

**THE INTERNATIONAL CRITICAL
COMMENTARY ON THE HOLY
SCRIPTURES OF THE OLD AND
NEW TESTAMENTS; A CRITICAL AND
EXEGETICAL COMMENTARY ON THE
BOOK OF ESTHER**

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LEWIS BAYLES PATON & S. R. DRIVER & A. PLUMMER

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The
International Critical Commentary
on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and
New Testaments.

UNDER THE EDITORSHIP OF

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PREFACE

THE Book of Esther presents no complicated problems of documentary analysis, such as are found in most of the other historical books of the Old Testament. With the possible exception of the concluding verses in 9¹⁰-10³, its unity is recognized by all schools of criticism. It also presents no difficult problems of dating, such as are found in the prophetic books. There is general agreement that it belongs to the Greek period, and probably to the latter part of that period. Questions of composition and age, accordingly, can be dismissed in this case far more rapidly than in other commentaries of the series. On the other hand, the text of the book raises a number of problems that have no parallels in the criticism of the rest of the Old Testament. Beginning with the Greek translation, and continuing through the Old Latin, Vulgate, Josephus, and Peshitto down to the Talmud and Targums, the versions of Esther disclose a number of remarkable additions to the Massoretic text that have no analogies in the versions of other books. These are found in full in none of the commentaries and are not easily accessible to the student, yet they are important both for the history of the text and for the history of exegesis.

This being the case, it is proper that a critical commentary should present these variations completely, and should discuss their textual and exegetical value. In preparing my apparatus, I soon discovered that ordinary methods of recording readings were inadequate on account of the extraordinary number of the variants. After a number of experiments I found that the only practical way was to have a separate large card for every word in the Massoretic text, and on this to record the alternate readings of the versions and recensions. The numerous additions could then be inserted on other cards whenever they interrupted the

Massoretic text. By this method I have secured, I believe, both completeness and accuracy. I have taken the *textus receptus* of Van der Hooght (1705) as the standard of comparison, and all departures from it in recensions, mss., printed editions, or ancient versions I have recorded in the critical notes. Only minor variations of vocalization or accentuation, which do not affect the interpretation, and which for the most part represent only the notions of particular punctuators or schools of punctuators, I have not thought it worth while to insert. Variants in the versions which represent the same Hebrew word I have not included. To have recorded all the cases of this sort would have been useless and would have swelled the volume to an enormous size.

How to treat the insertions of the versions has been a puzzling question. Substitutions of other readings for those of the Massoretic text should obviously be given in the original Greek, Latin, or Aramaic, in order that students may judge of their textual value; but the long additions of the versions are not translations from Hebrew, and, therefore, no good reason appears why they should be inserted in the original languages. For the ordinary reader a translation is more serviceable, and the specialist will have no difficulty in referring to the originals whenever this is necessary. Accordingly, I have given all the additions in English, making in each case a new translation from the best critical editions. Any one who is curious to see the originals and the textual variants in the Greek will find them in my article, "A Text-Critical Apparatus to the Book of Esther," in *Old Testament and Semitic Studies in Memory of W. R. Harper* (1908), ii. pp. 1-52. In the revision of this article I had the valuable help of Professor G. F. Moore of Harvard University, one of the editors of the Memorial Volume, and his suggestions in connection with this preliminary piece of work have been no small help in the preparation of the commentary. Many of the additions of the Midrashim are similar in character to those of the Targumim, and it would have been interesting to have included them also in this volume; but, with the limits of space imposed upon me, this was impossible. I hope presently to publish them in a volume entitled "The Story of Esther in the Bible and in Later Tradition."

Where to place the additions of the versions in the commentary has also been a problem. As textual amplifications, they seem to belong with the other textual apparatus in the critical notes. As secondary elements that interrupt the progress of the Hebrew text, they might conveniently be relegated to footnotes or appendixes; and, by using small type, much space might be saved for other matters. Practically, however, these additions are commentaries on the Hebrew text, and are interesting and valuable only as they are read in the same connection in which they were placed by the ancient versions. Accordingly, I have decided to insert them in square brackets in my translation of the Hebrew text at the same points where they are inserted in the originals. Thus they can be read in the way in which they were meant to be read by their authors. Let no one suppose that the matter in brackets is regarded as an integral part of the text. It is only the earliest extant commentary that I have interwoven with the text in the same manner as my own annotations. The Hebrew original is discriminated from the amplifications by the fact that its translation is given in italics. Ordinarily I have inserted the additions without note or comment, since a commentary on them would have carried the volume beyond the prescribed limits; but whenever the versions seem to preserve a reading that has been lost by the Hebrew, I have called attention to this fact.

