"BEAUTIFUL BUT TOUGH".
A COMPARISON OF LXX ESTHER,
JUDITH AND SUSANNA

G.J. STEYN

ABSTRACT

This study provides a comparative survey of the books of LXX Esther, Judith and Susanna. It utilizes primarily narrative criticism, keeping in mind that the narratives should be examined as literature, investigating each narrative as a whole. It is hoped that in this comparative investigation we will arrive at a better understanding of the *extent* of the similarities between the narratives of these three women, as well as exploring some possible *origins* for the basic narrative pattern (some "master narrative") from which these might have mutated. The concept of these characters as the main protagonists is challenged with the suspicion that we still encounter here male-dominated stories in which these women are possibly portrayed merely as role models of submission, obedience and self-sacrifice.

INTRODUCING THE THREE WOMEN

Attention has already been drawn to the commonalities between Esther, Judith (Kottsieper 1998:135-136; Berg 1979:149-150; Enslin & Zeitlin 1972:2)[1] and Susanna (Brenner 2004:11). The most striking commonalities might be summarised as follows: (a) they are narratives about Jewish women protagonists who seem to share similar qualities, (b) the plot of the narratives show striking similarities where they are situated in an environment of foreign powers; (c) their LXX versions date from approximately the same time, i.e. the second to the first century BC, thus all indicating a relatively late date (d) they probably originated outside the territorial boundaries of ancient "Israel", and (e)

---

[1]   Kottsieper found a surprising parallel between the Prayer of Esther and her appearance before the king with Judith 9-11. Cf. also Enslin & Zeitlin: "The stories in the books of Esther and Judith are similar in plot".

at least two distinctive and quite different Greek forms are found among their surviving manuscripts (Jobes & Silva 2000:45). A statement such as "the story of Judith … shares with Esther a heroine and a Jewish massacre of enemies, but the resemblance ends there" (Rogerson & Davies 1989:230) is thus in my opinion an oversimplification.

There seem to be uncertainty as to which method of literary analysis should be used in studying these documents (Doran 1986:305; Berg 1979:14-18). This study will follow the more obvious route of narrative criticism, keeping in mind that the narratives should be examined as literature and each be treated as a whole. More important, though, will be the comparative nature of this investigation. It is hoped that such a comparative study will assist, not only in understanding the *extent* of the similarities between these three women, but also in searching for some possible *origins* for a basic narrative pattern.

Doran (1986:303) reckons particularly with regard to Judith that the "exploration of this traditional narrative quality (of wisdom, *GJS*) would be of great help and may illuminate the connections between Judith and Miriam (Exodus 15), Deborah and Jael (Judges 4-5) and other wise and warlike heroines of the Bible".

LXX ESTHER

Six interpolations or additions are found in a longer LXX version of Esther that are lacking in comparison with the Hebrew. They consist mainly of decrees and prayers. A shorter Greek version exists, however, formerly known as the "Lucianic" and now as the "Alpha Text", which is closer to the Hebrew (Beal 2004:109; De Troyer 1997; Jobes 1996; Jellicoe 1989:295). Due to the arrangement by Jerome, the additions were presented in the Old Latin at the end of the canonical Esther as six additional chapters, and some think that this might actually represent a text form that is older than those of the LXX or the Alpha Text (Dines 2004:18). Traditionally, those sections were seen in scholarship to

actually form part of the consecutive history of the canonical Esther – as indicated before by Swete (1914:257-258),[2] Charles (1971:667) and others (e.g. Nagel 2006):

- LXX 11:2-12:6 = *Addition A*. This unit precedes Esther 1 and introduces the story by describing the events which led to the first advancement of Mordecai at the court of Ahasuerus/Artaxerxes. It is a double of Esth 2:21-23.

- LXX 13:1-7 + 16:1-24 = *Additions B + E*. The first of these passages (B) follows Esth 3:13, expands 3:8-13 and show striking similarities with 3 Macc 3:12-29 (DeSilva 2002:118). It professes to give copies of the letters of Artaxerxes referred to in those verses. The second (E) follows 8:12 and deals with the king's second Edict in favour of the Jews.

- LXX 13:8 – 14:19 + 15:4-19/1-16 = *Additions C + D*. These sections should follow Esth 4:17 and 5:1-2, containing the prayers of Mordecai and Esther as well as a description of Esther's approach to the king. Some striking parallels between these Additions and Judith 9-11 have been noted (Kottsieper 1998:135-136).

- LXX 10:4 – 11:1/5 = *Addition F*. This part follows after 10:3 and is an interpretation of Mordecai's dream. It is an epilogue and completes the story by relating the institution of the feast of Purim.

Kaiser (2004:45) pointed out that "it becomes apparent that the additions trace back to two different circles of tradition, of which, the older, Egyptian tradition underscored the loyalty between the foreign king and the Jews while the younger, Palestinian tradition aimed at a transparent theologization". The book was probably brought to Egypt during the second century BC (Flint 2001:54; Gruen 1998:161; West 1981:469; How 1932:304),[3] particularly in the year 114

---

[2]   On clustering these additions as "Issues", see Kaiser (2004:45-47).
[3]   According to How (1932:304), "The book can hardly be earlier than the latter part

BC – according to an attached note within the last of these Greek additions – if the reference is understood to be the fourth year of Philometor (Charles 1971:665; Gruen 1998:178). This does not mean necessarily, however, that all six these additions were written at this time. It is difficult to determine whether the additions to Esther are based on Semitic originals or directly composed into Greek (Dines 2004:18), but they were probably "additions in the interests of piety" (DeSilva 2002:121; Jellicoe 1989:295; How 1932:304) as these additions in the Greek "add the explicitly religious elements missing from the Hebrew" – a notorious version that lacks any mention of God (Jobes & Silva 2002:99). Some of these additions show strong sentiments against the non-Jews. Gruen aptly summarises the unique perspective of the Additions to Esther, saying that they "reinstate Yahweh, bring religion back to Mordecai and Esther, turn Haman into a raging anti-Semite, and convert what had been a personal conflict between Mordecai and Haman into a fundamental and implacable struggle between Jews and Gentiles on an international level" (Gruen 1998:179).

