

## COMMENTS AND COMMENTARIES ON JUDGES 11:29–40 IN THE HISTORY OF HIS FIRST RECEPTION

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### I. METHODOLOGICAL PRELIMINARIES

Speaking about commentaries in antiquity demands several reflections on the necessity and opportunity for the continued actualization of canonical texts. From studies of reworked scriptural materials found at the Qumran library, G. Brooke has concluded that “they show in a significant way various features of how the transformation of authoritative scriptures into canonical biblical books took place. From the post-canonical perspective these reworked compositions seem to fall into two groups: revision of biblical books, and more thoroughgoing rewritings of such books.” Further, he agrees that “rather than being the final word on what may be taken as authoritative in any religious tradition, canons of scripture tend to provoke extensive, elaborate, and creative exegesis.”<sup>1</sup> Canonisation demands respect for tradition, but it is precisely this respect that demands confrontation with tradition. And since the canon itself includes a well developed history of intertextuality, its corresponding commentaries are perhaps the most elaborate form of this confrontation.

In the analysis of Genette, inter- or transtextual<sup>2</sup> relationship “includes issues of imitation, transformation, the classification of types of discourse, along with the thematic, modal, generic and formal categories and categorizations of traditional poetics.”<sup>3</sup> New versions (hypertexts) of a pre-text (hypotext) form different types of transtextuality such as intertext (“the actual presence of one text within another”

<sup>1</sup> BROOKE, *Between Authority and Canon*, 86–87 and 96.

<sup>2</sup> Intertextuality or transtextuality means the “relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts: that is to say, eidetically and typically as the actual presence of one text within another” (GENETTE, *Palimpsests*, 2).

<sup>3</sup> ALLEN, *Intertextuality*, 100.

in the form of quotation, plagiarism or allusion), paratext (“kinds of secondary signals”),<sup>4</sup> metatext, hypertext<sup>5</sup> and architext (cf. discourses, genres and the phenomenon of canon). Generally, the commentaries belong to the category of metatextuality,<sup>6</sup> which does not necessarily mean that the hypotext itself is cited or named in this category.<sup>7</sup> Genette says that these types are not absolute categories without any reciprocal contact or overlapping.<sup>8</sup> So, paratexts and hypertexts can also be read as commentaries; paratexts and metatexts can have, too, the function of a literary genre (preface/titles etc., or criticism).<sup>9</sup> A paratext, for example, could be read as a commentary when it focuses on didactics: its essential feature can be the “displacement of interest and point of view.”<sup>10</sup> Another typical type of commentary is an addition to the hypotext, “a surplus in the nature of a commentary or free, even illegitimate, interpretation. . . . the hypotext here is no longer anything but a pretext, the point of departure for an extrapolation disguised as an interpolation.”<sup>11</sup>

We come to the conclusion that commentaries are not always running texts that are always written in the same, clear structure/form (cf. the Targumim; Pesharim.) They are sometimes summaries of other traditions, which innovate in a creative way the understanding of canonic texts. As the first symposium at Vienna has shown,<sup>12</sup> the so-called “extracanonical” literature is not well labelled by the term “pseud-epigraphy”, which is a very allusive notion. This literature is also described as the rewriting of the Bible/Scripture with several characteristics: the constant use of words of Scripture; the loose retelling of biblical narratives; the classification without authoritative status; the clear

<sup>4</sup> The term paratextuality was used by Genette (*The Architext*, 82) to describe what he calls in *Palimpsests* (cf. note 5) hypertextuality.

<sup>5</sup> “By hypertextuality I mean any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call hypertext) to an earlier text A (. . . hypotext), upon which is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary.” (GENETTE, *Palimpsests*, 5)

<sup>6</sup> Metatextuality is often labelled commentary. It “is the critical relationship par excellence. Extensive studies (meta-texts) of certain critical metatexts have naturally been conducted, but I am not sure that the very fact and status of the metatextual relationship have yet been considered with all the attention they deserve.” (GENETTE, *Palimpsests*, 4)

<sup>7</sup> This seems to be different in the case of ancient exegesis which is currently citing texts or marking them by a quotation formula but do not name it; cf. LUST, “Quotation Formulae.”

<sup>8</sup> “The architextual appurtenance of a given work is frequently announced by way of paratextual clues. These in themselves often initiate a metatext (‘This book is a novel’), and the paratext, whether prefatory or other, contains many more forms of commentary. The hypertext, too, often acts as commentary.” (*Palimpsests*, 8)

<sup>9</sup> GENETTE, *Palimpsests*, 7–8.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 243: Or, in form of the “(self-)condensation” of its own work it can be “the unwitting interpreter of it.”

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. LANGE, “In the Second Degree,” 13–16 with notes 38–49.

dependence on a scriptural text, and the “comprehensive or broad scope of rewriting of narrative . . . with commentary woven into the fabric implicitly” (M. Bernstein).<sup>13</sup> Rewriting processes claim that comment is the best form of adaptation and explanation.

