NOTES ON THE GREEK BOOK OF ESTHER*

In his version of Scripture, Jerome brought forth the Book of Esther, as he says, “from the archives of the Hebrews” and rendered it into Latin “just as it stands in Hebrew”. After the end of the Hebrew book, however, he placed six long sections that are found in Greek but not in Hebrew. Accordingly, Luther and then the English translators gathered together these six passages, removed them from their context and relegated them to the “Apocrypha”, as “The Rest of the Chapters of the Book of Esther”. Modern scholars continue to deal with these disconnected “chapters” as if they existed independently of the Greek Book of Esther. In fact, the latter not only adds these 107 verses to the “Scroll of Esther” but also more often than not disagrees with the Hebrew in 163 verses common to both books. The Greek Esther, of which the “Rest Chapters” are integral and essential parts, is not the Megillath Esther, couched in Greek language and letters, but its adaptation designed for the Diaspora.

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* Some abbreviations.

Ginzberg = L. Ginzberg, The Legends of the Jews.
I. S. = Institutions des Séleucides, 1938.
Motzo = B. Motzo, Saggi di Storia e Letterature Giudeo-Ellenistica, 1924.
Motzo (versione): see below n. 7.
RE = Realencyclopädie für class. Altertumswissenschaft.
StM = Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni.
Welles = C.B. Welles, Royal Correspondence in the Hellenistic Period.

1 Hieron, Prolog ad Esther. I quote Paton’s (p. 24) English translation. The expression Hebraica veritas which Jerome often uses (e.g. Prol. Galeat.: quamquam mihi omnino conscius non sim mutasse me quidpiam de Hebraica veritate) does not mean that the Hebrew text alone was correct (as the expression is now understood) but the authentic Hebrew text. See e.g. Hieron. (Praef. in Evang. PL, XXIX, p. 526); sin autem veritas est quaerenda de pluribus (sc. codicibus latinos); Aug. Epist. ad Hieron. (71, 6): si scripturam graecam… latinae veritatis redditis quae in diversis codicibus ita variis est ut tolerari vix posset, etc. The Additions are: A (before 1, 1), The Dream of Mordecai; B (after 3, 13), Artaxerxes’ Edict against the Jews; C (after 4, 17), the Prayers of Mordecai and of Esther; D (after 5, 1): Esther before the King; E (after 8, 12): Artaxerxes’ Edict for the Jews; F (at the end of the book), Interpretation of Mordecai’s dream.
I. Manuscript groups

The Greek Esther was quite popular with Jewish and Christian readers. Added in the Greek Book, the prayer of Esther who was “perfect in faith” was often quoted by Church Fathers, from Clement of Rome onwards. Origen recommended the book as appropriate reading for catechumens.2 Often copied, the Greek Esther circulated in a number of variant forms. Four of these recensions have come down to us.3

1. “K” This text is found in all uncial Mss. and in almost all cursive forms of the Greek Bible as well as in the Chester Beatty Papyrus, written about 250 C.E. Origen (ca. 240 C.E.) based his scholarly revision of the Greek Esther on the same recension.4 The type K also underlies the ancient versions of the book which were made from the Greek into Oriental languages as well as Jerome’s Latin rendering of the “Rest Chapters”. It was obviously the standard text used in the Greek Church, editio vulgata as Jerome calls it. We shall denote this current text by the symbol K (= koine ekdosis).5


