The Construction of Authority in the Old English *Judith*

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Abstract: The present article investigates the representation of Judith, the protagonist of the Old English poem preserved in the *Beowulf* Manuscript, based on episodes from the Old Testament Book of Judith. It argues that *Judith* makes significant additions to the biblical source with the aim of presenting the heroine as a figure of wisdom and justice. It also argues that such a representation of Judith is significant given the historical context of the composition of the poem. If the poem was composed in tenth-century England during Viking invasions, the way the text crafts Judith as a figure of wisdom and good counsel is evocative of some political ideas circulating in poetic, homiletic texts as well as in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. The Chronicle's representation of decision-making as a joint venture of the king and witan can especially help to elucidate the concept of authority presented in the poem, as Judith develops the antagonist Holofernes as an example of an ill-counselled and unwise leader, while depicting Judith as a figure of authority representing divine justice. The *Judith* poet manipulates the feast scene that he finds in the biblical source with a view to enhancing its representation of Holofernes as an example of unwisdom and bad counsel. Another significant addition to the source is the poem's emphasis on Judith's wisdom as well her physical and spiritual radiance. In fact, the poem's manipulation of light imagery and its recurrent contrasting of wisdom with unwisdom reflects the pressing concerns of the era regarding hierarchy, authority, obedience, and faith, all of which came to be considered key concepts in the unification of an England in crisis. The poem's imagery of light is directly linked to the poem's theme of justice and wise action. The sustained imagery of light and radiance underlies the poet's account of Judith's violence as a performance of divine justice. The imagery of light also creates a structural connection with the account of the Bethulian army victory over the Assyrians in the second half of the poem, enhancing both the poem's artistic unity and its political purpose.

Keywords: *Judith*, Old English poetry, Old English literature, the mind in Old English verse, wisdom in Old English poetry

The Old English *Judith*, found in London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A.xv (henceforward the Beowulf manuscript), is a versified alliterative adaptation of chapters 12.10 to 16.1 of the Old Testament Book of Judith. The existing text is fragmentary as it lacks the beginning, and its first sentence is incomplete. What survives from the entire poem brings the focus on Judith and her heroic defiance of the enemy in the first half of the poem and the heroic stance of the Hebrew army against the Assyrian enemy in the second. When it comes to the relationship of *Judith* with its biblical source, scholarship views the Old English poem as a simplification rather than an amplification of biblical matter when it comes to streamlining the narrative structure of the story and reducing the number of characters involved. Jackson J. Campbell claims that the Old English adaptation aimed to "minimise the unique and emphasise the typical" (Campbell 1971, 155). There are, however, important thematic and poetic additions to the source material, additions that include the imagery of light and the theme of the triumph of wisdom over unwisdom. As Campbell observes, while the Vulgate describes Judith as chaste, the emphasis placed upon her wisdom is an innovation introduced by the Old English poet (Campbell 1971, 155). The *Judith* poet also removes from Judith the blemish of deceptiveness that characterises the protagonist in the source. She does not participate in the feast to which Holofernes invites his retinue. She does not intoxicate him with alcohol. The poem presents Holofernes as succumbing to his own lust rather than to Judith's seduction, and most importantly, as I will show in the article, Judith is presented as a figure of justice and authority to a greater degree than in the source.

The argument of the present article is that the *Judith* poet makes a significant investment in Judith as an emblem of authority by reshaping the heroine as a vessel of wisdom and good counsel. I argue that *Judith*'s light imagery and its thematic vocabulary highlighting the contrast between wisdom and unwisdom respond to the topical concerns of the era regarding hierarchy, authority, obedience, and faith, all of which came to be considered key concepts in the unification of an England in crisis. The poem thematizes wisdom as an ability to be guided by wise counsel (*ræd)* and warns against following

bad counsel (*unræd*). While scholarship detects an implicit anxiety over Judith in Anglo-Latin and Old English writings, I would like to demonstrate that against this background the *Judtih* poet depicts the protagonist as a figure of military authority. I would contend that the reason why *Judith* makes its female protagonist more important, heroic, and wise than either the character found in the Bible or in those other English texts in which she features is to demonstrate that authority cannot be conceived of in exclusively secular, military, or heroic terms. I would also like to claim that the poem is aligned with the criticism of authority and figures of power in late tenth-century England. Judith demonstrates, as I would like to show, a unity of wisdom and action that appears to be idealized in some of the poetic and historical writings composed in England around the time of the poem's composition.

The poem *Judith* has been subject to various interpretations in modern scholarship. The first, and most obvious, focus of the scholarship was on the protagonist herself. The interpretation of the character was often allegorical, a take on the poem suggested by the exegetical work of Remigius of Auxerre and Hrabanus Maurus, who viewed her as a figure of the *ecclesia* at war with Holofernes, an impersonation of the devil or *hostis antiquus.* Such a reading is supported by Campbell, who claims that "while Judith represents a concept as complex as *Ecclesia*, she still was, for the poet, a woman, acting, reacting and feeling in a simple sequence of plot event" (Campbell 1971, 165). The allegorical interpretation of Judith as *ecclesia* might be dismissed on the grounds that, as Paul de Lacy suggests, unlike the protagonist of the biblical source, the poem's heroine accepts the spoils with which she is rewarded (de Lacy 1996, 405). The feminist scholarship's restorative work abandons the allegorizing approach to reveal the significance of Judith as a flesh-and-blood character but still inflected through medieval gender ideology as well as the poem's political context. Alexandra Hennesey Olsen argued that the poem changes the story to present Judith as facing the "danger of being raped and spiritually defiled by the diabolical pagan" (Olsen 1982, 290) and that her violence against Holofernes in the poem is an inversion of rape because *Judith* was composed during Viking invasions "to galvanize the men into action by shaming those noblemen in the audience who have watched the abuse of their wives" (Olsen 1982, 293). The problem of Judith's gender and sexuality has been further addressed by feminist and gender scholars who have analysed Judith's action not only as sexually subversive, but also as a subversion and expansion of her

gendered identity, especially by stressing that she transforms herself from an objectified *spolia* into a subject who subverts Holofernes's masculinism.[1]

