

its core. Contrue in their thoughts, they voiced their heart's grief, the death of their lord. A Geatish woman also, with tresses bound up, anxious in her grief, sang over and again a melancholy tale, how she for her part sorely dreaded evil days, a multitude of violent deaths, public panic, humiliation and captivity. Heaven swallowed up the smoke.

3156 Then the Weder-Geatish people built a resting-place on the headland, which was high and broad and widely visible to those journeying the ocean; and over ten days they constructed the monument of a man renowned for his striving. The remnants from the flames they built around with a wall in a way men of foremost skill could most worthily devise it. Within the barrow they placed rings and jewels, all such adornments as the hostile-minded men had previously seized from the hoard. They consigned the earls' wealth to the earth to keep, the gold into the ground, where it yet exists, still as unusable by men as it was at that former time.

3169 Then brave soldiers, princes' sons, rode round the burial mound, twelve in all. They wanted to utter their grief, to lament the king, to tell aloud his story and to talk about the man. They praised his heroism and his valorous accomplishments; in seemingly ways they glorified him as it is proper that a man should, extolling his friend and lord by his words, embracing him in his heart, when he must submit to be led forth from out of his bodily exterior.

3178 So the Geatish nation, the companions of his hearth, mourned the death of their lord. They said that among the kings of this world he had been the most compassionate of men, and the most humane, the most kindly to his people and the most eager for good repute.

Judith

[London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A xv, fol. 202^a-209^a]

Attempts to associate the composition of *Jud* with some contemporary event or personage in AS history have not proved widely persuasive and are probably unnecessary. The Old Testament Book of Judith — received as canonical by the Anglo-Saxons — is the poet's starting-point with its central theme: 'Thou seest the Assyrians assembled in their strength . . . and putting their faith in shield and javelin . . . They do not know that thou art the Lord who stamps out wars . . . They have planned to desecrate thy sanctuary. . . Shatter their pride with a woman's hand. For thy might lies not in numbers nor thy sovereign power in strong men; but thou art the God of the humble, the help of the poor, the support of the weak, the protector of the desperate, the deliverer of the hopeless. . . Give thy whole nation . . . the knowledge that thou alone art Israel's shield' (ch.9). The potential relevance of such a text to AS England in the time of the Danish wars is plain — but so too is its timeless message to the Christian soul beleaguered by evil in any form; and it is this aspect that the poet explicitly develops out of the scriptural source-material. With deliberate anachronism he gives Judith a prayer to the Trinity, and with calculated exploitation of conventional diction and imagery he characterizes her as a virginal saint and saviour of the godly city of Bethulia. Holofernes he characterizes as the moral monster of the poem, the reckless lord over cities of earth, spiritually blind, arrogant, drunk, lecherous, and at the last a satanic figure plunged into a familiar hell. Thus Judith joins those 'men of old' who stand on record for their faith and manifest in defiance of God's adversaries 'the righteousness which comes of faith' (Hebrews 11:2, 7), like the heroes of the poems *Gen*, *Exo* and *Dan*. Grace is a theme here as it is in a number of OE poems such as *Wan*, *Jul* and *Gic*; and here as in *Exo* an earthly reward of treasures to the chosen people, of spoils from the defeated foe, prefigures the giving and taking away of wealth in the Day of Judgment.

It is now generally thought doubtful that *Jud* was ever substantially longer than the surviving text, though certainly the opening is missing. The poet has exercised aesthetic and didactic choice in dramatizing the narrative of the killing of Holofernes and the triumph of the Hebrews, and in reducing the cast-list of the scriptural account to the three principal personages of the poem. Stylistic features have

suggested a tenth-century date which would preclude ascription to Cynewulf as favoured by some critics. But without doubt *Jud* is the work of an individualistic poet of rare talent. His capacity for characterization, scene-setting and story-telling is outstanding. The heroic diction used throughout is conventional enough, but when it is applied to the feminine and vulnerable Judith its effect is startling and aptly suggestive of extraordinary stature conferred in answer to the prayer of the righteous; when it is applied to Holofernes and the Assyrians its juxtaposition with gross behaviour effects not compliment but sardonic ridicule; and when it is applied to battle it matches in vitality the best battle-poetry in this long tradition and gives dynamic expression to the concept of God's unrelenting vengeance upon the unrighteous. The poet's relish in his subject and in his art is everywhere evident in this distinguished poem.

