

Why Jews Wear Costumes on Purim

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1 Introduction

One of the riddles or mysteries about the Jewish holiday Purim (פורים [purim])¹ is “Why do Jews wear costumes on Purim?” When this question is asked of a Jew celebrating Purim, often by wearing a costume, some of the typical answers given describe Purim traditions about wearing costumes without getting to what appears to these authors as a root reason. That is, some of the answers beg their own “Why?” questions. Among the answers the author Berry has heard from religious Jews, both in Israel and abroad, are:

1. “I dunno.” (I don’t know.)
2. “מי יודע? [mi yoday’a?]” (“Who knows?” in Hebrew)
3. “Wer weis? ווער ווייס? [ver vays?]” (“Who knows?” in Yiddish)
4. “Because!”
5. “So that you look like a non-Jew.”
6. “So that no one knows who you are.”

The first four of these are non-answers. The fifth reports the tradition that Jews dress as non-Jews on Purim. The sixth reports another, possibly related tradition. However, this sixth reason is applicable to any costuming event, such as Halloween, which has no connection with Purim other than that in each, one wears a costume. Neverthe-

¹ Whenever a Hebrew or Persian word is given in parentheses as the original for an apparently English word of non-English origin, the pronunciation of the Hebrew or Persian word is given enclosed in brackets, using Latin letters according to English pronunciation rules, with two exceptions: “kh” stands for a guttural sound not unsimilar to that of the “ch” in the German “ach” or the “J” in the Spanish “Javier”, and “gh” stands for a sound not unsimilar to that of the French or German “r”.

less, as is shown in this paper, the fifth and sixth come closest to being root reasons. However, each of the fifth and the sixth begs yet another “Why?”, namely “Okay, then why must you look like a non-Jew?” or “Okay, then why must no one know who you are? Why are you hiding?” Note that the sixth could be a root reason for the fifth.²

Indeed, the tradition reported by the fifth answer is embodied in a riddle that Rav Yitzchak Luria,³ a 16th century kabbalist asked about Yom Kippurim (יום כפורים [yom kippurim]),⁴ whose name means “day of atonements” and Purim, whose name means “lots”, as in “the luck of the draw” or “lotteries”. Luria’s riddle is:

מדוע יום כפורים יום כפורים? [madua yom kippurim yom k'purim?]

Literally, Luria’s question means “Why is Yom Kippurim a day like Purim?” (The Hebrew of “a day like Purim” is pronounced “yom k’purim”.) Of course, the question sounds better in Hebrew than in English because of the alliteration. Luria’s answer is:

ביום פורים, יהודים לובשים כמו גוים, [b'yom purim, y'hudim lovshim k'mo goyim,]
אבל [aval]
ביום כפורים, יהודים לובשים כמו יהודים. [b'yom kippurim, y'hudim lovshim k'mo y'hudim.]

In English, Luria’s answer is: “On the day of Purim (The Hebrew of “day of Purim” is pronounced “yom purim”),

Jews dress as Goyim (non-Jews),
but
on Yom Kippurim, Jews dress as Jews!”

Again, the answer sounds better in Hebrew than in English because of the alliteration.

² There is another tradition, reported by some, of cross dressing. However, during the writing of this paper was the first time the author Berry had heard of this tradition. To put this observation in context, know that Berry is a 60 year old Conservative Jew who was observant for 9 years, who has always made a point of learning what he can about Judaism, and who has asked the title question of rabbis and others who might know almost annually during Purim celebrations.

³ A search of Berry’s books at home and of Web pages about “Luria Purim like Yom Kippurim” via Google has failed to turn up a definitive citable source for this riddle, although many sources allude to the riddle. As indicated by Simcha Goldin in private communication, the question itself is apparently based on a statement in the Aramaic text of תיקוני הזוהר [tiqunay hazohar] 21, p. 57b. “פורים אתקריאת על שם יום הכפורים” [purim itqaryat 'al shem yom hakippurim] (Purim was called by the name of the Day of Atonements). Author Berry has heard at least three rabbis repeat the riddle sourced to Luria, two on Yom Kippur, and one on Purim. If you know of a proper citable source for this riddle, please inform the authors by e-mail.

⁴ The correct name for the holiday is “יום הכפורים” [yom hakippurim] (day of the atonements) or simply “יום כיפור” [yom kippur] (day of atonement). In this riddle, the first form is used without the definite article, “ה” [ha], to make the word play work.

2 Jewish Tradition of Purim

The Jewish tradition for Purim is described in *M'gillat Esther* (מגילת אסתר [m'gillat ester]) [1] and its commentaries [20]. This book of the Bible, one of the only two⁵ that do not mention any of the names of God, tells the story of how a Jewish Queen of ancient Persia (פרס [paras]), named Esther (אסתר [ester]), saved her people from being killed, pursuant to a decree to kill all Jews issued by her husband, King Ahasuerus (אחשוורוש [akhashverosh]), in response to a request by Prime Minister Haman (המן [haman]) to have all Jews in Persia killed. Haman was “enraged” (Page 17) [20] at all Jews because one Jew, Mordecai (מרדכי [mordekhai]), who happened to be Esther’s uncle and adoptive father, “would not kneel or bow low” (Esther 3:2) [1] to Haman, and “Mordecai did not rise or even stir on his [Haman’s] account” (Esther 5:9). Mordecai refused to bow down to Haman, because Mordecai “had explained to them that he was a Jew” (Esther 3:4). “He was a Jew and he would never bow down to any human being wearing the image of a pagan idol on his chest.” (Page 15) [20].

The King’s decree ordered to “all the king’s provinces to destroy, massacre, and exterminate all the Jews, young and old, children and women, on a single day, on the thirteenth day of ... Adar ... and to plunder their possessions” (Esther 3:13). According to *M'gillat Esther*, this date was selected by drawing lots, leading hence to the name for the holiday, “Purim”, which is Persian for “lots”. A peculiarity of the Persian Empire was that once issued, a decree by the King could not be revoked, not even by the King. The authors of this article believe that a King’s decree was not revocable, so that one could obey a King’s decree without worrying about legal liability for failure to follow a possible missed or not-yet-arrived nullifying decree.⁶ A possible contributing factor was that there was no way with the extremely slow, low reliability, horse-back-driven, posted-decree, and word-of-mouth (Internet) means to distribute royal decrees of those days, to be sure that all recipients of a first decree had received any corresponding subsequent cancellation decree. For either reason, the only way to prevent the *effects* of one decree was to issue another decree whose effect would be to mitigate or avoid the effects of the first decree.

According to *M'gillat Esther*, the way that King Ahasuerus tried to avoid having all Jews in Persia, including his Queen and her uncle, killed was to issue a second decree that “permitted the Jews of every city to assemble and fight for their lives; if any people or province attacks them, they may destroy, massacre, and exterminate its armed force together with women and children, and plunder their possessions — on a single day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, namely on the thirteenth day of ... Adar.” (Esther 7:11–12). *M'gillat Esther* reports that the Jews were victorious in the ensuing battles on the 13th and 14th of Adar (אדר [adar]) and possibly shortly afterwards, killing 75,810 men in self-defense. In honor of this miraculous, crushing turn of fortune, Jews celebrate the

⁵ The other book of the Bible not mentioning any name of God is Song of Songs (שיר השירים [shir hashirim]).

⁶ Some believe that a decree of the King was not revocable, even by the King, because the King was considered as infallible as a god. This belief is not correct! Among the empires and kingdoms of the ancient world, the Persian Empire was unique in several ways. One such way was that the King or the Emperor (the proper title was and still is “شاهنشاه [shahanshah]”, which means “King of kings”) was definitely *not* a god or any form of deity and was certainly not to be worshiped. The strict humanity of the King in the Persian Empire was in stark contrast to the Egyptian, Roman, and Chinese Empires and to virtually all other civilizations in the ancient world. As the ancient Iranians and Persians followed Zoroastrianism, a monotheistic religion that some historians consider to be the earliest monotheistic religion, the people of the Persian Empire neither attributed any supernatural or even superhuman qualities to their Kings nor considered their Kings to be infallible. However, orders were orders and the Law of the King was to be followed by all.

No King was considered infallible, and others could and did question or criticize the King’s judgement. There were instances in which the King ordered the execution of the courtier or military commander who had offered to the King unpalatable but ultimately correct criticism or advice. Even these instances show that the idea of offering criticism or advice to the King was not unthinkable.

holiday⁷ of Purim on the 14th of Adar, whose eve is at the end of the 13th of Adar.

3 Problems with Jewish Tradition

The Jewish tradition is problematic on three counts.

1. There is nothing in *M'gillat Esther* that explains why the celebration of Purim includes wearing a costume.
2. *M'gillat Esther* says that the Jews lived in peace among the Persians after the events commemorated by Purim. However, if in fact the Jews had avoided being killed by decisively defeating and killing 75,810 Persian men in battle, it is hard to see how there could have been peace between the Jews and Persians. Such battles and defeats would likely have prompted a long-lasting blood feud with revenge and counter revenge, as we see in the Middle East to this very day.

