

ACCIPITE IUDITH VIDUAM (HIER. PROL. IUD. 11).
JEROME'S IDEAS OF CHRISTIAN WIDOWHOOD
IN THE BOOK OF JUDITH OF THE VULGATE

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ABSTRACT In the Book of Judith of the Vulgate the figure of protagonist is notably refashioned in comparison to the main witnesses. Judith is emphasized as a model or ideal of widow and widowhood. Such reworking is brought about particularly through Vulgate's unique additions or *Sondergut*, which emerge as instructive glosses to the readership of Judith^{Vg} by work of Vg's narrator. The present study explores particularly the harmony of the ideas of Judith^{Vg} in their special material and Jerome's Christian views, in this case, regarding widows and widowhood, found elsewhere in his writings, particularly in his letters.

KEYWORDS Book of Judith – widowhood – ascetic Ideals – Christianization – Vg narrator.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG Im Buch Judith in der Vulgata wird die Figur der Protagonistin im Vergleich zu den Hauptzeugen deutlich umgestaltet. Judith wird als Modell oder Ideal der Witwe und des Witwentums hervorgehoben. Eine solche Überarbeitung wird besonders durch die einzigartigen Zusätze oder *Sondergut* der Vulgata bewirkt, die durch die Arbeit des Vg-Erzählers als lehrreiche Glossen für die Leserschaft von Judith^{Vg} erscheinen. Die vorliegende Studie untersucht insbesondere die Harmonie zwischen den speziellen Ideen von Judith^{Vg} und den christlichen Ansichten von Hieronymus, in diesem Fall in Bezug auf Witwen und Witwenschaft, die sich an anderer Stelle in seinen Schriften, insbesondere in seinen Briefen finden.

SCHLAGWORTE Buch Judith – Witwenschaft – asketische Ideale – Christianisierung – Vg Erzähler.

1. Introduction

In his 2018 study, B. Van Roekel has shown how Jerome notably christianized the figure of Judith in his new Latin version of the book². Before it, the figure of Judith in the Vulgate, had already been thoroughly studied by L. Lange³. The

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2. B. Van Roekel, "The Christianization of Judith: Considering the Hieronymian Translation of Liber Iudith and Jerome's Christianizing Agenda", *The Hilltop Review* 11/1 (2018) 31-46.

3. See L. Lange, *Die Iuditfigur in der Vulgata*. Eine theologische Studie zur Lateinischen Bibel (DCLS 36; De Gruyter: Berlin – Boston 2016)

present study focuses specifically on the figure of Judith in the Vulgate as a model of widowhood. Its aim is to highlight the remarkable harmony that exists between the ideas related to the Vulgate's depiction of Judith as a model widow and Jerome's views regarding Christian widowhood found elsewhere, particularly in his letters. Evidence suggests that the widow Judith in the Vg embodies notably Jerome's cherished ascetic ideals⁴.

As it is widely recognized, Jerome's translation of the Book of Judith seems to have been brought about in close time to that of Tobit. The points of contact between the prefaces of the two books are patent and the phrase in Judith's preface⁵ *adquieui postulatione uestrae* (line 6), remains senseless when not read in connection with Tobit's preface. The "your request," then, most certainly refers to that of Jerome's patron bishops, Chromatius of Aquileia (ca. 345-406) and Heliodorus of Altinum († 406) as explicitly stated in Tobit's preface. In that light, also Jerome's new translation of Judith, plausibly came about at request of his benefactors. An important piece of information found in both prefaces, is that Jerome's new Latin translation of the books, was worked out from a "Chaldean" *Vorlage* (i.e., an Aramaic text), and specifically regarding Judith's, it is said to have resulted also of a revision of other *Vorlage* (see *Prolog. Iud.* lines 8-9). Regarding his new Judith version, finally, Jerome affirms to have followed his famous translative principle *magis sensum e sensu quam ex verbo verbum*

4. The present study was devised as a supplement, some sort of second part of the paper we presented in the first IOVS Meeting, on August 8-12, of the present, in Zürich, Switzerland (upcoming publication in *Vid* special issue).

