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Rædende Iudithðe:

The Heroic, Mythological and Christian Elements in the Old English Poem *Judith*

A Thesis

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By

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Judith is a character born from the complex multicultural forces that shaped Anglo-Saxon society, existing liminally between the mythological, the heroic and the Christian.

Simultaneously Germanic warrior, pagan demi-goddess or supernatural figure, and Christian saint, Judith arbitrates amongst the seemingly incompatible forces that shaped the poet's world, allowing the poem to serve as an important site for the making of a new Anglo-Saxon identity, one which would eventually come to be the united English identity. She becomes a single figure who is able to reconcile these opposing forces within herself and thereby does important cultural work for the world for which the poem was written.

Liminality is an anthropological term that can refer, among other things, to an existence in a threshold area, an in-between and transitory space between two or more definitive states. Judith herself is liminal because she cannot definitively or solely be categorized as a heroic, pagan or mythological figure. She contains both traditional and non-traditional aspects of all three, which exist harmoniously side by side. A point of comparison would be the Trinity, in which three separate and usually incompatible identities (Father, Son and Holy Ghost) coexist within a single being. I argue that Judith occupies this Trinitarian liminal space, which allows her to simultaneously be Christian, pagan and heroic. The three belief systems are incompatible in many ways, and so they rightly require an alternative, in-between space to allow them to co-exist and ultimately create an Anglo-Saxon identity that can do likewise.

Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (written in the early 700s) highlights the multiple languages, peoples, and cultures that existed in Britain during the Anglo-Saxon period. Bede, a monk, was eager to "draw his fragmented world into a coherent and transcendent system of Latin-based Christianity" (Baswell & Schotter, 3). Out of complex and competing cultural forces, Bede attempted to fashion a clearly defined system that would create a new

Christian identity for his culture. The *Judith* poet, in adapting and writing his character, is attempting a similar task. The disjointed and often competing aspects of Anglo-Saxon society – Christianity, the pagan practices, traditions, and beliefs still in use, and the heroic culture – are drawn together into the coherent character of Judith. In embodying harmoniously all of these varied aspects of society, Judith creates a new identity and belief about who and what Anglo-Saxons are. This identity is diverse and multi-original, just like the collective identity of the Anglo-Saxon people. Britain “before and long after Bede” was “a multilingual and multicultural setting, densely layered with influences and communities that divide[d], in quite different ways, along lines of geography, language, and ethnicity, as well as religion, gender, and class” (Baswell & Schotter, 3), making it fragmented, socially and culturally, in many ways. The Anglo-Saxons were well aware of their own origins, along with the previous and current cultures that were a part of their society. An “awareness of these multiple origins...persisted” (Baswell & Schotter, 3) throughout the middle ages. Given that this awareness was not only of their geographic origins, but of their cultural ones as well, Anglo-Saxon society required a character like Judith to forge a new synthesized, hybridized Anglo-Saxon identity and a new set of cultural beliefs, which allowed what must have been a rather confusing array of cultural models to be cohesively defined into a single Anglo-Saxon identity.

Understanding the importance of *Judith* as a poem requires reviewing its history and context. It is written in Old English, the ancestor of Modern English that developed and was spoken in England roughly between the 5th and 13th centuries, though it existed, in different forms, before and after these dates. The poem was copied into its manuscript in a late West Saxon dialect, although there are some forms inconsistent with this dialect in the poem. This inconsistency suggests that “the poem is either West Saxon-in origin” or “has been so thoroughly

West-Saxonized in its process of transmission that its original dialect cannot be determined with any certainty, except that the dialect is likelier than not to have been Mercian” (Griffith, 21 – 22). Griffith also suggests Anglia as another possible origin (Griffith, *passim*). It is written in the epic, heroic style, which developed from an oral tradition of Germanic poetry that was brought to England with the Anglo-Saxons. It is also a fragmentary poem, beginning partway through its source text, which is the *Book of Judith* from the Old Testament. The poet, who was anonymous as most are from this period, would have worked from the Vulgate Bible in creating this Old English adaptation. *Judith*'s date depends on the dialect that was used: “if it is West Saxon, it is likely to be late (i.e. late ninth or tenth century); if it is Anglian, it may be earlier” (Griffith, 44). It is the final text in the Nowell Codex, the second of two codices in the manuscript Cotton Vitellius A.xv, which is famous for housing the Old English epic *Beowulf*. *Judith* immediately follows *Beowulf* and there is the possibility that it is a companion piece (Belanoff, 253, *passim*), given the thematic, descriptive, and stylistic connections between the two.

In terms of how much of *Judith* is missing, the number of posited lost lines varies from “just under a thousand lines” (Griffith, 3) to only about 450 (Griffith, 4, *passim*). It begins mid-line in what the manuscript tells us is section nine. However, as Griffith notes, the numbering of sections may have been in reference to the manuscript, not the poem, and the “selective treatment of the biblical source” (Griffith, 3) makes it less likely that very much of the poem has been lost.

The poem begins on the fourth day of Judith's stay in the Assyrian camp, where in the Vulgate, she has deceptively pretended to surrender to Holofernes in order to gain access to his person. The poem begins at the banquet that Holofernes throws for his retainers, where he becomes so drunk that Judith is consequently able to behead him. The rest of the poem deals

with Judith's triumphant return to her hometown of Bethulia, the Hebrews' battle with the Assyrians, and their and Judith's subsequent victory. Given its fragmentary nature, it is impossible to tell how much of the Vulgate story would have originally been included, but Griffith speculates that the missing part would have "dealt in fairly brief fashion with Holofernes' assault on the Hebrews, the siege of Bethulia, Judith's subsequent journey to the Assyrian camp, and her first three (relatively uneventful) days there" (4).

The poem is clearly an adaptation and not merely an Old English translation. The remaining portion is a condensed and simplified version of the tale, focusing primarily on the conflict between Judith and Holofernes, and the battle between the Hebrews and the Assyrians. Various plot elements and extraneous characters have been eliminated in what seems to be the poet's attempt to make his work a true adaptation that highlighted thematic messages and placed the characters in "a recognizable...setting for his Germanic audience" (Campbell, 165) that also fit the story into Old English poetic tradition. Additionally, aspects that may have been unappealing to the Christian poet, such as Judith's use of her sexuality to deceive Holofernes in the Vulgate, have been removed, and the heroic and martial aspects of the story have been emphasized in what was likely an attempt to make it appealing and familiar to an Anglo-Saxon audience. Similarly, as I argue, important elements of Anglo-Saxon culture have been added with a similar purpose of making the story relatable and applicable in mind.

To put *Judith* into a historical context, the Germanic invasion of England began in the early part of the 5th century, after Roman occupation had begun to erode. A weakening empire and increasing raids from Germanic tribes forced the Romans to begin to abandon their holding in Britain. Germanic tribes from what are now the northern Netherlands, Germany and Denmark – primarily the Saxons, Angles, Jutes and Frisians – began to lead invasions into the country.

The Germanic tribal invasions were likely strengthened by Germanic mercenary soldiers in the employ of Rome already living in England, who also began to take land. These invasions led to migrations and settlements all throughout the fifth and sixth centuries, so that by the 7th century, the majority of England and parts of southern Scotland were under Anglo-Saxon control, the Celts having been pushed to the north and west. Conversion to Christianity began in the 7th century and continued on until the 8th (Higham & Ryan, *passim*). At first, the various groups the tribes split into were led by chieftains who ruled through the power of their war-bands, but gradually chieftainships developed into kingships. Prominent kings were among the first to convert to Christianity, recognizing the power that the Church afforded them in establishing their kingdoms and decreasing the power of lesser rulers.

Beginning in the late 8th century, England saw Viking raids that “increased steadily over the course of the 9th century” (Higham & Ryan, 233) and “by the end of the 870s, the Vikings had overrun nearly all of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms” (Higham & Ryan, 233). Apart from Wessex, which had gained much power in the preceding century and so was able to hold up against them, much of England was under Viking rule, an area eventually referred to as the *Dena lagu* or “Danelaw.” Viking rule continued until the late 9th century, when King Alfred the Great began to push them further north, eventually recapturing Jórviik (York), the Viking capital. The Vikings returned in full-force in the late 10th and early 11th centuries with a series of large-scale attacks that culminated with the crowning of a Danish king, Sweyn Forkbeard, over all of England. After his rule and that of his son Cnut or Knútr, Viking power and presence in England diminished up until the Norman Invasion (themselves originally of Viking stock) in 1066.

What I hope to show then with this complex history, is that there continuously existed a varied and fluctuating series of cultural, religious and political influences and powers in England

throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. Christianity brought with it Mediterranean influences, but was adapted by the English to suit their own culture. The original Germanic tribal invaders brought their own strong and vibrant culture, including their poetry, mythologies, religious beliefs, and a warlike social structure. Likewise, the Vikings, with their invasions and subsequent settlements in England, brought their language, culture, and religious traditions, all very similar to that of the early Anglo-Saxon invaders and settlers. Given the Vikings' longtime presence in England as political powers and as settlers, it is undeniable that seepage and intermingling of cultures occurred. *Judith*, composed sometime during these centuries of great social and cultural upheaval and change, was bound to be influenced by these various factors. Thus, I have isolated the three main threads of cultural influence that I have found in the poem – the heroic, mythological and Christian – and demonstrate how these various forces have come together within *Judith* to create a cohesive Anglo-Saxon identity and set of beliefs that incorporates all of these disparate cultural aspects.

Heroic

The heroic warrior, it can be argued, is the central figure in Old English poetry. The hero, as a literary and mythological character, is generally mortal, but exists on a plane somewhere above common humanity due to his, or her, extraordinary skills or deeds. Grimm categorizes the hero as “a man that in fighting against evil achieves immortal deeds, and attains divine honors. As in the gradation of ranks the noble stands between the king and the freeman, so does the hero between God and man” (Grimm, 340). Grimm also compares heroes to saints (341, *passim*) insofar as the saint must commit extraordinary feats and overcome insurmountable odds and is rewarded with heaven and God's favor, just as the hero must commit great deeds to attain glory. Saints and heroes are also similar in that they both hold an elevated position between the divine

and the human worlds, the saint for his or her connection with God and the hero for his or her above-average ability or achievement.

Judith, herself, is this type of character that Grimm describes: she is a heroic warrior, possesses some aspects of the supernatural and some features of the Christian saint. (The latter two will be discussed in coming sections.) All three of these facets of Judith demonstrate that she is not on a par with common humanity, that she exists on an elevated level, with the ability to perform extraordinary deeds due to her connection with the divine. The first and clearest indicators of Judith's heroism are in the language of the poem, specifically the heroic epithets applied to her. She is *ellenrof* "courageous" (109a), *ellenpriste* "heroically bold" (133b), *eadhreðige* "triumphant" (135a), and *mægð modigre* "courageous woman" (334a). These are all qualities that are normally applied to male heroes in Old English poetry and are indicative of the qualities admired in the ideal warrior. Furthermore, Judith's military action and bravery prove her heroism and demonstrate her place within the Old English heroic topos. These actions include her slaying of the fearsome Holofernes, her triumphant procession after her victory, and her rousing call to arms of the Hebrews, showing them the way to their own victory. A third element is thematic and perhaps less obvious. This is the theme of the Germanic heroic code, as it existed in both society and literature, and the relationship between a lord and retainer, an essential part of this code. These themes can be found in an idealized state in *Judith* in the relationship between God and Judith and between Judith and the Hebrews. By examining both of these relationships, Judith is shown to be simultaneously a thane to her lord, God, and a lord in her own right to the Hebrews. Not only do these relationships demonstrate that Judith is a heroic warrior, but they break the exclusively fraternal structure of this relationship by replacing the thane and the lord with a woman.

The heroic warrior figure in Anglo-Saxon society and its literature arose out of the Germanic *comitatus* structure, a word referring both to the Germanic war-band and the social bond of mutual loyalty and responsibilities between a chief and his warriors (Old English *þegnas*, Modern English thanes) that accompanied it. Given that both early Germanic and Anglo-Saxon societies were “largely structured around warfare” (Higham & Ryan, 102), the war-band was a central social and political institution. The *comitatus* can first be found in early Roman accounts of the Germanic tribes and was transferred to England with the Anglo-Saxons, eventually developing into kingships and feudalism.

The war-band, in both its Germanic and then Anglo-Saxon settings, was centered around what has been termed a “Germanic heroic code” (Hill, 1) that required

“reciprocal loyalty between retainer and warlord, as especially enacted by the exchange of gifts for services and services for gifts; revenge obligation regarding injury or death, on behalf of a kinsman as well as for one’s lord; and fame-assuring battle courage, especially if a successful outcome – battlefield victory – seems impossible” (Hill, 1).

A lord was also expected to provide “wise protection” (Chance, 6) to his retainers. Warriors followed their lords voluntarily and chose him based not only on his “charisma” (Hill, 86), but on his fairness, generosity, loyalty to themselves, and adherence to the heroic code. As a lord could not rule without his warriors’ support, he was obliged to treat them well and fairly.

God and Judith’s relationship, when looked at as that of lord and thane, not only possesses tenets but ideals of the heroic code. It is based on “reciprocal loyalty” (Hill, 1) and on gift-giving. On Judith’s part, this loyalty is offered in her unwavering faith in God: *heo ahte trumne geleafan/ a to ðam ælmihtigan* “she had firm faith/ always in the almighty” (6b – 7a). She

is also a devoted servant, *nergendes þeowen* “savior’s handmaid” (73b – 74a), carrying out God’s will, evidenced by the slaying of Holofernes. She does so at personal risk and with the uncertainty of her success, proving also the stipulation that a warrior must act with the greatest courage when victory is doubtful. In return for her loyal devotion, God grants her *torhtmod tiðe* “glorious favor” (6a), courage, and victory, when he *hyre sigores onleah* “to her a grant of victory gave” (124b). He also provides her with protection against the sexual assault Holofernes intends to commit against her. When Holofernes *þohte ða beorhtan idese/ mid widle ond mid womme besmitan* “intended the bright woman/ with filth and with sin to besmirch” (58b – 59b), God prevents him from doing so: *he him þæs ðinges gestyrde* “he him of those things restrained” (60b). Judith’s constant faith and willingness to serve God, in addition to her carrying out the beheading of Holofernes, are loyally rewarded by him with gifts of victory and protection, as is required of a lord.

