ESTHER 2:16 The Four Missing Years in The Megila

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The first words of the book of Esther mentions a date: The third year of Ahashverosh. *“And it happened in the days of Ahashverosh, the one who reigned from India to Ethiopia, a total of 127 provinces, in the third year of his reign, the king made a feast to [entertain] all his ministers and subjects, the armies of Persia and Media, the governors and the leaders of the provinces, for 180 days … “*

This party was followed by another more modest celebration of only seven days, to which all the people of Shushan were invited. It was in this second celebration, during the last day of festivities, that Ahashverosh got drunk and sent for his wife Vashti to show off her beauty. Vashti refused to obey the king’s order, and then, according to the provisions of the rigid Persian law, the king had to order her dethronement (and possibly her execution).

The next time-reference is found in the second chapter. The subjects of the king organize the search for the next queen, and bring, in some cases by force, all the young and pretty girls of the empire, for the king to select one of them as his consort. On that occasion, Esther, a young Jewish woman, orphan of father and mother, was chosen by the king. The text indicates the new date when it describes the coronation of Esther: *“On the tenth month, Tebet, of the seventh year of the reign of Ahashverosh.“*

Unlike what happens with other Biblical books, the book of Esther can be confronted to numerous contemporary non-Jewish

historical sources, that not only confirm the historical accuracy of Megillat Esther but also help us to understand some apparent “loopholes” in the text.

From the third year the Megillah jumps to the seventh year. Why? What happened during those 4 lost years?

Let’s see.

First of all we must remember the identity of Ahashverosh. And for that, nobody better than the Jews of Iran, direct descendants of the protagonists of the Purim story. Persian Jews identify King Ahashverosh with “Khashayarsha”, the fourth Persian emperor. Known in English as “Xerxes”, or Ahasuerus, who reigned between the years 486-465 before the common era.

Ahashverosh is famous in world history for having organized, directed and led in person the largest military expedition in the history of mankind, trying to defeat Greece and thus expand the Persian Empire to the rest of Europe.

The Greek historian Herodotus (484-425, BC, considered the father of modern history) begins his detailed historical accounts with Ahashverosh and his attempted invasion of Greece. He says that the Persian emperor prepared an army of five million souls. To be more precise: 5,283,220 men, between soldiers and auxiliaries of soldiers. Apart from a fleet of 1,207 ships, which accompanied the army from the coast.

How long did that war last?

According to Herodotus, 4 years! Including the intense preparations for an invasion of such magnitude, for example the colossal construction of two floating bridges in the Bosphorus Strait. See here .

Even though Ahashverosh conquered and reduced Athens to ashes, his invasion of Greece failed miserably. Ahashverosh fell into a trap set by the Greek general Themistocles, tempting him to

enter with his ships in the Strait of Salamis. There, Ahashverosh lost about 500 ships, and decided then to retire and return, defeated, to Persia.

Since then Ahashverosh gave up his conquest of Greece and instead dedicated himself to supervise pharaonic constructions and endless extensions of his palace.

Now we can better understand several things mentioned in Megillat Esther.

1. That the book of Esther, with exquisite historical precision, does not mention those four years (that is, from 483 to 479 BCE) since Ahashverosh was not in the palace but overseas, training, building and fighting (also remember that "officially" the emperor is *the main protagonist* of Megillat Esther).

2. It is probable that the first "party" mentioned was not a party but an intense "strategic gathering" where the emperor summoned the armies, from all corners of the empire, to prepare his ambitious military campaign. Herodotus relates that in the army of Ahashverosh there were soldiers from 46 nations (including Yehudim). In the picture above, you can see a Persian relief showing the ethnic variety of the soldiers of Ahashverosh. The most important evidence that shows that this party was not a normal celebration is that the guests were mainly the armies of Persia and Media (□□□□ □□□ □□□). Also, it is striking that the text does not describe the sumptuous details of this "party", as it does with the next celebration, where the decorations, the alcoholic beverage, the luxurious utensils that were used to serve and drink the wine are mentioned, etc.

3. It is possible that in this case "party" is a euphemism for a "gathering". We explained last time that Esther's text seems to have been written with local sensitivities in mind. It is not surprising then, that the Megilla would not mention (or

risk to remind the Persian rulers) the preparation of the military expedition that failed and that everyone preferred to forget …