The genre of the "Greek Esther has been likened to the romantic 'novels' which were popular in the Hellenistic period" (Dines 2004:18; Würthwein 1969:167).[4] It could be seen as an "imaginative" or "popular" romance (How 1932:304) and its style has been described as "a distinctive comic-hyperbolic style" (Niditch 2004:29), with particularly the ironies in Esther that attracted attention (e.g. Goldman 1990:15-31). Gruen even refers to the additions to Esther (along with those to Daniel) as "entertaining tales" (Gruen 1998:296). The historicity of the Persian queen Esther, a Jewess, has thus been doubted by scholars (Fox 2001:11; West 1981:468; Berg 1979:14) and some have regarded it "merely as a transformed pagan myth" (How 1932:303). It was probably written specifically to explain the origin of the late winter Purim Feast which

---

of the 2nd century B.C."

[4] Würthwein says: "Diese Novelle ist mit hoher Meisterschaft geschrieben" (1969:167).

commemorated the Jews in Persia from Xerxes (Esth 9:19 – with the expansion in the LXX). Evidence of Esther amongst the Dead Sea Scrolls has never been found.[5]

LXX JUDITH

The story of Judith had been described, amongst others, as "a historical romance" (Coleman 1932:58; Swete 1914:272), "historical fiction" (DeSilva 2002:94; Ferguson 1993:417; Charles 1971:246)[6] or "Greek, oriental, and Jewish-Hellenistic novel" (Zenger 1981:437). One should cautiously take note of the opinion that its style is associated with that of LXX Daniel (Dines 2004:18).[7] Due to the fact that Clement of Rome knew the story and that Holophernes is probably a softened form for Orophernes, a Cappadocian king, it might be dated between 158 BC-96 AD (Kaiser 2004:39,42-43; Flint 2001:54; Ferguson 1993:417; Jellicoe 1989:295). Swete (1914:272) was of the opinion that "The religious attitude of the author of Judith is that of the devout Pharisee…, and the work may have been a fruit of the patriotic feeling called forth by the Maccabean wars" (similarly also Coleman 1932:59). Also Jellicoe (1989:295) dates this work "shortly after the Maccabean revolt" and Lamparter (1972:137) "in der Makkabäerzeit". The Maccabean calender places it under the Hanukkah Feast. It was probably originally composed in a now lost Semitic (Aramaic?) original (Jobes & Silva 2002:32; Ferguson 1993:417; Doran 1986:302; Zenger 1981:430-431; Enslin & Zeitlin 1972:40), but known in a Greek translation prior to Clement of Rome. Three main text groups can be identified: the LXX, so-called Lucianic, and Old Latin-Syriac. The manuscript traditions usually place Judith alongside Esther who is similar in character

---

[5]   See Flint (2001:71) on some possible reasons for this.
[6]   Enslin & Zeitlin (1972:1) call it "Jewish fiction".
[7]   The connection with Daniel was also made by Nuñes Carreira (1973:215-230) and Delcor (1967:174-179). Doran (1986:304) finds it less convincing.

(Coleman 1932:58). Judith was probably a fictitious character. The name of the book ("Jewess, or the feminine counterpart of Judas the Maccabee")[8] points in the direction of a paraenetic story on an ideal figure that was written to encourage prayer and strengthen faith. The description of Jerusalem as the virgin daughter of Zion and the character of Esther probably contributed to the figure of Judith (Coleman 1932:59).

LXX SUSANNA

The "discrete story" (Jobes & Silva 2002:81) of Susanna is placed at the beginning of Daniel where it precedes Dan 1:1 in the great uncials of Theodotion's version and has a much longer text there than in the LXX (Swete 1914:260,262). The LXX and Vulgate, in turn, place the story at the end of Daniel, namely as Daniel chapter 13. There are considerable differences between the text versions of Theodotion and the LXX,[9] although the plot remains essentially the same (Doran 1986:300). Susanna probably existed in an "Aramaic or new-Hebrew original" (Kaiser 2004:50-51), was possibly circulated separately, and does not form a suitable prologue to Daniel 1 (Swete 1914:260-261).[10] Its attachment to Daniel, though, gave it particular authority within the LXX (Charles 1971:644). The "folktale character" of Susanna has been accepted, and it is claimed that "religious considerations permeate the story, a Jewish reworking of pagan folklore in order to place God in the center and advance the theological concerns of Judaism" (Gruen 1998:175, who refers to MacKenzie 1957:211-218; Pfeiffer 1949:454).[11] Summarised in the words of

---

[8]   Doran (1986:304) cautions, however, against reading Judith in an allegorical manner.

[9]   For a discussion on the complex tradition history of Susanna, cf. Koenen (1998:1-13).

[10]   See Kaiser (2004:48-52) for a range of different theses on the possible connections between Daniel and its Additions.

[11]   This viewpoint was proposed particularly by Baumgartner (1926:279-280; 1929:187-188).

Engel (1985:180): "Erzählend, nicht moralisiernd oder theoretisch argumentierend, trägt der Verfasser seine hoffnungsvolle Überzeugung vor, daß JHWH Israel-Juda, sein Volk, retten kann und wird, auch wenn die eigenen gegenwärtigen Macht- und Gewalthaber dabei sind, es unter dem Schein der Legalität zu vergewaltigen und zu ruinieren". Two motifs that were identified are the innocent woman who is falsely accused and the clever young judge (Doran 1986:300). The date of the composition is probably around the turn of the second century (Doran 1986:301) in devout Palestinian circles (Kaiser 2004:51).