During the carrying out of Holofernes’ beheading, the mutual dependence Judith and God have on one another is revealed. Judith requires God’s aid in ensuring her victory: *Forgif me, swegles ealdor,/ sigor ond soðne geleafan* “Grant me, heaven’s prince,/ victory and true faith” (88b – 89a). She also asks him to help strengthen her resolve and fortify her courage. She tells Him that *þearle ys me nu ða/ heorte onhæted ond hige geomor,/ swyðe mid sorgum gedrefed* “Sorely is now my/ heart inflamed and mind gloomy,/ greatly with sorrows afflicted” (86b – 88a). This is not to say, however, that Judith is without courage or resolve of her own. Just preceding this prayer, she is *þearle gemyndig* “sorely mindful” (74b) of how she can most easily *ealdre benæman* “deprive of life” (76a) Holofernes before he awakes. She then grasps the sword and draws it from its sheath, proving her determination to kill him, before she prays to God. All of this shows that she is not without strength, courage, and resolve of her own, but she is fearful.

She asks God to help relieve this fear by strengthening the resolve she already possesses and thereby affirming his support of her in this task.

God, in his part of the reciprocal relationship, responds to Judith's request for strength and fortification and *ædre mid elne obryrde* "quickly with courage inspired her" (95a) as he does for all those *þe hýne him to helpe seceð/ mid ræde ond mid rihte geleafan* "who seek him for help/ with wisdom and with true faith" (96b – 97a). Those who show loyalty to God and serve him well and truly, as Judith does, receive gifts and loyalty in kind from him. As a lord is required by the heroic code to provide his thane with treasure in return for loyalty and services, so God does for Judith. Her true faith earns her gifts and her loyalty earns her protection. Her carrying out a task for her lord, at great personal risk, requires God to respond in his turn by aiding and wisely guiding her. The risk Judith runs is evidenced by the fact that she worries about Holofernes waking (75 – 77) and that she kills him in the midst of her enemies in the Assyrian camp, where she may be discovered and subsequently killed. Performing her task in spite of this danger means that the glory that Judith will receive from God is increased because "fame-assuring battle courage, especially if a successful outcome...seems impossible" (Hill, 1) was required of a thane under the heroic code.

Judith physically carries out the task of killing Holofernes; God does not work through her. It is Judith alone, merely fortified spiritually and mentally by God, who swings the sword and kills Holofernes. After she has *listum aledede* "skillfully positioned" (101a) the unconscious Holofernes, she strikes him *fagum mece* "with gleaming sword" (104b). The first blow does not kill him and she must then strike a second time before his *heafod wand/ forð on ða flore* "head rolled/ forth on the floor" (110b – 111a). It is her personal battle, with no intervention from God during the act. God, however, does guarantee and grant her the victory she enjoys, but it is she

who has won the battle: *Hæfde ða gefohten foremærne blæd/ Iudith æt guðe, swa hyre god uðe,/ swegles ealdor, þe hyre sigores onleah* “She had then won outstanding glory,/ Judith in battle, as to her God granted,/ chief of heaven, who to her a grant of victory gave” (122 – 124). The glory and the victory come from God, but the heroic deed of slaying Holofernes and the winning of the battle are Judith’s, proving again that she is a heroic warrior in her own right.

In terms of fulfilling the revenge obligation that the heroic code lays out, Judith must kill Holofernes because he is the enemy of her lord. He is *nergende lað* “odious to the savior” (45b). Holofernes is also a non-believer, a heathen, who attacks God’s people. His death as a heathen is justified by the poem and is required for the crimes committed against God’s people, and, by extension, God himself. In her own capacity as lord, which will be examined next, Judith owes a similar revenge debt to her retainers, the Hebrews, for the injury committed against them, in addition to her obligation to protect them. Both obligations require that she destroy the leader of their enemies and so allow them to defeat the Assyrians. Judith, therefore, must carry out a twofold revenge debt, both requiring the death of Holofernes. These two revenge obligations, to God and to the Hebrews, reveal Judith’s dual role as thane and lord.

As just mentioned, Judith also plays the role of lord to her own people, the Hebrews. Judith makes a triumphant return to Bethulia with her battle trophy, the head of Holofernes, in a scene that Fry identifies as fitting into “Hero on the Beach” topos in Old English literature. This common formula found in heroic poetry involves one or more heroes, beginning or completing a journey, “with his retainers...in the presence of a flashing light” (Fry, 169). Fry identifies it in various poems, most frequently in *Beowulf*, where it appears in various incarnations. Fry argues that Judith is the hero making her journey back to the *blican* “glittering” (137b) Bethulia, with her maidservant (a retainer). The theme is then repeated when Judith sends the troops to battle, in

which they, in the light of dawn and with gleaming armor, begin their journey (Fry, 182, *passim*). By demonstrating the use of the “Hero on the Beach” theme in *Judith*, Fry proves that she is part of the heroic canon and, like Beowulf, occupies the place of hero and lord.

Upon Judith’s celebrated return to Bethulia, she makes several speeches to the Hebrews. First, she informs the *sigefolce* “victory-folk” (152a) that their suffering under the Assyrians will be compensated, because God has favored them with glory and an approaching victory (152 – 158). She then displays Holofernes’ bloody head to the crowd as proof her success in battle: she gives it to her handmaid *to behðe blodig ætywan/ þam burhleodum/ hu hyre æt beaduwe gespeow* “as bloody proof to display/ to the townspeople/ how she at battle succeeded” (174 – 175b). The victory, in this moment, is claimed as her own, not God’s. God’s giving of glory and victory is acknowledged, but the actual defeat in battle is attributed to Judith. In this moment, Judith is the lord displaying her victory before her people. She is also God’s thane, but in this moment her status as lord to the Hebrews comes to the fore. Since she serves a thane but also exercises leadership, she is more like an earl or ealdorman, serving a king but also leading a troop of retainers.

Judith then makes a speech to the Hebrews that is a call to arms. Campbell notes that “military diction is rife in this passage, and is quite standard and Germanic” (165), cementing it within heroic tradition and again proves that Judith assumes the traditional role of a lord at the head of his, in this case her, retainers. While she does not physically lead her people into battle, her own defeat of Holofernes combined with her rousing call to battle causes the Hebrews to take up arms. In making her speech, she is *seo æðele* “the noble one” (196a), reinforcing her position not only as a noblewoman, but as a leader with authority. She reminds the Hebrews of the injury and violence committed by Holofernes: *þe us monna mæst morðra gefremede,/ sarra sorga* “that

against us, the greatest of men, violent crimes committed,/ grievous sorrows” (81 – 182a). These are wrongs that must be avenged, a revenge obligation that she owed to her people. Collectively, Judith and the Hebrews have been injured. As their lord, Judith has done her part in gaining revenge and offering protection to her people by killing Holofernes. Now the Hebrews must fulfill their portion of the revenge obligation to her by destroying the Assyrians.

She inspires the Hebrews with courage, as God did for her, displaying her bravery as an example to follow and her own victory, given to her by God, as a sign that they too will be successful. She tells them that *ic him ealdor oðþrong/ þurh godes fultum* “I from him [Holofernes] life took by force” (185b – 186a). Her worthiness as a brave and victorious leader who possesses both courage and military prowess is demonstrated in the fact that she herself took his life, with the aid of God. This aid will be extended to the Hebrews as they are both Judith’s and God’s people. Therefore, Judith’s part of the reciprocal arrangement has been fulfilled: she defeated their greatest enemy, who was the leader of the invading army, fulfilling both the revenge and the protection requirements of a lord in the heroic code. Her success was owed to her own lord, God, and her mission was possible because God fated that Holofernes would not live long: *him ne uðe god/ lengran lifes* “to him God did not grant/ long life” (183b – 184a). Yet, it was by her hand and her own physical strength and ability, as evidenced by the attribution of the victory to her, that the deed was carried out. She is an example for the Hebrews to follow.

What follows is the actual exhortation to battle. Judith addresses the *burgleoda* “townspeople” (187a) and asks them to go into battle. She does not order them to go, but says *ic... biddan wylle* “I wish to ask” (186b – 187b). Damico suggests that this phrasing may be Judith returning to the traditional role of the Germanic noblewoman in Old English poetry, who

incites warriors to battle or urges them to commit revenge, but does not herself participate in the fighting (Damico, 23, *passim*), as is the case with Judith. It could also be a reminder that her authority as a leader comes from God, who has set her this task, so she herself cannot command the troops. They fight because God wills it, not because Judith orders it. Following this portion of the speech, however, Judith adopts a more commanding tone and gives military instruction, telling the Hebrews *fysan to gefeohte* “to hasten to battle” (189a), now addressing them as *randwiggendra* “shield-warriors” (188a). She then speaks in the imperative, telling her soldiers to *Berað* “Bear” (191) forth their arms and ordering them *fyllan folctogan* “to cut down folk-leaders” (194a). She assures her warriors that *ge dom agon,/ tir æt tohtan* “you will have honor,/ glory in battle” (196b – 197a) because not only are their enemies doomed to death, but God has shown that they will have victory *þurh mine hand* “through my [Judith’s] hand” (198b). She aligns herself with God’s will, in informing the Hebrews that their victory is assured. She also reminds them of her own victory and military achievement, guaranteeing that they will also have one. Following Judith’s rousing speech, the men become *snelra* “eager” (199a) for battle and quickly prepare themselves and march off. They are inspired to courage and battle by Judith’s speech and follow her orders. Her authority, though granted to her by God, is exercised by her and she herself commands the respect of her troops.

Following the battle sequence – which includes the traditional beasts of battle motif (wolves, ravens, eagles) and other poetic battle devices, such as the sound of clashing arms, the gleam of armor and the repeated dauntless courage of the Hebrew army – Judith’s leadership and her bravery are credited as being the tool that led the Hebrews to victory: *Eal þæt ða ðeodguman þrymme geeodon,/cene under cumblum on compwige/ þurh Iudithe gleawe lare/ mægð modigre* “All that the warriors with might gained,/ brave under banners in battle/ through Judith’s wise

guidance,/ courageous woman” (331a – 334a). Her wise leadership, and the protection and inspiration it provided to her people, are again the marks of a lord. Judith possesses the attributes of a lord and fulfils the lord’s portion of the heroic code, which is to lead wisely and protect her warriors and people.

Judith then receives the spoils of battle due to a lord after a battle. These are Holofernes’ personal weapons and belongings, his sword, helmet, coat of mail, and all of his treasures. The Hebrews bring her these to reward her *of ðam siðfate sylfre brohton* “for the expedition she herself brought” (335). Granting Judith Holofernes’ weapons and treasures is an acknowledgement of her rank as leader and recognition of her military achievement. As she is responsible for killing Holofernes and for leading the warriors to battle, she receives the most worthy spoils. In terms of gift-giving by the lord, the warriors expected treasure as part of their arrangement of treasure for services. The Hebrews’ victory over the Assyrians makes them all rich with the treasures they collect after their victory. There is so much that it takes *anes monðes fyrst* “one month’s period” (324b) to collect all the booty from the fallen. The reward that Judith has given to her Hebrew retainers, therefore, consists both of material treasure and their freedom from the attacks of the Assyrians. From God, Judith and the Hebrews have received victory and his favor. For her own service as God’s thane, Judith is individually rewarded. She again demonstrates her loyalty to God and *sægde/ wuldor* “said glory” (341b – 342a) to him for the *weorðmynde* “honor” (342b) he has given her. In return for her service and unwavering devotion, God grants Judith not only *mærðe on moldan rice* “glory in earth’s kingdom” (343a) but a *sigorlean* “victory-reward” (344a) in heaven.

Mythological

What is known about Anglo-Saxon mythology and religion comes from fragmented or passing references that appear in inscriptions, historical documents and literary works. Names of gods and goddesses are sporadically mentioned – and can still be found in the days of the week – and there are references to what were obviously well-known tales. Supernatural or semi-divine beings also are referenced in many forms of literature, including charms, prayers and medical texts. What can be demonstrated from these various sources is that “Anglo-Saxon paganism encompassed a hierarchy of divine powers, from gods and goddesses to elves, spirits and ghosts” (Higham & Ryan, 149). Unlike the Norse people of Scandinavia, the Anglo-Saxons either did not write down their mythology or what was recorded was lost or destroyed. The traces that do remain show that they brought their religion with them to England where they practiced it for a considerable length of time and that it was similar to the Norse religion in many ways, which makes sense given that it was derived from what once was a common Germanic religion and mythology.

Conversion to Christianity, as previously mentioned, began in the 7th century, but it was a long process that waxed and waned in efficacy. Kings were among the first to convert, but it is difficult to impossible to claim that all of their subjects always converted along with them. Conversion of the general population was most likely a much slower process and “may have taken generations” (Higham & Ryan, 160) to really take hold. Furthermore, the suppression of paganism took a while to actively begin (Higham & Ryan, *passim*) and so people may have continued on with pagan practices despite their king’s conversion. To further blur the lines between Christianity and paganism, Pope Gregory issued mandates to St. Augustine of Canterbury that pagan temples be converted to Christian places of worship and that at least

pagan practices be adopted as Christian, in order to make use of existing structures and to make the conversion process easier. Consequently, pagan practices continued on alongside or in spite of Christianity in much of England because “traditional religion was embedded in many aspects of Anglo-Saxon life, including warfare, storytelling, the assembly, legal practice, medicine and the agricultural calendar” (Higham & Ryan, 153). Some may have simply preferred the old ways, while others incorporated pagan traditions and practices into their new Christian lives.

