

# On Esther

Ælfric of Eynsham

Translated and with introduction by

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## Introduction

Around the turn of the eleventh century AD,<sup>1</sup> the Anglo-Saxon monk and scholar Ælfric of Eynsham composed a summary version of the biblical story of Esther in Old English. Like its biblical counterpart, Ælfric's version is filled with both textual and historical complexity. It is extant in only one manuscript,<sup>2</sup> a transcription made in the seventeenth century by William L'Isle (who, like Ælfric, was both a cleric and a scholar), but the original Old English source material is now lost. It is thus shrouded in mystery, with little indication of Ælfric's reasons for composing it, nor of his intended audience. A great deal of confusion persists concerning

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<sup>1</sup> Between 998 and 1005 AD.

<sup>2</sup> Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Misc. 381, fols. 140v–148r.

his source material as well, for while he certainly based his text on the biblical book of Esther, it is unclear whether he was working from the Vulgate or the Old Latin translations,<sup>3</sup> whether the Carolingian commentators influenced him, or whether he was working from a specific exemplar (or exemplars) or merely from his own memory.

What is certain, though, is that Ælfric had a deep and thorough understanding of the book of Esther—its textual structure, literary themes, and religious messages—and that he carefully composed his version so as to guide his audience’s perceptions. Always a meticulous scholar, Ælfric manages to summarize the story of Esther in a way that both adheres closely to his source(s)<sup>4</sup> and re-works it into a story that reflects the Anglo-Saxon society of which he was part.

In the modern era, Ælfric’s *Esther* was first published by Bruno Assmann in 1889; this edition was later re-published with a supplementary introduction by Peter Clemons. In the late twentieth century, Stuart Lee published a new edition of the text online, with updated punctuation and layout, as well as notes and an editorial apparatus reflecting the intervening century’s-worth of research in Anglo-Saxon studies. Despite these publications, the text has received very little attention from Anglo-Saxon scholars, with only a handful of studies focusing on it since Assmann’s nineteenth-century publication. These include an unpublished doctoral thesis by Timothy Gustafson, who approaches the text from the perspective of cultural translation; articles by Mary Clayton and Stacy S. Klein, who both take a literary-historical view; and a study of sources by Stewart Brookes.

What follows is the text of Ælfric’s *Esther* in Old English (OE) and in Present-Day English (PDE). The OE, based on Lee’s edition, provides

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<sup>3</sup> For the Vulgate, see Weber. For the Old Latin, see Haelewyck; this edition represents an exciting development for Esther scholars, who until recently had to rely on the eighteenth-century edition by Petrus Sabatier for the Old Latin text.

<sup>4</sup> Although some have argued that Ælfric’s text differs significantly from his source, these arguments usually assume that he was working from a Vulgate text; however, textual evidence suggests he may have used the Old Latin translation(s), at least in part. For further discussion on this point, see Wilkins, especially pp. 31–34; also see Brookes.

what is essentially a diplomatic edition of L'Isle's seventeenth-century transcription. In Lee's edition, abbreviations are expanded using italics; modern word and paragraph divisions are used; and modern punctuation has been supplied (including inverted commas for direct speech). The OE letterforms thorn (þ) and eth (ð) are retained, but wynn (ƿ) is changed to modern 'w'. In opposition to Assmann, who formatted the text in half-line verse form, Lee produces the text with continual lineation, 'akin to modern prose'.<sup>5</sup> However, the line numbers of Assmann's 1889 edition are given every ten lines in the right-hand margin, and the footnotes offer critical comparison with Assmann's edition, particularly where the latter contains errors and/or emendations. Finally, Lee provides his own line numbering in the left-hand margin, and also notes the foliation of L'Isle's manuscript in the right-hand margin. A detailed description of the dimensions and physical properties of the manuscript can be found in Lee (2000). The reader interested in these details should refer to Lee's edition and article. In the version reproduced here, I have changed the Tironian *et* (7) to ampersand (&), which is more readily available in modern typefaces.

For the translation that follows, I have provided Lee's edition of the text on the left and my own translation into PDE on the right, with a 'sentence' number in the left-hand margin.<sup>6</sup> To aid reference to Assmann's and Lee's editions, every five sentences the corresponding line number for these editions has been provided in the right-hand margin: Assmann's line numbers are set in Roman type, Lee's in italics. The folio numbers of Laud Misc. 381 are given within the running text of the OE in square brackets.<sup>7</sup> I have included light annotation, in footnotes, for linguistic structures (both syntactic and semantic) that are particularly difficult or that have interesting connotations. The translation attempts to make the text intelligible for speakers of modern English while still

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<sup>5</sup> Lee, *Ælfric's Homilies*, 'Editorial Symbols and Procedures'.

<sup>6</sup> Though I have called them 'sentences', for lack of a better term, these do not always correspond to sentences (whether in OE or PDE).

<sup>7</sup> The folio numbers are all versos, since the rectos contain L'Isle's translation into Early Modern English.

retaining, as far as possible, the stylistic and syntactic elements of the original.

