

Assessing *The Lost Gospel*
Part 1: The Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor
– Content and Context

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Jacobovici and Wilson have chosen to make their case that *Joseph and Aseneth* is a coded history of Jesus and Mary Magdalene not from study of any of the Greek recensions of the work, but from the Syriac version in the late sixth-century manuscript of the Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor (British Library MS Add. 17202). This version was undoubtedly translated from a Greek original, but the manuscript is considerably earlier than any of the extant manuscripts of *Joseph and Aseneth* in Greek. It is also of special interest because of the context in which it is found in Pseudo-Zachariah, preceded by two letters that explain how it came to be translated from Greek and which speak of the ‘inner meaning’ of the work, though the concluding part of the second of these letters, where the ‘inner meaning’ was evidently explained, is now tantalizingly missing from the manuscript. Jacobovici and Wilson argue that both Moses of Ingila, who translated the work into Syriac and wrote something, now lost, about its inner meaning, and Pseudo-Zachariah himself, who included this material in his compilation of significant texts, knew that *Joseph and Aseneth* was a coded history of Jesus and Mary Magdalene. This means that several aspects of Pseudo-Zachariah’s work and of the context in which *Joseph and Aseneth* occurs in it are important for assessing the claims made in *The Lost Gospel*.

(1) The Title

In the manuscript Pseudo-Zachariah’s work has a title, which translators have rendered: ‘A Volume of Records of Events Which Have Happened in the World’ (Hamilton & Brooks 11) or ‘Volume of Narratives of Events That Have Occurred in the World’ (Greatrex 75). But Jacobovici and Wilson translate it thus: ‘A Volume of Records of Events Which Have Shaped the World’ (LG 1, 17).¹ This version of the title seems to have been adapted from Hamilton and Brooks, but the modification (‘Shaped’ for ‘Occurred in’) is not trivial. Indeed, it is highly tendentious, for Jacobovici and Wilson go on to describe the work as its author’s ‘attempt to preserve a record of events which, in his view, were earth-shattering in their import’ (LG 1, cf. 22). On this basis Jacobovici and Wilson argue that the author must have included *Joseph and Aseneth* in his compilation because he saw it as one of the writings ‘about events that transformed the world ... his world’ (LG 19). But the real title has no such implication. It says nothing about the importance of the events recorded, some of which the author must surely have regarded as far less important than others. What he does say is that he has collected and recorded the various components of his work ‘for the benefit of the faithful and those who have a concern for excellence and beauty of soul’ (Book I chapter 1: Greatrex 78).² He must have regarded *Joseph and Aseneth* as instructive, but not necessarily because it recorded events of ‘earth-shattering’ importance.

¹ I make references to *The Lost Gospel* by the abbreviation LG and a page number.

² See also Book II chapter 5, where the author says he has transcribed the letter of Proclus (an extended exposition of Monophysite Christology) ‘for the benefit of the

(2) The Contents of Book I

Jacobovici and Wilson attempt to show that all of the rather miscellaneous contents of Book I (including *Joseph and Aseneth*) concern 'events that transformed the world.'

This is how the manuscript's own table of contents of Book I lists its contents:

First Chapter: An account of the commencement of the Book.

Second chapter: A Letter of request concerning the Table of genealogies in the Book of Genesis.

Third chapter: An apologia concerning the Table of genealogies, with the chronological canons, as set out below.

Fourth chapter: A letter of request concerning the translation of the Greek Book of Aseneth which turned up in the library of the family of Brw' [probably Beroea], the bishops from the town of Resh'aina.

Fifth chapter: The reply to the letter.

Sixth chapter: Translation of the story of Aseneth.

Seventh chapter: Translation of [the story of] Silvester, patriarch of Rome, which tells of the conversion and baptism of the believing emperor Constantine, and the disputes of the Jewish teachers.

Eighth chapter: The revelation of the treasure (consisting) of the bones of Stephen, Nicodemus, Gamaliel, and Habbib his son.

Ninth chapter: Concerning Isaac and Dodo (Dada), the Syriac teachers.

(Greatrex 75-76)

When Jacobovici and Wilson describe 'the anthology of important ancient documents' that Pseudo-Zachariah had compiled (LG 20, 22-23), they make no mention of the exchange of letters about the chronological differences between the Greek and Syriac versions of the early genealogies in Genesis (Book I chapters 2-3). Nor do they mention the brief biographies of the two Syrian Christian teachers Isaac and Dodo that comprise chapter 9. The lives of these two teachers were doubtless significant for the author and his readers, but there is nothing 'earth-shattering' about them. Jacobovici and Wilson do discuss the story in chapter 8 (an account by the priest Lucian of an event that took place in 415 CE), though there is no sign that they have actually read it, but they refer only to the discovery of the relics of Stephen and Nicodemus, ignoring Gamaliel and his son Habib. The considerable importance of Gamaliel in this narrative rather spoils Jacobovici's and Wilson's claim that, 'Pairing Nicodemus and Stephen is very significant' (22). All this looks like the selection of evidence to support a case and the ignoring of evidence that does not.

(3) A Monophysite Work

Pseudo-Zachariah was a Monophysite³ Christian, i.e. he was one of those (numerous in Syria, northern Mesopotamia and Egypt in his time) who did not accept the decree of the Council of Chalcedon in 451. The difference between these anti-Chalcedonian Christians and those who accepted Chalcedon was over the language that most accurately describes the union of divine and human in the person of Jesus Christ.

believing brothers.' Theological instruction seems to be more important to him than world-changing events.

³ This is the traditional term. Some writers, with a view to the reconciliation between Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian churches at the present time, prefer the term Miaphysite. I will use the traditional term.

Briefly, whereas Chalcedon described the incarnate Logos as ‘in two natures,’ the Monophysites insisted on the formula that Cyril of Alexandria (claimed by both sides but especially a hero for the Monophysites) had used: ‘out of two natures.’ Both sides agreed that Jesus was fully divine and fully human and both agreed that divinity and humanity were united in one *hypostasis*. But the Chalcedonians thought the Monophysites confused the two natures, while the Monophysites thought the Chalcedonians denied the true union of natures in Christ. In view of the arguments of Jacobovici and Wilson, it is very important to state that this technical difference over Christology was *the only theological difference between the Monophysites and the Chalcedonians*. But this difference defined the Monophysites and the history of conflict it produced is largely what Pseudo-Zachariah’s work is about. He himself was fully committed to the Monophysite position and frequently quotes documents in which Monophysite Christology is expounded at length.

It has to be said that Jacobovici and Wilson have not the first idea of what this debate was about. The kinds of issues they say were at stake in the debates of the fourth and fifth centuries (LG 23-24) were in fact decided (if they were raised at all) long before the fifth century, and Chalcedonians and Monophysites did not disagree about them. Astonishingly, writing about the real Zachariah Rhetor whose history of the period from 451 to 491 Pseudo-Zachariah incorporated in his own work, Jacobovici and Wilson write:

Zacharias seems to have leaned towards monophysite Christianity, meaning the belief in Jesus’ *mono* or *single* nature.⁴ But this doctrine did not win out. The theological and power-politics debate led to the doctrine of the Trinity, the view that Jesus was fully divine and fully human, and that God is to be spoken of as three-in-one: Father, Son and Spirit (LG 24).

The doctrine of the Trinity was defined at the Council of Nicaea in 325 and subsequently accepted by all Christians except the Arians. The Monophysites not only accepted the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity as defined at Nicaea; they constantly insisted on it. All sides in the Christological debates of the fourth and fifth centuries presupposed the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity. As I have explained, the issue between Chalcedonians and Monophysites from 451 onwards was not whether Jesus was fully divine and fully human (they agreed he was both), but precisely how divinity and humanity should be said to be united in him.

This matters because the tactic of Jacobovici and Wilson in their not altogether coherent account of how one form of Christianity triumphed over all others (LG 24-25) is to imply that Athanasius’ Festal Letter of 367, defining the canon of the New Testament and leading to the suppression of other literature such as the Nag Hammadi writings, somehow explains why Pseudo-Zachariah included an *encoded* text (*Joseph and Aseneth* understood as an encoded history of Jesus, Mary Magdalene and Christian origins) in his work. This is absurd because Monophysites like Pseudo-Zacharias were not at all sympathetic to divergences from the Christianity that triumphed in the fourth century. They fully identified with it. Their quarrel was *only* with the christological definition of the Council of Chalcedon (451). Pseudo-Zacharias’s long work is full of expositions of Monophysite Christology but never, so far as I am aware, hints at any other controversial belief (and Jacobovici and Wilson do not claim that it does – apart

⁴ Perhaps Jacobovici and Wilson take this to mean that he was only human, not divine. Merely the first paragraph of the Wikipedia article on Monophysitism would have put them right.

from the case of *Joseph and Aseneth*). To suppose that he included *Joseph and Aseneth* in his compilation because he knew it encoded something so wildly divergent from Monophysite Christianity as the story Jacobovici and Wilson find encoded in it makes no historical sense at all.