More than one observer [35, 5, 7, 4], have expressed concern and moral revulsion over the large number of Persians reported killed in Chapter 9 of *M'gillat Esther*, 75,810 altogether, including the 800 *men* killed over two days in the city of Shushan and, the 10 hanged *sons* of Haman, and the 75,000 *foes* killed in the other provinces. Some of these observers have attempted to justify the killing or mitigate the severity of the apparent overkill by pointing out that the Jews were acting in self defense. Moreover, the Jews did not plunder as they had been *permitted* to do so by the Jewish tradition second decree, which had been carefully crafted to be a direct mirror of what was *ordered* in the first decree to be done to the Jews. In fact, if “foes” means only fighting men, then the Jews had not killed women, children, and old men as the Jewish tradition second decree had permitted them to do, again, as a direct mirror of what was ordered in the first decree to be done to the Jews. Some of these observers have explained that the 75,000 figure is clearly an exaggeration, citing the general tendency in those days to exaggerate sizes of palaces, numbers of people attending celebrations, sizes of fortunes, sizes of armies, etc.

3. *M'gillat Esther* says that the date chosen by lots was the 13th of Adar. It is highly unlikely that a decree by a Persian king would specify a Hebrew date such as the 13th of Adar. The decree would probably give a date in the Persian calendar. Perhaps, in the year in which the events took place, the specified date just happened to be the same day as the 13th of Adar.

4 Currently Understood Theories of Why and Since When Jews Wear Costumes on Purim

While *M'gillat Esther* does not address the issue of why Jews wear costumes, other elements of Jewish tradition have attempted to answer that question.

1. For many, Purim is the holiday of opposites [18]. What actually happened is the opposite of what Haman had planned to happen. Thus, all sorts of opposites are encouraged to celebrate Purim. One such opposite is for the normally sober Jews to drink wine until they cannot distinguish between “cursed Haman” and “blessed Mordecai”. Another is to dress as the opposite of normal, e.g., a man as a woman and vice versa, pupils as teachers and vice versa, and Jews as non-Jews. Perhaps, this tradition of dressing as one’s opposite gradually mutated into wearing costumes in general. Also, the general partying would encourage a carnival-like atmosphere that would in turn encourage dressing up in costumes. The difficulty with this explanation is that it could apply to most other event-commemorating holidays. In each of these events, with God’s help, what happened was the opposite of what some villain carefully planned to happen.

⁷ It is often said that the essence of many a Jewish holiday is “They tried to kill us; through God’s help, they did not succeed or we beat them; let’s eat!”. Purim is no exception. Jews eat haman-taschen (Yiddish: המן־טאשען [hamantashen], literally “Haman’s pocket”) on Purim! In Hebrew, haman-taschen are known as אוזני־המן [oznei-haman], literally “Haman’s ears”.

2. Since none of the words for God appear *M'gillat Esther*, God was hidden in *M'gillat Esther* [27, 29]. One way to hide oneself is to wear a costume.
3. “And many people of the land professed to be Jews, for the fear of the Jews had fallen upon them.” (Esther 8:17). Some say that after the Jewish victory described in *M'gillat Esther*, Persians dressed as Jews because they feared Jews [2].
4. Eliyahu Kitov suggests that the custom to wear a disguise on Purim and to appear as a non-Jew arises from Jacob’s wearing Esau’s clothing to trick his father Isaac into giving Jacob the blessings and inheritance that were due to Esau (Page 90) [14]. Kitov suggests that the disguising custom arises also from a verse of the Torah, “ואגבי הסתר אסתיר פני ביום ההוא” (“I shall surely hide My face on that day”) (Deut. 31:18), and the fact that the verb “אסתיר” (“I will hide”) shares four letters with the name “אסתר” (“Esther”). Thus it is proper to hide one’s face on the day of Esther, the day of Purim.

Eliezer Segal reminds us of the passage Hullin 139b in the Babylonian Talmud in which this very Torah verse was used, by far-fetched logic, to demonstrate that Esther was mentioned in the Torah: Esther had refused to reveal her Jewish origin to King Ahasuerus (Page 116) [29].

Other elements of Jewish tradition have attempted to identify *when* costume-wearing was introduced to Purim celebrations. Much of this tradition cites a costume-wearing tradition that may have begun in a place other than Persia and long after the events of *M'gillat Esther*.

1. Wearing costumes is not mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud, part of whose content was determined in Persia after the Persian conquest of Babylonia. Wearing costumes is mentioned only later on, e.g., by Kalonymos ben Kalonymos, who in his *Touchstones*, written in 1322, addresses the celebrations in honor of Mordecai and Esther on the 14th of Adar. He says that “The youth of Israel, for honor and glory, will rave and be rowdy, because by going crazy and being rowdy, they remember wondrous doings and they make miracles known. They shall cover themselves with magnificent ankle-long overcoats, in honor of Mordecai and Esther. ... Men will wear the dress of a woman, with pendants around their necks. They will act as the vacuous ones, with drum and dance, joy and triangles, they with them, men with women, on the occasion of the Purim eve meal.” (Page 30) [3]. He adds that “On that night, one is not to say ‘water is water’. He who drinks live wine is a light shining on the sky One must drink live wine with a big and full cup ... until he does not know ... ‘blessed Mordecai’ from ‘cursed Haman’ ... until he does not know his left from his right ...” (Page 31). Ben Kalonymos’s description of Purim celebrations implies that there *was already* a tradition, prior to the early 14th century, of wearing costumes, at least of cross dressing, in the context of wild celebrations involving sanctioned, heavy wine drinking. Nevertheless, we have no idea how much before the early 14th century this tradition began.
2. Citing M. Steinschneider [31], who is probably repeating the *Touchstones* information, the 1905 *Jewish Encyclopedia*’s article on Purim observes that “One of the strangest species of merrymaking was the custom of masquerading, which was first introduced among the Italian Jews about the close of the fifteenth century under the influence of the Roman carnival. From Italy this custom spread over all countries where Jews lived, except perhaps the Orient.” [17] Again, while we know that wearing costumes was part of the Purim celebration in Italy from the close of the 15th century, we do not know if the custom was already present in the 15th century, and if so, for how long the custom had been present. The possibility exists that the custom was present from the very first Purim celebrations.
3. In *The Jewish Festivals* by Hayyim Schauss, published in 1938 originally in Yiddish and translated to English by Samuel Jaffe [27], in paragraphs on Page 251, referred to by the index entry on Page 318, “Purim ... a nature festival, 250, 251”, one reads, “What kind of festival was Purim before it became the popular festival of Jewish salvation?”

“Many theories and hypotheses were advanced in answer to the above question. But none of them is well founded or entirely satisfactory, and not worthy of thorough examination here. From all the conjectures we may accept the following:

“Purim originally appeared amongst the Jews of Persia, and was adopted by them from their non-Jewish neighbors. Persian Jews observed, in common with their neighbors, a festival which was celebrated yearly in the middle of the last winter month It also seems that Purim, from the beginning, had the characteristic of a spring masquerade, and was a festival of play and frolic, of merriment and mischief, of abandon and wine-drinking.”⁸ Schauss’s text gives no indication of the origins of this characterization of Purim as being derived from a nature festival. Since the book is for educating those not in the know such as children, it appears to these authors that Schauss is reporting something that he thought was generally known by those in the know.

None of these explanations of why or when gets right to the heart of the issue of why *Jews wear costumes or dress as non-Jews on Purim*. That is, none of these explanations of why Jews wear costumes to celebrate Purim are as strongly related to the story of Purim as, for example, the explanation of why Jews light candles for the eight days of Chanukkah is to the story of Chanukkah or the explanation of why Jews eat matzah to celebrate Passover is to the story of Passover. In the cases of Chanukkah and Passover, a ritual of the celebration in question serves as a direct reminder of a specific, central event in the story of the holiday being celebrated. As shown in Section 6, a Persian version of the story of Purim provides both

1. a disguising, costume-wearing event that can be commemorated by celebratory costume wearing, and
2. an origin that is compatible with the account of Schauss in Item 3 above.

Adding to the mystery, at least one source describing in detail how to celebrate Purim, by Mindel [20], fails to even mention costume wearing. The section on the Purim celebration in *Gateway to Judaism* by Albert Shulman [30] does not mention wearing costumes as an aspect of the celebration. In fact, its only reference to masquerading is in its brief list of laws concerning Purim, “Masquerading in male or female attire permitted only on the Purim holiday”. The overall impression of the section is that masquerading is not a required part of the celebration; however, if you wish to cross dress, it’s acceptable, but only because it’s Purim!

5 A Persian Version of the Story of Purim

There is a Persian version of the story of Purim known by some, but not all, present day Iranians. Because knowledge of this version of the story is not universal, even among Iranian Jews, at most, the version can be called “a Persian version of the story of Purim”. Nevertheless, to simplify identifying this Persian version of the story in the remainder of this article, this Persian version is henceforth called simply “the Persian version”. See Sections 8 and 9 for details about how common is knowledge about the Persian version.