### Translation

0	[fol. 140v] Be Hester	On Esther	0, 1
1	Iu on ealdum dagum wæs sum rice cyning, namcuð on woruld, Asuerus gehaten, & se hæfde cynerice east fram Indian oð Eþiopian lande (þæt is fram eastewardan þissere worulde & supwardan oð to þam Silhearwum <sup>8</sup> ).	In olden days there was a certain powerful king, well- known throughout the world, called Ahasuerus, and he held authority in the east from India unto the Ethiopians' land (that is, from eastward of this world and southward as far as the Ethiopians <sup>8</sup> ).	1, 2
2	Hundtwelftig scira he soðlice hæfde & seofon scira, swa swa us secgað bec, on his anwealde, ealle him gewylde.	He had indeed 127 provinces, as the books tell us, in his kingdom, all subject to him.	
3	On þam þridan geare his cynerices he het gewyrca wundorlice feorme hundteonig daga on an & hundeahtig daga <sup>9</sup> eallum his ealdormannum, & his eþelborennum þegnum, & eallum his folce, þe þa feorme gesohton—wolde him	In the third year of his reign, he commanded a wonderful feast to be made, for 180 <sup>9</sup> days continuously, for all his princes and noble- born followers, and all his people who desired the feast—he wanted to show off his wealth and glory to them.	

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8 = *Sigel-warum* = 'Ethiopians'; according to Clark-Hall's *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, this spelling is mainly used by Ælfric.

9 Literally: '100 days continuously and 80 days'. Certain tens numbers, including 80 and 100, are formed with *hund* + [number] + *ig*. Thus, *hundehtig* = 80, and *hundeteonig* = 100. This seems to have been standardized as part of Æthelwold's language reformations at Winchester; for more on this subject, see Gneuss (1972).

æteowian his welan & his  
mærða.

- |   |   |   |        |
|---|---|---|--------|
| 4 | Us is eardod̄e to secgenne þa<br>seldcuðan <sup>10</sup> mærða on<br>gyldenum beddum &<br>agrafenum fatum, gyldene &<br>sylferne, selcub̄ æfre on<br>pellum, & purpuran, & ælces<br>cunnes gymmum, on<br>menigfealdre þenunge þe man<br>þær forðbear.   | It is difficult for us to tell<br>the rare <sup>10</sup> glory of the golden<br>couches and the engraved<br>vessels, both golden and<br>silver, always varied in silks<br>and purples and every kind<br>of gems, in the multiple<br>courses that were brought<br>forth.   |        |
| 5 | Se cyning bebead þam<br>gebeorum eallum þæt hi bliþe<br>wæron æt his gebeorscipe <sup>11</sup> &<br>þæt ælc mann drunce þæs<br>deorwurðan wines be þam þe<br>he sylf wolde & him softost<br>wære, & nan man ne moste<br>neadian oðerne to maran<br>drænce þonne his mod wold;<br>ac þa byrlas scencton be þæs<br>cyninges gesetnysse, ælcum<br>men genoh, name þæt he<br>wolde. | The king commanded all the<br>guests to be merry at his<br>party <sup>11</sup> and that each man<br>should drink of the<br>expensive wine according to<br>his wishes, and no man<br>should compel another to<br>more drink than his heart<br>desired; but the cup-bearers<br>poured out, according to the<br>king's decree, enough that<br>each man should receive<br>what he wanted. | 20, 17 |
| 6 | His cwen hatte Vashti, seo<br>wæs swiðe wlitig. Heo worhte<br>eac feorme mid fulre mærd̄e<br>eallum þam wifmannum þe<br>heo wolde habban to hire<br>mærþe, on þam mæran<br>palente þær þær se cyning<br>wæs oftost wunigende.   | His queen was called Vashti,<br>she was very beautiful. She<br>also made a feast with great<br>glory for all the women<br>whom she wanted to have,<br>to her glory, in the great<br>palace where the king was<br>most often dwelling.   |        |

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<sup>10</sup> *seld* 'seldom' + *cup* 'known' = 'unusual, strange, novel'; also 'various'.

<sup>11</sup> The word implies that alcoholic beverages are being consumed (*beor* = 'beer').

- 7 Se cyning þa het on þam seofoðan ðæge, þa þa he bliþe wæs betwux his gebeorum, his seofon burðenas þæt hi sceoldon gefeccan þa cwene Vashti, þæt heo come to him mid hire cynehelme (swa swa heora seode wæs þæt seo cwen werode cynehelm [fol. 141v] on heafode); & he wolde æteowian hire wlite his þegnum, forþan þe heo wæs swiþe wlitig on hiwe.
- Then the king commanded— on the seventh day, when he was merry among his guests—his seven chamberlains that they should fetch the queen Vashti, that she should come to him with her crown (as their custom was that the queen wore a crown on her head); and he wanted to show off her beauty to his followers, because she was very beautiful in form.
- 8 Þa eodon þa burðenas & abudon þære cwene þæs cyninges hæse, ac heo hit forsoc & nolde gehersumian him to his willan.
- Then the chamberlains went and announced to the queen the king's command, but she rejected it and did not want to obey his will.
- 9 Se cyning þa sona swiðe wearð geysod þæt heo hine forseah on swylcere gegaderunge, & befran his witan (þe wæron æfre mid him on ælcum his ræde þe he rædan wolde, & he ealle þing dyde æfre be heora ræde), hwæt him þuhte be þam be his forsewennysse.<sup>12</sup>
- The king then immediately became very angry that she spurned him in such a gathering, and asked his counselors (who were always with him in his every plan that he wanted to plan, and he did all things according to their advice), what they thought should be done about his being spurned.<sup>12</sup>
- 10 Þa andwyrdon sona sume his ealdormen, of Medan & of Persan, þe him mid druncon: 'Seo cwen witodlice, þe þin
- Then immediately answered 50, 42 certain of his princes, of Media and of Persia, who were drinking with him:

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<sup>12</sup> forsewennysse = 'spurned-ness, the state of being spurned'.