Such historicist readings of the poem as exemplified by Olsen, situating it in the context of the Viking invasions in the late tenth century, represent another important strand of criticism. Olsen has built her argument on David Chamberlain's view that "the most appropriate occasion in Anglo-Saxon history for the political and religious exemplum of this poem is the crisis under Æthelred from 990 to 1010 (Chamberlain 1975, 158). The approach to *Judith* as a political poem, adopted in this article, is supported by critical agreement that the poem was composed in the tumultuous tenth century.[2] Some evidence that *Judith* was composed, or at least read, in these times can be found in Ælfric's *Letter to Sigeweard*, a work also known as *On the Old and New Testament*, where he makes a brief reference to a vernacular work based on the Book of Judith, which, he says, was translated into the vernacular "eow mannum to bysne þæt ge eowerne eard mid wæmnum bewerian wið onwinende here" (as an example to our men that they should defend our homeland against the army of the invaders) (Marsden 2008, 127).[3] Unless Ælfric refers to his own homily on Judith, it is plausible that Ælfric references the poem now extant in the *Beowulf*-Manuscript. In addition, the poem's inscription in the *Beowulf*-Manuscript, which happened not earlier than around 975, further corroborates the view that the poem arose in the time of a major military crisis caused by the Viking invaders. In the *Beowulf*-Manuscript, *Judith* is placed directly after Beowulf, a poem in which the ancestors of the Danes who attacked England in the late tenth century are very important characters.

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1 See Karma Lochrie's reading of "the decapitation of Holofernes [as signifying masculinism's] reversal and spoiling" (1994, 9). Erin Mullally uses gift exchange theory to argue that "Judith's transformation in the poem is not solely from passive to aggressive nor from 'feminine' to 'masculine', but rather explicitly from 'possessed' to 'possessor'" (Mullally 2005, 257). Even though his reading is not strictly feminist, Denis Ferhatović also elucidates the heroine's transformation from an object to subject in his object-oriented reading of Judith (Ferhatović 2019, 126-127).

2 Pringle claims that Holofernes and the Assyrian soldiers are an echo of the Danes in England, framed as an embodiment of evil (Pringle 1975, 91). See Griffith's edition for a detailed discussion of the poem's date. Griffith arrives at a tentative conclusion that the poem was probably composed in the late ninth or in the tenth century (Grifith 1997, 47).

3 The translation from Marsden's edition is my own. Ælfric composed his own homily on the Book of Judith, in which he reads Judith as a figure of chastity.

Another historizing reading suggested that the poem was composed to honour Æthelflæd, Lady of Mercia, as a military figure, who, in concerted effort with her brother Edward, reclaimed for the West-Saxon rule much of the territory defined as the Danelaw after the death of her father, King Alfred the Great. The theory was advanced in 1892 by T. Gregory Forster, who suggested that

> Æthelflæd, then, is Mercia's Judith, for she by no ordinary strategy, we are told, raised her Kingdom and people to their old position. She, like the Hebrew Judith, abandoned the older strategy of raid and battle, not indeed to murder the Danish chief, but to build fortresses and beleaguer her enemies (Forster 1892, 90).

The theory has been mostly dismissed nowadays,[4] but it was revived in Bernard F. Huppé's edition and analysis of *Judith* (Huppé 1970, 145-7) and, as Michael Bintley remarks, "one should not assume that *Judith* need not have been written with direct reference to Æthelflæd for it to have called to mind her actions" (Bintley 2020, 162). Even though Æthelflæd was not a warrior-woman, but a political figure, her activity may have presented the poem's audience with an important historical and English precedent for female military leadership. Judith is, in fact, not only a warrior-woman who beheads the enemy. It must be stressed that the poem insists that the continuity between masculine, or manlike, strength and action is as important as the continuity between wisdom and action. Judith, who is wise and courageous, is a vessel of authority who directs the Bethulian men's heroic actions.

While in the poem Judith appears to be associated with brilliance and justice, one can surmise from other writings produced in early medieval England that, as a character, she generated some controversy. This is detectable in Aldhelm's Prose *De Virginitate*. While excusing Judith's employment of beauty and adornment to deceive the enemy and secure her people's victory, Aldhelm repudiates the impudence and wantonness of the "stubborn and insolent woman in Proverbs

4 In his edition of the poem, Timmer gives two reasons why the theory should be dismissed. The first is that Æthelflæd was never celebrated as heroine in early medieval English writings. The second is that the poem is religious and "this makes it very unlikely that a religious heroine like Judith would represent a secular queen" (Timmer 1966, 7). Pringle suggests the reason why Æthelflæd is not celebrated in Old English writings is the West-Saxon conspiracy of silence regarding Mercian rulers (Pringle 1975, 84).

who foreshadows the figure of the Synagogue" (Aldhelm 2009, 127) in a section that directly follows his account of Judith's defeat of Holofernes. Heide Estes argues in her reading of Aldhelm's account that "he finds Judith an ambiguous figure, not entirely in alignment with his vision of chaste femininity" (Estes 2003, 330). In her reading of Ælfric's homily on Judith, Mary Clayton claims that Ælfric glosses over ethical problems raised by Judith's lies and sexual seduction of Holofernes (Clayton 1994, 220). Both English authors, Aldhelm and Ælfric, independently viewed Judith as an imperfect heroine. Heroic and worthy of praise though she is, she is in constant need of justification or glossing over. Estes concludes her essay with a statement that the poem demonstrates "incapacity to transform the biblical figure of Judith into a fully acceptable Anglo-Saxon Christian heroine" (Estes 2003, 349). Similarly, in his detailed account of the retellings of the story of Judith in the Old English period, Simon C. Thomson contends that "this is a story that demands to be told so strongly that it cannot be set aside, but must instead be tamed" (Thomson 2021, 122). Against this critical background, however, it will be demonstrated here that the poem's investment in Judith as a figure of uncompromised authority is manifested in its treatment of the source. The poet unifies the episode of beheading with the episode of Judith's return to Bethulia and the actual battle through the imagery of light and mental clarity that enhances its retelling of the biblical source as a story of divine judgment and justice performed through Judith and the Bethulian men.

