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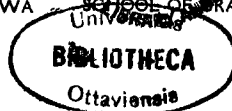
THE MEANING AND MESSAGE  
OF THE STORY OF SAMSON AND  
THE BOOK OF JUDITH  
by Sister Rosemarie Hudon

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## INTRODUCTION

Modern exegetes have done much to make the reading of the Bible more meaningful for Catholic laymen. More has been done in the last quarter century, perhaps, than had been done for centuries previously. In this work Catholic biblical scholars were following the directives of Pope Pius XII in his encyclical Divino afflante Spiritu of 1943.

Concerning the importance of understanding the ancient modes of writing, in the above-mentioned encyclical, the Sovereign Pontiff claimed:

What is the literal sense of a passage is not always as obvious in the speeches and writings of the ancient authors of the East, as it is in the works of our own time. For what they wished to express is not to be determined by the rules of grammar and philology alone, nor solely by the context; the interpreter must, as it were, go back wholly in spirit to those remote centuries of the East and with the aid of history, archaeology, ethnology, and other sciences, accurately determine what modes of writing, so to speak, the authors of that ancient period would be likely to use, and in fact did use.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rome and the Study of Scripture: A Collection of Papal Enactments on the Study of Holy Scripture together with the Decision of the Biblical Commission, 4th ed., St. Meinrad, Grail Publication, 1946, p. 97.

"Quisnam autem sit litteralis sensus, in veterum Orientalium auctorum verbis et scriptis saepenumero non ita in aperto est, ut apud nostrae aetatis scriptores. Nam quid illi verbis significare voluerint, non solis grammaticae, vel philologiae legibus, nec solo sermonis contextu determinatur; omnino oportet mente quasi redeat interpres ad remota illa Orientis saecula, ut subsidiis historiae,

## INTRODUCTION

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In the light of modern study in exegesis, this dissertation will attempt to find the meaning and message of the Story of Samson and the Book of Judith, which are interesting because of their peculiar literary genres. The Story of Samson is rooted in folklore. The Book of Judith stands at the edge of the edifying narrative and of the apocalyptic genre; it sums up the history and aspirations of the Jewish people at the time of the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.).

This thesis will not be an exhaustive research of the proposed solutions, simply the study of several such given by authoritative scholars, in view of forming a personal opinion.

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archaeologiae, ethnologiae aliarumque disciplinarum rite adiutus, discernat atque perspiciat, quaenam litteraria, ut aiunt, genera vetustae illius aetatis scriptores adhibere voluerint, ac reapse adhibuerint" (Acta Apostolicae Sedis, 25 (1943), p. 314).

CHAPTER I  
THE STORY OF SAMSON

INTRODUCTION

The saga of Samson is an excellent example of Hebrew storytelling. While reading it we must keep in mind the words of St. Paul: "See how all the words written long ago were for our instruction; we were to derive hope from that message of endurance and courage which the Scriptures bring us" (Rom. 15:4). The idea being that the biblical narrators did not write for the sake of historical interest, but for our sake.<sup>1</sup> They testify to God's being and to His plan for the world. The Israelites knew that evil brought its own punishment: the sacred writers had only to develop this thought.

Painstaking literary study indicates that Samson was truly an historical person.<sup>2</sup> In the face of geographical and historical evidence it seems unwarranted to judge that the story of Samson is a myth. The place names Saraa,

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Sigmund Mowinckel, The Old Testament as Word of God, trans. Reidar B. Bjornard, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1960, p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Philip J. King, The Book of Judges, Pamphlet Bible Series, Vol. 12, Gen. ed. Neil J. McEleney, New York, Paulist Press, 1960, p. 27.

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Esthaol, Thamma, Etam and Sorec are easily identifiable.

It is an admitted historical and geographical fact that, at that time, 11th century B.C., the tribe of Dan was situated in the district west and northwest of the site of the present Jerusalem (then in the portion of Benjamin), touching the northwest boundary of Philistia, with Juda at its south.<sup>3</sup>

Along the southeastern shore of the Great Sea the Philistines had settled. They were the uncontested masters of the Israelites. It was indeed a time of trial as the editorial note at the beginning of Chapter 13 of Judges points out: "Then, once again, the sons of Israel defied the Lord, and for forty years He left them at the mercy of the Philistines." Since the Philistines were the only people in possession of, and skilled in the use of iron, the position of the Israelites was similar to the North American Indians fighting with bows and arrows against the guns of the white men.<sup>4</sup> There was no declared war in progress, but border incidents of murder and pillage were frequent. In fact the whole of the Book of Judges is a piecemeal history. As for the hero, Samson, he fought a personal war.

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<sup>3</sup> The Westminster Historical Atlas to the Bible, eds. G.E. Wright and F.V. Filson, Philadelphia, Westminster Press, 1945, Plate VI, p. 42.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. King, op. cit., p. 17.

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The historical frame of the Samson saga is clear-cut and conforms to documental knowledge pertaining to the morals and customs of those times. Naturally, we cannot expect the nice precision and objectivity demanded in modern history. It is heroic narrative recording the extraordinary exploits of the hero of the clan of Dan. The primary importance of this sacred writing lies in its theological teaching. The author uses these spectacular stories of Samson's "goings down" which he knows will appeal to the mentality of his hearers and readers of that day, as well as of the future. Once their attention has been caught, he demonstrates lessons probably well known, but certainly often forgotten: the fatherhood, providence, and power of God; the actions of His people are known to Him and directed by Him even when the actors themselves are unaware of it; and finally, what was later expressed by St. Paul as, "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23). In particular, the tale of Samson follows the theme of four terms, constantly used in the Book of Judges, namely: sin and punishment, repentance and forgiveness.

This is not to hold for an instant that the exploits of Samson always make edifying reading; on the contrary, sometimes it is a shocking account of bawdry, disobedience, lies, debauchery, theft and multiple murder. Nevertheless we cannot use as criteria for this wickedness the norms of

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our civilization that has progressed during two thousand years under the guidance of Christ's Church.

We must remember that the Israelites then were still a barbarous people surrounded by peoples equally barbarous. They may be compared to a baby whose misdemeanours are excused until it is possible to train him properly. Samson, like his nation, had not outgrown savagery. The remarkable fact is not that under their severe trials and temptations they sometimes succumbed, but rather that under the charismatic leadership of the judges they managed to keep their faith in the one true God<sup>5</sup> who was close to them, who cared for them, and who rewarded or punished them according to their deserts.

For one reading in a spirit of faith there are specific lessons taught. Manoe and his wife were exemplary parents, preparing by prayer and sacrifice for the birth of their child, ready to do all that was asked of them by the angel.

While Samson's example teaches mostly in the negative vein, proving that sin is always punished, he also exhibits true contrition and great faith. He accepts his punishment as God-sent and deserved, and he asks no quarter amid the physical tortures of having his eyes gouged out

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. King, op. cit., p. 29.

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and being set to tread the mill. Nor does he lose faith in Jahweh's power to deliver him even while suffering the mental anguish of humiliation as he, the once strongest of men, is made to do slave's work, and finally is exhibited as a buffoon. His staunch faith is worthy of imitation.

In ancient times the popular form of expression, the normal mode of transmitting knowledge was by word of mouth. By story and song, both at feasts and religious festivals, were the traditions of a people kept alive. In their precarious situation of weak nation among the strong, it is surely credible that the Israelites would delight in tales of personal combat. No matter if the hero be religious or secular as long as he was one of their own. This proved to be the most successful way of handing down history to an illiterate group.<sup>6</sup> With constant retelling over hundreds of years, it is to be expected that embellishments would be added. Probably the times of greatest desperation for the nation would be the time of greatest elaboration for the stories. The Israelites would find courage to face the darkening future in their pride of past brilliant accomplishments.

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. S. Pagano, Formation of the Books of the Old Testament, Ottawa, University Seminary, 1962, p. 4, (Mimeographed).

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Always they believed that the causes of bygone victories whether seemingly due to military prowess, or fortunate meteorological conditions, or clever strategy were in fact direct interventions of God in their regard.

And they were not wrong! God did continually intervene on behalf of His chosen people. The modern mind finding natural causes or scientific explanations for many of these biblical happenings must, nevertheless, proceed finally to the First Cause, who arranged the times and circumstances of events in favour of the Israelites. They themselves did not bother with intermediaries, they had no thought for secondary causes, their acknowledgment went directly to God. Thus did the faith of Israel point forward.

## BIRTH OF SAMSON

(Judges 13:2-5)<sup>7</sup> We are not surprised to note that the birth of Samson was heralded by divine intervention. As in the case of the mothers of other celebrated men, such as Samuel and John the Baptist, Samson's mother (unnamed) received a message from an angel that she would give birth to a son. (To the Israelites the expressions: angel, Angel

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<sup>7</sup> The Confraternity of Christian Doctrine version of the Holy Bible was used for the Story of Samson.

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of Yahweh, and God were synonymous.) This child was destined to be a Nazirite, that is, vowed to God from his mother's womb. As an outward sign of this consecration, the heavenly messenger went on to say, no razor should touch his head "until the day of his death" (v.7). The angel then announced that this chosen one would begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines.

(v.6-14) On the second visit the angel repeated the two customary directions for observance of the Nazirite vow. A third prescription, that of the avoidance of the handling of dead bodies, was not expressly mentioned (Num. 6:2-6).

Since the child was consecrated to God even before birth, the rules were to be of obligation even for the mother. Usually only the one consecrated is prepared, but the birth of such a favoured child demanded special preparation on the part of the mother as well.

(v.15-18) According to Oriental custom,<sup>8</sup> a stranger is asked where he comes from, and is expected to reply, giving his name as well. But the Angel of Yahweh remained silent in this respect. Manoë essayed to find out by inviting him to dinner, but the invitation was declined.

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. M.J. Lagrange, Le livre des Juges, Paris, Victor Lecoffre, 1903, p. 224, note c.

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(This was a sign, since angels do not eat.) However, the offer had a double meaning; it could be taken either for a meal or for a sacrifice. The angel accepted the offering of a holocaust to Yahweh. Still undaunted, Manoe asked him outright for his name, giving as reason that they would wish to thank him after the birth of the child. But the angel answered that his name was mysterious. It was not that the Divine Being could fear that the knowledge of His Name would give the man power over Him; rather that the human intellect is utterly incapable of seizing the essence expressed by the name. It surpasses the limits of all human comprehension.

(v.19-23) Seeing these wonders, Manoe was terrified but his more practical wife reasoned that these manifestations had a purpose.

(v.24) And she bore a son and called him Samson. (Such a name, meaning "sun," was common and was found also in geographical names, for instance, in the nearby village of Beth Shemesh.<sup>9</sup>) The child grew and was blessed by God.

(v.25) A mark of the divine predilection was the gift he possessed of prodigious strength. By "spirit of the Lord" is not meant the Holy Spirit, the third Person of

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. M.J. Lagrange, op. cit., p. 228, note 24.

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the Blessed Trinity. The ancients had no knowledge of this mystery. Rather, "ruah" (spirit) means breath or power of the Lord.

## MARRIAGE OF SAMSON

(Judges 14:1) Samson's first "going down" was to Thamma in the land midway between the lowlands of the coast and the mountains of Juda—a distance of four or five miles from his home between Saraa and Esthaol.

(v.2-3) It would be hard indeed for his parents to understand how Samson could be taken with a Philistine woman. That he would want her for a wife would fill them with horror, because to the Israelites the Philistines were not only the archenemies, but also uncircumcised pagans, considered no better than low beasts.

(v.4) The Jewish narrator stresses here his own nationalistic point of view against the Philistines. Nevertheless, he never minimizes Samson's wrongdoing, because he fully realizes that bad example can be instructive.

Biblical scholars are not in unanimous agreement as to whether or not Samson's parents accompanied him to Thamma. Different translations slant the meaning of the text in different ways.

(v.5-6) The encounter with the lion is the first manifestation of the great strength of the popular hero.

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Traces of folklore are apparent here but it is not necessarily absolute invention; such a feat was within the realm of possibility for the muscular paragon.

(v.8) Jackals, birds and the sun would soon make a dry skeleton out of the carcass; nevertheless, there is question here of Samson's breaking his Nazirite vow by dealing with a dead body. The contrast between the sweetness of the honey and the strength of the lion is folklore artistry.

Samson contracted a moussarib marriage, which means that though it is legitimate, the wife remains in her own home. When the husband visits her he is expected to bring a present.<sup>10</sup> In the face of the strong disapproval of his parents, Samson probably considered this to be the best arrangement.

(v.10) We cannot be sure whether the wedding feast was given by Samson or by his father-in-law. In any case, it seems likely, in view of the banqueting customs of the time, that Samson was breaking another Nazirite prescription—that of abstaining from strong drink.

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<sup>10</sup> R. Tamisier, "Le Livre des Juges," La Sainte Bible, Texte latin et traduction, eds. Louis Pérot - Albert Clamer, Vol. III, Paris, Letouzey et Ané, 1949, p. 254, note b.

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## THE RIDDLE

(v.11-12) The thirty men to be the bridegroom's companions have every appearance of being, in truth, a strong guard for him. As yet Samson had no particular quarrel with the Philistines; nevertheless, he was in enemy territory. This cool welcome rather justifies the not very delicate idea of hoaxing them with a riddle.

(v.13) For the needs of the time, thirty sets of garments would be superfluous for one man, but the large number illustrates the bravado of Samson in making the bargain. It would be the occasion for more and louder boasting.

(v.14 and 18) The riddle itself, and Samson's reply when it was solved, show that his wit could be both penetrating and mordant.

(v.15) This fearful threat may have been the last of several, each one having increased in severity. The words "your family" could mean that the woman was a widow with children, as frequently was the case in a moussarib marriage.