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|----|--|--|
|    | word forseah, leof, ne<br>unwurðode na þe ænne mid<br>þan, ac ealle þine ealdormenn<br>& eac þine þegnas!  | “Certainly the queen, who<br>spurned your word, sire,<br>disrespected not only you<br>with this thing, but all your<br>princes and also your<br>retainers!   |
| 11 | Ðonne ure wif geaxiað be<br>þisum wordum æt ham, hu<br>seo cwen forseah hire<br>cynehlaford, þonne willað hi<br>eac us eallswa forseon! Ðonne<br>beoð ealle Medas micclum<br>forsewene & þa Pærsican<br>leoda swa us na ne licað.  | When our women ask about<br>this story at home, how the<br>queen spurned her liege-<br>lord, then they will also<br>spurn us likewise! Then will<br>all the Medes be much<br>spurned, nor will the<br>Persian people, likewise, be<br>pleased with us.   |
| 12 | Ac, gif þe swa geþincð, leof,<br>gesette þisne dom þæt ealle<br>Medas cweðað anmodum<br>geþeahte, & eac þa Pærsican,<br>to þisre dæde: þæt seo cwen<br>Vasthi ne cume næfre<br>heononforð into þinum<br>pallente betwux þinum<br>gebeorum, ac hæbbe sum oðer<br>wimman ealne <sup>13</sup> hire<br>wurðmynt, hire ungelica seo<br>ðe þe ungelicige.’ | But, if such seems good to<br>you, sire, set down this<br>judgment, that all Medes<br>proclaim the unanimous<br>thought, and also the<br>Persians, to this deed: that<br>the queen Vashti should<br>never henceforth come into<br>your palace amid your<br>guests, but some other<br>woman should have all her<br>honor from now on, <sup>13</sup> unlike<br>to her who displeases you.” |
| 13 | & se cyning Asuerus þisne<br>ræd underfeng, & man cydde<br>þa geond eall þæs cyninges<br>willan, & Vasthi geseah þa<br>þæt heo forsewen wæs.   | And the king Ahasuerus<br>received this counsel, and<br>the king’s will was then<br>proclaimed abroad, and<br>Vashti then saw that she<br>was spurned.   |

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13 = *ealnig* = ‘always, perpetually’; I have translated this with the phrase ‘from now on’.

- 14 Hit wearþ þa gecweden, þurh þæs cyninges witan, þæt man ofaxode on eallum his rice, gif ænig mæden ahwær mihte beon afunden, swa wlitiges hiwes þe him wurðe wære, & swilcere gebyrde þe his gebedda wære, & seo þænne fenge to Vasthies wurðmynte; & se cyning þa het embe þæt beon swiðe. Then it was proclaimed, through the king's counselors, that one should inquire in all his kingdom, if any maiden might be found of such beautiful form as was worthy of him, and of such birth as to be his bed-companion, and she should then succeed to Vashti's honor; and the king then urgently commanded that this should be.
- 15 On þam dagum wæs an Iudeisc þegen on þære byrig Susa, Mardocheus gehaten, se gelyfde soðlice on þone lifigendan God, æfter Moyses æ; & he mid him hæfde his [fol. 142v] broðor dohtor. In those days there was a Jewish retainer in the town of Susa, called Mordecai, who truly believed in the living God, according to Moses' law; and he kept with him his brother's daughter. 77, 65
- 16 Seo hatte Ester, wlitig mædenmann on wundorlicre fægernysse, & he hi geforðode on fægerum þeawum,<sup>14</sup> æfter Godes æ & his ege<sup>15</sup> symle, & hæfde hi for dohtor, forðan þe hire dead wæs ge fæder ge She was called Esther, a beautiful girl of marvelous loveliness, and he raised her in virtuous habits,<sup>14</sup> according to the law and awe<sup>15</sup> of God, and had her as a daughter, because both her father and mother were

14 *fægerum þeawum*: Both words have a fairly broad semantic range. Taken together, they mean that Esther was well behaved: 'virtuous habits,' 'lovely conduct,' 'pleasing manners,' and so on.

15 *Godes ... ege*: This phrase, which occurs again in sentence 60, is analogous to the Latin *timor Dei*, frequently translated as 'fear of God', particularly in the King James Version (though it does not occur in the Latin versions of Esther). I have translated it as 'awe of God' in both instances.



	moder, þa þa heo unmaga wæs.	dead, from which time she was an orphan.	
17	Seo wæs ardlice þa gebroht & besæd þam cyninge, & he hi sceawode, & him sona gelicode hire fæggra nebwite, & lufode hi swiðe ofer ealle þa oðre þe he ær gesceawode.	She was then soon brought and introduced to the king, and he examined her, and her lovely face immediately pleased him, and loved her greatly, above all the others whom he had previously examined.	
18	Ac heo ne moste na for Mardocheo nateshwon hire cynn ameldian ne þam cyninge secgan hwilcere mægþe hire magas wæron.	But, according to Mordecai, she was by no means allowed to reveal her kin, nor tell the king of what race her relatives were.	
19	Mardocheus þa folgode þam mædene to hirede, <sup>16</sup> & hire gymæne <sup>17</sup> hæfde holdlice symle, wolde gewitan hu hire gelumpe. <sup>18</sup>	Mordecai then followed the maiden as a member of her household, <sup>16</sup> and always had a kindly regard <sup>17</sup> for her, wanted to know how it went with her. <sup>18</sup>	
20	Heo wæs swiðe wlitig on wundorlicre gefægernysse & swiþe lufigendlic eallum onlociendum, & wislice geþeawod, & on wæstme cyrten; & se cyning hi genam to cwene þa, & gesette þone	She was very beautiful in marvelous loveliness and very lovable to all who saw her, and truly well- mannered, and comely in figure; and the king then took her as his queen, and	97, 80

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16 to *hirede*: 'into the retinue, company, court, body of domestic retainers'. OE *hirede* also means 'house, family, members of a religious house, band of associates'. Gustafson has 'to the household'. I have taken some slight liberty in using the phrase 'as a member of the household'.

