

JOSEPH AND ASENATH.

BY BERNHARD PICK.

INTRODUCTION.

THE romance of Joseph and Asenath is founded upon the words of Gen. xli. 45: "And he gave him to wife, Asenath, the daughter of Poti-pherah, priest of On." Later Judaism took offence that Joseph should have married a heathen woman, and the assertion was therefore made that Asenath, whom Dinah bore to Shechem, was brought up by the wife of Poti-pherah, prince of Tanes.¹ However this may be, certain it is that this religious romance was once widely known.

A fragment of a *Greek* text of this legend Fabricius published from a *Codex Baroccianus* in his *Codex pseudepigraphus*, Vol. II, 85-102; but the complete text according to four manuscripts was first published by Batiffol, *Studia patristica, études d'ancienne littérature chrétienne*, fasc. 1-2, Paris, 1889-1890, pp. 1-87, and this is the one we follow.

The *Latin* text, which was formerly the main source for the knowledge of the legend, is only an extract. It is printed in Vincentius Belloracensis (13th century), *Speculum historiale*, Vol. 1, lib. II, cap. 118-124, and reprinted in Fabricius, *Codex pseudepigraphus*, I, 774-784. The complete Latin text from which this extract was taken, was discovered by James in two MSS. of English origin (13th-14th century) at Cambridge, and is given in Batiffol's work, fasc. 2, pp. 89-115.² According to Batiffol, the translation, like that of the "Testaments of XII Patriarchs," may have been

¹ So the Targum Jonathan on Gen. xli. 45. In the Bible we read nothing of Dinah's daughter. In the "Testaments of the XII Patriarchs," Joseph (XVIII, 3) speaks to his children of his father-in-law Potipherah, his lord, who gave him his daughter Asenath to wife, and a hundred talents of gold besides.

² A perusal of this text proves that it is not as complete as the Greek.

made by Robert Grosseteste, or may have proceeded from his school (13th century).

A Syriac version was published by Laud, in *Anecdota Syriaca*, III, 1870, pp. 15-46. According to Wright (*Catalogue of Syriac MSS. in the British Museum*, p. 1047) this text (Add. 17202) belongs to the sixth or seventh century. Batiffol is inclined to ascribe it to the middle of the sixth century. If such is the case the Greek original must belong to the fifth century, or perhaps to a still earlier period. From the Syriac translation G. Oppenheim made a Latin version, *Fabula Josephi et Asenethae e libro syriaco latine versa*, Berlin, 1886. The Syriac text is imperfect; the end of section XIII, the whole of XIV and XV and the beginning of section XVI are wanting.

An *Armenian* translation was published by the Mechitharists of Venice in *Revue polyhistore*, Vol. XLIII, 1885, pp. 200-206, XLIV, 1888, pp. 25-34.³ A part of it was rendered into French by A. Carrière, "Une version arménienne de l'histoire d'Asseneth" in *Nouveaux mélanges orientaux publiés par l'école spéciale des langues orientales vivantes*, 1886, pp. 471 ff.

An *Ethiopian* version is mentioned at the end of an Ethiopian MS. belonging to the fifteenth century, as may be seen from A. Dillmann's catalogue of Ethiopian MSS. in the British Museum, Add. 16188, p. 142.

A *Slavic* text was edited by Novakavic, for which see the notice of Kozak in *Jahrbücher für protestantische Theologie*, 1892, pp. 136 f., and Bonwetsch in Harnack's *Geschichte der altchristlichen Litteratur*, I, 915.

Batiffol thinks that a Jewish legend is the basis of our narrative which became "the theme of a Christian development in the same style as that of the post-Constantine hagiographical legends, probably of the fifth century." He also thinks that the author "has left us more than a novel; we are indebted to him for a document of value for the history of ritual theology and of the Christian life" (p. 37).

JOSEPH AND ASENATH.¹

I. In the first year of plenty, in the second month, on the fifth

³ It is also printed in the collection of Old Test. Apocrypha edited by the Mechitharists, Venice, 1896.

¹ The title varies in the different manuscripts. Batiffol adopts the title "The Prayer of Asenath"; the Syriac reads, "The History of the Righteous Joseph and his Wife Asenath." We prefer the more common "Joseph and Asenath."

day of the month, Pharaoh sent Joseph forth to go through the whole land of Egypt. In the fourth month of the first year, on the eighteenth day of the month, Joseph came to the borders of Heliopolis, and he gathered together the corn of that land as the sand of the sea.

There was a man in that city named Pentephres,² a priest of Heliopolis and a satrap of Pharaoh, and a ruler of all satraps and great chiefs of Pharaoh. This man was very rich and exceedingly wise and mild, being also a counselor of Pharaoh, because he was wiser than all the great chiefs of Pharaoh. He had a daughter, a virgin named Asenath, eighteen years of age, tall and handsome and more beautiful than any virgin upon the earth. This Asenath was not like the virgins among the daughters of the Egyptians, but in all respects was like the daughters of the Hebrews, being tall like Sarah, and comely like Rebecca, and beautiful like Rachel. The fame of her beauty spread over all that land and unto the ends of the earth, so that on this account not only the sons of the great chiefs and satraps but also the sons of kings, all the young and mighty men, wished to marry her; and on her account there was much strife among them and they attempted to make war against each other.

The first-born son of Pharaoh also heard of her, and he entreated his father to give her to him for a wife saying: "Give me, O father, Asenath, the daughter of Pentephres, the first man of Heliopolis, for a wife." And his father, Pharaoh, said to him: "Why seekest thou a wife who is inferior to thyself, who art king of this whole land? Behold the daughter of Joachim, King of Moab, is nearer to thee, for she is a queen as well as very beautiful; take her, therefore, for thy wife."

II. Now Asenath was high-minded and proud, despising every man and holding them in contempt, and no man had ever seen her, because her father had built nearby his house a great and very high tower, and at the top of the tower was an upper story having ten rooms. The first room was large and very beautiful and strewn with bright stones; and its walls were covered with flat pieces of costly and variegated stones. The ceiling of that room was of gold, and inside many silver and golden gods of the Egyptians were fastened to the walls. And Asenath worshiped and revered all these, and offered sacrifices to them daily.

The second room contained all the dresses and chests of Asenath. There was much gold and silver in it, and new apparel inter-

² This is the Greek for Potiphar.

woven with gold, and many select gems and precious linen and all her ornaments.

The third room was the treasury of Asenath, containing all the good things of the earth. The other seven rooms were occupied by the seven ministering maidens of Asenath, each one having one room, because they were of the same age and born in the same night with Asenath, and she loved them fondly. They also were very beautiful like the stars of the heavens, and they were acquainted neither with any man nor male child.

The great room of Asenath wherein she passed her maiden days had three windows; one, which was very large, looked into the court towards the east; the second towards the south, and the third toward the street [where the passers-by could be seen].³ A golden bed stood in the room, looking toward the east, and it was covered with purple interwoven with gold, prepared of hyacinth and linen; only Asenath slept in this bed and in it no other person had ever slept. Round about the house was a large court, and around the court a very high wall built of square stones. In the court were four gates overlaid with iron, and a guard of seventeen armed young men watched them. Inside the court near the wall there were trees of great variety and all bearing fruit, their fruit being mellow, for it was the time of the harvest. To the right of the court was a spring of water, and underneath the spring a large basin received the water from that spring, whence it went like a river through the midst of the court and watered all the trees therein.

III. Now in the first of the seven years of plenty, in the fourth month on the eighteenth day of the month, Joseph came into the borders of Heliopolis to gather the corn of that country. And as he came near to Heliopolis, he sent before him twelve men to Pentephres, the priest of that city, saying: "I will lodge with thee to-day, because it is noon and time for dinner, and the heat of the sun is very great, and I will refresh myself under the cover of thy house." When Pentephres heard this, he rejoiced greatly and said, "Blessed be the Lord God of Joseph,⁴ because my lord Joseph has thought me worthy."⁵ And Pentephres called the steward of his house and said to him, "Make haste and prepare my house, and make ready a great meal, for Joseph, the mighty of God, comes to us this day."

When Asenath heard that her father and mother had come

³ So the Syriac.

⁴ One MS. reads: "Israel."