... she was suspicious of gifts in this wide world. So she readily met with a helping hand from the glorious Prince when she had most need of the supreme Judge's support and that he, the Prime Mover, should protect her against this supreme danger. The illustrious Father in the skies granted her request in this because she always had firm faith in the Almighty.

I have heard, then, that Holofernes cordially issued invitations to a banquet and had dishes splendidly prepared with all sorts of wonderful things, and to it this lord over men summoned all the most senior functionaries. With great alacrity those shield-wielders complied and came wending to the puissant prince, the nation's chief person. That was on the fourth day after Judith, shrewd of purpose, the woman of elfin beauty first visited him.

X

So they went and settled down to the feasting, insolent men to the wine-drinking, all those brash armoured warriors, his confederates in evil. Deep bowls were borne continually along the benches there and brimming goblets and pitchers as well to

the hall-guests. They drank it down as doomed men, those celebrated shield-wielders – though the great man, the awesome lord over evils, did not foresee it. Then Holofernes, the bountiful lord of his men, grew merry with tipping. He laughed and bawled and roared and made a racket so that the children of men could hear from far away how the stern-minded man bellowed and yelled, insolent and flown with mead, and frequently exhorted the guests on the benches to enjoy themselves well. So the whole day long the villain, the stern-minded dispenser of treasure, plied his retainers with wine until they lay unconscious, the whole of his retinue drunk as though they had been struck dead, drained of every faculty.

Thus the men's elder commanded the hall-guests to be ministered to until the dark night closed in on the children of men. Then, being wickedly promiscuous, he commanded the blessed virgin, decked with bracelets and adorned with rings, to be fetched in a hurry to his bed. The attendants promptly did as their master, the ruler of armoured warriors, required them. They went upon the instant to the guest-hall where they found the astute Judith, and then the shield-wielding warriors speedily conducted the noble virgin to the lofty pavilion where the great man always rested of a night, Holofernes, abhorrent to the Saviour.

There was an elegant all-golden fly-net there, hung about the commandant's bed so that the debauched hero of his soldiers could spy through on every one of the sons of men who came in there, but no one of humankind on him, unless, brave man, he summoned one of his evilly-renowned soldiers to go nearer to him for a confidential talk.

Hastily, then, they brought the shrewd lady to bed. Then they went, stout-hearted heroes, to inform their master that the holy woman had been brought to his pavilion. The man of mark, lord over cities, then grew jovial of mood: he meant to defile the noble lady with filth and with pollution. To that heaven's Judge, Shepherd of the celestial multitude, would not

(7-15-30)

consent but rather he, the Lord, Ruler of the hosts, prevented him from the act.

61 So this species of fiend, licentious, debauched, went with a crowd of his men to seek his bed — where he was to lose his life, swiftly, within the one night: he had then come to his violent end upon earth, such as he had previously deserved, the stern-minded prince over men, while he lived in this world under the roof of the skies.

67 Then the great man collapsed in the midst of his bed, so drunk with wine that he was oblivious in mind of any of his designs. The soldiers stepped out of his quarters with great alacrity, wine-glutted men who had put the perjurer, the odious persecutor, to bed for the last time.

73 Then the glorious handmaid of the Saviour was sorely preoccupied as to how she might most easily deprive the monster of his life before the sordid fellow, full of corruption, awoke. Then the ringletted girl, the Maker's maiden, grasped a sharp sword, hardy in the storms of battle, and drew it from its sheath with her right hand. Then she called by name upon the Guardian of heaven, the Saviour of all the world's inhabitants, and spoke these words:

83 'God of beginnings, Spirit of comfort, Son of the universal Ruler, I desire to entreat you for your grace upon me in my need, Majesty of the Trinity. My heart is now sorely anguished and my mind troubled and much afflicted with anxieties. Give me, Lord of heaven, victory and true faith so that with this sword I may hew down this dispenser of violent death. Grant me my safe deliverance, stern-minded Prince over men. Never have I had greater need of your grace. Avenge now, mighty Lord, illustrious Dispenser of glory, that which is so bitter to my mind, so burning in my breast.'

94 Then the supreme Judge at once inspired her with courage — as he does every single man dwelling here who looks to him for

help with resolve and with true faith. So hope was abundantly renewed in the holy woman's heart. She then took the heathen man firmly by his hair, dragged him ignominiously towards her with her hands and carefully laid out the debauched and odious man so as she could most easily manage the wretch efficiently. Then the ringletted woman struck the malignant-minded enemy with the gleaming sword so that she sliced through half his neck, so that he lay unconscious, drunk and mutilated.

