

5. Religious identifications and difference

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Hair and heathens: picturing pagans and the Carolingian connection in the Exeter Book and Beowulf-manuscript

“I am a wondrous creature, an object of hope for women,
useful for neighbours. I do not harm any
of the city-dwellers save my killer alone.
My foundation is very high; I stand in bed,
hairy somewhere below. Sometimes
a very beautiful churl’s daughter,
a proud woman, dares to grab hold of me,
she rushes on me when I’m red, robs my head,
fixes me into a confined space. She immediately feels
my power, she who confines me,
the braided-haired woman – her eye will be wet.”¹

When Leofric donated the manuscript commonly known as the Exeter Book (Exeter Dean and Chapter MS 3501) to Exeter on his death in 1072,² he was offering the monks of Exeter the opportunity to meditate on, among other things, the answer to this riddle (Riddle 25);³ or rather, the answers to this riddle. Recent work on the humour of such ‘obscene’ riddles has striven to explain how and why they were (and are) funny; at the same time, it has addressed the difficult question of how such riddles could possibly be appropriate for a monastic community.⁴ Of course, this work has been conducted on the assumption that there are two answers to the riddle: ‘penis’ and ‘onion’. The onion is, however, more of a master of disguise than it has heretofore been given credit for – there are, in fact, three answers to the riddle; the onion is not the final, correct answer, but merely another disguise for the true referent of the text, the Assyrian general Holofernes from the Book of Judith.

¹ *Ic eom wunderlicu wiht, wifum on hyhte,
neahbuendum nyt. Nængum sceþþe
burgsittendra, nymþe bonan anum.
Stapol min is steapheah; stonde ic on bedde,
neopan ruh nathwær. Neþeð hwilum
ful cyrtenu ceorles dohtor,
modwlanc meowle, þæt heo on mec gripeð,
ræseð mec on reodne, reafað min heafod,
fegeð mec on fæsten. Feleþ sona
mines gemotes, seo þe mec nearwað,
wif wundenlocc – wæt bið þæt eage.*

Riddle 25, in: *The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book* (ed. Craig Williamson, Chapel Hill 1977) 82 (numbered Riddle 23 in this edition). Unless otherwise stated, all translations are the author’s own.

² See *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry: An Edition of Exeter Dean and Chapter MS 3501* (ed. Bernard J. Muir, Exeter 1994) 1–3.

³ Although Williamson (see note 1 above) numbers this Riddle 23, this is Riddle 25 according to the more commonly-used numbering given in *The Exeter Book* (ed. George Philip Krapp/Elliot van Kirk Dobbie, *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records* 3, London/New York 1936) 193.

⁴ D.K. Smith, *Humor in hiding: laughter between the sheets in the Exeter Book Riddles*, in: *Humour in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. Jonathan Wilcox (Cambridge 2000) 79–98, at 84–87; Nina Rulon-Miller, *Sexual humor and fettered desire in Exeter Book Riddle 12*, in: *Humour in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. Jonathan Wilcox (Cambridge 2000) 99–126, at 101–107.

HOLOFERNES AS ONION

It is well-known that the principal female character of this riddle, the “churl’s daughter”, shares with Judith, the heroine of the Old English poem of the same name, the unusual distinction of being *wundenlocc*.⁵ This word appears only here and in Judith; once here (line 11), and three times in Judith (lines 77, 103 and 325), in which it refers both to Judith and to her people, the Bethulians.⁶ This is, moreover, not all that the humans of Riddle 25 share with Judith and the Bethulians. Like the Bethulians at line 159 of Judith, the people mentioned in line 3 of the riddle are *burgsittendra* (“city-dwellers”).⁷ These parallels in vocabulary – and especially the shared use of the otherwise unknown term *wundenlocc* – point to the possibility of a connection between Judith and Riddle 25.

The narratives of these two texts also show distinct similarities. The heroine of the riddle, the “churl’s daughter”, fulfils the role of Judith, acting as the “killer” of the onion, and doing so specifically by beheading; she “robs my head”. This is doubly reminiscent of Judith, for she not only decapitates Holofernes – thus robbing the man himself of his head – but also takes his head with her to show to the Bethulians – thus robbing his people, the Assyrians, of his head. We should also note that the “churl’s daughter”, like Judith, puts the head into a bag, although in the riddle this bag becomes the gloriously multivalent “confined space” (*fæsten*). So the women of the riddle are specifically referred to by terms used in the Old English Judith, while the action of the riddle bears a strong general resemblance to the story of Judith. Although this could equally be the story as told in the Book of Judith, the parallel lexis suggests a direct relationship between Riddle 25 and the Old English Judith.

The suspicion that the author of Riddle 25 may have had Judith in mind is strengthened if we compare the beheading scene of Judith with Riddle 25. The riddle-creature describes itself as *wifum on hyhte* (“an object of hope for women”), recalling Judith’s sudden access of *hyht* (“hope”) at lines 97–98 of the poem, immediately prior to seizing Holofernes’s hair and beheading him.⁸ The onion’s boast – “I stand in bed” – likewise calls to mind both Holofernes’s lecherous intentions towards Judith, as well as the location of his downfall, in bed. The onion is clearly one up on the Assyrian warlord, however, because this vegetable at least does not take its decapitation lying down. It seems, then, that Exeter Book Riddle 25 is deliberately poking fun at Judith, deflating that poem’s central act of heroism into a churl’s daughter chopping an onion. In doing so, it specifically attacks Judith as a representation of a powerful female figure, not only by spoofing the central deed of the poem, but also by depicting that deed as rebounding upon itself; the onion has its revenge by wetting the woman’s eye.

This revenge is an interesting element in the riddle, because it has no counterpart in Judith. Of course this partly functions as an attack on the character Judith, but it also suggests that the author of the riddle may have had the Book of Judith in mind as well in writing the riddle. In the Book of Judith, Judith prays “with tears” before attacking Holofernes.⁹ The riddle is not only humorously inverting the Old English Judith, then, but also drawing on the Book of Judith to point up this inversion; the tears come after the beheading in the riddle, not before.

The riddle’s claim that the heroine “fixes me into a confined space” also suggests that the author was using knowledge of the biblical account as well as the Old English Judith. The word used for

⁵ What exactly *wundenlocc* means is hard to determine. ‘Curly-haired’ is a possibility, but ‘with braided/plaited hair’ seems somewhat more likely; the use of the past participle of the verb *windan* (“to twist”) as the first element of the compound suggests that something has been done to the hair to achieve this state.

⁶ Judith (ed. Mark Griffith, Exeter Medieval Texts and Studies, Exeter 1997) 99, 100, 106.

⁷ Judith, ed. Griffith 101. The term *burgsittende* is relatively rare in Old English, and almost entirely confined to poetry. It is often used for Old Testament figures and peoples, perhaps reflecting a recognition that cities were a characteristic feature of the Old Testament landscape; the appearance of this word in Riddle 25 seems very much out of keeping with its normal usage.

⁸ Judith, ed. Griffith 99.