The poem's juxtaposition of Judith's wisdom as effecting the military action of the men of Bethulia with her nemesis' self-destructive ill counsel should thus not go unnoticed, because *Judith* is resonant of important issues raised in the tenth- and early eleventh-century England. In late tenth-century England, *ræd*, good counsel,[5] was an important ideological concept. In his recent reading of Old English biblical poetry from MS Junius 11, which was compiled around the time when *Judith* was inscribed in the *Beowulf*-Manuscript, Cark Kears argues that "OE *ræd* and OE *unræd* evoke early medieval cultural ideas about successful and unsuccessful governance,

5 The Bosworth-Toller Dictionary of Old English presents five meanings of the word: (I) counsel, advice; (II) counsel, prudence, intelligence, (III) counsel, course of action that results from deliberation, plan, a resolution taken after deliberation, ordinance, decree; (IV) what is advisable, benefit, advantage; (V) a council. In this paper I will translate the word as 'good counsel'. Its opposite, *unræd*, will be translated as ill-counsel or unwisdom. The Boswoth-Toller Dictionary defines *unræd* as (I) evil counsel, ill-advised course, bad plan, folly; (II) disadvantage, prejudice, hurt.

but also suggest how these were linked to interpretation and misreading in political thought" (Kears 2023, 5). As Kears observes, the link between governance and wisdom is a recurrent theme in Old English Alfredian literature, in which royal authority is supported by Solomonic *sapientia* (Kears 2023, 6). Kears finds an expression of the notion that good counsel is essential to ruling effectively in the verse preface to Alfred's *Old English Boethius,* in which Alfred says, "Ic sceal giet sprecan /fon on fitte, folccuðne *ræd* /hæleðum secgean" ("I must speak out, /engage in poetry, tell men /well known *advice*" (Kears 2023, 6).[6]

Following good counsel was synonymous with virtue and good policy; being led astray through *unræd* was synonymous with failure. The notorious failures of late-tenth-century policies of the English authorities had caused King Æthelred II to be remembered as *Æthelred Unræd*, that is, Æthelred the Unready, or the Ill-advised. Modern scholarship objects to such a negative assessment of the king, pointing to a complexity of factors that led to the subsequent rise of the Danes in England.[7] Regardless, this crisis led to Æthelred II's loss of power and exile in 1013, and occasioned Cnut's ascendance to the English throne in 1014. As Courtnay Konshuh points out in her recent discussion of ruling and policy making in Æthelredian England, "the importance of *ræd*, advice, is a topic which can be found in many of the texts produced during Æthelred's reign and it figures strongly in the annals for his reign" (Konshuh 2016, 140).

Ruling and decision-making was a burden to be shared between the king, his secular advisers as well as ecclesiastical authorities, as is testified in the famous 991 annal in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* recording the death of Ealdormann Byrhtnoth at Maldon.

> Her wæs Gypeswic gehergod, and æfter þam swiðe raðe wæs Birhtnoð ealdorman ofslægen æt Mældune. And on þam geare *man gerædd*e þæt man geald ærest gafol Deniscan mannum for þam mycclan brogan þe hi worhtan be þam særiman. Þæt wæs ærest X þusend punda. Þæne *ræd gerædde* Siric arcebiscop (O'Brien O'Keeffe 2001, 86)

6 The Old English text and the translation used here is taken from Irvine and Godden (2012).

7 See Keynes (1980), Stafford (1989), Konshush (2016) for important reevaluations of the representation of rulership and policy-making in Æthelredian England.

> In this year Ipswich was ravaged, and very soon afterwards Ealdorman Birhtnoth was killed at Maldon. And in that *it was determined* that tribute should first be paid to the Danish men because of the great terror they were causing along the coast. The first payment was 10,000 pounds. Archbishop Sigeric *first advised* that course (Whitelock 1955, 235).

The annal starts with describing acts of destruction: Ipswich is ravaged and Byrhtnoth killed, the latter event soon to be commemorated in the poem *Battle of Maldon*. It also says that *it was determined* ("*man gerædd*e") that the English should pay tribute to the Danes. Konshuh remarks, referring to a sequence of annals pertaining to the years 983-1016 of King Æthelred's reign, that "in a time of personal rule, it is perhaps surprising to find a text laden with impersonal constructions and circumlocutions surrounding the person of the king" (Konshuh 2016, 145).[8] The careful phrasing may have been employed in the annal to impress upon the reader that political authority is not identical with Æthelred's personal rule. The last sentence of the annal says that it was the bishop Sigeric's counsel, rather than solely the view of the king and his advisers from military circles, which argued that tribute should be paid to the Vikings.

The 991 annal makes an important association between counsel and action. While paying tribute would generate a sense of shame, a sound and socially cohesive justification for the policy of purchasing peace is found in the wisdom of the counsel that comes from the bishop's authority. The Anglo-Saxon chronicle annals of the late tenth and early eleventh centuries lay emphasis on a relationship between good advice and political action, bad advice and failure. Major decisions and policies in various versions of the Chronicle in which these annals are recorded demonstrate the use of new vocabulary marshalled with a view to justifying policies based on wise counsel to a greater degree than in earlier annals. The use of the verb *rædan* and *gerædan* makes more frequent appearances in the Æthelredian annals than in the annals pertaining

8 Konshuh claims that the sequence demonstrate unity and "show evidence of central direction" (Konshuh 2016, 141) and that "the section of annals for the years 983–1016 copied into Chronicles C, D and E are notably a unit,41 and foreshadowing contained within them allows their time of production to be dated between the years 1017 and 1023.42" (Konshuh 2016, 153).

to the reigns of earlier kings, as Konshuh demonstrates (Konshuh 2016, 142). When the Danes ravaged England in 999, for example, the Chronicle says that "ða rædde se cyning wið his witan þæt man sceolde mid scypfyrde and eac mid landfyrde hym ongean faran" (O'Brien O'Keeffe 2001, 88) [Then the king with his councillors determined that they should be opposed by a naval force and also by a land force (Whitelock 238).] In 1002, "se cynning gerædde on his witan þæt man sceolde gafol gyldan þam flotan, and frið wið þon þe hi heora yfeles geswican sceoldan" (O'Brien O'Keeffe 2001, 89) [In this year the king and his councillors determined that tribute should be paid to the fleet and peace made with them on condition that they should cease their evil-doing (Whitelock 1955, 239)]. The annal of 1003, which gives a scathingly critical account of Ealdroman Ælfric's treachery, complains about the irresoluteness of the English against the Danes as the opposite of good counsel.

