



AHASUREUS

AHASUREUS, name of a Persian king in pre-Christian Jewish tradition; it appears in the biblical books of Esther (1.1 et passim), Ezra (4.6), and Daniel (9.1) and in the apocryphal book of Tobit (14.15). In the Greek text of Esther, the Persian king's name is **Artaxerxes** (presumably Artaxerxes I, 465-424 B.C.), but it is impossible to equate the Old Persian for Artaxerxes (Artaxšaça) with the Hebrew (see below), which is rendered as Ahasuerus. In the Tobit passage, Nebuchadnezzar and Ahasuerus (Greek *Asuēros*) are said to have captured and destroyed Nineveh (612 B.C.); in this instance Ahasuerus can only mean Cyaxares the Mede (Herodotus 1.103, 106). In the text of Tobit found in Codex Sinaiticus, the Median king's name in 14.15 is given as Achiacharos. The name Ahasuerus (Hebrew ^a*ḥašwerōš*) appears to represent Old Persian Xšayaršā, the son and successor of Darius I, whose name the Greeks rendered by Xerxes (Herodotus 7.2-3). In Ezra 4.6, Xerxes is thought of as ruling between Darius I and Artaxerxes I, which is the correct sequence. In Daniel 9.1 there is a problematic reference to the Mede Ahasuerus, father of Darius. No Mede known to us ever bore the name Xerxes (Ahasuerus), nor did any Mede ever have a son named Darius. In the book of Esther, Ahasuerus is described as reigning "from India to Ethiopia over 126 provinces" and as having "laid tribute on the land and on the coastlands of the sea." Nothing is said of the king's unsuccessful attack on the Greek world, nor of his building activities at Persepolis. The biblical writer is concerned only with the events connected with the Jewess Esther, who had replaced Vašti as queen, and with Esther's part in rescuing the Jews in Persia from a pogrom planned by the wicked Haman. There may be some factual nucleus behind the Esther narrative, but



the book in its present form displays such inaccuracies and inconsistencies that it must be described as a piece of historical fiction. According to Herodotus, who knows nothing of either Vašti or Esther, Xerxes's queen was [Amestris](#), the daughter of Otanes (7.61, 114).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Given in the text.