(v.17) There is some discrepancy in numbers here. How does it happen that the woman coaxes him for seven days, when the "companions" threatened her only on the fourth day? It seemingly points to more than one author; or it

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may be that the wife really had been curious from the first on her own account; or it could be simply that the narrative shows little care for mathematics. It is understandable that he finally told her since, obviously, he was easily influenced by women.

(v.19) Far from being shocked at Samson's murderous plundering, the sacred author ascribes the idea and the power of execution to the "spirit of the Lord." The Israelites were still thinking in terms of a national and earthly kingdom; they, and they alone, were Jahweh's people. Other peoples, individually or nationally, could be exterminated with impunity.

The distance to Ascalon is about twenty-five miles, but had it been fifty or one hundred, it would have made no difference. The intention of the writer is to stress Samson's physical stamina. From now on he is portrayed as the popular resistance hero. Amid the stresses and strains of life as a dominated people the Israelites in centuries to come would admire his prowess and, in countless retellings, the story would grow with suitable embellishments. History and lyricism are not opposed as are truth and invention. The aim of the narrators was to bring out in sharp relief the religious idea that God assists His chosen ones when they are faithful to Him; He abandons them when they disobey Him.

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(v.20) By giving his daughter to another man, Samson's father-in-law paved the way for future trouble.

## BURNING THE CROPS

(15:1-3) Samson must have loved his wife; he did not punish her personally, and when his anger had cooled he returned to her. Neither would he have another in her place. Whoever was at fault, from now on Samson is against all Philistines.

(v.4 and 5) The foxes could have been jackals. No doubt popular folklore has increased their number. The idea of tying them tail to tail was probably to slow them down where they could do most damage before the fire itself separated them.

(v.6) Samson's revenge did him no good; now he is without a wife. The Philistines prove to be equally cruel and vengeful by burning human victims no more guilty than themselves.

(v.7) The first revenge was material or financial; now he takes a toll of human life to avenge the death of his wife. "Jungle law" prevailed; Samson was no exception.

(v.8) Even Samson needed rest occasionally. He withdrew to Rock of Etam which is very difficult of access.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> A. Vincent, "Le Livre des Juges," Bible de Jérusalem; fasc. 7, Paris, Cerf, 1958, p. 109, note b.

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In verses 9, 15, 16, 17 and 19 respectively the place of rendezvous is called Jaw-bone; Samson uses the jaw-bone of an ass for weapon; he makes a play on the word in his song of victory; even though Ramath means "hill", the sacred writer turns it to mean "Brandishing of the Jaw-bone" and the "Tooth of the Jaw-bone". Such literary turns are usual in Biblical narratives of this kind, and all redounds to the greater fame of Samson.

(v.10-19) Admitting that they are unable to cope with Samson themselves, the Philistines try another approach. They make a show of military strength against the Judeans and give them the choice of handing over Samson or going to war. In those days of the amphictyony, loyalty to one's own tribe was evidently placed ahead of loyalty to Israel as a whole. In any case, the men of Juda seemed quite willing to sacrifice Samson for the sake of their own safety.

Though they were terrified and upset, nevertheless the Judeans would hardly have needed three thousand men—there would not even have been room for that great number on that spot. The exaggeration in numbers, however, adds to the reputation of Samson.

Herculean strength often supposes weak intelligence, but we cannot suppose that Samson was so stupid as to give himself up that easily unless he was convinced that the

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power of God would deliver him from the Philistines.

(v.20) The chapter ends with the Deuteronomic formula which seems to indicate two distinct recensions.<sup>12</sup> This formula is repeated in almost the same words at the close of Chapter 16. According to Father Lagrange this consecrated sentence could not follow the account of the capture of Samson; the redactor therefore placed it before these unfortunate events which interrupted his judicature, but he repeats at the end that Samson had judged Israel.

## THE "GOING DOWN" TO GAZA

(Judges 16:1) Gaza was Philistia's great center of agriculture and commerce. Doubtless, business affairs were the main reason for Samson's trip. It was hardly necessary for him to travel forty miles to find a prostitute.

Commenting on this verse, M. J. Lagrange<sup>13</sup> expresses the opinion that it is useless to veil the facts by supposing an ordinary inn, as do some of the Fathers and commentators.

(v.2) Obviously he was easily recognized. The men of Gaza made their plans carefully to prevent his escape.

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. J. Blenkinsopp, "The Saga of Samson," in Scripture, Vol. XI, July, 1959, p. 86, note 5.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Lagrange, op. cit., p. 245, note 1.

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The words "and all the night they waited" suggest that they had already set their trap during the day. Though the city gates would then be open, they had laid an ambush for him. It never occurred to them that he would even wish to leave during the night. To their primitive mentality sleep was a mysterious state. Work at night was actually taboo, and custom forbade the rude or startled wakening of a sleeper.<sup>14</sup> Moreover these braves of Gaza trusted in their locked gates.

It is suggested that they were waiting for that critical hour before dawn when Samson would be, they hoped, at his weakest.<sup>15</sup> Nothing less than murder would satisfy them.

(v.3) Samson surprised them by rising at midnight. He does not bother to force the bars of the lock; in a spirit of bravado he carries away the two gateposts as well as the gates. He strides off where he will. No man, nor group of men could possibly oppose him while he is armed with such a weapon. Ironically Samson could use the Philistines' own possessions as a threat against them.

The locality designated by "the top of the ridge opposite Hebron" cannot be definitely located. It could, of course, be some hill east of the city in the direction of

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<sup>14</sup> Tamisier, op. cit., p. 261, note 2.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 245, note 1.

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Hebron, but what Jewish writer would deny Samson the power of trudging the seventy miles to Hebron to complete his mischievous intent?

The affair of Gaza vividly portrays the lusty character of Samson—his strength, his weakness, his irony, his humour, his truculence, his braggadocio. It is a pleasing example of the use of folklore to stress ideas as well as to entertain.

## SAMSON AND DALILA

(Judges 16:4) The last "going down" for Samson was to a woman of the Valley of Sorec. Even the place name connotes pleasure since it comes from a species of red grapes produced in that area. Right at the beginning of the account the sacred writer uses the expression, "He fell in love"; designedly there is no mention of the word "marriage."

Two Arab words dalla and dalil having for meaning respectively "the informer" and "the untruthful or deceitful lover,"<sup>16</sup> lead one to suspect that the name Dalila was given to Samson's paramour only after she had played her role with such effect in this lamentable episode.

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<sup>16</sup> Vincent, op. cit., p. 11, note e.

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(v.5) The lords or chiefs of the Philistines were usually five in number. The text says that they came themselves, and the amount of the reward they promised was enormous, which shows how greatly they desired to know the secret of Samson's fabulous strength. They believed it to be some magic charm. Hostility against him had actually reached the proportions of an affair of state. They may have found it easier to obtain the consent of Dalila by promising that, though they intended to chain, humiliate and maltreat Samson, they would not kill him.<sup>17</sup> In fact, they kept their word.

(v.6-9) It is clear that Samson was as wax in the hands of a beautiful woman. Perhaps his promiscuity served to render him stupid; nevertheless, Dalila would hardly have asked outright the question attributed to her. She must first have used to advantage all her feminine wiles. Samson's reply shows his readiness to enter into the spirit of the game; he would enjoy duping her without revealing his secret. Realizing that the Philistines would expect magic, he purposely uses the proverbial number of seven for the bowstrings and gleefully adds the difficulty that they must be fresh. "But he snapped the strings as a thread of tow is severed by a whiff of flame" (Judges 15:9). This

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. Lagrange, op. cit., p. 247, note 5.

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is an exceptionally apt figure of speech to indicate the slightest of touches.

(v.10-12) Does Samson still believe it to be only a game? In any case he is willing to play along, this time suggesting magic in the fact that the ropes should be new and unused. The unlikelihood of the scene should not surprise us unduly; the saga of Samson could not but become embellished after centuries of retelling.

(v.13-14) Samson is amused again to mock her with the use of the number seven. He is getting onto dangerous ground indeed when he allows her to play with his hair. This is the first step towards his undoing. For the third time Dalila uses the exclamation: "The Philistines are upon you, Samson" (Judges 16:14). The author uses this repetition to show clearly what was in the girl's mind. It also heightens the dramatic element since the secret of the God-given strength is still safe.

(v.15-18) Relentlessly the story moves on as Dalila clinches her great offensive. Samson's recklessness so far has displayed his strength; from now on it will expose his weakness.

He was deathly weary of her importunities, but because he still loved her, he gave in and told her all. The only Nazarite vow that he actually had kept he now had placed in jeopardy. Perhaps it was the realization of the

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seriousness of his act affecting his behaviour which intuitively convinced Dalila that at last she had won.

(v.19) "And she called for a man who shaved off his seven locks of hair." In this Confraternity of Christian Doctrine version it is clearly the barber who does the cutting, while Dalila does her part by keeping him asleep. She had fulfilled her part of the bargain in discovering the secret.

(v.20) "... He did not realize that the Lord had left him." The sacred writer makes undeniable the fact that Samson's strength had come not from magic, but from his fidelity to the Nazirite vow which now had been violated.

(v.22) The author notes that Samson's hair began to grow immediately. This could have been to disclose the fact that his strength did not return with the growth—that would come only after suffering and the humble prayer of faith.

## DEATH OF SAMSON

(v.23-27) The feast of Dagon was probably the first one to be celebrated since the capture of Samson, but it could not have been solely on his account; otherwise, it would surely have taken place sooner, before his hair had time to grow.

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Dagon was an Amorite goddess, protectress of the wheat, adopted by the Philistines and later falsely identified with a goddess having the body of a fish. Her principal temples were at Ashdad and Gaza, but the cult to her seems to have been widely practised over the whole region.<sup>18</sup>

"Our god has delivered into our power Samson our enemy." This may have been a rhyming couplet, part of a song of thanksgiving. In singing it, the people would be reminded of Samson's proximity, and therefore call for his appearance.

It is not likely that he would deign actually to "play the buffoon" at their demand, but simply the sight of him in a state of helplessness and blindness would be cause for ribaldry and laughter.

"Our god has delivered into our power our enemy, the ravager of our land, the one who has multiplied our slain" would appear to have been originally a quatrain similar to the one made up by Samson himself in response to the thirty companions at his wedding feast. Though the sacred author reports this song, evidently he does not approve of it.

Eventually the crowd would tire of making sport of Samson and go on with their feasting, thus allowing him

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<sup>18</sup> Vincent, op. cit., p. 114, note d.

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some little respite. He could not have been in the temple of Dagon as it was the custom to build the actual sanctuary and its adjoining buildings on a small scale. It sufficed that there was room for the priests to offer sacrifice. Close by there would be a hall of vast proportions where the people would gather to consume the remains of the victims offered, and otherwise make merry.<sup>19</sup>

(v.28) Samson would not have betrayed his intention of seeking revenge by thus crying aloud. It is the style of the author to put these words on his lips for our information, as was done for Dalila in the preceding verses. His prayer reflects the mentality of the era which considered vengeance to be licit. Still it is humble and hopeful, correcting our picture of Samson, the braggart.

(v.29) "Samson grasped the two middle columns on which the temple rested" is, without doubt, an overstatement even for a man of his giantlike proportions. The Bible of Jerusalem uses the word tata which gives a more plausible impression—he groped for them or he felt his way.

(v.30) The sacred writer impresses us with the reality that Samson acted knowingly and willingly with complete trust that God would hear his plea. He emphasizes the fact that Samson's heroic death did more to fulfil the

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Vincent, op. cit., p. 115, note c.

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words of the angel: "It is he who will begin the deliverance of Israel from the power of the Philistines" (Judges 14:5) than had his whole swaggering lifetime.

(v.31) It is not surprising that his kinsmen claimed his body; burial was rarely refused even to enemies, and Samson is restored to a place of honor in the estimation of Israel.<sup>20</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Samson lived on in the memory of his compatriots. Although he could not singlehandedly stop the infiltrations of the Philistines, he did keep the enemy at bay. Thus he prepared the way for the later triumph of David. The example of the success of one man performing such notable feats with divine assistance, would serve to comfort and encourage countless generations of Israelites who would have many reasons, no doubt, to suffer from an inferiority complex.

With candid singleness of purpose, the sacred writer labours to teach his people the inexorable lesson that Yahweh is looking after His chosen ones, but that He unflinchingly punishes the wayward. He depicts distinctly the tragedy which befalls a man who uses his charismatic

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<sup>20</sup> Tamisier, op. cit., p. 267, note 31.

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qualities for his own interests rather than for the glory of the Giver.

By what is known as the evolution of the Bible, we understand that the divine plan was to give Revelation by degrees. The progress in moral standards was very gradual. God chose to save men through men, necessarily flesh-and-blood men with all their limitations. In spite of his incomparable physical might, Samson was certainly a weak instrument; but he had been chosen, and in God's plan he was used.

As pointed out at the beginning of this paper, the story of Samson must not be judged by twentieth century standards. Rather should we remember the words of Judges 21-24, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what he thought best."

CHAPTER II  
THE BOOK OF JUDITH

INTRODUCTION

The Book of Judith takes its name from the heroine of the story. The original text, definitely Semitic, is now lost. It is generally supposed to have been written in Hebrew rather than in Aramaic.

The earliest form extant is the Greek translation of which there are three recensions.

All three recensions, however, represent the same version and go back to the same original. Their differences are due to corrections made not on a fresh comparison with the Hebrew, but subjectively by editors of the version, and though considerable, they concern the form rather than the matter.<sup>1</sup>

The Greek version is clear and shows marked Hebraistic phraseology, such as:

Let not thy eye spare,  
As I live,  
God of heaven,  
Son of man, and  
It came to pass when she had ceased crying.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A.E. Cowley, "Judith," I, Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha in the Old Testament, ed. R.H. Charles, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1913, p. 243.

<sup>2</sup> T. Witton Davies, International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia, p. 1780.

There are two Syriac versions both dependent on two of the Greek recensions, while the Old Latin, anterior to Jerome, seems to have been taken from the third one.

