

#3

*The Book
of Marko Marulić of Split
Containing the History of the Holy Widow*

Judith

*Written in Verses in the Proatian Style
how she Killed the General Holofernes
in the Midst of his Army
and Set the Israelitish People Free
from Great Peril*



*To the Reverend
Priest in Jesus Christ and Precentor of Split
Master Don Dujam Balistrilić
His Godfather,
Marko Marulić
This Humble Gift
With a Courteous Reverence
Gives from the Heart*



These holy Lenten days, my godfather and most respected master in the name of Jesus Christ, turning over the books of the Old Testament, I alighted upon the history of that honourable and holy widow Judith and the most arrogant Holofernes, whom she slew thus setting free all the land of Israel from the peril that did loom over it. As I read this tale, it occurred to me to translate it into our tongue that those who knew no Italian or Latin books might understand it. Wishing to dedicate this gift to your fatherhood, which is well versed in both languages, I determined to imitate the sleight of those children who, giving their New Year's gifts to their elders, oranges decked with fragrant herbs, with marjoram, rosemary and rue, adroitly set off their gifts that they may cunningly receive

greater presents in return. I do not intend to use their cunning procedures except with that witty decoration, for no other return gift do I seek from you save that which I have many times found afore, true and perfect love in Jesus Christ, which, to be sure, you feel for me more than I have deserved, though as befits your nobility, which is inclined to all and amicable to every one. This sleight, as I say, imitating, I endeavoured to make this tale in such a way that it should be tricked out with all kinds of external ornamentation and smoothness and decorativeness and painted with various tints; and this so that you should not say I am offering a bunch of wheat that you might find better in your books. Indeed, this bunch is decked with many a flower; when you look well, you will say: it has changed its face like a fruit tree in spring when it blooms most joyously.

For, thus behold, I have put this history into verses, according to the custom of our makers, and, to boot, according to the laws of those old poets who are not satisfied barely to tell how some event befell, but use many actions to please those who read, following the artful manner of the generous cook who at his lord's table places not only boiled and roast meats, but also adds saffron and pepper and other such things so that it shall be the more delicious for those who have come to dine. Yet, although my gift has no such worthiness, I trust in your charity that you will kindly receive it because of the true kindness and cordial amity that there has long been between us. There, to you my much respected Lady Judith is coming, perhaps with no fewer gauds than when she showed herself to Holofernes, not to deceive you, as him, withal, but on the contrary, to fortify you in the maintenance of holy chastity, having brought before your eyes displayed all her beauty, loveliness, virtue, fame and glory, with which she was adorned much more nobly and proudly than those who deck their selves with silk and gold and pearls, and knowing that she shall dwell as honourably beneath your roof as she whilom resided beneath her own in Bethulia. When you kindly converse with her, I think that you will laud her not less highly than the priest Eliachim who came from Jerusalem with all the Levites to Bethulia to see her, having heard of her courage, her brave deeds and the miraculous sanctity of her life. For this reason he expressed mighty praise to her, worthy honours, extolling her high, and pure love, spiritual, holy, not debauched with any scrap of unworthy lust, as befits the holy and as is meet for the servants of the Lord. And you, then, receive her courteously, take her willingly into your residence, and whom you always praise in your deeds, praise also in your words; for she has grown accustomed to praise, especially from your holy priestly order. Receive her, and command me; at your commands I am always at service, prepared to perform what you order me, insofar as I am capable. Peace and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you for ever more. Amen.

In the year of Our Lord Jesus Christ fifteen hundred and one, the twenty second day of the month of April. In the city of Split.



Josip Biffel: *Judita*

*The Books of Marko Marulić of Split
in Which is Contained
the History of the Holy Judith
Divided into Six Cantos
Commence to the Glory of God*

Book I, 1 – 20: Invocation.

