

## **Esther: A Hellenistic Queen?**

### 1. The Book of Esther (Masoretic Text (MT); LXX; Alpha Text (A-Text, or AT))

Paton, L. B. (1908), *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Esther* (Edinburgh).

p. 60: "the book is a product of the Greek period. The only dispute is, whether it belongs to the earlier or the later part of that period".

Bickerman, E. J. (1967), *Four Strange Books of the Bible* (New York).

Ego, B. (2010), "The Book of Esther: a Hellenistic Book", *Journal of Ancient Judaism* 1: 279-302.

Johnson, S. R. (2005), "Novelistic Elements in Esther: Persian or Hellenistic, Jewish or Greek?", *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 67: 571-89.

Macchi, J.-D. (2005), "Le livre d'Esther: regard hellénistique sur le pouvoir et le monde perses", *Transeuphratène* 30: 97-135.

Middlemas, J. (2019), "Dating Esther: Evaluating the Criteria for a Persian or Hellenistic Provenance" in R. Bantock & M. Lackowski (eds), *On Dating Biblical Texts to the Persian Period* (Tübingen), 149-68.

Stiehl, R. (1956), "Das Buch Esther", *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 53: 4-22.

Wills, L. M. (1995), *The Jewish Novel in the Ancient World* (Ithaca, NY).

### 2. LXX Translation, The Additions

(A) Mordecai's dream and discovery of a plot against the king, before 1:1, Add A 1-17;

(B) First letter of the king, after 3:13, Add B 1-7;

(C) Prayers of Mordecai and Esther, after 4:17, Add C 1-30;

(D) Appearance of Esther before the king unsummoned, before 5:3, Add D 1-16;

(E) Second letter of the king, after 8:12, Add E 1-24;

(F) The interpretation of Mordecai's dream, after 10:3, Add F 1-11.

Moore, C. A. (1973), "On the Origins of the LXX Additions to the Book of Esther", *JBL* 92: 382-93.

Moore, C. A. (1977), *Daniel, Esther, and Jeremiah: The Additions* (Garden City, NY).

### 3. LXX Translation, The Colophon

In the fourth year of the reign of Ptolemy and Cleopatra, Dositheus, who said that he was a priest, and Levitas, and Ptolemy his son, brought the foregoing letter concerning *Phourai*, which they said is extant, and which Lysimachus, son of Ptolemy, one of the people of Jerusalem, had translated (Hoschander trans., slightly amended).

ἔτους τετάρτου βασιλεύοντος Πτολεμαίου καὶ Κλεοπάτρας εἰσήνεγκεν Δωσίθεος ὃς ἔφη εἶναι ἱερεὺς καὶ Λευίτης καὶ Πτολεμαῖος ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ τὴν προκειμένην ἐπιστολὴν τῶν Φρουραῖ ἦν ἔφασαν εἶναι καὶ ἐρμηνευκέαι Λυσίμαχον Πτολεμαίου τῶν ἐν Ἱερουσαλημ.

Bickerman, E. J. (1944), "The Colophon of the Greek Book of Esther", *JBL* 63: 339-62.