17 *gymæn* = *gieman* = 'to take care of, observe, give heed to; correct, reprove'.

18 *hu hire gelumpe* = 'how it happened to her' (subjunctive past tense). Gustafson has 'how it suited her'.

- cynehelm on hire heafod sona  
þe Vasthi ær hæfde. immediately set the crown  
upon her head, which Vashti  
had previously had.
- 21 He het þa gearcian to heora  
gyftum swiðe mænigfealde  
mærða swa him mihte  
gerisan; & æfter heora  
gewunan he gewifode þa swa  
be his witenas ræde on heora  
gewitnysse, & his folc  
gegladode & libegode him on  
mislicum geswincum for ðære  
mærðe. He then commanded for  
their marriage very many  
honors to be prepared, such  
as might be suitable for  
them; and according to their  
custom he married then  
according to his counselors'  
advice, in their witness, and  
gratified his people and  
relieved them from various  
labors for that glorious  
event.
- 22 Hit gelamp þa siððan æfter  
litlum firste, þæt twegen his  
burðena, mid bealuwe  
afyllede, woldon berædan  
swiðe unrihtlice heora  
cynehlaford, & hine acwellan,  
& embe þæt wæron. It happened then, after a  
short time, that two of his  
chamberlains, filled with  
malice, wanted very  
unjustly to betray their  
liege-lord, and kill him, and  
were about that.
- 23 Þa wearð hit sona cuþ þam  
Mardocheo, þære cwene  
fæderan, & he hit þa cydde  
ardlice hire, & heo þam  
cyninge forð<sup>19</sup>; & man afunde  
mid him swutele tacna þæt hi  
swa woldon don (& hi sylfe  
sædon þæt hi swa woldon), &  
man aheng hi begen on  
healicum gealgan, &  
Mardocheus þa wearð þurh þa Then it immediately became  
known to Mordecai, the  
queen's uncle, and he  
quickly made it known to  
her, and she passed it on<sup>19</sup> to  
the king; and there were  
found among them clear  
signs that they wanted to do  
so (and they themselves said  
that they wanted to do so),  
and they were both hanged

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19 "she passed it on": the word *forð* (which is connected grammatically with *cydde* < *forðcyðan* = 'to make known, announce') implies some kind of forward or onward motion.

- micclan hlyde<sup>20</sup> cuð þam  
cyninge for ðære gecyþnysse.
- 24 Hit wæs þa gewunelic swiðe  
wislice þæt man gesette on  
cranice ælc þæra dæda þe  
gedon wæs mid him on þæs  
cyninges belimpum oððe his  
leode fær. Ða het he awritan  
hu hine gewarnode  
Mardocheus se þegen, þæt hit  
on geminde wære.
- 25 Sum ealdorman wæs þa,  
Aman gehaten, þone  
geuferode se cyning ofer ealle  
his þegnas, & ofer [fol. 143v]  
his ealdormen. & het hi ealle  
sittan on cneowum to him swa  
swa to þam cyninge.
- 26 & hine sylfne he asætte on  
heahsetle fyrmest & ealle his  
men siððan him anum  
abugon, buton Mardocheus for  
his micclum geþingþum nold  
him abugan ne gebigan his  
cneowa to þam Amane for his  
upahafennysse, þy læs þe he  
gegremode God mid þære
- on a high gallows, and  
Mordecai then became  
known to the king through  
that great commotion<sup>20</sup>  
because of that disclosure.
- It was then customary, very  
wisely, to put in a chronicle  
each of those deeds that  
were done among them in  
the king's affairs and his  
people's proceedings. Then  
he commanded that it  
should be written how  
Mordecai the retainer  
warned him, that it might  
be remembered.
- There was then a certain 127,  
nobleman, called Haman, 105  
whom the king elevated  
above all his retainers, and  
above his princes. And  
commanded them all to  
kneel to him just as to the  
king.
- And he sat himself upon the  
foremost high-seat and all  
his men afterward bowed to  
him alone, except Mordecai  
because of his great  
condition did not want to  
bow to him nor bend his  
knees to that Haman  
because of his arrogance,  
lest he should anger God

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20 *hlyd* = 'sound, noise'.

