An Ancient Debate on Canonicity: Julius Africanus and Origen on Susanna

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1. *From Archetypal Patterns to a Canonical Text*

The biblical story of Susanna is based on a universal narrative pattern. A beautiful and innocent woman (her name means 'lily') becomes the victim of the unlawful desire of two powerful men, and faces a fatal choice between rape and death. Having refused the indecent proposal she is falsely accused by the two frustrated men, is sentenced to death by a community spellbound by their might, and is almost executed. When all hope is lost, the unexpected intervention of a young and hitherto unknown hero saves her life and condemns the perpetrators to the same fate as the one they had prepared for the innocent woman. His name, Daniel, indicates the miraculous and divine nature of his intervention: 'God pronounced judgment' through him. This basic scheme can be further reduced to archetypal patterns (beauty desired, innocence accused, frustrated desire turning into hatred, justice abused and superior force defeated by the seemingly powerless) from which many true stories have been and will be created by writers, artists, and life.[1]

Searching for examples within the precincts of the biblical canon, we find some of the most prominent figures of Israel's history involved in situations made up of these elements. Joseph was the victim of the passion of his master's wife, and his deliverance from the prison was no more likely than that of Susanna from execution (Gen. 39–41). Tamar was falsely accused by her father-in-law Judah, and had she not produced the tokens proving that she was pregnant from no one else but him, she could hardly have escaped being burnt (Gen. 38). The Hittite Uriah, one of David's most faithful soldiers, was

1. For an overview of some developments of the narrative pattern presupposed by the story of Susanna, cf. G. Huet, 'Daniel et Suzanne: Note de littérature comparée', *RHR* 65 (1912), pp. 277-84; 76 (1917), pp. 129-30; W. Baumgartner, 'Susanna: Die Geschichte einer Legende', *ARW* 24 (1926), pp. 259-80 (repr. in *idem*, *Zum Alten Testament und seiner Umwelt: Ausgewählte Aufsätze* [Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1959]); B. Heller, 'Die Susanna-Erzählung: Ein Märchen', *ZAW* 54 (1936), pp. 281-87; S. Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1957).

less fortunate: his king ordered him to be killed by sending him 'in the forefront of the hottest battle' (2 Sam. 11.15), because of his beautiful wife Bathsheba, the future mother of King Solomon. The prototype of young Daniel, the prophet Nathan, could not save Uriah's life, nor was the repentant king sentenced to death.[2] But it was after this episode that the calamities in the house of David began, and one cannot resist seeing in it the ultimate cause of the fatal division of the monarchy, eventually leading to the Exile.

Other than the narrative substrate shared with many other narratives, these stories also have something else in common. As biblical stories, they are part of a more comprehensive narrative, namely, the history of Israel, a singular course of events with a potentially universal relevance. This is also true of the story of Susanna, although the main character is presented as a private individual and the perpetrators are also unnamed. Only Daniel is familiar from other biblical stories, but the role he plays here is not particularly characteristic of the prophet as he appears in the book named after him. In fact, Daniel could be easily replaced by another brave young man or woman, and the fact that he is young and unknown, as well as the meaning of his name, seem to be more important than his relation to the main character of the book of Daniel. The absence (or doubtful presence) in the story of a clear link to the main characters of Israel's history might be considered as a consequence of the particular historical situation. Israel as a whole is in exile in Babylonia, and in the absence of a state and a king the mainstream of its history is constituted not by the deeds of the members of the royal house but—as in Egypt before the Exodus[3]—by the fate of the people as a whole.

Beside this relative anonymity, there are at least two major distinguishing features in the book of Susanna that make the story unique in relation to other biblical stories based on this pattern. The first is the utter wickedness of the two elders, combined with their prominent status. In this story the perpetrator is not alone, so that one could suppose that he was driven by a sudden desire, but they are a pair, acting consciously, upon previous agreement. As friends of Susanna and her husband, they need not climb the garden walls or sneak in through the doors: they have free entrance to their house and they attack her from the very heart of the protected estate. And, above all, they are depicted as the highest representatives of the very law that prohibits such acts, held in such high esteem by the whole exiled community that they can feel exempt from all responsibility to higher—at least human—authorities. In the process they are accusers, witnesses, and judges at the same time. The fact that nobody wanted to consult, or expected the intervention of, a prophet suggests

2. As a king, David could have been sentenced to death by God alone, in the way his predecessor Saul was sentenced to death; cf. 1 Sam. 15.10-11 and 31.1-13.

