

**'She Made Herself Up Provocatively for the Charming of the Eyes of Men' (Jdt. 10.4):  
Cosmetics and Body Adornment in the Stories of Judith and Susanna**

**Abstract**

The use of cosmetics and body adornment in order to decorate and beautify oneself is an almost universal part of the human experience. This was also true of the ancient Palestinian culture that gave rise to the Hebrew Bible and early Jewish literature. Despite this, cosmetics and their function in the narratives in which they feature is an understudied subject within the academic scholarship of biblical literature. In this paper I consider cosmetics in biblical and Jewish-Hellenistic texts, demonstrating that cosmetics were associated with immoral behavior and illicit sexual practices. Nevertheless, in the stories of Judith and Susanna, these characters apparently receive no such censure for applying cosmetic oil. By considering the use of cosmetics akin to a speech act, able to communicate something specific about one's social or sexual status, I provide a new access to understanding these narratives and the characterisations of their female heroines.

**Key Words**

Book of Judith; Susanna; Additions to Daniel; Cosmetics; Body Adornment.

## **‘She Made Herself Up Provocatively for the Charming of the Eyes of Men’ (Jdt. 10.4): Cosmetics and Body Adornment in the Stories of Judith and Susanna**

### **Introduction**

The use of cosmetics in order to decorate and adorn oneself is an almost universal part of human culture. This was no different in the ancient Palestinian society which gave rise to the Hebrew Bible and early Jewish literature. Yet the study of cosmetics and their function in the narratives in which they feature have received short shrift in the academic study of the Hebrew Bible and related literature, in large part borne out by the interests of the male scholars who have traditionally interpreted these texts. Yet it is clear that the application of cosmetics plays a fundamental role in some of this literature: in the book of Judith and in the story of Susanna from the Additions to Daniel both heroines apply cosmetic oil at key points in the development of the narratives. In this study I will explore the implications of this for understanding the stories of Judith and Susanna. In this context, I understand ‘cosmetics’ to refer to the application of temporary dyes, powders, perfumes, lotions or oils to the skin for the purposes of decoration and the enhancement of beauty (DeMello 2007: 82).<sup>1</sup> By exploring references to such items in the Hebrew Bible and in early Jewish literature, it will be demonstrated that cosmetics were associated with women in general – and with a certain type of woman in particular. In this

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<sup>1</sup> The Hebrew Bible is also replete with more permanent examples of body modification such as nose piercing (Gen. 24.22); ear piercing (Exod. 21.6; Deut. 15.16); and body cutting (1 Kgs 18.28; Jer. 16.6; 41.5; Zech. 13.6). On the latter phenomenon, see Jacobs (2014a); and Stavrakopoulou (2013: 536-538). While tattooing is apparently outlawed in Lev. 19.28; 21.5 and Deut. 14.1, nevertheless this practice seems to be implied by Isa. 44.23; on the evidence for a tradition of tattooing in biblical and early Jewish tradition, see Jacobs (2014b). The most famous example of permanent body modification in the Bible is of course circumcision (Gen. 17.6-14; Exod. 4.24-16; Lev. 12.3; 19.23). For an excellent discussion of the adornment of hair in the Hebrew Bible, see Niditch (2008); hair shaving has been treated by Olyan (1998).

literature, cosmetic application is connected with immoral behaviour and deviant sexual practices. Accordingly, the use of cosmetics usually has negative implications. Yet both Judith and Susanna receive no such censure for their application of cosmetics in the narratives that bear their names. By developing a new theoretical model with which to understand the application of cosmetics and the adornment of the body in these early Jewish texts, it will be shown that in the stories of Judith and Susanna cosmetics function to allow the actors to behave or to be read as behaving in ways which would usually be barred from them, opening up a new access to understanding these ancient Jewish texts.

Key to this discussion, then, is an understanding of the body as a site of social, cultural, and sexual communication. Scholarship conducted by social theorists and anthropologists has demonstrated that the body is the visual centre in which complex ideologies of identity, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and social status are articulated.<sup>2</sup> More recently, this has been developed to include the utilisation of cosmetics, clothes and the adornment of the body as the means by which bodies are made social, the ‘social skin’ which models social boundaries between an individual actor and other actors.<sup>3</sup> Our social skin requires attention, whether unconscious or otherwise, to the norms and expectations of these other actors within any particular social setting: ‘the social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived’ (Douglas 1982: 93). There are ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ ways of being in any given social space – and hence right and wrong ways of appearing, dressing, and adorning oneself. Dress is thus an effective means of non-verbal communication,

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<sup>2</sup> See esp. Douglas (1966; 1982); Foucault (1974); Turner (1984); Butler (1990); and Shilling (1993). For a useful review of the development of this discourse, see Crossland (2010). See also Stavrakopoulou (2013: 532-533), who has helpfully contrasted this social scientific approach to the body with the older ‘post-Cartesian, Western intellectual traditions’ which read the body as ‘merely the fleshy vessel in which the “mind” or “spirit” was housed’.