St. Jerome made his Latin version, according to his own account, from a since lost Chaldee version, but he could also have had recourse to some of the above-mentioned manuscripts. Again quoting Dr. Cowley:

The questions which naturally present themselves are, What were these divergent MSS. and What was the 'Chaldee' text? The MSS. cannot have been Greek, because the Vulgate differs from that version in important particulars: ... It often follows VL closely even in diction (cf. cap. 16), and the resemblance throughout is sufficient to show that Jerome used MSS. of the VL, which he merely adapted and corrected, as he considered, by the help of his 'Chaldee' text. It is evident from his own remarks ('huic unam lucubratiunculam dedi magis sensum e sensu, quam ex verbo verbum transferens') that he spent very little time or trouble on it, and for this reason its style is less like Jerome's than the rest of the Vulgate.

As to the 'Chaldee' text, we have no other evidence.<sup>3</sup>

In general, Catholic authorities agree that St. Jerome's version is a free translation of an Aramaic midrash. It omits about one-fifth of the book.

Some late Hebrew versions, of midrashic character, have been found, but no one of them with evidence strong enough to be considered as the original text, though, in

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<sup>3</sup> Cowley, op. cit., I, pp. 243, 244.

1893, Rabbi Gaster<sup>4</sup> did make this claim for the manuscript found and edited by him.<sup>5</sup>

The Hebrew midrashes were composed for family reading among the Jews, and thus vary according to the time and place of their origins. Proper names are often omitted, Jerusalem is the scene of action, the wars are those of the Maccabees, Judith is a Jewish maiden, daughter of Ahitah. Only in the Gaster MSS. is she represented as belonging to the Maccabean family. In some of these midrashic versions it is Nicanor who is beheaded, the occasion being the Feast of Dedication; in the Gaster MSS., it is the king who is killed.

The Books of Ruth, Esther and Judith are the only ones in the Bible called by the names of their heroines, these women being the principal characters in each case.

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND<sup>6</sup>

Can this period which the sacred author is describing be brought into agreement with any known period

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<sup>4</sup> In "Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology."

<sup>5</sup> Davies, op. cit., p. 1780.

<sup>6</sup> This section is based on Pagano, Sebastiano, Adnotaciones in librum Judith, Ottawa, 1963, 11 pages (Typewritten).

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of history? Evidently not. According to the narrative Nebuchadnezzar has been King of Assyria for twelve years, with his capital at Niniveh. But the historical Nebuchadnezzar reigned in Babylon from 605 to 562 B.C., after his father had destroyed Assyria in 608. It was with the aid of the Medes that the Babylonians had conquered the Assyrian Empire; yet the narrative presents them as enemies.

No Median king was named Arphaxad; moreover, Ecbatana was fortified by Deioces. The names of Nebuchadnezzar's generals are known to history but that of Holofernes is not found among them. In fact, the names Holofernes and Bagoas are Persian and belong to the time of Artaxerxes.

The date assigned to Judith's exploit is 587; but that is the actual time of the destruction of Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar himself!

The story is represented as taking place shortly after the return from exile, yet Holofernes, supposedly Nebuchadnezzar's general, knows nothing about the Israelites. A greater anachronism still is evident in the fact that Nebuchadnezzar died in 561 B.C. and that the Jews returned under Cyrus in 538.

A close look at the customs and conditions, social and religious, portrayed in the book, especially in Chapter 3, reveals the Hellenistic period which flourished only

three or four centuries after the death of the personages mentioned in the account.

#### GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND<sup>7</sup>

Many exegetes and archaeologists have studied the nomenclature and the geographical and topographical features found in such profusion in the Book of Judith. The resulting hypotheses have been numerous and varied. Nevertheless, the great majority conclude from their findings that the author of Judith skillfully mingled the names of currently existing places and others taken from Holy Scriptures, with others that were pure invention.

The proofs for their statements rest upon findings from deeper research in ancient history and archaeology than falls within the scope of this paper. It should suffice here to give some of their better known and more easily understood arguments.

In the first chapter of the Book of Judith, Nebuchadnezzar sends out a call to arms to the inhabitants of Cilicia, Damascus, Lebanon and Antilebanon. This is strange procedure, involving, as it does, a geographically known region, a city and a chain of mountains.

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<sup>7</sup> This section is based on J. Steinmann, Lecture de Judith, Paris, Gabalda, 1953, pp. 35-45.

Passing without comment some well-known names in Galilee, Samaria and Judea, we come to the "river of Egypt." In Numbers 34:5, this was set as the theoretical border between Egypt and the Promised Land. It is generally accepted to be the Wadi el Arish.<sup>8</sup> This relatively unimportant river is mentioned while the life-giving Nile is omitted. The text reads as though the Land of Goshen included Tanis and Memphis. Biblical names only appear excluding even Thebes which, history tells us, was twice devastated by Nebuchadnezzar at about the beginning of the sixth century B.C.<sup>9</sup> The expression, "everybody in Egypt, until you come to the coasts of the two seas" (1:12) has no geographical explanation.

Not even the greatest of generals of that era could transport a whole army from Niniveh to Cilicia in three days, a distance of at least 400 miles. Moreover, Niniveh had already been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar's father Nabopolassar, about 608 B.C. Supposing such a feat to have been accomplished even in an ordinary length of time, it is too fantastic to think of a general causing his army to

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<sup>8</sup> M. Du Buit, Géographie de la Terre Sainte, Paris, Cerf, 1958, p. 228.

<sup>9</sup> S. Vailhé, "Thebes," The Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. XIV, New York, Robert Appleton Company, 1912, pp. 562, 563.

zigzag back across the Euphrates to a region already in his power.

This triumphal journey of Nebuchadnezzar began towards the end of the first month of the year, but when he zigzags back to Damascus, barely four months have passed, since he is said to devastate that area during the time of the wheat harvest, namely about the end of May.<sup>10</sup> This certainly surpasses the limits of human endurance.

In the catalogue of victories down the seacoast, is it not probable that the sacred writer is calling to mind certain prophesies of woe? Amos foretold the destruction of Geza, Ashdod, Askalon and the Philistine nation in general (Amos 1:6-8). Isaias prophesies the conquest of Egypt (20:4,5), of Phoenicia (23:1-14), and of Philistia (14:29-31). Zephaniah dooms Philistia (2:1-7), and also Moab and Ammon (2:8-11), Ethiopia and Assyria (2:12-15). These last four countries are named in Judith, Chapter One.

In Chapter Three, the victorious general receives the homage of "all the country round" but does not seem to notice the absence of the Israelites in spite of the fact that they had ignored his messengers. The army evidently passes in front of Judea, on the way from Askalon to Dothan, without attempting retaliation.

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<sup>10</sup> A. Barucq, "Judith, Esther," Bible de Jérusalem, Fascicule 13, p. 27, note g.

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The key-site of Bethulia, not mentioned outside the Book of Judith, is artistically portrayed, but no real geographical place can be at the beginning of the mountains of Samaria and, at the same time, near Jerusalem.

All through the book the writer uses very ancient names side by side with Hellenistic ones. This practice is most confusing for the modern reader but the readers of his time would understand his allusions and recognize that it was done not in ignorance but deliberately to avoid trouble with the political overlords of the time.

In the last chapter the author gives free rein to his imagination in a pen picture of Judith leading all the men and all the women, singing and dancing, towards Jerusalem. The distance from the supposed site of Bethulia, near Dothan, would be approximately 73 miles, making such a pilgrimage utterly impracticable even in good weather, an unlikely phenomenon at that time of year. The idea of a three-month celebration in Jerusalem is quite in accordance with the customs of the time, but would it be held in the rainy season? That is most improbable. Yet, by careful counting, we find that it would occur exactly at that time.

The barley harvest occurs normally in April.<sup>11</sup> Manasseh, Judith's husband, had died at that season, and she had been a widow for three years and four months at the time of the siege of Bethulia, which brings us to the end of August. Five days pass during the events of the story of Judith's encounter with Holofernes, then for another thirty days the people plunder the camp. The year has now advanced to October, usually the beginning of the rainy season. (The Confraternity and Know versions give Judith's widowhood as three years and six months, thus having no slightest doubt that the rain had come.) According to the former reckoning, all the townspeople would be returning to Bethulia about the month of January when the rains are at their heaviest.<sup>12</sup>

According to the second reckoning, two months later would not see much improvement in the situation.

The list of inaccuracies and anachronisms could be drawn out to a much greater length but only one more—a very pertinent one—will be added: no other book of the Bible agrees with the action described in Judith.

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<sup>11</sup> A. Duprez, "Le Livre de Judith," Évangile, No. 47, Paris, troisième trimestre, 1962, p. 46.

<sup>12</sup> Denis Baly, The Geography of the Bible, London, Lutterworth Press, 1961, pp. 51, 52.

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## LITERARY GENRE

After even this quick review of inconsistencies, it would be impossible to see in the Book of Judith a page of history according to modern standards. The opinions of modern critics with regard to the literary form may be reduced to three, namely:

- a) a fictitious narrative
- b) an historical nucleus surrounded with unhistorical additions
- c) a purely historical narrative.<sup>13</sup>

On this subject A. Robert writes:

We get rather the impression that the author, on the basis of an historical tradition that perhaps was pretty thin, and with constant recourse to Scripture, constructs in the past a scene which gives the key to a present situation and ordains for his contemporaries a practical judgment and attitude that are supernatural in form.<sup>14</sup>

We believe that the author was continually conscious of the end he wished to attain. He purposely confused historical and geographical data. The people for whom he

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<sup>13</sup> M. Leahy, "Judith," A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture, eds. Orchard, et al., New York, Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1953, 208 f., p. 404.

<sup>14</sup> Guide to the Bible, Vol. 1, Eds. A. Robert and A. Tricot, 2nd ed., trans. E.P. Arbez and M.R.P. McGuire, New York, Desclée Company, 1960, p. 304.

was writing would see and understand the reason for the confusion. This religious writing was prompted by some severe persecution in which the faith of the Jews was sorely tried. The dominant aim of the author is the same as that of Daniel—to encourage those suffering for their religion by giving instances of Divine deliverance in the darkest hour. The meaning had to be hidden by pseudonyms, otherwise the danger in which they were living would have been increased.

The inspired writer chose the best, perhaps the only medium of expression capable of attaining his end. About the second century B.C., the sacred literature of the Jews favoured two literary forms: the apocalyptic vision—the last form of prophecy—and the haggadah. The latter is a story for edification, or for entertainment, or for teaching doctrine or ceremonies that were not prescribed by the Law. The author of Judith unites both forms and succeeds in so doing without having recourse to the marvelous or the miraculous.

The trials of the chosen people are gathered together under the symbol of the invading Assyrian army, which possesses the traits of all other invasions. The author puts the apocalyptic hope of the present time in the framework of ancient sagas. He is pointing out the true way to deliverance by showing that Israel's troubles are

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due to sin, but that salvation comes through trust in God and obedience to Him. The Book of Judith emphasizes the point that God uses weak things to confound the strong—with nations as with individuals. It is a synopsis of the Semitic philosophy of religion.

## DATE AND AUTHOR

The persecutions of Antiochus IV Epiphanes supply the most fitting background of Jewish history for the composition of the heroic tale of Judith. Eulogizing events of a time long past, using present conditions as the setting, instilling hope for the future, this melange was intended as a general survey of Jewish history implying that the righteousness of God would eventually be fully vindicated.

The anonymous author seems certainly to have been a resident of Palestine as his local knowledge and interests show. His theology points to his belonging, most probably, to the Pharisaic party. This is evidenced by his obvious approval of the strict observance of the rigorous details of the Law.

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## STYLE

The book is a work of art neither laboured nor redundant; rather, it is written in a graceful style that is easy and straightforward. Apart from the purposeful exaggeration of the magnitude and rapidity of the military operations, the story proceeds simply and naturally. The writer shows his knowledge and love of the literature of his race by his frequent references to Old Testament events. The "Song of Judith" impregnated with the indomitable spirit of God's chosen people, deserves a place among the sublime and eloquent passages of Hebrew poetry.

Such literary skill would suppose an education on the part of its owner, which could not but have included a command of history, thus furnishing another proof of the deliberate intent to convey an inner meaning under an exterior confusion of facts.

THE CAMPAIGN OF HOLOFERNES<sup>15</sup>

The opening sentence with its deliberate confusion of names of people and places is an indication of the literary form to be found throughout the Book. All these

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<sup>15</sup> This section is based principally on L. Soubigou, "Judith," La Sainte Bible, traduite et commentée, Pirot-Clamer, t. IV, Paris, Letouzey et Ané, 1949, pp. 509-511.

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names would impress the reader with the reality that at all periods of history the Jewish nation has been small in numbers and lacking in military strength, never to be compared with the power of the contemporary pagans. Their survival has depended totally on their fidelity to the one true God.

The lengthy preparation disclosed in Chapter One contrasts with the rapid denouement of Chapter 13. In like manner the fabulous Ecbatana is the antithesis of the insignificant Bethulia.

The obviously unhistorical regal personage called Nebuchadnezzar could have brought to mind the Assyrian Assurbanipal, conqueror of Babylon and Egypt; or Artaxerxes III, victor in many campaigns in the West, who had under him a general named Holofernes and a retainer called Bagoas; or even the historical Nebuchadnezzar who twice devastated Jerusalem and burned the temple.<sup>16</sup>

The details are not meant to be historical. Nebuchadnezzar is introduced as the typical arch-enemy of Judaea; the time of the Return is chosen as being far away and little known, and the author is guilty of a further anachronism by describing his characters under the conditions of his own day.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> G. Ricciotti, The History of Israel, Vol. I, trans. C.D. Penta and J.A. Murphy, 2nd ed., Milwaukee, Bruce Publishing Company, 1958, p. 11, no. 15; cf. also Duprez, Évangile, No. 47, p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> Cowley, op. cit., p. 246.

