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Zenobia of Palmyra and the Book of Judith: Common Motifs in Greek, Jewish, and Arabic Historiography*

JOHAN WESTSTEIJN

Gerard Doustraat 252 iii, 1073 XD Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Abstract

This article points to the many parallels between the book of Judith and the Arabic account of the life and death of Zenobia of Palmyra. By comparing these two stories with the episode about Zopyros in Herodotus' *Histories* and the episode about Sinon in accounts of the fall of Troy, it argues that these similarities can only be explained if we assume that the book of Judith and the Arabic Zenobia Legend are adaptations of the same *Vorlage*, an earlier story that contained a Holofernes motif (heroine kills enemy) and a Sinon motif (enemy deceives heroine). When this *Vorlage* was adapted to create the book of Judith, the part of the deceiving Sinon was adapted to create the role of the sincere Achior, whereby he lost his function in the story and became a blind motif.

Keywords: Book of Judith, Achior, Zenobia of Palmyra (al-Zabbā'), Zopyros, Sinon, Arabic historiography

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The book of Judith has been labelled as one of the most beautiful and at the same time most controversial works of apocryphal literature.¹ One of the debated points is whether Judith was influenced by texts outside the biblical tradition. Classicists and biblical scholars have searched for parallels between the book of Judith and works from Greek historiography.² Another point of debate is the question whether the biblical book is the oldest account of Judith's life, or whether this book was based on pre-existing tales about her struggle with Holofernes. Might traces of such earlier tales be found in the Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic variants of Judith's story that were written down during the Middle Ages?³

In this light it has also been asked whether the two halves of the book of Judith originally belonged together. The first half, chs. 1–7, deals with Holofernes' preparations for war, his vassal Achior warning him against attacking the Jews, and Achior's consequent expulsion to the Israelites. Judith herself only appears in the second half of the story, which deals with her decapitation of Holofernes. Some have found this structurally imbalanced, and have wondered whether the Judith story originally consisted only of the last half, chs. 8–16, to

1. Adolfo D. Roitman, 'Achior in the Book of Judith: His Role and Significance', in James C. VanderKam (ed.), *'No One Spoke Ill of Her': Essays on Judith* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1992), p. 31

2. Moses Hadas, *Hellenistic Culture: Fusion and Diffusion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), pp. 165–69; M. Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus: Studien zu ihrer Begegnung unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Palästinas bis zur Mitte des 2. Jhs. v. Chr.* (Mohr: Tübingen, 1973), pp. 202–10; Arnaldo Momigliano, 'Biblical Studies and Classical Studies: Simple Reflections about Historical Method', *Biblical Archaeologist* 45 (1982), pp. 224–28; Mark Stephen Caponigro, 'Judith, Holding the Tale of Herodotus', in VanderKam (ed.), *'No One Spoke Ill of Her'*, pp. 47–59; Stanley M. Burstein, 'Cleitarchus in Jerusalem: A Note on the Book of Judith', in Frances B. Titchener and Richard F. Moorton (eds.), *The Eye Expanded: Life and the Arts in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), pp. 105–12; Benedikt Otzen, *Tobit and Judith* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), pp. 79–80; Barbara Schmitz, 'Zwischen Achikar und Demaratos: Die Bedeutung Achiors in der Juditerzählung', *BZ* 48 (2004), pp. 19–38; Sara Raup Johnson, *Historical Fictions and Hellenistic Jewish Identity: Third Maccabees in its Cultural Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 24–29 and 46–48.

3. A.M. Dubarle, *Judith: Formes et sens des diverses traditions* (2 vols.; Rome: Institut Biblique Pontifical, 1966), I, p. 129; André-Marie Dubarle, 'Les textes hébreux de Judith et les étapes de la formation du livre', *Biblica* 70 (1989), pp. 255–66; Otzen, *Tobit and Judith*, pp. 137–40; Caponigro, 'Holding the Tale of Herodotus', pp. 57–58.

which the author of the biblical version added chs. 1–7 as a rather long-winded and unnecessary introduction.⁴

The character Achior, finally, has been labelled as ‘one of the greatest mysteries’ of the book of Judith.⁵ Not only does he seem superfluous to the development of the story, but his actions appear inexplicable in a wider biblical context. As a pagan Ammonite and a traditional enemy of the Jews, Achior joins the Israelites, converts to their religion and circumcises himself, despite the prohibition in Deut. 23.3 that ‘no Ammonite is to be admitted to the assembly of Yahweh...for all time’. Up to now, biblical scholars have not been able to find a satisfactory explanation for such a character, neither from a narrative nor a theological point of view.⁶

Here I argue that all the above questions can be answered if we take a third tradition into account, and not only look at the Bible and Greek historiography, but also at Arabic literature: in particular the Arabic version of the life of Zenobia, queen of Palmyra.

Zenobia’s story is generally known from embellished accounts of her life in Greco-Roman history writing.⁷ In the third century CE, after her husband the king was murdered at a banquet⁸ (allegedly on her instigation⁹) the widow Zenobia ascends to the throne of the caravan city Palmyra. With the help of her sister Zaba,¹⁰ she declares herself

4. Caponigro, ‘Holding the Tale of Herodotus’, p. 58.

5. Roitman, ‘Achior in the Book of Judith’, p. 31.

6. H. Cazelles, ‘Le personnage d’Achior dans le livre de Judith’, *Recherches de science religieuse* 39 (1951), pp. 125–37; Schmitz, ‘Zwischen Achikar und Demaratos’, pp. 19–38; Barbara Schmitz, “‘Achior aber glaubte aus ganzem Herzen an Gott’ (Jdt 14,10): Der Ammoniter Achior im Buch Judit (3)”, *Bibel und Liturgie* 78 (2005), pp. 215–19; Mercedes Navarro Puerto, ‘Reinterpreting the Past: Judith 5’, *Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Yearbook* (2006), pp. 115–40.

7. Diederik Burgersdijk, ‘Zenobia’s Biography in the “Historia Augusta”’, *Talanta* 36–37 (2004–2005), pp. 139–51.

8. Zosimus, *Histoire nouvelle* (trans. François Paschoud; Paris: Belles Lettres, 2000), 1.39.2; Zonaras, *The History: From Alexander Severus to the Death of Theodosius the Great* (trans. Thomas M. Banchich and Eugene N. Lane; London: Routledge, 2009), 12.24.

9. *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* (ed. Ernestus Hohl; Leipzig: Teubner, 1965), II, p. 117 (= ‘Tyranni triginta’, 17.2).

10. *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, II, p. 168 (= ‘Divus Aurelianus’, 25.2), reading *sociam* or *sororem* instead of *socium*. See: A.P. Caussin de Perceval, *Essai sur l’histoire des arabes avant l’islamisme, pendant l’époque de Mahomet, et jusqu’à la réduction de toutes les tribus sous la loi musulmane* (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1847), II,

independent from Rome, mints coins with her own image instead of that of the Roman emperor, and establishes Palmyran dominion over large parts of the Levant. In 273 CE, the emperor Aurelian lays siege to her city, destroys it, and leads Zenobia in captivity to Rome. Since then, Palmyra has remained uninhabited, and its ruins stand as a reminder of her fate to this day.

