The function of the Ammonite Achior in the book of Judith

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An intertextual analysis of the character of Achior in the book of Judith shows that the author of the book proposes a changed Judaean identity. The way in which he depicts the character of Judith and her alter ego, Achior, illustrates the author's ideology that people like proselytes and marginalised widows are not only to be included in the society, but can even be the leaders of the community. A nationalistic and exclusivist approach is entwined in the narrative with an inclusivist viewpoint propagating a new identity for the people of that time.

Introduction

Dissenting opinions on Judaean identity were held during the Second Temple period (515 BCE – 70 CE). An exclusivist trend can be found in the priestly writings, in Ezekiel, the books of Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah. This disposition was mainly held by the Zadokites who had returned from the exile. They gradually became the dominant power in the Judaean community (cf. Boccaccini 2002:82). They followed a 'particularist policy' (Park 2003:13) propagating a new type of identity referring to themselves as בני הגולה [the sons of the captivity] (Ezr 4:1; 6:19–21; 8:35).

Several other groups, such as the Samaritans and the Tobiads, and some minor groups in Palestine, opposed the viewpoint of the exclusivist ruling party. Amongst them an inclusivist point of view was advanced. Their 'continuing voice of universalism' (Park 2003:14) is articulated in biblical books such as Ruth, Jonah, Job, Ecclesiastes, Esther and 'apocryphal' books such as Judith and Tobit.

However, the book of Judith seems to be problematic in this regard. The book 'is blatantly nationalistic' (Collins 2004:548) and celebrates 'militant Jewish nationalism' (Collins 2004:548). The heroine Judith frees the inhabitants of the beleaguered Bethulia by killing the Assyrian leader Holofernes in a deceitful way. Her role seems to indicate nationalism and therefore also exclusivism. But she also acts in a parallel role with the pagan Ammonite, Achior. He is initially depicted as adviser to Holofernes against Israel, but rejected when he favours Israel. In the end he is circumcised and joins the house of Israel as proselyte. As Deuteronomy 23:3 forbids any Ammonite to enter the assembly of the Lord, Achior's acceptance in the religious community seems to be contrary to prescriptions of the Law. His inclusion as proselyte indicates an inclusivist view. In the one narrative both exclusivist as well as inclusivist trends are found.

This seemingly contradicting view of Judaean identity is investigated in this article. Following a short study of present trends in intertextual studies, attention is paid to the 'confession' of Achior in Judith 5:6–21 where a traditional Deuteronomistic *review of history* is used. Next the function of Achior's speech is investigated in terms of his characterisation in the Judith narrative. Finally an endeavour is made to describe the authors' view on Judaean identity as represented in the characters of Achior and Judith.

Intertextuality
Aesthetic and polylogic

The process of quoting existing texts and combining them with a new set of words to form new texts can be described as 'intertextuality'. The study of intertextuality usually focuses on two aspects: aesthetical production and polylogy.

In the case of aesthetic production, authors explore existing sources, using techniques such as quotation, paraphrase, résumé, commentary, criticism, interpretation, allusion, parody and pastiche to create new texts.

In the second case, that of polylogy, intertextuality is linked to dialogue. In his studies, Bakhtin repeatedly indicates that language is always a social activity. Intertextuality is a process of

dialogue, not only with older texts, but also with the whole contemporary surrounding world. Following Bakhtin, Julia Kristeva coined the term 'intertextualité' in her studies to indicate that each text stands at the crossroad of a multiplicity of texts and ideas, which it re-reads, condenses, replaces and deepens into new forms.

Culler (2002) indicates that intertextuality should have a double focus: it is not only to indicate a work's relation to a prior text, but should also refer to the older text's participation in the signifying practices of a culture. As Culler (2002) explains:

> The study of intertextuality is thus not the investigation of sources and influences as traditionally conceived; it casts its net wider to include anonymous discursive practices, codes whose origins are lost, that make possible the signifying practices of later texts.

(Culler 2002:114)

Intertextuality therefore indicates much more than a simple link between two specific texts. The original text stands in relation to a multiplicity of other contemporaneous texts and the newer text is part of a discursive enterprise encompassing a vast array of phenomena. The opposition between original text and re-read text becomes blurred in the process of intertextuality. A literary work is related to a whole series of other works, treating them not as sources but as constituents of a genre (cf. Culler 2002:129). Defining intertextuality suggests 'the need for multiple strategies, for different focuses and restrictions even though one cannot have any confidence that these could eventually contribute to a grand synthesis' (Culler 2002:122).

Rashkow (1992:57) extends this multiplicity further by indicating that intertextuality exists on both micro and macro levels. In the first case, the relationship operating on linguistic level can easily be recognised. On the second, larger level, 'type scenes' ('narrative events using fixed modes or sequences of action' [Rashkow 1992:57]) as well as 'typology' ('characters and scenes symbolically prefigure later events' [Rashkow 1992:58]) can be indicated as forms of intertextuality. Whilst these forms of intertextuality have traditionally been understood in terms of the writer's ability to shape the original text, or the ability of the original text to effuse a multiplicity of other texts, Rashkow (1992:59) proposes a shift in focus 'to the *process* by which the individual readers confer meaning and perceive this intertextuality'. She calls this 'transference' (Rashkow 1992:59).

