

# Introduction

While for Jews, the Esther scroll is a veritable best seller, read every year on the carnivalesque festival of Purim, in Christian circles this work is relatively unfamiliar.

We can see the book, first of all, as a short historical novel with a well-constructed plot that clearly distinguishes good and bad. The characters are types, serving a “psychological” function that sometimes plays out in a delicious manner. Suspense, humor, and irony are not lacking, and neither are sex and violence.

But beyond this first simple glance, this work raises interesting and challenging questions: Why do such different versions of Esther exist? In what historical context was it composed and what does it say about ideas circulating at that time? How can we understand themes that, despite their fictionalized treatment, are in reality tragic and raise questions that still seem very contemporary?

The book of Esther, like most biblical books, is not the work of a single author, but the result of authors and successive editors over the course of time. They sought to transmit the traditions and foundational narratives of their community by reworking, correcting, and contemporizing them.

The Text

We have several different forms of the book of Esther: the Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT), which is part of the Jewish and Protestant Bibles, and two ancient Greek translations that are considerably longer. One of these, the LXX, is canonical in Catholic and Orthodox Bibles.

This commentary considers the textual diversity of the work and highlights how it was produced. It first discusses the editorial process that resulted in the Masoretic form of the work. According to the hypothesis developed here, one of the Greek textual forms – the Alpha Text (AT) – is the translation of a Hebrew *Proto-Esther* which, reworked mainly by proto-Masoretic editors, became the MT. Then, after the commentary on the Hebrew text, the commentary presents the supplemental sections that are part of the Greek texts.

The book of Esther provides fascinating information on the thought of ancient Judaism. It emanated from Jewish groups profoundly marked by the dominant culture of the Hellenistic world.

History of Ideas

According to our hypothesis, the oldest literary stratum was developed by diaspora Jews living in an urban Hellenistic context in Ptolemaic Egypt in the third century BCE. The main proto-masoretic editing reworked this text in the 2nd century in Judea after the Maccabean conflict between traditional Jewish circles and Hellenistic tyrants.

The book of Esther is sensitive to Hellenistic culture and in dialogue with it. The authors and the editors put into play a novelesque plot situated in the ancient Persian Empire. They describe this empire in a fashion very similar to the way the Greeks represented this distant and powerful oriental empire. At a moment when the Greek world took pleasure in composing narratives set in Persia, whether “Persica” or large historiographies, the Jews composed their book of Esther by using the same codes as Greek literature about Persia.

The Jews who conceived Esther show simultaneously their profound cultural similarity to the Greeks, as well as the tensions opposing them. This “dialogue”

with Hellenistic culture is often benevolent, notably when the book shows that the Jews share with the Greeks the ideals of liberty, courage, and fidelity to their god(s). It is also sometimes very harsh, in particular when it denounces the tyrannical diversions of Hellenistic sovereigns of whom Antiochus IV is the archetype, in ironizing upon the functioning of the Persian Empire.

**Themes** The book of Esther evokes problems of identity that may seem familiar to immigrants or their descendants, to people within marginalized communities, or simply to those whose convictions are different from a “majority” from which they feel foreign. Indeed, this narrative stages characters who, in a world marked by a culture different from their own, are at first tempted to conceal their identity before being obliged to reveal and defend it.

The oppression of minorities in general, and of Jews in particular, probably constitutes the central theme of this work, which in view of European history in the twentieth century seems prophetic. In just a few verses placed on the lips of the wretched Haman (3:8-9), the narrative denounces a discriminatory and terrifying rhetoric, consisting of a critique of the so-called harmful nature of the customs of people who have been dehumanized, and who are presented as dangerous “foreigners.” Then the consequences of the almost light and naive approval by the royal power of this discourse of exclusion are put into action over a long period, showing how difficult it is to stop the mechanics of genocidal horror once they have been engaged. Without doubt it was, it is, and always shall be urgent to combat from its inception any exclusionary discourse.

