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How Was the Book of Judith Received among the Eastern Fathers of the Fourth Century CE?

Dionisio Candido

Introduction

The history of biblical interpretation is closely intertwined with the history of the thinking of the Church Fathers. Within this framework the book of Judith provides an interesting example of the range of opinions expressed by these early Christian thinkers[1] about its status as divinely inspired, its theological import, and usefulness to the Church. Since it is attested only in Greek, Judith is part of the so-called "deuterocanonical" books of the Septuagint. From the earliest centuries of Christianity, the patristic sources show that at least some Christian communities such as those in Palestine were aware of the problems connected with the absence of this book in the Hebrew canon. In this regard, the most striking testimony of the book of Judith is provided by Origen (ca. 185 – 254 CE).[2] After Origen, the book of Judith is mentioned sporadically in some patristic works of the East. The question of its interpretation in the first centuries CE is thus intertwined with that of the canon, i.e. of the collection of the biblical books

[1] Some commentaries on the book of Judith focus only on the most famous Church Fathers such as Clement of Rome, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Jerome (cf. GERA, *Judith*, 13-15). Others concentrate on the Latin Church Fathers such as Ambrose, Jerome, Prudentius, Paulinus of Nola and Augustine (cf. WILLS, *Judith*, 107-110). In my commentary on the book of Judith I have briefly dealt with some of the Eastern Fathers presented in the present study: Methodius, Cyril, Serapion, Athanasius and Basil (CANDIDO, *Giuditta*, 242-247). In this article I will provide some of my analysis of these authors in a broader and more in-depth manner and supplement the discussion with other Church Fathers, such as Eusebius of Cesarea, Epiphanius, Amphilochius and John Chrisostomus. Where it is not specified, the English translation of their works is mine.

[2] Περὶ οὗ ἡμᾶς ἐχρῆν ἐγνωκέναι ὅτι Ἑβραῖοι τῷ Τωβίᾳ οὐ χρῶνται, οὐδὲ τῇ Ἰουδίθ· οὐδὲ γὰρ ἔχουσιν αὐτὰ κἂν ἐν ἀποκρύφοις ἑβραϊστί, ὡς ἀπ᾽ αὐτῶν μαθόντες ἐγνώκαμεν "We must admit that the Jews do not use either Tobias or Judith. In fact, they do not have them in Hebrew, even among the Apocrypha, as we have ascertained from their own" (ORIGEN, *Letter to Africanus*, 19, 13; *Philocalie*, 562-563).

which Christianity progressively recognized as divinely inspired and essential to the Christian message.

In particular, the fourth century CE is rightly considered "the golden age"[3] of patristic literature. Among the many concerns in this growing corpus are discussions about the shape of the biblical canon and the merits of the individual books that should be included. The present study will examine all the references to the book of Judith (or their lack) in the works of the most important Church Fathers who in the fourth century CE represented various areas of the Christian East: Palestine (Methodius of Olympus, Eusebius of Caesarea, Cyril of Jerusalem, Epiphanius of Salamis), Egypt (Serapion of Thmuis, Athanasius of Alexandria), Cappadocia (Basil of Caesarea, Amphilochius of Iconium) and Syria (John Chrysostom).

My aim is to highlight the use of the book of Judith in the argumentation of the Fathers. We will also show how some of them directly or indirectly express doubts about the inspiration and canonicity of the book, while others finally do not mention it at all within the biblical canon.

1 *The Banquet* by Methodius of Olympus

The sources that allow us to outline a precise biography of Methodius (ca. ? – 311 CE) are rare and often inconsistent with each other[4]. He came from Asia Minor and was first appointed bishop of Olympus in Lycia and before taking the

[3] "…the «golden age» of patristic literature extends from the end of the Diocletian persecution (311) until the Council of Chalcedon (451)" (KANNENGIESSER, *Handbook of Patristic Exegesis*, 673).

[4] JEROME, *De viris illustribus*, 83, says on Methodius: *Methodius, Olympi Lyciae et postea Tyri episcopus, nitidi compositique sermonis Adversum Porphyrium confecit libros, et* Symposium decem virginum *et De resurrectione opus egregium contra Origenem, et adversus eumdem* De Pythonissa, *et* De autexousíô, In Genesim *quoque et* In Canticum canticorum commentarios, *et multa alia quae vulgo lecitantur. Ad extremum novissimae persectutionis sive, ut alii affirmant, sub Decio et Valeriano in Chalcide Graeciae martyrio coronatus est* "Methodius, bishop of Olympas in Lycia and then of Tyre, composed in a limpid and elegant style the books *Against Porphyrius*, the *Symposium of the Ten Virgins*, *On the Resurrection* an important work against Origen and also against him *On the Soothsayer*, one *On Free Will*, also Commentaries *On Genesis* and *On Song of Songs* and many other works which are read by a wide audience. Towards the end of the last persecution or, as others say, under Decius and Valerian he received the crown of martyrdom in Chalcis of Greece." Cf. GIROLAMO, *Gli uomini illustri*, 190-191.

same office at Tyre in Phoenicia, in the northern coastal region of Palestine. He was martyred during the Roman persecution of Diocletianus in 311 – 312 CE.