4. Esther's Prayer (~ MT 4:16)

Esther Add C (Moore trans., amended)	
<p>12 <b>Queen</b> Esther was terrified and sought refuge in the Lord.</p> <p>13 She took off her stately robes and put on clothes appropriate for distress and mourning, and instead of extravagant perfumes she covered her head with ashes and dung. She debased her body completely,</p> <p>and she covered with her <b>disheveled hair</b> those parts which she ordinarily loved to adorn.</p> <p>14 she <b>prayed</b> to the Lord God of Israel and said: “My Lord, <b>only</b> you are our <b>king</b>! Help me who am <b>alone</b> and have no helper except you,</p> <p>15 for I am risking my life.</p> <p>16 All my life I have heard in my <b>ancestral tribe</b> that you, Lord, chose Israel from all the nations, and our fathers from all their predecessors, for a perpetual inheritance; and you treated them just as you had promised.</p> <p>17 But now we have sinned against you, and you have handed us over to our enemies</p> <p>18 because we extolled their gods. You were in the right, Lord.</p> <p>19 Nevertheless, they are not satisfied that we are in galling <b>slavery</b>; but they have made an agreement with <b>their idols</b></p> <p>20 to nullify the promise you made, to blot out your inheritance, to silence the lips of those who praise you, to quench the <b>glory</b> of your <b>house and altar</b>,</p> <p>21 to open the mouths of the pagans for the praise of <b>idols</b>, and to idolize forever a mere <b>mortal king</b>.</p>	<p>12. καὶ Ἐσθηρ ἡ <b>βασιλίσα</b> κατέφυγεν ἐπὶ τὸν κύριον ἐν ἀγῶνι θανάτου κατελιημμένη,</p> <p>13. καὶ ἀφελομένη τὰ ἱμάτια τῆς <b>δόξης</b> αὐτῆς ἐνεδύσατο ἱμάτια στενοχωρίας καὶ πένθους καὶ ἀντὶ τῶν ὑπερηφάνων ἡδυσμάτων σποδοῦ καὶ κοπριῶν ἔπλησεν τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτῆς καὶ τὸ σῶμα αὐτῆς ἔταπείνωσεν σφόδρα καὶ πάντα τόπον κόσμου ἀγαλλιάματος αὐτῆς ἔπλησε <b>στρεπτῶν τριχῶν</b> αὐτῆς</p> <p>14. καὶ <b>ἔδειτο</b> κυρίου θεοῦ Ἰσραὴλ καὶ εἶπεν· <b>κύριέ μου ὁ βασιλεὺς</b> ἡμῶν, σὺ εἶ <b>μόνος</b>· βοήθησόν μοι τῇ <b>μόνῃ</b> καὶ μὴ ἐχούσῃ βοηθὸν εἰ μὴ σέ,</p> <p>15. ὅτι κίνδυνός μου ἐν χειρὶ μου.</p> <p>16. ἐγὼ ἤκουον ἐκ γενετῆς μου ἐν <b>φυλῇ πατριᾶς</b> μου ὅτι σύ, κύριε, ἔλαβες τὸν Ἰσραὴλ ἐκ πάντων τῶν ἐθνῶν καὶ τοὺς πατέρας ἡμῶν ἐκ πάντων τῶν προγόνων αὐτῶν εἰς κληρονομίαν αἰώνιον καὶ ἐποίησας αὐτοῖς ὅσα ἐλάλησας.</p> <p>17. καὶ νῦν ἡμάρτομεν ἐνώπιόν σου, καὶ παρέδωκας ἡμᾶς εἰς χεῖρας τῶν ἐχθρῶν ἡμῶν,</p> <p>18. ἀνθ’ ὧν ἐδοξάσαμεν <b>τοὺς θεοὺς αὐτῶν</b>· δίκαιος εἶ, κύριε.</p> <p>19. καὶ νῦν οὐχ ἱκανώθησαν ἐν πικρασμῷ <b>δουλείας</b> ἡμῶν, ἀλλὰ ἔθηκαν τὰς χεῖρας αὐτῶν ἐπὶ τὰς χεῖρας <b>τῶν εἰδώλων αὐτῶν</b></p> <p>20. ἐξᾶραι ὀρισμὸν στόματός σου καὶ ἀφανίσαι κληρονομίαν σου καὶ ἐμφράξαι στόμα αἰνούντων σοι καὶ σβέσαι <b>δόξαν οἴκου σου καὶ θυσιαστήριόν σου</b></p> <p>21. καὶ ἀνοῖξαι στόμα ἐθνῶν εἰς ἀρετὰς <b>ματαίων</b> καὶ <b>θαυμασθῆναι βασιλέα σάρκινον</b> εἰς αἶωνα.</p>

22 Do not relinquish your **scepter**, Lord, to **non-existent [gods]**, and do not let them laugh at our downfall. Frustrate their plot and make an example of him who started it all!

