

הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה גִּדְּלָה הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחְשֵׁרֹושׁ אֶת־הַמֶּן בֶּן־הַמַּדְתָּא הָאֲגִי
 ב וַיִּנְשְׂאֶהוּ וַיִּשֶׂם אֶת־כְּסָאוֹ מֵעַל כָּל־הַשָּׂרִים אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ: וְכָל־עַבְדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ
 אֲשֶׁר־בְּשַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ כָּרְעִים וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוִים לְהַמֶּן כִּי־כֵן צִוְּהָ לּוֹ הַמֶּלֶךְ וּמְרַדְּכֵי
 ג לֹא יִכְרַע וְלֹא יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה: וַיֹּאמְרוּ עַבְדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲשֶׁר־בְּשַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְמְרַדְּכֵי

בַּחֲטִיבָה הַשְּׁנִיָּה אַרְבַּע פְּסָקוֹת:

- (א) הָמֶן מְצֻטָּה לְכַבֵּד אֶת מְרַדְּכֵי (ו א-יא); (ב) אוֹהֲבֵיו שֶׁל הָמֶן צוֹפִים לוֹ מִפְּלֵה (יב-ג);
- (ג) הַמִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁנִי וְקָצוֹ שֶׁל הָמֶן (ו יד-ז י); (ד) מְרַדְּכֵי בַּמָּקוֹם הָמֶן (ח א-ב).

חֲטִיבָה הַשְּׁנִיָּה: עֲלִיתוֹ שֶׁל הָמֶן וּגְדָלְתוֹ

(ג א-ה יד)

פְּסָקָה א (ג א-י): מְרַדְּכֵי אֵינּוּ מִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לְהָמֶן.

לְגִדְּלָה זֶה בְּעֵינֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחְשֵׁרֹושׁ, כִּי אֵין הַדְּבָר
 חָשׁוּב לְצַדִּיק סְפוּרָנוּ.

(ב) וְכָל־עַבְדֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ - כָּל הַמִּמְנִים מִטַּעַם
 הַמֶּלֶךְ לְכָל מְלָאכָה שֶׁהִיא. אֲשֶׁר־בְּשַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ -
 הַנְּמַצְאִים לְרַגְלֵי מְלָאכְתָּם בַּמָּקוֹם הַשָּׂרִים (ע"י לעיל ב
 יט). כָּרְעִים - כָּרְעִיָּה הִיא עַל הַבְּרַכּוּיִם (מ"א ח גר
 ועוד). וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוִים - הַשְׁתַּחֲוִיָּה נַעֲשִׂית בְּהִנָּעַת הַפְּנִים
 בַּקֶּרֶקַע (כ"י יט א ועוד הרבה). צִוְּהָ לּוֹ - עַל אוֹדוֹתָיו.
 מִלְשׁוֹן הַכְּתוּב מִסְתַּבֵּר, שֶׁמִּצְוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ חָלָה רַק עַל
 פְּקִידֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ, וְרַק בְּשַׁעַר הַמֶּלֶךְ. וּמְרַדְּכֵי לֹא
 יִכְרַע וְלֹא יִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה - מִמָּה שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר לְקַמֵּן פְּסוּק
 ד' כִּי־הִגִּיד לָהֶם אֲשֶׁר־הוּא יְהוּדִי מִשְׁמַע, שֶׁמִּחַמַּת
 יְהוּדוֹתוֹ סָרַב לְהַשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לְהָמֶן, וְכִנְרָאָה, סָבַר מְרַדְּכֵי
 שֶׁהַכָּרְעִיָּה וְהַשְׁתַּחֲוִיָּה לְבָשָׂר וְדָם יֵשׁ בָּהּ מִשׁוּם אֲבָק
 שֶׁל עֲבוּדָה זָרָה. וּמִשׁוּם כֶּף עֶבֶר עַל מִצְוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ
 וְהַכְּנִיס אֶת עֲצָמוֹ וְאֵת עֲמוֹ בְּסִכְנָה גְדוֹלָה.²

(א) אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה - הַלְשׁוֹן כְּלִשׁוֹן הַפְּתִיחָה
 בַּפָּרָק ב, עֵין שָׁם. וְכִנְרָת 'אֲחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה'
 לְקַשֵּׁר אֶת הַדְּבָרִים הַמְּסַפְּרִים עִתָּה עִם מַה שֶׁסִּפֵּר
 תַּחֲלָה (ע"י ב"ר לבר' טו א). גִּדְּלָה - מְנַהֵג לְשִׁרְתָּה.
 הַמַּדְתָּא - כֶּף שְׁמוֹ, ה"א מְעַצֵּם הַשֵּׁם (וְלֹא ה"א
 הַיְדִיעָה). הָאֲגִי - הַמֶּן מוֹנִים פְּרִשׁוֹ: מוֹרַע אֲגֵי מֶלֶךְ
 עֲמֶלֶק. וּמִן הָאֲחֵרוֹנִים יֵשׁ שְׁמֵשְׁעָרִים, ש' אֲגֵי זֶה אֵינוֹ
 אֲגֵי מֶלֶךְ עֲמֶלֶק, אֲלָא שֵׁם מִשְׁפַּחַה פְּרִסִית. וַיִּשֶׂם
 מִשְׁעָרִים, שֶׁהַיְהוּדִים כְּנֻהוּ 'אֲגֵי' עַל שֵׁם רִשְׁעוֹ, כְּמוֹ
 שְׁגֵם הַיּוֹם נוֹהֲגִים לְכַנּוֹת גּוֹי רָשָׁע שׁוֹנֵא יִשְׂרָאֵל
 'עֲמֶלֶק'. וַיִּנְשְׂאֶהוּ - הֵעֲלָה אוֹתוֹ לְמַעְמַד דָּם
 וְנִשְׂאָה. מֵעַל כָּל־הַשָּׂרִים - מֵעַל כְּסֻאוֹת כָּל
 הַשָּׂרִים. מְנַהֵגם הָיָה, שֶׁכָּל שְׁמֵעֲלָתוֹ גְּבַהָה מִמַּעַלְת
 חִבְרוֹ, אִף כְּסֻאוֹ גְּבַהָה מִכְּסֵּא חִבְרוֹ. וְכֵן מְצִינּוּ
 בַּיְכֻנִיָּה, שְׂאוּל מְרֻדֵךְ נָתַן אֶת כְּסֻאוֹ מֵעַל כְּסֵּא
 הַמְּלָכִים אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ (מ"ב כה כח). אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ - עִם
 הַמֶּלֶךְ אַחְשֵׁרֹושׁ. וְלֹא פְרִשׁ הַכְּתוּב, בְּמָה זָכָה הָמֶן