One of Methodius' works that has come down to us complete and in the original Greek version is the *Symposium of the Ten Virgins* (Συμπόσιον ἢ περὶ ἁγνείας), also known as *The Banquet.* The text is presented as a dialogue between a group of ten maidens and the daughter of Philosophy in the garden of Virtue; the latter promises a reward to the maiden who best exhorts virtues of chastity. This oratory competition is a literary device to praise the merits of virginity. In this regard, Marcella, one of the protagonists, expresses herself with an image that recalls the myth of the winged chariot in the *Phaedrus*, thus demonstrating Methodius' intellectual debt to Plato:

> Chastity (ἁγνεία) is a rare and difficult good to achieve: the higher it is and the more excellent it is, the greater the dangers it runs. It needs therefore strong and noble characters, which by decisively cutting off the current of pleasure, direct the chariot of the soul (τὸ ὄχημα τῆς ψυχῆς) upward (ἄνω) and without abandoning the goal can easily transcend the universe with the very strong momentum of intelligence (διανοίας) and place themselves on the truly heavenly vault. (*The Banquet*, I,1)

In the final *Hymn*, one of the virgins, Thecla, allegorically refers to the Church as Virgin and Christ as the Bridegroom. The *Hymn* is accompanied by a refrain at the close of each stanza, "I am a virgin for you" (ἁγνεύω σοι). Not by chance, just seven specific biblical characters are recalled throughout the hymn to provide examples of chastity which are worthy of praise. In general, the list of the great characters of the Old Testament can be considered a kind of literary practice of some Church Fathers that goes back at least to Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150 – 215 CE) and Origen (ca. 185 – 254 CE)[5]. In this *Hymn* in particular, each character is evoked for the particular circumstances in which his or her chastity was preserved: Abel (stanza 11), because his untimely death prevented him from marrying (cf. Gen 4:1-8); Joseph (stanza 12), son of Jacob, for resisting the seduction of Potiphar's wife (cf. Gen 39:7-15); Jephthah's daughter (stanza 13), because she was sacrificed to God by her father when she had yet "known no man" (cf. Judg 11:34-40); Judith (see below); Susanna (stanza 15-16), for

[5] Cf. CLÉMENT D'ALEXANDRIE, *Le Stromates* IV,119 (SC 463, 252-254); ORIGENES, *Buch V-VIII gegen Celsus* 13,3 (GCS 3, 327).

resisting the two perverse elders (Dan 13:1-64; specifically vv. 22-23); John the Baptist (stanza 17), for his austerity but also for his courage in calling Herod to chastity (Matt 14:1-12; specifically vv. 3-4). The last, seventh figure of the *Hymn* is the Virgin Mary (stanzas 18-23). The discussion of Judith is found in stanza 14:

> Conductor of foreign hosts with shrewd (εὐστόχοις)
> snares (δόλοις) Judith decapitated, with her beauty
> having seduced him, but not defiling the limbs of the body,
> loudly exclaims:
> I am a virgin for you. (*The Banquet*, *Hymn*, 14)[6]

While stanza 14 appears quite terse in recounting Judith's lethal activities against Holofernes (Jdt 13:1-10), it, in fact, provides precise comments about the virtues of Judith's actions: the first concerns Judith's cunning, which she operates "with shrewd snares"; the second explains that her seduction served to attract the enemy, and that this behavior is beyond moral or ethical critique because "the limbs of the body" were not defiled. In this way, two delicate questions are here resolved: Judith's deception and seduction are justified by keeping her virtuous chastity intact as she defeated Israel's enemies. Methodius therefore becomes one of the most illustrious spokesmen of an allegorical and moralistic reading of the book of Judith, emphasizing the female protagonist's abstinence.

2 *Chronicle* and *Ecclesiastical History* by Eusebius of Caesarea

Eusebius (ca. 263 – 340 CE) was born in Caesarea Maritima, in Palestine, and became bishop of the city in 313 CE. Trained at the school established by Origen at Caesarea, Eusebius can be considered the most authoritative historian of the Church of the patristic era. This is particularly evident from reading his *Church History* (Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ἱστορία), which documents the chronological development of Christianity from its inception until the first years of the reign of emperor Constantine (306 – 337 CE). He was a witness to and protagonist of the developments preceding and following the Council of Nicaea (325 CE), particularly with the arguments surrounding the Arian controversy; he was also an ardent defender of emperor Constantine.

[6] METHODE OF OLYMPUS, *Le Banquet*, 316-317 (SC 95, 316-317).

The first source in which Eusebius comments on the character of Judith is *Chronicle* (Χρονικοὶ κάνονες καὶ ἐπιτομὴ παντοδαπῆς ἱστορίας Ἑλλήνων τε καὶ βαρβάρων), composed around 303 CE. As a whole, the work is a historiographical writing in which Eusebius records the most important events in the history of humankind, especially those narrated in the Bible. One of the peculiarities of the work is the use of synoptic tables, which chronologically charts the important events that occurred from the time of Abraham to Constantine; by emphasizing the antiquity of biblical history, Eusebius intended to give it credibility in the eyes of the pagans.