Through the different attitudes of its heroes, the narrative also evokes strategies of resistance. Mordecai first faces his enemy with dignity and pacifism: he does not attack him, but instead has the courage to remain loyal to himself and to refuse obstinately to prostrate himself. Esther uses with cunning courage and intelligence the few powers at her disposal to convince the sovereign to enforce justice and to not let horror persist. Finally – and it is here that one aspect of the work offends the sensibilities of certain readers – when justice and legal action are unable to stop the terror, it seems that war must ensue. The authors of the work assuredly knew quite well that war is always terrible. They only legitimated the one at the end of the book because it is a matter of self-defense against genocidal aggressors and because there are no other solutions.

Though allusions to divine action as well as to Jewish rituals are hinted at in the book of Esther, God is not directly mentioned. The editors wish to address a theological message. They seem to invite the readers to ponder whether to identify divine intervention behind this or that event and especially whether God works through the actions of women and men.

## A. *Textual Forms and Editorial Stages*

The book of Esther is attested in very different textual forms. The content of the Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT) differs considerably from the ancient Greek and Latin translations, which contain six long supplemental sections – henceforth, “Additions A to F.” These additions add a dream of Mordecai, prayers, and the contents of decrees. Additionally, two fairly different ancient Greek translations coexist, the

LXX and the Alpha Text (AT). In the parts of the narrative that they share with the Masoretic Text – henceforth the “common narrative” – the Greek version of the LXX is fairly close to the MT while the Alpha Text is much shorter. The Latin translations also present certain distinctive features. The Old Latin (OL) differs from the Hebrew and Greek texts of Esther in both the “common narrative” as well as the additions. The Vulgate starts with a Latin text fairly loyal to the MT, but ends by appending the six additions.

## 1. Accounting for the Textual Diversity of Esther in this Commentary

In a critical commentary on the book of Esther, the diversity of the textual witnesses raises two questions: what textual form is the object of the commentary? And, how can one account for the textual diversity and the complex writing process of the work?

The Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT) is the basis of this commentary. It is the only textual form attested in the original language. The other ancient textual forms of the work are direct or indirect translations from Hebrew originals, with more or fewer variants from the MT.

The Hebrew Masoretic Text as the Primary Form Discussed  
The Other Textual Forms

The non-Masoretic textual forms of Esther, particularly the two primary Greek versions, merit attention. The LXX reflects the text of Esther privileged within the Catholic world. As for the AT, it gives us a better understanding of the editorial steps of the MT, since outside of the six additions, it probably constitutes the translation of a Hebrew text – the *Proto-Esther* – more ancient than the Masoretic Text.

This commentary will integrate the non-Masoretic textual forms in the following fashion. In the “common narrative,” the most significant variants in the LXX – as in the OL and the Vulgate – will be analyzed in the textual notes on the MT. In addition, after the main commentary, a separate chapter will be dedicated to the six additions in the LXX, the AT, and other versions.

The AT will be discussed in sections dedicated to the editorial process of the work, at the end of the commentary on each chapter. A translation and an analysis of *Proto-Esther*, based on the AT, will be presented before comparing the content of this proto-Masoretic text to the MT, in order to highlight the work of the editors who rework it to produce the text of the Masoretic family.

## 2. The Textual Witnesses

### 2.1. The Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT)

The MT of Esther appears in several large codices from the Middle Ages. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the critical editions of the Hebrew Bible reproduce the text of the Codex *Leningradensis* (B 19a Russian National Library) which dates to 1009 CE. BHS and BHQ do likewise.<sup>1</sup> The limited number of textual

1 BHS, the critical edition (1975) is credited to F. MAASS; BHQ (2004), the critical edition is credited to M. SÆBØ.

variants in *Leningradensis* and in other large Masoretic manuscripts show that the Tiberian text of this book is well stabilized.

The Masoretic Text presents a fairly ironic view of the Persian world. It introduces the unusual feature of not explicitly mentioning divine action.