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN FIRST CENTURY BC JEWISH COMMUNITIES

Much has been made by scholarship, particularly in socio-historical investigations, to point out that women played a minute role in second temple Judaism. The situation is, however, more complex when one keeps in mind the description of the Therapeutrides of whom Philo of Alexandria wrote in his *De Vita Contemplativa*. Crawford (2003:140) has also pointed out that even amongst the descriptions of the Dead Sea Scrolls "women had particular roles to play in the governance of community life, and could attain special honored positions" and that "although the hierarchy of the community was male-dominated and the viewpoint of the Scrolls androcentric, there is nothing in the Scrolls themselves that indicates that women were deliberately excluded or that this was a male-only community".[12] Also Ferguson (1993:71) pointed out that "Jewish women were not as restricted in public appearance as Greek women but did not have the freedom of first-century Roman women". The Jewess, Judith,

---

[12]   Also on the role of "women in the religious system of Qumran", see Gruber (2001:173-196).

stands out amongst our three women with behaviour that "contravenes convention at a number of points", but is "indeed domesticated again at the end of the story" (DeSilva 2002:105). Women were seen as subordinate to men "and most voices within Rabbinic Judaism agree that women are best kept separate from centres of communal governance, holiness, and learning" (Baskin 2001:194). This makes the narratives of Esther, Judith and Susanna interesting literature against these male dominated societies. But it also raises a sense of suspicion. Why do these stories show so many similarities and are these women indeed the main heroic characters?

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE THREE NARRATIVES

A comparison of the books of Judith, Esther and Susanna makes it clear that both the three characters themselves, as well as the narrative structure of each of their stories, are showing some striking similarities. If this basic narrative pattern, in combination with the qualities of the three characters, is studied against the backdrop of the position that women held in early Judaism and against the mythological world of a Hellenistic environment, then it becomes obvious that these narratives of Jewish women might have been influenced by their Hellensitic context. This possibility is supported by the fact that a number of historical detail in the book of Judith is wrong and that the book was not intended to be history but rather as a narrative with a moral and religious message (Van der Watt & Tolmie 2005:63). We will now identify some striking characteristics that are shared within the story patterns of Judith, Esther and Susanna.

THE MAIN CHARACTERS, THEIR NAMES AND IDENTITIES

• *Esther* is an adopted orphan and a young unmarried woman. She is also

called "Hadassah" (2:7) once in the beginning of the book, but this name does not occur in the LXX version. The name of Esther appears in the list of Heroes in Ecclesiasticus / Wisdom of Jesus Sirach (c. 180 BC).

• *Judith* is a widow. Her name means "Jewess" and leads to speculation that this is the feminine counterpart of Judas the Maccabee. Extending back for sixteen generations, the genealogy of Judith is one of the longest in the OT and indicates her importance (Freedman 1992:1114). Levine (2004:208) calls Judith a "peripatetic heroine".

• *Susanna* is a married woman from a prominent household and a Jewess (ἡ Ἰουδαία, Sus 1:22). Her name means "lily" and she is a "daughter of Israel".

QUALITIES OF THE MAIN CHARACTERS

BEAUTIFUL

• In Esther the search is on for a "beautiful young virgin" (Es 2:2, 3) and the young woman, Esther, was lovely and beautiful: καὶ ἦν τὸ κοράσιον καλὸν τῷ ἔδει (Es 2:7).

• Judith: καὶ ἦν καλὴ τῷ εἴδει καὶ ὡραία τῇ ὄψει σφόδρα, Jud 8:7. See also Jud 10:7, 14, 19.

• Susanna is described as "a very fair woman" (καλὴ σφόδρα, Sus 1:2), "a very delicate woman, and beauteous to behold" (ἡ δὲ Σουσαννα ἦν τρυφερὰ σφόδρα καὶ καλὴ τῷ εἴδει, Sus 1:31).

RELIGIOUS/PIOUS

• Esther: The book reports about Esther's devotion to God: οὕτως γὰρ ἐντετείλατο Μορδοχαῖος φοβεῖσθαι τὸν θεὸν καὶ ποιεῖν τὰ προστάγματα αὐτοῦ ... καὶ Εσθηρ οὐ μετήλλαξεν τὴν ἀγωγὴν αὐτῆς (Es 2:20).

• Judith: Also Judith had a deep devotion to God: ἐφοβεῖτο τὸν θεὸν

σφόδρα (Jud 8:8). Apart from the statement being made that Judith was a pious woman, chapter nine describes her prayer and supplication to the Lord to help her. Judith prayed to God, even as she chopped off Holofernes' head (Jud 13:7) (Freedman 1992:1122).

- Susanna: "one that feared the Lord" (φοβουμένη τὸν κύριον, 1:2).

WISE

- Esther: Although there are no explicit references to Esther or Mordecai as being wise, their cunning behaviour shows some well thought-through wisdom. But it is particularly the schemes and actions of Mordecai that ultimately lead to the rescue of the Jews – with Esther actually being simply a pawn in his game.

- The speech of Judith in chapter 8 displays a lot of insight and wisdom – which is confirmed by Ussiah when he said to her "Today is not the first time that we can see your wisdom" (ὅτι οὐκ ἐν τῇ σήμερον ἡ σοφία σου πρόδηλός ἐστιν, Jud 8:29). So also Holofernes and all his servants marvelled at the wisdom of Judith, astonished that there is no woman like she – so beautiful and so wise (καὶ ἐθαύμασαν ἐπὶ τῇ σοφίᾳ αὐτῆς ... οὐκ ἔστιν τοιαύτη γυνὴ ... ἐν καλῷ προσώπῳ καὶ συνέσει λόγων, Jud 11:20-21). According to Nickelsburg (1981:107), "Judith uses precisely the wisdom of the traditional narrative heroine".