In medieval Arabic historiography, a different, even more legendary account of her life can be found. In this Arabic version, the Romans play only a very minor part or are not mentioned at all: it is a revenge tale of blood feud between Arab tribes. The Arab queen Zenobia (al-Zabbāʾ) is killed and her city destroyed not by Romans but by Iraqi Arabs. The oldest more or less complete version of this Arabic Zenobia Legend is found in the *History of Prophets and Kings*, a universal history by the famous tenth-century historian Tabari.¹¹ Tabari's chronicle appears to contain many quotations from earlier Arabic works which have been lost; in all likelihood, the account of Zenobia's life contained in his work is older than the tenth century.¹²

A comparison of the book of Judith with this Arabic Zenobia Legend provides better insight in the possible relationship between *Judith* and Greek historiography. On the basis of a comparison of these two stories with each other and with a number of selections from Greco-Roman epic and history writing, I will show that they all

p. 30 n. 4; Friedrich Müller, *Studien über Zenobia und Palmyra nach orientalischen Quellen* (Kirchain: Schmiersow, 1902), p. 53. According to one manuscript of the *Historia Augusta*, Zenobia's sister/female ally was also called Zenobia: *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, II, p. 168.

11. Tabari, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk* (ed. M.J. de Goeje; Leiden: Brill, 1879–1901), I, pp. 756–71, translated by Moshe Perlmann as *The Ancient Kingdoms* (The History of al-Tabari: An Annotated Translation, 4; Albany: SUNY, 1987), pp. 138–50. See the comments on Perlmann's translation in Franz-Christoph Muth, 'Zur Übersetzung der Chronik des Tabarī', *Die Welt des Islams* 30 (1990), pp. 192–93. A similar version of the Arabic Zenobia Legend can be found in the work of Tabari's contemporary, Masʿudi: *Les Praries d'or* (trans. Barbier de Meynard and Pavet de Courteille, corr. Charles Pellat; Paris, 1965), II, §§1046–58.

12. Müller, *Studien über Zenobia*; M. Piotrovskij, 'Arabskaja versija istorii caricy Zenobii (az-Zabby)', *Palestinskij Sbornik*, 21 (1970), pp. 170–84; Eugenia Equini Schneider, *Septimia Zenobia Sebaste* (Rome: Bretschneider, 1993), pp. 45–52; Udo Hartmann, *Das palmyrenische Teilreich* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2001), pp. 332–51; Jan Retsö, *The Arabs in Antiquity: Their History from the Assyrians to the Umayyads* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 461–85.

belong to a genre of Near Eastern tales about stratagems for the capture and defence of cities. The stories selected here deal in particular with the ‘fake defector’ stratagem: a member of one of the two enemy camps, either from the besiegers or from the defenders, defects to the other side. This desertion, however, is mere pretence, and only intended to deceive the enemy leader and gain his trust. The alleged defector secretly remains working for his own side. Here I will deal with such stratagems as they are found in stories about the sieges of Troy, Babylon, the fictional Levantine city Bethulia, and Palmyra.

Sinon and the Siege of Troy

The first fake defector stratagem relevant for this analysis is found in the episode of the taking of Troy by the Greeks and their famous ruse of the wooden horse. This story is not part of Homer’s *Iliad*, but must have been known at least since the seventh century BCE, as we can see from images of the Trojan horse on Greek pottery from that period.¹³ Later authors have left us written versions of this episode in Latin and Greek. Virgil relates this story in his *Aeneid* (written 29–19 BCE). Other—Greek—versions are found in the works of Tryphiodorus (Egypt, third or fourth century CE) and Quintus of Smyrna (fourth century CE).¹⁴

When they have built the wooden horse and filled it with soldiers, the Greeks need someone to deceive the Trojans into bringing it inside their city. A man called Sinon volunteers to remain behind while the rest of the Greeks sail away as if they have given up the siege. When he is found by the Trojans, Sinon reveals to them the (alleged) war plans of the Greeks. He tells them that the Greeks have built the wooden horse as an offering to the goddess Athena, and that they built it this big to prevent the Trojans from bringing it inside their walls, for if the Trojans would succeed in doing so, Athena would make Troy invincible.¹⁵ Sinon accounts for his own presence on the beach by

13. The Mykonos vase from 670 BCE: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Mykonos_vase.jpg.

14. Virgil, *Aeneid* (trans. H. Rushton Fairclough; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), Book 2; Tryphiodorus, *The Taking of Ilios* (trans. A.W. Mair; London: Heinemann, 1958); Quintus Smyrnaeus, *The Fall of Troy* (trans. Arthur S. Way; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), Books 12–14.

15. Virgil, *Aeneid* 2.183–94; Tryphiodorus, *Taking* 291–303.

relating that the Greeks had physically punished him and left him behind out of anger because he had advised them not to abandon the siege (Tryphiodorus),¹⁶ or that they had chosen him as a human sacrifice—so the Gods would grant them favourable winds for their voyage back home—but that he had managed to escape and hide (Virgil and Quintus).¹⁷

The three authors differ about the physical state in which Sinon is found by the Trojans. According to Virgil, Sinon is brought before the Trojan king with his hands tied behind his back: ‘A youth whose hands were bound behind his back...he had of free will placed himself in the way of their coming’.¹⁸ According to Tryphiodorus, Sinon is naked and had mutilated himself: to convince the Trojans that the Greeks had punished him for giving them bad advice, he had whipped his own back so it had become covered with weals and blood is flowing from his shoulders.¹⁹ According to Quintus, the Trojans find Sinon unharmed but then torture him while interrogating him about the horse: they whip Sinon, and cut off his ears and nose.²⁰

Troy’s high priest Laocoön and the prophetess Cassandra warn the Trojans that the horse is a ruse,²¹ much to the distress of Athena, who punishes Laocoön.²² Despite these warnings, the inhabitants of the city believe Sinon’s story. Sinon asks for asylum in Troy,²³ forswears his Greek identity and becomes a Trojan.²⁴ After the Trojans have brought the horse within their city, they celebrate that the Greeks have left, drink wine and get drunk.²⁵ At night, Sinon releases the Greek soldiers from the horse; they slaughter the Trojans who lie asleep drunk²⁶ and destroy the city.

16. Tryphiodorus, *Taking* 273-77.

17. Virgil, *Aeneid* 2.108-36; Quintus, *Fall* 12.379-82.

18. Virgil, *Aeneid* 2.57-60.

19. Tryphiodorus, *Taking* 219-20, 227-29, 258-77.

20. Quintus, *Fall* 12.367, 370-71.

21. Virgil, *Aeneid* 2.40-53, 246-47; Tryphiodorus, *Taking* 358-418; Quintus, *Fall* 12.390-94, 525-85.

22. Virgil, *Aeneid* 2.199-231; Quintus, *Fall* 12.395-497.

23. Tryphiodorus, *Taking* 262-67.

24. Virgil, *Aeneid* 2.148; Tryphiodorus, *Taking* 284-87.

25. Tryphiodorus, *Taking* 449; Quintus, *Fall* 13.1-22.

26. Virgil, *Aeneid* 2.265; Tryphiodorus, *Taking* 500-502; 539-41; Quintus, *Fall* 13.21-29.

Zopyros and the Siege of Babylon

Another famous fake defector stratagem is found in the account of the taking of Babylon by the Persian king Darius in 522 BCE, as related in Herodotus' *Histories* (written 450–420 BCE).²⁷ The Persians have used every ruse they can think of in their attempt to capture Babylon, when Zopyros, a vassal of Darius, comes up with a new plan: he will whip himself and cut off his own nose and ears:²⁸