Also referring to the role of the reader in the process of intertextuality, Beal (1992:28) indicates that 'the practice of intertextual reading must find its place somewhere between the closed structure of a single text … and the uncontainably surplussive fabric of language'. What determines the relationship is the 'reader's ideology' (Beal 1992:28). The Hebrew Bible's surplus of meaning elicits biblical interpretation as production of meaning. What controls the means of production is always the ideology of the reader. What is needed in this regard is 'an ideological-critical

approach to reading readings' (Beal 1992:28). Beal (1992:31) sees ideology as 'a strategy of containment … which imposes meaningful structures on the totality'. Jameson was primarily concerned with analysing the ways narrative imposes ideological closure on the totality of history. Beal (1992:32) himself is rather interested in the way interpretation serves as an ideological containment strategy for intertextuality. The interpretative rules in biblical studies establish closure on the general text and legitimise certain intertextual relationships. It is also a strategy of containment and therefore ideology.

It is clear from this short investigation that the trend in general linguistics obviously accommodates the role of the reader in the intertextual process. Not only literary techniques, but especially the ideological stance of the reader should be kept in mind. I shall follow this trend in the analysis of the depiction of Achior in the book of Judith.

Intertextuality and biblical studies

In biblical studies it has been recognised since the 19th century that intertextuality is not only found in the major reworked issues of the Hebrew Bible (Septuagint, Targum and Samaritan Pentateuch), but that the Hebrew Bible itself is the product of such reworking (cf. Fishbane 1985:5). Its text is not monolithic, but rather the end result of a long process in which interpretation and exegesis of existing tradition was the rule. This was an on-going process over many centuries. To indicate this continuing process Fishbane (1985) uses the terms 'traditum' and 'traditio'. He calls fixed and finalised tradition 'traditum'. The process of recycling this received 'traditum' he calls 'traditio' (cf. Fishbane 1985:6).

With regard to the Bible, two levels of the process of intertextuality can be distinguished: the one found in inner-biblical exegesis and the other found in extra-biblical or post-biblical exegesis. The latter is found *inter alia* in so called apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature, Tannaitic sources, the Qur'an and the New Testament. In all these cases, the Hebrew Bible is the fixed written 'traditum' and the secondary literature represents the 'traditio'.

Whilst Fishbane (1985) concentrated on inner-biblical exegesis, Fisk (2001) focuses on the use of the already coagulated 'traditum'. This is often referred to as the category of 'rewritten Bible', a term usually attributed to Vermez. This category is found in books like Jubilees, the Genesis Apocryphon (1QapGen), 1 Esdras, and Josephus's Antiquities.

Fisk (2001) bases his study of Pseudo-Philo's use of scripture on the research already done by Fishbane (1985[1]), Hays (1989[2]) and Boyarin (1990[3]). Fisk pays special attention to the intertextual use of aggadic exegesis in the process of rewriting. He studies the compositional techniques (the mechanics of a citation or allusion to Scripture) as well as

1. Biblical interpretation in Ancient Israel.

2. Echoes of scripture in the letters of Paul.

3. Intertextuality and the reading of Midrash.

the hermeneutical strategy (the hermeneutical function of the precursor text within the new context and within the social-historical setting that gave rise to the new composition) (cf. Fisk 2001:109–110). Of importance to us is one of Fisk's (2001:110–116) remarks, namely that the exegesis of the 'traditum' depends upon the literary context of the 'traditio'. And this literary context includes the reader's ideology.

Fisk develops a model to indicate this movement from 'traditum' (inherited tradition) to 'traditio' (literary transformation). Crosswise on this vertical line he draws a horizontal line thereby forming a diagram consisting of four quadrants. Depending upon a large variety of factors, this process can be linked to any of these four quadrants. Rewriting material can either be nearer to the 'traditum' or to the 'traditio'. It can either be static (mere reception) or dynamic (innovation). Within these four quadrants 'we might plot virtually any instance of inner-biblical exegesis, intertextual echo and midrashic reading' (Fisk 2001:118).

Several external factors, such as politics, culture and history can play a role in the process of moving from 'traditum' to 'traditio'. In this regard Fisk (2001:127) refers to '*general patterns of interaction* between exegesis and social context'. In his indication of the role played by external factors, Fisk moves in the direction followed by general linguistic studies that have been indicated earlier in this article. He focuses on the social context of the recipient and his or her ideology. However, rather than theorising on the real social context of exegesis, he indicates a pattern or type of interaction found in the intertextual text. This comes very close to the ideological stance of Beal (as referred to earlier in the article). Fisk (2001:127) presents three probable 'basic social settings' (Fisk 2001:127), already proposed by Fishbane (1985):

- When moral lapse occurs or when righteousness is in decline and faltering commitment to the covenant is found, extension of the 'traditum' is used to call the people back to covenant allegiance.
- When a text fails to have direct moral, religious and theological values drastic revision of the 'traditum' takes place.
- In a time of crisis and social-historical dislocation the received 'traditum' becomes incomprehensible and must be interpreted anew to address the questions of the time.