3. Cf. Exod. 1 where 'the sons of Israel' are consistently referred to in the singular.

that the community was not only bereft of king and priests, but also the prophetic authority was transferred to the 'elders and judges'.

The second major distinguishing feature of the story is the way in which 'Daniel' intervenes. Although he is undoubtedly a prophet, he acts like a judge, citing the law, cross-examining the two elders, and demonstrating the falsity of their accusation through evidence. Since they have accused Susanna with a likely accusation, claiming that she had a secret rendezvous in the garden with a young man, Daniel separates the two elders from each other and asks each of them under what tree they saw Susanna and her alleged friend being intimate with each other. In their answer they name different trees (*schinos* and *prinos*), thereby betraying their lies. When Daniel tells them about the punishments awaiting them, the words (*schizein* and *prizein*) rhyme with the corresponding trees.

The story is extant in two Greek versions, and they agree in these major features as well as in many points of detail. Nevertheless, their emphasis is different. The one associated with the Septuagint (the 'Old Greek' version) is more concerned with the consistency of the legal procedure, and its style strongly reminds one of biblical narratives. The other, attributed to Theodotion, is more preoccupied with the dramatic coherence of the plot and despite its Hebraisms it exhibits many traits of a Hellenistic short story. For some reason it was the latter which became part of the Christian canon, but fortunately the major part of the other Greek version has also been preserved in a few manuscripts.[4] The two versions are two possible adaptations of the narrative to the biblical milieu, reflecting different attitudes on the part of the redactors and the religious communities represented by them. It would probably not be too far-fetched to suppose that the Old Greek version is better suited to the demonstration of the importance of accuracy in legal procedures, whereas Theodotion contrasts 'elders' and 'prophet' in more general terms, and this version is more suitable for allegorical interpretations. It is not unlikely that the latter was popular in a Hellenistic Jewish milieu, whereas the former expressed the views of Pharisaic circles.[5]

4. The first six verses of the Old Greek version, describing the background and circumstances, are lost. Both versions are printed side by side in the modern editions of the LXX. On the comparison of both versions, cf. K. Koenen, 'Von der todesmutigen Susanna zum begabten Daniel. Zur Überlieferungsgeschichte der Susanna-Erzählung', *TZ* 54 (1998), pp. 1-13.

5. For the latter, cf. N. Brüll, 'Das apokryphische Susanna-Buch', *Jahrbücher für jüdische Geschichte und Literatur* 3 (1877), pp. 1-69, and more recently D.W. Clanton, '(Re)dating the Story of Susanna: A Proposal', *JSJ* 34 (2003), pp. 121-40. On the interpretation of Susanna, cf. H. Engel, *Die Susanna-Erzählung* (OBO, 61; Freiburg, Switzerland: Universitätsverlag; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985), and J.J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), pp. 420-39.

In any case, neither of the two versions has an extant Hebrew or Aramaic original. Consequently, the story is not included in the canon of the Hebrew Bible, and as a further consequence, it is absent from most Protestant Bibles, relegated to the category of 'apocrypha' or 'deutero-canonica', halfway between canonical and extra-canonical. The hermeneutical implications of canonicity are plain: the attitude of the reader to a canonical text implies a rare confidence in the consistency of the meaning, since in an inspired text even the details are believed not to be accidental.[6] For this reason, canonicity is also highly relevant for the intellectual history of the community which accepted or rejected certain texts as canonical. The reasons for the authority of Susanna in Greek-speaking Jewish communities, its canonicity in the early Church, and its rejection by the Rabbis in the age of the Tannaim remain largely obscure.[7] Fortunately, an important document from these formative centuries of both the Jewish and the Christian canon has been preserved, the analysis of which might shed some light on the debates concerning the canonicity of the story. The document containing the arguments for and against its authenticity are preserved in a Greek correspondence from the middle of the third century, a letter to Origen by Julius Africanus, and Origen's reply to it.[8] I do not think that the evidence provided either by Origen or Africanus can decide the question of authenticity in either way. What their correspondence reveals is the nature of the debate, which, I think, is determined, to some extent, by the story itself. It is through the nature of the debate, then, that we may conjecture what might have happened to the text before the time of Origen and Africanus.

