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Multiple Endings, Not Expansions in MT Esther



“MT-Esther developed by localized supplementation and reworking of an earlier form of the story” (Fox 1991, 99).

“Lot(s) of writing happen(s) in the Book of Esther” (Bal 1994, 89)



Past Approaches to MT Esther 8-10

- Some or all of what is in MT chs. 8-10 has been added in some way to an earlier version of the novella, esp. the Purim material



Past Approaches to MT Esther 8-10

Paton: MT Est 9:20-10:3 is an addition (sim.: Meinhold, Clines, others)

Proto-Esther (MT ch. 1-9:19)



The texts of *Esther*

■ Currently available:

- The **Masoretic Text** (MT), with no ancient witnesses surviving
- The **Septuagint** (LXX), which is a translation of a text close to the MT, but which also includes blocks of additional, expanded text (Additions A-E) some of which were likely found in a Hebrew version of *Esther*, others of which were found in Greek, and perhaps composed during translation
- The **Alpha Text** (AT), originally considered a Lucianic recension of the LXX, but now considered a second edition of a Greek translation which is based on a Hebrew *Vorlage* that differs significantly from MT/LXX



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 - Some (Tov, de Troyer) think AT is a revision of LXX



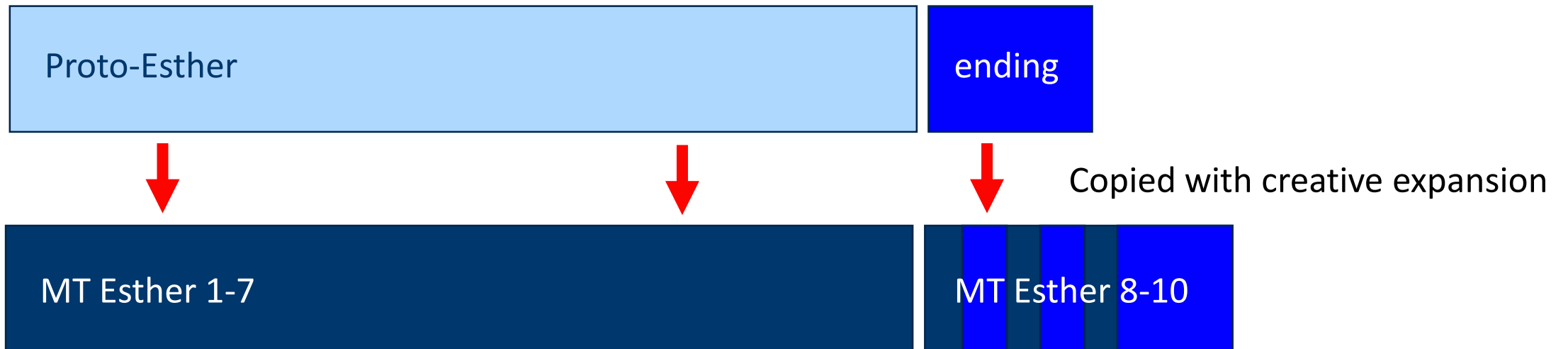
Past Approaches to MT Esther 8-10

- Work on Esther since the 1980's has turned to the Alpha Text to reconstruct the history of the text



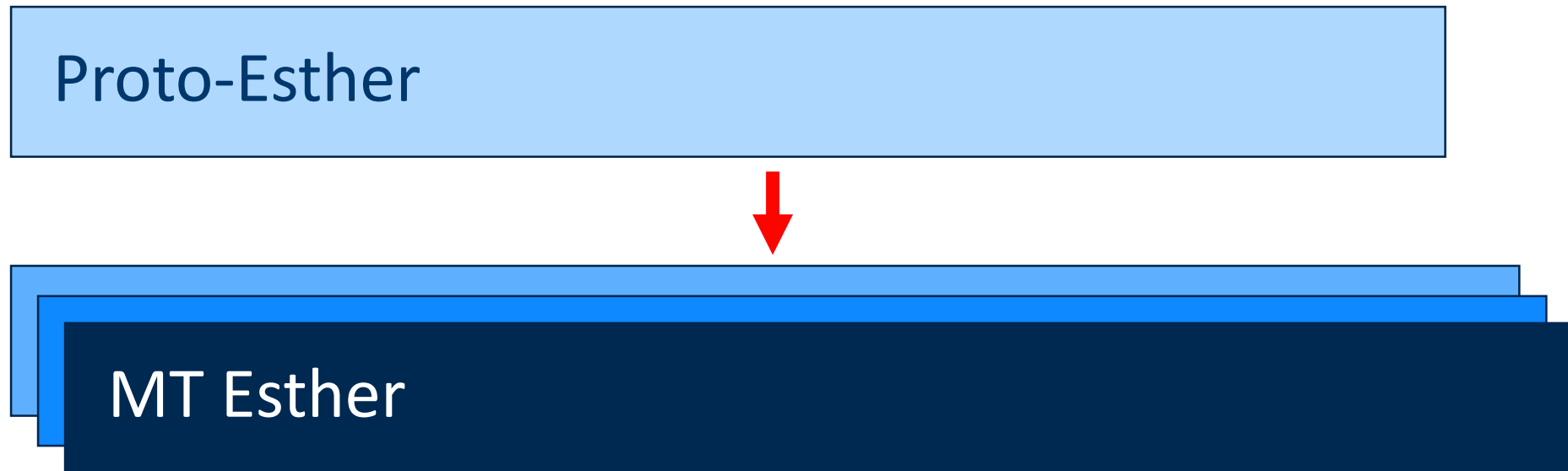
From “Proto-Esther” to MT Esther

Michael V. Fox:



From “Proto-Esther” to MT Esther

Beate Ego (2017): *Fortschreibung* throughout





My argument: an overview

- I argue that MT Esther is not **solely** the result of a series of expansions on a base text



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- I argue that MT Esther is not **solely** the result of a series of expansions on a base text
 - Note: LXX vis-à-vis MT is a perfect example of literary creativity by expansion, especially if it is assumed that some of the “Additions” are originally Hebrew



My argument: an overview

- I argue that MT Esther is not **solely** the result of a series of expansions on a base text
- **Rather**, in chapters 8-10, **multiple endings of separately existing editions can be postulated**, some of which themselves were likely created by the creative expansion or continuation of the final scenes of the story, but which at the same time were originally different, co-existing versions of *Esther*



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- **Rather**, in chapters 8-10, **multiple endings of separately existing editions can be postulated**, some of which themselves were likely created by the creative expansion or continuation of the final scenes of the story, but which at the same time were originally different, co-existing versions of *Esther*
- These were combined (redacted) into a multitext version that underlies or comprises the present MT Esther



My argument: an overview

■ Evidence:

■ Textual:

- Uneven textual status of chs. 8-10 bearing signs of composite history, including doublet-like sequences, some of which are contradictory

■ Comparative:

- The parallel version of the hypothetical Hebrew *Vorlage* of the (proto-)Alpha Text
- Contemporaneous Demotic narrative literature attesting to multiple versions of a single work of narrative literature (novellas)



My argument: an overview

- MT Esther, then, attests to different kinds of scribal creativity:
 - 1. Creative authorship of narrative literature
 - 2. Continued creative authorship in reworking pre-existing narrative literature (which I will define in more specific terms later in today's talk)
 - 3. Editing of written texts not only for the sake of creative expression, but for textual preservation



My argument: an overview

- This argument also presumes a certain perspective on MT Esther 1-7
 - There is no clear textual basis for reconstructing a complex text history as in chs. 8-10, although differences between the MT and (proto-)Alpha Text versions show that there were some differences



My argument: an overview

- This argument also presumes a certain perspective on MT Esther 1-7
 - There is no clear textual basis for reconstructing a complex text history as in chs. 8-10, although differences between the MT and (proto-)Alpha Text versions show that there were some differences
 - Nevertheless, there are some differences that may be connected with the different endings that can be reconstructed in the textual history of Hebrew versions of *Esther*, such as surrounding the motif of the inalterability of the Persian law



My argument: an overview

- This argument also presumes a certain perspective on MT Esther 1-7
 - This view of the text differs from some perspectives which see MT Esther as the combination of different “sources,” e.g. an “Esther” and “Mordecai” source (e.g. Cazelles, Bardtke, Kossmann) or a product of extensive, localized *Fortschreibung* as a whole (Ego)



General context of my argument

■ Refine the strict distinction between:

An “original” novella (oral?)
which is a fine example
of dramatic storytelling



A later, expanded edition
which became canonical

cf. Gunkel 1906



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■ Refine the strict distinction between:

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A later, expanded edition
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Original tradents
and/or authors



Redactors expanding texts



General context of my argument

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Redactors expanding texts

An original “secular”
novella



A “religious” and (proto-)canonical
text



Today's talk

- 1. Focus on inconsistencies in the text of MT Esther 8-10
- 2. Offer a highly tentative, work-in-progress reconstruction of different versions of *Esther* that circulated alongside each other
- 3. Compare similar scribal phenomena in contemporary narrative literature from Egypt (Demotic novellas)



1

Major Textual Tensions in MT Esther 8-10

(see handout, no. 1)



Major textual tensions in MT Esther 8-10

- 1. Traces of two denouements (8:15-17a, 9:23-28)
- 2. Esther makes two different requests to Ahasuerus (8:3, 8:4)
- 3. The Judeans attack in two waves (9:1-11, 9:15-16)
- 4. Haman's sons are put to death twice (9:10, 9:14)
- 5. Mordecai sends two decrees (8:9-12, 9:20-22)



Major textual tensions in MT Esther 8-10

■ Goal for this part of my talk:

- 1. Make compelling the view that MT Esther 8-10 is not a unified, single-authored text
- 2. Show that ch. 8 is equally problematic in its unevenness as chs. 9-10



1. Traces of two denouements (8:15-17a, 9:23-28)

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(8:15-17a, 9:23-28)

8:15 וַיֵּצֵא מִלְּפָנָיו הַמֶּלֶךְ בְּלְבוּשׁ
מַלְכוּת תְּכֵלֶת וְחֹר וְעֶטְרַת זָהָב גְּדוּלָּה
וְתִכְרִיף בּוּץ וְאַרְגָּמָן וְהָעִיר שׁוֹשֵׁן
צָהֲלָה וְשִׂמְחָה: ¹⁶ לַיהוּדִים הָיְתָה אֹרָה
וְשִׂמְחָה וְשִׁשׁוֹן וִיקָר: ¹⁷ וּבְכָל־מְדִינָה
וּמְדִינָה וּבְכָל־עִיר וְעִיר מְקוֹם אֲשֶׁר
דִּבְרַהֲמֶלֶךְ וְדָתוֹ מֵגִיעַ שִׂמְחָה וְשִׁשׁוֹן
לַיהוּדִים מִשָּׂתָה וְיוֹם טוֹב

Mordecai went out from the presence of the king in royal garb of purple and white, with a large, golden crown, with a cloak of byssos and purple-dyed wool, and with the city of Susa rejoicing and shouting for joy.

As for the Judeans, they had light, joy, jubilation, and honor, and in each and every province, and in each and every city in which the king's message and decree was proclaimed, the Judeans had joy and jubilation as well as a feast and holiday.

1. Traces of two denouements

(8:15-17a, 9:23-28)

9:23 וְקִבְּלוּ הַיְהוּדִים אֶת אֲשֶׁר-הִחֲלוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת וְאֵת
 אֲשֶׁר-כָּתַב מְרֹדֶכַי אֲלֵיהֶם: ²⁴ כִּי הָמָן בֶּן-הַמֶּדְתָּא
 הָאֲגָגִי צִוָּר כָּל-הַיְהוּדִים חָשַׁב עַל-הַיְהוּדִים לְאַבְדֵם
 וְהַפִּיל פּוּר הוּא הַגּוֹרֵל לְהָמָם וּלְאַבְדֵם: ...
 9:28 וְהַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה נִזְכָּרִים וְנַעֲשִׂים בְּכָל-דּוֹר וְדוֹר
 מִשְׁפָּחָה וּמִשְׁפָּחָה מְדִינָה וּמְדִינָה וְעִיר וְעִיר וַיְמִי
 הַפּוּרִים הָאֵלֶּה לֹא יִעָבְרוּ מִתּוֹךְ הַיְהוּדִים וְזָכְרָם
 לֹא-יִסּוּף מִזֶּרְעָם:

The Judeans accepted as custom what they had begun to do and what Mordecai wrote to them—that Haman, son of Hamdatha, the Agagite, enemy of all Judeans, plotted against the Judeans to destroy them, and had cast *pur*, that is, a lot, to confuse and destroy them ... (therefore) these days are to be remembered and kept in each and every generation, each and every family, each and every province, and each and every city, and these days of Purim will not be omitted from the midst of the Judeans, and their memory will not perish from their descendants.



1. Traces of two denouements (8:15-17a, 9:23-28)

- Both have generally similar content appropriate to denouements:
 - *Closure*: The story is “rounded out” (Mordecai is dressed in the same finery found in Ahasuerus’s palace in ch. 1; the ominous *pur* of Haman now becomes the cause for celebration for the Judeans)
 - *Euphoria*: Not only is everything OK: everything is better!
 - *Expansion*: Looking towards the entire empire or to future generations



1. Traces of two denouements (8:15-17a, 9:23-28)

- Both denouements are characterized by **reversal**
- Achieved differently, however:
 - 8:15-17a is **plot-based** and focused on Mordecai's elevation
 - 9:23-28 continues this notion, but is more focused on the **theme** of reversal and how it relates to Purim



1. Traces of two denouements (8:15-17a, 9:23-28)

- There are major differences in style and tone:
 - 8:15-17a is couched in standard, concrete narration, casting a wider, summarizing view of the new, final events of the plot
 - 9:23-28 1. summarizes and repeats what has already happened and interprets overtly and unsubtly their meaning, and 2. is prescriptive



2. Esther makes two different requests to Ahasuerus (8:3, 8:4-5)



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8:3 וַתֹּסֶף אֶסְתֵּר וַתִּדְבַר לְפָנַי הַמֶּלֶךְ וַתִּפֹּל
לְפָנַי רַגְלָיו וַתִּבְכֶּה וַתַּתְחַנֵּן-לוֹ לְהַעֲבִיר
אֶת-רַעַת הַמֶּן הָאֲגָגִי וְאֵת מַחְשַׁבְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר
חָשַׁב עַל-הַיְהוּדִים:

Esther again spoke before the king and fell before his feet, weeping and beseeching him to revoke the evil of Haman the Agagite and the plot he devised against the Judeans.