In her study Stahlberg (2008) also broadens the study of intertextuality to include the original text as well the context of the interpreter. Stahlberg (2008:6) indicates that 'there are three crucial, inextricably related aspects of a retelling': approach, stance and filter. *Approach* describes the means by which the re-telling gains entry into the original telling, how and how much a writer uses an extant writing. *Stance* designates the relationship the re-telling has to the telling, the indication of what one text 'thinks' of its *Urtext*. *Filter* is the lens through which the re-telling looks at the telling (cf. Stahlberg 2008:6). Filter is very much the same as the ideological aspect indicated earlier in the article. At the back of approach, stance, and filter, there are always three questions: how does the re-telling gain access to the telling?

What does the re-telling do to the telling once it has accessed it? Why does it access the telling in this way? (cf. Stahlberg 2008:207).

Stahlberg follows Gerard Genette's publication *Palimpsestes* of 1982 in which he 'introduces and explains a litany of terms that allow us to think and speak about the relationships between telling and retelling' (Stahlberg 2008:80). This publication enables her to develop a vocabulary that allows one to study re-tellings adequately. Being of the persuasion that 'the languages of literary theory, midrash, and translation become the language of retelling once they find themselves within the context of a discussion of retellings' (Stahlberg 2008:210), she investigates the three theoretical constructs of intertextuality, midrash, and translation.

The language and concepts used in literary criticism, midrashic studies and translation theory can provide us with 'a vocabulary that is specific enough to be illuminating but limited enough to be manageable' (Stahlberg 2008:209). Re-telling intersects with the areas of intertextuality, midrash and translation. The phenomena of approach, stance, and filter are found in each of these disciplines and these disciplines can therefore help in formulating what is happening when rereading texts.

As a result of her investigation Stahlberg develops a vocabulary for the study of re-reading texts. A cluster of related 'trans-' words can be used to indicate *approach*, the way re-telling gains entry into the telling (cf. Stahlberg 2008:211). This includes words like 'transfocalisation' (shifting the point of view of the story), 'transfusion' (importing the lifeblood of the original), 'transgression' (using the original as a springboard for another work), 'transiency' (the brief introduction of an element from the original; an 'unsustained' allusion), 'transition' (the setting of a story in a new era or period), 'translation' (the carrying across of the original to a new cultural setting), 'translocation' (the setting of a story in a new place), 'translucency' (a significant transposition of the original, which nonetheless maintains the shape or form of the original), 'transmodalisation' (the changing of the form of the original), 'transmutation' (the alteration of the medium of the re-telling), 'transplantation' (the extraction of a particular element of the original story), 'transposition' (a serious transformation of the original), 'transumption' (a quoting of the original), 'transvaluation' (a re-framing that shifts the evaluative connotation from negative to positive or from positive to negative), and 'transvocalisation' (the telling of the story in another voice) (cf. Stahlberg 2008:211–212).

When it comes to 'stance' the language of translation theory, indicating the relationship between source and target, is particularly useful. Stahlberg (2008:212–213) proposes the following terms: 'conquest' (re-telling rendering the original invalid or unnecessary), 'embrace' (upholding of the sensibility of the original), 'foreignization' (destabilising the original by rendering it less familiar or unfamiliar), 'inversion' (turning back to the original, causing us to read rather

than resist or re-place the original telling), 'misprision' (a misapprehension of the original text), 'reversion' (upholding the ideas of the earlier text), and 'subversion' (undermining of the original).

'Filter' indicates the lens through which the re-telling examines the telling (cf. Stahlberg 2008:213). A variety of –isms can be used to indicate the lens through which the older texts are scrutinised: atheism, capitalism, feminism, or Marxism, or through the lens of Christianity or modernity. All of these terms can be used when studying a specific case of intertextuality, like the characterisation of Achior in the book of Judith.

Historical review in Judith 5

When Holofernes, the general of the army of the Assyrians, enquires from the princes of Moab and the leaders of Ammon in Judith 5:1–4 who the children of Israel are, Achior, the captain of the children of Ammon, replies with a long summary of Israel's history. Sounding very much like a Judaean himself, Achior promises that he will tell the truth concerning this people who dwell in the mountains. He swears that not a single false word would come from his mouth (Jud 5:5). His words (Jud 5:6–25), however, are ordered according to a specific scheme[4] also found elsewhere in biblical literature[5]. Judith 5:6–9 deals with the time of the patriarchs, verses 10–13 with the exodus event[6], verses 14–15a with the sojourn in the desert, verses 15b–16 with the occupation of the land, verses 17–18 with the exile and verse 19 with the return to the land. This agrees with the retributive Deuteronomistic scheme used to review the history of Israel found in several places in the Bible and contemporary literature.

This scheme follows a standard pattern consisting of fixed elements. Israel's history is conceptualised in terms of different sequential phases: creation, patriarchs, exodus, journey through the desert, occupation of the land, exile and return to the land. Being repeated several times in the biblical literature, this pattern can be indicated as a *Gattung* called 'historical review'.