2. *The Arguments of Africanus and Origen*

Origen, most probably in his more advanced years, participated in a public dispute, and Julius Africanus, a learned Christian contemporary, was among the audience. It is not clear whether they had known each other before, but it

6. Cf. the name of Susanna's husband. If the story is canonical, the coincidence of his name with that of the exiled king of Judah will be a potential link for the exegete to the history of the Davidic dynasty.

7. For traces of Rabbinic debates on the canonicity of the Song of Songs, cf. *m. Yad.* 3.5; of Ezekiel, cf. *Hag.* 13a. On the Rabbinic canon, cf. recently J.P. Lewis, 'Jamnia Revisited', in L.M. McDonald and J.A. Sanders (eds.), *The Canon Debate* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), pp. 146-16.

8. For the text and French translation of both letters, see N. de Lange (ed.), *La lettre à Africanus sur l'histoire de Suzanne* in Origène, *Philocalie, 1-20. Sur les Ecritures et la lettre à Africanus sur l'histoire de Suzanne* (Sources chrétiennes, 302; Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1983), pp. 469-578. References in the present study are to the chapters of this edition. On the correspondence, cf. Engel, *Die Susanna-Erzählung*, pp. 17-24.

is very likely that Africanus was on Origen's side.[9] Precisely for this reason, he was surprised when he heard that Origen, in order to substantiate one of his arguments, quoted Daniel's prophecy from the story of Susanna. He did not raise an objection on the spot, but not very much later he set out to write his remarks, and in a concise letter he listed his arguments against the authenticity of the story, asking Origen to convince him of the opposite, if he could (Afr. § 10). It is immediately clear what was at stake in their correspondence: if the story is not canonical, then it may be considered edifying, but may not be cited as evidence in theological debates. Africanus's critical observations are remarkably to the point—nor did Origen take them casually: although he was travelling, he took his time to answer each of them in detail, composing a letter about ten times longer than that of Africanus.

Let us see the main points of their arguments.

a. *The Way of Prophesizing*

Africanus points out that in the present story Daniel is 'seized by the Spirit' before exclaiming that the judgment is unjust (Sus. 45), whereas in other stories he does not receive inspiration but prophesizes through 'visions and dreams' and 'angelic appearances' (Afr. § 3).[10] Moreover, in his view, the prophetic role of Daniel in the book of Susanna is fundamentally questioned by the fact that he quotes another prophet, Moses, since the truth of a real prophetic saying would not need any justification (Afr. § 8).[11]

In his reply (Origen 16), Origen refers to the Epistle to the Hebrews, where it is made clear that 'God has spoken to the fathers on many occasions and in varying manners through the prophets', and which in Origen's interpretation is true also of one and the same prophet (Origen 16.6-9).[12] As an example, Origen mentions Jacob who saw dreams, wrestled with an angel, and received inspiration.[13] As to the second objection, he claims that other

9. At the beginning of his letter (§ 2) he refers to Origen's conversation partner as 'that ignorant' (*ton agnômona*).

10. It is to be noted that in the Old Greek version it is precisely an angel who gives the prophetic inspiration to Daniel. This might be a reaction to objections like that of Africanus. At any rate, it is clearly the case that Africanus does not know the Old Greek version.

11. For the quotation (Exod. 23.7) see Sus. 53. Note that what is quoted is an 'article' from the Law, rather than a saying of Moses the prophet.

12. The quotation is Heb. 1.1; Origen attributes the letter to Paul although he is aware that its authenticity is debated by others (14.1-5).

13. Gen. 31.10-13; 32.25-32; 49.1-27. To be sure, Jacob was a patriarch, not a prophet in the strict sense; in general, Origen seems to consider all the great persons of the Old Testament as prophets—a sign of the prophetic self-identification of the Church.

prophets also quote their predecessors; his evidence is identical passages in Isaiah and Micah, or in Psalms and Chronicles.[14]

b. *The Depiction of the Historical Circumstances*

For Africanus, there is a sharp contradiction between other accounts of the Exile and the situation found in the book of Susanna. Jeremiah, Isaiah, and the book of Tobit all describe a terrible state of affairs,[15] 'whereas these people', he says, 'even pass death sentences, and that on the wife of their king Joakim whom the king of Babylon had made his fellow ruler. And if it was not he but another Joakim from among the people, whence did he have as a captive such a great palace and a garden as spacious as this?' (Afr. § 6).