Thus the Anglo-Saxons had a strong pagan tradition that continued on despite the majority’s conversion to Christianity. Even after people were converted, beliefs, practices and pagan traditions persisted, either in a new Christian form or alongside Christianity as folk belief. These beliefs and traditions were reinforced by the added influence of Viking settlers in England, who would have imparted their own culture and traditions and potentially strengthened the already existing pagan belief and practices among the Anglo-Saxons. The connection between the Norse peoples and the Anglo-Saxons, however, was not limited to their co-existence during the Danelaw period. The Anglo-Saxons “had maintained trading and cultural links since the Migration Period” (Higham & Ryan, 236) with Scandinavia and were very aware of their own Scandinavian origins (the Jutes from Denmark) and the original geographic, cultural and ancestral ties between themselves and the Norse people. Therefore, it is possible to examine the mythological aspects of *Judith* by looking back to older Germanic traditions, as recorded by the Romans for instance, and to those preserved in Norse mythology, as well as what few Anglo-Saxon mythological and religious beliefs can be gleaned, given the common origin and shared culture between all.

An examination should begin with the prominent use of the Old English word *ides* in the poem. *Ides* is a word that is most often translated as “lady” or “woman,” the latter of which I

have chosen for my translation. The precise meaning of the word, however, is more complex.

“Lady” is chosen by most translators as the Modern English equivalent of *ides* because the word refers to women who are elevated either in status or in some aspect of their character or nature.

The term in Old English poetry is frequently used for noblewomen, saints and, interestingly, Grendel’s Mother in *Beowulf*. In its other forms in other Germanic languages, the word is used in mythological texts to refer to goddesses, demi-goddesses and female battle spirits and, in Old Saxon and Old High German, for the Virgin Mary (Meaney, 158, *passim*). As these examples show and as Grimm notes, *ides* is a word that appears throughout Germanic languages and so necessary has an ancient common Germanic origin (Grimm, 401, *passim*). The Old English *ides*, for instance, appears in Old High German as *itis* and in Old Norse as *dís* (Grimm, 401).

Whatever its meaning came to be, *ides* has a long history of association with supernatural and powerful women, which is demonstrated in its selective usage for particular types of women throughout Old English and Norse literature.

Grimm posits that the word in its original common Germanic form, and its subsequent incarnations in Germanic languages, referred “to superhuman beings, who, considered lower than goddesses and higher than earthly women, occupy precisely that middle rank” (Grimm, 401) between the two. Referring to the *dísir* of Old Norse mythology, a particular class of female spirits, Damico similarly classifies them as women “of secondary rank, neither wives nor daughters” and says that “their authority was that at once [as] ‘handmaids’ to the gods and sources of revelation to men” (38). While Chance acknowledges the earlier “prophetic or holy connotations” (2) of *ides*, she holds that “by the seventh or eighth centuries” the word had diminished to merely refer to “important or noble woman” (2). However, the word’s association in Old English with not only noblewomen, but with saints, women with martial power (both

good and bad), and with Grendel's Mother, a powerful, otherworldly creature, seems to suggest otherwise. While the word certainly did refer to noblewomen it cannot have exclusively been reserved only for women of elevated social rank; its definition was much broader and incorporated supernaturally or divinely elevated women. In short, *ides* refers to women who stand above the general population in some way, whether by virtue of their social rank or their supernatural and/or divine associations and powers.

Ides appears eight times in *Judith*: six are in reference to her, one in reference to her handmaid, and one more in reference to the both of them. It is always accompanied by an epithet in the poem that describes one of Judith's qualities and usually thematically relates to the situation she is in. These are:

ides ælfscinu "elf-shining woman" (14a)

snoteran idese "wise woman" (55a)

beorhtan idese "bright woman" (58b and 340b)

ides ellenrof "courageous woman" (109a and 146a)

þa idesa ba,/ ellenpriste, "both of the women, heroically bold" (133)

The first epithet, with its comparison of Judith to an elf, is one whose meaning still puzzles scholars, and which I will look at more in depth. The next two refer to Judith's wisdom and brightness, which are perhaps the two most common epithets to describe her. As both Chance and Damico note, these two characteristics, wisdom and brightness, are common throughout Old English poetry and literature in describing women, particularly those who are noblewomen. The last two refer to Judith's heroism and are typically only found in association with male heroes. Beowulf, for example, is also called *ellenrof* (*Beowulf*, 340a, 3063a). The collection of epithets that accompany *ides* present three characteristics of Judith: her brightness

(potentially meaning beauty or, as will be seen below, a more supernatural connection), her wisdom and her heroism. Two other traits that Judith possesses, her nobility and holiness, are not paired with *ides*. Instead, the words denoting her as a holy woman and a servant of God are used with other synonyms for woman: *mægð* (which also means ‘maiden,’ perhaps referring to Judith’s chastity), *meowle*, and *wif*. These words are also used with epithets of nobility, wisdom and brightness, but it is interesting to note that the Christian aspect of Judith is never used with *ides*, perhaps suggesting that in this particular context, its associations are not to be taken to refer merely to Judith’s elevated social status, but perhaps to an otherworldly or potentially pagan connection.

Grimm’s argument that the *ides* belonged to women who were “superhuman beings” who existed midway between goddesses and mortal, non-supernatural women is applicable to Judith, who possesses this sort of categorical ambiguity. She is more than a woman, less than a goddess; neither fully male hero nor wholly Germanic noblewoman; a Hebrew woman who has been claimed as a Christian; and, finally, a character who possesses both pagan and Christian powers and associations. She straddles these categories in a liminal way: they coexist within her while she operates in the “middle rank” that Grimm describes. Whether Christian or pagan, she does not seem fully human, in the sense of Grimm’s “earthly,” but neither is she all-powerful as a goddess would be. Instead, she exists midway between the divine/supernatural and the human, much as a saint, supernatural creature or demi-goddess would.

Ælfscinu is the most curious of the epithets paired with *ides* and is one of the most obviously pagan-origin of the adjectives applied to Judith in the poem. As stated previously, its meaning is still unclear, although many scholars have suggested that it is a reference to her beauty, meaning “beautiful as an elf” (Belanoff, 251). *Ælfscinu* is a rare word, only appearing

three times in the entire Old English literary canon. The other two instances are both in *Genesis A* in reference to Sarah, Abraham's wife, and her "dangerous attractiveness" (Belanoff, 251). However, *mæg*, meaning "woman, wife or maiden," accompanies the epithet in Sarah's case, making the pairing of *ælfscinu* with *ides* in Judith's case the only example in Old English literature.

The poet's selection of *ælfscinu* from the wide variety of adjectives for beauty, if that is indeed one of its possible meanings, is interesting for a Christian heroine, given its obviously pagan origin. The pairing of *ides* with *ælfscinu* strengthens this pagan connection, perhaps referring to a supernatural or superhuman power that Judith possesses. This power could be drawn from a pagan tradition, or it could refer to the divine power she has been granted by God, or, as is likely, it was originally a reference to a pagan power that has been reinterpreted as a Christian one. Either way, the term suggests that Judith possesses some kind of otherworldly power or connection. It is possible to venture, then, that *ælfscinu* does not refer *only* to Judith's beauty, but refers to some more powerful aspect of her character.

The scholarly connection of *ælfscinu* with beauty likely has two sources. Firstly, "the association of radiance with beauty and goodness is of long Indo-European tradition" (Beekman Taylor, 212). The "shining" portion of the *ælfscinu* fits into this tradition, as Judith is good and holy, in addition to, at least in the Vulgate, possessing great beauty. The biblical Judith is said to be "exceedingly beautiful" (*Book of Judith*, 8:7), and God enhances this beauty to help her seduce and defeat Holofernes: "And the Lord also gave her more beauty: because all this dressing up did not proceed from sensuality, but from virtue. And therefore the Lord increased this her beauty, so that she appeared to all men's eyes incomparably lovely" (*Book of Judith*, 10:4). Her beauty, along with her clever deception and flattery of Holofernes, is essential to her

defeat of him. Upon seeing her, Holofernes is “caught by his own eyes” (*Book of Judith*, 10:17) and his “heart...was smitten, for he was burning with the desire of her” (*Book of Judith*, 12:16). She is aware that she is sexually appealing to him, for she adorns herself with beautiful clothing and jewels before she goes to meet him. She exploits his attraction to her beauty to manipulate Holofernes into trusting her.

In contrast, Judith’s sexuality in the Old English fragment has been eliminated. Her manipulation of Holofernes, by sexual means or by flattery, is also not mentioned. Whereas the biblical Judith seems to willingly go with Holofernes into his chamber (*Book of Judith*, 13:3), the Old English Judith is fetched and led there by soldiers. Holofernes’ sexual attraction to Judith is still present, but it is a darker and more violent attraction, given that he intends to rape her. He becomes gleeful when Judith is brought into his chamber because *pohte ða beorhtan idese/ mid widle ond mid womme besmitan* “he intended the bright woman/ with filth and with sin to besmirch” (58b – 59a). Instead of actively making herself beautiful and sexually appealing, using flattery and manipulation to deceive Holofernes, the Old English Judith is the intended victim of sinful lust and sexual violence, being forcibly brought into Holofernes’ tent chamber. The suggestion, then, that *ælfscinu* indicates “a woman who is the object of sexual attention” (Beekman Taylor, 213) would be a possible explanation, given that Judith is the intended victim of a sexual assault, rather than a woman who is merely beautiful.

However, there is also the elf element of the term and its history in Germanic mythology to consider. In Norse mythology, elves have a connection with beauty and brightness, perhaps suggesting that *ælf* and *scinu* reinforce one another. The *Prose Edda* describes two categories of *álfar*, or elves, in Norse belief: *ljósálfar* “light-elves” and *dökkálfar* “dark-elves.” *Ljósálfar* live in *Álfheimr* “Elf-Home” or “Elf-World,” which is part of the heaven structure, while the

dökkálfar live underground. Their appearances, as can be gleaned from their names, differ greatly: *dökkálfar* are described as “blacker than pitch” (Sturluson, 28), while *ljósálfar* are described as “more beautiful than the sun” (Sturluson, 28). There is the possibility, as Hall notes, that Sturluson, writing in the 13th century, was influenced by Christian concepts and may have based the light and dark elves on angels and demons (Hall, 55, *passim*). But while Christian structures may have influenced Sturluson’s text, the *Prose Edda* is based on much older tales and poems that record the Norse mythology, so there is also the likelihood that his characterization of the light and dark elves is fairly true to their original characterization. Furthermore, “Pagan and Christian concepts of light and shining impenetrate and reinforce one another” (Belanoff, 822), and so the associations of both angels and elves with brightness and the gods may have led Sturluson to conflate the two.

What can be determined from the *Edda* is that light-elves have good, even divine, associations, and possess wondrous beauty. They follow, then, in the Indo-European tradition of the association of goodness and beauty with brightness. The fact that the beauty of the light-elves is said to be greater than the beauty of the shining sun would account for the pairing of *ælf* and *scinu*, in that it is a potential reference to the light-elves and their wondrous beauty. The association of the light-elves with heaven and goodness also ties into Judith’s character. This is not to say that Judith is a light-elf, but it does suggest that the tradition of elves, and belief about traits they possessed, corresponded to traits that the poet wished to give Judith: an extraordinary or otherworldly beauty (potentially a beauty that has power) and an association with goodness and heaven. While belief in light-elves was probably not held by a Christian poet, the existence and use of the adjective evidently shows that the essence of this creature was part of the poetic

tradition, and that the poet felt that the traits that *ælfscinu* invoked were applicable to Judith, regardless of the pagan origin and association.

Anglo-Saxon interpretations of elves, however, seem to have differed somewhat from the Norse. Yet one particular image of elves that comes from the Old English to Latin glosses bears some similarity to its Norse counterpart. As Hall notes, elves are glossed with nymphs in these texts. Nymphs are beautiful and young “minor goddesses whose beauty was liable to attract the sexual attentions of gods and men (Hall, 84). While Hall notes that glossators may have struggled to find equivalent Latin comparisons for their Old English words, and that nymph may simply have been the closest option and not a direct equivalent to elf, its selection “might imply that *ælf* shared the nymphs’ characteristic beauty” (Hall, 88), even that “*ælf*e were not only characterized by beauty, as frost is characterized by coldness, but that they were a paradigmatic example of beauty, as frost is a paradigmatic example of coldness” (Hall, 92-93). Elves that are as beautiful as nymphs is an image that is very similar to the beautiful light-elves, indicating that the Anglo-Saxons may have had a similar concept. The connection returns again to the association of elves and beauty, strengthening the suggestion that the term refers to Judith’s physical appearance.

On the other hand, however, the Anglo-Saxons also seemed to have had a “tradition of mischievous or demonic sprite-like *ælf*e” (Hall, 76), who were responsible for a variety of illnesses and harm to humans and livestock, based on the references to charms and cures against elves in the medical texts. This image of elves fits in with the translations of *ælfscinu* that suggest a dangerous or deceptive beauty, “that someone who was *ælfscyne* was beautiful in a dangerously seductive way” and that “the women who are *ælfscyne* are not simply beautiful, but perilously so” (Hall, 93). Judith’s beauty is dangerous to Holofernes, as his attraction to it or by

it will lead to his death. Hall also notes that the “entrancing beauty” of *ælfscinu*, due to its association with elves, might also indicate the “supernatural assistance” (94) that Judith receives from God.