This *Gattung* is found in Biblical passages such as Psalms 78, 105, 106, 135, 136; Ezra 9; Nehemiah 9:5b–37; Ezekiel 16 and 20; Daniel 2:1–49, 7:1–28, 9:4–19 and 11:14. It is also found in apocryphal and pseudepigraphic passages like Ecclesiasticus 44–49; the Animal Vision (1 Enoch 89:59–90:19); Apocalypse of the Week (1 Enoch 93:1–10); Tobit 14:4–7; Cairo Damascus Document 1:3–12, 2:14–4:12, 5:20–6:11

and Jubilees 1:7–18 and 23:13–21. Not all of these passages make use of all of these fixed elements. In some cases some of these element are left out, such as creation (Pss 78, 105, 106), patriarchs (Pss 78, 106, 135, 137), exodus (Ps 137, Ez 20, Ec 44–49, Ezr 9:6–15), journey through the desert (Tobit 14:4–7, Jub 23:13–21), occupation of the land (Pss 135 & 137, Ezr 9:6–15) exile (Ps 105, CD 5:26–6:11, Jub 23:13–21) and return to the land (Pss 105 & 135, CD 2:14–4:12). Nehemiah 9:5b–37 is the only instance:

> in the Hebrew Bible where [all] the basic elements of the early history of Israel are woven together, in the way we are familiar with from the reading of the Hebrew Bible as a whole.
>
> (Kvanvig 2007:6)

In the case of Judith 5:6–21 all of these elements are used except for the theme of creation and the journey through the desert.

Following this sequential scheme, a Deuteronomistic retributive interpretation[7] of history is simultaneously presented. A coherent 'Deuteronomistic Patterning' (Endres 1987:53)[8] is used to present 'a specific religious identity' (Kvanvig 2007:1). This interpretation of the sacred history is constructed from an ideological perspective that identifies, substantiates and affirms a specific theological perspective on Israel's history[9]. It is part of the author's general ideological construction (cf. Baumgarten 2000:2–3), a crucial component of his ideological foundations (cf. Baumgarten 2000:9). Superimposed on this historical scheme a retributive schema is therefore used consisting of the elements of sin, punishment, penitence and salvation. This is the case in Deuteronomy 31–34, especially Deuteronomy 32:1–43, Psalms 78, 105, 106, 135, 136, Ezekiel 20, Ezra 9:6–15 and Daniel 2:1–49, 7:1–28, 9:4–19 and 11:14.

In the case of Judith 5, Achior not only presents a review of Israel's history, but also a theological evaluation of its history. He refers to Israel 'forsaking the ceremonies of their fathers, which consisted in the worship of many gods' and 'they worshipped one God of heaven ...' (Jud 5:8–9). As long as they did not depart from the worship of the Lord their God no one triumphed over his people (Jud 5:17). When they worshipped any other god beside their own God, they were given to spoil, to the sword, and to reproach (Jud 5:18). When they were penitent for having revoked the worship of their God, the God of Heaven gave them power to resist foreign kings (Jud 5:19). As long as they did not sin in the sight of their God, it went well with them. Their God hated iniquity (Jud 5:21). When they revolted against the way God told them to walk, they were destroyed in battles by many nations and very many of them were led away as captive to a strange land (Jud 5:22). When they returned to the Lord their

4. Caponigro (1992:48), looking for Herodotean material in Judith, points out that 'Achior in fact says nothing specifically about Torah ... only something very like the Deuteronomic theory of Israelite history'. If the book has a Maccabean background from the second century BCE, it is strange that Achior does not refer to the contemporary term of Torah, but does use its forms and contents.

5. Otzen (2002:124) says that Judith's oration to the elders in Bethulia in Judith 8:10b–27 is 'in principle' the same as Achior's oration in 5:6–25. This is only partly true. Judith does mention Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses. However, she does not use the form of a historical review and rather focuses on repentance than on any other aspect (cf. Jud 8:16–17).

6. The Vulgate offers in its 5:12–15 an extended version of the Sea of Reeds incident (cf. Moore 1985:160).

7. Moore (1985:162) summarises this Deuteronomistic view as follows: 'faithfulness to God is rewarded; infidelity *always* punished'.

8. Otzen (2002:79) refers to this speech as a 'direct application of typically deuteronomistic literature' pointing to post exilic times.

9. Although Moore (1985:162) acknowledges that Achior's speech represents a Deuteronomistic view of the 'sacred history', he evaluates it in terms of modern history writing and describes the presentation of history here as 'general and imprecise'. The point here is not the factual correctness of Achior's survey, but the type of genre being used as an expression of the author's ideology.

God they came together from the many places wherein they were scattered and went into the mountains and possessed Jerusalem again (Jud 5:23). When iniquity was found amongst them in the sight of their God, they would be delivered into the hands of the Assyrians (Jud 5:24). However, if no offence against their God is found, it will not be possible to resist them as their God defends them (Jud 5:25).

It is clear that the author used the traditional retributive historical schema consisting of the elements sin, punishment, penitence and salvation here. It seems to be rather the schema itself, than any particular text that was used intertextually here[10]. Several of Stahlberg's 'trans-' terms are applicable. The 'approach', the way in which re-telling gained entry into the 'traditum', can be described in terms of 'transfusion' (importing the lifeblood of the original), 'transvocalisation' (the telling of the story in another voice) and in a certain sense 'transumption' (a quoting of the original). The contents of Achior's speech are ironically put in the mouth of an Ammonite, a non-Judean, here. Therefore some of the other terms can be used as well. Relevant terms like 'transgression' (using the original as a springboard for another work), 'transition' (the setting of a story in a new era or period), 'translation' (the carrying across of the original to a new cultural setting), 'translocation' (the setting of a story in a new place), and 'transmutation' (the alteration of the medium of the re-telling), can be used.