I would like to show this process at work by looking at examples of transtextuality in Jgs 11.

## II. THE PRESENTATION OF JUDGES 11:29–35.39 (NRSV)

29 Then the spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh. He passed on to Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he passed on to the Ammonites. 30 And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord, and said, “If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, 31 then *whoever* comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return victorious from the Ammonites, shall be the Lord’s, **to be offered up by me as a burnt offering.**” 32 So Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight against them; and the Lord gave them into his hand. 33 He inflicted a massive defeat on them from Aroer to the neighbourhood of Minnith, twenty towns, and as far as Abel-keramim. So the Ammonites were subdued before the people of Israel. 34 Then Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah; and there was his daughter coming out to meet him with timbrels and with dancing. She was his only child; he had no son or daughter except her. 35 When he saw her, he tore his clothes, and said, “Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low; you have become the cause of great trouble to me.”<sup>14</sup> ***For I have opened my mouth to the Lord,*** and I cannot take back my vow.” 36 And she said to him, “My father, if you have opened your mouth to the Lord, ***do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth,*** now that the Lord has avenged you on your enemies, on the Ammonites.” 37 And she said to her father, “Let this thing be done for me; let me alone two months, that I may go and wander on the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my companions.” 38 And he said: “Go.” And he sent her away for two months; and she departed, she and her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains. 39 At the end of two months, she returned to her father, ***who did with her according to the vow he had made.*** She had never known a man. And it became a custom in Israel 40 that the daughters of Israel went year by year to lament [praise] the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year.

<sup>13</sup> BERNSTEIN, “Rewritten Bible,” 195; cited by LANGE, “In the Second Degree,” 14.

<sup>14</sup> LXX translates differently. Jgs 11,35 A: ἐμπεποδοστατήκας με εἰς σκῶλον ἐγένου ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς μου has changed כרע הiph. “incline the knees” to ἐμπεποδοστατέω “to be in the way of someone.” (*hapax*), and כרע to the metaphorical expression σκῶλον ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς “a thorn in the eyes.” Version B presents another text: παραγῆ ἐτάραξάς με, καὶ ἐτάραξάς με, καὶ σὺ ἦς ἐν τῷ ταραχώ/ταράχῳ μου “you has troubled me with trouble and you are (in) my trouble. . .” Both are searching for the responsibility by the daughter, but A attacks her attitude more than B.

The narrative structure of this biblical text, the hypotext, is strange not only because of a great number of gaps in the story,<sup>15</sup> but also because of the semantic openness, which forces the reader to reconstruct the action of the narrative and to interpret it broadly. Further, the narrative perspective is striking, when the narrator passes over the story without any comment. From a hermeneutic perspective, Jgs 11 is often set in parallel with Gn 22, with the latter as intertext, although certain differences emerge between the two stories.<sup>16</sup>

The sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter, performed by her father himself, is the consequence of a voluntary vow taken in the context of a war (Jgs 11:30ff). This vow does not specify the victim; the choice of the victim is determined by chance (v. 34). The text concludes with a simple statement concerning the realisation of the vow (v. 39). In Gn 22, by way of contrast, the sacrifice is demanded by God as a test (Gn 22:2). And at God's behest, the offering of a ram is substituted for the human offering.

The daughter of Jephthah accepts the role to which she was condemned by her father's vow (v. 36).<sup>17</sup> The only thing she does is ask for a delay of two months in order to "bemoan her youth/virginity" (v. 37ff.), because she will not have any descendants before being sacrificed. Her posterity will be assured thanks to the insertion of a festival into the liturgical calendar in her memory (v. 39b–40).<sup>18</sup>

At no point in this account does God intervene explicitly.<sup>19</sup> This is an important point of divergence from the intertext in Gn 22. But the fact that it is the daughter of Jephthah who comes out of the house could imply a divine act of providence: in this context, God could be seen as having accepted the vow of Jephthah, and has decided to put it to the

<sup>15</sup> Cf. STERNBERG, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 230–37. The gap consists of a missing piece of action or bears on causal linkage. It concerns the temporal sequence of events or relates to character, "indeterminacies about designs, motives, viewpoint, speech event, or personal relations" (233).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. BAUKS, "The Theological Implications of Child Sacrifice," 72–75.

<sup>17</sup> BROWN, *No longer be silent*, 94–95, 112–13, underlines that the element of willing submission to death, absent from Gen. 22, was introduced into the reception history in the form of the Jewish doctrine of the Aqedah, "the binding of Isaac," which stresses that Isaac allowed himself to be bound and offered, and that his death acquired atoning value for the Jewish people. The atoning nature of this kind of sacrifice is also set in parallel with the destruction of the temple described as the virgin daughter of Zion (Lam 2, l. 13) or Juda (cf. Lam 1, 15; Josephus, *Bibl. Ant.* XL, 6).

