
>
> Finally it is worth pointing out that for those scholars who emphasize the similarity between *Aseneth* and Greco-Roman novels, chapters 22-29 are seen to provide the elements of adventure, threatening the chastity of the heroine that typifies such novels, although usually prior to the marriage, not subsequently.[137]

If, as I propose, it is precisely after Manasseh and Ephraim are born that Asneth and Joseph become a chaste married couple, then the major threat to the heroine's chastity occurring after celibacy has begun, during the beginning of the seven years of famine, would make sense.[138] Certainly, medieval readers of the tale would have well understood that a threat to "chastity" would be just as devastating to one who had already had children and who had effectively, spiritually, restored her virginity through repentance and abstinence.

According to Elliot, it was mostly women who took the initiative to remain chaste in medieval marriages, and they often achieved relative autonomy in marriage and society in correlation with their abstinence. Additionally, the aspect of the poem that gives almost no significance to Asneth's consummated relationship to Joseph, and yet great significance to her subjection to him and the patriarchal system of Israel, may have satisfied real social concerns in the Middle Ages around the threat to patriarchal control over women who maintained a higher level of spirituality through celibacy in marriage,

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[136] p. 11, square brackets mine.
[137] p. 41.

and therefore were not bound by usual hierarchies. Certainly the poem poses the question "what is marriage?"[139] as one of its concerns, an issue that may have plagued pre-Christian as well as Early Christian readers of the tale. It certainly must have intrigued readers as the Hellenistic poem re-emerged in circulation in the Western World around the tenth century at a time when Augustine's definition of marriage as binding and eternal based on consent not consummation was a pre-requisite philosophy for the practice of Spiritual Marriage among the laity.

No one of the three ways of looking at *Asneth* in the context of Spiritual Marriage precludes any of the others. They are interdependent in terms of meaning and potential application. Helped by the erotic image of allegorical marriage in the poem, where the virginal Asneth appears to consummate with a celestial being, I argue that *The Storie of Asneth* may have been considered to be a near perfect model in women's devotional material for the practice of Spiritual, "chaste," Marriage (the post-procreative variety) in the Middle Ages. Asneth's conversion, faithfulness and willing subjection to patriarchal power—upon conversion—her sisterly relationship to Joseph, and perhaps most importantly, her ability, apparently, to procreate while maintaining a chaste purity "snow white" as the bees of lines 567-571, may have made her presence in medieval literature the model "spiritual wife" of the High Middle Ages.

Spiritual Marriage and Female Power:

Of the sixteen women involved in documented Spiritual Marriages in the Middle Ages, according to Dyan Elliott's study, nine are known to have been women in previously consummate relationships with their husbands. They were matrons—mothers who, after fulfilling their religious duty to bear children, convinced their husbands in the "private sphere," perhaps the most private of sphere's, the nuptial chamber, to forego physical relations in order to achieve a higher level of spiritual power. Most of these same matrons also had mystical, visionary experiences:

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[138] See discussion in third chapter on Isis and Osiris. If, as I propose, *The Story of Asneth* has anything in common with this myth, then one may recognized that Isis' is similarly threatened, after she has had a child.

[139] See Smith, Edgar. *Joseph and Asenath and Early Christian Literature*.

> But the line between sexual activity and the possibility of mystical experience cannot be firmly drawn. Mysticism played an important part in the spirituality of eight out of the nine women who convinced their husbands to make a gradual transition to chastity compared with probably only two out of seven of their virgin counterparts; this fact invites an examination of the relationships between sexual intercourse and spirituality.[140]

Where there may be a tendency in scholarship to separate concepts of Spiritual Marriage from mystical marriage, there is evidence in actual experience, as well as in *Asneth*, that the two can, and do, go hand-in-hand. As with the example of Mary, mortal marriage may be socially unavoidable, but may be concurrent with divine marriage and the mystical experience.

The practice of Spiritual Marriage was not exclusive to medieval England, or even to Christian cults. In her study, Elliot documents records of chaste marriages among laity—including Eastern Lives that circulated and ones that did not circulate in the West—to as early as 300 AD, and lists Egypt, North Africa, Asia Minor, Greece, Rome, Gaul, Spain, and Syria among the areas where the practice is accounted for. Co-incidentally, Burchard[141] lists the groups of *Asneth* manuscripts, other than the sixteen surviving in Greek as well as Latin translations, as surviving in Syriac, Armenian, Rumanian, Ethiopian and possibly Arabic, languages geographically commensurate with the documented practice.

Elliot shows the European practice of celibacy in marriage to be the largest between the tenth and sixteenth centuries. Asneth, according to Burchard, became widely circulated in Latin in the West beginning in the tenth century. The two confirmed documentations of celibacy among lay married couples in England are between Margery and John Kempe, and Margaret Beaufort and Thomas Stanley, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries respectively. They coincide with the period of Asneth's circulation in Middle English, though the Kempe's marriage may have been commensurate with an early copy of the poem.[142] Asneth cannot be excluded from modeling the idealistic, if

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[140] Elliot, p. 235.
[141] In Charlesworth, p.178-179.
[142] Margery Kemp died sometime after 1438, and her husband in 1431, so her Spiritual Marriage is roughly contemporary with the English translation of *The Storie of Asneth* in the first quarter of the fifteenth century. In any case, the poem was widely circulated in Latin before this time.

impractical goals of spiritual lay marriages in a society where exempla were reaped from literary depictions of saints' lives and visionaries on a common basis.

Asneth's popularity among lay women in the fifteenth century may have been especially poignant during a time when the proportion of female to male saints had declined significantly. Women no longer enjoyed the public recognition, and therefore religious power, they once had in the earlier Middle Ages, as a result of saintliness. According to Erler and Kowaleski:

> The decrease in public recognition of saintly, and therefore religiously powerful women, was paralleled by changes in the styles of female sanctity. Increasingly, new female saints received recognition for their private rather than their public accomplishments, for achievements in the domestic arts or motherhood—a change which corresponds to the declining role they played in secular affairs about the same time.[143]

If Asneth can arguably be considered concerned with the private sphere women concerned themselves with in the dichotomy of public and private, then the story must also be considered an example of how the private sphere can empower from a spiritual perspective. Like the practice of celibacy in marriage itself, *The Storie of Asneth*, to the reader, must be seen as empowering. In the public sphere of the poem, Asneth is eventually obedient, submissive and worthy of conversion into the patriarchal family of the Israelites through her marriage to Joseph. In the private sphere, she has attained a power through spirituality that not even Joseph's compares to. It is well-understood that Joseph's spirituality and godliness are profound; it is represented in the pomp of his public recognition and material connections; however, the reader doesn't have the opportunity to experience, and therefore internalize, his personal spiritual experience as the reader does Asneth's experience. Joseph's spiritual experience lacks the specific details which are necessary for an exemplum, whereas Asneth's fits, in many points of specific detail, the experience of the majority of the women who were thought to have achieved a Spiritual Marriage relationship in the Middle Ages, women who also had mystical visionary experiences.

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[143] Three essays in *Women and Power in the Middle Ages* offer variants on the "paradoxical achievement of power through its renunciation" (Erler and Kowaleski, Introd.). In the context of *Asneth* and the widely held identification of sex with power, as well as Elliot's reference (p. 325) to the need for further study regarding sex and spirituality, there is a possible further argument to be made concerning the story's "empowering" theme with respect to both sex and spirituality.

While anti-feminists may have promoted the circulation of *Asneth* in the West beginning in the tenth century as an example of women's malleability and subjection to patriarchal power,[144] and one may suppose that they did based on its circulation in Latin, it is an interesting thought that later women may have circulated it among themselves[145] in their devotional material. They perhaps recognized the inherent power, private and therefore perhaps subversive, that Asneth receives as a result of what appears to be renunciation or at least the marginalization of marital relations.[146] Is it possible that at a time when women were being forced into the private sphere, they recognized the power that could be gained spiritually, and therefore politically, given the all-encompassing influence of the church, by renouncing a husband in favor of God and at the same time becoming less subject to their husbands? What was thought to be light reading material for upper-class women in the fifteenth century may have had a further-reaching function, spiritually, practically and politically. Certainly women such as Margery Kempe understood that Spiritual Marriage, the renunciation of the marriage bed in favor of a mystical relationship with God, led to a level of freedom and a religious/political voice that was otherwise inaccessible to a laywoman.

Asneth and the Chivalric Tradition:

According to Elliot, "Popular representations of Spiritual Marriage were by no means confined to devotional works, but also made inroads into the romance tradition."[147] In this respect, *The Storie of Asneth* may have offered the reader an example of Spiritual Marriage from the perspective of both a devotional as well as a romantic genre.

> The erotic ethos of the troubadours presented an extramarital model that celebrated passion as opposed to pro-creation. Because the alleged object

[144] See Peck's introd. p. 11. He describes *Asneth* as "a guidebook in social behavior for aristocratic women," but also comments on the thinking, independent characteristics of the heroine.
[145] "Susan Groag Bell, ...demonstrates the substantial power that female book owners exercised over vernacular literature as readers, literary patrons and mothers in charge of education of their children." (Erler and Kowaleski, Introd., p. 7) There is evidence that Shirley's second wife and her sister, Margaret and Beatrice Lynn, may have been the unofficial owners of the manuscript that holds *Asneth*. See Connolly and Peck. See also my section on Patroness and Poet, Chapter One.
[146] The fact that pregnancy caused a significant health threat in the Middle Ages means that avoiding childbearing cannot be excluded as a further empowering result of abstinence for women.
[147] p. 174.

> of the poet's desire was usually unattainable, such relations were frequently described as remaining unconsummated--a feature connoting certain superficial similarities with Spiritual Marriage....There is little doubt that the alleged longing of the troubadours has a sexual as opposed to a religious telos.[148]

In nearly every source, including Peck, Asneth is described as a Hellenistic Romance. In Burchard it is aligned specifically with "the erotic variety."[149] According to Carol Meale,[150] there were two main types of literature being read by medieval women, devotional literature and romantic literature, particularly of the Arthurian tradition where specifically stories of Lancelot and Tristan were popular. Asneth would have nicely filled the expectations for readers of either genre.

Although it is assumed that the concept of Spiritual Marriage "made inroads into the romance tradition," it may be argued that the tradition of celibate love may have originated with the romance and made inroads into religious and devotional works. If, as I attempt to show in Chapter Three, *The Storie of Asneth* has connections with ancient fertility traditions, it may show how closely related the romance and religious traditions were.[151] Perhaps what appears now to be only a superficial relationship between the chivalric tradition of unconsummated love and Spiritual Marriage may not have been so at one time. If viewed as a romance, the sexual longing is seen without a doubt in the very erotic accounting of Asneth's mystical vision (below), linking the religious with the sexual.

Numerous other erotic encounters are described in medieval spiritual/religious visionary accounts of chaste women with the ultimate troubadour, Christ, in the mystical realm. Additionally, classic romances of the Middle Ages are Arthurian, which have also been associated with religious allegory. In this sense, Gueneviere, as opposed to Asneth, is the penitential woman in the tower. I have argued elsewhere that Gueneviere is representative of penitential Israel, bride of God, whom Arthur, a type for the House of

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[148] Elliot p.133 and 133n5.
[149] Burchard, introd. in Charlesworth, p.183.
[150] Ch. 7, p. 139. "'...alle the bokes that I haue of latyn, englische, and frensch': laywomen and their books in late medieval England," *Women and Literature in Britain 1150-1500*, ed. Carol M. Meale, (Cambridge University Press, 1993).
[151] Burchard states, "As to conversion forming part of a romance, apart from the general presence of religion, sometimes with an outright propagandistic drive (Heliodorus), there is Apuleius, Book 11.25 and (in a way) Cupid and Psyche again" (introd. in Charlesworth p. 184).

David, or Christ, must forgive for her infidelity.[152] With respect to Asneth, Edith McEwan Humphrey[153] makes a similar correlation to God's bride, Israel. In whatever genre chaste love appeared first, it is clearly a theme that crosses over from religion to romance, and vise versa, without a great deal of resistance.

Christ has always been seen in Christian tradition as the allegorical husband of the woman, the church. Yet mythic couples such as Isis and Osiris, who are heavily associated with fertility traditions, and therefore, one might say, romance traditions, seem to be the forebears of this religious allegory and therefore forebears or instigators of the practice of Spiritual Marriage. In the future, study of the influence of the romantic tradition of celibate love from allegory or myth, on the religious tradition of Spiritual Marriage, as opposed to the other way around, may be explored.

Asneth's Mystical Marriage to God:

Regardless of early typology in Asneth, Medieval Christian readers would have understood the poem in an evolved Judeo-Christian way commensurate with their knowledge of the Old and New Testament and medieval theological and popular religious beliefs that associated sex with original sin. Hence, Asneth's vision that was once perhaps understood to bear a legacy of the sacred marriage between the Earth Mother/ Moon Goddess and the Sun God, would primarily have been understood in the Middle Ages to be a virginal consummation with Jesus, Michael the Archangel, or in other words, a mystical marriage to God.

The story from the very beginning sets up Asneth as virgin and therefore pure and valuable from a marriageable, reproductive perspective. She is the beautiful, virginal maid that has been protected her whole life from even the conversation of a man. True to the stuff of medieval romance, yet consistent with Hellenistic Greek versions of the story, she lives in a royal tower with seven virginal maidens to serve her, all the same age as

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[152] My argument appears in an unpublished paper I wrote for Margot Louis' graduate course at University of Victoria on "Myth and Legend in Victorian Literature." There are many Old Testament references to this depiction of the woman as whore, including the whole book of *Hosea*, which some take to be an allegory of Yahweh and a Church that is continually unfaithful.

[153] See McEwan Humphrey, "The Ladies and the Cities…"

she. Other typological factors, such as gate and garden imagery, support the fact of her protection as well as the reproductive value of that being protected.

As in the *Story of Susanna*, a medieval version of an Apocryphal book also published in Peck, there is a link between the "gate" that is guarded and the sexual connotations of that which lies beyond. In *Susanna*, in the absence of her husband and protector, the gate to her garden is vulnerable, violated, and Susanna's virtue nearly compromised by the elders who sneak into the garden and try to coerce her into having sex with them. There can be no doubt that the garden is representative of the fertile and reproductive capacity of women, and the garden gate, the gate to the womb.[154] The vulnerability of Susanna in the context of the story was certainly also an admonition to husbands who would leave their wives unattended, or the "gate" unguarded and "garden" unprotected. There is no less concern for "gate" and "garden" imagery in *Asneth* which is well-guarded and bears fertility imagery consistent with one who is sexually valuable, but not yet plundered, including fruit-laden[155] trees and a conduit that "lustily" moistens.

> A gret halle was bild abowte with wallis wonder hie,
> With foure yren gatis, spered faste and stronge,
> And kept with eygtene men of armes harneised surely.
> Yet ther were planted in the side the halle trees faire behonge
> With frutes that were delectable, the fair leves amonge,
> And a cundite beside the halle that ran as cristalle cleer,
> That moisted the trees lustily and dide to hem gret chere.[156]

Further evidence of this imagery is supplied when Asneth greets her parents coming from the field and her father Putifar asks, "The closett [chamber] dore the shitte[?]"[157] symbolic of the gate or door to the valuable womb of the virgin. It was the father's duty to protect the woman from "invasion" until she was passed on to a husband who overtook the duty of protection.

Perhaps the most remarkable earmark of Spiritual Marriage found in the story is virginal sex. While the conception of Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, is necessary, it is briefly accounted for when compared to the heavenly visit of Asneth's

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[154] Or the gate could be the right of men over the sexuality of women, a social gate. In both ways it is the gate to the womb.
[155] Also within "solar legend" is the imagery of the sun in sexual union with fruit and the ripening of fruit around harvest time. See Goldzhier p.180, as well as the sun as "opener" of the womb p. 98.
[156] ll. 96-102.
[157] l. 138.

vision. The Angel not only gets past the gatekeeper, but also visits Asneth in her bedroom and on her bed. The vision is filled with coital language and imagery including a lengthy description of bees, who, it was thought in the Middle Ages, reproduced without having sex. Given the medieval ideology of marriage and the duty of couples to reproduce, alongside the concept of sex as sinful, sexless reproduction was the ultimate, idealistic goal in marriage to a religiously pious couple in the Middle Ages.

> The [Medieval] Church's reverence for bees and beeswax was in some ways related to a misconception of the bees' method of reproduction; a paschal 5th century hymn from Italy extols the virtues of bees 'who produce posterity, rejoice in offspring, yet retain their virginity'. The white wax of the candle was also supposed to represent the spotless body of Jesus Christ and the flame of the candle to represent the 'light of the world.'[158]

Elliot tells that when heresiarch, Gerald of Milan, "was asked … how the human race would perpetuate itself if all practiced virginity, he answered that once humanity was free of corruption it could reproduce itself sinlessly like bees."[159] The bees and the honeycomb are sexually and spiritually important symbols. They do not appear in the story until after Asneth's soul, as well as her body, has been purged of its pagan ways. The bees play an active role in the holy consummation between Asneth and God. It is they, God's agents, who appear to produce the fruit of Asneth's womb, the honeycomb, which is then fed to her as the Eucharist. She appears to bear from her womb a symbol for Christ, further linking her to the Virgin Mary.[160]

Asneth's vision begins after seven days of fasting and penance. This is also often the same pre-requisite that medieval women visionaries experienced. Many had mystical experiences after several days of either voluntary fasting, or sicknesses in which they came close to death after not being able to eat for some time. That the author had no doubt about the nature of penance we can be sure. I would like to show, however, that the addendum to the lengthy description that both versions of the poem have regarding Asneth's repentance of her Egyptian and pagan heritage, is a specific interjection in the Shirley *Asneth* of penance for sexual capacity.

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[158] Free, p. 105.
[159] p. 96n9.
[160] This imagery also further connects her to Neith, who in some accounts gives birth to Ra, the Sun God. Connects as well as to Isis and Horus. See Chapter Three.

The medieval equation of sex with sin seems to be particularly emphasized both in Asneth's original repentance and at the end of the first part of the poem and beginning at the "Song of Asneth." The very fact that the "Song of Asneth," which laments her sins, immediately follows her earthly marriage and the conception and birth of Ephraim and Manasseh, makes it seem clear that part of what Asneth must repent of is her reproductive or sexual capacity. It is also, as mentioned, the very place in the story that makes a transition between the fertile seven years of plenty, and the seven years of famine and infertility of the *Genesis* story that some Jewish traditions attribute to a commencement of abstinence between Joseph and Asneth.[161] Furthermore, the translator qualifies the birth of Asneth and Joseph's sons in a way that a medieval Augustinian Christian would well understand; he states, "this was here procreacion."[162] There is no such qualifier in Burchard's translation, or in the Medieval Latin version the poet was working from which simply states: "Et factum est postea intravit Ioseph ad Aseneth et concepit de Ioseph Aseneth et peperit Manasen et Effraim in domo Ioseph."[163]

A. R. Dwyer acknowledges this phenomenon in the poem where he states of the Medieval English version:

> "Now and then a psychological point is made more forcefully than in the original; as when Joseph's reaction on first seeing Aseneth—'Que est mulier illa que erat in cenaculo ad fenestram? Abeat nunc de domo ista'—is nicely expanded into, 'What womman was sche pat, that in pe wyndow stod of pe cenacle, as I cam in? *she ys ageyns my herte*, Remeveth here sone out of *pis* hous, *for marrynge*[164] *of my mod*' (ll. 215-17).[165]

I argue specifically that many of these conservative psychological points have to do with sexual relationships and sexual conservatism towards women and marriage.