In their attempt to connect *Joseph and Aseneth* with Syriac Christianity, Jacobovici and Wilson say that ‘many Syriac Christians’ refused to use the title *Theotokos* (‘God-bearer’ or ‘Mother of God’) that the Council of Ephesus in 431 attributed to Mary the mother of Jesus. They omit to say that these were Nestorian Christians, whereas Monophysite Christians were enthusiastic about this Marian title because of its christological implications. On the only issue that was truly in dispute – the relationship of the divine and the human in Christ – Monophysites and Nestorians were vehemently opposed. So it must be insisted that the context in which we find Syriac *Joseph and Aseneth* in Pseudo-Zachariah is very much Monophysite, even more opposed to Nestorian doctrine than to Chalcedonian doctrine.

(4) The Letters about *Joseph and Aseneth*

Jacobovici and Wilson attach considerable importance to the references to the ‘inner meaning’ (in Burke’s translation) of the text in the two letters that Pseudo-Zachariah reproduces to introduce the Syriac version of *Joseph and Aseneth*. The letters explain the origin of the Syriac translation: an anonymous correspondent (perhaps Pseudo-Zacharias himself) writes to Moses of Ingila (the place-name also occurs as Aggel or Inghilene), sending him a copy of the Greek version and asking him to translate it into Syriac. But he requests more than just a translation, explaining that while he could read the story (*historia*, the Greek word used in the Syriac here), he could not understand the ‘inner meaning’ (*theōria*, also a Greek word). So he asks Moses, not only to translate the text into Syriac, but also, as far as he can, to explain its *theōria*.

It is significant that these words are Greek. They are used because they were technical terms in the Alexandrian tradition of allegorical exegesis of the Old Testament, where every Old Testament narrative (*historia*) is expected to have a corresponding Christian allegorical meaning (*theōria*). There was nothing particularly Syrian about this. Indeed, Moses of Ingila is known to have also translated a work of Cyril of Alexandria, the *Glaphyra*, a commentary on the Pentateuch in which Cyril applied allegorical exegesis to all the narratives in this part of the Bible, including the Joseph story. This may well be why the anonymous correspondent thought Moses would be the man to help him.⁵

While allegorical exegesis was normally applied to canonical biblical texts, it is not too surprising that these two men should have thought that *Joseph and Aseneth*, a narrative about Old Testament characters set in Old Testament times, would also yield a deeper meaning if the proper sort of expertise were applied to it. This really tells us nothing about whether *Joseph and Aseneth* was originally intended to have a meaning beyond the surface meaning of the story.⁶ Nor does it tell us whether, supposing it was intended to have such a meaning, Moses accurately detected it. There was obviously no tradition of interpretation of this text on which Moses could draw. The book seems to be as new to him as it had been to his correspondent when the latter discovered the Greek

⁵ We do not know the respective dates of Moses’ translation of *Joseph and Aseneth* and his translation of Cyril’s *Glaphya*.

⁶ My own view is that it does have a symbolic dimension, but I do not think this because Moses of Ingila found an inner meaning in it.

manuscript. Moses attributes his discovery of the *theōria* of the text to his own inspired insight. So we may ask, would Moses of Ingila, given his background and context in sixth-century Monophysite Christianity, have been likely to discover an ‘encoded history’ of Jesus’ marriage to Mary Magdalene? He would be much more likely to find the kind of allegorical meaning that Cyril of Alexandria found in the Pentateuch.

One other aspect of Moses’ letter needs to be addressed. As both the letters illustrate, it was customary for religious people of this sort to adorn their letters with elaborate chains of biblical quotations chosen for their relevance to the topic of the letter. In part of Moses’ letter he explains how, on the one hand, he hesitated to try to explain the inner meaning of *Joseph and Aseneth*, but, on the other hand, he felt it would be wrong to refuse his correspondent’s request. Both sides of this dilemma are illustrated with a chain of biblical quotations. It is clear that his hesitation is a matter of modesty (‘recognizing my own shortcomings’), and it was probably a necessary formality to declare his inadequacy for the task, before going on to say that love compelled him and Scripture encouraged him to attempt what his correspondent had asked.

Jacobovici and Wilson completely misrepresent this material when they claim that Moses’ hesitation arises from fear ‘that the nature of the truth revealed by the text may endanger them’ (LG 377). Some of the texts he cites are conventional biblical warnings about the folly and the consequences of being too loquacious or confident in speaking (e.g. ‘he who guards his mouth will preserve his life’), but the point Moses is making is that one should not be too quick to voice one’s opinions, since all too often one has nothing worth saying.

(5) Censorship in the manuscript

Jacobovici and Wilson went to great lengths to apply the latest digital imaging techniques to the manuscript (i.e. to Book I chapters 4-6) (see LG 309). As a result, they say, they were able

to make sense of indistinct areas in the manuscript, simply worn down by time and handling over the centuries. Using these advanced techniques, we were also able to uncover the original lettering behind several smudges. More importantly, digital imaging revealed that a number of different inks and different colors were used in the smudged areas, as well as in other parts of the text (LG 312).

Here and elsewhere they hint that the ‘smudges’ may have been deliberate attempts to obscure the text (LG 309: ‘words that may have been deliberately smudged or covered up’). Since they give no examples of the words subject to these smudges, it is impossible to assess this claim. Indeed, it seems extremely likely that none of the smudges actually provide evidence of censorship. If they did, Jacobovici and Wilson would certainly have told us clearly and explicitly, explaining why someone would have wanted to cover up these particular words. One has the impression that the digital imaging did not, in this respect, provide what they had hoped.

However, in another respect they believe it has turned up trumps. The text of Moses’ letter ends, in mid-sentence, just as he is beginning to explain the inner meaning of *Joseph and Aseneth*. This occurs close to the bottom of a page and one might have supposed simply that the following page has been lost. But Jacobovici’s and Wilson’s ‘visual inspection’ ‘suggested’ that the manuscript had been ‘deliberately cut.’

This cut line was subjected to intensive digital imaging and processing. By means of this technology, we could now discern that the cut line went

right through a line of the text – right through the Syriac script – clearly indicating that this was an act of censorship (LG 312).

This is not as clear as it sounds. From the scans of this page of the manuscript that Tony Burke has kindly let me see, it appears that the manuscript has been cut so that the *lower part of the last two or three words of the bottom line* of the second column on the page has been cut through. (The text on the reverse side of this page has been similarly affected.) From my own observation of the photograph it looks as if this has been done through carelessness rather than in a deliberate attempt to obscure just those last two or three words on the page. I cannot really see how digital imaging would make any difference to this observation. Obviously, one cannot say that Jacobovici and Wilson are wrong about this without careful examination of the manuscript, but I think there is room for considerable doubt.

The next page of the manuscript, containing the rest of Moses' letter and, on its reverse side, the first part of the text of *Joseph and Aseneth* itself, is undoubtedly missing. But Jacobovici and Wilson themselves make a very interesting observation about this. There is another manuscript (British Library 7190), which is generally agreed to have been copied from the unique manuscript of Pseudo-Zachariah. The scribe was interested solely in making a copy of *Joseph and Aseneth* itself and so has copied only the text of *Joseph and Aseneth*, without the two letters that precede it in Pseudo-Zachariah. But the text of *Joseph and Aseneth* is complete. It includes the opening section that is now missing in the manuscript of Pseudo-Zachariah. So, when this copy was made, the page containing the final part of Moses' letter as well as the opening section of *Joseph and Aseneth* was still in place. This copy was made in the twelfth century, six centuries after the manuscript of Pseudo-Zachariah was written. So for *six centuries* no one thought the concluding part of Moses' letter was so shocking or dangerous that it ought to be censored. Even supposing the page was deliberately removed, rather than accidentally lost, it will be very difficult to tell what an Egyptian monk (?) in the twelfth century or later would have thought worthy of censorship.

I conclude that, although the matter deserves further investigation, Jacobovici and Wilson have not made a convincing case for censorship.

References

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Geoffrey Greatrex ed., *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor: Church and State in Late Antiquity* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011).