107 He was not then yet dead, not quite lifeless. In earnest then the courageous woman struck the heathen dog a second time so that his head flew off on to the floor. His foul carcass lay behind, dead; his spirit departed elsewhere beneath the deep ground and was there prostrated and chained in torment ever after, coiled about by snakes, trussed up in tortures and cruelly prisoned in hellfire after his going hence. Never would he have cause to hope, engulfed in darkness, that he might get out of that snake-infested prison, but there he shall remain for ever to eternity henceforth without end in that murky abode, deprived of the joys of hope.

XI

122 Judith then had won outstanding glory in the struggle according as God the Lord of heaven, who gave her the victory, granted her. Then the clever woman swiftly put the harrier's head, all bloody, into the bag in which her attendant, a pale-cheeked woman, one proved excellent in her ways, had brought food there for them both; and then Judith put it, all gory, into her hands for her discreet servant to carry home. From there the two women then proceeded onwards, emboldened by courage, until they had escaped, brave, triumphant virgins, from among the army, so that they could clearly see the walls of the beautiful city, Bethulia, shining. Then the ring-adorned women hurried forward on their way until, cheered at heart, they had reached the rampart gate.

141 There were soldiers, vigilant men, sitting and keeping watch in the fortress just as Judith the artful-minded virgin had

enjoined the despondent folk when she set out on her mission, courageous lady. Now she had returned, their darling, to her people, and quickly then the shrewd woman summoned one of the men to come out from the spacious city to meet her and speedily to let them in through the gate of the rampart; and to the victorious people she spoke these words:

152 'I can tell you something worthy of thanksgiving: that you need no longer grieve in spirit. The ordaining Lord, the Glory of kings, is gracious to you. It has been revealed abroad through the world that dazzling and glorious success is impending for you and triumph is granted you over those injuries which you long have suffered.'

159 Then the citizens were merry when they heard how the saintly woman spoke across the high rampart. The army was in ecstasies and the people rushed towards the fortress gate, men and women together, in flocks and droves; in throngs and troops they surged forward and ran towards the handmaid of the Lord, both old and young in their thousands. The heart of each person in that city of mead-halls was exhilarated when they realized that Judith had returned home; and then with humility they hastily let her in.

171 Then the clever woman ornamented with gold directed her attentive servant-girl to unwrap the harrier's head and to display the bloody object to the citizens as proof of how she had fared in the struggle. The noble lady then spoke to the whole populace:

177 'Victorious heroes, leaders of the people; here you may boldly gaze upon the head of that most odious heathen warrior, the dead Holofernes, who perpetrated upon us the utmost number of violent killings of men and painful miseries, and who intended to add to it even further, but God did not grant him longer life so that he might plague us with afflictions. I took his life, with God's help. Now I want to urge each man among these citizens, each shield-wielding soldier, that you

immediately get yourselves ready for battle. Once the God of beginnings, the steadfastly gracious King, has sent the radiant light from the east, go forth bearing shields, bucklers in front of your breasts and mail-coats and shining helmets into the ravagers' midst; cut down the commanders, the doomed leaders, with gleaming swords. Your enemies are sentenced to death and you shall have honour and glory in the fight according as the mighty Lord has signified to you by my hand.'

199 Then an army of brave and keen men was quickly got ready for the battle. Renowned nobles and their companions advanced; they carried victory-banners; beneath their helmets the heroes issued forth straight into battle from out of the holy city upon the very dawning of the day. Shields clattered, loudly resonated. At that, the lean wolf in the wood rejoiced, and that bird greedy for carrion, the black raven. Both knew that the men of that nation meant to procure them their fill among those doomed to die; but in their wake flew the eagle, eager for food, speckled-winged; the dark-feathered, hook-beaked bird sang a battle-chant.

212 On marched the soldiers, warriors to the warfare, protected by their shields, hollowed linden bucklers, they who a while previously had been suffering the abuse of aliens, the blasphemy of heathens. This was strictly repaid to all the Assyrians in the spear-fight once the Israelites under their battle-ensigns had reached the camp. Firmly entrenched, they vigorously let fly from the curved bow showers of darts, arrows, the serpents of battle. Loudly the fierce fighting-men roared and sent spears into their cruel enemies' midst. The heroes, the in-dwellers of the land, were enraged against the odious race. Stern of mood they advanced; hardened of heart they roughly roused their drink-stupefied enemies of old. With their hands, retainers unsheathed from scabbards bright-ornamented swords, proved of edge, and set about the Assyrian warriors in earnest, intending to spite them. Of that army they spared not one of the men alive, neither the lowly nor the mighty, whom they could overpower.