In Augustine's description of the goods of marriage, there is no doubt that a couple's duty is specifically to have children. This is the only justification for the sexual act. Just two lines with a medieval qualifier for the fact that they had sex at all, followed

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[161] Ginzberg, p. 77, "Asenath bore him two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, during the seven years of plenty, for in the time of famine Joseph refrained from all indulgence in the pleasures of life." See my comment under discussion of Joseph, Chapter Three.

[162] l. 683

[163] pg. 109, ll. 19-20, *Studia Patristica.*

[164] Because of the spelling, there may be a pun here which associates marriage with "marring," or in other words, damaging somehow, a possible further clue of the views the translator exhibited towards mortal marriage.

[165] "Asenath of Egypt in Middle English." *Medium Aevum* 39 (1970): 118-122.

immediately by statements of repentance by Asneth,[166] and a seven year famine, cover the extent of Joseph and Asneth's physical relationship in the Middle English version.

> "And after Joseph knewe his wyf and sche conceived sone,
> And bar Manasses and Effraim – this was here procreation.
> And after Asneth seurly to God sche mad here mone, [prayer of confession] Remembering her olde synne by prive meditacion,
> And after mournynge thus sche saide, with gret lamentacion [contrition],
> 'Lord, synned I have synned, moche synned in Thi presence,
> Asneth, dowhter of Putifar, pardone myn offence.[167]

Procreation is followed by what seems direct repentance for, among other things, this unfortunate, but necessary event. This seems to differ from the intent of Burchard's version of the poem that states: "And it happened after this, Joseph went in to Aseneth, and Aseneth conceived from Joseph, and gave birth to Manasseh and Ephraim, his brother, in Joseph's house."[168] Asneth's Psalm then follows an equally short account of the birth of their children in Burchard as well, but is not joined consecutively (i.e. in the very next sentence) to her reproduction. Before breaking into her confession, it states, with a more positive connotation: "And then Aseneth began to confess to the Lord God and gave thanks, praying, for all the good (things) of which she was deemed worthy by the Lord."[169] One may deduce that because this statement directly follows the account of the birth of her sons, the event is one of the "good things" she gives thanks for—a more positive sensibility than that found in the Shirley *Asneth*. What follows in Burchard is clearly repentance for her haughty ways and her idolatrous connection to Egypt and not necessarily repentance for her sexuality.

If we look at the repentance scene at the beginning of the story, just before she has a heavenly visitor, we see, in the Shirley *Asneth*, similar interjections that appear unique to the medieval sensibility of penance and its connection to sexual sin. In lines 322-323, the medieval translator embellishes the repentance scene by having Asneth

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[166] Note that Asneth repents of this, but Joseph does not.
[167] ll. 682-688.
[168] In Charlesworth, p. 236.
[169] l. 236 in Charlesworth. Compare Latin: Et factum est postea intravit Ioseph ad Aseneth et concepit de Ioseph Aseneth et peperit Manasen et Effraim in domo Ioseph./ Postea dixit Aseneth:/ "Peccavi, domine, peccavi, in conspectu tuo, multum peccavi. Ego Aseneth filia Putifaris sacerdotis Helyupoleos, --peccavi, domine, peccavi in conspectu tuo, multum peccaui,--ego eram vilissima in domo patris mei, et eram virgo

"bond her leendis with saccloth for pennance, / And did an here heve upon here bodi...."[170] Asneth binding her loins with traditional repentant sack cloth is specific to the medieval versions and seems to emphasize penance merely for the sin of female sexuality and reproductive capacity, not the act itself, because at this point she is still a virgin.[171]

Elliot states of the attitude towards sex in the Middle Ages: "Sex was possessed of a stain or impurity that negated prayer, while original sin was identified as the first sexually transmitted disease."[172]

The poet of the Shirley Asneth further emphasizes the negative sexual potential of women by embellishing Joseph's fear of wonton women with the line: "Dredynge with fere the infeccion of femenyn insolence."[173] The word "infeccion" emphasizes women's sexuality as both epidemic-like and viscera-like. In the Middle Ages these are the qualities attributed to femininity in the extreme.[174] This contrasts somewhat with Burchard's translation where it is clear that Joseph fears specifically, "strange" or foreign women (i.e. not Israelite) who have tried to seduce him. "For all the wives and the

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elata et superba,--peccavi *etc*., [etc., a Latin inclusion] –et colui deos quorum non est numerus, et comedi panem de sacrificiis eorum,--..." (p. 109 in *Studia Patristica*).

[170] There is a clear medieval image of penance by having Asneth put on a hair shirt which is not consistent with Burchard's translation, but is consistent with the Latin original: "et accepit pellem saccum, et circumcinxit circa lumbos eius, et circumposiut cilicium tristicie, et tutudit utraque manu sua pectus, et ploravit amare, et cecidi super cinerem, et flevit planctu magno et amaro cum suspirio et stridore per totam noctem usque mane..." (p. 99 in *Studia Patristica*).

[171] Asneth's penance here must also be seen as penance for snubbing Joseph and all other suitors to date, however if Joseph may be seen as her consummate partner, he is part and parcel of her potential sexuality. If the grain goddess is expected, for the continued success of Egypt, to consummate with the sun god, then her snubbing of Joseph could well be seen, from an ancient perspective, as being sinful indeed. On the other hand, a medieval interpretation of what she must repent of still seems to be for the sexual potential altogether.

[172] p. 38nn87-88.

[173] l. 221. Compare Latin, pg 95 in *Studia Patristica* to S of A, ll. 215-228: "Et ait Ioseph Putifari et omni cognationi eius: "Que est mulier illa que erat in cenaculo ad fenestram? Abeat nunc de domo ista". Propter quod timuerat Ioseph dicens "ne quando sit mihi et ista importuna." Erant vero illi importune universe femine et filie majorum et satraparum omnis terre Egypti ut dormirent cum eo. Et omnes mulieres et filie Egyptiorum statim ut videbant Ioseph, male paciebantur super pulcritudinem eius, et Ioseph despiciebat eos, et intercessores quo mittebant ad eum cum auro et argento et donis multis diversi generis proiciebat cum indignatione et iniuria."

[174] Abbot Otto of Cluny, in the tenth century, shows an extreme monastic perspective of women: "The beauty of woman is only skin-deep. If men could only see what is beneath the flesh and penetrate below the surface with eyes like the Boeotian lynx, they would be nauseated just to look at women, for all this feminine charm is nothing but phlegm, blood, humours, gall. Just imagine all that is hidden in nostrils, throat and stomach ... We are all repelled to touch vomit and odure even with our fingertips. How then can we ever want to embrace what is merely a sack of rottenness." In Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens*, p. 251.

daughters of the noblemen and the satraps of the whole land of Egypt used to molest him (wanting) to sleep with him...."[175] The assumption in Burchard is that no God-fearing Israelite woman would have acted wantonly. The assumption in the Shirley *Asneth* is that women in general act wantonly and should be feared.

After her virginity is well-established, after several days of fasting and requiting all worldly possessions and traditions and her conversion is at hand, Asneth is worthy of a visit by an agent of heaven. If she were a medieval nun, she would be worthy of her marriage to the church. If the Virgin Mary, of the Annunciation and Miraculous Conception. If a medieval mystic, of a vision akin to the Annunciation and Miraculous Conception. Asneth is no less honored. Though an erotic encounter may have been prescribed originally by Hellenistic writers if a connection of Asneth to the Egyptian Mother Goddess may be made, medieval readers would have understood the mystical encounter in an erotic context as well, given the very similar iconography of the Virgin Mary in the Middle Ages.

Certainly a mystical consummate relationship with God was both sinless and preferable to an earthly consummation with a human. Both celestials and virgins are sexually as pure and spiritual as bees. For Asneth, a physical relationship with her earthly husband is not described. Instead, a very erotic encounter with her heavenly husband, the "Prince of Goddis Hous,"[176] is lavishly depicted in the mystical realm of vision. The medieval poet of the Shirley *Asneth* associates the relationship of the celestial being to Asneth as a coital one in a way that exaggerates the sexual connotations in the Burchard version. He translates lines with arrangements of words such as "putte in Asneth mouth"[177] "enoynted with holi crème"[178] "mouth ... breth ... mouth"[179] that leave no doubt of their implication. It is for the celestial that "the [virginal] vail away sche caste"[180] and it is the angel who is allowed to "sitte a while upon this bed so clene."[181]

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[175] In Charlesworth, p. 210.
[176] l. 498.
[177] l. 551.
[178] l. 553.
[179] ll. 536-537, "But by commaundement of thi mouth, so yt was do,/ for the odour therof ys lik the breth of thi mouth also."
[180] l. 449. Square brackets mine.
[181] l. 508.

We have no such description of Asneth's earthly wedding night in any known translation of the poem.

The presence of the bees in the story supports the concept of Spiritual Marriage and Miraculous Conception, or sexless procreation, a model that for Medieval Christian readers was also established through the Virgin Mary. Mary, like Asneth, consummated with God. In Medieval iconography, Mary is often shown with a beehive and bees flying around her image. Bees are also representative of the prophetess Deborah in the Old Testament, whose iconography also shows bees, and whose name means "honey bee." Certainly these Biblical heroines have virginal as well as moral purity in common, one being thought to equal the other. They share similar "seeing" abilities with respect to visions and heavenly visits, and are attributed mystical gifts. The association with the virginal, pure bees "white as the snow," and the fact that they follow an image of blood[182] additionally reminds the medieval reader that chastity reaps righteousness: "... though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow...."[183]

Asneth's erotic mystical experience would also be understood to be Eucharistic to a medieval reader, which is further evidence of its righteousness. The honeycomb which the angel feeds to Asneth is directly referred to as "bred of lyf,"[184] a traditional Eucharistic term representative of the body of Christ, yet the sexual connotations in the vision, especially in the Shirley version, as well as the spelling, makes one wonder if there is a pun on the word "bred." Burchard addresses the quandary of Eucharistic imagery in the poem that predates the Christian practice by making a case for the idea that the story is much more important than previously supposed. He believes many of the rituals in *Asneth* actually influenced New Testament traditions such as the Eucharist, as opposed to being projected into the story by Christian translators. Despite the order in which these rituals appear in literary history, medieval readers would not have questioned their Christian immediacy.

After the man of heaven has appeared to Asneth and she has followed his instructions to "gird" herself with the "double ceynt of [her] virginity" as well as the virginal head-covering veil, he paradoxically gives her instructions to lose the virginal

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[182] ll. 560-564.
[183] *Isaiah* 1:18.
[184] l. 552.

veil, "why dost thu thus? Thu art maide, thin heed is fair to se."[185] He informs her that her name has been written in the *Book of Life*,[186] and she is renewed from all strife. Further, she will be given to his good friend Joseph as wife. He re-names her in the tradition of other Biblical heroines, calling her Moche-of-Refute [City of Refuge] for those who turn to God in the future. "And under thi wynggis thei schul be covered, tristynge in God alle, / And attendynge to the hiest God schul be kept in thi walle."[187] The word "walle" is consistent with useage in Burchard; however, in the margins is the translation, "sacred domain." Given the imagery of the gate/garden symbolism seen earlier, it seems reasonable to interpret "wall" or "sacred domain" as a place of chastity, the chaste womb. She will become the symbolic "mother"[188] of those who, like she, would repent of forbidden traditions and turn to God.

He praises her for her penance and tells her that it is Penance, a woman, who has the capacity to "maketh maidenes to reste in heavene in place arayd sikerly, / And renoveleth [renews] virgines clene to Goddis dere blessynge."[189] After seeming to explain that through Penance, God can renew virgins or virginity;[190] he explains again immediately she will be Joseph's wedded wife in "worldis eternalle." The apocalyptic nature of Asneth's marriage to Joseph is not passed on lightly. Throughout the poem, we are told it is for "wordle withoute end" "wordlis withoute endynge" "in worlde without ende" etc. This is consistent in Burchard.[191] What is unique to the Shirley *Asneth* with

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[185] ll. 448-449.

[186] The *Book of Life*, may have mythological connections to the ancient Egyptian book of the dead that Reymond speaks of associated with the myths found at Edfu. For a medieval generation of this mystical proclamation, see Margery Kempe bk. I, ch. 85, ll. 6971-6973. "And anon aftyr owr Lord Jhesu Crist spak unto hir and seyde: 'Dowtyr, loke that thu be now trewe and stedfast and have a good feith, for thi name is wretyn in hevyn in the Boke of Lyfe....'"

[187] ll. 464-465.

[188] In Burchard it states, she "shall be like a walled mother-city of all who take refuge with the name of the Lord God ..." (p. 229). In the Old Testament, prophetess' such as Deborah are called "mother of Israel" which is akin to wise-woman, mystic. See *Judges* 5:7, *The Song of Deborah*.

[189] ll. 472-473.

[190] In the Burchard translation in Charlesworth, it states that Penance is a virgin and loves virgins, but that "she will renew all who repent" (p. 227). See also Margery Kempe, where there is reference to her renewed virginity through penance after Margery and her husband agree to Spiritual Marriage, whereupon Margery begins to wear only white clothing associated with virginity, bk. I, ch. 15.

[191] If the marriage of Asneth and Joseph is important in Jewish Typology representing the overtaking of a multi-theistic tradition by a patriarchal monotheistic culture, then the eternal quality of that patriarchy would be secure as long as the sacred marriage was "eternal" as opposed to seasonal. The message is clearly that the patriarchy is "forever." The apocalyptic statements are characteristic of Jewish patriarchal religion.

the concept of renewal is that it is distinctly the renewal of virgins or virginity in connection with licit marriage that Penance will be able to accomplish. The marriage may be forever, but the renewal of virginity is also without end.

After the man explains that celestials are too great for most people to comprehend, Asneth asks if she may speak, and invites him to sit upon her bed, a blatant sexual invitation. She assertively guides him there by gripping his robe. She reminds him that "man ne womman satt never theron by no maner mene."[192] This is a right that is obviously being reserved for a husband. Next, in a time-honored symbol for sex, she offers to feed him.[193] "And I schall make a bord redy, and offre to your plesir / Breed and wyn fro my celer, ful swete and redolent; / And when ye have ete and drunke then aftir your desire, / Ye mai folwe forth your way aftir your entent."[194] After he consents, she "went to fette breed and wyne plesant to his taste,"[195] but he requires something else. He asks her to again enter her cellar and bring him a honeycomb. Asneth is dismayed because she believes she will have to send a child to "the feeld … Of hour heritage to fette on [one]"[196] But the angel insists she "Entre into [her] celer" where she "schalt fynde an honycomb redy on the bord, / Take and brynge yt to me." But Asneth argues that there isn't one there. He again directs her:

> "Entre thi celer," quod the aungel, "and on [one] ther schalt thu fynde."
> Sche entred in; an honycomb sche fond of a gret assise, [size]
> Also white as the snowe, clene and pure in kynde,
> Of odour swete. And Asneth mervayled in her mynde,
> And said, "Trowest not that of this comb that this man hath ete, [eaten]
> For the flavour ys as the breeth of his mouth so swete?"[197]

When Asneth finally puts the honeycomb before him he asks why she said there was none in her "cellar" or in her recette [keeping]. She says, "with gret drede" that she had

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[192] l. 509.
[193] See Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, for the importance of food imagery to medieval mystics. See also my note (below) with reference to food and food chamber/cellar in Egyptian funerary rites.
[194] ll. 510-513.
[195] l. 516. Also, there is a brief account in Reymond from the Edfu documents that attributes the partaking of a meal to the visitation of the Creator God at the renewal, or re-birth, of the Island of Creation. See p. 110.
[196] ll. 519-520.
[197] ll. 521-530.

no such honeycomb there, but that by the commandments of his mouth, "so yt was do, / For the odour therof ys lik the breth of thi mouth also."[198]

In a sexual reading of the poem, "cellar" imagery cannot be mistaken. It is akin to garden imagery or closet imagery. It is the place from which the angel plunders food and wine "aftir [his] entent" and "plesant to his taste." It is also the place where the Angel plants a pure white honeycomb, symbolic harvest of Asneth's womb, the womb of a converted woman and a virgin.[199] He then laughs at her and blesses her "for [she] has left the fay / Of all maner fals ydolys, and belevist in God veray." He tells her that all who come to God in holy penance shall eat of the comb that the bees of Paradise made using the dew of roses.[200] He says that the angels of God also eat of the comb and that those who eat of it shall never die. In a blatant Eucharistic image, he then breaks a part of the honeycomb and eats it.

> The remenant[201] he putte in Asneth mouth and bad here to ete.
> The angel saide, 'Lo, thu hast ete of the bred of lyf,
> And thu art anoynted with holi crème, and thi flesh fro this day
> Schal be renewed, and thi bonys cured from al strif,

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[198] ll. 536-537. This further connects the celestial to Joseph and his purity. Joseph in Hebrew myth reportedly attracts women merely by the sweet smell emanating from his breath (Ginzberg). Also, in Hebrew, a word for "spirit" is often interpreted as "breath" when translated into English. See also Margery Kempe, bk. I, ch. 35, ll. 2864-2866 where Margery in vision, "felt swet smellys with hir nose; it wer swettar, hir thowt, than evyr was ony swet erdly thing that sche smellyd beforn...." See also, Mechtild (below) where in vision the angel has sweet smelling breath.

[199] The "cellar" with respect to Egyptian temples may have further implications. In her book, *The Ancient Egyptians*, A. Rosalie David describes part of the funerary monument, the pyramid, "A small enclosed room, known today as a 'serdab' from the Arabic word meaning 'cellar,' was included in some of the mastaba-tombs and occurs in this complex. It provides a place accessible to the living, where food offerings could be brought for the deceased. It contained the statue of the tomb-owner, and part of one wall was either removed or pierced with two holes to allow the statue to see the offerings; the deceased, through the medium of his statue, could then partake of the food" (p. 61). Asneth is instructed by the angel to "Entre into thi celer" (l. 521), which may be a clear harking back to Egyptian funerary rites associated with an adjuration of the Sun God. See quote from Kraemer, in Chapter Three of this thesis.

