



### *Reviews of the Enoch Seminar 2014.10.13*

**Géza G. Xeravits, ed. *A Pious Seductress: Studies in the Book of Judith*. Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Studies 14. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2012. Pp. v + 225. ISBN 978-3-11-027994-8. Hardcover. €84.95/\$119.00.**

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The volume *A Pious Seductress* is a collection of eleven papers presented at the International Conference on the Deuterocanonical Books, held in Budapest, Hungary, 14-16 May 2009. Ten essays are written in English and one in German. As the very brief preface indicates, the papers are united in their exploration of the Book of Judith, but the topics discussed and the methods applied to the book vary greatly.

The first essay, “The Ancient Versions of Judith and the Place of the Septuagint in the Catholic Church,” examines the different versions of the Book of Judith, such as the Septuagint, Vulgate, and Nova Vulgata. Driven by theological interests, Stephen D. Ryan provides a comparative analysis of the Greek and Latin versions of the Book of Judith, and, relying on Adrian Schenker’s work on biblical canonicity and inspiration, looks at the place of the Septuagint in the Catholic Church and explores the canonicity of other translations. He concludes that textual diversity is completely appropriate in the Catholic tradition, where different versions can serve different purposes. The reader would benefit from having some previous familiarity with Schenker’s work.

Jeremy Corley’s essay, “Imitation of Septuagintal Narrative and Greek Historiography in the Portrait of Holofernes,” examines the figure of Holofernes for his reminiscences of characters from the Septuagint and the works of Greek historians. Corley argues that the author of the Book of Judith has masterfully incorporated echoes of defeated Persian kings, drawing on characters such as Cyrus, Darius, and Xerxes, “so as to present Holofernes’ character as a doomed aggressor” (25). The author of the Book of Judith presents Holofernes as lacking all four cardinal virtues, whereas Judith embodies them, by way of contrast. Corley’s article finds merit in its examination of the Book of Judith within the author’s larger cultural context, by situating it in a milieu influenced by Hellenistic thought and history.

In “Tigranes the Great as ‘Nebuchadnezzar’ in the Book of Judith,” Gabriele Boccaccini provides a fascinating and compelling exploration of the possible connections between the textual Judith and the Jewish Queen Salome Alexandra, and the literary Nebuchadnezzar and the Armenian King Tigranes the Great, where the parallels between these figures may also point to the original setting of the book’s composition. Boccaccini also theorizes the motive for the text’s production, concluding that the Book of Judith intended to restore the damaged reputation of Queen Salome Alexandra, who had publically submitted to King Tigranes, and it also served as “a sort of funerary eulogy (and apology)” to celebrate the queen’s victory over Tigranes (69).

Ellen Juhl Christiansen, in her article entitled “Judith: Defender of Israel—Preserver of the Temple,” reasonably argues that the author of the Book of Judith presents the figure of Judith as defender of Israel and, consequently, preserver of the temple. Judith functions as the personification of the Jewish people and as an example for the reader. The narrative ends by highlighting the sanctuary, thus speaking to the temple’s “fundamental importance to Israel’s identity” in the Book of Judith (83).

Michael Wojciechowski’s essay, “Moral Teaching of the Book of Judith,” examines the ethics of the Book of Judith. He argues that the book implies two ethical questions: “First, what is good or evil in war and public life? Next, what is proper for a person involved in a dramatic conflict? (and especially for a woman?)” (86). Based on the moral standards of the Bible, Judith’s deeds (lies, deceit, murder, etc.) are faulty. Wojciechowski claims that the author knew that Judith’s methods were morally doubtful, but such actions were permissible given the urgent circumstances of war. He argues that the story of Judith “should be seen theologically, as a case of divine deliverance, and not ethically, as a sequence of human moral or immoral acts” (91). This article provides some needed reflection on a topic (ethics) rarely treated in recent discussions on the Book of Judith.

Thomas Hieke’s paper, “Torah in Judith: Dietary Laws, Purity and Other Torah Issues in the Book of Judith,” is interested in the halakhic aspects emphasized in the Book of Judith, that is, those of food, purity, and sacrifice. The figure of Judith does not transgress the Torah in order to achieve her goals; for instance, she takes her own food to the Assyrian camp, therefore avoiding any prohibited foods. For the author, halakhic practices cannot simply be dropped in an emergency situation, but rather are central to Jewish identity. It is only by upholding her status of cultic purity that Judith can claim she acted as God’s instrument. Through his examination of the many intertextual links between the Book of Judith and the Torah, Hieke is able to persuasively claim that one notable effect of the Book of Judith is that “it teaches Torah” (109). He is careful to add that this statement “does not imply that teaching Torah is the only or even main purpose of the book” (109, fn 36).