<sup>18</sup> Jdg 11 seems to include an aetiology, but without any historical background, because the rite of v. 40 is not attested elsewhere in biblical or Jewish literature—see EXUM, "On Judges 11," 140–41 with n. 3, who confirms that those verses should be understood as a rite of passage. See also MARCUS, *Jephthah and his Vow*, 35, and BAUKS, *Jephtas Tochter*, 57–73.

<sup>19</sup> SJÖBERG, *Wrestling with textual Violence*, 68–69, underlines the point that "Yhwh appears in all the episodes of the cycle except one, Jephthah's expulsion . . . [He] functions rather unequivocally as the sender of redemption to the people and as Jephthah's helper to victory . . . the actor Yhwh is developed as a character in the text."

test. Certainly, v. 29a underlines Jephthah's privileged relationship to God in the words: "the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah."

Discussions of the possible theme/topic of this narrative are numerous and best illustrated by the history of its early reception. Four examples will demonstrate the different solutions proposed in commenting on and interpreting this biblical text.

### III. ANCIENT INTERPRETATION OF DIFFERENT KINDS OF GAP IN THE BIBLICAL TEXT

#### 1. The unspecified character of the offering in v. 30

The content of the vow in the hypotext is striking: it is a conditional vow demanding victory for the judge, who promises a human sacrifice without any specification of the victim. The fact that it is a human sacrifice and not an animal is expressed in the Hebrew text by a combination of the verb **נָצַח** + preposition **לְקַרְבָּן**.

30 ... If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, 31 then *whoever* comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return victorious from the Ammonites, shall be the Lord's, to be offered up by me as a burnt offering.

In Hebrew, the verse involves a tautology that is often analysed as paronomasia, which expresses certain nuances of indeterminateness.<sup>20</sup> In the context of the narration this verse (and v. 36) presents a deviation from strict chronology that looks forward (prolepsis). Sjöberg describes the function as follows: "First, an element of uncertainty is introduced into an otherwise stereotypical narrative [cf. Jgs 2:11–23]. Secondly, the prolepsis partly replaces the account of the actual event, namely the sacrifice."<sup>21</sup>

The Aramaic version of Jgs 11, Targum Jonathan, repeats the biblical text (v. 30–38) with little modification<sup>22</sup> but adds a gloss, an interpolation which functions as a commentary to guide the comprehension of the reader. Here, a solution is proposed by accusing Jephthah

<sup>20</sup> "If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, 31 then *whoever* comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return victorious from the Ammonites, shall be the Lord's, to be offered up by me as a burnt offering." The structure of the verse: protasis: an emphatic combination of the infinitive absolute + finite verb (3rd m. sg.) + indefinite subject; apodosis: three clauses beginning with *w-qatal*: when I return—shall be the Lord's—to be offered up. . . ; cf. JOÜON and MURAOKA, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, § 1580.

<sup>21</sup> SJÖBERG, *Wrestling with textual Violence*, 37.

<sup>22</sup> Targ.: **וְיֵדֵי דִּיפִיק** "whoever will come forth . . ."

of being ignorant in religious matters. The Hebrew text is generally respected, but clarified by a comment:

And it was made a rule in Israel, in order that a man not offer up his son and his daughter for a holocaust as Jephthah the Gileadite did. And he was not inquiring of Phinehas the priest; if he had inquired of Phinehas the priest, he would have redeemed her with blood. From time to time the daughters of Israel were going to lament (לִאֲרָאָה).<sup>23</sup>

Firstly, the Targum inserts a general rule against child sacrifice and suggests that the human being has to be either substituted by an animal sacrifice or has to be redeemed.<sup>24</sup>

Secondly, Jephthah is presented in the gloss as someone who is not familiar with religious law, and who had failed to consult a competent official about the validity of his vow.<sup>25</sup> Maybe there is an allusion here to Lev 27, a later annex of the Law of Holiness,<sup>26</sup> revising the irreversibility of vows and consecrations. This text demands that only pure animals are fit for offering, and that, therefore, all other *sancta* are redeemable. The tradition of consulting a priest is often mentioned in Rabbinic tradition (cf. b*Nedarim*), which proposes, within a general admonition to be careful in making vows, the substitution of vows through special proceedings. A priest should explain how redemption of vows is possible.<sup>27</sup> The condition for redemption in Rabbinic Halacha is an abrogation made by a rabbi or sage, and is clearly defined by the Mishna<sup>28</sup> and the Talmud (b*Ned* III,i,1b [§ 21b] and IX). Also the validity of animal offerings is discussed in Rabbinic literature with reference to Jgs 11.<sup>29</sup>

The Greek translators present v. 31 either literally (LXX<sup>B</sup>)<sup>30</sup> or more interpretatively (LXX<sup>A</sup>)<sup>31</sup>. The ancient rewriting authors and “trans-

<sup>23</sup> Translation: HARRINGTON and SALDARINI, *Targum Jonathan*, 83.

