

*Ružica Pšihistal*DOES MARULIĆ'S *JUDITH* NEED AN ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION?

The Turkish-Venetian war (1499-1502) was raging while Marulić was composing *Judith*. The deuterocanonical biblical book tells the story of a brave widow who, when all seemed lost, saved her besieged city and brought salvation to her people, the Israelites. The coincidence between the biblical story and the historic reality was so striking that it was felt that no additional explication was needed. The worlds of the biblical and Marulić's *Judiths* were consonant to the reality of the day. Consequently, it was logically understood that the story served as a means for defining the community's spiritual and national identities. A number of scientific, essayistic and poetic models of *Judith's* reception have been built on this assumption. Yet, it has never been tested in its own right and has never become an object of independent scholarly analysis. The active patriotic attitude that marked many of Marulić's works, his biographic code, the figures of his brothers and friends and his friendship with the public figures of his day, who were renowned for their anti-Turkish engagement provided an appropriate background against which *Judith's* anti-Turkish message was conveniently read.

However, these extra-textual indicators, although hermeneutically relevant, have not answered the most important question posed by Marulić's *Judith* and its model. Namely, when and based on what textual guidelines should the reader decide which parts to read literally and which figuratively? Also, from the standpoint of modern literary scholarship, to reduce the complex meaning of this *biblical* epic to a simple political-historic allegory seems rather hasty. Such a simplification puts serious limitations on the possibilities of interpreting other levels of *Judith's* allegorical meaning. However, we have every right to expect these in this genre, since Marulić was well-known for his practice of allegorical interpretation in a narrower sense (*Davidias*, *De humilitate*, *Parables*, *The Dialogue on Hercules*). The author probes these controversies, suggests new interpretative guidelines and offers an interpretative context which is much broader than the one delineated hitherto (*The Lamenting of the City of Jerusalem*, *The Prayer Against the Turks*, *The Epistle to Pope Hadrian VI*). She begins with a brief recapitulation of the scientific literary models engaged to date, their systematization and comparison, complete with the fresh ideas. The second part of the article summarizes Marulić's approach to the Old Testament, accentuating it as an indispensable point of reference for the analysis of the levels of meaning of *Judith* as an Old Testament book. It had to be redefined and transformed in order to suit the Christian world-view.

Two particular features of the biblical *Judith* – the theocentricity of historic events at the level of action and the immediate presence of moral-tropologic sense at the actor's level – are responsible for its uninterruptedly positive reception from

the day of the Apostolic Fathers (Clement of Rome), to the patristic period, to the eventual establishment of the Canon (The Council of Trident, 1546), when its place in the Canon was confirmed despite its disputable historic authenticity and the topsy-turvyness of its historic and geographic facts. The author believes - with all due respect to the intended recipient level – that they also played the decisive role in Marulić's choice of this particular Old Testament story. Consequently, the third part of the article offers an analysis of the places in the epic where it is particularly evident that the author paid attention to the historic meaning of the proto-text and exhibited direct exegetic intentions. Both have, hitherto, escaped the attention of Marulić scholars. Finally, the author offers guidelines for an analysis of the procedure used by Marulić in explaining the moral-tropologic sense of the proto-text, which, in her opinion, can be best observed in the manner in which he refers to the moral qualities of the biblical actors.

Marulić does not rely on military force or human power. Instead, by the example of a woman whose unconditional faith equally overpowered the militarily superior enemy, and the hesitating men from her own community, he advocates moral conversion as the sole weapon capable of suppressing the evident signs of divine wrath. In the Christian view Judith becomes an *imago virtutis* to be followed: by »each of us«, *now* and *here*.