<sup>3</sup> On the concept of ‘social skin’ see Turner (1980). Influential studies on body adornment include Brain (1979); Thevóz (1979); Craik (1994); and Entwistle (2000).

but one which at the same time is controlled and dictated through normative social values.<sup>4</sup> To transgress these values is to communicate something specific about one's social or sexual status. Body adornment is thus the visible form of our intentions, and the reverse of this, 'the image by which we are read and come to be read by others' (Entwistle 2000: 85).

In particular, this scholarship has demonstrated that sexual intention is heavily coded through dress and adornment. This can have negative implications: in the modern world, we are frequently confronted with instances in which a woman is held accountable for unwanted male attention based upon the mode of her dress. The perception of failure to heed conventional expectations in dress has been utilised to blame women for males own lax in behavioural norms: the man has succumbed to sexual temptation because the woman has dressed 'provocatively', whatever that is taken to mean within a particular social setting. But the body as an agent in (sexual) communication can also be positively and purposefully utilised, allowing an individual to express sexuality and articulate desire. And crucially, non-permanent forms of body adornment such as clothes and cosmetics can be changed at will, allowing an individual to adopt and discard multiple sexual identities and personalities.

In the following I will explore depictions of cosmetics and the adornment of the body in the Hebrew Bible and in early Jewish literature, before turning to a detailed study of the utilisation of cosmetic oil by Judith and Susanna. Throughout, I will remain sensitive to this awareness of cosmetics as a form of social communication. The utilisation of cosmetics by these two figures is the symbolic means by which they communicate certain desires and intentions to those around them, whether consciously or otherwise. Ultimately I will demonstrate that recognising these desires, and the ways that they are read and comprehended by others, is essential to understanding these two narratives.

### **Cosmetics in the Hebrew Bible and Early Jewish Literature**

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<sup>4</sup> On dress as a form of social control, see Arthur (1999).

The popularity of cosmetics in ancient Palestine is attested by the wealth of archaeological material related to beauty and beauty treatments, incorporating numerous tools for the application of cosmetics, as well as storage containers for powders, creams and oils, perfume bottles, and polished mirrors.<sup>5</sup> Yet in the Hebrew Bible and early Jewish literature, references to cosmetics are relatively few, save for the use of oil in the purposes of ritual anointment.<sup>6</sup> Certainly the magico-religious use of שֶׁמֶן, oil, in ritual settings was an important aspect of the use oil – but this was not its only use. Oil was utilised in food, lighting, and medicine (e.g. Isa. 25.6; Exod. 25.6; Isa. 1.6), and it could also serve a cosmetic function too, applied in order to soften<sup>7</sup> and scent<sup>8</sup> the skin and hence to enhance the beauty of the wearer. Alongside perfumed oil, the use of eye paint is also described in the biblical sources. The general term ‘cosmetics’ translates the Hebrew word תְּמָרוֹק,<sup>9</sup> the lexeme coming from the verb מָרַק, ‘to polish, burnish, scour’ (HALOT, 638a).<sup>10</sup> There are multiple types of perfume mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, occurring with especial frequency

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<sup>5</sup> For an excellent treatment of this assemblage, focused especially on finds from Hazor and Megiddo, see Jacob (2011: 93-276).

<sup>6</sup> This is probably why Michal Dayagi-Mendels has (incorrectly) claimed that the Bible ‘makes no mention of other uses of cosmetics [i.e. for non-ritual purposes] during the First Temple period’ (Dayagi-Mendels 1989: 8).

<sup>7</sup> Pss. 92.11; 133.2; Ezek. 16.9; Amos 6.6.

<sup>8</sup> So שֶׁמֶן רוֹקֵחַ, ‘perfumed oil’ is found in Song 5.13 and Eccl. 10.1; another type of perfumed oil, שֶׁמֶן תּוֹרֵק, is mentioned in Song 1.3. On the translation and interpretation of this latter oil, see Rendsburg and Young (2016).

<sup>9</sup> Translated as ‘cosmetics’ in the NRSV, NASV, NET, and ESV translations of Esth. 2.3, 9, 12; NKJV has ‘beauty preparations’; while NIV ‘beauty treatments’.

<sup>10</sup> Consequently, the KJV translates the lexeme ‘things for purification’.

in the Song of Songs.<sup>11</sup> Various forms of the root רקה describe perfumed ointments, e.g. מורקתים, ‘perfume’ in Song 5.13, and שמן רוקה, ‘perfumed oil’ in Eccl. 10.1. Perfumes were clearly expensive, as indicated by 2 Kgs 20.13, where they are stored together with silver and gold. In the New Testament, costly perfumed oils and ointments are stored in alabaster boxes (Matt. 26.7, 9; Mark 14.3), while a container for cosmetic oil seems to be referenced in Isa. 3.20.