The glory and the fame of Judith the blessed,
her bold deeds the same, to sing I'm possessed.
So, Lord, I've addressed my appeal for your light,
let it not be suppressed, grant your grace so bright.
You imparted your might to her every feat,
made her fair to the sight, with chastity meet;
Now this way I entreat you to lend me your aid
so the tongue can repeat what the mind has portrayed.
May your love be conveyed, by true spirit, to me,
far and wide have I strayed, in my mentality,
in old bards' company (wandering far around)
who worship a deity by which the world's bound.
With high holiness crowned, my master so true,
you inspire the sweet sound, calm and comfort are you,
and not that triple crew of maidens three,
and Apollo too, with his cithara free.
Raise my voice from this lea to the heavens on high
where the choirs heavenly praise your throne in the sky,
your regal palace nigh, let me sing while I may,
let my words testify with fearless Judith's lay.

**Book I, 81 – 120: King Nebuchadnezzar's sleepless night. The dawn.
The king summons his counsellors.**

How distant they drift, who talk of time's days
devoid of wisdom's gift, as if in a daze,
for our knowledge is haze, if He shows things not
who all wisdom displays and rules each man's lot.
While the king vents his wrath, with his bright face the sun
drives west his chariot and hides in the ocean.
See the darkness hasten, and livestock and nation
swain, beast and feathered one, cease their occupation,

m DOSSIER: MARKO MARULIĆ 0



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Dubravka Babić '09.

Dubravka Babić: Judita

yet he in vexation, clamouring, blustering
 finds no relaxation, this miserable king.
 But oh you wretched thing, what speeds you now your sway,
 though mortals else are sleeping, your thoughts you cannot stay.
 As when it turns at bay, then dashes here and there,
 the rabid canine stray flies it knows not where,
 turns round in its despair and snaps its foaming jaws
 round, about, ev'rywhere, it snarls and growls and roars,
 he's restless too because, though he tries to do nought,
 his thoughts give no pause, and there's no peace in aught.
 He twists his head o'erwrought, from left he turns to right;
 sleep comes not though 'tis sought, though squeezed his eyes are tight,
 for agonizing spite has come to haunt his rest,
 and piercing greed to blight, for all's still not possessed;
 though this gluttonous guest gulps down all its desire,
 till heart halts in his breast, he will not quench its fire.
 From below, morning's pyre had not fully caught light
 and the dew on the briar had not disappeared quite,
 now the mountain shines white on its summit so steep
 and the sparks mingle bright in the streams of the deep.
 Still the day did not peep out with its escort the sun
 although down gan to creep the night dark and dun;
 the counsellors 'Syrian all met in the king's hall:
 now to speak he's begun, to them come at his call.
 »In my court, all-in-all, no subjects as true,
 with your judgements not small, none as loyal as you,
 and most dear to me too, know my mind eats up me,
 and will quite me fordo, until the day I shall see
 all spots on land and sea that in this world hold sway
 pledge me their fealty and reverence to pay.
 so I've resolved this day to wage war on each nation
 that dares refuse to say it accepts subjugation.«

Book III, 105 – 178: Ozias, the governor of Bethulia, gives a banquet for the elders of the city and for Achior, who was handed over to the Israelites by Holofernes. The Assyrian army seizes the water supply of the city. Thirst in Bethulia.

All seated at the board, each th' other vies to treat,
 while servants of their lord convey them fare to eat,
 and others still are fleet to serve them jugs of wine
 and pour the scarlet sweet in golden goblets fine,
 while others round assign meats baked and seethed and roast
 on spotless plates condign, the bounty of their host,