...there was one way only in which he could bring the place under, namely by maiming himself and then going over to the enemy as a deserter. Taking this dreadful expedient as a mere matter of course, he at once put it into practice, and there were no half-measures in the way he set about it: he cut off his nose and ears, shaved his hair like a criminal's, raised weals on his body with a whip...²⁹

Before going over to Babylon, Zopyros arranges with Darius that the latter will three times send a detachment of Persians to attack the city armed with daggers only, and then, on a fourth prearranged date, will attack Babylon with his entire army. After making these arrangements, Zopyros, in his mutilated state, asks for asylum in the city. He tells the inhabitants that he had advised his king to abandon the siege, which had rendered Darius so angry that the king had mutilated him. To revenge himself, Zopyros wants to reveal Darius' plans of war to the Babylonians and work for them. The inhabitants of the city believe Zopyros' story and give him the command over a detachment of Babylonians. Three times Zopyros leaves the city at the head of his Babylonian men and defeats the first three groups of Persian attackers. After this feat, the Babylonians trust him completely; they appoint him as their general and as Guardian of the Wall. However, when Darius attacks the fourth time with all of his army, Zopyros opens the gates of Babylon for the Persians, enabling them to capture and destroy the city.

27. Herodotus, *Histories* (trans. A.D. Godley; London: Heinemann, 1963), 3.150–60.

28. In the Behistun inscription it is written that Darius had cut off the nose and ears of two rebels.

29. Herodotus, *Histories* 3.154.

Qasir and the Siege of Palmyra

A similar fake defector stratagem is found in the story of the taking of Palmyra, as related in the Arabic Zenobia Legend.³⁰ Amr, king of the Iraqi Arabs, wants to kill Palmyra's queen Zenobia, but within her city she is 'harder to catch than an eagle in the sky.' Amr's loyal servant Qasir devises a plan to defeat her. He whips himself and cuts off his own nose and ears:

Qasir said to Amr..., 'Cut off my nose, beat my back and leave her to me.' To this Amr replied, 'I am not going to do that. This is not what you deserve from me.' ...But Qasir cut off his own nose, and covered his back with wounds. So the Arabs say of a ruse, 'Qasir cut off his nose.' ...[The poet] Adi ibn Zayd recited: 'Like Qasir when he found nothing else / Qasir cut off his ears and nose for gratitude.'³¹

After mutilating himself, Qasir travels to Palmyra and tells Zenobia that he has been punished by his master Amr for giving him bad advice, and asks her to grant him asylum. Due to his wounds, Zenobia believes Qasir's story, welcomes him in her city and gives him a high position at her court as her new advisor. When he feels Zenobia has come to trust him, Qasir tells her that on his flight from Iraq he has left behind his possessions, among them precious Iraqi clothes and perfumes. Zenobia sends him with a caravan to Iraq, where Qasir asks Amr to equip him 'with all manners of clothes and other goods. Qasir then returned to Zenobia and displayed it all to her. She liked what she saw and was pleased, and her trust and confidence in him increased.' Three times Zenobia sends Qasir with a caravan to Iraq, but on the third trip Qasir asks Amr to load each camel not with clothes and perfumes, but with two soldiers hidden in sacks. Qasir's ruse succeeds. When the camels kneel down in the centre of town, the Iraqi soldiers get out of the sacks and attack the inhabitants of Palmyra. Zenobia tries to escape but Amr, who had followed the caravan, strikes her with his sword and kills her.

30. Tabari, *Tārīkh*, I, pp. 761-66.

31. Tabari, *Tārīkh*, I, p. 763.

Zenobia and the Defence of Palmyra

In the Arabic Zenobia Legend, the episode about Qasir's ruse to deceive the Palmyrans is preceded by an episode in which Zenobia herself uses a ruse to deceive the Iraqis.³² This ruse had allowed her to kill the previous Iraqi king, Amr's uncle Jadhima. Both Qasir and Zenobia use fake defector stratagems: they pretend they want to join the other side, but whereas Qasir mutilates himself to deceive his enemy, Zenobia uses her feminine seductiveness.

Zenobia wants to kill Jadhima because he has slain her father on the field of battle and she sees it as her obligation to exact revenge. Zenobia's sister Zubayba (literally 'little Zenobia') warns her about the risks of open war and advises her to resort to a ruse: she should pretend that she is willing to surrender herself to the Iraqi king and that she wants to join sides with him. Zenobia writes Jadhima a letter to invite him to her city, marry her, and bring their two kingdoms under a single crown. When this letter arrives in Iraq, Qasir warns his master several times that it is a ruse and that Zenobia should not be trusted, but his advice is not heeded and Jadhima travels to Palmyra.

When the Iraqi king arrives at her court, Zenobia takes off her clothes and reveals that her pubic hair is so long that it has been braided: 'When she saw him, she uncovered and, lo and behold, the hair of her pudendum was plaited'. The fact that her pubis has not been shaved means she is ritually impure and not ready to have intercourse with her suitor.³³ She seats her guest on an animal skin and gives him wine to drink from a golden cup until he is drunk. Zenobia tells him ominously that she has heard that royal blood is a cure against madness, and, instead of cutting off Jadhima's head—'Out of respect for royalty, kings were not killed by decapitation except in battle'—she orders his veins to be cut so he will bleed to death. She tries to collect Jadhima's blood in the golden cup from which he has just drunk wine. Zenobia had been told that if all of his blood is

32. Tabari, *Tārīkh*, I, pp. 757-61.

33. See also Robbert Woltering, 'Zenobia or Al-Zabbā': The Modern Arab Literary Reception of the Palmyran Protagonist', in *Middle Eastern Literatures* (forthcoming). In Mas'udi's version, when Zenobia reveals her unshaved private parts to Jadhima, he replies that they look like those of an uncircumcised slave. He compares being unshaven to being uncircumcised: *Prairies* §1049: 'O Djadhīma, comment trouves-tu la « chose » de l'épousée [que tu vois] ?—Celle d'une esclave dégoûtante sans pudeur.' §1050: 'Celles d'une esclave au long clitoris'.

collected in the bowl, his murder would not be avenged, so she would not have to live in fear of retaliation by his relatives. Zenobia's stratagem succeeds: using the weapon of seduction, she is able to take revenge on her enemy without the risks of open warfare, but her victory is not complete. Some drops of Jadhima's blood do spill outside the cup, which she then tries to absorb with a piece of cotton in her perfume container.³⁴

Achior and the Siege of Bethulia

The book of Judith contains a number of elements that are reminiscent of the episodes just discussed. It relates how the Assyrian king Nebuchadnezzar wants to exact revenge on the Israelites, because they have refused to assist him in his war against one of his enemies.³⁵ Nebuchadnezzar sends his general Holofernes to capture the mountain city of Bethulia that provides access to Jerusalem and the rest of Judea. However, one of Holofernes' commanders, the Ammonite Achior, advises his lord not to attack the Israelites, for he has heard that as long as they do not sin, their God will defend them and render them invincible.³⁶ Holofernes' men do not believe Achior. They assume that their own army is so numerous and the Jews so weak that they 'will be food' for them.³⁷ The men suggest that Achior should be 'thrashed'.³⁸

Like his men, Holofernes believes that his cavalry will 'eat' the Israelites and that the mountains will be 'drunk with their blood'.³⁹ He decides that Achior should be handed over to the enemy to perish with them. Holofernes' servants tie Achior up and leave him within sight of the city, where he is found by the Bethulians who untie him, bring him into their city and present him to their leaders.⁴⁰

34. Mas'udi, *Prairies* §1049: 'Zénobie fit clarifier le sang de la victime et le conserva dans une vase'.

35. Jdt. 1.12; 2.1.

36. 5.17-21.