As a foil for Nebuchadnezzar the author presents the King of the Medes, by name Arphaxad. His existence has not been proven by any historian.

(v.2-5) The detailed description of his military preparations of great magnitude could have but one outcome—the outbreak of war.

(v.6) Nebuchadnezzar has allies, possibly tributary nations, from the hill country, from the banks of the Euphrates and Tigris, and from the plains of Arioch. The Hydaspes mentioned in the same sentence should be identified with the Choaspes river which passes by Susa.<sup>18</sup>

(v.7-11) We are told that Nebuchadnezzar attempts negotiations with the inhabitants of Persia as well as with all the western nations. He meets with total refusal on every side.

(v.12-15) The great king swears vengeance on those who dared refuse but does not act precipitately. His plans are deep-laid and he carries them out carefully for the space of five years. He will punish the western countries but he cannot leave unfinished the war with Arphaxad.

In the seventeenth year he reopens hostilities and systematically wipes out first his rival's army, then his

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<sup>18</sup> Soubigou, op. cit., p. 509, note 6, and also cf. Barucq, op. cit., p. 22, note c.

cavalry, then all his chariots. He takes possession of his cities, and finally slays the king himself.

(v.16) The feast which Nebuchadnezzar offered to his army on its return from the campaign against Arphaxad lasted one hundred and twenty days! It recalls the banquet of Belshazzar in the Book of Daniel, that of Assuerus in the Book of Esther and prepares for the three months (12 weeks) of rejoicing of the people after the victory of Judith.<sup>19</sup>

The ancient Hebrews used the number twelve and its multiples to signify completeness. The feast in question, therefore, would apparently leave nothing to be desired.

(2:1) "In the eighteenth year of his reign, on the twenty-second day of the first month,"—this precise date is meant to give the appearance of real history.<sup>20</sup> The proposal "to take vengeance on all the land, just as he had said" is reminiscent of "I have resolved on the extermination of all mortals; for the earth is full of wrong-doing through them; I am going to exterminate them from the earth" (Gen. 6:13).

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<sup>19</sup> Steinmann, op. cit., p. 51.

<sup>20</sup> Cowley, op. cit., p. 249, note 1.

(v.4) Holofernes is introduced, the general of the army, second to the king. A supposedly Assyrian general with a Persian name is certainly meant to be symbolical.

(v.5,6) "Thus says the Great King, the Lord of all the earth:" is characteristic oracular style. The exaggerated figures for the size of the army are again given, not surprisingly, in multiples of twelve. The avowed intention is to mobilize and pit the strength of the East against the West.

(v.7) "You must call upon them to prepare earth and water," means to surrender their entire territory, with its principal object of wealth, water, source of all life and of all fecundity.<sup>21</sup>

(v.8-20) Holofernes receives specific instructions from his king and sets the entire army on the march. His well-trained troops are not to be compared with the conquered allies who are dismissed as a "motley host" (v.20).

(v.21-28) These eight verses could hardly be equalled for the difficulties they contain in the matter of names. Some place names have a probable identity, but others, such as Bectileth, Rassis, Cheleon and Abron are unknown.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Duprez, op. cit., p. 15.

<sup>22</sup> Steinmann, op. cit., p. 42.

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The region west of the Red Sea was at one time called Put (Phuth)<sup>23</sup> presumably after the person of that name, who was a descendant of Ham (Gen. 10:6).<sup>24</sup>

Lud (or Lydia) and Ludim were a place and a people of W. Asia Minor, including the Lydians, but occupying a more extensive territory than Lydia proper. The Ludim are mentioned in the list of peoples in Gen. 10:22 and I Chron. 1:17, ... as children of Shem. Lydians were not Semites.<sup>25</sup>

Put and Lud are also mentioned together in Ez. 27:10 and 30:5.

None of these geographical sites is certain. Atlas Biblique mentions Put, the descendant of Cham, but is uncertain whether to place the country of that name on the south shore of the Mediterranean, or on the west shore of the Red Sea.<sup>26</sup>

Though the Ishmalites are called Medianites in Gen. 37:28 and 36, in Jdt 2:23 and 26 they are presented as

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<sup>23</sup> Simon-Prado, Praelectiones Biblicae: Vetus Testamentum I, Fig. 8, Tabula gentium, p. 97.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. A. Vincent, Lexique Biblique, Tournai, Casterman, 1961, p. 302.

<sup>25</sup> M.S. and J.L. Miller, Harper's Bible Dictionary, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1952, p. 402.

<sup>26</sup> P. Lemaire et D. Baldi, Atlas Biblique, Louvain, Mont César, 1960, p. 36, carte 8, p. 34, and also cf. A Bible Atlas, Map of Ancient World and the Descendants of Noah, J.L. Hurlbut, Chicago, Rand McNally, 1940, p. 8, and also cf. Barucq, op. cit., p. 27, note a.

being two different peoples. The geographical situation is thereby doubly complicated.

Japheth is obscure. Gen. 10:1 and 2 enumerate some territories considered as those of Japheth, but none of them has southern frontiers facing Arabia.<sup>27</sup>

The familiar names Cilicia, Mesopotamia, River Euphrates, and Damascus are not placed in any reasonable, or even possible order for an army's line of march. The sea-coast cities—Sidon, Tyre, Jamnia, Ashdod, Askalon—would seem to be authentic, but difficulties are sown among them also. Sur is the ancient name for Tyre<sup>28</sup> but it is mentioned as a separate city. Ocine, as such, is non-existent, but it might be Akko.<sup>29</sup>

From these data it seems obvious that the author has deliberately distorted geographical features, mixed eponymous references, added a few imaginary names, and finally has given a semblance of truth by introducing some correct names of seacoast cities which, closer to home, would likely have been familiar to his readers.

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<sup>27</sup> Barucq, op. cit., p. 27, note e.

<sup>28</sup> La Bible, L'Ancien Testament II, ed. Edouard Dhorme, p. 57, note 28.

<sup>29</sup> Barucq, op. cit., p. 28, note a.

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The fantastic march continues on its way inexorably. Holofernes subdues in turn Cilicia, Mesopotamia and Damascus in the incredibly short time of four months. The sea-coast peoples, seized with terror, send messengers to sue for peace.

(3:1-8) These inhabitants of the western coast offer the most humiliating terms. According to Hellenistic custom (which could not have been in vogue until two hundred years after the return from captivity), they welcome the invaders "with garlands and dances and music" (v.7). Despite these forlorn measures, "He broke down all their frontier landmarks and cut down their groves, and succeeded in destroying all the gods of the country, in order that all nations should worship Nebuchadnezzar alone, and that all tongues and tribes should call upon him as god" (v.8). At the height of his power, Nebuchadnezzar is represented as demanding divine homage.

In actual fact neither the Assyrian nor Babylonian kings ever put forward such a claim. Nevertheless Ezekiel had previously reproached a king of Tyre for having wished to raise himself to the divine rank (Ez. 28:1ff), and a prophecy from the Book of Isaiah, no doubt post-exilic, celebrates the descent into Sheol of a Babylonian king who, in his pride, wished to make himself like to the Most High

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God (Is. 14:3-21). This proud pretension had already been stigmatized in the account of the fall (Gen. 3:5).<sup>30</sup>

(v.9-10) The dire menace of armed subjugation is now very real and close to Judea.

(4:1-3) The Israelites dread this formidable general whose strength of arms subjects all nations along his path. With agonizing horror they learn of his decree, which he enforces relentlessly, that all tribes acknowledge Nebuchadnezzar as their god. They are "disturbed about Jerusalem and the temple of the Lord their God" (v.3).

The author wished to convey the idea that the Israelites considered themselves a holy people, a race apart. Their superiority stemmed from their religious views and practices. The Temple of Jerusalem was not only a place of worship but the very heart and center of the life of the people. The circumstances related about the recent return from captivity and the consecration of the sacred dishes after profanation cannot be reconciled historically. Conceivably the writer is furnishing a motive for the attempted resistance in the narrow mountain passes, at such enormous odds, by calling to mind past degradation. Death would be preferable to the repetition of such a

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<sup>30</sup> Duprez, op. cit., p. 16.

calamity. This phase of the war is the open conflict between paganism and monotheism.

(v.4) The names Samaria, Cona (an unknown locality),<sup>31</sup> Bethoron, Belmain (which would be Ybleam), Jericho, Choba (which could be the "Hobah, which is north of Damascus" of Gen. 14:16, but is uncertain), Aesora (Hazor), east of Jaffa,<sup>32</sup> and the valley of Salem (which could designate a site close to Jerusalem; an archaism referring to Gen. 14:17-18),<sup>33</sup> all appear in the Fourth Chapter. Few will disagree with Rev. A. Abel in his opinion that the sacred writer was reminiscing on the ancient exploits of Joshua (VI and XI) when he used the names Jericho, Choba and Aesora in this context.<sup>34</sup>

It was precisely at the time of the Return that violent animosity sprang up between the Samaritans and the Jews. When the Samaritans had wished to help the Jews with the building of the temple, their offer had been firmly repulsed. In retaliation the Samaritans did all in their power to obstruct the work. Therefore, it is strange

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<sup>31</sup> Soubigou, op. cit., p. 519, note 3.

<sup>32</sup> Steinmann, op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>33</sup> Barucq, op. cit., p. 30, note b.

<sup>34</sup> Géographie de la Palestine, II, Paris, Librairie Lecoffre, 1938, p. 299.

indeed to find that messengers are sent, first of all to Samaria.

(v.5) The time element enters again. It is the month of June "for their fields had lately been reaped."<sup>35</sup>

(v.6,7) A Joakim appears in the lineage of high priests in Nehemiah 12:10,12 and 26. But at that period a civil functionary represented the power of Persia in Jerusalem: high commissioner or governor.<sup>36</sup> The Joakim in the Book of Judith, on the contrary, is plainly the political as well as religious ruler. He cannot be placed with any historical accuracy, though, under the Hasmoneans, the high priests did have recourse to force of arms. Surely the most incomplete of lists would have included the name of the high priest in such a crisis of Jewish history, had one actually existed.

The existence of neither Bethulia, the principal town of the story, nor Betomesthaim can be traced.<sup>37</sup> Bethulia, a variant of Bethel, meaning House of God, would be a symbolical city of most uncertain location.<sup>38</sup> Some

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<sup>35</sup> Barucq, op. cit., p. 27, note g.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 30, note c.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., note d.

<sup>38</sup> Steinmann, op. cit., p. 44.

scholars of the past century, for example, M. l'abbé Rabois-son,<sup>39</sup> have endeavoured to prove the historicity of these locations, but their conclusions are not entirely acceptable at the present time.

The plain of Esdraelon is a rough triangle whose apex in the northeast is near the Plain of Tabor. The very straight base stretches from Megiddo to Ibleam (near the modern Jenin). Its southern entrance to Dothan is a narrow defile about two miles long, guarded at one end by Jenin and at the other by the strong fortress of Ibleam. Dothan itself (the Dothan of Gen. 37:14-17) is a downfaulted basin which leads into the heart of Samaria.<sup>40</sup> Thus, the author definitely places the locale of his story in Samaria.

(v.8-15) The people are very obedient. Apparently, in this matter they are of one mind and heart. They do penance in earnest. They put on sackcloth—men, women, children, visitors, hired men and slaves. (This was the extent of conformity expected of aliens.) Even the cattle were included under the sackcloth regulation. The Jews went much farther. Those who lived in Jerusalem, with ashes on their heads, prostrated themselves and prayed

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<sup>39</sup> Judith, Rome, Imprimerie Polyglotte, 1898, p.374.

<sup>40</sup> Baly, op. cit., pp. 38 and 153.

before the temple. For them to have covered the altar with sackcloth was a most unusual departure indicative of their desperation.<sup>41</sup> "They continued to fast for several days" (v.13); their sincerity is unquestionable. "Continual burnt offerings, and vows and the freewill offerings of the people" are made as was usual following the command of Moses in Ex. 29:39. It would seem to have been unusual for the priests to have "ashes upon their miters" (v.15).<sup>42</sup>

It is interesting to note the ranks of the hierarchy: high priest, priests who officiated before the Lord and priests who ministered to the Lord.

(Chap.5) Holofernes is naturally astonished when he learns that the Israelites intend to resist. He questions their neighbours, the Canaanites, seeking the reason behind this freakish non-conformity. Achior, commander of all the Ammonites, volunteered to be spokesman. Notwithstanding the ancient enmity existing between their two nations, this Ammonite gives a summary of the history of the Israelites (from Abraham to that very day) which is a masterpiece of clarity and concision. His conclusion is perfectly logical:

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<sup>41</sup> Soubigou, op. cit., p. 522, note 12.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 523, note 15.

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Now, your Majesty, if there is any fault of ignorance in this nation, and they are sinning against their God, and we perceive that they are guilty of this offense, then we can go up and defeat them. But if there is no disobedience to law in their nation, then my Lord must pass by them, or their Lord will protect them and their God defend them, and we shall be disgraced in the eyes of the whole earth.

Nevertheless, Achior stands alone; every voice in the camp is raised against him. Deliberately the author presents Achior, an Ammonite, despised by the Israelites, speaking the purest Jewish theology.

Drawing inspiration from the past, the sacred writer presents Achior as a new Balaam.<sup>43</sup> The account of this pagan prophet is related in the Book of Numbers 22:5 - 24:25.

In a contrary situation Balak, King of Moab, feared the Israelites because of their superior numbers. He sent messengers to Balaam, in the land of the Ammonites, asking him to come and curse the Hebrews. But, like his later hypothetical compatriot, Balaam sees them as a people protected by God, and is unable to curse them; rather is he compelled to bless them at three different times (22:12; 23:8; 23:20-21).

(Chap.6) Holofernes condemns Achior to a refined torture. He is delivered over to the Jews to share their

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<sup>43</sup> Duprez, op. cit., p. 31.