Ivan Lovrenčić: *Judita*

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these bring, those are engrossed in taking used plates out,
drawing nigh, and then most courteous turn about.
Candles, high o'er the rout, with candelabra gleam
and from the walls shine out in many a golden beam.
There was none such, I deem, to play, to tell a joke,
laugh, grin, aspire to seem a wit the way he spoke.
Each feaster could invoke the heed of his calm mate,
a shrewd reply provoke, his own intention state,
lest the dark and deadly fate that stood without the door
of blood and rapine great burst in upon their store.
On this and that therefore, their varied conversation
touched, yet all were sure the fortification
walls, on which strong station the sentries watched and kept
their guard at night, salvation nothing meant, for except
our Lord and God accept our souls into his care,
which never yet has slept, in vain the watchman's stare:
the pious folk repair, all now upon their feet,
to their blessed place of prayer; their neighbours there they meet.
Here they the Lord entreat (the livelong night they plead)
to send them succour meet, to aid them in their need,
for he is all their speed, their health, refuge and might;
if he won't intercede, they'll fail fearful in their fight.
To scour the shades of night, now Titan lifts his head,
blushing in their sight from off his eastern bed;
the daylight glowing red, from hilltop lair they spy,
their tents there being spread, an army drawing nigh.
Down on the earth they lie, like axed and toppled pine,
and on their heads once high strew ash and cinders fine.
In prayers they say: Incline, oh Lord, your gracious ear:
our foemen do design to extirpate us here;
make miracles appear, the way you do and may,
that of your people dear the rule may not decay.
To arms they take straightway and load with stones their skirts
and climb to where the way is strait and disconcerts
with chasms cliff-girt set among the craggy screes,
where on the heights alert they whirl their slings with ease.
And yet the enemy's host approach their last resort,
about the rocks they squeeze, oppress the leaguered fort.
A streamlet flows athwart the meadow babbling still,
and in the pine shade swart, how cool and pure the rill.
They'd led along the hill a conduit from that brook
in cisterns deep to spill, where th'town its water took.
Holofernes at a look bade his army dam and turn
the stream so it forsook the city's stone cistern.

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Yet the town had wells extern, outside the city's port,
at which in much concern the people water sought
their drink with danger fraught, repairing to that source,
still fearing to be caught by the opposing force.
Then Moab had recourse, with Ammon at his side
to Holofernes' door, seeing the duke outside.
»Know,« the two to him confide, »this fortress does depend,
not on men, but hillside steep, on which the guards defend.
Wish we the siege to end and see without a fight
the citadel surrender, to win, their craft despite,
a picket place in sight the well that will not let
the doughty Israelite his vital water get.
This folk, unmastered yet, their fort to cede will fain,
by you so hard beset, or die in parching pain,
for thirst will rack their brain, your behest asserted
the stream into the plain be utterly diverted.«
His will with theirs concerted, he's fixed the captains bold,
sternly them alerted to guard that water cold.
A score of times they've told the rising of the day,
the passes all patrolled, and at those wells they stay.
The town can not allay from that day on its thirst;
from bone dry cisterns they then ascertain the worst;
deep in the earth submersed their last reserves are found,
some drops devoutly nursed, and in a cup passed round.
Yet as the drips they downed, they all were well aware
to quench their thirsts the ground had far too small a share.

Book III 217 – 235: Ozias is confronted with the decision of whether to surrender the city to the enemy or not.

In great distress and grief, with eyes that showed a tear,
and shaking like a leaf, Ozias, gripped by fear,
like pilot bound to steer his bark across the main
distressed by breakers sheer and fearful hurricane,
no course can he maintain, nor head the way he meant
but gives the sails the rein, where'er the spirit's bent.
His efforts he has spent, while 's helm is still intact
he strains to not relent, nor on the reef be cracked;
the scenes his eyes attract still more, for he can see
that he must strive, attacked, with wind and rain and sea;
roars the south-westerly, whistle amain the ropes
waves chase persistently, dash his stern and hopes;
the welkin envelopes a cloud with visage dark

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that all around them opes, pelts down upon the bark;
the lightning flashes stark, and thunder's rumbling peals
the sailor close does hark, desperate now he feels;
Ozias now reveals a yielding mood akin,
sees the deadly perils, and yet will not give in.

Book IV, 79 – 108: Judith adorns herself in order to deceive Holofernes.