Frederick John Hamilton and Ernest Walter Brooks, *The Syriac Chronicle known as that of Zachariah of Mitylene* (London: Methuen, 1899).

Simcha Jacobovici and Barrie Wilson, *The Lost Gospel: Decoding the Ancient Text that Reveals Jesus' Marriage to Mary Magdalene* (New York: Pegasus, 2014).

Assessing *The Lost Gospel* **Part 2: Misinterpreting Ephrem**

Richard Bauckham

In chapter 8 of their book, Jacobovici and Wilson endeavour to show that in Syriac Christianity, represented here mainly by the great fourth-century theologian-poet Ephrem (with some reference also to his third-century predecessor Aphrahat), Aseneth was understood to represent Mary Magdalene. The argument proceeds largely by these steps (a) Aseneth is a type of the church; (b) Mary Magdalene is a type of the church; (c) therefore Aseneth = Mary Magdalene. Let us see how these three steps are taken

(a) Aseneth is a type of the church

This is uncontroversial. The Syriac Fathers, who read the Old Testament in pervasively typological terms, took Joseph to be a type of Christ, as many other patristic writers also did. Joseph's bride Aseneth is then naturally understood as a type of the church, the bride of Christ. That Aseneth was a Gentile, the daughter of a pagan priest, made her especially appropriate as a type of the church viewed as 'the church of the Gentiles' (Ephrem, *Hymns on Virginity* 21, quoted LG 73). But this does not mean, as Jacobovici and Wilson suppose (LG 74-77), a particular community of Gentile Christians, to be distinguished from other early Christian movements, but simply *the Church*. These writers endorsed the supersessionist theology according to which the old people of God, the nation of Israel, had been replaced by the new people of God, the church of all nations (Murray chap 1).

(b) Mary Magdalene is a type of the church

Ephrem – or a writer close to Ephrem⁷ – writes about the two Maries, the mother of Jesus and the Magdalene, as in different ways symbols of the church. The latter was like the church because she brought the good news of Jesus' resurrection (Murray 147, partially quote LG 74). It should be noted that it is much more common in Syriac Christian literature for Mary the mother of Jesus to be treated as a type of the church than for Mary Magdalene to be cited in this role, and in the case of the latter the symbolism is limited: she is like the church in that she saw the risen Christ and brought the news of his resurrection. Moreover, in the passage quoted by Jacobovici and Wilson (LG 74) it is clear that the coincidence of the name Mary, borne by both women, plays a part in the typology. As we shall see, Ephrem delights in associating biblical characters that bear the same name. It is part of his extensive search for parallels and connexions between different parts of Scripture. In the case of the two Maries, Murray sees a tendency in Ephrem even to fuse them (146-148). It looks as though the treatment of Mary the mother of Jesus as a type of the church has been extended to Mary Magdalene because of the coincidence of names.

⁷ LG 76 erroneously says that the lines they there quote are from 'another passage of Hymn 21.' They are taken from Murray 147 (as footnote 24, LG 391 indicates), who cites them from 'a passage in the *memre* for Holy Week' and indicates that Ephrem may not be the author. There is another mistaken reference in LG 391 n. 19, where the page in Murray's book should be 223, not 136.

(c) therefore Aseneth = Mary Magdalene

That both Aseneth and Mary Magdalene could be understood as types of the church does not mean that Aseneth and Mary Magdalene were themselves in any way connected in Syriac Christianity. Other women of the Old Testament, such as Eve, Rachel, the Queen of Sheba and Esther, were also treated as types of the church (Murray 135-138), but it does not follow that they therefore represent Mary Magdalene. Typology in Syriac Christian literature is wide-ranging, complex and variable, very dependent on the particular passages of Scripture a writer has in mind.

However, Jacobovici and Wilson think that the threefold equation between Aseneth, Mary Magdalene and the church is 'even more explicit' in a passage in Hymn 21 of Ephrem's *Hymns on Virginit*y. (They call it 'The Clincher.')

It reads, in Kathleen McVey's translation (and with the addition of two more lines than Jacobovici and Wilson quote):

You [Ephrem] are the son of Asenath, the daughter of a pagan priest;
she is a symbol of the Church of the Gentiles.
She loved Joseph, and Joseph's son
in truth the holy church loved.
She had many children by the Crucified,
and on every member the cross is engraved.
By the symbol of Ephrem crosses are crowded into her,
by birth from water. (McVey 353).

This hymn is the second of two on the *city* of Ephraim, where Jesus took refuge towards the end of his ministry (John 11:54), but at this point Ephrem (the writer) exploits the fact that the city has the same name as the son of Joseph, who was progenitor of the Israelite tribe of Ephraim (Ephrem). He also exploits the coincidence of name between Joseph the patriarch and Joseph the reputed father of Jesus. The third and fourth lines mean: Asenath loved Joseph and the church loved Jesus son of Joseph. Murray's translation of these lines is slightly clearer:

she [Asenath] loved Joseph, and the Son of Joseph
has holy Church loved in truth (Murray 136).

Just before this passage Ephrem (the writer) has used gematria to associate the name Ephrem with 'crucified' and 'cross'⁸ ('on "crucified" and "cross" his name depends') and so the last four lines of our quotation pick up that association of the name. Ephrem, son of Joseph and Asenath, is the type of the many children borne to Jesus, the Crucified One, by his bride the church. ('She' in line 5 is probably 'the holy church,' though the subject might still be Asenath *as a symbol* of the church.) Every one of these children is marked with Ephrem's symbol, the cross, and they crowd into the church 'by birth from water,' an indisputable reference to baptism (cf. John 3:5).⁹ It is perfectly clear that the 'many children' of the Crucified are Christian believers, 'born' to him and his bride the church by baptism and marked with the sign of the cross. The passage is entirely intelligible without reference to Mary Magdalene, and there is nothing in it to suggest that we should think of Mary Magdalene.

Jacobovici and Wilson also quote McVey's translation, but with (unacknowledged) modifications:

⁸ See McVey 352 n. 288. The numerical value of Ephrem in Syriac is equivalent to the combined numerical value of the words 'crucified' and 'cros.'

⁹ McVey 353 n. 290, notes that 'Ephrem's understanding of baptism is closely linked with the crucifixion.'

You [Ephraim] are the son of Aseneth, the daughter of a pagan priest;
She [Aseneth] is the symbol of the Church of the Gentiles.
She [Aseneth] loved Joseph, and Joseph's son . . .
In truth, the Holy Church loved.
She had many children by the Crucified,
And every one of them is marked with the cross (LG 81).

The insertion of dots, normally used to indicate something has been left out of a text, at the end of the third line here is puzzling. Along with the comma inserted into the fourth line, it suggests that Jacobovici and Wilson have not understood the syntax, in which 'Joseph's son' is the object of the verb 'loved' in the next line. Alternatively, they have manipulated the text to suit their reading of it. Moreover, they have also conveniently ended the quotation before the indisputable reference to baptism ('by birth from water').

They claim that the passage only makes sense if we substitute 'Jesus' for 'Joseph' and 'Mary Magdalene' for 'Aseneth,' thus:

Ephraim, you are the son of Mary the Magdalene,
daughter of a pagan priest;
Mary the Magdalene is the symbol of the Church of the Gentiles.
She loved Jesus, and Jesus' son . . .
in truth, the Holy Church loved.
Mary the Magdalene had many children by the Crucified,
And every one of them is marked with the cross (LG 81).

Having thus imported Mary Magdalene into the text, Jacobovici and Wilson propose it means:

Mary the Magdalene is the daughter of a non-Jewish priest.
Mary the Magdalene is the symbol of the Church of the Gentiles.
Mary the Magdalene loved Jesus.
Mary the Magdalene had many children by Jesus.
The children were all marked for death (LG 82).

This is said to be 'the most natural reconstruction' and 'the plain meaning' (LG 82)!

I think the overwhelming case against such a 'reconstruction' should already be clear, but we may note especially

(1) It requires the entirely arbitrary addition of the three dots (. . .) at the end of the fourth line and the resulting unintelligibility of the fifth line (what or whom did Holy Church love? Why does this line intrude into the sequence of statements of which Mary Magdalene is supposedly the subject?).

(2) It ignores the wider context in which 'the cross' is the dominant topic, persistently associated with Ephraim, and clearly cannot be reduced to the notion that Jesus' biological offspring were 'all marked for death.'