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plight. Slaves of the general bring him close to Bethulia, bind him and leave him lying at the foot of the hill. He is captured by the Jews and brought before the magistrates of the village. In presence of all the people he tells what happened at Holofernes' council meeting. Immediately a despairing prayer is offered up to God. But sequels follow in the best Roman tradition: congratulations to Achior, whose heroism is as much appreciated as the information he brought, and the banquet which closes this adventure. This feast, held in the home of Uzziah, one of the elders of Bethulia, does not seem to be much in harmony with the rigorous fast mentioned above.<sup>44</sup> But these minor incoherencies are explained by the literary genre of the piece; they even add to its charm. Moreover, "They called upon the God of Israel for help all that night" (v.21). The Israelites were still doing penance.

The warmth of their congratulations may have been due to the fact that the inhabitants of Bethulia themselves were less hopeful of victory than this stranger of the detested Ammonite race. To them it seemed to be a lost cause. There was a great deal of astonishment mingled with their praise. In their eyes Achior appeared to be a simpleton. And in fact Uzziah regarded him with a pity

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<sup>44</sup> Steinmann, op. cit., p. 59.

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which was almost as insulting as the scorn Holofernes felt for this fool who, he was sure, had chosen death.<sup>45</sup>

## THE SIEGE OF BETHULIA

(7:1-3) The very next day Holofernes moves against Bethulia. The army of 120,000 has increased, by conquest, to 170,000 (according to the Greek text). The cavalry is still represented by the number of completeness—12,000. Attention is called to the fact that the wise general encamps near a spring.

(v.4) The troubled Israelites saying one to another "These people will lick up the face of the whole country" is reminiscent of Balak's plaint to the elders of Midian, "Now this horde will lick up all the pasture around us" (Nb. 22:4).

(v.5) The idea of kindling fires on the towers was probably to impress the enemy with their alertness, similar to 1 Macc. 12:28, 29. "They were frightened and were terrified ad heart, and they lighted fires in their camp."<sup>46</sup>

(v.6,7) On the second day Holofernes takes the lead himself. According to proper military procedure he reconnoitres the approaches, locates further springs of

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<sup>45</sup> Steinmann, op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>46</sup> Soubigou, op. cit., p. 533, note 5.

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water, seizes them and sets guards.

(v.8-21) On the advice of his confederates Holofernes decides to wait until thirst forces the surrender of the Israelites. The sons of Ammon, formerly under the command of Achior are given a prominent role in the seizure of the water supply; perhaps as a mark of confidence in their fidelity, perhaps to test it.

That the whole army surrounded it for thirty-four days points to the strategic importance of Bethulia. Nevertheless the possibility of this encirclement seems at variance with the words of Joakim:

... telling them to seize the passes of the mountains, because through them Judea could be entered, and it was easy to prevent any from approaching, as the way was narrow, with room for two men at most (4:7).

Neither does it accord with the later words of Judith, "For if we are taken, all Judea will be taken" (8:21).

(v.22-29) Within the town a revolt is fomenting. The citizens are driven to desperation by thirst. There do not seem to be any warriors worthy of the name. (The few slingers, who hurled stones at the Assyrian slaves, are the only ones mentioned.) The children are dejected, the women and even the young men are fainting with thirst. Somehow they do find strength for loud lamentations and accusations against their rulers. These weaklings, preferring slavery

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to death, beg the elders to surrender.

(v.30,31) Uzziah is forced to accede to their demands but he obtains a reprieve of five days. Later Judith will taunt him with setting limits for God's mercy.

(v.32) The chapter ends on the keynote: "There was great depression in the town." This understatement forms the backdrop for the entrance of the heroine.

## JUDITH

(8:1) Judith is introduced by solemn, biblical way of genealogy. Though the descent goes back to Jacob or Israel, it does not mention Symeon; this ancestor, however, is named later—"my father Symeon" (9:2). She is therefore presented as a Samaritan of the tribe of Symeon.<sup>47</sup> Again the factual enmity between Samaritan and Jew is ignored.

The genealogy at first glance seems to follow the traditional laws, but a closer scrutiny reveals it to be an intermixture of names of cities, of chiefs of other tribes, and of priests who were contemporaries of Joakim. J. Steinmann queries whether the author was not openly mocking the aristocrats of the time who forged genealogies for themselves when such were lacking.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Steinmann, op. cit., p. 72.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

M. Duprez questions whether the author wishes to illustrate that God seeks the saviours of His people from among the least.<sup>49</sup> Jacob curses Symeon and Levi in his benedictions before his death (Gen. 49:7). In punishment they shall be dispersed over Israel. Symeon is passed over in silence in the Deuteronomical benedictions of Moses.<sup>50</sup> This proves that Judith is not from stock of the finest reputation.

She therefore falls into the category of Saul whom God chose "...from the smallest of the tribes of Israel... the least of all the families" (1 Sam. 9:21). David was the youngest of the family of the little city of Bethlehem (1 Sam. 16:11). The Mother of Jesus lived in Nazareth, in Galilee, out of which no good could come (Luke 1:46, cf. Jn. 1:45-46).<sup>51</sup>

(v.2) Judith's marriage did not improve her social status. It is deliberately stated that her husband was of the same tribe and family.

(v.4-8) She is a widow, beautiful and rich, whose name is above reproach. She is a model to all in the performance of her religious duties. The customary tent on

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<sup>49</sup> Evangile, No. 47, p. 40, note 3.

<sup>50</sup> Duprez, op. cit., p. 40, note 4.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p. 40, note 3.

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the roof of the house, ordinarily used for the entertainment of guests, Judith reserved for herself that in privacy she might devote her life to prayer and penance.

(v.9-10) She is also a woman of authority; when she sends for the elders of her town, they come. She summons two by name—Chabris and Charmis (v.10). These same two are also called "magistrates" (6:15). According to J. Steinmann the above are Hellenistic names.<sup>52</sup> Uzziah is not mentioned in this last verse although it is he who replies (v.28).

(v.11-27) Judith addresses them at length and her words are a valiant attempt to stir up their lagging faith. She makes, with her compatriots, a national examination of conscience.<sup>53</sup>

She begins with a severe censure of their conduct because they had had the audacity to offer to the Lord Almighty an ultimatum of five days, actually setting a time limit for God!

One of the striking notes of the book is the contrast between the arrogance and mistrust of Uzziah and the elders and the humility and faith of Judith shown by their own words.

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<sup>52</sup> Lecture de Judith, p. 65.

<sup>53</sup> Barucq, op. cit., p. 46, note a.

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Then Uzziah said to them, "Courage, brothers! Let us hold out five days longer; by that time the Lord our God will show us his mercy, for he will not utterly forsake us. But if these pass and no help comes to us, I will do as you say (7:30-31).

The answer of Judith is a ringing challenge.

No, no, do not provoke the Lord our God. For if he does not wish to help us within these five days, he has power to protect us within whatever time he pleases, or to destroy us before our enemies. But you must not treat the counsels of the Lord our God as pledged, for God is not like a man, to be threatened, or like a son of man, to be cajoled. Therefore let us wait for the deliverance that comes from him, and call upon him to help us, and he will hear our cry, if it pleases him.

The strong motive for hope that Judith puts forward is that they have never followed other gods, and thus may unhesitatingly expect God to protect them. She appeals to their patriotism. The citizens of Bethulia are not alone, they must think of the danger to the Temple and to their brothers in Jerusalem. She goes so far as to say that God will hold them responsible if the Temple is profaned and their brethren slaughtered. It is their duty to set the proper example. She even urges them to thank God for this trial He is giving them similar to the trials He gave their forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. She ends by saying that God scourges His people of the Covenant, not in vengeance, but as a means of purification.

(v.28-31) With good reason R.P. J. Steinmann reads a double meaning into Uzziah's response.

No one could make a more polite mockery. Uzziah's overwhelming praise of Judith is offered with a sceptical smile. It is not only today that her wisdom is noted. As Judith is still young and the speaker aged, the phrase is most ironical. And the people are thirsty. What does faith mean to people who are dying of thirst? this old Qoheleth seems to murmur. Let this woman pray; he and his acolytes revere prayer, but no longer believe in its efficacious power<sup>54</sup>.

(v.32-34) Judith confidently promises to do, without their aid, what the men deem impossible—save Israel. She is quite within her rights in wishing to keep her plans secret. She wants to be allowed to pass through the gate that night, accompanied by her maid.

(v.35-36) The elders agree. After all, they have nothing to lose. They bid her a formal farewell, asking God to bless her but to take vengeance on their enemies.

(Chap.9) Judith's first act is to have recourse to prayer. In a penitential attitude she unites her supplication with the incense which is being offered in Jerusalem at the same hour. She prays to the God of her father

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<sup>54</sup> Lecture de Judith, p. 67: "On ne saurait se moquer du monde plus poliment! Tous ces éloges dont Ozias accable Judith sont proférés avec un sourire de scepticisme. Ce n'est pas d'aujourd'hui qu'on sait la sagesse de cette femme. Comme Judith est encore une gamine et que celui qui parle est un vieillard, la phrase est pleine d'ironie. Et les gens ont soif. Qu'est-ce que la foi pour des gens qui crèvent de soif? semble murmurer le vieux Qohèlèt. Que cette femme prie; lui et ses acolytes révèrent la prière, mais ne croient plus à sa toute-puissante vertu."

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Symeon. The vengeance taken by Symeon and Levi on the men of Shechem (Gen. 34:25-29) she accounts as zeal. She begs God to give her, a lone widow, the same kind of strength.

Note that Judith praises the conduct of Symeon, her ancestor, which Jacob absolutely condemned in his sons (Gen. 49:5-7).

Judith depends entirely on the help of God in contrast to the Assyrians who place their trust in military might. She appeals to Him as the Protector of the humble. She asks for inspiration that with seductive language she may carry out her plan successfully.

Her deceitful words (v.13) will not be used for personal vengeance, still less in indecency. It is purely and simply (in her mind) an act of war. She will fight Holofernes with her own weapons, in order to save the people of Israel and their temple. In time of war a general should be on the alert for such deception. Holofernes is ensnared by Judith through his own lust and imprudence.

She closes her prayer by throwing herself unreservedly under His protection. "The nation of Israel has no protector but you" (v.14).

The author of the prayer of Judith has evidently borrowed from the Canticle of Moses (Ex. 15). To cite some examples:

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"horse and rider" (Ex.15:1)	(Jdt.9:7)
"let loose Thy wrath (Ex.15:7)	"direct your anger" (Jdt.9:9)
"my father's God" (Ex.15:2)	"God of my father" (Jdt.9:12)
"the highlands... place of Thine abode" (Ex.15:17)	"Mount Sion... house Your sons possess" (Jdt.9:13)

Two passages present differences:

"The Lord is a warrior" (Ex.15:3)	"You are a Lord that crushes wars" (Jdt.9:7) "For the Lord is a God that shatters wars" (Jdt.16:3);
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and "The Lord is my strength and song for He saved me" (Ex. 15:2) corresponds with "You are the God of the lowly, the helper of the inferior, the champion of the weak, the protector of the neglected, the savior of the despairing" (Jdt. 9:11).<sup>55</sup>

## JUDITH AND HOLOFERNES

(10:1-4) After her prayer Judith rises from her prostrate position and goes down into the part of the house which she uses only on sabbaths and feast days. This marks a complete break with her former way of life.

The author goes into great detail over her bathing and dressing which emphasizes her ulterior motive. Judith

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<sup>55</sup> M. Dubarle, "Les textes divers du livre de Judith," Vetus Testamentum, VIII, 1958, p. 349.

considers it a sacred duty, in this case, to attract the eyes of men. The author does not gloss over this manifest design which he had already justified in 9:13.

She intends, neither by word nor gesture, directly to awaken his passion; she will appear before him in all decency and dignity. Nevertheless she realized that it would further her design if she appeared at her best. It would not be necessary to arouse his desire; this lewd man was definitely looking for a victim. Judith takes advantage of his lust not to consent to its appeasement but to contrive his death.<sup>56</sup>

It must be remembered also that Judith acted only after she had had recourse to prayer.

(v.5) In the matter of purification, food and drink the widow seems to be even more exacting than the Law demands.

(v.6,7) It is fitting that the doubting elders should be the first victims of her charms. R.P. L. Soubigou notes two reasons for their amazement at her incredible beauty: the radiance of her face transfigured by her heroic resolution, and the splendor of her apparel.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. Soubigou, op. cit., p. 503.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 547.

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(v.8) The blessings of the elders this time include "the exaltation of Jerusalem."

(v.9) The pious woman worshipping God in public at this moment attests to the purity of her intention.

(v.10) The gate is opened by the young men, and the women depart. The role of the maid is so unimportant that she is forgotten entirely. The plural verb is changed to the singular until v.17. We are told that the men, old and young, watched her until she was out of sight, but, since it was night time, they could hardly have seen her all the way down the mountain and through the valley. No one seems to have tried to dissuade her, or otherwise show much concern for her safety.

(v.11-13) They go directly to an Assyrian outpost where the questions of the sentinels provide the occasion for Judith to further her plans. Lies are one of the tools which Judith uses in her war against the enemy.

(v.14) These soldiers are overwhelmed by her sagacity as well as enchanted by her appearance.

(v.15) They praise and encourage her.

(v.17) A guard of one hundred men seems to be excessive. No doubt it was thought that such a woman might find it comparatively easy to escape, should she so decide. Moreover, such allurements did need strong protection in an army camp.

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(v.18-20) As was to be expected, the news of her coming spread rapidly and caused an immediate sensation. Judith became the center of a bedazzled crowd as she waited outside the tent of the commander.

The fascinated soldiery does some circuitous thinking. The low opinion they had of the Israelite men is now changed to admiration, nevertheless the determination to exterminate them is strengthened all the more; for, otherwise, it is feared that the Israelites will bewitch the whole earth by means of the beauty of their women folk.

