

PROVERBS 31: HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION

THE SONG OF THE VALIANT WOMAN (PROV 31:10-31):

A PATTERN IN THE HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION (TO 1600)

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ABSTRACT

The thesis traces the history of the interpretation of the Song of the Valiant Woman, the concluding pericope of the book of Proverbs, from the earliest records to 1600 A.D. It is shown that, for the first fifteen centuries of that history, there is a remarkable parallelism between the Jewish and the Christian traditions of interpretation, even though there was little interaction between them. Each began with a literal interpretation of the Song, taking the Valiant Woman to represent a God-fearing Israelite woman, continued with a variety of allegorical readings, and ended in the Middle Ages with a standard allegorical interpretation: the Valiant Woman representing the Torah among the Jews, and the Church among the Christians. From the time of the Talmud and the early Christian church fathers, the interpretation of the Song was overwhelmingly allegorical.

This allegorical consensus was broken by the sixteenth-century Reformation in Europe, when Protestant interpreters unanimously returned to a literal interpretation of the Song. The beginning of this new hermeneutical approach can be pinpointed with some accuracy: it arose in Wittenberg in the 1520's, probably initiated by Philip Melancthon, but soon taken over by his colleague Martin Luther. All Protestant expositors of the sixteenth century,

both popular and academic, followed their lead.

It is shown that the history of interpretation of this single pericope reflects the broader periods and movements of biblical hermeneutics. The tradition of allegorical interpretation reflects the influence of the Alexandrians Philo and Origen, the persistence of allegory in the Latin West reflects both a Scholastic respect for tradition and a sophisticated definition of the "historical" sense, and the Protestant return to a literal reading reflects both the hermeneutical rejection of allegory and Luther's doctrine of Beruf or "calling" applied to the Valiant Woman.

Along the way, many unnoticed details of textual history, exegesis, translation, lexicography and intellectual filiation are brought to the fore.

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Introduction

My goal in this thesis is to demonstrate that there is a pattern in the history of interpretation of "The Song of the Valiant Woman" (Prov 31:10-31). This pattern reveals itself not only in the parallel development of the Jewish and Christian traditions of interpretation, but also in the close connection between broader hermeneutical and theological epochs and the specific interpretation of Prov 31:10-31 (henceforth simply "the Song"). The year 1600 is an appropriate cut-off point because it can be said to mark the end of the Reformation period, and thus the beginning of the modern concern with literal (grammatical-historical) interpretation, which eventually developed into historical-critical scholarship.

To my knowledge, there is virtually no secondary literature on the topic I have chosen, so that my research is "original" at least in the sense that no one has gone over the exegetical material with this specific passage in mind. It is also original in the sense that I have unearthed texts which are virtually forgotten, and that aspects of the history of the text and translation of Prov 31:10-31 have come to light which have not been noticed before.

I am restricting myself to interpretations of the Song which are not part of the tradition of the biblical text

itself, including the ancient versions. This means that I will leave out of account the suggestion that the MT contains (in 31:30) a trace of a scribal interpretation,¹ or the evidence that the LXX translators betray a certain hermeneutical bias in their version.² Instead, I will begin my story with the first allusions to and comments on the Song that are found in the Talmud and early patristic writers, drawing on the relevant indices of biblical passages which modern editions conveniently provide, as well as the very useful reference work entitled Biblia Patristica, the first three volumes of which (plus a Supplement on Philo) have now appeared.³

By way of preliminary orientation, it may be useful to articulate a broad overall thesis which, though it will have to be qualified and modified in the sequel, can nevertheless serve as a rough and ready description of the historical lay of the land. Generally speaking, the following thesis can be defended: from the time of the earliest extant records of biblical interpretation up to the Protestant Reformation of sixteenth-century Europe, the Song of the Valiant Woman was overwhelmingly understood in allegorical terms. Since then, it has usually been interpreted "literally" as the portrait of an exemplary woman. In other words, for more than a millenium the Valiant Woman was understood by the vast majority of interpreters as an allegory of some spiritual

reality (e.g. the Torah or the Church), but this long tradition was decisively broken by the Reformers of the sixteenth century.

It would carry us too far afield to enter into the broader question of the origin of allegorical interpretation in general and its application to biblical exegesis in particular. Suffice it to say that the method of allegory (to be distinguished from typology) became dominant in the Greek philosophical school of Stoicism in order to give a philosophically acceptable sense to the myths of Greek popular religion,⁴ and that this same method, for analogous reasons, was popularized in biblical studies by Philo of Alexandria,⁵ the Jewish philosopher who was to prove so influential in patristic interpretation. Philo himself, who restricted his commentaries almost exclusively to the five books of Moses, appears not to have commented on the Song,⁶ but his allegorical method was applied to it by many subsequent students of the Bible.

CHAPTER ONE: TALMUDIC AND PATRISTIC INTERPRETATIONS

It took some time before full-scale commentaries on the book of Proverbs came to be written, so that we must content ourselves, for the first centuries of our era, with the evidence of incidental allusions to and quotations from Prov 31:10-31 in order to acquire a picture of how the Song was read in this period.

Rabbinic exegesis

For evidence of rabbinic exegesis I will limit myself to the Talmud, specifically the Babylonian Talmud, where the Song is quoted on six different occasions.

The most significant point to note about these occasions is that most of them reflect an allegorical interpretation, and that the one which was to become standard in later Jewish exegesis (the Valiant Woman as allegory of the Torah) is already represented. In one of the stories concerning Rabbi Eleazar son of Simeon, he applies to himself verse 14 of the Song: "She is like the merchant's ships; she brings her food from afar."⁷ The editorial note in Epstein's edition comments on this: "'She' is referred to the Torah; for the sake of his learning... his 'food'--ie. wealth--had been brought to him from afar."⁸ In another place we read of Rabbi Eleazar again in connection with the Song:

R. Eleazar further stated, What is the purport of what was written, She openeth her mouth with wisdom, and the Torah of lovingkindness is on her tongue? [Prov

31:26] Is there then a Torah of lovingkindness and a Torah which is not of lovingkindness? But the fact is that Torah [which is studied] for its own sake is a 'Torah of lovingkindness', whereas Torah [which is studied] for an ulterior motive is a Torah which is not of lovingkindness.^{8a}

Here the expression tôrat hesed of Prov 31:26, which when applied to a literal understanding of the Valiant Woman means something like 'kind teaching', is understood of the Torah as a basic religious category of Judaism. The Valiant Woman herself represents Torah, and therefore what she speaks, what 'is on her tongue', is tôrat hesed.

The equation of the Valiant Woman with Torah is not the only allegorical interpretation which we find in the Talmud. In two other passages, for example, we find that particular verses of the Song are correlated with the actions of individuals in biblical history. In Sanh. 20a we find the following discussion concerning Prov 31:29 and 30:

R. Johanan said: what is meant by the verse, Many daughters have done valiantly, but thou excellest them all?--'Many daughters', refers to Joseph and Boaz: 'and thou excellest them all', to Palti son of Layish.

R. Samuel b. Nahmani said in R. Jonathan's name: What is meant by the verse, Grace is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised?--'Grace is deceitful' refers to [the trial of] Joseph; 'and beauty is vain', to Boaz; while 'and a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised', to the case of Palti son of Layish. Another interpretation is: 'Grace is deceitful',

refers to the generation of Moses; 'and beauty is vain' to that of Joshua; 'and she that feareth the Lord, shall be praised', to that of Hezekiah. Others say 'Grace is deceitful', refers to the generation of Moses and Joshua; 'and beauty is vain' to the generation of Hezekiah; while 'and she that feareth the Lord, shall be praised', refers to the generation of R. Judah son of R. Ila'i, of whose time it was said that [though the poverty was so great that] six of his disciples had to cover themselves with one garment between them, yet they studied the Torah.

In another place (Ber. 10a) we read the following:

R. Joḥanan said in the name of R. Simeon b. Yohai: What is the meaning of the verse, She openeth her mouth with wisdom, and the law of kindness is on her tongue [Prov 31:26]? To whom was Solomon alluding in this verse? He was alluding only to his father David who dwelt in five worlds and composed a psalm [for each of them].

There are two points to be noted about this last quotation, apart from its obviously allegorical reading of a verse in the Song. The sentiment here expressed, though spoken by R. Joḥanan, is attributed to R. Simeon b. Yohai, who was the father of R. Eleazar ben Simeon,⁹ the tanna who, as we have seen, interpreted the Valiant Woman as the Torah. Father and son espoused two quite different allegorical interpretations of the Song, specifically of the tôrat ḥesed of vs. 26. Secondly, R. Simeon clearly assigns the authorship to Solomon, which possibly means that he equated the "Lemuel" of 31:1 with Solomon, an opinion which we shall meet again in

our inquiry.

Apart from the four passages we have mentioned which read the Song allegorically, there are also two places in the Talmud where it appears to be taken in a straightforward literal sense. In Pesah 50b we read the following:

Our Rabbis taught: He who looks to the earnings of his wife or of a mill will never see a sign of blessing. 'The earning of his wife' means [when she goes around selling wooll by weight. '[The earnings of] a mill' means its hire. But if she makes [e.g., woollen garments] and sells them, Scripture indeed praises her, for it is written, she maketh linen garments and selleth them. [Prov 31:24].

And in Ta'an. 26b we find a statement attributed to R. Simeon ben Gamaliel, which includes these words:

The daughters of Jerusalem came out and danced in the vineyards exclaiming at the same time, "Young man, lift up thine eyes and see what thou choosest for thyself. Do not set thine eyes on beauty but set thine eyes on [good] family. 'Grace is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised'" [Prov 31:30]. And it further says, "Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her works praise her in the gates" [Prov 31:31].

This last passage, again, is noteworthy for a number of reasons. First of all, whereas all our earlier quotes were from the Gemara, this one is from the Mishna. Secondly, in connection with this, it is clear that this use of Prov 31 is chronologically early: not only did R. Simeon ben Gamaliel live in the first century A.D.,¹⁰ but he is describing a

Jewish custom which traditionally took place on "the fifteenth of Ab and the day of Atonement," and therefore had presumably been going on some time before R. Simeon's own day. Thirdly, it appears that, within the context of this traditional folk custom, that is, outside the formal tradition of rabbinic learning, the Song was quoted in a straightforward literal sense, being applied to the courtship of young men and women. Finally, the concluding quotation has the look of a later addition, and probably does not belong to R. Simeon's words--at any rate, not to the traditional words of the folk custom being described.

The upshot of our survey of quotations of the Song in the Talmud is the following. There is some evidence of an early literal interpretation, probably going back to pre-Christian times. This was supplanted, or at least supplemented, by a later allegorical reading, either referring the Song to different events and persons of biblical history, or else to the Torah. The latter interpretation is first attested in the late second century A.D. with R. Eleazar ben Simeon, whose allegorical interpretation of the Song breaks with that of his father.

A final word needs to be said about a place in the Talmud where the Song is not quoted, but clearly alluded to. In Yoma 47a we find the statement: "All women are valiant, but the valour [grp] of my mother exceeded them all." This

is evidently an allusion to Prov 31:29, not least because the expression ‘ālā ‘al in the sense "exceed" or "surpass" is rare, and found in the Bible only in that text.¹¹ We learn from this allusion that the idiom ‘āsā hayil, which can mean both "to do valiantly" and "to gain riches",¹² was taken in rabbinic times to mean the former in Prov 31:29, at least if Jastrow is right in giving "valour" as the meaning of grp.¹³

Literal interpretations in the Church Fathers

Turning now to early Christian interpretation, we observe that the same pattern emerges: an early literal reading, which is followed by one or two Church fathers, is soon overwhelmed by allegorical interpretation. By the end of the patristic period all Christian interpreters take the Song to be an allegory, though there is no general consensus as to what it is precisely that the Valiant Woman is supposed to symbolize.

The earliest record of a Christian interpretation of the Song is found in the second-century Church father Clement of Alexandria. In the third book of his Paidagogos he quotes the Song a number of times as a model for God-fearing women. In a discussion of the legitimacy of manual labour, for example, he writes that the "Pedagogue" (that is, the Word of God) approves the kind of woman who "will stretch out her arms to the useful things (ta chrēsima) and extends her hands to a spindle; opens her hands to the poor, and stretched out

her palm to the indigent," thus giving a direct application of the literal meaning of Prov 31:19-20.¹⁴ A little later, speaking in lofty terms of the work of a wife and mother in her household, he describes her with phrases drawn from the Song of the Valiant Woman.¹⁵

We find a very similar use of the Song in the third-century Didascalia Apostolorum, the third chapter of which contains a complete translation of Prov 31:10-31. The heading of the chapter, which sets the context for the interpretation of the Song here given, begins as follows: "An instruction to women, that they should please and honor their husbands alone, caring assiduously and wisely for the work of their houses with diligence..."¹⁶ The quotation of the Song itself is introduced with these words: "O woman, fear your husband and reverence him, and please him alone, and be ready for his service. And your hand shall be for the wool, and your mind upon the spindle, as He has said in Wisdom: Who can find a valiant woman..."¹⁷

The textual history of the Song as quoted in the Didascalia Apostolorum is a study in itself, which we cannot pursue in this context. It is enough to say that this part of the Didascalia is extant only in a Syriac translation of the Greek original, and that the Song in the Greek was quoted in a version which betrays the influence of the LXX but is not identical with it. This produces a number of distinctive

renderings, such as verse 29, which reads (in Vööbus's English translation of the Syriac): "and her many daughters have become rich. And she did many great things and she was exalted above all other women."

The Biblia patristica at present covers only the first three centuries of the Christian era, so that I cannot be sure whether I have missed significant references to the Song in the patristic literature after the third century. As far as I know, the literal interpretation is found in only two other Church fathers: Gregory of Nazianze in the fourth century, and Paulinus of Nola in the fifth.

Gregory, in the context of the funeral oration on his father, also devotes a few paragraphs to his mother, Nonna. Among other things, he writes:

I have heard sacred Scripture saying: 'Who shall find a valiant woman?' and also that she is a gift of God... It is impossible to mention anyone who was more fortunate than my father in this respect.¹⁸

A little later he adds these words:

While some women excel in the management of their households and others in piety--for it is difficult to achieve both--she nevertheless surpassed all in both, because she was pre-eminent in each and because she alone combined the two. She increased the resources of her household by her care and practical foresight according to the standards and norms laid down by Solomon for the valiant woman. [My emphasis.]¹⁹

This last phrase (kata tous Solomōntos peri tēs andreas

gynaikos horous kai nomous) again clearly alludes to the Song of the Valiant Woman (which begins with the words gynaika andreian in the LXX), and is significant not only because it again appears to equate Lemuel and Solomon, but also because it clearly takes the literal sense of the Song to be normative for the practical domestic life of the Christian woman.

In the letters of Paulinus of Nola (353-431) we twice find a similar application of the Song, once with reference to Paulina, the late wife of his friend Pammachius, and once with reference to his friend Aper's wife, Amanda. The first letter, addressed to Pammachius, contains the following passage:

But she, as she always was, so shall she forever be a crown for her husband [Prov 12:4], and her lamp shall not go out [Prov 31:18]. for, as it is written, she has stretched out her arms to useful deeds [Prov 31:19], she opened her mouth with wisdom [Prov 31:26], she did good things for her husband [Prov 31:12], she crowned you with glory and honour, in order that she might rejoice with you in the last days [Prov 31:25]. [My translation.]²⁰

The second passage is too long to quote in full, but again applies many phrases from the Song to the exemplary life of Amanda. For example, we read:

She is the kind of person in whom the heart of her husband trusteth [Prov 31:11]. As Scripture says, she renders her husband good and not evil all the days of her life [Prov 31:12], so you

have no worry about the secular matters
of your house...21

Paulinus is the first author we have quoted who wrote in Latin, and the Bible version which he uses is the Vetus Latina, the Latin translation of the LXX which was in common use before it was superseded by Jerome's Vulgate. It is the Vetus Latina which accounts for Paulinus' use of phrases like circumspectus in foribus, reflecting LXX peribleptos... en pylais (Prov 31:23), and duplicia pallia, reflecting LXX dissas chlainas (Prov 31:22).22

To my knowledge, Paulinus is the last patristic writer to espouse a literal interpretation of the Song. Apart from the Church fathers we have mentioned, all others seem to have adopted an allegorical reading, beginning with Origen in the third century.

Allegorical interpretations in the Church Fathers

Origen (ca.185-254) is also the first person who is known to have written a complete commentary on the book of Proverbs. Only fragments of this commentary have survived,23 but fortunately the section on the Valiant Woman appears to have been preserved complete.24 We learn from this section that Origen took the Valiant Woman, in his philosophical way, to be an allegorical symbol of psychē, the human soul. A representative passage is his comment on verse 15:

Also, the sun of righteousness as a bridegroom finds the soul getting up at

night and awake, and certainly also praying that she might not fall into temptation, quoting the text "I was awake and became like a single sparrow on a roof" [Ps 101:8]. Now the brōma ("food") of the soul is the study of the divine words, its erga ("works") are the virtues, its therapainides ("servant-girls") are the senses. These then are the things which the soul, "more valuable than precious stones", supplies to its bodily home. [My translation.]²⁵

It is to be noted that Origen is commenting on the LXX text of the Song, and it is to this text that the words brōma, erga and therapainides²⁶ refer. We notice how Origen characteristically mingles concepts derived from Scripture (the Psalms quote) and Platonic philosophy (the soul in its relation to body).