23 Remember, Lord, **make yourself known** in this time of our afflictions!

**Give me courage, King of the gods** and Lord of all governments!

24 Make me **persuasive** before the lion and dispose him to hate the one who fights against us so that there may be an end of him and of those agreeing with him.

25 Rescue us by your hand and help me who am **alone** and have no one except you, Lord. You know everything

26 so you know that I hate the pomp of the **wicked**, and I loathe the bed of the uncircumcised and of any **foreigner**.

27 You know my **duty**: that I loathe that symbol of my exalted position which is upon my head.

**When I appear [at court]** I loathe it like a menstruous rag. I do not wear it **when I am not at court**.

28 Your **maid servant** has not dined at Haman's table, nor have I extolled a royal party nor drunk the wine of libations.

29 From the day **I arrived here** until now, your maid servant has not delighted in anything except you, Lord, the God of Abraham.

30 "God, whose **might** prevails over all", hear the voice of the despairing, and save us from the hands of the wicked! And, Lord, protect me from my **fears**!

22. μὴ παραδῶς, κύριε, τὸ **σκῆπτρόν** σου **τοῖς μὴ οὐσί**ν, καὶ μὴ καταγελασάτωσαν ἐν τῇ πτώσει ἡμῶν, ἀλλὰ στρέψον τὴν βουλήν αὐτῶν ἐπ' αὐτοῦς, τὸν δὲ ἀρξάμενον ἐφ' ἡμᾶς παραδειγματίσον.

23. μνήσθητι κύριε, **γνώσθητι** ἐν καιρῷ θλίψεως ἡμῶν καὶ ἐμὲ **θάρσυνον**, **βασιλεῦ τῶν θεῶν** καὶ πάσης ἀρχῆς ἐπικρατῶν·

24. δὸς **λόγον εὐρυθμον** εἰς τὸ στόμα μου ἐνώπιον τοῦ λέοντος καὶ μετάθες τὴν καρδίαν αὐτοῦ εἰς μῖσος τοῦ πολεμοῦντος ἡμᾶς εἰς συντέλειαν αὐτοῦ καὶ τῶν ὁμονοούντων αὐτῷ·

25. ἡμᾶς δὲ ῥῦσαι ἐν χειρὶ σου καὶ βοήθησόν μοι τῇ **μόνῃ** καὶ μὴ ἐχούσῃ εἰ μὴ σέ, κύριε. πάντων γινῶσιν ἔχεις

26. καὶ οἶδας ὅτι ἐμίσησα **δόξαν ἀνόμων** καὶ βδελύσσομαι κοίτην ἀπεριτιμήτων καὶ παντὸς ἄλλοτρίου.

27. σὺ οἶδας τὴν **ἀνάγκην** μου, ὅτι βδελύσσομαι τὸ σημεῖον τῆς ὑπερηφανίας μου, ὃ ἐστὶν ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς μου ἐν **ἡμέραις ὀπτασίας** μου· βδελύσσομαι αὐτὸ ὡς ῥάκος καταμηνίων καὶ οὐ φορῶ αὐτὸ ἐν **ἡμέραις ἡσυχίας** μου.

28. καὶ οὐκ ἔφαγεν ἡ **δούλη** σου τράπεζαν Ἀμαν καὶ οὐκ ἐδόξασα συμπόσιον βασιλέως οὐδὲ ἔπιον οἶνον σπονδῶν·

29. καὶ οὐκ ἠὐφράνθη ἡ δούλη σου ἀφ' ἡμέρας **μεταβολῆς** μου μέχρι νῦν πλην ἐπὶ σοί, κύριε ὁ θεὸς Ἀβρααμ.