Before we can apply Stahlberg's ideas on 'stance' (relationship between the source and the target) and 'filter' (the ideological lens through which the re-telling examines the telling), we will first have to study the role Achior plays in the narrator's composition.

Achior in the book of Judith

The character of Achior is depicted in several places in the narrative of Judith. We meet him the first time when Holofernes, the ranking commander of Nebucadnezzar, king of the Assyrian, prepares for war against the Israelites of Judah. He is advised by Achior, the leader of the Ammonites, that these people living in the hill country worship the God of Heaven[11]. Achior suggests to Holofernes to abstain from attacking them (Jud 5:24) because their lord and god will defend them (Jud 5:1–21).

Holofernes interprets this advice as an insult and bans Achior to the Israelite town of Bethulia where he would finally be killed along with the inhabitants when Holofernes' army ravage the city (Jud 6:1–10).

Achior is next tied up and left at the foot of the hill at Bethulia. Having been untied again and brought into the town, he

reports on Holofernes' offensive against the Israelites and his effort to discourage the Assyrians to fight against God's people. He is then taken to the house of the magistrate Uzziah where a banquet is held and the inhabitants pray all through the night for God's help (Jud 6:11–21).

The first time we hear of him again is after Judith decapitates Holofernes and returns to Bethulia with his head in a food sack. Judith summons Achior the Ammonite to see and recognise the one who despised Israel. Either identifying the face of Holofernes[12] or witnessing the result of his former warning to the deceased, Achior faints, is picked up and throws himself at Judith's feet and does obeisance to her. He requests her to report on what she did at Holfernes' camp. He understands these events as God's beneficial deeds to Israel. It moves him to believe in God completely. He is then circumcised and admitted to the community of Israel (Jud 14:5–10).

The narrator depicts the character of Achior by setting him in relationship to the other characters of the story[13]. In the conflict with Holofernes he witnesses to the God of heaven and thereby provokes his ordeal to die along with the people whom he defends. The narrator uses his character here to introduce the plot of the story and to indicate his viewpoint that nobody, not even the mighty Assyrians, are able to withstand the God of Israel. In the incident where he informs the inhabitants of Bethulia of Holofernes' offensive, Achior acts as agent not only to prepare them for the onslaught, but he also directs them to their God for help. Again he functions as an expression of the narrator's theological viewpoint. He gives a leading role in the events to a former pagan character.

Comparing the role of secondary male characters in the stories of Judith and Jael, White (1992:10) indicates that Achior 'is loosely modelled on the character of Barak in Judges 4 and 5'. Achior's function in the story is the same as that of Barak. He acts as a foil for the leading female character, Judith. In both cases the male 'characters leave the stage, only to return after the heroine has completed her action' (White 1992:10). This technique focuses on the women as the heroin, confirming 'Yahweh's use of a weak, marginalised member of the society in order to save it' (White 1992:10). Although being a foil Achior plays a similar role as Judith in the narrative, both indicate *persona non grata* who are the heroes of the story. White (1992:14) indeed remarks that the parallels between the Judith and the Jael stories (Barak and Achior) go beyond correspondence in structure, plot and character.

In his study of the role and significance of Achior in the book of Judith, Roitman (1992:32) indicates 'an especially intriguing structural relationship and a subtle

10. Otzen (2002:69) indicates that there are connecting lines between the literary piece of work in the book of Judith and the biblical books 'telling about heroines through Israelite history'. This article uses the intertextual link between Achior's speech and the traditional Deuteronomistic historical review to indicate that Achior is depicted as a mirror image of Judith, both of them expressing the ideological view of the author on the identity of the Israel of his day.

11. Cf. Ezra 1:2; 5:12; 6:9–10; 7:21, 23; Nehemia 1:4–5; 2:4; Daniel 2:19, 44 for this terminology.

12. Cf. Moore (1985:159). Having known Holofernes pesonally Achior could confirm for the citizens of Bethulia the identity of the decapitated head. Pay attention to the irony here: when Holofernes sent Achior away he says that Achior will not see his face again until he has taken revenge on the Israelites (Jud 6:5). Indeed Achior sees his face again after the revenge, but now it is the revenge on Holfernes and not on the Israelites.

13. Judith is also characterised by contrasting her to the other characters in the narrative. Compare, for example, how she is contrasted to the men of Bethulia in Judith 8:9–36. Against the weakness of the elders she is competent to fight the Assyrians (cf. Jordaan & Kanonge 2006:73–74).

complementarity between Achior and Judith'[14]. Achior is not simply a foil for the other characters in the book, but acts as a double or alter ego of the character of Judith. Thematically as well as functionally he is used in the narrative as the mirror image of Judith (cf. Roitman 1992:38)[15]. To study Achior and Judith's respective functions in the narrative, Roitman (1992:33–38) divides the story into five stages. Initially Achior the Ammonite is the pagan soldier whilst Judith is the timid Judaean widow living a secluded life. Undergoing a change in their respective fundamental traits, the story ends where Achior becomes a mere citizen (as opposed to a leader) in Bethulia. He is circumcised and accepted in the society as a co-believer in God, whilst Judith changes into a military hero and commander in Israel and is hailed for her piety and role as the saviour of her people. Although coming from different walks of life both belong to the same community of faith, in the end having both contributed to the solution of the intrigue in their different ways.