## 2.2. *Esther at Qumran?*

The manuscripts found at Qumran do not contain any fragments from the book of Esther.<sup>2</sup> This surprising observation must be nuanced insofar as several passages in Qumran manuscripts contain phraseology that seems reminiscent of Esther.<sup>3</sup> The absence of citations of Esther at Qumran could indicate that this book was set aside<sup>4</sup> or could simply result from the chance nature of the discoveries.<sup>5</sup>

Although the Masoretic textual form is not attested at Qumran and the oldest Masoretic manuscripts date to the Middle Ages, it is evident that the Masoretic text type was widely known in antiquity, as shown by the midrashic and targumic materials, as well as the Greek, Syriac, and Latin translations.

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- 2 Eugene Charles ULRICH, *The Biblical Qumran Scrolls: Transcriptions and Textual Variants* (VTSup 134), Leiden/Boston, 2010, does not mention any fragment from Esther. Józef Tadeusz MILIK, "Les modèles araméens du livre d'Esther dans la grotte 4 de Qoumrân," *RdQ* 59/15 (1992), 321-399 incorrectly identifies a *Proto-Esther* in 4Q550 = 4QpEsth (see the critiques John Joseph COLLINS and Deborah A. GREEN, "The Tales from the Persian Court (4Q550a-e)," in *Antikes Judentum und Frühes Christentum: Festschrift für Hartmut Stegemann zum 65. Geburtstag* (BZNW 97), B. KOLLMANN, W. REINBOLD and A. STEUDEL (eds.), Berlin, 1999, 39-50; Sidnie WHITE CRAWFORD, "Has Esther been found at Qumran? 4QProto-Esther and the Esther Corpus," *RdQ* 17 (1996), 307-325; KOSSMANN, *Esthernovelle*, 257-291; Kristin DE TROYER, "Once more, the So-called Esther Fragments of Cave 4," *RdQ* 19 (2000), 401-422; Michael G. WECHSLER, "Two Para-Biblical Novellae from Qumran Cave 4: A Reevaluation of 4Q550," *DSD* 7 (2000), 130-172.
  - 3 Joshua FINKEL, "The Author of the Genesis Apocryphon Knew the Book of Esther (Hebrew)," in *Essays on the Dead Sea Scrolls, in Memory of E.L. Sukenik*, Y. YADIN and C. RABIN (eds.), Jerusalem, 1962, 163-182, estimates that the pericope of Sarah with Pharaoh in 1QapGen 20 is reminiscent of Esther. Other resemblances to Esther at Qumran have been identified by TALMON, "Qumran."
  - 4 Esther could have seemed too violent or not very theological, or could have been unacceptable for liturgical reasons. The Qumran community's rejection of Purim might be because the origins of the festival do not derive from the Torah (MOORE, *Additions*, 160), because in the Qumran calendar the fourteenth of Adar was always on Sabbath (BECKWITH, *Canon*, 290-294; Roger T. BECKWITH, *Calendar, Chronology, and Worship: Studies in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, Leiden/Boston, 2005, 28-29; BERLIN, *Esther* xlv-xlv; John JARICK, "The Bible's 'Festival Scrolls' among the Dead Sea Scrolls," in *The Scrolls and the Scriptures. Qumran Fifty Years after* (JSPE.S 26), S. E. PORTER and C. A. EVANS (eds.), Sheffield, 170-182, 181), or because this festival was celebrated within Hasmonian circles (Hanan ESHEL, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Hasmonian State* (SDSSRL), Grand Rapids, Jerusalem, 2008 and MIMOUNI, *Judaïsme*, 240).
  - 5 See TALMON, "Qumran," 249-250. In addition, KALIMI, "Fear," 231-232 rightly notes that the small community at Qumran cannot be considered representative of the entirety of Judaism in that era.