30. ὁ θεὸς ὁ **ισχύων** ἐπὶ πάντα, εἰσάκουσον φωνὴν ἀπηλιτισμένων καὶ ῥῦσαι ἡμᾶς ἐκ χειρὸς τῶν πονηρευομένων· καὶ ῥῦσαί με ἐκ τοῦ **φόβου** μου.

## 5. Piety

OGIS 224.6-7: καὶ πρὸς τὸ θεῖ- || [ον ε]ὑσεβῶς δια[κ]εῖσθαι [Laodice III]

Ma, J. (1999), *Antiochos III and the Cities of Western Asia Minor*. Oxford), n. 18 73-4:

ἐπειδὴ ἡ βασίλισσα τὰ τε πρὸς τοὺς θεοὺς εὐσεβ[ῶς] διακεῖται [Laodice III]

OGIS 15 [Arsinoe II, dedication of the rotunda as an offering to the Great Gods at Samothrace]

## 6. Duality

Carney, E. D. (2011), "Being Royal and Female in the Early Hellenistic Period," in A. Erskine and L. Llewellyn-Jones (eds.), *Creating a Hellenistic World* (Swansea), 195-220 [197].

## 7. Gestures

**3 Macc. 1.4:** "When a bitter fight resulted, and matters were turning out rather in favor of Antiochus, Arsinoë went to the troops with wailing and tears, her locks all disheveled, and exhorted them to defend themselves and their children and wives bravely, promising to give them each two minas of gold if they won the battle" (γενομένης δὲ καρτερᾶς μάχης καὶ τῶν πραγμάτων μᾶλλον ἐρρωμένων τῷ Ἀντίχῳ ἰκανῶς ἡ Ἀρσινόη ἐπιπορευσαμένη τὰς δυνάμεις παρεκάλει μετὰ οἴκτου καὶ δακρύων **τοὺς πλοκάμους λελυμένη** βοηθεῖν ἑαυτοῖς τε καὶ τοῖς τέκνοις καὶ γυναῖξιν θαρραλέως ἐπαγγελλομένη δώσειν νικήσασιν ἐκάστῳ δύο μνᾶς χρυσίου). Cf. Polyb. 5.83.

(Cf. Damag. *Epigr.* 1= *Anth. Pal.* 6.277: Ἄρτεμι, τόξα λαχοῦσα καὶ ἀλκήνεντασοῖστους || σοὶ πλόκον οἰκείας τόνδε λέλοιπε κόμης || Ἀρσινόη θυόεν παρ' ἀνάκτορον ἢ Πτολεμαίου || παρθένος, ἡμερτοῦ κειραμένη πλοκάμου)

Van Oppen de Ruyter, B.F. (2015), *Berenice II Euergetis: Essays in Early Hellenistic Queenship* (New York), 86-7.

## 8. Esther' Appearance before the King Unsummoned (~ MT 5.1-3)

Esther Add D (Moore trans., amended)	
1 On the third day, when she had finished praying, she <b>took off the clothing</b> of a suppliant and <b>dressed herself</b> in splendid attire.	1. καὶ ἐγενήθη ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ, ὡς ἐπαύσατο <b>προσευχομένη</b> , <b>ἐξεδύσατο</b> τὰ ἱμάτια τῆς θεραπείας καὶ <b>περιεβάλετο</b> τὴν <b>δόξαν</b> αὐτῆς
2 After she had called upon the <b>all-seeing</b> God and savior, she, looking absolutely <b>radiant</b> , took two maids,	2. καὶ γεννηθεῖσα <b>ἐπιφανῆς</b> ἐπικαλεσαμένη τὸν πάντων <b>ἐπόπτην</b> θεὸν καὶ σωτῆρα παρέλαβεν τὰς δύο ἄβρας
3 leaning daintily on the one,	3. καὶ τῇ μὲν μιᾷ ἐπηρείδετο ὡς τρυφερευομένη,
4 while the other followed carrying her train.	4. ἡ δὲ ἑτέρα ἐπηκολούθει κουφίζουσα τὴν ἔνδυσιν αὐτῆς,
5 She was radiant, in the <b>prime</b> of her beauty, and her face was assured as one who knows she is loved, but her heart was pounding with <b>fear</b> .	5. καὶ αὐτὴ ἐρυθριῶσα <b>ἀκμῇ κάλλους</b> αὐτῆς, καὶ τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτῆς ἰλαρὸν ὡς προσφιλές, ἡ δὲ καρδία αὐτῆς ἀπεστενωμένη ἀπὸ τοῦ <b>φόβου</b> .
6 When she had <b>passed through</b> all the doors, she stood before the king.	6. καὶ <b>εἰσελθοῦσα</b> πάσας τὰς θύρας κατέστη ἐνώπιον τοῦ βασιλέως,