⁹ Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam versionem 13, 6 (ed. Robertus Weber, Stuttgart 1969) 706. The tears are also omitted in Ælfric’s homily on the Book of Judith; Ælfric, De Judith, quomodo interfecit Olofernem, in: Angelsächsische Homilien und Heiligenleben (ed. Bruno Assman, Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa 3, Kassel 1889) 102–116, at 111.

“confined space” in the riddle is *fæsten*, usually meaning “fortress”, “enclosure”, “prison”, “cloister”, as well as “fasting” (and, hence, “vigil”);¹⁰ it is not a word which appears elsewhere in the Exeter Book riddles. This word is used of Bethulia in Judith (line 143),¹¹ suggesting that the riddle could also be translated at this point as “fixes me on a fortress”, referring to Holofernes’s head being fixed to the walls of Bethulia, as Judith instructs in the Vulgate Book of Judith. This instruction does not appear in the Old English Judith, so the riddle author is perhaps also using the vocabulary of Judith to point out some of its divergences from the biblical account.

An added complication appears when we consider the riddle’s claim that the heroine “robs my head”; as pointed out above, this bears a general resemblance to the story of Judith, but it also bears a specific resemblance to the Old Latin version of the Book of Judith. In the Old Latin (but not in the Vulgate), *Judith abstulit caput eius ab illo* (“stole his head from him [Holofernes]”).¹² The riddle’s author, then, makes playful use not only of the Old English poem, but also of the Vulgate and Old Latin versions of Judith’s beheading of Holofernes. A riddle with these forms of humour certainly seems to point to the interest of such riddles for ecclesiastical and monastic audiences.¹³

HAIR, HOLOFERNES AND JUDITH

Aside from engaging in unsurprising anti-feminism, showing off the riddler’s knowledge of the biblical account of Judith, and identifying Holofernes as an onion and Judith as a churl’s daughter, the riddle’s parodying of Judith serves to point up the ways in which that poem constructs religious and regional identities. Perhaps the most obvious of the parallels between the riddle and Judith is the unusual word *wundenlocc*. In the riddle, this describes the “churl’s daughter”, and contrasts with the onion, which is “hairy somewhere below”. Both woman and onion have hair, but their hair is radically different. In this, they yet again resemble Holofernes and Judith, and, more broadly, the Assyrians and the Bethulians in Judith. In the passage in Judith describing the beheading of Holofernes, this contrast appears very starkly:

“Then hope was abundantly renewed for her, the holy woman, in her mind. Then she seized the heathen man firmly by his hair; she pulled him shamefully towards her with her hands, and disposed the evil, hateful man according to her wishes, so that she could most easily control the wicked man. Then the plaited-haired woman struck the hostile enemy with the patterned sword, so that she cut through half his neck, so that he lay unconscious, drunk and mortally-wounded. He was not yet dead, or entirely without his soul. Then the courageous lady zealously struck the heathen dog a second time, so that his head rolled forth onto the floor.”¹⁴

¹⁰ See An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, ed. Joseph Bosworth/Thomas Northcote Toller (Oxford 1882) 267; An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary: Supplement, ed. Thomas Northcote Toller/Alistair Campbell (Oxford 1972) 201f., addenda 23.

¹¹ See Judith, ed. Griffith 101.

¹² Those extant Old Latin readings which may have influenced the Judith-poet are conveniently collected in Griffith’s edition of Judith, whence this quotation (Judith, ed. Griffith 183).

¹³ This humour is not the subject of this article, but will be addressed more fully in a subsequent article.

¹⁴ *Ɔa wearð hyre rume on mode,*

haligre hyht geniwod. Genam Ɔa þone hæðenan mannan

fæste be feaxe sinum; teah hyne folmum wið hyre weard

bysmerlice, ond þone bealofullan

listum alede, laðne mannan,

swa heo Ɔæs unlædan eadost mihte

wel gewealdan. Sloh Ɔa wundenlocc

þone feondsceaðan fagum mece,

hetþoncolne, þæt heo healfne forcearf

þone sweoran him, þæt he on swiman læg,

druncen ond dolhwund. Næs Ɔa dead þa gyt,

ealles orsawle. Sloh Ɔa eornoste

ides ellenrôf (oð)re siðe

þone hæðenan hund, þæt him þæt heafod wand

forð on Ɔa flore.

Judith, ed. Griffith 99f. (lines 97b-111a).

In this scene, not only Holofernes's hair, but also Judith's hair, are referred to inside just five lines. This is not sanctioned in the Vulgate's version of this scene, which is altogether more bald:

"And when she had said these things, she approached the column which was at the head of his bed and drew his dagger, which was hanging fixed on the column, and when she had drawn it she seized the hair of his head and said, 'strengthen me Lord God of Israel in this hour,' and she struck twice on his neck and cut off his head and stole his canopy from the columns and rolled forth his beheaded body."¹⁵

The Old English text clearly draws on the Vulgate's statement that Judith "seized the hair of his [i.e. Holofernes'] head"; this is rendered by the phrase "then she seized the heathen man firmly by his hair". The Vulgate says nothing about Judith's hair here, however. In fact, the only mention of Judith's hair in the Vulgate is in Judith 10, 3, in which one of her preparations for going to Holofernes's camp is that she "parted the hair of her head".¹⁶ Yet Judith is described as *wundenlocc* ("plaited-haired") not only in this passage, but also shortly before (at line 77), when she first draws the sword with which she now kills Holofernes. The emphasis on hair at this juncture is, then, quite striking.

The Judith-poet's use of the very unusual word *wundenlocc* to refer not only to Judith but also to her people elicits from Griffith the observation that "perhaps it means 'curly-haired'";¹⁷ Griffith seems to be suggesting here that the poet could be using the word to convey the Jewishness of Judith and the Bethulians. If the author intended to characterise Judith and her people as Jews, however, it is strange that he or she glosses over Judith's Jewishness by putting into her mouth a prayer to the Trinity, which is plainly specifically Christian:¹⁸

"I want to pray to you, God of creation and Spirit of comfort, Child of the All-ruler, power of the Trinity, for your mercy to me, who am in need of it."¹⁹

In Riddle 25, the woman is not the only character whose hair is mentioned; the onion in the riddle has hair too, and this applies equally to the equivalent character in Judith. Not only Holofernes, but also the Assyrians he commands, have their hair mentioned. Hair belonging to Assyrians appears twice in Judith, and is always referred to as *feax*. In the description of the beheading of Holofernes, quoted above, Judith seizes Holofernes by his *feax*, and at line 281 Bagao *ongan his feax teran* ("began to tear his hair").²⁰ In the Vulgate account of Bagao's reaction to finding Holofernes dead, Bagao *scidit vestimenta sua* ("tore his clothes"),²¹ but his hair is not mentioned; Judith, however, mentions him tearing first his hair, and, almost as an afterthought, *his hrægl somod* ("his clothing as well").²²

It seems that the Judith-poet uses hair as a characterising feature, setting up an opposition between the Jews, who are *wundenlocc*, and the Assyrians, who are possessed of *feax*. This patterning does not seem to have been lost on the author of Riddle 25, who, characteristically, recasts this in humorous terms by setting off the *wundenlocc* woman against the onion with its rough hairs.