2. Esther makes two different requests to Ahasuerus (8:3, 8:4-5)

8:4 וַיִּוָּשֶׁט הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאַסְתֵּר אֶת שַׁרְבֵט הַזֶּהָב
 וַתִּקַּם אֲסֵתֵר וַתַּעֲמֵד לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ: 5 וַתֹּאמֶר
 אִם-עַל-הַמֶּלֶךְ טוֹב וְאִם-מְצֹאֲתִי חֵן לִפְנֵי
 וְכִשֵּׁר הַדָּבָר לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ וְטוֹבָה אֲנִי בְעֵינָיו
 יִכְתֹּב לְהַשִּׁיב אֶת-הַסְּפָרִים מִחֻשְׁבֵּת הַמֶּן
 בְּן-הַמְּדַתָּא הָאֲגָגִי אֲשֶׁר כָּתַב לְאַבְד
 אֶת-הַיְהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּכָל-מְדִינֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ:

The king stretched out the golden scepter to Esther, and Esther arose and stood before the king. She said, “If it seems good in the king’s esteem and if I have found favor before him, and the matter be pleasing before the king and I be good in his eyes: let it be written to reverse the writings which Haman, son of Hamdatha, the Agagite, made to destroy the Judeans in every district of the king.



2. Esther makes two different requests to Ahasuerus (8:3, 8:4-5)

- There **is** continuity in the narration and no true contradiction:
 - In 8:3, Esther is said to fall down at Ahasuerus's feet, and in 8:4, after he extends his scepter, she rises



2. Esther makes two different requests to Ahasuerus (8:3, 8:4-5)

■ Why the redundancy?

- Everything relevant is narrated in summary and through indirect speech in 8:3
- As MT Esther 5:1-2 shows, the protocol was that the king held out the scepter, and the person approached him (cf. also 4:11).



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■ Why the redundancy?

- Everything relevant is narrated in summary and through indirect speech in 8:3
- As MT Esther 5:1-2 shows, the protocol was that the king held out the scepter, and the person approached him (cf. also 4:11).
- Why would Ahasuerus grant Esther to speak to him after she speaks to him?
Unless 8:3 is not straightforward narration of the present but of the future.



2. Esther makes two different requests to Ahasuerus (8:3, 8:4-5)

■ Possible interpretations:

- 1. They are completely **separate** events: Esther asks generally about defeating Haman, then asks specifically about annulling the decree. Perhaps she is inarticulate at first, and then is emboldened by Ahasuerus, composes herself, and speaks clearly.
- 2. They refer to **the same event** in the story, which means the narrator is narrating something twice, first with less, then with more detail, *choosing to be redundant at the same time*



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[Ahasuerus ordered Haman to be hung]

And the king said to Esther, “He even intended to hang Mordecai, who saved me from the hand of the eunuchs! Didn’t he know that Esther is of his people?” The king called Mordecai and granted him everything that belonged to Haman. And he said to him, “What do you desire? I will do it for you.” And Mordecai said, “That you nullify Haman’s letter.” So the king entrusted to him the affairs of the kingdom.

[Esther asks the king on the next day to have Haman’s sons killed]



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2. Esther makes two different requests to Ahasuerus (8:3, 8:4-5)

- The proto-Alpha Text suggests that, after Haman's decree is revoked, Esther asks for revenge:

“Esther said to the king on the next day, ‘Allow me to punish my enemies with bloodshed.’ So Queen Esther appealed to the king against Haman’s children also, that they too should die along with their father. The king said, ‘Let it be so.’ So she struck the enemies in great numbers. And in Susa the king made an agreement with the queen to kill men, and he said, ‘Behold, I give them to you to hang.’ And so it was done.]



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3. The Judeans attack in two waves (9:1-11, 9:15-16)



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- First attack:
 - On the 13th of Adar, when Haman's decree was set to take effect, Judeans throughout the empire (including Susa) attack those who hate them, killing 500 alone in Susa.
 - This follows the edict of Mordecai in 8:10-14, which was hastily delivered throughout the empire
 - Among the victims are the ten sons of Haman (9:10).



3. The Judeans attack in two waves (9:1-11, 9:15-16)

- Unevenness in the first attack:
 - The attacks by the Judeans are not out of self-defense against organized attacks, as the decree of 8:11 states, but are generally directed against their enemies and those who hate them (Clines 1984, 39-40)



3. The Judeans attack in two waves (9:1-11, 9:15-16)

- Second attack:
 - On the 14th of Adar, Judeans in Susa kill 300 men, and in the rest of the empire, 75,000.
 - This follows an additional request of Esther to Ahasuerus which seems to pertain to Susa alone (9:12-13).
 - Nevertheless, there are also additional attacks in the provinces on 14 Adar, and not only in Susa (9:16).



3. The Judeans attack in two waves (9:1-11, 9:15-16)

- Unevenness in the second attack:
 - Esther's request in 9:13 may not explicitly ask for an additional day of slaughter in Susa on 14 Adar:

“Let it be granted also tomorrow to the Judeans in Susa to act according to today's decree (פְּדַת הַיּוֹם) and hang the ten sons of Haman on the gallows.”



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“Let it be granted also tomorrow to the Judeans in Susa to act according to today's decree (פְּדַת הַיּוֹם) and hang the ten sons of Haman on the gallows.”