⁵ Some MSS. omit: "because—worthy."

from the field of their inheritance, she rejoiced greatly and said, "I will go and see my father and mother, for they have come from the field of our inheritance,"⁶ because it is the hour of the harvest.⁷ And Asenath ran into her room where her dresses were,⁸ and put on a dress interwoven with gold and girded herself with her golden girdle,⁹ and put bracelets on her arms and golden sandals on her feet; and round about her neck she put a costly ornament and costly gems, having the names of the gods of the Egyptians inscribed on all sides, on the bracelets as well as on the stones;¹⁰ she put also a mitre upon her head, and a diadem she bound tightly¹¹ around her temples, and covered the head with a veil.

IV. And hastening she descended the steps from the upper room and came to her father and mother and kissed them. And Pentephres and his wife rejoiced very much over their daughter Asenath, because they beheld her dressed and adorned like a bride of God; and they took all the good things which they had brought from the field of their inheritance and gave them to their daughter. And Asenath rejoiced over all the good things, over the grapes and pomegranates and dates and over the doves and fruits and figs, because everything was beautiful and good to the taste.¹²

And Pentephres said to Asenath, his daughter, "My child," and she answered: "Here am I, lord." And he said to her: "Sit down between us, and I will speak to thee my message." Having seated herself between her father and mother, Pentephres, her father, took her right hand in his and kissed her, and said, "Most beloved child." She said to him: "Here am I, my lord father." And Pentephres said: "Behold, Joseph the mighty one of God, comes to us to-day. He is the chief of all the land of Egypt, and King Pharaoh has made him the chief of all our land, and he supplies all the land with corn and saves it from the coming famine. Joseph is a God-fearing man, wise and unmarried, as thou art to-day, and a man mighty in wisdom and understanding, and the spirit of God¹³ is upon him,

⁶ The Syriac omits: "she rejoiced—inheritance."

⁷ The Syriac and 2 MSS. omit: "because—harvest."

⁸ The Syriac omits: "into her room—were."

⁹ The Syriac and 1 Greek MS. omit: "and girded—girdle."

¹⁰ The Syriac and two Greek MSS. add after stones: "and the faces of the idols were graven in the stones."

¹¹ Two MSS. and the Syriac omit: "she bound tightly."

¹² One MS. omits: "and good to the taste." The Syriac omits all after "all the good things."

¹³ Syriac: "of the holy God."

and the grace of God is in his heart. Now then, most beloved child,¹⁴ I will give thee to him for a wife, and thou shalt be his bride, and he shall be thy bridegroom forever."

When Asenath heard these words of her father, drops of sweat stood on her face and she was greatly incensed, and looking askance at her father, she said: "Why speakest thou these words, my lord father? Wouldst thou give me to be a slave to a stranger and a fugitive, to a person bought with money? Is he not the shepherd's son from Canaan? Is he not the one who had guilty intercourse with his mistress and whom his master put into the dark prison, and whom Pharaoh took out of the prison when he interpreted his dream, in the same manner as also the old women of the Egyptians interpret?"¹⁵ Nay, but I will become the wife of the king's first-born son, because he will be king of all the land.¹⁶ When Pentephres heard this, he spoke no more of Joseph to Asenath, his daughter, because she had replied boldly and with anger.

V. And lo! a youth of Pentephres's household rushed in and said to him: "Behold, Joseph stands before the gates of our court." And when Asenath heard these words she fled from before her father and mother and went to the upper story to her room, and stood by the large window looking toward the east that she might see Joseph coming into her father's house. And Pentephres and his wife and all their family and household went out to meet Joseph, and when the gates of the court were opened, which looked toward the east, Joseph entered, sitting in the second chariot of Pharaoh. Four horses, white as snow, were harnessed with golden-studded bridles and the whole chariot was made of pure gold. Joseph was dressed in a white and glittering robe, and his stole was purple, made of linen interwoven with gold; a golden wreath was upon his head, and round about the wreath were twelve choice stones, and upon the twelve stones were golden rays, and in his right hand he held the royal rod, surmounted by a divided olive branch with much fruit on it.

After Joseph had entered into the court and its gates were shut, every stranger remained outside of the court, because the gate-keeper closed and locked the gates. Then Pentephres and his wife and all their family, with the exception of their daughter Asenath, came and fell before Joseph to the ground. And Joseph, having descended from his chariot, lifted them up.

¹⁴ Two MSS. and Syriac omit: "most beloved."

¹⁵ Some codices omit: "in the same—interpret."

¹⁶ One MS. and Syriac: "land of Egypt."

VI. And when Asenath saw Joseph she was stung to the heart, her knees became enfeebled, her whole body trembled and she was much afraid and said in her heart: "Woe is me, wretched me! Whither shall I, miserable one, go now, or where shall I hide myself from his face? Or how shall Joseph, the son of God, see me, because I have spoken evil concerning him? Woe is me, unhappy one! whither shall I go and hide myself, because he sees every hidden thing and knows all things, and no hidden thing is forgotten by him on account of the great light that is in him? And now be gracious unto me, O God of Joseph, because I have spoken evil words in ignorance concerning him. What shall I do now? Have I not said that Joseph is the son of the shepherd from the land of Canaan? but now he comes to us in his chariot like the sun from heaven and entered into our house to-day and shines like a light on earth. I was foolish and bold, because I mocked at him and spoke evil things about him, and knew not that Joseph is the son of God. Who among men upon earth has ever begotten such a beauty, or what woman has brought forth such a light? I am wretched and foolish, because I spoke such evil words to my father.¹⁷ Now, my father, give me to Joseph to be his handmaiden and slave, and I will serve him for ever."

VII. And Joseph came into the house of Pentephres and sat upon the throne, and they washed his feet and set before him a separate table, for Joseph ate not with the Egyptians because this was an abomination to him. And looking up, Joseph saw Asenath, and he said to Pentephres: "Who is that woman who stands in the upper story by the window? Let her go away from this house." For Joseph was afraid, saying, "lest she also may trouble me." For all the women and daughters of the chiefs and satraps of all the land of Egypt were anxious to be with him. But also as many of the wives and daughters of the Egyptians as saw Joseph were affected by his beauty; and the chiefs whom the women sent to him with silver and gold and precious gifts Joseph dismissed with threats and in pride saying: "I will not sin before the Lord God and before my father Israel." For Joseph had God always before his eyes and he always remembered the commandment of his father, Jacob, who often spoke and admonished his son, Joseph, and all his sons: "Keep away, my children, from a strange woman and have

¹⁷ The Syriac reads besides: "And now whither shall I go and hide myself from before his face, that Joseph, the son of God, see me not? Whither shall I flee, since every place is open and covered with light before him, since the light which is in him illumines everything. But now, have mercy upon me, O Lord God of Joseph, because I have spoken foolishly."

no intercourse with her, for intercourse with her is utter destruction and corruption." On this account Joseph said: "Let that woman go away from this house."

And Pentephres said unto him: "My lord, she whom thou seest standing in the upper story is not a stranger, but is our daughter, who despises every man, and no other man has ever seen her excepting thyself to-day. And if thou wilt, O Lord, she shall come and salute thee,¹⁸ for our daughter is as thy sister." And Joseph was very glad because Pentephres told him that she was a virgin hating every man,¹⁹ and Joseph said to Pentephres and to his wife:²⁰ "If she is your daughter and a virgin,²¹ let her come, for she is my sister,²² and I will love her as my sister from this day on."

VIII. Then her mother went upstairs and brought Asenath to Joseph, and Pentephres said to her: "Welcome thy brother, for he is also a virgin like thyself to-day, and he hates every strange woman as thou also hatest every strange man." And Asenath said unto Joseph: "Hail, O Lord, blessed of the most high God!" And Joseph said to her: "May the God who gives life to all, bless thee, O maiden." And Pentephres said to his daughter Asenath: "Go and kiss thy brother." As Asenath was approaching to kiss Joseph, Joseph extended his right hand and put it upon her chest between her two breasts (for her breasts stood out like beautiful apples) and Joseph said: "It is not proper for a God-fearing man who blesses with his mouth the living God, and eats the blessed bread of life, and drinks the blessed cup of immortality, and is anointed with the blessed ointment of incorruption, to kiss a strange woman who blesses with her mouth dead and dumb idols, and eats from their table the bread of strangling, and drinks from their libation the cup of treachery, and is anointed with the ointment of destruction. But the man who fears God kisses his mother and his own sister, and the sister of his tribe, and his wife—all such as bless with their mouths the living God. In like manner, it becomes not a God-fearing woman to kiss a strange man, for this is an abomination before the Lord God."

