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Esther and Alexandra: Paradigms of Queenship in the Septuagint and in Josephus' Writings

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Beitrag vergleicht die literarische Darstellung der Königin Esther in der Septuaginta mit dem Porträt der Königin Alexandra in den *Antiquitates* des Josephus. Die Analyse der Parallelen und Unterschiede zwischen beiden Texten verspricht neue Einsichten hinsichtlich der Führungsrolle der beiden Königinnen.

The leadership qualities of the female protagonists in the books of Esther and Judith as well as the apocryphal story of Susanna at the beginning of Daniel have merited various studies.¹ In an innovative and unique work, Tal Ilan proposes that these three works served as propaganda to support the legitimacy of Queen Alexandra's rule. Ilan's thesis is based on the presumption that the stories of Esther, Judith and Susanna were composed close to the reign of Queen Alexandra (or Shelamazion in Hebrew, 76-67 BCE) as well as upon the ideology behind these works – the questioning of the traditional gender hierarchy whereby men rule over women.² Yet, except for Ilan's analysis, the similarities between Queen Alexandra and Queen Esther have not received sufficient scholarly attention.

This article will explore the development of Queen Esther's character from the Hebrew Masoretic text (MT) to the Septuagint Greek version of the story of Esther (LXX)³ to her portrayal in Josephus' *Antiquities*, and examine how this influenced Josephus' portrayal of Queen Alexandra.⁴ Several similarities in the literary representation of these two queens will be examined in order to demonstrate the influence of the LXX upon Josephus' accounts of Esther and Alexandra in *Jewish Antiquities*, in particular, in regards to their leadership roles. Furthermore, owing to their marginalized status, Josephus could have viewed the rise to power of Esther and Alexandra as somewhat similar. Both Esther and Alexandra belonged to weak groups in society (an orphan and a widow respectively) and they were both able to transcend their position and achieve royal prominence, albeit through different channels.⁵ Esther's beauty enabled her to

achieve the highest rank in Persian society for a woman – that of a queen – despite the fact that she was an orphan and a member of a foreign minority group. In contrast, Alexandra’s husband bequeathed to her the throne. Paradoxically, widowhood, which was usually detrimental to a woman’s status in Jewish society, actually, in this case, allowed Alexandra to escape male dominance and achieve a unique position in Jewish history as the only legitimate sovereign queen to rule the Jewish people.⁶

The Book of Esther and Josephus’ Writings: Literary Genre and Date of Composition

What is the literary genre of the Book of Esther (MT) and Josephus’ *Antiquities*, and when were they composed? Some scholars have defined the story of Esther as a “historical novel,” that is, “a true description of an actual socio-historical situation, garnished with chronistic details of suspect accuracy.”⁷ Others have rejected Esther’s historicity.⁸ Michael Fox points out that numerous “inaccuracies, implausibilities, and impossibilities argue that the events did not happen as reported... They mark a writer working at a much later time who is not familiar with the chronology, geography, and events of the period he is writing about.”⁹ In contrast, Josephus’ accounts of Queen Alexandra’s reign in *The Jewish War* and *Jewish Antiquities*, along with brief references in Qumran documents, are viewed as reliable historical accounts, albeit with some debate as to the details.¹⁰ The date of these works’ composition is also germane to a comparison of Esther and Alexandra. Carey Moore holds that “the ‘first’ edition of Esther probably goes back to the late 4th century B.C.E... while the ‘final’ edition of the MT appeared in the early Hellenistic period [3rd century BCE].”¹¹ *War*, the first of Josephus’ two works, was completed between 78-81 CE, while *Antiquities* was finished circa 93/94 CE.¹² As we can see, both the final version of the MT and Josephus’ writings date to within some 120 years of Queen Alexandra’s reign.

The genre of the Septuagint version of Esther resembles that of the MT. The major difference is the inclusion of six Additions (A-F, 107 verses), which should be read as an integral part of the Greek Esther story:¹³ a dream of Mordecai (A), an edict by Haman (B), the prayers of Mordecai and Esther (C), Esther’s unannounced audience with the king (D); Mordecai’s royal edict countering that of Haman (E), the interpretation of Mordecai’s dream (F), and a colophon.¹⁴ Assuming it is reliable, most scholars date the colophon of Septuagint Esther to either 78 BCE (two years prior to the beginning of Queen Alexandra’s reign) or

114 BCE.¹⁵ More recently, 48 BCE has also been added as a possible date.¹⁶ In any case, this would place the composition of Septuagint Esther very close to (or soon after) Queen Alexandra's reign. The circulation of such a work, which extols a Jewish queen, would have, to some extent, engendered a positive attitude by Hasmonean society towards queenship.