To this criticism Origen (19–20) replies by giving three arguments, but even before these he points out that Africanus's reference to the book of Tobit is a blatant inconsistency since this book is no less absent from the Hebrew canon than the story of Susanna (19.11-16). But once we use it as a source—after all, for Christians Tobit is an inspired book—it will become clear that 'even in captivity there were captives who did well'.[16] Esther's uncle Mordecai could also see the king whenever he wished, and the same was true of Nehemiah.[17] Origen adds that in spite of Africanus's statement the text does not say that Joakim's house and garden were great, nor is he ever called a king.[18] Origen's second argument is particularly interesting. What is remarkable, he asks, about a subjected people being allowed to live according to their own laws? His example is contemporary Jewry: 'Even today, when the Romans are in power and the Jews pay tax to them, we know by our own experience what great power the ethnarch enjoys with the assent of the Emperor: he is practically the king of his nation. Judgments are being passed in accordance with the Law, and some are even sentenced to death, not entirely openly, but neither with the complete ignorance of the sovereign'.[19] Origen's third argument is intended to convince Africanus in case the historical parallel were not convincing enough. Even if we were to concede that for Judah and Benjamin, who were deported by the Babylonians, it was really not allowed to pass death sentences, there were ten other tribes in

14. Isa. 2.2-4 = Mic. 4.1-3; 1 Chron. 16.22 = Ps. 104 (105).15; 1 Chron. 16.23 = Ps. 95 (96).1. The verses cited by Origen are repetitions and parallels, rather than quotations by one prophet from another.

15. Jer. 14.16; Isa. 39.7; Tob. 2.3.

16. Origen 19.16-40; cf. Tob. 1.12-22.

17. Origen 19.40-50; cf. Est. 2.19-23, Neh. 1.11-2.6 (= 2 Ezra 11.11–12.6).

18. Nevertheless, *paradeisos* is normally more than the garden of a common individual even without an adjective specifically indicating its size.

19. Origen 20.7-15. On the institution of the ethnarch or patriarch (Hebrew *nasi*), cf. M. Jacobs, *Die Institution des jüdischen Patriarchen. Eine quellen- und traditionskritische Studie zur Geschichte der Juden in der Spätantike* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1995).

Babylonia, brought into exile earlier by the Assyrians, about whom we have no information whatsoever (20.15-20).

c. *The Style of the Story*

For Africanus's taste, the difference in style between the books of Susanna and Daniel is striking. Whereas Daniel's other stories are written in a solemn style, this story reminds the reader of a farce. What for Africanus is especially farce-like (and utterly superfluous after the prophetic saying) is the procedure of demonstration, especially the two puns and the absurd punishments (Afr. §4).

As an answer to this objection Origen quotes the book of Kings, claiming that if we wanted to find something really farcical in the Bible, then we could as well single out the celebrated judgment of Solomon to cut the debated child in two (Origen 17.11-14; cf. 1 Kgs 3.13-28). If this scene does not entail the exclusion of Kings from the canon, than we should not exclude Susanna either on account of its style. Origen further notes that the reason why it did not suffice for Solomon simply to say 'Give back the child to her since it belongs to her' was that in addition to the simple statement of the truth he also needed to convince the people (Origen 17.52-66). It was for the same reason that Daniel argued in the language of the simple people despite the prophetic inspiration. As for the brutality of cutting by sword, a punishment which figures in both Kings and Susanna, he reports that according to an oral tradition told by a Jewish friend, the statement is not entirely literal but refers to the world to come (11.9-12); moreover, the expression is used by Jesus himself in one of his parables.[20]

d. *Original Language and the Jewish Canon*

Africanus argues that the puns employed in the demonstration show that the work was written in Greek, since the corresponding Hebrew words do not rhyme, whereas it is a general principle that in order for an Old Testament text to be canonical, it is required that it should have been previously accepted by the Jewish tradition as a holy text (Afr. § 5). And since the Jewish tradition considers as holy texts only those written in Hebrew, it follows that a text without a Hebrew original cannot be a holy text. It is no wonder, Africanus claims in his final argument, that the story, together with the two others on Bel and the Dragon, is not part of the Jewish canon (Afr. §7).