[200] That the bees make honey from the dew of roses is not unique to the Shirley *Asneth*, yet bears a Christian interpolation. In the prologue the writer makes reference to the Rose, which I interpret to be Christ, who some associate to the Rose of Sharon (*Song of Solomon* 2:1). The flower, stem and pistol being pollinated by the bee, that in turn collects some of the pollen for the production of honey, is a blatantly sexual one. See also Mechtild's reference to Christ as the Rose, (Halligan, microfiche p. 199) "Thanne sayde oure lorde to here: 'Loo, y am pat am a rose ande borne [without] a thorne ande prykkyde y am with many thornys' (square brackets, Halligan's).

[201] The specific word "remnant" in the Shirley *Asneth* may be intentionally used as it is a Biblical term describing the church of God, the chosen ones. In Burchard, it states, "and what was left he put with his hand into Aseneth's mouth" (p. 229). It also harks to the concept of the reeds in the Edfu documents, where the remnant is the remnant of the first creation accounted for in Egyptian myth, specifically the reeds perhaps represented by the honeycomb that houses the ancestors, the bees. See discussion of Field of Heritage, Chapter Three of this thesis.

And thi vertu nevere faile[202]

The "dew" of the rose in heaven, as well as "holy crème" cannot be mistaken for anything but the male sexual contribution in coitus. It is after Asneth is "anointed" with "holi crème," or experiences a mystical marriage to God, that she is promised renewal of the flesh and never-failing "vertu." The honeycomb that is found in the cellar, or sacred domain, a symbol of the Eucharist, Christ, is also the home of the bees that appear from paradise. The honeycomb resides in the womb, the mother-city that has been made pure to house the converts of Israel. The message seems to be that those who are walled within the sacred mother-city-of-refuge shall be as virtuous and sexually renewed and pure as Asneth, as pure as bees, worthy of God's grace. They will literally reside "in Christ"[203] (the honeycomb) who resides in Asneth.

Next the angel touches the comb with his hand and it becomes whole once again. He then touches the honey and trails it from the east to the west and from the north to the south, making the sign of the cross. Medieval Christians would have understood it to be the sign of the holy cross.[204] The fact that the honey turns to blood at the sign of the cross would remind Christian readers of the restorative value of Christ and that purity, through the grace/blood of the cross, reaps righteousness. Additionally, in the Middle Ages, people thought that body fluids such as mother's milk and semen consisted of blood. If honey were representative of the seed of God, then the blood imagery would have a further connection to the body of Christ as the progeny of God.

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[202] This Eucharistic image is consistent in all versions of the story I have encountered. See Burchard's version in Charlesworth, p. 229, "And the man stretched out his right hand and broke a small portion off the comb, and he himself ate and what was left he put with his hand into Aseneth's mouth, and said to her, 'Eat.' And she ate. And the man said to Aseneth, 'Behold, you have eaten bread of life, and drunk a cup of immortality, and been anointed with ointment of incorruptibility. Behold, from today your flesh (will) flourish like flowers of life from the ground of the Most High, and your bones will grow strong like the cedars of the paradise of delight of God, and untiring powers will embrace you, and your youth will not see old age, and your beauty will not fail forever. And you shall be like a walled mother-city of all who take refuge with the name of the Lord God, the king of the ages."

[203] New Testament uses the term "in Christ" to refer to those who are under the saving power of Christ. See also Burchard on Asneth's influence on New Testament practice. From an Egyptian mythological perspective, if the remnant, the reed, is what the pillar of the first sacred order is comprised of, and Asneth can be seen as representing the pillar, then the remnant as reed that is fed to her in the story, i.e. the honeycomb as remnant, loosely may connect Christ to the pillar of the first sacred domain of Egyptian mythology from a Christian theological perspective. See Chapter Three, this thesis.

[204] This sign may have been applicable to the tradition of the Ancient Mother Goddess. See Chapter Three.

Then the angel asks Asneth to take heed of the comb, whereupon many bees emerge from it that are "white as the snow; Here wynges were of purpe hew"[205] and they fly about Asneth's head and build a honeycomb in her hand (in Burchard they build it upon her lips).[206] The bees then eat of the honeycomb. The angel then directs the bees to "Go ye now into your place" and they fly to the East into Paradise. The angel then reminds Asneth that what he has told her will be fulfilled. Then he touches the comb and it begins to burn[207] and is consumed, but does not destroy the table or the wood. The description of the bees is greatly reduced in the Shirley *Asneth*. In Burchard there is a lengthier description that may bear deeper symbolic scrutiny having to do with ancient mythologies as I later discuss.

Asneth then reminds the angel that she has seven maidens in her keeping and asks him to bless them. He tells her they will be the seven pillars of the city of refuge. Then Asneth is instructed to take away the board and she does and turns to see the man being drawn east toward Heaven by four horses resembling flame and thunder and lightening.[208] She then acknowledges aloud, "Alas! I have spoke with Godis aungel."[209] As she is still speaking, a young man rushes to tell her that Joseph is coming and that his messenger is already at the gate. In further symbolic language, as before, "Joseph entred into halle.[210] The gatis men did sprere [close] And shitte out alle straungeris that no man schul hym dere [bother]." Furthermore, they are unchaparoned, "'My lord Joseph, entre

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[205] ll. 567-568.

[206] See my comment on the bees representing the ancestral spirits, the "ba" of the ancient Island of Creation. There is also a brief reference in a footnote in Reymond (p. 8n2) to the "Builder Gods," in reference to the worship of the Ancestor Gods in the Edfu documents.

[207] This would have been seen as a purifying symbol, but also, in Reymond and the ancestral field of reeds, there is a reference of it being "fiery".

[208] Here is an indication of a monotheistic rendering of traditions of thunder/rain and sun/fire previously attributed to two gods, Seth and Osiris. See Chapter Three.

[209] ll. 591.

[210] Here is another support of the concept of "entering in" that I propose has to do with ancient Egyptian theology as well as a sexual connotation between the Sun God and Earth/Moon Goddess. Joseph "enters" Asneth's gates, "Et intravit Ioseph in atrium, et clausa sunt hostia atrii, et omnis vir et mulier alienigine manserunt extra atrium, propter quod custodes portarum clauserunt et forinaverunt eas et exclusi sunt omnes alieni" (p. 107 in *Studia Patristica*). In the sexual sense, he "infuses himself within her walls" just as the Creator God infuses himself in his monuments on the wall in Egyptology. Also, in the Medieval English translation, the poet uses the word "know" for sexual conjugation. It is a familiar one used in the Old Testament, however in the Latin version the poet was working from, the consummation between Joseph and Asneth is actually described in terms of entering, "intravit Ioseph ad Aseneth et concepit de Ioseph Asseneth et peperit Manasen et Effraim in domo Ioseph," (p. 109 in *Studia Patristica*) which must hark back to a theological context, as well as support the metaphor of temple interior or garden, for Asneth and her sexual compartment.

into oure place.' / Sche ladde him in by the right hand. Here fadir was absent."[211] Now that Joseph's role as husband is confirmed by the angel, the gate is closed and guarded with Joseph inside. The right of the husband is confirmed in the typology and language, but never described in detail. Much is made, however, of the fact that they are now a good match. The medieval versions (both Latin and English) embellish Pharaoh's speech to Joseph with another reference to Asneth's sexual purity, not found in Burchard, "For sche is a maide clene as thu…".[212]

Almost without exception, the small embellishments or changes found in the medieval versions of the story have to do with Asneth's sexual purity, downplaying her consummate relationship with Joseph, justifying relations for "procreacion" purposes, but embellishing the erotic language and implication in the visitation scene. Her wifely role is a mystical one, a socially and procreatively necessary one, and finally, a spiritual one.

Asneth and Medieval Exemplum, Saints' Lives and Female Mystics:

Was Asneth delegated to sainthood? Her association with the Holy Mother through mystical consummation certainly must have, if unofficially, put her on side with "saints" with respect to exemplum. Her similarity to female mystics alone, who were often canonized for their mystical relationship to God, is strong evidence of her proximity to sainthood. Elliot states of the example of saints in the Middle Ages:

> Saints embodied certain values that medieval men and women have gone on record as admiring. The hagiographer's bias may lead him to claim any number of fictional deeds on behalf of his holy candidate but his very partisanship ensures that these pious fictions conform to patterns of sanctity which are revered by society. The "inside-outside" nature of saints is evinced by the fact that, though often deviating from socially sanctioned norms, saints also frequently provide valuable role models that pious individuals, consciously or unconsciously, pattern their own religious expression upon. What I am taking to be historical about these sources is precisely their imaginary function, a function exercised in relation to the very particular circumstances that gave rise to their creation and deployment and shaped their usage. Even so, some figures are, of

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[211] ll. 623-624.

[212] l. 660. The Latin original is consistent: "Dixitque Pharao Ioseph: "Nonne ecce illa congruit tibi, cum sit virgo et speciosa sicut et tu? Accipe ergo illam, et sit tibi sponsa in eternum" (pp. 108-109 in *Studia Patristica*).

> course, more "historical" than others in the sense that they actually existed.[213]

The hagiography of saints' lives in the Middle Ages is an interesting note of concern with respect to *The Storie of Asneth*. Though not a saint officially, as far as I have discovered, Asneth's exemplum because of her connections to Mary may be numerous.[214] Additionally, Elliot points to Hellenistic romances in the evolution or borrowings of hagiographers for accounts of saints' lives, stating specifically, "many of the most popular saints' lives are indebted to Hellenistic romances,"[215] which, of course, is exactly where *Asneth* originated. Elliot states: "Whether examining the renarrated life of an individual who lived or a wholly fictive life, these sources are most securely historical when construed as repositories for social values and ideology."[216] Our Middle English translator, in his small embellishments and word choices, acted as Asneth's hagiographer, accentuating deeds on behalf of his "holy candidate," Asneth, which conformed to "patterns of sanctity which are revered by society," namely, Spiritual Marriage and the mystical experience. In turn, Asneth, on both accounts of "social values and ideology," may fit the criteria of religious exemplum for lay women as well as female mystics in the Middle Ages. Peck posits that Asneth specifically targets upper-class women as its readership, but this recognition coincides with Elliott's study that indicates women of upper-class standing were most likely to practice a Spiritual Marriage. It is also the same segment of society (along with some exceptions from the middle class) from which female mystics were drawn.

If, as Elliott points out, Spiritual Marriage is an "exemplary pattern of female behavior,"[217] then Asneth, as Peck points out, is no less an exemplary model of female behavior. These views differ, however, in their potential power as exempla. If *Asneth* is generically, romantically, an example of women's malleability to patriarchal control, and if as I show, it is also representative of a specific type, a post-procreative Spiritual Marriage, then Elliott's position that Spiritual Marriage was empowering to women may

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[213] pp. 8-9.
[214] Among others, Lydgate made this connection. See also Peck where he states Asneth is "amply adorned with Marian imagery," p. 14. See section this thesis on Mothers of Jesus.
[215] p. 8.
[216] p. 9.
[217] p. 15.

differ from the view that Asneth was an example of female malleability. According to Elliott:

> Although theoretically available to either sex, spiritual marriage was most frequently identified as a female religious practice. In particular, women seem to have availed themselves of this model as a means of attaining autonomy in marriage through chastity which is represented as a way of more closely aligning themselves with celestial favour.[218]

There is no doubt about the similarity of Asneth's visionary account to that of some well-known female mystics whose "nocturnal vigils" are often "depicted as clandestine meetings with a lover."[219] Margery Kempe's mystical union with God is blatantly spoken of in the context of the marriage bed:

> Therefore most I nedys be homly wyth the and lyn in thi bed wyth the. Dowtyr, thow desyrest gretly to se me, and thu mayst boldly, whan thu art in thi bed, take me to the as for thi weddyd husbond, as thy derworthy derlyng, and as for thy swete sone, for I wyl be lovyd as a sone schuld be lovyd with the modyr, and wil that thu love me, dowtyr, as a good <wife> owyth to love hir husbonde. And therfor thu mayst boldly take me in the armys of thi sowle and kyssen my mowth, myn hed and my fete as swetly as thow wylt.[220]

One only has to look at the recounting of a vision by Mechtild of Hackeborn, where honey and erotic imagery bear attestation to its similarity to recognize the potential influence that *Asneth* may have had on this visionary experience alone. *The Booke of Gostlye Grace of Mechtild of Hackeborn* was translated into Middle English in the fifteenth century, just before *The Storie of Asneth* was, but was written originally at a time when *Asneth* was widely circulated in Latin in Europe and England.[221] The vision occurs as a sort of epilogue at the end of the book where the writer claims the vision was received three years before the book was written, accounting for the book's prophetic importance. The following excerpt from the *Book of Gostlye Grace* is short, but rich, and some specific images look very much like images from Asneth's visionary account:

> And aftere that, sche sayde: "Who wille haffe of the honye of hevenlye Jerusalem?" Ande anone hym[222] thowght sche profryde a honycombe,

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[218] p. 12.
[219] Elliot p. 232.
[220] Margery Kempe, bk. I, ch. 36, ll. 2949-2957.
[221] For bibliographic information on Mechtild see Wogan-Browne et al., p. 289, Halligan, and Barratt.
[222] The translator uses the pronoun "hym" though it is generally accepted that the original writer was one of the Helfta nuns, Gertrude the Great. Wogan-Brown et al, p.288.

> owte of a vesselle that sche hadde, to all the sustrene in the qweere whiche come to here, Ande that same persone that sawe as by vysioun [went] to here also, als hym thought, ande sche gaffe hym a gobette of brede owte fro the honye. Ande while sche helde that breede in here handdys, wonderfullye that gobette of breede with the honye both togydders bygane to wexe owte into a loofe, so that the gobette of breede wexe owte in a hoole loofe, ande the honycombe persede the lofe withyn and withowte, and throrowe here handdis. Whilys sche helde that loofe, itt droppede in so moche plenteuosnes ande habundaunce that itt wette alle here lappe, ande so ranne forth ande moystede alle the erth abowte them.[223]
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> . . . . . .
>
> "A, sustere, whate goodenesse ande frewte es in this booke! For the furste tyme that evere I lokede thareopoun, my herte felte suche a wonderfulle ande a luffynge styrrynge, that itt wente thoroweowte alle the partyes of my bodye."[224]
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Thare es nothynge swettere than the comforth of Goddis grace, ande thare es nothynge that so informeth ande lyghttenes a sawlle als his grace; for that grace herteth ande comforteth a sawlle to alle goodenes.[225]

The first note of comparison is that Mechtild, like Asneth, "profryde a honycombe, owte of a vesselle that sche hadde."[226] This is akin to the honeycombe Asneth had in her "recette" or keeping. In *The Storie of Asneth*, Asneth is instructed by the angel to "Entre into thi celer"[227] to find the honeycombe. I have tried to show "celer" or "recette" imagery is synonymous with the symbolic womb of the virgin, from which what was considered a eucharistic image in the Middle Ages, a symbol for Christ, was safely borne. In the Burchard version, it is Asneth's "storeroom." Carolyn Walker Bynum offers further support of female, particularly Marian, imagery consistent with what housed the holy host:

> As the cult of the host grew in the later Middle Ages, tabernacles came to associate the consecration with the Incarnation, and therefore with the Virgin Mary. The Cistercians generally stressed the association of Mary

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[223] ll. 15-25.
[224] ll. 30-33.
[225] ll. 37-39. Excerpt taken from Wogan-Brown et al, pp. 289-290, note in square bracket, Wogan-Brown's. Two other references to honey in Mechtild may be found on pages 8 and 182 of the microfiches, Halligan.
[226] Wogan-Brown et al, as well as Bynum makes reference to a "vessel" that Mechtild reportedly had been given by Christ that was in the shape of Christ's heart, that held the sacrament. On page 1 of the microfiches it states: "What wordis owre lorde saide to here whan sche schulde go to Goddys borde and resayve that holy sacrament. And how owre lorde yave his hert in lyknes of a cuppe of golde and bade hyr bere hitt abowte to alle seyntes" (ll. 19-22). In their mention of the vessel, attention is given to the unusualness of a woman being allowed to proffer the sacrament.
[227] l. 521.

> with the sacrament, and at Citeaux the pyx was held by an image of the Virgin. The angel's words of salutation to Mary were sometimes reproduced on tabernacles. In his explanation of the mass … William Durandus said that the pyx or tabernacle or reliquary in which the host is kept signifies Mary's body. There is even an extant tabernacle that explicitly identifies the container with Mary. (It is surmounted by Anne, Mary's mother, and thus suggests that it is Mary herself.)[228]

Further, in Mechtild's experience the honeycombe which is proffered begins to "pierce" the loaf of bread with honey. We have an image of inundation; even the piercing that is associated with sexual union. I have tried to show Asneth's association to the Earth Mother. The sensibility of the earth, Mechtild, being fertilely covered, inundated, and even overflowing with a symbol for the seed of God, the honey, seems clear. It overflows from her hands, drips through her fingers, and onto her lap/loins completely wetting her. This in itself seems to emulate Asneth's erotic encounter, where she is "anointed with holy crème." The account goes even further, making one believe that there may have been a very close understanding of woman as an image of the fertile earth, harking back to earlier mythologies that associate the consummate virginal wife of God, to the Earth Goddess, for it specifically states: "itt wette alle here lappe, ande so ranne forth ande moystede alle the erth…." If one is still not convinced of this as a fertile image of a holy and erotic nature, the hagiographer makes sure we understand that when she seems to make reference to a climactic orgasm. A "wonderfulle ande a luffynge styrrynge … wente thoroweowte alle the partyes of my bodye."

Another quotation about virgins from *The Booke of Gostlye Grace* may also help to clarify the blurry line that is sometimes present between an erotic and visionary experience:

> This maidene, whene sche sawe ande felte suche a luffynge ande a tendere affeccioun of oure lorde to maidens ande to the degre of virgynite, was astonede with a wonderfulle gladnesse ande merueyle of so grete dignacioun of þe pytte of God. Ande þane oure lorde sayde to here: 'I haffe worscheppede virgyns abowne alle sayntys in thre thynges. One es þat I love a maydene more than anye / othere creature. Ande also whene that maydene furste of alle maydens vowede here chastyte to me I brennede in so moche luffe of here that y myght no langgere forbere, botte anone I come fro heuene ande puttede me alle fullye into here.[229]

[228] *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, p. 81.
[229] p. 133, ll. 6-17.