> Þa sceolde se ealdormann Ælfric lædan þa fyrde, ac se teah ða forð se ealdan wrencas sona swa hi wæron swa gehende þæt ægðer here on oþerne hawede. Þa gebræd he hine seocne and ongan hine brecan to spiwene and cwæð þæt gesicled wære and swa þæt folc becyrde þæt he lædan scolde, swa hit gecweden ys, þonne se heretoga wacað þonne bið eall se here swiðe gehindrad. Þa Swegen geseah þæt hi anræde næron and þæt hi ealle toforan, þa lædde he his here into Wiltune, and hi þa buruh geheregodon and forbærndon" (O'Brien O'Keeffe 2001, 90).
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> Then Ealdorman Ælfric was to lead the army, but he was up to his old tricks. As soon as they were so close that each army looked on the other, he feigned him sick, and began retching to vomit, and said that he was taken ill, and thus betrayed the people whom he should have led. As the saying goes: "When the leader gives way, the whole army will be much hindered." When Swein saw that they were irresolute, and that they all dispersed, he led his army into Wilton, and they ravaged and burnt the borough (Whitelock 1955, 240).

The annal lays blame on the English not being "anræde," that is, "in agreement," "unanimous" (Toronto Dictionary of Old English A-Le). Lack of agreement is thus presented as the direct cause of the destruction of Wilton.

Another interesting example can be found in the 1011 annal of the C version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (the text in italics is found in the C version only, the remaining part is also found in D and E versions).

> Her on þissum geare sende se cyning and his witan to ðam here, and gyrndon friðes, and his gafol and metsunge beheton wið þam ðe hi hiora hergunge geswicon. Hi hæfdon oferga (i) Eastengle and (ii) Eastsexe and (iii) Middlesexe and (iv) Oxenfordscire (…). *Ealle þas ungesælða þuruh unrædes*, þæt man nolde him a timan gafol beodan oþþe wið weohtan; ac þonne hi mæst to yfele gedon hæfdon, þonne nam mon frið and grið wið hi. And na þe læs for eallum þissum griðe and gafole hi ferdon æghweder flocmælum, and heregodon ure earme folc, and hi rypton and slogon (O'Brien O'Keeffe 2001, 95)

> In this year the king and his councillors sent to the army and asked for peace and promised them tribute and provisions on condition that they should cease their ravaging. They had then overrun: (i) East Anglia, (ii) Essex, (iii) Middlesex, (iv) Oxfordshire (…) *All those disasters befell us through bad policy* [lit. bad counsel], *in that they were never offered tribute in time nor fought against*; but when they had done most to our injury, peace and truce were made with them; and for all this truce and tribute they journeyed none the less in bands everywhere, and harried our wretched people, and plundered and killed them (Whitelock 1955, 245).

In her discussions of the representation of King Æthelred's reign in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Renée R. Trilling detects in several other such accounts of treachery on the part of the English "the chronicler's disgust with the English leadership" (Trilling 2009, 154). Konshuh supplies a more nuanced understanding of the chronicle's representation of policy-making in Æthelredian annals. She argues that "rather than vilifying the king for making bad decisions, the text puts distance between Æthelred and the tribute payments, military defeats and internal problems by concentrating on the actions of others, and direct criticism of Æthelred is not obvious" (2016, 142). She claims that the emphasis on the necessity to use good advice in Æthelredian annals

> appears to have been a conscious attempt of Æthelred to portray himself as a 'good' king, and was probably also a reaction to the increased size of the realm; on the one hand, a wise king takes advice from others in order to make informed decisions, while also needing their advice to maintain his grip on a political area which had not been unified for very long (2016: 143).

In the late tenth century, the inability to follow wise counsel and listen to the voice of authority is represented as a virtue. Successes and failures in the Chronicle are evaluated implicitly through references to the circumstances in which decisions were made and by stressing that actions resulted from careful deliberation.

In Old English homiletic literature and biblical verse, bad counsel accumulates even more sinister connotations through association with the devil. In some Old English poems and texts, especially the biblical poetry of Junius Manuscript 11, *Genesis A* and *Genesis B*, the devil embodies a more particular kind of evil, namely, rebelliousness against authority. In *Genesis A*, the fall of the angels happens because they do not follow good counsel: "noldan dreogan leng/ heora selfra ræd, ac hie of siblufan /godes ahwurfon" ("they no longer wished to act for their own advantage, but they turned away from God's intimacy", 23b-25a). For Kears, these lines in the poem imply "the dreadful consequences of not working for 'ræd' as it relates to both the stability of a kingdom and the relationship of that kingdom to the divine creator" (2023, 44).[9] Kears claims that such passages in *Genesis A*, *Genesis B*, as well as in *Exodus* and *Daniel* "make clear that to operate through *unræd* obscures God-as-creator as he exists within the text of the world" (Kears 2023, 45).

Kears has also suggested that there are striking parallels involving the concepts of *ræd* and *unræd* between Ælfric's commentary and the account of the fall of the angels in *Genesis A*.[10] For example, "Ælfric, like the poet of *Genesis A*, does

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9 There are other passages in *Genesis A* that establish a link between pride and the refusal to follow good counsel. For example, "Him þær sar gelamp, /æfst and oferhygd, and þæs engles mod /þe þone *unræd* ongan ærest fremman, /wefan and weccean" ("A sorrow befell them there, the envy and the arrogance and the mind of the angel who first began to fabricate, weave and awaken the *deceit* [lit. bad counsel]" (28b-31a), quoted and commented by Kears (2023, 45).