Though clearly both men and women could utilise perfumed oil, it is in particular associated with women.<sup>12</sup> This is also true of the other cosmetic item which features most prominently in the Hebrew Bible, the use of eye paint. This is in contrast with the wider ancient Near East, where both men and women are described as making use of kohl.<sup>13</sup> But in the Hebrew Bible the use of cosmetics is a gendered activity, more often than not associated with women. Thus in 2 Kgs 9.30 Jezebel lines her eyes with פוך, probably kohl or antimony.<sup>14</sup> One of Job’s daughters is named קרן הפוך (Job. 42.14), presumably after a receptacle for the storage of eye paint. The lexeme is used again in Jer. 4.30, here in conjunction with the verb קרע, ‘to rip, to tear up’, which is semantically equivalent to the verb used for kohl-application in Akkadian, *saḫālum*-D, ‘to prick, to pierce’ (Wasserman 2015). In Ezek. 23.40 the hapax legomenon כחל clearly

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<sup>11</sup> For example, בשם, probably ‘balsam’, and מר, ‘myrrh’ (Song. 1.13; 4.14; 5.1, 5, etc.). In Song 1.13, myrrh is placed into a sachet and worn between the woman’s breasts. On the many perfumes described in the Song of Songs, see Brenner (1983).

<sup>12</sup> See e.g. Isa. 3.24; Pss. 27.9; 45.8; Song 4.10-11; Esth. 2.12, etc.

<sup>13</sup> On cosmetics and body adornment in ancient Egypt, see Manniche (1999); for Mesopotamia, see Moorley (1994: 138-139); and Stol (2016: 47-48). Though the application of kohl to the eyes had a medical function, protecting the eyes from the sun and insects, beautification was clearly also an intention of applying eye paint: in the Sumerian myth of Inanna’s descent, the goddess applies a kohl to her eyes called “Man, come, come!” (Kramer 1951: 1-17).

<sup>14</sup> On Jezebel’s use of eye paint, see Stavrakopoulou (2013: 539-547).

describes this same process of painting the eyes; the lexeme may be related to the Arabic noun *kuhl*, Akkadian *guhlu*, and Aramaic *khl*, the latter of which is used to translate the references to kohl in the Targumim of 2 Kgs 9.30 and Jer. 4.30.

With the exception of Job's daughter, whose name perhaps alludes to her beauty,<sup>15</sup> the biblical references to eye painting are always negative, connected to Queen Jezebel (2 Kgs 9.30)<sup>16</sup> and with prostitution in Jeremiah and Ezekiel (Jer. 4.30; Ezek. 23.40). Indeed, numerous references associate women's use of perfumes, oils, eye paints, clothing, and jewellery with prostitution<sup>17</sup> and moral corruption (Isa. 3.16-24; Jer. 4.30; Ezek. 16.15-18; 23.40-42; Amos 6.6; Eccl. 7.1), while vanity in general is denounced (Prov. 31.30). Indeed, Woman Strange,<sup>18</sup> the paradigm of the immoral woman developed in the book of Proverbs, is explicitly associated with the application of cosmetics (e.g. at Prov. 7.16-17);<sup>19</sup> her beauty is in fact the cause of her sexual

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Job 42.15: 'Nowhere in the land could women be found who were as beautiful as Job's daughters'.

<sup>16</sup> Here Jezebel's application of cosmetics is probably a secondary addition to the text, incorporated as part of the postexilic rhetoric against the foreign woman. See Rofé (1988); and Camp (2000: 23 n. 9).

<sup>17</sup> While secular prostitution *per se* is not outlawed in the Hebrew Bible, nevertheless it is a morally inferior occupation that is specifically prohibited for the daughters of Israel (e.g. at Lev. 19.29).

<sup>18</sup> Prov. 2.16-19; 5.3-8, 20; 6.24-26, 19, 32; 7.5-27; 22.14; 23.27-28; 30.20; 31.3. On this figure see in particular Camp (2000: 40-71). While the meaning of נכריה or זרה in the Hebrew essentially indicates foreignness, the descriptions of this character more often conjure up images of illicit sexual activity rather than an ethnic, legal or social status. The meaning of 'foreign' in this case is essentially 'otherness', employed to describe a character of 'loose morals, devious charms and deviant religious convictions' (Brenner-Idan 2015: 122).

<sup>19</sup> On the role of perfume in the Woman Strange discourse see Yee (1995).

sorcery, and is therefore condemned. These negative associations of cosmetics are taken over into later Jewish literature, for example in 1 Enoch 8.1-4, where female beautification and ornamentation were taught to humanity by the angel Azazel. The text is explicit in its condemnation of cosmetics: 'The whole earth has been ruined by the teaching of the works of Azazel!' (10.8). Correspondingly, the sages also decried the utilisation of cosmetics for immoral purposes: wanton women would perfume their shoes in order to arouse young men (Shab. 62b); while prostitutes were particularly associated with the use of eye paint (Shab. 34a) and perfumes (Shem. R. 43.7).