¹⁵ Biblia Sacra 13, 8–10, ed. Weber 706: ... *et haec cum dixisset accessit ad columnam quae erat ad caput lectuli eius et pugionem eius qui in ea ligatus pendebat exsolvit eumque evaginasset illud adprehendit comam capitis eius et ait confirma me Domine Deus Israel in hac hora et percussit bis in cervicem eius et abscidit caput eius et abstulit conopeum eius a columnis et evolvit corpus eius truncum.*

¹⁶ *discriminavit crinem capitis sui* (Biblia Sacra 10, 3, ed. Weber 702).

¹⁷ Judith, ed. Griffith 120.

¹⁸ Griffith argues that "the anachronism by which an Old Testament figure appeals to the Christian God proves to be merely superficial, for it shows the insertion of exegetical interpretation of Judith's words into her own mouth" (Judith, ed. Griffith 74f.). This may well be true (certainly, exegetical interpretation seems to inform Judith to a considerable extent), but the superficiality of this anachronism would be all the more startling if the poet was making an effort to present Judith as Jewish.

¹⁹ *Ic De frymða God, and frofre Gæst,
Bearn Alwaldan biddan wyll
miltse Dinre me þearfendre,
Drynesse ðrym.*

Judith, ed. Griffith 99 (lines 83–86).

²⁰ Judith, ed. Griffith 105.

²¹ Biblia Sacra 14, 14, ed. Weber 708.

²² Judith, ed. Griffith 105 (line 282).

HAIR IN THE BEOWULF-MANUSCRIPT

Nor is this use of hair as a distinctive characterising feature limited to Judith. If one examines the rest of the Beowulf-manuscript, one finds that hair is of considerable importance here too. The version of the Wonders of the East preserved in Cotton Vitellius A.xv refers repeatedly to the hair of marvellous races and creatures. On the folio which Rypins numbers 100b, men appear who *habbað beardas oþ cneow side & feax oð helan* (“have ample beards down to their knees and hair down to their heels”); on folio 101b there are men with *sweart feax* (“black hair”); and on folio 105b women with *feax oð helan side* (“ample hair down to their heels”).²³ These seem to be fairly straightforward examples of the use of hair as a general distinguishing characteristic – as it undoubtedly was in the early medieval period as at any other period.²⁴ Very long hair particularly seems worthy of note, apparently emphasising a lack of grooming and control of the hair on the part of outlandish people.

In Beowulf itself, the simplex *feax* certainly appears twice, once referring to Grendel’s hair (line 1647), and once referring to that of Ongendeow (line 2967).²⁵ The latter’s hair is referred to twice in just six lines, for he is termed *blondenfeax* (“grey-haired”) at line 2962.²⁶ This compound is more common than the simplex *feax* in Beowulf, for it occurs a further three times; at line 1594 it seems to refer to Hrothgar’s companions on the headland over Grendel’s mere, while at lines 1791 and 1873 it refers to Hrothgar himself.²⁷ In all these cases, *blondenfeax* is used to refer to old men. Ongendeow is characterised as being aged, referred to as *gomela Scilfing* (“the old Swede”) at line 2968, while Hrothgar’s companions are *gomele ymb godne* (“old men around the good man”) at line 1595.²⁸ Hrothgar himself is *se gomela* (“the old man”) at line 1397, and in line 608 age and hair are explicitly linked in his description by the term *gamolfeax* (“old-haired”).²⁹

This seems to form a significant pattern. In Beowulf, compounds of *feax* are used to describe old men. The only compound of *feax* in this text which has not so far been mentioned is *wundenfeax* (“having plaited hair”?), which refers to Hrothgar’s horse at line 1400.³⁰ Clearly the horse is not an old man, but it is a means of transport by which the aged Hrothgar (characterised by *feax*-compounds) approaches the lair of Grendel (characterised by *feax* as a simplex). The horse functions, then, as a symbolic representation of the transition between the aged and the inimical; being *wundenfeax*, it is possessed of *feax*, but that *feax* is not an age-signifier, nor the unmodified, uncontrolled *feax* of the monster, but the tamed, artificially-styled *feax* of a domesticated animal. This brings us on to the use of the simplex *feax*. It is used of Grendel, who is, of course, a monster, but also of Ongendeow, who is not. Both are enemies of the Danes, however, and this recalls the use of *feax* in Judith. One might also note that *feax*, whether in a compound or as a simplex, is never used of any Geat in Beowulf, and we might perhaps see not only a distinction between compounds as signifiers of age, and the simplex as a sign of enmity, but also a broader sense that *feax* is the hair of the other, the non-Geat, in Beowulf.

In relation to the characterisation of the Bethulians in Judith as *wundenlocc*, and the Assyrians as having *feax*, this is particularly interesting. The beheading scene in Judith not only contrasts Bethulian and Assyrian hair, but also uses this contrast in developing an idea of heathenism and its distinguishing characteristics. In developing this idea of heathenism, moreover, it links into the pres-

²³ Wonders of the East, in: Three Old English Prose Texts in MS Cotton Vitellius A xv (ed. Stanley Rypins, Early English Text Society, Original Series 161, London 1924) 55, 57, 65.

²⁴ For an excellent survey of medieval uses of hair as a distinguishing characteristic, see Robert Bartlett, Symbolic meanings of hair in the middle ages, in: Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, Series 6, 4 (1994) 43–60.

²⁵ See Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg (ed. Friedrich Klaeber, Boston 31950) 61, 111. The word may also have been used of Grendel’s mother’s hair at line 1537, according to Eric Gerald Stanley, Did Beowulf commit feaxfeng against Grendel’s mother?, in: Notes and Queries 221 (1976) 339–340. This would reinforce the argument of this piece, but, as an uncertain emendation, it will not be considered here.

²⁶ Beowulf, ed. Klaeber 111.

²⁷ Beowulf, ed. Klaeber 60, 67, 70.

²⁸ Beowulf, ed. Klaeber 111, 60.

²⁹ Beowulf, ed. Klaeber 53, 23.

³⁰ Beowulf, ed. Klaeber 53.

entation of heathenism in Beowulf. In line 98 of Judith, we see Judith herself described as “holy” (*haligre*) and starkly set off against Holofernes, who is referred to as “heathen” (*hæðenan*). This is also the line in which Judith’s “hope” (*hyht*) is renewed, and the first two words of the line, *haligre hyht*, recall and invert the *hæþenra hyht* of the Danes at line 179 of Beowulf.³¹ The Danes’ ineffective response to persecution by Grendel is thus sharply contrasted with Judith’s highly effective response to Holofernes’s persecution of the Bethulians.