10 Kears' main argument in his book is that there is a persistent contrast between *ræd* and *unræd* in all the texts of the manuscript, both in those which are based on books of the Old Testament (*Genesis A, Genesis B, Exodus,* and *Daniel*) and also in *Christ and Satan* (the last poem in the Junius MS, which draws on themes from the New Testament): "Examining such thematic language in conjunction with the subject

describe Lucifer's influence over those who follow him as a form of bad counsel that leads them to hell" (Kears 2023, 47). In *De Initio Creaturae,* Ælfric of Eynsham depicts the devil as an embodiment of bad counsel:

> Þa gefæstnode he þisne ræd wið þam werode þe he bewiste, and hi ealle to ðam ræde gebugon. Ða ða hi ealle hæfdon ðysne ræd betwux him gefæstnod. þa becom godes grama ofer him ealle (…) ða ða hi wolde mid modignysse beon betera þonne he gesceapen wæs, and cwæð þæt he mihte beon þam ælmahtigum God gelic (Ælfric 2023,16)
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> The he confirmed his plan with the host that he ruled, and that they all agreed to that council among themselves, God's anger came over them all (…) when in his pride he wanted to be better than he was created and said that he might be equal to the almighty God (Ælfric 2023,17).

Ælfric expressly identifies the devil, not God, as the source of bad counsel: "ne næfre se yfela ræd ne com of Godes geþance. ac com of þæs deofles, swa swa we ær cwædon" ("the evil counsel never came from God's mind, but from the devil's, as we have said" (Ælfric 2023, 18-19).

Judith is also resonant with such representations of examples of good and bad counsel. The *Judith* poet manipulates the feast scene that he finds in the biblical source with a view to enhancing its representation of Holofernes as an example of unwisdom and bad counsel. In the source, the party does not involve excessive drinking on the part of Holofernes' men. In the poem, however, Holofernes makes his men excessively drunk, which is to have disastrous consequences when they will be facing their enemy "medowerige" [weary with wine] (229a):

> hie on swiman lagon,
> oferdrencte his duguðe ealle, swylce hie wæron deaðe geslegne,
> agotene goda gehwylces
> they lay unconscious, his entire staff drowned with drink, as if they were struck dead, drained of all good (28b-32a).

matter of these poems draws us to a consistent interest across the Junius poetry in the application of good counsel and in warning readers about the perils of ill-counsel and misinterpretation" (Kears 2023, 4).

Holofernes' men are in stupor. Foreboding is also the association of the drinking party with night and darkness. Night does not bring a peaceful end to the party, but seems to overcome the partying men, as Holofernes' men are drinking "oð þæt fira bearnum /nealæhte niht seo þystre" [until the murky night overtook the sons of mortals] (33b-34a). By contrast, drinking in most Old English poetic representations of feasts is more commonly associated with social order and wisdom rather than sin (as feasts present their participants with an opportunity to be exposed to the art of poetry and poetic performance). As Hugh Magennis argues, "the Germanic feast is an expression of admirable social order and cohesion: the particular feast which is described in *Judith* is deliberately presented as a travesty of such order and cohesion" (Magennis 1983, 332). It is notable, though, that when the Hebrews approach the Assyrian camp in the second half of the poem, Bethulia is referred to as "medobyrig" (167a). Since the Assyrians are nonetheless called "medowerige" (229a) during the battle, the poem inverts the traditional symbolism of drinking and feasting only with respect to the enemy (Magennis 1983, 332).[11]

A particularly negative connotation is evoked by the collocation "modig and medugal" (proud and drunk with mead") (26a) that describes Holofernes during the feast. The pairing of "modig and medugal" is resonant of a similar collocation found in two Exeter poems, *The Seafarer* and *The Ruin*: "wlonc ond wingal".[12] In line 34a of *The Ruin*, the collocation may generate positive associations as Magennis claims: "the image is of the hall as the place of feasting, the place of drinking together and of the joys of society" (Magennis 1983, 43). Such a positive association may, however, be compromised by the word *wlenco,* whose semantic range includes "arrogance" (The Bosworth-Toller Dictionary of Old English). The collocation is unambiguously negative in line 29a of *The Seafarer*, where it characterizes a hypothetical landlubber who does not know the sufferings to which the poem's lyric speaker is subjected.[13] Both *wingal* (drunk with wine) (*Daniel* l16b) and *medugal* (drunk with mead) (*Daniel* l. 702a) are used to characterize Nebuchadnezzar in the Old English *Daniel* of the Junius MS. What is important here is the similar association of Nebuchadnezzar and Holofernes' drunken state with their bad conduct.

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11 Magennis lists conventional elements in Old English poetic depictions of feasting that are inverted by the *Judith* poet (1983: 336).

12 The Old English text and translation of *The Seafarer* and *The Ruin* come from Bjork (2014).

13 "Forþon him gelyfeð lyt, se þe ah lifes wyn /gebiden in burgum, bealosiþa hwon, /wlonc ond wingal, hu ic werig oft /in brimlade bidan sceolde" (*The Seafarer*, 27-31).

In addition, the introductory lines of *Daniel* demonstrate that the fall of Jerusalem is caused by the Hebrews' inability to follow good counsel. The connection between bad counsel and drinking is as explicit in *Daniel* as in *Judith*.

> þenden hie þy rice *rædan moston*,
> burgum wealdan, wæs him beorht wela.
> (…)
> oðþæt hie wlenco anwod æt winþege
> deofoldædum, druncne geðohtas.
>
> While they were able to *guide the kingdom*, rule the cities, their glory was bright (…) until pride invaded them with devilish deeds at the feast, drunken thoughts (*Daniel*, 8-9; 17-18).[14]

In *Daniel*, drunkenness and pride are paired as a symptom of moral decline that blurs one's judgment and causes inability to rule and guide (*rædan*) the kingdom. Like the English ruling classes in the eleventh century, the Hebrews in *Daniel* are unable to rule their kingdom and lose it to the invader. Both the description of the feast in *Judith* and the reference to the drunken feasts and thoughts of the Hebrews in *Daniel* have fatalistic overtones. The passage from *Daniel* establishes an important analogue for the causal link between ill counsel and loss of prosperity. In *Judith,* similar fatalistic overtones accompany the death of Holofornes at the hands of Judith as well as the destruction of his army by the Hebrews in the battle that occurs the next morning.

