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# **The Christianization of Judith: Considering the Hieronymian Translation of *Liber Iudith* and Jerome's Christianizing Agenda**

*Brody Van Roekel*

## **Abstract**

I will consider Jerome's translation using gendered analysis while considering carefully how hints of his own preoccupations and Christianizing agendas can be found within. In *Liber Iudith*, Jerome gives a night's work to a text illustrating the story of the Hebrew widow Judith single-handedly overcoming the seemingly unassailable Assyrians. By comparing Jerome's translation to the earlier Septuagint text, a number of significant departures can be located. These departures demonstrate Jerome's conception of proper Christian widowhood, related too to his qualms with femininity. The Hieronymian changes then appear to be both culturally-motivated and implemented in response to the demands of an increasingly Christian world.

## Notes on Methodology and Thesis

This project seeks to examine the Christianizing undertones of patristic writers related to translations of the Vulgate Bible and the role of widows in the Christian schema. Specifically, I will consider Jerome's translation of the Book of Judith using gendered analysis while considering carefully how hints of his own preoccupations and Christianizing agendas can be found within. In *Liber Iudith*, Jerome, working in the fourth- and fifth-centuries, illustrates the story of the Hebrew widow Judith single-handedly overcoming the seemingly unassailable Assyrians. The Septuagint, written in Greek and not Hebrew, may be the original text for the Book of Judith. Alternatively, it may be a translation of a now-lost Hebrew text. By comparing Jerome's Latin translation to the earlier Septuagint Greek text, a number of significant departures can be located. These departures demonstrate Jerome's conception of proper Christian widowhood, related too to his qualms with femininity. The Hieronymian changes related to Jerome then appear to be both culturally motivated and implemented in response to the demands of an increasingly Christian world.<sup>1</sup> The Hieronymian translation of *Liber Iudith* demonstrates Jerome's commitment to translating the Biblical text *sensus e sensu*. While much of the "sense" of earlier texts is essentially present, the Christianization of the Hebrew woman, Judith, is apparent in Jerome's noticeable alterations.

### Introduction: *Hebraea illa*

As the nearly ubiquitous Christianization of the Mediterranean world proceeded between 100 CE and 500 CE, the early architects of the burgeoning religion sought paradigmatic and often pre-existing figures to tie to their novel worldviews. Renegotiated mores necessitated that the Church Fathers refashion some of those figures in order that they be better suited to their values. Many of the patristic writers, educated in pagan schools, had a fondness for classical literature, as many were trained in classical works. Among other patristic authors, Augustine spoke in his *Confessions* of the lasting impact classical literature had upon him.<sup>2</sup> The appreciation led some of them to consider many classical authors as progenitors to Christianity and to depict them as such. Moreover, patristic authors needed to reconsider the Jewish texts with which Jesus was so familiar. The Church

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<sup>1</sup> K. F. B. Fletcher, "Hyginus' *Fabulae*: Toward a Roman Mythography," in *Writing Myth: Mythography in the Ancient World*, ed. S. Trzaskoma and R. Scott Smith (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 135; although Fletcher applies this theoretical approach to the first-century BCE author Hyginus, the framework can also be applied to Jerome's translation of the Latin Vulgate.

<sup>2</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, trans. J.G. Pilkington, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 1887), IV.7.

Fathers' religion was something novel, neither Greco-Roman nor Judaic, but a combination of various extant frameworks from around the Mediterranean.

The legalization of Christianity by Constantine in the fourth century precipitated an even greater push to formalize the institutions and orthodoxy of Christianity, as the faith provided another opportunity to consolidate political power. With that formalization, notions of gender hierarchy also crystalized. Church Fathers generally co-opted classical structures of feminine submission. However, certain aspects of Christianized conceptions of gender allowed for possible expansions of female agency. Women could give up sexuality altogether, entering a life of voluntary celibacy. The roles of women in specific situations were also reconsidered. Widows, a commonplace reality given the youth of most wives in the ancient world, constituted a unique position. Likely older upon their husbands' death, widows were left in a precarious position for a variety of reasons. Already second-class citizens, widows had left their father's protection. Widows who did not have children were in an even more problematic situation. Without a daughter to marry into the expanded protection of another man or a son to command the household, widows were essentially alone in the world.