That the Lord comes from heaven and puts himself, "alle fullye into here," particularly with reference to the maiden that He loves more than any other, i.e. Mary, cannot be mistaken for anything but a consummate experience. Mechtild also variously describes Christ as "here dere lovere"[230] and "the luffere of my sawle."[231]

Besides the erotic imagery, there are other references in *The Booke of Gostlye Grace* that seem to emulate Asneth's dream vision. I see this particularly with reference to visionary heavenly visitors who are similarly described in terms of the sun, as Joseph and the Angel are in Asneth. This is not an uncommon theme in Biblical, or in other medieval visionary accounts. Christ and the message of salvation referred to as the light is a common visionary theme, "ande thare es nothynge that so informeth ande lyghttenes a sawlle als his grace." As well, apocalyptic images of Christ in *Daniel* and *Revelation* bear similarities, but this theme seems to especially parallel images from *Asneth* in *The Booke of Gostlye Grace*. As I have described, Asneth in vision sees "... a man like almost / Joseph, with scepter, stole, and coroune, his cheer as lighting leem, / And his yes bright shyninge as doth the sunne beem. / The heris of his heed were as flame of fire brennynge...."[232] In just one example of many, there is reference, as in *Asneth*, to food that is requested and then mysteriously supplied by a heavenly visitor who seems to shine like the sun:

> Aftere this here thought that owre lorde sayde: 'Whate salle we mayke of alle thes? Alle schalle be brente in luffe' & furthwith he bade: 'Sette furth a borde.' Ande anone sodaynlye thare was a borde before oure lorde fulle sette al abowte with platerys ande cuppys of golde. Oure lordys / face wich semede a sunne with bryghtnes of a sunnebeyme fulfilled eche vesselle as for mete & drynke.[233]

In *Asneth*, the heavenly visitor not only exudes aspects of the sun, but has sweet smelling breath, "For the flavour ys as the breeth of his mouth so swete?"[234] Likewise in *The Booke of Gostlye Grace*, "His mowht ande his tonge felis the taste of swyche swetnes pat may nogt be nempnede, ande suche a smelle of so grete a sauour breth fro his

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[230] p. 9, ll. 10-12.
[231] p. 182, ll. 11.
[232] ll. 424-426.
[233] p. 124, ll. 7-11.
[234] ll. 530.

mowth...".[235] Another consideration in imagery has to do with the garden, which in Asneth, I argue, represents the fertile and creative potential of the womb. Mythologically as well as Biblically, garden imagery is well documented, for instance, in Genesis' Eden, as well as the *Song of Songs*.[236] However, that it particularly perpetuates itself in female visionary literature may be significant and may hark back to further influences of Pseudepigraphal accounts such as *Joseph and Asneth* and the concept of the garden as a female, womb-like image.

In *The Booke of Gostlye Grace,* garden imagery is associated with a mountain upon which Christ rests that is full of fruit, and where the souls of the martyrs reside. This seems similar to Egyptian mythological evidence that I propose may associate Asneth and her garden with the Island of Creation (see Chapter Three) and the underworld of the soul, the ancestral field, associated with the Egyptian temple and Egyptian theology. The same ancestral field seems to translate in *The Booke of Gostlye Grace* as a field of saints or martyrs in connection with the garden:

> How sche sawe owre lorde syttynge on a mownteyne in a sete of iaspere richely araied with golde & rede stone, and whate alle this betokenede. And how the hille / was alle abowte heggyd with fayre trees growynge fulle of frute. Ande vndere the trees were soulys of seyntis whiche were fedde of the frute of tho trees aftyre here merytys. And howe thay worschippyd owre lorde. And how be Seynt Iohan Euaungeliste was sente to thame whiche were nought comonyd that daye here gostlye refeccioun as in a platere.[237]

In Egyptian accounts of the ancestral field and Island of Creation, the souls in the field are those who were killed in some sort of cosmic-related devastation having to do with the gods. Loosely, they may also be regarded as martyrs, and, I later argue, are represented by the bees in *Asneth*. The slight difference of the same account in *The Booke of Gostlye Grace* on page 122, has the saints again under fruit laden trees, but it also states "Eche of pame hadde a tene of golde ande pay ete the frewte with grete

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[235] p. 107, ll. 9-10.

[236] This Biblical love poetry has already been compared to *Asneth*; see McEwan Humphrey "The Ladies and the Cities...." For another look at the garden theme in Medieval women's visionary literature, see *The Orchard of Syon*, in Wogan-Brown et al (p.235-238), written 1420-40, a translation of Catherine of Sienna's *Dialogue Concerning Divine Providence* taken on her deathbed around 1378, but it states the text's actual origins are more complex than this. She also mentions Mechtild of Hackeborn's *Book of Ghostly Grace* as one of several fifteenth century manuscripts in which excerpts appear (excerpt 3.20).

gostleye lykynge." The Golden tent imagery associated with the saints may be akin to the honeycomb in which the bees reside, that same golden aura that may represent Christ to the medieval reader.

In Wogan-Brown's intro to *The Orchard of Syon*[238] she mentions the lavish gardens, particularly in convents and aristocratic estates of the Middle Ages. I find the idea of the garden in the convent particularly piquing in the context of Asneth's temple estate, which possibly enshrined or housed the ancestors, or souls of the dead. The rebirth, or new order attached to the concept of the ancestors is also alluded to in the renaming of Asneth, Mother City. To a medieval reader, convents are like the holy place where Asneth lives, walled cities with lush gardens, mother cities of virgins and often burial places. In this sense, the convent and garden and ancestors also go together in the Middle Ages, as they do in temple iconography reflected in *Asneth.*

While Egyptian temple traditions and theology may not have been directly known by Medieval readers and hagiographers, given the iconography of stories such as *Asneth*, including images such as "holy consummation," "garden," and towered "walled mother city" as well as the burial places of the saints, the meaning of "ancestral field" may have been, in the Middle Ages, much what it had been in the ancient Near East.

Asneth and Mothers of Jesus:

Asneth's purity which is obtained through the chastity of Spiritual Marriage as well as her mystical relationship to God merits her being ranked among the heroines of the Biblical canon, not the least of whom, as already mentioned, is Mary the mother of Jesus:

> Asneth is amply adorned with Marian imagery. The angel's visit resonates with the Annunciation: she is the *ancilla.* In her redeemed state, with her new name—"Moche-of-Refute"—she is a mediator, protector, and guarantor like Mary; her spiritual wings, like Mary's robe, provide shelter for her seven attendants and through her womb, she provides guarantee of the heritage. She is often compared to a city of refuge—a "cite bild of joye."[239]

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[237] p. 5, ll. 20-23; p. 6, ll. 1–2. This same scene is accounted for also on p. 121 and again repeated with very slight variation on p.122. A closer reading of all the microfiches may reveal yet more garden imagery.
[238] See previous footnote for reference in Wogan-Brown et al and bibliographic information.
[239] Peck, p. 14.

Ruth, Esther and Rahab the prostitute may also be alluded to.

Reference to the dutiful and foreign, converted daughter-in-law, Ruth, is seen where Asneth is washing Joseph's feet: "Thi feet ar myn owne fee, thi handdis also with alle, And thi soule ys my soule."[240] These lines closely parallel the submissive and loyal speech of Ruth, widowed daughter-in-law of Naomi in *Ruth* 1:16: "your people will be my people and your God my God." Ruth's duty to Naomi was a duty to Israel. Ruth may have actually fulfilled the obligation of Levirate[241] marriage on behalf of Naomi with Boaz, Naomi's distant cousin. The image of foot-washing also puts the Christian reader in mind of Mary Magdalene and Jesus, further emphasizing the Christ-like aspects of Joseph.

Repeated references of Asneth to an orphan remind us of Esther, the Hebrew orphan, Hadassah, who became queen of Babylon and facilitated the refuge of God's people by preventing their annihilation at the hands of Xerxes.[242] Additionally, just as Esther experiences the transformation of her name from Hadassah as she gains spiritual importance, so does Asneth become known by another name, "Moche of Refute … and under thi wynggis thei schul be covered."[243]

The very next line reminds one of the prostitute Rahab, whose redemption for her and her family was guaranteed when she hid and then smuggled spies safely out of Jerrico through the "wall" of the city where her apartment was located. Rahab is specifically listed in the lineage of Jesus along with Ruth and Tamar.[244] Asneth is likewise referred to as possessing a wall of safety: "And undir thi wynggis thei schul be covered, tristynge in God alle, And attendynge to the hiest God schul be kept in thi walle."[245] Given the wall/garden/gate imagery in *Asneth* and *Susanna* as a social/sexual/reproductive image of protection, is it possible that this imagery was allegorically used in the story of Rahab for the same typological value? Is it socially

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[240] ll. 630-31.

[241] Levirate: from latin levir, 'brother-in-law'. A custom of the ancient Hebrews and some other peoples by which a man [or closest male relative] is obliged to marry his brother's widow. [For the explicit purpose of producing an heir for that brother]. (OED). Square brackets mine.

[242] *Esther* 1.

[243] ll. 462-464. See also Edith McEwan Humphrey's explanation of apocalypse and conversion comprised partly of renaming in "The Ladies and the Cities…".

[244] *Matthew* 1:5.

expected that a prostitute would have a "hole" or "window" in the "wall" of her sexual protection? If so, there may be further room to speculate about the nature of her relationship to the Israelite spies, whom she saved via the window or hole in the wall.[246]

What these Biblical women all have in common is their place in the lineage of Israel, or heroines in the saving or propagating the line of the House of David from which Jesus was born. They are all "mothers" of Jesus. In the case of Ruth, Esther and Rahab, they also represent Israel as either foreigners or representatives in a foreign/heathen land. Asneth represents Israel in no less a foreign land, Egypt. There may also be a strong connection to the surrogacy these women play as wives and mothers or sexual negotiators for Israel. It is well understood that Esther gained the favour of Xerxes on behalf of Israel because she was his favourite consort, Ruth performed Levirate Marriage with Boaz, and Rahab, as mentioned, may have had a sexual window in her wall that benefited the spies and therefore Israel. The actual lineage of Jesus through Tamar was also a result of Levirate Marriage. Although Peck seems to refer to Asneth as one of the mothers of Jesus: "through her womb, she provides guarantee of the heritage,"[247] and while it may have been popularly conceived that Asneth propagated with Joseph the line of David, this is not strictly so. According to *Matthew* 1, the parentage of Jesus was accomplished through Joseph's brother Judah and Judah's daughter-in-law, Tamar, who fulfilled her duty to God to produce an heir by deceiving her dead husband's father into sleeping with her. However, perhaps because of the incestuous and seemingly illegitimate nature of Judah and Tamar's relationship, as well as the strong allusion to Mary and Joseph in *The Storie of Asneth*, it was popularly assumed in the Middle Ages that Asneth was also one of the mothers of Jesus. Her strong connection to these Biblical women would make her at least as important.

Also in the story, Asneth's previous betrothal to Pharaoh's son and her subsequent marriage to Joseph may connect her to the concept of Levirate Marriage as well. This possibility is especially poignant if one considers that Asneth would (loosely) provide an heir for the dead brother, the treacherous and slain prince, the rightful husband

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[245] ll. 464-465.
[246] *Joshua* 2. Also note in this Biblical chapter the possible language useage, in terms of "entering" the house of the prostitute.
[247] p. 14.

from the perspective of Egyptian ascendancy. That is, she would loosely provide an heir for Egypt that was Jewish. The prince, Pharaoh's legitimate son who dies, represents a dead religion, that of the Egyptians, that Asneth rejects. She was originally promised to the prince, but eventually produces an heir with Joseph. Joseph was understood to be, in a sense, the Pharaoh's adopted son, and therefore the prince's brother.[248] Through the concept of Levirate Marriage and the rivalry of the "brothers," Joseph and the Prince, for Asneth's body, Asneth may be seen to have assisted the continuation of Judaism rather than the continuation of Egyptian paganism. Judaism, therefore, has rightfully taken the place of, or provided heirs (all those who would find refuge in her) for Egypt. This idea is forcefully brought home within the last lines of the poem that states: "And Joseph was called in Egipt fadir to the kynge." This theme will recur in my discussion of typology and Egyptian myth and theology in *Asneth* in Chapter Three.

Conclusion to Chapter Two:

Despite ancient intentions, or perhaps because of them, *Asneth*'s medieval translators must have read the story in a sexually allegorical way. It must be expected that allegory would be open to literal interpretation to a greater or lesser degree. The marriage between Asneth and Joseph may be seen to have possibly influenced a literal interpretation (the practice of celibacy within licit marriage, Spiritual Marriage in the Middle Ages) that originally had symbolic meaning, at least in the context of this particular story. How that practice may have affected real people, and the autonomy of women in the Middle Ages, will be an ongoing study.

Given the medieval Church's obsession with sexual sin, and the popularity of erotic visionary experiences by women, Asneth must have been seen as a medieval as well as a converted Jewish heroine. The account of her visionary experience in the story closely resembles the experiences of medieval female mystics of the day. Most importantly perhaps, she resembles that female mystic of mystics, mother of God, Mary.

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[248] This story that is based on the myth of Joseph as Pharaoh's adopted son, may be contrasted to the story of Moses, generations later, who is also the adopted son of the Pharaoh and Jewish. He conversely rejects the Egyptian Kingship. Moses rejects the marriage to the princess and therefore the opportunity to be the "father of kings" in Egypt. In what appears to be the antithesis of the Joseph myth, where Joseph is responsible for the settlement of the Israelites in Egypt, Moses later leads the Israelites completely out of Egypt.

What seems to be clearly an erotic encounter with the "Man of Heaven" in *Asneth* would have been readily associated with Mary's coupling with the Holy Spirit to accomplish the Miraculous Conception of Jesus. It would also have been seen as an example of a woman's mystical, Spiritual Marriage to God that took precedence over an earthly marriage.

Clearly the story had implicit, if not explicit paradigms of marital chastity and an emphasis on virginity from its inception in Late Antiquity, whether or not Hellenistic writers intended them to be literally followed. Therefore, a society that was interested in the phenomenon of sexual purity, even within licit marriage, would have found the story affirming, and added their own justifications for Asneth and Joseph's behaviors in the text. The justifications or embellishments, or slight changes made by the fifteenth century poet, seem to support this. In a reciprocal, reflective sort of way, *Asneth* may be seen to support the concept and practice of Spiritual Marriage in the Later Middle Ages, and the concept may be seen to have influenced the evolution of the story into Middle English, reshaping it, however slightly. Allegory affected social practice, and social practice perhaps helped reshape allegory just a little.

Certainly, images that survive time and originated in Hellenistic versions of the story had, if not exact, then similar iconographic and theological meaning even in the Middle Ages. The fertile garden, the sign of the cross, the Eucharist, and a virginal consummate experience with "God" are Christian images, yet their implications in the Late Antique Near East, and the socio-historical context of the original story, may not have been completely dissimilar; we will explore these issues in Chapter Three. What all versions of the story and these icons support, in various social and historical contexts, is the conversion theme that is explicit in the text. What symbolizes this conversion, and seems to tie various of the icons and puzzling symbols in the story together, is the very theologically indicated concept of marriage (and fertility, new creation) played out in the story between the pagan, Asneth, and the Hebrew, Joseph.

Chapter 3

Asneth's Typological History: A Suggestion about Inherited Metaphorical Aspects of Marriage from Late Antiquity

Introduction:

The Storie of Asneth is a Middle English version of a Hellenistic narrative that medieval readers would have seen as a story about conversion from paganism to Christianity. It is demonstrably based on Judaic material about conversion from paganism to Judaism; but both the Christian and Jewish versions appear to contain pagan elements suggestive of an earlier, less patriarchal Egyptian religious system. What we have, therefore, seems to be a pagan myth that encompasses pagan religious elements that have been revised to support Judaic, and later, Christian patriarchal religion. Each version of the story in history no doubt has its own concerns, and is informed by its own social context (in the fifteenth century, perhaps Spiritual Marriage) and in some ways, each version reflects tensions between male power and attempts to create a place for female experience and dignity.

Most scholars agree that *Asneth* was originally written by Jews living in Egypt. If, therefore, an understanding of the many puzzling images that inform the story is to be found, one should start with aspects of Egyptology. While a look at Egyptology may reveal an understanding of what certain images and icons would have meant to ancient readers, most of these images remain relatively unchanged (though versions of *Asneth* are many) and consistently recur even in the Middle English Verse translation. It is possible that Christian translators understood these icons to have current Christian theological significance, even if unaware of their origin. The theme of marriage (and its various aspects), specifically may have facilitated similar theological and religious goals in different religious contexts, as it crossed from pagan Egypt, to Judaism, to Christianity.

While Medieval readers may not have understood Egypt's original influence on the story, it may be through the direct link of stories like *Asneth* and other literary legacies from antiquity that very specific icons and images seem to retain similar meaning in the Middle Ages. For instance, the honey bees' association with spirituality and sexless reproductivity in the Middle Ages, as well as their association with the Virgin

Mary, may be a direct legacy of the "ba," the intangible "ancestor spirits" of the Creator God from ancient Egyptology. The winged ba seems to play an active part in the ritual union (marriage) of the Sun God and his "monument" or goddess from Egyptology, as the bees seem to play a part in *Asneth* in what appears to be a union of Asneth with the angel. Likewise, concepts of "entering" or "indwelling" as well as the female body being representative of the "walled" temple (or garden) of the god have been specifically retained in the text up until the Middle Ages. The image seems to repeat itself or inform the structure and symbolic value of the religious convents of the Middle Ages, where inside the "walls" one often finds lush gardens as well as the virginal "brides of god."

Most important to Christian readers of the Middle Ages may be the association of Mary to Asneth. While icons in the story would perpetuate this association for Christian readers (the bees, the honeycomb/Eucharist, the sign of the cross), there is evidence that Mary was endowed with aspects of antiquity's "Great Goddess" and many studies have associated her specifically with Egypt's Isis. I make a preliminary suggestion that Asneth, likewise, may have been endowed with many aspects of the Goddess, and of specifically Isis, which may strengthen an understanding of Asneth's Christian association with Mary by medieval readers. Each of these three, Isis, Asneth and Mary, is portrayed, in some way, as the female consummate partner of a god. Many aspects of Egyptian, Jewish and Christian theology are informed by the metaphor of marriage and the icons and images in the story seem to support the metaphor as it crosses religious borders. Therefore, the typology in the story that seems to have retained similar meaning through time based in part on Asneth's image as the spiritual wife of a god, may be a very telling link between Egyptology, Judaism and Christianity. Over time Asneth would have been associated with a different mythological wife/goddess, and her marital role would be in the context of a different god.

The Sacred Marriage:

Perhaps the most direct route into Asneth's connections to Egyptian myth is through the etymology of her name. Asneth can be read as As*Neith*. That is, the meaning of her name, according to the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, is that she belongs to or is

the servant of Neith, the early grain goddess of the Egyptians.[249] That Jewish tradition would have the Hebrew keeper or gatherer of the grain stores in Egypt, Joseph, married to a female character whose very name associates her to the ancient Egyptian Grain Goddess, bears significance. I hope to show in this portion of my thesis that the iconography that associates the couple with the grain and the fertility of the land may lead to an understanding of the fact that the story was intended to make readers associate Joseph and Asneth with mythic couples throughout Late Antiquity whose marriage, or consummation, ensured good crops and prosperity to the society in which they were represented. This mythic archetype is commonly known as "the sacred marriage." The archetype of marriage also represents the basis for many different aspects of Egyptian theology. It includes, but is not exhausted by, the theological concepts having to do with kingship, ascendancy and ancestral heritage. Concepts of "entering in" seem to be associated with sexual union and motherhood, on which ascendancy or inherited kingship is dependent.[250] It may have been with deliberation that the Jewish writers of Asneth used their knowledge of Egyptian theology including metaphorical concepts of marriage, in an attempt to co-opt it in favor of Judaism.