In the midst of this gendered discourse, the conclusion that cosmetics, if not prohibited, were understood ill-favourably by the scribes who authored the Hebrew Bible and early Jewish texts seems obvious. Despite the prevalence of archaeological finds pertaining to the use of cosmetics in ancient Israel, the masculine voices that shaped Scripture commonly associate the use of beautifying preparations with immorality and illicit sexual practices. This has been borne out both by our study of kohl and perfumed oil in the Hebrew Bible and early Jewish literature, and is consistent with the unfavourable depiction of Woman Strange and her deviant sexual charm. From this perspective it would seem that the ideal Jewish woman would avoid the use of cosmetics. Yet there are two further references to the use of beautifying oil in early Jewish literature that are anomalous in this context: both Judith and Susanna utilise oil for cosmetic purposes in the books that bear their names, and both escape criticism – in fact, each character receives praise, not censure, in the course of the narratives.<sup>20</sup> In order to understand the function of their application of cosmetics and hence the reasons behind the lack of censure in these two tales, sociological models provide a vital insight into the meanings encoded by a cosmetically-enhanced body.

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<sup>20</sup> This is also true of the use of cosmetic oil in the books of Esther and Ruth. It is my intention to treat the function of cosmetics in these two biblical books in a separate study.



### **Cosmetics in the Book of Judith**

Like the books of Esther and Tobit, Daniel 1-6, and the Additions to Daniel, the book of Judith is a Jewish novella from the Second Temple period, most commonly dated to the Hasmonaean era.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, the book is often interpreted in light of the book of Esther,<sup>22</sup> although there are clearly parallels to other biblical precursors as well:<sup>23</sup> the narrative of Judith is often interpreted in light of the story of Jael and Deborah from Judges 4-5 (e.g. by White 1992). In each of these three texts, a Jewish woman is able to save her people through duplicitous actions: so Esther seduces the Persian king, Ahasuerus, hence securing his favourable treatment for the Jews of Persia; while Jael kills Sisera, commander of the Canaanite army of King Jabin of Hazor, by driving

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<sup>21</sup> For a review of the scholarly positions concerning the historicity of the book of Judith, see Craven (2003). A number of historiographical and typographical problems preclude the historicity of the narrative: the enemy of the Israelites in the book of Judith is the Assyrians, a threat to historical Israel and Judah in the eighth and seventh centuries. On the other hand, the king of the Assyrians is named as Nebuchadnezzar, the historical reflection of which ruled in the Neo-Babylonian period, in the sixth century BCE. Characters are able to move between large geographic distances with ease. A number of different interpretative strategies have been forwarded to deal with the conflation of history and geography in the book, for example as a means of archaism, or in order to express irony. Benedickt Otzen, on the other hand, sees in this distention of history an attempt toward universalism: the story is not tied to any particular era or location, and hence its teachings and narrative are universally applicable (Otzen 2002: 90).

<sup>22</sup> So André Lacocque: 'Esther is wife to a pagan king... and Judith plays the harlot with Holofernes. The intent of such stories is clear. They want to drive home the idea that women can indeed become God's instruments, even when they use the most controversial resources of their femininity' (Lacocque 1990: 2).

<sup>23</sup> The book's koine Greek is also heavily influenced by Hebraic syntax and idioms (Joosten 2007: 159-176).

a tent peg into his head. In some ways, Judith conflates these two tales: by seducing Holofernes, captain of the Assyrians and persecutor of the Jewish people, she is able to cut off his head and secure the military victory of her people. Yet despite the commonalities in these tales, arguably something quite different is going on in each narrative. Jael is never described as beautiful in the book of Judges, unlike Judith, whose beauty is frequently referred to in the book that bears her name.<sup>24</sup> The book is explicit that it is Judith's attractiveness, and in particular the heightening of her beauty by cosmetic preparations, that is the key to her success.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, Esther also partakes in cosmetic beautification before she visits the king. Yet unlike Judith, Esther is not allowed to return to her old life following the end of the narrative – and clearly Esther's status as wife of a Persian king was troubling to some of the book's ancient interpreters and translators. In the Greek Additions to Esther, Addition C finds Esther in an untenable situation: sharing a bed with an 'uncircumcised alien' whom she abhors (14.15). Esther is not allowed to enjoy sexual activity or her high status as queen in a foreign court. Crucially, in the so-called Alpha Text of Esther in the Greek, Esther's beauty treatment is entirely eliminated; while in Addition C Esther abandons her cosmetics, instead 'every part that she loved to adorn she covered with her tangled hair' (14.2). In this story it is prayer to God, rather than the seductive activities of Esther, which saves the Jews.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> On the concept of beauty in biblical literature, see Penchansky (2014).

<sup>25</sup> The narrative is explicit that the application of cosmetics has fundamentally altered Judith's look: following the makeover, Judith's 'face was altered' (Jdt. 10.7).