Of the interpretation of 'the many children' as 'metaphorical' children 'marked by the sign of the cross,' Jacobovici and Wilson say that it is 'obviously theologically motivated. It asks us to look beyond the plain language at metaphors that are not even hinted at' (LG 82). I suggest that anyone inclined to agree with this should read the whole hymn. It is nothing but deeply theological, metaphorical and symbolic throughout. Its author was a theologian and a poet. Metaphor and theology are precisely what he was about.

References

Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns*, translated by Kathleen E. McVey (New York: Paulist Press, 1989).

Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (2nd edition; Piscataway NJ: Gorgias, 2004).

Assessing *The Lost Gospel* **Part 3: Misreading *Joseph and Aseneth* (i)**

Richard Bauckham

By the time we get to chapter 9, where Jacobovici and Wilson begin to ‘decode’ the story of *Joseph and Aseneth* as really a story about Jesus and Mary Magdalene, we readers are expected to have been convinced that Aseneth is a mere code name for Mary Magdalene. On the basis of their arguments about the context in Pseudo-Zachariah and in Syriac Christianity they think that this can now be treated as virtually a fact. In the first two parts of my assessment, I have shown that those arguments do not hold water. I now turn to the way they (mis-)read *Joseph and Aseneth* (hereafter JosAs) itself.

(i) General points

(1) More than once they tell us that Aseneth is an obscure person in Genesis and so no one would have expected this Old Testament character to play the role given her in JosAs. However, the fact that she is mentioned only in two verses of Genesis (41:45, 50) would not have made her obscure or unimportant to attentive early Jewish or early Christian readers of Genesis. We should not measure this by the standard of the average modern Jew’s or modern Christian’s knowledge of Genesis. Many early Jewish and early Christian readers were accustomed to pondering every detail of their sacred texts. In the story of Israel’s origins, Aseneth plays an extremely important role. She is the mother of Ephraim and Manasseh, progenitors of two of the most prominent of the twelve tribes of Israel. This puts her alongside Rachel and Leah, mothers either themselves or by proxy (their two handmaids) of the rest of the tribes. Like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, Aseneth ought to be one of the Israelite matriarchs. I say ‘ought to be’ because, for later readers, the fact that she was the daughter of an Egyptian priest could make this problematic. But this importance in Israelite lineage explains why the author of JosAs assures us, early on, that Aseneth ‘was noble and glorious like Sarah, beautiful like Rebecca, and virtuous like Rachel’ (1:5). Surely, a Jewish or Christian reader of Genesis might think, we ought to know more about such a key figure in the ancestry of Israel. That someone should have thought of writing the story that Genesis might have been expected to tell but doesn’t would not be surprising. It is the reasoning behind the genesis of a good many apocryphal or para-biblical texts.

(2) Jacobovici and Wilson argue that the ‘story told in our manuscript is simply not the story found in Genesis’ – ‘It’s not even an elaboration of it. It’s a different tale altogether’ (LG 39-40). *Therefore*, they suppose, it is not actually about the biblical characters Joseph and Aseneth at all but a story about other people for whom these names are merely code. This is a *non sequitur*. The fact that the story is not in Genesis does not mean that it is not *about* the biblical characters. P. D. James recently published a sequel to Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*, in which all the main characters of the latter re-appear. The story is quite different (it takes place after the story in *Pride and Prejudice* ends), but James undoubtedly intended it to be about the same characters. Apocryphal or para-biblical literature, Jewish and Christian, is full of non-biblical stories about biblical characters. For example, there was a famous story about the conversion of Abraham from the pagan idolatry of his father to the worship of the only true God. It occurs (with some variation) in *Jubilees*, Josephus and the *Apocalypse of Abraham*. Genesis does not even tell us that Abraham converted from paganism to monotheism,

just as it does not tell us that Aseneth converted from paganism to monotheism. But later readers of Genesis assumed, in each case, that there must have been such a conversion and therefore made up a story about it. The Abraham of the story about his conversion is undoubtedly Abraham! In the case of JosAs, we should note how carefully the author links his story into the story Genesis tells in the first few verses, echoing Gen 41:45-50 in some detail (including the gathering of wheat 'like the sand of the sea') and establishing its precise chronological place within the Genesis narrative ('In the first year of the seven years of plenty...'; and again in 3:1).¹⁰ Similarly he places the second part of his story (chaps 22-29) later in the sequence of years indicated by Genesis (22:1). He then indicates that he is taking Genesis 42-45 as read, and catches up with the Genesis story again when Jacob brings his family to settle in Israel (Gen 46; JosAs 22:2). This is not coded history; it is deliberate indication that the author is writing an imaginative expansion of the Genesis narrative. Note also how the details of Joseph's story in Genesis are echoed in 3:10-11 and presupposed in chapters 22-29.

We should also note that there was at least one other apocryphal story about Aseneth herself (in an unidentified Jewish apocryphon that was certainly not JosAs, cited by Origen, *Comm. Gen.* 46-47).

(3) That JosAs is a story about the biblical characters, set in their time and place, is not incompatible with the possibility that it also has symbolic or typological dimensions. I see in LG a degree of confusion between typology, as practised by early Christian interpreters of the Old Testament, and what Jacobovici and Wilson call coded history. When early Christian interpreters of Genesis, such as Cyril of Alexandria in the work that Moses of Ingila translated into Syriac, understood, for example, Isaac and Joseph as types of Christ, they did not mean that the stories were not about real individuals who lived long ago and were ancestors of the people of Israel. They meant that the stories about them, composed under the inspiration of the Spirit, also carried prophetic meaning, foreshadowing the events of the story of Jesus and the early church. The stories really happened to the historical characters Isaac and Joseph, but they also had prophetic significance. Jacobovici and Wilson, however, suppose that, if Joseph in JosAs stands for Jesus, then the character simply is Jesus and the story simply is a story about Jesus written in code. Moses of Ingila and Pseudo-Zechariah, I think, would have read it as a story about the biblical character Joseph which *also prefigured* the story of Jesus and his church. They would therefore not have read its typological reference to Jesus in the literal way that Jacobovici and Wilson do.

The issue is particularly interesting in the passage where the 'man' from heaven tells Aseneth that her new name is to be "City of Refuge," for with you all the nations will take refuge and many people will be sheltered under your wing, and in your wall will be kept safe the ones attached to God through repentance' (15:5). Clearly here the figure of Aseneth is given a symbolic dimension that makes her more than an individual. Most scholars think this has to do with her status as a Gentile convert to Judaism; she is treated as prototypical of all other proselytes. I myself think an easier and more obvious reading is that she is represented as a type of the Christian Church. This at any rate is how Aphrahat, Ephrem, Cyril of Alexandria understood the biblical Aseneth: a type of the Church from the Gentiles, the Bride of Christ, married in the text to Joseph, a type of Christ. Readers of JosAs like Moses of Ingila would easily have read JosAs in the same typological way. To understand the text of JosAs here we need only two figures: (a)

¹⁰ I use the verse numbers in Tony Burke's translation of the Syriac in LG.

Aseneth the Egyptian woman who married Joseph according to the story read literally, and (b) the Christian church that Aseneth here symbolizes. To introduce a third figure – Mary Magdalene – is unnecessary and misleading. It makes for a strangely muddled reading:

Clearly, the text is not talking about the Aseneth of the Book of Genesis. That woman was a minor figure who disappeared from the world stage at least seventeen hundred years before *Joseph and Aseneth* was written. What we are being told – in very clear terms [!!] – is that Aseneth (that is, Mary the Magdalene) was perceived by her followers as a figure of Penitence, and a Daughter of God, who prepared “a heavenly bridal chamber for those who love her” (15:7) (LG 99).

This reading of the text seems to me mistaken in that it identifies the figure of Repentance (15:6-8) with Aseneth. But more importantly, it is looking for an individual woman to whom the symbolic language of the text can be applied *as an individual* and supposes Mary Magdalene to fit the requirement. This misses what seems to me clear: that the individual Aseneth is being made to symbolize something other than an individual: a ‘city’ in which many nations will take refuge. It doesn’t matter that Aseneth was ‘a minor figure who disappeared from the world stage at least seventeen hundred years before *Joseph and Aseneth* was written.’ That ‘minor figure’ stands for, is a type of the Christian church. Instead of looking for some kind of goddess (Mary Magdalene), *typology* can recognize both that Aseneth is an individual woman and that she symbolizes the church.