<sup>24</sup> So GenR 60,3 mentions as a third option the invalidity of the vow and its annulment.

<sup>25</sup> HOUTMAN, “Die Bewertung eines Menschenopfers,” 68 (cf. HOUTMAN and SPRONK, *Jefta und seine Tochter*, 36–37); he adds that a notice in Targ. Jon to Jgs 12:7 (SPERBER, *The Bible in Aramaic*, 74) alludes to an unhappy end of the judge because he had offered his daughter without mercy and without having consulted Pinhas, the priest.

<sup>26</sup> GERSTENBERGER, *Das dritte Buch Mose Leviticus (ATD 6)*, 396–98. J. MILGROM, *Leviticus 23-27 (AB 3B)*, 2407–408, argues differently, and thinks about a dating in the 8th/7th century because the prices of Assyrian slaves correspond to the tariffs in Lev 27, whereas these of post-exilic times are more important.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. PERELMUTTER, “Gelübde III. Judentum.”

<sup>28</sup> NEUSNER, *Judaism*, 192–93.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. GenR 60:3; LevR 37:4; KohR 10:15; Midrasch Tanchuma, Bechukotai 5, and bTaan 4a. Cf. infra § 4.

<sup>30</sup> LXX<sup>B</sup>: καὶ ἔσται ὁ ἐκπορευόμενος, ὃς ἐὰν ἐξέλθῃ ἀπὸ τῆς θύρας τοῦ οἴκου μου . . . (cf. MT).

<sup>31</sup> LXX<sup>A</sup>: καὶ ἔσται ὃς ἀν ἐξέλθῃ ἐκ τῶν θυρῶν τοῦ οἴκου μου . . .

mitters”, Flavius Josephus (*Ant.* 5:263)<sup>32</sup> and Pseudo-Philo (*LAB* XXXIX, 10),<sup>33</sup> deal with the biblical text more freely than the Targum. They falsify the content of the story by introducing a neuter pronoun respectively in the Greek and Latin texts, which suggests that an animal offering could also have been intended.

Josephus (*Ant.* 5, 263): *πάν ὃ τι καὶ πρῶτον αὐτῷ συντύχοι*, “whatever would first come to meet.”

Pseudo-Philo (*LAB* XXXIX, 10): “who-/whatever meets me first (cf. Vulg.) on the way will be a holocaust to the Lord.”<sup>34</sup>

By translating the pronoun as neuter, “Whatever/the first thing that would chance to meet him” (5, 263), Josephus suggests that the sacrifice of an animal would also have fulfilled the vow. Therefore, the sacrifice of a human being is seen as a tragic consequence of the vow. When Josephus does not conserve the elliptical style of the biblical text concerning the fulfilment of the sacrifice (Jgs 11:37), he intends to condemn Jephthah for not having reflected before making the vow *and* for his impiety in carrying it out. At the beginning of the story, Josephus does not speak about a holocaust, but about offering in general. Only in the statement about the fulfilment is the sacrifice defined as a burnt offering. The account of the vow contains a mixture of narrated and transposed speech. *Ant.* 5, 263 comes near the classical formula of the vow (MT), but the use of the neuter gender increases the vagueness of the promise.

Pseudo-Philo presents an extensive commentary on the story that first of all includes a critique of the unspecific character of the vow. Because the subject of the sacrifice is not stipulated, Pseudo-Philo points out that it may lead to an unconventional sacrifice.<sup>35</sup> It saves the situation by the reaction of God, who has chosen for himself an appropriate victim, the daughter.

And God was very angry and said: “Behold Jephthah has vowed that he will offer to me whatever meets him first on the way; and now, if a dog should meet Jephthah first, will the dog be offered to me? And now let the vow of Jephthah be accomplished against his own first-born (*in primogenitum eius*), that is, against the fruit of his own body, and his request

<sup>32</sup> Cited in the translation of WHISTON chap. 7–10; cf. BEGG, *Flavius Josephus*.

<sup>33</sup> The historical context of this work is the Palestinian synagogue during the 1st century B.C.E. For dating and translation cf. HARRINGTON, “Pseudo-Philo.”

<sup>34</sup> JACOBSON, *A Commentary on Pseudo-Philo's Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*, 959 notes that the translation by *omnes quod primum* “is a deliberate tactic by the translator to facilitate the movement of the argument to an animal rather than a human being.” The same argument applies also to Josephus.

<sup>35</sup> Here, Pseudo-Philo agrees with Rabbinic tradition, cf. explicitly bTaan 4a; GenR 60:3 ad 24:13 and LevR 37:4 ad 27:2; see. for the interpretation ROTTZOLL (A. and D.), “Die Erzählung von Jiftach und seiner Tochter,” 211–13.

against his only-begotten (*in unigenitam eius*). But I will surely free my people in this time, not because of him but because of the prayer that Israel prayed” (XXXIX,11).<sup>36</sup>

Pseudo-Philo reflects on the problem of the heretical offering in a new way. Thus, it is God who elects the first-born daughter as the victim, corresponding to the legislation of the sacrifice of first-borns as a new intertext.<sup>37</sup> Comments are implicitly produced by allusions to biblical legal texts.

