

Deborah Levine Gera  
Judith

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*For my teacher, Ra'anana Meridor*

ὅτι οὐκ ἐν τῇ σήμερον ἡ σοφία σου πρόδηλός ἐστιν,  
ἀλλ' ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ἡμερῶν σου ἔγνω πᾶς ὁ λαὸς τὴν σύνεσίν σου,  
καθότι ἀγαθὸν ἐστιν τὸ πλάσμα τῆς καρδίας σου (Judith 8:29)



## Preface

It has been over a decade since my friend and colleague, Doron Mendels, first approached me about writing a commentary on the Book of Judith for this series, and I am somewhat surprised to discover that I have actually finished the book. Judith is a challenging work and I have come to the text as a classicist, rather than a biblical or Septuagint scholar. I hope that this perspective has not led me too far astray, but rather allowed me to look at the work with the fresh eyes of an outsider.

I have incurred a great many debts over the years. My student, Mr. Guy Darsan, now Dr. Guy Darshan, helped me first become acquainted with the world of biblical and Septuagint studies. The Accordance program for searching Greek and Hebrew biblical texts has been an invaluable tool in my research, and I would like to thank Roy and Helen Brown for developing the program and teaching it so patiently in their seminars.

Joseph Geiger, my teacher and friend, read the entire manuscript with great care and had many helpful suggestions and corrections. Loren Stuckenbruck also read the complete manuscript and was most encouraging at a critical time. Dov Gera, Marc Hirshman, and David Satran read the introduction and I have benefitted from their comments. Marc, David, and I have been reading Talmudic and Greek texts together for many years and our weekly hevruta is a beacon of light. Amanda Davis Bledsoe read and copy-edited the commentary with an eagle eye and saved me from many errors and inconsistencies. My teacher Ra'anana Meridor was kind enough to put her vast knowledge, good sense, and precious eyesight at my disposal in reading the proofs. Unfortunately, I have not always been wise enough to accept the advice offered me by all these learned scholars, and the remaining mistakes and infelicities are my own.

Friends, too, have listened to me hold forth on Judith over the years and have politely disguised their doubts as to whether I would ever complete the commentary. Thanks to Sara Berman, Celia Fassberg, Harriet Finck, Ruth Rohn, and Shari Satran. My family, as always, has kept me anchored in the here and now, rather than in faraway Bethulia, and I'm deeply grateful to my mother, Ivriah Levine, to my husband, Dov, and to my children, Avital, Chemi, and Ariel Gera for their presence.

Finally, two technical points. My translation, based on the Hanhart text, is meant to be readable, but is also fairly literal, because it seems important to me to preserve the feeling of the Greek original: both its awkward, pseudo-biblical tone and its many internal echoes. I have used the term Palestine anachronistically throughout the book, for convenience's sake, to indicate the area, roughly speaking, of the biblical kingdoms of Israel and Judah where the Israelites of Judith live. I have also used the term to refer to the wider area, including the Galilee and coastal cities, inhabited by Jews during the Second Temple period.

Jerusalem,  
June 2013

Deborah Levine Gera



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## Abbreviations

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| ABD    | <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York 1992.   |
| AcOr   | <i>Acta Orientalia</i>  |
| ANET   | <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> . Edited by J. B. Pritchard. 3d. ed. Princeton 1969.  |
| AOAT   | Alter Orient und Altes Testament  |
| BAR    | <i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>  |
| Bib    | <i>Biblica</i>  |
| BIOSCS | <i>Bulletin of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies</i>  |
| BTB    | <i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>   |
| BZ     | <i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>  |
| CA     | <i>Classical Antiquity</i>  |
| CBQ    | <i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>  |
| CEJL   | Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature   |
| COS    | <i>The Context of Scripture</i> . Edited by W. W. Hallo. 3 vols. Leiden 1997–2003.  |
| CP     | <i>Classical Philology</i>  |
| CQ     | <i>Classical Quarterly</i>  |
| CRINT  | Compendia rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum   |
| DHA    | <i>Dialogues d'histoire ancienne</i>  |
| DSD    | <i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>   |
| EJJS   | <i>European Journal of Jewish Studies</i>   |
| ETCSL  | <i>The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature</i> . Edited by J.A. Black <i>et al.</i> <a href="http://www-etcs1.orient.ox.ac.uk/">http://www-etcs1.orient.ox.ac.uk/</a> . Oxford, 1998– |
| FGrH   | <i>Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker</i> . Edited by F. Jacoby <i>et al.</i> Leiden 1923–   |
| GB     | <i>Grazer Beiträge</i>  |
| HeyJ   | <i>Heythrop Journal</i>   |
| Hen    | <i>Henoch</i>   |
| HTR    | <i>Harvard Theological Review</i>   |
| HUCA   | <i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>  |
| JANES  | <i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society</i>  |

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| <i>JBL</i>    | <i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>   |
| <i>JHS</i>    | <i>Journal of Hellenic Studies</i>  |
| <i>JHebS</i>  | <i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>   |
| <i>JNES</i>   | <i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>  |
| <i>JPS</i>    | Jewish Publication Society  |
| <i>JQR</i>    | <i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>  |
| <i>JSem</i>   | <i>Journal for Semitics</i>   |
| <i>JSHRZ</i>  | Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit   |
| <i>JSJ</i>    | <i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period</i>   |
| <i>JSOT</i>   | <i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>   |
| <i>JSOTSS</i> | Supplements to <i>JSOT</i>  |
| <i>JSP</i>    | <i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>  |
| <i>LSJ</i>    | <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i> . Edited by H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, and H.S. Jones. 9th ed. with revised supplement. Oxford 1996. |
| <i>LXX</i>    | Septuagint  |
| <i>MT</i>     | Masoretic Text  |
| <i>NETS</i>   | <i>A New English Translation of the Septuagint</i> . Edited by A. Pietersma and B. G. Wright. Oxford 2007.                        |
| <i>NJB</i>    | New Jerusalem Bible   |
| <i>NovT</i>   | <i>Novum Testamentum</i>  |
| <i>NRSV</i>   | New Revised Standard Version  |
| <i>OG</i>     | Old Greek   |
| <i>RB</i>     | <i>Revue biblique</i>   |
| <i>RLAC</i>   | <i>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum</i> . Stuttgart 1941–   |
| <i>RTL</i>    | <i>Revue théologique de Louvain</i>   |
| <i>SBL</i>    | Society of Biblical Literature  |
| <i>ThZ</i>    | <i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>   |
| <i>VC</i>     | <i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>   |
| <i>Vg.</i>    | Vulgata Latina  |
| <i>VT</i>     | <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>  |
| <i>WZKM</i>   | <i>Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes</i>  |
| <i>ZABR</i>   | <i>Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte</i>  |
| <i>ZAW</i>    | <i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>   |
| <i>ZDPV</i>   | <i>Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>  |

Note: Ancient sources – biblical, parabiblical, rabbinic, and Greek – are cited by their usual abbreviations. DNb, XPh, etc. are the standard abbreviations for Persian royal inscriptions. The first letter indicates the name of the king (e.g. Darius, Xerxes), the second the site of the inscription (e.g. Behistun, Persepolis), while the third, lower-case letter indicates position in a sequence.

# I. INTRODUCTION



## Section 1: Preliminaries: The Story, Structure, and Message of Judith

The Septuagint Book of Judith opens with a war between two unknown, but seemingly historical rulers, Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Assyrians, and Arphaxad, king of the Medes. Nebuchadnezzar is unable to recruit allies in his campaign against Arphaxad, but nonetheless roundly defeats him (Jdt 1:1–16). After this victory, Nebuchadnezzar plots his revenge and sends his chief of staff Holofernes on an ambitious and punitive military campaign directed against those nations who did not join him in his earlier, successful war (2:1–20). Holofernes destroys the fields, flocks, and towns of those who resist him, taking some young men captive and killing others (2:21–27). When the fearful coastal peoples surrender and welcome Holofernes, he stations garrisons in their cities, conscripts their men into his army and destroys the local shrines, so that Nebuchadnezzar alone will be worshipped as a god (2:28–3:10). Next Holofernes approaches the Israelites, who decide to resist. The people of the Israelite town of Bethulia are told by the high priest in Jerusalem, Joakim, that they must block the Assyrian army's path to Jerusalem and its temple. The Israelites prepare for war and also pray to God, who, in his single appearance in the book, is said to hear their prayers and be aware of their distress (4:1–15). Holofernes is unacquainted with the Israelite enemy and learns something of their history and relationship with God from his ally, the Ammonite Achior. Achior warns Holofernes that God may well defend his people (5:1–21). Achior's speech angers the Assyrians and their commander, Holofernes, who sees Nebuchadnezzar alone as divinely powerful. Consequently he expels Achior from the Assyrian camp and Achior is brought to Bethulia, where he informs the Israelites of his exchange with Holofernes (5:22–6:21). Holofernes then besieges Bethulia and captures its water springs. When water supplies run low, the people of the town press their leaders to surrender to the Assyrians. Uzziah, the chief leader of Bethulia, promises to capitulate if there is no relief within five days (7:1–32). It is at this point that the pious, wealthy, and beautiful widow, Judith, steps on stage. Judith, who leads an ascetic and solitary life, summons Uzziah and his fellow leaders to her home. In a lengthy speech, she reprimands the town leaders for setting a five day limit for the surrender, an ultimatum which she interprets as a lack

of faith in God (8:1–36). Judith then takes matters into her own hands. She prays at length (9:1–14), bathes, and removes her widow’s weeds. Beautifully dressed Judith leaves Bethulia for the enemy Assyrian camp, accompanied only by her chief maid, who carries kosher food supplies in a bag (10:1–14). In the Assyrian camp, Judith charms and deceives Holophernes. In a speech rich in irony and double-entendre, she promises to deliver the Israelites to the Assyrians with the help of “her lord.” Judith presents herself to Holophernes as a prophetess and invents a tale of imaginary misdoings by the Israelites, misdoings which will lead to God’s anger and their downfall (10:18–12:4). For three days, Judith remains in the Assyrian camp, going out in the evenings to bathe and to pray to God. Holophernes then invites Judith to a party, sending his chief eunuch Bagoas as an intermediary. Holophernes’ intention is to seduce Judith, but he drinks a great deal of wine and collapses on his couch. Judith seizes Holophernes’ sword and after a brief prayer cuts off the head of the sleeping general (12:10–13:10). She returns to Bethulia with her maid, who carries Holophernes’ head in the food bag. Judith is celebrated by Uzziah and the townspeople for her deed, and when Achior the Ammonite learns of these events and sees the dead general’s head, he converts to Judaism (13:11–14:10). The Israelites, following Judith’s advice, subsequently take the offensive and attack the Assyrian army. The Assyrian forces panic after Bagoas discovers the decapitated Holophernes, and they are quickly defeated (14:11–15:7). Judith, praised by all, including the high priest Joakim and an entourage from Jerusalem, sings a victory song and joins in a procession to Jerusalem (15:8–16:20). At the close of the book, she returns to her quiet life at home, where she lives until the ripe old age of 105. All of Israel mourn her when she dies (16:21–25).

This, then, is the overall outline of the book.

1:1–16 Nebuchadnezzar wars with Arphaxad and defeats him.

2:1–20 Nebuchadnezzar has Holophernes organize a vast military initiative.

2:21–3:10 Holophernes’ conquests.

4:1–15 The Israelites brace for war and pray to God, who hears their cries.

5:1–6:21 Achior describes the Israelites to Holophernes and is expelled to Bethulia.

7:1–32 Holophernes cuts off Bethulia’s water supply, causing the people of Bethulia to despair.

8:1–36 Judith is introduced. She summons and scolds the town’s leaders.

9:1–14 Judith’s prayer.

10:1–17 Judith prepares for her mission and leaves for the Assyrian army camp.



10:18–12:9 Judith's first encounter with Holofernes and first days in the camp.

12:10–13:10 Judith parties with Holofernes and kills him as he sleeps.

13:11–14:10 Judith returns home to Bethulia and Achior converts to Judaism.

14:11–15:7 The Assyrians learn of Holofernes' death and are defeated by the Israelites.

15:8–16:20 The Israelite victory is celebrated in song and with a visit to Jerusalem.

16:21–25 Epilogue.

A few points are worth noting at the very outset. The story begins with Nebuchadnezzar in Assyria, in the twelfth year of his rule, and ends with Judith in the Israelite town of Bethulia. We are puzzled both by the unknown ruler Nebuchadnezzar king of the Assyrians and the unfamiliar Israelite town Bethulia and we must grapple with the accuracy of the story's history, chronology, and geography from its very start. Is this a historical work, conveying a true story? Can we rely on the historical, geographical, and chronological background supplied by our author? It quickly becomes apparent that the answer is no, for our story is fictitious, with an invented background, setting, plot, and characters.<sup>1</sup> Fictitious though the story may be, it has a strong biblical tinge, for the author often uses situations, figures, places and phrases taken from the Bible, adapting and combining these elements in order to lend his story verisimilitude and a biblical air. Virtually every scene and character in Judith has several biblical influences lurking in the background; there are Greek influences as well.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, our author is capable of inventing details freely and he plainly has a voice and style of his own.<sup>3</sup> He combines motifs and characters taken from the Bible with specific, but imaginary details to make his story both immediate and timeless. The author's own personality is particularly apparent in his rich and varied use of irony, for the Book of Judith is filled with ironic situations and speech, and both the narrator and his characters enjoy using duplicitous, double-edged statements.<sup>4</sup> In this fashion the author of Judith creates a tale which seems both historical and biblical, but is nonetheless an original piece of fiction. The story contains a clear and didactic message about God's ability to rescue his people, and it is laced with humor and irony as

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<sup>1</sup> See Section 3 for a detailed discussion.

<sup>2</sup> See Section 4 on the biblical influences in Judith and Section 5 on the Greek influences.

<sup>3</sup> For the strong probability that a male wrote our book, see Section 7.

<sup>4</sup> Moore 1985, 78–85 surveys the ironic elements of Judith; see too Section 5.

well.<sup>5</sup> The combination of qualities assigned to the heroine of the tale, Judith, well illustrates the versatility and wide-ranging purview of our author: his heroine is beautiful and wise, a warrior and a widow, deceptive, bold, seductive, and pious. While a variety of labels have been used to determine the genre of our work – it has been termed a Jewish novel, a didactic short story, a folktale, a legend, parabolic or paradigmatic history<sup>6</sup> – perhaps the most important point to remember is that the story is fiction and that the author gives us fair warning of this fictitious quality in his very first verse.<sup>7</sup>

Simply put, the story of Judith is one of conflict and reversal, a tale of a crisis and its resolution, and its theological message meshes with the literary means used to tell the tale.<sup>8</sup> Powerful enemies, the Assyrians and their allies, threaten the Israelites, Bethulia, Jerusalem, and the temple, and these enemies are overturned and defeated, thanks to Judith's initiative and God's support. Neither the Assyrian enemy nor the brave heroine are real. We are shown an archetypal enemy – a fictitious, supra-historical tyrant who attempts to attack the Israelites and dares to set himself up as an equal to God – whose plans are overturned by a mere woman, a woman who is a composite figure drawing on many biblical heroines. On one level the struggle in Judith is between the God of Israel and the heathen king attempting to usurp the place of God, a theological conflict over the identity of the true, supreme deity. On a second level, the conflict is a military and political one, a war between an imperialist nation, the Assyrians, and a people, the Israelites, who do not wish to be occupied and conquered. On a third level, dramatic and personal, it is the story of the charged encounter between Judith and Holofernes. All ends well: Judith kills Holofernes, the Israelites rout the Assyrians, and God defeats Nebuchadnezzar, if at a distance and metaphorically.