As with all his biblical portraits, Josephus' description of Esther in *Antiquities* (11:198-296) relies, to a great extent, upon the Septuagint although he does not include Additions A and F.¹⁷ Moore observes that this does not mean that these Additions did not exist at the time of Josephus' composition (in the 90s CE).¹⁸ Indeed, perhaps Josephus knew about them but did not include these Additions as they did not serve his objective. What is important for our purposes is that Additions A and F focus upon the character of Mordecai and by omitting them Josephus adds an even greater focus upon the character of Esther.

Esther and Alexandra: A Textual Analysis

Let us now delve into the texts themselves. Esther's beauty, which serves as the means to her ascent to the throne, is highlighted in both the MT and the LXX. When Esther first appears upon the scene, the MT stresses that "the maiden was shapely and beautiful" *וְהַנְּעִמָּה יָפֵת תֵּאֲרָ וְטוֹבַת מְרֵאָה* (Esther 2:7). The LXX edition follows the MT and states that "the girl was beautiful in appearance" *καὶ ἦν τὸ κοράσιον καλὸν τῶ εἶδει* (Esther 2:7).¹⁹ Such descriptions of Esther's beauty have served to discount her other qualities. For example, Lewis Paton asserts that Esther "wins her victories not by skill or by character but by her beauty."²⁰ Paton's commentary, which was first published in 1908, may have been influenced by the patriarchal view of women at the beginning of the twentieth century. In fact, this disparaging assessment, which attributes her victory to her physical beauty and not her brains, is proved wrong by the denouement of the story. Indeed, Esther shows great ingenuity and wisdom in weaving a complex plot to cause the downfall of Haman. First, she causes Haman to be confident that he is in favor with the royal court (the queen); then she arouses the king's wrath by announcing that she and her people are in peril of death and names Haman as the culprit.

Josephus elaborates upon the physical description of Esther in the LXX adding: "she *surpassed* all women in beauty (*τῶ κάλλει διαφέρειν*), and the grace of her countenance *greatly* (*μᾶλλον*) attracted the eyes of all who beheld her" (*Antiquities* 11:199). Louis Feldman believes that Josephus' exaggeration of the

beauty of women in general, and Esther is particular, is due to his adherence to “the tradition of the Hellenistic novels.”²¹ In contrast, there is no description of Queen Alexandra’s physical appearance in either of Josephus’ works (*War* and *Antiquities*), most probably, because Josephus felt that he was writing history when telling the account of Alexandra and not a novel.²²

Following her coronation, the MT relates that Esther demonstrated caution and prudence by obeying Mordecai’s instructions to hide her ethnic affiliation: “And Esther did not reveal her people or her kindred, for Mordecai had told her not to reveal it.” (Esther 2:10). On the other hand, such behavior can also be viewed as a demonstration of submissiveness. Louis Feldman writes that “[i]n the Biblical narrative Esther is completely subordinated, at least at the beginning of the tale, to Mordecai.”²³ One can say that Alexandra was also subordinated to her husband, King Alexander Jannaeus, until his death. Yet the subordinate status of Esther changes later on in the MT (and LXX) which somewhat parallels that of Alexandra in *Antiquities* (see below).

The LXX adds a religious dimension to Mordecai’s instructions: “But Esther did not reveal her ancestry. For so Mardochoaios had commanded her: to fear God and to do his ordinances...” (LXX Esther 2:19). Scholars have noted the theological implications of the addition of God’s name (over fifty times!) in the LXX, as seen here, while it is not even mentioned once in the MT.²⁴ This aspect is closely intertwined with the change in the character of Esther from the MT to the LXX. Unlike the MT, the LXX now portrays Esther as an exceedingly pious Jew who observes the commandments (although she is married to a non-Jew!). Addition C in the LXX includes several descriptions connected to Esther’s piety: her loathing of sharing the King’s bed since he is a non-Jew: “I abhor the bed of the uncircumcised one” (C:26); and her abstinence from eating non-kosher food and drinking the wine libations: “And your slave has not eaten at Haman’s table, and I have not honored the king’s banquet nor drunk the wine of libations” (C:28).²⁵ Finally it is noteworthy that Esther’s prayer is twice as long as that of Mordecai in the LXX. Although this may be due to the fact that she was in greater danger than Mordecai, it can also indicate that she was viewed as the main character of the story.