Origen implicitly subscribes to the view that for Christians only those texts can be considered as holy which were translated from Hebrew—this is clear from his arguments in favour of the Hebrew origin of the story. The puns, he

20. Origen 11.12-16; Lk. 12.45-46; Mt. 24.48-51 ('the master will cut him off'). As for the style in general, Origen simply does not find it different from that of the rest of Daniel; cf. 22.1-2.

argues, do not challenge the existence of a Hebrew original, since Africanus cannot be certain that they are *impossible* in Hebrew. Origen himself did extensive research on the question and he reports what he had heard from those Hebrews with whom he discussed it when he first encountered the problem (Origen 10.9-30). They told him that it was impossible to know the Hebrew original of those words that do not occur in the holy texts since today the language of the Jews is 'Syriac'—that is, Aramaic. Under such circumstances, Origen claims, it is *ab ovo* impossible to tell whether the puns exist in Hebrew. When he later on resumes the problem of the puns he gives the reasonable proposal that perhaps the translator did not adhere to the original meaning of the words (after all, it is not really important in the story which particular trees are involved) but invented *similar* Greek puns (18.1-8).[21]

Moreover, the existence of a Hebrew original is not merely possible but is in fact proven by oral traditions transmitted by prominent Jews. According to these midrashim, the two elders were historical figures and we are to imagine them in more or less the same way as they are depicted in the story of Susanna. The first tradition, which Origen heard from a certain 'son of a sage', identifies the elders with Ah(i)ab and Sedekias in Jeremiah.[22] Another tradition (Origen 12.1-15), also told to Origen personally, presupposes the above identification and explains Daniel's words 'This is how you have been treating the daughters of Israel, and they were intimate with you through fear. But the daughter of Judah did not tolerate your lawlessness' (Sus. 57). According to the explanation, Ahiab and Sedekias spread the rumour among the captives waiting for redemption that they had reliable information on the coming of the Messiah. Whenever they saw an attractive woman, they confidentially told her that they would beget the Messiah. And the women, driven partly by hope, partly by fear, gave in.

e. *Conclusions*

We have no information whether Africanus was finally convinced by Origen's arguments. What we know is that, according to the conclusion of his letter to Origen, the story, while 'a charming piece of writing', is nevertheless 'a forgery' (Afr. § 2) and a more recent addition to the book of Daniel (Afr. §9). Therefore, it should not be used as evidence in disputes, nor should a deeper meaning be searched in it, since it is not to be considered a holy text in the Church at all.

By contrast, Origen claims that *if* the story is part of the Greek canon used in the churches; *if* the existence of its Hebrew original cannot be rejected; and *if* Jewish oral traditions confirm the existence of the latter, then the only

21. The argument raises the question of the precise distinction between translation and redaction.

22. Origen 11.1-12; cf. Jer. 36.22-23 (LXX) = 29.22-23 (MT).

possible solution is that the story had originally been part of the Hebrew canon but was removed from it later on (Origen 13.3-6; 14.46-49; 15.19-25). 'The elders, the leaders and the judges', he says, 'removed from the knowledge of the people whatever they could of those writings that contained accusations against them, but some of them survive as apocrypha' (13.4-6).[23] He makes an effort to demonstrate by way of a series of New Testament quotations that an entire tradition, namely, the killing of the prophets (witnessed not only by the Martyrdom of Isaiah but also Hebrews and Jesus himself in Matthew) is also completely absent from the Old Testament (Origen 13.6–14.46; 15.1-19). Origen's final conclusion is that since we cannot fully rely on the Jewish authorities, while in the churches the divine providence and the sacrifice of Christ guarantee the reliable transmission of texts, we are compelled to acknowledge the authenticity of the story of Susanna.