### 2.3. The Majority Greek Text of the LXX

The LXX of Esther appears in the large uncials, in a fragmentary fashion in Papyrus 967 (third century CE) and in about thirty minuscule manuscripts. The edition of R. Hanhart<sup>6</sup> uses the sign o' for the majority Greek text. The manuscript tradition of the LXX of Esther is not entirely homogeneous. It is generally considered<sup>7</sup> that *Vaticanus* and Pap. 967 present the oldest text, that the primary minuscules give evidence of two minor revisions, and that a Hexaplaric revision is attested by someone correcting *Sinaiticus* as well as by some additional witnesses.<sup>8</sup>

In the sections that parallel the Hebrew text, it is generally agreed that the LXX constitutes a relatively free translation of a Hebrew substratum that is close to the MT.<sup>9</sup> That said, several variants between the MT and the LXX imply that the Hebrew substratum used by the LXX translators was not completely identical to the Hebrew that gave rise to the consonants of the MT. Glosses were also made on a Hebrew text after the LXX had been translated.<sup>10</sup>

The presence of the six additions (A to F) is the most significant difference between the Masoretic tradition and the LXX. These additions almost always appear in the Greek versions of Esther and in versions dependent upon them.<sup>11</sup> They contain a total 105 verses that add to 167 verses with parallels in the MT. The six additions introduce a whole series of elements absent from the MT. By means of the narrative of Mordecai's dream (Add. A1) and its interpretation (Add. F), the description of Esther's and Mordecai's prayers (Add. C), and the development of the episode of Esther's arrival before the king (Add. D), they stress the theological dimension of the events, explicitly evoking divine action and the piety of the Jewish protagonists. Moreover, the contents of the decree of annihilation of the Jews and the counter-decree (Additions B and E) aim to denounce an anti-Semitic discourse. Furthermore, they demonstrate the loyalty of the Jews to the empire, found in the narrative of the first scheme to be carried out by the eunuchs, and unravelled by Mordecai (Add. A2). A colophon (F,11) specifies the identity of the author of the manuscript and its date.

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6 HANHART (ed.), *Esther*. This edition introduces in synopsis the LXX and the AT.

7 HANHART (ed.), *Esther*, 45-87 and CAVALIER, *Esther*, 25.

8 One part of the text of *Alexandrinus* and four minuscules.

9 This is the common opinion (cf. CLINES, *Scroll*, 69; MOORE, *Additions*, 162-163; SPOTTORNO, "Beyond," 53; DE TROYER and WACKER, "Esther," 1265; BOYD-TAYLOR, "Esther," 204, 208-210; KAHANA, *Esther*, 441).

10 Among the late corrections of the Hebrew text, the most patent is the identification of Haman as Agagite (cf. the commentary on 3:1).

11 LXX, AT, and all the versions dependant upon the LXX (Latin, Coptic, etc.) present the additions. Jerome knew the additions that he rejected at the end of his Vulgate. Josephus knew some of the additions. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the additions are absent from the targumic texts, the Peshitta, and the Jewish interpretive traditions (Midrash, Mishnah, Talmud). Some elements introduced in the additions are, however, passed over in Midrash Rabbah, and some connections can be traced between Targum Esther II and Addition E (cf. CAVALIER, *Esther*, 39-41).

## 2.4. The Minority Greek Text, the Alpha Text (AT)

The Alpha Text, a Greek version very different from the LXX, is preserved in four manuscripts dating between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries CE.<sup>12</sup> This minority text was sometimes described as “Lucianic.”<sup>13</sup> Hanhart’s critical edition and several others<sup>14</sup> thus use the siglum L. The title “Alpha Text,” used more frequently by recent authors, is preferable.

The numbering of the verses in the AT varies according to different authors.<sup>15</sup> The present commentary will use the following system adapted from Hanhart.

MT	∅	1:1-3:13	∅	3:14-4:17	∅	5:1-2	5:3-7:10	8:1-12	∅	8:13-10:3	∅
LXX	A	1:1-3:13	B	3:14-4:17	C	D	5:3-7:10	8:1-12	E	8:13-10:3	F
AT	A	1:1-3:13	B	3:19-4:12	C	D	5:13-7:14	7:15-21	E	7:33-52	F