One such widow, the Jewess Judith, was alone except for her servants.<sup>3</sup> Following her husband's death, she remained single, but not for lack of suitors. Her pious disposition earned her great respect from her community.<sup>4</sup> The author of Judith's account also made her beauty exceedingly evident. The wealth left to her by her husband allowed her to maintain a home filled with servants.<sup>5</sup> All of these factors combine to both legitimize and make possible Judith's salvation of her homeland. Additionally, the original character of Judith appears to be soundly a product of Jewish and Hellenistic perspectives.<sup>6</sup> In his translation of *Liber Iudith*, Jerome uses the virtuous qualities of the Jewish woman Judith, such as chastity, elegance, and status, to his advantage.

In order to better depict her as an example of widowhood to Christian women, Jerome departs in various instances from the earlier Septuagint text. He insists that Judith's chaste living is an important factor in her success, tying it

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<sup>3</sup> When referring to Latin phrases or sentences, I have employed the *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*, edited by Robert Weber et. al. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007). English translations from the Vulgate have been rendered by myself, along with the MDVL 6000 class. English translations from the Septuagint come from *Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Göttingensis editum VIII.4: Iudith* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979). In order to easily differentiate between the Jerome's Vulgate translation and the Septuagint version of the same text, I will henceforth refer to both Jerome's text and its respective translations with "Judith" and English translations from the Septuagint with "Ioudith."

<sup>4</sup> Judith 8:8.

<sup>5</sup> Judith 8:7.

<sup>6</sup> *Judith*, Deborah Levine Gera, Loren T. Stuckenbruk, and Hermann Lichtenberger, ed. (Berlin: DeGruyter, 2014).

intimately with her piety. While Judith's beauty remained an explicit detail, the Hieronymian translation also asserted that her beauty was blessed by the Lord and not intended for the pollution of seduction. Finally, Jerome portrays the memory of Judith almost as if she were a canonized Christian *sancta*. The changes adopted by Jerome demonstrate the conscious and subconscious, culturally motivated reflections underlying his translations. New Christians of all contexts and situations were looking for examples upon which to base their lives. For widows, then, the Hieronymian Christianized Judith provided the perfect model.

### **Judith's Chaste Widowhood and the Masculine Overpowering of Womanhood**

An especial focus on chastity constitutes the most significant addition in Jerome's rendering of *Liber Iudith*. Examining the growing prevalence of chastity in the increasingly Christian world, it is unsurprising that Jerome puts such significant effort into depicting Judith as such. While chastity was largely expected for women in the ancient world, at least until marriage, social regulations on men's sex lives generally were more loosely guarded. Christianized late antique perspectives slightly altered this reality. Sexual purity began to govern proper masculine behavior along with proper feminine behavior. The imperative to subjugate the body to the mind had roots in the classical school of thought, Stoicism.<sup>7</sup> Adapted by early Christians, chaste living mutated from an essentially feminine virtue in the ancient world into one that was increasingly masculine.<sup>8</sup> This mutation is best shown in tying Christ, the perfect man, closely to chastity. Ambrose, the fourth-century bishop of Milan, explains in *De virginibus* how virginal chastity is both essentially freedom from sin and an imitation of the immaculate Son of God.<sup>9</sup>

Both the command to live continently and the connection between masculinity and chastity are found in *Liber Iudith* as Hieronymian additions. Jerome's *Prologus* offers a useful and unadulterated view into the translator's apparent agenda. As words penned by Jerome himself without the obligation of

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<sup>7</sup> Mathew Kuefler, "Desire and the Body in the Patristic Period," in *The Oxford Handbook of Theology, Sexuality, and Gender*, ed. Adrian Thatcher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 243.

<sup>8</sup> Julia M. H. Smith, "The Problem of Female Sanctity in Carolingian Europe c. 780-920," *Past & Present*, no. 146 (1995): 18. Though this article considers a later context, looking to solidified examples of femininity in Carolingian Europe can supplement our understanding of earlier contexts.

<sup>9</sup> Ambrosius Mediolanensis - *De uirginibus* (CPL 0145) - LLT-A, lib. : 1, cap. : 5, par. : 21, linea : 1: "Quid autem est castitas uirginalis nisi expers contagionis integritas? Atque eius auctorem quem possumus aestimare nisi immaculatum dei filium, cuius caro non uidit corruptionem, diuinitas non est experta contagionem? Videte igitur quanta uirginitatis merita sint."

translation, they provide essentially a single-remove from the patristic author. Moreover, the *Prologus* contains two of the four instances of *castitas*, “chastity,” in the Book of Judith. After expressing the initial disinterest he held towards the account of Judith, Jerome implores readers to receive the story of the widow Judith.<sup>10</sup> He also commands readers to make the Hebrew widow known through everlasting praise.<sup>11</sup> For most readers, such praise may certainly be warranted. The enthralling tale of a single woman overcoming insurmountable odds in order to save her city grabs readers’ attention. Yet, Jerome interestingly does not explicitly mention this main theme from *Liber Iudith* in his prologue.