→ It is possible that the second attack was not spurred by Esther's request, but was a spontaneous continuation of the attacks on 13 Adar



3. The Judeans attack in two waves (9:1-11, 9:15-16)

- The two waves of attacks can be read [harmoniously](#):
 - At the end of the first day of attack (13 Adar), Ahasuerus learns about it, discusses it with Esther, and tells Esther she can ask him for anything (?), and so she asks to have the sons of Haman hanged (9:11-13).
 - While this happens, the Judeans assemble **also** on 14 Adar throughout the empire (including Susa)

3. The Judeans attack in two waves (9:1-11, 9:15-16)

- The narrator's description of the dates of the attacks and the periods of rest seems like a heavy-handed harmonization however (9:15-18):

וַיִּקְהֲלוּ הַיְהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר-בְּשׁוּשָׁן גַּם בְּיוֹם אַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ
 אֶדְר וַיַּהַרְגוּ בְּשׁוּשָׁן שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת אִישׁ וּבְבִזָּה לֹא שָׁלְחוּ
 אֶת-יָדָם: וַיִּשְׂאֵר הַיְהוּדִים אֲשֶׁר בְּמִדְיָנוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ נִקְהְלוּ וַעֲמַד
 עַל-נַפְשָׁם וְנוֹחַ מֵאִיְבֵיהֶם וְהָרַג בְּשִׁנְאֵיהֶם חֲמִשָּׁה וְשִׁבְעִים אֶלֶף
 וּבְבִזָּה לֹא שָׁלְחוּ אֶת-יָדָם: בְּיוֹם-שְׁלֹשָׁה עָשָׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ אֶדְר וְנוֹחַ
 בְּאַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר בּוֹ וַעֲשֶׂה אֹתוֹ יוֹם מְשֻׁתָּה וְשִׂמְחָה: וַהֲיֵהוּדִים
 אֲשֶׁר-בְּשׁוּשָׁן נִקְהְלוּ בַשְּׁלֹשָׁה עָשָׂר בּוֹ וּבְאַרְבָּעָה עָשָׂר בּוֹ וְנוֹחַ
 בַּחֲמִשָּׁה עָשָׂר בּוֹ וַעֲשֶׂה אֹתוֹ יוֹם מְשֻׁתָּה וְשִׂמְחָה:

The Judeans in Susa assembled also on the 14th of the month of Adar and killed 300 men in Susa, but did not lay their hand on the spoil. As for the rest of the Judeans in the provinces of the king, they had assembled and stood up for their lives, and had rest from their enemies, and slew 75,000 of their enemies, but did not lay their hand on the spoil, on the 13th of the month of Adar, resting on the 14th of the same and making it a day of feasting and joy. As for the Judeans in Susa, they had assembled on the 13th and the 14th of the same and rested on the 15th of the same, and made it a day of feasting and joy.



4. Haman's sons are put to death twice (9:5-10, 9:13-14)



4. Haman's sons are put to death twice (9:5-10, 9:13-14)

וַיַּכּוּ הַיְהוּדִים בְּכָל־אֲבֵיהֶם מִכַּת־חֶרֶב וְהָרֵג וְאַבְדּוֹן
 וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בְשֵׁנָאֵיהֶם כְּרָצוֹנָם: וּבְשׁוֹשׁן הַבִּירָה הָרְגוּ
 הַיְהוּדִים וְאַבְדּוֹ חֲמִשׁ מֵאוֹת אִישׁ: וְאֵת פְּרִשְׁנֶדְתָּא
 וְאֵת דַּלְפוֹן וְאֵת אֶסְפָּתָא: וְאֵת פּוֹרְתָא וְאֵת אֲדַלְיָא
 וְאֵת אַרִידָתָא: וְאֵת פַּרְמַשְׁתָּא וְאֵת אַרִיסַי וְאֵת אַרְדַּי
 וְאֵת וַיְזָתָא: עֲשָׂרֵת בְּנֵי הָמָן בְּן־הַמַּדָּתָא צִרַר
 הַיְהוּדִים הָרְגוּ וּבִבְזֵיהֶם לֹא שָׁלְחוּ אֶת־יָדָם:

The Judeans struck all of their enemies with a sword's blow, murder, and destruction, and did as they pleased with those who hated them. In Susa the fortress, **the Judeans killed and destroyed** five hundred men, including **Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vaizatha: the ten sons of Haman**, son of Hammadatha, the oppressor of the Judeans, did they kill, not laying their hands on the spoil.

4. Haman's sons are put to death twice

(9:5-10, 9:13-14)

וַתֹּאמֶר אֶסְתֵּר אִם-עַל-הַמֶּלֶךְ
 טוֹב יִנָּתֵן גַּם-מָחָר לַיהוּדִים
 אֲשֶׁר בְּשׁוֹשָׁן לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּדַת
 הַיּוֹם וְאֵת עֲשָׂרַת בְּנֵי-הָמֶן
 יִתְּלוּ עַל-הָעֵץ: וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ
 לַהֲעֲשׂוֹת כֵּן וַתִּנָּתֵן דָּת בְּשׁוֹשָׁן
 וְאֵת עֲשָׂרַת בְּנֵי-הָמֶן תָּלוּ:

Esther said, “If it seems good in the king’s esteem, let it be granted to the Judeans in Susa to also act tomorrow according to today’s decree, and hang the ten sons of Haman on the gallows.” The king ordered that it be carried out thus. The decree was given in Susa, and **the ten sons of Haman were hanged.**



4. Haman's sons are put to death twice (9:5-10, 9:13-14)

■ A harmonizing reading:

- They are killed in 9:10 (spontaneously, by the Judeans)
- Esther then asks in 9:14 that their corpses be desecrated (hung from the gallows that Haman was hung on)
 - Cf. 1 Samuel 31:10 (the Philistines impaled [תקע] Saul's corpse on a wall) and Deut 20:21-23 (execution *followed by* being hung [תלה] on a gallows, using the same verb as in MT Esther)
 - This is made explicit in LXX Esther



4. Haman's sons are put to death twice (9:5-10, 9:13-14)

■ Against the harmonizing reading:

- The verb used in 9:13 is the same as in 7:9-10 for Haman [תלה], and though the verb itself does not necessarily mean *execute by hanging*, it implies execution in *Esther*
- Note: Haman is not said in MT Esther to be killed before being hung up—but he clearly is
- How did Esther find out that they died?



4. Haman's sons are put to death twice (9:5-10, 9:13-14)

- In the [Alpha Text](#), Esther requests that the sons of Haman be killed immediately after the decree of Haman is revoked
- The narrator says it was commanded afterwards (“And so it was done”)—which means it could have happened, or it could have been set in motion to happen
- There is no second request (i.e. to desecrate their corpses)



4. Haman's sons are put to death twice (9:5-10, 9:13-14)

- In the [Alpha Text](#), their execution is [narrated as an event](#), as in the MT, after Mordecai's decree is sent out, during a depiction of the Judeans' attacks in Susa (killing 700), and following a shorter list of similar names to what is found in MT 9:7-9—but they are **not** Haman's sons.
- This is also found in LXX, however, although LXX is like MT in giving ten names and saying they are Haman's sons



5. Mordecai sends two decrees (8:9-12, 9:20-22)



5. Mordecai sends two decrees (8:9-12, 9:20-22)

8:9-12

Purpose: to protect the Judeans by ordering them to attack the gentiles who seek to harm them

9:20-22

Purpose: to inform about Haman's plot, and his defeat, and to order the Judean community to celebrate and commemorate it

(also: to adjudicate between the two days that are used for celebration?)