For Hellenistic Jews living in Egypt, the writers of *Asneth* must be seen to have had knowledge of both Jewish and Egyptian traditions concurrently. These traditions must be seen to overlap in the story in order to propagate the idea of the supremacy of Judaism over Egyptian religion. In fact, some scholars would say that just as the Israelites "came out of" Egypt during the Exodus, there was also an Exodus of Egyptian theology that went with them. In his book entitled, *Egyptian Light and Hebrew Fire: Theological and Philosophical Roots of Christendom in Evolutionary Perspective*, Karl W. Luckert states: "Even though the Exodus religion historically and foremostly

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[249] See Peck's note, p. 19, where he cites the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Kater Publishing House Jerusalem Ltd., 1972), Vol. 3 "Asenath," by Nahum M. Sarna, col. 693. [Hebr. Meaning in Egyptian "she belongs to, or is the servant of [the goddess] Neith." Daughter of Poti-Phera, the high priest of On (Heliopolis).]

[250] "The meaning of 'bride of [G]od' (*nymphe theou*) is, however, far from obvious. Convinced that *Aseneth* draws heavily on Egyptian imagery, Philonenko considered this description an allusion to the possible marriage between Aseneth and the son of Pharaoh, since ancient Egyptians believed Pharaoh to be the divine incarnate, and the son of Pharaoh would presumably one day become that incarnation himself. But if so, the allusion is ironic, for Aseneth will become the bride not of an Egyptian god's son but of the true God's son, Joseph. However, the image of divine bride also reflects the numerous images of sacred marriage (*hieros gamos*) in the story, including the unions of Wisdom and the Wise Man, the lovers in Song of Songs, Selene (Moon) and Helios (Sun), God and Israel, and perhaps others." Kraemer p. 30.

represents a reaction against Egyptian civilization and its program of overdomestication, its theological tenets nevertheless come into better view when they are seen as having emerged from that same civilization."[251]

Luckert also suggests Christianity owes perhaps more to Egyptian theological traditions than has been previously conceived, and that this came via the route of Judaism. If this is so, it may help to solve the mystery of why a story such as Asneth, a Jewish work which I propose is full of Egyptian typology but predates or may be only roughly contemporary with the birth of Christianity, would have so much resonance for Christian readers. "All the while, the distinct 'Christian' strain of fresh theological awareness, of fresh revelation, mostly has been a revival of time-tested Egyptian theological truths."[252] One of these time-tested truths may be seen to be the "sacred marriage," which in Judaism is allegorically manifest in God's spiritual union with his bride, Israel. In Christendom, Christ's church is similarly described in terms of the bride. At the very roots of the ascendancy of Christ and the "birth" of Christendom, is the "sacred marriage" between God and Mary, "The Queen of Heaven" and the Miraculous Conception. Many studies have linked the mythical roots of the Virgin Mary to the "Great Goddess."

In her discussion of aspects of the prehistoric mythic "Great Goddess," Marija Gimbutas[253] states: "As supreme Creator who creates from her own substance she is the primary goddess of the Old European pantheon. In this she contrasts with the Indo-European Earth-Mother, who is the impalpable sacred earth-spirit and is not in herself a creative principle; only through the interaction of the male sky-god does she become pregnant." Gimbutas indicates that the tradition of the (Indo-European) "Earth Mother" in union with the Sky God, or as I will show, in Egyptian tradition, the Sun God, occurred after the third millennium BC. It is within this time frame of later antiquity, specifically Hellenism, well after this patriarchal transformation of the Great Goddess into the consummate partner of the "Sky God" had already been a long-standing archetype, that *Asneth* was written, although one may argue that aspects of the prehistoric Creator

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[251] p. 135.
[252] Luckert, p 28.
[253] *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe: 6500 – 3500 BC Myths and Cult Images* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982) 196.

Goddess did not disappear as she became patriarchally relegated to "wife." Symbols associated with the Ancient Goddess that Gimbutas discusses and that I propose may be seen in *Asneth*, include, but are not limited to, honey bees, dogs, snakes, the sign of the cross, and not least importantly, fertility and new creation. An analysis of these symbols cannot be fully developed within the parameters of this thesis, but deserve further attention at some later date in the context of the goddess. They may support the view that the story represents, in part, a patriarchal usurpation of an even earlier religious system than that found in Hellenistic Egypt, in which a female god was primarily worshiped. It may represent the taking over of a more gylanic, partnership society, in which neither women or men were hierarchically ranked but lived in a more symbiotic relationship to one another.[254] One sees a possibility of this in small ways in the text, for instance, where Asneth claims Joseph's prophetic abilities are inconsequential, because the old wives of Egypt had that ability: "To rede hym right the redeles of his swevenynge. / The olde wyfis of Egipt han craft in that cunnynge, / And therefore that dreme redere I utterly forsake."[255] It may also be alluded to in the possible pronoun change that would indicate the "field of Heritage" once belonged to "her" and after Asneth's marriage to Joseph, is referred to as "theirs."

Though both gods and goddesses were part of the Egyptian pantheon, one may still wish to argue that a goddess tradition had no place in the monotheistic patriarchy of the Jews, whose authorship of the story is generally accepted. However, according to Athayla Brenner,[256] this is not strictly so. She describes how, though suppressed from finding an obvious place in the Old Testament Canon, a goddess tradition among the Jews was at times popularly manifested.

> It is well established that the Israelites were familiar with various cults practiced in the land that eventually became theirs. Moreover and dialectically, they assimilated elements of those cults into their own…During one period at least (that of Jezebel and Athalia in the first half of the ninth century BCE: see 1Kings 17 to 2 Kings 10), the cult of Baal and his female consort – called Asherah – became the official state

[254]See Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade*, ch. 8, pp. 105-6, and p. xvii for a definition of "gylanic" society.
[255] ll.155-157.
[256] "The Hebrew God and His Female Complements." *The Feminist Companion to Mythology*. ed. Carolyne Larrington. (England: Pandora Press, 1992).

> cult in the Northern as well as Southern Kingdoms, alongside that of Yhwh.[257]

Brenner further explains that a cult of the "Mother Goddess" was popular even in Jerusalem (the stronghold of Yhwh's exclusive worship), as late as the sixth century BCE. This "family" cult of the Goddess flourished in times of political and economic stress. "In such times, people, especially women, turned back from the official cult of the divine Hebrew Father to the divine Mother in the quest for maternal love and assistance."[258]

Though there is a tradition of the Mother Goddess as the consort of God in Hebrew Society, I believe a stronger indication of this tradition may be seen in Egyptian mythology. It is in the context of Egyptian Temple Cults that the image of the Sun God in consort with the moon or earth may be seen clearly.[259] If the Jewish writers of *Asneth* may be seen to specifically use this archetype that was recognized locally in Egyptian myth, *Asneth* may be seen even more clearly in the light of a Jewish ascendancy that tries to encompass or assimilate Egyptian traditions, including those surrounding a "Sun God."[260]

In the story, Asneth's first sight of the celestial being is one that unmistakably associates that being with Joseph. The fact that he bears specific aspects of the sun seems to support both the Angel's and Joseph's classical connection with the "Sky God" (in Egypt's case, Sun God) of "the sacred marriage." "Sche lyft then here heed and saw a man like almost / Joseph, with scepter, stole, and coroune, his cheer as lyhtyng leem [his

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[257] p. 52. Also of note is that Yahweh is often referred to as "El" in the Old Testament, which is actually another name for Baal. In this sense Asherah, is the consort of Yaweh. My curiosity as to the possible direct association of Asneth to Asherah by the Jews prompted a question to a Professor of Theology at Walla Walla College, Washington, Dr. Zdravko Stefanovic, where he replied, "Your proposal to link etymologically Asenath and Ashera is attractive to me because of the similarities between the consonants in the two names (with the following shifts: s/sh, n/r {see Zoan/Zoar shift in Gen 13, etc} and -ah/-at feminine ending of the nouns in Hebrew). Yet, scholars maintain that "The name Asenath is characteristically Egyptian. The first 2 consonants have the meaning, 'she belongs to...' followed probably by the goddess Neit[h]. This is a common name of the Middle Kingdom ...." Yee A. Gale, ABD vol 1, s.v. "Asenath"".

[258] p. 53. See also Goldzhier on Hebrew mythology, "Wives and Concubines in Mythology" and "Mythic Wives and Concubines" p. 158-161. Specifically he talks about the "Queen of Heaven" being the Moon Goddess, and how the worship of the Moon Goddess by the Hebrew women was tolerated in Hebrew society.

[259] Burchard mentions that Asneth is the moon, Joseph the sun, and also that the story is astrological, but offers no mythological explanation other than this brief accounting. His emphasis is rather on the theological aspects having to do with conversion and the story's possible influence on early Christian cults.

[260] Kraemer compares Joseph specifically with aspects of "Helios," pp. 163-167.

countenance bright as a flash of lightening] / and his yes bright shynynge as doth the sunne beem."[261] And earlier Asneth describes her first look at Joseph comparing him with the sun: "And nowe he cometh as the sunne fro heven, with his bemys/Radiant...."[262] And after Asneth repudiated Joseph upon meeting him for the first time, she was quickly repentant and as he rode away "greved with sorwe, she wept sore to the sunne siled west" [wept bitterly until the sun settled in the west].[263] If it may be shown that Asneth and Joseph represent the archetype of the moon and sun in sacred marriage then other parts of the story begin to make sense. These include, but are not exhausted by concepts related, in some way, to the metaphor of the marriage. They include symbols associated with "the goddess" or with the marriage act itself, such as the theological concept of "entering," or the reincarnation of souls from the couple's funerary domain, the "underworld of the soul," perhaps represented in *Asneth* by, the "Field of Our Heritage." They also include aspects of the important, but sometimes unexplained, second half of the story, the Chase.

The Chase:

Scholars have been puzzled by what has been thought of as the second half of *The Story of Asneth*. It doesn't seem to fit the symbolic and ritual significance of the first half and has been thought of by some as an addendum of sorts, to simply make the story romantic or exciting, though Burchard addresses its integrity based on its style and thought content, and contends that it is equally ancient and original to the story.[264] The second half of the story is a chase and rescue of Asneth. Pharaoh's son has had his sights set on Asneth for a wife. She refuses him and subsequently becomes married to Joseph. The prince plans to kidnap Asneth. As the stage is set, in what seems to be a direct reference to the annual mythological fertility rites conjoining the Moon/Earth Goddess with the Sun God, Joseph commands Asneth to go to the harvest field and wait for him. He says the night before to Asneth, "Tomorowe thu shal go Into felde of howere heritage,

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[261] ll. 423-425.
[262] ll. 194-195.
[263] l. 274
[264] Introd. in Charlesworth, p. 182, subtitled *Integrity.*

for now is hervest seson."[265] As she makes her yearly ritualistic trek to the "field" she is accompanied by Benjamin for safety. Pharaoh's son lays an ambush with the intent of killing Joseph and making off with Asneth; however, in Joseph's absence, Benjamin escapes with Asneth before the prince can kidnap her. A chase ensues, culminating in the fatal injury of Pharaoh's son and the rescue of Asneth. The Israelite patriarchy has been reaffirmed.

What is enacted in the romance may be an evolved form of the "love chase" that is associated with the mythic harvest rituals and union of the Goddess, to the Sun God. It should also be noted that early references in the poem are to "hervest fro the feeld of here heritage."[266] The possessive pronoun, "her" with reference to the harvest field at the beginning of the poem would support the classical and pagan ownership and heirdom of Asneth to the grain of the field and the harvest: "The mayde rejosed of the frutes that were ful mature."[267] The evolution in pronoun use to "howere" (our) in reference to the ownership of the field by Joseph may be evidence of the evolution of the Goddess' job with respect to the fertility of the earth, to one that became dependent upon, or even dominated by the need for a male consummate partner. Joseph may have virtually overtaken Asneth's position as guardian of the corn, the Jewish religion overtaken its pagan predecessors as Hellenistic patriarchal society dictated.[268]

In any case, it seems arguable that the Jewish Hellenistic writers of Asneth were interested in the patriarchal subjection of the wife of Joseph. That is, they recognized that whoever "possessed" this female who may have represented a well-known archetype, would possess the fertile earth or land that she represented and presided over. In Egypt, she would have been identified with the matriarchal Grain Goddess, and he with the Sun God, so they made sure to include in the story a Jewish version of the well-recognized "love chase" associated with harvest rituals with, of course, Israel triumphing. This may offer insight into the patriarchal quality of the poem that Peck notices, as well as offer a mythological context for the second half of the story, the chase scene that has puzzled

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[265] ll. 808-809.
[266] l. 118. Peck interprets "here" as their, but in other places in the text as her.
[267] l. 136.
[268] On the other hand, if Joseph may be identified in any way with Osiris, and the field is the ancient "field of reeds" that represents the underworld of the soul this may make sense as Osiris was the patron of the

scholars. While the archetype of the love chase is not limited to Egypt, in Hellenistic times, it was popularly known by the myth of Isis and Osiris.

Isis and Osiris:

Most scholars of *Asneth* coincidentally mention the myth of Isis and Osiris (with others) in explanation of various portions of the story. I believe that there may be an even stronger allusion to the myth than conceived by scholars to date; however, this avenue into the story will be a study unto itself, and will have to be pursued at a later date. It is enough for now to associate the couple with the Moon Goddess, or Earth Mother, and the Sun God, with only the suggestion that *The Storie of Asneth* may have been more specifically "informed" by Isis and Osiris. At least Asneth and Joseph appear to have been endowed with certain traits of divinity which also appear in the case of Isis and Osiris.

While versions of *Asneth* associate the "Eastern Star" in the story with Venus, and in the medieval versions—both Latin and English—it is named Lucifer (also known as Venus), there is evidence that it may have been originally intended to be known as Sirius, associated with Osiris. In his study of the astrological information in *Asneth* and his study of ancient solar calendars and knowledge of Jewish holidays, R. Beckwith maps out what he believes is the exact solar calendar portrayed in the story. At the end of a lengthy documentation, he states:

> Joseph makes his first visit to Heliopolis on the 18th day of the 4th month (*J. & A.* 1, 2; 3, 1). A week passes (9, 5; 10, 20; 11,1; 13,8), and then the penitent Asenath draws her first comfort from the sight of the morning star in the eastern sky (14, 1-3). The date is the 25th or the 26th. Now, according to *1 Enoch 72*, the summer solstice falls on the quarter day between the 3rd and 4th months, and, as we saw above, at daybreak 24 to 26 days after the summer solstice the re-appearance of the Dog-star on the eastern horizon took place, which was the turning point of the Egyptian year. Is this merely a co-incidence? There is no doubt that *Joseph and Asenath* is speaking of the morning star (*heösphoros*), i.e. Venus, and not of the Dog-Star, i.e. Sirius, and it describes the star as herald of the day, not as herald of the year. Nevertheless, since the date is the same, the time

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underworld of the soul. Both he and Isis are heavily associated with fertility as well as funerary rites. See section on Field of Heritage.

> of day the same, and the part of the sky the same, it is tempting to think that some confusion between the two has taken place.[269]

Osiris is both the Dog Star, Sirius, and the Nile.[270] The regeneration and inundation of the Nile was directly linked to the fertility of the land and the growing season. Without the mud that the Nile deposited when it flooded in the spring, the earth of the Nile Delta would not have been richly nourished as it was yearly in anticipation of plentiful crops of grain or generically, corn. Ash was also a newly introduced fertilizer in Africa between 200 and 100 BC.[271] In the story, Asneth's tears mix with ash until her face is muddy. This could well be a symbol for the deposit of fertile mud the Nile puts on the earth, Asneth being representative of the moon, or earth. The image of ashy, fertile mud on Asneth's face is simultaneous with the appearance of the angel from the Eastern (Dog) star. It is also the beginning of what appears to be a holy consummation or "sacred marriage," that may have been seen by readers in Hellenistic Egypt as alluding, specifically, to the union of Isis and Osiris that coincided with the mud from the flooding of the Nile and a fertile growing season. In a future study, I anticipate that other points of similarity may prove to include the abduction and chase which seem to coincide in both stories around issues of ascendency and usurpation, Egyptian funerary rites, and other theological traditions surrounding the God and Goddess.

In this context, a specific comparison of Joseph to Osiris, at a later date, may prove to be revealing. Some points of similarity may include their association with the Nile, the North, their proof against the evil eye, the attempts of murder by a brother-prince (in Osiris' case the prince is successful in killing him, but not successful in preventing him from producing an heir). Similarities also may include the manner in which they were buried and "resurrected" from the waters of the Nile, and their position or mention of being the "father of the king" in Egypt. It also includes the important role each had in relationship to the temple. Each can be seen to "enter" the gates. That is,

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[269] "The Solar Calendar of Joseph and Asenath." *Journal for the Study of Judaism*, XV. 90-111.

[270] See Assmann, p. 197, for a fuller explanation of the god to the Nile, in this case, Amun-Re. "The continuation makes it clear that inundation and light are important, along with speech as the form of the god's effectiveness as ethical authority. All three—speech, Nile inundation, and sunlight—are forms of his solicitous, sustaining maintenance of life."

[271] See my earlier note in discussion of Asneth's Mystical Marriage to God, Chapter Two.

they each arrive from the east, in the role of a god/husband, and enter the temple, which may be seen to be a representation of the fertile woman.

Asneth and the Egyptian Temple:

The typology of Asneth's home bears remarkable similarities to Egyptian holy places.[272] Asneth, as Putifar's daughter, would be a priestess. This in itself would link her to the Moon Goddess tradition in Egypt. However, other aspects of her home are temple-like as well. Asneth's tower bears similarity to descriptions of temples in the sun and moon tradition that have strong links with astronomy and geomancy.[273] It is believed that temples were built on specific "solar skyline links" commensurate with the rising and setting of the sun at certain times of the year. Because of the obstruction to the view of the rising and setting sun, due to geographic location of surrounding hills or other temples, towers were built, specifically an "upper chamber of the sanctuary complex called the High Room of the Sun." This is the case of temples in the Necropolis at Thebes. The purpose of the high rooms was for the witnessing of the rising and setting sun where the priests would perform morning and evening rituals. This type of ritual seems consistent in Asneth, where she witnesses Joseph (the sun incarnate) rising, or coming from the East, and setting, or "siling west" all from the confines of her temple tower and the east and west facing windows. Additionally, the celestial of her dream, a representation of the Sun God, visits her in her tower room. In his recently published book on *Asneth*,[274] Ross Kraemer states of the visitation scene in *Asneth*: "It seems to me immediately apparent that the sum and substance of what Aseneth does is precisely an adjuration of the Sun.[275]. . . As we have already seen, the association of Aseneth's mysterious visitor with the Sun and with Joseph is quite explicit in the text, although they have received insufficient attention by scholars."[276]

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[272] See Kraemer.
[273] See Paul Devereaux, pp.161-169.
[274] *When Aseneth Met Joseph: A Late Antique Tale of the Biblical Patriarch and His Egyptian Wife, Reconsidered.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
[275] He explains how this was prevalent in mystical cults, and discusses aspects of similarity in *Asneth*, including: Preparation/Separation; Change of Clothing; Abstinence from Food and Drink; Abstinence from Sexual Behavior; Abstinence From all Forms of Social Intercourse, etc., pp. 93-105.
[276] p. 92.