Finally, the criticism of Pseudo-Philo, that God is angry because of the possible inappropriateness of the victim, is comparable with the interpretation of Josephus.

## 2. The openness of the vow and its fulfilment (v. 31–39):

We have seen that the vow is pronounced emphatically<sup>38</sup> in the MT: in the case of success, a holocaust would be offered by Jephthah (“vowing a holocaust. . .”). Although the victim has not been chosen, it has to be a human. Indeed, the fulfilment is described in a very discrete way: MT does not talk explicitly about the performance of the human sacrifice but only confirms that the vow was kept: “Jephthah did with her according to the vow.” The use of “with her” (עִיָּהּ) refers to the beginning of the story, the vow and the meeting of the father and the daughter, which could be a small indication of the fulfilment of the vow in form of a human sacrifice.<sup>39</sup> Both the version of the LXX<sup>40</sup> and the version of Targ.J<sup>41</sup> confirm the Hebrew text.

a) Josephus chooses a verb that is applicable to different types of sacrifice, bloody or not. Josephus (*Ant.* 5,263) speaks about ἱεουργήσεν (“a promise to sacrifice/offer up”). 266 clarifies the situation with the words θύσας τὴν παιῖδα ὀλοκαύσεν, “he sacrificed the child as a holocaust.”

<sup>36</sup> Translation HARRINGTON, in CHARLESWORTH (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, 352–353.

<sup>37</sup> Jacobson observes that “obviously a single child is also going to be the first-born child,” but what we have here is a case of *parallelismus membrorum*. It would be better to think that it is an allusion to the first-born-sacrifice (cf. Ex 22:28–29 etc.).

<sup>38</sup> This is the effect of the analepsis of the sacrifice pronounced in v. 35–36, which is directed to v. 29–30. In this episode, “two actors recount the same event and the obviously subordinate parties . . . confirm the version of the superior” (SJÖBERG, *Wrestling with textual Violence*, 36).

<sup>39</sup> The sacrifice is the absolute ending of the relationship between Jephthah and his daughter, but the status quo of the other relationships (Jephthah – Israel; Jephthah – YHWH) is preserved; cf. SJÖBERG, *Wrestling with textual Violence*, 31.

<sup>40</sup> LXX A+B: ἀνοίσω αὐτὸν ὀλοκαύτωμα. . . καὶ ἐπετέλεσεν ἰ. τὴν εὐχὴν αὐτοῦ.

<sup>41</sup> ועבד יה נדריה נדרה



Jephthah is described by Josephus as a scrupulous person when he returns and discovers that the victim of his vow would be his own daughter (§ 264).

(§ 263) He himself prayed for victory and promised that if he returned home safe and sound, he would sacrifice and offer up (ἱερουργέω)<sup>42</sup> whatever (πάν ὃ τι καὶ πρῶτον) would come (συντύχοι) to meet him first. Then, joining battle, he won a great victory. . . (§ 264) Upon his return, however, he underwent a misfortune that was not at all like his achievements. For his daughter met him she was his only child and still a virgin. He, lamenting the magnitude of his suffering, blamed his daughter for her solicitude for him in meeting him. She sees that her father had consecrated her to God.

Like in the MT, the daughter accepted her destiny without lamenting. In this version it is explicitly said that she was sacrificed (§ 266):

(§ 265) That which was to happen, did not, however, come upon her against her will, namely that she was to die for the victory of her father and the freedom of her fellow-citizens. She did, however, appeal to him to award her two months to bewail her youth with her fellow-citizens and then do according to his vow. (§ 266) He granted her the time just mentioned. Once this was past he sacrificed the child as a holocaust.

When the girl does not bewail her virginity, but her youth (§ 265), Josephus probably intends to play down similarities between Judaism and Greek Paganism (Idomeneus, Iphigeneia, Artemis cults), and to confirm that she was offered and not only dedicated.<sup>43</sup> Instead of the Greek parallels, Josephus reinforces the parallelism with the sacrifice of Isaac in Gn 22,<sup>44</sup> when he states that Isaac and the daughter were both the only children (μονογενής) of their father (*Ant.* 1.222; 5.264)—a formulation, which does not correspond to the text of the LXX, where τῆς is translated as ἀγαπητός “beloved”. Furthermore, the answer of the daughter in accepting the role of victim seems similar to the answer of Isaac in the version of Josephus: it would be impious not to obey (*Ant.* 1.232); but to turn Jephthah’s daughter into a heroine, as Pseudo-Philo proposes, is not intended. In contrast to Gn 22, Josephus’s description of the activity of the judge lacks any mention of God, the spirit of God *et cetera*. Josephus wants to underline that Jephthah is responsible for the sacrifice, and that God has nothing to do with this affair.<sup>45</sup> The guilt of