3. *Challenging Authority*

It is not my aim here to evaluate the individual arguments, most of which have reappeared in modified forms in the history of interpretation. Both authors make points that sound modern today and others that seem far-fetched or naïve. What is more relevant for us now is the general stance of the two authors, which, I believe, is not entirely independent from the contents of the text, the authenticity of which they are discussing.

Africanus's remarks are clearly based on good common sense, a refined literary taste and a reverence for history and literary transmission. For him, the Old Testament is a literary corpus comparable to Homer or Plato, even though it is naturally more important for a Christian than other literary texts. It was written and transmitted by the Jewish people and authorized by their professional and authentic representatives. His question is whether the story *is* really part of this canon, and not whether it *should be* part of it. Africanus's criteria are largely stylistic, and even where he argues from the historical reality, his approach is that of a literary critic rather than a historian or a theologian.

Origen's attitude to the canonicity of the story is already clear from the way he refers to it in the very beginning of his letter, namely, as a work 'considered by the churches as part of the book of Daniel' (Origen 2.2; cf. 3.14-15; 4.4-5; 8.2, 7; 9.8). Consequently, for him the Bible is not a closed literary corpus to be preserved and cleansed from later interpolations in an antiquarian way, but a living tradition transmitted by the Church. It is the authority of the Church which decides what should be included in the canon and what is

23. Cf. already Hippolytus, *In Dan.* 1.15.

to be excluded from it.[24] Moreover, he lays great emphasis on the unity of the New and the Old Testament within the boundaries of the one canon, where everything has a special value and similar authority. He shows through numerous examples that most of Africanus's objections could equally be raised against other, uncontested books of the Bible. Finally, he is also aware that although the Jewish canon is closed, the creativity that had created the written Torah is still active in the form of oral traditions. In this sense contemporary Judaism, for Origen, is also a living tradition.

Although Origen's final conclusion is perhaps contrary to the intuition of most readers today, nevertheless he points to an important feature of the problem of canonicity. Today it is widely accepted that most biblical books are composed of various layers; the discrepancy between the first and the second half of the book of Daniel, for example, or between Proto-, Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah, makes it sufficiently clear that canonicity is not synonymous with authenticity. We may add that formal requirements of canonicity, like a historical context or stylistic features, could be supplied easily—pseudepigrapha and midrashim of all times are good examples of this process.[25] It seems to be clear to Origen that what canonicity ultimately depends on is authority; therefore, it is the legitimacy of the authority deciding the canon that is to be established before arguing for the canonicity of an individual text. For Origen, this authority is Christ and the Church, whereas for Africanus it is the Hebrew canon fixed by the Jewish tradition. Of course, Origen did not question the legitimacy of the Jewish tradition as a whole, since in that case he should have questioned the canonicity of the entire Old Testament. But the story of Susanna was a good opportunity for him to criticize Rabbinic Judaism, which—or more precisely the leaders of which—he considered as corrupt, presenting a potential danger for the holy tradition.

It is at this point that the line of the debate on the canonicity of the story meets the line of the plot underlying the story itself. Origen, as we have seen, explicitly associates both the elders in Susanna and the 'elders' who fixed the canon with one of the main traditions of Judaism, the Pharisaic–Rabbinic movement, the chief rival of not only the Sadducees but also the early Christians. In doing so he implicitly identifies himself with young Daniel who challenges the authority of the elders and refutes their false claims by their own words. This is, then, why he took on the heroic task of reconstructing the precise text of Scripture—on the one hand, he no longer trusted the textual

24. In the same way did the Rabbis consider themselves to be authorized to decide on the canon; cf. J.N. Lightstone, 'The Rabbis' Bible: The Canon of the Hebrew Bible and the Early Rabbinic Guild', in McDonald and Sanders (eds.), *The Canon Debate*, pp. 163-84.

25. Cf. C.A. Moore, *Daniel, Esther, and Jeremiah: The Additions. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB, 44; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), pp. 85-86.

transmission by the Rabbis; on the other, he wished to refute or to convince them through that textual version that they considered as authentic (Origen 9.1-19). If we proceed a little further along this line, Susanna will inevitably correspond to Scripture itself, attacked by the elders who want to modify it (e.g. by excluding Susanna from the canon) and therefore to distort its message as a whole; but it is saved by Origen and like-minded polemicists. It is not at all impossible that Africanus also saw himself in the role of young Daniel, although in his case the 'elders' he bravely challenges could only be the Church who had wrongly included the book of Susanna in the canon—potentially people like Origen himself. At any rate, here again Susanna is the symbol of the holy tradition, in this case identified with the pure canon, uncontaminated by inauthentic additions.