- There is also no clear or explicit reference to Susanna or Daniel being wise. Daniel, however, challenges the Jews about their judicial procedure and calls them "fools" (μωροί, Sus 1:48) – the opposite of being wise – who held their case "without knowledge of the truth" (οὐδὲ τὸ σαφὲς ἐπιγνόντες, Sus 1:48). His wisdom is implied and acknowledged by the elders with the words: "God has given you the 'eldership'" (ὅτι σοὶ δέδωκεν ὁ θεὸς τὸ πρεσβεῖον, Sus 1:50). He makes the clever decision to review the testimony of the two judges by questioning them individually (1:51). Russell (1987:53) is probably

correct in stating that "the qualities of the man Daniel reflect those very qualities most highly prized in the community from which the author came and indicate the concerns prevalent at that time". He highlights the qualities of courage, wisdom and vision.

BEHAVIOUR AND ACTIONS OF THE MAIN CHARACTERS

LEADERSHIP "AT A TIME LIKE THIS"

- *Esther*: There are no explicit references to Mordecai or Esther as leaders, but both took the initiative at crucial times. Mordecai first arrange that Esther be included amongst the "beautiful virgins" and then summons her later not to think only of herself "*in a time like this*" (ἐν τούτῳ τῷ καιρῷ and εἰς τὸν καιρὸν τοῦτον, 4:14 *bis*).

- *Judith*: There are also no explicit references to Judith as a leader, but she took the initiative to save her people. Levine (2004:215) pointed out that Judith functions in such roles as judge, prophet, ambassador and priest. Judith 8:10 describe how Judith has sent her woman slave to call the city magistrates Ussiah, Gabris and Garmis to come to her. She delivers her speech to them (8:11-27) and challenges them: "Who are they to think that they can test God *on a day as today* (ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ σήμερον) and therefore showing openly that they think they are more important than God?" (8:12). They should not surrender the city but should wait until God saves them (8:17). Judith herself enters the camp of Holofernes and prays in her heart to the Lord God to look at this present moment (ἐν τῇ ὥρᾳ ταύτῃ, Jud 13:4), for "now is the time" (ὅτι νῦν καιρός, Jud 13:5).

- In the story of *Susanna,* she "cried out with a loud voice to God" who "heard her voice" (Sus 1:42-44). It is the young man Daniel, however, whose spirit is moved by God and who took the initiative to declare that she is innocent and that he "is clear from the blood of this woman" (Sus

1:45-46). This causes "all the people to turn around in haste" (καὶ ἀνέστρεψεν πᾶς ὁ λαὸς μετὰ σπουδῆς, Sus 1:50).

FEARLESS IN THE FACE OF DEATH

- *Esther* requests that her people fast and pray three days and nights for her and then she will approach the king without being summoned by him – which is against the royal custom. If she then dies, she dies (4:16). Esther then uses her mightiest weapon, her beauty, as an instrument to save her people.

- *Judith* took a similar decision as Esther by going voluntarily into the presence of the very man who seeks to destroy her people. She went forth, out of the city gates and down the mountain (10:9-10). Her beauty gave her entry past the soldiers (10:14, 19, 23), right into the tent of Holofernes, the chief captain of the Assyrian army (10:17, 20-21). She stays three days in the camp (12:7) and beheaded Holofernes the fourth night, passing again by the Assyrian soldiers.

- *Susanna* knows very well that whatever her decision would be, she is destined to die (Sus 1:22). She "sighed" (ἀνεστέναξεν, Sus 1:22) and "cried with a loud voice" (καὶ ἀνεβόησεν φωνῇ μεγάλη, Sus 1:24). She chose to turn down the advances of the two elders rather "than to sin in the sight of the Lord" (ἢ ἁμαρτεῖν ἐνώπιον κυρίου, Sus 1:23).

TRUST IN GOD AND PRAYER

Esther approached God in her moments of fear and anxiety and expressed her trust in God. This becomes clear from the contents of her prayer in LXX Addition C (14:1-19): "… she prayed to the Lord God of Israel, and said: O my Lord, you alone are our King. Help me in desolation – not having a helper, but you. For my danger is in my hand (ἐδεῖτο κυρίου θεοῦ Ισραηλ καὶ εἶπεν Κύριέ μου ὁ βασιλεὺς ἡμῶν, συ εἶ μόνος, βοήθησόν μοι τῇ μόνῃ καὶ μὴ ἐχούσῃ βοηθὸν εἰ μὴ σέ, ὅτι κίνδυνός μου ἐν χειρί μου, 14:3-4); "You are righteous,

O Lord!" (δίκαιος εἶ, κύριε, 14:7); "O King of the gods and of all powers" (βασιλεῦ τῶν θεῶν καὶ πάσης ἀρχῆς ἐπικρατῶν, 14:12).

Judith confesses her trust in the Lord when she spoke to the elders of the city: ἡμεῖς δὲ ἕτερον θεὸν οὐκ ἔγνωμεν πλὴν αὐτοῦ, ὅθεν ἐλπίζομεν ὅτι οὐχ ὑπερόψεται ἡμᾶς οὐδ᾽ ἀπὸ τοῦ γένους ἡμῶν (Jud 8:20). Her trust in God surfaces again in her prayer: σὺ εἶ κύριος συντρίβων πολέμους. Κύριος ὄνομά σοι (Jud 9:7-8).

Susanna too, approached God in her moment of fear on her way to be executed. She prays to the "everlasting God" (Ὁ θεὸς ὁ αἰώνιος, Sus 1:42) who knows all secrets and who knows the false witness that was borne against her (Sus 1:42-43).