And when Asenath heard these words of Joseph she became very sad and groaned aloud, and as she was gazing at Joseph, her eyes being open were filled with tears. And when Joseph saw her

¹⁸ Syriac: "salute thy nobility."

¹⁹ Syriac omits: "hating every man."

²⁰ Syriac omits: "to Pentephres and his wife."

²¹ Syriac: "virgin, and despises every strange person, she will not vex me."

²² Syriac: "relative."

weeping he pitied her very much, for he was meek and merciful and feared the Lord. He then laid his right hand on her head and said: "O Lord God of my father Israel, thou most high and powerful God, who givest life to all things and callest from darkness to light and from error to truth²³ and from death to life, bless thou also this maid, and quicken and renew her with thy Holy Spirit,²⁴ that she may eat the bread of life²⁵ and drink the cup of thy blessing; and number thou her with thy people whom thou hast chosen before the world was, that she may enter into the rest which thou has prepared for thine elect and live in thine everlasting life unto eternity."²⁶

IX. And Asenath was very glad for the blessing of Joseph. She then hastened and went to her upper room, and fell upon her bed, being weak²⁷ because she had joy and sorrow and sadness. And she did sweat as she heard these words of Joseph and how he spoke to her in the name of the most high God. She then cried bitterly, and withdrew from her gods which she had worshiped and the idols which she renounced,²⁸ and she waited till evening.

And Joseph ate and drank, and told his servants to yoke their horses to their chariots and to go round all the country. And Pentephres said to Joseph: "Let my Lord remain here to-day, and go on thy way to-morrow." But Joseph said: "Nay: I will go to-day, for this is the day on which God began to create all his creatures, and on the eighth day I will return to you and stay here."

X. When Joseph had gone away, Pentephres and all his family went about their business and Asenath was left alone with her six maidens,²⁹ sad and weeping, till the sun went down. She neither ate bread nor drank any water, and while all were asleep she alone was awake and wept and beat her breast vigorously with her hand. After this Asenath arose from her bed and crept silently down the steps from the upper story, and went to the gate where she found the gate-keeper sleeping with her children. She hastily took down from the door the covering of the doorway, filled it with ashes and carried it to the upper story placing it upon the pavement. She then locked the door firmly and threw the bolt from the side,³⁰ sighing and weeping heavily.

²³ Some MSS, omit: "and from error to truth."

²⁴ Syriac and one MS. omit: "Holy."

²⁵ Some codices omit: "That she may eat the bread of thy life."

²⁶ One codex omits: "and live—eternity."

²⁷ Syriac omits: "being weak."

²⁸ Syriac and one codex omit: "and the idols—renounced."

²⁹ Some codices omit: "six."

³⁰ Syriac omits: "she then—side."

When the maiden whom Asenath loved more than the others, heard her sighing, she hastened to the door, awaking the other maidens also from their sleep, and she found it locked. And as she heard the sighing and weeping of Asenath, she said to her, standing outside: "What aileth thee, my mistress? What maketh thee so sad, and what giveth thee such trouble? Open unto us and let us see thee." And Asenath answered from within without opening: "My head suffers a great and heavy pain, and I am resting on my bed and am unable to get up and open to you, for I am ill in all my limbs. Go, therefore, each one of you to her own room and rest, and leave me alone."

And when each maiden had gone to her own room³¹ Asenath arose, and opening the door of her bedchamber³² silently went to her second room where her garments were. She opened her coffer and took out a dark tunic which she had worn when her brother, the first-born, had died. Taking this tunic³³ to her room, she carefully locked the door again and threw the bolt from the side. Asenath then took off her royal robe and put on the dress of mourning. She loosened her golden girdle, girding herself with a rope, and cast aside her head-dress and the diadem, and the bracelets from her hands and feet, throwing everything to the ground. She then took her choicest dress and the golden girdle and the head-dress and diadem, and flung them out of the north window to the needy.³⁴ She also took all her gods which were in the room, gods both of silver and gold of which she had a number, and broke them into pieces and flung them out of the window to the beggars and the needy.³⁵ She also took the royal meal, the fatlings as well as the fishes and the meats of the heifer and all the offerings to her gods, and the vessels of sacrificial wine, and flung them out of the window on the north to the dogs³⁶ for food. Then she took the curtain with the ashes and spread it on the ground; she took a sack and girded her loins; she loosened the plaits of her hair and besprinkled her head with ashes, and with her hands she smote her breast and cried the whole night bitterly till morning. And when Asenath arose in the morning she looked, and behold the ashes on her head were like

³¹ Two MSS. and Syriac omit: "And rest, and—room."

³² Two MSS. and Syriac omit: "of her bedchamber."

³³ Syriac: "this mourning tunic."

³⁴ Syriac omits: "to the needy."

³⁵ Syriac omits: "to the beggars and the needy."

³⁶ Syriac: "to the strange dogs, saying: it is not becoming to give this impure and fetid meal to the domestic dogs but to strange ones."

clay because of her tears; and she fell again on her face upon the ashes, till the sun went down. This she did for seven days, without tasting food.

XI. And on the eighth day as the morning dawned and the birds were singing and the dogs were barking at the passers-by, Asenath rose a little from the floor and ashes on which she was lying, because she was very weak and exhausted from much humiliation; for Asenath was distressed and fainthearted, and her strength failed, and she leaned against the wall sitting down below the window looking towards the east; she threw her head into her lap, twisting the fingers of her hand over her right knee; and her mouth was closed, and she had not opened it during the seven days and seven nights of her humiliation. In her heart she thought without opening her mouth: "What shall I do, the lowly one, or whither shall I go? to what place shall I flee, or to whom shall I speak, a maiden orphaned and lonely, forsaken by all and hated? For all will hate me and with them even my father and my mother, because I have renounced their gods and destroyed them to the needy to be destroyed by men. For my father and my mother will say: 'Asenath is not our daughter'; and all my family will also hate me, and all men, because I have given their gods to destruction. And I, too, have hated every man and all that sought me in marriage, and now in this my humiliation I am hated by all and they rejoice in my affliction. The Lord God of the mighty Joseph hates all who worship idols, because he is a jealous God, and, as I have heard, fearful to all who worship strange gods.³⁷ And he hates me also, because I have worshiped dead and mute idols, and blessed them.³⁸ But now I have fled from their offering and my mouth is estranged from their table, and I have not the courage to call upon the Lord God of heaven, the Most High and powerful God of the mighty Joseph,³⁹ because my mouth is stained with the sacrifices of idols. But I have heard many say that the God of the Hebrews is a truthful God, and a living God, and a gracious God and long suffering, and very merciful and good, who considers not the sins of the humble and especially of one sinning in ignorance, and puts not to shame the lawless conduct in the time of the affliction of the distressed; therefore, I, too, the humble,⁴⁰ will turn and flee to him and confess to him all my sins and pour out my petition before him,

³⁷ Syriac: "worship the works of the hand of men."

³⁸ Syriac omits the whole sentence.

³⁹ Syriac omits: "and powerful—Joseph."

⁴⁰ Syriac omits: "the humble."

and he will have compassion on my suffering. For who knows that when he sees this my humiliation and this desolation of my soul, he will have pity upon me? He will also see the orphanhood of my distress and virginity, and protect me, since, as I hear,⁴¹ he is the father of orphans, the comfort of the distressed and the help of the persecuted. Therefore I, the humble,⁴² will also undertake to cry to him." Then Asenath stood up from the wall where she sat, and knelt towards the east, and lifting up her eyes toward heaven she opened⁴³ her mouth and spoke to God.