Also in the sun and moon tradition, it was found that at least one "pyramid of the moon"[277] had a "well penetrating its structure." In Asneth, it is clear that a "conduit" runs through the temple property, which may reflect temple expectations.[278]

Strong evidence of the solar tradition in *Asneth* is the geographic location in which the story takes place. Asneth lives in the "cuntre of Helinpoleos." In Burchard, the location is given its modern geographic name, Heliopolis, translated, "City of the Sun." That she lives "in the cuntre" can only mean that she resides in the acropolis of temples with her father, the "preest Putifar." In further support of this is the fact that Heliopolis is the birthplace of the original "official solar cult" in Egypt.[279] Great "sun-temples" were built here in the Fourth and Fifth Dynasty and "solar theology" was the official royal cult. As part of the solar cult, Asneth would have participated in religious rites as a representative of the goddess.

Asneth as Earth Mother/Moon Goddess:

Aspects of Neith and Isis seem prominent in the poem. Neith is Egypt's earliest creator-goddess and in some accounts gives birth to the Sun God, Ra,[280] and then proceeds to weave, with shuttle and loom, the human race. One of her icons is the veil, which represents mystery. On one of her statues is an inscription, "I am all that is or has been or that will be and no mortal has yet raised my veil."[281] Subsequently, and consistent with Isis' inheritance of aspects of Neith, Isis also is represented in a veil. In *Asneth*, the medieval translator adds a qualification to the image of the veil, stating: "Here hed was voluped with that vail, for virginal excellence."[282] "[F]or virginal excellence" is a medieval embellishment not found in Burchard or in the Latin original.[283] Whereas the veil to medieval readers would be thought to represent her virginity, it could

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[277] Devereaux, p. 66.
[278] See Jan Assmann for relationship of the river to Egyptian temple traditions.
[279] See Richard Cavendish, p. 98.
[280] Sarah Bartlett, p.14.
[281] --- p.14.
[282] l. 445.
[283] "et accepit theristrum lineum novum intactum gloriosum, et coperuit capud suum, et venit ad agelum in thalamo suo primo, et stetit in conspectu eius" (p. 102 in *Studia Patristica*). "A lynen newe theustre vail with riche ornamentis; Here hed was voluped with that vail, for virginal excellence, And returned to the

originally be symbolic of the mystery surrounding the ancient goddess and help to affirm the mysterious aspect of the story. In Near Eastern (including Jewish) mythology, the veil is "darkness" that specifically the sun does away with, "The dawn breaks through, or rather tears asunder, the veil of darkness and breaks forth out of it."[284] In *Asneth*, Asneth is the moon, darkness, Joseph the sun.[285]

Further evidence of Asneth as Moon Goddess is symbolic of her dress. In her penance scene, it says she puts on the dark robes of mourning. "Asneth privelye / Com to the chamber where here robis pressed were welle, / And drow to here a blacke robe, a cloth of sorwe and deele."[286] "And did on here the blake robe, the vesture of dolour."[287] This is consistent in Burchard. I believe that besides being a mourning garb,[288] the robe is specific to the iconography of the Moon Goddess and an image of the night that the sun tears asunder. Both Arabic and Hebrew words for "infidel" come from the meaning of night which came from the idea that a black cloak covers the night sky or specifically means, to cover, or coverer "one who covers up the good."[289] Variously, "Night is represented as a curtain,"[290] "The clothing of night is of black colour," "The darker the Night, the thicker is the black cloak with which it is provided."[291] Integral to the same etymology is the relationship between night and day, dark/light, not favoured by god (infidel)/ favoured by god. "As the Darkness of night is what covers over and hides, so on the other hand the Dawn, or the Sun in general, is that which uncovers and discloses . . . . In Arabic *safara* or *asfara* is said of the uncovering of any concealed object, and the same words are used of the breaking-forth of the morning sun."[292] The image in *Asneth* is very clear. Not only is she dressed in the black robes of night, but her face is also

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aungel, and stood in his presence" (*Storie of Asneth*, ll. 444-446). See my comments in section on Asneth's mystical marriage where I argue the embellishments the poet makes have a theme of sexuality vs. chastity.

[284] Goldzhier, p. 183.

[285] Burchard mentions that Asneth is the moon, Joseph the sun, and also that the story is astrological, but offers no mythological explanation other than this brief accounting. His emphasis is rather on the theological aspects having to do with conversion and the story's possible influence on early Christian cults.

[286] ll. 297-299.

[287] ll. 306.

[288] In Ginzberg, in one account, Asneth has a younger brother who dies. In Burchard's account as well as the Medieval English version of *Asneth*, it states that the mourning garb is for her brother.

[289] p. 193, Goldzhier.

[290] In this sense, the black cloak/robe that Asneth dons is similar to the mystery veil of the Moon Goddess that gets torn asunder by the sun.

[291] p. 192.

[292] p. 194.

muddied, black with tears and ash. She is found all dark at the moment her heavenly visitor, a representation of the sun, appears and tells her to wash her face and cast off the black robe and put on a new linen (light) one: "The aungel saide to Asneth, "Do of thi blak haire, / And thi garment of drede, the saccloth, do away; / Smyte the askes fro thi heed, and washe thi face faire, / . . . do on thi riche aray, / Thi lynnen robe, untouched newe, that glorious ys and gay. . . ."[293] The symbolic significance of her black robe/veil[294] also has sexual implications. In *Asneth*, the light Celestial of Heaven may be seen to "tear asunder" the dark infidel of Egypt in an erotic encounter.

There are also connections of Neith to the icon of the snake, a creature that she created by gathering it from the primordial waters—as she did all creation. It is the great snake of darkness, Aepep that swallowed light and lay in wait every day for Ra, the Sun God as he made his journey across the skies.[295] In Asneth the sea snake is the Leviathan, in Biblical tradition sometimes associated with darkness or evil, that she repudiates as part of her penance. In the same repentance scene, Asneth acknowledges the God of Joseph as the one who "foundid land upon the wateris as creatour to al kyndes,"[296] a creation tradition in Egypt that was anciently attributed to the Goddess Neith. Asneth, as Earth or Moon Goddess, contributes to theological dichotomies represented by light and darkness, and helps the reader to begin to read the story in an astrological/theological context, which in Ancient Egypt, were inseparable.

Burchard makes mention of a famous "obelisk or obelisks in the text"[297] of *Joseph and Asneth*, but is vague about which text. In light of the tradition that may allude to, in *Asneth,* a solar cult religion in Egypt, it may be worth looking at those Obelisks in light of Egyptian Hellenistic Solar Cult traditions and Egyptian and Jewish astronomical traditions that may be very similar. I would argue that ancient readers of the text and readers as late as the Middle Ages understood the significance of astronomical references in the text. Too much significant detail has been consistently

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[293] ll. 433-437.

[294] The symbolism of the black robe or veil, and its association with infidelism, or one who is not favoured by God, may have pejorative significance with respect to women, and specifically the black veil that women wear today in strict Muslim countries. A study of the black habit of the Catholic nun compared to the tradition of the Moon Goddess must also be considered.

[295] Sarah Bartlett, p.14. See also, Goldzhier, p. 184. See also Reymond, p. 113.

[296] l. 369.

[297] Introd. in Charlesworth, p.187. Mention of the Obelisks is in brackets as an aside.

retained for medieval translators not to have understood, at least in part, the importance of such details. Peck mentions the two Latin copies of *The Storie of Asneth* that are the source of the Middle English version that is the basis for this thesis, survive as two Cambridge manuscripts, Corpus Christi 424 and Corpus Christi 288. There is evidence that Corpus Christi 424 came from Christ Church, Canterbury, and that the whole of Corpus Christi 288 once belonged to it. Of particular note in the context of the story's astrological significance is that "the earlier copy is twelfth century and has been bound with fourteenth and fifteenth century astronomical treatises, including Chaucer's *Treatise on the Astrolabe*." The fact that *Asneth* was once bound in England along with other books on astronomy can be no coincidence.[298] If an astrological link to Egyptian traditions, such as that of the Moon Goddess and the Sacred Marriage may be made, then other specific images found in the story, may in turn, support this link to Egyptology. Or conversely, these images may prove to help unlock the mystery of the astrological implications in the story.

"Bees" and the "Field of our Heritage," "Entering," and Related Theological Factors in *Asneth* Passed Down from Late Antiquity:

So far scholars have variously described the bees of Asneth's vision as representative of the converts to Judaism, proselytes who find refuge in the "Mother City" (Asneth is named) and are accorded a place in heaven as a result.[299] It is a theory commensurate with Christian theology but it doesn't take into account the whole detailed explanation and satisfy the apparent symbolic significance, particularly in the longer

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[298] Peck, p. 8. Consistent with *Asneth*'s influence on and similarity with medieval saints and mystics, in Corpus Christi 288 "the thirteenth century Latin *Aseneth* appears in a collection of religious biographies and saints lives that share typologically similar materials."

[299] All sources except one coincide with this theory. In his thesis, Gideon Bohak gives a convincing argument for the bees being representative of Jewish priests based on the colors purple, violet and scarlet, as well as linen, and the gold crowns associated with them. One would have to look at Burchard's longer compilation of the story for more detail with respect to the bee scene, but I think Bohak's theory has merit. He claims the story is one describing the Jewish community and temple of Onias in Hellenistic Egypt. While my argument is that the bees represent the Egyptian, "Ba," this does not perhaps preclude his findings. It is possible that the Jewish writers intended for the "Ba" or the ancestor spirits, to somehow become associated with the spiritual leaders of the Jewish faith in Egypt. (One must, however, look at other ancient treatments of the symbol of a winged creature associated with the colors purple and scarlet, and with elemental fire, such as the Phoenix).

account of the bees found in Burchard's variant reading of the story. Notwithstanding this, Medieval Christian readers were no doubt quick to surmise this more simple conversion theory as well, especially given the eucharistic reading in the same scene, and the explicit reference in *Asneth* to those "peple [who] schul turne to God" by Asneth.[300] A look at Egyptian mythology regarding temple origins as well as a cursory look at Egyptian theology and some temple inscriptions, however, may offer a more conclusive historical explanation for the presence of the bees and other details. I will also offer a brief explanation for the "Field of Our Heritage," as well as the statements of "entering in" that occur too often in the poem to be overlooked as happenstance and may be directly related to the concept of "sacred marriage." I have shown elsewhere in this paper that concepts of "entering in" have a sexual connotation but it is also inherent to Egyptian theology, as it is later to Christian theology.

At Edfu scholars discovered temple documents written on the walls that are summaries of very ancient traditions from which, among other things, the temples of the Sun God emerged.[301] It is believed that the book found at Edfu was of general application and not a special work with restricted reference to the Edfu temple.[302] Basically it lists cultus-places believed to have been founded before documented times of the later temples and are mystical in nature. They offer myths in explanation of later sun-cult temples' locations and traditions. I found parts of these myths too similar to parts of *Asneth* not to mention them, though it would take much further study than this thesis can afford to offer this theory justice and the subject would be worthy of subsequent research.

Let us first consider that Jewish myth has Asneth, the illegitimate daughter of Dinah, as an infant delivered to the steps of Putiphar's temple by an eagle. Some accounts say specifically that the deliverer was a falcon and that she was specifically placed upon an altar. The mythic origins of the Egyptian Temple of the Falcon and the Sun Temple associate the falcon to an original Creator-God who disappeared into the underworld with the "'death' of the first sacred world." Reymond specifically cites the myth of Osiris as the progeniture of this tradition. Isis and Osiris, I have already

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[300] l. 463.

[301] My expertise is so very limited that I urge interested scholars to read this source more extensively. E.A.E Reymond, "The Decay and Resurrection of the Primieval Island," *The Mythical Origin of the Egyptian Temple* (New York, Barnes and Noble: Manchester University Press, 1969) 106-127.

attempted to show, may have many points of similarity to Joseph and Asneth on a mythological as well as an astronomical level.

There is evidence that the first sacred world was destroyed after an ensuing battle with an enemy, with the result that complete darkness fell on the sacred domain of the Creator. In this darkness the Primeval Island of Creation was later re-found coinciding with the dawning of a new period of creation. Basically the dead Creator-God was laid to rest in the primordial waters surrounding the island. The waters are characterized by the presence of reeds, and are an inundation surrounding the sacred island. It is the watery grave, not only of the original Creator-God, but also of the "company of divine beings" believed to have perished fighting the enemy. It is this company of divine beings, also described as the flying souls, the Ba, of the Creator God, that I believe the bees in Asneth represent. Kraemer interestingly states of the bees in *Asneth*:

> Unlike many elements in *Aseneth*, the scene with the bees has no obvious and necessary connection to Biblical and other traditional motifs and imagery. In chapter 6, I will argue that the key to understanding the mystery of the bees may be found in Neo-platonic symbolism of the bees as the righteous soul awaiting (re)incarnation. Nevertheless, it is worth observing an intriguing possible association with Psalm 117.10 ... At the conclusion of this scene [in *Asneth*] the figure touches the honeycomb, and it is consumed by fire that rises up from the table, exuding a sweet odor as it burns. This is clearly an allusion to sacrifice, particularly as described in Judges 6 and 13.[303]

If the "Ba," the spiritual company of divine beings, were killed defending the inhabitation of the original Creator God, then they surely represent an element of "sacrifice" and very possibly "reincarnation." The Primeval Island, in other words, is a tomb of ancient inhabitants, the "underworld of the soul" from Egyptology, where, once again, later tradition believed Osiris was pre-eminent. He is supposed to be the "*htpy, the reposing, the pre-eminent in the Underworld of the Soul, who* [significant to *Asneth*] *partakes of the meal.*"[304] The original Creator, or Earth God, "*Pn*-God" was regarded as being the *drty*-Falcon:

> Further allusion to the 'death and decay' of the first mythical world can be seen in the mention of the *relic (iht) of the Pn-God* ... As far as the

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[302] Reymond, p. 9.
[303] p. 39, square brackets mine.
[304] Reymond, p.110.

> description preserved permits us to reconstruct the situation, the name *relic* seems to apply to the reeds which grew on the marginal land of the island. In the first mythical world reeds were used for making the resting-places of the gods, specifically for the making up of the *dd*-pillar[305] ... Thus the reeds used for such a purpose and remaining *in situ* appear to have been regarded as the *relic*[306] of the sacred domain that once had existed there but had perished ... [T]he Island of Creation ... had obvious funerary associations, a place which was conceived as the burial place of a deity who died, whose soul had flown to the sky and whose material form remained in the same place: This Ka who dwelt among the reeds of the island ... The tradition of a god who was brought out of Nun[307] by a pre-existing power, but who died thereafter, whose soul went to the sky and for whose embodiment the underworld was then created, can be discerned in another text preserved at Edfu. In a description of the *August God*[308] *who came into being in the Great Pool* ... and who is the Sun-God born in the lotus, we read that, "for his soul the sky was uplifted so that he may shine therein, the underworld being mysterious to conceal his body...." The death of the Creator seems to have been regarded as the starting-point of a new phase of creation, or a new period of existence. This view agrees with the Heliopolitan doctrine concerning the daily rebirth of the Sun-God.[309] Referring to our Edfu myth, we can see definite points of contact with the fate of the *Pn*-God [Creator-God]. As has been said, the *Pn*-God appears on par with the Sun-God as regards his function in the first sacred domain of the island. That he was believed to have died is equally admissible, because the myth speaks of his *Ba* and *Ka* who appear on the scene at the opening of the new era in the existence of the island, but they are never said to be tangible divine beings.[310]

The Story of Asneth, particularly the repentance scene and image of darkness that Asneth embodies and subsequent visitation of the Sun God may reflect the Ancient Egyptian tradition of the death of an old order followed by the breaking forth of a new era or creation. This new beginning occurred on the primeval Island of Creation, the later

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[305] Reeds were also thought to be the material that the very first sacred dwelling places were made of on the geographic site of the later temples. See Jan Assman.

[306] The term relic here may have significance to the "remnant" that the angel feeds to Asneth in a eucharistic-like way.

[307] Nun is the place where Osiris was resurrected, as well as the place where Joseph's coffin was found, at the mouth of the Nile, and raised through divination.

[308] August is the time of year when the Dog Star, Sirius (Osiris) appears in the sky.

[309] If a study of the allusions in the story to Isis and Osiris were pursued, then a relationship of this daily rebirth, to the yearly rebirth/resurrection of the God for the "sacred marriage" must be studied. An explanation of the seemingly unexplained coincidence of the appearance of the Dog Star, Sirius (yearly) with the appearance of Venus (daily) and their synchronization in the story may be found if a day/year relationship (such as that found in Old Testament prophecy) was established for Ancient Egyptian/Hebrew astrology.