Rather than depict her as a victorious hero of her people, Jerome opts to dub Judith an *exemplum castitatis* or an example of chastity. Here, the translator alludes to his inherent cultural motivation. Judith must be a paragon for the new chaste ideal so integral to Jerome’s work. Indeed, Jerome himself also notes that she provides an archetype to which both women and men need to aspire.<sup>12</sup> The translator also suggests that her *castitas* should be ascribed exceedingly great “virtue.”<sup>13</sup> These examples demonstrate the importance of continence to Jerome and chastity’s new masculinization. Judith is an obvious paradigm for women, but the suggestion that she may also be imitated by men is striking. This fact is especially prescient with Jerome’s inclusion of *virtus*, or “virtue,” and its use to describe the Hebrew woman. Jerome and other architects of the early church utilize the theme of *femina virilis* or *virago* for women whose ascetic prowess transcends their gender.<sup>14</sup> Patristic terminology tied masculinity to virtue. For women to be virtuous, they needed to become masculine.<sup>15</sup>

While cenobitic monasticism was only beginning to crystalize in the fourth century, Jerome had a ready example of female monasticism in Judith. Women ascetics were often represented as adopting forms of domestic asceticism in which they conducted their renunciations in their familial household.<sup>16</sup> Judith’s ascetic home life provides a good foundation upon which Jerome can expand her general piety into specific sexual purity, a relatively short jump considering Jerome’s cultural milieu. In addition to the instances of *castitas* in Jerome’s prologue, the translator introduces the same phrase into his Latin rendering, while also tying the virtue of chastity to masculinity outright. In the final chapter of *Liber Iudith*, the

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<sup>10</sup> Jerome, “Prologus” for *Liber Iudith*, in *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*, ed. Robert Weber et. al. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007), 691: “Accipite Iudith viduam.”

<sup>11</sup> Jerome, “Prologus,” 691: “triumphali laude perpetuis eam praeconiis declarate.”

<sup>12</sup> Jerome, “Prologus,” 691: “Hanc enim non solum feminis, sed et viris imitabilem dedit.”

<sup>13</sup> Jerome, “Prologus,” 691: “castitatis eius rumerator, virtutem talem tribuit.”

<sup>14</sup> Smith, “Problem of Female Sanctity,” 18.

<sup>15</sup> Gillian Cloke, *The Female Man of God: Women and Spiritual Power in the Patristic Age, AD 350-450* (London: Routledge, 2005), 218.

<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth A. Clark, “Holy Women, Holy Words: Early Christian Women, Social History, and the ‘Linguistic Turn’” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6, no. 3 (1998): 416.

author describes how the hero Judith spends the remainder of her days in Bethulia. Following the downfall of Holofernes and Israel's salvation, the protagonist returns to her home to renew her cloister-esque domesticity.

Yet, a few important differences can be seen between the texts. Though it is implicit, Jerome introduces a subtle voice change in his translation. The Septuagint text relates that "no man knew her in all the days of her life since the day Manasses her husband had died."<sup>17</sup> This example assigns agency to the men who wanted to know Judith. Jerome, however, reverses this agency and depicts Judith as the active subject. He writes, "she was knowing no man for all days of her life, from the day when Manasses died, her husband."<sup>18</sup> It is also important to note that, had Jerome made *cognosceret* passive in voice, there would be no essential difference. However, Judith is the subject of the active verb, and thus, the actor herself.

Moreover, Jerome replaces entirely the sentiment preceding the line examined above. The Septuagint notes that "many [men] desired" Judith.<sup>19</sup> Jerome's understanding of the sexual nature of this desire necessitated his need to add to his translation. In lieu of men lusting after the Hebrew widow, Jerome adds that Judith was included in the "virtue of chastity."<sup>20</sup> The Church Father connects closely *castitas* with *virtus*. With the etymological connection between the Latin word for "man," *vir*, and *virtus* or "virtue," one can then see the logical association between manliness and chastity. Purity was now a moral imperative, and this absolute divide between male and female likewise divided virtue and vice.<sup>21</sup> The divide and Judith's uniqueness can be best seen in Jerome's final inclusion of *castitas*.