5. Mordecai sends two decrees (8:9-12, 9:20-22)

- The first decree is given after Ahasuerus grants Mordecai and Esther the freedom to write to the Judeans what they wish (8:7-8)
- As previously discussed, this does not seem to follow immediately on Esther's request to reverse Haman's decree (8:5-6)
- While the context in MT Esther 8 suggests that Mordecai's decree in 8:9-12 will reverse the decree, instead it gives the Judeans license to attack their enemies



5. Mordecai sends two decrees (8:9-12, 9:20-22)

- In the first decree, Mordecai commands that the Judeans take spoil (8:11)
- But after the first and second days of attacks, they do not take spoil (9:10, 16)

[N.B. there is a typo in the handout about this!]



5. Mordecai sends two decrees (8:9-12, 9:20-22)

- The Alpha Text (when LXX Add. E is subtracted) has only one decree
- It resembles Mordecai's single decree in the Alpha Text:
 - Explains what Haman had ordered
 - Tells the Judeans to celebrate because of the defeat of Haman
 - (nothing about defending, or attacking)
- This decree leads into the scene where Mordecai is wears royal clothing and is acclaimed in Susa (= MT Est 8:15-7, the “first denouement”)



Summary of the textual tensions



Summary of the textual tensions

- “Doubling” predominates, but not always “doublets”:
 - Significantly different:
 - Mordecai’s two decrees, accomplishing different things
 - Haman’s son are killed twice, but in different ways



Summary of the textual tensions

- There are different styles of narration evident across the texts in tension:
 - Straightforward depiction and summary of events
 - vs. unobvious, thematic-oriented summary as well as wide-reaching summary of events and their meaning



Summary of the textual tensions

- Even if MT Esther 8-9 can be read harmoniously, based on fractures in the text and on the Alpha Text in comparison, these chapters should be considered to be composite in some fashion
- Put another way: the editor/author of MT Esther worked with texts where, for example, Haman's sons died in different ways, but was able to rely on the different ways that this happened, as well as on the ambiguity of verbs like תלע, to create a coherent text
- Though this results in a strongly inconsistent text, is it nevertheless not truly contradictory (like some Pentateuchal texts, or 1 Samuel 17-18)



2

Postulating Multiple Endings in MT *Esther*



Multiple Endings, Not Expansions

- Instead of postulating that a base text similar to Esther 1-7 or -8* was expanded one or more times into the text that we have today, I argue that the text of chs. 8-10 implies a more complex picture of independent, coherent texts
- This is supported by a comparison with the Alpha Text (and the LXX), which show that multiple editions of *Esther*, even before the expansions of the LXX, existed
- My reading of MT Esther simply ascribes that multitext picture further backwards



Multiple Endings, Not Expansions

- In terms of the plot of *Esther* and where the different material collected together the MT originated, all stem from final scenes of the story, after the climax (the downfall of Haman and the deliverance of Mordecai) → [the ending of the story](#)
- What plot material is built on in each hypothetical ending:
 - How Ahasuerus responds to Haman's defeat
 - How Mordecai and Esther deal with the aftermath of Haman's defeat



Multiple Endings, Not Expansions

- In terms of the plot of *Esther* and where the different material collected together the MT originated, all stem from final scenes of the story, after the climax (the downfall of Haman and the deliverance of Mordecai) → the ending of the story
- What each hypothetical ending accomplishes:
 - Enacting poetic justice against Haman
 - The elevation of Mordecai
 - The commemoration of Judean victory



Multiple Endings, Not Expansions

- The uneven and extra textual material in MT Esther 8-10 points to three general [ways in which endings of Esther were created](#) (before they were combined later):
 - Alternation
 - Expansion (cf. LXX, MT ch. 10)
 - Reordering



The MT and Alpha Text compared

MT

Haman is hanged or hung up (after being executed)

Esther asks that Haman's decree be revoked

Mordecai sends a letter to the Judeans

The Judeans kill their enemies (incl. Haman's sons)

Esther asks that Haman's sons be hung up

They are executed (and hung up?)

The Judeans continue to kill their enemies

Alpha Text

Haman is hanged or hung up (after being executed)

Mordecai asks that Haman's decree be revoked

Esther asks for revenge, (and?) to kill Haman's sons

Esther's wish is granted ("It was so")

Mordecai sends a letter to the Judeans (= an ending?)

The Judeans kill their enemies (incl. Haman's sons)



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Mordecai sends a letter to the Judeans → Denouement 1

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Esther asks for revenge, (and?) to kill Haman's sons

Esther's wish is granted ("It was so")

Mordecai sends a letter to the Judeans (= an ending?) → Denouement 1

The Judeans kill their enemies (incl. Haman's sons)

Extra?



Multiple Endings, Not Expansions

- A working hypothesis:
 - An ending (or family of endings) where Mordecai wrote a letter to the Judeans and informed them of the defeat of Haman, and there was celebration



Multiple Endings, Not Expansions

- A working hypothesis:
 - An ending (or family of endings) where Mordecai wrote a letter to the Judeans and informed them of the defeat of Haman, and there was celebration
 - Another ending (or family of endings) where (additionally? [expansion?](#)) Esther sought vengeance—but likely in different forms



Multiple Endings, Not Expansions

- Who spoke up after Ahasuerus sealed Haman's fate?
 - Mordecai:
 - Sought to annul Haman's decree?
 - Esther:
 - Sought to annul Haman's decree?
 - Sought to put Haman's sons to death?
 - Sought general vengeance for the Judeans?



Multiple Endings, Not Expansions

- Who spoke up after Ahasuerus sealed Haman's fate? → potential alternates
 - Mordecai:
 - Sought to annul Haman's decree?
 - Esther:
 - Sought to annul Haman's decree?
 - Sought to put Haman's sons to death?
 - Sought general vengeance for the Judeans?



Multiple Endings, Not Expansions

- Ways that Mordecai asks to annul Haman's decree:
 - In AT, sends a letter to the Judeans to inform them. This resembles the second letter in MT ch. 9.
 - In MT, sends a letter ordering the Judeans to attack and defend themselves—a significantly different type of ending
- In the MT and the AT, this leads to Mordecai being proclaimed and the Judeans celebrating in the “first denouement”



Multiple Endings, Not Expansions

- Are versions where Mordecai annuls Haman's decree distinct from versions where Esther asks for vengeance?
 - May even be two **alternate** endings when it comes to Esther's vengeance:
 - 1. General vengeance
 - 2. Putting Haman's sons to death



Multiple Endings, Not Expansions

- Another hint of [alternating](#) endings:
 - The two different days of Judean vengeance preserved in MT with different details



Multiple Endings, Not Expansions

- Another hint of alternating endings:
 - The two different days of Judean vengeance preserved in MT with different details
 - = two separate **expansions** of endings where Esther asks for vengeance (in whatever way)?



Multiple Endings, Not Expansions

- Another hint of alternating endings:
 - The two different days of Judean vengeance preserved in MT with different details
 - = two separate **expansions** of endings where Esther asks for vengeance (in whatever way)?