The Persian version of the story is similar to the Jewish tradition in many ways. Also the Persian version tells:

1. that a decree was issued to kill all Jews in the entire Persian Empire on the 13th day of a month,
2. that the King Xerxes (خشایارشا [khashayarsha]) had no intention of harming the Jews; instead, the King was tricked by Haman (هامان [haman]), a man that the King trusted highly enough that the King gave to Haman the King’s signet ring in order that Haman could stamp a decree that Haman had issued in

⁸ It is curious that “nature festival” occurs in the index entry but not in the referred to text. Perhaps the translator from Yiddish to English had correctly translated the index entry, but inadvertently dropped one phrase, e.g., “of being out in nature” from the long list of aspects of the “festival”.

the King's name, a decree whose exact effect Haman had misrepresented to the King.⁹

3. that Xerxes is surprised when his queen Esther (استر [ester]) reveals to him that a decree has been issued in his name to exterminate her people and asks "Who is the man who dared to do such a thing?",
4. that once issued, a decree cannot be cancelled,
5. that all that can be done about a decree issued in error was to issue another decree whose effect avoids or mitigates the effect of the first decree,
6. Xerxes seeks the advice of Esther and Mordecai (مردخای [mordekhai]) who devise a plan to circumvent the implementation of the first decree, and
7. Xerxes proves that he never intended that Jews be killed and indicates his trust of Mordecai by giving to Mordecai his signet ring so that Mordecai can issue the second decree in the King's name.

However, from here, the Persian version of the story begins to differ from the Jewish tradition in significant ways that avoid the problems mentioned in Section 3.

First, the date on which the killing decree was to be carried out was not the 13th of Adar, a Hebrew date, but the 13th of Farvardin (فروردین [farvardin]), a Persian date. As is shown in Section 6.3, these two dates can never coincide.

The date of the extermination of the Jews was set in the first decree on the 13th of Farvardin, which is the thirteenth day *after* the Persian New Year (نوروز [noruz]), which is on the day of the Spring Equinox. The thirteenth day of the new year is the Persian holiday Sizdeh Bedar (سیزده بدر [sizdeh bedar]) celebrated throughout its history even until today [6, 26, 42]. One possible significance of the day is to avoid the bad luck of the number 13.¹⁰ The name of the holiday literally means "thirteen get-outta-here!". Another possible significance

⁹ Even Jewish tradition heaps all condemnation on Haman and none on the King. Therefore, Jewish tradition seems to recognize that the only, real villain in the story is Haman and that the King was probably at most an ignorant fool in trusting Haman.

¹⁰ The Persian association of bad luck to the number 13 is thought by some to come from the fact that ancient Persians believed that the 12 constellations of the Zodiac controlled the 12 months of the year. Each constellation ruled the earth for a thousand years, and at the end of 12 thousand years, the sky and earth collapsed into chaos. Thus, the number 13 is unlucky.

The Zoroastrian Heritage Institute offers an explanation of the Zoroastrian religious significance of Sizdeh Bedar that touches on the unluckiness of the number 13 and of the day [8].

"While the superstitious may associate the 13th day with bad luck, there is no such notion in Zoroastrian traditions. Perhaps the myth that it is unlucky to stay at home on the thirteenth was created to give the house-bound added incentive to leave their homes and appreciate the spring-time unveiling of nature's beauty.

"In the Zoroastrian calendar, Sizdah-be-dar falls on Tir (the 13th) day in the month of Farvardin, April 2. The name Tir is a modern and short form of the Middle Persian (Pahlavi) Tishtar and Avestan Tishtrya, the Zoroastrian Avestan name for the brightest star Sirius as well as the guardian angel of rain and rain water. Zoroastrians therefore make a special effort to spend the day beside a river or a lake. The devout will recite passages from the Tir Yasht.

"For Zoroastrians, this day also celebrates the unfolding bounty of nature and life (gaya). Sizdah Bedar provides an

of the day comes from another understanding of “بدر [bedar]” as short for “رفتن به در و دشت [raftan-e beh dar-o dasht]”, which means “going outdoors to the countryside”. Regardless, on Sizdeh Bedar, Persians were to dress up in their finest clothes, go out of the house, and spend the day on a picnic in nature, on grass and near a river, celebrating with wine.¹¹ For Zoroastrians, Sizdeh Bedar was a religiously mandated joyous celebration of nature. Persians would return from the picnic only at the end of the day, leaving the bad luck of the 13th day behind for the whole year, in the case of the first significance. In those days, a person’s station in life was announced by his clothes, so one could tell by looking at any person’s clothing if he or she were upper class, lower class, Persian, Jewish, etc. Thus, the finest clothes worn by a person on the 13th of Farvardin announce his or her station in life.

The major difference between the two stories was the contents of the second decree issued to help avoid or mitigate the first decree. The second decree, which Mordecai thought of and issued in the King’s name, specified that on the next 13th of Farvardin, the date on which the first decree was to be carried out, *all* Jews were to dress as Persians and to go out to the country side and celebrate Sizdeh Bedar on a picnic. Jews normally would not have been allowed to celebrate a Persian holiday by Jewish law, because it would mean worshiping another god. However, for preserving lives (פיקוח נפש [pikuah nefesh]), celebrating a Persian holiday would be allowed by Jewish law. Actually, celebrating a Persian holiday would be *required* if doing so preserved lives, even if that day were the Sabbath, as it might very well have been, according to Section 6.3. So, on the day that the mass killing of Jews was to happen according the first decree, the Jews obeyed the second decree and dressed as Persians. As a result, when the agents of Haman came to kill Jews, there were simply no Jews to be found. All the would-be killers found were Persians dressed in their finest and celebrating Sizdeh Bedar, and the Jews were saved!

6 Resolution of the Traditions

The shared Persian and Jewish tradition of the peaceful coexistence of Persians and Jews following the implementation of the second decree seems more likely with the second decree according to the Persian tradition than with the second decree according the the Jewish tradition. Probably the truth is some mixture of the two traditions. A bit of history can shed light on the social and cultural context in which these events took place and can help us understand what probably happened.

6.1 People and Places in History Preceding the Events of *M’gillat Esther*

The events of *M’gillat Esther* seem to have taken place in what is now called Hamadan (همدان [Hamadan]). “Hamadan” is the current name for the very ancient city of Ecbatana or Ekbatan (اکباتان [ekbatan]). It lies 375 kilometers southwest of Tehran (تهران [tehran]), 1850 meters above sea level, in a green mountainous area on the foothills of the 3570-meter-high Alvand (الوند [alvand]) Mountain. It is the oldest Iranian city and one of the oldest in the world. The Iranian mythology, as related in Ferdowsi’s (فردوسی [ferdosi]) Epic of Shahnameh (شاهنامه [shahnameh]), the Chronicle of Kings, attributes Ecbatana’s establishment to the very first legendary King, Jamshid (جمشید [jamshid]). An inscription from the first Assyrian king dates the construction of Ecbatana at 1100 BCE, while some historians date it back at 3000 BCE. Historically, Ecbatana first became prominent as the capital of the Iranian-speaking¹² Medes (مادها [madha]), the ancestors of today’s Kurds and Lurs. According to

opportunity for Zoroastrians to enjoy what nature has to offer while renewing their covenant to protect or enhance the environment, and not defile any of the seven aspects of the corporeal creation (gaiety): fire, air, water, earth, plants, animals and human beings.”

¹¹ Remember that these events predate Islam; so, there was no prohibition against drinking alcohol.

¹² Mede, the language of the Medes; Old Persian, the language of the Persian Tribe; and all the other languages in the Iranian family of languages were distinct but linguistically related.

Herodotus [12], Ecbatana was founded as the capital city of the Median kingdom around 715 BCE, by Deioces (דיאקו [diaeko]) son of Phraortes (פרורתיש [fravartish]). However, it was the son of Deioces, Cyaxares (הוֹכְשַׁטְרָא [hovakhshatra]), who in 625 BCE, succeeded to unite various Median tribes, destroyed the Assyrian capital city of Nineveh in 612, and made the Median Empire (1) a rival of Babylon and (2) the most prosperous among the tribes' brethren, the other squabbling Iranian tribes that included the Parthians and the Persians, among others. The Median Empire under Cyaxares quickly became a threat to its neighbors, to the extent that, according to Isaiah (ישעיה [yeshayah]) 40–48 and Jeremiah (ירמיה [yirmiyah]) 25:12, the exiled Jews of Babylon expected the destruction of Babylonia by the Medes. As it turned out, they had to wait about 70 years for their liberation by Cyrus (קורוש [curosh]) the Great, who as King of Persia (پارس [pars]), rebelled in 553 BCE against his own grandfather, the Median King Astyages (ایشتوויگو [ishtuviگو]), son of Cyaxares, whose own disgruntled nobles captured and turned him over to Cyrus in 550 BCE. This liberation by Cyrus (כורש [koresh]) was prophesied in Isaiah 45:1.

As the founder and the first king of the Achaemenid dynasty, Cyrus established himself in Ecbatana and unified the Medes with the Persians and other Iranian tribes in his new Empire of Iran, named after the common ancestry of all Iranian tribes. The participation and the role of non-Persian Iranian tribes, especially the Medes, in the new Empire was significant, so much so that in the beginning, the Greeks referred to it as the Empire of the Medes, but later the Greeks and the Romans referred to it as the Persian Empire. In 539 BCE, the last Babylonian King, Nabonidus, who was considered by his own people a tyrant with odd religious ideas, was defeated by Cyrus in a battle in June and fled. On October 12, after Cyrus's engineers had diverted the waters of the Euphrates, Cyrus's soldiers entered Babylon without fighting, and marched through the city peacefully. Nabonidus surrendered and was deported. The presence of dissatisfied foreign exiles, among them the Jews, in Babylonia facilitated the victory of Cyrus over Babylon.