It is interesting to follow the appearance (and disappearance) of four of the main characters of the book, Nebuchadnezzar, God, Holofernes, and Judith. Nebuchadnezzar goes to war in the first chapter and convenes a council in the second chapter, but he is then replaced by Holofernes, who

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<sup>5</sup> Gruen 2002, 158–170 discusses the many humorous elements in Judith.

<sup>6</sup> See the survey of scholarly discussion of the genre of Judith in Otzen 2002, 124–128 and Efthimiadis-Keith 2004, 99–100. The book has been described as a short story (Alonso-Schökel 1975, 1), a folk tale of rescue (Cootes 1975, 21), a tale of epic struggle (Milne 1993, esp. 48–55), a Jewish novel (Section 5, 60), paradigmatic history (Section 3, 27), etc. For wisdom elements in Judith, see, e.g. Schmitz 2004a, 474–481 and Otzen 2002, 106–107; see too notes on 8:14, 29.

<sup>7</sup> See Section 3 and note on 1:1.

<sup>8</sup> See further Section 3.

takes over the role of army commander and council-convenor and features prominently in the book thereafter. Nebuchadnezzar's behavior is autocratic and he is depicted, at times, in a manner elsewhere used only of God,<sup>9</sup> but he himself makes no direct claims to divinity and we do not see him actually usurping the power of God. He is a victorious and vengeful ruler, no more, and it is his underling and chief commander Holofernes who demands that Nebuchadnezzar be worshipped to the exclusion of all other deities (3:8 with note) and who states explicitly that the king is a god (6:2 with note). It seems that the author deliberately removes Nebuchadnezzar from the scene and does not have him appear in the flesh after the first two chapters in order to transform the king into a more remote and godlike figure. It is perhaps difficult to imagine Judith seducing and killing someone who is allegedly divine, and Holofernes, an ordinary flesh and blood general, is a more convenient victim. At the same time, the fact that we have seen Nebuchadnezzar involved in ordinary activities at first hand – turning to potential allies and being dismissed by them, going to war, losing his temper, and calling upon his staff for advice – reduces him to human proportions and makes him a less majestic figure, perhaps similar to a Homeric god, but an unlikely or unequal rival to God. While Holofernes may see Nebuchadnezzar as the only real god, the author makes certain that the readers of Judith will not share this view at any point in the story, precisely because we have seen him at such close quarters in the opening of the book. God, on the other hand, is a very distant figure in our text. While God is addressed and spoken of regularly by various characters in the story from chapter 4 onwards, he himself is barely present in the work and appears as an actual character only in a single half-verse, where he is said to listen to the Israelites' prayers and be aware of their tribulations (4:13 with note). This brief divine appearance is meant to assure readers of Judith that all will be well in the end, but the Israelites of the story are unaware of God's attention. Such divine remoteness compels the Israelites to deal with their fate on their own and also allows God to preserve his majesty and remain numinous. Nevertheless, Judith seems to feel particularly close to God. She describes God at great length, in her theological reprimand of the leaders of Bethulia, in her prayer, and in her victory song. Judith also selects herself to act on behalf of the Israelites and while there is no explicit indication in our text that God has chosen, guided, or aided her in any way, Judith presents herself as God's emissary.<sup>10</sup> In this fashion, Judith and Holofernes play

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<sup>9</sup> Jdt 1:11,12; 2:1,5,12, 13 with notes; see Section 4.

<sup>10</sup> See Section 7 with note on 11:16–17.

parallel roles, acting as the zealous lieutenants and spokespeople of God and Nebuchadnezzar respectively, and a great deal of the book centers on the encounter between these two proxies.

Indeed, the climactic scene of our story, familiar from countless paintings, is the final meeting between Holophernes and Judith, ending with his death at her hands. The death of Holophernes prefigures the defeat of the entire Assyrian army and underscores the inferiority of the king who has sent him, the not-so-divine Nebuchadnezzar. Holophernes is present virtually throughout the work, from his introduction in chapter two and even beyond his death in chapter 13, for his decapitated head is brought to Bethulia and his tent furnishings are dedicated to God in Jerusalem; our book has been described as the *Tragedy of Holophernes*.<sup>11</sup> There is little doubt, however, that Judith is the book's heroine and chief protagonist,<sup>12</sup> even if she is first introduced only midway through the book, after the first seven chapters. Her initiative leads to the victory of the Israelites and her success demonstrates the ability and desire of God to save his people. Although she arrives fairly late on the scene, Judith is at the center of the book's action once she does make her appearance. Scholars have sometimes considered Judith's late entrance a failing or misjudgment on the author's part,<sup>13</sup> but it is plain that the early chapters pave the way for the reversals found in the second part of the work. Judith's entrance serves as a turning point from the lowest juncture of the tale, where the Israelites despair and are willing to surrender to the Assyrian aggressors. This turning point leads some scholars to divide our book into two parts, pre-Judith (chapters 1–7) and post-Judith (chapters 8–16), and here the work of Toni Craven has been particularly influential. Craven divides our book into two symmetrical and parallel parts, with the first seven chapters demonstrating the case for Nebuchadnezzar's supremacy and the next nine chapters (in which Judith appears) presenting the case for the supremacy of God. Each of these two parts is further divided by Craven into a threefold grouping, with shifts between nations and geographical settings in the various chiasmic subdivisions. Craven tweaks her material at times, but her scheme does much to demonstrate that the book is a carefully constructed whole, with an intricate literary design.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Corley 2012, 22.

<sup>12</sup> Cf., e.g. Milne 1993, 48–55 for the claim that Judith is a secondary figure, with God as the chief hero; see too Section 7.

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g. the sources cited by Craven 1983, 56–58; Moore 1985, 56; cf. introductory note to ch. 8.

<sup>14</sup> Craven 1983, 60–64; Rakel 2003, 84–92 refines Craven's scheme, while Moore 1985, 58 n. 34 and Otzen 2002, 129 note that Craven sometimes overstates her case.

Another popular division, proposed by Zenger, divides the book into three sections, underscoring what he sees as the chief theme of the book, “Who is the true god, the Assyrian god or the Israelite one?” According to Zenger, Nebuchadnezzar reveals himself as god in chapters 1–3, there is an attempt to resolve the question of whether Nebuchadnezzar or God is divine in chapters 4–7, while God reveals himself to Nebuchadnezzar as god in chapters 8–16. Zenger finds close symmetry and links between his three sections and also notes the repeated key words found in Judith, which again point to the integrity and cohesiveness of the work.<sup>15</sup> Other commentators suggest other ways of dividing the book into several sections and it is not difficult to find connections between these various sections and divisions as well, for the book is a cohesive whole, and contains a great many symmetries and reversals coupled with verbal repetitions and echoes.<sup>16</sup> We can also arrange many of the book’s characters in complementary or contrasting pairs, such as the Assyrians and the Israelites, Holophernes and Judith, and Nebuchadnezzar and God. The eunuch Bagoas has his counterpart in Judith’s maid, and Uzziah, the town’s weak male leader, can be contrasted with Judith, a strong and independent woman or with Achior, a foreigner with a better understanding of the ways of God. Achior can also be contrasted with Holophernes, the good gentile versus the bad one, or else compared to Judith,<sup>17</sup> and he unites the two main sections of the book with “one foot solidly planted in the first part ... and his second foot resting in the other.”<sup>18</sup>

The Book of Judith is, then, a unified whole which scholars divide into subsections in order to illuminate the work’s underlying meaning and chief message. One major theme of our text is the contest between Nebuchadnezzar and God, and the demonstration that God is the only true god. We see the power and might of God and his capacity to deal with threats from the likes of Nebuchadnezzar and his huge army. In addition to this external contest between a foreign god and the Jewish one, the book also depicts an

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<sup>15</sup> Zenger 1981, 432–434.

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g. the division of Haag (1963, vii–viii): chs. 1–3 Threat to the Israelites by Nebuchadnezzar; chs. 4–8 The distress of the Israelites; chs. 9–16 Rescue of the Israelites. Van Henten 1995, 225–232 argues that chapters 7–13 are a cohesive unit; see in particular 231 n. 4 where he finds verbal echoes in chs. 7 and 8. Schmitz 2004a, 421–436 finds echoes between pairs of speeches, besides echoes within speeches. Roitman 1992a, 190–201 reproduces the detailed outlines proposed by a wide range of scholars.

<sup>17</sup> See Roitman 1992b.

<sup>18</sup> Moore 1985, 59.

internal struggle within the Israelite people on the right approach to God and the proper way to deal with a crisis when God seems to have disappeared. Judith interprets God's ways to her fellow Israelites,<sup>19</sup> and demonstrates that active resistance should go hand in hand with prayer and trust in God. Jerusalem and its temple must be protected at all costs, there is to be no submission to a foreign power, and all means, including deception and killing, are legitimate in this context.<sup>20</sup> The victory described in Judith is twofold: an external victory over a foreign enemy and their alleged god and an internal one over the defeatist Israelites. The book's message – both theological and political – may well be related to the author's own times and commentators attempt to link our book to various Hasmonean events and outlooks.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Roitman 1992a, 67–70, 90–95 quite correctly notes the significance and centrality of Judith's programmatic speech in chapter 8 in the overall structure of the book; see too Nickelsburg 1981, 107. Schmitz 2004a argues for the centrality of Judith's speech and prayer (chs. 8 and 9), taken together; see further Section 7.

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g. Christiansen 2012 for the claim that the message of the book is that violent resistance against a national and religious threat is justified and see Section 7 on ethical issues raised by the book.

<sup>21</sup> See Section 3 for the date of Judith and traces of topical issues.

## Section 2: Transmission, Canonicity, and Later Jewish Tradition

The Septuagint Judith is, according to the foremost editor of the text, Robert Hanhart, a translation text,<sup>22</sup> but there is no extant trace of an early Hebrew text of Judith, not even a single fragment. Indeed, the Book of Judith – which the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches include in their Bibles, while the Protestants place it among the apocryphal books – seems to have disappeared from Jewish tradition at an early stage. Judith is undoubtedly a Jewish work, written by and intended for Jews, and Judith herself is portrayed as an ideal Jewish heroine, as her very name, Yehudit, “Jewess,” indicates. There are also many references to Jewish practices in the work. Prayers to God are accompanied by the customary fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. The temple in Jerusalem with its priests, daily sacrifices, first fruits, and tithes plays an important role. Judith herself is punctilious in her religious observance. She fasts regularly and eats only kosher food, even in enemy territory, where she also bathes and prays under difficult conditions.<sup>23</sup> Despite its strong Jewish content, the story has had a checkered history among the Jews and there is no mention of Judith in Jewish tradition for well over a millennium. There is no remnant of Judith’s tale in the Dead Sea scrolls (which include hundreds of fragmentary biblical and post-biblical texts, dating from about 150 B.C.E. to 68 C.E.) and Judith is not mentioned either by Philo or by Josephus. Such arguments from silence are not conclusive: there is, for example, no surviving fragment of the Book of Esther, a work often linked with Judith, from Qumran, and Philo does not mention *any* of the apocryphal books. Nonetheless Judith’s absence from Josephus is worth noting, for when he rewrites the Bible in his *Jewish An-*

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<sup>22</sup> The opening sentence of Hanhart’s book on the text of Judith reads, “Der griechische Text des Buches Iudith ist ein Übersetzungstext.” (Hanhart 1979b, 9). Hanhart then suggests that the original language was Hebrew (or Aramaic) and consequently is particularly interested in the Vulgate tradition, because it is the only translation specifically said to be made from a Semitic source; see below. The majority of scholars think that Hebrew underlies the Greek text, but in recent years several scholars have argued for Greek as the original language of Judith; see Section 6.

<sup>23</sup> See Jdt 4:9–15; 8:6; 10:5; 12:1–4, 7, etc. with notes.

*tiquities*, he displays considerable interest in beautiful, biblical women and he utilizes both the Septuagint and the Hebrew Bible in his retelling of biblical tales. Josephus's colorful account of Esther (*Ant.* 11.184–296) is based on the Greek Additions to Esther as well as the Hebrew MT, and one might have expected him to include the story of Judith, with its similar themes and elements, as well.<sup>24</sup>

While the story of Judith is not mentioned explicitly in any early Jewish text, we do find traces of the tale in two early Jewish compositions. In both these works, the figure of Judith herself seems to have left its mark on the fashioning (or re-fashioning) of two biblical heroines. Thus the presentation of Esther in the Greek Esther, particularly in two of the six Additions which are not found in the MT, Additions C and D, is plainly influenced by the figure of Judith.<sup>25</sup> A colophon provides three possible dates for the Greek Esther with its Additions: 114 B.C.E., 78/7 B.C.E., or 49/8 B.C.E., with the first two dates generally considered more likely.<sup>26</sup> We can also recognize the influence of the figure of Judith on the re-telling of the story of Jael in *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*, a work written in Hebrew, in all likelihood in Palestine, between 50–150 C.E.<sup>27</sup> These two Jewish texts point to the influence of the *story* of Judith within Jewish circles, from the second or first century B.C.E. to some time in the first or second century C.E., but they do not mention the work or its heroine by name, and they provide no information on the text itself.

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<sup>24</sup> Enslin 1972, 43 suggests that Josephus did not think the story historical. Hengel (2002, 102) notes that Josephus makes use of 1 Maccabees, but “disdains or does not know” Tobit, Judith, the Additions to Daniel, etc. Hengel (2002, 115) also points out that Clement of Rome writes to the Corinthians of Judith and Esther at the very same time and same place as Josephus writes of Esther, using the same expanded Greek text of Esther; see immediately below. Rajak (2009, 220–221) discusses Josephus’ silence regarding several Jewish writers in Greek, such as Ezekiel the tragedian and Deme-trius the chronographer, and notes Josephus’ familiarity with the Greek Bible, as well as the Hebrew one (253–254).

<sup>25</sup> See notes on intro. to ch. 9; 9:1,10; 10:3,18; 12:2; 14:1–4. Moore 1977, 220–222 and 1985, 212–216 compares Esther of the Additions and Judith and finds the evidence for Judith’s influence on Addition D of Esther particularly strong. See too Day 1995, 222–225 for a detailed analysis of the greater resemblance between Esther and Judith in the Greek Esther texts than in the MT Esther.

<sup>26</sup> See Bickerman 1944; Moore 1977, 161; deSilva 2002, 116–118 and the further references there.