<p>He was seated on his royal throne, <b>arrayed</b> in all his <b>splendid</b> attire, all covered with gold and precious stones-a most formidable sight!</p>	<p>καὶ αὐτὸς ἐκάθητο ἐπὶ τοῦ θρόνου τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ καὶ πᾶσαν στολὴν τῆς <b>ἐπιφανείας</b> αὐτοῦ <b>ἐνεδεδύκει</b>, ὅλος διὰ χρυσοῦ καὶ λίθων πολυτελῶν, καὶ ἦν <b>φοβερὸς</b> σφόδρα.</p>
<p>7 Raising his face, flushed with color, he looked at her in <b>fiercest</b> anger. The queen <b>stumbled</b>, <b>turned</b> pale and <b>fainted</b>, keeling over on the head of the maid who went before her.</p>	<p>7. καὶ ἄρας τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ πεπυρωμένον <b>δόξη</b> ἐν <b>ἀκμῇ</b> <b>θυμοῦ</b> ἔβλεψεν, καὶ <b>ἔπεσεν</b> ἡ βασίλισσα καὶ <b>μετέβαλεν</b> τὸ χρῶμα αὐτῆς ἐν <b>ἐκλύσει</b> καὶ κατεπέκυσεν ἐπὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν τῆς ἄβρας τῆς προπορευομένης.</p>
<p>8 But God <b>changed</b> the king's spirit to gentleness. The king leaped down from his throne in alarm and took her up in his arms until she <b>revived</b>. He comforted her with <b>reassuring words</b>,</p>	<p>8. καὶ <b>μετέβαλεν</b> ὁ θεὸς τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ βασιλέως εἰς πραῦτητα, καὶ ἀγωνιάσας ἀνεπήδησεν ἀπὸ τοῦ θρόνου αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀνέλαβεν αὐτὴν ἐπὶ τὰς ἀγκάλας αὐτοῦ, μέχρις οὗ <b>κατέστη</b>, καὶ παρεκάλει αὐτὴν <b>λόγοις εἰρηνικοῖς</b></p>
<p>9 saying to her, "What's the matter, Esther? <b>I am your brother</b>. Relax.</p>	<p>9. καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῇ τί ἐστίν, Εσθηρ <b>ἐγὼ ὁ ἀδελφός σου</b>, θάρσει,</p>
<p>10 You're not going to die! This practice applies only to our subjects. 11 Come here!"</p>	<p>10. οὐ μὴ ἀποθάνης, ὅτι κοινὸν τὸ πρόσταγμα ἡμῶν ἐστίν· 11. πρόσελθε.</p>
<p>12 Then he raised his gold scepter and tapped her neck; he hugged her and said, "<b>Talk</b> to me!"</p>	<p>12. καὶ ἄρας τὴν χρυσοῦν ῥάβδον ἐπέθηκεν ἐπὶ τὸν τράχηλον αὐτῆς καὶ ἠσπάσατο αὐτὴν καὶ εἶπεν <b>λάλησόν</b> μοι.</p>
<p>13 "<b>My lord</b>", she said, "I saw you like an <b>angel of God</b>", and was upset by your awesome appearance.</p>	<p>13. καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ εἶδόν σε, <b>κύριε</b>, ὡς <b>ἄγγελον θεοῦ</b>, καὶ ἐταράχθη ἡ καρδιά μου ἀπὸ <b>φόβου</b> τῆς <b>δόξης</b> σου·</p>
<p>14 For you are <b>wonderful</b>, my lord, and your face is full of graciousness."</p>	<p>14. ὅτι <b>θαυμαστός</b> εἶ, <b>κύριε</b>, καὶ τὸ πρόσωπόν σου χαρίτων μεστόν.</p>
<p>15 And as she spoke, she sagged with relief.</p>	<p>15. ἐν δὲ τῷ διαλέγεσθαι αὐτὴν ἔπεσεν ἀπὸ <b>ἐκλύσεως</b> αὐτῆς,</p>
<p>16 The king was upset, and all his court tried to reassure her.</p>	<p>16. καὶ ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐταράσσετο, καὶ πᾶσα ἡ θεραπεία αὐτοῦ παρεκάλει αὐτὴν.</p>