37. 5.24. Roger A. Bullard and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on Tobit and Judith* (New York: United Bible Societies, 2001), p. 309: 'The Greek is literally "they will be food for your whole army"'.

38. 5.22. Enslin, *Book of Judith*, p. 92, n. 22: 'The common translation "put him to death" scarcely renders συνκόψαι, which is commonly used for "pound well" or "thrash soundly"'. See also Bullard, *Handbook*, p. 308, and Moore, *Judith*, 5:22.

39. 6.4.

40. 6.10-14. Enslin, *Book of Judith*, pp. 97-98.

Achior reveals to the Israelites what has been discussed at Holofernes' war council.⁴¹ The Bethulians praise Achior highly and their leader invites him to a banquet at his house.⁴² In the end, Achior becomes an Israelite, converts to Judaism, and completes his assimilation by taking the drastic measure of cutting off his own foreskin.⁴³

Judith and the Defence of Bethulia

Just as Qasir had advised Amr to use a ruse against Zenobia, and just as Zenobia's sister had advised her to refrain from open war against the Iraqis, Holofernes' generals advise him on a course of action by which he can exact revenge⁴⁴ on the Israelites without raising the sword against them and without losing a single man of his army.⁴⁵ He should not attack the Bethulians openly but cut off their water supply in order to starve them.⁴⁶ This plan seems to work, the Bethulians suffer from thirst⁴⁷ and are about to surrender, when one of them, the beautiful widow Judith, devises a ruse. She removes her widow's clothing and puts on precious ointment, her marital clothing, and jewellery, 'so as to beguile the eyes of as many as should see her'. Then she gives her maid a skin of wine, a jug of oil, and a bag of food.⁴⁸

Judith and her maid leave the city, and when they meet Holofernes' guards she tells them she is running away from the Israelites, because

41. 6.17.

42. 6.20-21.

43. 14.10. Enslin, *Book of Judith*, p. 160: περιέτέμετο τὴν σάρκα τῆς ἀκροβυστίας αὐτοῦ. Modern translators tend to render this phrase in the passive (Enslin: 'he got the flesh of his foreskin circumcised'), but the Greek uses a verb in the middle voice, which generally means that the subject performs the action *on his own body*; see James Morwood, *The Oxford Grammar of Classical Greek* (Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 60. The Vulgate uses an active verb and further emphasizes that Achior cut off the flesh of his *own* foreskin: *circumcidit carnem praeputii sui* (14.6); see Enslin, *Book of Judith*, p. 35. The KJV and the Douay-Rheims Bible translate both the Greek and the Latin as: '[he] circumcised the flesh of his foreskin'. The same expression is used in Gen. 17.24, where Abraham also circumcises himself.

44. 7.15. Enslin, *Book of Judith*, p. 104, n. 15. ἀνταποδώσεις ἀνταπόδομα, 'retaliate with a retaliation'.

45. 7.11.

46. 7.10-14.

47. 7.20-22.

48. 10.4-5.

they are about to be given to their enemies ‘as food’.⁴⁹ Judith tells them she will show their leader a way by which he can capture Bethulia without losing a single one of his men.⁵⁰ The guards, struck by her beauty, lead Judith to Holofernes’ quarters. Judith tells him that Achior was right: as long as the Israelites do not sin, no one can exact revenge⁵¹ upon them or raise the sword against them. Judith also reveals, however, that the Israelites are about to break under the pressure of the siege and will soon start eating non-kosher food, even going so far, according to the Vulgate, as to drink their animals’ blood.⁵² She herself will reveal to Holofernes the exact moment of this violation; every night she will leave the camp for the open field to pray to God that He may tell her when the Bethulians have started to sin⁵³ so Holofernes and his army can attack them. Holofernes invites Judith to eat his food and drink his wine,⁵⁴ but Judith declines the invitation to share his meal because it is ritually impure: she only wants to eat the kosher food she brought in her food bag.⁵⁵

According to a variant of the Judith story, that is preserved in, among others, a tenth-century Hebrew version from Iraq⁵⁶ and an eleventh-century Judeo-Arabic version from North-Africa,⁵⁷ Holofernes openly asks Judith to sleep with him on this first night. Judith declines his invitation under the pretence that she herself is ritually impure: she is menstruating and intercourse has to be postponed till

49. 10.12. Bullard, *Handbook*, p. 410.

50. 10.13. Bullard, *Handbook*, p. 411: ‘And he will not lose one flesh or one spirit of life of his men’.

51. 11.10. Reading ἐκδικᾶται as a form of the verb ἐκδικάζω, ‘to avenge’. See Enslin, *Book of Judith*, p. 138 n. 10. Statenbijbel 11.8 reads: ‘Want over ons geslacht wordt geen wraak genomen, en het zwaard overweldigt het niet, tenzij dat zij tegen hun God gezondigd hebben’.

52. 11.11-15. Enslin, *Book of Judith*, pp. 35 and 139 n. 12.

53. 11.17.

54. 12.1.

55. 12.2.

56. M. Gaster, *An Unknown Hebrew Version of the History of Judith*. Reprinted from: *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* (March 1894), pp. 156-63, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/46776022/Judith-Short-Hebrew-Version>.

57. Nissim ben Jacob Ibn Shāhīn, *An Elegant Composition Concerning Relief after Adversity* (trans. W.M. Brinner; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), pp. 92-95. See also Dubarle, *Judith*, I, pp. 128, 134. More versions of this variant of the Judith story with the menstruation motif quoted and translated into French by Dubarle, *Judith*, II, pp. 98-177.

the next day when her period will have ended. This night she will have to leave the camp to purify herself at a fountain near Bethulia.⁵⁸

According to the Bible, Judith asks Holofernes to order his men to allow her to leave the camp so she can go out to pray. On three consecutive nights Judith leaves the camp to pray to God and, as the Bible specifies, to wash herself in a fountain.⁵⁹ On the fourth night, Holofernes can no longer control his desire and feels he will lose face if he does not sleep with her, so he invites Judith to eat and drink wine with him in his tent and ‘become like a daughter of the Assyrians’.⁶⁰ Judith, as the guest, is seated on animal skins, and Holofernes gets drunk:

...Her slavegirl came forward and strewed on the ground for her before Holofernes the lambskins which she had received from Bagoas for her daily use, that she might recline on them as she ate. And Judith came in and reclined...and taking, she ate and drank before him what her slave had prepared. And Holofernes was enraptured with her and drank exceeding much wine, more than he had ever drunk in one day since he was born.⁶¹

When Holofernes lies on his bed dead drunk,⁶² Judith takes his sword and cuts off his head. She puts the head in the bag in which she had brought her kosher food and with her maid smuggles it out of the camp as if she were leaving for the open field to pray.⁶³

This time, Judith and her maid return to Bethulia, where they take the head out of the food bag and show it to the inhabitants and to Achior.⁶⁴ The Israelites hang Holofernes’ head on their battlements⁶⁵ and attack their besiegers, who run away in fear once they have discovered the decapitated body of their leader.