In 1:1-3:13 + 3:19-4:12 + 5:13-7:14 the AT corresponds fairly well to the Masoretic narrative of 1:1-7:10 and to its translation in the LXX (1:1-3:13 + 3:14-4:17 + 5:3-7:10<sup>LXX</sup>). One can thus speak of a “common narrative” since these three texts recount approximately the same story. However, although the AT’s narrative sequence is very similar to the MT/LXX, it is a little shorter. Sentences and parts of sentences in the Hebrew MT have no equivalent in the AT, while in the rest of the cases the AT seems to be a literal translation of the MT. Besides the numerous parts of verses absent from the AT,<sup>16</sup> the totality of vv. 1:17-18, 22; 2:10-16, 19-23; 3:12-14; 4:5-8a from the MT have no equivalent in the AT. Outside of the additions, passages in the AT without equivalent in the MT are rare, appearing only in Chapters 6 and 7 (6:4-6a, 13-18; 7:2, 4b-7, 14). Between 1:1 and 7:14, the AT is approximately twenty-five percent shorter than its parallel in the MT, and several motifs in the MT are absent from it. The necessity to conceal one’s Jewishness

12 Manuscripts 19, 93, 108 and 319; presented in HANHART (ed.), *Esther*, 15, JOBES, *Alpha-Text*, Appendice 2 and HAELEWYCK, *Hester*, 71. Manuscripts 93 and 108 present simultaneously the AT and the LXX and Manuscript 392 has a composite text blending the AT with the LXX.

13 This term was imposed in the nineteenth century following the work of DE LAGARDE, *Librorum* and B. JACOB, “Das Buch Esther bei den LXX,” *ZAW* 10 (1890), 241-298, 258-262.

14 HANHART (ed.), *Esther*. This addition presents in synopsis the majority text of the LXX (= o’) and the Alpha Text (=L). For the other printed editions of the AT, cf. CLINES, *Scroll*, 70-71. The designation L for the AT also appears in BARDTKE, *Esther*; CAVALIER, *Esther*; PATON, *Esther*; and others.

15 The system adopted by CLINES, *Scroll* and by the Cambridge edition (BROOKE, *Esther*) for the AT make Chapter 1 into Addition A and thus shift [reassign] the following chapters accordingly. Where RALPHS, *Septuaginta*, is concerned, who only publishes the LXX, he does not write of Additions A to F, but indicates them with a system of letters (Add. A is numbered 1:a-s; Add. B 3:13a-g etc.). See the table in DE TROYER, *Alpha Text*, 13.

16 For details of the elements absent from the AT, see the *Lists of Masoretic “Pluses”* throughout the commentary.

from the foreign court (vv. 2:10-11, 19-20<sup>MT</sup>) does not figure in the AT, and the absurd character of certain customs and of the functioning of the court is much less accentuated. It should also be noted that the verses or parts of verses in the AT that present a strict parallel with the MT are reproduced in a very different manner than in the LXX, so that a direct dependence in these sections of one Greek text upon the other is difficult to defend.<sup>17</sup>

Contrary to what appears in the common narrative, the AT presents Additions A-F in a Greek form close to that of the LXX, which implies that in these sections, the Greek texts depend directly upon one another.<sup>18</sup>

The conclusion of the AT does not introduce the same special features as those in the “common narrative.” In 7:15-21, 33-52<sup>AT</sup> the events in Chapters 8 to 10 of the MT are recounted in a much briefer and fairly different fashion (the irrevocability of the laws does not explain the massacre of the enemies). Several doublets appear.<sup>19</sup> Concerning parallels with the other textual witnesses, one can see that only vv. 7:15-16 and 33-34 present constructions similar to the MT (8:1-2, 5, 8, 10) and that it is only thematic similarities that bring 7:17-21<sup>AT</sup> close to 9:6-15<sup>MT</sup> and 10:1-3<sup>MT</sup>. Finally, the rest of the conclusion of the AT presents Greek phraseology very close to that of the LXX. 7:35-38<sup>AT</sup> is close to E,17-19<sup>LXX</sup> and 7:39-52 presents a text that is shorter than 8:15-10:3<sup>LXX</sup>, but contains Greek constructions that are very close.