The *Judith* poet represents Holofernes' feast as a symbol of social disorder. Drinking and drunkenness become a shorthand for unwisdom. The function of the episode is to exemplify the political failure that is inevitable when authorities are in moral decline. When Holofernes dies killed by Judith, the poem seems to imply that he is defeated through his lack of wisdom: "nyste ræde nanne / on gewitlocan" [he knew no good counsel in his wits] (69a). The word *gewitloca* is associated with several Old English compounds referring to the mind in which the *-loca* element is related to the Old English *loc* which denotes "a lock, bolt, bar, that by which anything is closed, an enclosed place, enclosure, fold" (Bosworth-Toller Dictionary of Old English). The Old English poetic idea of the mind as a chamber or enclosure

14 The Old English text and translation come from Anlezark's *Old Testament Narratives* (2011).

is exhaustively described by Britt Mize who argues that the idea is predicated upon "an interior/exterior model of personal mentality and its inaccessibility to others, expressed lexically as an analogy between the mind's 'contents' and material possessions that may be confined in an enclosure and protected or hidden" (Mize 2006, 59).[15] When an associated compound *ferhþloca* ("enclosure of the spirit, breast, i.e. thoughts, feelings, heart conceived as locked in the breast," Toronto Dictionary of Old English A-Le) is used in "The Wanderer" or Cynewulf's *Juliana*, it suggests that wisdom, locked and hoarded within in the mind's treasure-chest, is conceived of figuratively as precious mental content.[16] Mize describes many examples of the metaphorical representations of the mind as a treasure chest filled with wisdom, which he designates with a schema *mind holds*.[17] The mental material contained in the treasure-chest must be protected because either its release might incur shame or its content is too precious to be shared (Mize 2006, 73-74). The latter possibility must be presupposed in *Judith*, since the Old English version of the story fills Judith's mind with wisdom and counsel. In the case of Holofernes, however, the application of the schema is of course ironic, as his *gewitloca* is empty of such precious

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15 The concept of the mind as container is related to the hydraulic concept of the mind more thoroughly examined in Leslie Lockett's *Anglo-Saxon psychologies in the vernacular and Latin traditions.* The hydraulic model refers to "a loose psychological pattern, in which psychological disturbances are associated with dynamic changes of pressure and temperature in chest cavity. These physical changes resemble the behaviour of a fluid in a closed container, which expands and presses outward against the walls of the container when heated, threatening either to boil over or to burst the container if too much is applied. When the moment of intense emotion or distress passes, the contents of the chest cavity cool off and are no longer subject to excess pressure, just as if a heat source were removed from a container of boiling liquid" (Lockett 2011, 5).

16 In "The Wanderer", an elegiac lyric poem in the Exeter Book, the speaker remarks that a wise man must "his ferðlocan fæste binde, /healde his hordcofan, hycge swa he wille" (bind fast his soul enclosure, /hold his treasure chamber, think as he will) ("The Wanderer," lines 13-14). The quote from "The Wanderer" and the translation come from Bjork (2014). In Cynewulf's *Juliana*, the narrator commends the protagonist because "hyre wæs Cristes lof in ferðlocan fæste biwunden" (the praise of Christ, an inviolate power, was firmly enclosed in her heart) (*Juliana*, lines 233-234). The quote from Cynewulf's *Juliana* and the translation come from Bjork (2013).

17 Mize identifies four types of the metaphor. "The mind's aspect of containment, combined with impermeability and permeability respectively, can be designated by the schemata *the mind holds* and *the mind releases*; in its aspect of exclusion, we may designate the combinations with impermeability and permeability as *the mind repels* and *the mind admits*. All four of these theoretical combinations describing the mental enclosure's capabilities are attested in the extant Old English poetic corpus, at least in the form of a stated potential" (Mize 2006, 73).

content. Holofernes in the poem dies without, and because of his lack of, wisdom.

While Holofernes's mental state closes him off from wisdom and good counsel, he is also isolated from counsel in social terms. The most important symbol related to Holofernes is his flynet, an object that appears in the source, but which *Judith* makes more complex as a physical object and symbol. The importance of the flynet has been explicated in different ways. Campbell suggests that the poet's amplification of the Vulgate's description of the flynet is inspired by Hrabanus Maurus' commentary: "et conopeum hoc est rete muscarum, insidias significat dolosae cogitations."[18] He explains that "the flynet symbolizes the deceitful mental attitudes which are not accurately revealed to physical sight" (Campbell 1971, 163). According to Cart T. Berkhout and J. F. Doubleday,

> the significance he gives it is that of the 'two-way mirror,' something the Vulgate never suggests. The poet specifically states that the purpose of the net is to allow Holofernes to see everyone without being seen himself. He thereby implies Holofernes' suspicion and distrust of his men, a part of his character that the earlier sections of the poem had not suggested (Berkhout and Doubleday 1973, 631).

Like Campbell, they also detect the influence of Hrabanus Maurus's commentary (Berkhout and Doubleday 1973, 633). Karma Lochrie, in her feminist and psychoanalytic reading of *Judith,* claims that Holofernes exercises his symbolic power through masculine gaze that objectifies both his men and Judith (Lochrie 1994, 9). I would claim that the *Judith* poet expands the source's description of the flynet to associate Holofernes's policy with secrecy and unreceptivity to counsel. The flynet limits his physical vision and further impairs his ability to make good judgment because he is spatially, psychologically, and socially isolated from his men. The Chronicle annals discussed above portray King Æhelred in a different way. Æthelred is implied to be close to his witan, as the decision-making process is viewed in the annals as shared, distributed, and eventually under the scrutiny of chroniclers, scribes, and readers. In *Judith*, Holofernes' decision-making is obscure and involves deliberation in secret.

Judith is associated with good counsel, righteousness, and effective action. When she is to confront Holofernes, God inspires Judith's courage.

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18 The text comes from PL, 109, col. 573.

> Hi ða se hehsta dema
> ædre mid elne onbryrde, swa he deð anra gehwylcne
> herbuendra þe hyne him to helpe seceð
> mid ræde ond mid rihte geleafan. þa wearð hyre rume on mode,
> haligre hyht geniwod
>
> Then the highest judge inspired her straightway with courage, as he does every earthly sojourner who seeks his help with good judgment and with true belief. Her spirits were then lifted, the confidence of the saintly one restored (94b-98).