58. ‘He asked her to sin. She answered and said, “My lord king, for this very thing I have come hither with all my heart, but now it is impossible, as I am in my impurity; to-night is the time of my purification; I therefore desire the king to herald throughout the camp, that no one should stay the women and her handmaid, when she goes out in the night to the fountain of water. When I return I will give myself over to the king”’ (Gaster, *Unknown Hebrew Version*, p. 161).

59. 12.6-9. See also Gaster, *Unknown Hebrew Version*, pp. 156-57, and Enslin, *Book of Judith*, p. 145, n. 6.

60. 12.11-13.

61. 12.15-20.

62. 13.2.

63. 13.8-10.

64. 13.15; 14.5-6.

65. 14.1, 11.

Similarities between the Book of Judith and the Arabic Zenobia Legend

As we can see, there are many parallels between the book of Judith and the Arabic Zenobia Legend, starting with the sequence of motifs in the episodes in which the two heroines kill their suitors. In both stories, the heroine, who lives in a town in the Levant, defends her own life and her city from an enemy who comes from Iraq. Assisted by a female helper, she devises a fake defector stratagem: she pretends she is willing to surrender to her enemy, join his side and sleep with him. When they get together, the guest is seated on an animal skin, and the heroine announces that she is not ready to have sex with her suitor because she is ritually unclean: in the Arabic Zenobia Legend, her pubic hair is unshaven; in the Hebrew variant version of the Judith story, she is menstruating and has to await the end of her period. The enemy drinks wine and when he is drunk he is murdered by the heroine, who puts a part of his body in a food vessel: Judith puts her enemy's head in the bag from which she had just been eating her kosher meal, while Zenobia collects her enemy's blood in the cup from which he has just drunk wine.

Table 1. Parallels between the Episodes in which Judith and Zenobia Kill their Enemies

<i>Judith</i>	<i>Zenobia</i>
assisted by maid	assisted by sister
pretends to want to sleep with enemy	pretends to want to marry enemy
not ready for intercourse: menstruating	not ready for intercourse: pubis unshaven
guest seated on animal skin	guest seated on animal skin
enemy drinks wine; killed when drunk	enemy drinks wine; killed when drunk
enemy's head in food bag	enemy's blood in wine cup

In both stories, humans or human body parts are smuggled into the city hidden in bags: Judith smuggles Holofernes' head into Bethulia hidden in a bag that used to contain food, Qasir smuggles soldiers into Palmyra hidden in bags that are believed to contain clothes and perfumes. Just as Judith had gained the trust of the guards by leaving the enemy camp three times but always coming back, Qasir had gained the trust of his enemy by travelling three times to Iraq.

In both stories, killing one's enemy is an impure act, close to cannibalising: putting a human head in a kosher food bag or collecting

human blood in a drinking vessel. At the same time, both stories also contain the motif of 'clean' revenge, that is, the notion that one can avoid *counter-revenge* if one avoids certain unclean actions, such as spilling blood or eating impure food. Zenobia believes that no one will take vengeance on her for murdering Jadhima if she does not spill his blood outside the bowl. The Israelites believe no one will exact revenge upon them as long as they do not eat unclean food. Holofernes believes in a similar form of vengeance without consequences: that he can take his revenge on the Israelites without losing a single one of his own men. In the cases of Zenobia and Holofernes, this hope of clean revenge turns out to be idle: both lose their lives as result of exactly the kind of retaliation they were striving to prevent.

Not only do the book of Judith and the Arabic Zenobia Legend contain many of the same motifs, they also have a similar narrative structure. In both stories the episode of the heroine joining the side of the besiegers is mirrored by an episode about one of the besiegers joining the side of the besieged: a vassal of the eastern leader warns his lord about the true character of the inhabitants of the city, but his advice is not heeded. He receives physical punishment and joins the besieged, who give him a high position. In this respect, Achior's role in the book of Judith is similar to the role of Qasir in the Arabic Zenobia Legend.

Achior and Sinon, Zopyros, Qasir

When we look at Qasir, his role as a fake defector at first sight more closely resembles the roles of Sinon and Zopyros than that of Achior, who is not a fake defector but completely sincere.

The parallels between the stories of Sinon, Zopyros and Qasir are evident.⁶⁶ All are fake defectors who have disfigured themselves as a disguise to gain the trust of the inhabitants of a besieged city. Zopyros and Qasir lash their own back and cut off their own nose and ears,

66. On the parallels between Sinon and Zopyros, see J. ter Vrugt-Lentz, 'Sinon und Zopyros', *Mnemosyne*, 4.20.2 (1967), pp. 168-71. On the parallels between Zopyros and Qasir, see Franz-Christoph Muth, 'Zopyros bei den Arabern: Streiflichter auf ein Motiv Herodots in der arabischen Literatur', *Oriens* 33 (1992), pp. 230-67. See also Judith Weingarten, 'The Zenobia Romance', *Zenobia: Empress of the East. Exploring Zenobia's World. The Incredible Rise and Fall of the City of Palmyra* (13 June 2008), <http://judithweingarten.blogspot.nl/2008/06/zenobia-romance.html> (accessed 27 June 2012).

Sinon also lashes himself (Tryphiodorus' version) or has his nose and ears cut off by the Trojans (Quintus' version). All three pretend they have been punished and chased away by their lords for giving them unwelcome advice: Sinon claims he had advised the Greeks to continue the siege (Tryphiodorus), Zopyros claims he had advised his lord to abandon it, and Qasir claims he had advised Jadhima to marry Zenobia.⁶⁷ All three are granted asylum in the besieged city. Sinon is made a Trojan, Zopyros and Qasir are given high positions as advisors. Zopyros and Qasir leave the city three times to meet with their own side, Qasir as a trader, Zopyros as head of a detachment of Babylonians. Just as Sinon helps to smuggle soldiers into the besieged city hidden in a wooden horse, Qasir smuggles soldiers into the city hidden in bags carried by camels. All three defectors are instrumental in bringing down the cities of their new, credulous masters.

Even though Achior is not a double dealer like Sinon, Zopyros and Qasir, his story does resemble theirs. Just as Qasir rightly warns Jadhima that he should not trust and marry Zenobia because her proposal is a ruse, Achior rightly warns Holofernes that he should not attack the Israelites. In both cases, their lords do not believe them and this tragic blindness to the advice of their wise counsellors leads to their deaths. In the Sinon story, we find this motif on the side of the besieged, where Laocoön and Cassandra rightly warn the Trojans that the horse is a ruse. Just like Sinon in Virgil's *Aeneid*, Achior is tied up and left in the open field close to the city for the enemy to find him.⁶⁸ That Holofernes' men want Achior to be 'thrashed' is a parallel to the fact that Sinon (in Tryphiodorus' account), Zopyros and Qasir pretend to have been lashed by their masters. Like his counterparts, Achior is granted asylum in the city. Both Achior and Qasir cut off a part of their own body to prove that they have completely severed the ties with their old tribes. Both Sinon and Achior adopt the identity of their new masters: just as the Greek Sinon becomes a Trojan, the Ammonite Achior converts to Judaism and becomes an Israelite.