Upon entering the city on October 29 and proclaiming himself the King of Babylon, King of Sumer and Akkad, King of the four corners of the world, one of the first acts of Cyrus was to allow these exiles to return to their own homes, carrying with them the images of their own gods and their own sacred vessels. This event corresponds with the chronicle of Cyrus in the Biblical books of Ezra (עזרא [ezra]) and Nechemia (נחמיה [nekhemia]). The permission for exiles to return to their homes was embodied in a proclamation by Cyrus inscribed on a cylinder, which was excavated in 1879 under a wall of the Marduk Temple of Babylon, where it was originally placed as a foundation deposit, following a Mesopotamian tradition. In it, Cyrus describes how he conquered Babylon, how his mighty army marched in peace through the city, and that he issued a number of decrees. Three main premises underly his decrees on this cylinder: political, racial, linguistic, and religious equality; the right of slaves and all deported peoples to return to their homes; and restoration of all destroyed temples. The proclamation of Cyrus is described as the first charter of human rights in history [25, 15]. In 1971 it was translated into all six official U.N. languages, and a replica of the cylinder is now kept at the United Nations Headquarters in New York City in the second floor hallway [34]. The original cylinder is kept in the British Museum in London.

Some of the liberated Jews of Babylon returned to Jerusalem and rebuilt their Temple, "ומטעם כורש ודריוש" [umit'em koresh v'daryavesh v'artakhshasta melekh paras] (and according the decree of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes King of Persia)" (Ezra 6:14). Others remained in Babylon or relocated to other places within the Persian Empire, including Ecbatana, Isfahan (اصفهان [isfahan]), and Susa (شوش [shush] שושן [shushan]). However, Jews were already present in the rest of the territory that was now the Persian Empire for at least some 200 years, since the Assyrian King Shalmaneser V conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 BCE and sent the Israelites into captivity in their first diaspora, in what is today the Northeast province of Khorasan (خراسان [khorasan]) in Iran, bordering Afghanistan. There are also reports of even earlier migration of Jews to areas such as the southern shores of the Caspian. By this time, Jews had spread out and were living in many of the cities of the Empire, including Ecbatana, when they were joined by some of the Babylonian Jews. At the height of the Persian Empire, the Jews are believed to have comprised some 20% of the population. Ecbatana became the capital of one of the initially two Satrapies (استراپی [satrapi] אכשדרפני המלך [akhashdarpnei hamelekh]) in the Per-

sian Empire (The capital of the other one was Rey (ری [rey]), near the current Tehran.) and remained an important city throughout the history, serving as the, or at least a seasonal, capital from time to time. Ecbatana was prominent during the Sassanid period, the last dynasty of the Persian Empire, serving as the site of their summer palaces, before it fell into the hands of the Muslim Arabs in 633 BCE. Today, surviving inscriptions carved on the face of the Alvand mountain, one ordered by Darius (داریوش [dariush]) the Great and one by Xerxes, attest to the city's prominence during the Achaemenid period.

The official capital of the Achaemenids was Parsa (پارسه [parsa]), called “Persepolis”, i.e., “city of Persians”, by the Greeks. Its construction started by Darius I and continued under Xerxes. However, Persepolis was primarily used as the ceremonial capital, most prominently for the celebration of the Persian new year. The actual business of the government was conducted in Ecbatana or in the citadel of Susa. The events in the story of Purim may have taken place in Ecbatana, or Esther and Mordecai may have simply moved to and spent the last years of their lives in Ecbatana after the death of Xerxes.

6.2 People and Places in the Events of *M'gillat Esther*

The three main characters of the story, Mordecai, Esther, and Haman, have been linked with Babylon. Apparently, Mordecai was a distinctly uncommon name at the time among the larger Jewish population in Iran. It is said that “Esther” comes from “Ishtar (ایشتار [ishtar])” and “Mordecai” comes from “Marduk (مردوک [marduk])”, both Babylonian gods. A few historians have argued based on this that Mordecai was a Babylonian and not a Jew at all. Others have argued, more plausibly, that Mordecai himself or his parents must have been among the Jews of Babylon, making it reasonable that Mordecai and Esther would have Babylonian-Jewish names.

The Persian sources state that Esther's original, Hebrew name was Hadassah (הדסה [hadasa] [hadassa]) and her name was changed to Esther when she became the queen of Xerxes. They state that Esther is an Iranian name, derived from the Mede word “astra (آستر [astra])”, for myrtle, whose blossom looks like a star, or the Persian word, “setareh (ستاره [setareh])”, for “star”, because she was beautiful as a star. Also *M'gillat Esther* mentions that the original name of Esther was “Hadassah”, meaning in Hebrew “myrtle”. Finally, observe that when written in the modern Persian alphabet, “astra” and “Ester” are identical to each other.

Haman, the prime minister of Xerxes, is referred to as an Agagite, which later sources have interpreted as a descendent of the King Agag of Amalekite. However, he is also said to have been half-Babylonian. His upper-class Babylonian roots better explain his intolerance of Mordecai's position in the court and his plot to exterminate all the Jews, instead of scheming to punish or get rid of only this one Jew, Mordecai, for his insolence.

Some say that upon his appointment as prime minister, Haman mounted his steed and demanded that the entire court prostrate itself before him. Other accounts relate that Haman suddenly decreed that anyone who came to see Haman had to prostrate himself before an image of Haman that Haman had suddenly ordered to serve as a drape for an entrance of the court. Mordecai's refusal to prostrate before Haman or his image was an overt sign of the very insolence that Haman was likely to have solicited by his actions.

Xerxes, son of Darius I is the third king of the Achaemenid (هخامنشی [hakhamaneshi]) dynasty, who reigned in Persia 485–465 BCE. He is thought to be the Ahasuerus mentioned in *M'gillat Esther*. The name “Xerxes” comes from the Greek “Xerxe-s” which represents the Old Persian “خشایارشان [khashayarshan]”,¹³ meaning “ruling over heroes” or “he who rules over men.” “Xerxes” is “خشایارشاه [khashayarsha]” in modern Persian. He is the King Xerxes mentioned in the narrative of the Oracle of Delphi and of the famous Greek Expedition, which was a nearly total Persian victory over a group of adversaries including the Greeks and the Spartans.

¹³ The ancient Persian letter transcribed as “X” has several pronunciations, including “ش [sh]” and “خ [kh]”.

As Yamauchi states [43], many historians have identified events and people in *M'gillat Esther* with the historical records about Xerxes and his reign. For instance, there is a gap of silence of a four years in *M'gillat Esther*, between the third and seventh years of the King's reign; this gap corresponds to the Greek Expedition of Xerxes. Vashti (וַשְׁתִּי [vashti]) in *M'gillat Esther* is the queen of Ahasuerus. She falls out of favor with Ahasuerus after she refuses Ahasuerus's order stated as a request to appear before him at a celebration in which he wants to show her beauty off to the guest. Vashti is not killed, but she is relegated to the background. Vashti has been identified as Amestris (آمستريس [amestris]), the queen of Xerxes, who is indeed the mother of Artaxerxes I.¹⁴ Amestris was the daughter of the sister of Darius I, and is reported to have been in her thirties when she married crown prince Xerxes, right after Darius I died. Herodotus [12] describes her as a very jealous, cruel despot, although some of the stories he tells about her are puzzling and the facts behind them remain unclear. Amestris reappears after the death of her husband Xerxes, when she rules together with her son, the new King. Indeed, Amestris remained influential after the assassination of Xerxes, during the rein of her son, Artaxerxes I, until she died in her seventies, probably in 440 BCE. The timing of the rise of Esther to the position of the favorite wife or the queen of Xerxes after Amestris falls out of favor corresponds to the account of the events in *M'gillat Esther* as well. The historical events and the names mentioned in *M'gillat Esther* suggest that its chronicler had intimate knowledge of the people and the conduct of the Achaemenid court. As a result, some have proposed Mordecai as its author. The Persian tradition identifies Mordecai as a high-ranking official, namely the Royal Gatekeeper, in the court of Xerxes. Some accounts identify him as an older cousin of Esther, but Persian tradition identifies him as the brother of the father, i.e., the paternal uncle, of Esther. Either way, he is said to have raised Esther as his own daughter, after she lost her parents at an early age. The Persian tradition says that at an earlier stage in Mordecai's career in the court of Xerxes, Mordecai learned of a plot to assassinate the King, which Mordecai revealed to the King. The plot was foiled, and the two main conspirators were captured and hanged. This event raised Mordecai's status in Xerxes's court and earned Mordecai Xerxes's personal trust. This event may have also at least contributed to Xerxes's marrying Esther and making her his queen, as the Persian tradition says that Mordecai took Esther to the court after this event. The Jewish tradition reports a similar event, but occurring while Esther is already Ahasuerus's queen. In this same tradition, Esther entered the competition to become Ahasuerus's queen on the urging of her Uncle Mordecai, who took her to the court.