Origen is significant both because he was the first author of a commentary on Proverbs and because he is the first in the Christian tradition to propose an allegorical interpretation of the Song. With one significant exception, the remaining patristic authors who refer to our passage do so incidentally or very briefly. The exception is Augustine, who devoted one of his sermons to it. All of these authors agree in treating the Valiant Woman as an allegory, though they do not agree on what spiritual reality she represents. In what follows we shall simply list, in a roughly chronological order, the remaining patristic allusions, reserving for Augustine's sermon a more extended treatment. As the concluding figure of patristic exegesis we shall deal

briefly with Gregory the Great.

(1) Hilary of Poitiers (died 367). In his commentary on the book of Psalms, Tractatus Super Psalmos, he has the following comment on the phrase, "Your wife will be like a fruitful vine" (Ps 128:3):

However, in order that we may now know what ought to be understood under the designation "wife", we must observe what is dealt with under the same name of wife elsewhere as well. [My translation.]²⁷

He then quotes a number of biblical passages where the word uxor, "wife" is mentioned, including Prov 31:10 in the Vetus Latina: Uxorem virilem quis inveniet? This he explains as follows:

Therefore, we must understand the valiant wife according to the manner of proverbs, namely as the one whom Solomon desired to take as bride [Wisdom 8:2]... This woman, therefore, which is taken as his wife, is valiant wisdom, who accomplishes all things and subjects them to herself, and who is mighty in the work of useful deeds. [My translation.]²⁸

The Valiant Woman is an allegory of sapientia.

(2) Didymus of Alexandria (ca. 313-398). Among the Fragmenta in Proverbia attributed to this Didymus (also known as Didymus the Blind), we find the following comment on the phrase "her clothing is fine linen and purple" (Prov 31:22):

It says that the contemplation of things that have come to be, and the contemplation of the Holy Trinity, are the garment of a pure mind, consisting of fine linen and purple. [My translation.]²⁹

Here, apparently, the Valiant Woman is an allegory of nous.

(3) Epiphanius of Salamis (ca. 315-403). In a passing reference in Epiphanius' work Ancoratus (chapter 101) we find the statement:

But understand the valiant woman to be
the church of God, your mother. [My
translation.]³⁰

(4) Jerome (342-420). In his commentary on Ezekiel, Jerome has the following comment on the phrase "I swathed you with byssus (fine linen)" (Ez 16:10):

Jerusalem... is also swathed with byssus,
from which the finest threads in the high
priest's garment are woven. And the wife
in Proverbs who wove two cloaks for her
husband, both of the present and of the
future world, is said to have made for
herself garments of byssus and purple.
[My translation.]³¹

This passage refers to the LXX of Prov 31:22, which begins (erroneously³²) with dissas chlainas, here rendered by Jerome as duas chlamydes, "two cloaks." It is not clear how he interprets the Valiant Woman, but the reference to "the present and future world" shows that he takes the two cloaks in an allegorical sense, and presumably therefore also the heroine herself.

As an exegetical curiosity it may be pointed out that Jerome here follows the mistaken construal of šnym and mrbdym in the LXX of Prov 31:21-22 (see note 32) while his own translation in the Vulgate corrects this error.³³ This would

not be so surprising if it were not for the fact that this part of the Ezekiel commentary was completed in 412, some seven years after Jerome finished the Old Testament part of the Vulgate (405). It is further noteworthy that Jerome renders the relevant phrase from the LXX as duas chlamydes, whereas the Vetus Latina had duplicia pallia (see above under Paulinus of Nola).

For the history of interpretation it is also of interest that Jerome comments elsewhere on both the alphabetic pattern and the metre of the Song. In one of his letters to Paula he discusses alphabetic acrostics in Scripture, and observes:

A final alphabetic acrostic also concludes the Proverbs of Solomon, which is scanned in iambic tetrameter, beginning from the place in which it says "A valiant woman who shall find?" [My translation.]³⁴

The recognition of the alphabetic acrostic probably enabled Jerome to correct the LXX at Prov 31:21-22, but he makes a mistake of his own by describing the metre of the Song as iambic tetrameter.

(5) Johannes Cassianus (ca. 360-ca. 433). Like Epiphanius of Salamis, Cassianus took the Valiant Woman to represent the Church. He makes this clear in a famous section of his Collationes which deals with two kinds of theoretical (as opposed to practical) scientia:

Now theoretical scientia is divided into two parts, that is, into historical interpretation and spiritual

understanding. That is also why Solomon, when he had listed the varied grace of the Church, added: "For all in her house are doubly clothed" [Prov 31:21]. [My translation.]³⁵

This section in Cassianus is famous, not because it illustrates the allegorical interpretation of our Song, but because it contains the classic statement of the twofold interpretation of Scripture which was to dominate the Christian Middle Ages.³⁶ We here see that the influential distinction between historical (i.e. literal) and spiritual interpretation was initially justified by an appeal to the word dupliciter in verse 21 of the Song.

It is further noteworthy that this use of the Song was only possible because of a distinctive rendering of the verse in question, which takes synym as the last word of verse 21 (dupliciter), not as the first word of verse 22, following the LXX (duplicia pallia or duas chlamydes). Interestingly, Cassianus quotes the relevant line in a distinctive rendering; the wording Omnes enim qui apud eam sunt, vestiti sunt dupliciter conforms to neither the Vetus Latina (Omnes enim qui apud eam sunt. Duplicia pallia..., attested in Augustine³⁷) nor the Vulgate (Omnes enim domestici eius vestiti sunt duplicibus.)

(6) Opus Imperfectum in Matthaem (fifth century).

This work, which was long attributed to John Chrysostomus, was in fact written by an unknown Arian author of the fifth

century.³⁸ In the context of a commentary on the words "when Jesus got into the boat" (Mt 8:23), the author writes:

...we must inquire how this boat must be understood on the spiritual level... There is no doubt that this boat symbolizes the Church, in accordance with what the Holy Spirit says about her through Solomon, in the words: "she has become like a ship of distant trade" [Prov 31:14]. This is the church, which by the word of preaching travels in every direction, with the apostles as sailors, the Lord as helmsman, and the Holy Spirit as wind, carrying with her a great and precious ransom, with which it has purchased every race of men--or rather, the entire world--by the blood of Christ. [My translation.]³⁹

Clearly, the Valiant Woman is again understood as an allegory of the Church.

From a textual point of view it is worth noting that Prov 31:14 is here quoted in a somewhat unusual form. Facta est tamquam navis mercaturā longinquā may be a free citation from memory of the Vetus Latina wording Facta est tamquam navis quae negotiatur a longe.⁴⁰ Alternatively, it may be a free rendering directly from the Greek of the LXX (naus emporeuomenē makrothen), since the Opus Imperfectum is possibly a translation from a Greek original.⁴¹

(7) Pseudo-Procopius of Gaza (sixth century). This unknown author of a commentary on the complete book of Proverbs again interprets the Valiant Woman as an allegory of wisdom, understood in terms of Neoplatonic philosophy. Suffice it to quote his explanation of the words "But you

surpass them all" (Prov 31:29b):

This wisdom, as the science of sciences, stands above all the sciences of human things as their cause, and it has transcended them all by the activities of knowledge and virtue, being a science of divine things. [My translation.]⁴²

In this highly theoretical account of Wisdom, the husband in the Song is repeatedly equated with Mind (nous).

(8) Andrew of Crete (ca. 660-740). In his Fourth Oration, on the Nativity of the Virgin Mary, Andrew lists a whole series of scriptural epithets which apply to Mary, including "daughter." In that context he quotes the LXX of Prov 31:27 as applying to Mary: "Many daughters have gained riches, many have done mighty deeds, but you transcend and have surpassed them all."^{42a} To my knowledge, this is the first place where the Valiant Woman is related to the Virgin Mary. It was not, as we shall see, to be the last.

At this point we should make reference also to the commentary on Proverbs attributed to Salonius, the fifth-century bishop of Geneva, in which the Valiant Woman is taken as an allegory of the Church. It has recently been shown, however, that this commentary is actually the work of a much later medieval author. Accordingly, we will deal with it later under the heading Pseudo-Salonius.

It is clear from the patristic authors we have surveyed so far that the allegorical interpretation of the Song was widespread in the early Christian centuries, but also that it

was inconsistent. The Valiant Woman is taken to refer to Soul (Origen), Wisdom (Hilary of Poitiers and Pseudo-Procopius of Gaza), Mind (Didymus of Alexandria), the Church (Epiphanius of Salamis, Johannes Cassianus and the author of the Opus Imperfectum) and the Virgin Mary (Andrew of Crete). However, it was especially the equation of the Valiant Woman with the Church which was to prove influential. This was due very largely to the authority of Augustine and Gregory the Great.

The authoritative interpretations of Augustine and Gregory

Augustine (354-430) devoted one of his sermons (number 37 in modern editions) to the Song. This sermon was taken down in shorthand while it was being delivered, and later published. It is the longest treatment of the Song which has come down to us from antiquity, and it is also the most informal and the most influential. It is tempting to dwell on the many interesting features of this sermon (for example, it contains evidence of colloquial Latin pronunciation, of the lively interaction of Augustine with his audience, and of popular theological polemics, and it seems to have been preserved in two textual traditions going back to two stenographers in Augustine's audience⁴³) but we shall restrict ourselves to its allegorical hermeneutics and its value as witness to the Vetus Latina.

Apparently the Song had been read to the audience before

the sermon began. Augustine refers to this at the beginning of the sermon proper (after requesting his hearers to be quiet as they listen, since his voice is not strong):

What we are holding in our hands, namely the Scripture which you see, urges us to study and extol a certain woman, of whom you heard a moment ago in the reading, a woman of high standing who has a husband of high standing, a husband who found her when she was lost and adorned her when she was found. About this woman I will say a few things as time allows--the things which the Lord suggests, following the course of the text which you see me holding. After all, it is the day of the martyrs,⁴⁴ and therefore we must give the more praise to the mother of the martyrs. Now that I have said this by way of introduction, you have understood who this woman is. See also whether you recognize her as I go through the reading. To judge from your attitude, everyone in the audience is now saying to himself: "She must be the Church". I confirm that thought. For what else could be the mother of the martyrs? That's right: your understanding is the right one. The woman about whom we want to say a few words is the Church. [My translation.]⁴⁵

Augustine goes on in this vein, continually interacting with his audience, and dealing with each verse of the Song in succession. Each detail of the Valiant Woman's description is related to some biblical image connected with the Church--the "precious stones" of vs 10 to the New Testament image of living stones, the "night" of vs 15 to the tribulations of the Church, the "lamp" of vs 18 to Christian hope, the duplicia pallia of vs 22 to the two natures of

Christ, and so on. As an example of his general approach, here is his commentary on the words "She also strengthens her arms for the spindle [in fusum] (31:19b):

In fusum: not from infundere [i.e. infusum], but "for that spinning implement called fusus." About that spindle I will give the explanation which the Lord gives me. For this kind of spinning applies to both men and women. Listen to the meaning of the words: She strengthens her arms for the spindle. He could have said: "for the distaff," but he said "spindle", perhaps for good reasons. To be sure, it might seem that it is not absurd to take "spindle" to refer to spinning, and "spinning" to refer to good work, as of a virtuous woman and a hardworking, thrifty wife. However, I will not withhold from you, beloved, what I personally understand by this spindle. Everyone who lives a life of good works in the holy Church, who effects rather than neglects God's commandments, does not know what he is doing tomorrow, but does know what he did today. He is fearful about his future deed, but glad about his past deed. And he is careful to persevere in good deeds, for fear of losing the past through neglect of the future. But in praying to the Lord, in his every petition, he does not have a sure knowledge of his future deed, but of his past deed, based on what he has done, not on what he is going to do. Now then, if you agree with me that this is true, consider the two implements involved in spinning: the distaff and the spindle. It is the wool wrapped on the distaff which passes over to the spindle; it must be drawn out and spun into thread. That which is wrapped on the distaff is future; that which has been collected on the spindle is already past. Therefore your deed is on the spindle, not on the distaff. For on the distaff is that which you are going to do; on the spindle what you have done.

Therefore, look and see if you have something on the spindle: there let your arms be strengthened. There your conscience will be strong; there you will be secure and say to God: "Give, because I have given; forgive, because I have forgiven; act, because I have acted." After all, you do not claim a reward except for a deed that is done, not a deed that is to be done. Therefore, whatever you are engaged in, let your whole attention be fixed on the spindle, but that which has been collected on the spindle does not have to be brought back to the distaff. Therefore be careful what you do, so that you may have it on the spindle, that you may strengthen your arms for the spindle, that your whole effort may be directed to the spindle, that the spindle may have something which may console you, which may give you the confidence to pray and hope for the things that have been promised.

Perhaps you say, "And what shall I do, what do you bid me have on my spindle?" Listen to what follows: But she opened her hands to the poor [Prov 31:20a]. No indeed, we are not ashamed to teach you the holy art of spinning! Take note, if anyone has a full wallet, a full barn, a full cellar, all these things are on the distaff--let them pass over to the spindle! Look at the way she spins (neat), in fact look at the way she "spin" (neiat)⁴⁶--as long as all are instructed, never mind the grammarians! [My translation.]⁴⁷

It is worth observing that Augustine does briefly acknowledge that a literal meaning of the spindle is possible, making the Valiant Woman represent simply "a virtuous woman and a hard-working, thrifty wife," but he dismisses this in favour of his own much more fanciful interpretation of the spindle, which is clearly reminiscent

of the classical Greco-Roman conception of the Moirai or Parcae (i.e. the Fates) who spin man's destiny.⁴⁸

We turn now to the text of the Song which Augustine uses. As we have noted, this is the Vetus Latina, which is a translation of the LXX. In a few places, Augustine's text reflects an interesting variant reading in the LXX. For example, the beginning of verse 13 is quoted by Augustine as Inveniens lanas et linum, "Finding wool and flax." This reflects the LXX variant reading heuramenē, which probably arose because the correct reading mēryomenē (which is printed in all modern editions of the LXX) is a rare verb which here probably means "drawing out" or "spinning." Similarly, the beginning of verse 27 is quoted by Augustine as Severae conversationes domorum eius, "The occupations of her households are strict." The LXX has two different readings for the adjective in this sentence, both of which are quite well-attested: stegnai, "watertight," "strict," and stenai, "narrow". The Vetus Latina, as quoted by Augustine, would seem to reflect the first of these readings. A third example of a noteworthy LXX reading underlying Augustine's text is found in verse 31, quoted by Augustine as Date illi de fructibus manuum suarum, "Give her of the fruits of her hands". What is remarkable about this is that the best-attested LXX text here has Dote autē apo karpōn cheileōn autēs, "Give her of the fruit of her lips." The Vetus Latina

here reflects a textual variant in the Greek (cheirōn) which (though faithful to the MT) does not have the manuscript authority to replace the reading of the printed LXX editions (cheileōn).

There is also one case where the Vetus Latina is guilty of a serious, though understandable, mistranslation. The LXX of verse 20 reads as follows: Cheiras de autēs diēnoixen penēti, karpon de exeteine ptōchō, "She opened her hands to the poor, and she extended her karpos to the needy." It is clear from the parallelism of cheiras and karpon, as well as from the MT (which has kapāh and yādēhā) that karpos is here to be taken as a synonym of "hand", in other words, that it here means: "wrist".⁴⁹ In the Vetus Latina, however, it is translated "fruit", the much more common meaning of karpos: Fructum autem porrexit inopi. Needless to say, this gives Augustine occasion to hold forth on the importance of fruitbearing, but has little to do with the original text, either in Hebrew or Greek.

Before leaving Augustine, we should note that the textual tradition of his Sermo 37 also includes what Lambot calls an "interpolated text" of this sermon, which was at one time attributed to Ambrose, and printed among his works.⁵⁰ Apart from a few short interpolations which expand on Augustine's exposition, this text is of interest because it corrects the Vetus Latina on a few points. In verse 13, for

example, it has Filans rather than Inveniens, reflecting mēryomenē instead of heuramenē in the LXX text. In verse 27 it has angustae rather than severae, reflecting an original stenai instead of stegnai. In these and a few other places a hand has obviously retouched the sermon in order to make it conform more closely to another text of the LXX.

Augustine's Sermo 37 was to prove quite popular and influential, witness the fact that eleven medieval manuscripts of it have survived.⁵¹ It is undoubtedly because of this popularity and influence that the equation of the Valiant Woman with the Church gradually became dominant in the Christian West, replacing competing interpretations. We see this illustrated in the writings of Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604), the man who is often said to be the last Latin Church father, and whose authority, together with that of Augustine, was very great in the Latin West of the subsequent Middle Ages.