<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, many commentators have argued that the book of Judith was written to neutralize the book of Esther, the latter of which apparently felt no need to have its central female character abide by kosher food laws, unlike pious Judith. See e.g. Zeitlin and Enslin (1972: 14); and Otzen (2002: 77). See also the Additions to Esther in the Greek, which adds LXX Esth. 14.17 in order to explicitly state that Esther avoided non-koshered food. Indeed, the Additions to Esther

Yet Judith is allowed to—even celebrated for—utilising cosmetic preparations to heighten her beauty and charm in order to seduce a foreign enemy.<sup>27</sup> In so doing, Judith ‘endangers hierarchical oppositions of gender, race, and class, muddles conventional gender characteristics and dismantles their claim to universality, and so threatens the status quo’ (Levine 1992: 17). Worse still, she ‘moves out into the borderland between decency and moral laxity’ (Otzen 2002: 111): as we have seen, the use of cosmetics for the enhancement of beauty was frequently condemned in the Hebrew Bible and early Jewish literature. Judith’s actions are particularly fraught given the typical figuration of women as representatives of the Jewish community in this literature: so the virgin (2 Kgs 19.21; Isa 37.22; Lam. 1.15; 2.13; Jer. 14.17); the bride (Jer. 2.23; Hos. 2.15); the whore (Hos. 1-4; Ezekiel 16); and the widow (Lam. 1.1; Isa. 54.4-8) have all been utilized as images for the people of Israel. As a chaste widow, Judith provides a positive figuration of the ideal woman for her community, all the more so since her name ‘Judith’ is actually a gentilic: ‘the Jewess’. This is explicit in Jdt. 8.8, which is quick to claim that ‘No one spoke ill of her, for she feared God with great devotion.’ Yet this widow acts like a whore. She applies cosmetics, just like the Strange Woman of biblical literature encountered above. In Jdt. 9.10, 13, she actually asks God to make her a good liar, reminiscent of the ‘smooth words’ of the Strange Woman in Prov. 2.16; 7.5. How is it that Judith is allowed to get away with this? In this context, it is worth examining Judith’s cosmetic preparations in detail:<sup>28</sup>

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are probably dependent upon the book of Judith: see e.g. Zeitlin and Enslin (1972: 15-21); and Moore (1985: 215-216).

<sup>27</sup> And unlike Esther, Judith has (mostly) been treated favourable by later interpreters (Stocker 1998).

<sup>28</sup> Few scholars have subjected Judith’s use of cosmetics to an extended analysis. On the other hand, Deborah F. Sawyer has treated dress in the book of Judith, utilizing queer theory in order to argue that Judith’s donning of feminine clothes is akin to putting on drag (Sawyer 2001a; 2001b). While I appreciate Sawyer’s sensitivity to the performative aspect of dressing, Sawyer’s

She removed the sackcloth which she wore and stripped off the clothing of her widowhood, and she washed herself,<sup>29</sup> all around the body, with water and anointed herself with thick ointment and fixed<sup>30</sup> the hair of her head and placed a turban<sup>31</sup> upon it and put on the clothing of her merriment with which she was accustomed to dress in the days of the life of her husband Manasses, and she took sandals for her feet and put on the anklets and the bracelets and the rings and the earrings<sup>32</sup> and every ornament, and she

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conclusion that Judith ‘strides across the gender spectrum’, ‘imitating a male warrior’, is a very different implication to the one I draw here.

<sup>29</sup> The verb περιεκλύσατ occurs only here in the LXX and in the GI or ‘Short’ text of Tob. 6.2, in conjunction with Tobias’ bath in the Tigris. Accordingly, the substitution of ‘face’ in the Syriac is unnecessary – clearly the intention was a full-body ablution. Given the lack of water in Bethulia (Jdt. 7.22), this indicates the importance and significance of Judith’s mission.

<sup>30</sup> There are a number of variants here in the textual witnesses. The Old Latin provides *pectinavit*, ‘combing it out’; the Vulgate *discriminavit*, ‘parting it’. The majority of the Greek textual witnesses read διέξανε, ‘ordered, fixed’. The Syriac has Judith anointing her hair – though often associated with cultic implications, as we have seen the use of oil can also have a cosmetic implication, and is often utilised for the purposes of the cosmetic enhancement of the hair in the Hebrew Bible (cf. e.g. Pss. 23.5; 133.2; Eccl. 9.8, etc.). Clearly the beautification of Judith’s hair is the intent of all of the textual witnesses.

<sup>31</sup> The translation of μίτρων, here ‘turban’, as ‘tiara’ by the NRSV (Coogan 2010) perhaps better reflects the intent of Judith to beautify herself: her μίτρων is the equivalent of the bracelets, rings, earrings and other ornaments with which Judith adorns herself.

<sup>32</sup> Since ἐνώτια, ‘earrings’, is used in the LXX to translate Hebrew נִזְנֵי, which can mean either ‘earring’ (Gen. 35.4) or ‘nose-ring’ (Gen. 24.22), Carey A. Moore favours the latter interpretation here, suggesting that the preference for ‘earrings’ by most interpreters ‘may more reflect

made herself up provocatively for the charming of the eyes of men,<sup>33</sup> all who would cast eyes upon her (Jdt. 10.3-4).<sup>34</sup>

Judith is utilizing cosmetics and costume in order to communicate something specific about her social and sexual status. As a widow, she donned 'widow's garments' (Jdt. 10.3); it was observable to all around her that she was sexless and chaste. But by utilizing cosmetics, which as we have seen were associated with the immoral Strange Woman, Judith is communicating her sexual availability. Judith plays the role of the beautiful seductress, even if that role does not cover her own reality, but only the imagined reality of the men around her (Rakel 1998). This is explicit in the lengths to which the narrative goes to express her piety: even while dressed as a whore, she carries along with her kosher food to eat while at the Assyrian camp. Though her dress makes her

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unconscious Western preferences in female jewellery and decoration than rigorous, scientific translation' (Moore 1985: 200). However, 'nose-ring' is employed in the Hebrew Bible in contexts which imply either the formalization of marriage (Gen. 24.22), or utilised for the adornment of a married woman (Ezek. 16.12); since Judith's plan relies on the assertion of her sexual availability rather than its limitation, I reject Moore's suggestions and favour here with the NETS translation 'earrings'.