Josephus’ account follows the MT, and not the LXX, in declaring that Esther did not reveal her ethnic origin/people (τὸ ἔθνος - *Antiquities* 11:203), without any mention of God or commandments.²⁶ This appears to be part of Josephus’ general

tendency to minimize or eliminate descriptions of Esther's piety, as in his abridgement of Esther's prayer (Addition C) which leaves out the expressions of Esther's attack on idol worship (C 19-22) and non-Jews (C 24-28). What could be the reason for this deliberate omission? Feldman's observation that "[a] major purpose of Josephus' *Antiquities*... is to answer the charges of the anti-Semites," such as that of intolerance of other religions, can provide an answer.²⁷ Josephus probably eliminated those descriptions of Esther's piety, which involved disparaging remarks concerning non-Jews, in order to demonstrate the tolerant nature of the Jewish religion to his Roman readers.

Despite the fact that Josephus omits many of the descriptions of Queen Esther's piety in the LXX, nevertheless he does emphasize Queen Alexandra's piety, especially in his earlier work, *War*. Thus she had a "reputation for piety" (δόξαν εὐσεβείας) and was "very strict about her people's ancestral laws" (*War* 1:108).²⁸ In his later *Antiquities* Josephus merely hints at Alexandra's devout character. For example, she supported the Pharisees' authority by reinstating various ancestral religious laws: "Thus, even any minor regulation which had been introduced by the Pharisees and revoked by her father-in-law Hyrcanus, even that she once again restored" (*Antiquities* 13:408). Bickerman is one of the only scholars who notes the parallel between the LXX and Josephus: "[Esther]... is no less pious than Alexandra, the spouse of Alexander Jannaeus."²⁹

In the MT and LXX, Esther initially reveals a surprising ignorance of affairs of state and a lack of desire to endanger herself to help her people – Mordecai is the one to tell her about the king's edict regarding the Jews (Esther 4:7-8). Only when he threatens Esther that her life is in danger as well does she act: "Do not imagine that you, of all the Jews, will escape with your life by being in the king's palace. On the contrary, if you keep silent in this crisis, relief and deliverance will come from another place, while you and your father's house will perish" (Esther 4:13-14). Interestingly, in this case, Josephus does put God into the picture but not to compliment Esther's piety. Similar to the Alpha text, Josephus writes that God (ὁ θεός) will help the Jews if Esther does not (*Antiquities* 11:227) while both the MT and LXX have "another place" (רַחֵם אֶת־קוֹמָתֵנוּ; ἄλλοθεν).³⁰

This incident reveals a certain parallel between Esther and Alexandra. Mordecai counsels Esther to save the Jewish people while Alexandra's husband, Alexander Jannaeus, advises her on how to secure the kingdom for her rule by giving the Pharisees a measure of political power: "she talked with the Pharisees as her

husband had counseled and offered them all matters connected to his corpse and the kingdom” (*Antiquities* 13:405). Yet there is a significant difference between the actions of the two queens. Unlike Esther, Queen Alexandra does not reveal any ignorance of foreign affairs and instead implements wise strategic moves – when Tigranes, king of Armenia, threatens Judaea with a large army Queen Alexandra decides to employ diplomatic means to reach a treat and not force (*Antiquities* 13:419-421). Then again, one could say that, as already mentioned, Esther subsequently utilizes a shrewd and intricate strategy to bring about the downfall of Haman.

Following Mordecai’s admonition there is a turnabout in Esther’s nature in all the texts (MT, LXX, and *Antiquities*) – instead of a passive follower of Mordecai’s commands Esther is transformed into an active protagonist with her own ideas of how to save her people. She asserts a position of leadership by requesting that all the Jews in Susa unite in praying for the success of her mission (Esther 4:16; *Antiquities* 11:228). David Clines succinctly notes this transition: “Esther will ‘obey’ Mordecai but now she is not just his adoptive daughter but a Jewish leader on whose behalf the Jews are to hold an exceptional fact, and so Mordecai must ‘obey’ Esther (4.17).”³¹ Thus as the story progresses, Queen Esther comes to resemble Queen Alexandra more and more in her strong leadership characteristics.