In general, the moral implication of the story seems to encourage reactions like those of Africanus and Origen, namely, brave intervention to save innocent truth from corrupt authorities, despite the power of the latter and the passive collaboration of the multitude. Incidentally, Origen and other defenders of the story should have seen the paradox and the risk inherent in a story encouraging such a subversive attitude towards tradition and authority. Other than the idealistic aim of incorporating a revolutionary element into a conservative tradition, one explanation could be that the Church, one of the heirs of the biblical heritage, drew a clear distinction between the tradition of the 'elders' and that of the 'prophets', embracing the latter as their own, and identifying the former with the Rabbinic tradition. Therefore, the subversive potential of the story was mitigated by the fact that its target was not one's own tradition but that of the rival. It seems to be an inherent precondition of the authoritative status of the story in any tradition that there should be a rival heir of the same biblical tradition which could be associated with the two elders—allegorically or more literally. It is this inherent dynamism of the story that might lead us to a conjecture concerning its origin and development—from an archetypal narrative pattern to a (para-)biblical story, modified according to the principles of its tradents (orally or in written form, in Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek), and finally fixed as a candidate for canonicity. It was the canonicity of this fixed text that was at stake in the correspondence of Africanus and Origen; the different variants of the story are represented by the two extant Greek versions, while the initial phase can only be an object of speculation.

The key to a hypothetical reconstruction of this initial phase is provided by Africanus's rather plausible suggestion that the Joakim of the story is the king of Judah. It is not only the name which coincides with that of the king taken into exile by Nebuchadnezzar, but also the situation.[26] According to the

26. In the Greek versions the Hebrew name *Yehoyakhin*, just like his father and predecessor's name *Yehoyaqim*, is transliterated as *Iôakim*.

biblical account, Joakim was released from prison after 37 years of captivity, and his 'throne was set above the throne of all the other kings in Babylonia',[27] which immediately explains the *paradeisos* attributed to him in the book of Susanna. Joakim's privileged position is greatly emphasized by the fact that its description is placed at the very end of both Kings and Jeremiah, inviting the reader to further speculation about his fate in Babylonia. It seems that the point where a primitive form of the story of Susanna could be attached to the mainstream of biblical history was precisely this, probably combined with the elaboration of another tradition, also in Jeremiah, on Ahab and Sedekias, attributed by Origen to the Jewish oral tradition.[28] But other than midrashic curiosity and an inventive combination of scriptural passages, the association of the archetypal pattern with Israel's king in exile probably served another, more important purpose, no less polemical than the one that motivated Origen and Africanus.

If Joakim is the king of Judah, he is the current incarnation of God's promise to David, the representative of the pre-exilic world and the hope of the future restoration of Israel. But since the Exile is dragging on, the hope of the restoration is more likely to manifest in one of the king's offspring than in himself. Indeed, Joakim was the grandfather of Zerubbabel (1 Chron 3.17-19) the object of messianic expectations in the time of the prophet Haggai; moreover, he is also mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus (Hag. 2.20-23; Mt. 1.12 [contrast Lk. 3.27]). In this context Joakim is not only a pious member of the community but a man through whom the mainstream of Israel's history flows, the same lineage at earlier phases of which we find the stories of David and Bathsheba or Judah and Tamar. It follows that Susanna is also much more than an innocent 'lily' and a god-fearing daughter of Judah: she is the potential mother of the Messiah and certainly one of his ancestors. When her beauty is desired by the elders, the Davidic–Messianic lineage is in danger; when she resists, she saves the future son of David from being a *mamzer*.[29] Nevertheless, she must die because the king is powerless (he does not even appear in the story); unless the prophet intervenes, the representatives of the Law would either defile or destroy the mother of the Messiah and the Messiah himself with her. The moral is clear: the elders are a fatal danger for the messianic expectations, which can be saved only by the prophet.

27. 2 Kgs 25.28 = Jer. 52.32; cf. 2 Kgs 25.27-30 and Jer. 52.31-34.