XII. *Prayer and Confession of Asenath.*⁴⁴ "O Lord, God of the righteous,⁴⁵ who hast created the eons and preserved all living things,⁴⁶ giving the breath of life to all thy creatures;⁴⁷ who hast brought the hidden to light and hast made all things and madest visible the invisible; who hast made high the heaven and founded the earth upon the waters; who madest fast the great stones upon the abyss of the water which shall not sink but are forever doing thy will, since thou, O Lord, spokest and all became, and thy word, O Lord, is life to all thy creatures; to thee, O Lord my God, I now flee; from now will I cry unto thee, O Lord, and to thee will I confess my sins; to thee I direct my prayer, O Lord, and to thee will I reveal my transgressions. Spare me, O Lord, spare me, because against thee I have sinned much. I acted lawlessly, I acted wickedly, I spoke unutterable and wicked things before thee; my mouth, O Lord, is defiled from the offerings of Egyptian idols, and from the table of their gods. I sinned, O Lord; before thee I sinned, knowingly and unknowingly. I acted wickedly in adoring the dead and

⁴¹ Syriac omits: "he will—hear."

⁴² Syriac omits: "the humble."

⁴³ The Syriac: "And Asenath rose towards the eastern window and lifted her hands to heaven, being afraid to speak to the Most High God with an open mouth and to mention aloud the holy name. And turning again to the wall of the eastern window she sat down; and she smote her face and beat upon her breast with her hands and said in her heart without opening her mouth: 'I am weak and orphaned and solitary, whose mouth has been defiled through the sacrifice and vanity of the gods of the Egyptians, my people. Now, however, by these tears and ashes and dust in the humility of my soul, I do confess my sins, and I undertake to open my mouth and to implore the holy name of the God of compassion. And if the Lord is angry at me, he will chastise me, he will possess me, and if he should smite me again, he will heal me. And looking up towards heaven, she then first opened her mouth and said':

⁴⁴ This clause is omitted in two MSS. and in the Syriac.

⁴⁵ Two MSS. and Syriac read: "eons."

⁴⁶ Two MSS. omit: "who hast—alive."

⁴⁷ Two MSS. omit: To all—creatures.

mute⁴⁸ idols, and I am not worthy to open my mouth before thee, O Lord, I, the wretched Asenath,⁴⁹ daughter of Pentephres, the priest, a virgin and a princess, once pompous and proud and prospering in my ancestral riches above all men, now orphaned and solitary and deserted of all. To thee I flee, O Lord: to thee I bring my petition, and to thee I cry. Deliver me, O Lord, from my persecutors before I am left by them; for as a helpless child, which fears some one, flees to his father [and mother], and the father stretching out his hands presses it to his breast, thus do thou also, my Lord, stretch out to me thy pure and fearful hands like a father who loves his offspring, and snatch me away from the hand of the enemy. For, behold, the old and fierce and wild lion persecutes me, because he is the father [of the gods]¹ of the Egyptians, and his children are the gods of those who are worshipers of idols, and I hated them and destroyed them because they are children of the lion, and have thrown away from me all the gods of the Egyptians and destroyed them. And the lion, that is to say the devil their father, provoked to anger by me, seeks to destroy me. But do thou, O Lord, deliver me from his hands and rescue me from his mouth, lest he rend me in pieces and cast me into the flame of fire, and the fire cast me out into a hurricane, and the hurricane conquer me in the darkness and cast me into the deep of the sea, and the big sea-monster, which is from eternity, swallow me up and I perish forever. Save me, O Lord, before all this come upon me; deliver me, orphaned and defenseless, O Lord, because my father and my mother have utterly denied me and have said, 'She is not our daughter Asenath,' because I overturned and destroyed their gods, hating them so completely. And now I am orphaned and desolate, and there is no other hope for me save thee, O Lord, nor have I any other refuge besides thy mercy, O benevolent One, for thou alone art the father of orphans and the protector of the persecuted and the help of the distressed. Have mercy O Lord, and keep me [holy and chaste] who am forsaken and orphaned, because thou alone, O Lord, art a sweet and good and gentle father. Who else is such a sweet and good father like thee, O Lord? For behold, all the gifts of my father Pentephres, which he gave me as an inheritance are transitory and uncertain, but the gifts of thine inheritance, O Lord, are incorruptible and eternal.

XIII. "Behold, O Lord, my humiliation, and have mercy upon me, an orphan, and pity my distress. For behold, O Lord, I fled

⁴⁸ Syriac omits: "dead and mute."

⁴⁹ Syriac and two MSS. omit: "the wretched Aenath."

from all and fled to thee, the only benevolent one. Behold, all the good things of the earth I left behind and fled unto thee in sackcloth and ashes, naked and abandoned. Behold now I cast off my royal garment made of byssos and purple interwoven with gold, and put on a black mourning garment. Behold I have loosened my golden girdle and cast it from me and have girded myself with a rope and sackcloth. Behold I have taken from my head the diadem and head-dress and have sprinkled ashes upon it. Behold, the pavement of my room inlaid with vari-colored and purple stones, and once sprayed with perfume and cleansed with brilliant linen cloths, is now besprinkled with my tears and trodden down in dishonor. Behold, O Lord, the ashes mingled with my tears have formed clay in my chamber as on the highway. Behold, O Lord, the royal meat and other eatables I have given to the dogs. Behold also that I have fasted seven days and seven nights, and have neither eaten bread nor drunk water, and my mouth is parched like a drum, and my tongue like a horn, and my lips like a potsherd; my face is sunken and mine eyes have ceased to shed tears. But thou, O Lord, my God, deliver me from my many errors and grant my petition, for I am a maiden and have unwittingly wandered astray. Behold also, all the gods which I formerly worshiped ignorantly, not knowing that they were but mute and dead idols, I have broken in pieces and have given them to be trampled under foot by all men, and thieves have plundered those which were of gold and silver. And to thee, O Lord God, I flee, thou only merciful and benevolent One. Pardon me, O Lord, for I have sinned much against thee in ignorance and have spoken blasphemous words against my lord Joseph. And I, wretched one, knew not that he is thy son, O Lord, since wicked men filled with envy said to me that Joseph is a shepherd's son from the land of Canaan, which I wretched one, also believed and went astray, despising him and speaking evil concerning him, not knowing that he is thy son. For who among men has ever begotten or shall beget such beauty, or what other is so wise and mighty as this most beautiful Joseph? But beside thee, my Lord, I place him, for I love him more than my life. Keep him continually in the wisdom of thy grace, and make me his handmaiden and slave, that I may wash his feet and prepare his bed and administer to him and serve him, and I will be a slave to him all the time of my life."

XIV. And when Asenath ceased making her confession to the Lord, behold the morning star of heaven arose in the east. And when Asenath saw it, she rejoiced and said: "Has not the Lord

God heard my prayer, because this star is the messenger and herald of the light of the great day?" And behold, near the morning star the heaven was parted asunder and a great and immense light appeared. And when Asenath saw it she fell on her face in the ashes, and straightway a man from heaven came to her, sending forth rays of light, and stood above her head. And to her as she lay on her face the divine messenger said, "Asenath, arise." And she said: "Who calls me, since the door of my room is locked, and the tower is high, and how came any one into my room?" And he called her again a second time, saying: "Asenath! Asenath!" And she said: "Here I am, Lord, tell me who thou art." And he said: "I am the chief commander of the Lord God, and the general of the whole army of the Most High. Arise, stand on thy feet, that I may speak to thee my message." And lifting up her face she looked and behold, a man in everything like Joseph as to the robe and wreath and royal rod, except that his face was like lightning and his eyes like the light of the sun, and the hair of his head was like the flame of a burning glittering torch, and his hands and feet like iron shining out from the fire, for like sparks poured they from his hands and feet. When Asenath saw this she was afraid and fell upon her face, not being able yet to stand on her feet, for she was altogether afraid and all her limbs trembled. And the man said to her: "Take courage, Asenath, and be not afraid, but arise and stand on thy feet, that I may speak to thee my message."

Asenath then arose and stood on her feet and the angel said to her: "Go now without hindrance into the second room, and take off the black dress which thou hast on; throw the sackcloth from thy loins, shake off the ashes from thy head and bathe thy face and hands in clean water, and put on a new white dress and gird thy loins with thy shining girdle of virginity, the double one, and come again, and I will tell thee the word sent to thee by the Lord."

And Asenath hastened and went to her second room where the chests of her adornment were, and opened her little coffer and took out a beautiful white dress that had not been touched, and put it on, first taking off the black dress. She unloosened the cord and sackcloth from her loins and girded herself with the shining double girdle of her virginity, one round her loins and the other girdle upon her breast. She also shook off the ashes from her head, and washed her hands and face in clean water. She also took a most beautiful and glittering veil and covered her head.