<sup>27</sup> See notes on 4:9–15; 12:15, 16; 13:2,7 and see Jacobson 1996, i.199–210, 226, etc. for the date of *L.A.B.* and the influence of the story of Judith on *L.A.B.*



Judith is mentioned explicitly in one of the earliest extant Christian documents outside of the New Testament, the First Epistle to the Corinthians by Clement of Rome. The letter is dated to 95–97 C.E. and serves as a *terminus ante quem* for the dating of Judith in general. Clement speaks of women who, through the grace of God, perform manly exploits (ἀνδρεῖα) and he links together “the blessed” Judith and Esther “perfect in her faith” (1 *Clem.* 55:4–6). It is not just the story of Judith that Clement knows; the wording of his text echoes some phrases of the LXX text (e.g. 1 *Clem.* 59: 3–4~ Jdt 9:11).<sup>28</sup> Some hundred years later Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150 – ca. 215 C.E.) follows in his wake and again mentions Judith and Esther together, along with Miriam and Susanna (*Strom.* 4:118–119).<sup>29</sup>

The two pre-eminent Christian biblical scholars living in Palestine, Origen and Jerome, provide inconsistent testimony about the status of the Book of Judith among the Jews in the third and fourth centuries C.E. (while in the contemporary Jewish tradition we hear nothing at all). Origen, writing towards the middle of the third century C.E. tells us that the Jews do not use Judith (or Tobit) and adds that the Jews themselves have informed him that these two books are not found in Hebrew, even in the Apocrypha: Ἑβραῖοι τῷ Τωβίᾳ οὐ χρῶνται, οὐδὲ τῇ Ἰουδίθ· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἔχουσιν αὐτὰ κἂν ἐν ἀποκρύφοις ἑβραϊστί, ὡς ἀπ’ αὐτῶν μαθόντες ἐγνώκαμεν (Origen, *Letter to Africanus* 19).<sup>30</sup> It is worth remembering that five fragmentary texts of the Book of Tobit – four in Aramaic and one in Hebrew – which represent all 14 chapters of the work, have surfaced at Qumran, an indication that Jews were still reading Tobit in the first century B.C.E.,<sup>31</sup> and perhaps they were reading Judith then as well. Origen himself refers to Judith several times and was clearly acquainted with the Greek text.<sup>32</sup> Jerome, who translated the Book of Judith into Latin at about 400 C.E., says that the Jews count Judith among the Apocrypha (*apud Hebraeos liber*

<sup>28</sup> Clement nonetheless domesticates and modifies the figure of Judith, for he has her request permission from the city elders to leave for the Assyrian camp, but in fact she neither asks for permission nor reveals her plans; see van Henten 1995, 246–247.

<sup>29</sup> For further ancient Christian sources on Judith, see Biolek 1911; Dubarle 1959; Dubarle 1966, i.110–119, 173–179; Enslin 1972, 43–52.

<sup>30</sup> De Lange 1983, 562. This letter is dated ca. 245 C.E. “Apocrypha” should be understood here as “hidden” or possibly “stored” books, i.e., the more respected of the non-biblical books; see Beckwith 1985, 325–326 n. 30.

<sup>31</sup> Fitzmyer 2003, 19. See Flint 2001, esp. 89–96 and 124–125, for a useful survey of fragments of the Apocrypha found at Qumran.

<sup>32</sup> See Hengel 2002, 117–118; Dubarle 1966, i.174–175.

*Judith inter Agiografa*<sup>33</sup> *legitur*), implying that in his time the Jews still read or had access to the text. Jerome also states that an Aramaic text underlies his translation of Judith, a translation he allegedly finished in the course of a brief night's work by the lamp (*unam lucubrationem*). He adds that his translation is according to sense rather than a literal word-for-word version (*magis sensum e sensu quam ex verbo verbum transferens*).<sup>34</sup> This mention of an Aramaic version complicates matters, for there are no extant Aramaic versions or fragments of Judith to substantiate Jerome's claim. It seems plain that there was no Hebrew version available to Jerome and an Aramaic version would presumably have been translated for him on the spot into Hebrew, with Jerome then translating the Hebrew into Latin. This, at any rate, is the method he uses for his translation of Tobit.<sup>35</sup> It is clear that Jerome made use of Old Latin versions of the Book of Judith – and these Old Latin texts were translated from the Septuagint –<sup>36</sup> and introduced some passages of his own composition, as well as using his alleged Aramaic source.<sup>37</sup> We shall see that the Vulgate version of Judith differs in many ways from the Septuagint one, and it is particularly interesting to note the greater role assigned to God and the portrayal of Judith as a more subdued and domesticated heroine. These changes seem to reflect Jerome's own attitudes, rather than a missing Aramaic text.<sup>38</sup> One scholar, Dubarle, sug-

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<sup>33</sup> There is a variant reading *Apocripha*, instead of *Agiografa*. The word *Agiografa* is sometimes used of the Apocrypha and sometimes used as the technical term for the Ketuvim or Writings, the third section of the Bible. Here Jerome is referring to the Apocrypha. In his parallel preface to the Book of Tobit (p. 676 Weber), Jerome speaks of the Jews separating Tobit from the biblical canon and transferring it to the *Agiografa*, i.e. Apocrypha (*librum ... Tobiae quem Hebraei de catalogo divinarum Scripturarum secantes, his quae Agiografa memorant manciparunt*).

<sup>34</sup> *Preface to Judith* (p. 691 Weber).

<sup>35</sup> *Preface to Tobit* (p. 676 Weber).

<sup>36</sup> Bogaert 2001 suggests that the *Vetus Latina* is based on a Greek text close to that underlying the Peshitta translation of Judith, and should be dated to the third century C.E.

<sup>37</sup> Bogaert 2001, 58 and 64 is skeptical about Jerome's Aramaic source and argues for the predominance of Old Latin versions. Enslin 1972, 44–45 suggests that the “supposititious” Aramaic text was translated from the Greek; this elegant solution preserves Jerome's word while explaining why there is no trace of an Aramaic tradition. See too Moore 1985, 94–101; Otzen 2002, 137–138, 141 and the further bibliography there.

<sup>38</sup> See e. g. notes on 8:11–27; 13:4, 16; 15:10. André 1903, 164–168 is a useful tabular comparison of the Septuagint and Vulgate versions of Judith; see too Börner-Klein 2007, 3–11. Callahan 1998, esp. 81–85 discusses the ways in which Jerome trans-

gests that the Hebrew version – if not the Aramaic one – used by Jerome survived underground, as it were, in Jewish circles, only to surface again in medieval times, in the Judith midrashim; see below.

There is, then, no direct trace of Judith – no actual mention of either the figure or the text – in Jewish sources until medieval times, and this leads to a somewhat paradoxical situation. Many scholars posit an original Hebrew Judith which underlies the Septuagint version, but in essence the surviving Greek text serves as the original text of Judith. The manuscripts of the Septuagint are considerably earlier than the other ancient versions of Judith and all these other versions – the Old Latin, Syriac, Sahidic, Ethiopian, and Armenian – ultimately stem from the Greek, as daughter or sister versions.<sup>39</sup> The Vulgate, too, depends on the Septuagint through the Old Latin versions, albeit in a somewhat more complicated relationship, as we have seen.

The great uncial Septuagint codices of the fourth and fifth centuries C.E. – Vaticanus (B), Alexandrinus (A), and Sinaiticus (S) – are, then, the earliest sources for the text of Judith, along with the Venetus (V) of the eighth century C.E.<sup>40</sup> The very earliest bit of evidence for the text of Judith is an ostrakon in Cairo from the second half of the third century C.E., containing a lacunose version of Jdt 15:2–7.<sup>41</sup> There is also a (now missing) parchment palimpsest in Damascus from the fifth or sixth century C.E., containing part of a single verse, Jdt 2:19.<sup>42</sup> The Christian Septuagint uncials do not follow the order of the books used in the Hebrew canon and Judith is found in close proximity to Esther and Tobit. All three books are sometimes included within the group of OT texts.<sup>43</sup> The very earliest Syriac text of Judith comes from a 6th century manuscript called the Book of Women, which collects together Ruth and Esther (both translated from He-

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forms the figure of Judith. Skemp 2011, esp. 267–271 demonstrates how Jerome alters the text of Judith in order to emphasize the chaste heroine's exemplary traits; see too Ryan 2012, 5–9.

<sup>39</sup> Hanhart 1979a, 13–19; Ryan 2012, 4–6 is a brief and updated survey of the ancient versions.

<sup>40</sup> See Rahlfs and Fraenkel 2004, 337–344 (on B), 221–226 (on A), 201–206 (on S), 344–346 (on V) for a detailed description of the four respective uncials.

<sup>41</sup> Schwartz 1946 first published the ostrakon. Hanhart 1979a, 11 reproduces the text; see too Rahlfs and Fraenkel 2004, 165.

<sup>42</sup> See Rahlfs and Fraenkel 2004, 64; Hanhart 1979a, 11.

<sup>43</sup> Bogaert 2001, 41 conveniently lists the various orders in which the three books – Esther (E), Judith (J), and Tobit (T) – are found in several important Greek mss.: EJT, ETJ, E... TJ, JET, TEJ, T...EJ.

brew), Susanna and Judith (both translated from Greek), followed by the story of Thecla, the disciple of Paul.<sup>44</sup>

Of the four great uncials, Vaticanus (B) is considered the best witness of the text and earlier editors of Judith such as Swete and Brooke-MacLean-Thackeray used it as the basis of their text; Moore translates this text in the Anchor Bible Commentary.<sup>45</sup> The most recent and comprehensive editor, Hanhart,<sup>46</sup> has produced an eclectic text, and he notes that secondary readings are already found in all the old uncials.<sup>47</sup> Hanhart uses some 34 Greek minuscules, dating from the ninth to the fifteenth century, in addition to the early uncial texts, when compiling his edition, as well as translations from the Old Latin, Vulgate, Syriac, Coptic-Sahidic, Ethiopian, and Armenian.<sup>48</sup> In recent years Bogaert has done much work on the collection, classification and editing of the Old Latin manuscripts, while a new Syriac version of Judith has been discovered.<sup>49</sup>

Earlier editors often divided the mss. into three recensions,<sup>50</sup> but Hanhart, utilizing his earlier investigations of Esther and 1 Esdras, finds four recensions: (1) the so-called Origenic or hexaplaric recension, which served as the basis of the Old Latin and Syriac translations,<sup>51</sup> (2) the “Lucianic” recension, (3) recension a which shares readings most frequently with

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<sup>44</sup> See Burris 2007, esp. 88–89 who states that there is no evidence of an existing Jewish Book of Women to which the story of Thecla was added and concludes that it is a Christian collection; see too Van Rompay 2006, 205 on other Syriac mss. of the Book of Women. For Nachmanides’ likely acquaintance with a Syriac Book of Women, see n. 65 below. Swete (1914, 213) brings a Latin list of *libri mulierum*, Ruth, Esther, and Judith, found in the seventh-eighth century Bobbio Missal, while Moore 1985, 91 suggests that the scrolls of Esther and Judith were kept together in the same box in ancient Christian congregations.

<sup>45</sup> Swete 1907, ii. 781–814; Brooke, McLean and Thackeray 1940, iii. 1, 43–84; see Moore 1985, 108.

<sup>46</sup> Otzen 2002, 137 says of Hanhart’s 1979a edition: “all essential problems of the Greek text are solved by this impressive enterprise.”

<sup>47</sup> Hanhart 1979b, 60–74.

<sup>48</sup> For a detailed list of the Greek mss. see Hanhart 1979a, 7–11; the mss. and sources for the ancient non-Greek translations are found at 13–18.

<sup>49</sup> See Bogaert 2001; he lists and describes the Old Latin mss. at 12–29 and discusses the transmission of LXX Judith *passim*. Bogaert published and commented upon several of the Old Latin mss. in a series of articles in *Revue bénédictine* from 1967–1978. Van der Ploeg 1991 discovered and published a facsimile of a new Judith Syriac text with a translation and commentary; see too van der Ploeg 1992. Van Rompay 2006 discusses the importance of this new version for the study of the LXX text.

<sup>50</sup> See, e.g. Cowley 1913, 243; Enslin 1972, 47.

<sup>51</sup> Hanhart 1979b, 14–45; see however Bogaert 2001, 53–54 and 69.

the Venetus, and (4) recension b which has the most in common with the Alexandrinus.<sup>52</sup> These different recensions of Judith are recensions in a limited sense, i.e. groupings of the various manuscripts. There are of course many variant readings in the different groups of manuscripts, but, on the whole, the text of Judith is relatively fixed and the number of serious difficulties is few. There is no longer and shorter version of the text as with the Greek Tobit, nor are there two rather different versions of approximately equal length, as with the Greek Esther and Daniel. The translation here is based on Hanhart's eclectic text, unless otherwise noted.

### Canonicity

The question of the canonization of the Book of Judith is in fact a cluster of questions, about the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint and Judith itself. When was the Bible canonized? How? When was the text of Judith fixed and stabilized? Was Judith deliberately excluded from the canon or simply not included? How was the Christian Septuagint formed? Why was Judith included there? As compelling as these questions may be, scholars are unable to provide a definitive answer to any of them, and the evidence to be marshalled is essentially negative.

It is far from certain that there was a Hebrew Bible, i.e. a final, formal, and canonized list of biblical books, before rabbinic times, although scholars now tend to recognize the makings of a defined – but not definitive – collection towards the middle of the second century B.C.E.<sup>53</sup> The Book of Judith, which is not explicitly mentioned in Jewish literature before medieval times, may have been a candidate for inclusion in the Bible which ultimately emerged, but there is not a trace of any discussion in Jewish sources.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> See Hanhart 1979b, 46–60.

<sup>53</sup> See van der Kooij 1998 and the further references there; cf. Rajak 2009, 21.

<sup>54</sup> The rabbis discuss the canonical status of only a single apocryphal work, Ben Sira; see e.g. t. Yad. 2:13, where it is stated that the book of Ben Sira does not make the hands unclean, i.e. is not canonical. The rabbis also recognize Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe and friend, as a prophet (e.g. b. Meg. 14b), but do not mention the apocryphal work ascribed to him; see Beckwith 1985, 380–381 and Tanzer 1997, xxii–xxiii. The anonymous Christian writer of the sixth century C.E. *Dialogue of Timothy and Aquila*, no expert in Jewish matters, includes Judith in his list of the 22 books of the Hebrew Bible, joining Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs together in order to make room for the work; see Beckwith 1985, 270 n. 68.

We can contrast for example, the MT Esther, sometimes presented as Judith's rival for inclusion in the canon, a competitor who won the "canonization contest," so to speak, despite its more secular tone.<sup>55</sup> The canonicity of Esther was debated by the rabbis well into the third century C.E.<sup>56</sup> The search by scholars for the causes that led to the absence of Judith from the Hebrew Bible assumes that the original language of the text was Hebrew, and clearly if Judith was written in Greek it would never have been a candidate for inclusion in the Bible.<sup>57</sup> Some scholars who postulate an original Hebrew Judith suggest that the Hebrew text disappeared at a very early date or that the book was composed too late to be included in the Bible,<sup>58</sup> but we have only Origen's statement on the "missing" Hebrew text (see above) and we cannot point to a final and firm date for the closing of the canon. Both these hypotheses assume that objective circumstances led to the text not being included. Other commentators turn to the content of the work, searching for the "fault" that led to the deliberate exclusion of Judith from the canon. One alleged problem is the process of conversion which Achior the Ammonite undergoes, for Ammonites (and Moabites) are expressly forbidden to join "the assembly of the Lord," down to the tenth generation (Deut 23:4). Achior undergoes circumcision when he converts, but he does not follow the other rabbinical rules of ritual immersion and a sacrifice at the temple. It is likely, however, that the Book of Judith was composed before these rabbinical rules were regularized and codified.<sup>59</sup> Another theory points to the powerful role allotted Judith and suggests that she was simply too feminist and independent to be accepted by the rabbis, who did not appreciate her subversion of patriarchal norms.<sup>60</sup> Further hypotheses on the reason for Judith's exclusion have been raised, but none of these conjectures can be proved and, "the simple fact is that we do not know."<sup>61</sup> Judith survived in Greek, as a Septuagint text, that is to say in a Christian context,<sup>62</sup> and here, too, the reason for its survival and inclusion

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<sup>55</sup> Zeitlin 1972; Moore 1992; Crawford 2003.

