

Megillat Esther & the Second Temple – An Archaeological & Literary Portrait

מבט ארכאולוגי וספרותי על מגילת אסתר בהקשר תקופת בית שני

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Timeline of Early Persian Period

Emperor	Reign	Important Events
Cyrus	559 – 530 BCE	Return from Babylonian Exile
Cambyses	530(?) - 522 BCE	(Purim Story?...)
Bardiya (Rebel)	522 BCE (Last year of Cambyses)	
Darius I	522 – 486 BCE	Second Temple Completed
Xerxes I	485 – 465 BCE	(Purim Story?...)
Artaxerxes I	465 – 424 BCE	Respective arrivals of Ezra and Nehemiah, Rebuilding of Jerusalem city wall

Dating Megillat Esther – the Identity of “Achashverosh”

Hebrew	Greek	Old Persian (Persepolis, palace inscription)	Hebrew (Esther 10:1, ketiv)	Aramaic (Elephantine Papyri)	Aramaic (Dura Europos, panel WC2)	Akkadian, Elamite (Behistun Inscription)
אחשורוש, אחשורש	Ξέρξης (Xerxes)	Khshayarsha	אחשרש	חשי(א)רש, אחשירש	חשהורש (חשורוש?)	A: (a)h-ši-ar- šu E: ik-še-ir-ša

Linguistic Method of Dating

III Maccabees 5:43 (late 2 nd century – early 1 st century BCE)	Greek Addition to Esther E:24 (late 1 st century BCE?)
And waging a campaign against Judea, he would swiftly raze it to the ground with fire and spear (πυρί και δόρατι), and their temple, which had been inaccessible to him, he would quickly level with fire, [ridding it] for all time of those who perform sacrifice there.	Every city or province, without exception, which does not act according to the above, shall be furiously devastated by spear and fire (δόρατι και πυρί); it shall be made not only inaccessible to men forever, but also most hateful to wild animals and birds.

Comparing & Contrasting Esther & III Maccabees

<i>Esther's Perspective</i>	<i>III Maccabees Perspective</i>	
<p>וַיִּבֶזְעוּ בְעֵינָיו, לְשַׁלַּח יָד בְּמֹרְדֵכַי לְבַדּוֹ--כִּי-הִגִּידוּ לוֹ, אֶת-עַם מֹרְדֵכַי; וַיִּבְקֶשׂ הַמֶּלֶךְ, לְהַשְׁמִיד אֶת-כָּל-הַיְהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל-מַלְכוּת אַחַשְׁוֵרוּשׁ--עִם מֹרְדֵכַי</p>	<p>But it seemed contemptible in his eyes to lay hands on Mordecai alone; for they had made known to him the people of Mordecai. Instead Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes. (3:6)</p>	<p>He [Ptolemy] proposed to disseminate blame publicly against the Jewish nation. (2:27)</p>
<p>וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחַשְׁוֵרוּשׁ, וַיֹּאמֶר לְאַסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה: מִי הוּא זֶה וְאִי-זֶה הוּא, אֲשֶׁר-מָלְאוּ לְבֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת כֵּן</p>	<p>King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, "Who is he? Where is he—the man who has dared to do such a thing?" (7:5)</p>	<p>Hermon and all the friends pointed out, "The beasts and the forces [for killing the Jews] have been prepared, O king, according to your urgent proposal." But at these words the king was filled with extreme wrath because his every thought concerning these matters had been scattered by the providence of God. (5:29-30)</p>
<p>וַיִּזְדַּע הַדָּבָר לְמֹרְדֵכַי, וַיֹּאדָר לְאַסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה; וַתֹּאמֶר אַסְתֵּר לַמֶּלֶךְ, בְּשֵׁם מֹרְדֵכַי</p>	<p>And the thing became known to Mordecai, who told it to Esther the queen; and Esther told the king in Mordecai's name. (2:22)</p>	<p>But Dositheos, called the son of Drimylus, a Jew by race, but one who later had abandoned the observance of the Law and had become alienated from the ancestral teachings, had led Philopator away and arranged for a certain undistinguished person to lie in the tent... (1:3)</p>
<p>וַיִּקְתְּלוּ הַיְהוּדָיִים (הַיְהוּדִים) אֲשֶׁר-בְּשׁוּשַׁן, גַּם בַּיּוֹם אַרְבַּעַת עָשָׂר לְחֹדֶשׁ אָדָר, וַיְהָרְגוּ בְשׁוּשַׁן, שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת אִישׁ; וּבְבִזְזָה--לֹא שִׁלְחוּ, אֶת-יָדָם</p>	<p>The Jews in Susa came together on the fourteenth day of the month of Adar, and they put to death in Susa three hundred men, but they did not lay their hands on the plunder. (9:15)</p>	<p>And on their way they killed and slew as a public example any compatriot they came upon of those who had defiled themselves. And on that day they slew more than three hundred men... (7:14-15)</p>

Greek Additions' Interpretation of Esther

<p>Greek Addition to Esther E:10, 12-13 (late 1st century BCE?)</p>
<p>For Haman son of Hammedatha – a Macedonian – without any Persian blood and quite devoid of our goodness – was treated by us as a guest...Unable, however, to contain his arrogance, he schemed to deprive us of both empire and life. By involved deceptions and arguments he sought the destruction of both Mordecai, our savior and constant benefactor, and Esther, our blameless partner in the kingdom, as well as all their nation.</p>