- dæde, gif he eorðlicne mann  
ofer his mæde wurðode.
- 27 Ða geseah Aman þæt he hine  
forseah, & he hæfde ofaxod æt  
oðrum mannum ær þæt he  
wæs Iudeisc, þe wurðodon  
symle þone heofonliccan God;  
& him þa þuhte to waclicre  
dæde þæt he fordyde hine  
ænne, ac wolde miccle swiðor  
eall þæt manncyn fordon  
Iudeisces cynnes, þæt he  
wræce his teonan.
- 28 Aman þa smead swicollice  
embe þæt, hu he eall Iudeisc  
cynn fordyde ætgædere, þe  
Godes æ heoldon æfter Godes  
gesetnyssum, & began hi to  
wregenne wið þone cyning  
þuss:
- 29 ‘An mancynn wunað, leof,  
wide tostenced under þinum  
anwealde on gehwilcum  
scirum, þe næfð ure þeawa, ne  
ure laga ne hylt; & þu wel  
was, leof, þæt hit wile  
hearmian þinum cynerice  
heora receleasnyse, gif him  
man ne gestyrð heora  
stuntness. Læt hi ealle fordon,  
& ic gedo þæt þu hæfst tyn
- with that deed, if he should  
honor an earthly man above  
his measure.
- When Haman saw that he  
spurned him—and he had  
discovered of other men  
before that he was Jewish,  
who continually worshipped  
the heavenly God; and then  
it seemed to him too paltry a  
deed that he should destroy  
him alone, but desired much  
more to destroy all the  
people of Jewish race, that  
he might avenge his  
injuries.
- Haman then deceitfully  
pondered about that, how he  
might destroy all the Jewish  
race together, who kept  
God’s law according to God’s  
decrees, and began to accuse  
them before the king thus:
- “There is one race, sire,  
dwelling widely dispersed  
under your jurisdiction, in  
any number of provinces,  
who neither have our  
customs nor keep our laws;  
and you know well, sire,  
that their recklessness will  
harm your kingdom, if their  
foolishness is not restrained.  
Let them all be destroyed,  
and I will ensure that you  
have ten thousand pounds<sup>21</sup>  
in your money-chest.”<sup>22</sup>

	þusend punda <sup>21</sup> to þinum mydercum. <sup>22</sup>	
30	Se cyning þa sona slypte his beah of & forgeaf Amane, & be þam mancynne cwæþ: 'Hafa þe þæt seolfor to þines sylfes bricum, and gedo be þam folce swa þe best licie.'	The king then immediately slipped off his ring and gave it to Haman, and concerning that people said: "Keep that silver for your own use, and do about the people as it best pleases you."
31	Aman þa, sona swa he þis gehyrde, dihte gewritu be þam Iudeiscum to ælcere scire þe hi on wunodon, þæt man hi ofsloge sæmtinges ealle, ealde & iunge, eall on anum dæge; & him fultum gesænde to heora slege micelne <sup>23</sup> to þam ylcan andagan þe he him gewissode.	Then Haman, as soon as he heard this, dictated writings about the Jews, to every province in which they lived, that they should be slain all together, old and young, all on one day; and help should be sent to them for their great slaughter <sup>23</sup> on the appointed day that he had indicated to them.
32	Mardocheus þa micclum wearð geangsumod, & for his agenum magum get micle swiðor þonne for him selfum, & gesæde hit þære cwene;	Mordecai then became greatly anxious, and cried out for his own kinsmen much more than for himself, and told it to the queen,

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<sup>21</sup> *tyn þusend punda*: The pound in use during the Anglo-Saxon period was a monetary unit equivalent to one pound, by weight, of silver; it is the direct predecessor to the modern-day British pound sterling (GBP). Ælfric uses this word to translate the Latin term *talent* 'talentum', a unit of money whose value varied greatly throughout the ancient world (see Esther 3.9, Vulgate).

<sup>22</sup> The word *mydercum* is a *hapax legomenon*, appearing nowhere else in the extant OE corpus. The meaning is therefore uncertain, but based on the biblical source material, it appears to be 'money-chest, coffer'.

<sup>23</sup> *him fultum gesænde to heora slege micelne*: Haman ensures that troops (*fultum* = 'help', but also 'military forces') are sent into all the provinces in order to carry out the slaughter of the Jews, since it is such an enormous undertaking.

- bæd þæt heo gehulpe hire  
mægðe & hire, þæt hi ealle ne  
wurdon to swilcere  
wæfersyne.
- 33 Ða behead seo cwen þæt hire  
cynn eall sceolde fæstan þreo  
dagas on an & Godes fultum  
biddan, & heo sylf eallswa eac  
swylce fæste, biddende æt  
Gode þæt he geburge þam  
folce & eallum þam  
manncynne on swa micelre  
frecdnesse.
- 34 Ða eode [fol. 144v] seo cwen  
æfter þam fæstene, swiðe  
fægeres hiwes, ætforan þam  
cyninge; & he swiðe bliðe  
bicnode hire to mid his  
cynegyrde & gecwæþ þas  
word:
- 35 ‘Hwæs bytst þu, la Hester? &  
þeah þu biddan wille healfne  
þone anweald þe ic hæbbe  
under me, þu scealt beon tīþa  
untweolice þæs.’
- 36 Seo cwen cwæð þa to him:  
‘Leof cynehlaford, ic wille þæt  
þu beo æt minum gebeorscipe,  
þu leof, & Aman, to þinum  
wurðscipe, þæt ic þe mage  
secgan minne willan.’
- 37 Ða het se cyning clypian  
Aman, & het þæt he wære  
gehersum þære cwene to hire  
willan to hire gereorde, &
- requested that she should  
help her relatives and  
herself, that they should not  
all come to such a spectacle.
- Then the queen commanded  
that her people must all fast  
three days continuously and  
pray for God’s help, and she  
herself should also fast  
likewise, asking God that he  
might protect the people and  
all the race in such great  
danger.
- Then the queen went, after  
the fasting, very lovely in  
appearance, before the king;  
and he very agreeably  
beckoned to her with his  
scepter and spoke this word:
- “What do you request, o  
Esther? And though you  
should ask half the kingdom  
that I have under me, you  
shall undoubtedly be a  
receiver of it.”
- The queen then said to him:  
“Beloved liege-lord, I desire  
that you should be at my  
feast, you sire, and Haman,  
in your honor, that I may  
tell you my request.”
- Then the king commanded  
Haman to be summoned,  
and commanded that he  
should be obedient to the  
queen, to her desire for her