In the Vulgate, Judith utters a prayer to God that he should strengthen her.[19] The *Judith* poet elaborates upon the source to showcase Judith as exemplary in that she approaches God with wisdom and faith. Judith receives from God such wisdom, *ræd,* as Holofernes does not possess in his *gewitloca.* The word *gewitloca* in the poem indicates mental unreceptiveness, as such a mind, being locked, can never be exposed to the influence of divine wisdom. Judith is the opposite of that, her mind heeding good counsel. While Holfernes' mind is described ironically as a travesty of the schema that Mize designates *the mind holds*, Judith's mental state corresponds to a different schema which he names *the mind admits*: "sometimes the mind's interior should be, and in this case it must be, opened to something outside of it" (Mize 2006, 87). Mize does not provide any examples of the schema from *Judith.* However, illustrating the schema with references to other Old English verse, he explains that "wisdom or spiritual understanding can be represented in Old English poetry as something originating outside of the mind that should be voluntarily received into it" (Mize 2006, 87). It can thus be said that the *Judith* poet presents Judith as an exemplary figure of authority in that she receives courage from God because she seeks and prays for it, being wise (having *ræd*).

Judith, in contrast to Holofernes, is a vessel of wisdom. The poet's

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19 In the Vulgate, Judith addresses God praying, "dicens confirma me Domine Deus Israhel et respice in hac hora ad opera manuum mearum ut sicut promisisti Hierusalem civitatem tuam erigas et hoc quod credens per te posse fieri cogitavi perficiam" ("Saying: Strengthen me, O Lord God of Israel, and in this hour look on the works of my hands, that as thou hast promised, thou mayst raise up Jerusalem thy city: and that I may bring to pass that which I have purposed, having a belief that it might be done by thee").

emphasis on Judith's wisdom is, in fact, one of the most significant additions to the source.[20] As Mark Griffith demonstrates in his edition of the poem, "a system of contrasting repetitions is seen in the pervasive use of compounds containing elements meaning 'mind' or 'spirit' (28 instances of 22 different compounds)" (Griffith 1997, 89). Judith is "gleaw on geðonce" (brilliant in her plan) (13b) and "ferhðgleawe" (sage of spirit) (41a).[21] She is also "seo snotere mægð" [a wise young woman] (125a) and "searoncol mægð" [a prudent-minded woman] (145a). In addition, Judith is radiant, as is brought into relief on the night that falls after the feast. She is "ides ælfscinu" [a lady of elvish beauty] (14a) and "torhtan mægð" [a radiant young woman] (43a). While the association forged in the poem between night and the spiritually benighted fulfills the poet's purpose to reinforce the contrast between good and evil, the *Judith* poet also introduces to the story an association between radiance, wisdom and good counsel.

The fact that Holofernes knew no good counsel ("nyste ræde nanne") thus enters the set of important associations established in the late tenth-century literature, in which both *ræd* and *unræd* are critically important words in the vocabulary of poetic and historical writings. Read in light of the broad historical and literary context, Holofernes emerges as a warning to authorities that the inability to follow sound counsel results in both spiritual death and military defeat. By contrast, Judith emerges in the poem as a figure whose authority is based on wisdom and right faith. Holofernes, as an example of bad leadership, might be of great interest to tenth-century poets who wanted their audience to be exposed to examples of leadership worthy of emulation and warned against becoming the opposite. In addition, the theme of kingship and lordship was of significant interest to whoever compiled the texts of the Cotton Vitellius A xv, as all texts feature kings, especially earthly pagan princes. While a number of critics view monsters as the central interest of most of the texts found in the *Beowulf* -Manuscript, a different suggestion is made by Kathryn Powell, who argues that the choice of texts in the manuscript

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20 That emphasis is accounted for by Astell as a possible influence of Ambrose's commentary on Judith, who identifies Judith with sobriety and Holofernes with drunkenness (Astell 1989: 123).

21 Other compounds in the poem that emphasise Judith' wisdom, which Griffith lists in his discussion, include "ferhðgleawe" (41a), "searoðoncol" (145a), "gleawhydig" (148a), "gearoþonclorne" (341a, "higeðoncolre" (131a), "ðancolmode" (172) (Griffith 1997, 89).

reflects "an interest in rulers and rulership, particularly in the ethical conflicts that arise in their interactions with foreign peoples as those rulers defend and expand their kingdoms" (Powell 2006, 10).

As an earthly prince, Holofernes is presented as benighted and pervasively contrasted with Judith, who is *beorht ides,* "a bright lady," and possesses wisdom. In the poem, the imagery of light and radiance is essential to the poem's representation of Judith as a figure of authority. The poet's technique of simplification and polarization makes Judith a figure of authority to a greater degree than the source. Such a positive investment in Judith's wisdom is also unprecedented in Aldhelm and Ælfric. Mental illumination and the light bestowed on Judith invest her actions with supernatural and spiritual legitimacy. Holofernes is thus contrasted with God as the giver of light and with Judith as *beorht ides,* whose actions perform divine justice in the material world. The radiance that characterizes Judith is not biblical in origin; the sources emphasise her beauty, but radiance is a feature attributed to Judith only by the *Judith* poet. Judith is "ides ælfscinu" [the lady of supernatural beauty] (14a) and "beorhtan idese" [the radiant lady] (58b). Helen Damico has argued that Judith has been modelled on Valkyrie-brides and that the source of light imagery is Germanic (Damico 1990, 185).

Whatever the source of this imagery, the *Judith* poet invests this imagery with the poem's political purpose. Most importantly, the sustained imagery of light and radiance informs the poet's account of Judith's violence as a performance of divine justice. Judith addresses God as "torhtmod tires Brytta" (93a) when she prays to him before striking and killing Holofernes. The moment when the imagery of radiance is used especially exuberantly is when Judith presents Holofernes's head to the Bethulians on her return from the Assyrian camp. When Judith has come with Holofernes' head as a sign of victory, she says to the Bethulians that

> "Ic eow secgan mæg
> þoncwyrðe þing, þæt ge ne þyrfen leng
> murnan on mode. Eow ys metod bliðe,
> cyninga wuldor; þæt gecyðed wearð
> geond woruld wide, þæt eow ys wuldorblæd
> torhtlic toweard ond tir gifeðe
> þara læðða þe ge lange drugon."