1 במדרשי חז"ל ובפיוטים חוזר פעמים רבות דבר זה, שהמן הוא מזרע אגג מלך עמלק, שהיה בימי שאול. וכן נאמר בפיוט
 'אשר הניא': 'המן הודיע איבת אבותיו ונטר שנאת אבות לבנים ולא זכר רחמי שאול כי בחמלתו על אגג נולד אויב'.
 ואמנם מלשון פרשת שאול ועמלק בספר שמואל עולה לכאורה, שכל עם עמלק (וביניהם גם כל משפחת אגג) הושמדו על
 ידי שאול, ורק אגג לבדו נשבה חי על ידי שאול והומת לאחר מכן בידי שמואל. ולפיכך יש מקום לשאלה: איך
 יתכן שנותר עוד זרע לאגג, שממנו יצא המן? אולם יש מדרשים, שמספרים, שבאותו הלילה שהיה אגג במחנה שאול
 בגלגל, נודמנה לו לאגג שפחה ונתעברה ממנו, ומזרעה יצא בדור אחר המן בן המדתא. ואפשר שלמדרש מעין זה כיוון
 הפייטן מחבר 'אשר הניא'. ובתרגומים הארמיים לאסתר מובאות גם רשימות היחס המונות את כל הדורות מן עמלק בן
 אליפו בן עשו עד המן בן המדתא. אך אפשר לומר, ששאל לא השמיד את עמלק כולו, וגם לא את משפחת אגג כולה. שהרי
 לאחר מעשה שאול מצינו עוד עמלקים בימי דוד (ש"א פרק ל ועוד), ואף בימי חזקיה מלך יהודה (ד"א ד מג). ואמנם
 שם מסופר שבני שמעון הכו את שארית הפליטה לעמלק. אך אין זה מן הנמנע, שגם 'משארית הפליטה' היא ניצלו ונותרו
 בחיים אחדים מזרע אגג, ומצאצאיהם היה המן. - על כל פנים מסתבר שהכתוב כיוון לרמוז ולסמל, שהמן מזרע אגג נופל
 לפני מרדכי מזרע שאול בן קיש.

2 ומצינו הרבה במקרא ובדברי חז"ל, שאף גדולי ישראל היו משתחוים לפני נכבדים ומושלים אף של אומות העולם. אך יש

disfigurement appear to be unique to the Esther-Midrash, with no parallels in the Palestinian collections.⁶³

"Very Wrath"

[120] "Therefore the king was very wrath, and his anger burned in him" (Esther 1:12).

What⁶⁴ did she send him⁶⁵ that he⁶⁶ was so⁶⁷ fired up?

—Rather, 68 says Rava.⁶⁹ Thus⁷⁰ did she send⁷¹ to him.⁷² You are the⁷³ son of Father's stable-keeper! "He drank wine before the throne" (Daniel 5:1) and was not satisfied.⁷⁴ Yet⁷⁵ that man became drunk with his wine immediately.

At once: "and his anger burned in him."

This comment fills in the flow of narrative events by inserting a fictitious dialogue between the accounts of Vashti's disobedience and the king's reaction, where the biblical author has remained tantalizingly

⁶³ In Rashi's commentary to Esther 1:12 he presents the talmudic explanation introduced by "Our Rabbis said," apparently as a way of distancing himself from the tradition.

⁶⁴ "What"—MSS L, M and Printings: "why?"

⁶⁵ "did she send him"—Only in MS Y, HgT, AgE and Genizah fragment; ~ in all other witnesses.

⁶⁶ "he"—MSS N, B, L, M, Mf, HgT, YS: "his anger."

⁶⁷ MSS G, N, B, O, P, R, W, Mf, L, EY, HgT, YS add: "increasingly."

⁶⁸ "Rather"—Only in MS Y and AgE. [כִּי] (which frequently appears in oriental MSS as כִּי or כִּי) is a graphic variant on "כִּי(?)" found in most other witnesses.]

⁶⁹ "Rava"—MSS P, R, YS: "Rabbah."

⁷⁰ "Thus"—Only in MSS Y, O, AgE; ~ in all other witnesses.

⁷¹ "Rather...to him"—MS G: "She sent."

⁷² "to him:—~ in MSS M, Mf, Genizah fragment, MS B add: "saying"; HgT add: "thus."

⁷³ "You are the"—Only in MS Y and AgE; ~ in all other witnesses.

⁷⁴ "and was not satisfied"—~ in MS P and YS.

⁷⁵ "yet [lit.: "and"]"—~ in MSS N and M; MS R: "for."

silent. The content of the exchange does not seem to be based on any obvious clues from the biblical text, though the traditional commentators have made some interesting attempts to explain the midrash as a response to textual stimuli.⁷⁶ Rava attempts to reconstruct what sort of thing Vashti would have been likely to say under such circumstances.⁷⁷ In the present instance, as we shall note below, some of the specific "facts" that are alluded to by Vashti have not yet been spelled out in our midrash.