His analysis brings Roitman (1992:39) to the question why the author portrayed Achior as the soldier and Ammonite as the thematic and functional counterbalance of Judith? It could have been done for more than purely literary reasons. It is possible that the story is the result of an underlying ideology of proselytism in this nationalistic book. Presumably the author wanted:

> to teach us through this very sophisticated technique that a righteous pagan, even one who belongs to the hateful people of Ammon, is, essentially, the parallel and complement to a complete Jew by birth, and that he is able to perfect his condition by believing in God and joining the people of Israel through conversion.
>
> (Roitman 1992:39)

Roitman (1992:39) is of the opinion that this 'subtle ideology of proselytism' substantiates his thesis that the traditions about Abraham were used by the author to depict the characters of both Judith and Achior. Referring to the witness of Achior in Judith 5:6–9 as 'the Abraham section', Roitman (1992:45, n. 51) comes to the conclusion that the book of Judith advances the doctrine that 'the righteous pagan who converts to Judaism would also have, as the native Jew has, Abraham as his model or "father"' (Roitman 1992:40).

Judith 5:6–9 refers to the Israelites as the descendants of the Chaldeans who did not want to worship the gods of their ancestors in Chaldea. Abandoning the way of their ancestors they worshiped the 'God of Heaven'. They were driven out by the Chaldeans from the presence of their gods and fled to Mesopotamia where they settled for a long time before moving to the land of Canaan. This description agrees only with the second item of the patriarchs in the *Gattung* of

'historical review' as indicated earlier in the article. As Israel is presented as a collective unit in Judith 5:6–9, Roitman's acceptance of Abraham can be questioned. Other possibilities for the modelling of Achior should also be considered.

Moore (1985:163–164) indicates that Achior was a wise man, also in the technical sense of the word. He is depicted as an Ammonite form of Ahikar. Ahikar was a:

> famous pagan wise man who was an advisor to the Assyrian kings Sennacherib and Esarhaddon and the reputed author of a wisdom book containing a number of proverbs and fables.
>
> (Moore 1985:163)

The profile of this Ahikar as a good and just pagan fits the Achior of Judith. In the contemporary book of Tobit the Assyrian Ahikar has been Judaised. Moore agrees with Cazelles' argument that Achior is an ethnic transformation of Ahikar. Roitman (1992:42) refers to this 'Ahikar theory' proposed by Moore and Haag, but strongly rejected by Steinman. Otzen (2002:108) doubts the theory that Achior and Ahikar can be identified with each other. His argument is based on the difference in status between the two: Ahikar is a Jew by birth, whilst Achior is a 'genuine pagan'. Roitman (1992:32) criticises the aforementioned scholars for failing to see Achior's 'overall complex function and to integrate it into the structural framework of the story'[16]. Although it is probable that the tradition of Ahikar served as model for characterising Achior, it is necessary to rather study the narrator's transformation of this figure in his story.

Moore (1985:167) calls Achior an 'Ammonite "Balaam," a Gentile who must speak only good about Israel'. The Ammonite Achior[17] may have been based upon the tradition of Balaam son of Be'or (Nm 22–24)[18]. In the Deir Allah inscriptions he played an important role in the Ammonite literary tradition from at least 700 BCE.

Moore (1985) explains:

> [J]ust as Balaam of Deir Allah brought to his people a communication from the gods, so later on another Ammonite, Achior, tried to enlighten his people about the nature and will of Israel's God.
>
> (Moore 1985:167)

Moore correctly identifies Achior as a messenger of the gods, but does not ask the question of the role Achior plays in the Judith narrative and how his message fits into a totally different situation.

This brings us back to the question of intertextuality. Not only the probable source of the Achior character, but also the 'stance' and 'filter' (Stahlberg) is to be studied to identify

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14. Nickelsburg (2005:99) refers to the author's literary artistry in 'the sophisticated manner in which the author depicts Judith and Achior as counterparts to one another. The use of multifaceted humor, including irony and absurdity, is also an important aspect of the author's literary artistry'.

15. VanderKam (2001:75) refers to the contrasted yet paralleled roles of Achior and Judith. Their roles are paralleled in that both make speeches evoking Israel's history and emphasising the power of Israel's God to 'save; if he is obeyed (that is, both present a deuteronomistic theology)'. Achior becoming a proselyte is remarkable: 'his admission to a Jewish leader's home and entry into the religious community seem contrary to the policies of leaders such as Ezra and Nehemiah. That is, the book of Judith seems to represent a dissenting opinion' (Vander Kam 2001:75).

16. In a section on 'Narrative Approaches' Otzen (2002:118–123) indicates that 'only few critics have tried to look at the book of Judith from a narrative point of view' (Otzen 2002:118). He refers to the studies of Alonso-Schökel, Jensen, and Roitman. This article uses narrative criticism to study the characterisation of the Achior character in an effort to understand the author's ideological view on Judaean identity during the Maccabean period.

17. Otzen (2002:75) adds that the pagan Rahab can also be glimpsed behind the figure of Achior.

18. Caponigro (1992:48) points out that Achior 'plays a role like that of the Gentile prophet Balaam ... especially the angry reaction of Balak in 24:10–11'.

the ideological purpose of the author in using the character of Achior.

