

*Judith*, Debora Levine Gera 2014. Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature (CEJL). Berlin, Boston: de Gruyter. Xii + 571 pp. Hardbound. ISBN 978-3-11-032304-7. 140 Euro.

The present most recent volume in the Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature (CEJL) series by Jewish scholar Debora Levine Gera, the Hebrew University Shalom Horowitz Professor of Classics, offers an excellent commentary on the apocryphal Book of Judith. The fresh translation and commentary is based on Robert Hanhart's edition of the Greek text (Iudit, Septuaginta, Vetus Testamentum Graecum VIII.4; Göttingen, 1979). Gera describes the aim of her translation as follows: "it is meant to be readable, but is also fairly literal, because it seems important to me to preserve the feeling of the Greek original: both its awkward, pseudo-biblical tone and many internal echoes" (viii).

The extensive introduction (3–109) comes in seven sections. "Preliminaries: The Story, Structure, and Message of Judith" (3–10) offers a short outline of the book and an analysis of the theological themes. Gera writes:

Simply put, the story of Judith is one of conflict and reversal, a tale of a crisis and its resolution, and its theological message meshes with the literary means used to tell the tale. Powerful enemies, the Assyrians and their allies, threaten the Israelites, Bethulia, Jerusalem, and the temple, and these enemies are overturned and defeated, thanks to Judith's initiative and God's support. Neither the Assyrian enemy nor the brave heroine is real. We are shown an archetypal enemy - a fictitious, supra-historical tyrant who attempts to attack the Israelites and dares to set himself up as an equal to God - whose plans are overturned by a mere woman, a woman who is a composite figure drawing on many biblical heroines. On one level, the struggle in Judith is between the God of Israel and the heathen king attempting to usurp the place of God, a theological conflict over the identity of the true, supreme deity. On a second level, the conflict is a military and political one, a war between an Imperialist

nation, the Assyrians, and a people, the Israelites, who do not wish to be occupied and conquered. On a third level, dramatic and personal, it is the story of the charged encounter between Judith and Holofernes. All ends well: Judith kills Holofernes, the Israelites rout the Assyrians, and God defeats Nebuchadnezzar, if at a distance and metaphorically (6).

She also discusses various proposals for dividing the book. One major theme of Judith is the contest between Nebuchadnezzar and Israel's God and the demonstration that God is the only true and living God. Next to this external contest, Judith also portrays the internal dissensions within Israel about the right approach to God and about dealing with a crisis when God and his direct intervention seem to have disappeared (9f; "God is a very distant figure in our text. While God is addressed and spoken of regularly by various characters in the story from chapter 4 onwards, He himself is barely present in the work and appears as an actual character only in a single half-verse, where He is said to listen to the Israelites' prayers and to be aware of their tribulations (4:13)", 7). In this context, "Judith interprets God's ways to her fellow Israelites, and demonstrates that active resistance should go hand in hand with prayer and trust in God. Jerusalem and the temple must be protected at all costs. There is to be no submission to a foreign power, and all means, including deception and killing, are legitimate in this context" (10). Thus Judith gains a victory not only over foreign enemies and their alleged god, but also over defeatist Israelites.

The following section describes the transmission of Judith, discussions of its canonicity and curious appearances of Judith in later Jewish tradition from the tenth century onward (11–25). In "Dating Judith: History, Historicity, and Geography" (26–40), Gera sketches the factors involved in determining the date of Judith. While the book is rich in historical, geographical and genealogical detail, these details do not provide any readily identifiable historical background, location or date for the story. The book presents pseudo-history, not wrong history. The date is somewhere between the defeat of Nicanor by Juda in 161 B.C.E. and before the Roman conquest of Judea in 63 B.C.E. (39), more precisely about 100 B.C.E. (44). A further section examines the many biblical influences in Judith (45–56). Its familiarity with the Bible as a

whole is apparent throughout. The author uses figures, situations, and clusters of phrases taken from a wide variety of biblical episodes and weaves them with great skill to his own text. The book is a symphony of biblical allusions (45). In particular, Judith herself, “the beautiful, seductive, and courageous Judith, who is the most complex and composite figure of all, and her deed and character are reminiscent of a whole series of biblical women” (51). Gera also discusses the rhetorical function of the many allusions on pp. 53–56.

Most instructive and a really original contribution of this commentary is the following long section on influences from Greek literature in Judith (57–78). This is where Gera’s background in Classics (see above) comes in fully. In addition to the often observed allusions to classical Greek literature mentioned at the beginning (57f), most interesting and complicated are the storytelling elements in Judith which come from the world of the Oriental, or more specifically, Persian courts, as they are found in Greek writings (58). Gera indicates the considerable overlap between the themes, plot and characters of Judith and those found in Greek authors writing about Persia. Although it cannot be proven, it is likely, particularly in view of the fact that Judith was probably originally written in Greek, that the author was directly acquainted with the writings of Herodotus, Ctesias and Xenophon. However, there are few traces of verbal allusions to these writings. This is in contrast to passages which are based on biblical situations and characters which often include verbal echoes of the underlying biblical texts (78). What are the implications of this observation?

