

***The Sword of Judith: Judith Studies Across the Disciplines*, edited by Kevin R. Brine, Elena Ciletti, and Henrike Lähnemann**

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This volume is a multidisciplinary collection of essays devoted to Judith studies, based on the proceedings of “The Sword of Judith Conference” held at the New York Public Library in the spring of 2008. It is a fascinating and erudite collection of high-quality essays and it has its given place in any university library that specializes in the reception history of the Bible. The book is also nicely presented with illustrations of the pieces of art that are discussed in the various essays.

The book falls into four main parts. The first part, devoted to Introductions, contains three overarching studies. The opening essay, written by

Kevin R. Brine, explains the goals of the so-called Judith Project, an ongoing, cross-disciplinary project that seeks to foster scholarly collaboration across disciplines and national and language borders and to make knowledge freely available. It does not aim to produce a comprehensive guide to Judith studies but instead to provide a forum for specialized essays and to enable individual scholars to define their own research agenda within the broader field. Brine further provides a succinct overview of key issues in Judith studies: the narrative itself, its genre, theological outlook and *raison d'être*, its origin and textual transmission, and its place within the various and developing Jewish and Christian traditions. Brine also summarizes all the essays in the current volume.

The second article, by Deborah Levine Gera, surveys the book of Judith in Jewish traditions. Gera notes that Judith is a very Jewish heroine and that her story is presented along biblical lines. She discusses the possible Hebrew origin of the tale and the critical issues that such a supposition entails. She also notes that there is no evidence to suggest that the book was ever a candidate for inclusion into the canon of the Hebrew Bible. The reasons as to why it was not included may stem from its late date of composition (after 150 BCE), the possibility that it was originally composed in Greek in Alexandria, its lack of conformation to Jewish *halacha*, and its strong female heroine (which might have displeased the rabbis). As a result, the book did not survive in Hebrew which, in turn, rendered it virtually unknown in the Jewish communities of the first millennium. The Judith tradition resurfaced in the tenth century CE in the so-called Judith *midrashim* and became linked with the celebration of Hanukkah. Gera outlines the characteristics of the three types of Judith *midrashim*. She also comments on the Judith traditions found in two liturgical poems (*piyuttim*) for Hanukkah and their textual relationship to the Judith *midrashim*. Finally, Gera explores how, in the age of print, Moses Meldonado translated the Vulgate version of Judith (1552) at which point the book reentered the Jewish textual tradition. The essay ends with a selective bibliography to Jewish Judith studies.

The third article, by Elena Ciletti and and Henrike Lähnemann, offers a parallel overview of the reception history of book of Judith in Christian traditions. The Vulgate version remained the dominant text throughout the Patristic period and the Mediaeval Ages. The first commentary stems from Hrabanus Maurus (830s) and it influenced renderings of Judith in several languages, among them the Early Middle High German versions of Judith. Judith also survived in rewritten form in chronological accounts of world

history. For example, Peter Comestor, in his *Historia Scholastica*, relocates the story to the time of the Persian ruler Cambyses. The book of Judith also features in mediaeval allegorical collections where Judith's beheading of Holofernes prefigures Mary's suppression of the devil. Ciletti and Lähne-mann further survey the use of the motif of Judith in early modern Italian art and discuss Judith's importance as a prototype for Mary in art, music, and literature.

The second part contains four specialized studies on the book of Judith in Jewish traditions. Barbara Schmitz analyzes the portrayal of Holofernes. The first half of the Judith narrative portrays Holofernes as a successful commander and typical male hero while the latter half depicts him as Judith's passive victim. Judith 10:21, a turning point in the narrative, uses the Greek word κωνώπιον when describing the décor of Holofernes's tent. Schmitz looks at three Latin texts that contain the Latin equivalence *conopeum* and notes that in all texts this word is an attribute of women. Consequently, she suggests that the Greek word aims to present Holofernes as an effeminate and weakened figure. After meeting with Judith, Holofernes becomes an unmanly, indulgent drinker who lacks self-control. Based on her analysis, Schmitz argues that the book of Judith belongs within the larger context of Greek and Roman literary traditions.

