Tradition intended the Book of Esther to be accepted as an accurate and reliable account of events which befell the Jewish exiles in the Persian empire under the reign of King Ahasuerus, who was identified with Xerxes I (486-465) 1). The purported historiographical nature of the book is underlined by its concluding passage, Esth. x 1-3. Here the author deliberately employs technical terminology which is widely used in biblical historiography, especially in the Books of Kings and in Chronicles.

However, modern biblical scholarship has severely doubted the accuracy of the account given in the Esther story and “most scholars nowadays agree that the book in its present form does not relate real historical events” 2). It is a widely, though not universally, held opinion, first propagated by T. D. Michaelis in 1783, that the ‘chronistic’ finale (Esth. x 1-3), which refers the reader to the ‘Chronicles of the Kings of Mede and Persia’ for further information on Ahasuerus and Mordecai, is to be judged a late apposition to the original compilation. Although there is no marked difference in style between the core of the book and the concluding passage 3), certain discrepancies of contents often are deemed sufficient to warrant their separation 4).

The same has been said of the section immediately preceding the

1) The traditional identification recently has been upheld on philological and archaeological grounds by R. Stiehl, “Das Buch Esther”, WZKM 53 (1956), pp. 1 ff.
4) However, D. Daube, “The Last Chapter of Esther”, JQR 37 (1946-47), pp. 139-147, considers ch. x the crowning piece of the story. In it the author of Esther advocates the preference of orderly and regular royal taxation (Esth. x 1) over financial blood-letting and persecution as were proposed by Haman (ib. iii 9; iv 7; vii 4).—Cp. further H. Gunkel, Esther, Tübingen 1916, n. 276.
'finale' which deals with the establishment of Purim as a national festival (ib. ix 20-32). 1)

In the Esther-story itself prominent details were pointed out which are inconsistent with what is known of Persian customs. The rather numerous legendary, even fanciful embellishments of the incidents reported further detract from the historical reliability of the account.

However, there also have been scholarly attempts to uphold the historicity of the Book of Esther. This was done by means of a re-identification of its central figures, and by a re-setting of the occurrences described, in various historical periods and situations with which the details of the Esther story could supposedly better be squared than with the times of Xerxes I. Such an attempt was already made by Josephus (Antiq. XI 6, 11 ff.) who retrojected the whole account into the reign of Cyrus the Great (559-530). Under this king, Mordecai, who had been exiled in 597 B.C.E. according to our book (Esth. ii 6), could have been active without stretching his lifespan to an incredible length, as would be necessary if he was a contemporary of Xerxes I.

Some modern scholars have moved down the chronology of the story into the later Persian period. GUNKEL decided on Darius’ II times (423-404) as the most likely date of its composition 2). J. HOSCHANDER suggests that Ahasuerus should be identified with Artaxerxes II (Memnon, 404-358) 3), whose name, he supposed, initially was mentioned in the story but later was suppressed for political reasons. HOSCHANDER then proceeds to discover in the Book of Esther allusions to historical events which occurred in the reign of this king.

Others defined the Book of Esther as a clever literary fabrication which is but a disguised report on historical facts that came to pass in Hellenistic or in Roman times and were retrojected into the Persian period for reasons of political expediency. Thus H. WILLRICH

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3) J. HOSCHANDER, The Book of Esther, Philadelphia 1923.—Most mss. of LXX give the name of the Persian king as Αρταξέρξης. The same name appears in some cases in the Lucanian version (Esth. ii 16, 21; viii 12), while in others the name is given as Ασσωύρος, Ασσωύρος or Ξέρξης (ib. x 3).