The theme of Esther’s courage is found in both the MT and LXX, and is reiterated in Josephus’ descriptions as well. Both the MT and LXX state that Esther will approach the king even if this entails her death. Josephus adds in the words “to submit to it” ὑπομενεῖν (*Antiquities* 11:228) which highlights Esther’s resolve. This is in keeping with what Feldman terms Josephus’ Hellenistic style which builds up of the stature of the heroine.³² In the MT, Esther requests to see the king several times, and each time her life is in danger and this willingness to jeopardize herself highlights Esther’s remarkable courage.³³ Feldman provides an example of Josephus’ stress on Esther’s valor which is not found in the MT or LXX – the additional statement that men with axes stood around the king’s throne to punish those who approached without being summoned (*Antiquities* 11:205).³⁴ G.J. Swart asserts that Josephus often emphasizes the predicament of women as “victims of a society dominated by patriarchal values,” however, as seen here, such is not the case with Esther.³⁵ Thus, like the MT, Josephus portrays Esther as a brave woman willing to risk her life to save her people.

Josephus' description of Queen Alexandra is much more matter of fact than that of Esther. Although he does not specifically state that Queen Alexandra was courageous, the description of her actions bears this out. For example, she organizes a large army and terrifies the surrounding tyrants (*Antiquities* 13:409). Josephus also states that she was "a woman who experienced none of her gender's feebleness" (*Antiquities* 13: 430), which would imply that she was strong.

As in the MT, Esther is also portrayed as a devoted Jewish nationalist in the LXX, one who is concerned more for her people's welfare than for her own. Indeed, it is a "tribute to Esther's character ... that she first prayed extensively for her people (C: 16-22) and then prayed at lesser length for herself (C:26-29)."³⁶ One can perceive a certain parallel between Esther's concern with her people's welfare in the LXX and Josephus' ultimate statement concerning Queen Alexandra – "she maintained the nation peacefully" (*Antiquities* 13:432).

Nonetheless, there is an inherent difference between Alexandra and Esther. Alexandra is a strong independent queen with supreme power in her own homeland while Esther, who lives in the diaspora, is in actuality powerless for she is totally dependent upon King Aratxerxes. This dichotomy resembles the general situation of the Jewish people at that time – during the Hasmonean period they had independence in the land of Israel while in the diaspora they lacked political power. This political situation may have influenced Esther's portrayal in the LXX. Despite the other instances of Esther's bravery, the LXX also depicts her as a weak woman – she faints when she appears before the King (Additions D) and only God's intervention (changing the king's mood) saves the day.

Following the deliverance of the Jewish people towards the end of the narrative, Esther acquires more authority in both the MT and LXX. Esther, and not Mordecai, becomes the one in charge – she appoints Mordecai over Haman's house (Esther 8:2). She also has authority in Jewish ritual matters – although Mordecai ordered the initial celebration of the fourteenth and fifteenth of Adar as days of feasting and rejoicing (Esther 9:21-22), Esther sends a second missive also ordering the Jews to observe the festival of Purim (Esther 9:29-30). In contrast, there is no such change in Esther's character in *Antiquities*. Josephus only states that Esther gave Mordecai Haman's possessions as a gift (*Antiquities* 11:270) and omits Esther's second missive concerning the observance of Purim, only mentioning Mordecai's first announcement (*Antiquities* 11:293). Unlike Josephus' depiction of Esther, Queen Alexandra attains increasing authority as the

narrative progresses, similar to that of Esther in the Septuagint. Following her inheritance of the throne, Queen Alexandra is initially portrayed as, to some degree, under the Pharisees' control: "So, although in title she ruled the kingdom, the Pharisees held the power" (*Antiquities* 13: 409). However, she also acts forcefully and independently. For example, her younger son, whom she regarded as a threat to the throne, "she kept under [her] control" (*War* 1:109). Subsequently, Queen Alexandra implements political and military moves worthy of a strong leader: she "doubled the army, and she also collected a large (number) of foreign (mercenaries), so that not only did she strengthen her own nation but she also caused foreign rulers to fear (her)" (*War* 1:112, and parallel in *Antiquities* 13:409); and "she was skillful while fond of power; she proved by her deeds both her effectiveness and her [good] judgment" (*Antiquities* 13:430). Yet Josephus also criticizes her for desire to act as formidable leader, terming this a "raving mad lust for power" (*Antiquities* 13: 417).³⁷