Deborah Levine Gera explores select tenth-century Jewish *midrashim* on the book of Judith. She points out that these *midrashim* present the character of Judith as a more vulnerable person than what the apocryphal book does. For example, they depict Judith as a young unmarried woman rather than as a widow, and present her genealogy in a manner to lend her status rather than to stress her importance. Gera also highlights several significant changes to the storyline which together render Judith less of an independent woman. For instance, many of the *midrashim* have the city guards doubt Judith's virtue both at her exit out of and her re-entry into the city. Another change that probably betrays the rabbis' unease with an independent Judith revolves around her bath. In the apocryphal story, Judith purifies herself three times in preparation for receiving God's communication, while in many of the *midrashim* she purifies herself once in order to end her menstrual impurity. Gera also highlights the juxtaposition of the Judith story with a story about Hannah, the sister of Judah Maccabee, who refuses to agree to the decree that she, as a bride, should first have sexual intercourse with an important enemy minister. Finally, Gera discusses the many textual allusions

in the *midrashim* to the Hebrew Bible. In particular, the portrayal of Judith alludes to Ehud, David, and Esther, as well as to Tamar (David's daughter), Hagar, and Delilah.

Susan Weingarten offers a preliminary translation of a hitherto unpublished Hebrew manuscript called *Megillat Yehudit*. This manuscript is the first written example of the incorporation of the Judith narrative into the Hanukkah festival. Weingarten demonstrates how this Hebrew text alludes to almost every instance of women associated with either sexual violence or seduction (e.g. Esther, Sarah, Ruth, both Tamars, Dinah, Bathsheba, Jael, Abigail, Delilah, Rahab, two anonymous prostitutes [1 Kings 3:18; 3:28], Lot's daughters, and Potiphar's wife) in the Hebrew Bible. In this manner, *Megillat Yehudit* shows Judith as a sexual being, in conscious polemic against the Christian tradition that depicts her as a chaste widow. Weingarten further highlights the role of earthly food in *Megillat Yehudit* and how food serves as a response to the Christian polemic against Jews (e.g., John 6:48–9) and the way in which Christians interpreted the manna in the wilderness account as a typology for Jesus as the heavenly manna partaken by Christians in the Eucharist. The essay ends with a translation of *Megillat Yehudit*, with footnotes listing all the allusions to the biblical intertexts.

Ruth von Bernuth and Michael Terry argue that the Yiddish translation of Judith by Shalom bar Abraham is based on the Swiss-German translation by Leo Jud, Zwingli's right-hand man. This translation precedes the Luther Bible and is a very literal translation of the Vulgate text. There are no changes on a theological level and no ideological manipulations. Bernuth and Terry maintain that the Yiddish translation borders on a transliteration of the Swiss-German translation, yet it is best seen as a proper translation in that it reworks verbal endings and whole expressions that were peculiar to Swiss-German. In a few instances, it also changes expressions that otherwise would have had Christian overtones. For example, it rendered *pfaffen* (clergy) as *rabonim* (rabbis).

The third part contains seven essays on Judith in the Christian textual tradition. Marc Mastrangelo looks at female agency in early Christian history and explores its typological use. To illustrate his case, Mastrangelo analyzes Prudentius's treatment of the Judith story in his *Psychomachia* (The Battle within the Soul), which depicts a series of combat scenes between virtues and vices. In that book, Judith represents *Pudicitia* (Chastity) who, as she kills Holofernes, defeats *Libido* (Lust). The typology transforms female weakness

into spiritual strength for all Christians. It also conveys that chastity is the means by which a Christian soul can obtain purity in both body and soul which, in turn, leads to salvation.

Tracey-Anne Cooper explores the two appearances of Judith in the Old English corpus of literature: in the Nowell Codex alongside *Beowulf* and in a homily by Ælfric (both written around 1000 CE). Cooper shows that Ælfric's homily, composed against the background of the threats by the Vikings, depicts Judith as a very human and sympathetic character who, through prayer, is able to stand up against the Viking threat. For nuns, the intended audience of the homily, Judith provides a model of active resistance. In contrast, the poem in the Nowell Codex, despite its vivid battle scenes and heroic language, portrays a more passive Judith. The portrayal is influenced by the patristic interpretations of Judith, according to which she is more of an allegory of virtue than a living and breathing woman. Cooper's essay also contains a short description of the pictures of Judith in the Winchester Bible (1160–75), as well as the text and modern English translation of the two aforementioned Judith texts.

John Nassichuk discusses the content of Judith's prayer as found in two fifteenth-century French Mystery plays, *Mystères de la procession de Lille* and *Mistère du Viel Testament*. He demonstrates that while the former French text represents closely the Latin text of Judith in the Vulgate, the latter is more of a paraphrase of the Latin text. By analyzing the expressions that deviate from the Vulgate, Nassichuk shows that this paraphrase presents Judith as an important figure on par with the saints and the biblical prophets.

