

ρόω (crucify) rather than κρεμάζω (hang/impale), which is in Esther at this point. Thus, later when Haman is crucified, he really does get the punishment that he had devised for Mordecai. Interestingly, in 11.267, which parallels Esth 7:9, Josephus reverts to the verb κρεμάζω, but he calls the “pole” of Esther (ξύλον) a “cross” (σταυρός). Finally Josephus, as he does elsewhere, gives a moralizing interpretation of Haman’s death in 11.267–268. He observes that God visited on Haman the punishment that he had envisioned for Mordecai, which as far as Josephus is concerned demonstrates God’s justice and offers an opportunity for people to understand that when they commit injustice, they store up the same for themselves, even if they do not realize it.

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B. Rabbinic Judaism

The figure of Haman was expounded and elaborated in the numerous midrashic compendia and Targums to Esther, and in comments scattered through the Talmuds and other rabbinic works. The conflict between Haman and Mordecai was defined by national or religious typologies that transcended their individual personalities. In addition to features common to anti-Jewish figures like Pharaoh or Titus, the rabbis stressed Haman’s designation as “Agagite” (Esth 3:1), that is, heir of the throne of Amalek (two Amalekite kings are called Agag in the Bible; Num 24:7 and 1 Sam 15). The Amalekites are the first nation to attack the Israelites after the Egyptian exodus (Exod 17:8–16). Following the Israelite victory, God declared “the Lord will have war with Amalek from generation to generation” (v. 16). Deuteronomy 25:17–19 states “Remember what Amalek did to you.... You will blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. You shall not forget.” For his part, Mordecai is also treated typologically. Identified as a “Benjaminite” (Esth 2:5), he was regarded as continuing the mission of the Benjaminite king Saul who had been ordered to wage a campaign against the Amalekites in 1 Sam 15.

According to Gen 36:12 Amalek was the grandson of Esau, whom the rabbis equated with Rome, hence many rabbinic depictions of the villainous Haman were really directed against the contemporary Roman “evil empire.” Indeed, in expounding Esth 3:8 where Haman persuades Ahasuerus to allow the slaughter of the Jews in his empire, the rabbis ascribed to Haman several of the standard anti-Jewish accusations that were current in the Helle-

nistic environment (*bMeg* 13b, Targums). As with other biblical villains, the rabbis exaggerated Haman’s evil and his villainy was interpreted in terms of conventional Jewish religious values: e.g., the scribe Shimshai who persuades Xerxes to delay the rebuilding of the temple in Ezek 4:8 is identified as Haman’s son (2 *Panim Aherim* 55, 66) and Haman demands to be worshipped as an idol (*Abba Gorion* 22; *EstR* 2:5; 3:1–2; etc.). Several rabbinic accounts also portray him as a humiliated buffoon who is enslaved to Mordecai, serves him as a barber and bath attendant, and has a chamber-pot emptied on his head by his own daughter (*bMeg* 16a).

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C. Medieval Judaism

Abraham ibn Ezra (1089–1164; version B) and several late medieval Spanish exegetes, including Abraham Shalom (15th cent.; in his *Neweh Shalom*) and Abraham Saba (15th–16th cent.), accepted the rabbinic tradition that Memucan, Ahasuerus’ adviser responsible for deposing Vashti (1:16–21), was Haman. For some, e.g., Shalom and Isaac ben Joseph ha-Kohen (14th–15th cent.), it explained how Haman could rise so quickly to power. Ahasuerus was so pleased with how matters turned out after Vashti’s deposition that he expedited Haman’s promotion through the ranks of his courtiers (Walfish 1993: 33).

Most exegetes, following the sages (e.g., *bMeg* 10b), agree that bowing to Haman would have been tantamount to idol worship (some say he had an image of some sort affixed to his clothing or his headgear; others, e.g., Gersonides (1288–1344), that the king had made him a kind of demi-god, worthy of worship) and therefore Mordecai had no choice but to refuse to bow down to him (Esth 3:2; see Ibn Ezra, version A, Isaiah of Trani [13th cent.], Avigdor Kohen-Tsedeq [13th cent.], Abraham Saba). The Karaite exegete Yefet ben ‘Eli (late 10th cent.) further elaborates on this intended worship by correlating it with socio-religious realia – specifically, the Mazdean-Dualist conception regarding the “Divine Light,” for

some of the Persians believed that the Divine Light (*al-nūr*) had certain active manifestations (*af’āl*), and therefore, when they saw someone who was attractive and intelligent, they would opine that something of the Divine Light existed within him, and so they would deem it fit to worship him in a special fashion. (Comm. on 3:8)

Saadia Gaon (882–942) likewise correlates the worship of Haman with socio-religious realia, pointing