[310] Reymond, p.111.

building place of the sun temple, Asneth's home, to which she was delivered as a baby by the Creator God, the Falcon, in anticipation of a new creation.[311] The Celestial visitor of Asneth's dream as well as the bees he summons forth is consistent with the "Ka" and "Ba," the flying spirit of the Creator God and the spirits of the ancestral inhabitants he commands. Consistent with the "Ka" and "Ba," neither are "tangible" divine beings, but rather distinct spirit entities. "We are told that *the Ka arrived in the capacity of the Flying Ba* … We know that the *Flying Ba* was the spiritual likeness of the nameless god."[312]

Jan Assman cites a text from the temple at Dendara that refers to specific representations in the Osiris chapel there, and looks much like the ritualistic (and erotic "entering") visionary experience in Asneth:

> He comes from the sky flying like a sparrowhawk
> He descends as a falcon on his chamber in Dendara…
> In peace, he enters his august[313] chamber
> with the *bas* of the gods who are around him.
> He sees his mysterious form depicted in its place,
> his figure engraved on the wall;
> he enters into his mysterious form,
> alights on his image
> and the *bas* of the gods take their place beside him[314]

In another temple text two lines describing the *ba* are significant:

> The gods awake early to adore your *ba*,
> O exalted winged beetle who ascends to the sky![315]

Not only is there consistency in the winged *Ba*'s relationship to the soul or spirit,[316] but it is specifically described in terms of a small insect with wings, the size and image consistent with that of a bee.[317] In *Asneth* these winged creatures, when they are finished,

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[311] See Kraemer, p. 25, 51, 212, for a discussion of the theoretical complications arising from the fact that *Asneth* was chosen by God before birth. Her pre-birth choosing, is consistent in different versions of the story.
[312] Reymond, p. 115.
[313] August is the time of year consistent with the appearance of the "Dog Star" Osiris/Sirius.
[314] Assman's footnote 39, Pyr. 393. Pyr = pyramid texts cited by paragraph number.
[315] Assman cites: The Epigraphic Survey, *Medinet Habu*, vol. 6, OIP 84 (Chicago, 1963), pp. 422-423. (OIP= Oriental Institute Publications).
[316] "We translate ba as 'soul'; Egyptians believed that this was the form in which people lived on after death, not on earth, in the tomb, and in the memory of the community, but in the next world, in the sky" (Assmann, p. 42). It is widely accepted that bees in the Middle Ages, were associated with the spirit and purity.
[317] Assman, p.178, cites another temple text in which the ba claims to "make light after the darkness."

go into their place in the "sky": "Thei wente toward the est, / Into paradis."[318] In the medieval version of *Asneth* the bees are afforded a part in the action only long enough to fly out of the honeycomb the angel provides, "ful fele, and white as the snow; Here winges were of purpre hewe,"[319] fly around Asneth, build a honeycomb in Asneth's hand,[320] and "ete thereof inow" and be ordered back home by the angel. It all takes place within a seven-line stanza. In Burchard's variant reading of the story, the bees fly around Asneth from her feet to her head, build a honeycomb on her lips instead of in her hand, and some of them try to sting Asneth. The harmful bees fall to the ground dead, but are resurrected and allowed to live and work in her garden, contrasted with the others who fly back to paradise.[321]

A look again at the account in Reymond of the documents at Edfu refers to the Underworld of the Soul, the resting place of the Creator-God, as a "field of reeds" and specifically, *the (field of) reeds that restores the Ancestors*.[322] If the bees represent the "ancestor spirits," I believe the field, is precisely the ancestral field referred to more than once in *Asneth* as the "Field of our Heritage." In the story the bees are associated with the field when Asneth at first offers to have a servant fetch a honeycomb (from which the bees later emerge) from the field. In the Edfu documents, the "Earth-God" [Creator-God] was believed to be the *First among the ancestors* and Reymond reminds us that this field is the resting-place of Osiris in later myth. The same Ancestral Field of Reeds is also referred to in the texts subsidiarily as "*Fiery Place of the Ancestors* ...or the *Field of the Ancestors*. They tell us of the *Field of the drty-Falcons, the blessed territory of the Primeval Ones... a* name which appears to be used in the Edfu geographical lists as synonymous with the *District of the ddw-Ghosts which enshrines the reeds*...and the *Field of the Ancestors*".[323]

> It refers to the death from which results the rebirth; the resurrection of the island and of its inhabitants. The divine beings who were first to found the resting places in the island of creation are now the *tpyw-c*, the *Ancestors*, of the new world of gods. They too, bear the name *ddw-Ghosts* ... In their spiritual form in which they came forth from the *Underworld of*

[318] ll. 571-572.
[319] ll. 567-568.
[320] See Assman and Reymond for mention of the spirit ancestors, the ba, as "builder gods."
[321] See 16:18-23, in Charlesworth, p. 230.
[322] p. 117.
[323] p. 118.

> *the Soul*, they seem to have attended the creation of the lands for new sacred domains which were the continuation of their own cultus place. The idea of 'ancestry' evidently governs the creation theory implicit in our Edfu documents … A new phase of creation began when once more the light shone on the primeval island and waters. It is to this precise moment, when a new period dawned, that it would seem that the beginning of the first Edfu record refers … This picture of the beginnings of the sacred world is unknown elsewhere. In the main, however, it makes allusion to a very common fact: the light brings new life to the world which must have lain in darkness as a consequence [this light-bringing image in *Asneth* cannot be mistaken] of the aggression made by the enemy on the domain of the Earth-God.[324]

Heretofore the consistent reference in Asneth to the "Field of Our Heritage" has puzzled me. It seemed somehow consistent with, and I believe is connected even in this context to fertility rights which co-join the Moon Goddess and Sun-God, however references could have simply referred to it as the field of corn, or grain, in this context. In *Asneth*, however, a distinct referral to an older tradition, having to do with the ancestral field of reeds, the remnant inhabitants of the Island of Creation, the underworld of the soul, is retained. In *Asneth*, additional significance of the Prince's attempted abduction of Asneth in the second half of the story may be seen in this light. The story specifically states that Asneth was on her way to the "Field of our Heritage," the ancestral field, very possibly the field of reeds, or "underworld of the soul," from Egyptian myth. If this field of ancestors is typified by the reeds that grow on the margins of the Nile, then the story seems to indicate that the Prince waited for Asneth, precisely at the ancestral field, at the borders of the underworld of the soul.

> Commaaunde us, lord, mo figtynge men that we may be reson/ Go afore hem on the nyht and leye a bushement with treson,/Bi the brook and hide us there in the spers of the redis….[325]
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Thei wente and hidde hem by the broke in the reed slily….[326]
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Gad and Dan entred the redis and hid hem that stounde.[327]

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[324] p. 118-119, square brackets mine.
[325] ll. 811-813.
[326] l. 823.
[327] l. 849.

In Burchard's variant reading, the place of ambush is referred to likewise, three times, as the "waddy" and "the thicket of the reeds." In Egypt, fertility and funerary rites may be closely associated with one another. For instance, the "Ka" and "Ba" of the Creator God, must perhaps first be "resurrected" or released from the underworld before it can "enter" or infuse itself with the Goddess. If so, Pharaoh's son would have a vested interest in suppressing this ritual or resurrection that is about to take place in the "field," especially if it had been overtaken somehow or co-opted by the Hebrews and if the resurrection of the spirits was necessary for fertility purposes and the continuation of a nation.[328]

Asneth's Association with the Pillar:

The remnant that the Creator God in the form of a Falcon establishes on the site of the Island of Creation, amidst the field of reeds in anticipation of a new creation, is in the form of a pillar, also referred to as the "perch."

> ... the relic of the early domain was the only means through which the dead world might have been brought to its former state. The reed was the material from which the *ḏd*-pillar was made, and as the relic of the first sacred world that vanished, provided the essential element for the creation of a new sacred domain that succeeded the former in a direct line.[329]

The Goddess has long been associated with the tree or pole as Asherah was in the Old Testament. Similarly, she is associated with a pillar, or tower, as Gueneviere is in medieval myth and as Asneth is in *The Storie of Asneth*. That the Falcon of Egyptian myth, the Creator God, deposits Asneth as a baby on the site of the solar temple, and that she is associated with the tower, or the high place of the sun, must be seen as significant

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[328] In the myth of Isis and Osiris, Osiris is specifically resurrected from the dead from a portion of the Nile, Nun, which represents the underworld of the soul, long enough for a consummation with Isis. She becomes pregnant with Horus, and Osiris immediately returns to the underworld. Horus goes on to become King. That is, this consummation that occurs at the "field" amongst the "reeds" with the help of an entity who must be resurrected for this purpose, is responsible for the rightful ascendancy to kingship. Also of note, in her article, "The Hebrew God and His Female Complements," Athayla Brenner curiously states: "After a prolonged sojourn in Egypt, Yhwh sends Moses to deliver the Hebrews back to their land. He saves them from bondage by inflicting plagues upon the Egyptians and parting the Sea of Reeds for them (Exodus 1-15)" (p. 51). What is commonly understood in the English version of the Biblical account as the "parting of the red sea" perhaps actually refers to the parting as one which allowed the Israelites to pass through, or defy, or transcend the "field of the ancestors," or "field of reeds," from Egyptian tradition. This specific metaphorical image may have punctuated their defiance or freedom from Egyptian kingship or rule. If the reeds may be associated with the Egyptian underworld of the soul, there may be greater symbolic implication to this event than is commonly, superficially understood.

from a theological perspective. In this sense Asneth is the pillar, the perch that the Creator god establishes in anticipation of a new order. From the perspective of the supremacy of the Jewish Patriarchy, the fact that this Egyptian priestess is actually genealogically Hebrew according to the myth that makes her Dinah's illegitimate daughter[330] (and Joseph's biological niece!) is further evidence of the story's propagandist quality. The message is clearly that the old order consisted of Judaism, and that likewise, a new order would recognize this, cast aside Egyptian traditions, and once again embrace the true religion, that of the Jews.

In his dissertation on *Joseph and Aseneth*, Bohak points out a prophecy from Isaiah that he cannot fully explain, though in my opinion he rightly associates it with the Pseudepigraphal story. "In that day there shall be five cities in Egypt speaking the language of Canaan and swearing allegiance to the Lord of Hosts; one of them shall be called the City of the Sun [Heliopolis]. In that day there shall be an altar to the Lord in the heart of Egypt, and a sacred pillar set up for the Lord upon her frontier."[331]

Bohak proposes that the Jewish followers of Onias interpreted this as the building of Onias' Jewish Temple in Heliopolis. I believe that *The Storie of Asneth*, regardless of whether it can be linked to Onias temple, nicely addresses the prophecy from the perspective of the "pillar" that Isaiah refers to. The Old Testament writers no doubt associated the pillar with the "new creation" they hoped for and the supremacy of the Jewish Patriarchy that I argue is inherent in *The Storie of Asneth.*

Asneth as "Walled Mother City" and Egyptian Temple Theology:

Another aspect of Egyptian theology that cannot be overlooked with respect to the images found in Asneth is that of the "wall," again with the concept of "entering in." I describe wall and garden imagery as consistent with the capacity to sexually reproduce.[332] It is the wall that surrounds the garden, the "sacred place" or "chamber" that is uterine and female in nature. It is this space which is variously protected by her father and the "gatekeepers" and encroached upon in Asneth, by the Angel, the bees and

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[329] Reymond, p. 122, and other discussion on the pillar of the ka, and "planting the perch."
[330] See Ginzberg for one account of this tradition, p. 38.
[331] *Isaiah* 19:18-19.

Joseph, as well as an attempted encroachment by Pharaoh's son.[333] Jan Assmann describes these concepts of "entering" in the context of temple documents and Egyptian theology which I believe are commensurate with the potentially sexual reading of the symbols found in Asneth:

> The texts describe the relationship between the *ba* and the image as "uniting," "fraternizing," and "embracing." Hermann Junker coined the concept of "installation" or "indwelling" (*Einwohnung*), which has since become common in Egyptology. The concept is in fact quite well taken, for it expresses the specifically Egyptian concept of the "local" dimension of divine presence and supplements our all-too-static concepts of "native" or "autochthonous" in reference to performative, eventful nature of this presence. The gods do not "dwell" on earth, which would merely be a condition; rather, they "install" themselves there, and specifically, they "install" themselves in their images; this is an event that occurs regularly and repeatedly, but with the collaboration of humankind, on whom the cult is dependent. Junker coined the concept of "indwelling" in reference to text passages that describe a deity's *ba* as descending from the sky and uniting not only with the cult statue, but also with the representations in the reliefs on the walls ... In texts of Dynasty 18 (ca. 1400 BCE), we read statements such as "May my *ba* alight on my images... in the monuments I have made."[334]

Temple Texts at Dendara similarly state:

> After his *ba* came from the sky to see his monuments,
> his heart united with his cult images.
> . . . . . .
> After his *ba* came to the house of Re,
> it united with his image on the wall.[335]

In the sense that the gods alight upon and "install" themselves in or enter into their images on the walls, it is consistent with descriptions of temple alcoves where statues of the Gods are kept.[336] It is also consistent with the description in *Asneth* of her

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[332] See section this thesis, ch. 2, on "Asneth's Mystical Marriage to God."

[333] In this context, that the pharaoh's son is unsuccessful shows he is not a "true" god, in the sense of aristocratic kingship being of a divine nature. Consider "Asneth as Kingmaker" relative to Jan Assmann's discussion of Isis as Kingmaker.

[334] Assmann, p. 43 and n43, *Urk.* IV, p. 1526 (written as though the text said "on the leaves of the *mnw* trees"). If "images" are variously interpreted in places as "trees" this is also significant to Asneth in the sense that she may be representative of the pole, or trees long associated with women in myth and religion.

[335] Assmann n. 41 and n. 42 respectively, Mariette, *Denderah* [vol. 1 Paris 1870], p. 73 c. and p. 45 c.

[336] See Reymond.

temple home where "in the wallis here Egypt godis sette in sundry wyse."[337] Yet in *Asneth*, before the angel's visit, Asneth rejects these images of the Egyptian gods, throwing them out of the North window of her chamber in repentance, "And alle here godis of goold and silver, sche tok hem in haste, / With alle the idolis of Egipt, at the wyndow out sche caste."[338] Asneth repudiates the Egyptian traditions, yet ironically becomes the living image, wherein the god installs himself. Asneth herself is the monument, the towered, mother "walled" city, passed down through myth.[339] Asneth herself is the "pillar" that the Creator-God, in the form of a falcon, deposited upon the island of creation in anticipation of a union that would bring about a new era of creation.

Asneth as "the city" is a direct allusion to the temple, which in Egyptian tradition was representative of the Cosmos. That the pillars of the "city" are represented in *Asneth* by her handmaids and are described in terms of the stars, cannot be coincidental:[340]

> For seven maidenes, that lowly served here with plesance.
> Thise were here Egipt eveneldis to here daliance
> Fair of face, bright of ble as sterre in the firmament[341]
> . . . . . .
> Asneth saide, "I have seven maidenes on o nyht bore
> With me; as my sisteres I love hem all therfore.[342]
> . . . . . .
> The aungel seide, "almyhti God Lord blesse you alle,
> Be ye to the Cite of Refute seven pileris in assistence,
> And alle dwellynge in that cite schul reste on your prudence."[343]

Jan Assman describes the Egyptian temple, in such a way, that the gate and garden imagery with its fruitfulness in *Asneth* as well as the astrological implications are clearly recognizable:

> Essentially, the floor of these later temples represented the earth,[344] and the ceiling the sky. Columns took the form of plants rising from the earth,

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[337] ll. 76.
[338] ll. 312-313.
[339] For further study look at Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens*.
[340] See Goldzhier, "Wives and Concubines in Mythology" and "Mythic Wives and Concubines," p. 158-161. Specifically he talks about the "Queen of Heaven" being the Moon Goddess, and how she "bears sway" over the stars of the night sky. See also how the worship of the Moon Goddess by the Hebrew women was tolerated in Hebrew Society.
[341] ll. 85-87.
[342] ll. 578-579. Note that Asneth and her sisters, the moon and the stars of the night sky, are described in terms of being born at night.
[343] ll. 582-584.

> the dados of the walls were decorated with marsh plants[345] or with processions of "fecundity figures," personifications of telluric fruitfulness that always face the inner part of the temple, bearing offerings. As the sky, the ceilings were decorated with stars or with astronomical representations. Between the floor and the ceiling, between earth and sky, stretched the decorations on the walls with their endless cult scenes filling this stony cosmos *in effigie* with action and life ... Viewed from the outside, the temple is a highly protected area, an enclave of the sacred in a profane world, a tightly sealed vessel of radiant divine power ... But viewed from within, this vessel of holiness separated from the world is itself the entire world ... The cosmic symbolism of Egyptian temples rests on this antinomy between interior and exterior ... The doors of the shrine are the celestial gates through which the sun god passes in the morning. The remainder of the temple is the world that the sun god floods with light when he appears in the east.[346]

That Joseph "enters in" at the gate or arrives from the east described as the sun in *Asneth* I have mentioned, but this also must be seen in a more specific context to the function of the temple and the interior/exterior quality shown above. It must also be noted that in a more intimate sense, Asneth herself is the living temple, that the God enters. Within her "walls" is "the sacred vessel" which I argue is both garden-like, and womb-like in the context of *Asneth*.[347]

The concepts of the setting up of the temple for the purposes of a "new creation" wherein the Sun God infuses himself has so many implications theologically and historically to the development of Christianity that I cannot even begin to touch on them in this paper. Burchard's observations that the Pseudepigraphal story influenced New Testament practices only barely touches on a much more deep-reaching influence of the poem and the concepts within the poem to Christian theology. Peck states of the medieval poem that "Asneth is amply adorned with Marian imagery."[348] I propose in light of the original date of the story and what I support are its deep roots in Egyptian mythology, that Mary is, conversely, amply adorned with Asnethian imagery. The idea

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[344] Note that in *Asneth,* before her cosmic encounter with the Sun God, she is robed in black and has a face muddied with tears and ash. In the Burchard version it is clear that the floor of her chamber is also all covered in mud from ashes mixed with tears, a clear representation of the floor of the temple as earth.
[345] Marsh plants, or reeds have already been shown to have a special significance to Egyptian theology and the building of a new creation, represented by the temple.
[346] p. 35-36.
[347] See my comments on the vessel, womb-like attributes of Mary and the Miraculous Conception as well as Mechtild and the sacred vessel, section on female saints.
[348] p. 14.

of the god alighting on his image, or monument, or human temple and infusing himself with it so strongly looks like Miraculous Conception, that the tradition of Miraculous Conception of the Holy Spirit through Mary cannot be ignored in this context. Further, Assmann described the goddess Isis as "kingmaker" in her study of Egyptian theology.[349] Aside from the myths of Isis and Osiris, the myth of Isis and her child Horus stand alone as an "entirely independent cycle of myths"[350]:

> As mother of the Horus child, Isis ... is not only the great healing goddess, but also the bestower of legitimate kingship. Her milk not only heals illness, it makes the child a king ... it is said of the prophesied savior-king that he will "come from the sun and be enthroned by the great goddess Isis." ... In Egypt, the legitimate, salvation-bringing king was not the "anointed one," but the "suckled one." Many temple reliefs, particularly from the New Kingdom, represent him in this role, in the arms and at the breast of the mother-goddess Isis.[351]

That Christian iconography of Mary and Jesus duplicates this image of mother and suckling child almost need not be mentioned. While many studies of Mary have been made that compare her to the ancient mother-goddess, the direct parallels that *The Storie of Asneth* offers, by what I propose is Asneth's association to the Egyptian goddess, Isis, cannot escape mention here.

That the story is one of conversion and renewal, all scholars I have read agree. What has been overlooked, is just how ancient a tradition Jewish Hellenistic writers drew from to formulate the story. *The Storie of Asneth* is even more clearly a "conversion" story if one looks at it in the context of proselatization from the perspective of this ancient myth. How better to "convert" Egyptian ideologies to Jewish ones than to present Jewish heroes in the context and typology of Egyptian gods? The Jews clearly wanted Israel to be associated with the "new era of creation," the new order of things, as it were, at a time when Ancient mythologies were being challenged and Egypt was occupied by Rome.[352] It appears that, consistent with Hellenistic ideals that attempted to

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[349] *The Storie of Asneth* curiously mentions in the last line that "Joseph was called in Egipt fadir to the kynge." In the context of the association of Joseph to Osiris, Osiris is the father to the Child King, Horus. If Joseph is the father to the King, Asneth is surely, by association, Mother to the King, and cannot help but be associated with Isis in Hellenistic Egypt.

[350] Assmann, p. 133.

[351] ---p. 134.