Balancing line 98 is line 110, where Holofernes is once again referred to as a heathen – this time a “heathen dog” (*hæðenan hund*) – and the second half-line of the verse uses “head” (*heafod*) to alliterate with *hæðenan hund*.³² In 98–99 Judith seizes Holofernes’s hair, thereby gaining control of his head; in 110–111 the head escapes from her grasp, having been severed. The head’s escape, however, is merely onto the floor: *him þæt heafod wand | forð on ða flore* (“his head rolled forth onto the floor”). This grimly humorous image of a severed head rolling onto the floor is one of the Anglo-Saxon poet’s elaborations of his or her biblical source, and is a very striking image indeed. The conjunction of head and floor is present also in Beowulf, moreover, at lines 1647–1648; *Ða wæs be feaxe on flet boren | Grendles heafod* (“Then Grendel’s head was carried onto the floor by the hair”).³³ In Beowulf, as in Judith, the villain’s head can be controlled by taking a firm grasp of his hair; at the same time, depositing your defeated enemy’s head on the floor certainly emphasises the completeness of your victory. Showing off the head is also important, for similar reasons, and Judith does this as well at lines 177–179:

“Here you, victorious warriors, leaders of the people, can clearly gaze on the head of the most hateful heathen warrior.”³⁴

Again, Holofernes’s head is closely linked with his heathenism. Thus the head and hair sit within a rich intertextual matrix of ideas about Christianity versus heathenism, as well as the characterising of foes, and the positioning of their heads when they are defeated. The floor is an undignified place for the head to be, and Riddle 25 perhaps recognises this fact as well, in its statement that the onion’s hairiness is *neodan ... nathwær* (“somewhere below”). Ann Astell has explored the use of the head in Judith as a symbol around which the literal and allegorical levels of the poem intersect, and argues that “the poet’s language, which establishes a conflict between native inhabitants (*landbuende*) and invaders (*elþeod*), Christians and heathens ... facilitates the assimilation of the audience into the poem at the tropological level, inviting them to fight as courageously against the Danes as the Israelites do against the Assyrians”.³⁵ The use of hair in Judith certainly seems to establish a conflict between Christians and heathens, but Astell’s attempt to situate Judith historically in relation to Danish attacks on England is not without its difficulties; nevertheless, as we shall see, it is probably correct to see Judith as relating to a literary tradition of portraying the Danes as an archetypal pagan people. Astell recognises the importance of the head as a symbolic focus for identifying heathens, but does not recognise that the head’s identifying power is concentrated particularly in its hair – and it is by means of hair in particular that the texts of the Beowulf-manuscript, and Riddle 25, seek to establish identities.

In Beowulf and Judith, then, hairstyle functions in a number of ways as an indicator of identity. In Beowulf, hair is associated with age, but also with otherness and enmity. When associated with age, a compound in which the hair is qualified as grey or old is always used. The hair of an enemy,

³¹ The pairing of *halig* and *hyht* in a half-line is fairly common in Old English verse, whereas the Beowulf-poet’s *hæþenra hyht* is unparalleled; perhaps, therefore, we would do better to see this as a case of the Beowulf-poet ironically inverting a well-known formula.

³² Judith, ed. Griffith 99f.

³³ Beowulf, ed. Klaeber 61.

³⁴ *Her ge magon sweotole, sigerofe hæled,*
leoda ræswan, on ðæs laðestan
hæðenes heaðorinces heafod starian
Judith, ed. Griffith 102.

³⁵ Ann W. Astell, Holofernes’s head: *tacen* and teaching in the Old English Judith, in: Anglo-Saxon England 18 (1989) 117–133, at 132.

however, needs no qualification; the fact of being hairy is itself symbolic. Given that Grendel's head is carried by the hair, it seems probable that his hair is to be seen as being lengthy, and if hair is in itself a distinguishing feature of the enemy, we need hardly be surprised that a figure as inimical as Grendel should be characterised as possessing a lot of hair. Judith seems to draw on Beowulf, however, not only highlighting the hair of the Bethulians and the Assyrians so as to create a sharp contrast between them, but also emphasising at this point the paganism of Holofernes and linking it with that of the Danes in Beowulf. This contrasts with the emphatic Christianity of Judith in this passage. We cannot date Judith with any great degree of accuracy, of course, and we should therefore bear in mind that Beowulf may in fact be drawing on Judith, rather than vice versa.³⁶ Nevertheless, the presence of both texts in Cotton Vitellius A.xv fits well with the idea that they comment on one another, and it is certainly possible that the creation of identity by hair in Beowulf is re-imagined in Judith as a creation of heathen identity. The representation of the Danes in particular as heathens is, as we shall see, part of a creation of heathen identity which is not peculiar to Anglo-Saxon England, but which also has strong continental roots.

HRABANUS MAURUS AND THE CAROLINGIAN CONNECTION

Noticing the peculiar hairstyles of foreigners was nothing new when the Anglo-Saxons started doing it. Tacitus does it, Pliny does it; in fact, this is something of a universal human habit. As Bartlett has pointed out, there are a number of reasons why hair is especially commonly exploited as a way of indicating various kinds of identity.³⁷ The specific connection of long hair with heathenism and the associated vice of being Danish, are, however, of relatively recent date in late Anglo-Saxon England. Charlemagne's court seems to be the first home of this distrust of long hair as pagan and Danish, and the idea seems to have gained currency across England and Francia during the period of Viking attacks on western Europe.

Both Alcuin and Paulus Diaconus provide vivid examples of the way that excess hairiness was regarded in the Carolingian court circle. A well-known letter from Alcuin to Æthelræd of Northumbria and his nobles complains of the adoption of the hairstyles of the pagans by Northumbrian aristocrats:

“Behold your hairstyle, how you have wished to imitate the pagans in your beards and hair. Surely the terror of those whose hairstyle you have wanted to have is threatening you?”³⁸

Rightly or wrongly, Alcuin clearly thinks that *pagani* have their own characteristic hairstyle, and, as Chase points out, Alcuin's opinion on the matter reached a wider Anglo-Saxon audience than merely Æthelræd and his noblemen; this letter survives in British Library manuscript Cotton Vespasian A.xiv, a collection of Alcuin's letters which ‘apparently belonged to the library of Wulfstan’.³⁹

Alcuin's contemporary, Paulus Diaconus, provides an even clearer example of the association of paganism and hairiness in Carolingian court discourse. In a verse letter addressed to Charlemagne,

³⁶ Griffith accepts only linguistic evidence for dating Judith, and, quite rightly, points out that this evidence may be of only slight value (Judith, ed. Griffith 44–47); he notes that there are a few pieces of linguistic evidence in the text which “have some significance and are consistent with the poem being late ninth or tenth century in date, but the tentativeness of this conclusion must be admitted” (ibid. 47). If one accepts that Exeter Book Riddle 25 parodies Judith, then Judith must have been composed prior to the writing of the Exeter Book, which Muir places around 965–975 (Exeter Anthology, ed. Muir 1–3). As for the dating of Beowulf, debate continues to rage on this subject; for a useful summary and a variety of views see The Dating of Beowulf, ed. Colin Chase (Toronto 1981). See also Michael Lapidge, The archetype of Beowulf, in: Anglo-Saxon England 29 (2000) 5–41.

³⁷ Bartlett, Hair 43.

³⁸ Alcuin, Epistolae 4 (ed. Colin Chase, Two Alcuin Letter-Books, Toronto 1975) 55, lines 58–60: *Ecce tonsura quam in barbibus et in capillis paganis adsimilari uoluistis. Nonne illorum terror imminet quorum tonsuram habere uoluistis?* This letter is also edited in Alcuin, Epistola 16 (ed. Ernst Dümmler, MGH EE Karolini aevi 2, Berlin 1895) 1–493, at 42–44.