ANTAGONISTS

- In Esther, none of the antagonists in the narrative are Jews – whereas the protagonists, Mordecai and Esther who save the king and the Jews, are Jews. The antagonists are Persians and connected to the king's own household: *Vashti* is disobedient to the king (Es 1:12); *Bigthan* and *Teresh* plotted to kill king Ahasuerus (Es 2:21) and *Haman* planned to kill Mordecai and all the Jews (Es 3:6). Mordecai and Haman are pictured as the two dragons in the LXX additions to Esther (Add Es 10:4-7).

- In Judith, the antagonists are *Nebuchadnezzar*, the Assyrian king, and *Holofernes*, the head of his army. The Assyrians, with the leader of their Assyrian army, are posing a danger and a threat to the Jews of Judea – and in this book particularly to the city of Bethulia (Jud 7). Holofernes greatly desired the beautiful Judith since he saw her the first time (Jud 12:16). The fact that a great portion of the book is devoted to males who do little, are absent and lack enthusiasm, might make us consider them also as antagonists.

- In Susanna, the *two elders* who were appointed as judges by the people are the antagonists who falsely accused Susanna of adultery because she refused to submit to their sexual desires. As they saw the beautiful Susanna walking every day in her garden, "their lust was inflamed toward her" and "perverting their own mind" they were "wounded with her love" (Sus 1:8-10). The people who follow the elders blindly, especially Joakim who does nothing, might also here be considered as antagonists (Gruen 2003:173).

PLOT OF THE NARRATIVES - AN UNEXPECTED TURN IN THE EVENTS

- **Esther**: The development of the events leads to the occupation of strategic positions by the Jews, Esther and Mordecai, at the palace of the Persian king. The shrewdness of Haman boomerangs in the story. He is not honoured by the king and dies ironically by the very same gallows that he constructed for Mordecai – who is honoured instead and lives. The truth is finally revealed. The desperation of the Jews is unexpectedly turned around and they are saved. All of this because of Esther's courage and beauty that made the king change his decree. Niditch identified four major plot moves in Esther: (1) the story of Vasthi's banishment, (2) the story of Esther's becoming queen, (3) the brief story of Mordecai's saving the king, (4) the most important story of Esther's saving Mordecai and her people (Niditch 2004:32).

- **Judith**: The reign of terror of the Assyrian general Holofernes and king Nebucadnezzar poses a life threat to the people of Betulua. Holofernes is eliminated due to the courage and beauty of the Jewish woman, Judith, who entered the camp of the enemy by enticing him and chopped off his head. The desperation of the Jews is unexpectedly turned around and they are saved when Judith arrived back in Betulua

with the head of the army leader.

- **Susanna**: The two judges bear false witness by accusing Susanna of adultery. After initially being sentenced to death, the truth is revealed due to the intervention of Daniel. The desperation of Susanna is unexpectedly turned around and she is saved. According to Doran (1986:300), the "narrative structure shows that the plot functions primarily to highlight the success of the young man". Daniel is thus the hero of the story, and not Susanna. One obvious difference between the story of Susanna and the stories of Esther and Judith is that the confrontation in the latter two is between Jew and non-Jew. In Susanna, however, the confrontation is between Jew and Jew (Collins et.al. 1993:437).

RESULT AND MESSAGE

The narratives show clear signs of a mixture between beauty and love, on the one hand, and toughness and war, on the other hand, as combined characteristics to be found in each of these three women characters. Such characteristics point to mythological undertones and to the possible sharing of these elements from existing mythological women figures. Such an "inter-textual" merging of mythological features was no strange phenomenon as was pointed out by Creuzer in his discussion on the situation in Ephesus.[13]

> No one doubts Judith's cleverness or courage. But many have questioned her character and conduct. To be sure, she prayed constantly and fasted frequently (8:4–8); she ate only kosher foods even in the crises of life (12:1–2, 19); she honored the memory of her deceased husband by never remarrying; and she did all the

---

[13] "Es vereinigen sich im Ephesischen Gottesdienste augenscheinlich *Medisch-Persische, Aegyptische, Libysche, Scythische* und *Cretensische* Elemente" (Creuzer 1973:517).

proper things right before she died (16:22–24). But in her dealings with Holofernes she was a shameless flatterer (11:7–8), a bold-faced liar (11:12–14, 18–19), and a ruthless assassin (13:7–8; "a clever and resourceful assassin" (Nickelsburg 1981:106; cf. also Freedman 1996:1122).

AN EXISTING COMMON AND RECURRING PATTERN?

The narrative structure of Esther,[14] Judith and Susanna display some striking common elements. Especially the narrative patterns of Esther and Judith, where the conflict is between Jew and non-Jew, are very similar. The "narrow escape from oppressors in exile is a favorite, indeed central, Israelite literary *typos*" (Niditch 2004:45, following Gerleman 1966:10-28; 1973:11-23). Even the narrative pattern of Susanna, where the conflict is between Jew and Jew, is very similar to the other two. The elements of the narrative are present, though in a different order and with the male, Daniel – and not the female, Susanna – as the saviour character. These elements can be illustrated as follows:

Element	Esther	Judith	Susanna
1. A king, the city and palace	Persian king, Ahasuerus, at Susa	Assyrian king, Nebucadnezzar, at Nineve	*A garden in Babylon, at the time of king Nebuchadnezzar*
2. Humiliation of the king	Vasthi does not obey his order	Western regions and Persia don't obey his orders	*Susanna declines the advances of the two judges – they are humiliated*

---

[14]   Niditch identified a pattern of "problem-plan-resolution" in each of the story lines of the fall of Vasthi, rise of Esther, Mordecai who saves the king, and the saving of Mordecai and the Jews (2004:33-41).