<sup>33</sup> In the book of Ruth, Ruth also applied oil to her body before visiting Boaz, an act which has often been interpreted as an act of seduction by some of the commentators (Lacocque 1990: 2; Klein 2003: 4), and hence in parallel to the actions of Judith. Yet Ruth's cosmetic preparations are much less developed than Judith's, encompassing only the washing of her body and the application of oil (Ruth 3.3). Given that these things were denied to widows (2 Sam. 14.1), most probably the function of cosmetic oil in this narrative is to signal to Boaz that Ruth is of a marriageable status: her period of mourning is now over. On the other hand, in Judith the narrative is explicit that Judith's actions are undertaken in order to make herself attractive to men.

<sup>34</sup> All translations have been checked against NETS (Pietersma and Wright 2007).

seem accessible, this is negated by her basket of food. Holofernes reads the sexual cues encoded by Judith's adorned body, and hence declares his intention of having sexual intercourse with her (Jdth. 12.12). But unlike in the book of Esther,<sup>35</sup> the seduction never actually takes place: Judith assures all that she had enticed Holofernes without being defiled by him.<sup>36</sup> She can thus remove her Strange Woman garb and return to her previous life of piety and widowhood at the end of the narrative. Cosmetic preparations have allowed Judith to adopt and discard the alternative persona of the seductress, a persona which is permissible if only because it was a temporary one. Despite the potential of Judith's actions to 'endanger hierarchical oppositions of gender' (Levine 1992: 17), this is allowed because ultimately she will return to her proper place, the private sphere: the crisis precipitated by her actions for this androcentric society is avoided. At the end of the day, possible misunderstandings concerning the status of woman are rectified.

### **Cosmetics in the Story of Susanna**

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<sup>35</sup> The sexual implications of the transaction at the harem are explicit: the virgin is to **גָּבַח**, 'go to' the king, which is often utilised in the Hebrew Bible as a euphemism for sexual activity (e.g. Gen. 16.2; 29.21, 23; 2 Sam. 11.4; 16.21, 22). After her evening in the king's company she does not return to the residence of the virgins, but to a second harem, the house of the concubines (2.14), unless she has found special favour in the eyes of the king.

<sup>36</sup> This is in spite of the sexual implications of the entire interaction between Judith and Holofernes. Accordingly, Michael Wojciechavski argues that the narrative implicitly suggests at least the possibility of a sexual relationship between the two. He thus suggests that the current version of the tale is probably a puritan redaction of an originally more sexually explicit tale (Wojciechavski 2012: 91).

The story of Susanna is a brief, self-contained narrative that appears in the Greek manuscripts of the book of Daniel.<sup>37</sup> Though the basic intent of the story in each version of the Greek texts is the same, the Old Greek (OG) version is significantly shorter than Theodotion (TH).<sup>38</sup> In both texts, Susanna begins the tale as a pious, married woman<sup>39</sup> living in Babylon<sup>40</sup> and lusted after by some of the elders of her community. It is in the text of TH that Susanna engages in the application of cosmetic oils.<sup>41</sup> The elders witness Susanna bathing and applying oil in the privacy of her garden,<sup>42</sup> and they try to coerce her into sexual relations: if Susanna refuses, they will accuse her

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<sup>37</sup> Most probably the story was originally composed in Greek, albeit a Greek heavily inspired by the style of translation Greek and hence replete with Semitic syntax and idioms (Joosten 2009). The additions were probably written as original compositions, and added to OG Daniel when the translation was made ca. 135-120 BCE (Lahey 2015).

<sup>38</sup> For a comparison of the differences between the two versions, see Moore (1977: 78-80). Stressing their similarities is Brooke (1992).

<sup>39</sup> As G.W.E. Nickelsburg has demonstrated, Susanna is painted as a picture of piety: her name means 'lily'; she is a God-fearing woman; and she is shown to actively pray and communicate with God (Nickelsburg 1981: 26).

<sup>40</sup> Despite this narrative setting, like the rest of the book of Daniel the composition of the tale is usually dated to the Hellenistic period (Glancy 2000: 157).

<sup>41</sup> Accordingly, Susanne Scholz argues that without the narrative in the garden, the OG version of the story is explicit in envisioning a severe attack upon Susanna by the elders; on the other hand, in TH, there is at least the possibility that the elders' actions are a misguided attempt at seduction rather than rape (Scholz 2010: 49).