³⁹ Alcuin, Epistolae, ed. Chase 2. According to Chase, the hand of the section of the manuscript containing this letter is ‘a large script of the early eleventh century’ (ibid. 8).

Paulus discusses an imagined meeting between himself and the contemporary pagan Danish king Sigifrid in the following terms:

“I will be thought to be an ape or bristle-bearing brute beast,
and the stupid mob will mock my head.
It is allowed that he should be hairy and most like shaggy bucks,
And that he should give laws to kids and command goats –
Those men are feeble women, trembling in their breast –
For he fears too much your name and arms.
If he recognises me to be one of your citizens,
He will not dare to touch my least digit.
...
But rather let him hasten and lick your feet,
And lay down his crimes together with his hair.
And seeing that your power has been bestowed from heaven,
May he, requiring purification, be bathed in your waters.
If not, let him come with his hands bound behind his back,
And Thonar and Waten will be no help to him.”⁴⁰

Here we see Paulus discussing Sigifrid specifically in the context of conversion, pointing out the inefficacy of his gods, *Thonar et Waten*, and alluding to baptism: *tinguatur vestris purificandus aquis*. Paulus contrasts his own short hair, which makes him appear *setiferum* (“bristle-bearing”) with the long hair of Sigifrid. In fact, Paulus enters into elaborate alliterative mockery of Sigifrid’s hair: not only is Sigifrid *hirsutus hirtisque simillimus hircis* (“hairy and most like shaggy bucks”), but it is also thought desirable that he *cumque suo ponat crimina crine simul* (“and should lay down his crimes together with his hair”). Sigifrid’s heathenism is closely connected with his long hair; we are to understand; Paulus’s short hair is indicative of Christianity. This position perhaps owes something to Carolingian polemic directed against the long-haired Merovingians; although this dynasty had long been Christian, the political disempowerment of some late Merovingians by the strongly Christian practice of tonsuring seems to suggest that characterisation of long hair as heathen could be a viable means of discrediting this dynasty.⁴¹ Attempting to establish that this practice was undertaken with this in mind is, however, fraught with difficulties.

That a poem based on the book of Judith should form a focal point for this sort of characterisation of pagans in Anglo-Saxon England is perhaps not surprising. Paulus and Alcuin were not alone in making the connection between pagans and hairiness; this tradition was continued by Alcuin’s pupil, Hrabanus Maurus, whose commentary on the Book of Judith, the *Expositio in Librum Judith*, has received a great deal of attention as a possible source for Judith.⁴² Hrabanus’s treatment of

⁴⁰ *Simia setiferumve brutum pecus esse putabor,
Deridetque meum stulta caterva caput.
Sit licet hirsutus hirtisque simillimus hircis,
Iuraque det hedis imperitetque capris,
Sunt illi invalidae pavitanti in pectore vires,
Nam nimium vestrum nomen et arma timet.
Is scierit vestris si me de civibus unum,
Audebit minimo tangere nec digito.*

...

*Quin potius properet, vestra et vestigia lambat,
Cumque suo ponat crimina crine simul.
Caelitus et quoniam est vobis conlata potestas,
Tinguatur vestris purificandus aquis.
Sin minus, adveniat manibus post terga revinctis,
Nec illi auxilio Thonar et Waten erunt.*

Paulus Diaconus, *Sic ego suscepi tua carmina, maxime princeps* (ed. Ernst Dümmler, MGH Poetae Latini aevi Carolini 1, Berlin 1881) 51f., at 52 (lines 21–36).

⁴¹ For a brief introduction to previous work on this subject, see Bartlett, *Hair* 44.

⁴² Two specific details in Judith which seem very likely to depend directly on the *Expositio in Librum Judith* are pointed out in Jackson J. Campbell, *Schematic Technique in Judith*, in: *English Language History* 38 (1971) 155–172, at 162–

Holofernes's hair in his commentary does seem to relate to the tradition of characterising pagans as hairy. A clearer example of Hrabanus's use of this tradition, however, is afforded by his commentary on the Book of Leviticus, at the point where he comments on the statement *neque in rotundum tondetis comam, nec radetis barbam* ("neither clip your hair into a round, nor shave your beard"):

"But not to cultivate locks stronger than other hairs in honour of demons, and to vow by this, for the pagans strive by this to offer the head of boys to demons"⁴³

While it is not clear exactly what practice Hrabanus had in mind here, it is clear that he saw certain uses of hair as characteristic of pagans; and it also seems likely that he was thinking in terms of contemporary pagans, since his interpretation relates only tenuously to the sentence on which he is commenting, but nevertheless seems to indicate quite a precise activity. Presumably Hrabanus was aware of some sort of tradition of which he disapproved, and felt that the presence of a prohibition of certain sorts of hair-cutting in the Book of Leviticus allowed him the license to condemn this tradition.⁴⁴ The point is reinforced by his mention of those *qui barbaricas student comas: propter quod hoc Septuaginta sisyn, forsitan propter magnitudinem concursorum capillorum, appellaverunt* ("who

164; the first is the treatment of the *fleohnet* ("fly-net"; a straightforward equivalent for Hrabanus's *rete muscarum*) in line 47, and the second is Holofernes' confinement in hell after death (lines 111–121), which has no equivalent in the Book of Judith, but "must," according to Campbell, "depend on commentary similar to this [i.e. Hrabanus']" (ibid. 164). Astell points to the first parallel as a clear instance of Hrabanus's influence on the Judith-poet: "the poet, incorporating Hrabanus's interpretation into the actual plot, literalizes the allegory in the form of the fly-net" (Astell, Holofernes's head 125). Griffith, in his entry on the sources of Judith in the Fontes Anglo-Saxonici database, apparently completely rejects the first parallel, as he does not mention it. Yet he does suggest a parallel similar to the second one, proposing Hrabanus' *ad perditionem perpetuam* as a "possible" direct source for lines 119b–121a of Judith: Mark Griffith, The sources of Judith (Cameron A.4.2), in: Fontes Anglo-Saxonici: World Wide Web Register (2000) <http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk/>, accessed November 2003. While it is not difficult to imagine an Anglo-Saxon author assuming that Holofernes went to hell (and writing accordingly), it is striking, to say the least, that the author imagines the *conopeum* of the Book of Judith as a fly-net, just as Hrabanus does. It seems likely that the Judith-poet was at least partially aware of the Expositio in Librum Judith, but the treatment of Holofernes' *conopeum* seems to support this contention more plausibly than the departure of Holofernes to hell. In his edition, Griffith notes that *fleohnet* glosses *conopeum* only twice in Old English (Judith, ed. Griffith 116), but he does not point out that Hrabanus' definition of the term, *rete muscarum*, appears in exactly the same form in the Corpus Glossary: An Eighth-Century Latin-Anglo-Saxon Glossary (ed. Jan Hendrik Hessels, Cambridge 1890) 33 (line C531). Hrabanus appears to have been following Isidore's Etymologiae – which he used as the main source for his own De universo libri XXII – which provides this definition: *Conopeum, retes qua culices excluduntur in modum tentorii* ("canopy, a net by which midges are kept out in the manner of a tent") (Isidore of Seville, Etymologiae XIX, 5, PL 82, 669). While the Corpus Glossary certainly made use of Isidore's work (see Michael W. Herren, The transmission and reception of Graeco-Roman mythology in Anglo-Saxon England, 670–800, in: Anglo-Saxon England 27 [1998] 87–103, at 98f.), the use of exactly the same phrase by both Hrabanus and the Corpus Glossary suggests a more direct link between the two than a shared source which gives a slightly different definition. At the same time, it is hard to see how this late eighth- or early ninth-century glossary (ibid. 103) could be drawing on Hrabanus's Expositio in Librum Judith, since this was probably written in the early 830s or shortly before (Michael J. Enright, Charles the Bald and Aethelwulf of Wessex: the alliance of 856 and strategies of royal succession, in: Journal of Medieval History 5 [1979] 291–302, at 294, suggests that the Expositio was completed in 834; Mayke de Jong, Exegesis for an empress, in: Medieval Transformations: Texts, Power, and Gifts in Context, ed. Esther Cohen/Mayke de Jong [Cultures, Beliefs and Traditions 11, Leiden 2001] 69–100, at 79f., argues convincingly that the Expositio was presented to Judith in 830 or early 831), and therefore very probably after the production of the Corpus Glossary. Perhaps, then, we have to consider the possibility of an English tradition of defining *conopeum* as *rete muscarum* which influenced Hrabanus?