Element	Esther	Judith	Susanna
3. A plan to restore his honour	Condemnation of Vasthi, appointment of new queen	Condemnation of regions, declaration of war	*Conspiracy to rape Susanna*
4. A loyal outsider	Mordecai	Agior	*Daniel*
5. Military leader and threat	Haman	Holofernes	*Two judges (representing King and General?)*
6. A woman: beautiful, religious and courageous	Esther	Judith	*Susanna*
7. The woman's daring plan	Enter the king's court without his request. Plea to change the proclamation	Enter the General's tent and execute him.	*Susanna rejects the advances of the judges, their ultimatum and faces death. Daniel challenges the judicial process and appeals for another hearing*
8. The woman's prayer	Esther's prayer before taking the risk	Judith's prayer before taking the risk	*Susanna's prayer on her way to be executed*
9. Execution of the military leader (antagonist)	Haman dies by his own gallows	Holofernes dies by his own sword – through the hand of a woman	*Two judges are executed as false witnesses*
10. Joy because of salvation by the woman's act	Jews may defend themselves and	Jews attack their enemy and win the battle	*Susanna is released, though through Daniel*

Element	Esther	Judith	Susanna
	win the battle		
11. God is praised	*The city of Sushan rejoiced and was glad (8:15)*	*The people worshipped God (13:17)*	*God is praised (1:60)*

The intention is not to force the narrative pattern here – especially with regard to Susanna – but to indicate the similarities. The narrative patterns of some of the Persian (Ishtar), Egyptian (Isis) and Greek (Aphrodite) mythological stories show similar traces. Neither space nor time allows us to pursue those here. However, turning to the Jewish world itself, when the above narrative pattern and its different elements are compared with the story of Deborah (Judg 4-5), there are definitely some striking similarities to be noted here:

Element	**Deborah**
1. A king, the city and palace	Canaanite king, Jabin
2. Humiliation of the king	*The honour of God's people is at stake*
3. A plan to restore his honour	*War against the Canaanite king Jabin*
4. A loyal outsider	Barak
5. Military leader and threat	Sisera
6. A woman: beautiful, religious and courageous	Deborah (beautiful not explicitly mentioned)
7. The woman's daring plan	Attack Sisera.
8. The woman's prayer	Song of Deborah
9. Execution of the military leader (antagonist)	Jael executes him.

10. Joy because of salvation by the woman's act	In Song of Deborah
11. God is praised	In Song of Deborah

This connection with Deborah was already noted before and one can thus not unqualifiedly agree with Wahl that narratives such as Ruth and Judith highlight women as protagonists for the first time (Wahl 2001:118). Kaiser (2004:42), for instance, noted that Judith is obviously "portrayed as a second Jael and Deborah", but also sees numerous other Biblical motifs and features of other prominent Biblical characters at play here. DeSilva (2002:95) too, made this connection. Van Henten (2004:224-252), in turn, noticed some other Biblical connections and compared Judith 7-13 with Exodus 17, Numbers 20 and Deuteronomy 33:8-11. Gruen (1998:125) found a connection between Judith's prayer to God before entering the camp of Holofernes and the slaughter at Shechem: "the Lord had delivered its inhabitants to destruction in answer to Israelite pleas and as vengeance for the pollution of a virgin". The fact of recurring motifs and intertextual connections is widely supported in scholarship and the same applies to the book of Esther (Berlin 2001:14). Berg (1979) compared, for instance, also the story of Joseph with those of Esther and Judith.

If these narratives are novels, what prompted their origin? At a time when men do not display the qualities they should, a young woman arises as a single figure and display the courage, wisdom, faith and leadership – and thereby saving not only her people (Esther & Judith) but also their religious values (Susanna? & Judith). Justice will prevail at the end. The mood of the Purim festival (Esther) is "the celebration of deliverance by a people faced time and time again with the threat of extinction" and is similar to the story of Daniel (West 1981:469). Judith "emphasizes patriotic loyalty to the law, which will effect deliverance from foreign invaders" (Ferguson 1993:417).

Gruen's opinion regarding these kinds of narratives is that "Jewish writers

helped to build the confidence of their fellow Jews with a series of stories that gave their religion, their holy books, and their special shrewdness privileged positions within the councils of the realm". He, furthermore, states that Hellenistic writers "had astonishingly wide scope in manipulating biblical tales, whether by radical amplification of received texts or liberal infusion of new material" (Gruen 1998:187).

CONCLUSION

Baskin wrote that, "The literary documents of Rabbinic Judaism are complex multi-stranded texts that interweave traditions, motifs, and influences from a variety of sources, time periods, and diverse environments, reflective of the extended duration of their composition and redaction" (Baskin 2001:177). This can be clearly seen in the resurfacing of the motif of a beautiful, wise and religious woman, but one who is courageous and tough too.

Probably modelled on the story of Deborah, the beautiful but tough Jewish women characters, Esther and Judith, align themselves with pagan rulers and thereby save their people through their beauty, intelligence (wisdom), courage and religious convictions. At least, this is how these narratives are portrayed on the surface level. The big question is, however, whether these women are *really* portrayed as "tough", courageous, displaying leadership roles (particularly as a correction of male leadership) (Van Henten 2004:245) and serving as saviours of their people at crucial moments – or, whether they are merely pictured as role models of ultimate obedience to God and to the expectation of their people, of submission to the men of their nation by being weapons of beauty through whom the enemy can be destroyed by displaying a willingness of self-sacrifice.[15] Are they thus portrayed as heroes, or are they rather portrayed as

---

[15]   In a comparison of the Hebrew text, the LXX and the Alpha-text of Esth 2:8-18,

ultimate objects of obedience, piety, submission and self-sacrifice? Is their "beauty" to be found "in the eye of the beholder"? How tough are our women in their own right?