5. The whole text of the Prologue runs as follow: INCIPIT PROLOGUS IUDITH Apud Hebraeos liber Iudith inter Agiografa legitur; cuius auctoritas ad roboranda illa quae in contentione veniunt, minus idonea iudicatur. Chaldeo tamen sermone conscriptus inter historias computatur. Sed quia hunc librum sinodus nicena in numero Sanctarum Scripturarum legitur [5] computasse, adquieui postulationi vestrae, immo exactioni, et sepositis occupationibus quibus vehementer artabar, huic unam lucubrationem dedi, magis sensum e sensu quam ex verbo verbum transferens. Multorum codicum varietatem vitiosissimam amputavi; sola ea quae intelligentia integra in verbis chaldeis invenire potui, latinis expressi [10]. Accipite Iudith viduam, castitatis exemplum, et triumphali laude perpetuis eam praeconis declarate. Hanc enim non solum feminis, sed et viris imitabilem dedit, qui, castitatis eius remunerator, virtutem talem tribuit, ut invictum omnibus hominibus vinceret, insuperabilem superaret. EXPLICIT PROLOGUS [15].” See Hieronymus, *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*. Lateinisch-deutsch. Band II: Iosue – Iudices – Ruth – Samuhel – Malachim – Verba dierum – Ezras – Tobias – Iudith – Hester – Iob (Herausgegeben von Andreas Beriger, Widu-Wolfgang Ehlers und Michael Fieger) (Sammlung Tusculum: De Gruyter, Berlin – Boston 2018) 1220 (the numbers between square brackets correspond to the Prologue's lines in the edition). For an English translation of the preface, see E. L. Galagher, “Why did Jerome Translate Tobit and Judith”, *HTR* 108/3 (2015) 356–375, 375.

(line 8; recall also *Ep.* 57 to Pammachius). The above-mentioned elements constitute important premises for the considerations that follow.

2. *Widow Judith in Jerome's Prologue*

In the conclusive paragraph of his prologue to the Book of Judith^{Vg}, Jerome, as it seems addressing more than simply his translation's patrons but more broadly his (future) Christian readership, invites them to "receive the widow Judith." Noteworthy, Vulgate's narrator uniquely, while introducing Judith to the reader in Jdt 8:1^{Vg}, immediately presents her as "widow" (*et factum est cum audisset haec Iudith vidua*; Gr: Καὶ ἤκουσεν ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις Ἰουδιθ; OL: *Et erat in civitate commorans in diebus illis Judith*). Even though the theme of widowhood in connection to the protagonist is clearly an emphasis of the Greek text (see Jdt 8:4-6; 9:4.9; 10:3; 16:7)⁶ its occurrence in the Vulgate seems to serve a different purpose. Jerome's invitation to "receive the widow Judith" is, in fact, immediately narrowed to "as an example of chastity" (*castitatis exemplum*). Such annotation appears in notable consonance with Vulgate's rephrase of Jdt 16:22 in which the Greek narrator states that "many desired [to marry] her" (καὶ πολλοὶ ἐπεθύμησαν αὐτήν), and in the Vg we read *erat etiam virtuti castitatis adiuncta ita ut non cognosceret virum omnibus diebus vitae suae ex quo defunctus est Manasses vir eius* (Jdt 16:26 Vg)⁷. One of Vulgate's main emphasis regarding the figure of Judith, therefore, according to Jerome's very words in the preface and Vulgate's rephrase just mentioned, is on her exemplarity on the virtue of chastity in her widowhood. The idea of *virtue* is also worth highlighting here. In Jerome's Prologue, in fact, we find divine endorsement for Judith's exemplary chaste behaviour: the "rewarder of her chastity" (*Prol.* line 13), gave her such *virtus*⁸ that she "overcame the one not overcome by anyone, and conquered the unconquerable" (*Prol.* line 14). Lastly, Judith's exemplarity is extended in the Preface beyond gender and state (woman-widow) to all Judith's potential readers, including the male ones, to which Jerome also evoke divine