⁴³ Hrabanus Maurus, Expositionum in Leviticum libri septem VI, 7, PL 108, 458: *Sed nec cincinnos nutrire in honore daemonum capillis aliis fortiores, et hoc vovere, student enim hoc pagani caput puerorum offerre daemonibus.*

⁴⁴ Bartlett, Hair 48, identifies an "early medieval Frankish practice" of marking a boy's departure from infancy with a symbolic first haircut; a practice which "does not seem to have survived long into the Carolingian period". The apparent disappearance of this practice (which was certainly, according to Bartlett, a practice of Slavic pagans, and may well have originated in Germanic societies before the arrival of Christianity) in the Carolingian period may owe something to the Carolingian polemic against the *reges criniti*. Moreover, if, as Bartlett argues, "the Church very soon recognised it [the ritual first haircut] with liturgical forms" (ibid. 47), Hrabanus' statement here does look remarkably like an instance of the church – or at least a churchman – re-evaluating the practice as strictly pagan. Perhaps, then, it is this practice to which Hrabanus refers, and on which he frowns.

strive for barbarian hair: the Septuagint called this *sisyn*, perhaps because of the magnitude of the mass of hairs"). The reference to those "who strive for barbarian hair" cannot help but recall Alcuin's admonishment to the Northumbrian noblemen who seek to wear their hair in the style of the *pagan*. Clearly, identification of the pagan or barbarian as hairy was a feature of Hrabanus's socio-religious worldview as much as of Alcuin or Paulus Diaconus's.

Whether or not Paulus's verse epistle was widely-known in Anglo-Saxon England is hard to ascertain; Alcuin's letter to Æthelræd of Northumbria clearly was known, although this is perhaps not entirely surprising, since it was a letter sent to a Northumbrian monarch. Hrabanus's use of hair is especially relevant here, then, not only because he wrote a very well-known commentary on Judith, but also because this commentary was certainly known in Anglo-Saxon England,⁴⁵ and it has been suggested that one or two details found in the Old English Judith may derive from the author's knowledge of Hrabanus' commentary (see above, note 42). While none of these parallels is conclusive proof of direct influence, it is certainly plausible that the author would have been aware of Hrabanus' text.

Hrabanus' treatment of Holofernes' hair in his commentary is, moreover, another area in which we might reasonably see some influence from Hrabanus on the Old English poem. In discussing the passage in which Judith beheads Holofernes, Hrabanus interprets Holofernes's hair as representing *elatio superbae mentis* ("the self-exaltation of a proud mind").⁴⁶ This is not a direct association of Holofernes's hair with paganism, of course, but the idea of pride is one which has been seen as connecting closely with the presentation of paganism and the pagan past in Judith. Andy Orchard has argued convincingly that the texts of the Beowulf-manuscript "are concerned with the tension between an age which extolled heroic glory and an age in which vainglory was condemned".⁴⁷ Judith in particular, he argues, deals with "the fatal humiliation of overweening pagan pride".⁴⁸

Mark Griffith points out that Holofernes is also described by Hrabanus, and by Remigius of Auxerre, as a type of the Devil.⁴⁹ Griffith points out several elements in Holofernes's characterisation in Judith which seem to relate to this exegesis of him; indeed, numerous scholars have remarked on the characterisation of Holofernes as diabolical in Judith.⁵⁰ This suggests the further possibility of an allegorical approach to characterising Holofernes in terms of the sin of pride. The sin for which Lucifer was cast out of heaven was, of course, pride.⁵¹ Griffith interprets Judith as an exegetically-aware text, which makes use of exegetical interpretations of Holofernes as a type of the Devil, although it "literalises whatever may have been taken from exegesis".⁵² Perhaps, then, the presentation of Holofernes as proud, remarked by Orchard, is in part a function of his presentation as devilish. The special attention given to his hair – which, in Hrabanus' view, represents pride – serves to point up his pride, and, with it, his devilishness. The connection of pride with the Devil as well as with hair is, in fact, a connection found elsewhere in Hrabanus's *Expositio in Librum Judith*; earlier in the commentary, as Orchard points out, he interprets Arphaxad as follows:

⁴⁵ Gneuss lists one manuscript (Arras, Bibliothèque Municipale [Médiathèque], MS 764 [739]) of the *Expositio* which seems to have been written towards the end of the ninth century in northeastern France, whence it made its way to England sometime in the tenth century, Helmut Gneuss, *Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A List of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100* (Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 241, Tempe-Arizona 2001) 116 (number 779).

⁴⁶ Hrabanus Maurus, *Expositio in Librum Judith* 13, PL 109, 539–592, at 573A.

⁴⁷ Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* (Cambridge 1995) 169.

⁴⁸ Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies* 5.

⁴⁹ Judith, ed. Griffith 76–78.

⁵⁰ The diabolical qualities of Holofernes – and his possible interpretation as a type of the Devil – in Judith have been discussed repeatedly; see, for some representative examples, Carl T. Berkhout/James F. Doubleday, The net in Judith 46b–54a, in: *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 74 (1973) 630–634; John P. Hermann, The theme of spiritual warfare in the Old English Judith, in: *Philological Quarterly* 55 (1976) 1–9, at 4f.; Judith, ed. Griffith 76–79. Astell, Holofernes's head 120f., argues that Holofernes is presented more as an incarnation of the Devil through wicked humans (in particular Danes) than as an abstract type of the Devil.

⁵¹ Judith, ed. Griffith, 77.

⁵² Judith, ed. Griffith, 76–79, at 79. Interpretations of Judith as drawing in various ways on exegetical traditions are common; see, for instance, Hermann, *Spiritual warfare*, and Astell, *Holofernes's head*.

