

Note on Vashti

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IT is perfectly clear that the names *Mordecai* and *Esther* in the Book of Esther are of Semitic origin, and, furthermore, that the author, especially in the case of *Mordecai*, was using a name which, in the late post-exilic period at least, was regarded as a Jewish one. We may compare the mention of a *Mordecai*, for example, in Ezra 22 and Nehemiah 77 in connection with a number of Semitic names. *Mordecai*¹ (מֵרְדֵכַי) stands for *Mardukâ*, with which should be compared the מֵרְדֵכַי of an Aramaic gloss (Clay, *OTSS*, i. 313) "man of *Marduk*", or properly, "Mardukæan", a name which, although heathen from a Jewish point of view, was evidently permissible for an exilic Jew to bear. Such a name stands on the same plane as many more modern names of Jews and at the time of the compilation of the Book of Esther had probably lost its Babylonian sense entirely. The name *Esther* has long been recognized as a derivative from the Babylonian god-name *Istar* and cannot be regarded as a derivative from Persian *Sitareh*², *Stareh* = Greek ἀστὴρ "star".

The name *Vashti*, however, differs from *Mordecai* and *Esther*, in that it does not show so patent an origin. Clay ("Amurru",

¹ There can of course be no connection between *Mordecai* and the Persian name *Wardakë*, which appears on a seal with a female picture (Horn, *Sassanid. Siegelsteine*, p. 84, N. 33). This means 'little rose' and has been compared by Justi (*Iran. Namenbuch*) with the name Βαρδακός (p. 351). It is equally impossible to derive *Mordecai* from a compound with Bab. (*w*)*arad* 'servant'; as (*w*)*arad-Akha* 'the servant of Akha', an Elamic deity.

² The name of the mother of Avicena (Justi, *op. cit.*, p. 311).

p. 127) is inclined to connect *Vashti* etymologically with *En-Martu* by way of *En-Maštu* (p. 127), and formulates the comparison: אַנְוַשְׁתִּי = *En-Maštu* = *En-Martu* = *Bá'al Amurru*. This אַנְוַשְׁתִּי is an Aramaic gloss equated with *Martu*, which Clay reads *En-Wašt(u)*.³ It is true that *ma-aš* = MAŠ (BAR) = *ma-a-šu-dNinib*, B. 1778, to which should be added Clay's comparison (*op. cit.*, p. 200): *dMa-a-šu ù dMa-aš-tum mare Sin* "Mašu and Maštu are children of Sin", the moon-god. Of course, *Maštum* is clearly to be regarded here as the feminine of *Maš* = MAŠ (BAR) and would seem to indicate the consort of *Ninib*, furnishing a tempting analogy with the obscure *Vashti* of the Book of Esther. In the biblical account, however, the name of the Persian king is given in a reasonably correct Persian form *Ahasuerus* = אַחַשְׁוֵרֶשׁ, so that here we have undoubtedly a Hebraised form of an Aryan name. Inasmuch as *Mordecai* and *Esther* are Semitic names of Jews, who are supposed to be dealing with hostile aliens and the alien king's name appears in a quasi-Persian form, it would seem natural to look for the derivation of his queen's name *Vashti* rather in the Persian or Elamic nomenclature than in Semitic. If, as seems advisable, we are to consider the Book of Esther as being a late Jewish popular adaptation of an earlier tale, based upon a primitive Babylonian narrative of contest for national supremacy between Babylonian (Semitic) and Non-Babylonian (non-Semitic) powers, it would militate against the unity of the Esther narrative to regard *Vashti* as a variant of a Semitic Babylonian name such as *dMaštum*. In any case, the fixed final *-i* in *Vashti* would seem to indicate a Non-Semitic origin. This final *-i* is well attested by the Greek texts Ἀστυ; Ὀνάστυ and Ὀνάστῃ Josephus *Ant.* 11 6, 1.⁴ Furthermore, it is highly likely that the anti-Semitic *Haman* is not a Semitic name. Jensen has sought to connect *Haman* with the Elamic god-name *Khum*, *Khumban*, *Khumma*, *Amba*, *Umba*⁵ which seems a possible comparison.

³ For various opinions as to אַנְוַשְׁתִּי, see Prince, *JBL*, XXIV, pp. 54 ff.

⁴ The final η in Ὀνάστῃ in Josephus certainly seems to show that this vowel at this period had the same î-value as in modern Greek.