Semantic Parallels between the LXX and Antiquities

Let us now address another matter. Two dialogues in the LXX and *Antiquities* present a marked semantic parallel. Queen Esther implores King Artaxerxes to spare her people: "For I and my people have been sold to be destroyed, slain and annihilated. And if we had been sold as slaves and as maids I should have kept silent for the enemy is not sufficient for the injury of the King"³⁸ (LXX: Esther 7:4). Likewise, in Josephus' retelling of the LXX, Queen Esther also implores the king to spare her people though with the addition of the phrase "for the evil would have been tolerable" (μέτριον γὰρ τοῦτο τὸ κακόν·): "She lamented the danger of her people and she said that for destruction we are delivered over, together with the nation, and due to these things I make the plea; for she would not have troubled him if into bitter bondage he had commanded them to be sold, for the evil would have been tolerable, [and] she appealed to be delivered from this" (*Antiquities* 11:263).³⁹ This echoes *Antiquities* 13:413 where the "men of rank and influence" (perhaps Sadducees) plead with Queen Alexandra stating that it would be tolerable (μετρίως) for them to bear it if the Pharisees would be satisfied with those already slain: "They also said that if their adversaries would be satisfied with those slain, it would be tolerable for them to bear, and they would agree to it due to their devotion to their masters." Thus we see here a thematic and verbal parallel between Queen Esther and Queen Alexandra, which is not present in the LXX. Furthermore, in *Antiquities* 13:413, Alexandra's role parallels that of King Artaxerxes – the Sadducees beseech Queen Alexandra while Queen Esther pleads with the King. If this semantic parallel is correct, then the similarity between the

two texts would indicate the great authority that Josephus ascribes to Queen Alexandra – since he parallels her with King Artaxerxes!

Conclusion

What can we learn from this comparison between Queen Alexandra and Queen Esther? In both the MT and the LXX, Esther is no mere beauty queen. The MT portrays her as a brave Jewish leader albeit not overly concerned with religious practice. David Clines provides a succinct summary of Esther's character: "Esther's success is achieved by a combination of charm, courage, rhetoric, and strategy."⁴⁰ Unfortunately, many scholars have concentrated upon Esther's "charm" while ignoring her other attributes. The LXX adds the qualities of piety and Jewish nationalism. Josephus' retelling of the Esther story amplifies the queen's beauty and courage, perhaps in order to conform to the style of Hellenistic novels, but minimizes her piety. Similar to the Septuagint's highlighting of Esther's piety, Josephus' portrayal of Alexandra in his earlier work, *War*, emphasizes Queen Alexandra's piety. Nevertheless, in his later *Antiquities*, Josephus minimizes Alexandra's religiosity. Similar to the Esther narrative in *Antiquities*, Josephus' account of Queen Alexandra's actions indicates her increasing courage and fortitude. Still, there is one major difference in Josephus' portrayal of the two queens – he ascribes greater authority to Queen Alexandra than to Queen Esther, which is quite appropriate since the former was a sovereign queen who reigned in her own homeland and possessed great power. The literary and textual similarities between Josephus' description of Queen Alexandra and the Septuagint's portrayal of Esther indicate that latter certainly influenced the former. Inasmuch as there are almost no other queens in Jewish history, it is not surprising that Josephus associates the story of Queen Esther with Queen Alexandra, especially since both are viewed in a positive light.

To conclude, given that the LXX was quite probably composed between 114-78 BCE, it therefore, quite naturally, described Esther in Hellenistic terms. Furthermore, since its composition most likely dates to within two to thirty-eight years prior to Queen Alexandra's ascent to the throne (76 BCE), the depiction of Esther as a powerful queen in the LXX would have impacted upon Hasmonean society's acceptance of a powerful queen like Alexandra. Josephus' account of Alexandra appears to have been influenced by the Septuagint's portrayal of Esther as evidenced by several thematic and semantic parallels. Furthermore, similar to the depiction of Esther in the LXX, Josephus describes Queen

Alexandra as pious, courageous and authoritative. Thus, Josephus creates a clear connection between the two queens, both of whom represent an exceptional model of female leadership in the Second Temple period.