(4) Another difference between real typology, of the kind that early Christian writers deployed in their interpretation of Scripture, and the kind of coded history that Jacobovici and Wilson take *Joseph and Aseneth* to be, lies in their notion that the story of Jesus and Mary Magdalene was encoded in this way for secrecy, since a book openly telling that story would have been destroyed by the persecuting authorities of the form of Christianity that triumphed over all others in the fourth century (here I merely replicate Jacobovici’s and Wilson’s reading of church history). Jacobovici and Wilson seem to allow that this was a novel use of ‘the tools of typology’ (LG 127). They seem to be proposing a unique genre of ancient literature. Why should we believe them? It seems to be simply a way of getting Mary Magdalene into a text whose indications that it is more than *just* a literal story seem quite adequately explained in properly typological terms.

Assessing *The Lost Gospel* **Part 4: Responding to Simcha's Responses**

Richard Bauckham

Here I respond to Jacobovici's responses to my Parts 1 and 2. I am aware that responses to responses can get rather tedious and so I will not try to be exhaustive but simply make points that seem to me important.

Responses to Part 1

(1) The Title

I pointed out that Jacobovici and Wilson mistranslated the title. (i) Jacobovici responds with an argument about what the title *ought to* mean, not what it does mean, which is a linguistic point. It seems clear that he decided on an inaccurate translation because of his own view of the contents of the book. Readers who notice this will not be inclined to trust his accuracy in other assertions. (ii) The true title 'A Volume of Records of Events Which Have Happened in the World' is equivalent to our word 'chronicle.' We all know that chronicles record events of very varying importance. Compilers of chronicles think that everything they record is of some significance, of course, but events certainly do not have to be "earth-shattering" to be included in a chronicle. (iii) The title covers the contents of all twelve books of Pseudo-Zachariah's work, not just Book 1. Did Pseudo-Zachariah really think all these events were of "earth-shattering" importance?

(2) The Contents of Book I

Jacobovici here makes the *completely baseless* assertion that Isaac (of Antioch) and Dodo (of Amida) 'appeared "very acceptable" to the authorities while covertly teaching heretical ideas.'

(3) A Monophysite Work

Here Jacobovici digs himself further into the hole that he and Wilson dug for themselves in trying to characterize the context of Pseudo-Zachariah's work as heretical. He continues to say: 'Monophysites differed from Trinitarians in their idea of the nature of Christ.' I don't think I could have made it clearer that Monophysites *were* Trinitarians. They were as Trinitarian as you could get. What distinguished them from Chalcedonians (the main body of the church that had imperial support) was whether Christ should be said to be 'in two natures' (divine and human) or 'out of two natures' and 'one incarnate nature of the divine Logos' (i.e. both divine and human). Modern readers may well be impatient with this technical distinction, but that is precisely my point: Although this distinction was important for them, it was the *only thing that distinguished* Monophysites from the larger body of the Catholic Church. In other words, Monophysites were a branch of what Jacobovici and Wilson call the 'Pauline Christianity' that triumphed over all other forms in the fourth century and persecuted other forms of Christianity. The point *is relevant* because, as the full twelve books of Pseudo-Zachariah's work show, he was a very strongly committed Monophysite. The only doctrinal issue that concerns him is the issue between Monophysites and Chalcedonians. There is nothing about his work to suggest that he had any sympathy for the sort of ideas that Jacobovici and Wilson find in *Joseph and Aseneth* (and these, of course, include much more bizarre deviations from orthodoxy than merely the idea that Jesus married). It will not do to say that his sympathy had to be secret and that's why

the only heretical passage in his huge work was an encoded text, because, of course, Pseudo-Zachariah included also Moses of Ingila's explanation of the hidden meaning of *Joseph and Aseneth*. (This was only removed from the text many centuries later.) As far as I can see, Jacobovici and Wilson never explain why, if the true meaning of *Joseph and Aseneth* was so dangerous and had to be kept secret by encoding, Pseudo-Zachariah prefaced it with the letter of Moses of Ingila, which, according to Jacobovici and Wilson, explained that the inner meaning of the text concerned Jesus' marriage to Mary Magdalene!

(4) The Letters about *Joseph and Aseneth*

I would simply urge readers to read Moses' letter, which is quite explicit in saying that his hesitation was due to modesty ('recognizing my own shortcomings'). Jacobovici and Wilson are cloth-eared when it comes to hearing these texts as they would have sounded in a devout, Scripture-saturated literary context in sixth century Syria.

(5) Censorship in the manuscript

This is really the most important point because I need to clarify what I meant. I was not doubting that the page has been 'cut' (or at least I will not doubt it before seeing the manuscript). When I first read the account in *The Lost Gospel* I thought that the page must be cut so that a large part of the page, with a large portion of text, has been cut off. In fact (as can be seen in the photo in the book) it is only a small portion of the page that has been removed, and all that the cut has done to the text has been to obscure two or three words at the end of one line. It is hard to believe that these two or three words (continuing the sentence that we have) could have been so revealing that they needed obscuring in this way. If they did need obscuring, it would have been simpler and more effective just to blot them out. When I judged that what has been done to the page looks more like carelessness than censorship, I meant that it looks as though someone has cut off the bottom margin of the page and accidentally cut through these last few words of the text. To judge this properly, of course, we need more information of a kind that the authors are not ready to give us, such as whether any other pages of the manuscript have had margins removed by cutting, just as we need much more information about the general state of the manuscript.

Responses to Part 2

Yes, I first came to think that *Joseph and Aseneth* may well be a Christian text when I reviewed Kraemer's book, although she of course does not come out definitively in favour of this explanation. I'm well aware of the other precedents for this view. But it is plainly ridiculous to claim that those scholars who judge the text to be Jewish do so 'because they are afraid of the implications of this interpretation' (i.e. of the interpretation of it as Christian). After all, those scholars include Viktor Aptowitz and Gideon Bohak, both Jewish, not Christian. Moreover, before Jacobovici and Wilson, none of the scholars who argue that it is a Christian text have regarded this as having any implications that anyone need be afraid of. It needs to be stressed that none of these scholars have thought for a moment that it is a coded history about Jesus' marriage.

The reason why the majority of scholars have seen *Joseph and Aseneth* as a Jewish work is that, in the study of apocryphal or para-biblical works of this kind during the twentieth century, it was generally considered that a work that had Jewish themes (such as a story about Old Testament characters) and no overtly Christian features must

be Jewish. Even if there were a few passages of a Christian character, it was usually thought that these must be Christian interpolations in an originally Jewish work. This approach was a general approach to this kind of literature and was applied to *Joseph and Aseneth* simply as a matter of course, not specifically in order to evade a Christian reading of this text. But more recently, this approach has been significantly challenged, especially in James Davila's important book *The Provenance of the Pseudepigrapha*, where he argued that it was quite possible for Christian authors to write about Old Testament characters in Old Testament times without overtly Christian language and that we need tougher criteria for distinguishing Christian from Jewish literature of this kind.

In my assessment of *The Lost Gospel* it has not been my intention to expound or to justify my own view of *Joseph and Aseneth*, but simply to critique Jacobovici's and Wilson's arguments. Most of my critique can easily be accepted by scholars who see *Joseph and Aseneth* as Jewish, not Christian, and I don't think Jacobovici should be claiming me as an ally. My preference for seeing *Joseph and Aseneth* as Christian rather than Jewish is in fact still a quite tentative proposal, which I would not want to be too dogmatic about. Actually, when discussing typology, what I was most concerned to argue was that ancient Christian readers of *Joseph and Aseneth* such as Moses of Ingila and Pseudo-Zachariah would very likely have read it in typological terms, seeing Joseph as a type of Christ and Aseneth as a type of the church. Since they did the same with Genesis, it doesn't follow that *they* supposed *Joseph and Aseneth* to be a Christian text. Most likely, they thought it was a text from pre-Christian times, an apocryphal Jewish work that could be read in the same typological way as they read Genesis.

(1) Aseneth is a type of the church

Just to be accurate, what I meant was "uncontroversial" was that the Syriac Fathers, such as Ephrem, saw Aseneth in Genesis as a type of the church.

(2) Mary Magdalene is a type of the church

The problem with the logic is this. What Ephrem thinks is

A (Aseneth) *symbolizes* or *prefigures* (B) the church.

C (Mary Magdalene) *symbolizes* or *prefigures* (B) the church.

It does not follow that A (Aseneth) *symbolizes* or *prefigures* C (Mary Magdalene).

The trouble is that Jacobovici is too inclined to assimilate typology to coded history, which deals in simple equivalents.

Note very carefully that Jacobovici does not defend his flagrant misreading of the key passage of Ephrem that he had called 'The Clincher.' He merely shifts the ground to his reading of *Joseph and Aseneth*.