<sup>42</sup> On the motif of the garden in the story of Susanna, see Pearce (1996). On Susanna as an object of the male gaze, see Glancy (2000: 158); and Levine (1995). On the male gaze in other biblical stories, in particular the stories of Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11) and Jezebel (2 Kings 9), see Bach (1997: 7-9).

of engaging in an extra-marital affair. Susanna has been caught in a compromising situation, and it is this that fuels the development of the narrative.

And she said to the girls, “Now bring me olive oil and soaps, and shut the orchard door so that I can bathe.” And they did as she said, and they shut the orchard doors and went out by the side doors to bring the things they had been commanded (TH Susanna vv. 17-18).<sup>43</sup>

Susanna refuses the advances of the elders and is accordingly accused of sexual impropriety, the punishment of which is death (Lev. 20.10; Deut. 22.21-24). All seems to be lost, until the intervention of Daniel, who separates the elders and finds flaws in their joint narratives of Susanna’s alleged sin. Susanna is found to be innocent after all.

According to André Lacocque, the story of Susanna can be understood in parallel to that of Judith: ‘Susanna is accused of fornication and adultery, and Judith plays the harlot with Holofernes. The intent of such stories is clear. They want to drive home the idea that women can indeed become God’s instruments, even when they use the most controversial resources of their femininity’ (Lacocque 1990: 2). Accordingly, Susanna is a heroine who exploits her femininity (amplified by the application of olive oil and soaps<sup>44</sup>) in end of becoming an instrument of God. Yet this interpretation does not fit well with the narrative. To a certain extent, the story inverts the traditional roles of the predatory Strange Woman and the innocent male youth, led astray. Yet arguably, Susanna is not necessarily presented as an entirely innocent character after all. The motif of the bathing woman is suggestive of other biblical and Jewish-Hellenistic texts in which a bathing woman is the cause of a sexual disaster. David, for example, engaged in sexual intercourse with the married Bathsheba after seeing her bathing on the roof of her home (2 Sam. 11.2).

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<sup>43</sup> This translation has been checked against NETS.

<sup>44</sup> The NRSV translates ‘oils and ointments’, which perhaps better relates the beautification aspect of these products, as opposed to being merely for purification.



Typically, this image is usually understood by critics according to two polar extremes: either Bathsheba as an innocent victim of David's attention (e.g. Bal 1987: 25-29); or Bathsheba herself as the sexual aggressor, bathing on the roof in order to seduce the watching David (Bailey 1990: 89), this latter interpretation complicit with the Bible's own portrayal of the seductive and dangerous Woman Strange. Yet interestingly, this first image of a bathing woman may actually have had no such improper implications: rather Bathsheba's bath is dictated by the needs of the developing narrative. Her bathing indicates that Bathsheba has completed her menses and hence is not pregnant – any pregnancy thereafter must thus stem from David, and not her husband who is away at camp (Perry and Sternberg 1985). Crucially, the biblical text itself does not hold Bathsheba accountable for the adultery, but instead heaps censure upon David. But by the time we get to the late Second Temple period, the image of the bathing woman had become fixed, heaped with sexual implications: Jubilees 22 and the Testament of Reuben 3, for example, expand upon the cause of Reuben's sin with his father's wife Bilah (Gen. 35.22; 49.4) by including the narrative detail that Reuben had witnessed Bilah bathe prior to the seduction.

By bathing in the garden and adorning her body with cosmetic oil, Susanna engages in two tropes that would see her read by the characters around her as a potential Strange Woman. Accordingly, the elders who witness these activities confront Susanna with their sexual plot: her adorned body communicates to the watchers that illicit sexual activities are on the table. Thus rather than treating her as a pious, god-fearing woman (v. 2), they treat her as the Strange Woman that her actions in the garden suggest her to be. Of course, this is illusory: Susanna refuses their advances (unlike previous victims, cf. v. 57). But nevertheless, in the narrative she is still understood to be complicit in the misunderstanding. The servants of the household feel shame at the report of Susanna's actions (v. 27): she has brought dishonor upon the entire house. Even though 'never had a word like this been said about Susanna', immediately everyone believes the elders' tale. Susanna's parents and husband rejoice at the outcome of the trial, not because Susanna's life is saved, but because she had been found innocent of a 'shameful deed' (v. 63). In their eyes, the crisis was not the loss of a wife or daughter, but the possibility that Susanna may

have brought shame upon her household through her actions.<sup>45</sup> As for Susanna, we never hear about her reaction to the positive outcome of the trial. By the end of the story, Susanna has entirely faded from view. In TH, it is Daniel who emerges as the hero of the tale, concluding with a description of his rise to fame and emergence as a figure of wisdom.<sup>46</sup> In the OG, it is the praise of 'young able sons' which the narrative finally concludes with. As Daniel says, Susanna's beauty has 'beguiled' (TH) or 'deceived' (OG) the elders (v. 56). Ultimately it is Susanna who is to blame: 'the narrative approves Susanna's assessment that a woman's experience of forced sex renders her guilty' (Glancy 1995: 290).<sup>47</sup>