Surprisingly, Amestris seems to have spared Esther and Mordecai her reputed cruelty and the venom of her jealousy for losing her position as the queen of Xerxes to Esther, even after she returned to power after the assassination of Xerxes, as the mother of the new king Artaxerxes I. Esther and Mordecai seem to have lived dignified lives to the end, had honorable burials, and their graves became holy shrines. This history shows a tolerant atmosphere in the court as well as the society, congruent with the accounts of the peaceful coexistence of the Jews and the Persians. The lack of the slightest hint of any conflict between Amestris and Esther and their convenient mutually exclusive appearance and disappearance on the scene are consistent with the claims of the Bible scholars Robert Dick Wilson and Robert L. Hubbard that Esther and Amestris are the same person [36,38,24]. This claim, of course, contradicts the Persian tradition as well as the Jewish tradition, both of which consider Amestris, a.k.a. Vashti, and Esther as different individuals.

¹⁴ The name "Ahasuerus" seems to come from the Greek "Artaxerxes" derived from the Old Persian "ارتخشاشا" [artakhshasa], which means "having a kingdom of justice" or "having a just rule." If so, then the names of the father, Xerxes, and the son, Artaxerxes, have been mixed up in the Biblical account. In modern Persian, Artaxerxes is called "آردشیر" [ardeshir]. Because "Ardeshir" was the name or the throne name of a few other later kings in the Achaemenid dynasty, this first Ardeshir is referred to as "Artaxerxes I". Aside from being the first, he is the most famous among them in no little part because of his memorable nickname. He was known as "Artaxerxes the Long-armed", among the Persians, he was known as "آردشیر دراز دست" [ardeshir deraz dast], and among the Greeks, he was known as "Artaxerxes I Longimanus". According to Plutarch [21], Artaxerxes I, "among all the kings of Persia the most remarkable for a gentle and noble spirit, was surnamed the Long-handed, his right hand being longer than his left, and was the son of Xerxes."

The tombs of Esther and Mordecai exist to this day next to each other in a mausoleum in the center of the city of Hamadan in western Iran, although some accounts claim that one of these two graves belongs to the Jewish queen of a much later king, Yazdgerd (یزدگرد [yazdgerd]) (399–421 CE) of the Sassanid dynasty (ساسانی [sasani]). The present mausoleum was built in the 13th century by the order of Arghun Khan (ارغون خان [arghun khan]),¹⁵ the fourth ruler of the Mongol (مغول [moghol]) Ilkhanate (ایلخانیان [ilkhaniyan]) Empire. The present mausoleum most likely replaced an older one, containing more ancient tombs. It has the Islamic architecture of the period, with an entrance, a vestibule, a sanctuary, and a sitting area. Under the mausoleum's simple brick dome are two exquisite wooden tomb boxes. The older box has an inscription in Hebrew, and there are some Aramaic and some more Hebrew inscriptions, including that of the ten commandments (עשרה דבריה [ʿasara div-raiya]), on the plaster wall. The appendix of this paper shows the brochure and some photographs of the mausoleum, including that of a complete genealogy of Mordecai.

¹⁵ A devout Buddhist himself, Arghun Khan was very tolerant of other faiths. His minister of finance was a very competent Jew named Saʿad-al-Dowleh (سعد الدوله [saʿad ed doleh]) who restored order in the government. Arghun's mother was a Christian princess, and he had pro-Christian tendencies. His sister was married to a Georgian prince. He had his second son, Oljeitu (اولجايتو [oljaitu]), baptized as a Christian at birth, naming him Nicholas, after Pope Nicholas IV; Oljeitu's mother was Christian too. Arghun tried to establish a Franco-Mongol alliance against their common enemy, the Muslim Mamluks (مملوك [mamluk]) of Egypt, and even promised to have himself baptized if Jerusalem were conquered. But, by the late 13th century, the Europeans had already lost interest in the crusades. When Arghun lost his favorite wife, he requested a new bride from his great-uncle, Kublai Khan of China. Heading the mission to escort the new bride, Kokotchin, across Asia on a two-year journey through land, the Indian ocean, and Persia gave Marco Polo the reason to return to Venice after 23 years. Arghun died before Kokotchin arrived and she was married to his first son Ghazan (غازان [ghazan]) instead. Ghazan and Oljeitu later succeeded Arghun as the sixth and the seventh Ilkhanate sultans. Oljeitu became a Buddhist in his youth. Later, Ghazan, who was raised as a Buddhist, converted to Sunni Islam taking the name Mahmood (محمود [mahmud]). Influenced by one of his wives, also Oljeitu became a Sunni Muslim and took the name Mohammad, Servant of God (محمد خدا بنده [mohammad khoda-bandeh]). During his reign in 1307-1308 CE, a bitter feud between the Hanafi and Shafii branches of Sunni Islam disgusted Oljeitu to the point that he considered converting back to Buddhism, a politically impossible move. Influenced by the Shiite theologian al-Hilli (الحلي [al-helli]), Oljeitu converted instead to Shiite Islam and in 1309-1310 CE, after returning from a visit to the shrine of Imam Ali in Iraq, Oljeitu declared Shiite Islam the official religion of Iran. He followed up on his father's Franco-Mongol alliance to dislodge the Mamluks from the Holy Land and put it in the hands of the Christians, but it was too late for Europe to launch another crusade. Oljeitu's Mausoleum is in Sultaniyeh (سلطانیه [soltaniyeh]) near Qazvin (قزوین [ghazvin]) in Iran [37, 39].

The prominence of Shiite Islam as the official and de facto religion in modern Iran cannot be directly linked with the above-mentioned declaration of Oljeitu. The Twelver School of Shiite Islam was effectively established and actively promoted as the official religion of Iran by the Safavid (صفوی [safavi]) Dynasty who ruled Iran from 1502 to 1722.

6.3 Dates

There seems to be more to the date of the 13th day of the month, whether it be Adar or Farvardin, which Haman supposedly picked by casting lots. *M'gillat Esther* reports that this event happened in the 12th year of the reign of Xerxes. This year means 474 BCE. According to *Calendrical Calculations* [22, 23], the Persian New Year or the first of Farvardin in this year was a Monday. Therefore, the picnic festivities of expelling the bad omen on the 13th day of the new year would have been on Saturday. For Haman's purposes, this configuration of days presented a golden opportunity that would not occur for another 7 years: While all the Jews in the realm would be at home observing Sabbath, all Persians would be out on Sizdeh Bedar picnics. The extermination of the Jews could be carried out swiftly and cleanly by his operatives, because they would easily find all Jews in their homes and they could kill these Jews without stirring up sympathetic feelings of the Jews' Persian neighbors, who were out of their homes for a day in nature, and running the risk of the mess that could arise if the Jews' Persian neighbors were around.

6.4 The First Decree

The Jewish tradition describes the contents of the first decree as specifying that all provinces were ordered to exterminate the Jews. Who was to do the actual extermination? It makes no sense to assume that the general population was expected to do the killing. No one in a position of power in the court who was really intent on exterminating the Jews would resort to relying on the general population of a vast empire to carry out this mission. It would be unreliable and messy and would likely lead to chaos and civil war, with unpredictable results. It would be much more effective, and more rational to use some reliable trained troops to swiftly carry out the royal decree in a disciplined and orderly fashion.

6.5 The Second Decree

The content of the second decree according to the Jewish tradition raises questions of its own. It ordered the Jews to arm and defend themselves. Such actions make sense as a Plan B, to reassure the would-be victims. However, without a Plan A to avert the brunt of the upcoming attack, arming a militarily untrained 20% of the population of a large empire and ordering them to defend themselves against the professional operatives acting in the name of the King is not only foolhardy, but is also a sure-fire recipe for a civil war and a disaster whose outcome no one could have controlled, much less predicted. If the Jews were ordered by the King and their own leaders to simply dress up as Persians and to join the Persians in their ceremonial outing on the date of the first decree, they would have avoided most of the attack and subverted the extermination plan without bloodshed.

Perhaps the true second decree combined the contents of the second decrees according to both Jewish and Persian traditions. As a real solution, it told the Jews to dress as Persians and join the holiday celebration, and as a reassuring gesture, it allowed the Jews to arm and defend themselves if attacked. The active ingredient in this recipe would be Jews disguising themselves as Persians, successfully avoiding the massacre, and preventing the need for an armed conflict altogether. It is understandable, then, how subsequently the Jewish tradition could have focused on one part of the decree, whereas the Persian version simply ignored that part because it played no substantial role in the actual course of events that transpired.

6.6 The Fateful Day

To understand fully why the actual second decree is probably a mixture of the two second decrees, it is useful to explore how the first decree and the two second decrees would be received and acted upon by various actors in the events of the fateful day of Sizdeh Bedar.

M'gillat Esther says that Haman was hanged on the same tall gallows that he had erected for the hanging of Mordecai. It is useful to examine Haman's hanging in the Persian socio-political context, both in the King's court and among the general population throughout the empire.

