ESTHER 3:8, Credit, an old Jewish innovation

ישנו עם אחד מפוזר ומפורד בין העמים בכל מדינות מלכותך

As we explained yesterday, the Jews were deported from Israel in 586 BCE. At that time, more than 100,000 Jews were living in the Babylonian Empire. The Jews were second class citizens, virtual prisoners of war of the Babylonians. But the Jewish resilience prevailed. Not only they did not assimilate but in a few decades, especially with the surge of the Persian Empire (538 BCE), the Jews began to thrive. While in Israel, for centuries, the Jews dedicated mainly to agriculture, now they discovered a new enterprise: trade. The huge Persian Empire was a perfect international free-trade-zone. Some examples.

According to Samuel Kurinsky (see below) the Jews discovered how to produce glass (from sand) including ornamental glass-beads. The Jews exported glass-beads to China in exchange for gold and silver mining rights.

The Jews also exported to China linen, made in Israel, (thus helping their brothers in Yerushalayim) and imported Chinese silk. Kurinsky explains that Chinese people fancied linen as much as the west fancied Chinese silk. Because of the international network they developed, Jews were very prominent in the famous Silk Road. "…the Jewish enclaves within the region, formed the hub of a network of trade routes that fanned out across Asia to the East and West. Jewish merchants and artisans established colonies at strategic points along those routes….".

Jews were also very strong in the spices trade. They imported exotic spices from China and India, which were in high demand in the west.

But all scholars agree that the most successful Jewish enterprise was "credit". We have records, almost 900 clay tablets, of two families of Jewish bankers, among them the

Murashu family. (see **this**). Imagine promissory notes, written in Hebrew, that were recognized and honored by other Jewish merchants and financiers in the remote corners of the Persian Empire, which extended from India-China to Sudan-Ethiopia. "Jewish bankers made finance capital a factor of Persian industrial development and initiated a system of credit that Jewish traders wove into the world economy. The surviving records of two Jewish banking families are among the most revealing documents of the Persian period. Jews supplied the credit and capital for the expanding economy of the region."
Probably referring to this international trade-hub, Haman described the Jews to Ahashverosh with great accuracy (Esther 3:8)"*There is a certain people spread and dispersed among the peoples, in all the provinces of your kingdom*…"
It seems that by the time of Ahashverosh, the Jews in the Persian Empire were economically successful. This could also explain why the majority of the Jewish population (probably over 200,000 Jews) choose to remain in the prosperous Diaspora instead of joining those who returned to Erets Israel in 538 BCE.
For more information about the innovations and entrepreneurship of the Jews in their first diaspora read: "Samuel Kurinsky – The eighth day: the hidden history of the Jewish contribution to civilization"