67. Tabari, *Tārīkh*, I, p. 764.

68. The parallels between the story of Achior and those of Sinon and Zopyros were already noted by Carl Fries, 'Studien zur Odyssee II: Odysseus der bhikshu', *Mitteilungen der Vorderasiatischen Gesellschaft* 16.4 (1911), pp. 148-50.

Table 2. Parallels between Episodes in which Sinon, Zopyros, Qasir and Achior ‘Defect’ to their Enemies

<i>Sinon</i>	<i>Zopyros</i>	<i>Qasir</i>	<i>Achior</i>
[Laocoön and Cassandra] warn about the true character of the besiegers, but are not believed	-	warns his lord about the true character of the besieged, but is not believed	warns his lord about the true character of the besieged, but is not believed
<i>pretends to have</i> advised his lords against abandoning the siege (Tryphiodorus)	<i>pretends to have</i> advised his lord to abandon the siege	<i>pretends to have</i> advised his lord to marry Zenobia	advises his lord to abandon the siege
lashes himself (Tryphiodorus); tied up (Virgil); nose and ears cut off (Quintus)	lashes himself; cuts off his nose and ears	lashes himself; cuts off his nose and ears	his lord’s men suggest thrashing him; tied up; cuts off his foreskin
<i>pretends to have been</i> physically punished by his lords (Tryphiodorus: for giving them unwelcome advice)	<i>pretends to have been</i> physically punished by his lord for giving him unwelcome advice	<i>pretends to have been</i> physically punished by his lord for giving him unwelcome advice	physically punished by his lord for giving him unwelcome advice
given asylum in the besieged city	given asylum in the besieged city	given asylum in the besieged city	given asylum in the besieged city
<i>pretends to</i> reveal plans of besiegers	<i>pretends to</i> reveal plans of besiegers	-	reveals plans of besiegers
-	given high position among besieged	given high position among besieged	given high position among besieged
joins the religion/ethnicity of besieged	-	-	joins the religion/ethnicity of besieged
-	leaves city three times to gain confidence of besieged	leaves city three times to gain confidence of besieged	-
uses an animal to smuggle soldiers into city	-	uses animals to smuggle soldiers into city	-
allows besiegers to enter city and destroy it	allows besiegers to enter city and destroy it	allows besiegers to enter city and destroy it	-

The Relationship between the Book of Judith and the Arabic Zenobia Legend

The similarities between the book of Judith and the Arabic Zenobia Legend are so numerous that they cannot be the result of mere coincidence. This raises the question of the relationship between these two texts and the examples from Greco-Roman literature quoted above: What is the reason behind all these parallels? How are these texts related to each other? All deal with fake defector stratagems, in which someone gains the trust of his enemy to destroy him. We have encountered two types of fake defector stratagems:

- To defend her city, a woman seduces, intoxicates and then kills her enemy. We could call this, after its most famous example, the ‘Holofernes motif’.⁶⁹
- To capture an impenetrable city, a man mutilates himself in order to gain the trust of the besieged and then leads his soldiers inside the walls. After the episode of Troy, the most famous of all sieges, we could call this the ‘Sinon motif’.⁷⁰

These two motifs can occur independently of each other. Especially the Sinon motif occurs frequently on its own. Besides in the various accounts of the fall of Troy treated above or in Herodotus’ account of the fall of Babylon, it is found in a wide variety of Mediterranean and Near Eastern sources.⁷¹ Based on the large number of surviving examples we must conclude that the Sinon motif was so popular and so widely used that it is fruitless to suppose a relationship of direct

69. ‘K872. Judith and Holofernes: girl from enemy camp chosen to sleep with intoxicated general kills him in bed’, S. Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Medieval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955–58). Another example of this motif from Greco-Roman Antiquity is the following: General Spitamenes is betrayed and decapitated by his wife who sends his head to his enemy Alexander the Great. Quintus Curtius, *The History of Alexander* (trans. John C. Rolfe; London: Heinemann, 1962), 8.3.1–13. A variant account of Spitamenes’ betrayal is to be found in the anonymous *Metz Epitome*. See Burstein, ‘Cleitarchus in Jerusalem’, pp. 105–12.

70. ‘K2040.1.1§ Partisan (patriot, spy, soldier, etc.) leads enemy to believe that he is switching sides: enemy betrayed and defeated’, Hasan M. El-Shamy, *Types of the Folktale in the Arab World: A Demographically Oriented Tale-Type Index* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), p. 661.

71. Many examples quoted by Muth, ‘Zopyros’, pp. 231–37, 247–57.

influence between texts in which this motif occurs. Much rarer, in contrast, are texts in which the Sinon motif is combined with a Holofernes motif in a single story. If these two motifs are applied in such a way that the besieged use a Holofernes stratagem while the besiegers use a Sinon stratagem, we get a story of the 'deceiver deceived' or 'avenger avenged' type, a tragic story in which there are no real victors.

Here I hypothesize that the parallels between the book of Judith and the Arabic Zenobia Legend are due to the fact that they both go back to the same model, a *Vorlage* that predates the book of Judith but is now lost, and that this *Vorlage* was such a deceiver deceived version which combined a Holofernes motif with a Sinon motif. This *Vorlage* was a tragic revenge tale in which a woman deceives and kills an enemy king who attacks her city but is then in her turn deceived and killed by his servant. We could call this the 'heroine deceived' version.

Struck by the ruins of Palmyra and the historical fact that its last ruler Zenobia was a woman, a story of her downfall and that of her city was modelled after this tragic heroine deceived *Vorlage*. This account of the siege of Palmyra has come down to us as the Arabic Zenobia Legend.⁷² The Arabic Zenobia Legend has preserved the tragic 'deceiver deceived' structure of the *Vorlage*: first Zenobia deceives the Iraqis by seducing and murdering their king, but then Zenobia in her turn is deceived by Qasir and murdered by the Iraqis.

Much earlier, this same *Vorlage* that was used by the author of the Arabic Zenobia Legend was also used as a model by the author of the book of Judith. This author, however, adapted the structure of the *Vorlage* more rigorously and changed the original deceiver deceived structure to create a story in which the heroine triumphs in the end. We could call this adaptation the 'heroine triumphant' version, to distinguish it from the original heroine deceived version. To make her victory complete, the author of the book of Judith not only rewrote the *Vorlage* so that his heroine would not be killed, but also that, although she deceives her enemies, she is not deceived by them. To this end, the part of Sinon was stripped of all its cunning to create the character

72. Note that the Greco-Roman accounts of Zenobia's fall also contain some elements (husband killed during a banquet at heroine's instigation; widow heroine helped by female ally) that are reminiscent of the Arabic Zenobia Legend and the book of Judith. See also Retsö, *Arabs*, p. 466.

of Achior: the role of the fake defector who deceives the heroine and the inhabitants of the city was rewritten into that of a *sincere* defector who does not pretend that he has been punished and chased away by his lord but who is actually banished by him. This way, Achior has become a ‘blind motif’, an element that has no function or meaning in the existing story, but that was relevant in an older form.⁷³