Several midrashic collections contain similar reconstructions of Vashti's alleged berating of Ahasuerus. An examination of these parallels offers us some insights into the possible origins and development of Rava's comment.

Thus, in the Palestinian midrashim the passage is introduced as follows: "She sent to him speaking words that touched his heart." The style implies that "words (דְּבָרִים) that touched his heart" is somehow derived from the wording of the verse. According to Maharzu to *Esther rabbah* 3:14, the exegesis is based on a midrashic reading of the phrase "at the king's commandment" (צִוְיָהּ צִוְיָהּ) as if it meant: "with her own words to the king," or "about the king" (referring to her royal ancestry).⁷⁸ This is consistent with a well known midrashic propensity

⁷⁶ Maharsha tries to pin it on the redundancy of the verse's employing two phrases to indicate the king's anger, implying that there was an additional incitement beside the material described so far. He also suggests that the mention of the anger burning *in him* was taken to mean that he was enraged at something that related to his person, i.e., a personal insult. A somewhat similar explanation is proposed by the *Gate* of Vilna (cited in *ḤS yosef* to EY). The *Yefeh tanf* to *Esther rabbah* (see below) discerns in the wording "the queen Vashti" a hint that she was appealing to her royal descent. *Mishnat rabbi eifetz* there finds further confirmation to this approach in the reversal of the normal word order (which usually speaks of "Vashti the queen"; cf. Alsheikh's commentary to Esther 1:12). None of the above explanations should be ruled entirely out of hand, however none strikes me as being as likely as the one based on צִוְיָהּ, cited below.

⁷⁷ See Heinemann, *Darkhei ha'aggadah*, 13, 23-4.

⁷⁸ Although the midrashic tradition seems to be unanimous in tracing Vashti's descent to Nebuchadnezzar, there is disagreement as to whether her father was Belshazzar or

they pleased or dared. This Persian habit of compelling excess in drinking was ignored at Ahasuerus's banquet; every guest did as he chose.²⁸

The royal bounty did not show itself in food and drink alone. The king's guests could also indulge in the pleasures of the dance if they were so minded. Dancers were provided, who charmed the company with their artistic figures displayed upon the purple-covered floor.²⁹ That the enjoyment of the participants might in no wise be marred, as by separation from their families, all were permitted to bring their households with them,³⁰ and merchants were released from the taxes imposed upon them.³¹

So sure was Ahasuerus of his success as a host that he dared say to his Jewish guests: "Will your God be able to match this banquet in the future world?" Whereunto the Jews replied: "The banquet God will prepare for the righteous in the world to come is that of which it is written, 'No eye hath seen it but God's; He will accomplish it for them that wait upon Him.' If God were to offer us a banquet like unto thine, O king, we should say, Such as this we ate at the table of Ahasuerus."³²

VASHTI'S BANQUET

The banquet given by Queen Vashti to the women differed but slightly from Ahasuerus's. She sought to emulate her husband's example even in the point of exhibiting treasures. Six store-chambers she displayed daily to the women she had bidden as guests; aye, she did not even shrink from arraying herself in the high-priestly garments. The meats and dishes, as at Ahasuerus's table, were Palestinian, only instead of wine, liquors were served, and sweets.

As the weak sex is subject to sudden attacks of indisposition, the banquet was given in the halls of the palace, so that the guests might at need withdraw to the adjoining chambers. The gorgeously ornamented apartments of the palace, besides, were more attractive to the feminine taste than the natural beauties of the royal gardens, "for a woman would rather reside in beautiful chambers and possess beautiful clothes than eat fatted calves."³³ Nothing interested the women more than to become acquainted with the arrangement of the interior of the palace, "for women are curious to know all things." Vashti gratified their desire. She showed them all there was to be seen, describing every place as she came to it: This is the dining-hall, this the wine-room, this the bed-chamber.³⁴

Vashti, too, was actuated by a political motive when she determined to give her banquet. By inviting the wives of the nobles entertained by her spouse, she could hold them as hostages in case the men rose in insurrection against the king.³⁵ For Vashti knew the ways of statecraft. She not only was the wife of a king, but also the daughter of a king, of Belshazzar. The night of Belshazzar's murder in his own palace, Vashti, alarmed by the confusion that ensued, and not knowing of the death of her father, fled to the apartments in which he was in the habit of sitting. The Median Darius had already ascended the throne of Belshazzar, and so it happened that Vashti, instead of finding the hoped-for refuge with her father, ran straight into the hands of his successor. But he had compassion with her, and gave her to his son Ahasuerus for wife.

and Gabriel kept on writing. R. Assi said: R. Shila, a man of Kefar Temarta,¹ drew a lesson from this, saying: If a writing on earth which is for the benefit of Israel cannot be erased, how much less a writing in heaven!²

*There is nothing done for him.*³ Raba said: [They answered him thus] not because they loved Mordecai but because they hated Haman.

*He had prepared for him.*⁴ A Tanna stated: [This means], he had prepared for himself.⁵

*And do even so to Mordecai etc.*⁶ Haman said to him: Who is Mordecai? He said to him: 'The Jew'. He said: There are many Mordecais among the Jews. He replied: 'The one who sits in the king's gate'. Said Haman to him: For him [the tribute] of one village or one river is sufficient! Said Ahasuerus: Give him that too; let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken!