The Greek original of *Chronicle* has been almost completely lost. Around the sixth century CE a translation was made into Armenian, but it remained practically unknown until the end of the eighteenth century CE. Much more famous is Jerome's Latin translation (347 – 420 CE). In fact, he not only interpolated Eusebius' text on occasion with his corrections, but also added events to the chronology until 337 CE. One finds here only a fleeting reference to the book of Judith: *Cambisen iustum aiunt ab Hebraeis secundum Nabuchodonosor vocari, sub quo Judith historia conscribitur* "They claim that Cambyses the righteous was called by the Jews according to Nebuchadnezzar, during whose reign the story of Judith was written" (*Chronicle*, II)[7]. The quote is very short, and supplies only the date of composition, which Eusebius reckons to the time of Cambises II (529 – 525 BCE).

Another of Eusebius' work that refers to Judith is *Church History* (Ἐκκλησιαστικὴ ἱστορία), which documents the chronological development of Christianity from its inception until the reign of emperor Constantine (306 to 337 CE). Unlike *Chronicle*, this work should not be understood as a systematic description of past events in church history. It does, however, contain copious historical documentation from the first three centuries of Christianity. Here we find a direct reference to the book of Judith and more specifically to the character of Achior (cf. Jdt 5–6; 14). In *Church History* I,7, he intends to show that there are no substantial discrepancies between the two genealogies of Jesus in Matt 1:1-17 and in Luke 3:23-38. He reminds the reader that Herod the Great (72 BCE – 4 CE) feared that evidence of his non-Jewish lineage would emerge, and so he had destroyed all the birth records:

[7] PG 19, 468. Cf. the translation from Armenian in EUSEBIUS, *Die Chronik*, 152.

> Herod [...] burned the records of the generations, which were in the archives, with the list of Jewish lineages: those of the proselytes (τῶν προσηλύτων), such as Achior Ammonite (ὡς Ἀχιὼρ τοῦ Ἀμμανίτου) and Ruth Moabite, and those of the so-called 'mixed', who had come from Egypt. (*Church History* I,7,13)[8]

The character of Achior is described only in the book of Judith, which presents him as an Ammonite general who joined the Assyrian army led by Holofernes. When Achior first enters the scene, he speaks these words:

> My lord, hear this account from your servant; I will tell you the truth about this people that lives near you (that inhabits this mountain region); no lie shall escape your servant's lips. (Jdt 5:5)

Perhaps it is this commitment to the truth that saves Achior in the end; in any case Achior is important to Eusebius because he illustrates how one can be included in the history of the people of Israel (Jdt 5:5-21). He is first expelled from the Assyrian camp for a sympathetic view towards Israel and is condemned by general Holofernes to suffer the same fate as the rebellious Israelites in the town of Bethulia. Yet, later, in the face of Judith's victory, "he believed deeply in God, and was circumcised and received into the house of Israel forever" (Jdt 14:10). The legitimacy of the circumcision and the conversion of Achior, the Ammonite, will be taken up and reworked in various ways by post-biblical sources both Jewish and Christian[9]. It is noteworthy to mention here that Achior's fate as a convert to Israel contradicts a command in the Torah:

> The Ammonite and the Moabite shall not enter the community of the Lord; none of their descendants, not even to the tenth generation, shall enter the community of the Lord. (Deut 23:4)

Yet other books in the Old Testament convey a different message; that is, the welcoming of pagans into the chosen people (see Ruth the Moabite in Ruth 1:16; 4:11b). Thus, Eusebius' citation of these characters can be understood as functional to highlight those pagans who played a negative (Herod) or a positive (Achior and Ruth) role within the people of Israel.

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[8] EUSEBE DE CESAREE, *Histoire Ecclésiastique* (SC 31, 28)

[9] "His [Achior's] conversion typifies the conversion of the Gentiles, an interest which became increasingly important in post-exilic Judaism" (MONTAGUE, *The Books of Esther & Judith*, 20). It is worth noting that in the first century CE Flavius Josephus (*Ant.*, 13.318) records a forced conversion to Judaism of the Galilean populations occurred in the second century BCE.

3 *Catechetical Lecture 4* by Cyril of Jerusalem

A short space can be devoted here to Cyril of Jerusalem (ca. 315 – 387 CE), one of the most prominent Fathers of the Eastern Church in fourth century CE, because of his references to the books of the Bible in use in his area, i.e. the biblical canon he knew. Cyril is remembered for his episcopate in Jerusalem (348 CE onwards). Around the year 348 CE he preached at the *Martyrium* of the newly built basilica of the Holy Sepulcher, commissioned by Constantine the Great (274 – 337 CE). These sermons were written down and bound as the eighteen *Catechetical Lectures* and the five *Mystagogic Catechesis*.