181,  
151

- Aman þa gecyrde sona to his inne. dinner-party, and Haman then immediately returned to his chambers.
- 38 Mardocheus þa sæt þær ute, & nolde alutan ne lyffettan þam Amane. Ða wearð he swiþe gram<sup>24</sup> þam Godes þegene, & cwæþ to his cnihtum þæt him forcuplic þuhte þæt se an Iudeisca hine forsawe. Mordecai then was sitting outside there and would not bow or pay court to Haman. Then he became furious<sup>24</sup> with the servant of God, and said to his attendants that it seemed to him disgraceful that he, a Jew, should despise him.
- 39 ‘Se cyning me wurðað, swa swa ge witaþ ealle, & seo cwen ne gelaðode nænne oðerne to hire butan me ænne to eacan þam cyninge. Nu þingþ me þæt ic næbbe nænne wurðscipe on life swa lange swa Mardocheus me nele abugan.’ “The king honors me, as you all know, and the queen invited none other to her but me alone, to join the king. Now it seems to me that I will have no dignity in life so long as Mordecai will not bow to me.”
- 40 Ða cwædon his magas þæt he macian sceolde ænne heagan gealgan, & habban hine gearwe, & biddan æt his hlaforde þæt he lete ahon þone Mardocheum þe his mihte forseah; & he þa swa dyde be heora dyslican ræde. Then said his relatives that he ought to make a high gallows and have it ready and request of his lord that he should allow Mordecai to hang, who spurned his power; and he then did so, according to their foolish advice. 203, 168
- 41 Hit gelamp þa on þære nihte þæt se cyning læg wæccende lange on forannihte, & he het It happened then on that night, that the king lay awake long in the evening,

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24 *swiþe gram* = ‘very angry’.

- þa forðberan þone cranic fram and he then commanded  
his yldrena dagum & rædan that the chronicle should be  
ætforan him, oððæt he fulge brought forth from his  
on slæpe. earlier days and should be  
read before him, until he  
should fall asleep.
- 42 Man<sup>25</sup> him rædde þa fela þæs They<sup>25</sup> then read to him  
þe gefyrn gelamp, oððæt hit many of those things that  
becom þærto hu his had previously happened,  
burcnihtas woldon hine sylfne until it came to the part  
amyrran, & hu Mardocheus about how his chamberlains  
hit sæde þære cwene, & heo wanted to destroy him and  
cydde þa him. how Mordecai told it to the  
queen, and she then made it  
known to him.
- 43 Þa befran se cyning his Then the king asked his  
cnihtas & cwæp: 'Hwilce mede attendants and said: "What  
hæfde Mardocheus for þam, reward did Mordecai have  
þæt he swa holdlice hogode for that thing, that he was  
embe me?" so loyally concerned about  
me?"
- 44 His cnihtas him andwyrdon, His attendants answered  
& cwædon him þus to: 'Leof him and said to him thus:  
cynehlaford, ne com him nan "Dear liege-lord, nothing  
þing to þance, þæt he swa came to him as thanks that  
getreowlice þæt þe he thus faithfully disclosed  
geopenode.' that to you."
- 45 Hwæt, þa on ærne mergen Lo and behold, then in the 222,  
com Aman to þam cyninge, early morning Haman came 186  
wolde þæt he hete ahon to the king, desiring that he  
Mardocheum. should command Mordecai  
to be hanged.

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25 The subject and verb are singular, employing the generic OE pronoun *man*, meaning 'one'. As this pronoun continues to decline in use in PDE, I have chosen the more commonly employed generic plural pronoun 'they'.



- 46 Ac se cyning axode hine sona & cwæð: ‘Hwæt þingð þe, Aman, hwæt hit mage beon [fol. 145v] þæt ic gedon þam menn þe ic gemynte wurþscipes?’ But the king immediately asked him and said: “What does it seem to you, Haman, what may it be that I should do to that man whom I intend to honor?”
- 47 Ða wende Aman to gewissan þinge þæt se cyning wolde wurþian hine swiðor, & nænne oþerne, & he andwyrde þus: ‘Ðone man þe se cyning wile wurðian mid his gife, man sceal embcscrydan hraþe mid cynelican reafe, & settan on his heafod sumne cynehelm eac, & lætan hine ridan on þæs cyninges radhorse; & læde sum ealdormann hine geond þas burh, & secge þam burhmannum þæt þus beo gewurðod se man þe se cyning wile wurðscipe hæbbe.’ Then Haman thought it certain that the king wanted to honor him more greatly, and no other, and he answered thus: “That man whom the king would honor with his gift shall be clothed about immediately with a royal robe and a crown set upon his head also, and let him ride on the king’s riding-horse; and some nobleman should lead him throughout the city and say to the citizens that thus is honored the man whom the king desires to have honor.”
- 48 Ða cwæþ se cyning to Amane: ‘Ic cweðe þæt ic wille þæt þu genime Mardocheum & þisne wurðmynt him gedo, & loca þu georne þæt þu ne forlæte nan þing.’ Then the king spoke to Haman: “I declare that I want you to take Mordecai and do this honor to him, and look you diligently that you neglect not one thing.”
- 49 Aman þa dyde swa mid sorhfullum mode, & gelædde Mardocheum mærllice gescrydne, & mid helme, geond þa burh, swylce he his horsniht wære, and sæde eallum mannum þæt se cyning mihte on þa wisan mærsian þone man þe he Haman then did so with a sorrowful spirit, and led Mordecai, splendidly clothed and with a crown, through the city, as though he were his groom, and said to all the people that the king might glorify in this manner that man whom he would;