> I can tell you something worthy of gratitude, that you no longer need have anxiety of mind. Providence is kind to you, the splendour of kings; it has been revealed throughout the wide world that resplendent, glorious honour has befallen you and glory is given you, redemption from the trials you have long endured (*Judith* 152b-158).

The word *tir* makes another appearance in the final part of her speech:

> Fynd syndon eowere
> gedemed to deaðe, ond ge dom agon
> tir æt tohtan, swa eow getacnod hafað
> mihtig Dryhten þurh mine hand"
>
> our enemies are sentenced to death, and you will have honour and glory from the encounter, as the mighty Lord has revealed to you through my hand (195b-198).

Judith's speech to Bethulians, delivered at the city walls, contains a confluence of themes and brings together the imagery of light, mental clarity, and revelation. She displays the head as a clear sign of glory. Now the Bethulians can "sweotole … heafod starian" [clearly … see the head] (177-179).

The word occurs for the fourth time in a critical moment of the poem, when the Assyrian army is defeated by the army of the Bethulians. The defeat is presented as a manifestation of God's judgment: "þa wæs hyra tires æt ende, / eades ond ellendæda" (Their glory was then at an end, their prosperity and their prowess) (272b-273a). The artistic and thematic purpose of the collocation serves thus to unify the two parts of the poem, presenting Judith's single-handed defeat of Holofernes and the heroism of the Bethulian men in the same light, that is, as an expression of divine justice, and figuring Judith as the conduit of wisdom and counsel. The function of the imagery of light is to present a causal relationship between Judith's counsel and wisdom and the heroic action performed by the people of Bethulia.

The collocation of "torhtlic" (glorious) and "tir" (glory) is thus an important addition to the poem, and the poem's exuberant collocating of light, justice and mental clarity is consistent and therefore significant. John M. Hill has made

insightful observations regarding the collocation of "tir" with light in other Old English verse. While the meaning of "tir" may appear quite transparent, seeing as the basic meaning of the word is "glory" and "honour" according to Bosworth-Toller Dictionary of Old English, Hill suggests that the collocation is a reflection of a pre-Christian association of the pagan Germanic god of justice, *Tir* or *Tiu*, with light, an association which, as argued by Hill, is operative in the account of Beowulf's fight with Grendel's mother (Hill 1995, 64). Inspired by Georges Dumezil's theories about Germanic paganism, Hill suggests that the origin of the collocation is pagan.[22] The critic lists a number of examples from Old English verse in which the word *tir* appears in the context of battle and light and points out that

> similar associations in *Beowulf* and elsewhere in Old English poetry suggest that when terms for brightness and glory fall together with 'god', 'drihten', and 'metod' within a context of judging the outcome of battle or of binding the terrible and undoing bonds of terror, then a cluster of terms and attributes appears which parallels our recon structed sense of Tiu or Tyr as the original sky god and god of war as law, as settlement (Hill 1995, 69).

Hill only briefly refers to the passage in *Judith* quoted above, suggesting that *Judith*'s "torhmod tires brytta", which refers to the Christian God, maintains such an association (Hill 1995, 69). Considering the textual analysis demonstrated above, however, it would be fair to argue that the *Judith* poet makes a far more complex use of the collocation than the *Beowulf* poet, and integrates it intricately into the poem's narrative structure, theme, and imagery. The *Judith* poet makes use of the theme with a view to presenting Judith as a figure of authority whose wisdom guides her actions as well as inspires the actions of her community.

Moreover, such an addition to the source strengthens J. E. Cross's suggestion that *Judith* introduces into the story the concept of just war. He points that while

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22 Hill argues that Tiu's chief function resided in granting victory in battle and this function is attested in Old English poems like *Beowulf* and *Widsith* (Hill 1995, 65). Hill does not argue for the presence of Tiu in *Beowulf*. Rather, he makes a valid claim that the traditional vocabulary was shaped by the concept of Tiu as a god of law and had become a residual element in Old English poetic tradition (Hill 1995, 66).

the biblical source presents the Bethulians as putting the Assyrians to flight, the poem makes it clear that their role is to defend their homeland, designating them as "eðelweardas" (line 320a) (*eðelweard*: "guardian of the realm, defender of the native land", Toronto Dictionary of Old English A-Le) (Cross 1971, 275). Cross observes that in engaging the Assyrians in the battle, "Judith's people have now really shown themselves to be 'guardians of the people'" (Cross 1971, 275). Ælfric of Eynsham, in his adaptation of the Old Testament Book of Maccabees, defines just war as defensive warfare against the Danes who have infringed upon the English territory: "*iustum bellum* is rihtlic gefeoht wið ða reðan flot-menn / oþþe wið oðre þeoda þe eard willað fordon" (*iustum bellum* is just war against the fierce seamen or against other peoples who intend to destroy our land) (Ælfric 2019. Lines 709-710). As Cross argues in his discussion of the ethics of war in early medieval England, English authors from Bede to Ælfric agree that the only justifiable kind of war is "defensive war" (1971, 273-274). In the poem, the justice of the defensive battle that the Bethulians are rallied into by Judith is manifest, since they are dedicated to defending their territory. Samantha Zacher, in her reading of war in the poem, argues, however, that the war the Bethulians choose to fight is not only just, but also an exemplary holy war on the grounds that God intervenes and assists Judith in killing Holofernes (Zacher 2013, 135-136). It is thus important that Judith emerges in the poem as a figure of both wisdom and justice. The significance of the poet's emphasis on wisdom and counsel lies not only in presenting Judith as wise, but, first and foremost, in creating an identity between her righteous action and the heroism of the men whom she inspires to fight. The imagery of light creates a relationship between Judith as a vessel of wisdom and the Bethulian army, whose obedience to divinely inspired authority is presented as exemplary.

I would like to conclude that the poem is political in that it introduces the issue of policy and counsel into the biblical narrative. It is especially important to see that it demonstrates the complexity of the concept of authority as negotiable and shared. Victory in the poem is presented as a social effort inspired by authority, both military and spiritual. Perhaps, it was the intention of the poet to choose the story of Judith to express this political purpose. That investment in Judith as an embodiment of such important virtues as wisdom and righteousness, in addition to heroism, demonstrates that the concept of authority was under heavy scrutiny in the late tenth century.

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