Friedrich V. Reiterer’s essay, “‘Meines Bruders Licht’: Untersuchungen zur Rolle des Achior,” analyzes the role of Achior, the leader of the Ammonites, in the Book of Judith (5:5–6:21; 11:9–10; and 14:5–10). At over fifty pages, this paper provides one of the more exhaustive studies in this volume. Reiterer argues that the mention of Achior is unnecessary for explaining the course of events in the book—therefore, why does the author make mention of this figure? He makes the intriguing and plausible suggestion that the term Ammonite may have been a code word for Samaritans, and that Achior functions as the Samaritan representative. The author of the Book of Judith therefore hopes that Samaritans will find the right path back to God, as Achior does in Judith 14:10.

Géza G. Xeravits’s essay, “The Supplication of Judith (Judith 9:1–14),” analyzes the longest prayer in the Book of Judith, 9:2–14, which theologically rationalizes Judith’s fight against Holofernes. Xeravits undertakes a structural analysis of the prayer, observing some of the word plays in the Greek and discussing its bipartite and tripartite constructions. Judith’s supplication is “a concise confession about the might of God” exerted on behalf of the weak and oppressed (177). Xeravits concludes by successfully countering Carly Moore’s depreciation of this prayer, arguing instead that “this supplication provides an artfully arranged prayer,” one which adopts and adapts some ideas from the Hebrew Bible (177).

In “The Lord Who Crushes Wars: Studies on Judith 9:7, Judith 16:2 and Exodus 15:3,” Judith Lang compares Judith 9:7 and 16:2, where God is the “Lord, who crushes wars,” to the phrase’s source, Exodus 15:3. This latter verse praises God as “the Lord, when he shatters wars” in the Septuagint, but as “the Lord, a man of war” in the Hebrew text. Lang asks whether Israel, including Judith, would have worshipped God as he is characterized in the Hebrew text or in the Septuagint. She examines both versions and determines that the Greek text actually perpetuates the characterization of God as capable of destruction. Exodus 15:3, therefore, speaks to the futility of human warfare and intends to exclude Israel

from warfare. In her concluding section, she brings her discussion back to the Book of Judith, stating that “the theology of Judith is a theology of the experience of Exodus” (186). Although Lang investigates an interesting question, her essay would have been a stronger contribution to this volume if she engaged more with and further developed her concluding remarks on the Book of Judith.

Eszter Balassa’s contribution, “The Consequences of Dinah’s Rape,” uses the mention of Dinah’s rape in Judith 9:2 to analyze the retellings of this story in the Book of Judith, Jubilees, and the Testament of Levi, among other writings. These Second Temple Period texts suggest that the revenge of Dinah’s rape was divinely ordered. Balassa argues that the figure of Dinah served as “the symbol of Israel and the Temple,” violated by Gentiles, thereby invoking the wrath of God (196). Much like Lang’s article, Balassa’s article, although providing some interesting arguments, only marginally investigates issues related to the Book of Judith.

In the last essay, entitled “Judith on Stage: The Dramatic Career of a Biblical Heroine,” Karin Schöpflin analyzes four plays from the sixteenth century onwards: Sixt Birck’s *Judith* (1539), Friedrich Hebbel’s *Judith* (1840), Johann Nepomuk Nestroy’s *Judith und Holofernes* (1849), and Jean Giraudoux’s *Judith* (1931). This article discusses the various ways in which each playwright adapts the story of Judith on stage. Because assessments of Judith’s reception in modern history often focus on her portrayal in art, Schöpflin’s paper refreshingly focuses on another component of her reception. However, this paper is more descriptive than analytical and leaves the reader wanting to know more, such as, how were the adaptations of the story of Judith reflective of the playwright’s psyche or of contemporary concerns?

The contributions in *A Pious Seductress* tackle a number of topics, using a variety of methodologies, and providing a rich diversity of perspectives on the Book of Judith. Some of the essays look at the narrative material, such as the book’s characters and observance of Torah, other essays look at the form and structure of the book, discuss theological issues, historically contextualize the Book of Judith, or examine the book’s reception and interpretation in Western culture. The breadth of the material covered is both the volume’s strength and weakness. This diversity means the volume can interest scholars from a variety of backgrounds who have an interest in the Book of Judith. However, there is a sense of disunity between the papers. Even the topic of “The Book of Judith” is loosely applied. A couple of the papers only marginally look at the Book of Judith, using a verse or two from the book in order to access and explore other texts. While such papers do provide an engaging exploration of other materials, it would have been helpful if the volume’s preface highlighted certain key terms that could bring more unity to this collection. In fact, an introductory chapter would have been most welcome in order to also situate these articles within the current scholarship on the Book of Judith. Furthermore, a section with a short biography for each contributor would have been useful. These criticisms aside, this volume is recommended to those who wish for further reflection on the Book of Judith.