Because Zenobia’s story needed to end with the historical facts of her death and the destruction of her city, in the Arabic Zenobia Legend the Holofernes motif precedes the Sinon motif. In the book of Judith, however, which was meant to end with the heroine’s victory, the Achior episode is put first and followed by the Holofernes episode:

Table 3. The Supposed Relationship between the Arabic Zenobia Legend and the Book of Judith

<i>Arabic Zenobia Legend</i>	<i>Book of Judith</i>
‘Heroine deceived’	‘Heroine triumphant’
Holofernes motif	blind version of Sinon motif
+	+
Sinon motif	Holofernes motif
Hypothetical <i>Vorlage</i> ‘Heroine deceived’	
Holofernes motif + Sinon motif	

The differences between the book of Judith and the Arabic Zenobia Legend result from the fact that they were adapted from the same *Vorlage* to stress different themes. The main theme of the Arabic Zenobia Legend, with its all-Arab cast, is blood feud and its tragic consequences, or, in other words: ‘(s)he who seeks revenge should dig two graves’. Such a theme would have struck a chord among a public of Arab tribesmen living in a largely tribal society, who would have first-hand experience of such vendettas and their constraints and pitfalls. In this case, adherence to the code of blood feud leads to a cycle of betrayal, cruelty, regicide and destruction.⁷⁴

73. Wouter F.M. Henkelman, ‘The Birth of Gilgameš (Ael. NA XII.21): A Case-Study in Literary Receptivity’, in Robert Rollinger and Brigitte Truschnegg (eds.), *Altertum und Mittelmeerraum: Die antike Welt diesseits und jenseits der Levante. Festschrift für Peter W. Haider zum 60. Geburtstag* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2006), p. 815.

74. On the function of the Arabic Zenobia Legend in the *Islamic* context of Tabari’s chronicle, see Johan Weststeijn, ‘Bloedwraak, bedrog, en koningsmoord: De Zenobia-novelle in Tabari’s “Geschiedenis van profeten en koningen”’, in

In contrast, the book of Judith is not about the dire consequences of the human code of blood feud but about the benefits of adhering to divine Law: as long as the Jews do not sin and abide by his Law, God will protect them from all harm.⁷⁵ The book of Judith is not a tragic but a moralizing and uplifting story. It exhorts its public to follow Judith's example: Jews should eat kosher; in general, true believers should follow God's Law. The book also exhorts its public to take consolation from Judith's example: even in the face of foreign invasion or oppression and persecution by unbelievers, Jews, and all true believers, can trust God to be on their side and save them.

The heroine of the Arabic Zenobia Legend is cast as a tragic hero: she is a tragic figure because, despite her power and position as a queen, she meets her downfall due to a tragic flaw—she believes in the chimera of clean revenge without consequences. She is also a tragic figure because the demands of her society leave her no choice but to adhere to its codes.

In contrast, the heroine of the book of Judith is not cast as a ruler who meets her downfall, but as an underdog who triumphs against all odds because she believes in a single God. Judith, a widow, single-handedly confronts an unbelieving tyrant and his mighty army, defeats him and saves her people. Such a tale would have struck a chord among a public familiar with similar triumphant underdog stories from biblical tradition: the slave Joseph versus Pharaoh, the boy David against the giant Goliath, the orphan girl Esther and emperor Ahasuerus, Daniel against Nebuchadnezzar.

Blood Feud vs. Divine Law

One of the most striking differences between the episodes in which the heroines of the book of Judith and the Arabic Zenobia Legend kill their suitor, is that Judith decapitates her enemy while Zenobia lets him bleed to death. In both versions, this is the single most dramatic point of the story, the one scene by which the whole chain of events of

Diederik Burgersdijk (ed.), *Zenobia van Palmyra: Vorstin tussen Europese en Arabische traditie* (Armada, 53; Amsterdam: Wereldbibliotheek, 2008), pp. 19-24.

75. Enslin, *Book of Judith*, pp. 38 and 138 n. 10: 'The central emphasis of the book...: so long as they do not sin—and this involves ritual as well as morality—God's people are sure of his protection'.

the narrative can be summarized. Why do these two related stories differ in this central aspect?

One could argue that, first of all, there is a very practical reason for the particular way in which Judith kills her enemy: she has no choice but to decapitate Holofernes because she needs to smuggle a recognizable part of his body back to Bethulia, so she can prove to its inhabitants that she has actually slain their attacker. Zenobia is under no such constraints because her suitor has already rendered himself voluntarily inside her city. More important than such practical reasons, however, are thematic ones. When they reworked the *Vorlage*, the respective authors of the two stories used this dramatic focal point to stress the main theme of their respective adaptations.

To illustrate his main theme—God will protect the Jews as long as they abide by his Law—the author of the book of Judith focusses on the example of dietary law and emphasizes (kosher and non-kosher) food throughout his story. Food and drink are mentioned with increased intensity up to the moment Judith murders Holofernes.

5.24	The Israelites will be ‘food’ to their enemy
6.4	Holofernes announces that his army will ‘eat’ the Israelites and that the mountains will be ‘drunk’ with their blood
6.21	The leader of Bethulia invites Achior to a banquet
7.12-17	Holofernes cuts off Bethulia’s supply of drinking water
7.20-22	The way the Bethulians suffer from thirst is described in detail
10.5	The food Judith brings from Bethulia is described in detail
10.12	The Israelites will be ‘food’ to their enemy
11.12-13	Judith describes the forbidden food that the Bethulians are about to eat in detail and specifies that they are about to drink the blood of their cattle
12.1	Holofernes invites Judith to eat his food
12.2	Judith refuses because she has brought her own food
12.3	Holofernes is afraid that her supply of kosher food might run out
12.9-20	Holofernes invites Judith to a banquet
12.20	At a cliff-hanger moment, the final verse of ch. 12, just before ch. 13 in which Holofernes is murdered, it is said that Holofernes ‘drank more wine than he had drunk at any time in one day since he was born’ ⁷⁶

76. In Jdt. 12 eating or food is mentioned six times (12.1, 2, 9, 11, 15, 19) and drinking or wine seven times (12.1, 11, 13, 17, 18, 19, 20).

Holofernes believes the Israelites will perish when they eat forbidden food. What he does not realize is that this not only applies to the Jews, but to all characters in the book of Judith. Those who eat and drink kosher food (Judith, the Bethulians, the converted Achior) will survive, and *all* those who eat non-kosher food, even the pagans (Holofernes and his men), will perish. Holofernes' lack of insight leads to dramatic irony. While he is waiting for the moment that the Bethulians, who are nearly dying from hunger and thirst, start eating unclean food and seal their fate, he himself overindulges on unclean food and drink⁷⁷ and unwittingly signs his own death-warrant.

Eating kosher or non-kosher food are not only metaphors for abiding by or violating God's Law and living or dying, eating is also a metaphor for aggression in the book of Judith: eating someone is a metaphor for taking one's revenge on someone, killing him, or having intercourse with that person. Judith declines to eat Holofernes' food, which in fact means that she refuses to surrender to him and have sex with him. Holofernes thinks his army will consume the Israelites and that he will consummate his liaison with Judith, but in the end it is Judith who all but eats Holofernes: she butchers him and puts his head in a food bag.