*Then took Haman the apparel and the horse.*⁷ He went and found [Mordecai with] the Rabbis sitting before him while he showed them the rules of the 'handful'.⁸ When Mordecai saw him approaching and leading the horse, he became frightened and said to the Rabbis, This villain is coming to kill me. Get out of his way so that you should not get into trouble with him.⁹ Mordecai thereupon drew his robe round him and stood up to pray. Haman came up and sat down before them and waited till Mordecai had finished his prayer. He said to him: What have you been discussing? He replied: When the Temple stood, if a man brought a meal-offering he used to offer a handful of fine flour and make atonement therewith. Said Haman to them: Your handful of fine flour has come and displaced my ten thousand talents of silver. Said Mordecai to him: Wretch, if a slave acquires property, whose is the slave and whose is the property?¹⁰

(1) [Tamara, south of Kabul, v. *Ej.* s.v.] (2) Seeing that Gabriel is already there (Maharsha). (3) *Esth.* VI, 3. (4) *Ibid.* 4. (5) As otherwise the words 'for him' are superfluous. (6) *Ibid.* 10. (7) *Ibid.* 11. (8) *V. Lev.* II, 2 and *infra.* (9) *Lit.*, 'that you be not burnt with his coal'. (10) How then can you, being the slave of Ahasuerus, talk of your ten talents of silver. [*Aliter*: Haman had sold himself to Mordecai as slave. *V. supra* p. 90, n. 4.]

Haman then said to him: Arise and put on this apparel and ride on this horse, for so the king desires you to do. He replied: I cannot do so until I have gone into the bath and trimmed my hair, for it would not be good manners to use the king's apparel in this state. Now Esther had sent and closed all the baths and all the barbers' shops. So Haman himself took him into the bath and washed him, and then went and brought scissors from his house and trimmed his hair. While he was doing so, he sighed and groaned. Said Mordecai to him: Why do you sigh? He replied: The man who was esteemed by the king above all his nobles is now made a bath attendant and a barber. Said Mordecai to him: Wretch, and were you not once a barber in Kefar Karzum?¹ (For so a Tanna stated: Haman was a barber in Kefar Karzum twenty-two years.) After he had trimmed his hair he put the garments on him, and said to him, Mount and ride. He replied: I am not able, as I am weak from the days of fasting. So Haman stooped down and he mounted [on his back]. When he was up he kicked him. He said to him: Is it not written in your books,² Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth? He replied: That refers to an Israelite, but in regard to you [folk] it is written, And thou shalt tread upon their high places.⁴

*And proclaimed before him, Thus shall be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour.*⁵ As he was leading him through the street where Haman lived, his daughter who was standing on the roof saw him. She thought that the man on the horse was her father and the man walking before him was Mordecai. So she took a chamber pot and emptied it on the head of her father. He looked up at her and when she saw that it was her father, she threw herself from the roof to the ground and killed herself. Hence it is written⁶

And Mordecai returned to the king's gate. R. Shesheth said: This indicates that he returned to his sackcloth and fasting.

(1) [MS. M. עורר, Kefar Karayim in Transjordan, cf. Josephus, *Ant.* XII, 8, 4; v. however, Romanoff, *P. Amer. Acad. for Jewish Research*, VII, pp. 58ff.]. (2) *Lit.*, 'for you'. (3) *Prov.* XXIV, 17. (4) *Deut.* XXXIII, 29. (5) *Esth.* VI, 11. (6) These words connect with the sentence after the next, 'but Haman hastened' etc.

daily from the worship of idols, and, condemning their old ways, went over to the new religion, he, an execrable and pernicious tyrant, sprung forward to raze the heavenly temple and destroy the true faith. He it was who first persecuted the servants of God; he crucified Peter, and slew Paul: nor did he escape with impunity; for God looked on the affliction of His people; and therefore the tyrant, bereaved of authority, and precipitated from the height of empire, suddenly disappeared, and even the burial-place of that noxious wild beast was nowhere to be seen. This has led some persons of extravagant imagination to suppose that, having been conveyed to a distant region, he is still reserved alive; and to him they apply the Sibylline verses concerning "the fugitive, who slew his own mother, being to come from the uttermost boundaries of the earth;" as if he who was the first should also be the last persecutor, and thus prove the forerunner of Antichrist! But we ought not to believe those who, affirming that the two prophets Enoch and Elias have been translated into some remote place that they might attend our Lord when He shall come to judgment, also fancy that Nero is to appear hereafter as the forerunner of the devil, when he shall come to lay waste the earth and overthrow mankind.

CHAPTER III.

After an interval of some years from the death of Nero, there arose another tyrant no less wicked (Domitian), who, although his government was exceedingly odious, for a very long time oppressed his subjects, and reigned in security, until at length he stretched forth his impious hands against the Lord. Having been instigated by evil demons to persecute the righteous people, he was then delivered into the power of his enemies, and suffered due punishment. To be murdered in his own palace was not vengeance ample enough: the very memory of his name was erased. For although he had erected many admirable edifices, and rebuilt the Capitol, and left other distinguished marks of his magnificence, yet the senate did so persecute his name, as to leave no remains of his statues, or traces of the inscriptions put up in honour of him; and by most solemn and severe decrees it branded him, even after death, with perpetual infamy. Thus, the commands of the

tyrant having been rescinded, the Church was not only restored to her former state, but she shone forth with additional splendour, and became more and more flourishing. And in the times that followed, while many well-deserving princes guided the helm of the Roman empire, the Church suffered no violent assaults from her enemies, and she extended her hands unto the east and unto the west, insomuch that now there was not any the most remote corner of the earth to which the divine religion had not penetrated, or any nation of manners so barbarous that did not, by being converted to the worship of God, become mild and gentle.

CHAPTER IV.

This long peace, however, was afterwards interrupted. Devils appeared in the world, an accursed wild beast, to afflict the Church,—and *who* but a bad man would persecute religion? It seems as if he had been raised to sovereign eminence, at once to rage against God, and at once to fall; for, having undertaken an expedition against the Capi, who had then possessed themselves of Dacia and Moesia, he was suddenly surrounded by the barbarians, and slain, together with great part of his army; nor could he be honoured with the rites of sepulture, but, stripped and naked, he lay to be devoured by wild beasts and birds,—a fit end for the enemy of God!