	wolde; & eode him ham siððan sorghfull to his cnihtum.	and afterward went home sorrowfully to his attendants.	
50	Se cyning þa sende sona æfter Amane, & he unþances þa com to þære cwene feorme, & se cyning Asuerus swiþe bliðe wæs þæs dæges mid þære cwene Hester, & cwæð hire þus to: ‘Hwæs bytst þu, la Hester, þæt ic þe forgife?’	The king then immediately sent for Haman, and he then came unwillingly to the queen’s meal, and the king Ahasuerus was very happy that day with the queen Esther, and spoke to her thus: “What do you request, o Esther, that I should grant to you?”	246, 208
51	Hester seo cwen þa cwæð to þam cyninge þus: ‘Ic bidde þe la, leof, mines agenes lifes, & mines folces feores, & minra freonda eac. We synd ealle belewde to ure lifleaste, þæt we beon toheawene mid heardum swurdum, þæt ure gemynd beo mid ealle adilegod.’	Esther the queen then spoke to the king thus: “I request of you, o sire, my own life and the life of my people, and of my friends also. We are all betrayed unto our death, that we should be hewn with hard swords, that our memory and all that concerns us should be hidden.”	
52	Se cyning þa befran þa cwene þus eft: ‘Hwæt is se manna, swilcere mihte, þe þas dæda æfre dorste gefremman?’	The king then asked the queen again: “Who is the man, of such power, who ever dared to commit these deeds?”	
53	Heo cwæð to andsware: ‘Us is se wyrsta feond, <sup>26</sup> witodlice <sup>27</sup> þes Aman, þe hæfð gecweden	She said in answer: “The worst enemy is against us, <sup>26</sup>	

<sup>26</sup> *Us is se wyrsta feond*: Literally, ‘to us is the worst enemy’. I have taken some liberty in using the preposition ‘against’ to indicate the relationship between the Jews and their enemy, which is implicit in the syntax of the personal pronoun *us*.

- |    |  |   |             |
|----|--|---|-------------|
|    | andagan þæt he sceall<br>acwellan mine agene mægðe<br>for Mardochees þingon—se þe<br>is min fædera, se þe me<br>afedde.’   | even <sup>27</sup> this Haman, who has<br>proclaimed that he shall kill<br>on one day my own relatives<br>for Mordecai’s sake—he who<br>is my uncle, he who<br>nourished me.”   |             |
| 54 | Ða ablicgde Aman unbliþum<br>andwlitan, & ne mihte na<br>acuman þæs cyninges [fol.<br>146v] graman, ne he ne dorste<br>beseon to his ansyne; & se<br>cyning aras hraþe gehathyrt,<br>& eode him sona ut binnon his<br>æppeltun, swilce for<br>rædinge. <sup>28</sup> | Then Haman blanched with<br>an unhappy face, and was<br>not able to bear the king’s<br>rage, neither dared he look<br>upon his face; and the king<br>quickly arose, angry, and<br>immediately went out into<br>his apple orchard, as if for<br>consideration. <sup>28</sup> |             |
| 55 | Ac he hraþe sona eft eode him<br>inn, & efne <sup>29</sup> Aman þa niþer<br>afeallen to þære cwene fotum,<br>þæt heo him gefultumode to<br>his agenum feore. <sup>30</sup>   | But he very soon went in<br>again, and behold, <sup>29</sup> Haman<br>had fallen down at the<br>queen’s feet, that she might<br>help him to his own life. <sup>30</sup>   | 270,<br>227 |
| 56 | Ða oflicode þam cyninge, þæt<br>he læg hire swa gehende, & þa<br>cnihtas oncneowon þæs<br>cyninges micclan graman, &<br>gefengon þone Aman, & hine<br>geblindfelledon, & hine fæste<br>geheoldon to þam þe se cyning<br>hete.  | Then the king was<br>displeased, that he lay so<br>near to her, and the<br>servants perceived the<br>king’s great rage and seized<br>that Haman and blind-<br>folded him and held him   |             |

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27 *witodlice* = ‘truly, indeed’.

28 = ‘reading, consultation’. Because the text makes no mention at this point of the king’s otherwise ubiquitous counselors, I have chosen to translate this as ‘consideration’, which implies that the king is consulting with himself alone.

29 *efne*: In this context, the word seems to have the force of an interjection (‘Lo and behold!’), though it can also be translated with a more sedate ‘even’, ‘indeed’, or ‘likewise’.

30 = *feorh* ‘life’.