Then she doffed the sacking, with water washed her skin;
leaving nothing lacking, she rubbed sweet perfume in;
her hair in braids wound twin, she then arrayed her tresses;
in gorgeous raiment thin her body now she dresses,
with ribbon gold blesses her arms, and ears with rings,
to her two feet presses dainty boots with fast'nings;
wearing such adornings, proper she was, I ween,
to sit with gracious kings on carpets fine, be seen
at wedding fete with queen, and eke to sit in state
and reverence between the dames of governors great.
Her braids do scintillate with golden threads all bound
and needles delicate in her locks, shaking, sound.
Golden flowers abound upon her silken train,
diverse, thick on the ground; her skirts their hues maintain.
The ruby's carmine stain upon her hands is bright,
and sapphire blue shines plain, and on her sleeves the white
of pearls as, clear in sight, upon her bust full-blown;
around her hips, with sleight composed, a golden zone.
Not ornament alone did grace her, greater yet
her beauty, like precious stone, in golden foil set
its splendour to abet, improves the gold, or blade
of wheat that's single let to grow in grassy glade.
So fair she was, she made improvement to the look
of these more than, arrayed in finery, she took.
And yet, as says the Book, lest this not yet suffice,
The good Lord undertook to add to grace the spice
of allure with no vice; immodesty lies not
in pleasing artifice of love without a blot,
and feelings with no spot; he gave her charms so strong
as men to near besot, to gaze upon her long.

Book IV, 205 – 228: Judith is brought before Holofernes and his servants.

When he the dame espied, the chief from that first sight
felt stabbing through his side the pain of love's despite;



Željko Lapuh: *Judita*

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he stood in stillness quite, like mountain eminent;
his eyes unblinking bright were fixed on her intent;
this lord omnipotent was quite of words forlorn,
as Perseus'd been sent with head from Gorgon torn.
The princes had withdrawn into the tent's dark space;
all round her they were borne, drawn by her beauteous face:
»If ladies have such grace,« they said, »that here do dwell,
let us besiege this race and all their towns as well.
In fighting we'll excel, no battle shall we shun
until this land we quell and all of it be won.
Refuse the fight will none, to each clash with good cheer
each one of us will run, for ladies like this fere.«
In front of Holofernes stands Dame Judith then,
enthronéd gaudy here like peacock before hen,
a gorgeous specimen, by weaver dressed sans peer
in lands Assyrian, disposed to persevere,
and floral masses clear create in silks diverse
and gold, and gemstones dear upon the top disperse.
Widow Judith then herself, looking on his mien,
fell prostrate, though averse her honour to demean,
obeisance often seen at court from toadies sly;
with hand most glad, I ween, he waves her stand on high.

Book V, 65 – 84: Holofernes, enchanted with Judith's beauty, gives a feast in her honour.

As when the angler's line is cast and hooks the prey,
the fisher's next design's it to the shore to play,
elated with the savour for his noontide bread,
Judith, who now can say her web is deft of thread,
arranges on her head the outward trappings fair
and, skirts enticing spread, goes most cheerful there,
and weaves her cunning snare with touch of dainty hand.
He sees her, Holofernes, right before him stand,
and deep in love does land, his heart quite lost meanwhile,
so honey sweet, unmanned is he, and shall taste bile
when he lies, the gentile, as cold as any snow.
But now with eager smile a place he does bestow
by him at board; below, his lords, constrained, do sit,
Then he tells the widow: This debt I must acquit,
for you did not omit to haste at my command,
and thus it does befit you garner from my hand
what grace you can demand and joy in my goodwill.
Drink, merry lady grand, and eat with me your fill,
And with these guests fulfil your every desire.

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Dimitrije Popović: *Judita*

DOSSIER: MARKO MARULIĆ

Book V, 165 – 188: Holofernes and his suite are intoxicated.

Holofernes scarcely stood on his own two feet,
for as much as any two could drink and eat
himself had made his meat, and now was apt for rest;
closed is his tent, his suite at Bagoas' behest
have gone in stumbling quest of lodging for the night.
Many a flagon with zest they swallowed down aright,
Each did some song recite, toasts took down at a draught,
a new cup hove in sight, as soon as one they'd quaffed.
To walk they had no craft, their legs entwined all ways,
they staggered, fell and laughed, their heads bobbed in a daze;
their cheeks were all ablaze, their nostrils full of fume,
gouts of grease did glaze their chins with beards abloom.
Grossly bulge their wombs, like great distended urns,
their thickened tongues consume the words they feebly churn,
in reason's overturn, their eyes are blear and glassy
their bodies they misgovern, powerless in their glee;
one rev'ller dizzily collapsed and hit a board,
one soaked himself in pee, some quarrelled in discord.
to keep aloft one lord clutched at a reeling mate
who no prop could afford and both went sprawling straight;
some spew and eructate, others gaze disgusted;
others in tipsy state they bore back to their bed;
as much sense in their head they had as donkey dead.