The exact date of Haman's execution is not known, but his fate was certainly sealed by the time the second decree was issued. By that date, Haman would have certainly been removed from office and would have been at least in custody if not already executed. Haman was a trusted minister of the King who had abused the King's trust and had misrepresented to the King the contents of the first decree, on which Haman had put the King's royal seal. Recall from Item 2 of the Persian version of the story of Purim in Section 5 that the King had no intention of harming the Jews. Thus from the King's viewpoint, Haman had betrayed the King and had therefore committed treason.

Two significant news items would have emerged from the King's court at virtually the same time: Haman's demise or impending demise and the second decree. The news of the former may have even started to spread before the latter. The fall from grace of any trusted minister on charges of treason and his, at least impending, execution would certainly have been a huge event with serious impact throughout the Empire. The news of this event and the reason for it, namely that the first decree was illegitimately issued by Haman, would have spread like wildfire throughout the Empire, certainly no less speedily and widely than the mitigating second decree itself. Everyone in the Empire, certainly anyone who knew of the second decree, would have known that the decree to kill the Jews, although still in effect, was not really to be obeyed because its issuer had already been arrested for issuing it in the King's name and was, if not already executed, awaiting execution. Independent of the moral implications and social consequences of the mass murder of the Jews prescribed by this decree, even the allies and political appointees of Haman throughout the Empire would no doubt be scrambling at this point to distance themselves from him. Anyone with a shred of common sense would not attempt to carry out this first decree.

Nevertheless, the first decree would still technically be a decree with the seal of the King, which everyone would be duty bound to obey. The genius of the second decree according to the Persian version is that it provided a reprieve not only to the would-be victims, the Jews, but also to any would-be killer, who would need a way out of carrying out a King's decree that everyone knew was not to be carried out. With Jews dressed up as Persians on that fateful day, any sensible would-be killer could feign an honest attempt to find Jews to kill on that day and conveniently fail, all the while protesting and feigning disappointment that there were just no Jews to be found; the would-be killer had obeyed the letter of the first decree.

If there were a would-be-killer who (1) either did not have any common sense or wanted the Jews killed anyway, but (2) who knew from reading the second decree that his quarry were disguised as Persians, he could not with certainty distinguish Jews dressed as Persians from non-Jewish Persians. Since the would-be killer would not be allowed to kill other Persians, even in error, he would probably have opted on the side of caution and would have spared everyone he found that day. In addition, if the true second decree had been a combination of the second decrees according to both the Jewish and Persian traditions, he would have known that the Jews were armed, prepared, and permitted to defend themselves.

In all likelihood, however, any sincere attempt by a would-be killer to identify which people dressed as Persians were really Jews would probably be the exception rather than the rule. While the Jews would be pretending to be Persians, Persians would be pretending that they did not know any better, and everyone would rejoice this masquerade dance through the administrative loopholes opened up by the very inspired, clever second decree that rendered the ominous first decree innocuous.

6.7 Support for Persian Version of Second Decree in Jewish Tradition

Recall Item 3 in the list in Section 4 of currently understood theories of *when* Jews began to wear costumes on Purim. The authors of this article read Schauss's paragraphs as saying that the Purim holiday was first celebrated as going out to nature while masquerading, which would be a fair description of participating in a Sizdeh Bedar celebration while dressed, as required, in a Persian's best clothing. Certainly Schauss's description does not contradict the origin of the Purim celebration arising from the Persian version of the story of Purim. It looks as though Schauss had read or heard descriptions of the early celebrations without having read, heard, or known the Persian version of the story. Therefore, Schauss was compelled to report his findings as not well founded and not entirely satisfactory.

7 Possible Answer to the Question and Solutions to Problems

The authors believe that the Persian version of the story of Purim described in this article provides clarity to the Jewish tradition of Purim. Of course, the Jewish tradition's big military victory seems a better cause for a big celebration. However, the survival of the Jews by the decidedly simple Persian version's second decree is no less miraculous. The Persian version second decree is a particularly clever mitigation, which according to the Persian version, was Mordecai's invention.

The second decree according to the Persian version solves the three problems listed in Section 3.

1. It explains why Jews have a tradition of wearing costumes to disguise themselves and to dress as non-Jews on Purim. On the day that Purim commemorates, the Jews dressed up as Persians, to pretend to be Persians and to celebrate a Persian holiday. Moreover, they dressed as non-Jewish Persians so that they could not be identified as Jews, i.e., so that no one would know who they really are.
2. It offers a second decree the obeying of which is far more likely to lead to the peaceful co-existence that followed the events that Purim celebrates.
3. It explains also the issue with the date attached to the decree. The Jewish tradition says that the date attached to the decree was the 13th of Adar. The Persian version says that the date attached to the decree was the 13th of Farvardin. Certainly, a Persian royal decree is far more likely to have specified the 13th of Farvardin than the 13th of Adar. Could the two dates have coincided? They clearly could not. Farvardin *starts with* the Spring Equinox, and the ceremonial outing of Sizdeh Bedar comes 13 days later. The Babylonian Hebrew calendar is such that if a day is on or after the Spring Equinox, its date must be on or after 15th of Nisan (ניסן [nisan]), the first day of Passover (פסח [pesach]), which *must* be on or after the Spring Equinox [22]. The 15th of Nisan is the beginning of Passover and is one month and one day after Purim on the 14th of Adar. Thus the Persian date attached to the decree would be in Nisan by the Jewish calendar. In fact, in the year 474 BCE, suggested in Section 6.3 as the year of the event, the 13th of Farvadin was the Sabbath day, the 24th of Nisan, *after* the end of Passover.

Author Berry recalls reading in a Jewish history of Purim that Purim was originally celebrated in Nisan, but it was moved to the previous month Adar because it was too close to Passover.¹⁶ Jews want to spread the holidays out more. Perhaps, the date in *M'gillat Esther* was changed from 13th of Farvardin to 13th of Adar to make the story consistent with what had become the fact later.

On the other hand, there is a way under Jewish practices in the Babylonian and Persian diaspora that the 13th of Adar II could have occurred after the Spring Equinox and, therefore, could have coincided with the 13th of Farvardin. At the time, the Jewish calendar was observational and therefore subject to errors in observation and judgement calls. That is, a new month was declared on the sighting in Jerusalem of an invisible new moon, the sighting of which is not an exact science. A new year and the month of Nisan was declared on a new moon occurring at the end of Adar that was less than half a month before the Spring Equinox. If the conditions for declaring a new year were not met at the end of Adar, a 13th month, Adar II, was declared for the current year, the new year and Nisan were delayed until the next new moon.

The Sanhedrin, one of whose members was Mordecai, had the authority to make all calendrical decisions. Apparently, the Sanhedrin considered more than just the new moon and Spring equinox in making its decisions about declaring the new year.

In deliberating on whether to add a month to the year, the Sanhedrin considered whether bad weather would prevent the far-flung exiles from arriving in Jerusalem in time for the Pesach pil-

¹⁶ A search of Berry's books at home and of Web pages about "Purim Date Originally Nisan" via Google has failed to turn up any source. If you know of a citable source for this claim, please inform the authors by e-mail.

grimage. It is true that with the arrival of Ezra and his followers Jerusalem had returned to its place of pre-eminence in Jewish life, and it was from there, and especially the Sanhedrin, that authoritative instructions went forth to Jews everywhere. Nevertheless, the study of Torah had continued throughout all these years in Babylonia uninterrupted. [HOJP I, p201-203] (where “HOJP” refers to *Nassi and Av Beis Din* information from “History of the Jewish People”, based on Seder Olam Zuta) [32]

As observed by Jair Jehuda, it is easy to imagine a scenario in which Mordecai, mindful of the decree whose implementation was set for the 13th day of Farvardin, 13 days after the Spring Equinox, would on the end of Adar, convince the Sanhedrin to declare Adar II, even though by observations alone it was correct to declare the new Year and Nisan. We call this kind of Adar II a “calendrically unnecessary Adar II”.

Notice first, that *if* the new year and Nisan were declared at the end of an Adar that was within one day of the Spring Equinox, the 13th day after the Spring Equinox, the 13th of Farvardin, the scheduled date of the massacre of the Jews, would be just before Passover, on the 12th, 13th or 14th of Nisan. If, on the other hand, Nisan were put off for another month to insert a calendrically unnecessary Adar II, then the scheduled massacre would be finished a month before Passover, and the 13th of Farvardin could very well have coincided with the 13th of Adar II. Why would Mordecai want Nisan to be postponed?

Mordecai’s thinking could have been:

1. Jerusalem is part of the Empire; so also it is endangered by Haman’s decree. However, Jerusalem is on the outer reaches of the Empire.
2. Haman is reputed to have convinced the Persian King to suspend the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem.
3. Haman’s sending his army to Jerusalem during the upcoming Passover pilgrimage would put the army in a position to kill both the pilgrims and the people rebuilding the Temple, making it more likely that Haman would send his army to Jerusalem.
4. Postponing Nisan for one month would mean that no Jews would be enroute to Jerusalem on the day of the scheduled massacre, making it less attractive for Haman to send his army on to Jerusalem.
5. Postponing Nisan for one month would mean that all Jews would still be in their homes, making any defense easier than if some were on the road exposed to attacking marauders.