XV. And after this she went to the divine arch-commander and stood before him, and the angel of the Lord said to her: "Take

off the veil from thy head, for thou art to-day a holy virgin, and thy head is like that of a young man." And she took it away from her head and again the divine angel said to her: "Take courage, Asenath, thou holy virgin, for the Lord God has heard all the words of thy confession and prayer; he has also seen thy humiliation and distress during the seven days of thy fasting, because from thy tears upon these ashes much clay originated before thy face; for the rest, take courage, Asenath, thou holy virgin, for behold thy name is written in the book of life, and shall not be blotted out forever. From this day thou art renewed and quickened, and thou shalt eat the blessed bread, and drink the cup filled with immortality, and be anointed with the blessed ointment of incorruption. Take courage, Asenath, thou holy virgin; behold, the Lord God has given thee to-day as a spouse to Joseph, and he shall be thy bridegroom forever. And thy name shall no more be called Asenath, but thy name shall be City of Refuge, for unto thee shall many nations flee, and upon thy walls shall be carefully guarded those who are devoted to the Most High God in repentance. For repentance is the daughter of the Most High and it moves the Most High God for all who are repenting, since he is the father of repentance. It is the crown and guardian of all virgins; loving you much, on account of you it entreats the Most High every hour, and offers [to all penitents] a resting place in the heavens; and it renews every penitent. And repentance is very beautiful, a virgin, pure and sweet and meek. And on this account the Most High God loves it, and all angels reverence it, and also love it much because it is also my sister and as it loves you who are virgins, so I also love you. And now I shall go to Joseph and shall tell him all these words concerning thee, and he shall come to thee this day, and will see thee and shall rejoice over thee and love thee, and he will by thy bridegroom, and thou shalt be his beloved bride forever. Moreover listen to me, Asenath, and put on the wedding-dress, thy former and original one, reserved in thy room from the beginning; put on also all thy select ornaments, and adorn thyself like a good bride and be ready to meet him. For behold he comes to thee to-day, and he shall see thee and rejoice."

And when the angel in human form had ceased speaking these words to Asenath, she rejoiced greatly over all that he had said, and falling to the ground on her face she knelt at his feet and said to him: "Blessed be the Lord thy God, who hath sent thee to deliver me from darkness and to lead me from the bottom of the abyss to the light, and blessed be thy name forever. If I have found

grace in thy sight, my lord—and I know that thou wilt bring about all the words thou hast spoken to me—let thy handmaiden speak to thee.” And the angel said to her, “Speak on.” And she said: “I pray thee, lord, sit down a little on this couch, for this couch is pure and undefiled, because neither any man nor any woman has ever sat on it before, and I will prepare for thee a table and bread and thou shalt eat. I will also bring the old and beautiful wine whose smell goes up to heaven, and do thou drink of it and after that thou mayest go on thy way.” He said unto her: “Make haste and bring it quickly.”

XVI. And Asenath hastened and set before him an empty table.⁵⁰ And as she went to provide the bread, the divine angel said to her: “Bring me also a honeycomb.” And she stood in perplexity and was sad, because she had no honeycomb in her storehouse. And the divine angel said to her: “Wherefore standest thou still?” and she said, “My lord, I will send a boy to the neighborhood, for near by is the field of mine inheritance, and he will quickly bring it from thence and I will put it before thee.” Then spake the divine angel to her: “Go into thy storehouse and thou shalt find there a honeycomb on the table; take it and bring it hither.” And she said: “Lord, there is no honeycomb in my room.” And he said: “Go and thou shalt find.” And Asenath went to the storehouse and found there a honeycomb on the table. And the comb was big and bright like snow and full of honey; and that honey was like the dew of heaven, and its odor like the odor of life. And Asenath, wondering, said within herself: “Is not this comb from the mouth of this man?” And Asenath took that comb, and brought it and put it on the table, and the angel said to her: “Why saidst thou that there is no honeycomb in thine house, and behold thou dost bring it to me?” And she said: “Lord, I never put any honeycomb in my house, but as thou didst say, so it came to pass. Did it not come from thy mouth, because its odor is like the odor of an ointment?” And the man smiled at the understanding of the woman. He then called her to him, and as she went he stretched forth his right hand and took her head, shaking it with his right hand, and Asenath was exceedingly afraid of the hands of the angel, because sparks poured from them after the manner of a smelting iron. She gazed throughout with much fear and trembling upon the angel’s hand, and smilingly he said: “Blessed art thou, Asenath, that the secret mysteries of God are revealed unto thee, and blessed are all who devote themselves to the Lord God in repentance, because they shall eat from

⁵⁰ The Latin reads: “a new table.”

this comb; for this comb is the breath of life. The bees of paradise have made it from the dew of the roses of life which are in God's paradise, and from every flower, and from it the angels eat and all the chosen ones of God, and all the sons of the Most High, and whoever eats thereof shall never die."

And the angel then stretched forth his right hand, and took a small piece of the comb and ate it. The rest he put with his own hand into the mouth of Asenath and said to her, "Eat,"⁵¹ and she ate. And the angel said to her: "Behold, thou hast eaten of the bread of life, and hast drunk of the cup of immortality and hast anointed thyself with the ointment of incorruption. Behold, now to-day⁵² thy flesh shall send forth flowers of Life from the fountain of the Most High, and thy bones shall wax fat like the cedars of the paradise of God, and inexhaustible powers shall keep thee secure. Moreover thy youth shall see no old age, nor shall thy beauty ever vanish, but thou shalt be for all⁵³ like a walled metropolis.⁵⁴ And the angel struck the comb and many bees rose up from the cells of that comb, and the bee-hives were numberless, thousands of thousands, and ten thousands of ten thousands. And the bees were also bright as snow; their wings like purple and hyacinth and like the scarlet oak. They also had sharp stings, and harmed no one. Then all these bees surrounded Asenath from the feet to the head, and other large bees, as it were their queens, came out from the combs and surrounded her face and lips and made a comb on her mouth and lips like the comb which was laid before the angel. And all these bees ate from the comb which was on the mouth of Asenath. And the angel said to the bees: "Begone to your place." Then all the bees arose and fled away to heaven. As many as meant to harm Asenath fell to the ground and died.

⁵¹ The Syriac: "eat the bread of life, and drink the cup of life, and anoint thyself with the oil of incorruption."

⁵² Syriac: "from this day on."

⁵³ Syriac: "for all who take refuge in the name of the King, Lord, God of the worlds"; so also the Latin.

⁵⁴ Here the Syriac adds: "And the man extended his right hand, and the piece which he broke off from the comb was restored and it became as before he had touched it. He again stretched forth his right hand toward the comb and with his finger he touched it distinctly from the eastern side and drew a part of it to him. And again he touched with the finger of his extended right hand the western side of the comb, and while moving it toward him, there came blood in place of honey. Again with his hand extended he touched the northern part of the comb and blood came forth again in place of honey when he moved it toward himself. And again did he stretch forth his hand and touch with his finger the southern part of the comb and when he moved it toward himself there was blood in place of honey. And Asenath, who stood at his left saw everything that the man did." So also in the Latin.

And in like manner the angel stretched out his rod over the dead bees and said to them: "Arise, and go ye to your place." Then all the dead bees arose, and went into the court which was near the house of Asenath and took up their abode on the fruit-bearing trees.

XVII. And the angel said to Asenath: "Hast thou seen this thing?" And she said: "Yea, my lord, I saw everything." Then said the divine angel to her: "Thus shall it be with all my words which I have spoken to thee this day." And the angel of the Lord stretched forth his right hand a third time and touched the break in the comb, and straightway fire came out from the table and devoured the comb, but harmed not the table. When from the burning of the comb a very sweet smell came forth and filled the room, Asenath said to the divine messenger: "Lord, I have seven maidens which were brought up with me from my childhood and were born in the same night with me; they attend on me, and I love them all as my sisters. I will call them and do thou bless them as thou didst bless me." And the messenger said to her: "Call them." And Asenath called the seven maidens and placed them before the angel, and the angel said to them: "The Lord, the Most High God will bless you, and you shall be . . . of seven cities.⁵⁵ And all joint inhabitants of the chosen ones of that city shall . . . forever."⁵⁶

Then the divine messenger said to Asenath: "Take away this table." And as Asenath turned around to move the table, he straightway went away from her eyes and she saw how a chariot drawn by four horses went towards the east to heaven. And the chariot was like a flame of fire, and the horses like lightning, and the angel stood above the chariot. Then said Asenath: "I, the lowly, am foolish and without understanding, because I spoke thus when the man came into my room from heaven and I know not that God came in; and now he goes again to heaven to his place." And she spoke within herself: "Be merciful, O Lord, to thy servant, and spare thine handmaid, because in ignorance I spoke boldly before thee."