- Note that one of the days of vengeance in the MT includes uneasily the execution of Hamans' sons ... is this an example of **reordering**, where Esther's original impetus of vengeance was transferred?



Multiple Endings, Not Expansions

- The names of the individuals killed by the Judeans in the MT and Alpha Text:
 - In the Alpha Text, five names are given, different from the ten sons of Haman also killed
 - In MT, ten names (some similar) are given, and are said (though perhaps awkwardly!) to be, in fact, the tens of Haman



Multiple Endings, Not Expansions

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- In the Alpha Text, five names are given, different from the ten sons of Haman also killed
- In MT, ten names (some similar) are given, and are said (though perhaps awkwardly!) to be, in fact, the tens of Haman

→ Could argue that the MT's version is **expanded**, with five becoming ten and equated with Haman's sons. This supports a view that there was an ending without the death of Haman's sons, with only general vengeance (cf. AT).



Is the Purim connection necessarily late?

Is the Purim connection necessarily late?

- The lateness of the Purim material is the postulation of classical historical criticism of the Hebrew Bible
 - Was argued by Michaelis already in 1783
 - See also Eissfeldt, *Einleitung* and Paton's ICC commentary
- This view is challenged or ignored in many recent “literary” treatments of the text



Michaelis



Is the Purim connection necessarily late?

- Arguments regarding the “late” nature of the Purim material:
 - MT Esther 9-10 is significantly different from chs. 1-8 and so is not original
 - More specifically, 9:20-10:3 reads like an appendix
 - The proto-Alpha Text arguably made no overt connection to Purim (esp. where Haman first casts the lot)



Is the Purim connection necessarily late?

■ One recently-proposed possibility:

- 3:13 (the date Haman decreed the destruction of the Judeans) and the Purim material in MT Est 9 are a late addition (or edition) → a *Fortschreibung* of an MT-like text of Esther

(Ego 2017, 41)



Is the Purim connection necessarily late?

- If MT Esther 8-10 is not simply a series of expansions, but a complex conflation of the endings of several different versions of *Esther*, there is no longer a necessary reason to hold that the Purim material in ch. 9 is “late”
- Cf. the etiological import of *Ruth*, which informs the entire novella, and the genealogy at the end



Is the Purim connection necessarily late?

- If the Purim connection is not “late,” it at the same time does not mean that MT Esther as we have it is a straightforwardly integral composition like, e.g., *Ruth*



Is the Purim connection necessarily late?

- If the Purim connection is not “late,” it also does not necessarily follow that original or older versions of *Esther* made the connection as explicit and unsubtle as the present MT Esther arguably does
- Just because there is a connection in the story to Purim does not mean that *Esther* was intended as a *hieros logos* (Clines) for the festival



Is the Purim connection necessarily late?

- The solution may come down to the history of the festival of Purim, whether it was originally associated with 14-15 Adar, and whether it would have been recognizable to the readership of *Esther* (in an original or near-original form) through subtle clues alone
 - For a pattern of subtle clues followed by overt connection, cf. *Ruth*



Moving on...

- Pure speculation, but not baseless...



3

Evidence for Multiple Editions of Demotic Novellas from Egypt



Overview of Evidence: Demotic Egyptian Narrative Literature

- Dozens of works of narrative literature (prose fiction), written perhaps as early as the Persian period, but appearing for certain in the Ptolemaic period (3rd-1st centuries BCE), in the Demotic language and script
- Most manuscripts come from temple libraries in the Roman period (like Qumran), many being versions of texts known from earlier, Ptolemaic manuscripts
- Several of these are single, lengthy, and complex stories like *Esther*, and can thus be identified as **novellas**
- A handful are preserved in extensive, reasonably good form to allow in-depth study



Variation in Manuscripts of Demotic Narratives

- The promise of studying Demotic narrative literature alongside works like *Esther*:
 - Contemporaneity
 - Similar literary milieu (Achaemenian/Aramaic; Hellenistic Greek)
 - Similar literary features and compositional techniques: prose narrative fiction, similar genres and configurations of stories
 - Similar themes and content: interest in the past, both legendary and recent; court intrigue
 - Similar socio-cultural matrix: scribes and priest-scholars linked with temples as well as with imperial administrative centers
 - Similar textual medium (ink on papyrus scrolls)



Overview of Evidence: Demotic Egyptian Narrative Literature

- Relevance for studying textual history of novellas, and reconstructing one for *Esther* in particular:
 - *The Prebend of Amun* (Papyrus Spiegelberg; P. Carlsberg 433 and 434, and others not yet published)
 - *The Armor of Inaros* (Papyrus Krall; P. Carlsberg 456+)



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 - *The Prebend of Amun* (Papyrus Spiegelberg; P. Carlsberg 433 and 434, and others not yet published)
 - *The Armor of Inaros* (Papyrus Krall; P. Carlsberg 456+)
 - Both part of the “Inaros Cycle” (or “Inaros-Petubastis Cycle”) of narrative literature, sharing numerous characters, many of which are based on historical figures from the period of the Assyrian invasion of Egypt (late 7th century BCE)



Overview of Evidence: Demotic Egyptian Narrative Literature

- Relevance for studying textual history of novellas, and reconstructing one for *Esther* in particular:
 - *The Prebend of Amun* (Papyrus Spiegelberg; P. Carlsberg 433 and 434, and others not yet published)
 - *The Armor of Inaros* (Papyrus Krall; P. Carlsberg 456+)
 - Both are quite lengthy (perhaps 33% larger than *Judith*)



Overview of Evidence: Demotic Egyptian Narrative Literature

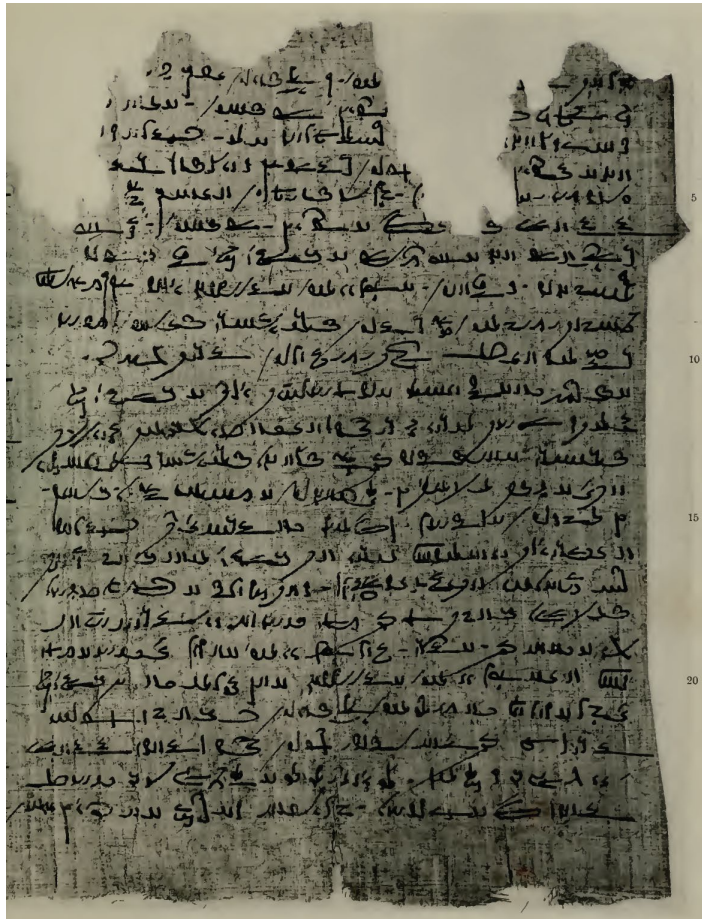
- Relevance for studying textual history of novellas, and reconstructing one for *Esther* in particular:
 - *The Teaching of Onchsheshonqy* (not a novella, but a frame narrative with proverbial material like *Ahiqar*)