The fact that an elf is chosen to describe Judith’s beauty does not, then, merely reflect indicate an extraordinary beauty; it indicates that she has a beauty that is potentially lethal and has an otherworldly power about it. The pagan power that is associated with elf potentially enhances the idea of the Christian power Judith receives from God. The long history of associating elves with power (either good or malicious), was likely common knowledge among Anglo-Saxon audiences. The association, then, between elvish power and Judith’s Christian power would have enhanced the understanding of the latter, causing it to resonate more strongly. In short, it was another way to tie Judith into existing Anglo-Saxon beliefs and their system of associations or comparisons. To have the power of an elf is to have a supernatural power, potentially good or potentially lethal, but otherworldly. The similar association of elves with beauty and brightness, as the light-elves and their glossing as nymphs prove, again strengthens the connotation of a supernaturally-derived power: that the beauty Judith possesses is harmful and dangerous, to Holofernes, but it simultaneously carries out God’s will, thereby making it a force for good. Finally, *ælfscinu*’s association with *ides* places Judith within a long Germanic tradition of supernaturally or otherworldly powerful women.

The categorical ambiguity of Judith can again be examined in relation to another supernatural figure from Germanic mythology: the valkyries, who occupy the middle place between goddess and human that the *ides* can be found. While valkyries are figures primarily associated with Norse mythology, they are of Germanic origin, and are so shared by the Anglo-Saxons. *Valkyr*, plural *valkyrja*, is a compound Old Norse word meaning “slaughter-chooser” or

“chooser of the slain.” It exists in Old English as *wælcyrge/wælcyrrie* with an identical meaning. Valkyries are demi-goddess figures who, as Damico suggests, evolved from a more primitive Germanic battle spirit. In Norse mythology, they are responsible for choosing and collecting those killed in battle. In the *Prose Edda*, they are described as handmaids of Oðinn or Odin, the head of the Norse gods, who sends them to battle. They choose who will die and who will have victory. They then bring the slain back to Valhalla, the place where those who have died in battle and are worthy go to live and become one of the *einherjar*. These are the chosen warriors who will fight alongside the gods at *Ragnarøk*, the apocalypse that will eventually destroy the world. The valkyries are also known by the name *skjaldmeyjar* “shield-maidens” (Damico, 42), which additionally refers to legendary (but potentially historical) accounts of women who fought as warriors in battle (Damico, 33, *passim*). The goddess Freyja, typically a love or fertility goddess, also possesses the battle-goddess identity of Valfreyja “mistress of the slain” (Damico, 19) and, along with the valkyries, participates in the choosing of the slain, as described in *Grímnismál*: “Half of the dead/ Freya chooses each day/ And Odinn rakes up the rest” (Branston, 100). She also, therefore, has associations with valkyries and with their function.

The Old Norse word for *ides*, *dís* (plural *dísir*), has connections to valkyries as well. As Damico notes, *dís* refers to a class of female spirits or demi-goddess figures in Norse mythology who “are very closely allied in function and aspect” (Damico, 69 – 70) with valkyries, as both are “armed, powerful, priestly” (Damico, 70) figures, who have noble and vengeful sides to their image. Hall, in fact, suggests that *dísir* and valkyries are actually the same being: “valkyrja is most likely a kenning (‘chooser of the slain’) for *dís* (‘(supernatural) lady’)” (Hall, 22). A kenning is a compound used in poetry that gives a word a figurative meaning. For example, in *Judith*, the kenning *hildenædran* “battle-adders” (222a) is used to poetically refer to arrows. In

the case of *dís*, as Hall suggests, valkyrie describes the function of the *dís* in figurative terms. If Hall is correct, that valkyrie is a kenning for *dís* and *ides*, then it is possible to begin to draw connections between Judith and valkyries, given their identical, or at least shared identity with the *dísir*.

With regards to physical appearance, similarities can again be noted between Judith and the valkyries in the way they are described. Like Judith's association with brightness, valkyries are commonly denoted by the Old Norse epithets *hvít* "white," *biört* "bright," *sólbiört* "sun-bright," and *biartlituð* "bright of form" (Grimm, 418)¹. As noted previously, the terms *beorhtan idese* "bright woman" (58b and 340b) and *ides ælfscinu* "elf-shining woman," as applied to Judith, both indicate that she is "a source of brightness or sheen" (Belanoff, 822). Belanoff describes this particularly quality or type of brightness, one that is internal or inherent, as being a "role women share with otherworldly beings" (Belanoff, 822). Like the light-elves, valkyries also possess this internal brightness. Given their position as demi-goddesses and the supernatural creatures that light-elves are, these adjectives of brightness refer not only to beauty, but, again, to an extraordinary or powerful beauty, which is a reflection of the supernatural power of the creature or being to whom the adjectives apply. Once again, with her similarities to valkyries, Judith is associated with pagan figures and powers.

Another possible source for Judith's brightness is her metal adornments, which arise from a typical formula for describing women in both Norse and Old English literature. Judith is described as being *beagum gehlæste,/ hringum gehrodene* "with bracelets loaded,/ with rings adorned" (36b – 37a) when she is led to Holofernes' tent. Then both she and her handmaid are referred to as *beahhrodene* "ring-adorned ones" (138b) when they make their victorious return to Bethulia. Finally, Judith is *golde gefrætewod* "with gold adorned" (171b) when she stands before

¹ Translations here are my own, while the Old Norse terms come from Grimm.

the Hebrews and displays Holofernes' head. Two possible meanings can be derived from these terms. The first is that they describe jewelry, which, as Damico recounts, is a typical way to describe noblewomen, who are often associated with rings, as Judith is. Rings were both a sign of status and of wealth, as they could serve as "treasure or currency" (Damico, 33). The wearing of rings also indicates "generosity" (Damico, 32), as it is associated with the noblewoman in her capacity as a "treasure-giver" (Damico, 32), exemplified, for example, by Wealhtheow in *Beowulf*.

However, given the "highly martial setting" (Damico, 32) in which these epithets are used in *Judith*, it is unlikely that these terms are describing Judith as a noblewoman or gift-giver. It may be more apt, as Damico suggests, to interpret Judith's metal adornments as references to armor. Damico examines the epithet of *beahhrodene* that is applied to Judith and her handmaid as they make their victory march back to Bethulia. *Beah* or *beag*, the noun used in this epithet, refers to a circular, metal adornment, such as a bracelet, armband, ring or collar. As Damico notes, the Old Norse form of *beag*, *baugr*, is used to describe the valkyries. She takes the example of Sigrun in the *Poetic Edda*, who is called "*brúðr baugvarið* 'ring-bedecked woman'" (Damico, 33). Sigrun is described in a martial setting as also being ring-adorned, just as Judith is, perhaps again suggesting a connection between *baugr* and *beag* and the adornments of warfare.

Baugr also possessed the more explicitly martial meaning of "a circle painted on a shield" in Old Norse, which Damico argues could then mean that *baugr* refers "to a woman who either is decorated with shields or who carries a shield, the ring of battle" (Damico, 33). There is, as Damico notes, historical evidence that *skjaldmeyjar*, or shield-maidens, were "covered by little shields," as described by the Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus. These little shields could refer to "a byrnie covered with metal shields" (Damico, 33 – 34). Therefore, as an alternative to

ring-adorned, Damico suggests “shield-adorned” (Damico, 34) in describing Judith on her march back to Bethulia.

Damico does not, however, include the first reference to Judith as being *beagum gehlæste/ hringum gehrodene* “with bracelets loaded/ with rings adorned” (36b – 37a) in her suggestion of a martial connotation. Assumedly, Damico does not include this reference to *beag*, or *hring*, in her discussion of line 138b’s *beahhrodene* and its martial associations because they does not occur in an overtly martial context. Judith is adorned in bracelets and rings when Holofernes’ men are ordered to bring her to his tent, which has been interpreted by some scholars as indicating that the rings and bracelets refer to her bedecking herself as “allurement for a man” (Damico, 32), meaning to seduce Holofernes. But given that Judith’s sexuality, as previously noted, has been stripped away from the poem, this argument does not hold up very well. What seems more likely, if Damico’s theory about the words is to be borrowed, is that *beag* and *hring* refer to Judith’s preparations for battle. Judith is, as Holofernes and his men believe, being taken to Holofernes’ tent to be raped. In actuality, as she, God, and the audience now know, she is actually going there to kill him. The audience has been told by the narrator in the banqueting scene that Holofernes and his men are *fæge* “doomed to die” (19b). Holofernes’ own end, killed while he is in a drunken stupor, is foreshadowed when he and his men *on swiman lagon,/ oferdrencte his duguðe ealle,/ swylce hie wæron deaðe geslegene* “lay in a swoon,/ all his elite band made over-drunk,/ as if they were struck down in death” (30b – 31b). So, as is clear to the audience, Judith is entering a place of battle, a fact of which only Holofernes and his men are unaware. Her bracelets and rings therefore take on a double meaning. For Holofernes, they have a sexual connotation, the “allurement” that scholars refer to, as symbols of his lust for Judith. On

the other hand, as the audience and Judith are aware, they are adornments of battle, signaling her entrance into the climactic heroic moment of her journey.

Beag has already been shown by Damico to have martial connections, but *hring* bear similar connections to armor, as evidenced in *Beowulf*, where it is used to refer to reference chain mail. When Beowulf battles Grendel's Mother, for example, he is protected from her claws by ringed armor: *hring utan ymbbearh,/ þæt heo þone fyrdhom ðurhfon ne mihte,/ locene leoðosyrca* (*Beowulf*, 1503) "rings protected him from the outside,/ so that she could not penetrate the coat of mail/ the linked limb-armor" (Fry, 175). Clearly, the rings here describe chain mail, made up of interlocking rings of metal. Elsewhere in the poem, Beowulf's men wear *hringnet* "ring-nets" (*Beowulf*, 1889b) and a *hringde byrnan* "ringed byrnie" (*Beowulf*, 2615b)² is part of the arms belonging to Eanmund, who is slain by Weohstan. While rings are also given as treasure and worn as jewelry in *Beowulf*, their association with war-gear is evident. Therefore, in *Judith*, the double pairing of *beag* and *hring* in lines 36 and 37 strengthens the martial interpretation of these adornments, over their interpretation as adornments of beauty.

The second use of *beag* in the epithet *beahhrodene* is, as Damico demonstrates, is the more obviously martial of the two in terms of context, as it appears in a triumphal victory procession, following a collection of heroic epithets. But the first use of *beag* (36b) along with *hring* (37a) could likewise indicate armor. The description of Judith as *golde gefratowod* "gold-adorned" (171b) when she stands before her people and displays Holofernes' head could also fit into this vein of martial association, or at least can be associated again with valkyries, as Damico suggests that it bears similarity to the epithets describing gold decoration that are applied to valkyries throughout Norse literature (Damico, 36 – 37, *passim*). The association of *beag*, *hring*,

² Both of these two translations are my own.

and gold with valkyries and with Judith could give some indication of Judith's otherworldly or, at the very least, extraordinary powers, derived from a divine connection.

Finally, Judith can be compared to the valkyrie figure in terms of the deeds she commits and the power she possesses to carry them out. Damico notes that in Old Norse literature there are two "distinct and antagonistic perceptions of valkyries" (41). On the one hand, the valkyries are noble and "radiant, courtly warrior-figures" (Damico, 43) who are "wise, articulate and stately" (Damico, 42). The other image of the valkyrie is "more elemental" (Damico, 43) and they are described as bloodthirsty, vengeful battle-spirits. Looking back at earlier texts, Damico concludes the image of the battle-spirit valkyrie is the older of the two and that the noble valkyrie figure evolved out of the former. For evidence of these "baleful war-spirits" (Damico, 43), Damico examines the *idisi* (the Old High German plural equivalent of *ides*) of the *First Merseburg Charm* "who bind and fetter the host and... inflict a kind of paralytic terror upon the warriors" (Damico, 43).³ Therefore, taking this particular association of the term with battle spirits, it is likely that *ides* not only had prophetic or supernatural associations, but also martial ones, again highlighting its appropriateness in connection with Judith.

Damico argues that while elements of both types of the valkyrie figure exist in Old English literature, the "earlier concept of the valkyrie as a baleful war-spirit is" perhaps more "easily distinguishable" (Damico, 44). She bases this assumption on the few pieces in which valkyrie figures are mentioned⁴ and on the fact that Old English to Latin glosses pair *wælcyrrie*

³ *The First Merseburg Charm* is contained in a collection of Old High German pagan spells, charms and incantations, recorded in the 10th century, though of older origin. The translated text reads: "In days gone by, the *idisi* sat here and yonder. Some made firm the fetters, some hindered the host, and some picked apart the chains; escape from fetters, escape from foes" (Damico, 43).

⁴ These two texts are both Old English charms: "For a Sudden Stitch" and "Against a Swarm of Bees." In both, valkyrie-like female figures are figuratively used to describe the pain of a stitch, and are blamed for its pain, and the swarming bees.

with the Erinyes (the Greek Furies), the *Parcae* (the Roman Fates), and “the Roman goddess of war, *Bellona*” (Damico, 44). Later on, *wælcyrían* were also equated with witches and other malevolent beings (Damico, 44 passim), again suggesting that the view of valkyries in Anglo-Saxon culture was less positive than their Norse counterpart, who were revered as demi-goddesses. This split seems to mirror the divergent view of elves that also existed between both cultures, perhaps suggesting that the Anglo-Saxons retained older images or interpretations of mythological figures in their beliefs, while the Norse ones shifted.

When these two distinct valkyrie figures are compared to Judith, it is possible to see that she possess aspects of both. Like the Norse valkyrie, she is noble, wise, and eloquent, but like the battle-spirit valkyrie she is associated with the concept of revenge, as demonstrated in her capacity as thane and lord, and seems to have some of the fettering ability of the *idisi* of *The First Merseburg Charm* that Damico describes. In the beheading scene, Holofernes is completely incapacitated by drink and unable to move, which allows Judith to easily kill him. Although his drunkenness is seemingly blamed on his own excessiveness and lack of self-control, his death has been willed by God, who has promised to help Judith in carrying it out, so there is the element of supernatural intervention in the binding of Holofernes with drunkenness. This is similar to the “paralysis” faced by the warriors who are “hindered” (Damico, 43) by the *idisi*. Judith is next involved in the literal fettering of Holofernes: she takes hold of Holofernes *fæste be feaxe sinum* “fast by his hair” (99a), grasping him in a manner similar to the *idisi* who “make firm the fetters” (Damico, 43) of their victims. After Judith beheads him, Holofernes is sent to hell, where he is *susle gesæled* “in torment fettered” (114a) and *wyrmum bewunden,/ witum gebunden,/ hearde gehæfted* “wound with snakes,/ in tortures bound,/ painfully chained” (115a – 116a). Working together, God and Judith fetter Holofernes in torment and hell-fire for eternity.