28. On the midrashic origin of the story, cf. J.W. van Henten, 'Het verhaal over Susanna als een prerabbijnse midrasj bij Dan 1.1-2', *Nederlands theologisch tijdschrift* 43 (1989), pp. 278-93.

29. It is very probable that the midrash reported by Origen on the seemingly silly trick of the elders related to the begetting of the Messiah (Origen 12.1-15; cf. above 2.d) goes back to similar speculations. It is to be noted that according to the *Protoevangelium Jacobi* the husband of (H)anna (the mother of Mary) and thus the grandfather of Jesus was also called Joakim.

This sharp contrast between elders and prophets, legalism and messianism, probably did not bear out the religious experience of most groups within Second Temple Judaism. The story was probably widespread, but with a little modification its moral could be transformed into a different one. As Africanus observes, the Daniel of the story does not behave as a real prophet when he quotes the Torah and cross-examines the witnesses like a judge. This element of the story is indeed probably a secondary development. At any rate, if the legal aptitude of Daniel is emphasized while the role of the king is reduced (in the Old Greek version his name is missing), and Susanna already has many children, we have a completely different moral. In this case the conflict is not one between elders and prophets but between wicked and righteous sages, the latter uniting the virtues of the prophet and the scribe.

Speculation could be continued; and if Susanna had become part of the Hebrew canon, we could perhaps read such interpretations in the Rabbinic midrashim as well, not unlike those we have in the Church Fathers.[30] What can be stated with more or less certainty is that these interpretations, together with the arguments of Africanus and Origen, clearly show what happens to an archetypal narrative if it becomes a biblical story. At first sight it might seem to lose its universal character due to a particular adaptation: an archetypal pattern is universal because it is not bound by time and space, whereas the presence of historical coordinates is the most obvious feature of a biblical story. But as soon as the latter is integrated into a larger narrative, into a singular history with universal relevance, then the dimensions of the particular story itself become universal. The story of Susanna is integrated into this unique history if it is canonical: excluded from the canon, it is just one of the particular adaptations of an archetypal pattern that should rather be a myth; within the canon, it is an important milestone on the way to redemption.

30. Cf. B. Halpern-Amaru, 'The Journey of Susanna among the Church Fathers', in E. Spolsky (ed.), *The Judgment of Susanna: Authority and Witness* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), pp. 21-34, and C.B. Tkacz, 'Women Types of Christ: Susanna and Jephthah's Daughter', *Gregorianum* 85 (2004), pp. 278-311.

Support for the Poor: Leviticus 19 in Qumran and in Early Rabbinic Interpretation

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All cultures of antiquity knew some kind of support for the poor from different motives, varying from fear of social unrest to genuine social concern and religious motivations. In biblical tradition, the legal provisions in favour of the poor are all rather late and are documented only after much earlier prophetic texts. Biblical law provides for equal treatment of the poor in the law-court, for immediate payment of the wages of day labourers, for prompt restoration of their clothing taken in pawn and against taking interest from them. It also grants the poor a certain part in the yield of the land of Israel, be it poor man's tithe, the corner of the field, the forgotten sheaf, the gleanings of the field and the vineyard, and so on. Only for part of these provisions do we have evidence that they were really put into practice in the period of the Second Temple.

Rabbinic texts inform us about an elaborate system of support for the poor developed in the centuries after 70; here we also have substantial evidence that much of it was put into practice, be it under the influence of the rabbis, many of whom seem to have engaged themselves personally in the collection of gifts for the poor, be it outside their rather limited sphere of influence. Here I intend to deal only with a very limited aspect of the system, the provisions which grant the poor a certain part of the harvest according to Leviticus 19 and parallels. These biblical texts are the basis of halakhic midrash and of the systematic presentations of rabbinic halakhah in Mishnah and Toseftah, above all in tractate *Pe'ah*. The rabbinic interpretations are first of all texts, theory based on their understanding of the biblical texts. How much of it was put into practice, to what extent and by whom, cannot be determined and is not the present objective.

Leviticus 19 'comprises a miscellany of laws (ritual and ethical, apodictic and casuistic, directed to the individual and to the collective...)... The laws incorporated into chap. 19 were chosen for their aptness to be subsumed