¹ For example, the recent article by Sidnie White Crawford, “Esther and Judith: Contrasts in Character” in Bob Becking and Lester Grabbe (eds.), *Between Evidence and Ideology: Essays on the History of Ancient Israel* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 61-76; Kevin Brine et al., *The Sword of Judith: Judith Studies across the Disciplines* (Cambridge, U.K. : OpenBook Publishers, 2010), pp. 10-13, 30-31; Gert J. Steyn, “‘Beautiful but Tough’: A Comparison of LXX Esther, Judith and Susanna” in *Journal for Semitics* 17/1 (2008), pp. 156-181; Athalya Brenner, *A Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith and Susanna* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995); Linda Day, *Three Faces of a Queen: Characterization in the Book of Esther* (Sheffield: Sheffield Press, 1995), pp. 222-225; Michael P. Carroll, “Myth, Methodology and Transformation in the Old Testament: The Stories of Esther, Judith and Susanna,” *Studies in Religion* 12 (1983), pp. 301-312; Solomon Zeitlin, “Introduction (The Books of Esther and Judith: A Parallel)” in Morton, Enslin, *The Book of Judith: Greek Text with and English Translation, Commentary and Critical Notes* (Leiden: Brill, 1972), pp. 1-37.

² Tal Ilan, *Integrating Women into Second Temple History*, (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1999), pp. 127-153. Scholars have noted the general connection between the Greek book of Esther and the Hasmoneans. For example, Elias Bickerman argues that “[t]he historical background of this literature is the violent and implacable war between the Maccabees and the Greek cities in Palestine, which develop since 110 B.C” and John Collins claims that “[t]he Greek translation of Esther may, in a sense, be regarded as Hasmonean propaganda.” See Elias Bickerman, “The Colophon of the Greek Book of Esther” in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 63 (1944), p. 361 and John Collins, *Between Athens and Jerusalem: Jewish Identity in the Hellenistic Diaspora* (Cambridge: Eerdsman, 2000), p. 112.

³ There are two versions of Greek Esther – the Septuagint (LXX) and the shorter *Alpha* text (AT) or “Lucianic” version, both of which contain six Additions. Some scholars believe that the Greek style and syntax of these Additions indicate that they were originally composed in Greek (with the exception of Addition D) and were inserted later into both Greek texts. See “Esther” translated by Karen Jobes in Albert Pietersma and Benjamin G. Wright (eds.), *A New English Translation of the Septuagint (NETS)* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2009, p.

424 and Carey Moore, *Daniel, Esther and Jeremiah: The Additions*, (New York: Doubleday 1977), pp. 162-163. Yet Charles Torrey contests a Greek origin for the Additions. He argues that “the two extant Greek versions of the book are translations from the Aramaic originals.” See Charles Torrey, “The Older Book of Esther” in *Harvard Theological Review* 37:1 (January 1944), p. 2. Likewise, David Clines posits that most of the Additions were *not* initially written in Greek: “it is probable that four of the Additions (A, C, D, F) originally existed in a Semitic original, whereas the other two Additions (B, E) are patently Greek compositions.” See David Clines, *The Esther Scroll, the Story of the Story* (Sheffield, JSOT, 1984), p. 69. Emanuel Tov argues that the Lucianic version “is a translation which is based on the LXX but corrects it towards a Hebrew (or Aramaic) text which differs from the MT.” See Emanuel Tov, *The Greek and Hebrew Bible: Collected Essays on the Septuagint* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), p. 548. Tov’s conclusion can be viewed as a synthesis of the above approaches – a Greek origin for the AT but with Hebrew/Aramaic influences. As to the objective of the LXX and how it differs from the MT, Elias Bickerman contends that “Greek Esther ... is not the *Megillat Esther*, couched in Greek language and letters, but its adaptation designed for the Diaspora,” see Elias Bickerman, “Notes on the Greek Book of Esther,” *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, 20 (1951), p. 2.

⁴ Inasmuch as the goal of this article is to endeavor to understand the influence of the Esther story upon Josephus’ portrayal of Queen Alexandra, as opposed to an investigation of the various versions of Esther, discussion focuses upon the MT and LXX, with reference to the AT when relevant.

⁵ This idea stems from Sidnie Crawford’s comparison of Esther and Judith, see Crawford, “Esther and Judith,” p. 63.

⁶ Likewise, Judith’s status as a widow allowed her the freedom of movement to implement her ingenious plan for defeating Holofernes and the Assyrian threat.

⁷ Shemaryahu Talmon, “‘Wisdom’ in the Book of Esther,” *Vetus Testamentum* 13 (1963), p. 422. Following Talmon, Robert Gordis concludes that Esther “is to be regarded as a basically historical account of an anti-Semitic attempt at genocide.” (“Religion, Wisdom and History in the Book of Esther – A New Solution to an Ancient Crux,” in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 100 [Sept. 1981], p. 388).