Gregory did not write a commentary on Proverbs, nor did he deliver a sermon on the Song of the Valiant Woman, but he frequently refers to the Song in his extant writings. The following is a sampling of his references to it:

- (1) "Therefore Solomon speaks of the Church in these words:
Her husband is noble in the gates, when he sits with the senators of the land." [Prov 31:23]⁵²
- (2) "... mindful that it is written about the Church

universal: She does not eat bread in idleness." [Prov 31-27b]⁵³

(3) "... as it is written about the holy Church: She made linen clothing and sold it [Prov 31:24]; about which it also is said a little later [sic] in that passage: She saw that her trading is good." [Prov 31:18]⁵⁴

(4) "About these gates Solomon says again: Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates." [Prov 31:18] For then the holy church receives from the fruit of her hands, when the recompense of her labour raises her up to partake of the things of heaven."⁵⁵ [These four passages my translation.]

It would be easy to multiply these examples, especially from Gregory's widely-read Moralia in Job (the index to the recently completed critical edition of this work by M. Adriaen lists thirteen references to the Song), but the point is clear: Gregory consistently takes the Valiant Woman to be an allegory of the Church. The most noteworthy difference between his treatment and Augustine's is that Gregory now uses the Vulgate instead of the Vetus Latina. In the case of Proverbs, the Vulgate represents a very considerable improvement in terms of fidelity to the MT.

CHAPTER TWO: MEDIEVAL INTERPRETATIONS

There is of course no invisible line or precise date which divides the Middle Ages from the period of rabbinic and patristic interpretation which we have been discussing. It could be argued that Andrew of Crete, whom we briefly mentioned above (seventh-eighth centuries), already belongs to the medieval era. However, since our discussion will henceforth focus (mainly through lack of relevant sources from Byzantine literature) on the Latin West, we shall somewhat arbitrarily draw the line which marks the threshold of the Middle Ages between Gregory the Great (sixth century) and the Venerable Bede (seventh-eighth centuries).

Medieval Jewish interpretations

Our discussion of Jewish interpretations of the Song in medieval times must needs be very brief. This is mainly because my own command of medieval Hebrew is virtually non-existent, and because Jewish commentaries from this time period are in any case hard to come by. Moreover, there seems to be some reason to believe that the medieval Jewish interpretation of the Song, at least in its popular form, was quite uniform. Although the tradition of Jewish midrash did not normally settle on a standard allegorical interpretation of a given passage of Scripture, the Song of the Valiant Woman was an exception. Alexander Altmann, an authority in these matters, tells us:

Rabbinic aggadah and Midrash employed the allegorical method in an uninhibited homiletic rather than in a systematic manner... The only exceptions are the allegorical interpretations of Proverbs 31:10-31 (the "woman of valor" being understood as the Torah) and of the Song of Songs.⁵⁶

As we have seen, this interpretation of the Song is already found in the Talmud. That it was widely held in medieval Jewish interpretation, also outside of the homiletic context of the midrashim, is shown by the authoritative commentary on Proverbs by Rashi, i.e. Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac (1040-1105), who also interprets the Valiant Woman as representing Torah.⁵⁷

Alongside this interpretation, which can be said to represent the mainstream of medieval Jewish exegesis, there are a number of others, mainly of a more philosophical character. It is to be noted that these other interpretations, though departing from the mainstream, nevertheless agree with it in giving an allegorical interpretation. Two representatives of this philosophical approach may be mentioned: Maimonides and Ralbag.

Maimonides (1135-1204) has a passing reference to the Song in his famous Guide for the Perplexed. He writes:

As regards the portion beginning, "Who can find a virtuous woman?" it is clear what is meant by the figurative expression, "a virtuous woman." When man possesses a good sound body that does not overpower him nor disturb the equilibrium in him, he possesses a divine gift.⁵⁸

It is clear from the context (a discussion of the control of bodily passions) that Maimonides here equates the Valiant Woman with a healthy body which does not upset a person's equilibrium. Note his use of the phrase "figurative expression."

Ralbag, i.e. Rabbi Levi ben Gershon (1288-1344), understood the Song in a similar way. He took the Valiant Woman to symbolize "matter" in the Neoplatonic sense. In the words of the sixteenth-century French commentator Mercerus, "Rabbi Levi takes this passage to refer to matter, that is, the sensitive soul which yields and subjects itself to reason and intellect."⁵⁹ Ralbag's interpretation seems to be a refinement of Maimonides'.

Although both Jews and Christians consistently gave an allegorical interpretation of the Valiant Woman in the Middle Ages, there seems to have been very little contact between the two exegetical traditions. It is not until the fourteenth century, as we shall see, that there is evidence of one tradition influencing the other. Until then, the Christian tradition appears to be virtually untouched by the Jewish interpretation, and vice versa.

The Venerable Bede

The Venerable Bede (672-735) is the author of an extensive commentary on the Song which is remarkable for its soberness and independence. It has come down to us both as

the last part of his commentary on the book of Proverbs⁶⁰ and as an independent composition entitled De muliere forti libellus.⁶¹ There is good reason to assume that it was originally a separate work, because the comments on the verses of the Song are almost four times as extensive as those on the rest of Proverbs.⁶²

The independence of Bede's commentary on the Song has only recently become evident. Since there are many verbal correspondences with the Proverbs commentary that was long attributed to Salonius of Geneva (fifth century), Bede seemed to be heavily dependent on Salonius. As we shall see shortly, however, the commentary ascribed to Salonius is in fact dependent on Bede, not the other way around. Viewed in this light, it becomes apparent that Bede drew very little on his predecessors.

In his Proverbs commentary, Bede marks the transition from "the words of Lemuel" (Prov 31:1-9) to the acrostic Song as follows:

So far the words of Lemuel. From this point on, Solomon, the wisest of Kings, sings the praises of the holy Church in just a few verses but with a fullness of truth. For the song in question consists of twenty-two verses, according to the sequence and number of the Hebrew letters, so that the verses each begin with a different letter. The altogether perfect sequence of this alphabet symbolically indicates the altogether complete description here given of the virtues and rewards of either the individual believing soul or the entire

holy Church, which is constituted one catholic church out of all the elect souls. [My translation.]⁶³

It is to be noticed in this introduction, not only that Bede accepts the now-standard interpretation of the Valiant Woman as the Church, but also that he pays attention to the literary features of the Song as a distinct unit of composition. He clearly distinguishes it from the "words of Lemuel," although the Vulgate (like the MT) does not clearly mark a break between the two. (The problem did not arise for those commentators whose text was the LXX or Vetus Latina, since there the "words of Lemuel" occur much earlier, preceding 25:1.) He points out that this distinct literary unit is a song (carmen), and that it conforms to the pattern of an alphabetic acrostic. This attention to the literary form of the Song (probably based on information gleaned from Jerome) is very remarkable when we compare Bede with his predecessors.

Furthermore, Bede is the first commentator in our survey who assigns a literary function to the use of the alphabetic acrostic: in his view it serves to convey the notion of completeness or perfection. This explanation of the function of the alphabetic acrostic (which will often be repeated in modern commentaries) is of particular interest in the case of Bede, since he himself wrote poetry using this device.⁶⁴

Although Bede follows the allegorical interpretation of

the Song made popular by Augustine and Gregory the Great, he is not without originality in this regard. We must read his exposition in the light of his approach to the book of Proverbs as a whole. His commentary on Proverbs begins with the words:

Parabolae [i.e. Proverbs] in Greek are called similitudines in Latin. The reason Solomon gave this title to the present book was to teach us to understand what he says in depth, and not according to the letter... [My translation.]⁶⁵

According to Bede, it was in the nature of Solomon's Proverbs to be understood allegorically. Notice also that Bede takes the Valiant Woman to be an allegory not only of the Church, but also of the individual soul. This is not to be understood in Origen's philosophical sense, but in the theological sense of the individual believer as member of the universal Church. In this way Bede makes the Song more directly applicable to the life of the pious Bible-reader. He thus gives a devotional focus to the patristic tradition of interpretation.

Bede's independence is most evident in the details of his exposition. Although he quotes verbatim from Gregory's Moralia in Job on three occasions,⁶⁶ and once from Augustine,⁶⁷ he generally gives his own explanation of the individual verses. By way of illustration we quote Bede's words about the spindle in verse 19, which may be compared to

the passage we quoted above from Augustine's Sermo 37:

The text says And her fingers grasped the spindle. When women spin they usually hold the spindle in their right hand and the distaff in their left. "It is the wool wrapped on the distaff which passes over to the spindle; it must be drawn out and spun into thread." [= Augustine, Sermo 37,13,lines 287-288]. Now the right hand often signifies everlasting life in the Scriptures, and the left hand signifies God's gifts in the present life, namely material wealth, temporal peace, and bodily health, as well as knowing the Scriptures and receiving the heavenly sacraments. When we receive these and similar blessings from the Lord's bounty, we bear in our left hand, as it were, the wool wrapped on the distaff, but when we begin, out of love for the things of heaven, to cultivate these blessings in a salutary way, we are already transferring the wool of "the Lamb without blemish" from the distaff to the spindle, from the left to the right hand, because we are making for ourselves, from the gifts of our Redeemer, and from the examples of his deeds, a robe of heavenly glory and a "wedding garment" of love. For the fingers with which she is said to grasp the spindle suggest the application of the discernment with which everyone does his work, no doubt for the reason that no parts of our body are distinguished by more joints than our fingers, and are as flexible. Therefore, any person who can truthfully say with the apostle: But our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, that person's righthand fingers have grasped the spindle, because he has learned to work for the benefits of eternity with diligent discernment. And it is well said that the fingers grasped, to highlight the more vividly with what zeal and what urgency we ought to strive, amid the uncertainty of this life, for the certain rewards that are

found with the Lord. [My translation.]68

Notice that Bede here borrows the theme of distaff-and-spindle from Augustine's Sermo 37, even inserting verbatim (without attribution) an entire sentence from Augustine, but gives both this theme and the rest of the verse an altogether different exposition. This general pattern of independent exegesis holds good throughout his commentary on the Song.

We find a textual curiosity in Bede's commentary on 31:22, the place where the Vetus Latina had incorrectly referred to duplicia pallia. Bede's text and commentary read as follows:

She made for herself a stragulatam vestem, fine linen and purple was her clothing. A stragulata vestis, which is usually made very stiff by means of varied weaving, signifies the valiant [literally "strong"] deeds of the Church and the various ornaments of her virtues, about which the prophet sang in the eulogy of the supreme King (who is, of course, this woman's husband): The queen stood at thy right hand, in gilded clothing, arrayed in varied attire [Ps 45:10]. [My translation.]69

What is unusual about this passage is that Bede is giving an explanation of a "ghost-word", a word which has arisen as a result of textual corruption--in this case the adjective stragulatus. Although this adjective is listed in all major Latin dictionaries, the only place where it is attested is here, in the Vulgate of Prov 31:22. Ironically, however, it

is here a corruption for the adjective stragulus. Jerome had correctly translated the Hebrew marbad in this verse as stragula vestis, a well-attested expression in classical Latin meaning a "bedspread" or "coverlet".⁷⁰ This was corrupted to stragulata vestis in the early Middle Ages,⁷¹ so that it is found in most medieval manuscripts of the Vulgate, as well as in the printed editions of modern times. It was finally corrected to stragula vestis in the critical edition of the Vulgate Proverbs published in Rome in 1957.⁷² Bede's explanation of the corrupt reading stragulata vestis was to prove influential in medieval commentaries, though it is not altogether clear what he means by the phrase "varied weaving" (variante textura). In any case, he seems to have taken stragulata vestis to refer not to bedclothes, but to some kind of garment made of very stiff (firmissima) material, which can therefore be said to represent the fortia opera or "valiant deeds" of the Church.⁷³

Before leaving Bede we should take note of the fact that the recent critical edition of his Proverbs commentary by D. Hurst (1983) is sadly deficient. His apparatus fontium still lists the commentary of Pseudo-Salonus as one of Bede's sources (though his Praefatio acknowledges that this is incorrect), but fails to record the quotation from Augustine's Sermo 37 which we noted above, as well as many biblical allusions. A few examples of the latter are agni

immaculati (line 321; cf. 1 Pet 1:19), vestem nuptialem (line 323; cf. Mt 22:11-12), promissionem habent vitae quae nunc est et futurae (lines 361-362; see 1 Tim 4:8). Moreover, the marginal reference "xxxi, 14" was inadvertently omitted at line 180, and the word manuum is missing from the biblical text in line 572. Finally, the manuscript evidence on which the text is based fails to include the separate composition De muliere forti libellus as well as the Proverbs commentary transmitted under the name of Hrabanus Maurus which is really Bede's commentary,⁷⁴ and the Glossa Ordinaria on Proverbs, which draws heavily on Bede's commentary.

Pseudo-Salonus

In the period from Bede's death (735) until the twelfth century there is little to report with respect to the interpretation of the Song of the Valiant Woman. We can mention the fact that Saint Boniface, the missionary to the German tribes, explicitly asks for Bede's commentary on Proverbs in one of his letters (dated around 750),⁷⁵ and repeat the point we just made, namely that Bede's commentary later circulated in Germany under the name of Hrabanus Maurus (ninth century).⁷⁶ For the rest, the only literary production that is relevant to our survey during these three-and-a-half centuries is the commentary which was until recently attributed to Salonus, the fifth-century bishop of Geneva.

It would carry us too far afield to enter into the scholarly discussion surrounding the true date and author of the work published as Salonii Commentarii in Parabolas Salomonis et in Ecclesiasten. Suffice it to point out that the traditional attribution was still defended by C. Curti in the critical edition of these commentaries which he published under this title (Catania, 1964), but was challenged by the French scholar Jean-Pierre Weiss in a review of this edition.⁷⁷ Since then Weiss has elaborated on his critique in two articles, both published in 1970,⁷⁸ and come to the conclusion that Pseudo-Salonus was a schoolmaster in Germany, probably of the ninth century. Apparently quite independently of Weiss, the New Zealand scholar Valerie I.J. Flint also challenged the Salonian authorship, in yet another article published in 1970.⁷⁹ She concluded that the true author is Honorius Augustodunensis (eleventh-twelfth century), under whose name a version of the commentary was circulated in medieval Germany. We will content ourselves with the conclusion that Pseudo-Salonus lived after Bede and before the early twelfth century.

The commentary on Proverbs by Pseudo-Salonus now turns out to be a thoroughly unoriginal work, composed very largely of excerpts from Bede's commentary, occasionally supplemented with passages drawn from Gregory the Great.⁸⁰ Pseudo-Salonus' own contribution consists almost exclusively

in the format of the commentary, which is that of a dialogue between teacher and student, no doubt for use in schools.

The section on the Valiant Woman begins as follows:

Teacher. Who is that Valiant Woman of whom it says: Who shall find a valiant woman? Her price is remote and from the farthest regions?

Student. The holy catholic Church is called a valiant woman. The reason she is called a woman is that she gives birth to spiritual sons for God out of water and the Holy Spirit. She is called valiant because she disdains and despises all the things of this world, whether harmful or advantageous, because of faith and love for her Creator and Redeemer. [My translation.]⁸¹

Note that in Pseudo-Salonus' commentary the reference to the alphabetic acrostic and its function is omitted, and that the allegorical interpretation is restricted to the Church, without reference to the individual soul. For the rest, the content of the commentary is drawn directly from Bede, both here and throughout the section dealing with the Valiant Woman. Though based on Bede throughout, Pseudo-Salonus' comments are very selective, using only a fraction of Bede's work. In fact, he gives extracts of Bede's commentary on only nine of the 22 verses, namely 10, 14, 24, 22 [in that order!], 25 and 28-31. The remaining thirteen are simply passed over in silence.

Whoever Pseudo-Salonus was, and whenever it was in the early Middle Ages that he lived, it is clear that he was a transmitter of Bede's views of the Song, and thus of the

broader allegorical tradition which interprets the Valiant Woman as the church.

Individual interpretations in the twelfth century

It was in the twelfth century that the intellectual culture of the Latin West began the resurgence which was to culminate in the great achievements of the thirteenth century. Around the turn of the twelfth century we meet Bruno of Segni, also known as Bruno of Asti (ca.1045-1123), who wrote a short commentary on the Song entitled Expositio de Muliere Forti.⁸² This commentary is of interest because it is not a mere reworking of earlier material, and because its author is known as "one of the best exegetes of the Middle Ages."⁸³ A curious feature is the Latin poem with which Bruno concludes his exposition, the first stanza of which reads as follows:

<u>Certissime cognovimus</u>	"We know most certainly
<u>Quod sermo Salomonicus</u>	that the word of Solomon
<u>Mulierem fortissimam</u>	by the Most Valiant Woman
<u>Significat Ecclesiam.</u> ⁸⁴	means the Church."