In *Catechetical Lecture 4*, Cyril explains to the neophytes (νεοφώτιστοι) the doctrinal and ethical fundamentals of the Christian faith. His first concern is with sacred Scriptures in order to immediately refute the heretics and lay claim to the Church's authority to interpret its own books correctly. But it is also necessary to clarify which books are to be considered "sacred" by the Church:

> Diligently learn from the Church which are the books of the Old Testament and which are the books of the New. And do not read any of the Apocrypha (μηδὲν τῶν ἀποκρύφων): for you who do not know the truths accepted by all, why do you toil in vain about controversial subjects? Read the divine Scriptures (τὰς θείας γραφὰς), these twenty-two books of the Old Testament (τὰς εἴκοσι δύο βίβλους τῆς παλαιᾶς διαθήκης ταύτας), translated by the seventy-two interpreters (τὰς ὑπὸ τῶν ἑβδομήκοντα δύο Ἑρμηνευτῶν ἑρμηνευθείσας). (*Catechetical Lecture 4*, 33)

While rejecting the so-called "apocryphal" books (τὰ ἀποκρύφα), therefore, Cyril does not strictly limit himself to the "twenty-two books" of the Old Testament, which would correspond to those of the so-called "short" Hebrew canon. He also mentions the translation of the Septuagint (or the Seventy-two), thus showing that he is familiar with the so-called "long canon" that had long been in use by the Eastern Churches. Yet, when listing the books of the Old Testament, Cyril keeps to the list of the twenty-two books of the Hebrew canon for practical concerns (*Catechetical Lecture 4*, 35-36)[10], and the book of Judith

[10] PG 33, 497-500.

is not kept. Finally, it is worth mentioning that although it is clear Cyril prefers the so-called Hebrew "short canon" as essential to the Christian message, he simultaneously acknowledges the importance of the Greek version of the Septuagint.

4 *Panarion* by Epiphanius of Salamis

Epiphanius (ca. 315 – 402 CE), a native of Gaza in Palestine, was bishop of the city of Salamis, on the eastern shore of the island of Cyprus. His experiences as a young monk in Egypt would leave an impression on him that lasted for the rest of his life. From the point of view of doctrine, he can be considered one of the most important proponents of the Antiochene tradition.

Among his works that have been preserved, the most well-known is perhaps the *Panarion.* Here, while referring to the Old Testament, Epiphanius states:

> These are the twenty-seven books (εἴκοσι ἑπτά) given by God to the Jews: according to the Hebrew language they are counted by them as twenty-two (εἴκοσι δύο), since ten books are duplicated and to be counted as five. Of this I have elsewhere spoken at length. By them there are two other books which are in doubt: the Wisdom of Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon; apart from a few other apocryphal books (χωρὶς ἄλλων τινῶν βιβλίων ἐναποκρύφων). (*Panarion* I,1,6)[11]

For Epiphanius, these twenty-seven books were like a "pedagogue" (παιδαγώγος) for the Jews until the time when Christ would come. The reference to the number twenty-two, expanded to twenty-seven, depends on the Hebrew canon because the status of Sirach and Wisdom were in doubt. In this way, the book of Judith does not fall within the list of sacred books and is thus categorized as one of τὰ βιβλία ἐναποκρύφα, "the apocryphal books."

5 *Against the Manichaeans* by Seraphion of Thmuis

Serapion (ca. 300 – 370 CE) is called *Thmuitanus* because he was bishop of Thmuis in Egypt, today known as Timay al-Imdid. He is known to have had

[11] PG 41, 213. Cf. WILLIAMS, *The Panarion*, 26. Cf. also *Panarion* III,1,5 (PG 42, 560), in which Epiphanius briefly reports on his canon.

close relations with Antony (ca. 251 – 356 CE), the father of Egyptian monasticism, and with Athanasius of Alexandria (see below).

It is in his treatise *Against the Manichaeans* that Serapion quotes a passage from the book of Judith. Firstly, he recalls the figure of Joseph, son of Jacob and last patriarch, because he was an example of courage and self-mastery. By relying on the narrative of Genesis, Serapion notes that despite being abandoned by his brothers and the consequent loss of his freedom (cf. Gen 37:12-36), Josef did not give in to despair. Moreover, he preferred to suffer and risk his life rather than give in to lustful pleasure (cf. Gen 39:7-20). In this precise context that Serapion introduces the character of Judith:

> This is an example of wisdom (τῆς μὲν σωφροσύνης ὑπόδειγμα); many others are examples of courage (τῆς δὲ ἀνδρείας), but a particular one is that of Judith. She was weak and frail (ἀσθενὲς καὶ ἄτολμον), because she was a woman; but she was also bold and courageous (εὔτολμον καὶ ἀνδρεῖον), because she had faith (ἐπεὶ πιστὸν ἦν). What was impossible in men's expectations he showed them possible through courage. She accomplished unexpected events through faith and hope (εἰς πίστιν καὶ ἐλπίδα), having been strengthened in courageous faith (ἀνδρείᾳ πίστει). Indeed, the doors opened and the young woman went out, and with only one servant, not fearing suspicion because of her beauty, not being worried about swords, not fearing that he might rape her or survive enforced licentiousness, not fearing that she would have to suffer the unexpected from a sword, but rather conquering with courage the fear of the sword (τὸ μὲν φοβερὸν τοῦ ξίφους τῇ ἀνδρείᾳ νικῶσα) and entrusting her beauty to God (τὸ δὲ κάλλος τῷ θεῷ παρατιθεμένη). For he believed that God was the guardian of beauty (τὸν θεὸν φύλακα [...] τοῦ κάλλους): he used swords as sticks lighter than papyrus, having overcome fear with the wisdom of courage (πεπατηκυῖα τῷ φρονήματι τῆς ἀνδρείας τὴν δειλίαν). (*Against the Manichaeans*, 47, 36)[12]