CHAPTER V.

And presently Valerian also, in a mood alike frantic, lifted up his impious hands to assault God, and, although his time was short, shed much righteous blood. But God punished him in a new and extraordinary manner, that it might be a lesson to future ages that the adversaries of Heaven always receive the just recompense of their iniquities. He, having been made prisoner by the Persians, lost not only that power which he had exercised without moderation, but also the liberty of which he had deprived others; and he wasted the remainder of his days in the vilest condition of slavery: for Saporos, the king of the Persians, who had made him prisoner, whenever he chose to get into his carriage or to mount on horseback, commanded the Roman to stoop and present his back; then, setting his foot

on the shoulders of Valerian, he said, with a smile of reproach, "This is true, and not what the Romans delineate on board or plaster." Valerian lived for a considerable time under the well-merited insults of his conqueror; so that the Roman name remained long the scoff and derision of the barbarians; and this also was added to the severity of his punishment, that although he had an emperor for his son, he found no one to revenge his captivity and most abject and servile state; neither indeed was he ever demanded back. Afterward, when he had finished this shameful life under so great dishonour, he was flayed, and his skin, stripped from the flesh, was dyed with vermilion, and placed in the temple of the gods of the barbarians, that the remembrance of a triumph so signal might be perpetuated, and that this spectacle might always be exhibited to our ambassadors, as an admonition to the Romans, that, beholding the spoils of their captived emperor in a Persian temple, they should not place too great confidence in their own strength.

Now since God so punished the sacrilegious, is it not strange that any one should afterward have dared to do, or even to devise, aught against the majesty of the one God, who governs and supports all things?

CHAPTER VI.

Anrelian might have recollected the fate of the captived emperor, yet, being of a nature outrageous and headstrong, he forgot both *his* sin and its punishment, and by deeds of cruelty irritated the divine wrath. He was not, however, permitted to accomplish what he had devised; for just as he began to give a loose to his rage, he was slain. His bloody edicts had not yet reached the more distant provinces, when he himself lay all bloody on the earth at Cætophrurium in Thrace, assassinated by his familiar friends, who had taken up groundless suspicions against him.

Examples of such a nature, and so numerous, ought to have deterred succeeding tyrants; nevertheless they were not only not dismayed, but, in their misdeeds against God, became more bold and presumptuous.

CHAPTER VII.

While Diocletian, that author of ill, and deviser of misery,

was ruining all things, he could not withhold his insults, not even against God. This man, by avarice partly, and partly by timid counsels, overturned the Roman empire: for he made choice of three persons to share the government with him; and thus, the empire having been quartered, armies were multiplied, and each of the four princes strove to maintain a much more considerable military force than any sole emperor had done in times past. There began to be fewer men who paid taxes than there were who received wages; so that the means of the husbandmen being exhausted by enormous impositions, the farms were abandoned, cultivated grounds became woodland, and universal dismay prevailed. Besides, the provinces were divided into minute portions, and many presidents and a multitude of inferior officers lay heavy on each territory, and almost on each city. There were also many stewards of different degrees, and deputies of presidents. Very few civil causes came before them: but there were condemnations daily, and forfeitures frequently inflicted; taxes on numberless commodities, and those not only often repeated, but perpetual, and, in exacting them, intolerable wrongs.

Whatever was laid on for the maintenance of the soldiery might have been endured; but Diocletian, through his insatiable avarice, would never allow the sums of money in his treasury to be diminished: he was constantly heaping together extraordinary aids and free gifts, that his original hoards might remain untouched and inviolable. He also, when by various extortions he had made all things exceedingly dear, attempted by an ordinance to limit their prices. Then much blood was shed for the veriest trifles; men were afraid to expose aught to sale, and the scarcity became more excessive and grievous than ever, until, in the end, the ordinance, after having proved destructive to multitudes, was from mere necessity abrogated. To this there were added a certain endless passion for building, and, on that account, endless exactions from the provinces for furnishing wages to labourers and artificers, and supplying carriages and whatever else was requisite to the works which he projected. *Mere* public halls, *there* a circus, *here* a mint, and *there* a workhouse for making implements of war; in one place an habitation for his empress, and in another for his daughter. Presently great part of the city was quitted, and

siastes. This discussion is framed in terms of whether the books defile the hands, and it is assumed that for some reason the holy books included in the canon render the hands impure, whereas those outside this collection do not. Tosefta Yadayim (text 3.7.4) expands upon this theme. In any case, these sources demonstrate that the content of the collection of biblical books was agreed upon by Rabbinic times. Yet we should note that the New Testament and the Dead Sea Scrolls indicate that such agreement was for the most part reached much earlier.

The documents we have presented here open up to us a formative period in the history of Judaism in which Judaism moved from the biblical era toward the development of its postbiblical manifestations. Already in these sources we see tendencies toward sectarianism and schism, yet at the same time the priesthood, Temple, and biblical canon were asserting themselves as the basic organizing principles of Jewish life and religion in Late Antiquity.

3.1 HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

3.1.1 Ezra 1: Inaugurating the Return¹

According to the biblical account, soon after Cyrus the Great conquered Babylon in 539/8 B.C.E., he decreed that the Jews could return from exile in Babylonia and rebuild their city and Temple. This declaration may be said to have inaugurated the Second Temple period.



1:1 In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, when the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah was fulfilled, 2 the Lord roused the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia to issue a proclamation throughout his realm by word of mouth and in writing as follows:

2 "Thus said King Cyrus of Persia: The Lord God of Heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and has charged me with building Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. 3 Anyone of you of all his people—may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem that is in Judah and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, the God that is in Jerusalem; 4 and all who stay behind, wherever he may be living, let the people

1. All biblical texts are from *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1985).

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of his place assist him with silver, gold, goods, and livestock, besides the freewill offering to the House of God that is in Jerusalem."