6. Regarding the multidimensionality of the figure of Judith as widow in the Greek text, see for instance D. L. Gera, *Judith* (CEJL; De Gruyter: Berlin – Boston 2014) 65.98-109

7. Noteworthy, the "ut" clause in the Vg conforms itself almost *verbatim* to the rest of the Greek text for this verse excepting its closing phrase (καὶ προσετέθη πρὸς τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ) which in the Vg is not found.

8. Jerome here seems to play with both senses of the word *virtus*, "virtue" (in the sense of moral practice or action) and "power, strength."

authority: “For he (God) has given her as a model not only to women, but also to men” (*Prol. Iud.* lines 12-13).

3. *Judit 10:4^{Vg}*

Between Jerome’s Preface and Vulgate’s unique addition in Jdt 16, we find an interesting *Sondergut* in Jdt 10. In effect, having already toned down the heroine’s external embellishment before she goes down to the Assyrian camp (compare Jdt 10:3-4 Gr/ 10:3^{Vg}) Vg-narrator adds this unique moralizing remark: *Cui etiam Dominus contulit splendorem quoniam omnis ista compositio non ex libidine, sed ex virtute pendebat; et ideo Dominus hanc in illam pulchritudinem ampliavit, ut incomparabili decore omnium oculis appareret* (Jdt 10:4^{Vg}). Noteworthy, this Vulgate special material strikingly restates and in a skillful manner articulates the main ideas encountered in the Preface and in Jdt 16: emphasis on Judith’s exemplary behavior, her chaste virtuosity, God as rewarder of chastity and enhancer of Judith’s splendor because of that (10:4ab^{Vg}). Then, whereas the narrator in Greek Judith states that “thus *she* made herself very beautiful, to entice the eyes of all the men who might see her” (καὶ ἐκαλλωπίσατο σφόδρα εἰς ἀπάτησιν⁹ ὀφθαλμῶν ἀνδρῶν, ὅσοι ἂν ἴδωσιν αὐτήν; see 10:4b), Vg narrator affirms that *the Lord* enhanced her beauty “so that she would appear before the eyes of all with incomparable beauty” (10:4cd^{Vg}). Although slight, the difference between the two versions is remarkable: in the Vulgate, Judith’s extraordinary beauty resulted also or even more from a divine agency than from worldly embellishment, thus becoming object of admiration and stupefaction¹⁰ more than physical desire (as in the Greek text according to the narrator’s statement in Jdt 10:14). Moreover, according to the Vulgate, widow Judith adorned herself, *non ex libidine* (i.e., not to arise desire) *sed ex virtute* (i.e., guided and motivated by the strength of her after-widowhood standing chastity).

9. Gera renders this prepositional phrase as “in order to beguile” (i.e., to cause to fail, to stumble). See Gera, *Judith*, 327.

10. We notice again a nuanced and yet significant change of sense in Vg’s reading corresponding to this verse: *et cum audissent viri verba eius considerabant faciem eius et erat in oculis eorum stupor quoniam mirabantur pulchritudinem eius nimis*. Vg’s rendering of this verse seems to play with the word *stupor* and the verb *miro*, deemphasizing the sensual connotation of the Greek reading clearly has.

