

EMPIRE AND GENDER IN LXX ESTHER

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Meredith J. Stone

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Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	Freedman, David Noel. <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.
AGJU	Arbeiten zure Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
A.J.	Josephus, <i>Antiquitates judaicae</i>
ANET	Pritchard. James B., ed. <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> . 3rd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969.
AOTC	Abingdon Old Testament Commentary
APB	<i>Acta Patristica et Byzantina</i>
AT	Alpha Text of Esther
AUSTR	American University Studies, Series 7: Theology and Religion
b.	Babylonian Talmud
BCAW	Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World
BDAG	Danker, Frederick W., Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilber Gingrich. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i> . 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
BHAW	Blackwell Histories of the Ancient World
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
<i>B.J.</i>	Josephus, <i>Bellum judaicum</i>
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
<i>BJS</i>	<i>British Journal of Sociology</i>
BLS	Bible and Literature Series
<i>BTB</i>	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft

CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBCS	Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges
CSSCA	Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology
<i>Cyr.</i>	Xenophon, <i>Cyropaedia</i>
EJL	Early Judaism and Its Literature
<i>ER</i>	<i>Ecumenical Review</i>
FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible
<i>Flacc.</i>	Philo, <i>In Flaccum</i>
<i>GELS</i>	Muraoka, Takamitsu. <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint</i> . Leuven: Peeters, 2009.
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
HDR	Harvard Dissertations in Religion
<i>Hist.</i>	Herodotus, <i>Historiae</i>
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>INJ</i>	<i>Israel Numismatic Journal</i>
ISBL	Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JES</i>	<i>Journal of Ecumenical Studies</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JQR</i>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSJSup	Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplement
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
LBS	Library of Biblical Studies
Let. Aris.	Letter of Aristeas
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies

LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LSTS	Library of Second Temple Studies
LXX	Septuagint
Meg.	Megillah
MNTS	McMaster New Testament Studies
MS(S)	manuscript(s)
MT	Masoretic Text
NCB	New Century Bible Commentary
<i>NIB</i>	Keck, Leander E., ed. <i>New Interpreter's Bible</i> . 12 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994–2004.
<i>NIDB</i>	Sakenfeld, Katharine Doob, ed. <i>New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> . 5 vols. Nashville: Abingdon, 2006–2009.
NovTSup	Supplements to Novum Testamentum
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
<i>OEBI</i>	McKenzie, Steven L., ed. <i>Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation</i> . 2 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
OL	Old Latin
OTL	Old Testament Library
<i>PAAJR</i>	<i>Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research</i>
Pss. Sol.	Psalms of Solomon
R.	Rabbi
Rab.	Rabbah
<i>RelSRev</i>	<i>Religious Studies Review</i>
<i>RevQ</i>	<i>Revue de Qumrân</i>
<i>Rhet.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Rhetorica</i>
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SCS	Septuagint and Cognate Studies
SDSS	Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Literature
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
SJLA	Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity
SVTG	Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Gottingensis editum
SymS	Symposium Series
TCS	Text-Critical Studies
<i>TDNT</i>	Kittel, Gerhard, and Gerhard Friedrich, ed. <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Translated by Geoffrey Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976.

TENTS	Texts and Editions for New Testament Study
<i>Text</i>	<i>Textus</i>
T. Levi	Testament of Levi
T. Mos.	Testament of Moses
<i>Tradition</i>	<i>Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought</i>
TSAJ	Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
WW	<i>Word and World</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

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Introduction

Esther is a book set in the center of the Persian Empire. It has a king, two queens, and courtiers for its main characters, and demonstrations of imperial power abound in the plot. But while it cannot be denied that Esther is a book about empire, scholarly discussions of empire and its negotiation in Esther have been minimal. Empire in Esther has only been considered a minor detail to explore but never analyzed as the book's main actor, stage, setting, plot complication, and denouement.

In this study I provide a synchronic reading of the Septuagint version of Esther (hereafter referred to as LXX Esther) utilizing an imperial-critical approach that foregrounds the exertion and negotiation of Persian imperial power with attention to the performance of gender within the interplay of power. This reading of LXX Esther is primarily literary in nature and focuses on the world of the text. In the reading I foreground the imperial context of the Persian Empire as it is portrayed in the narrative of the book and place it in dialogue with social-scientific models and postcolonial concepts that illustrate the structures of empire and the varied forms of its negotiation. In addition, I demonstrate that the performances of gender depicted in the narrative are inextricably intertwined with the structures and negotiation of imperial power, most prevalently the interconnected nature of hegemonic masculinity and Persian imperial power.