As a rhetorical strategy, Serapion emphasizes Judith's "wisdom" (σωφροσύνη) and "courage" (ἀνδρεία), which she demonstrated in the biblical account, and it is in reference to her actions that he coins the syntagma ἀνδρεία πίστις, or "manly faith." As had been the case with the patriarch Joseph, Judith overcame the obstacles of life through faith in God. Moreover, her success was guaranteed by God as a "keeper of beauty" (φύλαξ τοῦ κάλλους): in this way it is

[12] PG 40, 895-942. Cf. SERAPION OF THMUIS, *Against the Manicheans*, 121-122.

even clearer that her strategy to entice Holofernes (cf. Jdt 12:10-20) was related to God's saving will.

6 *Festal Letter 39* by Athanasius of Alexandria

In the era following the Council of Nicaea (325 CE), Athanasius (ca. 298 – 373 CE) stands out as one of the most eminent Church Fathers for his doctrinal brilliance and his refutation of the Arian heresy. As the bishop of Alexandria in Egypt, he then had to overcome considerable difficulties, showing great pastoral wisdom through enduring the adversity caused by both the imperial power and members of the Church.

Within the context of the polemic against the Arians, Athanasius' *Letters* play a prominent role. The genre, in fact, comes closer to that of a dogmatic treatise than a simple correspondence. In particular, the so-called *Festal Letters* (Ἐπιστολαὶ ἑορταστικαί) were sent annually to indicate the dates of the upcoming Lent, Easter and Pentecost festivals, and also to address important ecclesial, organizational, disciplinary and/or doctrinal issues. It is in these *Letters* that we find recourse to scriptural texts in general, and to the book of Judith particular.

For example, in the *Festal Letter 39*, written in 367 CE, we find a statement clarifying which books are to be considered canonical:

> The total number of books of the Old Testament (τῆς μὲν παλαιᾶς διαθήκης βιβλία) is therefore twenty-two (τῷ ἀριθμῷ τὰ πάντα εἰκοσιδύο). For I have heard that this is the number of texts handed down among the Jews (τοσαῦτα [...] τὰ στοιχεῖα τὰ παρ' Ἑβραίοις εἶναι παραδέδοται). (*Festal Letter 39*, 17)[13]

By declaring the number of twenty-two books, Athanasius assumes the Hebrew canon. The list therefore lacks the book of Judith, as it belongs to the so-called "deuterocanonical" books of the Greek Old Testament. He then lists the books of the New Testament and finally inserts a hermeneutical note:

> These (books) are the sources of salvation (ταῦτα πηγαὶ τοῦ σωτηρίου), so that whoever is thirsty may be satisfied with the words that are in them; in these alone is in fact proclaimed the doctrine of the right faith. Let no one add to it or take away from it. [...] But for greater exactness I add that [...] there are also other books besides these, not canonized

[13] FILIPPI – LORA, *Enchiridion Biblicum*, 16-17.

> (οὐ κανονιζόμενα), but which the Fathers command to be read by those who have recently entered (τοῖς ἄρτι προσερχομένοις) and want to be catechized on the discourse of the right faith (βουλομένοις κατηχεῖσθαι τὸν τῆς εὐσεβείας λόγον): Solomon's Wisdom, Sirach's Wisdom, Esther, Judith, Tobias, what is called the Doctrine of the Apostles and the Shepherd. However, my dear ones, neither in those canonized, nor in those to be read, is there anywhere any mention of the Apocrypha (τῶν ἀποκρύφων μνήμη), but it is a cunning of the heretics, who write them when it pleases them, granting and attributing to them a chronology, so that, presenting them as ancient, they may have a pretext for deceiving the simple in this way. (*Festal Letter 39*, 19-21)[14]

In contrast to the concerns of the heretics, Athanasius seems compelled to point out which books contain "the doctrine of the right faith" (τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας διδασκαλεῖον). However, he cannot but note that the Church has long since accepted other biblical books and that these books can be actually valuable for the new members of the Church. He thus qualifies the books that are usually categorized as 'deuterocanonical'[15] as those which are 'not canonized, but considered to be known by the Fathers' (οὐ κανονιζόμενα μέν, τετυπωμένα δὲ παρὰ τῶν πατέρων ἀναγινώσκεσθαι). This means that the book of Judith, although not considered a divinely inspired book, was not counted among the "Apocrypha" (ἀποκρύφα) and so to be rejected. Rather, this book is considered useful to read (ἀναγινωσκομένα) for those who take their first steps in the Christian faith.