To summarize, in the “common narrative” in 1:1-7:14<sup>AT</sup>, the AT corresponds to the general order of the MT, while presenting a shorter text, in which the Greek does not seem to have a direct connection to the LXX. With regard to the six additions, the AT is close to the LXX. Where the conclusion of 7:15-21, 33-52<sup>AT</sup> is concerned, it is heterogeneous: some verses (15-16, 33-34) recall what takes place in the common narrative; others are connected very indirectly with what appears in the MT-LXX (7:17-21); and what remains (7:35-52) is briefer than the text of the LXX of E,17-19 and 8:15-10:3<sup>LXX</sup>, but the Greek within it contains phraseological connections to the LXX.

## 2.5. *Flavius Josephus*

In his *Antiquities* (11.184-296) Flavius Josephus reports the episodes described in the book of Esther.<sup>20</sup> His narrative corresponds in large part to the contents of the MT/LXX. The additions are only partially found in Josephus. Additions B, D, and E are present in a form close to the LXX/AT, the contents of Addition C are only briefly reported, and Additions A and F are absent.

17 The analysis of JOBES, *Alpha-Text*, 147-157 shows that the syntactic identities between the Greek of Chs. 1-7 of the LXX and of the AT are very limited (generally not more than ten percent), see also FOX, *Redaction*, 17-34.

18 The comparison by JOBES, *Alpha-Text*, (149-150, 165 and App. 1) of the six additions in the LXX and the AT shows a strict formal agreement in almost half of the cases.

19 Mordecai obtains power in 7:17<sup>AT</sup> and 7:39-41<sup>AT</sup>, the massacre of enemies appears in 7:21<sup>AT</sup> and in 7:44-46<sup>AT</sup> and the festival is instituted in 7:34<sup>AT</sup> and then in 7:47-49<sup>AT</sup>.

20 For a presentation of the textual witnesses of *Antiquities* 11 and their possible connections, see Nodet: FLAVIUS JOSEPHE, *Antiquités*, Vol. 5 p. viii-xix, xxiv-xxxii.

It is not clear which biblical text Josephus relied upon for his recounting of Esther.<sup>21</sup> His paraphrasing and rewriting of biblical sources seem to depend upon a *Vorlage* that corresponds to either the LXX or the MT or both of these witnesses.<sup>22</sup> The primary elements that distinguish the AT from other textual witnesses are not evident in Josephus.<sup>23</sup>

Josephus's rewriting has several characteristics.<sup>24</sup> Esther and Mordecai live in Babylon, and Esther comes from royal origins (*Ant.* 11.185, 198, 204). Vashti's refusal is explained by a Persian prohibition (*Ant.* 11.191, 205-206). The king remains very much in love with Vashti after having repudiated her (*Ant.* 11.195). The gathering of the young women only involves four hundred women (*Ant.* 11.200). Mordecai reacts with panache when Haman comes seeking him (*Ant.* 11.257-258). The eunuch sees and finds out about the gallows (*Ant.* 11.261). The drawing of lots is omitted as well as the thirty days of Esther's lack of summons. Finally, Josephus, as in the LXX, presents the motif of divine action and emphasizes the Jews' piety (*Ant.* 11.227-233, 237, 268).

Josephus's account shows that the textual complexity of Esther and its traditions were still important at the end of the first century CE.

## 2.6. The Old Latin (OL)

The *Old Latin* (OL) text of Esther is attested in approximately twenty manuscripts from the end of the eighth to the fifteenth centuries CE.<sup>25</sup> Haelewyck's critical edition<sup>26</sup> shows three primary families, of which the closest to the original OL, (R), is attested in MS 151.

Like the LXX and AT, the OL differs from the MT by the presence of "additions." There are an entire series of relatively minor differences in Additions B, D, E, and F between the OL and the Greek witnesses. OL does not present the second part of Addition A, thus avoiding the doubling of the description of the

21 A comparison between JOSEPHUS, *Ant.* 11.184-296 and the other Esther witnesses (MT/LXX/AT), to my knowledge, has never been systematically made, although some information is in HANHART (ed.), *Esther*, 36-38 and in Nodet: FLAVIUS JOSÈPHE, *Antiquités*, Vol. 5, lxvi-lxvii and in the notes in his translation.