<sup>56</sup> All the rabbis named in b. Meg. 7a who deny the canonicity of Esther belong to the third century C.E.; see, e.g. Beckwith 1986, 275.

<sup>57</sup> See, e.g. Joosten 2007, \*175–\*176.

<sup>58</sup> Crawford 2003, 70.

<sup>59</sup> See, e.g. Moore 1985, 87 and note on Jdt 14:10.

<sup>60</sup> Craven 1983, 117–118; Crawford 2003, 70, 73–76; see too Section 7.

<sup>61</sup> Moore 1992, 66.

<sup>62</sup> The concept of a Greek Jewish canon, compiled by the Jews of Alexandria, is now rejected by scholars; see, e.g. Beckwith 1985, 382–386; Rajak 2009, 21.

in the Septuagint, as opposed to various other Jewish works of the Second Temple period, “remains a mystery.”<sup>63</sup>

### Later Jewish Tradition

Despite her early disappearance from Jewish tradition, Judith proved too vital a figure to vanish entirely. Judith is not mentioned in the Mishnah, Talmud, or other rabbinic literature, but from about the tenth (or perhaps the eleventh) century C.E. onwards, over a thousand years after the apocryphal book was first composed, Judith is found once again in Jewish literature. When Judith does re-surface, it is in a variety of contexts and genres, in brief as well as lengthy form. Thus we encounter accounts of Judith in several different kinds of Jewish literature: Hebrew tales of the heroine, liturgical poems, commentaries on the Talmud, and passages in Jewish legal codes.<sup>64</sup> These later accounts vary considerably and it is worth noting at the outset that none of the medieval versions tell a story identical to that found in the Septuagint. Indeed, the Septuagint version of Judith virtually disappears from Jewish tradition until modern times.<sup>65</sup>

In many of these medieval Jewish sources, Judith becomes linked with the festival of Hanukkah, an eight day holiday first instituted by Judas Maccabeus in 164 B.C.E., to celebrate the re-dedication of the temple in Jerusalem. It is clear that Hasmonean events influenced the composition of the original tale<sup>66</sup> and in medieval times, perhaps as a result of this, Judith becomes an actual participant in events surrounding the Hasmonean victories. Another reason for the introduction of Judith into Hanukkah tales and customs seems to be the many parallels between Judith and Esther: these two beautiful and seductive Jewish heroines who save their people from the threats of a foreign ruler are associated together.<sup>67</sup> At the same

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<sup>63</sup> Hengel 2002, 113.

<sup>64</sup> See the fuller survey in Gera 2010a.

<sup>65</sup> There is one notable exception. The biblical commentator and philosopher Ramban (Moses ben Nachman or Nachmanides) was acquainted in the twelfth century with a Syriac version of Judith, translated from the Septuagint, for he quotes from the Peshitta version of Jdt 1:7–11 in his commentary on Deut. 21:14. He says that the verses come from מגילת שושן, the Scroll of Shoshan (or Susann), apparently referring to a scroll containing the “women’s books,” Susanna, Ruth, Judith, and Esther, which began with Susanna.

<sup>66</sup> See Section 3.

<sup>67</sup> Crawford 2003 is a detailed comparison of Esther and Judith.



time, the holiday of Hanukkah is linked in Jewish eyes with the festival of Purim, for both festivities are late ones. The two holidays are not mentioned in the Torah, but date to the Second Temple period, and their laws and customs are regulated by the rabbis. The holidays share a special, parallel prayer, “On the Miracles,” as well. Purim has a heroine, Esther, and a scroll telling her story, Megillat Esther, and this may have led to the analogous holiday, Hanukkah, which has no special text of its own, being assigned a similarly seductive heroine, whose story is entitled at times, Megillat Yehudit, the Scroll of Judith.<sup>68</sup> It is also worth noting in this context the final verse of the Vulgate version of Judith, apparently a late addition to the text, which speaks of an annual celebration: ‘The day of ... this victory was accepted by the Hebrew among their holy days, and is observed by the Jews from that time up to the present day.’ (Vg. Jdt 16:31).<sup>69</sup> Thus, even though there is no actual basis for linking Judith with Hanukkah,<sup>70</sup> Judith’s tale is frequently enmeshed with the story of Hanukkah in medieval times,<sup>71</sup> and we find this connection in several separate strands of Jewish literature.

The Hebrew stories of Judith, often termed the Judith midrashim, are the largest and most varied group of medieval Jewish texts which mention Judith. While some of the stories are attributed to named authors who can be dated, other tales are simply found anonymously, in manuscripts written as late as the sixteenth century. Two of the Judith stories are known only in published form, in books dating to the eighteenth and nineteenth century,<sup>72</sup> and there are many other Hebrew versions of Judith’s tale which have yet to be published.<sup>73</sup> Many of the texts cannot be dated with any certainty, but

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<sup>68</sup> See Bogaert 1988.

<sup>69</sup> *dies autem victoriae huius festivitatem ab Hebraeis in numero dierum sanctorum accepit et colitur a Iudaeis ex illo tempore usque in praesentem diem.* See, e.g. Soubigou 1949, 575 and Grintz 1957, 197 on the lateness of the verse.

<sup>70</sup> See however Bogaert 2000, esp. 345–346 (and the further references there) for the argument that the author of the Septuagint Book of Judith already subtly refers to Hanukkah. In the sixteenth century, the critical Jewish thinker Azariah de’ Rossi objected vigorously to the association of Judith with Hanukkah; see Weinberg 2001, 636–639.

<sup>71</sup> Stemberger 1993, 527–545 discusses Hanukkah in rabbinic Judaism and the various medieval tales associated with the holiday. Friedman 1986/87, esp. 225–232 brings various manuscript illuminations and Hanukkah menorahs which point to the connection between Judith and Hanukkah in Jewish art.

<sup>72</sup> See Gera 2010a, 37–39 (Texts D and 9); Dubarle 1966, i. 33–37, 94–98; ii. 152–163.

<sup>73</sup> See, e.g. a Yemenite account of Judith published for the first time in Leiter 2006, 435–442 and the eleventh century liturgical poem by Rabbi Isaac son of Samuel discussed below.



several were already in circulation in the eleventh century.<sup>74</sup> The tales are not readily accessible and have been published, chiefly in Hebrew, in a variety of books and journals, but there is no single comprehensive collection of the midrashim.<sup>75</sup> Most of the midrashim have not been translated into English at all, and the existing English versions of these stories are scattered in various venues and have not been collected together. French and German readers are better served.<sup>76</sup>

The midrashim can be grouped into several categories (with some overlap between the categories). One group of Hebrew stories is closely related to the Vulgate and these accounts recast in Hebrew the Vulgate account of Judith, generally in abridged and adapted form.<sup>77</sup> We have seen above (14–15) the view expressed by Dubarle, the foremost collector of these medieval Hebrew tales, that these stories preserve the ancient, original Hebrew version of the Book of Judith. He suggests that these medieval Hebrew tales of Judith stem from an independent older tradition, one which underlies Jerome's Latin text as well. These early Hebrew accounts were then translated into Aramaic, runs the argument, and it is this Aramaic version that Jerome subsequently translates into Latin.<sup>78</sup> Dubarle's claims have not been widely accepted.<sup>79</sup> Most scholars think that the medieval Hebrew versions of Judith are translations and adaptations of the Vulgate, and stem

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<sup>74</sup> Both the brief Hebrew tale by Nissim ben Jacob and the liturgical poem of Joseph Ben Solomon are dated to the eleventh century C.E.; see Dubarle 1966, i.82–84, 98–99; ii.104–109, 162–167. If the Hanukkah *sheelta*, a homily on Jewish law and ethics, ascribed to Rav Ahai (680–752 C.E.) is authentic, then the earliest extant Hebrew tale telling of Judith dates back to the eighth century. See Mirsky 1961, 175–176 and 182–190 for the text; Wacholder 1963, 258 thinks that this tale is a late gloss.

<sup>75</sup> Dubarle 1966, i–ii and Börner-Klein 2007 (who relies heavily on Dubarle) are the fullest collections. See too the further bibliography cited in Gera 2010a, 32 n. 30 and the appendix of sources there on 37–39.

<sup>76</sup> For translations of several midrashim into English, see, e.g. Moore 1985, 103–107; Mehlman and Polish 1979; Weingarten 2010, 110–125. Dubarle 1966 and Börner-Klein 2007 translate the Hebrew texts they collect into French and German respectively.

<sup>77</sup> See Dubarle 1966. ii. 7–97 for the texts.

<sup>78</sup> One of Dubarle's allegedly original Hebrew texts turned out to be a Hebrew translation of the German translation of Judith in Luther's Bible; see Dubarle 1961. Dubarle 1966 is nonetheless a very useful collection of material, even if one does not accept his theories.

<sup>79</sup> See Grintz 1957, 196–204; Moore 1985, 102; Hanhart 1979b, 10 n. 1 and the further discussion and references in Otzen 2002, 138–140 for reservations about Dubarle's hypothesis; Otzen himself is inclined to accept some of Dubarle's arguments.

from a much later source, most probably a medieval Hebrew translation of the Vulgate Judith, rather than being the source of Jerome's text. Because of their close resemblance to – and dependence upon – the Vulgate these stories do not teach us much about medieval Jewish attitudes towards Judith and her story. They do, however, provide important evidence for a renewed Jewish interest in the Book of Judith – and the Apocrypha in general – in medieval times. From the tenth century onwards, a series of medieval Jewish writers translated many of the apocryphal works into Hebrew, often in adapted form, as part of larger (historical) compositions.<sup>80</sup> These Hebrew Vulgate-based Judith versions are linked, at times, to Hanukkah as well. Thus the title page of one such version reads "This is the book of Judith daughter of Merari of Hanukkah," even though there is no mention of Hanukkah in the story itself.<sup>81</sup>

A second group of Judith stories consists of rather brief, folkloric accounts which concentrate upon Judith's actual deed.<sup>82</sup> These stories make little reference to the events described in the first half of the Book of Judith and make no mention of Hanukkah. Brief though these tales may be, their basic plot, which deviates in certain ways from the Septuagint, is followed in all the non-Vulgate versions. A third group of Hebrew Judith stories is directly linked to Hanukkah, and these stories fall into two parts.<sup>83</sup> In the first half, we hear of the assassination of an enemy leader by Hasmoneans, who object to the leader's desire to exercise his right of the first night (*ius primae noctis*) when their sister is about to be married. Judith, who is now identified as a relative of the Hasmoneans, performs her daring deed in the second half of these stories.<sup>84</sup> A particularly interesting group of midrashim are hybrid tales which have a Vulgate-inspired account in the first half of the

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<sup>80</sup> The author of the *Book of Josippon* (mid-tenth century C.E.) was apparently the first medieval Jewish author to translate and adapt various sections of the Apocrypha. He is followed by Jerahme'el son of Solomon (early twelfth century C.E.) and Rabbi Eliezer son of Asher (mid-fourteenth century C.E.), among others; see Yassif 2001, 38–40.

<sup>81</sup> Dubarle 1966, i. 22.

<sup>82</sup> Dubarle 1966, ii. 100–109, 152–163 (=texts 1, 2a, and 9).

<sup>83</sup> Dubarle 1966, ii. 110–116, 118–125, 138–152, 170–177 (=texts 3, 4, 5, 8, and 12); see too Weingarten 2010, 110–125. Dubarle prints only the second Judith-related half of these texts; see Gera 2010a, 38 for further sources which cite the full versions of these midrashim.

<sup>84</sup> Bogaert 2000, 353–358 provides interesting indirect evidence for the circulation of such Hanukkah-Judith midrashim in thirteenth century France, for he demonstrates how the *Chevalerie de Judas Macchabée* of Gautier de Belleperche incorporates elements of the Hebrew stories.

tale, until immediately after Judith arrives on the scene. The second half of these stories resembles the accounts of Judith found in the Hanukkah tales.<sup>85</sup>

Many details of the plot and the characters in these medieval Hebrew stories are not identical with those found in the Book of Judith. The setting of the story is generally Jerusalem, rather than Bethulia. The enemy king Nebuchadnezzar and his commander Holofernes are often conflated into one figure, the leader whom Judith encounters and kills, and his name and country of origin vary considerably from story to story. Even Judith herself is not always named in these stories and her family background varies. Similarly, an Achior figure, a wise counsellor who advises the enemy commander against attacking the Israelites, is found in virtually all the tales, but his name, position, and profession vary in the different stories. In all the tales, Judith's city is besieged and she decides to intervene and meet with the enemy leader. This leader attempts to seduce or marry her, arranges a banquet, becomes intoxicated and is killed by Judith. She returns to her city with his head and the Israelites are filled with joy when they learn of his death. The enemy forces discover their leader's body and are then slaughtered by the Israelites, and their possessions are pillaged. All of these elements are found, of course, in the original Book of Judith and they form the very core of the plot.<sup>86</sup> At the same time, several key features are missing in the medieval stories, which add some new elements of their own.<sup>87</sup>

Judith was celebrated in Hebrew poetry as well as prose in medieval times, and there are at least three liturgical poems (or *piyuttim*) for Hanukkah which tell her story. The three poems were recited in synagogues in various Jewish communities on either the first or the second Sabbath of Hanukkah. One poem, **אִירֵךְ כִּי אִנַּפְתָּ בִּי** (I give thanks to you although you were angry with me) was composed by Joseph ben Solomon of Carcassone, who is dated to the first half of the eleventh century.<sup>88</sup> The poem tells an epic tale of the Jews' resistance to the decrees of Antiochus IV and includes accounts of both the Hasmonean bride and Judith. It bears a considerable

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<sup>85</sup> Dubarle 1966, ii. 8–55, 127–136 (=texts E, 7a and 7b)

<sup>86</sup> For a survey of all these elements in the various tales, see the useful list in Dubarle 1966, ii. 98–99.

<sup>87</sup> Gera 2010b discusses the more vulnerable, dependent, and subdued role assigned to Judith in the various midrashim and compares Judith with the Hasmonean woman described in the Hanukkah midrashim; see too Weingarten 2010 for a close reading and annotation of one particular Judith midrash.