[352] See Pierre Grimal, "The Eastern Countries on the Fringe of Hellenism: The Egyptian World in the Age of the Ptolemies and Caesars." In *Hellenism and the Rise of Rome.* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1968).

recognize one supreme God and propagate a patriarchal monotheism,[353] Hellenistic Jews in Egypt used as a mythic source for Yahweh[354] an ancient tradition of an Egyptian Creator-God.

Certainly Asneth's writers would have had to be familiar with ancient traditions preserved on temple walls. In Hellenistic times they would have already been very old stories possibly even then with limited access. Grimal has an interesting explanation of the protectiveness of the Egyptians in Hellenistic times surrounding the mysteries preserved in the "hiding" places of the temples.[355] Considering this, *The Story of Asneth* may have been even more propagandist because it may have attempted to expose those mysteries in the light of Hebrew ascendancy at a time when the mysteries may have been jealously guarded.

Burchard has argued that *Asneth* is important to an understanding of New Testament practices. *Asneth* may be equally important for understanding of Early Egyptian views on the history and function of the ancestral inhabitants of the Egyptian underworld. Particularly concepts of re-creation that seem to recur in Christian theology, may well have originated in Egyptology, and may be best encapsulated in the metaphor of marriage.

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[353] See Grimal, p. 236, on Hellenistic Egypt: "...certain thinkers wanted to combine the various ethnic communities of Egypt into one...Ptolemy Soter, the founder of the dynasty, had conceived a grand plan of uniting his subjects under the religion of a single god." Herotodus as well as Manetho of Sebennytos, a Hellenized member of the priesthood of Heliopolis, aroused interest in Egyptian mythology to foreigners by claiming their gods were the same only with different names.

[354] Grimal on Hellenism p. 239-40, "More perfect still was the synthesis in the acephalous god...This Monstrous, headless figure, endowed with all the power of the man who died a violent death, unites Seth and Osiris under the name of Jao [Jehovah], which is none other than Yahveh who was 'revealed to the prophets of Israel'. According to a magic papyrus, this god appears with two opposite characters. His sweat is the fructifying rain – as is the sweat of Osiris – but he is also eternal fire and thunder, like Seth [like the pillars of fire and cloud Yaweh leads Israel with during the Exodus]. These attempts to express the unity of the power that controlled the world – there is astonishing representation of the acephalous god sitting on the world, which is itself resting on the underworld [underworld of the Soul associated with Osiris] – may seem strange, but they are nonetheless moving indications of a state of mind in the Hellenistic and Roman centuries that our own period may well regard with sympathy, caught up as we also are in the need to make new syntheses." Square brackets mine.

[355] p. 225 and before.

A Brief Discussion of Joseph in Jewish Myth in the Context of *The Storie of Asneth*:

Though Joseph plays a relatively small role in *The Storie of Asneth*, an initial understanding of his relationship to Jewish mythology is integral to an understanding of our story, both typologically and in the context of Spiritual Marriage. Future deeper study into the Jewish myths surrounding this character in extra-Biblical Jewish writings may eventually reveal a more obvious historical context with respect to the Hellenistic readers of the tale.

Most important to our medieval version of the story and the idea of Spiritual Marriage is the sexual virtue of Joseph that is seen in every aspect of the Jewish accounting of Joseph's tradition up to his progeneration of Ephraim and Manasseh and once again afterward. Joseph's virginity alone makes him the only good match for the virgin, Asneth; Burchard notes that they are literary mirror images of one another and also that the story of Joseph in *Genesis* is the only reference to male virgins outside of the New Testament.[356] What I found in one of Ginzberg's accounts of Joseph and Asneth's relationship (as mentioned earlier in this thesis) is specifically important in that it cites a tradition that the progeneration of Ephraim and Manasseh occurs during the seven years of plenty, and that during the seven years of famine, Joseph foregoes sexual relations with Asneth. "Asenath bore him two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, during the seven years of plenty, for in the time of famine Joseph refrained from all indulgence in the pleasures of life."[357]

In at least one account of the ancient relationship between Joseph and Asneth, there is a very explicit tradition of Spiritual Marriage. Joseph and Asneth accomplish "chaste co-habitation in the context of licit marriage" once they have fulfilled their marital obligations to reproduce. Further, the tradition that they become chaste co-habitors at the juncture in the story, that begins the years of famine, coincides with the second repentance of Asneth that I argue falls not coincidentally immediately after her sons are born. Certainly the medieval translator makes the most of this, where I argue he embellishes that Asneth's repentance is most specifically for sexual sin. As previously

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[356] Burchard, "The Importance of Joseph and Aseneth…"

[357] p. 77. Source listed in Ginzberg n190, v.5, p. 345: "Ta'anit 11a. Comp. ER 20, 112 and 25, 120; EZ I, 167, and 15, 198." The abbreviations are for sources in Hebrew.

mentioned, it follows from a symbolic perspective that there would be copulation during times of "plenteous abundance," during fertile times, and a lack of it during unfertile times, times of famine "hunger scars and chere,"[358] particularly for a couple who may have been associated with "the sacred marriage," and fertility rites.

Joseph's brotherly relationship to Asneth can be seen on many different levels, historically and mythically. According to the Biblical account in *Genesis* Joseph, is purchased by Potiphar and resides in his household for several years as a young man. It is the same household where he is accosted by Potiphar's wife and fraudulently accused of sexual misconduct. It is the same household, according to our story, where Asneth is being raised as a priestess. In one account in Jewish myth, she is instrumental in saving his life through prophetic intervention,[359] for there is a history of Asneth's "seeing" abilities as there is Joseph's prophetic ability. This is the same Rabbinic tradition that proposes that Asneth is actually the niece of Joseph through the illegitimate seduction of Dinah, and therefore the adopted daughter of Potiphar. As his young niece, they would have been raised in the patriarchal family as brother and sister had they remained with the family of Israel. Regardless, they are both in Egypt, and one tradition still has them nurtured in the same household together, loosely as brother and sister.

Historically Egyptian kings and queens were brother and sister. In this tradition an understanding of the myth of Isis, Osiris and his brother Set, may be further understood. Isis is Osiris' as well as Set's sister, but is given to Osiris in marriage because he is the inheritor.[360] A parallel of the myth to Joseph and Asneth has already been shown, connecting them as king and queen of Egypt and brother and sister. Whereas mythology and history understood aristocratic relationships of brother and sister to be sexually consummated, a Christian medieval understanding of a sibling relationship would be one of chastity. Joseph's brotherly relationship to Asneth is historically understood as well as literally stated in *The Storie of Asneth* when he calls her "sister" thereby solidifying conceptions of chastity and Spiritual Marriage to the medieval reader.

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[358] l. 718.

[359] Ginzberg, p. 76 and earlier.

[360] In *Asneth*, the prince, Pharaoh's son is the genealogical inheritor, but Joseph is the actual inheritor. This is consistent where in other Old Testament stories the genealogical inheritor is usurped by an inheritor of God's choosing. See, for instance, the story of Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, or even of David, the

Some other points of similarity between the Jewish myth of Joseph and astrological myths of Egypt may be inherent in the concept of the twelve sons of Jacob who make up the tribes of Israel and are apportioned twelve regions of land. Some accounts claim they are represented by the same stars of the night sky from Egyptian mythology.[361] Joseph dreams of his brothers and himself in terms of the sun and moon and stars in *Genesis* in support of this mythology, concurrently with dreams of sheaves of wheat.[362] These dreams are no doubt linked with harvest traditions around the alignment of the heavens. Additional earlier mythology refers to the stars of the night sky traditionally as "herdsmen,"[363] commensurate with the occupation of Jacob's sons. It is also thought in Arab mythology that precedes Jewish mythology that the stars and the night sky are what bring the rain.[364] In Egyptian mythology the Dog Star brings the rainy season and the flooding of the Nile; Ra, the Sun God, must traverse the night sky in a boat.[365] Another element of this astrological tradition has the sun traversing across the sky in the morning as a youth, at noon a man, and just before sunset an old man ready to die.[366] It is possible that the story supports this from a Jewish perspective in the representation of Jacob as the old man ready to die. In the blessing scene, where Asneth visits him and consistent with how Joseph has been described earlier in the poem as the sun, Jacob also is described with "yees schynyng as liht"[367] and "good in sight,"[368] though Jacob is blind in his old age according to the Old Testament account. There may be future support for this if Benjamin can be associated with the sun as "youth." I suspect the story is more deeply rooted in eastern solar traditions than I am able to address, with perhaps each of the Celestial, Joseph and Jacob, or Benjamin, Joseph and Jacob, all representing stages of the sun: at morning, midday and night, and seasonal

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youngest, most vulnerable son of Jesse, who usurps Saul as King of Israel. This is a common theme in the Old Testament.

[361] Goldzhier, p.173.

[362] *Genesis* 37:6-9.

[363] Goldzhier, p. 220.

[364] Ibid. p. 220.

[365] Bartlett, p. 90. See also Reymond.

[366] In both Bartlet p. 90, and Goldzhier. See also Assman, p. 196 where she explains the names of the sun god at these stages, "morning (Khepri), midday (Re), and evening (Atum) sun," and the Egyptian theological aspects of the god at these stages.

[367] l. 735.

[368] l. 732.

changes that were worshiped in the Ancient Near East in accordance with Jewish and pre-Jewish traditions having to do with heavenly life-cycles and fertility celebrations.

I also suspect that the story is linked to "Northern" Jewish traditions that predate the Biblical Canon[369] and that this may offer further explanation for the apparent heroic depiction of Benjamin. It is Benjamin in the story who rescues Asneth against the evil plot of the prince. Joseph is the "Patriarch of the North" whereas the concubines' (slaves') son's, Dan and Gad, who were in alliance with the Prince to kidnap Asneth, would be associated with the South.

> Thus the Northern Hebrews possess national memories connecting them with Joseph-Ephraim. It is therefore quite natural that, as the national difference which parted the Northern from the Southern people became more evident, vivid and acknowledged, the mind of the former was more occupied with the cycle of stories about the person and adventures of Joseph ... the patriarch of the North ... and ... the supremacy of Joseph over Judah ... Joseph is brought forward with satisfaction and pride as the brother whom the aged father treated with the greatest favour and distinction, and whose life alone was able to revive his fainting spirits, while Joseph's mother was the only woman whom the Patriarch really loved, whereas the Southerns were descended partly from the ugly Leah, Judah's mother, who became Jacob's wife only by deceit and craft, and partly from slaves.[370]

Benjamin, of course, as the only other offspring of Jacob's beloved Rachel, shares in the heroism of the Northern tribes of Israel as Joseph's only full brother. Likewise, he shares in the heroism of *The Storie of Asneth.*

Conclusion to Chapter Three:

While information in this chapter is cursory, and some icons in Asneth may have already been noted by scholars in a similar light (for instance: her house and its

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[369] "As the drawing up of the Canon belongs to an age in which the antagonism between North and South had ceased to exist, the literary products of the North which were still preserved from old times obtained a place in it, though always brought into harmony with the all-pervading theocratic character by occasional interpolated modifications of sentiment" (Goldzhier, p. 289, footnote). This accounting of Jewish concerns regarding the primacy of North over South, in connection with the Joseph stories, is similar to the North/South concerns that were early associated with the Myth of Osiris. According to Assman, p. 135, "In the first, however, Osiris is not mentioned, Seth is not a murderer, and Horus is not an avenger. Their conflict has no motive other than the antagonism of the south and the north, of Upper and Lower Egypt, which might have had a historical basis." See also Gideon Bohak, "*Joseph and Aseneth* and the Jewish Temple in Heliopolis," where he claims that North/South rivalries came to the fore in Egypt again in the 1st to 2nd Century BC at the time the story was written. p. 50.

association with the Egyptian temple—Kraemer; her association to the pillar—Bohak; tower—McEwan Humphry; the moon—Burchard), I think too little has been explored previously that connects these observations. When viewed in the context of the sacred marriage, all of these seemingly fragmented pieces of the puzzle of *Asneth*'s typology start to come together in relation to the metaphor of marriage and its theological significance and portrayal particularly in Egyptian mythology and theology of later antiquity. They include, as mentioned, the ancestral field (underworld of the soul), and therefore the bees whose resurrected image seems to be necessary for the consummation of the couple somehow. It includes all the many complicated aspects of the Sun God's role with respect to the woman-like temple, which have only barely been touched on here. It will take, if I am correct, an expert in Egyptology, perhaps, to understand fully some of these images that have survived time.

Implicit in the story is the idea of a "new creation" that embodies progeneration and the theme of fertility (and perhaps also abstinence) that only a mother in consort with a father could accomplish, and which crosses the borders between Egyptian cult, Judaism, and Christianity. The abstinence which may have been accomplished by the couple during the years of famine may have been seen to support, in Medieval Christianity, the social practice of Spiritual Marriage. If this is true, then the marriage metaphor, where it pertains to the fertility of the land, was likely understood to medieval readers, whether or not all of the larger ancient theological and mythological implications of the metaphor were understood. Clearly, new creation has theological significance having to do with usurpation, or ascendency of one way over another and supports the explicit conversion theme in all versions of the story to date.

Most important, perhaps, is the recognition of the potential influence these apparently ancient icons and images had on later theological Christian traditions in a much more extensive way. I believe a more thorough study of Asneth in the context of Egyptology will continue to support the ideas I have preliminarily discussed in this chapter, including the fact that the story may have been, as Burchard suggests, an influence on the development of Christian concepts such as repentance, and the eucharist, and as I propose, the Virgin Mary and Miraculous Conception. This influence is perhaps

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[370] Goldzhier, p. 285-286.

due to the story's specific links to Egyptian myth and supports the growing consensus among theologians that there is a continuum of theological traditions from Egypt that influenced Judaism, and in turn, Christianity. One metaphor that moves across this continuum of religious traditions is marriage.

Thesis Conclusion

In this thesis, I have dealt with *The Story of Asneth* in three capacities. I have addressed it as belonging to a Late Medieval, fifteenth century manuscript. I have attempted a close literary reading of portions of it as a Christian document and religious devotional "read" of the Middle Ages with a connection, perhaps, to the social practice of Spiritual Marriage. And I have attempted to extrapolate some new meaning of it as an Old Testament Pseudepigraphal document from the Hellenistic Near East. While a study began that was born from a literary sense of aspects of this Biblically-based "story," my curiosity helped to affirm that a good story is much more than the sum of its apparent parts, and that close readings, instead of offering explanation, create more questions.

The Storie of Asneth as a Medieval Manuscript inspired an attempt to answer the question of patronage and authorship, especially given the tantalizing prologue and epilogue to the Middle English translation. My theory that Elizabeth Berkeley and John Walton are the patroness and poet of *The Storie of Asneth* potentially offers links for those in the field of Later Medieval Manuscript Studies. It has the possibility of spurring further studies about the cleric and poet, John Walton, with a possible connection of his work to the Alliterative Revival Movement of the fifteenth century. It also offers up a question regarding the political climate or intended audience at the times of the two translations that allowed Walton to identify the patron as female in the prologue to *Asneth*, but not in the prologue to *Boethius*.[371] It may also offer further insight into the connections and motivations of the book owner, John Shirley, as well as those of the Berkeley and Beaucamp households. It may, for instance, offer a connection of John Lydgate's knowledge of *Asneth* to the Beaucamp household and therefore to John Walton, for it seems *Asneth* may have been commissioned by Richard Beaucamp's first wife, Elizabeth Berkeley, and Lydgate was patronized by Richard Beaucamp's second wife, Isabelle Despenser. Walton's conservatism as an Augustinian Canon of Osney, as well as the possible precedence he set in his translation of *Boethius* of what may be called justifications or explanations of the text, may fit the small changes or qualifications I propose occur in the translation of *Asneth* into Middle English.

A study of the small changes the medieval translator made may support the theory that the story was understood from the perspective of marital chastity or Spiritual Marriage in the Middle Ages. If so, it may be relevant to current research in other areas of Medieval Literature, including studies of Spiritual Marriage and attitudes toward sex and marriage in the Middle Ages; studies that may link Spiritual Marriage to the chivalric tradition; studies of women and power in the Middle Ages; and further studies of the story with respect to female saints and mystics.

If I have correctly named the original patroness and owner of the Middle English Verse translation, then it may help to genealogically link manuscripts that were commissioned, owned and read by women, and help to further uncover a literate network of women, specifically in the West Midlands. It may help to link the women involved with the manuscript that holds or once held *Asneth* to the women connected with the famous Findern Manuscript. It may also help to confirm or more closely date Ellesmere 26.A.13.

When I began this study, my curiosity and frustration with respect to the story's iconographic and symbolic meaning drove me, for I felt that without a better understanding of this, a medieval historical reading of the poem could not be as well understood. Studies of *Asneth* as a Jewish Hellenistic document up until now have left a gap that scholars have only cursorily been able to fill. As if covered in a tightly woven dark veil of its own, much of the story has remained a mystery. My brief proposal that Asneth and Joseph may well be, among other things, a Jewish story informed by the myths surrounding Isis and Osiris, will, I hope, generate further curiosity. If seen in the context of the Egyptian Solar Cult and the archetypal "Sacred Marriage" of the Moon Goddess to the Sun God pertaining to Egyptian (and possibly Jewish) fertility rites, the story offers a possible further avenue of study in the area of Old Testament Pseudepigraphal studies. From the perspective of the metaphor of marriage and its theological similarities across time, it may strengthen theories that support a link between the religions of the Ancient Near East and present day Christianity. The story also offers strength to the Jewish writings of the Old Testament that propagate the concept of the ascendancy of a Jewish patriarchal monotheism, in this case, over an Egyptian

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[371] See comments in Wogan-Brown et al.

multitheistic, or perhaps even earlier, more gylanic tradition that may be addressed in the conversion theme.

Both Asneth and Mary seem to be endowed with traits pertaining to the goddess Isis (or at the very least, to an ancient Mother Goddess or Earth Goddess): for the Christian reader, therefore, Asneth appears as a compelling model of Mary, Mother of Jesus. The very vestiges of the idea of Mary's body being the living temple or repository of God which He "enters" may have had its inception in early Egyptian theology and temple sun cult traditions, but was perhaps not dissimilarly understood in the context of Medieval Christian theology.

The concept of Miraculous Conception in mystical marriage, and possibly the social practice of at least a type of Spiritual Marriage, may be offered as models in *Asneth* in the Middle Ages. This is especially poignant if Asneth's association to the fertile earth was understood. The seven years of plenty followed by the seven years of famine must have been seen not just as an aspect of the land, but as a symbol for the sexual habits and fertility of the characters themselves. If Joseph and Asneth are seen as abstaining from a sexual relationship during the seven years of famine, their abstinence solidifies the theory that in some capacity, the story propagated the concept of post-procreative abstinence within a legally binding marriage.

I hope that this thesis offers scholars a few more questions, if not answers, in the process of unraveling some of the mysteries apparent in *The Storie of Asneth* and helps to give it continued life as it survives and is studied in the twenty-first century.

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Degrees Awarded:

B.A. (Honours) English	Canadian Union College	97

Honours and Awards:

N/A

Publications:

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