## 9. Sister

Ager, S.L. (2005), "Familiarity Breeds: Incest and the Ptolemaic Dynasty", *JHS* 125: 1-34.

Ogden, D. (1999), *Polygamy, Prostitutes, and Death: The Hellenistic Dynasties* (London), 124–8, 134–7, 140–3, 146–7.

*OGIS* 224: [Antiochus III] "our sister queen Laodice" (τῆς ἀδελφῆς βασιλίσης Λαοδίκης).

*OGIS* 99, 773: Cleopatra I as the "sister" of Ptolemy V: 99: τὴν ἀδελφὴν βασίλισσαν Κλεοπάτραν; 773: ἡ βασιλέως Πτολεμαίου ἀδελφὴ καὶ γυνή.

#### 10. Epiphaneis

OGIS 98 (Philae): βασιλεὺς Πτολεμαῖος καὶ βασίλισσα Κλεοπά[τρα] ||  
θεοὶ Ἐπιφανεῖς καὶ Πτολεμαῖος ὁ υἱὸς Ἀσκλη[πιῶι].

#### 11. Transformation:

Lubitch, R. (1993), “A Feminist's Look at Esther”, *Judaism* 42 (1993), 438-46.

Fox, M. V. (2003), “Three Esthers”, in S. White Crawford and L. J. Greenspoon (eds.), *The Book of Esther in Modern Research* (London), 50-60. [59]:

“The Additions introduce a number of elements known from the Hellenistic romances, including explicit and extensive explorations of thoughts and feelings, the heroine's piety, female frailty, overwhelming emotions and fainting [...]”.

#### 12. Salome Alexandra?

Ilan, T. (2001), *Integrating Women into Second Temple History* (Peabody, MA), 132-3:

“In light of negative popular and philosophical thinking on women as potential rulers at the time, and after John Hyrcanus failed to bequeath the throne to his wife, in order for Shelamzion to succeed to the throne, some measures had to be taken, to prepare the grounds for the woman's queenship. Are there any traces in the ancient sources that support my contention that some sort of propaganda in Shelamzion's behalf was attempted? The thesis of this paper is that three unusual and closely related compositions – Esther, *Judith* and *Susanna*, all three named after women – could be considered as such pamphlets”.

Wilker, J. (2020), “Hasmonean women” in E. D. Carney and S. Müller (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Women and Monarchy in the Ancient Mediterranean World* (London), 222-33. [229]:

"the female protagonists of signature novels such as *Judith* and *Greek Esther* cannot be read as reflecting Hasmonian queens; they feature prominent female figures, yet they are far from depicting a woman taking power permanently and legitimately”.