XVIII. And while Asenath was yet speaking to herself, behold a young man of the household of Joseph came saying that "Joseph, the mighty of God, is coming to you this day." And straightway Asenath called the steward of her house, and said to him: "Make

⁵⁵ There is a small gap here in the text. The Syriac translates: "and you may be seven pillars in the city of refuge." This seems also to have been the reading of the Latin.

⁵⁶ Here too the text is deficient. The Syriac: "and rest with you and through you forever."

haste and prepare my house, and get ready a nice meal, for Joseph, the mighty of God, comes to us this day."

When the steward of the house saw her (her face having fallen away because of her distress and weeping and seven days' fasting) he cried sorrowfully, and taking her right hand he kissed it and said: "What aileth thee, my mistress, that thy face has so fallen away?" And she said: I had great pain in my head and sleep left mine eyes." The steward then went away and prepared the house and the meal, but Asenath remembered the words of the angel and his injunctions, and hastened to her second room where the coffers of her adornment were, and opening her big chest, she took out her best dress, all glittering like lightning, and put it on; she also put on her royal girdle of gold and precious stones, and on her hands she put golden bracelets, and on her feet golden sandals, and a precious ornament around her neck, and a golden crown she put upon her head. In the crown above her forehead was a large precious stone, and round the large stone six very costly stones, and her head she covered with a very beautiful veil. As Asenath remembered the words of her house-steward, for he had told her that her face had fallen away, she sighed very sorrowfully and said: "Woe is me, miserable one, because my face has fallen away: Joseph will see me, and I shall be despised by him."

And to her maiden she said: "Fetch me water from the pure spring." When it was brought, she poured it into a dish, and stooping down to wash her face, she saw her own face bright as the sun, and her eyes like a rising morning-star, and her cheeks like a constellation of the heaven; her lips were like red roses, the hair of her head like the vine in the paradise of God abounding in its fruits, her neck like a richly-hued cypress.⁵⁷ When Asenath saw this change in herself she was astonished at the sight and greatly rejoiced and washed not her face for she said, "lest haply I wash off this great and blooming beauty." Again her steward came to tell her that everything was done according to her behest. And when he looked at her he was greatly afraid and was trembling for a long time, and falling at her feet, he said: "What is this, my mistress? What is this beauty which is laid on thee, that is so great and wonderful? Has the Lord God of heaven chosen thee as bride for his son [Joseph]?"

XIX. And while they were yet speaking a lad came to Asenath saying: "Behold, Joseph stands before the gates of our court." At

⁵⁷ The Syriac translates: "a neck like the isles of rest of the angels in heaven and her breasts like the exalted mountains of love."

this Asenath hastened and went with her seven maidens down the steps from her upper room to meet Joseph, and stood before her house. When Joseph had entered the court the gates were closed and all strangers were left outside.

And when Asenath came forward to meet Joseph, he was astonished at her beauty when he saw her, and said to her: "Who art thou, maiden? Tell me quickly!" She said to him: "I am Asenath, thy handmaiden, lord. All idols I have cast away from me, and they are destroyed. A man came to me this day from heaven and gave to me bread of life and I did eat, and I drank the blessed cup, and he said to me, 'I have given thee for a bride to Joseph, and he shall be thy bridegroom forever, and thy name shall not be called Asenath, but it shall be called a City of Refuge, and the Lord God shall rule over many nations, and through thee shall they flee to the Most High God.' The man also said: 'I will also go to Joseph that I may speak into his ears my words concerning thee'; and now thou knowest, my lord, whether that man has come to thee and whether he spoke concerning me." Then said Joseph to Asenath: "Blessed art thou, O woman, by the Most High God, and blessed be thy name forever, because the Lord God has founded thy walls, and the children of the living God shall dwell in the city of thy refuge, and the Lord God shall rule them forever. For that man came to me this day from heaven, and spoke to me these words concerning thee, and now come hither to me, thou virgin and holy, and why standest thou afar from me?" Joseph then stretched forth his hands, and embraced Asenath, and Asenath embraced Joseph, and they kissed each other for a long time, and both revived in their spirits. And when Joseph kissed Asenath he gave her the spirit of life; the next time he gave her the spirit of wisdom, and when he kissed her the third time he gave her the spirit of truth.

XX. And after they had embraced each other repeatedly, and clasped hands, Asenath said to Joseph: "Come hither my lord, and go into our house, because I have prepared our house and a great meal." She took hold of his right hand and led him into her house, and placed him on the throne of her father, Pentephres, and brought water to wash his feet. And Joseph said: "Let one of the maidens come and wash my feet." And Asenath said to him: "Nay, lord, for from now on thou art my lord, and I thy servant, and why dost thou ask thus that another servant should wash thy feet? for thy feet are my feet, and thy hands are my hands, and thy soul is my soul, and no other will wash thy feet." And having constrained him, she washed his feet. And Joseph took her by the

right hand and kissed her, and Asenath kissed his head, and he then seated her at his right hand. Her father came and her mother, and her relatives came from the land of their inheritance, and saw her sitting with Joseph and attired in her wedding robe. And they were surprised at her beauty, and rejoiced and praised God who revives the dead.

Then they all ate and drank and were merry. And Pentephres said to Joseph: "To-morrow I will call all the chiefs and satraps of all the land of Egypt, and will make for you a wedding, and thou shalt take my daughter Asenath to wife." But Joseph replied: "I will go to-morrow to King Pharaoh, for he is my father who has made me ruler of all this land, and I will speak to him about Asenath, and he will give her to me for a wife." And Pentephres said to him; "Go in peace."

XXI. And Joseph stayed that day with Pentephres, and rising up in the morning, went his way to Pharaoh and said to him: "Give me Asenath, the daughter of Pentephres, the priest of Heliopolis, to wife." And Pharaoh rejoiced very much and said to Joseph: "Behold, is she not promised to thee for a wife from eternity? Take her, therefore, for thy wife now and forever."

Pharaoh sent then for Pentephres, and Pentephres brought Asenath and set her before Pharaoh, who when he saw her was astonished at her beauty and said: "The Lord God of Joseph bless thee, child, and may thy beauty remain forever, because the Lord God of Joseph has chosen thee to be his bride, for as Joseph is the son of the Most High, thou shalt also be called his bride from now on and forever." After this Pharaoh took Joseph and Asenath and put golden crowns upon their heads, such as were in his house from of old, and Pharaoh put Asenath to the right of Joseph. Putting his hands upon their heads, Pharaoh said: "The Lord God the Most High bless you, and multiply you and make you great and magnify you forever."

Pharaoh then turned their faces toward each other, and they putting their mouths together kissed each other. And Pharaoh made a great banquet for Joseph for seven days, and called together all the rulers of Egypt and all the kings of the nations, making known throughout the land of Egypt, "that whoever works during the seven days of the wedding of Joseph and Asenath shall suffer death." After the wedding feast was over, Asenath conceived and bore to Joseph Manasseh and Ephraim his brother in the house of Joseph.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ The Syriac adds here the following: "Hymn and praise of Asenath to

XXII. And when the seven years of plenty had passed, the seven years of famine commenced. When Jacob heard of his son Joseph, he went into Egypt with all his family, in the second year of the famine, in the second month, on the twenty-first day of the month, and dwelt in the land of Goshen.

And Asenath said to Joseph: "I wish to go and see thy father, for thy father Israel is as my father and God." And Joseph said to her: "Thou shalt go with me and see my father." So Joseph and Asenath went to Jacob in the land of Goshen, and the brothers of Joseph went forth to meet them and bowed before them with their faces to the ground. Then both went to Jacob who was sitting upon his bed and was very old. When Asenath saw him she was surprised at his beauty, for Jacob was very beautiful in appearance and his age was like the youth of a man; his head was white as snow, and the hair of his head was very thick and very full; his white beard reached to his breast, his eyes were bright as with lightning, his tendons and shoulders and arms like those of an angel, his thighs and legs and feet like those of a giant.⁵⁹ When Asenath saw him thus, she was astonished and falling down she bowed before him, her face to the ground.