<sup>42</sup> The LXX translates as ἀναφέρειν ὀλοκαύτωμα (Jgs 11:31). This term is only attested in 4Mc 3:20 (as noun) and in Greek classic literature.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. FELDMAN, *Studies in Josephus Rewritten Bible*, 184–185. For the tradition-historical implications cf. BAUKS, *Jephtas Tochter*, 67–73.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. FELDMAN, *op. cit.*, 185–186.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. BROWN, *No longer be silent*, 120. She points out that there is an important difference from the Greek parallels: Iphigeneia is explicitly demanded by Artemis, but in the Jephthah story God is nearly absent.

Jephthah is implicitly a denial of any responsibility on the part of God. The consequences of Jephthah's act for future generations that Josephus foresees (such a sacrifice sets a bad example) contain a further statement of Josephus's criticism. Jephthah not only commits a mistake but also creates a heresy.<sup>46</sup>

b) Pseudo-Philo speaks about holocaust twice:

*LAB XXXIX,10*: Whatever meets me will be a holocaust to the Lord . . .  
*XL,8*: And he did everything that he had vowed and offered the holocausts.

The second time he adds the fulfilment of the vow to the uttering of it (*et fecit omnia quecumque oravit et obtulit holocaustomata*).

The daughter has the symbolic name of Sheila (= pass. part., "the one asked for; the one requested;"<sup>47</sup> cf. Josephus, *Ant.* XL,1; 1 Sam 1:20; 27–28), and is designated a sacrifice to YHWH (XXXIX,11). Sheila accepts her destiny in a very noble manner. She is presented as "wise in contrast to her father and perceptive in contrast to all the wise men who are here" (XL,4). She is ready to be sacrificed for the salvation of her people before she demands the time of mourning with her companions, as in the MT. In contrast to Josephus's *Ant.* 5, the commemoration is included and is followed by a notice of the burial.

And Seila, his daughter said to him: "And who is there who would be sad in death, seeing the people freed? Or do you not remember what happened in the days of your fathers when the father placed the son as a holocaust, and he did not refuse him, but gladly gave consent to him, and the one being offered was ready and the one who was offering was rejoicing? And now do not annul everything you have vowed, but carry it out." (XL,2)

Unlike Josephus, Pseudo-Philo does not make a negative judgment about human sacrifice in general. The story only refers to cultic misbehaviour, which is provoked by the openness of the vow (cf. Josephus). On the other hand, Pseudo-Philo follows Josephus's portrait of the daughter as an exemplary child. But he inserts some additions. She demands that her father fulfil the vow and forbids mourning. But her companions prepare a burial place and invent the ritual of commemoration. Virginity and death are the aspects Pseudo-Philo explicitly focuses on. The conviction of the daughter that her death will bring salvation to her people, explains her glorification of death. As Josephus, Pseudo-Philo has made some additions to the narrative, but in this case

<sup>46</sup> συμφορά "calamity, misfortune" in Josephus, *Ant.* 5, 264 could be interpreted as a fate independent of Jephthah's activity (cf. BROWN, *No Longer Be Silent*, 119).

<sup>47</sup> Cf. the explanation of the etymology by BOGAERT, "Les 'Antiquités Bibliques'," 342–43; JACOBSON, *A Commentary on Pseudo-Philo's Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*, 960–61, proposes "she who has been borrowed" (cf. 1 Sam. 1:20; 27–28).

in a paradoxical way: the motif of the wise men, who should be consulted in religious cases (cf. Targum Jonathan; Josephus).

XL,4: and the Lord thought of her by night and said, “Behold now I have shut up the tongue of the wise men of my people for this generation so that they cannot respond to the daughter of Jephthah, to her word, in order that my word be fulfilled and my plan that I thought out not be foiled.”

Comparison with the MT reveals that, finally, the human sacrifice is required by God in order to punish the father and to glorify the daughter.<sup>48</sup> Pseudo-Philo underlines the absolute claim of God to have the human being at his disposal, at the cost of projecting a very uncomfortable image of God (“alteration”<sup>49</sup>). The reaction of the people who hear about the incident, cited by Josephus, is not taken into consideration by Pseudo-Philo. On the contrary, God is free to chose his punishment for Jephthah for his illegal behaviour. In both versions, the necessity of fulfilling the vow is unquestioned and there is no suggestion that it could be revoked, as was claimed by the targumic version. All these additions are interpolations which were legitimated by gaps in the biblical text.

c) The comparison of Josephus’ and Pseudo-Philo’s versions reveals many parallels:

