Judith (Tr. Andrew S. Jacobs)

Jerome (c. AD 347–420)

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[Translated by Andrew S. Jacobs]

THE PREFACE OF JEROME ON THE BOOK OF JUDITH

Among the Jews, the book of Judith is considered among the apocrypha; its warrant for affirming those [apocryphal texts] which have come into dispute is deemed less than sufficient. Moreover, since it was written in the Chaldean language, it is counted among the historical books. But since the Nicene Council is considered to have counted this book among the number of sacred Scriptures, I have acquiesced to your request (or should I say demand!): and, my other work set aside, from which I was forcibly restrained, I have given a single night's work , translating according to sense rather than verbatim. I have hacked away at the excessively error-ridden panoply of the many codices; I conveyed in Latin only what I could find expressed coherently in the Chaldean words. Receive the widow Judith, example of chastity, and with triumphant praise acclaim her with eternal public celebration. For not only for women, but even for men, she has been given as a model by the one who rewards her chastity, who has ascribed to her such virtue that she conquered the unconquered among humanity, and surmounted the insurmountable.

Footnotes 1. This was translated and released to the public domain by Andrew S. Jacobs, University of California Riverside, to whom many thanks. The text used was the Patrologia Latina text which reads: PRAEFATIO HIERONYMI IN LIBRUM JUDITH. [Col. 0037D] Apud Hebraeos liber Judith inter apocrypha legitur: [Col. 0038D] cujus auctoritas ad roboranda illa quae in [Col. 0039A] contentionem veniunt, minus idonea judicatur. Chaldaeo tamen sermone conscriptus, inter historias computatur. Sed quia hunc librum Synodus Nicaena in numero sanctarum Scripturarum legitur computasse, acquievi postulationi vestrae, immo exactioni: et sepositis occupationibus, quibus vehementer arctabar, huic unam lucubratiunculam dedi, magis sensum e sensu, quam ex verbo verbum transferens. Multorum codicum varietatem vitiosissimam [Col. 0040A] amputavi: sola ea, quae intelligentia integra in verbis Chaldaeis invenire potui, Latinis expressi. Accipite Judith viduam, castitatis exemplum, et triumphali laude, perpetuis eam praeconiis declarate. Hanc enim non solum feminis, sed et viris imitabilem dedit, qui castitatis ejus remunerator, virtutem ei talem tribuit, ut invictum omnibus hominibus vinceret, et insuperabilem superaret. (PL 29:37-39)

2. legitur = counted/considered. 3. illa, i.e. the apocryphal texts. 4. By 'Chaldean' he means Old Aramaic. 5. Your-Plural, vestrae. According to Migne, the translation was probably requested by Jerome's friends and fellow ascetics Chromatius and Heliodorus: "From this it seems to us to correctly conclude that this preface was written to men, and not to women [the assumption being that most of the translations were done eitherfor men abroad or for Paula and/or Eustochium, his companions in Bethlehem-ASJ], and this very translation of Judith was offered forth by Jerome. To be sure, although there is no mention of the persons to whom it was dedicted in the editions or book manuscripts, Tillemont (and others subsequently) deduced from this, as they say, suitableness of the work to have been given to his beloved fellow-toilers [πηιλοπονωταταις, in Greek] Paula and her daughter Eustochium. It seems more fitting to us that he was compelled to this work as well by those brother bishops, Chromatius and Heliodorus, in whose names he had dedicated earlier the neighboring books of Tobit..." etc. [Footnote - g] [Col. 0040C] (The footnote is to the part where Jerome talks about how Judith provides an example "even for men")

6. "Night's work" = lucubratiuncula.

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