

## Lost and Found in Translation: the encouraging career of the apostle Junia

As early as the fifteenth century, the brilliant poet, translator, historian and theological feminist Christine de Pizan saw that for women to have a proper intellectual appreciation of their own theological, social and cultural capacities, and to do away with the crippling psychological burden of internalised misogyny, they needed to inform themselves of and then celebrate the histories of women of achievement.<sup>1</sup> A significant reason for assembling these histories was to show that a suitable rebuttal to the claim that women were incapable of performing certain roles, or ought not to perform them for reasons of seemliness or propriety, was a demonstration that they had in fact already done so on previous occasions.

As a church historian who specialises in the Patristic period, one of my many interests is in how often the stories of women of agency get lost from one generation to the next. A woman can be well known in her own day, but that is not enough for her memory to last. Later generations, with their very different (and often completely inaccurate) views of what women would, should or could have done in society in earlier historical periods, often inadvertently or even deliberately write earlier women out of history. This is why feminist historiography is so necessary: we need not only to re-appropriate the stories of those earlier women, but also to make sense of their achievements with as much accuracy as possible, or they risk being lost.

Passing through history is one kind of translation in which women can get lost, but translation from one language to another adds a further complication. There are all kinds of reasons for women to get literarily lost in translation. I want to look here at one particularly spectacular example of a New Testament woman who was well known to Greek and Latin authors in her own day and for centuries afterwards to be a woman, but who from the eighth century onwards began to be re-interpreted as male, and hence to be increasingly translated out of history as a woman. As we shall see, once influential Bible translators and commentators accepted and then disseminated the view that she must be a man, this assumption came to be increasingly bulwarked by an array of learned scholarly scaffolding, all of which was completely misplaced. This woman is now almost universally recognised to be a woman in modern English translations of the Bible, but a few lingering translations continue the misunderstandings of a former day and make her a man, among them the English Standard Version, or ESV. This woman, to whom the apostle Paul sends greetings in Romans 16.7, is the apostle Junia.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Christine de Pizan's seminal work *The Book of the City of Ladies* is available in English translation in readable and affordable form as a Penguin Classics paperback (Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, ed. and tr. Rosalind Brown-Grant; London: Penguin Classics, 1999). Every feminist historiographer should read it, especially those who think feminist theory is primarily Anglophone and begins with Mary Wollstonecraft. Simone de Beauvoir knew otherwise.

<sup>2</sup> For detailed discussion of the NT textual evidence and its interpretation in English translations, see Eldon Jay Epp's *Junia: the First Woman Apostle* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), which covers all the points made here in more detail except those drawn from the Byzantine evidence, which are my own contribution to the debate. Epp's account of the Patristic, medieval and Reformation evidence draws closely, as he notes, on Bernadette Brooten's seminal short piece 'Junia...Outstanding among the Apostles', in *Women Priests: A Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration*, eds Leonard Swidler and Arlene Swidler (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 141-144. The text of Brooten's piece is available via her Brandeis University staff webpage.

Romans 16 is a fascinating chapter, though I find it hard to suppress a shiver when I read Paul's greetings in it to the Christians he knew, or knew of, in Rome, because some of them were presumably among the protomartyrs of Rome, the group of Christians there who died horribly under Nero. The names and descriptions of the women mentioned in this passage are particularly interesting. They include two women mentioned singly, Phoebe, deacon of the church in Cenchreae, and Maria, who has laboured much for the Roman community; a pair of women, Tryphaena and Tryphosa, who have likewise laboured in the Lord, and five other women who are named or referred to in a pair with a man: Nereus and his sister, Rufus and his mother, Philologus and Julia, Prisca and Aquila, and Andronicus and Junia. Prisc(ill)a and Aquila we know from the *Acts of the Apostles*, and Rufus may conceivably be the son of Simon of Cyrene, but Andronicus and Junia are otherwise unknown. Paul's commendation of them is strong, however: he calls them 'outstanding among the apostles', ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις.

At this point, it is worth bringing up Junia's evil twin Junias – evil because he is in fact non-existent – and saying a word or two about accents. Andronicus and Junia appear in the accusative in the phrase ἀσπάσασθε Ἀνδρόνικον καὶ Ἰουνίαν, greet Andronicus and Junia. There is nothing at all unusual about either name: both are very common. Given that they must be Jewish, as Paul implies by calling them his συγγενεῖς, kinsfolk, Junia may be a Latinisation of the name Joanna. But if you have a Bible translation from the nineteenth century or the twentieth up until at least the 1970s, it will speak not of Andronicus and Junia but of Andronicus and Junias, and probably also call them Paul's 'kinsmen' and/or say that they are 'men of note among the apostles'. If your Greek New Testament dates from between 1927 and 1993, it will have a circumflex on the 'an' ending [Ἰουνιᾶν], rather than the acute accent to be found on printed editions before and after those dates. If your Arndt and Gingrich Greek-English lexicon comes from before 2000, it will tell you that the name is probably Junias, while noting that ancient authors thought the name was Junia and that she and Andronicus were a married couple. And if the Romans commentary you generally use was written by someone using one of those editions, they will in most cases have solemnly told you the name could be either masculine or feminine, plumping for one or the other as most likely according to their views on the proper sphere of women as much as their understanding of the scholarship.