Though he is here clearly following the standard allegorical tradition established by the authority of Augustine, Gregory and Bede, he is no slavish epigone of these earlier giants. Consider for example his comments on the "fingers" and "spindle" of Prov 31:19b:

We understand by her "fingers" all those believers who are small in achievement

and position. It is the ones who take care of the lighter tasks and who are equipped only with faith and hope, that grasp the spindle. For any woman can spin, and it is no great chore to believe and hope. [My translation.]⁸⁵

If we compare the above-quoted passages by Augustine and Bede on this same verse, it is clear that Bruno is exercising a great deal of independence. Even when he does rely on his predecessors, he is not reluctant to make modifications, as in his comment on stragulata vestis (Prov 31:22):

Stragulata [vestis] is a kind of clothes which is made with great variety. Therefore, the garment of the Church is stragulata, because she is depicted with great variety. For in her are resplendent the virtues of humility, peace, perseverance, godliness, meekness and so on. [My translation.]⁸⁶

Bruno picks up the idea of varietas from Bede, but changes its focus; the cloth designated by the adjective is not stiff, but multicoloured, and therefore denotes not the valiant deeds, but the many virtues of the Church. Nevertheless, it is still the Church which the Valiant Woman represents.

So common has the equation of the Valiant Woman with the Church become in the twelfth century, that preachers quote verses from it in their sermons to make a point about the life of the Church, or of the individual believer, without bothering to explain the allegorical interpretation which makes this possible. We find such incidental allusions

repeatedly, for example, in the sermons of Gueric of Igny (ca. 1075-1157):

Therefore it is written in the praise of the Valiant Woman, who "arose at night" [Prov 31:15], and who by working day and night with her hands "ate not her bread in idleness" [Prov 31:27]: "Her lamp will not go out at night" [Prov 31:18], that is, her faith will not fail in temptation. [My translation.]⁸⁷

There are at least three other places in Gueric's sermons where we find a similar unexplained application to the life of the Church.⁸⁸ Apparently his audience could be trusted to make the appropriate allegorical connection.

However, the twelfth century also gives some evidence of exegetical innovation. With the rise of Mariology we also find the first examples in the West of an interpretation of the Valiant Woman as the Virgin Mary. Around the middle of the century we discover, in one of the sermons of Julien de Vézelay (ca. 1085-ca. 1162), the application of two verses in the Song (24 and 27) to Mary.⁸⁹ And near the end of the century we meet with a sermon which attempts to synthesize the Mariological interpretation with the traditional view:

We can therefore undoubtedly understand the Valiant Woman as the wisdom of God, or the mother of wisdom himself: Mary, or the mother of the wise: the Church, or indeed the seat of wisdom: the soul. [My translation.]⁹⁰

These words were written by Adam of Perseigne, a mystic of the school of Bernard of Clairvaux, who flourished around

1190.⁹¹ He is obviously using wisdom as a category which can integrate the interpretation of Bede (Church and soul) with the exegetical innovation (Mary). It is not clear whether he had any knowledge of the fathers Hilary of Poitiers and Pseudo-Procopius of Gaza, who had earlier seen wisdom as the reality symbolized by the Valiant Woman.

The Glossa Ordinaria

Whatever the case may be, these twelfth-century variations of the standard allegorical interpretation were not destined to become very influential. They were, after all, only passing comments in popular sermons delivered by relatively obscure preachers. They could not compete with the interpretation embodied in another work of the twelfth century which was soon to achieve almost canonical status in Latin Christendom: the Glossa Ordinaria.

Apparently initiated by Anselm of Laon (ca. 1050-1117), first compiled by Anselm himself and a number of associates, and later expanded by others, the Glossa Ordinaria was a series of short exegetical notes (glossae) on the complete Bible, drawn almost entirely from patristic and early medieval authorities. By the end of the twelfth century it had achieved its definitive form, as well as its definitive place in the scribal layout of the biblical text. That is, it was positioned in the margin and between the lines of the portion of Scripture to which it applied. As Beryl Smalley,

the great authority on the Glossa, wrote shortly before her recent death:

The Gloss became the standard aid to the study of Scripture, the "tongue" of the biblical text, and an essential part of the pagina sacra itself. The text and the Gloss were studied together. Biblical lectures dealt with the glossed text. Numerous biblical allusions can only be understood by referring back to the Gloss. [My translation.]⁹²

The author-compiler (glossator) of some parts of the Glossa Ordinaria is known, but we do not know who was responsible for the glossing of Proverbs and thus of the Song of the Valiant Woman. He was almost certainly a twelfth-century member of Anselm's famous school in Laon in northern France, but may have originated from almost any region of Latin Christendom.

Whoever the author was, the glosses on Prov 31:10-31 are taken almost exclusively from Bede's commentary. With the exception of a number of interlinear comments dealing with the supposed meaning of the names of the Hebrew letters with which each verse begins, the Glossa on the Song is a compendium of Bede's commentary. Unlike the work of Pseudo-Salonus, however, the abridgement here is intelligently and consistently done. Bede's important opening comment on the alphabetic acrostic and on the Valiant Woman as Church or soul is reproduced almost in its entirety, though the wording has been slightly simplified. Here is the

Latin text of both versions:

Bede

Hucusque verba Lamuhel. Hinc
sapientissimus regum Salomon
laudes sanctae ecclesiae
versibus paucis sed plen-
issima veritate decantat.
Constat namque idem carmen
versibus viginti et duobus
iuxta ordinem videlicet
Hebraearum ac numerum
litterarum ita ut singuli
versus a singulis litteris
incipiant. Cuius ordine
perfectissimo alphabeti
typice innuitur quam plen-
issime hic vel animae
cuiusque fidelis vel
totius sanctae ecclesiae,
quae ex omnibus electis
animabus una perficitur
catholica virtutes ac
praemia describantur.⁹³

Glossa Ordinaria

Hucusque verba Lamuelis
regis; hinc Salomon
paucis versibus, sed plen-
issima veritate
decantat laudes ecclesiae.
Constat enim hoc carmen
versibus xxij
per ordinem
Hebraei alphabeti:
& singuli
versus singulis incipiunt
litteris, ubi
innuitur quam plene
hic vel animae
uniuscuiusque fidelis vel
totius ecclesiae sanctae,
quae ex omnibus electis
una perficitur
catholica virtutes
describantur ac praemia.⁹⁴

It is clear from this comparison that Bede's overall interpretation is faithfully incorporated in the Glossa

Ordinaria. This is true not only of this introductory section, but of the entire commentary on the Song, although the abridgement is usually more thoroughgoing. Throughout, the glossator is concerned not only to abbreviate, but also to clarify. The rather awkward sentence which Bede quotes from Augustine, In colo enim lana involuta est quae filo ducenda et nenda transeat in fusum (see note 67 above), becomes simply de colo lana filo transit in fusum, which is both shorter and clearer. When Bede uses the verb insinuant in the unusual sense of "suggest" or "indicate" in that same passage, the glossator changes this to the more straightforward significant. The correspondence between the two verses of the commentary is often so close that the Glossa can sometimes serve as an independent witness to Bede's text, as when it reads (again in the same passage) intentionem discretionis QUAM quisque operatur, "the application of the discernment which everyone exercises" instead of QUA quisque operatur, "with which everyone does his work" (which is the reading found in the direct textual tradition of Bede's commentary.)

The effect of this wholesale incorporation of a shortened version of Bede's commentary into the Glossa Ordinaria on the Song was that his interpretation achieved an even higher degree of authority than it already had for the Christians of Medieval Europe. The Valiant Woman as allegory

of the Church was now de rigueur in all the schools of Latin Christendom.

The thirteenth century

A striking example of the weight of this authority is provided by an important commentator of the thirteenth century, Hugh of St. Cher, or Hugo a Sancto Caro (ca. 1200-1263). Hugo was a leading Dominican (the first to be made cardinal) and is remembered as a biblical scholar for his correction of the Vulgate text, his Concordance on the Vulgate, and his extensive commentary on the Bible entitled Postilla super totam Bibliam (ca. 1232).^{94a} The latter was reprinted many times up to the seventeenth century; we will refer to the edition of 1504.

His commentary on the Song begins with the now-familiar words of Bede about the alphabetic acrostic and the Song's reference to the Church or the soul. He then continues:

A valiant woman who will find etc.
Although this could be expounded literally in some way, according to the text in Ecclesiastes 7: "One man among a thousand have I found; a woman among all these I have not discovered;" yet, because the Glossators make no mention of a literal exposition, we shall proceed with the mystical exposition, not wishing to play the prophet at this point. [My translation.]⁹⁵

In the rest of his Postilla, Hugo regularly gives both a literal and a "mystical" interpretation of each passage. Here, however, he is prevented from pursuing a literal

reading (though he acknowledges that it would be possible) because of the authority of the exegetical tradition represented by the Glossatores (he is probably thinking in the first place of the compilers of the Glossa Ordinaria). It is also noteworthy that he gives an additional reason for restricting himself to a non-literal exposition: he does not want to "prophesy" or "play the prophet" (vaticinari). This somewhat obscure usage seems to suggest that an interpreter who breaks with the authoritative exegetical tradition must conceive of himself as a prophet, someone endowed with a divine inspiration which overrides human wisdom. Hugo is not prepared to cast himself in that role, at least with respect to this passage.

The rest of his comments on the Song indeed follow the traditional pattern set by Bede. They do, however, bring to bear the text-critical expertise which Hugo had acquired in preparing a corrected text of the Vulgate. On stragulatam (verse 22) he first has this comment:

That is, "reaching to the ankles", or "embroidered", or "firmly woven by means of a variety of weaving"... Stragos is taken to mean "ankle" or "various." [My translation.]⁹⁶

This incorporates the explanations given by both Bede and Bruno, and adds a speculative etymology connecting this puzzling word with "ankle". A little later, however, Hugo notes that

some manuscripts have: "She made for herself a stragulam vestem." This is the same as a garment made of polymite or hexamite damask cloth, that is, woven with many threads. We read of a stragula vestis in 2 Kings 8:15... [My translation.]⁹⁷

Rather than substituting the correct reading stragulam for the corrupt reading stragulatam, Hugo assigns different meanings to each (all of them speculative) and retains the ghost-word in the text.

It would seem that the thirteenth century, like the centuries before it, is completely dominated by the standard interpretation of the Song reflected in the Glossa Ordinaria. With one exception, I know of no author in the thirteenth century who significantly modifies the basic consensus. The exception is Albertus Magnus.

Albertus Magnus (ca. 1200-1280) wrote an enormous commentary on the Song entitled Liber de Muliere Forti. In the Borgnet edition it runs to almost 200 large pages,⁹⁸ and is divided into 22 chapters, corresponding to the 22 verses of the alphabetic acrostic. This mammoth work is not an exception to the general rule which sees the Valiant Woman as an allegory of the Church, but rather to the traditional way in which this is worked out. One could say that he radicalizes the tradition by writing an entire theological treatise on ecclesiology on the basis of the Song. The opening words of the book state simply: Laudes Ecclesiae

describit Salomon in figura mulieris fortis, "Solomon lists the praises of the Church in the figure of a valiant woman," and the rest of the work gives a theological elaboration of that assumption, interspersed with philosophy and Aristotelian physics (for example on the formation of snow, in connection with verse 21). The work is so huge, and so far removed from ordinary exegetical concerns, that we will do no more in this context than mention it as a kind of anomaly in the history of interpretation. Later interpreters of the Song, as far as I know, never mention it.⁹⁹

The fourteenth century

We move now to the fourteenth century, where the exegetical climate is much the same. A single example can illustrate that the standard interpretation is still the one which prevails. In a Latin sermon delivered near the end of his life, John Wycliffe, the wellknown English religious reformer (ca. 1328-1384), begins his exposition of the Song as follows:

It is clear from the plain meaning of this Scripture passage, and from the unanimous witness of holy men, that today's Bible reading speaks of Christ, the bridegroom of the Church, and of the holy mother Church, his bride. [My translation.]¹⁰⁰

Note again the appeal to the authority of the exegetical tradition. Accordingly, the rest of Wycliffe's sermon on the Song runs on traditional lines.

Although Wycliffe's sermon shows that the standard interpretation of the Song was still taken for granted in the late fourteenth century, there had appeared earlier in the century another series of glosses on the entire Bible which directly challenged the consensus. These were the famous Postillae of Nicholas of Lyra (1270-1349), which were to achieve, by the end of the Middle Ages, an authority almost equal to that of the Glossa Ordinaria, and to have a significant influence on the sixteenth-century Reformer Martin Luther. What distinguished Lyra from the earlier medieval glossators was above all the fact that he had a knowledge of Hebrew. This meant not only that he was in a position to consult the original text of the Old Testament, but also that he had access to the works of medieval Jewish commentators. His Postillae show an especially heavy reliance on the commentaries of "Rabbi Solomon" (that is, Rashi), the famous eleventh-century French commentator on the Bible and Talmud. Compared to the Glossa Ordinaria, which had restricted itself to the Latin text of the Vulgate, and to Christian commentaries on it, Lyra's Postillae were therefore a dramatic innovation. At long last there was significant contact between the Jewish and Christian traditions of interpretation.

Lyra begins his notes on the Song with the following words:

In the last part of this book is placed the praise of the valiant woman. It is commonly interpreted by our scholars to refer to the Church, which is metaphorically called the valiant woman, and her bridegroom Christ, whereas her sons and daughters are called the Christian people of both sexes. And they say that this is the literal sense, the way it says in Judges 9: "The trees went to the bramble bush, etc." The literal sense does not refer to the physical trees, but to Abimelech and the Shechemites who anointed him as their king. And although this exposition is reasonable and commonly accepted, yet I am not pursuing it, because it is sufficiently widespread in the Glossae and common Postillae. Now Rabbi Solomon agrees with the Catholic scholars with respect to the fact that we here have a metaphorical way of speaking. But he says that it is sacred Scripture which is understood by the valiant woman. It is this exposition that I intend to pursue, because it seems to be rational, and is not commonly held. On some points, however, I intend to speak differently from him, according as it is suitable to our faith, especially because they call only the Old Testament sacred Scripture, but I include both, namely Old and New. [My translation.]101

Apart from the interesting argument that the allegorical interpretation in this case is the literal interpretation (to which we shall return later), this passage is striking in that it deliberately prefers a Jewish authority over the authority of the Christian doctores, although of course Lyra hastens to add that Rashi's notion of Scripture (actually, the Jewish scholar had written Torah) will have to be expanded to include the New Testament. The standard medieval

Jewish allegory here replaces (in Christianized form) the standard medieval Christian allegory.

Further evidence of Rashi's influence is found in the notes on individual words and phrases, for example on ad fortia (verse 19) and a frigore nivis (verse 21):

She stretched out her hand to valiant deeds. In Hebrew it says to the whorl, which is a kind of small, somewhat heavy ring, attached to the lower part of the spindle, so that it spins in an upright and controlled manner; this explanation fits with what follows: And her fingers grasp the spindle. [My translation.]¹⁰²

...from the cold of snow. That is, from the punishment of hell, according to what Rabbi Solomon says here, adducing Job 24:19, He will pass from the waters of the snows to excessive heat, and speaks of the condemned man. [My translation.]¹⁰³

Although the comment about the spindle-whorl does not mention Rashi, it is taken verbatim from the latter's commentary.

(The Hebrew word referred to here is kîšôr, a hapax legomenon which is today usually translated "distaff". However, the meaning "whorl" is again given in Koehler-Baumgartner's lexicon.)

Lyra continues to stand in the tradition of Latin Christian exegesis as well. Witness his comment on our ghost-word: "Stragulatam vestem. That is, interwoven with diverse colours (diversis coloribus intextam)."

Lyra's Postillae gradually achieved considerable

authority during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. An index of this is the fact that they were printed, together with the biblical text, as early as 1481, and that they were often printed thereafter together with the Glossa Ordinaria. Another indication of Lyra's influence is found in the marginal notes which accompanied the so-called Second Wycliffite translation of the Bible into English, which appeared in about 1395. This was an idiomatic translation into Middle English of the Latin Vulgate, done by an unknown follower of Wycliffe. The introductory comment on the Song reads as follows:

a strong woman; Christen doctours
 expownen comynly this lettre, til to the
 ende, of hooly chirche, which bi
 figuratif speche, is seid a strong
 womman; hir hosebande is Christ, hir
 sones and dougtris ben Christen men and
 wymmen; and this is the literal
 understanding, as thei seyen; and this
 exposicioun is resonable, and set opynly
 in the comyn glos. But Rabi Salomon
 seith, that bi a strong womman is
 undurstondu hooli Scripture; the
 hosebonde of this womman, is a studious
 techere in hooly Scripture, both men and
 wymmen; for in Jeroms tyme summe wymmen
 weren ful studious in hooly Scripture.
Lire here. C.104

This clearly relies heavily on Lyra, as the concluding reference to "Lire" also indicates, but does not (unlike Lyra) express a preference for Rashi's view.

The note on "to stronge thingis" (i.e. ad fortia) is also dependent on Lyra, though shortened: "in Ebreu it is,

to the wherne; and the lettre suyngē acordith wel herto.