<b>Josephus</b>	<b>Pseudo-Philo</b>
Lack of God’s spirit	God strengthened the spirit of J. (39,8)
Prayer and promise to sacrifice whatever . . .	J. explains to the people that he will offer to God as holocaust whoever . . .
His daughter, a virgin, his only child, comes out	Critical view by God of the unspecific vow (cf. Targ. J)—God chooses the daughter
She is accepting of her fate	She is accepting of her fate and refers to Isaac
	Jephthah recognizes the meaning of her name Sheila
She demands to be allowed to bewail her youth	She demands to be allowed to bewail her youth
She is offered as a holocaust	[Holocaust]
Neither lawful nor pleasing	God shuts up the tongue of a wise man consulted by her and confirms the necessity of the human sacrifice
Ritual is lacking	Holocaust, burial, and ritual

<sup>48</sup> Cf. BAUMGARTEN, “Remember That Glorious Girl!”, stresses the great importance of Pseudo-Philo for the medieval interpretation of the story.

<sup>49</sup> BROWN (*No longer be silent*, 97) emphasizes the fact that “at the time when commentators on the whole sought to censure Jephthah’s vow, he (= Pseudo-Philo) has chosen to portraying God as responsible for the sacrifice of Jephthah’s daughter.” Here, another implicit allusion (“metalepsis”) to Gn 22 is given.

Both authors “comment” on the incidental introduction of the spirit of God in v. 29 (MT) in a critical way: Josephus omits it as he omits all reference to God in his narrative. Pseudo-Philo speaks about God and inserts the spirit at the beginning of the story but in the sense of strengthening the spirit of Jephthah as a military commander and not as a description of the close relationship between him and God. The idea of the vow is omitted, too. Josephus prefers to speak about a prayer for victory, and the vow becomes a promise. This corresponds to a generally critical evaluation of vows in the Judaism of this time.<sup>50</sup> Pseudo-Philo speaks about Jephthah making a statement to the people, saying that he wants to offer a holocaust to God. When God discovers the unspecific character of the vow, he intervenes and determines the daughter as an appropriate victim (sacrifice of the first-born in order to justify the act). In both versions, the daughter accepts her fate and is glorified for this. There are several striking implicit and explicit allusions to the Aqeda story of Gn 22. In Jgs 11, a different type of comment is used to fill a gap. Finally, the father accepts her demand to bewail her youth, and she will be commemorated in the future by a ritual. Pseudo-Philo adds the remark that she consulted a wise man in the mountains, but God himself shut up his tongue to prevent any obstacle to the realisation of the sacrifice (40:4). The God of Pseudo-Philo aims to accomplish the punishment of Jephthah without mercy. This is the most important difference between Josephus and Pseudo-Philo: Josephus interprets the sacrifice as neither lawful nor pleasing to God but as a scandal for future generations. The commemoration ritual is probably missing for the following reason: an inappropriate sacrifice cannot be remembered. For Pseudo-Philo the glorification of the wise and pious daughter is important. Thus, a burial notice is added to the holocaust and the ritual. The latter is transformed from a meta-comment by the narrator into a proper event that concludes the story.<sup>51</sup> Following Genette, we can speak about a surplus in the nature of a commentary, or a free, even illegitimate, interpretation<sup>52</sup> that is strongly inspired by intertexts like Gn 22 or Greek traditions.

## **2. An example of ambiguous semantics: the mourning of Jephthah in verse 35**

The vocabulary of mourning in v. 35 (MT) is ambiguous: “When he saw her, he tore his clothes, and said: Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low; you have become the cause of great trouble to

<sup>50</sup> Cf. BAUKS, “Jephtas Gelübde”; ead., *Jephtas Tochter*, 82–95.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. SJÖBERG, *Wrestling with Textual Violence*, 77.

<sup>52</sup> GENETTE, *Palimpsests*, 203.

me.” To tear the clothes is a typical act of mourning. The following words are less clear, particularly v. 35c: “you have become a great trouble to me.” The verb עכר is very ambiguous: its first meaning is “to make turbid,” metaphorically, “to afflict” or “to retain, to hold back”; the second meaning is “to rake up.” The reader can interpret the words of the father as a reproach or as expressing the tragedy of the situation. LXX<sup>B</sup> prefers the former and interprets the words as a reproach and therefore preserves the metaphorical character of the following expression: *ταραχῆ ἐτάραξάς με, καὶ σὺ ἦς ἐν τῷ ταραχῶ μου*, “you have troubled me with trouble and you are (in) my trouble . . .” (cf. MT). LXX<sup>A</sup> has rendered עכר hiph., “bend the knees” by ἐμποδοστατάω, “to be in the way of someone” (*hapax*), and עכר by the metaphorical expression σκῶλον ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς, “a thorn in the eyes.” Josephus also prefers an active involvement of Jephthah, who blames his daughter: “he underwent a misfortune that was not at all like his achievements. . . He, lamenting the magnitude of his suffering, blamed his daughter for her solicitude in meeting him . . .” (5,264). Pseudo-Philo recognizes a broader signification: “And when Jephthah saw her, he grew faint and said: ‘Rightly was your name called Seila, that you might be offered in sacrifice. And now who will put my heart in the balance and my soul on the scale’.” Further, his daughter was determined to be a victim of sacrifice because of being named Sheila, “the requested one.” He preserves the aspect of tragedy with a notion of providence. Thus, the mourning of the father is transformed into the negation of his responsibility for the begetting of the daughter. At the same time, the importance of Sheila grows because of her contact with the wise men of Israel and the high esteem in which she is held by God.<sup>53</sup> In contrast to that, there is another addition, which is Sheila’s lament (LX.5-7). Her lament is a long individual speech and the climax of the narrative, distinguished by its lyrical tone, and its heavy focus on the fate of the daughter.