In spite of the smallness of the Book of Esther its bibliography is exceedingly copious. Its quasi-legal character gave it a large place in the discussions of the doctors of the Talmud. It has two Targums and at least eight Midrashes, and all of these have been made the basis of numerous super-commentaries and discussions. More Jewish commentaries have been written upon it than upon any other book except the Law, and these in their turn have been explained by later scholars. The problem of its canonicity attracted much attention in the early Christian centuries, and the additions of the Greek text brought it into the discussion of the canonicity of the Apocrypha. In modern times its historical difficulties have called forth a host of treatises attacking or defending its credibility, and within the last few years the "Panbabylonisten" have deluged us with literature endeavouring to prove the Baby-

lonian origin of Purim. My bibliography contains upward of 700 titles of books and articles on Esther. The more important half of these I have found in the admirable library of Hartford Theological Seminary, and my hearty thanks are due to Dr. Charles S. Thayer, the librarian, and to Mr. M. H. Ananikian, the assistant librarian, for the great help that they have given me in hunting out these books and in putting them at my disposal for long periods of time. The remaining works, with the exception of about fifty, I have found in the libraries of Harvard, Yale, and Princeton Universities, and of Harvard, Princeton, Union, and the New York Jewish Theological Seminaries. The rich collection of the Jewish Theological Seminary in particular contains almost no gaps in the series of Jewish commentaries. To the librarians of all these institutions I wish to express my gratitude for the assistance they have given me and for the books they have so willingly put at my disposal. As a result of my search I have reached the conclusion that, with the exception of MSS., all the books that a student of the Old Testament needs can now be found in American libraries quite as well as in those of Europe, and that the conditions attached to their use are much less strict on this side of the Atlantic than on the other. In subsequent references it will be understood that I have had personal access to the literature mentioned except in cases where I indicate the contrary.

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INTRODUCTION.

I. PLACE OF ESTHER IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

§ I. PLACE IN THE HEBREW BIBLE.

In codices and printed editions of the Hebrew Bible the Book of Esther is one of the *K'thûbhîm* or 'Writings' that constitute the third division of the OT. canon. The various arrangements of the books that form this collection are exhibited in the following tables:

1	2	3	4
Ruth	Ruth	Ruth	Chr.
Psal.	Psal.	P'sal.	Ruth
Job	Job	Job	Psal.
Prov.	Prov.	Prov.	Job
EccI.	Song	Song	Prov.
Song	EccI.	EccI.	Song
Lam.	Lam.	Lam.	EccI.
Dan.	Dan.	Esth.	Lam.
Esth.	Esth.	Dan.	Esth.
Ezr.-Ne.	Ezr.-Ne.	Ezr.-Ne.	Dan.
Chr.	Chr.	Chr.	Ezr.-Ne.

The first of these arrangements is that of the Madrid codex of A.D. 1280, of five codices of the British Museum, namely Harley 1528, Add. 1525, Or. 2212, Or. 2375, Or. 4227, and of the Babylonian codex Berlin Or. Qu. 680. This order is the least logical and, therefore, probably the most primitive. The Babylonian Talmud, our earliest witness on the subject, declares it to be the correct arrangement (*Baba Bathra* 14^b).

The second arrangement is found in one codex of the British Museum,

Add. 15252. It differs from the first merely in the inversion of the order of Ec. and Song. Ec. is placed last, possibly, because it is regarded as a product of Solomon's old age.

The third arrangement is that of the Paris Codex (A.D. 1286) and British Museum Or. 2091. It differs from the second in the transposition of Dan. and Est. This brings together the four little books, Song, Ec., Lam., Est., and is therefore a step in the direction of the formation of the sub-collection of the Five *M'ghillôth* or "Rolls."

The fourth arrangement is found in the codex Arundel Orient. 16. It differs from the third only in the transposition of Ch. from the end to the beginning of the Hagiographa.

5	6	7	8
Psal.	Chr.	Chr.	Psal.
Job	Psal.	Psal.	Prov.
Prov.	Job	Prov.	Job
Ruth	Prov.	Job	Song
Song	Ruth	Dan.	Ruth
Eccl.	Song	Ruth	Lam.
Lam.	Eccl.	Song	Eccl.
Esth.	Lam.	Lam.	Esth.
Dan.	Esth.	Eccl.	Dan.
Ezr.-Ne.	Dan.	Esth.	Ezr.-Ne.
Chr.	Ezr.-Ne.	Ezr.-Ne.	Chr.

The fifth arrangement occurs in the codex British Museum Or. 2201 (A.D. 1246). It is derived from the third by the transposition of Ruth to a position before Song of Songs. Here for the first time the five little books, Ru., Song, Ec., Lam., Est., are grouped in the sub-collection of the Five *M'ghillôth*. There is no trace of this grouping in the Talmud or Midrashim, nor is the name Five *M'ghillôth* known. It arose during the Middle Ages in consequence of the liturgical use of these books in the service of the Synagogue.

The sixth arrangement is that of the St. Petersburg Babylonian codex of A.D. 1207, British Museum codices, Harley 5710-11, Add. 15251, most Spanish codd., and most codd. with Massoretic apparatus. It differs from the fifth in the transposition of Ch. from the end of the Hagiographa to the beginning. The Massoretic treatise *'Adhath D'bhârim* (A.D. 1207) declares this to be the orthodox Palestinian arrangement, and that which places Ch. at the end to be an innovation of "the men of Shinar" (cf. Strack, *ZLT.* xxxvi. 1875, p. 605). This is a mistake. Ch. was not taken into the canon early, because it was not needed alongside of Samuel and Kings; and when it was added, it was appended to the end of the collection. The transposition to the begin-