3.1.2 The Declaration of Cyrus: The Rebuilding of Ancient Shrines²

Cyrus conquered Babylonia in 539 B.C.E., and, with his ascendance to the throne, he published this edict of 538 B.C.E. Its purpose was to allow the rebuilding of local temples and the reinstatement of worship in them by the peoples who had previously been exiled. This edict was the basis for the Jewish effort to return to the province of Yahud (Judea) and rebuild the Jerusalem Temple.



... an inferior man has been appointed enu³ of his land ... he commanded that copies be set upon them. A model of the temple of Esagila⁴ ... for Ur⁵ and for the remaining holy cities improper rites (he) ... daily he babbled, yet blasphemously he discontinued the regular offerings. He revealed(?) ... he set up in the holy cities. The worship of Marduk, the king of the gods, he [changed] into abomination, daily he used to do evil against (Marduk's) city. [He tortured its inhabitants] with a yoke without relief; he ruined them all. Upon their protestations, the lord of the gods was enraged and [...] their region, and the other gods living among them abandoned their houses, angered that he had brought them into Babylonia. May(?) Marduk ... return his favor to all the settlements whose dwellings have lain in ruins!

Further, he showed mercy to and had pity on the people of Sumner and Akkad⁷ who had become like dead men. He searched and looked through all the countries, seeking a just king of his own choosing, whom he took by the hand. He named Cyrus, king of Anshan; he appointed him to rule all the world. He made the Guti-country and all the Manda-host prostrate themselves before (Cyrus') feet. And (Cyrus) always undertook to administer fairly and justly the black-haired⁸ people whom (Marduk) made him

2. Trans. S. Berrin with the assistance of D. Fleming from F. H. Weissbach, *Die Keilschriften der Achmeniden* (Vorderasiatische Bibliothek 3; Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1911), 2ff.

3. An Old Sumerian title for leader.

4. The temple precinct of Babylonia.

5. One of the oldest cities in southern Mesopotamia, the biblical "Ur of the Chaldees."

6. The chief god of Babylonia.

7. An expression denoting Babylonia in terms of the two major ethnic groups which dominated it in the second millennium B.C.E.

8. Literally, "black-headed."

conquer. The great lord Marduk, guardian of his people, observed with approval (Cyrus') good deeds and his upright heart and ordered him to march against his city Babylon. He had him start upon the way to Babylon, accompanying him like a friend and companion. His outspread host, whose number was as indistinguishable as the water drops of a river, marched at his side with girded weapons. He allowed him to enter his city Babylon without battle or conflict, averting any harm to Babylon. He delivered into his hands Nabonidus,⁹ the king who did not worship him. All the inhabitants of Babylon as well as the entire country of Sumer and Akkad, officers and governors, knelt low to (Cyrus) and kissed his feet, elated at his kingship and radiant. They hailed him joyously as a master whose aid had returned them to life from death, and had saved them from tragedy and ruin, and they worshipped his name.

I am Cyrus, king of the world, great king, legitimate king, king of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four ends (of the earth), son of Cambyses, great king, king of Anshan, grandson of Cyrus, great king, king of Anshan, descendant of Teispes, great king, king of Anshan, of a family of eternal kingship, whose rule Bel and Nebo¹⁰ love, whose kingship they require for their satisfaction. When I entered Babylon peacefully, I took up a lordly residence in the royal palace amid joy and celebration, and the great lord Marduk aroused the love of the . . . citizens of Babylon to me, and I worshipped him daily. My outspread hosts marched within Babylon peacefully, and I prohibited anybody from oppressing [Sumer] and Akkad. I pursued peace in Babylon and in all his holy cities. As for the Babylonians, who against the will of the gods were subjected to a yoke not proper for their status . . . , I relieved their weariness, I released their . . . The great lord Marduk was well pleased with my deeds and sent generous blessings to myself, Cyrus, the king who worships him, to Cambyses, my son, the offspring of my loins, as well as to all my host, so we shall live happily in his presence, in peace.

All the kings of the entire world from the Upper to the Lower Sea, those who sit on a throne dais, those who live in other buildings, and all the kings of the West Land living in tents, brought their heavy tributes and kissed my feet in Babylon. From . . . as far as Ashur and Susa, Agade, Eshnunna, the towns Zamban, Me-Turnu, Der, as far as the Gutian territory and the settlements on the other side of the Tigris, where their temples have long lain in ruin, I returned the gods who lived therein to their places and provided them with permanent temples. I gathered all their

9. The last king of Babylon (556–539 B.C.E.).

10. Mesopotamian deities.

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inhabitants and returned them to their homes. Furthermore, upon the command of the great lord Marduk, the gods of Sumer and Akkad whom Nabonidus had brought to Babylon, so enraging the lord of the gods, I ensconced securely in their abodes, the places which make them happy.

Daily, may all the gods whom I have brought back to their holy sites speak on my behalf for long life and plead my favor before Bel and Nebo. To my lord Marduk may they say thus: Cyrus the king who worships you, and Cambyses his son . . . all of them I settled in a peaceful place. . . .

3.1.3 Ezra 1: The Vessels of the Temple

The biblical account sees the support for the return as coming both from the Jewish community in Babylonia as well as from the Persian ruler who returned the sacred vessels taken by the Babylonians when they sacked the Jerusalem Temple in 586 B.C.E.