“But by Arphaxad can be mystically represented the type of the arrogant and the proud, whose whole striving and work, which is carried out through the arrogance of bigheadedness and through the self-exaltation of the mind, easily falls into the portion of the spiritual Nabuchodonosor, that is the devil.”⁵³

Hrabanus does not, however, here connect the Devil with pride through portraying Lucifer’s sin as pride; rather he represents the pride of humans as tending to lead them to the Devil. At the same time, Hrabanus again refers to pride with the phrase *elatio mentis*, looking forward to his treatment of Holofernes’ hair. In representing Holofernes, moreover, Hrabanus tends not to interpret him as the Devil. Griffith quotes the following passage as presenting Holofernes as a type of the Devil:

“This Holofernes we can understand as either the empire of (pagan) nations, which has persecuted the Church of Christ, or as the head itself of all evils, and the lowest son of damnation”⁵⁴

Clearly Holofernes can be seen as a type of the Devil,⁵⁵ but Mayke de Jong quite rightly understands this passage as presenting him as a type of the Antichrist rather than the Devil;⁵⁶ Hrabanus’ “lowest son of damnation” is later qualified by the phrase *in quem totus intrabit Satanas* (“into whom Satan will enter entirely”), which clearly distinguishes this figure from the Devil.⁵⁷ Nor is this the only interpretation which Hrabanus allows. He also allows us to interpret Holofernes as the main instrument of the Antichrist; the *gentium principatum*, the earthly (and pagan) power *qui persecutus est Ecclesiam Christi* (“which has persecuted the Church of Christ”). This is, in fact, a common interpretation of Holofernes in the *Expositio in Librum Judith*. Since Nabuchodonosor has been interpreted as the Devil, Holofernes must in general be interpreted as one of the Devil’s subordinates or followers and this is the interpretation which Hrabanus usually gives:

“For king Nabuchodonosor ordered him to destroy all the gods of the land, so that he himself might be called God by these peoples which it had been possible to subject to Holofernes’s power.’ Because the devil himself, who is the leader and head of all evil people, strives in one way through hidden traps, and schemes in another way through open persecutions, to change all the sense and toil of people on earth to his worship, and so that he himself might rule over them all.”⁵⁸

Here Hrabanus places Nabuchodonosor and Holofernes together, and clearly associates Holofernes with the earthly persecutions which bring the world around to the cult of the Devil. This depiction of Holofernes as representing worldly rulers who encourage unchristian behaviour and worship is made even more explicit in Hrabanus’s comments on Judith’s eating behaviour:

“But Holofernes asked Judith to abandon the provisions which she brought with her, and sought if somehow he could make her a participant in his feast, because sometimes the worship of the Christian religion seems among the rulers of the pagans to be contemptible and base, and they strive to drag its practisers to the filth of idols, or to the lures of carnal desires.”⁵⁹

Here Holofernes is not simply associated with the rather vague idea of the cult of the Devil, but is specifically presented as one of the *gentilium principes*, the rulers of pagans. As a pagan ruler, he

⁵³ Hrabanus, *Expositio* 1, PL 109, 544D-545A: *Mystice autem per Arphaxad arrogantium typus atque superborum potest exprimi, quorum totus nisus et labor, qui per fastum tumoris atque per elationem mentis agitur, facile in partem spiritualis Nabuchodonosor, id est diaboli, cadit.*

⁵⁴ Hrabanus, *Expositio* 2, PL 109, 546B: *Holofernem hunc aut gentium principatum, qui persecutus est Ecclesiam Christi, aut ipsum etiam iniquorum omnium caput, et novissimum perditionis filium possumus intelligere.*

⁵⁵ Remigius of Auxerre, for instance, presents him as such. See above, note 49.

⁵⁶ De Jong, *Exegesis* 89.

⁵⁷ Hrabanus, *Expositio* 2, PL 109, 546C.

⁵⁸ Hrabanus, *Expositio* 3, PL 109, 549C-D: *Præceperat enim illi Nabuchodonosor rex, ut omnes deos terrae exterminaret, ut ipse solus diceretur Deus ab his nationibus, quae potuissent Holofernens potentia subjugari.” Quia ipse diabolus, qui rector et caput omnium est iniquorum, hoc per occultas insidias molitur, hocque per apertas persecutiones machinatur, ut sensus et labor terrestrium universus in suum cultum commutetur, et ipse omnium dominetur.*

⁵⁹ Hrabanus, *Expositio* 12, PL 109, 571A-B: *Sed conqueritur Holofernes Judith victualia, quae secum apportavit, deficere, et quaerit si quo modo possit sui convivii participem efficere, cum apud gentilium principes aliquando despectus et vilis esse videtur cultus religionis Christianae, et executores ejus student ad immunditiam idolorum, seu ad illecebras carnalium voluptatum pertrahere.*

is, naturally enough, shown trying to encourage Christians to apostatise and practise idolatry.⁶⁰ Judith, however, here behaves just as the Church – and each good Christian – should:

“Note that Judith, talking with Holofernes, was not polluted by the foods or drink of the pagans, but ate and drank those things which her maid had prepared for her: because the Church, living among the (pagan) nations, is in no way polluted by the idolatry and superstition of paganism, but uses those things which it deems to be worthy for its nourishment, which the devotion of the faithful through obedience and the carrying out of good work has prepared for it.”⁶¹

Judith refuses to pollute herself *idololatria aut superstitione gentilitatis* (“with the idolatry and superstition of paganism”). As such she represents an ideal of personal Christian behaviour, and, as a type of the Church, she also displays an ideal of communal Christian behaviour. Hrabanus specifically sees this ideal, moreover, as relating to the conduct of the Church when living among pagans. This seems at odds with Enright’s insistence that Hrabanus’s commentary specifically reflects on the “contemporary political circumstance” of the Empress Judith, to whom his work was dedicated.⁶² No doubt Enright is correct to see some political resonance in the text, but this does not mean that he is right to dissociate the text’s messages about the enemies of the Church entirely from the external threat posed by pagans; both layers of meaning can exist simultaneously within Hrabanus’s commentary.

Hrabanus, unlike Alcuin and Paulus Diaconus, is not explicitly talking about Danes. He may well be talking about the specific problem of persecution of the Empress Judith by her stepsons. Nevertheless, his *Expositio in Librum Judith* also deals with the general problem of persecution of the Church by pagans; on that point he is perfectly clear. Part of Hrabanus’ image of pagans is, moreover, that they are hairy; and since Hrabanus’ teacher Alcuin evidently took this view, we need not be surprised that Hrabanus does too. Hrabanus manages to integrate this view into his exegesis by interpreting Holofernes’ hair as the pride which leads humans to the Devil; hairiness is literally a marker which identifies pagans, but it is also metaphorically the pride which has led them into the camp of the Devil. In drawing on Hrabanus’ commentary (directly or otherwise), the Judith-poet draws on its presentation of Holofernes as a representative example of oppressive pagan rulers, and presents him in a similar way (whilst also pointing towards his other interpretation as a type of the Devil; on which see above note 50). At the same time, the Judith-poet and Hrabanus both draw on a shared tradition of characterising pagans as hairy; whether or not the Judith-poet was thinking specifically in terms of Hrabanus’ exegesis of Holofernes’s hair in his commentary must remain an open question.