<sup>88</sup> Dubarle 1966, i. 98–99, ii. 162–167 (=text 10).

resemblance to two of the Hanukkah midrashim<sup>89</sup> and this is evidence for the circulation of the joint Hasmonean daughter-Judith tales in the eleventh century, even if the surviving manuscripts of these stories are from a later date. This elegant and abstruse poem by Joseph ben Solomon was recited on the first Sabbath of Hanukkah in Italian synagogues. A second poem, **אין מושיע וגואל** (There is no savior and redeemer) is by Menachem ben Machir of Ratisbon who was active in the second half of the eleventh century.<sup>90</sup> His poem may be based on the earlier one and he devotes only a few lines to Judith, comparing her to Jael. A third, unpublished poem **אחורכם שמעוני** (I shall declare to you, listen) is found in several festival prayer books from France and was written by Rabbi Isaac ben Samuel of Provence, who probably should be dated to the middle of the eleventh century. This rhyming acrostic poem is based on the Vulgate version of Judith and it is studded with biblical quotations and allusions, some of which are taken from tales which underlie the Judith story, such as the stories of Jael and Ehud.<sup>91</sup> Such biblical echoes are found in the Hebrew prose tales of Judith as well, and these biblical phrases serve a double function, both narrating the surface story and subtly underscoring the resemblance between Judith's tale and similar biblical stories and characters which were well known to the readers.<sup>92</sup>

Although Judith is not found in the Talmud itself, later commentators on the Talmud do mention her, always in the context of Hanukkah.<sup>93</sup> These commentators do not tell Judith's story for its own sake, but use elements of her tale to explain the commandments and customs of the holiday. Thus the foremost exegete of the Talmud, Rashi (Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac, 1041–1105), when discussing why women, as well as men, are required to light Hanukkah candles, simply notes that when the Greeks decreed that Jewish virgin brides were to be bedded first by the ruler, a woman brought about the miraculous rescue. We know that Rashi was acquainted with the liturgical poem *Odecha ki anafta bi* because he quotes it in his biblical commentary (on Ezekiel 21:18), and it is very likely that he knew of the story of Judith, but did not choose to mention her by name. Rashi's grandson, the Rashbam (Rabbi Samuel ben Meir, 1085–1174), does mention Judith, and he is quoted as saying that the chief miracle of Purim came about through

<sup>89</sup> Dubarle 1966, ii. 113–117, 170–177 (= texts 4 and 12); see Grintz 1957, 205–208.

<sup>90</sup> Dubarle 1966, i. 100, ii. 168–169 (=text 11)

<sup>91</sup> See Zunz 1865, 168. I am grateful to Avraham Levin of Jerusalem for allowing me to see his unpublished research on the text, author, and background of the poem.

<sup>92</sup> See Section 4.

<sup>93</sup> See Dubarle 1966, i. 105–107, 109.

Esther, and that of Hanukkah through Judith.<sup>94</sup> Later commentators bring further details. Nissim ben Reuben (ca.1310–1375), known as the Ran, refers to Judith not by name, but as the daughter of Johanan. In his account, which he says comes from a midrash, the woman gave the chief enemy cheese to eat<sup>95</sup> so as to make him drunk, and then cut off his head. This, adds the Ran, is why it is customary to eat cheese on Hanukkah.<sup>96</sup> In the *Kol Bo* (section 44), a work outlining Jewish laws and customs dating to the thirteenth or fourteenth century, we find a similar version. In this account, the king of Greece attempts to seduce Judith, the daughter of the high priest Johanan, and she feeds him a cheese dish so that he will become thirsty, drink too much, and fall asleep. Such references to Judith's encounter with an enemy whom she fed either cheese or milk are subsequently found in a long line of works which codify halakah, Jewish law, and supply the background to the practice of eating cheese dishes on Hanukkah. Similar remarks are found in Jewish guides and responsa written to this very day.<sup>97</sup>

Judith, then, disappeared from Jewish tradition at an early stage, but subsequently returned, transformed, in the Middle Ages, and left her mark on Jewish texts, prayers, practices, and ritual art. In the earliest known printed Hebrew version of the Book of Judith, a translation of the Vulgate dating to ca. 1552, the translator, Moses Meldonado, sees fit to apologize for straying from the accounts of Rashi and the Ran. He points out that Jerome's version and those of the Talmudic commentators have something in common – the recollection of God's boundless grace and mercy.<sup>98</sup> Indeed, all the various versions of Judith we have looked at – the Septuagint, the Vulgate, the midrashim, prayers, and commentaries – have at least certain elements in common and all become part of Jewish tradition.

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<sup>94</sup> Rashi on b. Sabb. 23a; Tosafot on b. Meg. 4a.

<sup>95</sup> According to several mss. of the LXX and OL, as well as the received text of the Vg., Judith takes cheese along with her other kosher food, when setting out for Holofernes' camp; see note on 10:5.

<sup>96</sup> Nissim ben Reuben on Alfasi, Shabbat 10a (on b. Sabb. 23b).

<sup>97</sup> See the detailed discussion in Leiter 2006, 362–369. A search of the Bar Ilan Online Jewish Responsa Project (<http://www.biu.ac.il/jh/Responsa/>) supplies further texts, including a responsum from 1996.

<sup>98</sup> See Habermann 1975, 15–16, 62–74.

### Section 3: Dating Judith: History, Geography, and Historicity

The Book of Judith is rich in historical, geographical, and genealogical detail, but this information does not provide any readily identifiable historical background, location, or date for the story. The very first verse of the Book of Judith well illustrates the difficulty in setting the work in an actual historical time and place, despite the specific information it contains. The verse reads, “In the twelfth year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, who ruled over the Assyrians in the great city of Nineveh, in the days of Arphaxad, who ruled over the Medes in Ecbatana” (Jdt 1:1). Nebuchadnezzar (605/4–562 B.C.E.), the nefarious king who captured and destroyed Jerusalem, was the second ruler of the Neo-Babylonian empire. He did not reign from Nineveh, which was, in fact, conquered in 612 B.C.E. by his father, Nabopolassar. Further difficulties arise with Nebuchadnezzar’s enemy, Arphaxad, king of the Medes. Arphaxad is otherwise unknown and the Medes were allies, not enemies, of the Babylonians and joined Nabopolassar in his conquest of Nineveh.<sup>99</sup> We begin, then, with an anachronistic, ahistorical situation, akin to the statement “It happened at the time when Napoleon Bonaparte was king of England and Otto von Bismarck was on the throne in Mexico.”<sup>100</sup>

What lies behind this egregious error? While it has been suggested that the author of Judith is simply ignorant<sup>101</sup> or perhaps did not distinguish sufficiently between Assyria and Babylonia,<sup>102</sup> it seems more likely that the mistake is deliberate. This is pseudo-history, not wrong history. It is clear from the historical survey of the Jews found in Achior’s speech in chapter 5 that our author is well acquainted with the history of the Jews as recorded in the Bible. Indeed, his close familiarity with the Bible as a whole is apparent throughout the book of Judith, for he uses figures, situations, and clusters of phrases taken from a wide variety of biblical episodes and re-works them

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<sup>99</sup> See, e.g. Kuhrt 1995, ii. 544–546 and 590; Wiseman 1985, 8–9.

<sup>100</sup> Torrey 1945, 89.

<sup>101</sup> Thus, e.g. Millard 1999, 197: “he had little knowledge and did not anticipate others to be better educated.” See too Pfeiffer 1949, 297.

<sup>102</sup> See note on 1:1.

skillfully into his own text.<sup>103</sup> Nonetheless, at the very opening of his work, our author chooses to deviate from the biblical record. Nebuchadnezzar, a well-known, even notorious figure among the Jews, is allotted the wrong kingdom and an imaginary enemy, and this must be a deliberate move on the part of the author. If Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Assyrians, is patently unhistorical, the Assyrians and the Babylonians were nevertheless the two worst enemies of the biblical Israelites, and the conflation of the two seems intentional. A new, stereotypical figure, who seems to combine the most frightening features of the two kings, Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar, and their peoples, the Assyrians and Babylonians, has been created. By straying from the facts and recasting them in a fictional way in the very first verse of his book, the author gives us fair warning that what we are about to read is not a historical account, not factually true in the narrow sense, but nonetheless actual and illuminating in a broader way. This fictitious account serves as a general lesson about the Israelites, their God, and their foes.<sup>104</sup>

A similar conclusion can be drawn from the genealogy allotted to Judith in the very first verse where she appears. “Judith ... the daughter of Merari son of Ox, son of Joseph, son of Oziel, son of Elkiah, son of Ananias, son of Gideon, son of Raphaim, son of Akitho, son of Elijah, son of Hilkiah, son of Eliab, son of Nathanael, son of Salamiel, son of Sarasadai, son of Israel” (Jdt 8:1). This long list of ancestors honors Judith and emphasizes her importance; no biblical woman is assigned such a full and detailed genealogy (note on 8:1). At the same time, the very length and comprehensiveness of the list seems designed to underscore its fictive quality. There is something exaggerated, even comical, about this extended genealogy and it seems clear that we are not meant to take this list of sixteen generations of forefathers as historical truth.<sup>105</sup> Judith’s family is traced all the way back to Israel (i.e. Jacob) and in the process she is allotted ancestors whose names link them to several different tribes, thus transforming her into an ideal, generic Israelite woman who belongs to all of the tribes.<sup>106</sup> Judith’s very name, “Jewess,” makes the identical point. Several of her forefathers’ names – Gideon, Elijah, Joseph and Merari – are identical with those of judges, prophets, ambassadors, and priests, all the various roles which Judith herself plays in the story, so that the list of her ancestors also hints at or encapsulates her

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<sup>103</sup> See Section 4.

<sup>104</sup> For this approach see Haag 1963; Licht 1975; Nickelsburg 1981; Zenger 1981; see too the useful summary in Otzen 2002, 91–92.

<sup>105</sup> Pace Bruns 1956.

<sup>106</sup> See van Henten 1995, 247–250.

doings.<sup>107</sup> Judith's elaborate genealogy plays a parallel role to the depiction of "Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Assyrians." Just as we are made to understand at the very outset that the chief villain of the work is a fictitious, composite character, here, too, we are told (again, obliquely) from the very moment that the book's heroine is introduced that she is not a real person, but a composite and idealized figure.

The lengthy catalogue of Judith's ancestors also points to our author's fondness for detailed lists and measurements. Thus he reports the precise dimensions of Arphaxad's fortifications in Ecbatana (1:2–4), the exact size and composition of Holophernes' army (2:15), and the plethora of places traversed and captured by the Assyrians once they set out (2:23–28). No matter that the fortifications are imaginary or that Holophernes' route is meandering and roundabout, with his huge army covering some 500 kilometers in a mere three days.<sup>108</sup> The catalogue of place names, like the detailed list of Judith's ancestors, the size of Arphaxad's tower, and the numbers of the Assyrian army, should not be pressed for accuracy or coherence and it is the overall impression created by the accumulation of details that is significant.<sup>109</sup> We are not meant to trace Holophernes' route carefully, map in hand, for the military march is intended rather to dazzle and impress readers with its sweep and success. We, the readers, see that Holophernes and his immense army conquer all the countries that lie between him and the Israelites. It is not military or geographical logic that underlie his path, but the author's desire to portray Holophernes' string of victories as an inescapable, all-encompassing force, which only the Israelites are able to resist.<sup>110</sup> The author takes liberties with historical figures and events, as well as geographical locations, in order to present a story which is true on a different plane, true on the broader theological level. His powers of invention are apparent throughout the book, as is his willingness to make use of fabrications even while imparting a serious theological message.

If we assume that the author of Judith deliberately altered historical facts in order to tell a more universal, meta-historical tale, then the chronological inconsistencies found in the work can be noted, but need not be explained

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<sup>107</sup> Levine 1992, 21.

<sup>108</sup> See Gruen 2002, 163 and note on 2:21–27.

<sup>109</sup> Compare Esth 1:10 and 1:14 with its playful lists of Ahasuerus' eunuchs and advisers. See too the catalogue of the Israelites' movements in the desert at Num 33:10–37 ("They left x and encamped at y") where the repetition and the detail of these stops is an effective means of stressing the length of their stay in the desert.

<sup>110</sup> Licht 1975, 177; Haag 1963 *passim*.



away or made to harmonize.<sup>111</sup> Indeed, it is not surprising to discover that it is impossible to assign our story a dramatic date. The author mentions three absolute dates, the twelfth, seventeenth and eighteenth regnal years of Nebuchadnezzar (1:1, 13; 2:1). It is particularly noteworthy that the campaign against Bethulia is said to take place in Nebuchadnezzar's eighteenth regnal year (2:1), i.e. in 587 B.C.E., the exact date of the destruction of Jerusalem by the historical Babylonian king. Yet the Jews of our story repel and defeat the forces sent by Nebuchadnezzar, and Jerusalem is untouched by the enemy. To complicate matters further, Achior clearly refers to post-exilic events, some seventy years later, stating that the Jews have recently returned from Babylonia and regained possession of Jerusalem and its temple (5:19; cf. 4:3 with notes). Our author is not interested, then, in assigning a specific and realistic date to the events he describes. This does not, however, prevent him from including in the story a series of references to precisely defined periods of time. We hear, for example, that Nebuchadnezzar and his forces feast for 120 days after their first victory (1:16), Uzziah requests a five day waiting period before surrendering (7:30), and the Jews celebrate in Jerusalem for three months after their victory (16:20).<sup>112</sup> Modern scholars have followed up on these precise markers of time and (with a bit of tweaking) it has been calculated that the plot of the Book of Judith unfolds over the course of a year, from Hanukkah to Hanukkah.<sup>113</sup> This kind of subtle calculation is not apparent to the average reader of Judith, but if the author did intend such a connection to be made, it well suits his playful use of elaborate (and imaginary) circumstantial detail to make a larger theological point.<sup>114</sup>

Geography and topography also play an important role in Judith,<sup>115</sup> and our author mentions a great many place names, just as he includes many specific references to the passage of time. There is a great deal of movement in our work. We first follow Nebuchadnezzar and his messengers in his quest for allies against Arphaxad, from Persia to Cilicia to Palestine, Egypt and Ethiopia (Jdt. 1:7–12). After the defeat of Arphaxad's army in Ecbatana

<sup>111</sup> As in the "evolving text" theory of Steinmetzer described by Moore 1985, 52.

<sup>112</sup> See the useful enumeration of references to time in Moore 1985, 38–39.

<sup>113</sup> See Bogaert 1984 and the further references there; cf. Bogaert 1988.

<sup>114</sup> Such allusions to Hanukkah would also indicate that our work was composed not only after the actual rededication of the temple in 164 B.C.E., but also after the annual celebration of Hanukkah became institutionalized; see below.

<sup>115</sup> Otzen 2002, 87–90 is a useful and balanced survey of earlier scholarship on the "topographical jumble of the book of Judith" (90), its problems, and the suggested solutions.

and the death of the king at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar in the mountains of Ragae (1:13–15), we track the course of the wider punitive campaign undertaken by Nebuchadnezzar's general Holophernes. Holophernes is said to stop in Cilicia, Put, and Lud, along the Euphrates, and on the Damascus plain, among other places (2:21–27). He then focuses on Palestine, first its coastal cities and then the more central areas (2:28–3:10). Finally, Holophernes besieges the town of Bethulia, the last obstacle before the conquest of Jerusalem (chs. 4–13). In the course of the siege, Achior is expelled from Holophernes' camp and brought to Bethulia (ch. 6), while Judith leaves her city for the enemy camp and then returns home (chs. 10–13). After Holophernes is killed, the Israelites gather from Bethulia and its surroundings, as well as Jerusalem, Gilead, and the Galilee, to pursue the frightened Assyrian army all the way to Damascus (15:4–5). The Israelite victory causes the high priest Joakim and other dignitaries to come in person from Jerusalem to Bethulia in order to congratulate Judith (15:8). She and the people of Bethulia then make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the tale ends with their return home (16:20–21).