1: 5 So the chiefs of the clans of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and Levites, all whose spirit had been roused by God, got ready to go up to build the House of the Lord that is in Jerusalem. 6 All their neighbors supported them with silver vessels, with gold, with goods, with livestock, and with precious objects, besides what had been given as a freewill offering. 7 King Cyrus of Persia released the vessels of the Lord's house which Nebuchadnezzar had taken away from Jerusalem and had put in the house of his god. 8 These King Cyrus of Persia released through the office of Mithredath the treasurer, who gave an inventory of them to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. 9 This is the inventory: 30 gold basins, 1,000 silver basins, 29 knives, 10 30 gold bowls, 410 silver double bowls, 1,000 other vessels; 11 in all, 5,400 gold and silver vessels. Sheshbazzar brought all these back when the exiles came back from Babylon to Jerusalem.

3.2 POLITICAL AFFAIRS

3.2.1 Elephantine Passover Papyrus: The Observance of Passover¹¹

The celebration of Passover at Elephantine in the fifth century B.C.E. already included many of the observances we recognize today—the eating of unleavened bread (matzah), the abstention from work, as well as the putting

11. Trans. S. Bernin from the Aramaic in B. Porten and A. Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, Department of the History of the Jewish People, Texts and Studies for Students, 1986), p. 54 (Cowley 21).

*the years of the life of Amram were seven and thirty and a hundred years?*¹ What lesson will you derive from that?—There is a difference here, because the whole text is superfluous. See now: it is written, *from Hadu to Cush. Why then do I require, seven and twenty and a hundred provinces?* You must conclude that it is for a special lesson.

Our Rabbis taught: Three [potentates] ruled over the whole globe,² namely, Ahab, Ahasuerus and Nebuchadnezzar.³ Ahab, as it is written, *As the Lord thy God lieth, there is no nation or kingdom whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee* etc.⁴ Now if he was not king over them, how could he make them take an oath? Nebuchadnezzar, as it is written: *And it shall come to pass that the nation and the kingdom which will not serve the same Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and will not put their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon*.⁵ Ahasuerus, as we have pointed out above [11b].

(Mnemonic: Sh'S'D'K')⁶ But are there no more? Is there not Solomon?—He did not retain his kingdom [till his death]. This is a sufficient answer for the one who holds that he was first a king and then a subject.⁷ But for the one who holds that he was first a king, then a subject, and then a king again, what can we reply?—Solomon was in a different category, because he ruled over the denizens of the upper world⁸ as well as of the lower, as it says, *And Solomon sat upon the throne of the Lord*.⁹

But was there not Sennacherib, as it is written, *Who are they among all the gods of these countries that have delivered their country out of my hand*.¹⁰—There was Jerusalem which he had not subdued.

But was there not Darius, as it is written, *Then king Darius wrote unto all the peoples, nations and languages that dwell in all the earth, Peace be multiplied unto you?*¹¹—There were the seven over which he did not rule, as it is written, *It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom a hundred and twenty satraps*.¹² But there was Cyrus, of whom it is

(1) Ex. VI, 20. (2) Heb. תַּרְסֵי. Lit. 'arch', the space beneath the vault of the heaven. (3) Only those mentioned in Scripture are reckoned (Tosaf.). (4) I Kings XVIII, 10. The text continues, and when they said, he is not here, he took an oath, etc. (5) Jer. XXVII, 8. (6) Sh = Solomon (Shelomoh); S = Sennacherib; D = Darius; K = Koresh (Cyrus). (7) Cf. Git. 68b. (8) The demons. (9) I Chron. XXIX, 23. (10) Isa. XXXVI, 20. (11) Dan. VI, 26. (12) Ibid. 2.

written, *Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia. All the kingdom of the earth hath the Lord given me?*¹—There he was merely indulging in a boast.

*In those days, when the king sat [on his throne].*² [How can this be] seeing that it says just afterwards, *in the third year of his reign?*—Raba said: What is meant by 'when he sat'? After he began to feel secure. He reasoned thus: 'Belshazar calculated and made a mistake; I have calculated and made no mistake'. What is the meaning of this?—It is written, *After seventy years are accomplished for Babylon I will remember you*,³ and it is written, *That He would accomplish for the desolations of Jerusalem seventy years*.⁴ He reckoned forty-five years of Nebuchadnezzar and twenty-three of Evil-merodach and two of his own, making seventy in all. He then brought out the vessels of the Temple and used them. And how do we know that Nebuchadnezzar reigned forty-five years?—As a Master has said: 'They went into exile in the seventh year and they went into exile in the eighth year; they went into exile in the eighteenth year and they went into exile in the nineteenth year'. [That is to say], in the seventh year after the subjection of Jehoiakim⁵ they underwent the exile of Jeconiah, this being the eighth year of Nebuchadnezzar.⁶ In the eighteenth year from the subjection of Jehoiakim⁷ they underwent the exile of Zedekiah, this being the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar,⁸ as a Master has said, In the first year [of his reign] he [Nebuchadnezzar] overthrew Nineveh; in the second year he conquered Jehoiakim⁹ and

(1) Ezra I, 2. (2) Esth. I, 2. Which would naturally mean, immediately after his accession. (3) Jer. XXIX, 10. (4) Dan. IX, 2. (5) By Nebuchadnezzar, as explained *infra*. V. Jer. LII, 28. This is the people whom Nebuchadnezzar carried away captive: in the seventh year etc. (6) V. II Kings XXIV, 12. And Jeconiah (Jeconiah) the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon . . . and he took him in the eighth year of his reign. (7) Jer. LII, 29. (8) V. II Kings XXV, 8. (9) Jehoiakim served Nebuchadnezzar three years (II Kings XXIV, 1), and according to the Seder Olam, he was in rebellion for three years. (This is based on Daniel I, 1. In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem, etc. which is interpreted to mean, the third year of his rebellion. V. Raah.) In the same year he was deposed and Jeconiah went into exile, and as this was the eighth of Nebuchadnezzar (v. *supra*), his subjection must have commenced in the second or third year of Nebuchadnezzar.

father is Hystaspes, Hystaspes' father is Arames, Arames' father was Ariaramnes, Ariaramnes' father was Teispis, (and) Teispis' father was Achaemenes.