To illustrate his main theme, 'kosher food means survival; non-kosher food means death', in the most graphic way possible, the author of the book of Judith has chosen to make his heroine commit, in the story's central scene, the highly un-kosher act of putting the head of one's enemy in a kosher food bag.

In the same vein, the author of the Arabic Zenobia Legend uses this same central scene of the heroine murdering her enemy to illustrate the theme of his adaptation: the tragic consequences of adhering to the code of blood feud. In this scene, to foreground the motif of human blood, unusual things are done with and said about Jadhima's blood. What is done, in fact, is that several metaphors about blood feud are taken literally. Blood feud derives its name from the metaphor that one has to 'pay with one's own blood' for the physical harm one inflicts. Zenobia takes this literally and exacts revenge on her father's

77. See also Jan Willem van Henten, 'Judith as a Female Moses: Judith 7–13 in the Light of Exodus 17; Numbers 20 and Deuteronomy 33:8–11', in A. Brenner and F. van Dijk-Hemmes (eds.), *Reflections on Theology and Gender* (Kampen: Kok, 1994), p. 38.

murderer by making him slowly bleed to death and trying to collect every last drop of his blood.⁷⁸

The drive to take revenge is referred to as ‘blood thirst’; the desire—metaphorically or even actually⁷⁹—to drink the blood of one’s enemy. Two motifs in Zenobia’s story—the notion that human blood can be taken as medicine and the collecting of blood in a wine cup—suggest such drinking of the enemy’s blood. Finally, wounding or killing is known as ‘spilling blood’. This expression is played upon in the prediction that Jadhima’s murder will only be avenged if drops of his blood are literally *spilt*: that is, if they are not collected in the bowl but are wasted because they fall on the floor beside it.

The way in which Zenobia kills her victim also has a function in the development of the plot. The prediction ‘if blood spilt, murder avenged’; the heroine’s attempt to prevent the prediction from coming true; and her consequent failure to achieve this, raise suspense and stress the tragic aspect of Zenobia’s story. Moreover, her failure—the drops that fall outside the bowl—provide a hinge by which the first part of the narrative (Zenobia’s ruse to kill Jadhima, the ‘Holofernes motif’) is integrally connected to the second part, in which the prediction comes true and Jadhima’s murder is avenged (Qasir’s ruse to kill Zenobia, the ‘Sinon motif’). Both prediction and fulfilment, as well as the three metaphors about blood feud, have been condensed in the image of vainly trying to collect the avenged murderer’s blood in a drinking cup.

Conclusion

In this article I have compared texts from three different traditions that are usually studied by scholars from separate disciplines: Greco-Roman literature, Arabic historiography, and the Bible. In the course of this analysis I have not merely compared two stories, but simultaneously drawn comparisons between four different stories and some of

78. In Bal‘ami’s Persian adaptation of Tabari’s *History*, Zenobia preserves Jadhima’s blood as ‘ransom’ for her father’s blood. Bel‘ami, *Chronique de Tabari (Histoire des envoyés de Dieu et des rois) traduite sur la version persane* (trans. Hermann Zotenberg; Paris: Al-Bustane, 2002), p. 303.

79. In the epic of al-Zir the hero exacts his revenge by actually drinking the blood of his slain enemy: Jaroslav Oliverius, ‘Themen und Motive im arabischen Volksbuch von Zīr Sālim’, *Archiv Orientalní* 39 (1971), p. 131.

their variants: the Arabic Zenobia Legend, the book of Judith, and the episodes about Sinon and Zopyros. This method has yielded the following results:

Classicists had already noted the similarities between the stories of Sinon and Zopyros.⁸⁰ At the same time, Arabists had noted that the Arabic Zenobia Legend appears to have borrowed and brought together elements from two different Classical sources: Qasir's ruse of cutting off his nose and ears appears to have been borrowed from Herodotus' Zopyros⁸¹ while the ruse of the soldiers in the camel bags appears to have been copied from stories about the Trojan horse.⁸² By comparing the three episodes of Sinon, Zopyros and Qasir at the same time I have shown that these two ruses (pretending to have been punished, smuggling soldiers into a city) had already been combined in other stories than the Arabic Zenobia Legend, and are part and parcel of a recurring group of narrative elements that I have here called the Sinon motif.

This realization that the episodes about Sinon, Zopyros and Qasir belong to the same family or are expressions of the same motif leads to the insight that the episode about Achior is also a member of this family.⁸³

Above I have shown that the book of Judith and the Arabic Zenobia Legend contain a remarkable number of parallels: they not only share many details but also have a similar plot structure. Using the method of simultaneously comparing a number of stories from different traditions I concluded that these parallels can only be explained if we assume that Judith and the Zenobia Legend are two different adaptations of the same model: a *Vorlage* that contained both a Holofernes motif and a Sinon motif. In the course of the reworking of this *Vorlage* to create the book of Judith, the Sinon part was adapted into the role of Achior. These conclusions solve or shed new light on four problems that have hitherto puzzled scholars on Judith:

80. Vrugt-Lentz, 'Sinon und Zopyros'.

81. Muth, 'Zopyros bei den Arabern', p. 259.

82. Muth, 'Zopyros bei den Arabern', p. 249; Irfan Shahîd, 'al-Zabbâ', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam: 2nd Edition* (Leiden: Brill, electronic edition). See also Weingarten, 'Zenobia Romance'.

83. Fries, who used the same method of simultaneously comparing a large number of stories from different cultural traditions, also came to the conclusion that Achior, Sinon and Zopyros belong to the same type ('Studien zur Odyssee II', pp. 148-50).

(1) That Achior, as a sincere version of the deceiving Sinon, became a blind motif and lost his function in the narrative, not only explains the presence of this character in the book of Judith (and why his function in the story has been unclear up to now), but also why, despite the prohibition in Deuteronomy, the Ammonite Achior becomes an Israelite, converts to Judaism, and takes the drastic measure of circumcising himself. Where the deceiving Sinon merely pretended to have given up his Greek identity and became a Trojan, the sincere Achior completely identifies and assimilates with his new hometown and with God's people.

(2) When the book of Judith was created by rewriting the *Vorlage*, the Sinon motif of that model was rewritten to create Judith 1–7, and the Holofernes motif was used to create chs. 8–16. This proves that the theory that the events treated in chs. 8–16 might have formed the original core of the Judith story, to which chs. 1–7 was only added later as an unnecessary introduction, is incorrect.

(3) That the book of Judith was adapted from an older model proves that the Septuagint text is not the oldest version of a story with this plot. There existed at least one, and maybe even a number of stories with this particular structure, and these various older stories may have influenced the later variants of the Judith story and account for the differences between them.

(4) That Achior is an adaptation of a Sinon motif that is also found in Greek and Latin historiography does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that the author of the book of Judith adapted Achior's role directly from his reading about Zopyros in a copy of the *Histories* or from his reading about Sinon in works by classic poets on the fall of Troy. A motif such as the Sinon motif was used by so many Near Eastern and Mediterranean storytellers that it would be farfetched to assume that the author of Judith could only have encountered it in Greek literature, or even to assume that this motif was originally invented by Greek historians and poets. At the same time, I have argued that a combination of a Sinon motif with a Holofernes motif, such as we find in both the book of Judith and the Arabic Zenobia Legend, is so specific that it does point to derivation from a single source or from a specific tale type. As to the original language of this tale or its cultural context, we remain, however, in the dark.