Book V, 193 – 220: Judith prepares herself for her brave deed.

How Holofernes' force does wither into dust
how 'tis dissolved perforce by filthy acts of lust!
In's quarters' centre just his place lies of repose;
with coloured curtains trussed, soft, clean and white it glows:
in Holofernes goes, does headlong on it keel:
in sleep he snores and blows much worse than monkish seal,
his weakness to reveal to Judith's watchful eye;
To Abra quoth she: »Steal to door, and stop forby!«
For in that lordly sty, the two of them had stayed,
drunk Holofernes nigh, sleep's call had not obeyed.
Doorward went the maid, stood there and bent her ear
for sound of guards arrayed, but nothing could she hear;
Grooms stopped in their career, the guards were sleeping sound,
all still as on a bier, for all the table round
had eat like any hound, and had imbibed still more;
none kept vigil on the ground, no guard without the door.

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For heaven's great Signor, the lord omnipotent,
had firm resolved before t'aid a people suppliant.
The bed's accoutrement did Judith draw aside,
and, heartbeat violent, approached the lord's bedside.
With hand to hand allied and lifted to the sky,
abundant tears she cried, fell to her knees thereby.
Her voice was not raised high, her prayers spoke from her soul:
My Lord, let me comply, your will my deeds control;
Your servant mercy dole, your handmaid fortify,
her tim'rous heart console, then raise her arm on high,
the plan to satisfy was plotted in her mind,
your name should terrify the lands and all mankind.

Book V, 229 – 258: Holofernes is killed. Judith and her maid Abra flee the Assyrian camp.

Her shoulders she arrayed and held herself full square,
in silence took the blade hung on the bedpost there;
in one hand seized his hair, Holofern' to subdue:
with sweep of metal bare the sleeping man she slew.
He moaned and shuddered too, as supine there he lay,
jerked arms and legs askew; his force all drained away;
life expires in strength's decay, his blood from windpipe flows;
the hero turns to clay again, his eyes now close.
A worm against him rose, with his own sword did smite;
o'ercome by woman's blows was he who bragged his right
to subdue to his might the world, who held the Lord
himself of strength too slight to stand his army's sword,
who Judith aid ensured t' assail the enemy
(stretched as flat as board, sans head, like stump of tree),
to act not futilely, gave meaning to her deed.
She struck him lustily once more, cut off his head
and then to Abra said: Close this in saddlebag!
She rose, and, from the bed, the coverlet did drag,
at once with corpse of braggart lord, as was their way;
and now on courtyard's flags they walked as if to pray;
here made they no delay, but went through camp entire,
then along the valley, though sweating and afire,
as, should a hawk acquire some quarry in its quest,
it soars o'er crags still higher, alights upon the crest,
its talons still possessed of beastie that it's ta'en,
until its crag-borne nest it does at last attain,
most rapid will it plane, it may the sooner feed
its young at home complaining in their hungry need.

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The women made full speed, they took no rest at all
till they at last could see dear sentries on the wall.

Book VI, 429 – 441: The end of the poem.

They desired that the day Holofernes was beat
should be observed for aye by those did him defeat,
till their necks neath the feet of stranger did they set,
their Messiah did mistreat, fordo their last prophet.
I give this gift, my debt, to God, my salvation,
now to the end I get of this my narration,
in which celebration Judith's fame shall dwell
till the conflagration of this earthly circle,
or till the world can tell that people in this land
their words on paper spell in a Croatian hand.
Sea-weary, I command the sail of my new ship
be lowered at last and thus my God I worship,
who earth and heaven planned, with all things did equip.
Amen.

*Here End the Books of Marko Marulić of Split
with the Tale of the Holy Widow Judith. Praise be to God in All Things.
Amen*

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by Graham McMaster*