

Judith and Elene
Dr. Brian McFadden
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Deuterocanonical / apocryphal books

- Tobit
- Judith
- parts of Esther
- 1 Maccabees
- 2 Maccabees
- Wisdom
- Ecclesiasticus
- Baruch
- parts of Daniel

Book of Judith

- Surviving text in Greek, but probably had Hebrew source - Hellenized Jews at Alexandria
 - Judaism does not regard the book as canonical
 - Our version follows the Vulgate
- Roman/Orthodox/Eastern Rite churches regard as part of Scripture, but some disputes
 - Western/Eastern church fathers divided over canonicity
 - Follows the canon of St. Augustine; Council of Nicaea (325)
 - Deuterocanonical text - Council of Trent (1545-63) finalized its status for the Roman church
- Many Protestant denominations regard it as apocryphal (related to Scripture but not part)
 - St. Jerome translated it but notes that Jews did not recognize its canonicity
 - Martin Luther thought it was a good story, but not deserving of canonicity

Why have scholars had problems with Book of Judith?

- Historical errors - kings, reigns, events, etc. are out of place in several passages
- Geographical errors - places mentioned don't fit narrative order
- Deceit/trickery in God's name
- Assassination, not battle, is how Judith wins
- Sexual content

What's missing from the OE

- Chap. 1 - Nebuchadnezzar is fighting Arphaxad of the Medes - calls on neighbors for help, but he is generally ignored
- Defeats Arphaxad on his own, but is ticked off at most of Middle East
 - Never ruled Assyrians; was Babylonian
 - Peoples mentioned are not specific nor realistically in the right places

What's Missing 2

- Chaps. 2 and 3 - Nebuchadnezzar declares war on all who refused him, wants to be

worshipped

- Sends armies under Holofernes to conquer their territories - shows little mercy to the conquered
- Stops at borders of Judea to prepare
 - Name of Artaxerxes' officer, not Nebuchadnezzar's
 - Nebuchadnezzar dies about 20 years before the Jews had returned from the Babylonian Captivity - time frame is off
 - Neither Assyrians nor Babylonians practiced emperor worship
 - Campaign path is not geographically accurate

What's Missing 3

- Chaps. 4, 5, 6 - Israelites receive word of oncoming army and are alarmed
- Military preparations
- Fasting and prayers to be delivered
- Holofernes holds council of war
 - Achior, his lieutenant, suggests that the Jews' God will defend them because they are observant of their religious duties
 - he is laughed at, bound, and dumped near Bethulia, a Jewish city
 - he warns the Bethulians of Holofernes' plan and is honored by them for his help

What's missing 4

- Chaps. 7, 8, 9 - Holofernes avoids Bethulians in battle but encircles them, cutting off water and supplies
- Talk of surrender - Uzziah, the leader, says to wait five days for divine aid and then surrender
- Judith's history - widow of Manasseh - tells elders not to give up and that she has a plan
 - Prays for strength and mentions other Jewish heroes who have resisted oppression

What's missing 5

- Judith dresses, takes basket of ritually pure food, brings along servant, and goes to Assyrians, claiming that the Bethulians have sinned and will soon be abandoned by God
- Holofernes invites her to a feast with his officers; is smitten by her beauty and his lust flares up
- OE picks up at this point

Judith the poem

- folios 199-206 of *Beowulf* MS (London, BL, Cotton Vitellius A.xv)
- Missing a section at the beginning; some debate as to how much is missing
 - A lot of narrative missing from the Biblical book
 - A lot of compression of events in the poem
 - Hard to tell what is and isn't there
- Same scribe that finished *Beowulf* - was apparently copied separately and attached later to MS at end

Sexuality/gender elements

- Medieval Christianity - proper ways of expressing sexuality were virginity, conjugality in

marriage, and chaste widowhood

- Remarriage permitted, but the ideal was moving one's love from the material world to the spiritual world
- Pauline influence, especially 1 Cor 7; Col 3; Eph 5
- Paul's ideas were shaped by classical education - desire points one to the world
 - Stoics - distrust of the emotions - rational life as the highest good
 - Cynics - distrust of material/social worlds - intellectual/spiritual life as the highest good
 - Virginity/celebrity could be seen as empowering in a rigid society
- Judith's depiction in the poem owes quite a lot to hagiographical pictures of virgin saints; feminine sexuality contained by religion

What's different

- In Biblical text, Judith is a widow
 - OE - *mægd*, "virgin" - fits into conventions of virgin saints – but no specific indication that she isn't widowed
- Prayer before beheading is to "the Lord God"
 - OE - Father, Son, Spirit - Christian, Trinitarian, and anachronistic
- Offers her post-victory property to God
 - OE - keeps it - fulfills the lord's role in the *comitatus*
- The poem has been recast to fit the cultural surroundings of an A-S audience

The Vercelli Book

- Vercelli, Bibliotheca capitolare cxvii, second half of the tenth century
- southeast of England, possibly Canterbury
 - 23 homilies
 - Six religious poems (*Andreas*, *Fates of the Apostles*, *Dream of the Rood*, *Elene*, *Soul and Body I*, *Homiletic Fragment I*)
 - Possibly brought by an English monk on a trip to Rome, or by English pilgrims *en route* to Rome, or given to an Italian priest who had been in England - no one knows for sure how it ended up in Italy

Life of St. Cyriacus

- Likely source of the poem in the *Acta Sanctorum* for May 4
- Aiming at a literal reading of the events – focuses on the deeds themselves
- Author – maybe Cynewulf – focuses more on finding spiritual meanings of the events than the deeds themselves

Connections to Britain

- Constantine is supposedly a Briton by birth
- A way for the English to connect themselves to the narrative of Christ and the Holy Land

Historical issues

- Huns and Romans fighting at one time, Franks and Romans at another – different wars mashed together
- Legendary elements included in narrative – no guarantee that the True Cross was ever

found

Anti-Semitism

- Very few if any Jews in Anglo-Saxon England; no formal invitation until after the Norman Conquest in 1066
 - Little contact = little understanding
- Very literal scriptural reading – “his blood be on us and on our children”
 - Medieval Christian sense of corporate responsibility for the Crucifixion
- Also, OT Israelites can be seen as heroic, while NT Jews seen as enemies
 - rejection of Christ as Messiah as motivating force