⁵ *WZKM*, VI. pp. 58; 70; *ZDMG*, LV. pp. 285 f. Cf. also Zimmern, *KAT.*, p. 485; pp. 516 ff.

Haman might also be Iranian *Human* (older *Homan*; Justi, *Iran. Namenbuch*, p. 132), but I am inclined to agree to an Elamic derivation, in view of the tempting possibility of also deriving *Vashti* from an Elamic, rather than from an Iranian source.

In the Elamic documents, there occurs a divine name written MAŠ (BAR)-TI. Jensen (*ZDMG*, LV, 235) reads this *Mašti* and not *B(P)arti*, because the Bar = *bar* sign can have the value *maš* in Elamic, as well as in Semitic Babylonian. Also in *WZKM*, VI, pp. 61—62, he repeats his opinion that BARTI was to be read *M(w)ašti* = *Vashti* and contradicts the view of Weissbach (*Neue Beiträge*, 755, 27 f.) and Sayce, that BARTI was to be read *B(P)arti*. Here it should be noted that Hüsing points out (*OLZ*, VIII, p. 390) that the pronunciation *P(B)arti* for this name is established by the occurrence of the name *Pa-ar-ti-ki-ra*, that of the city of Portipa (Πορτιπα), as well as by the allusion to a prince of *Parti*, all of which names contain the element *p(b)ar-* of *P(B)arti*. On the other hand, Hüsing denies that there is any Elamic deity *Mašti* = *Vashti*, which latter name he connects with Indo-Iranian *Wah(i)šti*, apparently for *Wahistā*.

The comparison between *Vashti* and Iranian (Avestan) *Wahista*, the superlative of *wanhu* 'good' has already been made (see Gesenius, *Hebr. Lexicon*¹⁵, s. v. 'תש). This is unsatisfactory, owing to the fixed *-i* ending in *Vashti*. Nor can we connect *Vashti* with such a form as *vasti*, the 3. p. sing. of Avestan *vač* 'desire; wish': 'she (he) desires', because we should rather expect a passive participle here: 'the desired one = *Désirée*', but this would be *Uštā* in Avestan. The modern Persian *vašti* 'beauty' (Justi, *Namenbuch*, p. 359) is a later form and a doubtful comparison in this case.

I believe that *Vashti* is Elamic rather than Persian and that the difficulties raised against Jensen's connection of it with Elamic *Mašti* by Hüsing are overcome, if it be remembered that the BAR-MAŠ sign, with both *bar* and *maš* values, represented originally a single vocable *wař* (*vař*), a suggestion which I made in *MSL*, p. XII. It is well known that *m* = *w*, probably a nasal *w*, similar to the nasalized *mh* = *w(v)* which

appears to-day, for instance, in Scottish Gaelic *lamh* 'hand'. That *r* and *s* frequently interchange is too well known to require demonstration. In modern Turkish, for example, the final *r* in such words as *bir* 'one' is almost *ř*, and the *ř* in Czech (*passim*) is an excellent example of an existing consonant which stands phonetically halfway between *r* and *s*. If it be supposed then that Elamic *Mašti* and *B(P)arti* are one and the same name, this word probably contains the Elamic *Vř-t*, seen in Mitanni in *AŠ-ti* 'consort', which, however, Bork⁶ reads *ruti* and connects with the older Elamic *ru'ti*, which word has undoubtedly the same stem as *ru* 'human beings'. Bork admits, however, that *AŠ-ti* may be read *asti* and only rejects any connection between this word and the Semitic Babylonian *aššatu* 'woman'. In this he is, of course, quite correct. Mitanni **asti* = **ařti* and metathetically probably = Old Elamic *ru'ti* = Mitanni *ruti* 'consort', which may be the stem of the god-name *Bar (Maš)ti* and this may really have been the original of the Vashti of Esther.⁷ That the compiler of Esther had a very vague notion as to foreign names is seen from his use of *Tarshish*⁸ (1 14) for a Persian prince.

⁶ Ferdinand Bork, *Die Mitannische Sprache*, p. 79.

⁷ If Bork is correct in his connection of Elamic with the Caucasus linguistic group, the name of the Georgian prince *Wašte* (Joh. Mami-koni in Langlois, Coll. i. 381) may have some connection with *Barti-Wařti-Vashti*.

⁸ *Taršiš* (also in I Chr. 7 10) is of course an invented name; according to LXX and Josephus = 'chrysolith stone'. See, however, Haupt, in *Verh. d. 13 Or. Kongr.*, p. 233.