Susanna is introduced as the daughter of *Hilkia* and wife of *Joachim* and is saved by *Daniel's* intervention. Although her loud cry is in accordance with the prescriptions of the Jewish law (cf. Deut 22:24), it sounds closer to despondency and desperation because of her checkmate situation. Since her accusers "were elders, men of high standing in the community, and judges, their testimony persuaded the congregation which promptly condemned Susanna to death" (Gruen 1998:173) – without listening to or considering her side of the story. Glancy has pointed out, in the case of Susanna, that it is not so much the physical well-being of Susanna herself, when she is threatened with rape and death, but rather the honour of *Joachim's* household that is at stake here. "The tale suitably closes with Susanna's parents and husband rejoicing, not because Susanna is going to live, but because she is innocent of disgracing the household" (Glancy 2004:292). Kottsieper is of a similar opinion: "…nicht das Geschick Susannas (stand) im Mittelpunkt des Interesses, sondern die beiden Alten und Daniel" (Steck, Kratz & Kottsieper 1998:286). Susanna becomes an ultimate example of remaining faithful to the law of God and to her husband – "even though that would mean losing the reputation of being chaste and even her life" (DeSilva 2002:231).

The **LXX Esther** is introduced as the daughter of *Aminadab* and she is guided all the way by means of the wisdom and advice of her uncle *Mordecai*.[16] One might argue that Mordecai used Esther (in return for the favour that he raised her as an orphan?) as an instrument to save the Jewish people by giving her as a wife to the uncircumcised Persian king. He even threatens her that if

---

Kristin De Troyer concluded that particularly the Hebrew and Alpha-texts have clearly been written by men for men (2004:70).

[16]   So, similarly argued in the history of recent research. Cf. Wahl (2001:118-119).

she does not intervene for the Jewish people "at a time like this", that someone else will do so and that her family will be killed anyway (Es 3:14). Esther's terrified, depressing and fatalistic statement, "If I die, I die", probably resonates more the tone of desperation and a point of no return, than that of a brave, courageous, tough leader. Esther Fuchs (1982:149-160) argued along similar lines. Her viewpoint is summarised (but also criticised) by Fox (2001:205-206):

> Fuchs believes that the Esther story undergirds the assumption of patriarchal ideology by showing that a woman should be obedient and submissive, by teaching that women can become national heroines only by fulfilling their assigned roles as wives and mothers, and by showing that women get their way through deceptive and circuitous means.

Even in the case of one of the much earlier possible "mother" versions of this narrative, Deborah is introduced as wife of *Lappidoth*, and Jael is introduced as the wife of *Heber* the Kenite. It is ultimately the army of *Barak* that is instrumental in winning the physical battle and Sisera is the only escapee. Nevertheless, at least in the case of Judith the situation seems to be different and she has been contrasted with Esther.[17] Or is it the case? According to DeSilva (2002:94-95), Judith was written to entertain and to instruct. Furthermore,

> Judith is, from beginning to end, a moral tale, reinforcing for its hearers the basic theology of the Deuteronomistic History, presenting Judith as a model of piety and rigorous observance of God's covenant, affirming the efficacy of prayer coupled with faithful action, and encouraging confidence in the God of Israel and in the ability of the Torah-observant Jew to become a vehicle through which God may benefit God's people (DeSilva 2001:85).

---

[17] Enslin & Zeitlin argued that "Judith was written to neutralize the book of Esther" (1972:14).

In this sense, Judith seems to be "an inspirational example of piety, dedication to God, and courage" (DeSilva 2001:95; cf. also Moore 1985:62; Enslin & Zeitlin 1972:14). Maybe much more research is needed, not only investigating the purpose behind the origins of the narratives of Esther, Judith and Susanna, but also the psychology of the cultural context within which the narratives originated as well as their implied persuasive function meant for the communities to whom they were directed.

Finally, it can only be agreed with Rogerson and Davies (1989:230): "Narrative is a form that knows no boundaries either of form or imagination, of length, scope, or style. … Narrative is, in fact, the predominant mode of Old Testament literature, and the vehicle for most of its philosophy, theology, and anthropology".

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Baskin, J R 2001. Woman as other in rabbinic literature, in Neusner, Vol 2, Part 3, 2001:177-196.

Baumgartner, W 1926. Susanna: Die Geschichte einer Legende, *ARW* 24:259–290. [Also in *idem*, 1959. *Zum Alten Testament und seiner Umwelt: Ausgewählte Aufsätze.* Leiden: Brill].

_____ 1929. Der Weise Knabe und die des Ehebruches Beschuldigte Frau, *ARW* 27:187-188.

Beal, T K 2004. Tracing Esther's beginnings, in Brenner 2004:87-110.

Berg, S B 1979. *The Book of Esther: motifs, themes, and structure.* SBL Diss Ser 44. Missoula: Scholars Press.

Berlin, A 2001. The book of Esther and ancient storytelling, *JBL* 120:3-14.

Brenner, A (ed.) 2004. *A feminist companion to Esther, Judith and Susanna*. London: T & T Clark.

Charles, R H 1971. *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*. Volume 1. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Coleman, ND 1932. Judith, in Gore 1932:58-62.

Collins, J J, Cross, F M & Collins, A Y 1993. *Daniel: A commentary on the book of Daniel.* Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.

Crawford, S W 2003. Not according to rule: women, the Dead Sea Scrolls and Qumran, in Paul 2003:127-150.

Creuzer, G F 1973. *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker, besonders der Griechen.*

Hildesheim/New York: Georg Olms Verlag.

Delcor, M 1967. Le Livre de Judith et l'époque grecque, *Klio* 49:151-179.

DeSilva, D A 2002. *Introducing the Apocrypha: message, context and significance*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

De Troyer, K 1997. *Het einde van de alpha-tekst van Ester: vertaal- en verhaaltechniek van MT 8,1-17, LXX 8,1-17 en AT 7,14-41*. Leuven: Peeters Press. [English: De Troyer, K 2000. *The end of the alpha text of Esther. Translation and narrative technique in MT 8:1-17, LXX 8:1-17, and AT 7:14-41*. Septuagint and cognate studies series 48. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature].