7 *On the Holy Spirit* by Basil of Caesarea

Basil (330 – 379 CE) is rightly remembered by the title "Great" for his intellectual accomplishments and spiritual virtues. He also demonstrated wisdom in his dealings with imperial authorities during his episcopate in Caesarea, Cappadocia. Those were very precarious years following the celebration of the Council of Nicea (325 CE) and the spread of the Arian heresy.

[14] FILIPPI – LORA, *Enchiridion Biblicum*, 18-19 (PG 26, 1176; 1436-1437).

[15] Note that in addition to the biblical books that later entered the Catholic canon at the Council of Trent (1545-1563), Athanasius also mentions the *Didascalia apostolorum* and the *Shepherd of Hermas*.

Among Basil's writings on doctrine, the treatise *On the Holy Spirit* (Περὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος) occupies a central place, and it represents one of his most intellectually mature works (it was finished in 375 CE). One of his aims in this work is to contest Arian Christology, that the Son and the Father were not of the same essence, and so Basil takes up a number of biblical passages to emphasize first the equality between the Father and the Son and then to demonstrate the substantive equality of the Holy Spirit as well[16]. In this context, he quotes from the book of Judith:

> So the goods come to us from God through the Son (τὰ ἐκ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀγαθὰ διὰ τοῦ Υἱοῦ), who works each of them more quickly than the word could. [...] Of what extension of time, then, could "he who bears the universe by his word" (Heb 1:3) and does not operate bodily, he who does not need, in order to create, the help of his hands, but who by his irresistible will holds subject the nature of all that he has made? As Judith says, "Thou hast thought, and all that thou hast thought has been made before thee" (Ὡς ἡ Ἰουδίθ- Ἐνόησας, φησί, καὶ παρέστησάν σοι πάντα ὅσα ἐνόησας). (*On the Holy Spirit* VIII,19)[17]

Recourse to biblical texts is frequent in Basil's works to support his argument: in the same paragraph he cites Jdt 9:5 (cf. 16:14), John 1:9 (Christ the light), 2 Tim 4:8 (Christ the righteous judge), and John 5:22 (Christ the judge on behalf of the Father). The communion between the Father and the Son is made explicit in the creative act: "Goods come to us from God through the Son." Basil's use of other scriptural texts helps us understand better the quotation taken from the book of Judith.

Basil shows that he is familiar with Judith's prayer (Jdt 9:1-14), especially her invocation to God the Creator:

> My God, my God, hear me also, for I am a widow. For you have made things that were before the present, then these things and those to come. Thou hast conceived the present things and those things to come: and

[16] According to Arius, Jesus was considered to be the same as any other human, albeit with a prominent or elevated status. Meanwhile, the so-called *Pneumatomachi* tended not to recognize the consubstantiality of the Holy Spirit: they argued that both the Spirit and the Son are subordinate to the Father. Basil counters this argument attempting to demonstrate through the sacred Scripture the indisputable equality between the three Divine Persons. His arguments will influence subsequent theological developments, including those that grew out of the Council Constantinople II (381 CE).

[17] BASILE DE CESAREE, *Sur le Saint-Esprit*, 312-314 (PG 32, 101C).

> what thou hast conceived has come to pass (καὶ ἐγενήθησαν ἃ ἐνενοήθης). The things that you had decided have come before you (καὶ παρέστησαν ἃ ἐβουλεύσω) and said, "Here we are, we are here." Yea, all thy ways are ready, and thy judgment is already established. (Jdt 9:4-6).

One can also notice an echo of Jdt 16:14:

> To thee shall every creature serve, for thou hast spoken, and [things] have received existence (ὅτι εἶπας, καὶ ἐγενήθησαν)[18]; thou hast sent forth thy spirit, and it hath produced effects: none can oppose thy voice.

Basil had introduced the theme of God's spoken word a little earlier by quoting Heb 1:3: "He who sustains the universe by the power of his word" (ὁ φέρων τὰ σύμπαντα τῷ ῥήματι τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ). These words 1:3 recall the active role of the Son in creation, while the passage taken from the hymn in Jdt 16:1-17 introduces the theme of the Spirit. In this way, relying on these biblical texts for his reflection, Basil weaves together the threads of the three Persons of the Trinity. Thus, it must be recognized that Basil does not provide any critical exegesis of the book of Judith: rather, he recalls the passages from the book of Judith because they are useful for his theological and Trinitarian argumentation. Such a use of the book of Judith within a typically theological argument, which turns out to be unheard of among the Church Fathers before Basil, suggests its respectable role within the sacred Scriptures.

8 *Iambics to Seleucus* by Amphilochius of Iconium

The life and thought of Amphilochius (ca. 340 – 403 CE) is closely linked to the great Cappadocian Fathers. Born in Caesarea of Cappadocia, he completed his studies in Antioch and then moved to Constantinople. In 374 CE he was consecrated bishop by Basil, who had dedicated his treatise *On the Holy Spirit* to him, and occupied the episcopal See of Iconium, a city in Galatia that was already well-known from the New Testament (cf. Acts 14:1-7 and 2 Tim 3:11).