Immediately following the Bethulian victory over the Assyrians, the head priest Joachim and all of his elders travel from Jerusalem in order to meet Holofernes' bane. The following quotations from the elders require special attention. Instances of direct speech are useful as they are obviously chosen by the author, putting words in the subject's mouth. Upon meeting Judith, Joachim and the elders extol Judith as the glory of Jerusalem, the joy of Israel, and honored by her people.<sup>22</sup> After these praises, the elders speak a number of conditional statements. They commend Judith for acting in a manly way.<sup>23</sup> They note how she

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<sup>17</sup> Ioudith 16:22.

<sup>18</sup> Iudith 16:26: "[Iudith] non cognosceret virum omnibus diebus vitae suae."

<sup>19</sup> Ioudith 16:22.

<sup>20</sup> Iudith 16:26: "Erat enim virtuti castitatis adjuncta."

<sup>21</sup> Mathew Kuefler, *The Manly Eunuch: Masculinity, Gender Ambiguity, and Christian Ideology in Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 19.

<sup>22</sup> Iudith 15:9-10: "Joachim autem summus pontifex de Jerusalem venit in Bethuliam cum universis presbyteris suis ut videret Judith. Quae cum exisset ad illum, benedixerunt illam omnes una voce, dicentes : Tu gloria Hierusalem; tu laetitia Israhel; tu honorificentia populi nostri."

<sup>23</sup> Iudith 15:11: "fecisti viriliter."

loved *castitas* in her heart.<sup>24</sup> They recognize that Judith has known no other man after Manasses died.<sup>25</sup> Each of these factors were prerequisites for their final statements. Because Judith had acted *viriliter*, had maintained her chaste heart, and had remained a widow, the Lord strengthened her. Moreover, from these virtues and the Lord's strength, she would receive eternal blessing.<sup>26</sup> The Septuagint text details a similar blessing by the Lord, but beyond this similarity, the other aspects of v. 11 are wholly introduced by Jerome.<sup>27</sup> The alterations in this verse constitute perhaps the most explicit revelation of Jerome's agenda. Only by acting in a manly fashion, demonstrated in masculine chastity, could Judith overcome Holofernes, receive the Lord's comfort, and gain eternity.

Although Jerome's translation of *Liber Iudith* provides a plethora of evidence for his culturally motivated rendering, a few other texts solidify the arguments. In a letter from Jerome and a work from Ambrose, the prominent Church Fathers further disclose their conception of chaste Christian widowhood. These works mention Judith specifically. In an epistle, Jerome relates the account of Judith as an example to the newly widowed Furia. The encouraging account of "woman vanquishing men" and "chastity beheading lust" represents Jerome's dichotomized views.<sup>28</sup> By juxtaposing these two sentiments, Jerome suggests that Judith, only through her chastity, is able to overcome the lust of Holofernes. Additionally, in the opinion of Ambrose, it is only through her chastity that Judith

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<sup>24</sup> Judith 15:11: "et confortatum est cor tuum, eo quod castitatem amaveris."

<sup>25</sup> Judith 15:11: "post virum tuum, alterum non scieris."

<sup>26</sup> Judith 15:11: "ideo et manus Domini confortavit te, et ideo eris benedicta in aeternum."

<sup>27</sup> See the full passages for both the Vulgate and the Septuagint: Judith 15:9-12: "(9) Moreover, Joachim, highest priest from Jerusalem, came into Bethulia, with all his elders, in order to see Judith. (10) Who, when she had gone out to him, all blessed her in one voice, saying: you are glory of Jerusalem; you are joy of Israel, you are honored of our people. (11) **Because you have done with manly virtue, and your heart was strengthened, in it because you love chastity and after your man, you knew no other: therefore, the hand of the Lord also strengthened you, and therefore you shall be blessed in eternity.** (12) And all people said: Let it be, let it be." Compare these verses to Ioudith 15:8-10: "(8) And Ioakeim the great priest and the senate of the sons of Israel, those residing in Ierousalem, came in order to view the good things which the Lord had accomplished for Israel and to see Ioudith and to speak peace with her. (9) Now when they came to her, they all blessed her with one accord, and they said to her: "You are the exaltation of Ierousalem; you are the great pride of Israel; you are the great boast of our race. (10) **You accomplished all these things by your hand; you accomplished good things with Israel, and God was pleased on account of them. Be blessed before the omnipotent Lord for all time.**" And all the people said: "So be it."