⁸ Starting with Lewis Paton (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Esther* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1906, 1976], pp. 64-77), followed by Roger E. Herst (“The Purim Connection,” *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 28 [1973], pp. 139-145), Jon Levenson (*Esther, A Commentary* [Westminster John Knox Press,

1997], pp. 23-27), Carey Moore (David Freedman [ed.], *Anchor Bible Dictionary* [hereafter *ABD*], II, [New York: Doubleday, 1992], s.v. “Esther, Book of”, p. 638), and many others (see also below).

⁹ See Michael Fox, *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1991, 2001), p. 134. Adele Berlin humorously notes the decreasing number of pages needed to demonstrate that the book of Esther is not historical: “You might note that the number of pages is going down, probably because all the main points were laid out by Paton, and if you are going to rehash an argument you should do it in fewer pages than the original.” See Adele Berlin, “The Book of Esther and Ancient Storytelling,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120/1 (2001), p. 3.

¹⁰ See Hanan Eshel, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Hasmonean State*, Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi 2004, pp. 122-125 (Hebrew); Tal Ilan, s.v. “Shelamzion Alexandra” in Lawrence Schiffman and James VanderKam (eds.), *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, II (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 872-874; eadem, “Shelamzion in Qumran: New Insights” in David Goodblatt, Avital Pinnick and Daniel Schwartz (eds.), *Historical Perspectives: From the Hasmoneans to Bar Kokhba in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp. 27-31; eadem, *Silencing the Queen: The Literary Histories of Shelamzion and other Jewish Women* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); Joseph Geiger, “The Hasmoneans and Hellenistic Succession,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 52:1 (Spring 2002), pp. 1-17; James VanderKam, “Peshet Nahum and Josephus” in Alan Avery-Peck et. al., *When Judaism and Christianity Began: Essays in Memory of Anthony J. Saldarini* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), pp. 299-311 (which discusses Alexander Jannaeus’ bequest of the kingdom to Alexandra upon his deathbed).

¹¹ *ABD*, 2, “Esther, Book of,” p. 641.

¹² Although earlier scholars believed that *War* was written between 75-79 CE, today scholars date *War* somewhat later: “Josephus appears to have completed his work [*War*] between 78 and 81 after previously receiving the encouragement and approval of Vespasian and Titus.” See Jonathan Edmondson, et al. (eds.), *Flavius Josephus and Flavian Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 4. This is based upon Christopher P. Jones’ dating of 79 AD as the *terminus ante* for most of *War* and 81 AD for its completion. See Christopher P. Jones, “Towards a Chronology of Josephus,” *Scripta Classica Israelica* 21 (2002), p. 114. The dating of *Antiquities* is clearer as *Ant.* 20:267 relates that it was completed in the “13th year of the reign of Domitian Caesar,” that is, 93/94 CE (*ibid*).

¹³ In the past, the Additions were usually relegated to the Apocrypha in Christian Bibles, see Bickerman, “Notes on Greek Esther,” p. 2. Newer translations have integrated the Additions in their proper place; see “Esther” translated by Karen Jobes in *NETS*.

¹⁴ Moore, *Additions*, p. 153; idem, “On the Origins of the LXX Additions to the Book of Esther,” in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92:3 (Sept. 1973), pp. 382-393; *ABD*, 2, s.v. “Esther, Additions to,” pp. 626-627.

¹⁵ Moore, *Additions*, pp. 165-166. In 1944 Charles Torrey argues that 114 BCE is the only possible date for the book’s composition (Charles Torrey, “The Older Book of Esther,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 37 [January 1944], pp. 12, 26.) while in an in-depth examination of this issue Elias Bickerman concludes that 78-77 BCE is the date of the colophon (see Bickerman, “Colophon of Greek Esther,” p. 362 and entire article).

¹⁶ Jon Levenson notes that possible dates for the colophon range from 114-48 BCE (Levenson, *Esther*, p. 136). Likewise, John Barton adds the proviso that if the colophon is authentic then Septuagint Esther would date, in general terms, to the late second or early first century BCE and he cites 114, 77, and 48 BCE as possible dates (John Barton, *Oxford Bible Commentary*, [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001] p. 643). Hanna Kahana broadens the possible date range even further to between 114 BCE and 93 CE and notes that “the composition of the Esther Scroll and its Greek translation were made within [a] hundred years of each other” (Hanna Kahana, *Esther: Juxtaposition of the Septuagint Translation with the Hebrew Text* [Leuven: Peeters, 2005], p. xxvii).

¹⁷ Henry St. J. Thackeray asserts that we can “confidently state in general terms that Josephus used a Greek Bible.” See Henry St. J. Thackeray, *Josephus the Man and the Historian* (New York: Jewish Institute of Religion, 1929), p. 83.

