ESTHER 1:1-3: Who was Ahashverosh?

To appreciate a little better the story of Megillat Esther, we are analyzing some historical data that will help us understand the events recounted in this wonderful book.
First, we will focus on identifying Ahashverosh, which is also the intention of the first pasuq (biblical verse) of the Megilla. With this data, I think we will better realize the magnitude of the miracle of Purim.
The ancient tradition of the Jews of Iran is that King Ahashverosh was the emperor who in Persian language is known as "Khashayarsha". And Khashayarsha is none other than the famous King Xerxes (also known among Gentiles as "Ahasuerus"), who reigned from 486-465, before the common era.
Cyrus (reigned 559-529 BCE) was the first Persian emperor. Then followed his son Cambyses (528-521 BCE), and then the famous Darius (521-486 BCE), the predecessor of Ahashverosh. Already at the time of Cyrus, the Persian Empire was huge and reached all the way to India (in Hebrew "Hoddu"). But Darius expanded it further, conquering several civilizations of North Africa: Egypt, Libya, Sudan, and Ethiopia (in Hebrew "Kush"). This was the huge empire inherited by Ahashverosh.
The Megilla begins with this description. The first pasuq of the Megilla reads:
ESTHER 1: 1 *"And it came to pass in the days of Ahashverosh, the Ahashverosh who reigned from India to Ethiopia, a total of 127 provinces."*
Rabbi Moshe Almosnino, in his extraordinary book on the Megillot "Yede Moshe" explains why the Megilla started with this information, which might seem superfluous. As discussed yesterday, the Persian Empire was the largest known to humankind, and it was never larger than in the times of Ahashverosh. This information is relevant to the story of Purim. Because now we know that ALL the Jews of that time lived under the Persian empire. And when Haman decreed the elimination of the "Persian Jews", he did not target just the Jews of Shushan, but absolutely all the Jewish people. As this pasuq says, the Kingdom of Ahashverosh extended to Israel

and it even included Egypt, where it is estimated that there were some Jewish colonies. IN THE TIME OF AHASHVEROSH THERE WERE NO JEWS LIVING OUTSIDE THE PERSIAN EMPIRE. That gives us an idea first, of the magnitude of the danger experienced by the Jewish people during Purim: I think that with the exception of the Shoah, there was never a time the Jewish people were so close to an impending and total elimination. Second, as Rabbi Almosnino says, this fact helps us to appreciate even more the *"godel hanes"*, i.e., the extraordinary Providential protection HaShem granted us, saving us from total extermination.

ESTHER 1: 3. *"In the third year of his reign, [Ahashverosh] made a feast for all his nobles and officials: all the army officers of Persia and Media, and the princes and nobles of the provinces"*

Although the Kingdom of Ahashverosh was very large, for the emperors it was never enough. Darius had left an incomplete mission: to conquer Europe. And the gateway to the conquest of Europe was Greece. Darius died before he could conquer Greece. Ahashverosh then, had as the main goal of his life to conquer Greece.

Ahashverosh or Xerxes is known in world history for leading the largest military expedition in the history of mankind. According to Herodotus, who is considered the father of modern history (and who began his career with the story of Xerxes) the Persian emperor prepared an army of 5 million (to be more precise: 5,283,220 men) between soldiers and auxiliaries, to conquer Greece (He ultimately failed!).

In its third pasuq the Megilla tells us that Ahashverosh made a feast which lasted for six months, and then he threw another party that lasted for seven days. Some say that the first party was actually a "smokescreen" to bring together all the rulers and the generals of the Empire, and spend together six months organizing the army of 5 million soldiers.

There are two facts in the Megilla that seem to corroborate this theory.

1.The first guests mentioned in this pasuq are indeed the Military chiefs of Persia and Media (the Medes were allies of the Persians).

2. This would also explain why Ahashverosh, who was very fond of alcohol, got drunk only on the last day of the second

party: as if during the first six months Ahashverosh, the commander in chief of the army, had to be sober and lucid not to lose any detail of the preparation of this monumental military expedition. After six months of intensive work, the monarch allowed himself to celebrate for seven days, without any limitations. Historical data also seems to confirm the theory of the smokescreen, as it is estimated that Ahashverosh began preparing his expedition in 483 BC (see this), that is the third year of his reign, as it is mentioned with exquisite precision in our Megilla .
To be continued…