Jacob said to Joseph: "Is this thy bride or wife? Blessed be she in the Most High God." Jacob then called her to him and blessed and kissed her. Asenath stretched forth her hands, and clasped Jacob's neck, and hung on it⁶⁰ and kissed him. Then they ate and drank, and afterwards Joseph and Asenath returned to their home. Simeon and Levi, the sons of Leah, accompanied them,

the highest God: 'I sinned much before thee, O Lord, I, Asenath, the daughter of Pentephres, the priest of Heliopolis, the city of the sun, which sees all. I have sinned and have done evil before thee. And I was quiet in the house of my father, but proud and high-minded. I have sinned before thee, and worshiped numberless gods, and have eaten of their sacrifice, and have drunk of their libations, and did neither know the Lord God of Heaven, nor did I trust in the exalted Living One, but I put my trust in the glory of my riches and in my beauty, and I was proud and high-minded, and despised every man before me and those who sought me. I sinned greatly before thee, O Lord, and in vanity I spoke pratingly to thee, and in my pride I said that there is no prince on earth who can make me ashamed, but I will be the wife of the son of the greatest king of Egypt, till Joseph, the powerful of God came, who has drawn me away from my arrogance and pride and has crippled my powers, and hunted me with his beauty, and with his wisdom he caught me like a fish with a hook, and by his spirit he subjected me to life, and with his vigor he strengthened me, and brought me to God, the head and lord of the world, and by the hands of the high leader of hosts the bread of life and cup of wisdom was given to me, and I became his bride forever.' The same is also found in the Latin.

⁵⁹ Syriac adds: "and Jacob was like a man who fought with God."

⁶⁰ Syriac adds: "like one who returns home from the war after a long time."

but the sons of Billah and Zilpah, the handmaids of Leah and Rachel, accompanied them not, because they envied and hated them. And Levi was to the right of Asenath, and Simeon to the left. And Asenath took hold of Levi's hand because she loved him more than the other brothers of Joseph as a prophet and a pious and God-fearing man, for he was wise and a prophet of the Most High God, and he saw letters written in the heaven and understood them, and revealed them secretly to Asenath. And Levi also loved Asenath greatly and he saw the place of her rest in heaven.

XXIII. And it came to pass, as Joseph and Asenath passed by on their way from Jacob, that Pharaoh's first-born son saw them from the wall, and beholding Asenath, he became mad on account of her great beauty. Pharaoh's son then sent messengers for Simeon and Levi. They came, and when they stood before him, Pharaoh's first-born son said to them: "Know that ye are mighty men, and that with your right hands the city of the Shechemites was destroyed, and that with your two swords you put down 30,000 warriors. I, too, will take you this day for my comrades, and will give you much gold and silver, man-servants and maid-servants and houses and large possessions, and ye shall contend with me and show mercy unto me; for I have been treated very shamefully by your brother Joseph when he took Asenath to wife, for she was promised to me first. And now come to me, and I will fight against Joseph to kill him with my sword, and I will take Asenath to wife, and ye shall be to me as brothers and true friends. If you do not listen to my words, I will slay you."

And having spoken thus, he uncovered his sword and showed it to them. Now Simeon was desperate and bold, and desired to put his right hand on his sword and to strike the son of Pharaoh because he had spoken harsh words to them. When, therefore, Levi perceived the thought of his heart—for he was a prophet—he touched with his foot the right foot of Simeon and pressed it, giving a signal to him to cease from his wrath. And Levi said quietly to Simeon: "Why art thou angry at this man? We are God-fearing men, and it becomes us not to repay evil for evil." Then said Levi to Pharaoh's son boldly and in gentleness of heart: "Why does our lord speak these words? We are God-fearing men, and our father is a friend of the Most High God, and our brother is as the son of God. And how shall we do this evil thing and sin before our God and our father Israel and before our brother Joseph? And now hear my words: It becometh us not as God-fearing men to wrong any man in any wise. If one will wrong a God-fearing man,

that man avenges him not because he has no sword in his hand. And now take heed lest ye speak again to us such things about our brother Joseph. If thou abidest by this evil counsel, behold our swords are drawn before thee."

Then Simeon and Levi drew their swords from their sheaths and said: "Seest thou now these swords? With these two swords the Lord has avenged the pride of the Shechemites, with which they insulted the children of Israel in our sister Dinah whom Shechem, the son of Hamor, defiled."

When Pharaoh's son saw the drawn swords he was much afraid and trembled all over because they glittered like a flame of fire, and his eyes became dim and he fell upon his face on the earth at their feet. Levi then stretched forth the right hand and seized him, saying: "Arise and fear not, only take care never again to speak anything evil against our brother Joseph." And Simeon and Levi went away from him.

XXIV. The son of Pharaoh remained therefore filled with fear and sadness because he feared the brothers of Joseph. He became very angry again, and on account of the beauty of Asenath he mourned the more. His servants then spoke into his ear: "Behold, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, the maids of Leah and Rachel, Jacob's wives, are most at enmity with Joseph and Asenath and hate them. They will be to thee in all things according to thy will." And the son of Pharaoh sent messengers to them at once and called them, and they came to him in the first hour of the night. And when they stood before him he said to them: "I have heard from many that you are mighty men." And Dan and Gad, the older brothers, said to him, "Let our lord speak to his servants what he wishes, that thy servants may hear, and that we may do as thou wishest."

And Pharaoh's son was very glad, and said to his servants, "Go away a little from me because my word to these men is in secret." And all stood back. Then Pharaoh's son lied and said to them: "Behold blessing and death are before you; take ye rather the blessing than death, for ye are strong men and ye shall not die like women, but be men and keep off your enemies; for I heard your brother Joseph⁶¹ say to Pharaoh, my father, 'Dan and Gad and Naphtali and Asher are not my brothers, but children of my father's maid-servants. I only wait for my father's death and I will destroy them from the land and all their families that they may not inherit

⁶¹ Syriac: "say, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah are thy servants, who sold me by deceit."

with us, for they are children of the maid-servants. For they also sold me unto the Ishmaelites, and I will recompense them according to the violence which they committed against me. Only let my father die.' And my father Pharaoh praised him at these words, and said to him: 'Thou hast spoken well, my son; moreover, take from me mighty men and instruct them concerning all that they shall do for thee, and I will also assist thee.'"

When Dan and Gad heard this from Pharaoh's son, they were greatly alarmed and distressed, and said to him: "We pray thee, help us; from now on we are thy slaves and servants, and we will die for thee." And Pharaoh's son said: "I will help you, if ye also hear my words." And they said to him: "Tell us what thou wilt, and we will do according to thy will." And Pharaoh's son said to them: "I will kill my father Pharaoh this night, because Pharaoh is like a father to Joseph, and promised to assist him against you. Kill ye Joseph, and I will take Asenath to wife, and ye shall be my brothers and joint-heirs of all that is mine; only do this."

And Gad and Dan said to him: "We are this day thy servants, and we will do all that thou hast assigned to us. We also heard Joseph say to Asenath: 'Go to-morrow into the field of our possession, for it is harvest time,' and he sent with her six hundred strong men for an army and fifty forerunners. Now hear us, and we will speak to our lord." And they spoke to him all their mind in secret.

Pharaoh's son then gave to the four brethren full five hundred men and made them their rulers and leaders. And Dan and Gad said unto him: "We are this day thy servants, and will do all as thou hast told us. We will go at night and lie in wait by the stream, and hide ourselves in the thicket; but do thou take with thee fifty archers on horses, and go at a distance before her, and when Asenath comes she will fall into our hands and we will put down the men who are with her. She will then flee with her chariot and fall into thy hands, and thou shalt do with her as it pleaseth thee. After this we will kill Joseph, who will sorrow for Asenath, and we will kill his children also before his eyes."

When the first-born son of Pharaoh heard this, he rejoiced greatly and sent them away and two thousand warriors with them. And as they went to the stream to hide themselves in the thicket, they were divided into four commands, and full five hundred men encamped on the further side of the stream towards the front on each side of the way; likewise the remaining five hundred men stayed on the near side of the stream, and they were encamped in the

thicket on both sides of the way. Between them the road was broad and wide.