The *Iambics to Seleucus* are a refined poetic work, which has a moral purpose: the central point is the importance of sacred Scripture in the personal formation of the believer. The word of God is considered essential for acquiring

[18] The expression ὅτι εἶπας, καὶ ἐγενήθησαν, "for you have spoken and [things] have received existence" (Jdt 16:14), recalls especially Ps 32:9 LXX (cf. also Ps 148:5; Lam 3:37).

Christian wisdom that is opposed to worldly foolishness. As part of his apologetic message, Amphilochius outlines his own biblical canon against those used by the heretics. He does not include the book of Judith[19]. The absence can be considered significant, because it raises the well-founded suspicion that, at least in the region of Cappadocia in the fourth century CE, the book of Judith was not yet of such authority as to be included in the biblical canon.

9 *Homily 61 on the Gospel of John* by John Chrysostom

By the second half of the fourth century CE, John Chrysostom (ca. 344 – 407 CE) had become a popular and celebrated Church Father. His extensive theological training took place in Antioch and the surrounding area, although in 397 CE he was appointed bishop of Constantinople. His righteousness earned him enduring fame, but also bitter enemies. It is likely that Chrysostom's numerous homilies on biblical texts that we know date from the Antioch period, more specifically from the decade between 386 and 397 CE. Among these are *Homilies on the Gospel of John*. Chrysostom's style is typical of an oral exposition; his method for interpreting scriptures follows the Antiochene school.

In *Homily 61*, Chrysostom recalls the episode in John 10:22-30, where Jesus emphasizes the inability of his interlocutors to believe his words and works; he posits here that the central question does not concern the identity of Jesus himself, but rather the acceptance of his messiahship (*Homily 61 on the Gospel of John*, 2). By focusing on the unity of purpose and substance between Jesus and the Father, Chrysostom highlights Christ's authority and power. Jesus avoids all exaltation, and often withdraws to the desert, the place where God has instructed his people, and where the soul can find peace from worldly concerns. According to Chrysostom it is the woman who possesses the virtue of contemplation, since she can live at home, removed from worldly bustle:

> So the woman, residing in the house as in a philosophical school (καθάπερ ἔν τινι διδασκαλείῳ φιλοσοφίας), and turning her thoughts to it, will be able to engage in prayers and study and other kinds of wisdom. (*Homily 61 on the Gospel of John*, 2)

[19] AMPHILOCHIUS VON IKONIUM, *Iambi ad Seleucum* (PTS 9, 29-40). Cf. ROSSIN, Amphilochius, 131-157.

The wife is the only one who has the strength and virtue to influence her husband for the good:

> I could bring you the example of many men who are coarse and without discipline, whom their women have made polite and civilized. The woman is the man's companion at the table, in bed, in the procreation of children: she is the confidante of his secrets, his initiatives and what else? In everything at her husband's side, she is united to him as the body to the head. She will render more service to her husband than anyone else, if she is honest and reasonable. (*Homily 61 on the Gospel of John*, 2)

In the context of contrasting the innate virtues of men and women, Chrysostom mentions the figure of Judith. She, too, thus enters the list of the "holy women" of the Bible, who have been able to influence the lives of men:

> She has the power to direct towards virtue or towards great evils. Like the one who killed Absalom, the one who killed Ammon, the one who was about to kill Job; the one who saved Nabal from death; the one who saved the people from total annihilation. And then Deborah and Judith, who accomplished the accomplishments proper to male leaders (ἀνδρῶν στρατηγῶν κατορθώματα ἐπεδείξαντο). And many other women. (*Homily 61 on the Gospel of John*, 3)

In the rhetorical construction of the *Homily*, the women mentioned seem to be united by one factor: courage. Upon closer inspection, however, some details do not quite correspond to the biblical narrative. Absalom, David's son, was not killed by a woman, but by Joab, a faithful general of David's army (cf. 2 Sam 18:14-15); Job's wife was not about to kill him, but rather was about to dissuade him from remaining faithful to God (cf. Job 2:9-10). Decidedly more fitting are the references to Abigail, who saves her husband Nabal from death at the hands of David (cf. 1 Sam 25:1-44), and Esther, who saves her people by risking intercession with King Ahasuerus (cf. Esth 4:11.16; 5:1-5). The first woman of the last couple is Deborah. As a prophetess and judge of Israel, she reveals to the fearful Barak that the victory over Sisera, leader of the Canaanite army of Jabin, will not be his but that of the woman, Jael (Judg 4:1-24). And finally, Judith is mentioned. The theme of Judith's courage runs through the entire second part of the book, right from her first speech, which ends with these words: "Listen to me! I will do something that will go down from generation to generation among the descendants of our race" (Jdt 8:32). It is still because of her courage that the risky mission of seducing and killing the enemy general is

successful (cf. Jdt 10:1–13:10), as is her military strategy against the enemy army (cf. Jdt 14:1-5). Moreover, the importance that Chrysostom assigns to Judith seems to be confirmed by the fact that he gives her seventh place in the list of biblical women considered outstanding for their courage.