In the Cyrus Cylinder, Cyrus is not called an Achaemenid, nor a Persian, but a king from a family of "kings of Anshan," a major city in the kingdom of Elam over which Cyrus' ancestors, possibly Teispis, took control ca. 646 B.C.E.⁷⁵ In Bisitun, Darius never mentions Cyrus' Anshanite heritage and purposefully disconnects Cyrus' origins from the kingdom, a propagandistic ploy that King Darius continued in the fake inscriptions he ordered engraved in Cyrus' name: "I am Cyrus the king, an Achaemenid."⁷⁶ In this pseudo-autobiographical inscription, Darius dubs Cyrus simply "a king" (and not "king of Anshan") and "an Achaemenid." In composing both Bisitun and the fake inscriptions, Darius was able to accomplish his multilevel rhetorical needs as the new Persian king: to connect himself to Cyrus through the Achaemenid-Teispid line so as to legitimize his claim to the throne, to not recall Cyrus' past achievements so as to overshadow his own reign, and to erase the contradiction between his own Persian heritage and Cyrus' Elamite connection so as not to be seen as a usurper.

Cyrus' Elamite identity has been stressed Daniel T. Potts who summarizes nicely the overall implications of Darius' *coup d'état* and manipulation of Cyrus' legacy:

Finally, if what we today call the Persian empire was, in fact, originally an *Anshanite* empire, established by Kurash, king of Anshan, then its creation must be seen not as a new creation *ab novo* but as a major *revival* in the political fortunes of a group... By the same token, if the kingdom so brilliantly expanded by Cyrus was Anshanite, then Darius' seizure of power upon the death of Cyrus' son Cambyses emerges as a Persian *coup d'état* which replaced the Anshanite, Teispid family of Cyrus with the Persian line of Achaemenes headed by Darius [Potts' italics].⁷⁷

Darius' motivations in rewriting the details of Cyrus' history was thus twofold: on the one hand, he depended on Cyrus' legacy insofar as he needed it to verify his own genealogical legitimacy to the throne, while on the other hand, he downplayed Cyrus' accomplishments as king of Anshan in order not to overshadow his reign or contradict his Persian line.⁷⁸ Darius' negative agenda against Cyrus may have been compelling, in part since, as we shall now see, the Sasanians did not give the king any special role in their royal genealogy; nor did they mention him at all in their writings.

⁷⁵ See Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 16–17.

⁷⁶ CMA-c. See Pierre Lecoq, *Les inscriptions de la Perse achéménide: Traduit du vieux perse, de l'élamite, du babylonien et de l'araméen* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 185–86.

⁷⁷ Potts, "Cyrus the Great and the Kingdom of Anshan," 23.

⁷⁸ See also Briant's comments, *From Cyrus to Alexander*, 181–83.

3. Cyrus and Darius in Middle Persian Sources⁷⁹

When the Sasanians came to power, the rise in importance of Zoroastrianism in their political realm affected the way the new Persian kings explained their royal origins and their relationship to the past, including to the Achaemenids. Not necessarily seeking any objective truth about their Achaemenid forebears, and perhaps even possessing relatively little accurate memory of them, the Sasanians integrated into their myth of origins a religious ideology steeped in Avestan epic traditions and figures with whom they claimed to be genealogically connected. Around the fourth and fifth centuries C.E., the Sasanians began to legitimize the origins of their royal authority by aligning themselves, as well as the only three Achaemenid kings mentioned in Middle Persian texts (Darius I, Darius III, and Artaxerxes II),⁸⁰ to the legendary Kayanid dynasty (i.e., the *kavis* of the Younger Avesta), basing their part-legendary, part-historical genealogy on the ideal Zoroastrian model of divine paternal ancestors.⁸¹ Although this process of adopting and adapting a royal genealogy developed over time, the best documentary evidence that we have of the appropriation by the Sasanians of the Kayanids as their ancestors is from the late fourth century, when Sasanian coinage for the first time uses the title "Kayanid" (*kay*) in reference to Shapur III (383–388).⁸² Thus, from at least this reign on, the Sasanians derived their political ideology in part from a religious system such that it allowed the Sasanian royal house to integrate itself into the Zoroastrian historical drama that was still in the process of unfolding in their own time. With respect to the origins of the royal authority of Sasanian kings, the Middle Persian *dhīrs* ("scribes") gave precedence to their Zoroastrian worldview and related political agenda over any sort of quest for an objective history of their ancestors, including when it came to their Persian forebears, the Achaemenids.⁸³

⁷⁹ This article unfortunately cannot deal with the complicated issue of the legacy of the Achaemenids among the Parthians. Suffice it to mention here that the later Parthians appear to have also connected their reign to the Achaemenids, though this is of course a debated issue. To cite just one tradition in support of the connection, Artabanus III (79–81 C.E.) named one of his sons Darius and claimed to be an heir of Cyrus, if we are to believe Tacitus (*Annals* 4.31). For more on this topic, see Jacob Neusner, "Parthian Political Ideology," *Iran* 3 (1963): 40–59.

⁸⁰ Such that Dārā I = Darius I, Dārā II = Darius III, and Artaxšīr I Kay = Artaxerxes II.

⁸¹ See the discussion on this final point in Vladimir Lukonin, "Political, Social and Administrative Institutions, Taxes and Trade," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, vol. 3, 2nd ed. Yarshater (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 681–746, especially 696–98.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 697.

⁸³ See Lukonin, "Institutions," 692, where the author explains how Sasanian genealogy can be divided into a historical part and a legendary part.