Holofernes' personal attendants, coming out of his tent, conduct her at once to his presence. It would seem that nothing stands in the way of this determined Jewess.

(v.21) Having heard such glowing accounts Holofernes comes forward to meet her. The writer gives here rein to his imagination in this description of an army tent during a campaign, even though it is that of the commander in chief.<sup>58</sup> Again the same effect is produced in the new surroundings; all are overwhelmed by the woman's ravishing beauty. Judith herself remains levelheaded and performs the rites of oriental politeness. She makes low obeisance to Holofernes but his slaves raise her up at once—a sign

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<sup>58</sup> Barucq, op. cit., p. 54, note a.

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that she has met with approval.<sup>59</sup>

(11:1-3) Holofernes reassures Judith in the most extravagant terms, apparently anxious to make a good impression on her. Forgetting that she must have heard of his merciless treatment of those peoples who had tried to come to terms with him, he tells her that only the scornful defiance of the Israelites forced him to "raise his spear against them" (v.2). This could have been an ordinary proverbial expression, but it is rather strange to find it on the general's lips since spears were never before mentioned in connection with the equipment of his army. Judith leaves unanswered, for the moment, the two questions put to her by Holofernes.

(v.4) "This last clause is intentionally ambiguous: Holofernes thinks of victory for his arms, Judith of the death of the enemy of her people."<sup>60</sup>

(v.5-11) In the Bible, with few exceptions, beautiful women have not been distinguished for superior intelligence. Judith is one of these exceptions. It is not her beauty alone which allows her to mock Holofernes

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<sup>59</sup> Soubigou, op. cit., p. 550.

<sup>60</sup> M. Leahy, "Judith," A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture, eds. Bernard Orchard, et al., New York, Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1953, p. 406, 309 l.

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so successfully. She seems to know intuitively just how far she may carry her flattery.

(v.6) This is one of the best examples of her irony. She glibly ascribes to Holofernes a share in carrying out God's infallible plans while mentally intending him to be the victim of them.

(v.7,8) The exaggerations here testify that she is confident that the man is under her spell.

(v.9-11) It took courage, after her excessive praise of his wisdom, to try to convince Holofernes that he had misjudged Achior's words, but she hurries on to claim that the great lord cannot be defeated.

(v.11-14) She now begins to argue her cause with incomparable casuistry. The Jews have sinned, she says in effect, the guilt will involve even the senate in Jerusalem. They are now vulnerable.

At the moment she is imputing to her countrymen a sin of wrong intent. They intend, she says, to eat and drink what has been forbidden.

This is pure fiction. When Judith spoke to the elders in the town she upbraided their pride and lack of faith, but apparently there was no question of guilt incurred by breaking these levitical laws. They were not even mentioned. Moreover, these words are in direct opposition to 8:18-20.

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The laws regarding food and drink are abridged by M. Leahy as follows:

The drinking of the blood of animals was a primeval prohibition (Gen. 9:4) which was reenacted in the Mosaic Law (Lev. 17:10-14). Every Hebrew was bound to offer to God first-fruits of his vineyard, of his trees and of his corn and these were to be eaten by the priests only (cf. Num. 18:11). The loaves of proposition likewise belonged to the priests (Lev. 24:9). Everyone was forbidden to eat the fat covering the intestines, the great lobe of the liver, the kidneys and the fat adhering to them (Ex. 29:13; Lev. 3:4, 10, 15, etc.).<sup>61</sup>

(v.15) The day that the favourable answer is received from Jerusalem will mark the day of Israel's destruction.

(v.16,17) The personal aspect comes into evidence when Judith finally answers Holofernes' first question. She escaped because she is devout and God-fearing and she found intolerable the proposed actions of her fellow citizens.

It is not clear whether the writer wishes to portray Judith as somewhat fanatically keeping the Pharisaical laws, or simply as mocking the Pharisees. One would consider her eminently capable of the latter; still, she seems to have been going to these rigorous extremes even before the advent of Holofernes and the resulting need of penance.

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<sup>61</sup> Op. cit., p. 406, 309 l.

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(v.17,18) She offers her valuable aid conditionally. Every night she must be allowed to leave the camp, with her maid, to pray in the valley. It is only there, in solitude, that God will communicate to her the hour of the Israelites' sin. Thus she prepares a means of escape after the realization of her plans. She calls Holofernes "Lord", and herself his slave, but she makes it clear that she worships only "the God of heaven".

(v.19) To the second question Judith answers that she has come to lead him "through the heart of Judea." She closes with: "It was declared to me, and I was sent to tell you." She is evidently claiming yet another distinction—that of prophetess.

Concerning Judith's deceit, J. Steinmann had this to say:

Until now, in the book, there has never been a question of famine in Bethulia, nor of consuming the tithes. Judith's deceit did not consist in imputing to her compatriots the intention of committing these infractions of the law, which had never entered their minds. The deceit consisted in pretending that God punishes such minimal infractions and considers them to be faults as grave as idolatry. Judith's defense of Israel before Chabris and Charmis contains no allusion to these minute legal observances, multiplied at will by the Pharisees.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Steinmann, op. cit., p. 87.

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(v.20-23) The effect of her words on the general and his men is expressed succinctly but perfectly: "There is not such a woman from one end of the earth to the other, for beauty and intelligence" (11:21).

Holofernes is so completely infatuated that he declares, even in the presence of his officers, that, if Judith does as she has said, "Your God shall be my God" (v.23) Probably one God more or less would matter little to him. Nevertheless, it could have been a dangerous pronouncement in view of the previously published decree "that all nations should worship Nebuchadnezzar alone (3:8).

At this point in the story the sacred writer is delightfully ironical. His pen picture of a Hebrew woman making a fool of an invading general would gratify his Jewish readers who were actually living in times of persecution.

(12:1-4)<sup>63</sup> That the best of everything will be given Judith is plain from the fact that she is entertained in the tent where the treasures, including the silver dishes, are kept. She refuses this hospitality, however, making it clear that she believes that God will not prosper her cause should she break any of the religious regulations.

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<sup>63</sup> Chapter 12 is based on the Pirot-Clamer Bible footnotes.

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Quite naturally Holofernes is concerned about what will happen when her own food gives out. He is entirely deceived by her equivocal answer.

(v.5-9) Holofernes gave the required orders for the nightly withdrawals from the camp. Judith daily performs the ritual ablutions at the spring before commencing her prayers which, doubtless, were most fervent. It would seem that she continued to fast as she had done at her own home, eating only at the end of the day.

(v.10-14) The fourth day is the decisive one. Holofernes sends Bagoas to invite Judith to a banquet with the avowed intention of seducing her. As the story continues that point becomes perfectly clear.

The vulgarity of Bagoas' invitation is crude. He proposes an honorable reception and a cheerful banquet, it is true, but, to be followed by a night of debauchery. "Become today like a daughter of the Assyrians who wait in the house of Nebuchadnezzar" (v.13), would actually mean to become a favourite in Holofernes' harem.

Judith responds with feigned submission, even willingness. She really is anxious to take advantage of what appears to be propitious circumstances.

(v.15-20) Again she goes to great lengths to appear as alluring as possible. "Her slave went and spread fleeces on the ground for her before Holofernes... so that

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she might recline on them and eat" (v.15). In this particular action she exhibits her independence. Even in the presence of her host she uses her own coverings as she uses her own food.

Holofernes' passion is inflamed and he coaxes her to drink, hoping thereby to break down her resistance. Her answer completely deludes him: "Certainly, I will drink, my lord, for my life means more to me today than in all the days since I was born."

The general's avidity and drunkenness cause his undoing. Judith cleverly profits by conditions she did not create.

(13:1-10) The climax comes swiftly. The two principal actors of the drama are left alone and Judith knows they will not be disturbed. She tells her maid to wait for her outside the tent that they may leave the camp together as usual.

Holofernes lies in a drunken stupor upon his bed. Judith stands beside him and prays from the heart. Her thought is for Jerusalem and the destruction of the enemies of God's chosen people. There is no word of hate or personal vengeance. It is a typical prayer of the just of the Old Testament.

The description of the death scene is brief. Judith takes down his own scimitar and, holding his head

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by the hair, prays for strength, then slashes twice. Apparently, her long fast had not undermined her strength.

Like Sisera, Holofernes is slain by a woman, in the Plain of Esdraelon. The author adds the gruesome detail that the maid put the head in her "bag of food, and they both went out together as they were accustomed to do, to offer their prayer" (v.10).

It must be remembered that Judith had all the rights and privileges of war. She had announced to the chiefs of state that she had a plan and had received their consent, blessing and encouragement.<sup>64</sup> Her cause was that of God's people against a tyrannical and irreligious aggressor. Her good intention is stated precisely:

Hear my prayer and make my deceitful words the wound and stripe of those who have planned such cruelty against your agreement and your consecrated house, and Mount Zion and the house your sons possess (9:13).

Moreover, it is clear that Judith considered herself inspired by God as had been Gideon, Jael and Samson.

(v.11-14) "And Judith called from a long way off to the watchman at the gates" (v.11). She was eager to tell her news, anxious also that there would be no untoward

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<sup>64</sup> Cf. Henri Demante, Entretiens sur les livres de Judith et d'Esther, Paris, Librairie Catholique Internationale de l'Oeuvre de Saint Paul, 1883, p. 117.

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delay. "God, our God, is with us" (v.11) could be followed only by good news. Realizing this, the townsmen call the elders and all, young and old, run to the gate to welcome the returning women. When they had left, the people were lamenting and weeping and talking of revolt. After four more days of thirst, small wonder that they rush to hear the result of the feminine strategy.

A fire is lit, this time for its light only. It was night and everyone wished to see Judith. She speaks in a loud voice for all to hear. It is evidence of her piety that she begins with Alleluias, and of her humility that she gives thanks to God for having used her as the instrument of His mercy. She renders glory to God; she does not seek it for herself.

(v.15-17) She exhibits the gory head, explaining what has happened—their archenemy is dead. Holofernes was ignominiously killed while soddenly drunk, and (greatest of all possible indignities) by the hand of a woman. Concerned about keeping the good reputation accorded her in 8:8, Judith hastens to assure them that her honour is unstained. God protected her on her mission. The people respond with a fervent prayer of thanksgiving directed to God.

(v.18-20) Following usual procedure, Uzziah, the chief magistrate, adds his own blessings in the name of

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the people. His first blessing was for Judith herself. "Blessed are you, my daughter, beyond all the women on earth in the sight of the Most High God" (v.18). Though the author did not know it, these beautiful words of Uzziah are an anticipation of the words of Gabriel to Mary. He most likely had in mind the tribute that Deborah had paid to Jael: "Most blessed of women may Jael be" (Ju 5:24).

"Your hope shall never disappear from the minds of men when they remember the strength of God" (v.19) could mean that Judith's well-founded, well-rewarded trust in God will be a perpetual inspiration to all men of all ages.

Uzziah freely acknowledges now that Judith was willing to sacrifice her life for her fellow citizens at a time when they were ready to surrender all to save their lives.

The Amen really had meaning for the people. It has come down to ours from the Jewish liturgy.

(14:1-5) No one could be in a better position to issue orders, and Judith takes advantage of the opportunity. Her first command concerned the head. It was to be hung on the battlement, not for the sake of the Assyrians who could not see it, but following an ancient barbarous custom. The second was good military tactics. A sham sortie must be made, followed by the extermination of the enemy after pandemonium had made them easy victims. The third

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was to summon Achior to identify the head. He was the only man in that town who had seen Holofernes in life. He, therefore, could furnish positive proof that no mistake in identity had been made.

(v.6-10) The gruesome change from pompous general to revolting corpse cause Achior to lose consciousness. When he was revived, he also paid homage to the heroine. Strangely, the sacred writer has him say "Blessed are you in every tent of Judah" (v.8), when Judith is of the tribe of Symeon.

It is only natural that Achior would be anxious to hear the details of her stay in the same camp from which he had been expelled. The crowd, too, listens eagerly and, as she finishes, bursts into shouts of joy. The Ammonite's appreciation went far deeper: "He believed in God with all his heart" (v.10).

In her first long prayer Judith had pleaded: "... Make Your whole nation and every tribe to know and understand that You are God..." (9:14). The conversion of Achior is the first sign that her prayer will eventually be answered.

Circumcision was the sign of the Covenant of God with His people (Gen. 17:9-14). Isaiah had prophesied that aliens would join them and become members of the house of Jacob (Is. 14:1), and from the most ancient times it

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would seem that it was possible to circumcize men of any origin, slaves (Gen. 17:23), or allies (Gen. 34:13-24). At a more recent date there appeared to be a desire to draw proselytes to Yahweh (Est. 8:17; 9:27). There was a special difficulty for the Ammonites and Moabites, because a legal clause excluded them forever, even unto the tenth generation, from the assembly of Yahweh (Deut. 23:3).<sup>65</sup>

The reason given was as follows: "No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted into the Lord's community, likewise none of their descendants to the tenth generation shall ever be admitted into the Lord's community; because the one did not meet you with food and water on the road after you came out of Egypt, and the other hired Balaam, the son of Beor, to curse you" (Deut. 23:4).

L. Soubigou suggests that this legislation could have had only a temporary validity, and had fallen into disuse, or that exceptions were tolerated. The case of the Ammonite Achior was singular enough to be treated with special consideration.<sup>66</sup>

(v.11-19) The Bethulians carry out Judith's command at dawn of the next day. The word is passed around

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<sup>65</sup> Soubigou, op. cit., p. 564.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 564.

the Assyrian camp—from sentinels to officers, to generals, to colonels and all their officers—that "these slaves have dared to come down against us to battle, so that they may be utterly destroyed" (v.13), such is their confidence in their own superior strength.

