# JUDITH: AN OLD ENGLISH EPIC FRAGMENT

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Judith: An Old English Epic Fragment by Albert S. Cook

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#### **ALBERT S. COOK**

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EDITED BY

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#### Preface

My earlier editing of this poem provided considerable material which I have been able to use with little modification in the present work. On the other hand, as the plan of this book is different, and as new opinions on certain points had in the mean time been broached, and needed to be dealt with, the new edition is not a mere condensation of the earlier. In one respect, however, and that perhaps the most essential, I have been true to my first conception: I have endeavored to present the poem, fragmentary as it is, as a work of art, being persuaded that unless philological scholarship tends to exalt life, and the nobler aspects which life has assumed, or under which it has been conceived, the less we have of it the better.

YALE UNIVERSITY, Dec. 21, 1903. Ri .

#### Introduction

#### MANUSCRIPT

THE manuscript is the well-known Cotton Vitellius A. XV of the British Museum, probably of the tenth century, which likewise contains (fol. 129\*-198\*) the poem of Beownif. The whole manuscript was first described by Wanley, Catalogus, pp. 218-219; then in Planta's Catalogus of the Manuscripts in the Cottonian Library (London, 1802), and elsewhere. Besides the Beownif and the Judith, it contains eight other pieces, these two forming the final ones.

A fire in 1731 destroyed some of the Cottonian manuscripts, and injured others, among the latter being this one. The injury consisted in the scorching of its edges and the shriveling of certain leaves. In some places the edges have been chipped away, and words, or portions of words, lost. It does not appear, however, as Dr. Tinker remarks (The Translations of Beowulf, p. 8), that these losses are of so great importance as the remarks of some prominent Old English scholars might lead one to suspect; I and it is certain that some awkward readings of the Judith are due to the blunderings of one or more scribes, though if Foster's conjecture is right, and the poem was composed about 915, there can hardly have

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> But the injury to the manuscript is of less importance in this case, since the poem had been printed by Thwaitee in 1098, before the injury occurred (see Bibliography).

been many transcriptions, on the theory that the manuscript is of the tenth century. The mixture of dialectic forms, however, seems to indicate that a Northern original passed through one or more hands, and that the last scribe, at all events, belonged to the Late West Saxon period. Forms like hehsta (4, 94) and nehsta (73), for example, point to the North, while such as hyhita (309) are clearly West Saxon; so secent (96), hafan (197), medowerige (229) seem distinctively Northern (Foster, Judith, pp. 50-51).

The Judith begins in the manuscript immediately after the Beowulf, and covers fol. 199\*-206b. A photographic facsimile of the Beowulf pages was published by the Early English Text Society in 1882, with a transliteration and notes provided by Professor Zupitza; and a page (200b) of the Judith is similarly reproduced in my earlier edition, containing lines 55° to 69°. An autotype facsimile of all the pages of the Judith is in my possession, and I shall be happy to facilitate its consultation by scholars.

#### DATE

Very few of the Old English poems are dated. Those of which we are most certain are the ones on the battles of Maldon and Brunanburh, and these must have been written soon after the respective dates of those battles, a. D. 937 and 991; and the Cynewulfian poems, Juliana, Elene, and Christ, which must have been written not far from the year 800. The latter poems have the name of the poet spelled in runes, the two former as Cynewulf, the latter as Cynewulf. Now the form Cyne-begins to appear about 750, and Cyn-about 800; hence the Christ may be conjecturally dated about 800, or even

<sup>1</sup> See Sievere' proofs in Anglia 13. 11-15.

later; the Elene only enough earlier to permit of the poet's alluding to himself as an old man; and the Juliana within the limits of Cynewulf's activity as a religious poet. All that can be said with relative certainty is that the Christ no doubt belongs to the early ninth century, that the Elene can hardly be more than ten or a dozen years earlier, at most; and that the Juliana can be only a few years earlier than the Elene, if indeed it be not later (for on this point we have no evidence). Of the remaining poems, the verse translation of the Metres of Boethius must, at earliest, fall at the very end of the ninth century, since it was executed either by Alfred or by some later writer. The interpolated portion of Genesis, known as Genesis B, can hardly be earlier than the middle of the ninth century, since it is based upon an Old Saxon poem which is ascribed to about 830 or 840. Cadmon's Hymn would date from about 670, and Bede's Death-Song from 735. It is generally agreed that in its present form the Beowulf can not be later than about 750. These are almost the only poems which can be dated somewhat independently of others. The Andreas, Guthlac B, and the Phoenix have been assigned by some critics to Cyncwulf, the evidence being perhaps clearest in the case of the Andreas. The rest of the poems must be dated on the basis of internal evidence, by a comparison of diction and metre with those of the foregoing, or perhaps rarely with Continental poems of date approximately ascertained.

The Judith exhibits some striking correspondences in phraseology with the Juliana, the Elene, and the Andreas; with Genesis A, the Battle of Maldon (Byrhtnoth), and the Beowulf; and, at a greater remove, with Gifts of Men, the Dream of the Rood, the Psalms, etc. For example, the phrase is \$\varepsilon \cdot \cd