- tightly as the king  
commanded.
- 57    Ða cwæð an þara burcnihta to þam cyninge þus: ‘La leof cynehlaford, an lang gealga stænt æt Amanes inne, þe he gemynt hæfde Mardocheo, þinum þegene, þe þe hylðo<sup>31</sup> gedyde.’
- Then one of the chamberlains spoke to the king thus: “O beloved liege-lord, a tall gallows stands by Haman’s chambers, which he intended for Mordecai, your servant, who did a kindness<sup>31</sup> for you.”
- 58    Ða cwæð se cyning to andsware: ‘Ahoh hine þæron!’ & hi sona swa dydon, mid swiðlicum ofste, ahengon þone Aman on þam healican gealgan þe he gemynt hæfde Mardochee on ær, & þæs cyninges yrre wearð þa geliþegod.
- Then the king said in answer: “Hang him on it!” And they immediately did so, with great speed, they<sup>32</sup> hanged that Haman on the high gallows that he earlier had intended to have Mordecai on, and the king’s anger was then appeased.
- 59    Ða cydde seo cwen eall be hire cynne hire cynehlaforde, hwanon heo cumen wæs, & be Mardocheo hu he hire mæg wæs; & he eode þa inn toforan þam cyninge, & se cyning him sealde sona þone beah (þe he genam of Amane) him to wurðscipe, & he underfeng þone anweald þe se oðer hæfde, & he his æhta betæhte þære cwene to hæbbenne.
- Then the queen told her liege-lord all about her kin, whence she was come, and about Mordecai, how he was her relative; and he then went in before the king, and the king immediately gave him the ring (which he had taken from Haman) to give him honor, and he accepted the government that the other had, and he entrusted

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31 = ‘favor, grace, kindness, protection; allegiance, loyalty’.

<sup>32</sup> The plural subject is implied in the syntax of the OE; for the sake of greater clarity and fluency, I have made it explicit in the PDE translation.

		his possessions to the queen to have.	
60	Seo cwen þa aleat to þæs cyninges fotum mid agotenum tearum, mid Godes ege onbryrd, & bæd hire cynehlaford þæt he lete awritan oðre gewritu to eallum þam scirum þe þa Iudeiscan on eardedon, <sup>33</sup> togeanes þam gewritum þe Aman ær awrat, þæt þa Iudeiscan moston for his micclan cynescipe beon ealle on friðe & unforhte to þam dæge þe Aman him gecwæp to heora agenum slege.	The queen then knelt at the king's feet with streaming tears, inspired by awe of God, and asked her liege- lord that he might have other writings written to all the provinces where the Jews lived, <sup>33</sup> against the writings that Haman previously had had written, that the Jews might all, on account of his great majesty, be peaceful and unafraid of that day on which Haman had commanded their slaughter.	295, 248
61	Se cyning þa andwyrde þære þus, & eac Mardocheo, swiðe mildelice: 'Aman ic aheng, [fol. 147v] & his æhta þe betæhte. Hwa dear nu gedyrstlæcan þæt he derige þam folce?	The king then answered her thus, and Mordecai also, very gently: "I hanged Haman and entrusted his possessions to you. Who dares now to presume that he should injure that people?	
62	Awritað nu gewrita be þam þe ge willað, þæt eall beo aidlod Amanes sirwung ongean þam Iudeiscum, & him ne derige nan man. Ac ic swiðor wille þæt man ofslea eac Amanes	Now write writings about this as you will, that Haman's plotting against the Jews might all be made useless, and no man might injure them. But I rather intend that Haman's	

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33 *eardian* = 'to inhabit, dwell, abide, live'; the connection with *eard* = 'earth, home' implies a long-term residence; the Jews have put down roots, so to speak, in these provinces.

- magas for his micclan swicdome.’ relatives should be slain on account of his great treachery.”
- 63    Dis wearð þa geforþod, & hi on friþe wunedon þurh þære cwene þingunge þe him þa geheolp & fram deaþe ahredde, þurh hire drihtnes fultum þe heo on gelyfde on Abrahames wisan. This then was done, and they lived in peace through the queen’s intercession which helped them and rescued them from death, through her Lord’s help, in whom she believed according to Abraham’s manner.
- 64    Ða Iudeiscan eac wundorlice blissodon, þæt hi swilcne forespræcan him afunden hæfdon, & heoldon þa Godes æ þæs þe glædlicor æfter Moyses wissunge þæs mæran heretogan. The Jews also rejoiced wonderfully, that they had found such an advocate for them, and then kept God’s law afterward the more gladly, according to the guidance of Moses, the great leader.
- 65    Mardocheus eac miclum wæs gewurþod, & swiðe geuferod for his eadmodnysse, swa swa Aman wearð gehynd for his uppahefednysse; & se cyning wearð gerihtlæht þurh þære cwene geleafan Gode to wurðmynte þe ealle þing gewylt, & he herode God þe hine geuferode & to cyninge geceas ofer swilcne anweald. Mordecai was also much honored and greatly elevated for his humility, even as Haman was humbled for his arrogance; and the king became converted through the queen’s faith to the honor of God who controls all things, and he praised God who had elevated him and chosen him as king over such kingdom. 320, 270
- 66    & he wæs rihtwis, & rædfæst on weorcum, & he hæfde oþerne naman: Artarxerses. And he was righteous, and wise in works, and he had another name: Artaxerxes.

67	Sy wuldor & lof þam welwillendan Gode se þe æfre rixað on ecnysse! Amen.	Glory and praise be to the benevolent God, he who reigns ever in eternity! Amen.
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