XXV. In the same night Pharaoh's son arose and went to the bed-chamber of his father to kill him with the sword. The guard of his father prevented him from going into his father's room, and said to him: "What is your desire, my lord?" And Pharaoh's son said to them: "I wish to see my father, for I am going to take the sap from my newly planted vine." And the guard said to him: "Thy father is in pain, and has lain awake the whole night and now is resting, and he has said to us: 'Let no one come to me, even if it were my first-born son.'"

When he heard this he went away enraged, and at once took fifty archers and went before them as Dan and Gad had told him.⁶² But the younger brothers, Naphtali and Asher, spoke to their older brothers, Dan and Gad, saying: "Why are you again dealing knavishly against your father Israel and against your brother Joseph? And God preserveth him like the apple of his eye. Did you not once sell Joseph, who this day is ruler over all the land of Egypt and a saviour and giver of bread? If you now try again to deal knavishly against him, he will cry to the Most High, who will send fire from heaven and eat you up, and the angels of God will war against you." At this the other brothers became angry against them, and said: "And shall we die like women? This shall not be." And they went forth to meet Joseph and Asenath.

XXVI. And Asenath arose in the morning and said to Joseph: "I will go into the field of our possession as thou hast said, but my soul is very sad, because thou shalt be separated from me." And Joseph said to her: "Be of good cheer and fear not, but rather go rejoicing, dreading none, for the Lord is with thee, and he will keep thee like the apple of his eye from every evil, and I will go on my way distributing corn, and I will give corn to all the men in the city, and no man shall die of hunger in the land of Egypt."

Asenath then went her way and Joseph went his way distributing corn. As Asenath came to the place of the stream with the six hundred men, those who were with Pharaoh's son came suddenly from the ambush, and began to fight with Asenath's men, and killed them with their swords and also all the forerunners. Asenath fled in her chariot.

At once Levi, the son of Leah, perceived all this in his spirit like a prophet and told his brethren of Asenath's danger, and every man among them took his sword and his shield and his spears, and

⁶² The following to the end of the section is omitted in the Latin.

followed after Asenath quickly. And as Asenath fled before, behold Pharaoh's son and his riders with him met her. When Asenath saw him, she was much afraid, and she trembled and called upon the name of the Lord her God.

XXVII. Benjamin sat to her right, on the chariot. Now Benjamin was a strong youth of nineteen years of unspeakable beauty and with the strength of a lion's whelp; he also feared God greatly. And Benjamin leaped down from the chariot, took a round stone from the stream and threw it at Pharaoh's son, striking him on the left temple and wounding him sorely, so that he fell half-dead from his horse to the ground. And then running likewise near the rock, Benjamin said unto Asenath's chariot driver: "Give me stones from the stream." And he gave him fifty⁶³ stones; and throwing the stones Benjamin slew the fifty⁶³ men who were with Pharaoh's son, all the stones piercing their temples. Then Leah's sons, Reuben and Simeon, Levi and Judah, Issachar and Zebulun, encountered the men who lay in wait for Asenath and fell upon them unawares, slaying them all. And the six men killed 276 men.

But the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah fled before them,⁶⁴ saying: "We shall perish from the midst of our brethren; Pharaoh's son has also fallen by the hand of Benjamin, the young man, and all who were with him have perished by his hand." The rest (those who were left) said: "Come now, let us kill Asenath and Benjamin and flee into the thicket." And they went towards Asenath, their swords being covered with much blood. When Asenath saw them she was much afraid, and said, "O Lord God, who hast given me life and hast redeemed me from idols and the corruption of death, as thou hast said that my soul shall live forever, deliver me now from⁶⁵ these evil men." And the Lord God heard the voice of Asenath and the swords of the enemies fell from their hands to the ground and they were powerless.

XXVIII. When the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah saw this wonderful thing that had taken place they were sore afraid and said: "The Lord battles against us for Asenath." They then fell upon their faces to the earth, and bowing low to Asenath said: "Be merciful unto us, thy servants, for thou art our mistress and queen. We have, indeed, done a wicked thing against thee and against our brother Joseph, but the Lord has requited us according to our deeds. Therefore we, thy servants, pray thee, be merciful unto us who are

⁶³ Syriac: "forty-eight."

⁶⁴ Syriac: "fled from before Dan and Gad."

⁶⁵ Syriac: "from the sword of these fraudulent men."

mean and unworthy, and deliver us from the hand of our brethren; for they will become thine avengers, and their swords are before us (and we know that our brethren are God-fearing men, and repay no man evil with evil). Be therefore merciful to thy servants, O mistress, in their presence." And Asenath said to them: "Be of good cheer, and fear not your brethren, for they are God-fearing men and fear the Lord. Go then into the thicket till I appease them concerning you and their wrath be stayed, because ye have undertaken evil things against them. The Lord shall see, and judge between you and me."

Gad and Dan then betook themselves to the thicket, but their brothers, the sons of Leah, ran like stags in great haste after them. And Asenath descended from her chariot and received them with tears, and they, falling down before her to the ground, wept with a loud voice and sought to destroy their brothers, the sons of the maid-servants. And Asenath said to them: "I pray you, spare your brothers, and repay them not evil for evil, for the Lord has saved me from them, and dashed their spears and swords from their hands, and behold, they melted and were reduced to ashes upon the earth like wax before a fire, and this is sufficient for us that the Lord battles for us against them. Therefore, spare ye your brothers, for they are your brothers and the blood of your father, Israel."

And Simeon said to her: "Why does our mistress speak good words for her enemies? Not so, but we will rather slay them with our swords, because they devised evil things against our brother Joseph and against their father Israel, and against thee, our mistress, this day." Asenath then stretched forth her right hand to Simeon and kissing him tenderly, said: "By no means, brother, shalt thou repay thy neighbor evil with evil, because the Lord will avenge this violence. They are, moreover, your brothers, and the sons of your father, Israel, and they fled from afar before your face. Therefore, pardon them."

Levi then came to her and kissed her right hand, for he knew that she wished to save the men from the wrath of their brethren that they should not kill them, and that they were near by in the thicket. Levi, his brother, knew it, but did not tell it to his brethren, fearing lest in their wrath they might kill their brethren.⁶⁶

XXIX. Pharaoh's son arose from the ground and sat down and spat blood from his mouth, for the blood ran down from his temple into his mouth. And Benjamin running upon him, took his sword, and drawing it from the sheath of Pharaoh's son (for Ben-

⁶⁶ This whole section is wanting in the Latin.

jamin had not a sword), he made a move to strike upon the breast of the son of Pharaoh. But Levi ran to him, and taking hold of his hand, he said: "By no means, brother, shalt thou do this deed, for we are God-fearing men, and it becometh not a God-fearing man to repay evil with evil, nor to strike one who is prostrated nor to destroy his enemy unto death. And now, put the sword into its place, and come and help me, and we will cure him of his wound, and if he lives he shall be our friend, and his father Pharaoh shall be our father."

Then Levi lifted the son of Pharaoh up from the ground, and washed the blood from his mouth, and bound a bandage over his wound, and put him on his horse and brought him to his father Pharaoh, telling him all that had happened. And Pharaoh, rising up from his throne, bowed before Levi to the ground, and blessed him.

On the third day Pharaoh's son died of the stone with which he had been wounded by Benjamin. And Pharaoh mourned much for his first-born son, on which account Pharaoh became sick and died, being one hundred and nine years old, and he left his diadem to the most beautiful Joseph.

And Joseph ruled in Egypt forty and eight years, and, after this Joseph gave the crown to Pharaoh's younger son, who was a child when Pharaoh's oldest son died. And Joseph was from that time on like a father to Pharaoh's youngest son in the land of Egypt unto his end,⁶⁷ praising and glorifying God.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ The Syriac omits the last words but reads: "Finished is the story of Joseph and Asenath, the wife of Joseph, which has been translated from the Greek into the Syriac."

⁶⁸ The Vatican codex adds after God: "And Joseph lived years. . . . And Joseph saw Ephraim's children, etc., (all that is found Gen. l. 23-26, with the addition: "and Asenath also died after the death of Joseph, her wooer. For all these we praise the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit now and always, forever and ever.")