4. Judith in Jerome's Letter 54

Interestingly, we find the figure of Judith mentioned in Jerome's Letter to Furia (Ep. 54, date by Nautin to 395), which according to its Incipit constitutes a treatise on Christian widowhood.¹¹ Already in its first lines it is stated the idea of "chastity" in connection to that life-state. Jerome in fact affirms that his interlocutor has insistently asked him to write her about how to live her widowhood without detriment of the good name of chastity (*uiuditatis corona inlaeso pudicitiae nomine conseruare*). Next, while recalling the figures of Paula, Eustochium and Blesila, his faithful female followers, the Stridon states, "oh that the men would imitate the feats of women" (*atque utinam praeconia feminarum imitarentur uiri*). The link between this remark and the one found in Judith's Preface needs no apology. The theme of *virtue* becomes central thereon. Towards the end of the letter, while reflecting with Furia about the young widows that abandon themselves to luxury (*luxuriatae*), "prostituting chastity" (*prostituere castitatem*) Jerome evokes the figure of Judith. In such evocation, Judith is presented as a "widow consumed by fasting and disfigured by the mourning dress" (*uiduam confectam ieiuniis et habitu lugubri sordidatam*). Such expressions are tinted with ascetic colourfulness. Regarding her figure, then, while graphically restating her "bloody feat," Jerome emphatically states: "being a woman, she beat the men and with her chastity she decapitates lust" (*uincit uiros femina et castitas truncat libidinem*)¹². Judith again is emphasized as a model of chastity. Such moral virtue constitutes her strength.

11. The New Testament background of Letter 54 appears to be clearly 1 Tim 5:3-18, from which Jerome extensively quotes or alludes in his later Letter 123 to Geruchia (from 409).

12. It is noteworthy that right in the beginning of his eulogy to Nebridius, Salvina's defunct husband (Letter 79, from around 400), while comparing him to the figure of Cornelius in Acts 10:2 (described by Luke as pious, God-fearing, charitable and man of prayer), Jerome describes him, first and foremost as *amator pudicitiae, ut uirgo sortiretur uxorem* (see Ep. 79,2). Moreover, in Letter 79, which is also a short instruction on Christian widowhood, Jerome again stresses the virtue of chastity regarding them (see Ep. 79,10) and towards its conclusion, evokes the figure of Judith together with that of Anna, daughter of Phanuel of Lk 2:36, *quae diebus et noctibus uersabantur in templo, et orationibus atque ieiuniis thesaurum pudicitiae conseruabant* (79,11).

5. *Summary and Conclusions*

In the Vulgate, Judith seems to be emphasized in her ascetic profile specially as a model of chastity in her widowhood, and that not only for women but also for men (i.e., to all potential readers of the book). The agreement between Jerome's ideas in his preface to Judith with those found in the Book of Judith^{Vg} *Sondergut* is remarkable. Notably, mostly Vulgate's *Sondergut* works for the Christianization of Judith's figure in it. As of Tobit, also of Judith, Jerome states to have elaborated his new Latin version from an Aramaic *Vorlage*. Of such *Vorlage*, however, we find no vestige. To draw more accurate conclusions regarding the harmony between Judith's *Sondergut*, Jerome's preface and the same ideas found in his letters referred in this study, it would be necessary to count on a more exact dating for Jerome's translation of Judith. Jerome's patrons presumably died in or around the same year (ca. 406). Besides having that year as a *terminus ante quem* and on the base of other evidence, a plausible date for Jerome's Judith translation seems to be towards the end of Jerome's translating activity, perhaps around 404. Therefore, if not originally part of Jerome's Aramaic *Vorlage* (which for lack of evidence is impossible to ascertain) the agreement between Jerome's *Sondergut* and the ideas found in his letters, at least two of them, written before that date (*Ep.* 54 and 79), points to Jerome's authorship. Chastity and virginity were at the top of the list of Jerome's cherished ascetic ideals¹³. Vulgate's emphases are latent in the Greek text. Following his translative principle for Judith, Jerome seems to have explored such latencies, which resulted in his additions. Such additions then can be seen as some sort of instructive glosses, through which the Vg-narrator directly addresses and instructs his potential Christian readership.

13. Emblematic in that regard is Jerome's famous Letter 22 to Eustochium.