TEXTS, IDENTITIES, AND CONNECTIONS: A DYNAMICS OF HAIR SYMBOLISM IN THE BEOWULF-MANUSCRIPT?

The *Expositio in Librum Judith* was clearly composed for an historical individual called Judith: the empress Judith.⁶³ The Old English poem has been the target of attempts to make a similar connection, generally focussing on English queens who may have been associated with efforts to repulse Danish attacks.⁶⁴ While there is no plausible reason to suppose that Judith was composed for an

⁶⁰ Here we see Hrabanus portraying Judith very much according to the pattern of a Christian martyr; although some scholars have seen hagiographical qualities in the Old English Judith, these qualities are not specific to hagiography, but can, as here, have a place in other christian genres. For a brief discussion of this problem, see Judith, ed. Griffith 80–82.

⁶¹ Hrabanus, *Expositio* 12, PL 109, 572A: *Nota quod Judith apud Holofernem conversans, non coinquinata est cibis vel potu gentiliis, sed ea manducavit et bibit quae sibi praeparaverat ancilla ejus: quia Ecclesia inter gentes habitans nullo modo polluitur idololatria aut superstitione gentilitatis, sed his utitur quae victui suo iudicat esse condigna, quae devotio fidelium per obedientiam et exercitium boni operis sibi praeparat.*

⁶² Enright, Charles the Bald 295.

⁶³ See Hrabanus’ dedicatory epistle at the beginning of the *Expositio*: Hrabanus, *Expositio*, ed. Migne 539C–542A. For discussions of how the *Expositio* addresses the circumstances of the empress Judith, see Enright, Charles the Bald 294f., and de Jong, *Exegesis*.

⁶⁴ These are summarised and, quite rightly, rejected by Timmer, in: Judith (ed. Benno Johan Timmer, Exeter 1978) 6–8.

anti-Danish queen, that is not to say that Judith does not deal with the Danes. While we might not agree with Astell's claim that Judith's Anglo-Saxon "audience in turn is moved to follow her [Judith's] example and confront, with comparable courage, the invading Danes",⁶⁵ it does seem that Judith addresses itself to the question of identifying Danes. The Danes are, pre-eminently, the contemporary representatives of paganism, not only for Alcuin and Paulus Diaconus, but also for later, Anglo-Saxon authors. Ælfric, and, following him, Wulfstan, in their homilies *De falsis deis*, both sought to discredit Danish heathenism by pointing out that their gods were in the wrong familial relationships to one another when compared with their Roman equivalents;⁶⁶ the Danes are the 'pagans' who are immediately available to scrutiny by English authors in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries.⁶⁷ The anonymous author of an Old English homily based on Adso's *De antichristo* simply replaced Jove and Mercury with Thor and Odin.⁶⁸ In late Anglo-Saxon England, it seems, the supposed paganism of the Danes was to some extent capable of replacing Roman paganism as the model for the pagan community which persecutes the Church.

In identifying this pagan community, hair is clearly an important marker. For Hrabanus Maurus, Holofernes' hair represents the sin of pride which motivates the persecutors of the Church. He is working within a wider tradition, however, which makes a more straightforward identification of long hair as the hairstyle of the pagans, and especially the Danes. The contacts of Charlemagne's court with Danes,⁶⁹ at a time when Denmark was still very much pagan, seem to have played a part in the development of this idea, and the idea was shared with Anglo-Saxon circles almost immediately, from where it went on to be used and re-used in succeeding centuries. Judith makes use of the general tradition, and perhaps of Hrabanus's work specifically, and the emphasis on hair in Judith was evidently not lost on the clever – and well-educated – individual who wrote Exeter Book Riddle 25.

Judith, then, creates its own careful distinction between the Christian Bethulians, who are *wundenlocc*, and the heathen Assyrians, with their *feax*. It seems that it also reads backwards into Beowulf with this understanding, although perhaps the direction of influence is the other way round. While Beowulf itself tends to downplay the paganism of its protagonists – with the exception of the Danes' apparently unusual response to Grendel's attacks – Judith re-paganises these Scandinavian *feax*-bearers. The author of Exeter Book Riddle 25, moreover, apparently recognised the importance of hair and *hyht* in this process, using them in his spoof of Judith. Both Judith and the riddle, then, participate in an act of reading Beowulf and imagining the heathen, by appealing to a discourse of long standing which identifies heathens – and especially Danes – as being hirsute.

⁶⁵ Astell, Holofernes's head 119.

⁶⁶ Ælfric, *De falsis deis*, in: *Homilies of Ælfric: a Supplementary Collection* (ed. John C. Pope, Early English Text Society, Original Series 259–260, London 1967) 667–724, at 684–685; Wulfstan, *De falsis deis*, in: *The Homilies of Wulfstan* (ed. Dorothy Bethurum, Oxford 1957) 221–224, at 223.

⁶⁷ The Danes were, if Harald's ('Bluetooth') runestone at Jelling is to be believed, christianised during the second half of the tenth century; regardless of the exact state of Christianity and traditional religions in Denmark, however, it is certainly the case that Harald's son and grandson, Sveinn ('Forkbeard') and Knut, were both occasionally represented or imagined by eleventh-century Christians as pagans. Sveinn is depicted by Adam of Bremen as an apostate who undertook *magnam ... persecutionem christianorum* ("great persecution of Christians"), Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hamburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum*, in: *Quellen des 9. und 11. Jahrhunderts zur Geschichte der Hamburgischen Kirche und des Reiches* (ed. Werner Trillmich, *Ausgewählte Quellen zur deutschen Geschichte des Mittelalters* 11, Berlin 1961) 137–499, at 264. Knut fares even worse, receiving a famous thank-you letter from Fulbert of Chartres in which he expresses his pleasant surprise at finding out that Knut is not a *paganorum princeps* ("ruler of pagans"), Fulbert of Chartres, *The Letters and Poems of Fulbert of Chartres* (ed. Frederick Behrends, Oxford 1976) 66 (number 37). For a useful summary of the christianisation of Denmark, and the roles of Sveinn and Knut in this process, see Richard Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion: From Paganism to Christianity* (New York 1997) 404–408.

⁶⁸ *De temporibus Anticristi*, in: Wulfstan: *Sammlung der ihm zugeschrieben Homilien nebst Untersuchungen über ihre Echtheit* (ed. Arthur Napier, *Sammlung englischer Denkmäler in kritischen Ausgaben* 4, Berlin 1883) 191–205, at 197.

⁶⁹ For instance, Charlemagne received an embassy from Sigifrid – the focus for Paulus Diaconus' anti-Danish sentiment – in 782, see Paulus Diaconus, *Poems*, in: *Die Gedichte des Paulus Diaconus: kritische und erklärende Ausgabe* (ed. Karl Neff, *Quellen und Untersuchungen zur lateinischen Philologie des Mittelalters* 3, 4, München 1908) 100.