Ultimately Chrysostom's reasoning is meant to be encouraging for women, but to modern ears it may raise suspicion of sexism: these biblical figures are indeed cited as exemplary, but still within a fundamentally masculinist framework. The continuation of the *Homily* maintains the same parenthetic and spiritual tone. It repeats an invitation to the women to be humble and consistent in their husband's eyes:

> Therefore, if you want to please your husband, adorn your soul with chastity, piety and care for the house (κόσμει τὴν ψυχὴν σωφροσύνῃ, εὐλαβείᾳ, προστασίᾳ οἰκίας). These are the things that remain most and do not pass away. (*Homily 61 on the Gospel of John*, 3)

Conclusion

In the canon of the Christian East, even during the "golden age" of the fourth century CE, the status of the book of Judith was still in flux. The reason was presumably linked to the influence of the Hebrew biblical canon, which did not contain the Greek book of Judith. On the one hand, some Fathers from ancient Palestine, such as Epiphanius of Salamis, indeed assumed priority of the twenty-two books of the Hebrew canon. Cyril of Jerusalem, on the other hand, while leaning toward the "short" canon, notes the importance of the Greek Old Testament books which were already used in the Church: he therefore seems to leave the door open to the so-called "deuterocanonical" books. A similar position is found in Egypt, in the works of Athanasius: for him the book of Judith is among the books which are "not canonized, but considered to be known by the Fathers" (*Festal Letter 39*). Finally, in Cappadocia, Amphilochius of Iconium does not mention the book of Judith at all.

In the few cases in which the Eastern Fathers explicitly quote from the book of Judith, some differences are notable. No methodical commentary on the biblical text is found, but rather references to certain passages which function to support the argumentation in the specific topics chosen by their authors. In the case of Basil of Caesarea or Eusebius of Caesarea, the quotation from the book of Judith comes in support of the theological and Trinitarian argumentation, which starts with the idea of God the Father Creator. But above all, the heroine

of the book is credited with some important personal qualities: Serapion of Thmuis and John Chrysostom highlight her faith and courage; for Methodius of Olympus, Judith is to be praised for acting astutely but also for having chosen chastity; finally, Serapion argues that her beauty was an instrument in God's hands.

In summary, the evidence collected does not allow us to argue that the book of Judith circulated widely among the Eastern Fathers of the Church of the fourth century CE as it happened in Western Christianity. Indeed, probably because of the spread of the Greek biblical canon, the Western Church Fathers show no difficulty in including the book of Judith in their biblical canon and in interpreting it mainly typologically[20]. On the other hand, as we have demonstrated, in the (few) cases in which Eastern Fathers quote the unique narrative of Judith, they interpret it as they would any other biblical book in the canon. They consider the story to be historically true, but also interpret it allegorically and typologically, demonstrating that Judith is for the Christian believers an exemplary figure in both her ethics and faith.

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[20] Cf. CANDIDO, *Giuditta*, 251-278.

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Zhrnutie

Štúdia skúma odkazy (alebo ich absenciu) na Knihu Judita v dielach cirkevných otcov žijúcich v rôznych oblastiach kresťanského Východu v štvrtom storočí pred n. l.: Metódia, Euzébia, Cyrila a Epifánia v Palestíne; Serafiona a Atanáza v Egypte; Bazila a Amfilokia v Kapadócii; a Jána Zlatoústeho v Sýrii. Na rozdiel od západného kresťanstva diela cirkevných otcov kresťanského Východu nedosvedčujú ustálenú recepciu či rozsiahlu cirkuláciu Knihy Judita. Mohlo to byť spôsobené vplyvom hebrejského biblického kánona, ktorý neobsahuje grécku Knihu Judita, hoci grécky biblický kánon bol známy. V danom období otcovia východnej cirkvi poskytujú z Knihy Judita síce málo citácií, ale zato

významných: z knihy sa necituje za účelom jej interpretácie, ale jednotlivé pasáže sú vybrané, aby slúžili na podporu teologickej a morálnej argumantácie.

Kľúčové slová: Kniha Judita, východní otcovia, Septuaginta, dejiny recepcie, biblický kánon.

Summary

The essay examines the references (or their lack) to the book of Judith in the works of the Church Fathers living in different areas of the Christian East in the fourth century CE: Methodius, Eusebius, Cyril, and Epiphanius in Palestine; Serapion and Athanasius in Egypt; Basil and Amphilochius in Cappadocia; and John Chrysostom in Syria. Unlike in Western Christianity, the works of the Church Fathers of Eastern Christianity do not testify to a secure reception and wide circulation of the book of Judith. This seems to be due to the influence of the Hebrew biblical canon, which did not contain the Greek book of Judith, although the Greek biblical canon was known. In that period the Fathers of the Eastern Church provide few but significant quotations from the book of Judith: it is not quoted to be commented in itself, but the passages chosen serve as support for theological and moral argumentation.

Keywords: Book of Judith, Eastern Fathers, Septuagint, History of reception, Biblical canon.

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Obsah

Štúdie

Reflexie

Contents

Treaties

Reflextions

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