The places and movements mentioned in the work often have symbolic significance. Sometimes, as we have seen, a list or catalogue of places is meant to dazzle the reader. Elsewhere it is the physical setting – the mountains, plains, valleys, and coasts – that is significant, and mountains and high places play a particularly prominent role in *Judith*.<sup>116</sup> At times, the very act of crossing over various areas is meaningful. In chapter 10 of the work, Judith moves from the roof of her house down to the house itself and then over its threshold and into the streets of Bethulia. Next she passes through the city gates, moves down from the mountain and over the plain into the enemy camp, and eventually arrives at the very tent of Holophernes. These movements are not merely physical, for she is crossing a series of conceptual boundaries as well as actual ones, when she leaves her protective roof, home and city and walks into the epicenter of danger, the enemy's lair. It matters little if Judith's house, the gates of Bethulia, or Holophernes' camp and tent cannot be assigned an actual, precise physical location: broader movements and issues are at stake here.

When recording these varied movements, the author of the Book of Judith mentions many place names and these lists are problematic in two different ways. When known places are named, they are often mentioned in an inappropriate or puzzling geographical framework. Thus we find a curious blend of cities, countries, and physical entities, as well as inappropriate,

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<sup>116</sup> See Craven 1983, 76–80 and Ben Eliahu, forthcoming, ch. 4.

haphazard routes, and reference to vast areas of territory.<sup>117</sup> Many sites mentioned in the book are not otherwise known and it is often difficult to situate these places in a precise locality (e.g. 4:4 with note). The outstanding instance is Judith's own city of Bethulia. Despite the many topographical details supplied by the author, scholars have been unable to agree upon an exact location. Bethulia is said to be north of Jerusalem, somewhere in northwest Samaria, as well as to control a narrow pass which leads to the capital city, which is why Holofernes besieges Bethulia on his way to Jerusalem (4:6–7 with notes). This description bears little relation to geographical or historical reality. No actual invader ever used such a route from the north when attempting to conquer Jerusalem and none encountered any such obstacle. Indeed, there is a much more straightforward route to Jerusalem from Scythopolis along the west bank of the Jordan to Jericho, and only then westward towards Jerusalem.<sup>118</sup> Judith's home town of Bethulia is, it seems, an invented, artificial obstacle on the road to Jerusalem and its "real" location is of no consequence. Bethulia, wherever we place it, is not important in and of itself; it is the fact that it is allegedly the last stronghold before Jerusalem, the very last obstacle in the Assyrian army's path to the temple, that makes its defense of critical importance. Bethulia cannot surrender because Jerusalem and its holy places cannot be violated. It is Jerusalem which is the crucial place in our story, and the city and its temple lie at the heart of the book.<sup>119</sup> It is not surprising that in several later versions of our tale, Bethulia simply disappears, with Judith located in Jerusalem.<sup>120</sup> Most scholars are unwilling to pinpoint an exact location for Bethulia and place it on a map; this is a strong indication of the town's fictitiousness.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> See, e.g. 1:6, 7–10; 2:7, 21–27 with notes. See too Haag 1963, 16–18; Otzen 2002, 91.

<sup>118</sup> Caponigro 1992, 53–54; see note on 4:6.

<sup>119</sup> See Otzen 2002, 94–97; Christiansen 2012.

<sup>120</sup> In medieval Hebrew tales of Judith, Bethulia is often dispensed with altogether and it is Jerusalem itself that is threatened; see, e.g. Dubarle 1966. ii, 100, 104, 110, 114 for four such tales. In the Vulgate Judith, Bethulia is virtually blended with Jerusalem; see Moore 1985, 101 and the further references there.

<sup>121</sup> Zertal 2009 is the most recent, speculative, and detailed attempt to argue for the historicity of Judith and the accuracy of its information on Bethulia and its surroundings. Zertal points to traces of settlements in the valley of Dothan dating from the Persian period and contends that these were Jewish settlements. He assigns the towns of Bethulia (and even Betomesthaim) precise locations between the valleys of Dothan and Jezereel, draws a map of Bethulia and its surroundings, and also tries to pinpoint the location of Holofernes' military camp and the family tomb of Manasseh and Judith! Another scholar who is bold enough to locate Bethulia physically on a map of Palestine is Michael Avi-Yonah; see Aharoni and Avi-Yonah 1968, 132 (frequently

Some of the unfamiliar names in Judith may well point to actual places which were once known but subsequently disappeared. Nonetheless, we cannot assume that all the places mentioned in the work reflect real cities and their precise locations at some specific historical period.<sup>122</sup> We know that our author freely mixes facts with fiction and blends together various historical periods, and there is no reason to assume that he is more precise or exacting when dealing with geographical features. There may be fragments of authentic information about the cities and settlements of Palestine during the author's own lifetime to be found in our work, or perhaps traces of such inhabited areas from an earlier period, but it is extremely difficult to separate these traces and memories from the surrounding fabrications and inventions.

The part played by Samaria in the Book of Judith is a particularly good example of the difficulties in analyzing the information provided in our work, difficulties which touch upon questions of geography, history, chronology, and ideology. Our story seems to take place in an idealized, united Israel with no division between northern and southern Israel, i.e. Samaria and Judah. Thus cities belonging to northern Israel are incorporated into Judith's Israel.<sup>123</sup> We might understand this situation as implying events in the period before 722 B.C.E., i.e. before the northern kingdom of Israel was captured and incorporated into the Assyrian empire.<sup>124</sup> This would explain the mention of Israelite tribes and their territories in our book (6:15; 8:2; 16:21), although there is a difficulty with Judith's own tribe and territory. Her forefather – and that of her husband – was Simeon, but there is no evidence that the tribe of Simeon lived in Samaria or was allotted land there.<sup>125</sup> Another suggestion is that the plot centers on northern Samaria for ideological reasons. The author, who may have been a native of the area, imagines a Samaria without any Samaritans, erasing them as it were, and incorporating the territory into Judea. At the same time he stresses the importance and centrality of Jerusalem and its temple. Towards the end of the

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reprinted). Compare the question mark used by Grintz (1957, 247) in his map and the absence of Bethulia in the map of Moore (1985, 42–43).

<sup>122</sup> Z. Safrai 1987 notes that the book includes place names from both the Persian and Hellenistic periods.

<sup>123</sup> See 3:9–4:7 with notes on 4:1 and 4:4.

<sup>124</sup> See Otzen 2002, 82; cf. Joosten 2007, \*169–\*170 who sees this as ignorance on the part of the (non-Palestinian) author.

<sup>125</sup> According to Josh 19:1–9 the tribe of Simeon was given territory in the south, in the vicinity of Beersheba. Elsewhere they are said to be scattered in towns within the territory of Judah; see Büchler 1956, 63–64.

book the author broadens his canvas to include the Jews of the Gilead and Galilee, who join in the pursuit of the Assyrian army in what appears to be a reversal of the Maccabean rescue of the Jews of the Galilee and Gilead in 163 B.C.E. (15:5 with note). This is ideological or wishful geography, a map of the Land of Israel as it should be.<sup>126</sup> Other scholars contend that the situation in Judith reflects a Persian layer of the story and suggest that the picture found in Judith of a Samaria settled by Jews is historical, and describes a time when Jews returned from the Babylonian exile and settled in Samaria.<sup>127</sup> Recent archaeological excavations point to a large number of (possibly Jewish) settlements in Samaria during the Persian period and a unique rabbinic source mentions the existence of such Jewish settlements.<sup>128</sup> About half of these Samaritan settlements disappeared in Hellenistic times.<sup>129</sup> Yet other scholars make use of the information on Samaria to date our work to Hasmonean times. They look closely at the boundaries of Palestine as described in our story to pinpoint an exact date for its composition, under the assumption that the geographical data reflect a genuine historical setting and time, the author's own. The Jewish Samaria described in Judith (4:4–6) is thought to be the result of the capture of the important Samaritan cities of Shechem and Samaria by John Hyrcanus. Since the coastal cities of Jamnia and Azotus are independent (2:28) and not yet under Hasmonean control, this is said to lead to a precise date of 108–107 B.C.E. for our work.<sup>130</sup> Other commentators use the geographical and political situation outlined in the work to arrive at different dates.<sup>131</sup> It is probably unwarranted to press the text in this way. As the case of Bethulia shows, our author can be casual, even cavalier, about geographical matters, even when he is acquainted with the territory.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Ben-Eliahu, forthcoming.

<sup>127</sup> Grintz 1957, 29–43 is a strong proponent of this thesis.

<sup>128</sup> See the scholion or commentary on Megillat Taanit on 25 Marheshvan with the discussion of Noam 2003, 243–249.

<sup>129</sup> See further the highly speculative Zertal 2009 (with note 121 above).

<sup>130</sup> See, e.g. Avi-Yonah in Aharoni and Avi-Yonah 1968, 132 (note 121 above) and compare Moore 1985, 67–71. Corley 2012, 25–26 notes that the precise date of the destruction of the temple on Mount Gerizim by John Hyrcanus is disputed, but is generally thought to be between 128 and 104 B.C.E.

<sup>131</sup> See, e.g. Mendels 1987, 51–56, who dates the final version of Judith to 140–135/4 B.C.E., because of the relatively independent status of Moab, Ammon, and the Edomites, as well as Jerusalem, Judea, and the Jewish settlements in Samaria.

<sup>132</sup> See, e.g. Pfeiffer 1949, 296–297 for the suggestion that our author was acquainted only with the geography of Palestine, but was ignorant of more remote areas.

The geography of the Book of Judith, then, presents challenges parallel to those raised by the historical information included in the work. The author takes liberties with names and places in order to present a story which is not factual, but is true on the broader theological level. The deliberate use of historical and geographical imprecisions conveys both a religious message and a literary one: our tale is not what it appears to be on the surface. The story is not restricted to a specific time or precise place: instead it tells of a paradigmatic encounter between an enemy of Israel, one who rules over a vast empire, and his defeat at the hands of the only true god, the God of Israel. The tale is not bound by specific historical events or actual geographical and topographical data; consequently its message of the power of God to defend his chosen people and defeat any hybriatic enemy who may arise, is a timeless, universal one.<sup>133</sup> At the same time, such use of fictitious materials makes for a more colorful and dramatic story. These inaccuracies also prepare the reader for the many instances of deception and irony to be found in the work and enhance our appreciation of its literary qualities.<sup>134</sup> The author of Judith is no less deceptive than his cunning and duplicitous heroine. In this fashion, the literary and the theological blend together seamlessly in the Book of Judith.

The direct information supplied by the author of Judith does not, then, allow us to assign the work a consistent dramatic date or a precise historical or geographical setting. When we look beyond the problematical dates, places, and figures explicitly mentioned by the author and turn to implicit traces of actual events, personalities, and institutions embedded in our text, the situation becomes even more complicated. There is no shortage of allusions to – and traces of – historical happenings in Judith, but they point to a variety of time periods, spanning some five centuries.<sup>135</sup> We already have noted the anachronistic combination of Assyrians, Nebuchadnezzar, and Medes, mentioned directly by the author. The Assyrians ruled from their capital Nineveh in the seventh century B.C.E., Nebuchadnezzar ruled in the sixth century B.C.E., and the Medes were still independent in the first half of that century. The return from exile, mentioned by Achior, took place at the end of the sixth century. There are other, less obvious, historical markers as well. Thus we find many Persian names, paraphernalia, and practices in

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<sup>133</sup> Haag 1963 pioneered this approach; see 27 with n. 104.

<sup>134</sup> Schuller 1992, 241: "From the [historical mistakes in the] very first verses one is alerted that this work is not what it appears to be, and one is thus prepared for irony and double entendre in what follows." For the use of historical blunders, recognizable not only to modern scholars, but to the original audience, as related to the genre of the novel and indicative of the fictional mode, see Wills 1995, 51.

<sup>135</sup> See the useful survey of Pfeiffer 1949, 292–295.

the book, reflections of the Persian period of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E.<sup>136</sup>

Two Persian features are particularly striking. The first is Nebuchadnezzar's mention of earth and water as a token of submission, familiar to us as a demand made by Persian kings in Herodotus.<sup>137</sup> The second prominent Persian element is the use of the two names Holophernes and Bagoas in our story. Both a Bagoas and a Holophernes (or Orophernes) are said to have participated in a campaign waged by the Persian king Artaxerxes III Ochus against Egypt. Artaxerxes went to war against Egypt twice. After an initial unsuccessful campaign against Egypt in 351 B.C.E., Artaxerxes subdued rebellions in Phoenicia and Cyprus, and this revolt may possibly have extended to Jerusalem and Jericho as well. In any event, the king and his army had to pass through Palestine on their way from Sidon to Egypt.<sup>138</sup> The Persian king's second attack on Egypt in 343–342 B.C.E. was successful and he is then said to have plundered gold and silver from Egyptian shrines and taken away inscribed records from the ancient temples.<sup>139</sup> It is tempting to link these events with our story and see the imperialistic and impious Artaxerxes as the inspiration for the figure of Nebuchadnezzar in the Book of Judith. Artaxerxes and his generals may well have left some kind of mark on our story, but there are many differences between the two tales and the respective kings' characters. Artaxerxes III, unlike our Nebuchadnezzar, did not, it seems, demand to be worshipped as a god. Nor is it clear from our source on Artaxerxes III, Diodorus Siculus, if Bagoas and Holophernes participated together in the same Egyptian campaign and there is no trace of a heroic female figure akin to Judith in the Diodorus account. Only a few lines of Diodorus devoted to Holophernes have survived, and he is identified there as the son and brother of Cappadocian kings and is said to have fought well in Egypt, on the Persian side. We hear nothing of a defeat or death akin to that found in Judith.<sup>140</sup> Bagoas, on the other hand, features

<sup>136</sup> See Section 5 with n. 244.

<sup>137</sup> See note on 2:7 and Section 5, 60–61.

<sup>138</sup> Stern 1974–1984, i. 43 and ii. 421 collects the ancient sources telling of the deportation of the Jews of Jericho by Artaxerxes III. See the detailed discussion in Briant 2002, 682–688, 1004–1005, who calls the evidence for an anti-Persian rebellion in Jerusalem and Jericho “meager and contradictory” (685), and compare Schürer 1986, iii. 1, 6 with n. 12 and 217–218.

<sup>139</sup> Diod. Sic. 16.51.2; see too Ael. *VH* 6.8.