But the name Junias did not exist in the ancient world, and nobody before the eighth century used it. All of the early Church fathers without exception who comment on Junia's name assume she is a woman, though Latin authors often read the variant Julia. There are a couple of twelfth-century mss. variants of Rufinus' Latin translation of Origen's commentary on Romans which use Junias at one point, but since they represent only a part of one branch of the tradition, they are clearly secondary, and they are late.

The first appearance of the form Junias in the nominative arrives in a series of motley collections of legends of the prophets, apostles and disciples (variously and spuriously attributed in the manuscripts to Epiphanius of Salamis, Dorotheus or Hippolytus) which begin to appear from the eighth century. We can see fairly clearly here what has happened to bring this about: the author wants to give names and careers to the seventy (or seventy-two) disciples whom Jesus sends out in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 10. In particular, the author wants them to have later careers as bishops. So that author trawls the letters of Paul looking

for likely candidates, and besides the many men who fit the bill, also comes up with two who are actually women transformed: ‘Priskas’, deemed to have become bishop of Colophon, and ‘Junias’, deemed to have become bishop of Apamea in Syria.<sup>3</sup> Prisca’s transformation did not take hold; Junia’s did.

The form ‘Junias’ itself may have come from an early version of the *Synaxarion*, or liturgical book of saints, of Constantinople. The *Synaxarion*, known to us in its tenth-century format, celebrates Andronicus and Junia together on 17<sup>th</sup> May, which is termed the ‘Memory of the holy Apostle Andronikos, one of the Seventy, and of Junia. This disciple and apostle of the Lord, having run through all the world as having wings, overthrew deceit from the depths, proclaiming Christ, having accompanying him also the most marvellous Junia, already mortified to the world and living for Christ alone.’ The names are in the genitive at their first appearance, and of course the genitive of Junia is Junias. The *Synaxarion* treats them throughout the narrative as a married couple living a life of chastity together, but a casual reader of the first line of the entry who read no further could easily have read the genitive of the feminine name (by this stage a name that was no longer commonly used in the Greek-speaking world) as the nominative of a masculine one.<sup>4</sup>

In Latin, the claim that ‘Julia’ is in fact a male name can be found from the thirteenth century. But a sea-change comes about in the sixteenth century when Luther translates Andronicus and Junia into German using masculine articles for both, ‘den Andronicum und den Juniam’. Thereafter the notion that both are male begins to be widely accepted in commentaries, though it is still challenged by some of the more erudite commentators, and by the nineteenth century has widely taken hold in the English-speaking world as well.

In the face of complaints that Junia is a common female name and Junias is unknown in the classical world, a theory developed in the mid-eighteenth century that  $\text{I}\text{ou}\nu\text{i}\tilde{\alpha}\nu$  with a circumflex was a contracted form of Junianus, analogously to other such contracted names. This theory proved so persuasive that the circumflex was the main reading in Greek New Testaments from 1927-1993, after which it was dropped in the face of general recognition that there was actually no evidence for it whatsoever, in favour of an acute accent on the iota.

This, while it certainly assorts with the feminine name Junia, also allows a hypothetical  $\text{I}\text{ou}\nu\text{i}\alpha\varsigma$ , albeit, as noted, a form unattested in the ancient world. A further curiosity is the use of the feminine form of the name ‘Junia’ with ‘my kinsmen’, following the King James Bible. This is the move that is made by the ESV.

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<sup>3</sup> A number of these interrelated texts were edited by Th. Schermann, *Prophetarum uitae fabulosae, indices apostolorum discipulorumque domini Dorotheo, Epiphanio, Hippolyto aliisque uindicatae* (Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1907). Priskas, ‘bishop of Colophon’, is followed in the ‘Epiphanian’ list by Junias, ‘bishop of Apamea in Syria’, at Schermann, 125, lines 17—20.

<sup>4</sup> *Synaxarium Ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae, E Codice Sirmondiano, Nunc Berolinensi, Adiectis synaxariis Selectis*, ed. Hippolytus Delehaye, Propylaeum ad Acta Sanctorum novembris (Brussels: Socii Bollandiani, 1902), 689/90 (17 May).

But the early church Fathers all knew that Junia was a woman; none of them even considered the idea that she was anything else. The clearest witness is John Chrysostom in the late fourth century. ‘To be an apostle is something great. But to be outstanding among the apostles- just think what a wonderful song of praise that is! They were outstanding on the basis of their works and virtuous actions. Indeed, how great the wisdom of this woman must have been, that she was even deemed worthy of the title of apostle’.<sup>5</sup>

Junia the woman apostle, who was once lost in translation, is now found again, at least in most English translations. The processes that led to her invisibility as a woman are perhaps extreme, particularly in the level of scholarly ingenuity employed in trying to demonstrate that modern authors knew better than the Greek Fathers how to read their own language. But she is a salutary reminder of what happens when everything else is judged against what one thinks one knows about what a woman could possibly do in the ancient world. Accuracy in translation is a term that is often paid lip-service, but it means more than word-for-word translation. Above all else, it means genuinely considering with an open mind the evidence for a reading rather than assuming it on a priori grounds. At least it should do, if we are honest in our claim to be trying to read accurately what Scripture actually says.

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<sup>5</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 32 (31).2. The Greek text is available in *Joannis Chrysostomi Homiliae in Romanos, Homiliae XXXIII*, ed. Frederick Field (Oxford: J. H. Parker, 1849), 475-6. (As Field can be difficult to find, Migne’s *PG* 60 669-670 may be more conveniently available online to some readers.)