When Judith's deed is discovered, Bagoas is in utter despair. Terror and dismay seized upon all! The leaders rushed about with much loud crying and shouting and tearing of garments.

J. Steinmann explains the panic thus:

It must not be forgotten that in the Orient monarchical power was absolute. The monarchs and their all-powerful ministers governed immense empires as dictators. The disappearance of a general-in-chief would cause a void in the army all the more difficult to fill because the favour of the prince played a determining role in the appointment of successors...

Moreover, the powers of the general, emanating from those of the prince, had in them something of the divine. The death of a supreme chief was not only a sinister omen; it deprived the army of a representative of divinity. Soldiers who would let their chief be assassinated were jointly guilty of treason and of sacrilege. In ancient times such charges were not treated lightly.

To all of these considerations which combined to make of Holofernes' death a disaster, the author of Judith intends to add that of the very direct intervention of the divine power. The Assyrian soldiers are the victims of a supernatural panic.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> La Lecture de Judith, pp. 104, 105.

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(15:1-7) When the men in the tents heard what had happened they immediately broke into a rout. Each man for himself, they fled by whatever pass they thought best, over hills or plains.

Only then did the warriors of Bethulia come into action. They united, at last, in the common purpose of capturing, destroying and plundering the demoralized enemy. The region of Damascus which saw the departure of Holofernes for his victorious expedition against Canaan becomes the theatre of his defeat.<sup>68</sup> It hardly redounds to the glory of the Israelites from any part of the country that they made no single offensive move until the invaders had been thrown into confusion by a woman.

(v.8-10) A finer picture of Israelite unity is presented when Joakim, the high priest, and the senate of Jerusalem came to pay tribute to Judith. "They all blessed her with one accord" (v.9) and their words are worthy to be incorporated in the Roman liturgy in the final verse of the Epistle for August 15th, to praise the Mother of God on the feast of her Assumption. The same magnificent words are used on the feasts of the national heroines of France—St. Joan of Arc and St. Genevieve. "They all blessed her

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<sup>68</sup> Baruxq, op. cit., p. 67, note b.

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with the voice saying: Thou art the glory of Jerusalem, thou art the joy of Israel, thou art the honour of our people" (Jdt 15:10).

The first part of the Epistle for August fifteenth is taken from Judith 13:22-25, and the Chapter repeats verse 22. In the Offertory (Gen. 3:15), we may note a connection with the Epistle. "Judith beheaded the prince of the enemy; at the gates of paradise God spoke in terms of Mary as the 'serpent-crusher'."<sup>69</sup>

(v.11) "And all the people plundered the camp for thirty days"; which seems to be a long time. It would be done very thoroughly, however, and a satisfactory distribution would be a lengthy process. It was fitting that Holofernes' personal effects should be reserved for Judith, since they would be the best and costliest. Her share was large enough to require more than one wagon to transport it.

(v.12) The women expressed their appreciation also. They chose a picturesque and appropriate way to honour a woman of such superb grace as was Judith. It is not the first time that praise and thanksgiving, in the Old Testament, is expressed by dancing processions. For example, we have the scene of Jephthah's home-coming with "his

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<sup>69</sup> Pius Parsch, Year of Grace, Vol. IV, trans. W.G. Heidt, Colledgeville, Liturgical Press, 1959, p. 331.

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daughter coming out to meet him with tambourines and dancing" (Ju 11:34). And, when speaking of the restoration of Israel and Judah, Jeremiah says:

"Once more shall you take your timbrels,  
And go out in the dances of those who make merry"  
(Jer. 31:4)

and "Then shall the maiden rejoice in the dance" (Jer. 31:13).

Noting the word "branches," A.E. Cowley remarks in a footnote in his work on Judith: "'branches' a strange word to use. It properly means the wands of the Bacchants. In the LXX only here and 2 Macc. 10:7."<sup>70</sup>

The reference given is to the Jewish celebration of the purification of the Temple after the profanations of Antiochus Epiphanes: "So carrying wands wreathed with leaves and beautiful branches and palm leaves too they offered hymns of praise..."

(v.13) According to Cowley, the fact that they crowned themselves with "olive" denotes a Greek rather than a Jewish custom, thus indicating a late date for the book.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Vol. I, Apocrypha and Pseudepigraphy of the Old Testament, ed. R.H. Charles, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1913, p. 265, note 12.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 265, note 13.

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The men join the procession, still in their armour, but, most important, singing hymns of thanksgiving.

Earlier in the book the terrified people of the seacoast came to meet Holofernes with singing and dancing; by contrast it is now his vanquisher who is so honoured.

(Chap.16) Mention has been made of prayers and blessings throughout the book. They could in reality be called psalms. The author uses them all, whether spoken to Judith or by her, to emphasize her piety.

Judith's first long prayer (9:2-14).

The blessing of the ancients as she leaves the city (10:8).

The short prayer when left alone with the drunken Holofernes (13:4,5,7).

Blessing of Uzziah on her return (13:18-20).

Blessing of Achior (14:7).

Blessing of Joakim and the Senate (15:9,10).

Thanksgiving of Judith (16:2-17).

The last-mentioned encompasses the salvation history of God's people. Their numerous persecutions down through the ages are symbolized by the invasion of these would-be conquerors of the world. The characters of Nebuchadnezzar and Holofernes personify all the enemies of the Israelites. Regardless of time or place, this truth is evident: God will protect His own if they remain faithful to His commands. In this last prayer the power of God is represented

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as using only the hand of a woman to destroy all worldly opposition.

Judith's manner of rejoicing is comparable to that of Miriam, the sister of Moses, who led the women in dances and songs of praise after the safe passage of the Red Sea (Ex. 15:20,21).<sup>72</sup>

This thanksgiving prayer forms the greatest of the canticles of Judith. It follows the literary rules of psalms of thanksgiving;<sup>73</sup> which means that it has an Introduction, a Development in a narrative style, and a Conclusion.

According to A. Barucq's footnotes in the fascicule of the Bible of Jerusalem,<sup>74</sup> the literary analysis is made as follows:

- 1st stanza - (v.2) invitatory
- 2nd stanza - (v.3) announces the theme of the hymn
- 3rd stanza - (v.4-7) development of the theme of thanksgiving
- 4th stanza - (v.8,9) resumes the theme of v.6 with greater fullness

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<sup>72</sup> Cf. Duprez, op. cit., p. 61.

<sup>73</sup> P. Auvray, "Les Psaumes," Introduction à la Bible, Vol. I, eds. A. Robert, A. Feuillet, Tournai, Desclée & Cie, 1959, p. 604.

<sup>74</sup> Page 69, note a. Please note that the numbering of the verses follows the Edgar J. Goodspeed translation, University of Chicago Press.

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5th stanza - (v.10-12) resumes the theme of v.7

6th stanza - (v.13-15) praises God in the general tone of hymns

the two v.16 and 17 draw the lesson from the achievements lauded.

(v.1) Judith led off the singing and all joined in.

The introduction of a canticle into a narration is frequent in the Bible. We have just brought to your attention the canticle of Moses and Miriam (Ex. 15). Consider also the hymns of Deborah (Jg. 5), of Anna, mother of Samuel (1 Sam. 2), the women after the victory of David (1 Sam. 18:7); the hymn of David at the time of the conveyance of the Ark to Jerusalem (1 Chr. 16).<sup>75</sup>

(v.2) This opening stanza follows the pattern of Ps. 81:1-3; of Ps. 135:1 and of Ps. 149:1-3. They all begin on a joyous invitatory note.

(v.3) The theme emerges: Jahweh is conqueror.

(v.4-7) The portrayal of the enemy from the north reaches epical heights of poetry and serves to intensify the antithesis to which it leads: the delicate beauty of the daughter of Merari overcomes the brute force of the general-in-chief of Nebuchadnezzar. The boastful Holofernes is struck down not by an armed warrior of comparable strength, but by a weak woman.

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<sup>75</sup> Duprez, op. cit., p. 61, note 3.

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The use of the word "champion" recalls the fate of Goliath (1 Sam. 17:51).

The "sons of the Titans" and "the tall giants" (v.7) may refer to the Rephaim. "The OT at many places (Gen. XIV 5 and passim) mentions the R. as a race of giants who had lived in prehistoric ages on both sides of the Jordan."<sup>76</sup>

"The valley 'of Rephaim' (near Jerusalem) mentioned in 2 Kgs 5:8) is called in LXX the 'valley of the Titans.'<sup>77</sup>

(v.8,9) Speaking of herself in the third person, Judith justifies her conduct in changing her mourning garb for her most alluring attire. She deliberately used every aid to appear seductive, carefully choosing cosmetics, coiffure, dress and shoes. Her sandals, in fact, are given particular attention both in 10:4 and in 16:9. This kind of footwear must have been greatly prized by the Jews, since sandals are admired also in Song 7:1. But, in adorning herself, Judith assures her people she had one sole intention—to save her people, cost what it may.

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<sup>76</sup> J. Simons, The Geographical and Topographical Texts of the Old Testament, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1959, p. 78, No. 211.

<sup>77</sup> Leahy, op. cit., p. 407, 309 o.

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These details explain more fully her idea of how God saved the Israelites "by the hand of a woman" (v.6).

(v.10-12) In his commentary A. Duprez queries whether there could be seen here an allusion to the sovereignty exercised by the Medes and Persians over Israel in Exile.<sup>78</sup> Certainly the fame of the heroism and subtlety of Judith could be sufficient cause for uneasiness even for the strongest and remotest of nations. Moreover, would they not be amazed to learn that the God of Israel had heard and answered the cries of such a weak and faint-hearted people by Himself putting their enemies to rout? The pagans could not understand the efficacy of humble, persevering prayer.

(v.13-15) The development of the narrative has ended and with verse 13 we come to the conclusion of the psalm in the form of a song of praise: "I will sing to my God a new song" (v.13). It opens with praise of God in His creation and continues with faith in His power and confidence in His mercy. These three verses are almost completely an accommodation of expressions taken from the Psalms.

(v.16) The principal lesson is contained in this verse: sacrifice is insignificant unless the creature fears the Lord, then only will He be "great forever."

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<sup>78</sup> Evangile, No. 47, p. 63, note 2.

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(v.17) The canticle ends with a prophecy of woe for "the heathen that rise up against my nation."

The day of judgment corresponds to the 'day of Yahweh' referred to frequently by the prophets as the day when God will intervene to punish iniquity and to reward righteousness. Their dead bodies will lie unburied, a prey to worms; they will be got rid of by burning instead of by burial; "and they will weep feeling pain unceasingly." The words "for ever" mean here, as frequently in OT (cf. Ex. 19:9), "while they last".<sup>79</sup>

(v.18) The writer draws attention to the fact that "when they reached Jerusalem, they worshipped God." Their pilgrimage was for that purpose, not just for pleasure. On account of the killing and pillaging which had taken place, it was necessary that they all be legally cleansed before offering their gifts.

(v.19) Judith "dedicated" to God all the silver dishes which had been allotted to her after the plundering of Holofernes' tent. In so doing she was following the ancient custom of the Israelites in their wars of conquest. "But all the silver and gold, and the articles of bronze and iron are sacred to the Lord; they are to go into the treasury."<sup>80</sup>

The canopy which she herself had taken from Holofernes' bed she gave as a gift to God. This last was "for

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<sup>79</sup> Leahy, op. cit., p. 405, 309 c.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Jos. 6:19.

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an anathema," a personal trophy which would be sacred to God, preserved from any profane use. Such gifts were made frequently. The canopy therefore would serve as a memorial of this outstanding victory.

(v.20) The three month celebration must be quite an exaggeration, especially since, as before mentioned, it was the rainy season.

(v.21) Since "everyone traveled back to his own inheritance," there seems to have been no fear of retaliation on the part of Nebuchadnezzar. In Chapter 2:10 the King had ordered Holofernes: "You must go and take all their frontiers for me in advance... and you must hold them for me." But all that is forgotten now.

(v.22) The author wishes to point out that chastity crowned all the other virtues of our heroine.

(v.23) According to the Jews, longevity was a sign of God's favour. That she set her maid free may be evidence of charity. That would depend on the time element, which is not known. How old was the maid when she was given her freedom?

(v.24) The sacred writer shows her to be wise to the end, leaving no cause for litigation.

(v.25) The finale is similar to those of some of the stories in the Book of Judges.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Jg. 3:11; 3:30; 5:31; 8:28.

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## CONCLUSION

The Book of Judith was not intended to be historical. It is haggadic midrash—a story for edification containing some teachings on questions of practical morality. It would have been well understood as such by the first readers. It was intended to encourage them in time of national hardship and danger.

If it does not reach the standard of Christian morality of today, we must realize that it was written for people whose religious and moral ideas had been formed before the Christian era. The author probably had in mind the Book of Joshua.

If, instead of a neat system of chronology, the author delights in inconsistencies and impossibilities, we must understand that he is using a literary genre that is completely foreign to twentieth century writings, but was greatly in vogue with the Jews of postexilic times.

The Book is profoundly religious. It symbolizes the ultimate triumph of monotheism over paganism. God is the one Creator, all-powerful, who "shatters wars." He is also the God of the Covenant who protects His chosen ones as long as they are faithful to His commands.

The greatest lesson taught is faith in the power of prayer. The Jews had been faithful, therefore they could

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expect God to come to their aid. Judith, whose name means "the Jewess" is the personification of the ideal Jewish woman. She is a model of confidence in God. She does not expect miracles; first she prays, then she uses to the utmost the natural gifts with which God has greatly endowed her, leaving the rest to Him.

The author has convincingly drawn a fascinating character that is ascetic, pious and courageous, the intelligent champion of the weak and humble. Believing that God uses human beings to carry out His mysterious designs, and that in this case she is His instrument, Judith does not hesitate to use the scimitar. But it was not a case of taking advantage of the possession of superior might. She went into the enemy camp unarmed and at immense risk. In killing Holofernes she prevented the killing of the women and children in Bethulia.

