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2. Images, Texts, Reality

3. THE DIVINE BEES - GENS AETERNA.

4. 20 min.

5. Outline

The paper is dedicated to the bee-scene of the Old Testament Apocrypha "Joseph and Aseneth". The sacral functions of bees and honeycomb in this central apocalyptic scene are in an accord with the mythological and symbolic meaning of bees and ritual functions of honey, that are widely spread all over the Mediterranean region. The main role of the bees in myths is the mediation between heavenly and human worlds: they serve as therapontes of the gods and divine messengers. Yet the most enigmatic apocalyptic scene involving bees and honeycomb has no parallels in the literary sources. In this mystery scene Aseneth is renamed as City of Refuge, and is shown as a virgin surrounded by wonderful big bees. Their colors repeat that of the Jewish priest's attire. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate, that the image of Aseneth vested by bees, could be explained with the help of the cult and iconography of Artemis of Ephesus - a virgin Goddess with bees on her garment. Artemis of Ephesus and Aseneth (after her transformation into an angelic creature) are both the defenders of the city, and the City itself. A bee is stamped on the Ephesian coins as a sign of a colony (swarm leaves the native hive). Similarly Aseneth covered with big bees that build a honeycomb on her mouth becomes the City of Refuge for all the proselytes.

It leads to reinterpretation of the strange "polymastia" of Artemis of Ephesus: the "breasts" of Artemis turn to be cells of King\Queen-Bees, called in Greek by the rare word "essenēs". The same word designates the collegium of priests of Artemis. It opens an understanding of the name, that Greek authors gave to Qumranites. So the priest-bees from "Joseph and Aseneth" find their imaginative parallel in the priest's community of Qumran through the famous Ephesian cult.