22 In the common narrative, JOSEPHUS is sometimes closer to the MT and sometimes to the LXX. In *Antiquities* 11.209, 211 Haman is an "Amalekite," which presupposes the MT (LXX speaks of "Bougaïos"), but the king is identified by Josephus as Artaxerxes, as in the LXX. The Hebrew spelling אֲחִשְׁתֵּרֶשׁ corresponds to the Persian name of Xerxes (not Artaxerxes).

23 The primary "pluses" of the MT and the LXX in relation to the AT appear in Josephus (*Ant.* 11.194 // 1:17-18<sup>MT/LXX</sup>; *Ant.* 11.200-204 // 2:10-16, 19-23<sup>MT/LXX</sup>; *Ant.* 11.228-229 // 4:17<sup>MT/LXX</sup>). The distinctive features of AT's conclusion are not present in Josephus. On the other hand, however, the few "pluses" of the AT (esp. 6:4-6a, 13-18; 7:2, 4b-7, 14 in the AT) are not present in Josephus. The convergences of Josephus with the AT, emphasized by DOROTHY, *Books*, 335 and PATON, *Esther*, 39, remain rare and minor.

24 See Louis H. FELDMAN, "Esther," in *Studies in Josephus' Rewritten Bible* (JSJSup 58), Leiden/Boston/Köln, 1998, 513-538 and Nodet: FLAVIUS JOSÈPHE, *Antiquités*, Vol. 5 p. lxiv-lxv.

25 See the presentation of HAELEWYCK (ed.), *Hester*, 11-17.

26 HAELEWYCK (ed.), *Hester*. An annotated French translation of the OL also appears in the appendix of CAVALIER, *Esther*, 243-266.



eunuchs' plot in 2:21-23. The prayers of Esther and Mordecai in Addition C are shorter. And, a prayer of the Jews (Addition H) which introduces themes figuring in the parts of prayers of Esther and Mordecai, absent from the OL (C,3-5 and 17-21), appears at the end of Chapter 3 in the OL.<sup>27</sup>

Aside from the additions, the text of the OL is much more akin to the LXX/MT than to the AT. The sections of the LXX/MT without parallel in the AT are most often attested by the OL, while practically none of the distinctive features of the AT appear in it.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the OL insists upon certain theological themes. In Chapter 4, it reports in detail the fasting ritual, and in Chapter 6, it emphasizes even more than the LXX that God is at work behind the salvific events reported.<sup>29</sup> The most significant difference between the LXX and the OL concerns the vindictiveness of the work's conclusion, which is largely absent from the OL. The massacre of the enemies of the Jews is not reported at all. The OL does not contain an equivalent to 9:5-19 in the LXX/MT. In the OL, Haman's missives are annulled by the decree sent by Esther and Mordecai (8:8ff.), whose contents are reported in Addition E.

To know whether the OL constitutes a translation that revises a Greek text close to the LXX, or whether it translates a lost Greek text, remains under discussion. But it is clear that the OL does not have the characteristics of the AT and that it must therefore be close to the lineage of the LXX.

## 2.7. The Vulgate

At the start of the fifth century CE, the Vulgate, Jerome's Latin translation, undergoes a radical change in relation to the Old Latin text. The content of Chapters 1:1-10:3 in the Vulgate corresponds closely to some liberties taken in the MT.<sup>30</sup> The six additions are relegated to the end of the text appearing in the chapters between 10:4 to 16:24 (Add. F = 10:4-11:1; A = 11:2-12:6; B = 13:1-7; C = 13:8-14:19; D = 15:4-19; E = 16:1-24). In the Vulgate, the Latin translation of the additions seems to have been based upon a form close to the LXX.<sup>31</sup> The Vulgate thus introduces a "hybrid" text that depends upon the MT for 1:1-10:3, but upon the LXX for the additions.

27 HAELEWYCK (ed.), *Hester*, 90-91 clearly shows this point. He considers that the translator of the LXX integrated the content of Addition H into the prayer of Esther and Mordecai in Addition C. The inverse (the translator of the OL moves part of the contents of Addition C to create Addition H) seems *a priori* just as likely.