Kathleen M. Llewellyn discusses three renderings of the Judith story in early modern French literature: Jean Molinet, Guillaume de Saulluste Du Bartas, and Gabrielle de Coignard. Her prime interest is the ways in which the persona of Judith is transformed in the literature to fit the ideal of a Renaissance woman. In comparison with her apocryphal counterpart, Judith prays more, her virtue is stressed, her femininity is emphasized, and her deference towards men is increased, all as befitting a woman in France at this time. In the latter two works, Judith is also made into an object of beauty rather than a beautiful subject of actions.

Robert Cummings also looks at Du Bartas's portrayal of Judith but his essay focuses less on the persona of Judith and more on the notion of tyrannicide. He notes that many readers in the sixteenth century understood the Judith story as a story of rebellion against and resistance to unjust rule. It follows that killing a tyrant was considered a noble and right thing to do.

Cummings argues that Du Bartas was undoubtedly familiar with this line of thinking, yet his own rendering of the Judith narrative deviates from this tendency. Cummings further discusses the manner in which Du Bartas alludes to earlier literature and how these textual allusions turns the original apocryphal tale of tyrannicide into a celebration of the virtues of court ladies.

Henrike Lähnemann analyzes three examples, two short and one long, of anonymous *Meistersinger* stanzas from fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Germany. She demonstrates that, in contrast to the apocryphal tale which portrays Judith as a woman characterized by her piety, the aforementioned three texts all describe Judith as a “cunning woman,” i.e. a woman who uses her feminine cleverness and attractions to cause the downfall of men. These texts thus place the character of Holofernes in a series of men, biblical and non-biblical, that have been snared and brought down by female cunning. The appendix contains the German text and an English translation of the longer Judith-Song.

Janet Bartholomew highlights the ways in which the proto-feminist Margaret Fell, a Quaker in the seventeenth century, used the persona of Judith to support the Quaker struggle for women’s rights to preach. In her book *Women Speaking Justified*, Fell appeals to Judith’s speech to the elders upon her return with Holofernes’s head in order to show that God could speak through women and that even the Jewish elders accepted her preaching. In addition, Fell challenged the claim, found in much of the writing of her time, that Judith was a deceitful woman who used her beauty and wanton behaviour to snare men.

The next five articles look at Judith in the visual arts. Elizabeth Bailey argues that in the earliest version of the *Speculum Virginum* (ca 1140), a book that consists of a series of illustrations and dialogues between the male teacher Peregrinus and the female acolyte Theodora, the persona of Judith serves as a symbol of virtue. More specifically, Judith is depicted as a precursor of Mary in her humility and chastity. The book intended to be a devotional guide for unmarried women who contemplated becoming nuns, and it aimed to encourage them to model their lives after Judith, as well as after Yael and Mary.

Roger J. Crum suggests that, in Renaissance Florence under the Medici family, the character of Judith represented an ideal balance between public and private life. After her decapitation of Holofernes and her brief moment of public fame, the apocryphal narrative depicts Judith as returning quietly to her home in Bethulia and living out the rest of her life in the domestic

sphere. Crum argues that, to a certain extent, the popularity of Judith and the placement of the statues of her in private places (in contrast to the positioning of the statues of David in public places) may reflect and also be influenced by the Florentine concerns about the overextension of the ruling family's private concerns into the public arena and its inappropriate fusing of the private and the public/political spheres.

Sarah Blake McHam discusses the political connotations of the character of Judith in Florence at the end of the fifteenth century. She highlights that Donatello's statue of Judith in many respects served as a symbol against tyranny. In the hands of the Republic of Florence, Judith came to personify prudence of governance and righteous rebellion against the house of Medici. In a similar manner, the preacher Savonarola referred to the character of Judith in his sermons as an ideal virtuous woman and saviour of her people. As such, she constituted an antitype of Ezekiel's harlot of Judah (Ezek 16), who for Savonarola symbolized a wayward human who denied God's supreme power.

Diane Apostolos-Cappadona analyzes the role of Judith's clothing and jewellery in sixteenth-century Italian art. She notes that the depictions of Judith's dresses are reminiscent of the way in which the ancient Greeks depicted the dresses of Athena and Artemis. Likewise, Judith's jewellery brings to mind that of the Greek goddesses, and Judith's serene face evokes that of a classical statue. In this manner, the Italian artists highlighted the military aspects of Judith's persona and emphasized her role as God's faithful female warrior.