Lire here. C." (Wherne is here clearly the Middle English word for "spindle-whorl",¹⁰⁵ just as suyngē means "following".)

The foregoing completes our survey of medieval Latin Christian interpretations of the Song of the Valiant Woman, since I have found nothing in the fifteenth century. There is undoubtedly a good deal of relevant material that I have passed over, both in printed and manuscript sources. (There is for example an exposition of the Song by the fourteenth-century British monk Richard Rolle which has never been published.¹⁰⁶) But the overall picture is clear enough: a universal adherence to an allegorical interpretation, almost always with reference to the Church.

One final remark needs to be made about this overwhelming allegorical consensus. The persistence of the allegorical interpretation is particularly striking when we consider that there was a strong movement away from the often fanciful and arbitrary excesses of the allegorical tradition during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Among the leaders of this movement were Albertus Magnus and Nicholas of Lyra, who insisted throughout on the importance of the literal sense.¹⁰⁷ As a matter of fact, Lyra in his Postillae selfconsciously seeks to restrict himself to the literal sense.¹⁰⁸ Yet both these authors give an allegorical

exposition of the Song. Moreover, Hugo of St. Cher, whose Postilla super totam Bibliam systematically gives both a literal and a "mystical" interpretation of the biblical text, deliberately refrains from offering a literal reading of the Song, although he acknowledges that one would be possible. How can we explain this apparent inconsistency in these authors? The answer is, in my opinion, twofold: respect for tradition and a more sophisticated understanding of what "literal" means. Among the greatest authorities in the late Middle Ages were Augustine, Gregory and Bede, all of whom had given an exclusively allegorical interpretation of the Song of the Valiant Woman. It would require an unusual measure of self-confidence (almost a sense of prophetic calling, to judge from Hugo's nolentes vaticinari) to depart from such authority in the age of Scholasticism. Secondly, we see in Lyra a hermeneutical justification for equating "literal" and "allegorical" in the case of the Song of the Valiant Woman. If "literal" is defined in terms of authorial intent, and the Song is put on a par with Jotham's parable of the trees in Judges 9:7-15, then it is not unreasonable to argue that the "literal" meaning of the Valiant Woman is something other than an enterprising Isrealite wife and mother. Of course the crucial move in the argument was the hermeneutical identification of the Song as a parable, but once this was made, an emphasis on the literal sense could be reconciled

with the traditional interpretation of the Song. Lyra's comment (repeated in the Second Wycliffite version) indicates that this was a common Scholastic view of the literal sense of parables,¹⁰⁹ and something like it may also have been held in the Jewish tradition, since Rashi is also known for his attachment to the literal sense.

Looking back over the roughly fifteen hundred years of interpretation which we have surveyed, it is remarkable how similar the patterns are in both the Jewish and Christian traditions. Both began with a literal understanding, both moved to a variety of allegorical interpretations, and both developed a standard allegorical reading in the Middle Ages which crowded out the others. For the Jews the Valiant Woman represented the Torah; for the Christians she symbolized the Church. For more than a thousand years, in both traditions, there was an overwhelming consensus that the Valiant Woman should be understood allegorically. It was this consensus which was challenged by the Reformation.

CHAPTER THREE: INTERPRETATIONS IN THE REFORMATION

The sixteenth century saw a great efflorescence of biblical studies in Europe, stimulated by the Renaissance ideal of studying the classics of antiquity in their original languages, and by the Reformation insistence on sola Scriptura. The result was a flood of new commentaries, based on a study of the original text, on the various books of the Bible, including Proverbs. A partial list of such sixteenth-century scholarly commentaries on Proverbs includes the following names:¹¹⁰

- P. Melanchthon (Halle, 1529)
- J. Arboreus (Paris, 1533)
- P. Melanchthon (Hagenau, 1555)
- R. Baynius (Paris, 1555)
- V. Strigel (Leipzig, 1565)
- C. Jansenius (Louvain, 1568)
- H. Osorius (Antwerpen, 1569)
- J. Mercerus (Geneva, 1573)
- S. Senensis (Lyon, 1575)
- L. Lavater (Zurich, 1586)

These commentaries were written by both Protestants and Catholics, and for much of the material covered in the book of Proverbs there were not significant differences in interpretation between the two opposing parties. With respect to the Song of the Valiant Woman, however, there was

a decided difference. Whereas the Catholic exegetes continued to defend an allegorical interpretation, the Protestants were unanimous in rejecting allegory and giving an exclusively literal interpretation.

Needless to say, it will not be possible to deal with all the above-mentioned commentaries, not even the Protestant ones, since most sixteenth-century commentaries are available only in a few (usually European) libraries. However, it is possible to pinpoint rather precisely the time and the place in which the new Protestant interpretation took its rise, and to give incidental illustrations of the adoption of the new reading by subsequent Protestants.

Melanchthon and Luther

Luther was the giant who more than anyone else precipitated the Reformation, and Melanchthon was important mainly as Luther's lieutenant and successor, but for our purposes we must mention Melanchthon first, since he preceded Luther in acquiring a knowledge of Hebrew, in studying the book of Proverbs, and in consistently rejecting allegory in biblical interpretation.

Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560) was taught Hebrew as a child by Johannes Reuchlin (1422-1522), the great Christian Hebraist who was the first to write a Hebrew grammar-cum-lexicon in Latin (the Rudimenta Linguae Hebraicae, 1506). As it happens, Reuchlin was Melanchthon's

great-uncle (the brother of the grandmother who raised him) and personally supervised young Philip's education.¹¹¹ When the 21-year-old Melanchthon arrived at the University of Wittenberg as professor of Greek in 1518, he already had a solid grasp of Hebrew. In fact, when the professor of Hebrew, another new appointee at Wittenberg University, left halfway through his first year, Melanchthon was prevailed upon to take over the man's Hebrew lectures.¹¹² For some years thereafter, Melanchthon would regularly teach a Hebrew reading course at Wittenberg.¹¹³ This was at a time when Luther, his older colleague at Wittenberg, had only an elementary knowledge of Hebrew, and freely acknowledged Melanchthon's superiority in this regard.¹¹⁴

Melanchthon had a special interest in the book of Proverbs. When he first arrived in Wittenberg, he planned to publish a trilingual edition (Hebrew, Greek and Latin) of this biblical book,¹¹⁵ but he never accomplished this, probably because Sebastian Munster published a Hebrew-Latin edition in 1520.¹¹⁶ He did lecture on the book of Proverbs in the early months of 1524,¹¹⁷ and these lectures were published (without his permission) later in the same year,¹¹⁸ under the title Paroimiae sive Proverbia Solomonis. Cum Adnotationibus Philippi Melanchthonis.¹¹⁹ This consisted of theological comments on selected proverbs, not going beyond chapter 27. Shortly after this unauthorized publication,

probably still in 1524,¹²⁰ Melanchthon published his own translation, without notes, of the entire book of Proverbs, entitled Solomonis Sententiae, Versae ad Hebraicam Veritatem a Philippo Melanchthone.¹²¹ Then in 1529 he published a commentary on Proverbs: Nova Scholia in Proverbia Salomonis, ad iusti pene commentarii modum conscripti.¹²² Finally, near the end of his life (1555) he came with another, more extensive commentary: Explicatio Proverbiorum Salomonis.¹²³ It is clear that Melanchthon had a special and lifelong interest in this book of the Bible, an interest which distinguishes him from his colleague Luther, whose concern with Proverbs was largely limited to what was necessary in connection with his German translation of the Bible.

It was also Melanchthon who took the lead in the resolute rejection, as a matter of principle, of the allegorical interpretation of Scripture. In the words of Hansjörg Sick, who made a special study of Melanchthon's exegetical works on the Old Testament, "In Melanchthon's interpretation of the Old Testament we observed from the beginning a strong rejection of allegorical interpretation..."¹²⁴ It is well known that Luther initially wavered on this point. In some of his earlier works of biblical interpretation he was prepared to make free use of allegory. It was only later, under Melanchthon's influence, that he eschewed allegorical interpretaion almost

entirely.¹²⁵ "Luther only gradually freed himself from the allegorical method and returned to the literal meaning of the text."¹²⁶

With this background we turn to Melanchthon's interpretation of the Song of the Valiant Woman. His Paroimiae did not include the last chapters of Proverbs, and his Sententiae contained only a fresh translation, so that we must look to the Nova Scholia of 1529 for the first explicit evidence of a non-allegorical reading of the Song. This is what he writes on Proverbs 31:10-31:

This passage has to do with home management and the duties of a wife and mother. The difference between philosophical and prophetic precepts is that the philosophers lay down nothing concerning the fear of the Lord and faith. Paul very briefly summarized the duties of a wife and mother in the words: "The woman is saved through the bearing of children, if she continues in the faith" [1 Tim 2:15], that is, a woman will be saved if she has faith and consequently is devoted to her calling. It is a woman's calling to give birth to children and to take care of them. Faith can never be idle, and in male and female does the work proper to each. The work proper to woman is childbearing; she is to know that she pleases God in this work, and to bear whatever befalls her as a burden laid on her by God. For just as Moses, when he led the people out of Egypt, knew that he was doing the right thing because he was leading them out (educere) at God's command, so a woman is to know that this ministry of bearing and rearing (educare) children is pleasing to God. In another place [1 Tim 5:14] Paul also assigns to them the administration of household affairs and

commands them to be caretakers of the home. Peter enjoins them [1 Pet 3:4] to be of a modest and gentle spirit, that is, to be chaste and yet not peevish, serious and not irritable. Virtually the same duties are taught in the present passage: to have the fear of God and faith, to be chaste, diligent in taking care of the household, and generous toward the poor. [My translation.]¹²⁷

This remarkable passage could be discussed from many points of view (for example, the prominence given to the bearing and raising of children, when the Song does not mention this at all) but we will restrict ourselves to two comments. The first is that the allegorical interpretation is nowhere in evidence - it is not even polemicized against. The Song is taken in a literal sense as outlining the praiseworthy deeds of a Godfearing woman, just as it was in some early patristic works. The second comment is that Melanchthon here explicitly evokes the Reformation doctrine of vocation or calling. This is Luther's famous teaching concerning every person's Beruf before God in his ordinary daily occupation. Vocatio was understood as relating, not specifically to God's call to be a monk or priest, but rather to his call to do an honest day's work as a carpenter, a cobbler or a housewife. Any legitimate way of earning a living became a religious calling before the face of God.¹²⁸ Melanchthon takes over this idea from Luther, and applies it to a literal exposition of Prov 31:10-31.

We find the same pattern emerging in Melanchthon's

second commentary on Proverbs, the Explicatio of 1555. This is a new and more extensive commentary than the Nova Scholia, more than an expanded revision of the latter, but the main points of the interpretation of the Song remain the same. I will quote only two significant sentences from this new commentary:

The third part [of the chapter] is a song about the virtues of an honourable wife and mother. Now this whole passage must be understood in a straightforward manner, without allegory, as the mirror of an honourable wife. [My translation.]¹²⁹

It is also noteworthy that Melanchthon again makes reference to a woman's calling; he speaks of the praecipuae virtutes et officia vocationis that apply to a woman. In this second commentary, therefore, Melanchthon explicitly mentions the two Protestant themes which shaped the new understanding of the Song: the rejection of allegory and the doctrine of Beruf or calling.

Melanchthon's Latin translation of Proverbs, first published in 1524, and incorporated into the Nova Scholia of 1529, was a linguistic feat in its own right, the first idiomatic rendering directly from the Hebrew since Jerome's translation in the Vulgate. Since it was done in close conjunction with Luther's German translation of the Bible, we will return to Melanchthon's rendering of the Song in our discussion of Luther's interpretation, to which we now turn.

Although the exegetical writings of Martin Luther (1483-1546) are voluminous, he never wrote a commentary on the book of Proverbs, or paid any special attention to it apart from his Bible translation work. The closest he came to commenting on Proverbs was in the jotting of short notes in the margin of his translation of Proverbs. It is from one of these marginal notes that we learn that Luther, like Melanchthon, adopted a literal interpretation of the Song. Alongside Prov 31:30 he wrote these words:

That is to say, a woman can live with a man honourably and piously and can with good conscience be a housewife, but she must also, in addition and next to this, fear God, have faith and pray. [My translation.]¹³⁰

Since this was written after Melanchthon's commentary, and since Luther's opposition to allegory had needed to be reinforced by Melanchthon, it is safe to say that Luther's non-allegorical interpretation is dependent on Melanchthon, not the other way around.¹³¹

It can also be shown that Luther's German translation of the Song was dependent on Melanchthon. This can be demonstrated (or at least made very probable) by observing the following sequence of events in the year 1524:

1. Before March 1: Melanchthon lectures on Proverbs.¹³²
2. Between Feb. and Sept./Oct.: Luther translates Proverbs.¹³³

3. Sept./Oct.: first publication of the Third Part of Luther's Bible translation (Job through Song of Solomon).¹³⁴
4. Sometime after March 1: Melanchthon's Paroimiai are published.¹³⁵
5. After previous item: Melanchthon's Sententiae are published.¹³⁶

In order to appreciate the significance of these dates, we must understand that Melanchthon was working very closely with Luther on his translation, and that he had probably chosen to lecture on Proverbs early in the year in order to be of more effective help to Luther when he came to the translation of this biblical book a few months later.¹³⁷

Luther's procedure in doing his translation work was that he made a first draft of a passage on his own, leaving blanks (or simply transliterating the Hebrew) for words or phrases of which he was uncertain. He then discussed the passage with his two co-workers, Melanchthon and Aurogallus (the current professor of Hebrew at Wittenberg). On the basis of this discussion he revised and completed his translation for publication.¹³⁸

As it happens, Luther's autograph of his original translation (he made revisions continuously throughout his life) has survived into the twentieth century, and has been meticulously edited in the great Weimar edition of his

works.¹³⁹ Even more strikingly, Luther used a different colour of ink for his own initial draft (dark ink) and for his subsequent revisions after consulting with his colleagues (red ink), and these differences in colour are duly recorded in the Weimar edition. In the words of Hans Volz, the foremost authority in these matters:

At least in the second and third parts of the Old Testament he used a dark-coloured ink for his first draft, but red ink for the revision which he always carried out with the aid of Melanchthon and Aurogallus. So in these parts Luther's original and the revision carried out with others' assistance are clearly distinguishable.¹⁴⁰

Turning now to Prov 31:10-31, we notice that Luther's initial draft (in dark ink) leaves a blank or writes out the Hebrew in four cases:¹⁴¹

1. Verse 11: leaves a blank for yeḥsār.
2. Verse 19: leaves a blank for kîšôr.
3. Verse 22: leaves a blank for marbadîm.
4. Verse 24: writes out the Hebrew word Sādîn.

The revisions which were made on the basis of his discussions with Melanchthon and Aurogallus (clearly indicated by red ink), and which were published in September or October 1524, supply the missing translations as follows:

1. Verse 11: "und narung wird ihm nicht mangeln" (yeḥsār).
2. Verse 19: "Sie streckt yhre hand nach dem rocken"

(kîsôr).

3. Verse 22: "Sie macht yhr eyn schmuck" (marbadîm).

4. Verse 24: "Sie macht eyn rock" (sādîn).

What is striking about these readings is that each of them disagrees with both the Vulgate and the LXX (Luther's chief aids in interpreting difficult Hebrew words), and agrees with Melanchthon's Latin rendering as published that same year (the Salomonis Sententiae). Consider the following comparative table:

	<u>MT</u>	<u>LXX</u>	<u>Vulgate</u>	<u>Luther 1524</u>	<u>Melanchthon 1524</u>
1. Vs. 11:	<u>vehšār</u>	<u>aporēsei</u>	<u>indigebit</u>	<u>wird ihm mangeln</u>	<u>deficiet.</u>
	"will run short"	"will lack"	"will be lacking to him"	"will be lacking to him"	"will be lacking"
	(subject is <u>ba'al</u>)	(subject is <u>ba'al</u>)	(subject is <u>šālāl</u>)	(subject is <u>šālāl</u>)	(subject is <u>šālāl</u>)
2. Vs. 19	<u>kîsôr</u>	<u>ta sympheronta</u>	<u>fortia</u>	<u>rocken</u>	<u>colum,</u>
	"the useful (things)"	"valiant (deeds)"	"distaff"	"distaff"	"distaff"
3. Vs. 22	<u>marbadîm</u>	<u>chlainas</u>	<u>stragullaitan</u>	<u>schmuck</u>	<u>ornamenta</u>
	"cloaks"	<u>vestem,</u>	"coverlet"	"ornament"	"ornaments"
4. Vs. 24	<u>sādîn</u>	<u>sinonas</u>	<u>sinonem,</u>	<u>rock</u>	<u>tunicas</u>
	"linen garments"	"linen garment"	"coat"	"coats"	"coats"

In each case Luther, after consulting with Melanchthon and

Aurogallus, chooses a novel rendering which agrees with Melancthon's Latin translation. Given the fact that Melancthon had long planned his own translation of the book of Proverbs, and had recently lectured on it, it is probable that these new translations of difficult or ambiguous Hebrew words originated with him, and not with Aurogallus or Luther.

