

Junia or Junias, what does the evidence tell us?

Suzanne McCarthy

I love the name “Naked Bible” and in this case, it evokes for me stripping the accents off the Greek words and then stripping phrases down to their most concrete meaning. It means gaining an understanding of what is an accretion of extrabiblical tradition accumulated over the centuries, and what we can agree was most likely in an early text. I won’t say “original” – we don’t have originals. No birthday suit here!

Mike introduced the question of Junia, as this person is commonly called, and what he or she signifies in the ongoing discussion surrounding women in ministry. Mike referred to a few articles which I had previously read, so I offered to summarize some of the issues found in these articles. I wish, however, to follow a chronological outline of the evidence, textual and otherwise.

The name for Andronicus’ partner in Romans 16:7, IOYNIAN, (Iounian) was in the accusative case, and grammatically could have stood for either for IOYNIAN, (Iounia) accepted as a feminine name, or IOYNIAS, (Iounias) masculine. There is no definitive way of knowing, but it will boil down to deciding whether these letters represented a name which usually occurred in other literature of the time as a masculine name, or as a feminine name.

The early manuscripts were called uncials and the letters were somewhat as represented here – IOYNIAN – no accents. However, one early manuscript, P46, had IOYNIAN (Ioulian). This is the Greek for Julia, and was known only as a feminine name. Already, we can guess that the scribe who copied P46, may have found the name interchangeable with Julia, and thought of IOYNIAN was a woman’s name. We don’t know for sure, but the evidence suggests this.

The next evidence is found in the early Greek fathers. Chrysostom, and all other early Greek and Latin writers, referred to Junia as a woman. Chrysostom, also refers to her as an apostle. He wrote,

'Even to be an apostle is great, but to be of note among them - consider how wonderful a song of honour that is. For they were of note because of their works, because of their successes. How great the wisdom of this woman that she was even deemed worthy of the title of the apostles.'

The only exception to this is Epiphanius, who referred to Junias as a masculine name. However, this is usually discounted as he also called Prisca “Priscus” a man. In general, scholars agree that all Greek and Latin authors before the 12th century referred to Junia as a female, and some referred to her as an apostle.

David Jones, in his article on the CBMW website, states that Origen also referred to Junias as a male. In fact, it is only in a 12th century manuscript of Rufinus’ Latin paraphrase of Origen’s commentary on Romans, that the variant Junias is found. In the critical text for Rufinus, the conclusion is that Rufinus had used the feminine, as is found in the majority of the copies of his work.

There is no scholarly argument remaining today that Origen, or any Greek author – other than Epiphanius - ever mentioned the masculine name Junias, from the earliest manuscripts up to our present day Greek Bibles and church calendar. In the Greek Orthodox Church today, Junia is a saint and considered one of the seventy apostles. It is not unheard of for the Greek church to honour female apostles. Saint Nina is another. This does not mean that they were ordained as priests, and I will not be discussing that in this post. In addition to this evidence for a feminine Junia, there is an icon which clearly demonstrates that Junia was a woman.

When manuscripts shifted from uncial to minuscule, or what we would call “lower case” letters, accents were added to the text. In the manuscripts, the name Junia was only accented in one way, as Ἰουνία. This form of accent was universally considered to indicate a feminine name, Junia.

However, from the 12th to the 16th century there were references in Latin literature to Junias or Julius as a man, specifically in a commentary by LeFevre, 1512. Finally and more famously, in Luther’s Bible translation, Junias appeared as a “famous apostle.” However, Erasmus’ Greek text followed the manuscripts and accented Junia as a feminine name and the Bibles in the King James tradition represented Junia as a woman.

In the 19th century, when critical Greek texts began to make their appearance, the name Junia was accented Ἰουνιῶν, which is what the name would look like if it had been Junias, a man. But, in fact, no manuscript ever had this form. It was pure speculation, and unfortunately, a fabrication. There was some discussion that those compiling the text thought that the original unaccented form IOYNIAN could technically have been a masculine name, and this is what Ἰουνιῶν was intended to represent. The simple fact is that format constricted the publishers from printing the name without accents, so instead of accenting as the later Greek manuscripts had, a masculine form was given preference.

Since the critical Greek text was published offering the masculine Ἰουνιῶν as the most likely form, many Bibles in the last two centuries used the masculine name, and many commentaries also reported that the name was masculine. However, the only accented form attested to in manuscripts is Ἰουνία.

Since accents are late in Greek manuscripts and don’t really count as evidence, the matter has recently rested on the fact that Junia was an extremely common Latin name, as was Julia, and was also found as a feminine name in Greek, although rare. The male name Junias, as a Latin or Greek name is completely unknown. It did not occur. When this was brought into consideration, most scholars made the simple statement that Junia must have been a woman after all, and loopholes were sought elsewhere.

However, two scholars dug deeper. Bauckham suggested that Junia was a transliteration of the Hebrew name Joanna or יוֹחָנָה *Yôḥānnāh*/*Yehôḥānāh*. And more recently Al Wolters wrote a paper arguing that the name could have been Junias, a transliteration of the masculine Hebrew name יְחֻנִּי *Yeḥūnni*. Wolters argues that Junias, as it was written in the minuscules, with an acute accent, Ἰουνία, could have been masculine. He proves that this is technically possible.

I argue that the accenting of the minuscules, dating from the 9th century onward, are proof of nothing at all, except that the scribes at that time thought that Junia was a feminine name. The scribes accented

the word as feminine because they thought that the name was feminine. I suggest this, not because the acute accent automatically indicates a feminine name, but because all Greek and Latin writers up until the 12th century referred to Junia as a woman. The Latin name Junia was very common at the time that the letter to the Romans was written and the few Icons and images of Junia we have, portray her as a woman but never as a man.

Could the name Junia/s have referred to a man? It is technically possible. However, there is no other record of this name in Greek or Latin referring to a male. It was a very common woman's name in Latin. If Junias had been a transliteration of a masculine Hebrew name, there is no way that the readers of the letter to the Romans would have been able to recognize that, given the popularity of the name for women. The masculine form was also popular but it was Junius, not Junias or Junia.

I very much appreciate that Wolters brought to light the technical possibility that Junia with an acute accent could have been a transliteration of a Hebrew name, a Hebrew name which could have been either masculine or feminine. Altogether the argument for an underlying masculine name remains highly unlikely and, to my mind, truly obscure. But Wolters' discussion of first declension masculine names is interesting to those who love morphology. His argument is well taken, that the acute accent does not prove that the name is feminine. On the contrary it is the common usage of the name which suggests that it is feminine, and the accent in Byzantine manuscripts derives from that. If we abandon usage as a guideline in Bible translation, we risk losing the meaning of the Bible altogether, naked or otherwise.

Bauckham, Richard, *Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 166-86

Brooten, Bernadette. "Junia... Outstanding among the Apostles (Romans 16:7)," in *Women Priests: A Catholic Commentary on the Vatican Declaration* (ed. Leonard Swidler and Arlene Swidler; NewYork: Paulist, 1977), 141-44;

Jones, David. A female Apostle?: A Lexical-Syntactical Analysis of Romans 16:7 CBMW Website

Wolters, Al, IOYNIAN (Romans 16:7) and the Hebrew Name *Yēhunnī*, *JBL* 127, no. 2 (2008): 397-408