<sup>28</sup> Hieronymus - Epistulae (CPL 0620) - LLT-A epist. : 54, vol. : 54, par. : 16, pag.: 484, linea : 3: "uincit uiros femina et castitas truncat libidinem."



overcomes the Assyrians.<sup>29</sup> The triumph of Judith's preserved chastity equals the achievement of delivering her country.

For Ambrose and Jerome, the quality of Judith lies in her chastity. Their sentiments are explicit in their own works, which readily reflect their opinions. Moreover, the prologue to *Liber Iudith* allows Jerome to disclose some of his preoccupations. Jerome's opinions, however, become more problematic when rendered in translation. In translation, the prescription of chastity for the Hebrew widow Judith appears in various facets of the text. These occurrences represent marked departures from the earlier Septuagint text. Even in translating, then, Jerome's agenda shines through. Whether made consciously or not, the translator chooses specific instances to paint the text with his own hue. For the solidifying Christian religion, chastity was paramount, and for Jerome, Judith's story was useful in depicting that virtue.

### **Elegance and Not Seduction: Depicting Judith as an Unadulterated Beauty**

The account of Judith absorbs readers with compelling characters and a relatable story. It is understandable why Jerome rendered it in Latin, even considering his apparent reluctance evidenced by his prologue to *Liber Iudith*. The most substantial translation variance used to Christianize Judith stems from Jerome's *castitas* additions. Given the importance of sexual continence to early and later Christians, these additions should be largely unsurprising. Other slight changes are also discernable in the texts. In both the Vulgate and Septuagint the beauty of Judith is well-attested. However, the Septuagint characterizes Judith's beauty almost as a tool for sexual temptation. Jerome's bowdlerizing sensibilities compel the translator to curtail the alluring nature of the Hebrew woman, depicting her elegance instead of her seductive nature.

Jerome's translation demonstrates instances of the translator smoothing over Judith's beauty. The Vulgate entails a widow, just as stunning as her Septuagint counterpart. Yet, there is a careful delineation of Judith's beauty and her use of it. An aesthetically pleasing appearance represents a central trait for good women and men in the ancient world. This centrality was adopted by Christianity's architects and remained a defining feature of virtuous people in the Middle Ages. However, beauty was not simply skin deep. Indeed, a beautiful body denoted a beautiful soul.<sup>30</sup> The most important difference stemmed from the employment of attractiveness. As seen in the previous section, many of the Church Fathers

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<sup>29</sup> Ambrosius Mediolanensis, *De uiduis*, (CPL 0146) - LLT-A cap. : 7, par. : 39, linea : 2-5: "abstinentiae meritum, pudicitiae gratiam reseruaret. Nec cibo enim, ut legimus, maculata, nec adultero, non minorem seruatae castitatis ex hostibus reuexit triumphum quam patriae liberatae."

<sup>30</sup> Dick Harrison, *The Age of Abbesses and Queens: Gender and Political Culture in Early Medieval Europe* (Sweden: Nordic Academic Press, 1998), 345.

regarded purity of the body as an imperative for all adherents. Jerome's inclusion of *castitas* throughout shows this preoccupation.

Thus, Jerome is faced with the prospect of keeping Judith's beauty intact, while also depicting her as unquestionably pure. The tying of Judith's beauty and piety is largely accomplished through *castitas*. Yet, other instances stand out in Jerome's translation upon its comparison to the Greek text. Following her admonishment of Bethulia's elders, Judith returns to her home in order to prepare for her mission. In a montage akin to arming oneself for battle, Judith strips off the garments of widowhood and washes herself in preparation. The widow dons charming clothes and striking ornamentations. She, along with her servant girl, also packs supplies which were in keeping with Hebrew food guidelines. The two set out and find Ozias, the high priest of Bethulia, at the city gates.

In the midst of Judith's preparations, Jerome deems the situation a fitting location for a slight but noticeable departure from the original text. The Septuagint summarizes her aesthetic preparations succinctly and sharply. "She made herself up provocatively for the charming of the eyes of men," reads the text, "all who would cast eyes upon her."<sup>31</sup> This verse shows how the main purpose of Judith's beauty was for the provocation of men. Jerome, at least, appears to have read the verse in this manner. He surely rails against this sentiment in his translation. Going beyond simply truncating the problematic text, Jerome instead decides to inject his own preoccupations.