While this postponement would not be for weather considerations, it would be for the benefit of the Passover pilgrimage.

8 Source of the Persian Version of the Story of Purim

Lest there be a suggestion that author Arbab invented the story embodied by this Persian tradition to explain the costume-wearing tradition that he already knew about, the story of how Arbab and Berry came to write this paper is instructive: Several years ago, when Berry visited Arbab in Amsterdam on a date that happened to be near the Purim holiday, Berry asked Arbab if he, Arbab, an Iranian, knew how Jews celebrate Purim. Arbab said that he did not know all the details. Berry then asked Arbab to explain the details that Arbab knew. Arbab explained the Persian version as described here. When Berry heard about the Persian version’s second decree, he knew that he had just learned the solution to one of Judaism’s heretofore unsatisfactorily answered questions, “Why do Jews wear costumes to celebrate Purim?” Just to be sure, Berry asked Arbab if he knew that Jews celebrate Purim by dressing in costumes. Arbab said that he did; however, he knew about the Persian version in Iran before he came to the U.S. to study, and he learned about Jews celebrating Purim by wearing costumes only later, in the U.S. while studying there. Thus, Arbab knew about the Persian version long before he learned that Jews celebrated Purim by wearing

costumes, having learned the Persian version in elementary school. Moreover, to his memory, while Jews in Iran dress up nicely for Purim, as they do for other holidays, they do not dress in outlandish or disguising costumes, as he saw that Jews in the U.S. do. Arbab was surprised to learn from Berry that Jews outside of Iran know nothing of the Persian version of the second decree. He had assumed that Jews everywhere naturally knew what he and some other interested Iranians knew. Arbab and Berry realized that they had to write this article.

A natural follow-up question to ask is, “Where did Arbab hear the story that is described as the Persian tradition?” Arbab does not remember exactly who told him this story, but he cannot explicitly remember not knowing it. He had visited the site of the Tomb of Esther and Mordecai as a child. The docents at the site tell all visitors about the artifacts there, but Arbab does not remember if he heard the story there. He does remember mentions of the story when he was shooting the bull with his friends in school, some of whom were Jewish, when talking about interesting summer trips, about Persian history, or even about Persian Jewery. He recalls a teacher giving a mini-lecture in class about the story. Basically to him, this story was part of folklore and history that every child learns about the place in which he lives.

One might assume that the story was a universally known part of Iranian folklore and history, sort of like the American stories that the young George Washington chopped down a cherry tree as a youth and that Abraham Lincoln grew up in a log cabin and the Jewish story that the young Abraham smashed his father’s idols to get his father to see that idols had no power. The author Berry cannot remember when he did not know these stories and has no recall of when he first learned these. Moreover, he would assume that any other American or Jew would know the corresponding stories.

However, Arbab now knows that knowledge of the story, while common, is not universal among Iranians. He learned it because his family, unlike most others in Iran at the time he was growing up, was interested in and did tourism and were conscientious about learning about the history of places that they visited. So it was natural for him and for others like him to absorb and remember all sorts of interesting historical tidbits.

Moreover, Jewish history was not of any interest to Iranians, even to Iranian Jews. Arbab remembers reading accounts of foreign Jews visiting Iran some 100 years ago who were exasperated by the lack of interest of Iranian Jews in their own history and culture. Even the history of Iran was not of interest to most Iranians. He believes also that most visitors to the site were devout Jewish pilgrims who were interested in only the religious rites and the significance of their pilgrimage, and not in the history of Purim, which, after all, they knew from the account in *M’gillat Esther*.

Thus, the story is more akin, in the American context, to the knowledge that “Y. A.” in the name of the great quarterback of the New York Football Giants Y. A. Tittle stands for “Yelberton Abraham” and in the Jewish context, to the knowledge of how to determine if any given Jewish year has the leap month of Adar II.

Arbab does not recall ever discussing the Persian tradition story, in particular the contents of the second decree, in depth with anyone while he lived in Iran. It was just a curious historical event that he had come to know and that had left an impression on him when he was a child, but it was simply not something that concerned him and he never spent any attention or thought on it. In fact, while in Iran, he never even connected the holiday, whose name was unknown to him, that the Jews around him celebrated before the Spring equinox and the story that he knew. It was only after he moved to Los Angeles, CA, USA that he learned about the Purim holiday and that he realized the connection between the holiday and the story he knew. However, he naturally assumed that the story that the Jews knew was the same that he knew and rarely discussed it with anyone.

The one time that Arbab did discuss Purim with American Jews in Los Angeles, the conversation focused on the celebration of Purim and not on the story. So, when he heard about the wearing of costumes, it was clear to him that the tradition arose from the second decree as he knew it, and he again naturally assumed that the others in the conversation understood the same. He saw no reason to go into detail about the story and that was that. The other people in the conversation knew that he was Iranian and made the remark that it happened there, but never

thought to probe his understanding of the story.

The first time that Arbab discussed the story in depth with a Jew was in the conversation with Berry that led to the writing of this paper.

With regard to the issue of the date of the holiday, Arbab is certain that while he lived in Iran, he did not know or remember that Purim commemorates events that took place on the 13th of a month in the Jewish calendar. He believes that he learned or relearned that Purim commemorates events that took place on the 13th of Adar during the conversation with American Jews in Los Angeles. However, the connection of the 13th of Adar with Sizdeh beh Dar did not hit him until he had his discussion with Berry and the connection between costume wearing and the Persian tradition second decree had been established.

9 How Purim is Celebrated by Iranian Jews and More on the Source of the Persian Version

The first attempts to learn from Iranian Jewish sources about their modes of celebration and their knowledge about Purim were less than satisfying. Two Web sites about Iranian Jewish celebrations of Purim discuss neither the wearing of costumes in celebration of the holiday nor any histories other than that of *M'gillat Esther* [11,9]. However, sources of information were found.

Karmel Melamed, an Iranian Jewish attorney and writer about Iranian Jewish affairs, told the authors by e-mail that Iranian Jews do not wear costumes to celebrate Purim. He said, "From my knowledge and expertise, no. This is a european/ashkenazi [sic] tradition." [19] Melamed says,

"Even though Purim is for all Jews around the world, we as Jews living in Iran feel particularly close to Purim," said Parviz Yeshaya, national chairman of the Jewish Council in Iran. "Especially since the tombs of Esther and Mordechai are here in Iran."

Iran's Islamic regime does not discourage the celebrating of Jewish holidays, including Purim, Yeshaya said. Still, the tone of the holiday is quite different than [sic] in other countries. The Jewish community in Iran has embraced the long-standing religious aspects of Purim rather than the light-hearted festivities that characterize American observance.

"The most important part of celebrating Purim in Iran starts with the fast, which is 24 hours, and the reading of the megillah in synagogues during the fast," Yeshaya said. "We give gifts here, but not as many, and we don't have carnivals like the Ashkenazim. But children in their Jewish school conduct their own plays of the Purim story."

Melamed adds,

[Amnon] Netzer [an Iranian Jewish Scholar] did, however, have an explanation of the more subdued, religious nature of the holiday's observance. Jews in Iran have always been cautious in their celebrations of Purim, he said, because the Book of Esther contains unflattering depictions of non-Jewish Persians and also includes the tale of a slaughter of non-Jews.

"If you read the book [*M'gillat Esther*] itself you will see that it says the Iranian Jews were permitted actually to massacre a lot of Iranians on a certain day and King Ahasuerus, also known as Xerxes, is pictured as a stupid king," Netzer said. "So these factors actually made Iranian Jews extremely careful not to have high-profile celebrations for Purim."

Consistent with the observation that for Iranian Jews, Purim is more religious than festive, Schauss mentions that Iranian Jews observe the Fast of Esther as strictly as they observe the Fast of Yom Kippur [27].

Julie G. Fox confirmed the seriousness of the day to Iranian Jews in her interview of Rabbi Shofet of the Nessah Synagogue, of Fariba Ramin, of Fariba Sameyach, and of Ellia Salemnia in “For Iranian-American Jews, Purim is a serious day” [10] Fox wrote, “Wearing costumes is not a Persian custom, but emissaries and educators who arrived in Iran from Israel brought the notion, and Persian children in America today do enjoy dressing up.”

The authors asked two expatriat Iranian Jews that they knew in the United States, if Jews in Iran celebrated Purim by wearing costumes. Neither of them recall seeing any such costume wearing. Each protested that he was not from a very religious family, so perhaps he was not the person to ask. One offered that it is not difficult to see why Iranian Jews would not wear costumes, given their minority status in relatively hostile surroundings.

This situation is the ultimate opposite in the so-called holiday of opposites. In Iran, where some people know about the Persian version second decree, Jews do not wear costumes to celebrate Purim, and Jews believe that the custom is a tradition introduced outside of Iran. Outside of Iran, Jews wear costumes to celebrate Purim, they do not know about the Persian version second decree, and they are *uncertain* about the origin of costume wearing. That Jews in Iran focus on the religious aspects of Purim rather than on merry making led Rabbi Lori Cohen to wonder if we should ask an opposite of Luria’s riddle, “Why is Purim like Yom Kippurim to Iranian Jews?” The authors are mystified about this inversion as indeed they are about the evident lack of written record about the Persian tradition. They can only speculate as to the reasons for them.