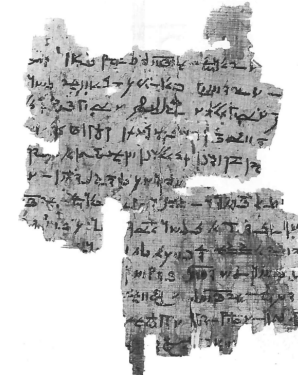
Variation in Manuscripts of Demotic Narratives

- In general, **variation** among manuscripts of Demotic narrative literature, including novellas, **is the rule**
- Kinds of textual variation seen when comparing manuscripts:
 - **Changing of wording**, from small-scale to significant, alongside unchanged text
 - **Expanded scenes** (following patterns)
 - **Expanded endings** (additional story material)
 - ***Conflated versions** (both in middle and end)

P. Spiegelberg column 14, of 26+ (mid-first century BCE)



P. Carlberg 433, 434 fragments
(2nd century CE)



The Prebend of Amun – parallel texts with significant differences



The Prebend of Amun

- Also known as *Der Kampf um die Pfründe des Amun*, and called by its primary text witness, Papyrus Spiegelberg
- Roman-period copies (P. Carlsberg 433, 434), though fragmentary, show different kinds of textual variation when compared with the primary Ptolemaic copy (P. Spiegleberg)
- Numerous close correspondences, yet significant changes, especially in character speeches



The Prebend of Amun

Example 1

P. Spiegelberg 10.1-10

The [Great of the East Pe]krur ans[wered him:] “Is what you are doing frenzy? Or is....to take revenge on the shepherds who captured Prince Ankhhor and General Wertepamunniut? The army will not be able to withstand any of them. Do you say, ‘The army of Egypt may prepare against them!’ that the shepherds cause a bloodbath among them? And further, Amun, the great god, is here with us. [It is] not [appropriate] that we do anything without Amun. Let Pharaoh ask before him! If he commands us to fight, we will fight. If it happens to be something different that Amun will command, we will act accordingly.”

P. Carlsberg 434, ll.3-9

- (3)] the Great of the East, Paklul, **the Exceedingly Great**, saying [
(4)] **your (attempts at) cleverness are what have let them capture Prince Ankhhor and** [
(5)] **their hands and their feet, as they sent them on board** [
(6) ... the army **of] Egypt** [will not (be able?)] to withstand **him upon the banks of the** [
(7) ... they (sc. the shepherds)] cause a bloodbath among **[the] army of Egypt** [
(8)] with them. It is not appropriate to do anything without **consulting him** (sc. Amun). **Please consult** [
(9)] fight, (then) we shall fight. **That which he** (sc. Amun) will com[mand ...



The Prebend of Amun

- A significant amount of the parallel text matches closely on a word-to-word basis
- Yet much of the variation is extensive, reaching beyond what memory variance or scribal interventions could explain
- The easiest explanation is that a textual archetype similar to P. Spiegelberg underlies the Tebtunis versions, probably transmitted in writing (although memorization is possible as well), and that this text was changed one or more times



The Prebend of Amun

- Many differences apparent in the later copies are related to the evolving depiction of characters and their characterization, especially revolving around Pharaoh Petubastis
 - Petubastis → less at fault
 - Djedhor (grandson) → more at fault
 - Pekrur/Paklul (advisor) → more unambiguously pro-Petubastis



The Prebend of Amun

- An explanation for the change (see discussion in Cross, forthcoming):
 - The variation is a kind of *mouvance* like that of the medieval *chansons de geste* (Paul Zumthor) and argued by many to have taken place during the early transmission of Homeric epic (Nagy 1996) and even accompanying its written transmission (Bird 2010, but cf. Ready 2019)
 - A textual impermanence, an “unceasing vibration and a fundamental instability” (Zumthor) inherent in the text which exists because the textual performance tradition is still alive (Nagy 1996, 10)



The Prebend of Amun

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 - A textual impermanence, an “unceasing vibration and a fundamental instability” (Zumthor) inherent in the text which exists because the textual performance tradition is still alive (Nagy 1996, 10)
 - Such *mouvance* accompanies the textual history of the novella even though it was not composed extemporaneously in performance like the Ur-Homeric poems (cf. Jay 2016)



The Prebend of Amun

- What allows such *mouvance*?
 - The performative nature of ancient prose fiction
 - Libretti-like book-scrolls which find their full realization when read or declaimed out loud to an audience



The Prebend of Amun

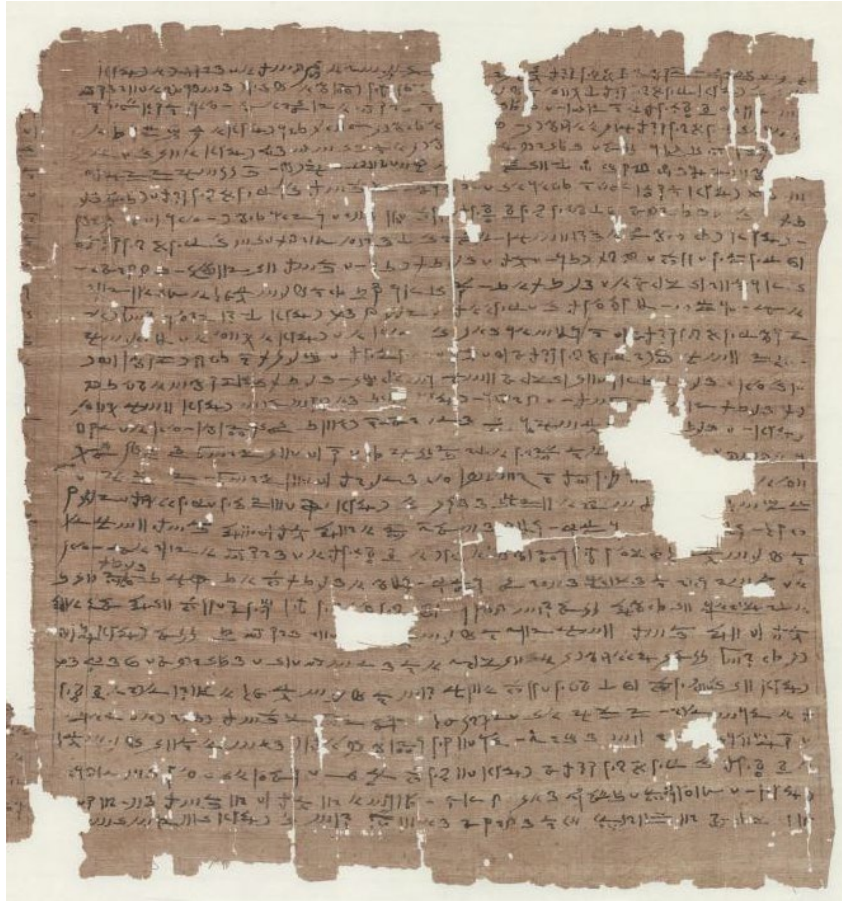
- What allows such *mouvance*?
 - Able to reach its full realization even when being read by **a single voice** (cf. Jay 2021), that is: the libretti is not of a dramatic text with multiple speakers
 - Such reading-in-performance by a single performer encourages private understandings of works as a whole that can be idiosyncratic, and are based on different textual cues (intended or not by the “author”)
 - Such reading-in-performance also requires the performer to embody in a certain way the voices and behaviors of characters
 - Cf. the idea of “mimetic prose” in Aristotle, *Poetics* 1147a28-b13