It is of interest to note that the meaning "distaff" for the obscure word kîsôr (a hapax legomenon), a meaning which occurs in almost all twentieth-century versions of the Bible, occurs for the first time in Luther's German translation, and thus probably goes back to Melancthon.

To argue for Luther's dependence on Melancthon in matters of philological detail is in no way to detract from Luther's magnificent achievement in making the Bible speak idiomatic German. In any case, Luther continually revised his translation, improving it from year to year. For example, he later changed his rendering of marbadîm from the mistaken schmuck, "ornament", to the correct Decke, "coverlet".¹⁴² But it was especially in his feel for the music and idiom of his native German that Luther was a master. A fine example of this is the way he revised his translation of Prov 31:12, which reads literally "She does him good and not evil all the days of her life." In his initial translation of 1524, Luther rendered this as "Sie thut yhm guts und keyn boeses, seyn lebenslang." The last

phrase is already a considerable improvement over such literal renderings as the Vulgate's omnibus diebus vitae suae. But later Luther revised his translation to read "Sie thut ym liebs und kein leids, sein leben lang," which he must have done purely for reasons of rhythm and alliteration. Perhaps he is consciously or unconsciously seeking to echo the alliteration found in the Hebrew of the previous verse: bātaḥ bāh lēb ba^ʿēlāh, or is influenced by the Vulgate of the next verse: Quaesivit lanam et linum. Another example of a felicitous revision is found in Luther's German of vs 30a, which he originally rendered quite literally as "Gonst ist falsch und schöne ist eytel." This was later revised to the more idiomatic "Lieblich und schöne sein ist Nichts."

Perhaps it could be argued that the very directness of Luther's language and the earthiness of his idiom reflect the renewed appreciation for the literal sense of this passage. In any case, it is to Melanchthon and Luther that we must assign the credit (or blame) for having broken the spell of the allegorical interpretation which had for so long dominated the reading of the Song of the Valiant Woman.

Wolfgang Russ

It is amazing how rapidly and how universally the new non-allegorical interpretation of the Song was adopted by Protestants in sixteenth-century Europe. I am not aware of a single example of the old allegorical interpretation among

supporters of the Reformation throughout the sixteenth century. The literal interpretation was espoused by everyone, both in academic commentaries and popular homiletic works.

A good example in the latter category is a German pamphlet entitled Der Weyber geschefft, "The business of women", which was published by an obscure Protestant preacher called Wolfgang Russ in 1533. This was just four years after the publication of Melanchthon's Nova Scholia, the first modern commentary to give a literal interpretation of the Song. The 21-page pamphlet is written in the Swabian dialect of German, and is reminiscent of Augustine's Sermo 37 in that it appears to be the record of an informal sermon which deals with Prov 31:10-31 verse by verse. Its full title is Der Weyber geschefft. Auslegung der ain und dreissigisten Capitels der Spruchen Salomonis, was ein redlich dapffer weib sey, was thon und lassen soll, durch Wolffgang Russ zu Riethen prediger.¹⁴³ ("The Business of Women. Explanation of the thirty-first chapter of the Proverbs of Solomon: what an honest staunch wife is, and how she is to behave, by Wolfgang Russ, preacher in Riethen.") There is not much known about Russ, but he appears to have been a native of Ulm in the South-German region of Swabia, and to have been a Protestant preacher in Riedheim (or Riethen) not far from Ulm.¹⁴⁴

The first two pages of the pamphlet contain the heading "These are the words of King Lemuel, the teaching which his mother taught him" (Prov 31:1), immediately followed by the Song, both in a German translation. The translation turns out to be Luther's original version of 1524 adapted to the Swabian dialect. For example, "to her maidens" of vs 15 is yhren dyrnen in Luther's rendering, but iren mägten in Russ's version, probably because Dirne in Swabian (as in modern standard German) often means "prostitute". Similarly, Luther's word for "distaff", rocken, is changed to gunckel (=Kunkel), the word more commonly used in southern Germany for this spinning implement.¹⁴⁵ In substance, however, the translation offered by Russ is identical to that of Luther. There is no indication that Russ revised Luther's version on the basis of an independent knowledge of Hebrew.

The sermon itself is remarkable for its informal style and colloquial speech, spiced with many colourful idioms and pithy proverbial expressions. It has something of the vividness and earthiness of Luther's own language in the Tischreden, and is often difficult to translate, not only because of its picturesque expressions, but also because its vocabulary cannot be found in modern dictionaries, not even the great dictionary of the Swabian dialect compiled by H. Fischer.¹⁴⁶

In his introduction Russ makes no bones about the

literal approach which he is taking to the text. He decries the frivolous ways of the young women in his day, who are in need of serious admonition, and then goes on:

I don't know anything that would serve that purpose better right now than precisely this chapter which we have before us. For the matter is a serious one, as it must be, since a queen teaches it and a king writes it down. It is not something which the majority of our young ladies today find interesting or amusing.

For here one learns home management and piety, not idleness: how one ought to work, how one ought to speak and on what topics--in short, the whole business of running a household is here described.

[My translation.]147

We have seen how Luther, under Melanchthon's influence, had translated Prov 31:12b as narung wird yhm nicht mangeln, "a living will not be lacking to him [i.e. the husband]." Russ comments on these words as follows:

Such a competent honourable woman does not let anything spoil or go to waste. She turns to good account everything that comes into the house through hard work and honest Christian business dealings. She can put it all to good use in due time, so that there is something useful to do every day. She is no spendthrift.

As the saying goes: "they suffer no want there." She does an excellent job of running her household; she knows how to get things done. [My translation.]148

Russ has the following to say about Prov 31:27, "She looks to the ways of her household, and does not eat her bread in idleness":

It is not enough that maidservants and menservants (in fact even the children) should carry out and fulfill to our satisfaction their daily tasks and work. A woman must keep an eye on her servants' way of life before God: the company they keep, their gaming companions, and the faith they profess, lest they become a villainous and godless crew who care nothing for God. They must also be brought to the word of God and an honourable life. Any woman who runs her household in the manner described does not eat her bread in idleness. The grass will not grow under her feet, and she will not be spared a good deal of care, trouble and toil. [My translation.]149

Finally, I will quote Russ's comments on the climactic verse 30: "Charm is deceitful, beauty is vain; a woman who fears the Lord must be praised."

How coarse and clumsy the Holy Spirit is, that he dares to say that charm is deceitful, a woman's attractiveness is only skin deep, beauty is vain, unprofitable, superfluous, useless. Our ladies are not going to take kindly to the Holy Spirit, that he dares to tell them the truth in this manner. No wonder that so few people are attached to the word of God; the wonder is that there is still anyone who is attached to it, since the Holy Spirit spares no one, but says the truth straight out, like a town crier, like a fishwife. [My translation.]150

Mercerus and Muffet

It would be wearisome to list all the incidental indications throughout the sixteenth century that Protestant exegetes, without exception, gave a literal interpretation of the Song. We could mention, for example, the headings printed at the beginning of Proverbs 31 in the many new Protestant Bible translations. The English "Great Bible" (1540) has "Kynge's ought to judge justely: The propertye of an honest maryed wife," in which the second phrase obviously reflects a non-allegorical understanding of the second part of Proverbs 31. Similarly, the great Geneva Bible (1560), the standard English version of the Elizabethan age, has "2 He exhorteth to chastitie and justice, 10 And sheweth the conditions of a wife and worthy woman." We might also point out that the Reformer John Calvin (1509-1564), although he never wrote a commentary on the book of Proverbs, nevertheless gives evidence of the common Protestant interpretation of the Song when he remarks in his commentary on 1 Samuel that Abigail, the forceful wife of Nabal who later married David, is like the valiant woman of Proverbs 31.¹⁵¹

Instead of enumerating such incidental allusions in the sixteenth century, we will conclude our survey by referring briefly to two commentaries on Proverbs published in the latter half of the century, a scholarly one by Johannes

Mercerus written in Latin, and a popular one by Peter Muffet written in English.

Johannes Mercerus or Jean Mercier (died 1570) was a French Hebraist of Calvinist persuasion who succeeded his teacher Vatablus at the Collège de France in 1546. It is said of him that "as exact scholarly exegete he surpasses all other interpreters of the sixteenth century".¹⁵² Shortly after his death there was published in Geneva a collection of his biblical commentaries, including one on the books of Proverbs.¹⁵³ The commentary on Proverbs was long regarded very highly by subsequent interpreters. According to W. Frankenberg, who published a German commentary on Proverbs in 1898, "Mercerus has made by far the most valuable contribution to the interpretation of Proverbs. The best of what is found in the commentaries on Proverbs goes back, directly or indirectly, to him."¹⁵⁴

Mercerus takes the Song to be written by the Lemuel of Prov 31:1 (whom he, like many of his predecessors, equates with Solomon), but he regards it as an independent composition:

Because he has adduced the precepts with which he had been instructed by his mother he has taken the occasion to add the praises of an industrious and godly woman.¹⁵⁵

He explicitly rejects the allegorical interpretation, though he is thoroughly familiar with medieval commentaries, both

Jewish and Christian. As we noted above in our discussion of Ralbag, Mercerus knew and used the Proverbs commentary of this eminent Jewish scholar, but he also refers to Rashi, Ibn Ezra, David Kimchi and others.

In his discussion of the term ḥayil (Prov 31:10), Mercerus writes that it is the equivalent of the vernacular (that is, French) une vaillante femme, the first time (to my knowledge) in the history of the interpretation of the Song that it is explicitly related to heroic categories. The remainder of the commentary is of interest chiefly for its great philological erudition and knowledge of the history of interpretation. For our purposes it is enough to note that this influential scholarly commentary takes a resolutely literal approach to the Song throughout.

The last commentator that we will discuss is Peter Muffet (Moffett), an obscure Englishman who wrote A Commentary on the Whole Book of Proverbs, first published in 1592, and reprinted two years later.¹⁵⁶ Apart from this commentary, nothing seems to be known of the author, although we can deduce from the commentary that he was a Protestant clergyman. There is some evidence that he died in 1617.¹⁵⁷

The commentary is meant for the lay reader, and is simple, plain, and straightforward. Lemuel is equated with Solomon, which makes Lemuel's mother (Prov 31:1) Bathsheba, and it is she whom Muffet takes to be the author also of the

Song. He comments on verse 10:

Bathsheba cometh now to describe and commend a good housewife. Her most rare excellency is shewed in this verse. By demanding the question she declareth that many find beautiful and rich women, but few a good or godly wife, who is a special gift of God. By comparing a virtuous woman with pearls, she insinuateth that she is not only a rare, but an excellent blessing of the Lord, for it is well known that precious stones or pearls are in great account among all people.¹⁵⁸

Muffet's comment on verse 17 is as follows:

Herein is shewed after what sort the painful wife followeth her business. 'She girdeth her loins with strength,' &c. As one ready to run a race, or to wrestle with a champion, she flieth about her work, and setteth on it with a courage. Her garments hang not loose about her, but she tucketh them up that she may be the more nimble. She is then unlike to many nice dames, who will set their finger to no work, nor scant stir about the house.¹⁵⁹

We find the same straightforward exposition on the climactic verse 30, ending with a reference (echoing Melanchthon) to the woman's calling:

'Favour is deceitful;' comeliness of personage or any outward grace is as a shadow which hath no substance; moreover, it causeth men oftentimes to go astray; finally, under it many vices are hid. For divers that have well-favoured countenances have ill-favoured conditions. 'Beauty is also vain.' A good colour or a good complexion is but a fading flower, which by sickness, sorrow, age, and death, withereth and decayeth. Indeed these two things are of themselves good things, for the which

sundry women in the Scripture are praised, but they are but frail good things, and inferior to the fear of God. For this cause it is furthermore said, that 'a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.' The garland of praise is only to be set on her head who believeth in God, repenteth of her sins, practiseth good works, and walketh faithfully in her calling.¹⁶⁰

Although Muffet makes no great display of erudition, he does occasionally refer to the Hebrew text (for example, on sādîn in verse 24), and the English translation on which he bases his text seems to be a modified version of the Geneva Bible. For example, while the Geneva Bible translates kîsôr in verse 19 as "wherne" (that is, "spindle-whorl", following Rashi and Lyra), Muffet has "wheel" (that is, "spinning-wheel"), apparently unaware that this relatively recent invention was unknown in Bible times.

Conclusion

We conclude our survey with the commentaries of Mercerus and Muffet, a scholarly and a popular representative of the Reformation consensus which decisively broke with the long tradition of an allegorical interpretation of the Song. The emphasis on the literal sense, together with the historical-grammatical method of elucidating that sense, were to set the stage for the later critical methods which would dominate the interpretation of the Song in modern times. The decisive step had been taken in the Reformation.

ENDNOTES

1. As suggested, for example, in the notes to the Jerusalem Bible.
2. See B. Gemser, Sprüche Salomos. Zweite Auflage (HAT; Tübingen: Mohr, 1963) 9-10.
3. Biblia Patristica. Index des citations et allusions bibliques dans la littérature patristique 3 vols. (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1975-1980).
4. See J. Pépin, Mythe et Allégorie. Les origines grecques et les contestations judéo-chrétiennes. Nouvelle édition, revue et augmentée (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1976).
5. Pépin, Mythe et Allégorie, 231-242.
6. The Supplément to the Biblia Patristica, which records the biblical references in Philo, indicates one place where Prov 31:10-31 may be alluded to (Quaestiones in Genesim I,26), but this turns out to be only a general statement about the place of women, not a direct reference to the Song.
7. B. Mes. 84b. I am quoting from the English translation found in Epstein's edition.
8. The Babylonian Talmud, ed. I. Epstein (London: Soncino, 1938-1948), Part 4, Neziḳin, vol. 1, ad loc.
- 8a. Sukkah 49b.
9. See the article "Eleazar ben Simeon" in EncJud 6.599.
10. See the article "Simeon ben Gamaliel I" in EncJud 14.1555.
11. See the lexica s.v. ʿālâ.
12. See the lexica s.v. ḥayil.
13. See the note ad loc. in Epstein's edition.
14. Paid. 3, 49, 5 (my translation). He appears to be quoting the LXX from memory since he has the future

ektenei, "will stretch out" instead of the present ekteinei, and the synonym chrēsima instead of sympheronta, but for the rest follows the LXX word for word.

15. Paid. 3, 67, 2-3.
16. The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac, ed. Arthur Voobus (Louvain, 1979) 20.
17. Didascalia Apostolorum, 20-21.
18. Gregory of Nazianze, Oratio XVIII, 7 (PG 35, 993A). I am quoting the English translation by Leo P. McCauley in Funeral Orations by Saint Gregory Nazianzen and Saint Ambrose (FC 22; Washington: Catholic university of America Press, 1953) 124.
19. Oratio XVIII, 8.
20. Paulinus of Nola, Epistola 13,5 (PL 61,210): "Verum illa, ut fuit semper, ita et erit in perpetuum corona viro suo, et non extinguetur lucerna eius: extendit enim, ut scriptum est, brachia sua ad opera utilia, os suum aperuit prudenter, operata est viro suo bona; gloria et honore coronavit te, ut iucundaretur tecum in diebus novissimis." The English translation by P.G. Walsh in Letters of St. Paulinus of Nola. 2 vols. (ACW 35; London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1966) I, 122, makes a number of mistakes, and fails to recognize the allusion to Prov 31:25.
21. Paulinus of Nola, Epistola 44, 4 (PL 61, 388-389): "Quae talis est, fidit in ea cor mariti eius. Operatur enim, ut scriptum est, viro suo bona tota vita sua, et non mala: et ideo non sollicitus agis quae in domo tua terrena aguntur". (We have here quoted Walsh's translation.) Note, again, that Walsh fails to catch all the allusions to the Song in Paulinus' text, e.g. pretiosior lapidibus pretiosis (cf. Prov 31:10).
22. PL 61,389.
23. See his Expositio in Proverbia, PG 17, 149-252.
24. PG 17, 249-252.
25. PG 17, 249-252: "ē kai tēn ek nyktos anistamenēn psychēn, grēgorousan heuriskei ho tēs dikaiosynēs hēlios nymphios, pantōs de kai proseuchomenēn tou mē empesein

eis peirasmon, legousan to Ēgrypnēsa kai egenomēn hōs strouthion monazon epi dōmatos. Brōma de esti psychēs, hē meletē tōn theiōn logōn, erga de, hai aretai, therapainides de, hai aisthēseis. Taut' oun parechei hē timiōtera lithōn polytelōn psychē tō sōmatikō autēs oikō."