Regarding “Original Language and Milieu” (79–79), Gera concludes that Judith was perhaps written originally in Greek by a Hebrew-speaking Jew well conversant with Greek culture or a Greek-speaking Jew well acquainted with the Bible. The book likely originated in Palestine (95, the attitude is not outward looking as associated with works composed in the Diaspora. “In our book, elements of a diaspora tale are transformed into a story of a Palestinian victory over foreigners”, 96). In the final section, Gera discusses the figure of Judith between feminism and theology (98–109). Judith’s character and qualities as they emerge from the narrative bear no evidence of a female author and no clear indication of female voices or traces of a feminist

perspective. Rather, Judith has the air of a cold and androgynous figure; she appears as an honorary male, rather than a role model for women (102). Gera concludes:

What shall we do with Judith? We should recognize her as the book's most substantial character, an independent, impressive, and complex figure, who cannot be termed feminist by any means. Neither Judith's behaviour, her concerns nor her outlook are those of a flesh and blood woman. The author uses Judith both as a vehicle to tell an exciting and dramatic story and as the chief spokesperson for various theological (and political) ideas, and these are demanding and somewhat contradictory tasks. Judith's role as a *femme fatale* requires that she be beautiful, seductive, and deceptive. She must also be unencumbered by a family and the activities of an ordinary woman if she is to undertake her mission. At the same time, Judith's role as a religious authority demands wisdom, piety and punctilious religious observance, and the author takes pains to present her as an authoritative and moral figure. Judith has much to do and say in our book, but neither her voice nor that of her author is a female voice (109).

The introduction is followed by Gera's fresh translation and commentary (113–476). The volume closes with a bibliography (477–498) and indexes of ancient sources, names and sources and modern authors.

The strength of this commentary lies in its strong and consistent intertextual approach. It serves as a case study in intertextual interpretation. The extent of this intertextuality, not only with biblical texts but also with Hellenistic Greek literature, sheds fresh light on the intensive interaction of early Jews with Greek culture and literature and the way in which they were both ready and able to draw on these traditions in pursuing their own theological agenda. While offering many insights, the volume does not always bring out the full theological implications or present a comprehensive theology of Judith in a section of its own (as a biblical scholar might do), although there are valuable pointers on pp. 5–10 and throughout the volume.

On Judith, see also H. Engel, “Judith, Das Buch Judith”, in Siegfried Kreuzer (ed.), *Einleitung in die Septuaginta, Handbuch zur Septuaginta/Handbook of the Septuagint LXX.H 1* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2016), 279–288 (Engel notes “Es wird noch eingehender zu erforschen sein, inwieweit zur Zeit der Abfassung verbreitete hellenistische Literatur Einfluss auf die Struktur des Buches, Motive und Darstellungsweisen hatte ...”, 288; what Gera has done!) and the recent commentary by B. Schmitz, H. Engel, *Judit*, HThKAT 40 (Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 2014) with a focus different from Gera.

Other volumes in the series *Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature* (projected for 58 vols.) are P. W. van der Horst, *J. H. Newman, Early Jewish Prayers in Greek* (2008); B. J. Wright, *The Letter of Aristeas* (2015); A. Kulik, *3 Baruch* (2010); D. R. Schwartz, *2 Maccabees* (2008); L. T. Stuckenbruck, *1 Enoch 91-108* (2008); W. T. Wilson, *The Sentences of Pseudo-Phocylides* (2012); D. C. Allison, *Testament of Abraham* (2013) and J. A. Fitzmyer, *Tobit* (2002).

**Christoph Stenschke**, *Biblich-Theologische Akademie Wiedenest* and Department of Biblical and Ancient Studies, University of South Africa.

E-mail: [Stenschke@wiedenest.de](mailto:Stenschke@wiedenest.de). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25159/1013-8471/3137>

**Origenes, Die Homilien zum Buch Jesaja**, Fürst, Alfons, C. Hengstermann 2009. *Origenes: Werke mit deutscher Übersetzung Band 10*. Berlin, New York: W. de Gruyter; Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder. Vii + 400 S. Gebunden. ISBN 978-3-11-020436-0; 978-3-451-32915-9.

Dieses Buch gehört zu den ersten Bänden einer neuen eigenständigen Gesamtausgabe (Separatausgabe, also nicht Teil einer anderen Editionsreihe), der Werke des Origenes von Alexandrien, die sich einer gegenwärtigen Origenes-Renaissance verdankt, die sicher auch im Rahmen einer rezeptionsgeschichtlichen Wende in der Bibelwissenschaft hin zur allgemeinen Kulturwissenschaft zu verstehen ist. Im „Editorial“ des ersten Bandes (*Origenes, Die Kommentierung des Buches Genesis:*