Assessing *The Lost Gospel* **Part 5: Misreading *Joseph and Aseneth* (ii)**

Richard Bauckham

From some of the things that Jacobovici and Wilson say about *Joseph and Aseneth* (JosAs) one might suppose that to read it as a 'lost gospel' all one needs to do is to substitute the names Jesus and Mary the Magdalene for Joseph and Aseneth. But it turns out to be much more complicated. For a start, Aseneth is the daughter of a priest of the city of On (Heliopolis) in Egypt. She lives, within the precincts of her father's house, in a tower, which is her home, though it also bears some resemblance to a temple and includes a room where she worships all the Egyptian gods. Mary the Magdalene, on the other hand, is a Syro-Phoenician priestess. Her tower, a Phoenician-style sacred tower, is a temple to the goddess Artemis, whose priestess she is, located in Magdala in Galilee. This is explained at some length, but there is not then, as one might expect, a detailed explanation of the whole text of JosAs, explaining how it translates into a story about Jesus and Mary the Magdalene. The treatment of the text is quite selective, both within the main body of the book and in the notes that Jacobovici and Wilson add to Tony Burke's translation of JosAs.

In this part of my assessment I shall highlight just a few examples of the way Jacobovici and Wilson treat the narrative of JosAs, including both major misreadings of the text and arbitrary methods of deriving a story about Jesus and Mary the Magdalene from it.

(1) The seven virgins

Seven virgins live with Aseneth. They each have a room in the tower and they act as companions (she and they are all of the same age and have grown up together) and as maidservants looking after her needs (2:5). When, during the night, Aseneth embarks on her week of extreme penance and mourning, the seven virgins hear her groaning and weeping and come to her door to see what is wrong. Aseneth does not open the door to them, but tells them that she is in bed with a headache and needs to be left to be quiet. So the virgins return to their rooms.

In an effort to connect JosAs with the portrayal of Mary Magdalene in the Gospels, Jacobovici and Wilson claim that the seven virgins correspond to the seven demons that Jesus cast out of Mary Magdalene (Luke 8:2; Mark 16:9):

Aseneth has seven women attendants, co-priestesses. In the eyes of monotheistic Jews and pagans of the time, these priestesses would have been seen as spirits – or, in Greek, *daimons* [*sic*] – demons who officiated with her in her tower. When ... Aseneth rejects her gods, she also has no further use for her seven vestal virgins. They are dispensed with – in a sense, cast out or cast away (LG 91-92; cf. 318-319 n. 18).

In JosAs there is no indication that the virgins are 'co-priestesses.' They are servants and companions. Aseneth does not dispense with their services as priestesses or even with their services as servants, but simply wants, on this occasion, to get on with her penance and mourning uninterrupted. Moreover, I don't know of any evidence that monotheists would regard pagan priestesses as *daimones*. They might well regard the pagan gods as *daimones* (as Paul does in 1 Corinthians and some other early Jewish and Christian writings do), but not the priests or priestesses.

After the episode of the bees and the honeycomb, Aseneth asks the ‘man’ from heaven if she may call the seven virgins, so that he may bless them too, as he has Aseneth, for, she says, she loves them as sisters (17:4). So they come and the man says to them:

May the Lord God Most High bless you. You will be the seven pillars in the City of Refuge and all the daughters of the house of the Village of Refuge who choose shall enter and upon you they shall rest forever (17:5).

The only comment that Jacobovici and Wilson make on this episode is in a note to the text: ‘The seven pagan demons are now transformed into seven pillars of the New Church’ (LG 355 n. 157). But in the text the seven virgins have simply remained Aseneth’s beloved companions and are now given a key role in the institution that she represents. What do Jacobovici and Wilson think these ‘pillars’ are? What can it mean that women will ‘rest upon them forever’? Why do they not appear prominently in Jacobovici’s and Wilson’s reconstruction of the early history of Christianity? One would expect them to represent seven female leaders who support Mary the Magdalene in her leadership of her Christian group. I think this shows both how far Jacobovici and Wilson have to distort the narrative of JosAs to suit their application of it to Mary Magdalene and also how little their reconstruction of Christian origins is really governed by the actual narrative of this supposedly so valuable ‘lost gospel.’

Jacobovici and Wilson do note, when equating the seven demons of Luke 8:2 with Mary Magdalene’s (Aseneth’s) seven ‘pagan attendants’: ‘Interestingly, one of the Gnostic texts tells us that Jesus had seven women as well as twelve males among his disciples’ (LG 319 n. 18). Most readers will not be able to check out this unspecified Gnostic text. It is the *First Apocalypse of James* (CG V,3), where James asks Jesus: ‘who are the [seven] women who have [been] your disciples?’ (38:16). Later four of these are named: ‘Salome and Mariam [and Martha and Arsinoe...]’ (40:25-26). The seven would undoubtedly have included Mary Magdalene, the most famous of Jesus’ female disciples, who is not specified in addition to the seven and so must be included among them, and she is almost certainly the ‘Mariam’ who is named (as in many early Christian texts Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany are probably fused). So this tradition of seven female disciples, including Mary Magdalene, is no support for the idea that Aseneth’s seven virgins represent seven attendants of Mary Magdalene.

(2) The foster father

In chapter 18, Aseneth, following her transforming encounter with the ‘man’ from heaven, hears that Joseph is coming to visit. Her parents are away on their country estate (see 20:5), and so she takes charge of affairs and instructs her ‘foster father – the manager of her father’s house’ (18:2) to prepare the house and a banquet. Jacobovici and Wilson comment:

Her biological father is noticeable by his absence, as her “foster father” takes over. This seems to reflect a time when Mary the Magdalene’s biological father, priest, and king “abandoned” her, before becoming reconciled to the marriage (LG 356 n. 163).

But the narrative in JosAs does not imply that Potiphar, Aseneth’s father, has abandoned her because he objects to the marriage. On the contrary, he has been a strong advocate of Aseneth’s marriage to Joseph from an early stage – from the time when Joseph first visited the family and before Aseneth herself had fallen in love with Joseph (4:9). He never opposes the marriage. He just happens to be away from home on this occasion. When he does return home, he immediately proposes that Joseph and Aseneth should

get married as soon as possible – the very next day! (20:5-6). There is not the slightest hint that he has to become ‘reconciled’ to the marriage. Once again, Jacobovici and Wilson are spinning a fantasy that has no basis even in their own practice of reading JosAs as a coded story of Jesus and Mary Magdalene.

(3) The visit to Jacob

After Joseph’s marriage to Aseneth and when the famous famine is beginning, Joseph’s father Jacob and Jacob’s other sons and relatives arrive in Egypt and settle in the land of Goshen. (It is impossible to evade the deliberate echoes of the Genesis narrative here.) Joseph and Aseneth travel to Goshen to visit Jacob and Joseph’s brothers. Jacob approves and blesses his new daughter-in-law (22:3-10). Jacobovici and Wilson note that this episode is not in Genesis (LG 364 n. 195). But, applying their methodology, the implication ought to be that it represents an event in the life of Jesus and Mary the Magdalene. What event? Who is Jacob when decoded? They do not tell us. All we learn from them is that this narrative expresses a Gnostic theology (LG 364-365 nn. 194, 195). Clearly this is a part of the JosAs narrative that they have not been able to decode. That throws doubt on the whole enterprise.

(4) What happened to Mary the Magdalene?

The following passage I find utterly baffling:

A later Christian tradition says that after Jesus’ death, she [Mary the Magdalene] went to Ephesus. But *Joseph and Aseneth* seems to suggest otherwise. It seems to be telling us that she stayed in the Jerusalem area to the end (LG 208).

Early medieval tradition takes Mary Magdalene to southern France (where that tradition is still very much alive), but there is no tradition claiming she went to Ephesus. This point is obviously a confusion with Mary the mother of Jesus, who according to tradition from the fifth century onwards died in Ephesus. But the puzzling point is what Jacobovici and Wilson then say about JosAs. How does the latter suggest that Mary Magdalene stayed in the Jerusalem area until the end (her death?)? According to Jacobovici and Wilson, JosAs is ‘a gospel compiled between the rescue of Mary the Magdalene and the crucifixion of Jesus’ (LG 376 n. 233). How can it possibly tell us anything about what happened to Mary Magdalene after the crucifixion? It would seem that Jacobovici and Wilson have got so used to reading whatever they think about Mary Magdalene into the text of JosAs that they have overlooked this obvious problem.