After ornamenting herself, Jerome writes, "To [Judith], truly, truly, the Lord bestowed brilliance: since all that arrangement was depending not from lust, but from virtue: and therefore the Lord augmented this woman in that beauty, in order that she was appearing in unique elegance in the eyes of all men."<sup>32</sup> A number of aspects of this translational addition require examination. The first, and most important, lies in the genesis of Judith's beauty. The Septuagint text relates that Judith made herself more beautiful, implicitly through her dress and jewelry in addition to her already lovely appearance. Jerome describes her splendor as having come from the Lord, instead of Judith herself. Moreover, the "arrangement" depended not upon *libido* or provocation from Judith's appearance as related in the Septuagint. Rather, *virtus* is the basis of her plans. Because the plot rested upon *virtus* and not *libido*, then, the Lord provides for the augmentation of Judith's beauty.

Finally, Jerome appears to smooth out the description of Judith's appearance in the eyes of men. She looks "uniquely elegant" in the eyes of all men. The sharpness of the manly lustful gaze is dampened, and Judith emerges as an

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<sup>31</sup> Judith 10:4.

<sup>32</sup> Judith 10: 4: "Cui etiam Dominus contulit splendorem : quoniam omnis ista compositio non ex libidine, sed ex virtute pendebat : et ideo Dominus hanc in illam pulchritudinem ampliavit, ut incomparabili decore omnium oculis appareret."

elegant beauty instead of a provocative seductress. The Septuagint translator writes that as Judith dresses, she puts on clothes “with which she was accustomed to dress in the days of the life of her husband Manasses.”<sup>33</sup> While there is nothing explicitly related to seduction in this remark, the mentioning of Judith’s deceased husband apparently disturbs the Latin translator. This sentiment is entirely missing from Jerome’s translation.

The purpose for this omission is twofold. On the one hand, Jerome’s subordination of marriage to virginity is well-known.<sup>34</sup> Additionally, Jerome considers marriage as a lesser good than chaste widowhood. Judith’s purity bound with her widowhood yields a good far beyond marriage. On the other hand, many patristic writers considered marriage to be the only legitimate outlet for sexual activity. By reminding readers of Judith’s marriage to Manasses, the Septuagint writer also prompts readers of Judith’s story to remember aspects of her sexuality. Jerome must do away with Judith’s sexuality while also elevating her as an archetypal chaste widow, the second highest spiritual yield behind virginity.

The translator carefully delineates between Judith’s beauty and her usage of it. The Hebrew widow’s beauty must remain intact, as a physically pleasing appearance was a prerequisite for her virtue. Jerome has, however, pared away any notion of a connection between beauty and lust. The Lord imparted beauty unto Judith and ultimately blessed her mission due to her *virtus*. A good Christian widow engaging in seduction would have been unthinkable. The extraction of beauty from seduction essentially connects back to Jerome’s attempts to depict Judith’s continence. She was elegant, not sultry. Furthermore, in Jerome’s mind, marriage was largely without benefit. It seems that the only benefit of Judith’s marriage for Jerome is the status it imparts unto the Hebrew widow, an aspect of Judith’s account which is considered in the final section.

### **Memory of the Hebrew Woman: Status, Confrontation, and Holy Days**

Jerome elucidates most explicitly the important facets of Christian widowhood, continence and untainted beauty. He finally moves to illustrate other aspects of Judith’s Christian-widow exemplarity. The translator maintains certain criteria of Christian widows, including social status and confrontation with the elders, and also adds the ascription of holy days to paradigmatic Christian figures to Judith’s narrative. Admittedly, the addition of feast days in Jerome’s translation is an argument from silence regarding the Septuagint text. Yet, there does not seem to be an analogous piece in the Septuagint text that is comparable to the inclusion

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<sup>33</sup> Judith 10:3.

<sup>34</sup> Hiero, *Epist. 48*, “*ad pammachium*.” In this letter, Jerome defends his exaltation of virginity against opinions that his reverence had come at the cost of marriage. See also Ruth Mazo Karras, *Sexuality in Medieval Europe: Doing unto Others*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 2012), 42.

of Christian holy days. Moreover, social status and confrontation simply appear in both the Vulgate and Septuagint, and thus these considerations diverge slightly from the main thrust of the paper.