¹⁸ Moore, *Additions*, p. 154.

¹⁹ Interestingly, in this matter the AT is more similar to the MT: “and the child was very beautiful in appearance and lovely to see.” Unless otherwise noted, this and subsequent English citations from the LXX and Alpha Text (AT) are from “Esther” translated by Karen Jobes in Pietersma and Wright, *NETS*. Greek citations from the Septuagint are from Alfred Rahlfs, *Septuaginta: id est, Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes* (Stuttgart: Privilegierte württembergische Bibelanstalt 1965, c1935). Citations from the MT are from *Tanakh, The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation According to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (Jerusalem/Philadelphia: JPS, 1985).

²⁰ Paton, *Commentary on Esther*, p. 96. Michael Fox also notes this derogatory evaluation, see Michael Fox, “Three Esthers,” in Sidnie Crawford and Leonard Greenspoon (eds.), *The Book of Esther in Modern Research* (New York/London: T & T Clark, 2003), p. 50.

²¹ Louis Feldman, “Hellenizations in Josephus’ Version of Esther,” in *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 101 (1970), pp. 148-149.

²² Likewise, Josephus does not offer any physical descriptions of the male Hasmonean monarchs such as Aristobulus or Alexander Jannaeus.

²³ Feldman, “Hellenizations in Esther,” p. 147.

²⁴ Gruen observes that the Additions reinstate God and religion into the story of Esther, see Erich Gruen, *Heritage and Hellenism: The Reinvention of Jewish Tradition* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), p. 179; see also *ABD*, II, s.v. “Esther, Additions to,” pp. 626-627.

²⁵ Although it would seem that Esther declares that she does not eat with Haman due to her observance of Jewish dietary laws, Luzia Sutter Rehmann proposes another explanation. She claims that Esther does not eat with Haman in order to avoid socializing with an enemy who schemes to kill the Jewish people. See Luzia Sutter Rehmann, “Abgelehnte Tischgemeinschaft in Tobit, Daniel, Ester, Judit. Ein Plädoyer für Differenzierung,” *Lectio Difficilior* 1/2008, p. 10.

²⁶ Thackeray believes Josephus utilized two biblical texts: a Hebrew or Aramaic Bible and a Greek version, see Thackeray, *Josephus the Man*, p. 81. In this case, Josephus might have been following the Hebrew Bible.

²⁷ Feldman, “Hellenizations in Esther,” pp. 163-165.

²⁸ This and all subsequent translations connected to Queen Alexandra (from Josephus) are my own.

²⁹ Bickerman, “Notes on Greek Esther,” p. 25.

³⁰ Gerhard J. Swart does not attribute any importance to the addition of God’s name here and asserts that Esther’s reaction is the same in both the LXX and Josephus, see Gerhard J. Swart, “Rahab and Esther in Josephus – An Intertextual Approach” in *Acta Patristica et Byzantina* 17 (2006), p. 64

³¹ Clines, *Esther Scroll*, p. 35.

³² Feldman, “Hellenizations in Josephus,” pp. 146-147.

³³ Nevertheless, for some reason, Carey Moore claims that the courage of Esther is “asserted by the author more than proven” (*Anchor Bible Dictionary*, II, s.v. “Esther”, p. 634).

³⁴ Feldman, “Hellenizations in Josephus,” p. 147.

³⁵ See Swart, “Rahab and Esther,” p. 64.

³⁶ Moore, *Additions*, p. 213.

³⁷ Eighty years ago, Grace Macurdy noted the double standard used to judge powerful queens: “I have also discussed the character of these [Hellenistic] queens, who are generally reputed to have been wicked. This reputation rests, as does the statement that they possessed power equal to that of men, on the acts of a few of the many who were queens in the Hellenistic centuries. Of these few it may be said that if they were in nature and character the counterparts of the men, they should be judged by the same standard. If the women are to be compared to tigresses... we must admit that the Macedonian blood produced tigerish men.” See Grace Macurdy, *Hellenistic Queens: A Study of Woman-Power in Macedonia, Seleucid Syria, and Ptolemaic Egypt* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press 1932), p. x.

³⁸ My translation, based upon Paton, *Commentary on Esther*, p. 258 (a more literal and less idiomatic translation in order to better understand the original Greek).

³⁹ My translation.

⁴⁰ Clines, *Esther Scroll*, p. 145.

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