### 3. The narrative view

The “absence of the narrator” provoked by the neutral presentation of facts without any comments or evaluation has been completely changed. In the terminology of Genette<sup>54</sup> the biblical story focuses on an emotionally neutral or involved external position, situated outside the characters of the story. The hypertexts of Jgs 11 present another focalization. In the version of Pseudo-Philo, the narrator is less obvious than

<sup>53</sup> Cf. SJÖBERG, *op. cit.*, 78–79.

<sup>54</sup> GENETTE, *Narrative Discourse*, 189; cf. SJÖBERG, *Wrestling with Textual Violence*, 40–44.

in the MT. His function is to apportion speech sequences among the actors. The comments are given by God who condemns Jephthah's vow and commends the sacrifice of the daughter. In the *Antiquities* of Josephus, the biblical text is narrated. Because of the omission of dialogues and speech, the text seems to percolate through the narrator, who is very present in this version.

On the one hand, the ancient versions add comments to the MT:

Targ. J. adds the obligation of a vowing person to ask a priest (Pinchas), how to redeem the sacrifice (cf. bTan 4a + Rabbinic traditions).

Josephus (*Ant.* 5,266) declares that the sacrifice is neither lawful nor pleasing to God but a scandal for future generations.

Pseudo-Philo (*LAB* 39,11) adds the inappropriate nature of the unspecific vow and its dangers: there is no possibility of annulling it (40,2), and the vow is spoken carelessly. At the same time, the name of Seila announces her predestination to be sacrificed. And the allusions to a sacrifice of firstlings (God) or to salvation (like Isaac; daughter) transform the sacrifice into a positive act.

The gloss in Targ. J brings in the Rabbinic view of the general problems that affect vows and their consequences. The Talmud and other Rabbinic writings require that a rabbi or priest be consulted for instruction on how to redeem a human sacrifice. Josephus and Pseudo-Philo confine themselves to criticising the unspecific character of the vow. Other Rabbinic traditions suspect the reader of a misunderstanding. In v. 31 two alternative solutions are proposed: if an animal comes out first, then it is to be sacrificed, but if a human, then he or she is to be dedicated to God.

On the other hand, the versions omit passages of the biblical text:

Josephus (*Ant.* 5, 263) does not talk about divine intervention. Pseudo-Philo (*LAB* XXXIX,8) explains that God strengthened the spirit of Jephthah in a military sense. Josephus lacks the commemoration ritual (Josephus, *Ant.* 5,266: the scandalous nature of the sacrifice forbids any commemoration). And the idea of the father's mourning has changed to reproaches of his daughter. Instead of bewailing his daughter, the father criticizes her (LXX; Josephus, *Ant.* 5,264: Jephthah blames his daughter).

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The different examples we have considered of the Jewish reception history of Jgs 11:29–40, both translations and rewritten texts, illustrate four points which demonstrate the theological problems of the narrative:

Did human sacrifices to YHWH exist in Ancient Israel, or is the narrative an example of the dedication of a human being to the temple service as a consequence of a vow (cf. 1 Sam 1)?

Would God recognize vows, if the victim was an unspecific or an inappropriate offering?

Why does Jephthah not inquire about the possibility of annulling his vow?

Does the narrative focus on God and his dark side, on Jephthah and his egocentric and impious character, or on his daughter, the victim?

There are plenty of pregnant ambiguities and gaps in the biblical text inviting not only the reader, but also the authors of the rewritten texts, to interpret the intention of these passages in different ways. The absence of the narrator, who qualifies the events, is also striking. The *rewritten texts* are different: added comments, valued acts and withdrawn openness of the action prove the discomfort of the rewriting author. With techniques such as additions, summarising paragraphs, grammatical and semantic specifications and different focalization the gaps of the biblical text are filled in and, with regard to their openness, theologically interpreted. Neither Josephus, nor Pseudo-Philo is a literal commentary on Jgs 11. For example they do not include any quotation of verses to explain their point of view. They have transmitted paraphrases<sup>55</sup> or hypertexts, which are highly interpretive.

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<sup>55</sup> FELDMAN, *Josephus’ Interpretation of the Bible*, 17. He sees in the Aramaic targums the closest parallel to Josephus among the Jewish sources and classifies their versions as paraphrases.

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