The place of Holofernes' punishment is Christian, but the nature of his punishment is strikingly similar to that faced by warriors from the battle-spirit valkyries. Additionally, the hell he enters bears similar qualities to the Norse equivalent of hell that appears in the *Prose Edda*. After *Ragnarøk*, when the world, heaven, and earth are destroyed, three worlds remain in which people will live. The hell version in this trio is *Nástrandir* "Corpse Strands," which is located in the region of *Niflheim* "Dark Home" or "Mist Home," the underworld domain of the death goddess Hel. *Nastrandir* is described as "a large foul hall...constructed from the spines of snakes like a house with walls woven from branches. The heads of all the snakes turn into the house, spitting venom so that a river of poison runs through the hall, and down it must wade those who are oath breakers and murderers" (Sturluson, 76). To address the possibility that Sturluson was again drawing from Christian structures in his *Edda*, as mentioned earlier by Hall, one of the *Sibyl's Prophecies*, the older, pagan poems on which Sturluson largely based the *Edda*, which were written prior to the Christianization of Iceland, appears alongside Sturluson's text, showing the origin of his description. So this image of the Norse hell is taken directly from the pagan source.

The hell that Holofernes is sent to is called a *wyrmsele* "snake-hall" (119a) and to reach it he must pass *under neowelne næs* "under the steep cliff" (113a), giving associations of both an underworld and a beach (the strand in *Náfstrandir*). Furthermore, Holofernes is a *wærlogan* "troth-breaker" (71b) and a murderer, which the inhabitants of *Nafstrandir* are. So, Holofernes, as a troth-breaker and murderer, suffers torments in the same place that those guilty of the same crimes in Norse mythology do, in a hall made of snakes. While it is certainly a Christian hell, it is also a Germanic-inspired hell, revealing again the fusion of the pagan and Christian in the poem.

Finally, to put Judith's similarity to the valkyrie figures into starker relief, it is helpful to once again examine her lord and thane relationship with God. If Judith is examined as a valkyrie figure, then God is her Oðinn, a deity and commander who sends her as a slaughter-chooser to collect the soul of Holofernes. And, just as warriors who do not valiantly die in battle are not allowed into Valhalla, Holofernes' sinful life and heathenism prevent him from entering heaven. In a Norse setting, his ignominious death, drunk and slaughtered by a woman, would also prevent him from entering Valhalla, as only those who are worthy and die in battle may enter it. Judith takes on another role of the valkyrie here, which is to determine who is and who is not worthy of entering Valhalla, or, in this case, heaven. Because he is not worthy of heaven, Holofernes is sent to the torments of hell, or, as shown in the Norse elements of his hell, to a sort of *Niflheim* and the torments of *Náfstrandir*, which is where those who do not die in battle or who are criminals are sent to live in torment. In this interpretation, Judith, who is *nergendes þeowen* "the savior's handmaid" (73b – 74a), becomes a slaughter-chooser figure serving her lord. She is responsible for dispatching Holofernes, an aspect of the more elemental valkyrie figure as described by Damico, and also for evaluating his worthiness and sending his ghost to its final dwelling place, a task of the noble valkyrie.

As shown, the valkyries, as slaughter-choosers, were responsible for deciding and carrying out the fates of men in battle. This function bears similarity to the *wyrd* concept in Anglo-Saxon belief. *Wyrd*, meaning fate or destiny (and the origin of the modern English "weird") was an abstract Germanic concept of an "all-powerful Fate or Destiny...to whom even the gods were subject" (Branston, 65), that was responsible for all events and for governing the predetermined life of each person. In addition to this concept of fate, *wyrd* was also embodied in goddess figures, who were the Germanic equivalent of the Three Fates of Greek mythology. In

Norse mythology, these goddesses, or demi-goddesses, were called norns. In Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda*, he describes the norns as three maidens:

...ór þeim sal koma þrjár meyjar þær er svá heita: Urðr, Verðandi, Skuld. Þessar meyjar skapa mönnum aldr. Þær kōllum vér nornir. "...from that hall come three maidens who are named thus: Urðr ['become'], Verðandi ['becoming'], Skuld ['will be']. These maidens shape people's lives. We call them nornir" (Hall, 23).

The first of these, *Urðr*, is the Old Norse equivalent of the Old English *wyrd* (Grimm, 406, passim). Therefore, *Urðr* (and her Anglo-Saxon equivalent *Wyrd*) and her sisters were either the anthropomorphic embodiments of the *wyrd* concept or the agents of it.

The *Prose Edda* suggests that there are various groups of norns, both good and bad, with different obligations and origins: "Some are of the Æsir [the gods],/ some are of the elves,/ Some are the daughters of Dvalin [a dwarf]" (Sturluson, 26). The three norns mentioned above, then, are part of a larger group of norns with varying degrees of power and responsibility. The primary task of the three fatal norns in the *Edda*, however, is determining the trajectories and spans of lives, through the spinning and weaving of the cloth of life, making them the source of fate.

The norns, as Hall notes, seem to overlap with *dísir* and valkyries (Hall, 22, passim), making them part of the demi-goddess category defined by Grimm. The valkyries share the element of being fate-choosers with the norns, as they, the valkyries, "choose which men are to die and they determine who has the victory" (Sturluson, 45). At least one of the named norns actually accompanies the valkyries into battle to perform this task: "Gunn and Rota [valkyries] and the youngest norn, named Skuld, always ride to choose the slain and to decide the outcome of a battle" (Sturluson, 45). Both valkyries and at least some of the norns, then, are slaughter-choosers, participating in the actual reaping of souls from the battlefield. Simultaneously, both

also carry out the task of deciding fates, of who will win the battle, who will die and where the dead will be sent. In this way, it is possible to see that valkyries and norns carry out the same functions in many ways, choosing the slain and determining *wyrd*.

Thus a third pagan tradition, that of *wyrd* and its agents or anthropomorphic embodiments, the norns, can also be found in *Judith*. There, God takes on the role of *wyrd*: he is omnipotent and his will is inescapable. Furthermore, God has, from the beginning, determined the outcome of the confrontations. It is mentioned several times throughout the poem that Holofernes and his men are doomed and their fate is predetermined, seemingly willed either by God or by *wyrd*, though it is never explicitly mentioned. As already noted, Holofernes and his men are described as *fæge* “doomed to die” (19b) at the outset of the poem. Before Judith beheads him, Holofernes has *his ende gebidenne/ on eorðan unswæsligne* “his unpleasant end reached/ on earth” (64b – 65a) and *he sceolde his blæd forleosian* “he must his life lose” (63b). Given that the verb *sculan* is used, which indicates obligation, necessity and inevitability, that he *must* lose his life, it is clear that Holofernes’s fate is sealed and unalterable. God or *wyrd* have fated that Holofernes and the Assyrians will die.

Judith participates as an agent of *wyrd* in her own right. She tells the Hebrews that the Assyrian leaders are *fæge* (195a), like Holofernes was, and are *gedemed to deaðe* “condemned to death” (196a). She also informs the Hebrews that they will have victory, as God has shown through her defeat of Holofernes. Judith is not only privy to the destiny that has been predetermined by God, she is an executor of it. As previously discussed, her resolve to kill Holofernes is present from the beginning. With God’s aid and her fated victory, she carries out Holofernes’ destiny, which is to die. But, the decision to end his life is at least partially hers. Like the norns, therefore, Judith cuts the thread of life belonging to Holofernes, simultaneously a

servant to *wyrd* and a determiner of fate. Like a valkyrie, she is a death-bringer, acting under the orders of her lord. Like a norn, she is a participant in the writing and carrying out of fate.

While it is clear that the *Judith* poet was not “creating a combination saint and pagan half-goddess type...[,]the parallels suggest that this female type was so embedded in Germanic heroic poetry that, in its depiction, religious or national boundaries were ignored” (Damico, 39). Judith resembles so many pagan demi-goddess and supernatural figures because she was being inserted into a long poetic practice of female characters that had arisen from a pagan tradition. Not only had the language used to describe these women become standard, but characterizations, qualities and character types were a core part of the Old English poetic tradition. Furthermore, pagan practices were a deeply rooted and culturally valued aspect of Anglo-Saxon society that was never fully rejected in spite of Christianity’s influence, all of which serve to strengthen the pagan elements within *Judith*.

Christian

The biblical *Book of Judith* long predates Christianity and is about a Jewish woman, but in the poetic adaptation Judith is recast as a Christian woman, perhaps even a saint figure. Along with references to her wisdom, epithets demonstrating Judith’s holiness, piety and the favorable relationship she shares with God are the most numerous. She is called *halige meowle* “holy woman” (56b), *metodes meowlan* “creator’s woman” (261a) and *nergendes/ þeowen* “savior’s handmaid” (73b-74a). Judith is not only a holy woman but a servant of God. Her direct relationship with God allows her to speak directly to him, and she receives guidance, strength and gifts, her victory, for example, from him. This relationship demonstrates parallels with a saint, who has the same kind of direct relationship with God and receives aid and guidance from him. It is possible, therefore, to consider Judith as a saint figure, though she is never named as

such. I will demonstrate this potential interpretation through a comparison of Judith to the saints Juliana and Elene who, like Judith, are the subject of two separate Old English epic poems. I argue that Judith and these two other fighting saints are indicative of an Anglo-Saxon attempt to once again hybridize their culture with Christianity, by emphasizing the martial stories of the Christian tradition.

Judith herself is most certainly not a Christian: she is a Hebrew and Jewish woman from the Old Testament. Given that this fact was known to the poet, it is obvious that this poem has claimed Judith for Christianity and recast her as a Christian, saint-like figure, most likely in order to strengthen Judith's and the story's applicability to a Christian audience. The poem keeps the setting in Bethulia in Judea and does not change Judith and her people from Hebrews to a Christian people. Instead, Christian elements are added alongside these original features of the story, which shows that the poem, as it has in many other ways, has been adapted to fit into Anglo-Saxon society and appeal to a Christian audience. One of the clearest examples of the added Christian details is in Judith's prayer to God, in which she directly addresses the Trinity, the *ðrynesse ðrym* "Trinity's majesty" (86a), and calls on the *frymða god ond frofre gæst,/ bearn alwaldan* "God of creation and Holy Ghost of comfort,/ Child of the all-powerful ruler" (83 – 84a).

It is possible to view *Judith*, as previously mentioned, as a complete poem that has been condensed, focused and structured in order to highlight specific themes, of which the Christian are some of the most prominent. For instance, the dichotomy between Judith, a faithful and holy woman, and Holofernes, a *hæðenan hund* "heathen hound" (110a), is evident, as are the efforts to clearly distinguish between good and evil, the faithful and the unfaithful, and the courageous

people of God and the weak and sinful Assyrians. Generic Christian concepts of the Church and its faith in opposition to the devil and sin are embodied in these distinctions.

A more concrete Christian concept, that of the *Ecclesia militans*, or Church militant, can also be seen in the poem. *Ecclesia militans* refers to the metaphorical and spiritual struggle between Christians and the devil and sin: “Put on the armor of God...For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but...against the world rulers of this darkness, against spiritual forces of wickedness on high” (*Ephesians* 6:11 – 6:12). *Ephesians* also calls on Christians to take up the metaphorical weapons of God, which include truth, justice, the gospel, and faith. Judith herself becomes a “heroic emblem of the Church or like the warrior of Christ battling the devil” (Chance, xvii), taking up literal weapons and waging real war against the devil figure of Holofernes instead of a metaphorical battle using the tools of faith.

Campbell argues that Judith’s exhortation of the Hebrews to battle would have been interpreted by Anglo-Saxon audiences of the poem as an allegorical call to arms in defense the Church and that they would have recognized that Judith was not “merely talking about literal swords and spears” (172). Rather, he argues, they would have realized “that here again was a place where the familiar and vigorous old Germanic fight formulas could also have a Christian meaning, following the frequent Pauline metaphor of spiritual battle” (Campbell, 172), or the *Ecclesia militans* of Paul’s *Ephesians*. So the heroic action and warfare that takes place in the poem is justified and strengthened by the idea of the *Ecclesia militans*, of the Church battling the devil. An Anglo-Saxon audience would have likely seen their own war-like society justified and represented in the character of Judith who took up literal arms in defense of the faith. They would also have recognized their own situation in hers, engaged as they were during the 9th and

10th centuries in a fight against an invading and encroaching *hæþen here* “heathen army” of Vikings.

To begin to look at Judith as a Christian saint figure, it is helpful to look at two other heroic, religious Old English poems that feature female saints as their protagonists: *Elene* and *Juliana*. Both poems are attributed to the poet Cynewulf and are written in the epic style, as *Judith* is, though both are longer and complete. Their characters, the saints Juliana and Elene (or Helena) share similarities with Judith, in terms of both characterization and theme. Chance categorizes these three poems and their protagonists as exemplifying the “heroic militant Ecclesia” (xvii), a genre she defines as a “religious epic describing the deeds of a fighting saint” (Chance, 31). Judith, Juliana and Elene, therefore, can be categorized as fighting saints or Christian warriors fighting in service of God, the Church and the Christian faith. The militant Christian theme can also be found elsewhere in Old English poetry, as in, for example, *The Dream of the Rood*, in which Christ himself becomes a heroic warrior, bravely and eagerly climbing upon the cross and sacrificing himself to save his people. What becomes obvious, then, is that the selection of fighting saints and the enhancement of militant themes from Christian stories is an attempt to make the religion resonate within Anglo-Saxon culture, centered as it was on heroic values and warfare.