(5) Pharaoh

In the interests of the fantastic tale of political conspiracy and murder in Palestine in 19 CE, soon after Jesus’ marriage to Mary Magdalene, that Jacobovici and Wilson spin out of the later chapters of JosAs, they identify Pharaoh in the text with the emperor Tiberius and Pharaoh’s son with Tiberius’s adopted son Germanicus. But they mostly ignore an aspect of the JosAs narrative to which they cannot do justice in constructing their tale. This is Joseph’s relationship with Pharaoh. Joseph is ‘the magistrate of all the land of Egypt, because king Pharaoh put him in charge over all the land’ (4:7). (There is no note on this verse in Jacobovici’s and Wilson’s annotated text of JosAs, and no reference to it in chapter 10, where one might have expected it to be discussed.)

When Joseph decides to marry Aseneth, he explains that he must ask Pharaoh to give her to him, because, he says, Pharaoh ‘is like my father and has appointed me magistrate over the land’ (20:7). Here there is a note by Jacobovici and Wilson: ‘Jesus

seems to have had a relationship with the Roman emperor' (LG 361 n. 182). Then Pharaoh not only sanctions the marriage but performs the marriage ceremony and hosts the week-long wedding banquet (21:1-8). He also

called all the chiefs of Egypt and all the kings of the nations and proclaimed to the whole land of Egypt that every man who does work for the seven days of the wedding of Joseph and Aseneth shall die (21:8).

This is only intelligible and appropriate because Joseph is Pharaoh's vicegerent, second only to Pharaoh himself in the ruling hierarchy of Egypt.

On this material Jacobovici and Wilson have only this to say:

"Pharaoh" here acts as Pontifex Maximus, which, of course, was the title and role of a Roman emperor such as Tiberias, but he seems more intimately involved in blessing this union than Tiberias would have been – even if he was aware of it. More likely, it is Sejanus who is playing the de facto role of Pharaoh here, with Germanicus playing the role of "son of Pharaoh" (LG 362 n. 185).

What is wrong with this?! In the first place, the relationship Jacobovici and Wilson here postulate between Jesus and Tiberius (so LG 361 n. 182) or, rather, Sejanus (so LG 362 n. 185: note the inconsistency) plainly does not do justice to the JosAs narrative, which ought to mean (on Jacobovici's and Wilson's theory) that Jesus was put in charge, if not of the whole empire, then of the whole territory of Roman Palestine or at least Galilee by Tiberius or Sejanus, and that Jesus' marriage to Mary Magdalene was actually performed by the emperor in his role as Pontifex Maximus. (It is surely not credible that Sejanus could have actually acted in the role of Pontifex Maximus.) Moreover, since Joseph goes to Pharaoh's court to gain Pharaoh's blessing on his marriage, the marriage must have taken place in Rome, with the greatest pomp and publicity.

It is easy to see why, in the second place, there is no hint of this relationship between Jesus and the emperor or Sejanus in chapter 14, where Jacobovici and Wilson construct their utterly conjectural tale about Tiberius, Germanicus, Sejanus, Pilate and Mary Magdalene. They have enough difficulty making that story seem credible without taking account of the relationship between Joseph and Pharaoh in JosAs. This illustrates again how arbitrary is their method of reading JosAs. Joseph's marriage to Aseneth and the birth of their children is taken to be a straightforward code for Jesus' marriage to Mary Magdalene and the birth of two biological children to them, but Joseph's position as vicegerent of Pharaoh, magistrate over all Egypt, and Pharaoh's part in the marriage are explained only in footnotes and there they are diluted to a faint echo of what the JosAs narrative actually says. Jacobovici and Wilson take that narrative seriously when it suits them, distort it on other occasions, and virtually ignore it when they realise that it would strain all credibility to read it in the same way as they read the passages that really feature in their construction of a story about Jesus and Mary Magdalene.

(6) Joseph's brothers

In chapters 22-29 Joseph's brothers play a key role. Especially important are the pairs Simeon and Levi (after Reuben, the two eldest brothers, sons of Leah), Dan and Gad (two of the four sons of the handmaidens), Naphtali and Asher (the other two sons of the handmaidens) and Benjamin (Joseph's full brother, the youngest). Reuben and Judah also appear. Generally, Jacobovici and Wilson take the brothers of Joseph to represent Jesus' disciples (perhaps the twelve, though this is not explicit). But they are not consistent about it, because they also suppose that some of them are Jesus' blood

relations (LG 368-369 nn. 209-210). Nor are they consistent in their treatment of the names. In chapter 23 Simeon and Levi are very clearly identified in the text as the sons of Jacob of those names in the Genesis narrative, since reference is made to their famous destruction of the city of Shechem (23:2). But Jacobovici and Wilson take them to represent the disciples of the same names: Simeon (Simon Peter) and Levi (Matthew). So is it a happy coincidence for the author who encoded the story of Jesus in this way that these two sons of Leah are namesakes of precisely those two disciples of Jesus he wanted those two sons of Leah to represent? Jacobovici and Wilson do not extend this treatment of the names of Joseph's brothers any further: they do not postulate disciples of Jesus named Dan and Gad, for example. Why not? As in so many cases, the 'decoding' of JosAs is done inconsistently, following no stable principles.

It should also be carefully noted that in their treatment of these chapters of JosAs (22-29) Jacobovici and Wilson cannot avoid admitting that the brothers of Joseph are those to whom the text of Genesis refers (see, e.g., 373 n. 225), since information about them (such as Simeon's and Levi's destruction of Shechem, and the fact that Benjamin is Joseph's full brother) is presupposed and alluded to. So although they insist that the story itself 'has absolutely nothing to do with the text in Genesis' (370 n. 214), they are, in effect, conceding that the story is a non-biblical story *about biblical characters*, even if these characters *symbolize* other persons. This is what they elsewhere deny when they insist that Joseph simply is not the biblical patriarch nor Aseneth his Egyptian wife.

Assessing *The Lost Gospel* **Part 6: On Mary Magdalene and Magdala**

Richard Bauckham

I have deliberately restricted most of my assessment of LG to matters relating to *Joseph and Aseneth*. But I shall add a few remarks about Mary Magdalene's name and her home town.

(1) Mary Magdalene was Jewish

A central claim about Mary Magdalene in LG is that she was a Gentile, indeed a pagan priestess. Needless to say, there is not the slightest trace of this view of Mary Magdalene anywhere in ancient literature (not even in the 'Gnostic Gospels'). It depends entirely on supposing that the character of Aseneth represents her. There is a very simple and obvious objection: her name. Mary (Hebrew Miriam, which was evidently pronounced Mariam in this period) was much the most popular name among Palestinian Jewish women of this period. (This is why there are so many women called Mary in the Gospels and Acts and also why one should keep them distinct and not confuse them.) It was a quintessentially Jewish name. At the very least, Jacobovici and Wilson need to address this point. As far as I can tell, they never mention it. (Throughout the book it is very rare for them to make any reference to possible objections to their arguments.)

(2) Magdala was a Jewish town

As it happens I know a lot about Magdala. I have been studying Magdala (literary sources and archaeology) for more than two years now, and I'm currently editing a volume of interdisciplinary essays on Magdala, in collaboration with Italian archaeologist Stefano de Luca (who excavated the southern part of the site) and Israeli archaeologist Mordechai Aviam.

Magdala was founded in the wake of the Hasmonean (i.e. Jewish) conquest of Galilee c. 100 BCE. There was some kind of settlement there previously, but we know nothing about it. There is no reason to believe that it had a tower or was called Magdala. Nothing of it survived into the Jewish settlement established by the Hasmoneans, which flourished down to the early Roman period and was no doubt the home town of Mary Magdalene. It is not credible that 'Magdala might have been a Phoenician merchant outpost dominated by a ritual tower, hence the name,' still less that the tower was a temple of Artemis in which Mary Magdalene served as priestess (LG 93). The tower after which the town was given its Aramaic name Magdala ('tower') has been excavated. It was a massive construction, with casement walls, beside the port of Magdala. It probably functioned as a defensive look-out post, since from it one could see all around the sea of Galilee and spot any enemy forces approaching from any direction. It was certainly not a pagan temple.

Jacobovici and Wilson claim that Magdala

was in many ways a Gentile city, specifically Phoenician, and primarily engaged in the production of salted fish. Much of Magdala's products were sent to Tiberias just a few miles south, to Damascus to the northeast, and to Tyre and Sidon up the coast in Phoenician territory. From these commercial hubs and Mediterranean port cities, Magdala's salted fish would have made their way throughout the empire.