The Book contains further teachings for the thoughtful student on government, public prayer and observances, sin and conversion, proselytism, and strict legalism.

Mother Kathryn Sullivan, R.S.C.J. lists some of the "glowing terms" used by the Fathers to praise Judith:

Clement of Alexandria hails her as a perfect woman, lacking no needful virtue. Origen devotes a homily to her heroism and extols her magnificence and nobility. Ambrose declares that she is holy, worthy of admiration and highly to be praised for

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her fasting. Fulgentius speaks of her beauty and her intelligence, of her contempt for earthly vanities and of her love of heavenly virtue. St. Augustine cites her purity, her powerful prayer, her intrepid victory.<sup>82</sup>

The Church sets her mark of approval on Judith by holding her to be a figure of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Her crushing of the huge Assyrian forces is likened to Mary's crushing of the powers of evil. The liturgy praises Mary in the inimitable words used by the elders to Judith:

You are the exaltation of Jerusalem,  
You are the glory of Israel,  
You are the great boast of our nation (Jdt. 15:9).

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<sup>82</sup> "The Book of Judith," Worship, Vol. XXXI, No. 6, May-June, 1957, p. 391.

CHAPTER III  
RESUME AND COMPARISON

A summary of these two chapters will show some similarities but more differences.

The Story of Samson is told in four chapters but it vividly relates six adventures of the hero. He carried on a personal war with the Philistines which was not conclusive. After his death the Israelites still suffered from the encroachments of their neighbours.

The Book of Judith contains sixteen chapters but concerns only one event in the life of our heroine. Nevertheless, her one accomplishment was so effective that the Israelites enjoyed peace for the remainder of her lifetime and for many years afterward.

Which literary form has been used by the sacred writer in each of these two cases? Searching for the answer to these and like questions, scholars have worked in a scientific manner. They have based their theories on facts found in the Bible, in secular history, in archaeology and in the study of languages.

As a result of such study the most common opinion today is that the Story of Samson has an historical basis. His name, with an account of his exploits, is found in every reliable history and chronological table of the

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period of the Judges. A modern biblical scholar states the facts thus:

A careful literary study of the stories points to Samson as an historical person... To say that they have been embellished by legend and colored by the imagination and faith of Israel is not to deny them a historical nucleus.<sup>1</sup>

In The History of Israel, G. Ricciotti affirms:

"It is therefore concluded that the judgeships of Jephthe and Samson were contemporaneous."<sup>2</sup> There is no doubt that they existed.

The fanatical slayer of the Philistines would be a popular figure with each successive generation of Israelites all the more because, proportionately, such individual champions were few. Daniel-Rops reads his character thus:

What a strange and pathetic destiny is that of this hero! Extreme, truculent, for a long time his existence seemed to be outside the norm of humanity, and to belong rather to a picturesque romance than to history. At the same time, and with a strange ring of veracity, it enters the subjective order, in which each of us fights combats like his. The enemy that he had to vanquish was less the Philistine than his own secret temptation, his sin. As weak as the humblest of mortals, he struggled in snares that are familiar enough. Much more than his exploits, the thing that gives him his stature is his suffering, the tragic

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<sup>1</sup> Philip J. King, The Book of Judges, Pamphlet Bible Series No. 12, New York, Paulist Press, 1960, p. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. I, trans. C.D. Penta and R.J.A. Murphy, Milwaukee, Bruce, 1958.

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magnificence of his last moments, and, seen through all the picturesque detail of his story, the drama of man weakened by sin, but reestablished through expiation.<sup>3</sup>

On the contrary, Catholic biblicists on the whole do not claim a place in history for the Book of Judith. The copious historical and geographical incongruities prevent this. It is an edifying narrative combined with apocalyptic prophecy, but without wonders and supernatural marvels. The aim is to provide inspiration and courage for the faithful servants of Yahweh.

St. Jerome evidently believed that the Book of Judith filled this need. After translating it from the Chaldaic, he wrote:

Receive Judith the widow, an example of chastity, and sing her praises in triumphal song for ever. For she gave an example not to women only but to men; He who was the rewarder of her chastity gave her power to conquer the unconquered of men and to overcome him whom none had overcome.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Israel and the Ancient World, trans. K. Madge, London, Eyre Spottiswoode, 1949, p. 126.

<sup>4</sup> "Praefatio Hieronymi in Librum Judith," Patrologiae, J.P. Migne, tomus XXIX, Paris, 1846, 40.  
"Accipite Judith viduam, castitatis exemplum, et triumphali laude, perpetuis eam praeconiis declarate. Hanc enim non solum feminis, sed et viris imitabilem dedit, qui castitatis ejus remunerator, virtutem ei talem tribuit, ut invictum omnibus hominibus vinceret, et insuperabilem superaret."

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In their desperate situation her people were forgetting that the all-powerful God could protect them. Trusting implicitly in Him, Judith uses her God-given gifts of beauty, ability and energy to full advantage. To those who might suspect the morality of this use at times, A. Lefèvre protests:

We might be tempted to find that she does abuse these, following too closely the example of her father Symeon, whose acts she does not judge with the same severity as did Jacob (cf. Jdt 9:2ff and Gen 49:5ff). Judith's wiles were not tainted with the same sacrilegious cruelty of the sons of Jacob; they were acts of war that are classical in history and still more in legend.<sup>5</sup>

In the case of both Samson and Judith we would do well to follow the advice of Dom Celestin Charlier to pay attention to "a whole world of thought and feeling which is radically different" from our own. "The mentality of the Bible is one of challenge, one which demands commitment, and it is necessary to get inside that mentality."<sup>6</sup>

The Son of Man had not yet given His "Sermon on the Mount":

You have heard that they were told, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I tell you not to resist injury... (Matt. 5:38,39).

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<sup>5</sup> A. Lefèvre, Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible, IV, Paris, Letouzey et Ané, 1949, p. 1320.

<sup>6</sup> The Christian Approach to the Bible, trans. H.J. Richards and Brendan Peters, London, Sands & Co. (Publishers) Ltd., 1959, p. 21.

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You have heard that they were told 'You must love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for your persecutors... (Matt. 5:43,44).

Samson and Judith were acting under the ancient law of talion.

Dom Paul Passelecq feelingly prescribes the attitude proper to the reading of these stories:

Jesus was made man and accepted from human nature all its limitations, pettiness and weakness. The message of God on earth comes to us by means of a similar incarnation, which reminds us, at the same time, of the compassionate divine condescendence and of the lowliness of our condition.<sup>7</sup>

Pope Pius XII clarifies the accepted use of legends and so-called embellishments, which might disturb the minds of some readers, in his encyclical Divino afflante Spiritu:

For the ancient peoples of the East, in order to express their ideas, did not always employ those forms or kinds of speech which we use today; but rather those used by the men of their times and countries. What those exactly were the commentator cannot determine as it were in advance, but only after a careful examination of the ancient literature of the East. The investigation, carried out, on this point, during the past forty or fifty years with greater care and diligence than ever before, has more clearly shown what forms of expression were used in those far off times, whether in

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<sup>7</sup> Préjugés des catholiques contre la lecture de la Bible, Maredsous, Editions de Maredsous, 1954, p. 28.

poetic description or in the formulation of laws and rules of life or in recording the facts and events of history.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless no one, who has a correct idea of biblical inspiration, will be surprised to find, even in the Sacred Writers, as in other ancient authors, certain fixed ways of expounding and narrating certain definite idioms, especially of a kind peculiar to the Semitic tongue, so-called approximations, and certain hyperbolic modes of expression, nay, at times, even paradoxical, which even help to impress the ideas more deeply on the mind. For of the modes of expressions which, among ancient peoples, and especially those of the East, human language used to express its thought, none is excluded from the Sacred Books, provided the way of speaking adopted in no wise contradicts the holiness and truth of God.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Rome and the Study of Scripture, p. 97. "Veteres enim Orientales, ut quod in mente haberent exprimerent, non semper iisdem formis iisdemque dicendi modis utebantur, quibus nos hodie, sed illis potius, qui apud suorum temporum et locorum homines usu erant recepti. Hi quinam fuerint, exegeta non quasi in antecessum statuere potest, sed accurata tantummodo antiquarum Orientis litterarum peruestigatione. Haec porro, postremis hisce decenniis maiore, quam antea, cura et diligentia peracta, clarius manifestavit, quaenam dicendi formae antiquis illis temporibus adhibitae sint, sive in rebus poetice describendis, sive in vitae normis et legibus proponendis, sive denique in enarrandis historiae factis atque eventibus" (Acta Apostolicae Sedis, 1943, p. 315).

<sup>9</sup> Rome and the Study of Scripture, pp. 97 and 98. "Nihilominus etiam apud Sacros Scriptores, sicut apud ceteros antiquos, certas quasdam inveniri exponendi narrandique artes, certos quosdam idiotismos, linguis praesertim semiticis proprios, approximationes quae dicuntur, ac certos loquendi modos hyperbolicos, immo interdum etiam paradoxa, quibus res menti firmiter imprimantur, nemo sane miretur, qui de inspiratione biblica recte sentiat. A Libris enim Sacris nulla aliena est illarum loquendi rationum, quibus apud veteres gentes, praesertim apud Orientales, humanus sermo ad sententiam exprimendam uti solebat, ea tamen condicione, ut adhibitum dicendi genus Dei sanctitati et veritati haudquam repugnet" (Acta Apostolicae Sedis, 1943, p. 315).

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These two biblical characters, Samson and Judith do have much in common as regards their faith. C.H. Dodd, an eminent Christian authority, points out this fact:

The Hebrew mind, of which the Bible is the product, conceives God, not as Absolute Being, but as the 'living God', active in this world of time and space, though not confined within it.<sup>10</sup>

Both Samson and Judith adore God as the all-powerful Creator, who is Master of the outcome of wars, and also of the destinies of individuals. They both clearly see the connection between their acts and God's justice. He will unflinchingly reward the good and punish the wicked; but they set no time limits for the accomplishment of His will.

They both give glorious witness to the power of prayer. More than that, they reveal in themselves the truth that heartfelt prayer enlightens and uplifts the soul. They are convinced that Yahweh sends trials to purify those whom He loves. Both show humble dependence on their Maker. They visibly grow in virtue as a result of prayer. After prayer Samson is truly contrite and manifests a lively faith under the most tragic circumstances; after prayer Judith finds strong hope and tremendous courage.

In the introduction, the aim of this thesis was said to be the study of the Story of Samson and the Book of

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<sup>10</sup> History and the Gospel, Digswell Place, James Nisbet and Company Limited, 1960, p. 31.

Judith, to find the meaning and message with particular regard to their literary genre. An opinion has been given but it does not pretend to be final. Even the most eminent scholars cannot give decisive opinions on these stories under discussion in spite of the immense forward strides in Catholic exegesis following the urging of Pope Pius XII in 1943.

Knowledge of the sagas of Samson and Judith will be further advanced by scientific study. Are they fact or fiction? The choice remains open for solidly based theories—as long as they do not contradict divine revelation. Pope Pius XII, in the same renowned encyclical, remarks that the Fathers, and especially St. Augustine, observed in their time that:

God wished difficulties to be scattered through the Sacred Books inspired by Him, in order that we might be exercised in due submission of mind. No wonder if of one or other question no solution wholly satisfactory will ever be found, since sometimes we have to do with matters obscure in themselves and too remote from our times and our experience; and since exegesis also, like all other most important sciences, has its secrets, which, impenetrable to our minds, by no efforts whatsoever can be unravelled.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Rome and the Study of the Scriptures, p. 101.  
 "Deum nempe Sacros, quos ipse inspiravit, Libros consulto difficultatibus adpersisse, ut et intentius ad eos evolvendos et perscrutandos excitaremur, et salubriter mentis nostrae limites experti, debita animi demissione exerceremur. Nihil igitur mirum, si unius alteriusve quaestionis nullum unquam habebitur responsum plane perfectum, cum interdum agatur de rebus obscuris et a nostris temporibus nostraque experientia nimis longe remotis; et cum etiam exegesis, sicut ceterae graviores disciplinae, sua habere

Progressive study of Sacred Scripture will continue especially on those problems on which the Church, the infallible interpreter, has not pronounced.

There could hardly be a brighter note of hope on which to end than that sounded by the same illustrious Pontiff:

Nevertheless no one will be surprised, if all difficulties are not yet solved and overcome; but that even today serious problems greatly exercise the minds of Catholic exegetes. We should not lose courage on this account; nor should we forget that in the human sciences the same happens as in the natural world; that is to say, new beginnings grow little by little and fruits are gathered only after many labors. Thus it has happened that certain disputed points, which in the past remained unsolved and in suspense, in our days, with the progress of studies, have found a satisfactory solution. Hence there are grounds for hope that those also will by constant effort be at last made clear, which now seem most complicated and difficult.<sup>12</sup>

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possit secreta, quae mentibus nostris impervia, quibusvis conatibus aperiri nequeant" (Acta Apostolicae Sedis, 1943, pp. 318, 319).

<sup>12</sup> Rome and the Study of the Scriptures, p. 100.  
 "Nemo tamen miretur non omnes adhuc esse difficultates expeditas atque evictas, sed graves etiam hodie quaestiones catholicorum exegetarum mentes non parum agitare. Quam ad rem non est profecto concidendum animo; neque est obliviscendum, in humanis disciplinis rem non aliter se habere atque in rerum natura: videlicet incepta paulatim crescere, ac non posse nisi post multos labores colligi fructus. Ita factum est, ut quaedam, quae elapsis temporibus non solutae ac suspensae haberentur disputationes, nostra demum aetate, progredientibus studiis, feliciter enodatae sint. Quamobrem fore spes est, ut illae etiam, quae nunc maxime implicatae maximeque arduae videantur, constanti conamine tandem aliquando plena luce pateant" (Acta Apostolicae Sedis, 1943, p. 318).

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