While I focus primarily on a literary reading of the exertion of imperial power and its negotiation in LXX Esther, I also argue that the negotiation with the Persian Empire literarily present in LXX Esther has multiple points of connection with the range of imperial power experienced by Jewish people in the late Second Temple period. Though precise dating of the translation/compilation/writing of LXX Esther is difficult to achieve, I establish two potential reading locations for the earliest readers of LXX Esther in Ptolemaic Alexandria and Hasmonean Judea in the early first century BCE. These locations provide settings for sociohistorical connec-

tions with a literary reading of LXX Esther through the lenses of empire and gender and demonstrate why such a reading is plausible.

I have chosen to focus my reading on LXX Esther because I find that when read synchronically with the Additions in their integrated locations, an added emphasis on Persian imperial presence and its negotiation is found. Additions B and E are copies of imperial edicts that give further voice to imperial power; Additions C and D offer internal reflections from the characters of Mordecai and Esther that reveal the motivations behind their actions of negotiation; and Additions A and F contain apocalyptic themes similar to the apocalyptic literature of the late Second Temple period, which has been demonstrated to reflect imperial negotiation.¹ The same case may be constructed for reading the Greek Alpha text of Esther (hereafter referred to as AT Esther) through the same lenses. However, manuscript evidence for AT Esther, only surviving in four manuscripts, is scant when compared to the more widely known LXX Esther, which survives in thirty-six manuscripts.² Because I seek to offer a reading of LXX Esther that would have been plausible for historical contexts shaped by imperial power, I choose to focus on the more widely known and evidenced text. Additionally, while AT Esther has been the subject of significant work, contemporary scholarly attention to LXX Esther has been negligible. Emanuel Tov writes, “It can be said that the Septuagint version of Esther has been the stepchild of LXX research over the past half century.”³ With a synchronic reading through the lenses of empire and gender, I seek to add a new voice to the minimal conversation surrounding LXX Esther.

In order to conduct this reading of LXX Esther, the first chapter of this study provides a framework for locating LXX Esther and defining

1. Anthea Portier-Young, *Apocalypse against Empire: Theologies of Resistance in Early Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011); Richard A. Horsley, *Scribes, Visionaries, and the Politics of Second Temple Judea* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007); and Horsley, *Revolt of the Scribes: Resistance and Apocalyptic Origins* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010).

2. Karen H. Jobes, *The Alpha-Text of Esther: Its Character and Relationship to the Masoretic Text*, SBLDS 153 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 1–2.

3. Emanuel Tov, “The LXX Translation of Esther: A Paraphrastic Translation of MT or a Free Translation of a Rewritten Version?” in *Empsychoi Logoi: Religious Innovations in Antiquity*, *Studies in Honour of Pieter Willem van der Horst*, ed. A. Houtman, Albert de Jong, and Magdalena Wilhelmina Misset-van de Weg, AGJU 73 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 507.

the imperial-critical approach utilized, with considerable attention to the intersections between empire and gender studies. After this opening chapter, chapters 2 through 8 provide the synchronic reading of LXX Esther that is interspersed with connections to early readers in their imperial contexts. Chapter 2 offers interpretation of Addition A's framing of LXX Esther by introducing Mordecai and establishing the subsequent narrative as a contest for hegemonic masculinity between Artaxerxes and God waged by their representatives: Haman for Artaxerxes and Mordecai for God (11:2–12; 12:1–6). Chapter 3 considers the initial depiction of Artaxerxes and his imperial power and describes Vashti's negotiation of defiance to imperial power (1:1–12a). Chapter 4 continues by examining the imperial responses to Vashti's defiance that function to stabilize threatened hegemonic and complicit masculinities, but also create opportunities for multivalent negotiation (1:12b–2:20). Chapter 5 explores Mordecai's shifting methodology of imperial negotiation toward public defiance, and reads the edict of extermination as an imperial response to the threat that Mordecai's defiance created (2:21–3:13; 13:1–7; 3:14). Chapter 6 analyzes the public and private responses to the edict of extermination as subordinate transcripts of negotiation. These transcripts include the public responses of the Susaites, Mordecai, and Persian Jews, the private responses of Mordecai and Esther's conversation, and the prayers of Mordecai and Esther (3:15–4:17; 13:8–14:19). Chapter 7 describes Esther's initial negotiation with Artaxerxes on behalf of her people and as a representative of God. Esther's first negotiation includes flattery, euphemism, deference, and most pervasively, performances of feminine frailty and sexuality, which function as anonymity (15:1–16; 5:3–6:13). Chapter 8 elucidates Esther's additional two acts of negotiation with Artaxerxes, which utilize methodology similar to her first negotiation, and which result in the deliverance of her people and a victory for God, though in mimicry and ambivalence (6:14–8:12; 16:1–24; 8:13–14). The final section of chapter 8, then, provides brief comment on the aftermath of Esther's successful negotiation and the concluding notes of LXX Esther that further reinscribe power and demonstrate ambivalence (8:15–11:1).