As a result of this, many of Magdala's inhabitants were Gentiles. The proof is in the material culture found in Magdala and in Bethsaida, a related Galilean town engaged in the fishing industry. Specifically, the archaeology reveals coins, statues, altars, and so forth, that attest to the fact that the residents of these towns were both Jewish and Gentile. Magdala also had many links to Phoenicia just a few miles north to the northwest, outside Jewish territory (LG 206-7).

A good deal of this is imagination and much is wrong.

It is certainly true that Magdala flourished because of its fishing industry: both catching the fish and processing it to produce salted fish (the only form in which fish could be transported more than a few miles) and fish sauce, the famous *garum* that was extraordinarily popular throughout the Roman world. These fish products were certainly exported, but we do not actually know to where. In the Mediterranean world they would have been in competition with the flourishing trade in fish products from Spain, North Africa and the Black Sea region. The most obvious major markets for Magdala would have been Sepphoris (in Galilee), Tiberias (only after 18 CE, when it was founded), Jerusalem, the Golan and the Decapolis cities across the lake. Magdalene fish products may have travelled further afield, but Phoenicia (Tyre and Sidon) is actually not a very likely destination, because Phoenicia had its own fish processing industry. I know of absolutely no evidence that 'Magdala also had many links to Phoenicia.'

Magdala (in Galilee) and Bethsaida (not a Hasmonean foundation) (strictly speaking, not in Galilee, but in the Golan) had very different histories and should not be assimilated when discussing their cultures. There are no statues or altars from Magdala – or indeed from anywhere in Galilee. Coins prove nothing relevant here: they are found everywhere and were used by everyone. (Tyrian coins depicting Phoenician gods were even the official currency of the Jerusalem Temple.) What we can say, at least about the southern part of the city of Magdala, the area around the port and including a palaestra and a large complex of Roman baths, is that it was significantly romanized in its culture, but this is not evidence of the ethnicity of the inhabitants. Nor does it prove that the inhabitants were not observant Jews, for Jews in many parts of the Roman world were quite prepared to adopt aspects of the common culture that did not involve them in honouring pagan gods. What we do not find in Magdala – or anywhere in Galilee in the period following the Hasmonean conquest – is any evidence of pagan religion: no temples, no altars, no statues. All we have in the way of figurative art from Magdala is a mosaic in the baths decorated with the standard motifs used in such a context: a dolphin, a ship, implements used in the baths and athletics.

It is likely enough that a few Gentiles lived in Magdala – merchants, perhaps, and other people brought there by Magdala's trade – but there is no basis for supposing that 'many of Magdala's inhabitants were Gentiles.' When Josephus the Jewish historian made Magdala (he calls it by its Greek name – *Tarichaeae*, meaning 'fish factories') his headquarters during the Jewish revolt in the late 60s, it seems from his accounts to have been an entirely Jewish town, where Gentiles were not welcome. The total absence of Gentiles at that time may have been the result of the revolt, which would have made Gentiles feel unsafe and unwelcome, but, on the other hand, *Tarichaeae* in Josephus' time does not sound like a town from which a large proportion of its inhabitants (Gentiles) had fled, to be replaced by new Jewish inhabitants. That Magdala was ever anything but a dominantly Jewish settlement there is no reason at all to suppose.

Assessing *The Lost Gospel* **Part 7: Conclusion and Pauline Postscript**

Richard Bauckham

Conclusion

In this assessment I have focused on the use that LG makes of *Joseph and Aseneth*, since it is the identification and interpretation of this as a 'lost gospel' that the book is ostensibly about. There is a great deal in the book that is only tangentially related to its reading of *Joseph and Aseneth*, and a great deal could be said about that. I could easily also extend my critique of Jacobovici's and Wilson's interpretation of *Joseph and Aseneth*, but I think I have done enough. By now readers will probably either agree with my critique or be impervious to further argument along the same lines.

In the assessment I have taken the arguments of LG seriously and assessed them by the usual criteria of rigorous historical investigation. This appears to be how the authors wish their arguments to be treated by scholars (cf. LG 304). But at the end of this assessment I am driven to wonder whether even the authors take their arguments and conclusions seriously. Jacobovici, at the end of his response to the first two parts of my assessment, seems himself to be suggesting that I am taking them too seriously. Probably the most generous assessment of the book would be to suppose that the authors have all along intended it as no more than an entertaining joke – a joke at the expense of those 'Pauline Christians' they so obviously detest.

A Pauline Postscript

This is not the place to argue my own interpretation of *Joseph and Aseneth*, which I am still developing. But I will say something here about one aspect of it that may be of particular interest to readers of LG and in which, as far as I'm aware, my argument is new. In general, I see *Joseph and Aseneth* as a novella in the style of the Greek romantic novels and with some precedents in such Jewish novellas as *Esther*, *Judith* and *Tobit*. (Since, in my view, *Tobit* has a symbolic dimension, about which I have written, it may be the most interesting of these texts for comparison with *Joseph and Aseneth*.) But in addition to being an engaging story, beautifully composed and embodying both romance and adventure, I believe *Joseph and Aseneth* is a Christian writing with a Christian theological dimension at a symbolic level. This does not mean that every element in the story can be decoded in an allegorical fashion, because the story has to work as a coherent and engaging narrative, something that consistent and elaborate allegories seldom achieve. But important aspects of the story (including chaps 22-29) function symbolically and there are phrases and passages that point very clearly beyond the literal level of the story and tease the reader into thinking about their religious meaning. The central symbol, of course, is the union of Jesus Christ with the church imaged as his bride, a common image in early Christian literature, beginning with the New Testament, and one that is used by patristic writers in their allegorical readings of Genesis to give typological significance to the marriage of Joseph and Aseneth. But, as readers of this assessment of LG will be well aware, I do not think that Mary Magdalene has anything at all to do with this text!

As in many other early Jewish and Christian texts, biblical allusions play a key part in giving the text more meaning than it might have were such allusions not present or not noticed. Some of the allusions to the Old Testament (LXX) are well known, though I do not think their full significance has been generally appreciated. Allusions to the New Testament are more rarely noticed, because the majority of scholars have interpreted *Joseph and Aseneth* as a non-Christian Jewish text. Where they have noted parallels in the NT they have tended to regard them either as interesting Jewish precedents for the NT texts or dismissed them as Christian interpolations in the Jewish work that is their sole interest. My particular concern in this note is the extent of significant allusion to Paul's writings, which has not been previously appreciated.

There is recurrent reference in JosAs to 'the bread of life' and 'the cup of blessing,' in surely unmistakable allusion to the Christian eucharist. The first of these phrases is from the Gospel of John (John 6:35, 47), the second from Paul (1 Cor 10:16). This Pauline allusion has often been observed, though not always taken seriously. But I wish to draw attention to two other Pauline passages that have influenced JosAs:

I feel a divine jealousy for you, for I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a chaste virgin (παρθένον ἀγνήν) to Christ
(2 Cor 11:2 NRSV).

But we were gentle among you, like a nurse (τροφός) tenderly caring for her own children (1 Thes 2:7 NRSV).

In JosAs both the 'man' from heaven and Joseph call Aseneth 'chaste virgin' (παρθένος ἀγνή: 15:1, 2, 4, 6, 10; 19:9), exactly the phrase used in 2 Cor 11:2, one of Paul's rare uses of the image of the church as the bride of Christ. This Pauline text has influenced the portrayal of Aseneth in JosAs and accounts for the emphasis this work places on Aseneth's unsullied virginity up to her marriage (note especially 21:1).

In the second of these Pauline quotations, Paul compares his care for the church with that of a mother or foster mother caring for her children (1 Thes 2:7). The word τροφός is feminine. Its masculine equivalent is τροφεύς, which is used in the sense of 'foster father' in JosAs 18:2, 3, 5, 7, 11. I think this Pauline text accounts for the otherwise rather puzzling figure of Aseneth's foster father in chapter 18. (Would his narrative role not have been adequately performed by Aseneth's father's steward, without portraying him as her foster father? Why should Aseneth have had a foster father?) The foster father represents Paul. In a narrative that symbolically portrays the church from the Gentiles as a bride of Christ, it is appropriate that the role of *the* apostle to the Gentiles in caring for that church in its infancy should be represented.

So, if I am right, this work that Jacobovici and Wilson think derives from a non-Pauline, even anti-Pauline sector of earliest Christianity in fact features Paul himself in its symbolism, acknowledging his unique role in the early history of Christianity among the Gentiles.