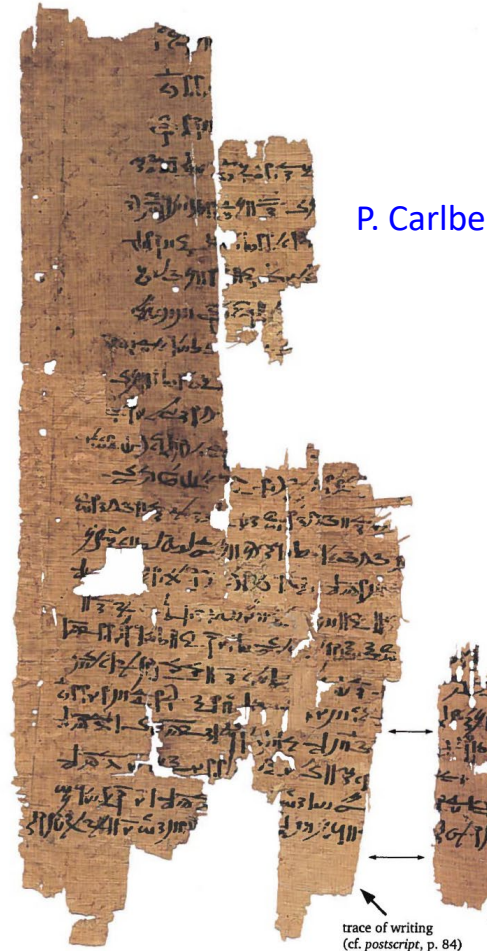
The Prebend of Amun

- What allows such *mouvance*?
 - The dramatically-embodied speech of characters is ripe for adaptation and innovation by a storyteller
 - Storytellers would possess their own copy of a novella like *The Prebend of Amun*, or would use one from a community holding like a library
 - The text would be “moved,” that is changed and re-inscribed in a new edition, once a storyteller arrived at a new understanding of how to embody certain characters, and wished to make that permanent and available for others in libretto form

P. Krall column 9, of 26+ (ca. 137-138 CE)



P. Carlberg 456+ (2nd century CE)



trace of writing
(cf. postscript, p. 84)

Fig. 3 = Last column

The Armor of Inaros – parallel texts with significant differences



The Armor of Inaros

- Also known as *Der Kampf um den Panzer des Inaros*
- The main manuscript, P. Krall (Roman period) exists alongside a fragmentary version from Tebtunis (P. Carlsberg 456+), also from the Roman period, which preserves portions of the beginning and the ending



The Armor of Inaros

- Portions from the beginning scenes which are paralleled in P. Krall and P. Carlsberg 456+ follow very closely, even closer than the parallels of *The Prebend of Amun*
- These allow us to reconstruct much of the missing beginning preserved in P. Krall



The Armor of Inaros

- The ending of the novella differs substantially:
 - P. Carlsberg 456+ represents an entire new ending, which seems to be added onto a text much like P. Krall, and even picks up some phrases and themes
 - In this ending, the major ancestral figures of the two clans which fight over the armor of Inaros (Inaros himself, and Hareunakhte) debate about which clan is mightier...in the afterlife



The Armor of Inaros

- Additionally, P. Carlsberg 456+ suggests that a theme latent in the P. Krall version, a certain religious festival celebrating Osiris, was magnified in the later version and made to feature more prominently
- This expanded theme seems to effect the characterization of Pharoah Petubastis



The Armor of Inaros

- Finally, there appears to be the conflation of two versions of *The Armor of Inaros* in the text of Papyrus Krall (not paralleled in P. Carlsberg 456+):
 - The text depicts the surprise arrival of two different warriors on the field of battle (Minnemmei and Montubaal) near the climax of the story, their arrival being decisive for the move towards the climax and the conclusion
 - Earlier in Papyrus Krall, Minnemmei is said to have already arrived with his compatriots...



The Armor of Inaros

- While *mouvance* may be relevant for the expanded ending and for other differences, the changes seen in P. Carlsberg 456+ vis-à-vis P. Krall, and in (perhaps) the potential conflation in P. Krall, are more reminiscent of direct scribal intervention in copies of a popular work of literature than what was seen with *The Prebend of Amun*



Creativity Attested in Demotic Novellas

- In separate editions of the same story:
 - 1. Expanded endings that pick up on themes in the story and draw them out further
 - 2. Changed characterization, which can have larger effects on the story
- In compound, edited editions of the same story:
 - Conflation of similar scenes into a single text, with varying degrees of disguising the “joins” (cf. also the transition in *Onchsheshonqy* between the narrative and the proverbs)



Comparing *Esther(s)* with Demotic Novellas

- The different editions of the Demotic novellas attest independently to:
 - In general: continued, creative interventions in works of prose fiction
 - Evolving understandings of characters which can be explicitly connected to “moved” texts (cf. Petubastis and Esther’s vengeance)
 - The ending of works of prose fiction being a particular site of creativity
 - The cultivation of multiple, differing versions of the same work of prose fiction
 - Scribal techniques of conflation to create multitext editions?



Types of literary creativity seen in novellas

- 1. Authoring of novellas
- 2. Widespread, creative reworking of novellas (coauthoring; *mouvance*), implying significant time spent with these texts from storytellers
- 3. Preservation of differences among reworked versions of the same novella, even resulting in textual incoherence, implying time spend with these texts by scholars
- 4. Translation of novellas, including creativity like nos. 2 and 3



4

Conclusion

