



HAMAN

HAMAN, the chief courtier of King Ahasuerus (Xerxes, Xšayārša; q.v.), according to the story of the Book of Esther in the Hebrew Bible. He is portrayed as the villain of the narrative: He took a dislike to Mordecai, who was at the court of the king but did not pay his respects to Haman by bowing to him. In revenge he arranged to have all the Jews in the kingdom killed, and to hang Mordecai. His downfall came as a result of the intervention of Queen Esther, who had been raised by Mordecai, and who got King Ahasuerus to revoke Haman's designs. The end of the story is that Haman and his ten sons were hanged at the king's command, and Mordecai was elevated to Haman's position. The story of the Book of Esther has not been corroborated by historical sources, and the figure of Haman could well be fictitious. At the same time, as with several other details in the story, it seems that his name could fit in with the setting of the 5th century B.C.E.

Haman is said to be the son of Hammedatha the Agagite. The meaning of his name is not clear, and several explanations have been offered for it. One possibility is that the name is derived from that of his father, perhaps as a hypocorism (Scheftelowitz, I, pp. 43 f.; Bogolyubov, p. 212). A derivation from the Elamite proper name *humpan* has also been proposed (Zadok, pp. 20 f.). The patronym could be interpreted as a variant of Hauma-dāta "created (or given) by (the god) Haoma." The epithet Agagite can be taken to be connected with the name of the king of the Amalekites, a semi-mythical people whose traces vanish from history after the ancient period of the wanderings of the Israelites in the desert and the early kingdom. This had become a symbolic



name for the enemies of the Jewish people. Assuming that Haman, his patronym, and his epithet fit in with the period under consideration, however, it makes better sense to explain the epithet not by reference to the Amalekites but from Elamite *a-ga-ga*, *ag-ga-ga* (as done by Zadok, p. 21).

The names of the ten sons of Haman, enumerated in the Book of Esther (9:7-9), have been variously interpreted in terms of their possible Iranian forms. The names as given in the Biblical text are Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vaizatha. The last name seems clearly to be *Vahya-zāta- “born of the better one,” and some of the other names can also be reasonably interpreted as Iranian, but it is difficult to notice a clear pattern of Iranian forms in this list.

Hāmān is a figure in the Qur’ān and in Muslim tradition. He appears in the Qur’ān as an advisor to Fer’awn (Pharaoh of Egypt), and he is said to have built a tower which was to enable Pharaoh to reach the God of Moses (Qur’ān 28:38; 40:38 f.).

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