These aspects of the Hieronymian rendering of *Liber Iudith* are nonetheless important. The growing need for institutionalized orthodoxy and orthopraxy necessitated a full examination of widowhood in the case of Jerome's translation. The Jewess Judith needed to look as Christian as possible, while also providing an idealized vision to Christian widows. The consistency of certain characteristics facilitates this appearance. References to Judith's extravagant wealth and status occur unambiguously in both the Septuagint and Vulgate.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, part of her plot against Holofernes requires her to be sumptuously dressed.<sup>36</sup> In addition to her wealth, Judith's social positionality rings through the Septuagint text as well as Jerome's translation.<sup>37</sup> Her lineage and previous marriage also precedes her account, only adding to her understood status.

Only after sketching her as the epitome of wealth and status in the Bethulian community does the author feel confident enough to describe her encounter with the town's authorities. Jerome consciously follows this pattern as it coincides well with his agenda for Judith. Status for women derived from their vast inherited wealth and social position.<sup>38</sup> A danger of that status, however, was expanded agency on the part of widows. Increased agency could lead to attention and resulting consequences, which was especially a problem in a society that did not value women as full members. Such clout led to guards on their actions.<sup>39</sup> Judith needed her status accorded to her by wealth and position in order to confront the doubting Ozias. Yet, after the Assyrians are dealt with, she resumes her life of domestic asceticism.

Judith's return to her previous life connects well with what seems to be Jerome and others' ideal for female ascetic practice. Women ascetics were often represented conducting their renunciations in their familial household.<sup>40</sup> The earliest stages of Christianity could provide women with an opportunity for rebellion as the burgeoning religion was at first at the margins of society like women. Jerome, though, carefully avoids support for women in leadership or clerical privilege.<sup>41</sup> Yet, a subtle message remained: generally excessive female

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<sup>35</sup> Iudith 8:7, 15:14; Ioudith 8:7, 15:11.

<sup>36</sup> Iudith 10:3; Ioudith 10:4.

<sup>37</sup> Iudith 8:8; Ioudith 8:8.

<sup>38</sup> Clark, "Holy Women, Holy Words," 414.

<sup>39</sup> Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Early Christian Women and Pagan Opinion: The Power of the Hysterical Woman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 181.

<sup>40</sup> Clark, "Holy Women, Holy Words," 416.

<sup>41</sup> Gail Streete, "Women as Sources of Redemption and Knowledge in Early Christian Traditions," in *Women & Christian Origins*, ed. Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 342.

agency contravened the boundaries of tolerable diversity. It was one thing to admire women such as Judith, but another thing entirely to imitate her.<sup>42</sup> The good Christian widow could not assume a public role that would overstep “certain clearly felt limits and thereby contradict that within her which remains female.”<sup>43</sup>

Admiration for holy persons could take a variety of forms, one of which entailed feast days in remembrance of especially holy individuals. The Catholic holy calendar is ripe with paragons and sainted men and women. A prominent Hieronymian addition in the final verse of Judith’s account requires a final note. Judith had done the impossible against Holofernes and the Assyrian hordes. The widow challenged the men of her city who questioned God’s protection. She had remained a prominent figure in Bethulia after her success. Even the high priest of Jerusalem had commended her on her *virtus* and accomplishment. She returned to a life of domestic asceticism and lived out the remnant of her life in continence and sanctity.

Were Judith a Christian, her name may have been included in the list of Catholic saints. But Judith was obviously Jewish. However, Jerome could not forego the opportunity to give her a Christian hue one last time. The Septuagint text closes with Judith’s burial and the assurance that none accosted Israel during Judith’s life and “for many days after she had died.”<sup>44</sup> The Vulgate follows this reading, declaring to readers that none disturbed Israel. This verse does not close the Latin translation though. In his prologue to *Liber Iudith*, Jerome appended to his rendering, “Moreover, the day of this victory obtained a holiday by the Hebrews in the number of holy days, and it was maintained by the Jews from that time, up into the present day.”<sup>45</sup>

Hebrews celebrated various holy days. One for Judith probably would have been out of the ordinary, at least for someone with a cursory understanding of Jewish practice. The addition would not be unusual at all except for its glaring absence in the Septuagint. One can only guess at Jerome’s specific motivations here. The notion of a holy day tangentially dedicated to Judith might have been reminiscent of the litany of Christian *sancta* and their feast days. Jerome might have been giving encouragement to Christian widows, showing the possibilities of dedicating their lives to piety and chastity using the widow Judith. Regardless of specific motivations, Jerome’s general agenda remains the same in this final alteration as it has been throughout the translation.