Stance

The 'traditum' (cf. Fishbane & Fisk) used in the depiction of Achior is the *Gattung* of the 'historical review'. The traditions of Ahikar and Balaam probably played a role as well. However, what is of more importance is the way this 'traditum' is formed into 'traditio'. The characterisation of Achior falls in Fisk's (2001:110–116) fourth quadrant of dynamic (innovative) 'traditio'. The 'traditum' is used here in an innovative way to create a totally new story. The basic social setting (Fisk 2001:127) here is where the 'traditum' is drastically revised to have direct moral, religious and theological value. This viewpoint can be substantiated by following Stahlberg's guidelines on 'stance'.

The value of the traditional 'historical review' is upheld here. Using language from translation theory the following terms are applicable regarding the stance in Judith (cf. Stahlberg 2008:211–212): 'embrace' (upholding of the sensibility of the original), 'inversion' (turning back to the original, causing us to read rather than resist or replace the original telling), and 'reversion' (upholding the ideas of the earlier text). The Deuteronomistic witness of Achior to Israel's history, his informing of the inhabitants of Bethulia resulting in their praying to the Lord all through the night and his decision to become part of Israel when he saw what Judith did to Holofernes, transfers the traditional religious values of Israel into the story.

Filter

The lens is the *filter* through which the re-telling examines the 'traditum' (cf. Stahlberg 2008:213). The lens is obviously ideological here. Collins (2004:548) is correct that the book 'is blatantly nationalistic' and celebrates 'militant Jewish nationalism'. However, there is more to this nationalism than traditional exclusivism. There is also much more to the Judith narrative than an underlying ideology of proselytism. Otzen (2002:69) places Judith 'at the point where two strong biblical traditions meet: the tradition of the salvation of the chosen people, and the tradition of the clever and heroic woman'. I would propose that the focus rather falls on the type of person playing a leading role in the salvation of Israel. The narrator is proposing an ironic view of Judaean identity. He uses two very unlikely figures as representatives of Judaean identity.

Judith, like Naomi[19], represents a weak member of society. Like the orphan Esther, Judith is marginalised through her lack of position in a family unit (cf. Crawford 2002:7). However, she 'is in all respects an "exceptional person"'

(Otzen 2002:102). She, of whom one should expect it the least, is the one who turns into the military leader of her people. She achieves the unbelievable. She is rich, a celibate widow, fasting excessively. She represents individual courage and exemplary piety. She reprimands the citizens of Bethulia for not having faith in the Lord. She can be seen 'as a personification of the Jewish people in an ideal shape' (Otzen 2002:102). However, with her deeds she not only depicts the ironic and unsuspected way in which God can save his people, but also the ironic personages who can play a role in the destiny of God's people. 'Judith is a peculiar mixture of humble piety and self-confident rugged dauntlessness' (Otzen 2002:105). What is more, 'Judith's particular representation – her status, rhetoric, wealth, beauty, and even her genealogy – aborts the metaphor of widowhood' (Levine 1992:19). Being a representative of her people[20] she transforms the traditional role of Israelite women[21] (cf. Levine 1992:24). Acting in the world of Israelite patriarchy 'she endangers hierarchical oppositions of gender, race, and class, muddles conventional gender characteristics and dismantles their claims to universality, and so threatens the status quo' (Levine 1992:17). Judith subverts her patriarchal society. She is 'a dangerous woman, dangerous to men because she refuses to fulfill – and in fact subverts – the gender expectation of her society' (Crawford 2002:13)[22].

Achior is a pagan and a person whom nobody would expect to be the hero in what happened. He is an Ammonite, usually not at all acceptable in the Israelite community. But he witnesses God's relationship with his people in a way that nobody would expect from a non-Judaean. He reveals the plans of Holofernes. Although being a pagan, he is the one who directs God's people towards their God[23]. He complies with the rules of real Israelite citizenship, leaving the inhabitants of Bethulia ashamed of their distrustful behaviour. An Ammonite man attains a new social and religious position in the community not only by converting to Judaean faith, but also by playing a central role in history. Achior also threatens the status quo. He is not merely included in the society as a proselyte, but even plays the leading role of a hero saving the Judaeans from Holofernes' onslaught. Not only in Achiors' speech in chapter 5, but in the rest of the story as well, 'the author of the story could express his own understanding of the sacred history of the Jewish people' (Moore 1985:159).

Both of these characters are the least possible candidates for saving the Judaeans. Both are not only accommodated in Judaean society, but they are the two leaders of the people in their 'strangeness'. Both open up the eyes for a Judaean identity that encloses even the widow and the foreigner in Israelite society. The story indicates that even a foreigner and

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19. See Otzen (2002:74–79) for a discussion of biblical and non-biblical sources of the book of Judith. According to Nickelsburg (2005:100) '[t]he story combines features of a number of biblical stories, and Judith is the personification of several Israelite heroines: Miriam (Ex 15:20–21), Deborah and Jael (Jdg 4–5), the woman of Thebez (Jdg 9:53–54), and the woman of Abel-beth-maacah (2 Sm 20:14–22). Her deed also recalls the story of David and Goliath (1 Sm 17:12–54), and the book of Judith as a whole is a kind of reversal of the story of the rape of Dinah (Jdt 9:2–4, 8-10; cf. Gn 34)'.