26. Therapainides here presupposes therapainisi in the LXX of Prov 31:15. This seems to be a textual variant of the therapaisi found in the printed editions.
27. PL 9, 708: "Ut autem nunc cognoscamus quid sub uxoris nuncupatione intellegi oporteat, contuendum est quid et alibi sub eodem uxoris nomine tractetur."
28. PL 9, 708: "Ergo secundum proverbiorum rationem uxorem virilem nosse debemus, eam nempe quam sibi Solomon sponsam optarit assumere... Haec igitur tamquam uxor assumpta sapientia virilis est, perficiens omnia, et sibi subdens, et in labore utilium operum valida."
29. PG 39, 1645-46: "Tēn theōrian tōn gegonotōn kai tēn theōrian tēs hagian Triados, endyma einai legei nou katharou, ek byssou kai porphyras."
30. PG 43, 200: "Andreian de gynaika noeite moi tēn Ekklēsiā tou Theou tēn hymōn mētera."
31. PL 25, 132-133: "Hierusalem... et bysso accingitur, de qua tenuissima in veste pontificis fila texuntur; et uxor, in Proverbiis, quae viro suo duas texuit chlamydes, et presentis saeculi et futuri, sibi de bysso et purpura fecisse dicitur vestimenta."
32. The LXX construes šnym at the end of verse 21 with mrbdym at the beginning of verse 22. We know this is a mistake because, in the context of the alphabetic acrostic, mrbdym is required to be at the beginning of the mem-line. (Besides, šnym would have to be in the construct form šny if it is taken as a number with mrbdym.)
33. The Vulgate has "omnes enim domestici eius vestiti sunt duplicibus (šnym). 22. Stragullatlam vestem (mrbdym) fecit sibi."
34. Epistola XXX, PL 32,445: "Proverbia quoque Salomonis extremum claudit alphabetum quod tetrametro iambico supputatur, ab eo loco in quo ait: Mulierem fortem quis inveniet?"

35. PL 49, 962: "Theoretice vero in duas dividitur partes, id est, in historicam interpretationem, et intelligentiam spiritalem. Unde etiam Salomon cum Ecclesiae multiformem gratiam enumerasset, adjecit: Omnes enim quid [sic] apud eam sunt, vestiti sunt dupliciter." Note that quid must here be a misprint for qui.
36. See Henri de Lubac, Exégèse médiévale. Les quatre sens de l'Écriture. 3 vols. (Paris: Aubier, 1959-1961) 1.190-193.
37. CCSL 41,461.
38. J. Quasten, Patrologia. 3 vols (Westminster MD: Newman, 1963) 3.471.
39. PG 56,755: "Quaerendum enim est, quid haec navis juxta spiritualem rationem intelligi debeat... Et non dubium est navem istam Ecclesiam figurasse, secundum quod per Salomonem de ea Spiritus sanctus loquitur, dicens, Facta est tamquam navis mercatura longinqua, id est Ecclesia, quae navigantibus apostolis, gubernante domino, flante Spiritu sancto, praedicationis verbo ubique discurrit, portans secum magnum et inaestimabile pretium, quo omne genus hominum, vel potius totum mundum sanguine Christi mercata est."
40. CCSL 41,453.
41. Quasten, Patrologia, 3.471.
42. PG 87.1, 1544: "Hautē de hē sophia, hoia epistēmē epistēmōn, hyper pasas tas tōn anthrōpinōn pragmatōn epistēmas hyparchei, hōs toutōn aitia, kai tais kata gnōsin kai aretēn energeiais hyperbebēke pasas, theiōn pragmatōn epistēmē hyparchousa."
- 42a. Homiliai, PG 97,872.
43. See C. Lambot, ed. Sancti Aurelii Augustini Sermones de Vetere Testamento (CCSL 41; Turnholt: Brepols, 1961) 444-445, and his article "Le sermon de Saint Augustin sur la femme forte du livre des Proverbes," Revue Bénédictine 65 (1955) 208-217.
44. The sermon was held on July 17, "on the anniversary of the Sicilian martyrs", according to the title. See Lambot's introduction to this edition of the Sermon, p.445.

45. Sermo 37, 1 as found in Lambot's edition: CCSL 41, 446-447. My rendering is a bit free, to capture the informal and colloquial character of the original, which was clearly delivered "off the cuff." The original reads: "Et hoc quod gestamus in manibus, scriptura scilicet quam uidetis, commendat nobis inquirendam et laudandam mulierem quamdam, de qua paulo ante cum legeretur audistis, magnam, habentem magnum uirum, eum uirum qui inuenit perditam, ornauit inuentam. De hac secundum lectionis tenorem, quam me portare conspicitis, pauca pro tempore quae dominus suggerit dicam. Dies est enim martyrum, et ideo magis laudanda est mater martyrum. Iam quae sit ista mulier me proloquente accepistis. Videte etiam utrum me legente agnoscatis. Omnis nunc auditor, quantum ex affectu uestro satis apparet, dicit in corde suo: 'Ecclesia debet esse'. Confirmo istam cogitationem. Nam quae potuit esse altera martyrum mater? Ita est. Quod intellexistis, hoc est. De qua muliere uolumus aliquid dicere, ecclesia est."
46. Augustine here deliberately uses the colloquial pronunciation neiat with which his audience is familiar. See Lambot, "Sur la femme forte," 215-217.
47. Sermo 30, 13-14 as found in Lambot's edition: CCSL 41, 457-459: "In FVSVM, non ab 'infundendo', sed in illud instrumentum lanificii, quod uocatur fusum. De fuso isto, quod dominus donat dicam. Neque enim ista lanificia sunt a uiris aliena. Audite quid sit: BRACHIA SVA FIRMAVIT IN FVSVM. Potuit dicere: In colum. Fusum dixit, forte non frustra. Quamuis possit uideri nec absurde intellegi de fuso lanificium significatum, de lanificio bonum opus, tamquam castae mulieris et matronae impigrae et diligentis. Tamen ego, carissimi, in isto fuso, quod intellego, non tacebo. Omnis qui uiuit in bonis operibus in sancta ecclesia, non neglector sed effector praeceptorum dei, quid faciat cras nescit, quid fecerit hodie scit. De futuro opere timet, de praeterito gaudet. Et ut perseueret in bonis operibus uigilat, ne forte negligens futurorum perdat praeteritum. In orando tamen domino, in omni deprecatione sua, non habet firmam conscientiam de opere futuro sed de praeterito, ex eo quod fecit, non ex eo quod facturus est. Iam ergo si hoc uerum esse mecum uidetis, attendite in lanificio duo instrumenta ista: colum et fusum. In colo lana inuoluta est, quae filo ducenda et nenda transeat in fusum. Quod in colo inuolutum est, futurum est; quod fuso collectum est, iam praeteritum. Opus ergo tuum in fuso est, non in colo."

In colo enim est quod factururus es; in fuso quod fecisti. Vide ergo si aliquid habes in fuso, ibi firmentur brachia tua. Ibi erit fortis conscientia tua, ibi securus deo dices: 'Da, quia dedi; dimitte, quia dimisi; fac, quia feci'. Non enim petis praemium, nisi opere gesto, non opere gerendo. Quidquid ergo operaris, totus animus ad fusum sit. Quia et quod pendet in colo, ad fusum traiciendum est, non autem illud quod collectum est in fuso ad colum reuocandum est. Ergo uide quid agas, ut habeas in fuso, ut brachia tua firmes in fusum, ut totum conetur ad fusum, ut habeat aliquid fusum quod te consoletur, quod te confirmet, quod tibi det fiduciam deprecandi et sperandi promissa. 'Et quid agam?' forte dicis 'quid me iubet habere in fuso?' Audi quod sequitur: MANVS AVTEM SVAS APERVIT PAVPERI. Eia, non nos pudet lanificium sanctum docere uos. Videte, si quis habet plenum saccellum, plenum horreum, plenam apothecam, omnia ista in colo sunt, transeant in fusum. Videte quemadmodum neat, immo uidete quemadmodum neiat--dum omnes instruantur, grammatici non timeantur."

48. See S. Eitrem, "Moirai", RE XV, 2449-2497, esp. 2479-2484. Augustine seems to be dependent here on the version of the myth found in Apuleius, De mundo 38,373 where the spindle and distaff are also correlated with past and future.
49. See the Greek lexica s.v.
50. Lambot, CCSL 41, 444-445. It was published in the Roman edition of Ambrose's works (1581) and later in the Paris edition of 1603 (col. 1097-1106).
51. Lambot, CCSL 41, 445. Note also that Sermo 139 of Caesarius of Arles (ca. 470-542) is largely an abridgement of Augustine's sermon (see CCSL 103; Turnholt: Brepols, 1953, pp.571-576).
52. M. Adriaen, ed., Sancti Gregorii Magni Homiliae in Hiezechielem Prophetam (CCSL 142; Turnholt: Brepols, 1971) 28: "Hinc Salomon de Ecclesia loquitur, dicens: Nobilis in portis vir eius cum sederit cum senatoribus terrae."
53. D. Norberg, ed., Sancti Gregorii Magni Registrum Epistularum Libri I-VII (CCSL 140; Turnholt: Brepols, 1982) 278: "... memor quod de ecclesia uniuersali scriptum est: panem otiosa non comedit."
54. M. Adriaen, ed., Sancti Gregorii Magni Moralia in Job,

Libri XI-XXII (CCSL 43A; Turnholt: Brepols, 1979) 922: "... sicut de sancta Ecclesia scriptum est: Sindonem fecit et vendidit; de qua et paulo post illic dicitur: Vidit quod bona est negotiatio eius."

55. M. Adriaen, ed., Sancti Gregorii Magni Moralia in Job, Libri I-X (CCSL 43; Turnholt: Brepols, 1979) 290: "De his portis Salomon iterum dicit: Date ei de fructu manuum suarum et laudent eam in portis opera eius. Tunc quippe sancta Ecclesia de fructu manuum suarum accipit, cum eam ad percipienda caelestia laboris sui retributio attollit."
56. Alexander Altmann, "Allegorical Interpretation", s.v. "Bible", EncJud 4.895-96.
57. See the standard editions of the Biblia Rabbinica, which contain Rashi's commentary in the margin of the text of Proverbs.
58. Moses Maimonides, The Guide for the Perplexed. Translated by M. Friedländer (Second edition; New York: Dover, 1956) 262 (=Part 3, Chapter 8).
59. J. Mercerus, Commentarii in Iobum et Salomonis Proverbia... (Lugduni, 1651) on Prov 31:10-31.
60. PL 91, 937-1040.
61. PL 91, 1039-52.
62. A simple calculation shows that Bede's comments on the rest of Proverbs average 6.6 verses a page (in Hurst's critical edition of the Proverbs commentary: CCSL 19B) compared to an average of 1.7 verses for the Song.
63. In Proverbia Salomonis III, xxxi, 9, in Bedae Venerabilis Opera, Pars II: Opera Exegetica, 2B (CCSL 119B; Turnholt: Brepols, 1983) 149: "Huc usque uerba Lamuhel. Hinc sapientissimus regum Salomon laudes sanctae ecclesiae uersibus paucis sed plenissima ueritate decantat. Constat namque idem carmen uersibus uiginti et duobus iuxta ordinem uidelicet Hebraearum ac numerum litterarum ita ut singuli uersus a singulis litteris incipiant. Cuius ordine perfectissimo alphabeti typice innuitur quam plenissime hic uel animae cuiusque fidelis uel totius sanctae ecclesiae quae ex omnibus electis animabus una perficitur catholica uirtutes ac praemia describantur."

64. For example, the hymn in honour of St. Aethelthryth inserted in Bede's Historia Ecclesiastica (IV,20) and the hymn In Natali SS. Petri et Pauli edited by J. Fraipont in Bedae Venerabilis Opera. Pars IV: Opera Rhythmica (CCSL 122; Turnholt: Brepols, 1955) 428-430.
65. In Proverbia Salomonis I, i, 1: "Parabolae Graece Latine dicuntur similitudines. Quod huic libro uocabulum Salomon ob id imposuit ut sciremus altius et non iuxta litteram intellegere quae dicit..."
66. See the notes in Hurst's edition on verses 23, 24 and 27.
67. See lines 313-314 in Hurst's edition.
68. In Proverbia Salomonis III, xxxi, 19: "Et digiti, inquit, eius adprehenderunt fusum. Solent feminae nentes fusum in dextera, colum tenere in sinistra. In colo enim lana inuoluta est quae filo ducenda et nenda transeat in fusum. Saepe autem in scripturis dextera uitam perpetuam, laeua praesentia Dei dona significat, opulentiam uidelicet rerum, pacem temporum, sospitatem corporum, scientiam quoque scripturarum, et caelestium perceptionem sacramentorum. Haec et huiusmodi bona cum domino largiente percipimus quasi lanam colo inuolutam in laeua gestamus; at cum ea pro amore caelestium salubriter exercere incipimus iam lanam agni immaculati de colo in fusum, de laeua in dexteram traicimus quia de donis nostri redemptoris, de exemplis operum eius stolam nobis gloriae caelestis ac uestem caritatis nuptialem facimus. Digiiti namque quibus apprehendere fusum dicitur ipsam intentionem discretionis qua quisque operatur insinuant, ea nimirum ratione quia nulla corporis nostri membra pluribus sunt distincta articulis ac flexibus apta quam digiti. Quicumque ergo ueraciter dicere cum apostolo potest: Nostra autem conuersatio in caelis est unde etiam saluatorem expectamus dominum nostrum Iesum Christum, huius profecto digiti dextri adprehenderunt fusum quia discretionem sedula pro aeternis bonis laborare didicit. Et bene dicitur, adprehenderunt, ut uiuacius commendetur quanto studio, quanta festinatione in huius uitae incerto pro certis apud dominum praemiis agere debeamus".
69. In Proverbia Salomonis III, xxxi, 22: Stragulatam uestem fecit sibi, byssus et purpura indumentum eius. Stragulata uestis quae uariante textura solet firmissima confici fortia ecclesiae opera et diuersa uirtutum eius ornamenta significat de quibus propheta in summi regis

uiri uidelicet illius laude cecinit: Adstetit regina a dextris tuis in uestitu deaurato circumamicta uarietate.

70. See e.g. The Oxford Latin Dictionary s.v.
71. The correct reading stragula vestis is still attested in Isidore of Seville (sixth-seventh century); see his Etymologiae 19, 26, 4.
72. Biblia Sacra iuxta Latinam Vulgatam Versionem Ad Codicum Fidem Iussu Pii PP. XII. Libri Salomonis (Roma: Vatican Press, 1957).
73. For this meaning of fortis see Oxford Latin Dictionary s.v., 8. See also fortia in the Vulgate of Prov 31:19.
74. PL III, 681-792.
75. Quoted in J.-P. Weiss, "Essai de datation du Commentaire sur les Proverbes attribué abusivement à Salonius," Sacris Erudiri 19 (1969/70) 95-96.
76. See note 74; cf. Clavis Patrum Latinorum, no. 1351, and Weiss, "Essai de datation," 102-103.
77. Revue des Etudes Latines 44 (1966) 482-84.
78. See his "Essai de datation" (n.75 above) and Studia Patristica X (Berlin, 1970) 161-167.
79. "The True Author of the Salonii Commentarii in Parabolas Salomonis et in Ecclesiasten," Recherches de Théologie Ancienne et Médiévale 37 (1970) 174-186.
80. See Weiss, "Essai de datation," 87-94.
81. I am quoting from the Migne edition, PL 53, 989 (substituting Magister and Discipulus for Veranus and Salonius; see Weiss, "Essai de datation," 98-99):
"Magister. Quae est mulier illa fortis de qua dicit: Mulierem fortem quis inueniet? procul et de ultimis finibus pretium ejus? Discipulus. Mulier fortis appellatur sancta Ecclesia catholica; quae ideo mulier dicitur, quia Deo spirituales generat filios ex aqua et Spiritu sancto. Fortis ideo dicitur, quia cuncta saeculi hujus aduersa simul et prospera, propter fidem et amorem sui Conditoris ac Redemptoris contemnit et despicit."
82. PL 164, 1229-34.

83. See the article "Bruno von Segni" in Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche, which concludes with the words: "Darf als einer der besten Exegeten des Mittelalters gelten."
84. PL 164, 1234.
85. PL 164, 1231: "Per digitos quoscunque fideles intelligimus, qui minoris meriti et officii sunt. Hi autem fusum apprehendunt, qui leviora negotia procurant, solaque fide et spe muniuntur. Filare namque quaelibet muliercula potest, credere autem et sperare, non magnus labor est."
86. PL 164, 1231: "Stragulata enim genus vestium est, quod multa varietate fit. Stragulata est igitur vestis Ecclesiae, quoniam multa varietate depingitur. Ibi enim humilitas, pax, patientia, pietas, mansuetudo, caeteraque virtutes refulgent."
87. Gueric d'Igny, Sermons, edd. J. Morson and H. Costello (Sources Chrétiennes 166; Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1970-73) I, 278: "Inde scriptum est in laude mulieris fortis, quae de nocte surrexit, et de die ac nocte operans manibus suis panem otiosa non comedit: Non extinguetur, inquit, in nocte lucerna eius."
88. See his Sermons, I, 212 and 214; II, 508.
89. Julien de Vézelay, Sermons (Sources Chrétiennes 192-193; Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1972) I, 90.
90. Adam of Perseigne, Mariale, Sermo 5, as found in PL 211, 734: "Mulierem itaque fortem sane possumus intelligere Dei sapientiam, aut matrem ipsius sapientiae Mariam, aut sapientium matrem Ecclesiam, aut certe sedem sapientiae animam."
91. See the article on "Adam of Perseigne" in The New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. 1 (1967).
92. Beryl Smalley, article on "Glossa Ordinaria" in Theologische Realenzyklopädie. Band XIII (1984) 452: "Die Glosse wurde zur massgeblichen Handreichung für das Schriftstudium, zur 'Zunge' des biblischen Textes, und zu einem wesentlichen Teil der pagina sacra selbst. Man studierte Text and Glosse miteinander. Biblische Vorlesungen behandelten den glossierten Text. Zahlreiche biblische Anspielungen werden nur unter Rückgriff auf die Glosse verständlich."