236

Thus in the hour of morn those comrades in arms the whole time harried the aliens until those who were their adversaries, the chief sentries of the army, acknowledged that the Hebrew people were showing them very intensive sword-play. They went to inform the most senior officers of this by word of mouth and they roused those warriors and fearfully announced to them in their drunken stupor the dreadful news, the terror of the morning, the frightful sword-encounter.

246

Then, I have heard, those death-doomed heroes quickly shook off their sleep and thronged in flocks, demoralized men, to the pavilion of the debauched Holofernes. They meant to give their lord warning of battle at once, before the terror and the force of the Hebrews descended upon him; all supposed that the men's leader and that beautiful woman were together in the handsome tent, the noble Judith and the lecher, fearsome and ferocious. Yet there was not one of the nobles who dared awaken the warrior to inquire how it had turned out for the soldier with the holy virgin, the woman of the Lord.

261

The might of the Hebrews, their army, was drawing closer; vehemently they fought with tough and bloody weapons and violently they indemnified with gleaming swords their former quarrels and old insults: in that day's work the Assyrians' reputation was withered, their arrogance abased. The men stood around their lord's tent, extremely agitated and growing gloomier in spirit. Then all together they began to cough and loudly make noises and, having no success, to chew the grist with their teeth, suffering agonies. The time of their glory, good fortune and valorous doings was at an end. The nobles thought to awaken their lord and friend; they succeeded not at all.

275

Then one of the soldiers belatedly and tardily grew so bold that he ventured pluckily into the pavilion as necessity compelled him. Then he found his lord lying pallid on the bed, deprived of his spirit, dispossessed of life. Straightway then he fell chilled to the ground, and distraught in mind he began to tear his hair and his clothing alike and he uttered these words to the soldiers who were waiting there miserably outside:

285

'Here is made manifest our own perdition, and here it is imminently signalled that the time is drawn near, along with its tribulations, when we must perish and be destroyed together in the strife. Here, hacked by the sword, decapitated, lies our lord.'

290

Then distraught in mind they threw down their weapons; demoralized they went scurrying away in flight. The nation magnified in strength attacked them in the rear until the greatest part of the army lay on the field of victory levelled by battle, hacked by swords, as a treat for the wolves and a joy to the carrion-greedy birds. Those who survived fled from the linden spears of their foes. In their wake advanced the troop of Hebrews, honoured with the victory and glorified in the judgment: the Lord God, the almighty Lord, had come handsomely to their aid. Swiftly then with their gleaming swords those valiant heroes made an inroad through the thick of their foes; they hacked at targes and sheared through the shield-wall. The Hebrew spear-throwers were wrought up to the fray; the soldiers lusted mightily after a spear-contest on that occasion. There in the dust fell the main part of the muster-roll of the Assyrian nobility, of that odious race. Few survivors reached their native land.

311

The soldiers of royal renown turned back in retirement amidst carnage and reeking corpses. That was the opportunity for the land's in-dwellers to seize from those most odious foes, their old dead enemies, bloodied booty, resplendent accoutrements, shield and broad sword, burnished helmets, costly treasures. The guardians of their homeland had honourably conquered their enemies on the battlefield and destroyed with swords their old persecutors. In their trail lay dead those who of living peoples had been most inimical to their existence.

323

Then the whole nation, most famous of races, proud, curled-locked, for the duration of one month were carrying and conveying into the beautiful city, Bethulia, helmets and hip-swords, grey mail-coats, and men's battle-dress

ornamented with gold, more glorious treasures than any man among ingenious men can tell. All that the people splendidly gained, brave beneath their banners in the fray, through the shrewd advice of Judith, the courageous woman. As a reward the celebrated spear-men brought back for her from the expedition the sword and the bloodied helmet of Holofernes as well as his huge mail-coat adorned with red gold; and everything the ruthless lord of the warriors owned of riches or personal wealth, of rings and of beautiful treasures, they gave it to that beautiful and resourceful lady.

341

For all this Judith gave glory to the Lord of hosts who granted her esteem and renown in the realm of earth and likewise too a reward in heaven, the prize of victory in the glory of the sky because she always had true faith in the Almighty. Certainly at the end she did not doubt the reward for which she long had yearned.

346

For this be glory into eternity to the dear Lord who created the wind and the clouds, the skies and the spacious plains and likewise the cruel seas and the joys of heaven, through his peculiar mercy.

Poems from Other Manuscripts