<sup>140</sup> Diod. Sic. 31.19.2–3. The form Holophernes (Ὅλοφέρνης) found in Diodorus is thought to be a corruption of Orophernes (Ὀροφέρνης); Diodorus himself uses the latter form for the later Cappadocian king of that name (Diod. Sic. 31.32, 32b, 34).



quite prominently in Diodorus, who tells us that he was the king's most trusted companion. Diodorus' Bagoas is a wily and devious figure, a brave, powerful eunuch who eventually assassinates Artaxerxes and his son(s).<sup>141</sup> In other words, Bagoas is a much more prominent figure than Holophernes in Diodorus' account, in contrast to their respective roles in Judith. It may even be a second Holophernes mentioned by Diodorus who has given his name to our tale (note on 2:4). The younger Holophernes (or Orophernes), who ruled Cappadocia briefly ca. 160 B.C.E., drove his brother from the throne and plundered temples.<sup>142</sup> He was notorious for his dissolute lifestyle and drunkenness and eventually was also expelled from the throne.<sup>143</sup> Interestingly, this Orophernes was aided by Demetrius I Soter of Syria, the very same Demetrius who sent Nicanor against the Jews.<sup>144</sup> Our Holophernes resembles this dissolute Orophernes in his plundering of temples and love of drink. If the younger Orophernes has given his name to our Holophernes, this would point to a later date for Judith, i. e. Hasmonean times; see further below.<sup>145</sup>

The attempt to identify the Nebuchadnezzar of Judith with the historical Artaxerxes III is a particular instance of a more general approach favored by a great many scholars of Judith over the years. Since there clearly was no "Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Assyrians," scholars have attempted to resolve the chronological problems of Judith by identifying an actual, historical king who lies hidden behind the figure of Nebuchadnezzar. Such an approach goes all the way back to Sulpicius Severus, who at the beginning of the fifth century C.E. already identified Nebuchadnezzar with Artaxerxes III Ochus, and noted the presence of Bagoas in both stories.<sup>146</sup> Other ancient writers suggest that the Nebuchadnezzar of Judith is a different Persian king, Cambyses, Darius, or Xerxes.<sup>147</sup> In this fashion, a whole series of rulers were identified by different scholars as the "real" Nebuchadnezzar.

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<sup>141</sup> See esp. Diod. Sic. 16.47.3–4; 17.5 3–5.

<sup>142</sup> Diod. Sic. 31.32, 32b, 34; App. Syr. 244–245.

<sup>143</sup> Ael. VH 2.41; see too Plb. 32. 11. 10 = Ath. 10.440b and Corley 2012, 43–44.

<sup>144</sup> Plb. 3.5.2; Justin 35.1; see too Diod. Sic. 31.32; 1 Macc 7:26 and see below on Nicanor.

<sup>145</sup> See Hicks 1885. One further point to be noted is that Orophernes' mother, Antiochis, who was the daughter of Antiochus III (Diod. Sic. 31.19.7), may be the same Antiochis who is mentioned in 2 Macc (4:30) where she is described as the mistress or *pal-lake* of Antiochus IV Epiphanes.

<sup>146</sup> *Chronica* 2.12.1, 14–16. Sulpicius notes that many of his predecessors had suggested Cambyses as the figure behind Nebuchadnezzar.

<sup>147</sup> See the sources in Dubarle 1966, i.115–120; ii.178–180. We also find textual variants in the ancient manuscripts of Judith, with, e.g. the name Cambyses instead of Nebuchadnezzar; see Hanhart 1979a, apparatus at 1:1 and 1:11.



For some commentators the search for the actual Nebuchadnezzar was linked to a belief in the historicity of the story and was intended to reveal the concrete historical circumstances behind the tale of Judith. Finding and identifying such a monarch, would at the same time supply a *terminus post quem*, an earliest possible date for the composition of the work. This has not proven to be an easy task. Over 20 possible candidates for the role of Nebuchadnezzar have been suggested by scholars over the years, with the dates of these kings spanning nearly a millennium.<sup>148</sup> Ashurbanipal and Antiochus IV Epiphanes are two popular contenders, in addition to Artaxerxes III. Ashurbanipal, an actual Assyrian king (668–626 B.C.E.), waged many campaigns in the West and even went to war with the Medes. King Manasseh of Judah went into exile during the years of Ashurbanipal's reign and subsequently returned, and this is thought to be linked to Achior's description of the Jews' return from exile, as well as explaining why it is the High Priest Joakim who is the ultimate authority.<sup>149</sup> Antiochus IV (175–164 B.C.E.) of Syria (i.e. "Assyria" in Judith) certainly resembles our Nebuchadnezzar, for he is presented in Jewish sources as a hubristic king who prohibited Jewish worship, defiled the temple, and attempted to rival God. Antiochus, too, waged war against Egypt and Judea in the West and against Persia (if not Media) in the East.<sup>150</sup> We shall see below that figures and events dating to Hasmonean times certainly influenced the writing of Judith, but as the very number of hypotheses indicates, there is no single overwhelming reason to identify any particular ruler as the Nebuchadnezzar of Judith. Indeed, those who wish to find the specific historical circumstances underlying the story of Judith should not restrict their search to a single, historical king. Instead, they should identify a whole series of interlocking historical figures – the people disguised as the characters Arphaxad, Holophernes, and Achior, as well as Judith herself – who were active at the same time as their designated "Nebuchadnezzar." Commentators are not able to meet this challenge successfully and it is particularly interesting to

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<sup>148</sup> See Pfeiffer 1949, 295–6; Haag 1963, 1–8; Soubigou 1949, 489–493; Moore 1985, 52–56; Otzen 2002, 83–87 for lists of the candidates. The list is still growing; Boccaccini 2012 – using the earlier work of Rocca 2005 – suggests that Tigranes the Great who nearly invaded Palestine, but then yielded to Shelamzion's bribes and withdrew, is the figure behind Nebuchadnezzar.

<sup>149</sup> See 2 Chr 33:1–20 with, e.g. Moore 1985, 54–55 and the references there; Moore rejects the identification.

<sup>150</sup> See Mittag 2006, 159–327 for Antiochus' military campaigns. Delcor 1967, 168–173 is a detailed discussion of the presence of Antiochus IV in our book; see too n. 157 below.

note how few scholarly attempts have been made to assign a real name and figure to Judith, the heroine of the tale.<sup>151</sup> Judith is almost invariably seen as an allegorical figure, representing the Jewish people, rather than a flesh and blood woman.<sup>152</sup> She also owes a great deal to earlier biblical women.<sup>153</sup> Once we assume that Judith is a fictitious character, there seems little point in looking for history in any of the other characters. Just as Judith is a composite, seemingly allegorical figure based on a series of biblical (and other) women, the same could be true of the royal Nebuchadnezzar, his commander Holophernes, etc. Why should there be more history in the king and his general than in the heroine? Settling on one historical king or another as the inspiration for Nebuchadnezzar, would give us at best a *terminus post quem*, no more, for we have seen that the work is a layered one, with allusions to many different historical periods. And what we gain in precision by choosing a particular stand-in for Nebuchadnezzar, we lose in general relevance. Nebuchadnezzar of Judith, the imperialist tyrant who attempts to rival God, is most impressive as he is, a compelling literary representation of a powerful tyrant who is unsuccessful in his attempt to equal God or subdue God's people.

While we cannot find an interlocking set of historical figures who serve as the basis for the work's characters and cannot use the traces of several different cultures and time periods found within the text to arrive at a precise dramatic or actual date for Judith, we can nonetheless attempt to date the work by more indirect means. The outstanding piece of evidence is a definite *terminus ante quem*, since Clement of Rome is plainly acquainted with the text of Judith, and writes of it ca. 95–97 C.E.<sup>154</sup> Our book can be dated even earlier than that, by using an argument from silence, for there is no telltale trace of the Roman period in the work. There is no literary, historical, geographical or linguistic bit of evidence that points to Roman rule, i.e. that points to a date after 63 B.C.E.<sup>155</sup> When we approach the book

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<sup>151</sup> Thus, as recent and intelligent a commentator as Otzen (2002, 83) complains that Arphaxad is overshadowed by Nebuchadnezzar in scholarly circles and only identified as a secondary figure, but he displays no interest in identifying Judith. In the past decade or so, both Cleopatra III and Shelamzion have been put forward as a possible source of inspiration for Judith; see below.

<sup>152</sup> See Section 7, 102.

<sup>153</sup> See Section 4, 51.

<sup>154</sup> See Section 2, 13.

<sup>155</sup> Thus, e.g. Delcor 1967, 160–161 notes that the Hellenistic term γερονσία found in Judith is not replaced by the Roman concept of βουλή. Schürer 1986, iii.1, 219 points out that the political background of Judith – with the high priest as sovereign,

from the other end of the spectrum and attempt to set a *terminus post quem*, it is clear that despite its Persian flavor, the work cannot be earlier than Hasmonean times. Evidence from several different quarters converges to indicate a time after the defeat of Nicanor by Judah (161 B.C.E.) and before the Roman conquest of Palestine (63 B.C.E.).

The characters in Judith – most notably Nebuchadnezzar, Holophernes, and Judith herself – are clearly influenced by figures in Hasmonean history, particularly as these figures are presented in 1 and 2 Maccabees.<sup>156</sup> While Antiochus IV need not be the sole model or basis for the Nebuchadnezzar of Judith, it seems plain that he has left his mark on the work. Both the historical king and the fictitious one are said to proclaim themselves gods – Antiochus IV is thought to be the very first Persian, Macedonian or Seleucid king to aspire to such divinity – and they show no religious tolerance towards others, pillaging and destroying temples and sacred groves.<sup>157</sup> The depiction of the defeat of Nicanor, a general under a later Seleucid king, Demetrius I, in 1 and 2 Maccabees certainly influenced the portrayal of Holophernes' death and its aftermath in our work. The sequence of events in 1 Maccabees (7:39–50) and the Book of Judith (chs. 9–16) is particularly close: (1) the hero(ine) prays to God; (2) the chief lieutenant of a powerful and evil king is killed; (3) the enemy army panics and flees; (4) all the surrounding Israelite soldiers attack; (5) they kill and plunder; (6) the enemy's head is chopped off and brought to Jerusalem; (7) the Israelites celebrate their victory; (8) peace descends on the land.<sup>158</sup> Judith herself can be seen as a variation on the figure of Judah (especially as portrayed in 1 Maccabees), a counterpart of sorts to the Maccabean leader, as her very name hints. Both Judith and Judah are pious figures who fast, pray, and reprimand their fellow Israelites for their lack of faith in God. Both manage to overturn the threat to the temple in Jerusalem posed by an overweening and arrogant king and they both behead the chief military commander in the process.

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and the various towns as independent political entities – corresponds more closely to the Hellenistic period than the Roman one.

<sup>156</sup> See Dubarle 1966, i.156–157; Nickelsburg 1981, 108–109; van Henten 1995, 243–245; Rakel 2003, 265–272.

<sup>157</sup> See notes on 3:8 and 6:2 and Delcor 1967, 163–174. Mittag 2006 is a recent and comprehensive discussion of Antiochus IV; see especially 128–145 and 225–281 on Antiochus' claim to be divine and his religious rulings. See too Pfeiffer 1949, 294–295; Zenger 1981, 442–443; Delcor 1967, 168–173, etc. for the Nebuchadnezzar – Antiochus identification and parallels.

<sup>158</sup> See note on 14:1 and the useful chart in Rakel 2003, 267, which includes a comparison with 2 Macc 14–15 as well.

Both are celebrated in song for their deeds and both are deeply mourned when they die.<sup>159</sup> It is also worth noting that the temple, altar, and vessels in our book are said to have been polluted and then reconsecrated (4:1–3), rather than destroyed and rebuilt, and this too points to the activities of Judah the Maccabee and the events of 164 B.C.E.<sup>160</sup> There are a great many parallels between the plot and characters of the Book of Judith and the Maccabean revolt, as described in 1 and 2 Maccabees,<sup>161</sup> and it is not surprising that in medieval times, Judith becomes linked with the Maccabees and associated with the celebration of Hanukkah.<sup>162</sup>

Here we must be careful to distinguish between historical Hasmonean figures and events and their subsequent representation in literature, most notably the books of 1 and 2 Maccabees. The Book of Judith betrays the influence of early Maccabean history as shaped and mediated in 1 and 2 Maccabees. In other words, it is not simply the Maccabean revolt that influenced the writing of our book, but the recounting of these events in later literary works. This means that Judith should be dated after the composition of 1 Maccabees and after either the original version or later epitome of 2 Maccabees. 1 Maccabees is generally dated towards the end of the second century B.C.E., or the early part of the first century (and the Greek translation followed shortly thereafter).<sup>163</sup> The original composition by Jason of Cyrene underlying 2 Maccabees is thought to have been composed shortly after the events it describes, i.e. mid-second century B.C.E., while the book itself is dated to the close of the second century B.C.E. or the early first century B.C.E.<sup>164</sup>

None of these dates is certain or absolute, but the language and terminology used in the extant Greek text of Judith also point to a date of about 100 B.C.E. Steiner demonstrates that the transliteration of *het* as *chi* used for the Hebrew names found in our text points to a date in the Hasmonean period, some time around the turn of the first century B.C.E.<sup>165</sup> More generally, the vocabulary of Judith has much in common with the later works

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<sup>159</sup> See further Gera 2009.

<sup>160</sup> 1 Macc 4:36–51; see Nickelsburg 1981, 109.

<sup>161</sup> See notes on 13:8, 19; 14:1; 15:1–7; Weitzman 2005, 34–54.

<sup>162</sup> See Section 2.

<sup>163</sup> See, e.g. Schürer 1986, iii.1, 181 and Gruen 1998, 265 n. 86 and the further references there.

<sup>164</sup> See, e.g. Schürer 1986, iii.1, 532–534 and Gruen 1998, 265–66 n. 88 and the further references there.

<sup>165</sup> Steiner 2005, esp. 264–267; he notes that Judith is certainly earlier than Josephus and probably contemporary with 1 Maccabees.

of the Septuagint, most particularly 1 and 2 Maccabees.<sup>166</sup> The political, geographical, and military terminology used in our text points to the Hasmonean period as well. Delcor studies a series of military and administrative titles used in Judith – terms such as σατράπης, στρατηγός and ἡγούμενος – and points to their correspondence with Seleucid usage.<sup>167</sup> Institutions such as the Jerusalem *gerousia* (note on 4:8) and a high priest who acts as a military commander (note on 4:6–7) are further indications of the Hasmonean coloring and date of the work. Baslez extends the study of Hellenistic military terminology used in Judith and (more speculatively) suggests that the kind of warfare waged in our work – the use of light units in mountainous terrain – is meant to be a corrective of actual Seleucid-Hasmonean encounters, in particular the battle of Beth Zacharias of 162 B.C.E.<sup>168</sup>

Scholars also see our book as a response to challenges raised by the activities of the Hasmoneans, although they are divided as to whether our work is intended to praise the Hasmoneans or criticize them; different scholars refer to different periods of Hasmonean rule. Thus our book has been seen as a model for Jewish cultural survival in the time of John Hyrcanus (135–104 B.C.E.), with the maneuvering and duplicitous Judith portrayed as a female version of that ruler. Judith, it is claimed, shows that submission to foreign rule does not mean a relaxation of one's commitment to defend Jewish tradition, but may simply be a question of waiting for the right moment to rebel.<sup>169</sup> Achior's conversion, too, is thought to be a reaction, whether negative or positive, to the conversion of the Idumaeans by Hyrcanus (135–104 B.C.E.) and the Itureans by Aristobulus (104–103 B.C.E.), and this too would point to a date around the turn of the first century B.C.E.<sup>170</sup> Other commentators suggest more generally that our book is used to attack the political excesses of the Hasmoneans, with Judith as a new and improved version of Judah the Maccabee, as her very name suggests. Most notably, Judith does not turn to political or religious office once her deed is done, and she does not establish a dynasty of high priests, let

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<sup>166</sup> See notes on 2:2; 4:3; 5:5; 7:1, 15; 9:7–8; 11:3, 11; 12:10; 13:2, 18; 15:5, etc.; see too, e.g. Rajak 2009, 170.