93. See note 63 above.
94. I am quoting from Biblia sacra cum glossa ordinaria (Paris, 1590), ad loc.
- 94a. We are assuming that Hugo was indeed the author of this entire work, despite the argument put forward recently that a team of scholars produced the postills published under his name; see Robert E. Lerner, "Poverty, Preaching, and Eschatology in the Revelation Commentaries of 'Hugh of St. Cher'," in The Bible in the Medieval World. Essays in Memory of Beryl Smalley, edd. K. Walsh and D. Wood (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985) 157-190, esp. 181-183.
95. Hugo de Sancto Caro, Postilla super totam Bibliam. 6 vols. (Basel, 1504), Vol. III, p.59 verso, col. 2: "Mulierem fortem quis inveniet etc. Quod quamvis ad litteram posset exponi qualitercumque: iuxta illud Eccles. 7 Virum de mille unum repperi: mulierem ex omnibus non inveni: Quia tamen Glossatores nullam de litterali expositione faciunt mentionem, nolentes hic vaticinari: mysticam prosequemus expositionem."
96. Postilla, ad loc: "Id est, talarem vel picturatam vel varietate texturae firmiter textam... Stragos talus vel varium interpretatur."
97. Postilla, ad loc: "Aliqui libri habent: Stragulam vestem fecit sibi: Et est idem quod vestis polymita sive examita, id est, pluribus filis texta. De veste stragula legitur iiii Regis viii d..." (NB: the adjective examitus reflects the Greek hexamitos, literally "of six threads," analogous to polymitos, "of many threads".)
98. Alberti Magni Opera Omnia, ed. A. Borgnet. 38 vols. (Paris: Vivès, 1890-99), Vol. XVIII, 5-196.
99. There is one exception to this, namely Cornelius à Lapide in his seventeenth-century commentary, who refers to Albert's ingens liber on two occasions.
100. Ioannis Wyclif Sermones, ed. I. Loserth. 4 vols. (London, 1887-90), Vol. IV, 147-48: "Constat ex evidencia huius scripture et concordie sanctorum testimonio quod ista epistola loquitur de Christo sponso ecclesie et sancta matre ecclesia sponsa sua." (Note that epistola is here used in the sense of assigned Scripture reading for a particular Sunday in the

liturgical calendar.)

101. I am quoting from Biblia latina cum postillis Nicolai de Lyra (1481) ad loc.: "In ultima parte huius libri ponitur commendatio fortis mulieris. Et exponitur communiter a doctoribus nostris de ecclesia, quae metaphorice dicitur fortis mulier, et sponsus eius Christus; filii autem eius et filiae populus Christianus in utroque sexu. Et dicunt quod iste est sensus litteralis, sicut Iudicum IX dicitur: Ierant ligna ad rhamnum, etc. Sensus litteralis non est de lignis materialibus, sed de Abimelech, et Sichimitis eum super se regem inungentibus. Et licet haec expositio sit rationalis et communis, tamen eam non prosequor, quia satis diffuse traditur in glossis et communibus postillis. Rabbi Salomon vero convenit cum doctoribus Catholicis quantum ad hoc quod hic est metaphorica locutio. Sed dicit quod per mulierem fortem intelligitur Sacra Scriptura. Et hanc expositionem intendo prosegui quia rationabilis videtur, nec communiter habetur. In aliquibus tamen intendo aliter dicere quam ipse, prout est consonum Fidei nostrae; maxime quia Sacram Scripturam vocant solum Vetus Testamentum, ego autem utrumque, scilicet Vetus et Novum."
102. Biblia latina cum postillis, ad loc.: "Manum suam misit ad fortia. In Hebraeo habetur, ad vertebrum, quod est quidam circulus aliquantulum ponderosus in inferiori parte fusi positus, ut recte et ordinate vertatur: et huic dicto consonat quod subditur: Et digiti eius apprehenderunt fusum."
103. Biblia latina cum postillis, ad loc.: "... a frigoribus nivis. Id est, a poena gehennae, secundum quod dicit hic Rabbi Salomo allegans illud Job xxiiii c. Ab aquis nivium transiet ad calorem nimium, et loquitur de damnato."
104. Quote from Josiah Forshall and Frederick Madden, edd., The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments, With the Apocryphal Books in the Earliest English Versions, Made from the Latin Vulgate by John Wycliffe and his Followers (Oxford: Clarendon, 1850).
105. The Oxford English Dictionary s.v. "wherne" needs to be corrected on this point, since this entry states that "wherne" is a mistake for "wherve" (also meaning "spindle-whorl"). The editors were apparently unaware that "wherne" occurs in this fourteenth-century text as

a direct translation of the Latin vertebrum.

106. See Nicole Marzac, Richard Rolle de Hampole (1300-1349. Vie et oeuvres, suivies du Tractatus super Apocalypsim (Paris, 1968) 49, where there is a reference to Rolle's work Super Mulierem Fortem, preserved in five British manuscripts.
107. B. Smalley, The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages. Third edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), Chapter 6.
108. The proper title of Lyra's work is Postilla litteralis.
109. It seems that this definition of the literal sense was developed by Stephen Langton and Thomas Aquinas; see G.A.C. Hadfield, section on "Medieval Christian" interpretation in the article "Interpretation, History of" in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Supplementary Volume (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976) 452-454.
110. My source for these names and dates is the bibliography of the article "Sprüchebuch", in Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, Dritte Auflage (Tübingen: Mohr, 1962) 6.288-89.
111. See W. Maurer, Der junge Melanchthon zwischen Humanismus und Reformation, Bd. I: Der Humanist (Göttingen, 1967), chapter 1: "die Ausbildung in der Obhut Reuchlins."
112. H. Volz, "Melanchthons Anteil an der Lutherbibel," Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte 45 (1954) 202.
113. See the chronological table of Melanchthon's lectures given in Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl. Bd. IV, ed. Peter F. Barton (Gütersloh, Gütersloher Verlagshaus: 1963) 10-12. We learn from this that he lectured on Genesis in 1522, Exodus in 1522/23, Proverbs in 1523/24 and again in 1527/28, Lamentations and Daniel in 1524, Psalms in 1527, Micha in 1528, and Jeremiah in an undetermined year.
114. See Luther's statement in Luthers Werke, Weimar-Ausgabe, Briefe 3.258-59.
115. See Volz, "Melanchthons Anteil," 201-202.
116. S. Münster, Proverbia Salomonis, iam recens iuxta Hebraicam veritatem translata, et annotationibus illustrata (Basel, 1520).

117. See note 113 above.
118. On the date, see Hansjörg Sick, Melanchthon als Ausleger des Alten Testaments (Tübingen: Mohr, 1959) 5, note 16.
119. Published in Haguenau in 1524 and reprinted there the following year.
120. According to Corpus Reformatorum, Vol. 14, p.1, and Sick, Melanchthon als Ausleger, 155.
121. Published in Argentoratus in 1524 and (again) reprinted there the following year.
122. Halae Suevorum, 1529.
123. Published in the series Corpus Reformatorum, Vol. 14, pp.1-87.
124. Hansjörg Sick, Melanchthon als Ausleger des Alten Testaments (Tübingen: Mohr, 1959) 149: "Wir beobachteten von Anfang an in der alttestamentlichen Auslegung Melanchthons eine starke Ablehnung der Allegorese..."
125. See Sick, Melanchthon als Ausleger, 28-30 and H. Bornkamm, Luther und das Alte Testament (Tübingen: Mohr, 1948).
126. Klaas Runia, "The Hermeneutics of the Reformers", Calvin Theological Journal 19 (1984) 122, n.5.
127. Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl, IV, 463: "Hic locus est oeconomicus de officiis matris familias. Sed hoc interest inter philosophica praecepta et prophetica, quod philosophi nihil de timore Dei et fide praecipiant. Paulus matris familias officia brevissime complexus est, cum inquit: 'Salvatur mulier per filiorum generationem, si in fide manserit', id est: mulier, si habuerit fidem et deinde vocationi suae serviens, salvabitur. Est autem mulieris vocatio gignere et curare subolem. Fides numquam otiosa esse potest, sed in utroque proprium opus exercet. Est autem mulieris proprium opus gignere, et in eo opere sciat se Deo placere, ferat, quidquid accidit, tamquam onus a Deo impositum; ut enim sciebat Moses se recte facere, cum educeret populum ex Aegypto, quia mandato Dei educebat, sic mulier sciat Deo placere hoc ministerium pariendi et educandi. Alio loco etiam committit eis procurationem rei domesticae et iubet esse custodes domus. Petrus iubet, ut sint modesti et mansueti spiritus, hoc est: ut sint pudicae et tamen

sine morositate, sine iracundia sint graves. Haec fere officia et hoc loco traduntur, ut habeant timorem Dei ac fidem, ut sint pudicae, sedulae in re familiari custodienda, liberables erga pauperes."

128. See the article "Beruf" in Theologische Realencyclopädie, 5, 654-676, esp. 660-666.
129. Corpus Reformatorum, Vol. 14, cols. 85-86.
130. Luthers Werke, Weimar-Ausgabe, Die Deutsche Bibel, 10.103: "Das ist, Eine frau kan bey einem Manne ehrlich und göttlich wonen, und mit gutem gewissen Hausfrau sein, Sol aber darüber und darneben Gott fürchten, glauben und beten." This handwritten note was first printed in the second 1543 edition of Luther's Bible translation. For its earlier history, see op. cit., Bd. 4, pp. xxxiii and 29.
131. For further passing comments by Luther revealing a literal interpretation of the Song, see Weimar-Ausgabe 20, 78 and 44, 659.
132. Barton, in Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl, IV, 305.
133. Luther's translation of the "third part" of the Old Testament was published in September or October of 1524 (see next note), and in February he was still working on Job (Weimar-Ausgabe, Deutsche Bibel, 1, pp. xiii-xiv). Since he was following the traditional order (Job-Psalms-Proverbs) in his work of translation, his version of Proverbs was probably prepared in the summer of 1524.
134. Weimar-Ausgabe, Deutsche Bibel, 1, p. xiv.
135. See note 118 above.
136. See note 120 above.
137. Melanchthon lectured on Exodus in 1522/23, and on Lamentations and Daniel later in 1524 (see note 113 above). These lectures, together with those on Proverbs in early 1524, were the first Old Testament lectures he had given since filling in for the absent Hebrew professor in 1518, and coincide with the times Luther was about to translate these parts of the Old Testament. It is a reasonable assumption that this was by design.
138. See the contribution by Hanz Volz on "Deutsche Bibel-

Übersetzungen" in Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart. Dritte Auflage, I, 1204.

139. Weimar-Ausgabe, Deutsche Bibel, Volumes 1 and 2.
140. Hans Volz, "Continental Versions to c. 600: 1. German", in The Cambridge History of the Bible: The West from the Reformation to the Present Day (Cambridge, 1963) 97.
141. Weimar-Ausgabe, Deutsche Bibel, 1, 613.
142. Weimar-Ausgabe, Deutsche Bibel, 10:2, 103.
143. The pamphlet is exceedingly rare. I was fortunate in being allowed to make a photocopy, in 1982, of the copy found in the British Library in London.
144. See the note on him in Huldreich Zwinglis Sämtliche Werke. Bd. XI (Leipzig: Heinsius, 1935) 531-532, note 3.
145. J. and W. Grimm, Deutsches Wörterbuch. Vol. 5 (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1873) s.v. "Kunkel" (col. 2653).
146. Hermann Fischer, Schwäbisches Wörterbuch. Zu Ende geführt von Wilhelm Pfeleiderer. Six volumes in seven (Tübingen: Laupp, 1904-1936).
147. Russ, Der Weyber geschefft, 3: "ich waiss auch jetzmals nichts das bass darzu thu / und diene / dann eben diss Capitel / das wir hie vor uns haben / Dann es freilich ein ernstlich ding ist / und sein muss / dieweyl es ein Königin leert / ein König auff schreybt / es ist je nicht ding / damit unser jungen frawen der merthail jetz ummgond und kurtzweyl haben.
Dann do lernet man hauss haben / gotsforcht / nit müssig gan / was man arbaiten soll / was und wo von man reden soll / kurtz das gantz hauss geschefft / einer hausshalterin ist hie beschriben."
In this translation from Russ's sermon, and those which follow, my rendering is occasionally quite free and sometimes speculative. But I have chosen passages where I am confident that I have grasped the general sense of the idioms and the dialectal expressions.
148. Russ, Der Weyber geschefft, 6: "Ein solch fromm ehren weib / lasst nichts verderben noch zu grundt geen / sie kans als zu eeren pringen / was durch saure arbeit / Christlich gewin und gewerb zu hauss kommt / das kan sie als zu seiner zeiten prauchen / das man alle tag etwas

her zunemen hab / sie ist kain vil prauch / da ist kayn mangel / wie man sagt / das ist ein feine hausshalterin / sie kan wol zuschlagen."

149. Russ, Der Weyber geschafft 19: "Es ist nit gnug / das mägdte und knecht / ja auch die kind jr teglich geschafft und arbeit nach unserm sinn thon und volbringen / Ein weib soll sehen / wie jr gesind ein wandel und leben gegen got füre / was geselschafft / gespilschafft es hab / was glauben es sey / das nit ein verrucht gotloss gesindt sey / das nach got nit frag / das mans auch zum gotswort und erbarkeit ziehe / wölche fraw also hauss helt / wie erzelt / die isst jr brot nit mit faulkait / der wirt wenig grass undern füsenn wachsen / es wirdt on grosse sorg mü und arbeit nit zu geen."
150. Russ, Der Weyber geschafft, 20: "Wie ist der gaist gots so grob unnd ungeschickt / das er darff sagenn / Gunst sey falsch / frawenn lieb sey schneyder werck / und schön sey eytel / unnutz upig / vergebens / es solten wol unsere weyber dem hailigen gaist auch nit holtz in die kuchen tragen / das er jn also darff die warheit sagen / es ist nit wund / das dem gotswort wenig leut hold seind / ein wunder ists / das noch etwar ist / der jhm hold ist / die weyl der hailig gayst niemants verschonet / gerad die warhait heraus sagt / wie ein hörold / wie ein holipper."
151. Corpus Reformatorum, Vol. 58, col. 546.
152. H.J. Kraus, Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments von der Reformation bis zur Gegenwart (Neukirchen, 1956) 79: "Johann Mercerus überragt als exakt wissenschaftlicher Exeget alle andern Ausleger des 16. Jahrhunderts."
153. Johannes Mercerus, Commentarii in Jobum, et Salomonis Proverbia, Ecclesiasten, Canticum Canticorum (Geneva, 1573). I am quoting from a later edition published in Leiden in 1651.
154. W. Frankenberg, Die Sprüche (HAT; Göttingen, 1898) 16: "Merc[erus] hat bei weitem das Wertvollste geleistet zur Erklärung der Prov[erbia]. Das Beste was sich in den Komm[entaren] über die Spr[üch]el findet, geht auf ihn--mittelbar oder unmittelbar--zurück."
155. Mercerus, Commentarii, 512: "Quia precepta attulit quibus a matre eruditus fuerit, per occasionem subjungit laudationem sedulae et pia matronae."

156. The work is rare, but is accessible in Nichol's Series of Commentaries (Edinburgh, 1868), which contains a reprint of Muffet's commentary. It is from this edition that I quote.
157. This is the date of death given in one of the entries referring to this commentary (under the name "Moffett") in the National Union Catalog.
158. Nichol's Series, Proverbs, p.184.
159. Nichol's Series, Proverbs, p.185.
160. Nichol's Series, Proverbs, p.188.

BIBLIOGRAPHYAbbreviations

<u>ACW</u>	<u>Ancient Christian Writers</u>
<u>CCSL</u>	<u>Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina</u>
<u>EncJud</u>	<u>Encyclopaedia Judaica</u>
<u>PG</u>	<u>Migne, Patrologia Graeca</u>
<u>PL</u>	<u>Migne, Patrologia Latina</u>
<u>RE</u>	<u>Pauly-Wissowa, Realencyclopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft</u>
<u>SC</u>	<u>Sources Chrétiennes</u>

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