To begin the examination of Judith as a fighting saint, to borrow Chance’s term, I will compare her to Juliana, an actual saint and so a point of reference. The poem *Juliana* tells the story of the life of St. Juliana of Nicomedia, a young Christian woman who was martyred for both refusing to wed the Roman governor Eleusius and for refusing to renounce her religion, in order to protect her virginity and faith. As part of her trials during the poem, she undergoes a physical and mental struggle with a demon who attempts to make her renounce her faith. In this

way, Juliana can also be categorized as a fighting saint, though not in the explicitly martial way that Judith can be.

Along with thematic connections, Judith and Juliana share traditional Germanic and poetic characteristics. Juliana, like Judith, is wise and described as being bright and shining: she is the *sunsciene* “sun-shining one, radiant one” (*Juliana*, 229a), *wuldres condel* “candle of glory” (*Juliana*, 454b) and *sunnan scima* “light of the sun” (*Juliana*, 166b), the latter name given to her by Eleusius, who also notes *Hwæt, þu glæm hafast* “what brilliance/brightness you have” (*Juliana*, 167b)⁵. The comparison to light ties into Juliana’s holiness and her beauty, again referring back to Belanoff’s note that Christian and Germanic ideas about brightness, divinity, beauty and goodness play into one another (822, *passim*). In this same way, Judith’s own brightness, as previously discussed, can be interpreted as representative of her association with God and her own holiness.

The fighting portion of Juliana’s sainthood, her struggle with the demon, is a confrontation that is similar to the one between Judith and Holofernes, in terms of both language and theme. Juliana is locked in a cell after being tortured by Eleusius, when the demon, disguised as an angel, comes to her. He attempts to trick her into believing that God wants her to renounce her faith and pay homage to the pagan gods of the Romans in order to end her suffering, for which God will then forgive her. Juliana, frightened and doubtful of the veracity of these promises, calls upon God to give her guidance and to reveal the identity of this supposed messenger, who “urges me to an evil path” (Gordon, 170). To this plea “a glorious voice answered her from the clouds” and orders her to “Seize that proud one and hold him fast” (Gordon, 170), until he reveals his true identity. Then “the glorious maiden’s soul was rejoiced”

⁵ All of these translations are my own.

(Gordon, 170) and *Heo þæt deofol genom* “she grasped/took hold of the devil” (*Juliana*, 288)⁶. This sequence of events is paralleled in the scene in *Judith* in which she prays to God and then kills Holofernes. Like Juliana, Judith, troubled with thoughts of the task she must carry out, prays for guidance and strength from God, and receives fortification and encouragement for what she must do: *Pa wearð hyre rume on mode,/ haligre hyht geniwod* “then became she untroubled in mind,/ in the holy one hope renewed” (97b – 98a). Judith then *Genam ða þone hæðenan mannan* “took hold of then the heathen man” (98b) and kills him. Both women, at the behest or encouragement of God, physically seize and then defeat a devil-figure. Juliana defeats her demon by entering into a battle of wits and will with him, forcing him to confess to all of the evil he has committed, which results in the loss of his power. Judith, of course, beheads her devil-figure. Both the demon in *Juliana* and Holofernes face a similar torturous ends as the result of their defeat. Holofernes descends into hell, where he will be tortured and bound in darkness for eternity. The demon, in failing to break Juliana’s faith, will suffer under the torments and tortures of Satan, who punishes those demons who cannot carry out their tasks. After she “has constrained [him] by powerful blows” (Gordon, 174), Juliana releases the demon *þystra neosan/ in sweartne grund* “to seek darkness/ in the black/dark abyss” (*Juliana*, 554b – 555a)⁷, which again bears similarity to the hell underneath the *neowelne næs* “steep cliff” (113a) where Holofernes is *þystrum forðylmed* “in darknesses enveloped” (118a) in a *heolstran ham* “dark home” (121a).

The similarities between Judith and Juliana, in their descriptive epithets and actions, demonstrate that Judith fits into the collection of female fighting saints, despite the fact that she is not a Christian in the source text. Both women do physical battle against a devil figure through

⁶ This last translation is my own.

⁷ Translation is my own.

the strength and guidance of God, with whom they share a direct relationship. Juliana's fight, like Judith's, involves the physical constraining of the demon, but it is largely a battle of the mind and heart, and she, with wisdom and faith, is able to defeat him. Judith, too, uses her faith in God and her wisdom and shrewdness to overcome her enemy, but her defeat of Holofernes is primarily physical and warlike. God does not physically work through Judith, as he seems to do through Juliana, or even guide her arm. While Juliana and Judith clearly share saint-like similarities, Judith is most certainly the more heroic and warrior-like of the two, while Juliana takes on the more traditional role of "a spokesman and instrument of God" (Damico, 38) that generally belongs to a saint.

Some comparisons regarding the militant Christian image of Judith can also be made with the second of the previously mentioned poems of Cynewulf's, *Elene*. In this poem, the Roman emperor Constantine, newly-converted to Christianity, bids his mother Elene (known now as St. Helena) to set out to Jerusalem to find the true cross. She invades the city with her army and, after much haranguing of the Jewish people for their denial of the true God, orders and then threatens the elders with painful deaths if they do not bring her the man who knows where the cross is hidden. The man, whose name is Judas, refuses to tell her and she starves him in a pit until he reveals its hiding place. The cross is dug up and Elene builds a church to house it and sets the nails that pierced Christ's hands on a bridle for her son.

Elene's speeches, which are numerous, reveal her agility of mind, her wisdom and her ruthless single-mindedness about her task. Just as Judith is *pearle gemyndig* "sorely mindful" (74b) when she is on the brink of carrying out her deed and killing Holofernes, Elene is also *gemyndig* (*Elene*, 266b) of the great importance of the task assigned to her by her son and the necessity of its completion. She is again *gemynde* (*Elene*, 1063a) when she expresses the desire

to find the nails that held Christ to the cross, which is a necessary part of her task but also the result of personal desire. Elene is *eadhreðige* “blessed/triumphant” (*Elene* 266a) in the moment after her fleet’s arrival in Greece, when they are about to set out to Jerusalem. Judith and her maid are also *eadhreðige* (135a) when they come out of the Assyrian camp and see Bethulia shining in the distance and set out for it. Both women in this moment have completed a part of their journey, look to their destination and now set their mind to a new task: leading their armies. Elene will lead hers to Jerusalem, and Judith, through the example of her courage and victory and her rousing speech, will lead the Hebrews into war against the Assyrians.

Elene commands an army, but unlike Judith and Juliana, she does not have a direct relationship or communicate with God. Nor does she directly carry out his orders. Instead, Elene acts under the orders of her son, Constantine. This distances her from them somewhat in the categorization of her as a saint. Additionally, although Elene does heroically lead an army on an ocean voyage and then across foreign lands, and is called by the title of *guðcwen* “battle-queen” (*Elene* 254a), but she is a commander and not a warrior, as Judith is. Her task is in the service of Christianity and for the glory of God, but it is not assigned by God. She does not possess the direct connection or have interaction with God in the same way that Judith and Juliana do, in which they are guided by him. There is also the added complication that her quest is at least partially carried out for personal glory and for the glory of her son, as is evidenced by the desire she expresses to possess the cross and then the nails. The fact that these are placed on a bridle as a trophy for her son makes them more analogous to the spoils of battle in *Judith*, a symbol of her and Constantine’s victory, rather than a symbol of the fulfillment of God’s will.

Elene bears similarities to Juliana and Judith in her eloquence, wisdom and sharp wit. She is similar to Judith in that they are both martial figures, participating in traditionally male heroic

roles. But, unlike Juliana and Judith, Elene's task does not come directly from God and is somewhat muddled by a quest for personal glory. She valiantly leads an army in the fashion of a Germanic hero or warlord, but designates the active elements of her quest to others. Missing too is the devil figure which both Juliana and Judith confront and defeat, again making it difficult to categorize Elene as a warrior of Christ. While Elene is clearly a fighting and martial saint, the parallels between her sainthood and that that Judith and Juliana embody are tenuous. She is far closer to a secular figure in many ways, who, instead of acting on the will of God, is acting in the name of God and the Christian faith.

Conclusion

In *Judith*, then, the poet succeeds in forming a new Anglo-Saxon identity, one that incorporates the various and disparate aspects of Anglo-Saxon culture. The heroic, mythological and Christian aspects of Judith as a character, and their presence as themes within the poem, allow both Judith and the poem to become a site for the making of a new Anglo-Saxon hybrid identity, uniting seemingly incompatible aspects of Anglo-Saxon society and culture and weaving them harmoniously together. In this way, Judith plays a similar role to that of the traditional Anglo-Saxon female role of *freoðuwebbe*, or "peace-weaver," whose task it was to weave peace between warring families and to maintain this peace by cultivating friendship and harmony. Judith has a similarly seemingly impossible task. Like the peace-weaver who must unite warring factions, Judith weaves together incompatible aspects of Anglo-Saxon culture (the old ways and the new) into a single united identity. Judith is not wholly a Germanic hero, a pagan demi-goddess or supernatural figure, nor a Christian saint, but simultaneously contains aspects of all three, uniting them within herself. She becomes the ideal archetype for a new

Anglo-Saxon and eventually English national identity and culture, proudly integrating the disparate but rich elements of its complex history.

Moreover, the poet's choice of a female character for this task highlights the important place that women could hold in Anglo-Saxon society, not only as peace-weavers, but as leaders in their own right in some cases. Possessing courage and wisdom, they become emblems of ideal values, and keepers of culture, who maintained traditions. The fact that it is a poem in which this cultural work is done demonstrates the importance of literature, in Anglo-Saxon culture and the present day, as a site for social change and cultural formation.

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Appendix I: Judith

tweode

she doubted

gifena in ðys ginnan grunde. Heo ðær ða gearwe funde
 of gifts in this wide world. She there readily finds
 mundbyrd æt ðam mæran þeodne, þa heo ahte mæste þearfe,
 protection from the illustrious lord, that she who had the greatest need
 hyldo þæs hehstan deman, þæt he hie wið þæs hehstan brogan
 had the favor of the highest ruler, when he her from the highest of dangers
 5 gefriðode, frymða waldend. Hyre ðæs fæder on roderum
 protected, ruler of creation. To her the father in the skies
 torhtmod tiðe gefremede, þe heo ahte trumne geleafan
 granted glorious favor, because she had firm faith
 a to ðam ælmihtigan. Gefrægen ic ða Holofernus
 always in the almighty. Heard I then that Holofernes
 winhatan wyrcean georne ond eallum wundrum þrymlic
 an invitation to wine made eagerly and made all marvelous things
 girwan up swæsendo. To ðam het se gumena baldor
 to be prepared for the banquets. To that he ordered, the prince of men,
 10 ealla ða yldestan ðegnas; hie ðæt ofstum miclum
 all the most senior thanes; they that with great haste
 ræfndon, rondwiggende, common to ðam rican þeodne
 carried out, the shield-warriors, came to the powerful lord

feran, folces ræswan. Ðæt wæs þy feorðan dogore

to go, chief of the folk. It was on the fourth day

þæs ðe Iudith hyne, gleaw on geðonce,

that Judith she, wise in thought,

ides ælfscinu, ærest gesohte.

elf-shining woman, first came.

15 Hie ða to ðam symle sittan eodon,

They then to the feast to sit went,

wlance to wingedrince, ealle his weagesiðas,

merry to wine-drinking, all his companions in misery,

beadle byrnwiggende. Pær wæron bollan steape

bold mailed-warriors. There were deep bowls

boren æfter bencum gelome, swylce eac bunan ond orcas

borne along the benches frequently, in addition to goblets and pitchers

fulle fletsittendum; hie þæt fæge þegon,

full for the hall-sitters; they that were doomed to die drank,

20 rofe rondwiggende, þeah ðæs se rica ne wende,

brave shield-warriors, though of it the powerful one did not suspect,

egesful eorla dryhten. Ða wearð Holofernus,

dreadful lord of earls. Then became Holofernes,

goldwine gumena, on gytesalum:

gold-friend of men, in a festive mood:

hloh on hlydde, hlynede ond dynede,

he laughed and roared, clamored and made a rowdy racket,

þæt mihten fira bearn feorran gehyran

so that children of men were able from far away to hear

25 hu se stiðmoda stymde on gylede

how the fierce-hearted one stormed and yelled

modig on medugal, manode geneahhe

courageous and drunk with mead, urged frequently

bencsittende þæt hi gebærdon wel.

the bench-sitters that they enjoyed themselves well.

