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 2:2 and Nehemiah 7:7 in connection with a number of Semitic names. Mordecai סַּלִּדְדִה (מֶרְדֶּכַי) stands for Mardukā, with which should be compared the אַלּוּדָּה of an Aramaic gloss (Clay, OTSS, i. 313) “man of Marduk”, or properly, “Mardukaean”, 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 Ṣtareh, Ṣtareh = Greek δαστήρ “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 Wardakā, which appears on a seal with a female picture (Horn, Sasanid. Siegelatamente, p. 34, N. 33). This means ‘little rose’ and has been compared by Justi (Iran. Namenbuch) with the name Ḫotmanos (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 Elamite 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 (p. 127), and formulates the comparison: רָשָׁתָה ← En-Maštû ← En-Martu ← Bā‘al Amurru. This רָשָׁתָה is an Aramaic gloss equated with Martu, which Clay reads En-Wašt(u). It is true that ma-as ← MĀŠ (BAR) = ma-a-su-dNinib, B. 1778, to which should be added Clay’s comparison (op. cit., p. 200): dMa-a-su ʿi ʾdMa-aš-tum mare Sin “Mašu and Maštû are children of Sin”, the moon-god. Of course, Maštûm 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 Aḥasuerus ← ΑﻦΩΣΕΡΟΣ, 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 ʾdMaštum. 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 “Ασττων, ‘Ουάστων and ‘Ουάστηn 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 which seems a possible comparison.

3 For various opinions as to רָשָׁתָה, see Prince, JBL, XXIV, pp. 54 ff.
4 The final η in ‘Ουάστη in Josephus certainly seems to show that this vowel at this period had the same i-value as in modern Greek.
Haman might also be Iranian Homan (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(u)mašti = 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 B(P)arti for this name is established by the occurrence of the name Pa-ar-ti-ki-ra, that of the city of Portipa (Πορτίπα), 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)sti, apparently for Wahistā.

The comparison between Vashti and Iranian (Avestan) Wahista, the superlative of wahu ‘good’ has already been made (see Gesenius, *Hebr. Lexicon*¹⁵, s. v. ’יוּ). 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(ν) 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 ɾ, and the ɾ 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 Vr-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 ašti and only rejects any connection between this word and the Semitic Babylonian aššatu 'woman'. In this he is, of course, quite correct. Mitanni *ašti = *ašti 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 Tarshish⁸ (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 Wāštē (Joh. Mamikon in Langlois, Coll. i. 381) may have some connection with Barti-Wāštī-Vashti.
⁸ Taršīš (also in I Chr. 7:19) is of course an invented name; according to LXX and Josephus = 'chrysolith stone'. See, however, Haupt, in Verh. d. 13 Or. Kongr., p. 233.