<sup>167</sup> Delcor 1967, 153–163. These linguistic arguments are based, out of necessity, on the extant Greek text (and would be less relevant to an original Hebrew text). See too 3:7 with note on the Hellenistic crowns or victory tokens awarded to Holophernes.

<sup>168</sup> Baslez 2004.

<sup>169</sup> Thus Weitzman 2005, 34–54 esp. 52.

<sup>170</sup> See note on 14:10.

alone kings, but returns home to her quiet and retiring life.<sup>171</sup> Such attempts to date Judith on ideological grounds are by their very nature subjective and cannot lead to a definitive result.

Some commentators find parallels between the figure of Judith and the only reigning Hasmonean queen, Shelamzion or Salome Alexandra, who ruled in Judea (76–67 B.C.E.).<sup>172</sup> Both are women who come to the fore as widows and represent the Jews as a whole, taking an active role in military affairs in defense of their country. Both are said to be formidable, arousing terror in their foes (Jdt 16:10; *Ant.* 13.409, *B.J.* 1.112), both have a reputation for piety and strict observance of sacred laws (Jdt 8:6, 8; *B.J.* 1.108, 110–11), both bring about peace (Jdt 16:25; *Ant.* 13.410, 432) and both die peacefully of old age (Jdt 16:23; *Ant.* 13.430).<sup>173</sup> More generally, beyond the specific resemblances between the two women, the Book of Judith is thought to serve as political propaganda for Shelamzion, in a literary campaign designed to promote the leadership of women through its depiction of a strong female leader.<sup>174</sup> If the historical queen Shelamzion has indeed left her mark on the Book of Judith, this would mean that the book was written after 67 B.C.E. However the resemblances between Judith and Shelamzion are not that strong. Judith comes forward for a single mission and is not an active political leader who rules for a considerable amount of time. Unlike Shelamzion, she does not govern, form alliances, or send off armies to war, and she retires to the privacy of her home once her deed is done and the victory celebrations are over. While the fictional Judith and the historical Shelamzion do not seem directly related, it is possible that they share a common influence, the powerful Egyptians queens. The second century B.C.E. Ptolemaic queens, Cleopatra II and Cleopatra III, are two instances of strong and independent women who ruled (at times only nominally) alongside male relatives, and these queens probably paved the way for Shelamzion's ascent to the throne. Cleopatra III thwarted the offensive against

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<sup>171</sup> See Roddy 2008, esp. 275–276; van Henten 1995, 244–245. Eckhardt 2009 suggests that Judith is a “counter-discourse” to the Hasmoneans, a work of fiction which recasts and alters the biblical references and terms used by the Hasmoneans to legitimize their rule. Rakel 2003, 271–272 argues that Judith presents an alternative, less belligerent form of resistance to the Seleucids.

<sup>172</sup> See Patterson 2002, 277–281 and Corley 2001, 79–80 on specific similarities between Shelamzion and Judith; see too Patterson 2008; Zeitlin in Enslin 1972, 180–181; Hopkins 1998, 281; Rocca 2005; Boccaccini 2012.

<sup>173</sup> This is an unusual feat for a Hasmonean ruler, as Sievers (1988, 138) notes.

<sup>174</sup> See Ilan 1999, 127–153; Patterson 2002 *passim* and 2008; Rocca 2005; Boccaccini 2012.

Jerusalem led by her son Ptolemy IX and concluded a treaty with Alexander Jannaeus (103–102 B.C.E.), and perhaps the figure of Judith was influenced by her.<sup>175</sup>

Three other ancient works should also be mentioned in conjunction with the dating of Judith. Biblical influence is pervasive in Judith, but the influence of the Book of Daniel is particularly noteworthy because of its relatively late date of composition. Our text echoes situations and phrases taken from the Book of Daniel,<sup>176</sup> and the Old Greek (LXX1) version of Daniel which underlies our text is generally dated around 100 B.C.E.; the “Theodotion” translation (LXX2) is later.<sup>177</sup> Another likely influence on the Book of Judith is the history written by Eupolemus, the earliest Hellenistic Jewish historian. Eupolemus is generally identified with the ambassador whom Judas Maccabeus sent to Rome in 161, and his work, a historical composition on the kings of Judea written in Septuagintal Greek, is dated to 157/8 B.C.E.<sup>178</sup> Only a few fragments of the work remain, but one fragment (FGrH 723 F5) has considerable overlap with the opening chapters of Judith. Eupolemus tells of Nebuchadnezzar’s campaign against the Israelites together with a Median king named Astibaras, during the time of Jonachim. The Babylonian king first attacks Samaria and his army includes 120,000 cavalry troops. All these elements are found in our book, albeit in slightly different form: Nebuchadnezzar is not allied with a Mede king, but wars with one; his army, led by Holophernes, includes 120,000 infantry troops; and there is an Israelite leader Joakim, rather than Jonachim.<sup>179</sup> Eupolemus’ posited influence is interesting not only for the *terminus post quem* of 158/7 B.C.E. which it supplies, but also because of what it suggests about the milieu of our work and its author; see Sections 5 and 6. The influence Judith had on a later Jewish work, the Additions to Esther, should also be taken into ac-

<sup>175</sup> See Haider 1998 for Judith as a Jewish version of Cleopatra III.

<sup>176</sup> See Section 4, 48. For the influence of Daniel on Judith, see Delcor 1967, 174–177; Eckhardt 2009, 248. For echoes of the Old Greek in our text, see notes on 3:8 and 11:7.

<sup>177</sup> See, e.g. deSilva 2002, 223. Moore (1977, 31–33) notes that the LXX additions to Daniel are dated to the same time as the Old Greek, i.e. about 100 B.C.E. The “Theodotion” of Daniel is not the second century C.E. Theodotion and the translation is generally dated to the first half of the first century C.E. (or even earlier, during the first century B.C.E.).

<sup>178</sup> See 1 Macc 8:17; 2 Macc 4:11 (with Schwartz 2008, 220–221); Wacholder 1974, 1–7.

<sup>179</sup> Priebatsch 1974, esp. 51–53 argues for Eupolemus’ direct influence on our work, with the author of Judith misunderstanding or distorting his text. Wacholder 1974, 136–137, 234 points to the similar geography found in the two texts.

count. Esther of the Additions, particularly Additions C and D, is influenced by – even modelled upon – the figure of Judith.<sup>180</sup> The Greek Esther with its Additions is generally dated 114 B.C.E. or 78/7 B.C.E., and this would again point to a pre-Roman date for our work.<sup>181</sup>

In conclusion, a series of factors – literary, linguistic, historical, political, military, and possibly geographical – taken separately and together, all point to a date of circa 100 B.C.E. for the Book of Judith, give or take a decade or two on either end.

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<sup>180</sup> See the references in Section 2, note 25. Moore 1985, 212–216 notes that Judith's conversation with Holophernes in ch. 11 is an integral part of the work, but the similar scene in Addition D is simply an elaboration of MT Esth 5:1–4. This is a strong indication that Judith served as a model for Esther of the Additions, rather than the influence being in the opposite direction.

<sup>181</sup> See Section 2, 12; *L.A.B.*, another work which exhibits the influence of Judith, is generally assigned a later date, 50–150 C.E., and consequently is less relevant for our purposes.



## Section 4: Biblical Influences

The author of Judith was thoroughly acquainted with the Bible and our work is filled with traces of biblical situations and characters, themes and theology, allusions and quotations. Indeed, Judith has been described as a “symphony of biblical allusions” and virtually every commentator who writes on Judith points to “the intricate palette of intertextual relations between Judith and biblical writings.”<sup>182</sup> Biblical passages are utilized in the work in a variety of ways, beginning with the overall plot of our book. Our narrative is reminiscent of a great many biblical salvation stories, chief among them the paradigmatic tale of the exodus from Egypt. It is clear that the story of Exodus 1–15 and, in particular, the Song of the Sea have left their mark on our work. The author of Judith utilizes the first section of the Book of Exodus in a variety of ways, borrowing elements from the characters, language, and literary features of these biblical chapters, in addition to the overall plot, and he makes use of these borrowings in several different sections of the story. In our story, as in Exodus, the weak and frightened Israelites are threatened by an arrogant foreign leader and his powerful army, and here, too, they cry out to God. God, in his single appearance in our work, hears the Israelites’ cries, just as he did in Egypt, and “saw their affliction,” a phrase used in Exodus as well (note on 4:13). This verbal echo underlines the similarity between the Israelites’ plight in our story and that of Exodus. Nebuchadnezzar and his Assyrians are assimilated to Pharaoh and the Egyptians,<sup>183</sup> and Judith, who rescues her people, has been termed a “female Moses.”<sup>184</sup> Judith appropriates the Song of the Sea, echoing phrases and themes of Exodus 15 both in her prayer and her victory

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<sup>182</sup> The quotations are from Montague 1973, 10 and van Henten 1995, 224 respectively. See the brief survey in Otzen 2002, 74–79, and for more detailed comparisons and discussions see, e.g. Haag 1963 and Rakel 2003 *passim*. Dubarle 1966, i. 137–164 and Zenger 1981, 439–446 list a series of specific biblical passages which have influenced our work.

<sup>183</sup> See notes on 1:12; 2:5, 8; 9:7–10.

<sup>184</sup> See note on 14:7 with van Henten 1994; see too Rakel 1999, esp. 44–47 and 2003, 249–253.

song.<sup>185</sup> Such broad borrowings invite, virtually compel, readers to draw the parallel between episodes in Judith and the biblical original, and transform our story into a recasting, as it were, of the deliverance story of Exodus.

Our salvation story can also be compared to the story of the attack of the Assyrian king Sennacherib on Jerusalem.<sup>186</sup> The danger presented by Nebuchadnezzar and Holophernes to Jerusalem and the Israelites has many parallels with the threat posed by the biblical Sennacherib and his officer Rabshakeh, and in this fashion the Assyrians in Judith are likened to the Assyrians of Sennacherib's time. Holophernes, who proclaims Nebuchadnezzar's divinity, is reminiscent of Rabshakeh who conveys his king's contempt for the Israelite God.<sup>187</sup> Judith, it seems, is assigned the role of Hezekiah, and one section of her prayer closely echoes the content of Hezekiah's prayer.<sup>188</sup> Here, too, there are parallels in plot, character, and language between the biblical story and our own, and here, too, these parallels are scattered over several scenes.

The deliverance stories found in Judges have also influenced our tale, which shares with them a pattern of a threat to the Israelites, a leader who comes forward, and the rescue of the Israelites.<sup>189</sup> Judith plays the role of a judge who delivers her people from danger and brings peace to her country. The very last verse of our book (16:25) telling of the many years of quiet following Judith's death is apparently intended to recall the phrase "and the land had peace for 40 (or 80) years" used several times in Judges.<sup>190</sup> The miraculous rescue stories of 2 Chronicles seem to have influenced our work as well.<sup>191</sup>

The author of Judith is particularly fond of making use of the setting, characters or plot of a biblical scene and then deliberately adding a direct allusion to the original biblical passage which underlies his own narrative. A further instance can be found in the scene of communal supplication and prayer at Judith 4:9–15. This communal prayer is influenced by several such biblical scenes, most notably Joel 1–2 and Jonah 3. Our author in-

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<sup>185</sup> See notes on 9:7–10; 16:1–17, 3, 4, 10, 13, 14.

<sup>186</sup> 2 Kgs 18–19 = Isa 36–37; see Zenger 1981, 441–442; Otzen 2002, 76–78.

<sup>187</sup> See notes on 1:1; 2:4–13, 5, 10; 3:8; intro. to ch. 9.

<sup>188</sup> See 2 Kgs 19:15–19 = Isa 37:16–20; see notes on 9:12–14.

<sup>189</sup> The stories from Judges usually begin with the sins of the Israelites and their subsequent punishment, but this is not true in Judith, where the Israelites have not sinned.

<sup>190</sup> Judg 3:11, 30; 5:31, 8:28; see note on 16:25 with van Henten 1995, 242–244.

<sup>191</sup> 2 Chr 13:4–20; 14:7–14; 20:1–30. See notes on 4:12; intro. to ch. 9; 15:1–7; see too Haag 1963, 118–124.

cludes the acts of fasting, donning sackcloth, and praying performed by men, women, and children in the two biblical texts. In addition, he includes two telling and specific details, one of content and one of wording. The animals in Judith wear sackcloth, just as they do in Jonah, and the Israelites cry out to God in the same unique and intense fashion (ἐκτενῶς) found in the two biblical passages.<sup>192</sup> In similar fashion, the protests by the people of Bethulia when water supplies run out are not only reminiscent of the complaints by the Israelites in the drought scenes of Exodus 17 and Numbers 20, but also include verbal echoes from these two biblical episodes.<sup>193</sup> When Holophernes inquires about the Israelites before attacking them, both the content and the wording of his questions resemble the information which the spies sent to Canaan are meant to uncover at Numbers 13.<sup>194</sup> The discovery of Holophernes' body by Bagoas bears a striking resemblance to the discovery of the dead King Eglon by his servants, and our author underlines the similarity by giving us a rare glimpse into Bagoas' mind just as the narrator in Judges 3 lets us know what Eglon's servants are thinking.<sup>195</sup> In another episode, we are shown the parallels between Judith's attempt to win over Holophernes with words at their first meeting and Abigail's diplomatic efforts to placate David at their first encounter. Judith, like Abigail, is a beautiful, intelligent, and eloquent woman who needs to soothe a powerful and dangerous man. When presenting herself as Holophernes' humble maidservant, Judith makes use of a variation on Abigail's conciliatory language towards David, and in a second, perhaps associative echo, she takes with her virtually the same food that Abigail has brought for David and his men.<sup>196</sup>

In all these instances, the author underscores, as it were, the biblical underpinnings of his work by including allusions which unmistakably – and deliberately – point to the original source. Elsewhere he makes use of biblical allusions in a more subtle way. A good example is the way the narrator prepares his readers for the presentation of Nebuchadnezzar as a deity to rival the Israelite God. Even before Nebuchadnezzar is explicitly proclaimed as a god, the author assigns him epithets (Lord of the entire earth), actions (swearing by his own might), and commands (forbidding the violation of his instructions), which are the exclusive province of God in the

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<sup>192</sup> Notes on 4:10 and 4:12.

<sup>193</sup> Exod 17:1–7 and Num 20:1–13; see notes on 7:20–29, 23–32; 8:12.

<sup>194</sup> Num 13:17–21; see note on 5:3–4.

<sup>195</sup> Judg 3:23–25; see notes on 13:1; 14:14–18.

<sup>196</sup> 1 Sam 25; for Judith and Abigail see notes on 8:29; 10:5; 11:5–19, 21, 22.