Swa se inwidda ofer ealne dæg

So feasted the wicked one throughout all the day

dryhtguman sine drencte mid wine,

with his warriors drunk with wine,

30 swiðmod since brytta, oð þæt hie on swiman lagon,

arrogant giver of treasures, until they lay in a swoon,

oferdrencte his duguðe ealle, swylce hie wæron deaðe geslegene,

all his elite band made over-drunk, as if they were struck down in death,

agotene goda gehwylces. Swa het se gumena aldor

drained of every good. So ordered the prince of men

fylgan fletsittendum, oðþæt fira bearnum

to serve to the hall-sitters, until that towards the children of men

neahlæte niht seo þystre. Het ða niða geblonden

approached the gloomy night. Ordered then the steeped-in-violence one

35 þa eadigan mægð ofstum fetigan

she the blessed woman hastily to fetch

to his bedreste, beagum gehlæste,

to his bed, with bracelets loaded,

hringum gehrodene. Hie hraðe fremedon,

with rings adorned. They quickly did,

anbyhtscealcas, swa him heora ealdor bebead,

the servant-retainers as he their prince commanded,

byrnwigena brego: bearhtme stopon

lord of mailed-warriors: they tumultuously advanced

40 to ðam gysterne, þær hie Iudithðe

to the guest-house, where they Judith

fundon ferhðgleawe, on ða fromlice

found wise-in-spirit, and then rapidly

lindwiggende lædan ongunnon

the shield-warriors began to lead

þa torhtan mægð to træfe þam hean,

the noble woman to the high tent,

þær se rica hyne reste on symbel

wherein the powerful one himself always rested

45 nihtes inne, nergende lað,

of a night, odious to the savior,

Holofernus. Þær wæs eallgylden

Holofernes. There was an all-golden

fleohtnet fæger ond ymbe þæs folctogan

fair fly-net and around the folk-leader's

bed ahongen, þæt se bealofulla

bed it hung, so that the baleful one

mihte wlitan þurh, wigena baldor,

was able to look through, warriors of the prince,

50 on æghwylcne þe ðær inne com

on each one who therein came

hæleða bearna, ond on hýne nænig

of the sons of men, and on him none

monna cynnes, nymðe se modiga hwæne

of the race of men could look, unless the arrogant one any one

niðe rofra him þe near hete,

of the brave from battle ordered nearer to him,

rinca to rune gegangan. Hie ða on reste gebrohton

of the warriors to secret council to go. They then to the bed brought

55 snude ða snoteran idese; eodon ða stercedferhðe

quickly the wise woman; went then the stout-hearted

hæleð heora hearran cyðan þæt wæs seo halige meowle

men to their lord to make known that was the holy woman
 gebroht on his burgetelde. Ða wearð se brema on mode
 brought into his tent's bedchamber. Then became the famous one in his heart
 bliðe, burga ealdor, þohte ða beorhtan idese
 happy, lord of earls, he intended the bright woman
 mid widle ond mid womme besmitan. Ne wolde þæt wuldres dema
 with filth and with sin to besmirch. Wished not the ruler of glory that
 60 geðafian, þrymmes hyrde, ac he him þæs ðinges gestyrde,
 to permit, shepherd of the host, but he him of those things restrained,
 dryhten dugeða waldend. Gewat ða se deofulcunda,
 the lord, ruler of hosts. Set out then the devilish one,
 galferhð, gumena ðreate,
 lust-minded, with the troop of men,
 bealofull his beddes neosan, þær he sceolde his blæd forleosan
 the baleful one to go to his bed, where he must his life lose
 ædre binnan anre nihte. Hæfde ða his ende gebidenne
 quickly within one night. He had then his unpleasant end attained
 65 on eorðan unswæsligne, swylcne he ær æfter worhte,
 on the earth, such as he previously had strived for,
 þearlmod ðeoden gumena, þenden he on ðysse worulde
 severe-spirited prince of men, while he in this world
 wunode under wolcna hrofe. Gefeol ða wine swa druncen

remained under the roof of clouds. Fell then with wine so drunk
 se rica on his reste middan, swa he nyste ræda nanne
 the mighty one in the midst of his bed, so that he knew nothing of the plans
 on gewitlocan. Wiggend stopon
 in his wit-locker. Warriors advanced
 70 ut of ðam inne ofstum miclum
 out of the room with great haste,
 weras winsade, þe ðone wærlogan,
 men gluttet with wine, then the troth-breaker,
 laðne leodhatan, læddon to bedde
 loathsome tyrant, they led to his bed

 nehstan siðe. Þa wæs nergendes
 for the last time. Then was the savior's
 þeowen þrymful þearle gemyndig
 glorious handmaid sorely mindful
 75 hu heo þone atolan eaðost mihte
 how she the terrible one could most easily
 ealdre benæman ær se unsyfra,
 deprive of life before the unclean one,
 womfull, onwoce. Genam ða wundenlocc
 foul one, awoke. Grasped she the braided-locks one,
 scyppendes mæð, scearpne mece,

creator's woman, the sharp sword,
 scurum heardne, ond of sceaðe abræd
 hardened by showers of blows, and from the sheath drew it
 80 swiðran folme. Ongan ða swegles weard
 with her right hand. Began she heaven's keeper
 be naman nemnan, nergend ealra
 by name to call, savior of all
 woruldbuendra, ond þæt word acwað:
 world-dwellers, and that word spoke:
 "Ic ðe, frymðaða god, ond frofre gæst,
 "I you, God of creation, and Holy Ghost of comfort,
 bearn alwaldan, biddan wylle
 Child of the all-powerful ruler, wish to ask for
 85 miltse þinre me þearfendre,
 your mercy toward me who is needy,
 ðrynesse ðrym. Þearle ys me nu ða
 the Trinity's majesty. Sorely is now my
 heorte onhæted ond hige geomor,
 heart inflamed and mind gloomy,
 swyðe mid sorgum gedrefed. Forgif me, swegles ealdor,
 greatly with sorrows afflicted. Grant me, heaven's prince,
 sigor ond soðne geleafan, þæt ic mid þys sweorde mote

victory and true faith, so that I with this sword may be permitted

90 *geheawan þysne morðres bryttan. Geunne me minra gesynta,*

to cut down this dispenser of great wickedness. Grant me my deliverances,

þearlmod þeoden gumena: nahte ic þinre næfre

firm-hearted lord of men: I have never had

miltse þon maran þearfe. Gewrec nu, mihtig dryhten,

of your grace the greater need. Avenge now, mighty lord,

torhtmod tires brytta, þæt me ys þus torne on mode, hate on hreðe minum.”

glorious giver of glory, that which is so grievous in mind, hot in my heart.”

Hi ða se hehsta dema

He then the highest judge

95 *ædre mid elne obryrde, swa he deð anra gehwylcne*

quickly with courage inspired her, as he does for each one

herbuendra þe hyne him to helpe seceð

of those dwelling on earth who seek him for help

mid ræde ond mid rihte geleafan. Ða wearð hyre rume on mode,

with wisdom and with true faith. Then became she untroubled in mind,

haligre hyht geniwod. Genam ða þone hæðenan mannan

in the holy one hope renewed. She then took hold of the heathen man

fæste be feaxe sinum; teah hyne folmum wið hyre weard

fast by his hair, pulled him with hands toward her

100 *bysmerlice, ond þone bealofullan*

ignominiously, and the baleful one
 listum alede, laðne mannan,
 skillfully positioned, loathsome man,
 swa heo ðæs unlædan eaðost mihte
 so she the wicked one easiest could
 wel gewealdan. Sloh ða wundenlocc
 well control. Struck then she the braided-locks one
 þone feondsceaðan fagum mece,
 the bitter foe with gleaming sword,
 105 heteþoncolne, þæt heo healfne forcearf
 the hostile one, so that she half cut through
 þone sweoran him, þæt he on swiman læg,
 his neck, so that he in a swoon lay,
 druncen ond dolhwund. Næs ða dead þa gyt,
 drunk and mortally wounded. He was not dead yet,
 ealles orsawle. Sloh ða eornoste
 not entirely lifeless. Struck then earnestly
 ides ellenrof oðre siðe,
 the courageous woman a second time,
 110 þone hæðenan hund, þæt him þæt heafod wand
 the heathen hound, so that his head rolled
 forð on ða flore. Læg se fula leap

forth on the floor. Lay then the foul trunk
 gesne beæftan, gæst ellor hwearf
 deprived of life behind, his ghost elsewhere passed
 under neowelne næs ond ðær genyðerad wæs,
 under the steep cliff and there was abased,
 susle gesæled syððan æfre,
 in torment fettered, ever after,
 115 wrymum bewunden, witum gebunden,
 wound with snakes, in tortures bound,
 hearde gehæfted in helle bryne
 painfully chained in hell-burning
 æfter hinsiðe. Ne ðearf he hopian no,
 after death. No need has he to hope, not at all,
 þystrum forðylmed, þæt he ðonan mote
 in darknesses enveloped, that he might be permitted thence
 of ðam wrymsele, ac ðær wunian sceal
 from the snake-hall, but there must dwell
 120 awa to aldre butan ende forð
 for ever and ever without end henceforth

 in ðam heolstran ham, hyhtwynna leas.
 in the dark home, devoid of hope of bliss.
 Hæfde ða gefohten foremærne blæd,

She had then won outstanding glory,
 Iudith æt guðe, swa hyre god uðe,
 Judith in battle, as to her God granted,
 swegles ealdor, þe hyre sigores onleah.
 chief of heaven, who to her a grant of victory gave.

125 Þa seo snotere mægð snude gebrohte
 Then the wise woman quickly put
 þæs herewæðan heafod swa blodig
 the warrior's head so bloody
 on ðam fætelse þe hyre foregenga,
 in the bag in which her attendant,
 blachleor ides, hyra begea nest,
 bright-cheeked woman, carried both of their provisions,
 ðeawum geðungen, þyder on lædde,
 flourished with virtues, to there brought in,

130 ond hit ða swa heolfrig hyre on hond ageaf,
 and it then so gory into her hand gave,
 higeþoncolre, ham to berenne,
 thoughtful one, homewards to carry,
 Iudith gingran sinre. Eodon ða gegnum þanonne
 Judith to her handmaid. They went then directly from that place

þa idesa ba, ellenþriste,

both the women, heroically bold,
 oðþæt hie becomon, collenferhðe,
 until they came, proud-minded,
 135 eadhreðige mægð, ut of ðam herige,
 triumphant women, out of the army,
 þæt hie sweotollice geseon mihten
 so that they clearly could see
 þære wlitegan byrig weallas blican,
 the beautiful town's glittering walls,
 Bethuliam. Hie ða beahhrodene
 Bethulia. They the ring-adorned ones
 feðelaste forð onettan,
 on the track forth hastened,
 140 oð hie glædmode gegan hæfdon
 until they glad-minded had come
 to ðam wealgate. Wiggend sæton,
 to the wall-gate. Warriors sat,
 weras wæccende wearde heoldon
 watchful men the watch held
 in ðam fæstenne, swa ðam folce ær
 in the stronghold, as to the folk before
 geomormodum Iudith bebead,
 sad at heart, Judith bade,

145 searoðoncol mægð, þa heo on sið gewat,
 shrewd woman, when she on her heroic march set out,
 ides ellenrof. Wæs ða eft cumen,
 courageous woman. Was then she come back,
 leof to leodum, ond ða lungre het
 beloved to the people, and then forthwith called
 gleawhydig wif gumena sumne
 wise of thought woman one of the men
 of ðære ginnan byrig hyre togeanes gan,
 of the wide town to go towards her
 150 ond hi ofostlice in forlæton
 and her hastily to let in
 þurh ðæs wealles geat, ond þæt word acwæð
 through the wall's gate, and that word spoke
 to ðam sigefolce: "Ic eow secgan mæg
 to the victory-folk: "I to you can say
 þoncwyrðe þing, þæt ge ne þyrfen leng
 a memorable thing, so that you no longer need
 murnan on mode: eow ys metod bliðe,
 to grieve in heart: the creator is pleased with you,
 155 cyninga wuldor; þæt gecyðed wearð
 king of glory; that it has become known

geond woruld wide, þæt eow ys wuldorblæd
 throughout the wide world, that towards you is glorious

torhtlic toward ond tir gifeðe
 success approaching and honor will be granted

þara læðða þe ge lange drugon.”

for the afflictions you long suffered.”

Þa wurdon bliðe burhsittende,

Then became glad, the town-dwellers,

160 syððan hi gehyrdon hu seo halige spræc

when they heard how the holy one spoke

ofer heanne weall. Here wæs on lustum;

over the high wall. The army was in joy;

wið þæs fæstengeates folc onette,

towards the fortress' gate folk hastened

weras wif somod, wornum ond heapum,

men, women together, in crowds and heaps,

ðreatum ond ðrymmum þrungon ond urnon

in troops and hosts thronged and ran

165 ongean ða þeodnes mægð þusendmælum,

towards the lord's woman in thousands,

ealde ge geonge. Æghwylcum wearð

old and young. Each one became,

men on ðære medobyrig mod areted,
 men in the mead-town, in heart gladdened,
 syððan hie ongeaton þæt wæs Iudith cumen
 when they realized that was Judith come

eft to eðle, ond ða ofostlice
 back to the native land, and then speedily

170 hie mid eaðmedum in forleton.

they with reverences let her in.

Pa seo gleawe het, golde gefrætewod,

Then she the wise one, in gold adorned,

hyre ðinenne, þancolmode,

gave to her handmaid, thoughtful-minded one,

þæs herewæðan heafod onwriðan

the warrior's head to unwrap

ond hyt to behðe blodig ætywan

and it as bloody proof to display

175 þam burhleodum, hu hyre æt beaduwe gespeow.

to the townspeople, how she at battle succeeded.