De Troyer, K 2004. An oriental beauty parlour: an analysis of Esther 2.8-18 in the Hebrew, The Septuagint and the Second Greek Text, in Brenner 2004:47-70.

Dines, J M & Knibb, M A (eds.) 2004. *The Septuagint*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.

Doran, R 1986. Narrative literature, in Kraft & Nickelsburg 1986:287-310.

Engel, H 1985. *Die Susanna-Erzählung: Einleitung, Übersetzung und Kommentar zum Septuaginta-Text und zur Theodotion-Bearbeitung*. OBO 61. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht.

Enslin, M S & Zeitlin, S 1972. *The book of Judith*. Jewish Apocryphal Literature 7. Leiden: Brill.

Ferguson, E 1993. *Backgrounds of early Christianity*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Flint, P W 2001. The shape of the "Bible" at Qumran, in Neusner, Vol 3, Part 5, 2001:51-54.

Fox, M V 2001. *Character and ideology in the book of Esther*. Studies on Personalities of the Old Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Freedman, D N 1992. *The Anchor Bible dictionary*. Vol 3. New York: Doubleday.

Fuchs, E 1982. Status and role of female heroines in the biblical narrative, *Mankind Quarterly* 23:149-160.

Gerleman, G 1966. *Studien zu Esther: Stoff-Struktur, Stil-Sinn*. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag.

_____ 1973. *Esther*. BKAT 21. Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag.

Glancy, J A 2004. The accused: Susanna and her readers, in Brenner 2004:288-302.

Goldman, S 1990. Narrative and ethical ironies in Esther, *JSOT* 47:15-31.

Gore, C et al. (eds.) 1932. *A new commentary on Holy Scripture including the Apocrypha*. London: SPCK.

Gruber, M I 2001. Women in the religious system of Qumran, in Neusner, Vol 3, Part 4, 2001:173-196.

Gruen, E S 1998. *Heritage and Hellenism. The reinvention of Jewish tradition*. London: University of California Press.

_____ 2003. *Diaspora: Jews amidst Greeks and Romans*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

How, J C H 1932. Esther, in Gore 1932:303-307.

Jackowski, K A 1989. Holy disobedience in Esther, *ThToday* 45:403.

Jellicoe, S 1989. *The Septuagint and modern study*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.

Jobes, K H 1996. *The Alpha-Text of Esther: its character and relationship to the*

Masoretic Text. SBL Diss Ser 153. Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.

Jobes, K H & Silva, M 2000. *Invitation to the Septuagint.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.

Kaiser, O 2004. *The Old Testament Apocrypha. An introduction.* Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers.

Koenen, K 1998. Von der todesmutigen Susanna zum begabten Daniel: zur Überlieferungsgeschichte der Susanna-Erzählung, *ThZ* 54:1-13.

Kottsieper, I 1998. *Esther und Daniel.* ATD 5. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Kraft, R A & Nickelsburg, W E (eds) 1986. *Early Judaism and its modern interpreters.* Atlanta: Scholars Press.

Lamparter, H 1972. *Die Apokryphen II: Weisheit Salomos, Tobias, Judith, Baruch.* Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag.

Levine, A-J 2004. Sacrifice and salvation: otherness and domestication in the Book of Judith, in Brenner 2004:208-223.

MacKenzie, R A F 1957. The meaning of the Susanna story, *Can J Theol* 3:211-218.

Moore, C A 1985. *Judith.* AB 40. Garden City: N.Y., Doubleday.

Nagel, P 2006. An investigation of the theologically explicit insertions in the Greek translations of the Hebrew version of Esther. Unpublished Masters Thesis: Ancient Languages and Culture, University of Pretoria.

Neusner, J et.al. (eds.) 2001. *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, Vol 2, Part 3. Leiden: Brill.

_____ 2001. *Judaism in Late Antiquity.*Vol 3, Part 4. Leiden: Brill.

_____ 2001. *Judaism in Late Antiquity*, Vol 3, Part 5. Leiden: Brill.

Nickelsburg, G W E 1981. *Jewish literature between the Bible and the Mishnah.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Niditch, S 2004. Esther: folklore, wisdom, feminism and authority, in Brenner 2004:26-46.

Nuñes Carreira, J 1973. O gênero literário de 'Judite' eo Macabeus, *Didaskalia* 3:215-230.

Paul, S M, et al. (eds.) 2003. *Emanuel: studies in Hebrew Bible, Septuagint and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honor of Emanuel Tov.* Leiden/Boston: Brill.

Pfeiffer, R H 1949. *History of the New Testament times with an introduction to the Apocrypha*. New York: A & C Black.

Rogerson, J & Davies, P 1989. *The Old Testament world.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Russell, D S 1987. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Steck, O H, Kratz, R G & Kottsieper, I 1998. *Das Buch Baruch. Der Brief des Jeremia. Zu Ester und Daniel.* ATD Apokryphen Band 5. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

Swete, H B 1914. *Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Van der Watt, J & Tolmie, F (eds.) 2005. *Apokriewe Ou en Nuwe Testament. Verlore boeke uit die Bybelse tyd.* Vereeniging: Christelike Uitgewersmaatskappy.

Van Henten, J W 2004. Judith as alternative leader: a rereading of Judith 7-13, in

Brenner 2004:224-252.
Wahl, H M 2001. Esther-Forschung, *ThR* 66:103-130.
West, J K 1981. *Introduction to the Old Testament*. London: Collier Macmillan.
Würthwein, E 1969. *Die fünf Megilloth.* HAT 18. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
Zenger, E 1981. *Das Buch Judith.* JSHRZ. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus.

Gert J Steyn
Department of New Testament Studies
University of Pretoria
Pretoria
e-mail: Gert.Steyn@up.ac.za