Amy-Jill Levine has convincingly made a case that, like Judith (the 'Jewess'), Susanna is also representative of the Jewish community. Living in the diaspora in Babylon, she represents the temptation of the community to lose its sense of self. 'Rather than lamenting by the waters of Babylon, she bathes in them... Representing the threatened covenant community, she is already a warning to those who would enjoy social privileges in a foreign setting: no garden is safe' (Levine 1995: 312). While 'Esther is forced into sexual action; Judith is compelled by her sense of justice; Susanna simply pampers herself' (ibid: 315). Figuratively speaking, Susanna is all dressed up with nowhere to go. She looks the part of a seductress, but refuses to be seduced. Though she is eventually saved (by another – unlike Judith, Susanna requires male assistance<sup>48</sup>), the damage is

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<sup>45</sup> On the concept of shame in biblical narrative, see Bechtel (1991).

<sup>46</sup> In TH, the story of Susanna is placed as an introduction to the book of Daniel, while in the OG (and in the Vulgate) it appears as the final chapter of the book. Accordingly, Daniel is more prominent in the ending of the TH than in the OG version of the tale.

<sup>47</sup> This has been perhaps implicitly acknowledged in the reception history of the story, in which 'Susanna's innocence is implicitly transformed into guilt; and she, like Eve, is fashioned into a temptress who is responsible for sin' (Bohn 2001: 265).

<sup>48</sup> On this distinction, see Levine (1995: 310-311): 'Apparently, when the threat is external, women/the community can act; when the threat is internal—that is, when it threatens the very

done. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the trial itself, where Susanna is ‘uncovered’ before her tribe (v. 32): in TH this apparently entails just the removal of her veil so that the elders might gaze upon her face; but in the OG it seems that Susanna is stripped naked, in accordance with Jewish ritual law (Ezek. 16.37-39; Hos. 2.3-10). Susanna is being treated like a prostitute or an adulteress. Clearly this was socially stigmatizing: those who were with her all weep for this disgrace (v. 33). Susanna may ultimately have been saved from death, but the social stigma and shame of the trial with its ritual disrobing forever encodes Susanna as a potential Strange Woman, even if in actuality this is proven not to be so: from this day on, ‘her life will always be suspect’ (Levine 1995: 319).

## Conclusions

In this study, I have considered the function of cosmetics in the stories of Judith and Susanna. By utilizing sociological models that deemed cosmetics akin to a speech act, able to communicate the social status and sexual intentions of the wearer to those around them, I was able to bring out various nuances within the narrative. Despite the tendency in biblical and Jewish-Hellenistic literature to understand the utilisation of cosmetics by female characters negatively, in the book of Judith cosmetics allow the heroine to adopt and discard alternative social and sexual personalities. Though she starts the narrative as a chaste and pure widow, by applying cosmetic oil and other body adornments Judith is able to communicate her sexual availability to Holofernes, allowing her privileged access to the Assyrian camp. Thus by utilizing cosmetics Judith is able to temporarily transcend the gender normative role with which she begins the narrative – and crucially, since this is a non-permanent form of body modification, she is allowed to return to it at the end of the book. Cosmetics are thus essential to both the development of the narrative, and the lack of censure Judith faces for actions which might otherwise be considered

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core of the community—a man, or, more precisely, the deity whom the man represents, must preserve the existence of the male-defined community and must reinstate its honour.’

unseemly. On the other hand, in the story of Susanna cosmetics provoke a miscommunication: because she applies cosmetic oils, Susanna is read as open for sexual relations by the elders, despite her status as a pious, married woman. Again, understanding the function of cosmetics is essential to properly appreciating this narrative.

Cosmetics and body adornment, then, are crucial cues for understanding both the intentions of the actor, and the ways that other actors respond to him or her. As we have seen, this can have both negative and positive associations: Susanna is painted as complicit in her downfall; while Judith is celebrated as the savior of her people. Even so, utilizing the image of the Strange Woman—even temporarily—is a dangerous strategy. Some scholars have wondered why it be necessary that Judith start the story as a widow at all.<sup>49</sup> Yet this too is necessitated by the demands of Israelite patriarchy: had Manasseh been alive, Judith's actions would have subjected him to sexual disgrace (Levine 1992: 19). It is necessary for the story that Judith be sexually experienced but unattached; her actions would have been unthinkable for a married woman. Similarly, Judith is not permitted to marry again at the end of the story, though being childless was something of a disgrace for women in the Hebrew Bible and early Jewish literature,<sup>50</sup> while the Pastoral Epistles recommended remarriage to young widows (1 Tim. 5.11, 14; cf. Rom. 7.2-3). But unmarried Judith must remain. Only in death, when she is buried in the cave of her husband Manasseh (Jdt. 16.23), is she able to return to the role of wife. Ultimately, an adorned woman is a troubling woman, no matter how short the duration.

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<sup>49</sup> So Zeitlin and Enslin (1972: 180): 'There is really no special need that Judith be a widow.'

<sup>50</sup> Given that in death Judith distributed her property to all those who were next-of-kin to her husband (Jdt. 16.24), we should assume that Judith was a childless widow, although this is unstated in the text itself.

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