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<sup>42</sup> Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society, ca. 500-1100* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 407-408.

<sup>43</sup> Susanna Elm, *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 166.

<sup>44</sup> Judith 16:25.

<sup>45</sup> Judith 15:31: “Dies autem victoriae hujus festivitatem ab Hebraeis in numero dierum sanctorum accepit, et colitur a Judaeis ex illo tempore usque in praesentem diem.”

### Conclusion: *Christiana illa*

Throughout Jerome's translation of *Liber Judith*, the patristic writer works to sketch Judith in the manner of an idealized Christian widow. This agenda, as has been shown, appears explicitly when comparing Jerome's translation to the earlier Septuagint text. In his additions, glosses, and occasional textual removals, Jerome fully demonstrates his intentions for the Hebrew widow. Even certain continuities between the Septuagint and Vulgate texts show a consciousness in attempting to sketch Judith as a character upon which Christian women, especially widows, could draw.

The character trait for Jerome's Judith was *castitas*. The term only appears four times in Jerome's translation, two of which occur in the *Prologus*. The prologue gives readers an idea of Jerome's main intent for the text. Judith ought to be viewed as an example in many ways, but most importantly as an *exemplum castitatis*. The additions in his translation are stark and their placement significant. The first use comes in the form of a direct quote from the high priest of Jerusalem, Joachim. Direct speech is especially useful as the author can impart vital ideas from the mouths of important characters. The character being quoted also requires thought. One of the highest-ranking authorities in all of Israel commends Judith for her *castitas*.

The second usage of the term ties to *virtus* and the masculinization of Judith. Contenance increasingly was viewed as a masculine value. Moreover, for Christian women to become virtuous, they needed to shed their femininity. Both of these notions are demonstrated in Jerome's Judith. Her abstinence is on display due to Jerome's work. She is also connected to *virtus* throughout. Additionally, Joachim explains how Judith's success was based on her masculinization and her chastity. Only with these prerequisites could Judith overcome the Assyrians and Holofernes. Finally, Jerome and his contemporary Ambrose show their undiluted perceptions of widows generally and Judith specifically in their own works.

Jerome also understands how Judith's beauty was imperative to both her success and her virtue. In various departures from the Septuagint, Jerome carefully maintains Judith's incredible beauty, while also depicting it as a gift from God. As a blessing from God, then, her exquisiteness and her plot against Holofernes needed to be based upon *virtus*. God could not bless anything connected to *libido*, and so all notions of seduction needed to be washed from the text. The dress and ornamentation from her marriage might even be misconstrued as invoking her sexuality, as marriage was the only legitimate outlet for sexuality. Jerome goes as far as downplaying Judith's marriage to Manasses in order to maintain her unadulterated beauty.

That marriage, though, holds a slight use for bolstering Judith's status. Along with her inherited wealth and her irrefutable piety, Judith's social standing

in the Bethulian community looms largely in her story. This standing makes her confrontation with the city's elders possible. Yet, Judith understands her place well. Once the threat of annihilation has passed, the Hebrew woman returns to a life of domestic cloister. She is not forgotten though. According to Jerome's translation and not the Septuagint, her deeds live on as a holy day amongst the Hebrews. Such an honor, outside of someone as accomplished as Judith, befitted only the most holy of Christian men and women. While not the strongest point for Judith's Christianization, this conspicuous addition at the close of his translation leaves careful readers emphatically and enduringly cognizant of Jerome's program.

The story of Judith offers an exemplary picture of virtuous widowhood. With an obvious awareness of this fact, Jerome had few qualms about adapting her to his personal and institutional agenda. Making decisions that were culturally motivated, Jerome depicted Judith in a manner more befitting an increasingly Christianized world. Demands for Christian *exemplum* in that essentially novel world also necessitated examples be drawn from many sources, Christian or not. For these reasons, Judith may no longer be viewed as she was in the eyes of Holofernes, who called her "Hebraea illa," or "that Hebrew woman." Instead, Judith may better be thought of as Jerome must have seen her, as *Christiana illa*.

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