Spræc ða seo æðele to eallum þam folce:

Spoke then the noble one to all the folk:

“Her ge magon sweotole, sigerofo hæleð,

Here you can openly, triumphant men,

- leoda ræswan, on ða laðestan
 leaders of people, on the loathsome one's,
 hæðenes heaðorinces heafod starian,
 the heathen warrior's head gaze,
 180 Holofernus unlyfigendes,
 of Holofernes lifeless,
 þe us monna mæst morðra gefremede,
 that against us, the greatest of men, violent crimes committed,
 sarra sorga, ond þæt swyðor gyt
 grievous sorrows, and that greatly yet
 ycan wolde, ac him ne uðe god
 to increase wished, but to him God did not grant
 lengran lifes, þæt he mid læððum us
 long life, so that he with malice us
 185 eglan moste: ic him ealdor oðþrong
 might plague: I from him life took by force
 þurh godes fultum. Nu ic gumena gehwæne
 through God's aid. Now I each one of the men
 þyssa burgleoda biddan wylle,
 of these townspeople wish to ask,
 randwiggendra þæt ge recene eow
 of the shield-warriors that you swiftly yourselves

fýsan to gefeohte, syððan frymða god,
 hasten to battle, since God of beginnings,
 190 arfæst cyning, eastan sende
 benevolent king, from the east sends
 leohtne leoman. Berað linde forð,
 bright light. Bear linden-shields forth,
 bord for breostum ond byrnhomas,
 shield-boards before breasts and byrnies,
 scire helmas in sceaðena gemong,
 gleaming helms in the throng of enemies,
 fyllan folctogan fagum sweordum,
 to cut down folk-leaders with decorated swords,
 195 fæge frumgaras. Fynd syndon eowere
 first-spears doomed to death. Your foes are
 gedemed to deaðe ond ge dom agon,
 condemned to death and you will have honor,
 tir æt tohtan, swa eow getacnod hafað
 glory in battle, so you have shown,
 mihtig dryhten þurh mine hand.”
 mighty lord, through my hand.”
 Þa wearð snelra werod snude gegearwod,
 Then became the troops eager quickly prepared,

- 200 cenra to campe. Stopon cynerofe
of the bold for battle. Stepped royally
secgas ond gesiðas, bæron sigeþufas,
men and retainers, bore banners of victory,
foron to gefeohte forð on gerihte,
marched to battle forth straightaway,
hæleð under helmum of ðære haligan byrig
men in helms, out of the holy town
on ðæt dægred sylf. Dynedan scildas,
into that dawn itself. Shields dinned,
- 205 hlude hlummon. Þæs se hlanca gefeah
loudly resounded. For that the lank one rejoiced
wulf in walde, ond se wanna hrefn,
the wolf in the wood, and the dark raven
wælgifre fugel: wistan began
slaughter-greedy bird: they both knew
þæt him ða þeodguman þohton tilian
that to them the warriors intended to supply
fyllen on fægum; ac him fleah on last
a feast on the fated; but behind them flew
- 210 earn ætes georn, urigfeðera;
the eagle eager for prey, wet-winged;

salowigpada sang hildeleoð,
 the dark-coated one sang a war-song
 hyrnednebba. Stopon heaðorincas,
 horny-beaked one. Stepped the warriors,
 beornas to beadowe, bordum beðeahte,
 men to war, protected by shield-boards,
 hwealfum lindum, þa ðe hwile ær
 with hollowed linden-shields, those who a long time before
 215 elðeodigra edwit þoledon,
 foreigners' scorn endured,
 hæðenra hosp. Him þæt hearde wearð
 heathens' insult. By them that harshly became

 æt ðam æscplegan eallum forgolden
 at the spear-play all repaid
 Assyrium, syððan Ebreas
 to the Assyrians, since the Hebrews
 under guðfanum gegan hæfdon
 under battle-standards had arrived
 220 to ðam fyrdwicum. Hie ða fromlice
 at the army-camps. They then boldly
 leton forð fleogan flana scuras,
 let forth fly showers of arrows,

hildenædran of hornbogan,
 battle-adders from horn-bows,
 strælas stedehearde. Styrmdon hlude
 arrows firmly fixed. Stormed loudly
 grame guðfreca, gas sendon
 the fierce warriors, spears sent
 225 in heardra gemang. Hæleð wæron yrre,
 into the throng of brave ones. Men were wrathful,
 landbuende, laðum cynne,
 the land-dwellers, against the loathsome kind,
 stopon styrnmode, stercedferhðe;
 stepped stern-minded, stouthearted;
 wrehton unsoften ealdgeniðlan
 awoke ungently the ancient foes,

 medowerige. Mundum brugdon
 mead-weary. With hands drew
 230 scealcas of sceaðum scirmæled swyrd,
 the retainers from sheaths brightly adorned swords,
 ecgum gecoste, slogon eornoste
 with tried edges, struck earnestly
 Assiria oretmæcgas,
 the Assyrians' warriors,

niðhycgende. Nanne ne sparedon
 evil schemers. Not on they spared
 þæs herefolces, heanne ne ricne,
 of the army-folk, not low nor high,
 235 cwicera manna þe hie ofercuman mihton.
 of living men that they might overcome.
 Swa ða magoþegnas on ða morgentid
 So the retainers in the morning-tide
 ehton elðeoda ealle þrage,
 pursued the foreigners continuously,
 oðþæt ongeaton ða ðe grame wæron
 until they realized that the fierce ones were
 ðæs herefolces heafodweardas,
 the head-guards of the army-folk,
 240 þæt him sywrdgeswing swiðlic eowdon
 that one them violent sword-strokes showed

 weras Ebrisce. Hie wordum þæt
 the Hebrew men. They in words that
 þam yldestan ealdorþegnum
 to the eldest chief thane
 cyðan eodon, wrehton cumbolwigan
 went to make known, the warriors awoke him

ond him forhtlice færspeþ bodedon,
 and to him fearfully the sudden bad news announced,
 245 medowerigum morgencollan,
 to the mead-weary ones the morning-slaughter,
 atolne ecgplegan. Ða ic ædre gefrægn
 the terrible sword-play. Then I quickly learned
 slegefæge hæleð slæpe tobredon
 the slaughter-doomed men sleep shook off
 ond wið þæs bealofullan burgeteldes
 and towards the baleful one's tent chamber
 werigferhðe hwearfum þringan,
 weary-hearted the crowd pressed forward,
 250 Holofernus. Hogedon aninga
 to Holofernes. They intended at once
 hyra hlaforde hilde bodian,
 to their lord to announce the battle,
 ærðonðe him se egesa onufan sæte,
 before the terror upon him set,

 mægen Ebrean. Mynton ealle
 the might of the Hebrews. All thought
 þæt se beorna brego ond seo beorhte mægð
 that the chief of warriors and the bright woman

255 in ðam wlitegan træfe wæron ætsomne,
 in the splendid tent were together,
 Iudith seo æðele ond se galmoda,
 Judith the noble and the lascivious one,
 egesfull ond afor. Næs ðeah eorla nan
 dreadful and fierce. None of the earls was, however,
 þe ðone wiggend aweccan dorste
 the warrior who dared to awake
 oððe gecunnian hu ðone cumbolwigan
 or to investigate how the standard-warrior
 260 wið ða halgan mægð hæfde geworden,
 with the holy woman had turned out,
 metodes meowlan. Mægen nealæhte,
 the creator's woman. The force approached,
 folc Ebreā, fuhton þearle
 of the Hebrew folk, they fought vigorously
 heardum heoruwæpnum, hæfte guldon
 with hard deadly weapons, hafts repaid
 hyra fyrngflitu, fagum swyrdum,
 their old quarrels, with decorated swords,
 265 ealde æfðoncan. Assyria wearð
 old grudges. By the day's work became

on ðam dægweorce dom geswiðrod,
 the Assyrians' glory destroyed,
 bælc forbíged. Beornas stodon
 their pride brought low. Warriors stood
 ymbe hyra þeodnes træf þearle gebylde,
 around their lord's tent very emboldened
 sweorcendferhðe. Hi ða somod ealle
 gloomy-minded. They then all together
 270 ongunnon cohhetan, cirman hlude
 began to clear their throats, to shout loudly
 ond gristbitian – gode orfeorme –
 and gnash their teeth – from God estranged –
 mid toðon, torn þoligende. Þa wæs hyra tires æt ende,
 with teeth, grief suffered. Then was their glory at an end,
 eades ond ellendæda. Hogedon þa eorlas aweccan
 their happiness and valorous deeds. Intended the earls to awake
 hyra winedryhten: him wiht ne speow.
 their friend-lord: to him no help at all.
 275 Þa wearð sið ond late sum to ðam arod
 Then became at last and late one ready
 þara beadorinca, þæt he in þæt burgeteld
 of the warriors, so that he into the tent's bedchamber

niðheard neðde, swa hyne nyd fordraf.

daringly ventured, as he was compelled by need.

Funde ða on bedde blacne licgan

Found then on the bed lying pale

his goldgifan gæstes gesne,

his gold-giver of his ghost dispossessed,

280 lifes belidenne. He þa lungre gefeoll

of life deprived. He then at once fell

freorig to foldan, ongan his feax teran,

shivering to the ground, began his hair to tear,

hreoh on mode, ond his hrægl somod,

distraught in mind, and his clothing too,

ond þæt word acwæð to ðam wiggendum

and that word spoke to the warriors

þe ðær unrote ute wæron:

who there dejected outside were:

285 “Her ys geswutelod ure sylfra forwyrd,

“Here is revealed our own destruction,

toward getacnod, þæt þære tide ys

the future betokened, that the time is

mid niðum neah geðrunge, þe we sculon nu losian,

with violence near hastening, in which we must now lose,

somod æt sæcce forweorðan. Her lið sweorde geheawen,

together in battle to perish. Here lies by sword struck down,

 beheafdod healdend ure.” Hi ða hreowigmode
 our leader beheaded.” They then sorrowful at heart
 290 wurpon hyra wæpen ofdune, gewitan him werigferhðe
 flung their weapons down, they set off weary at heart
 on fleam sceacan. Him mon feaht on last,
 to hasten in flight. They fought behind them,
 mægeneacen folc, oð se mæsta dæl
 the mighty folk, until the great part
 þæs heriges læg hilde gesæged
 of the army lay by battle felled
 on ðam sigewonge, sweordum geheawen,
 on the victory-field, by swords hewn down,
 295 wulfum to willan ond eac wælgifrum
 to wolves for pleasure and also to slaughter-greedy
 fuglum to frofre. Flugon ða ðe lyfdon
 fowls for joy. Fled those who lived
 laðra lindwig; him on laste for
 of the loathed shield-army; behind them
 sweot Ebreas sigore geweorðod,
 the army of Hebrews was with victory honored
 dome gedyrsoð. Him feng dryhten god

with glory exalted. To them gave lord God

300 fægre on fultum, frea ælmihtig.

fairly in help, lord almighty.

Hi ða fromlice fagum swyrdum,

They then boldly with gleaming swords,

hæleð higerofe, herpað worhton

brave-hearted men, the war-path strived for

þurh laðra gemong, linde heowon,

through the throng of hated ones, linden-shields cleaved,

scildburh scæron. Sceotend wæron

the shield-wall sheared through. The shooters were

305 guðe gegremede, guman Ebrisce,

by battle enraged, the Hebrew men,

þegnas on ða tid þearle gelyste

thanes at that time were sorely desirous of

gargewinnes. Þær on grot gefeoll

spear-battle. There on grit fell

se hyhsta dæl heafodgerimes

the greatest part of the head-count

Assiria ealdorduguðe,

of the Assyrians' chief leaders,

310 laðan cynnes. Lythwon becom

the hated kind. Few came
 cwicera to cyððe. Cirdon cynerofe,
 home of the living. Royally turned back
 wiggend on wiðertrod, wælscel oninnan,
 the warriors in withdrawal, among slaughter-heaps,

 reocende hræw. Rum wæs to nimanne
 reeking corpses. Then was the opportunity to seize
 londbuendum on ðam laðestan,
 by the land-dwellers from the hated ones,
 315 hyra ealdfeondum unlyfigendum
 their ancient foes lifeless
 heolfrig herereaf, hyrsta scyne,
 the bloody spoils of war, shining trappings,
 bord on bradswyrd, brune helmas,
 shield-boards and broadswords, polished helms,
 dyre madmas. Hæfdon domlice
 precious treasures. They had gloriously
 on ðam folcstede fynd oferwunnen
 on the battle-field the foes conquered
 320 eðelweardas, ealdhettende
 the guardians of the homeland, ancient enemies
 swyrdum aswefede. Hie on swaðe reston,

with swords put to sleep. They on the track lay dead,

þa ðe him to life laðost wæron

those who to him in life most hated were

cwicera cynna. Ða seo cneoris eall,

of living kind. Then the tribe all,

mægða mærost, anes monðes fyrst,

most illustrious nation, for one month's period,

325 wlanc, wundenlocc, wægon on læddon

proud, braided-lock ones, carried and led

to ðære beorhtan byrig, Bethuliam,

to the bright town, Bethulia,

helmas ond hupseax, hare byrnan,

helms and hip-knives, grey corselets

guðsceorp gumena golde gefrætewod,

war-clothing of men with gold adorned,

mare madma þonne mon ænig

of greater treasures than any man

330 asecgan mæge searoþoncelra.

can say of the shrewd ones.

Eal þæt ða ðeodguman þrymme geodon,

All that the warriors with might gained,

cene under cumblum on compwige

brave under banners in battle

þurh Iudithe gleawe lare,

through Judith's wise guidance,

mægð modigre. Hi to mede hyre

courageous woman. They to reward her

335 of ðam siðfate sylfre brohton,

for the expedition she herself brought,

eorlas æscrofe, Holofernes

spear-brave earls, Holofernes'

sweord ond swatigne helm, swylce eac side byrnan

sword and bloody helm, as well as the broad byrnies

gerenode readum golde, ond eal þæt se rinca baldor

adorned with red gold, and all that the arrogant price of warriors

swiðmod sinces ahte oððe sundoryrfes,

of riches had or of personal possessions,

340 beaga on beorhtra maðma, hi þæt þære beorhtan idese

armlets and bright treasures, they that to the bright woman

ageafon gearoþoncolre. Ealles ðæs Iudith sægde

gave, the ready-witted one. For all that Judith said

wuldor weroda dryhtne, þe hyre weorðmynde geaf,

glory to the lord of hosts, who to her honor gave,

mærðe on moldan rice, swylce eac mede on heofonum,

glory in earth's kingdom, in addition to the reward in heaven,
 sigorlean in swegles wuldre, þæs ðe heo ahte soðne geleafan
 the victory-reward in heaven's glory, because she had true belief
 345 to ðam ælmihtigan. Huru æt þam ende ne tweode
 in the almighty. Certainly in the end she doubted not
 þæs leanes ðe heo lange gyrnde. Þæs sy ðam leofan dryhtne
 of the reward she long yearned for. For that be to the beloved lord
 wuldor to widan aldre, þe gesceop wind ond lyfte,
 glory forever, who shaped wind and sky,
 roderas on rume grundas, swylce eac reðe streamas
 heavens and wide worlds, as well as savage seas

 ond swegles dreamas þurh his sylfes miltse.
 and heaven's joys through his own grace.