20. Judith in Hebrew means Jewess and therefore represents Israelite women.

21. Feminist scholars may differ from this viewpoint being of opinion that the potential subversion of gender roles is vitiated here.

22. Crawford investigates the problem why the book of Esther became part of the Jewish canon whilst the book of Judith did not. Her argument is that Esther never threatened the status quo, whilst Judith did.

23. The central issue here is not proselytism (cf. Otzen's 2002:107–109) as such, but rather the true identity of Judaeans consisting *inter alia* of widows like Judith and converts like Achior and their unsuspected role in the community.

a marginalised widow can be the most important members in Israel's history.

Socio-historic context

Referring to '*general patterns of interaction* between exegesis and social context' Fisk (2001:127) refrains from theorising on the real social context in which a text is read. Fisk (2001:127) refers to 'basic social settings' such as moral lapse, a text failing to have direct moral, religious and theological values, and a time of crisis and social-historical dislocation when the received 'traditum' becomes incomprehensible. The book of Judith was probably written in such basic social settings.

In studies trying to identify the time when the book of Judith was written, it is obvious that efforts are made to describe the proposed time in terms of ideology. Otzen (2002:86) remarks that since 1940 consensus can be found amongst all scholars that the book of Judith is from the Maccabean era built upon material from the Persian epoch. The background for the book of Judith 'is the important phase of Judaean history in the second century BCE, when the soul and existence of Israel were at stake' (Otzen 2002:134). The geographical and historical problems of the book indicate that we are dealing here with inflated or distended history. Here '[h]istory and geography are taken into the service of ideology!' (Otzen 2002:90).

In Nickelsburg's (2005) opinion the narrative of Judith:

> is a rare example of a book in biblical and early postbiblical Jewish … literature whose protagonist is a woman whose roles and action often confound normal portrayals of gender relations.
>
> (Nickelsburg's 2005:100)

Living in an admittedly patriarchal society, the author created a female protagonist acting as saviour who delivered Israel from mortal danger in the same way as Moses and other male heroes in the books of Judges and 1 Samuel, and Judas Maccabeus did, but was then side lined at the end.

Esler (2002:139) reads Judith as ludic history seeking to re-invent Israelite identity around the issue of gender. Esler (2002:112) situates the book within 'the world of ethnic boundary maintenance and negotiation, perhaps even reinvention'. Judith offers a version of Israelite history deliberately and ludically counter to contemporary books like 1 and 2 Maccabees with their triumphant males (cf. Esler 2002:121). In a culture where women were relegated to the liminal, Judith represents a social anomaly of someone outside the usual male–controlled kinship patterns. The story of the widow Judith would have presented a severe shock on an ancient Israelite audience. It would have provided 'the stimulus to reconsider afresh the nature of Israelite ethnicity' (Esler 2002:132). In the portrayal of her triumph a notable re-interpretation of the meaning of Israelite identity by the amplification of female gender could have been created. The author could have acted as a self-conscious creator of something new in the social forms and values of Israel (cf. Esler 2002:135). The same can be said of Achior as well. In his case he is a pagan, an Ammonite, who should not have become a member of society. His character is also intended to make the readers rethink their definition of an Israelite.

Esler's analysis closely corresponds with my argument that both Judith as well as Achior are used in the narrative to propose a new definition of Judaean identity. The basic social setting for the book of Judith, very probably found during the Maccabean era of the second century BCE, was one of reflecting on true Judaean identity. The ideology advanced by the author is that marginalised widows and Ammonite proselytes are to be included in Judaean society, and can even be the leaders and the heroes of Israel.

Conclusion

The book of Judith is usually seen as a narrative representing an exclusivist perspective on Judaean identity. Although the book is blatantly nationalistic, it does include a pagan as one of the leading personalities in Judaean history. To study this probable contradiction between an exclusivist and inclusivist position in one narrative, an analysis was made of the character of the Ammonite Achior in the Judith narrative.

An investigation into the trends followed in intertextual studies showed that the interpreter's ideological frame of reference usually plays a very large role in his or her re-writing of an older text. Using the terms provided by intertextual studies ('traditum', 'traditio', general patterns, approach, stance and filter) to analyse the ideological use of older material in the Judith narrative, it became clear that the author of Judith depicts the character of the pagan Achior in terms of Judaean identity. He used the *Gattung* of the traditional 'historical review' to portray Achior as a pagan well versed in the way Israel interprets her own history. He even plays a cardinal role in Bethulia's successful defence against the onslaught of the enemy, directing them to God for help and therefore playing the role of a leader in the community.

Achior acts as functional counterbalance for the character of Judith in the narrative. Judith is also a very unlikely character to act as leader in Israel. As a traditionally weak and marginalised widow she ironically saves her people by seducing the enemy general and cutting off Holofernes' head. She transforms the social role of Israelite women and thereby indicates the narrator's ideological viewpoint that even proselytes and widows can be the leaders in Israel.

These two main characters are the vehicles for the narrator's propaganda for a new definition of Israelite identity. He combines an exclusivist view of Israel with an inclusivist stance not only including proselytes and marginalised widows in the Judaean history as well, but even proposing that they are the heroes and real leaders who save their people.

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