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ANONYMOUS, Excerpts from *Midrash Esther Rabbah Chapters 1-5*
In Hebrew, manuscript on paper
Ottoman Empire, sixteenth century

i + 23 + i leaves on paper (most likely unmarked non-European/Ottoman paper, but it is possible that it once included watermarks that are now lost due to damage and remounting of the leaves), modern endpapers with watermark, "Al Masso," modern foliation in pencil, complete (collation i-v⁴ vi² vii² [-2, one leaf seemingly cancelled with no loss of text]), catchwords on ff. 5v and 15v reflect original quire structure, unruled (justification 194-183 x 130-120 mm.), written with biblical passages in Sephardic square script and midrashic commentaries in Sephardic semi-cursive script in 24-28 long lines, possibly, but not certainly, by more than one scribe, the lines of text on f. 23v narrows gradually from the fourteenth line through the twenty-third, before finally returning to the standard length in the twenty-fourth line, creating a shape resembling a goblet, extensively restored, all leaves were removed from the original codex due to damage to the gutters and remargined, and the quires were then re sewn, some loss of text in the gutters due to repairs, evidence of water or mold damage with staining and loss to text, corners of paper rounded. Bound in eighteenth-century(?) three-quarters vellum over paste paper boards. Dimensions 260 x 195 mm.

This is an attractive manuscript, copied in a beautiful Sephardic script, that contains commentaries on the first five chapters of the book of Esther, the biblical book telling the story of the heroic Queen Esther, one of the seven female prophets of Israel. It contains an extensive prayer of Esther (ff. 20v-22) in the middle of the Midrashic commentary to ch. 5:1. This prayer may be unique and should be studied further with comparison to other extant manuscripts. The text differs from the standard printed editions with numerous spelling variants, and textual variants.

PROVENANCE

1. Our manuscript lacks a colophon and bears no signs of censorship: the National Library of Israel has catalogued it as sixteenth century (Online Resources). Sephardic script of the type in this manuscript is notoriously difficult to localize due to the widespread nature of the Sephardic Diaspora post-1492, and there are no telltale signs of a North African provenance. Thus, we can conclude only that it seems most likely that this was copied somewhere in the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century, perhaps in one of the major centers of Jewish life in the Ottoman Empire like Salonika or Constantinople, or in a smaller community such as Smyrna/Izmir or Adrianople/Edirne.
2. Front flyleaf, f. 1, in pencil "42737," and Hebrew pen trials.
3. Belonged to Michael Krupp (b. 1938), Jerusalem, MS 4234 (recorded in the National Library of Israel's KTIV database); Krupp is a German Protestant minister, who lived in Israel. Among his publications are books on the Talmud and Zionism (Online Resources).

TEXT

ff. 1-23v, [Excerpts from *Midrash Esther Rabbah* chapters 1-5], incipit: "va-yehi bi-yemei ahashverosh hu ahashverosh ha-molekh me-hodu ve-ad kush sheva ve-esrim u-me'ah medinah. Shemu'el patah lah pitha le-hai parsheta ... va-tomer lo zeresh ishto ve-kol ohavav ya'asu ets gavoah hamishim ammah u-ba-boker emor la-melekh ve-yitlu et mordokhai alav u-bo im ha-melekh el ha-mishteh sameah va-yitav ha-davar lifnei haman va-ya'as ha-e[ts]."

Esther Rabbah is part of a group of exegetical and homiletical works called *Midrash Rabbah*, ranging in date from the fourth to the eleventh century. These works comment upon a biblical book verse by verse, weaving together materials from Rabbinic literature such as the Talmud with later literary and theological interpretations which seek to expand upon the biblical text. *Esther Rabbah* in particular includes materials from the sixth to the eleventh century and draws upon Talmudic materials known colloquially as the Babylonian Esther Midrash, along with two exegetical Aramaic vernacular translations (*Targum*) called *Targum Risbon* and *Targum Sheni*.

Six primary manuscripts of *Esther Rabbah* are extant and formed the basis for the critical edition published by Yosef Tabory and Arnon Atzmon (Jerusalem, 2014). The earliest dates to 1291 (Paris, BnF MS hebr. 149) with most dating from the fourteenth-sixteenth centuries. The first printed edition is Constantinople, 1517, while the standard edition is Vilna, 1878.

The most significant feature of the present manuscript is the Prayer of Queen Esther on ff. 20v-21. The biblical book of Esther notably lacks any overtly religious elements, especially prayer. The Septuagint version of Esther seeks to rework the book in the model of Daniel, adding several prayers by Mordechai and Esther. The two *Targum* traditions of Esther likewise include significant additions to the text and prayers. The prayer in our text has not been previously studied and a thorough comparison to Targumic and Midrashic materials is desirable.

Esther, the wife of King Ahasuerus, was one of the seven prophetesses of Israel. Thanks to her intercession, with the help of her uncle Mordechai, the Jews of the Persian empire were saved from annihilation by Haman, a miracle commemorated each year at Purim. When Esther appeared before King Ahasuerus to plead her case, she dressed in special robes, and composed the prayer known as "Esther's prayer" (as noted above, this prayer is not found in the Hebrew text of Esther).

LITERATURE

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Strack, Hermann Leberecht, and Gunter Stemberger. *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 2d. ed., translated by Markus N. A. Bockmuehl, Minneapolis, 1992.

Tabory, Joseph, and Arnon Atzmon, eds. *Midrash Esther Rabbah*. Jerusalem, 2014.

ONLINE RESOURCES

This manuscript is described:

https://www.nli.org.il/en/discover/manuscripts/hebrew-manuscripts/itempage?docId=PNX_MANUSCRIPTS990036747550205171&vid=MANUSCRIPTS&scope=PNX_MANUSCRIPTS&SearchTxt=990036747550205171.

"Michael Krupp," Wikipedia entry

https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Krupp

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