Elena Ciletti highlights the role of Judith as a type for Mary in the counter-reformation in Italy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. On the most basic level, the Catholic Church used the book of Judith as an emblem in their fight for the canonicity of the apocrypha. The persona of Judith came to symbolize the military church and Judith's decapitation of Holofernes stood for the fight of the triumphant Catholic Church against heretics. The military and Marian symbolism was expressed in paintings from that time, the most salient example being the fresco cycle in the Palazzo Lateranense in Rome.

The last part of the volume contains six studies devoted to Judith in music and drama. Kelley Harness surveys several pieces of music about Judith, commissioned by influential women such as Archduchess Maria Magdalena of Austria and Margherita Aldobrandini Farnese, the widowed duchess of Parma and Piacenza, in seventeenth-century Italy. She analyzes how those fe-

male patrons used Judith as a symbol for female heroism and political power, combined with the contemporaneous ideals of female decorum and chastity. For these patrons, Judith personified the notion that women, when guided by God, acquired spiritual and physical strength to rule over men.

David Marsh surveys libretti written on the theme of Judith between 1675 and 1734. He looks at the drama by Federico Della Valle, the series of oratorios by Marc-Antoine Charpentier, the texts written by members of the Ottoboni family set to music by Alessandro Scarlatti, the text by Giacomo Casseti set to music by Antonio Vivaldi, the anonymous libretto used by Francisco António de Almeida in this opera *La Giuttitta*, and finally the libretto written by Pietro Metastasio. In each case, Marsh notes the number of players, the role of the choir (whether singing the part of the Jews or the part of the Assyrians), and the interchange between the different singers.

Paolo Bernardini argues that the gradual marginalization of Judith in music from the nineteenth century was caused partly by the emerging European nationalism. As nations rather than ruling families became important, the individual Judith who fights the Assyrian without the knowledge of her people gradually became irrelevant to writers and audiences alike. In those pieces of music that still feature Judith, she is accompanied by a male warrior and backed by a strong army. In addition, she often serves as the love interest of the male warrior. In other cases, the story of Judith is rendered as a comedy with farcical elements.

Alexandre Lhâa discusses the ways in which the portrayal of Judith in the libretto of *Guiditta* (1860) by Marco Marcello has been adapted to suit the nationalistic-patriotic ideology of the Risorgimento, the politico-cultural process aiming for the construction of an Italian state (1796–1870). Lhâa argues that Judith is depicted as a woman ready to sacrifice herself for her homeland and that the Assyrians are equated with Austria, the political threat to Milan. He also shows that the libretto has a religious agenda that sees the Italian people as the new Israel and that asserts the independence of the Italian national liberation movement against Pope Pius IX. Finally, Lhâa argues that the desexualisation of Judith in the libretto reflects Marcello's own discomfort with a strong female warrior.

Jann Pasler looks at the political and religious uses of the Judith narrative in French operas after 1870. For example, while the monarchists and the republicans emphasized different aspect of Judith's character, both groups used her as a symbol of patriotism. Pasler further highlights the ways in which the musical score adds a layer of interpretation to the Judith narrative.



He shows, for instance, how the music can enhance a given aspect of the libretto, how the choice of a mezzo-soprano to sing the role of Judith helps portray her as a mature woman capable of heroism, and how specific forms of duets between Judith and Holofernes can emphasize the dramatic tension and sexual attraction between the two characters.

In the final article, Gabrijela Mecky Zaragoza argues that some of the uses of the Judith story in the German *Volkstheater* in Austria in the nineteenth century reflect the fear towards Jewish assimilation. While many Austrians sought the Jews' conversion to Christianity, they simultaneously feared that their conversion would lead to a class of semi-assimilated Jewry that would appear German yet maintain some of their "wild" Jewishness. Zaragoza looks at two dramas. She highlights the explicit anti-Semitism of the drama *Judith und Holofernes* (1818) and the more ambiguous anti-Semitism of Johann Nestroy's play with the same name (1849). She notes that while the latter drama makes fun of Jewish stereotypes and the current Viennese Jewish population, is also advocates a new society in which the Jews can be victorious and where their enemies, the so-called "Jew-Eaters," are put in chains.

In conclusion, this is a very interesting and stimulating collection of articles that can be highly recommended.

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