28 The large "pluses" of the LXX/MT, with respect to the AT (1:17-18, 22; 2:10-16, 19-23; 3:12-14; 8:1-17) do not appear in the OL. In contrast, the content of some "pluses" in the AT (esp. 6:4-6a, 13-18; 7:2, 4b-7, 14 in the AT) does not appear in the original OL. The conclusion of the OL (Chs. 9-10) is quite different from the LXX/MT but does not introduce the characteristics of the AT.

29 4:16-17<sup>OL</sup> describes at length the fasting practices of the Jews. In Chapter 6 of the OL, divine intervention is mentioned on four occasions (6:1, 2, 6, 12).

30 The manuscript tradition of the Vulgate is complex. See HAELEWYCK (ed.), *Hester*, 19-20, 64-67 and the line H-O of his edition of the OL. For an edition of the Vulgate of Esther cf. *Libri Hester*.

31 HAELEWYCK (ed.), *Hester*, 64; HANHART (ed.), *Esther*, 24.

## 2.8. Other Ancient Versions

The textual tradition of the Syriac version of the Peshitta is relatively homogeneous and deviates little from the MT.<sup>32</sup> The Aramaic textual tradition preserved two targumic texts (Tg. Esth. I and II), both dependent on a textual form close to the MT that is largely paraphrased and developed in a midrashic way. The Coptic-Sahidic, the Ethiopic, and the Armenian versions depend in large part upon the Greek text of the LXX.<sup>33</sup>

## 3. The Work's Editorial Process

The major differences between the MT, the two Greek translations (LXX and AT), and the Latin translations call for an inquiry into the origin of these textual forms and their dependents.

Some points seem certain. Outside of the six additions, the LXX constitutes the translation of a Hebrew original very close to the MT,<sup>34</sup> and must be dated based upon its colophon to the end of the second or beginning of the first century BCE.<sup>35</sup> The six additions absent from the MT did not comprise part of the original narrative but were introduced at a late stage in the work's evolution.

Other points are debated (see below): the relationship between the Alpha Text (AT) on the one hand, and the MT and the LXX on the other hand; whether the original form of the narrative contained the narrative thread that we know; the origins of the additions; and, the origins of the Old Latin (OL).

### 3.1. The Alpha Text (AT), a Late Revision Dependant upon the LXX and/or the MT

One current within Esther studies considers that the AT results from rewriting from within the majority tradition reflected by the LXX and the MT. In the "common narrative," the AT is significantly shorter than the LXX and the MT, which implies that the editor of the AT abbreviated the work.

32 See Olivier MUNNICH, "La Peshitta d'Esther: ses relations textuelles avec le texte massorétique et la Septante," in *L'Ancien Testament en syriaque* (Etudes syriaques 5), F. BRIQUEL CHATONNET and P. LE MOIGNE (eds.), Paris, 2008, 75-90, and PATON, *Esther*, 16-18. For the Peshitta editions of Esther, see CERIANI (ed.), *Translatio*.

33 See HANHART (ed.), *Esther*, 26-36 and C. CAVALIER, *Esther*, p. 28.

34 This large consensus was unconvincingly contested by Paul CARBONARO, "Que pourrait-on ajouter contre un si fieffé menteur? (Contre Apion I,320): Lysimaque et le livre d'Esther," *RB* 118 (2011), 5-37 who thinks that Esther of the LXX would have been translated into Hebrew late.

35 The mention of the "fourth year of the reign of Ptolemy and Cleopatra" in F,11<sup>LXX</sup> would permit a dating in 142, 114-113, 78-77 or 49-48 BCE. See MILLER, *Versions*, 113-119; MOORE, "Additions," 632 and Elias J. BICKERMAN, "The Colophon of the Greek Book of Esther," *JBL* 63 (1944), 339-362; LIEBOWITZ, "Esther," 2-3. This dating was contested by Claudine CAVALIER, "Le 'colophon' d'Esther," *RB* 110 (2003), 167-177 and "Histoire reconstituée d'une transmission: Pourim de Moïse à Dosithée selon Esther F,11," *RB* 110 (2003), 487-496 who thinks that this colophon makes up a part of the literary fiction of the work.