In the Zoroastrian religion, Sizdeh Bedar, which is as old as the Persian civilization and predates Islam, originally was an exaggeratedly jovial celebration to exhort the angel of rain and rainwater to defeat the demon of drought. After the Arab conquest of Iran was sealed with the fall of the Sassanid Empire in 651 CE, the Arab Muslim rulers generally suppressed all non-Islamic traditions. Almost overnight, the Zoroastrian majority found itself severely persecuted and its traditions strongly suppressed. The Muslim Arab rulers considered Zoroastrianism as paganism and Zoroastrians as infidels that had to be converted to Islam.

On the other hand, the Muslims *tolerated* Judaism as an Abrahamic faith, and the Jews, as the people of the book, were allowed to practice their religion. Jews, in their precarious position as a tolerated minority under Islamic rule, found it prudent to distance themselves from Zoroastrian practices such as Sizdeh Bedar. Thus, Persian Jews had every reason to at least appear to expunge from Purim celebrations and traditions any link to Sizdeh Bedar and to stick to what is written in *M’gillat Esther*, which is part of the book that Jews were the people of. So it is not surprising that there are few if any Iranian Jewish *writings* that mention the link between Sizdeh Bedar and Purim.

At the same time, the non-Jewish Persians, Muslim or otherwise, were trying to preserve their cherished ancient culture and traditions under Islam. They managed to neutralize enough of the Zoroastrian religious aspects of their culture and of many of their traditions, including those of Noruz and Sizdeh Bedar, to be able to continue to celebrate them, albeit in what appeared to the Muslim rulers as non-religious, national events. This suppression of the religious aspects of Sizdeh Bedar would include disassociation of Sizdeh Bedar from the Purim holiday celebrated by another religious group, even though the group itself and its own celebrations might have been tolerated. Thus, it is not surprising that there are few if any non-Jewish Iranian *writings* that mention the link between Sizdeh Bedar and Purim.

What *is* surprising and somewhat miraculous, is that the story of the connection between Sizdeh Bedar and Purim, the Persian tradition of this paper, has survived to this day, albeit apparently primarily among non-Jewish Iranians, solely by verbal transmission. Perhaps this back-channel verbal transmission is yet another miracle of Purim. It is no less a miracle than the survival of Jewish tradition strictly by oral transmission from generation to generation among Crypto Jews [41]. Finally, it seems to these authors that Schauss, in his characterization of Purim as being derived from a nature festival, is alluding to some verbally transmitted traditions.

Why does this verbal transmission seem to exclude Iranian Jews? Since Jews celebrating Purim in Iran feel that they are walking on eggshells and have to mute the celebration because Purim is about an utter defeat and slaughter of the Persians, they do not talk with non-Jews about Purim. Non-Jews return the favor and do not talk with Jews about Purim either. Each tacitly assumes that the other knows what it knows when, in fact, the other does not.

Author Berry visited the Nessah Synagogue, the largest Persian Jewish congregation in Los Angeles one Sabbath in June 2009. No one that he asked, even among the older generation, claimed to have any knowledge of the Persian version of the story of Purim. For them, Purim was as described by *M'gillat Esther*. At the time, Berry was surprised. However, in retrospect, this lack of knowledge would be a clear result of suppression of any written record of Purim's connection to Sizdeh Bedar and of the lack of verbal transmission among Jews of the same.

In fact, the *Comprehensive History of the Jews of Iran: The Outset of the Diaspora* by Habib Levy [16] is disappointing as a source of information for this article. It devotes only one sentence to the holiday of Purim, saying only (Page 70), "From this time forward, Jews throughout the world have celebrated the 14th and 15th of the month of Adar as 'Purim.'" This sentence is preceded by a summary of the *M'gillat Esther* version of the story of Purim, and there is no discussion of any other version of the story. However, concerning the second decree, on Page 69, Levy says only,

Xerxes then countermanded all the orders for the mass execution of the Jews. A new order was written to the governors of the 127 provinces, from India to Ethiopia, nullifying the order to kill the Jews.

This account matches neither the *M'gillat Esther* account nor the Persian tradition story account, although it seems closer to the Persian tradition story account because it fails to describe any military action that the Jews were permitted to take to defend themselves. The depth with which Levy goes into other details of the story stands in contrast to the brevity of this account of the second decree; thus, perhaps Levy is aware of something he is not reporting.

An article by Almut Hintze about the Greek and Hebrew versions of *M'gillat Esther* [13] discusses differences between the two versions. It also considers the influence on Purim of the Persian holiday of Fravardigan (فروردگان [fravardegaan]), ten days before the Persian New Year, which is on the day of the Spring equinox. The article suggests that the gift giving tradition of Purim arises from the gift-giving tradition of Fravardigan because the 14th day of Adar occasionally coincides with the date of Fravardigan. This influence is similar to the 20th Century Jewish diaspora's tradition of giving gifts on Chanukkah arising from Chanukkah's proximity in the calendar to the Christmas gift-giving season. The article even describes a connection between the Persian word "فروردگان [fravardegaan]" and the Hebrew word "פורים [purim]" However, the article makes no mention of the second decree and of costume wearing.

Hintze's article appeared in a volume of *Irano-Judaica* edited by Shaul Shaked and the late Amnon Netzer. None of the volumes was available at any libraries that author Berry had access to. Before buying these volumes, by e-mail Berry asked Shaked, one of the editors, if any of the articles in the volumes deal with the contents of the second decree or the costume wearing tradition. Shaked was kind enough to say, "I don't think any of the articles in the volumes of *Irano-Judaica* deals with the history of Purim as celebrated by Iranian Jews. There are two or three articles which study the Book of Esther, but not from the angle you are interested in."

A recent article by Jona Schellekens about the origins of the Jewish festival of Purim [28] discusses several issues raised by the account of the events in *M'gillat Esther*. These issues include those of the ancestries of Mordecai and Haman. However, the article has no discussion of the contents of the second decree and of the wearing of costumes in celebration of the holiday.

10 Question Raised About the Wild Way Purim is Celebrated

As Lea Guendelman asks, “Why are Jews not only allowed to but encouraged to violate so many of Judaism’s commandments and norms on Purim?” Perhaps this permission and encouragement is in commemoration of the likely fact that to keep up the disguise as Persians, the Jews would have had to behave in a distinctly non-Jewish manner, perhaps getting drunk as part of the Sizdeh Bedar festivities. Compounding the violation is the likely fact that the day was the sabbath and there would have been wholesale violation of the rules for the sabbath, such as against traveling too far, to get to nature; against preparing food, for the picnic; etc. All of these violations would have been deemed acceptable, perhaps after some debate (Note that the concept of *pikuach nefesh* had not been enunciated yet.), by the Jewish authorities because it was for saving the lives of all Jews in Persia. Thus, it could be that the behavioral excesses of Jews in celebrating Purim are in commemoration of behavioral excesses that saved the lives of the Jews’ ancestors in Persia.

11 Conclusion

A Persian version of the events of Purim complements the Jewish traditions about some events of Purim by explaining some details that have long been mysterious. In particular, the Persian version provides the simplest answer to the question of why Jews wear costumes when celebrating Purim, and specifically why Jews are to dress as non-Jews on Purim. The Persian version says that the second decree was an order to Jews to dress as Persians on the day that they were to be killed so that the killers would find no Jews to kill.

Note that this article is itself an example of the resolution of two traditions leading to better understandings of both traditions. The two authors come from two different traditions, neither knew about the other’s traditions about Purim, and each had assumed that there was no difference in the two traditions. They had to resolve their traditions and in doing so, came to an understanding that led to this article’s writing.

The authors believe that in order to understand the truth behind such a complex phenomenon that happened so long in the past, it is essential to juxtapose deep understandings of multiple cultures, traditions, histories, and narratives, and look for real answers to questions, while assuming that the people back then were inherently just as reasonable, competent, intelligent, capable, and rational as they are today, albeit, operating in less informed, less technologically advanced societies, with somewhat different norms and structures. Very few people have approached the topic of this article in this way.

Finally, it is interesting that the two often-stated, but not fully understood reasons traditionally given for Jews’ wearing costumes on Purim,

1. “Jews wear costumes so that they look like non-Jews,” and
2. “Jews wear costumes so that no one knows who they are,”

were right on the mark, as they capture the intent and purpose of the second decree according to the Persian version.

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Appendix

This appendix shows and explains the brochure and the photographs obtained from the Mausoleum of Mordecai and Esther in Hamadan.¹⁷

Figure 1 shows the cover page of a brochure that one obtains on a visit to the mausoleum. The photograph in the center shows the exterior of the mausoleum. Notice the apparent absence of any religious icons, such as a crescent, a cross, or even a Star of David.

Figure 2 shows an interior page of the brochure, which contains an explanation of the history of the people buried in the mausoleum. An English translation of this text is:

In the Name of the Highest

Among the religious relics left by the Jews (کلیمیان [kalimiyan]) in Hamadan, is the mausoleum of Esther and Mordecai. This place every year hosts many Jewish pilgrims and visitors from various places in Iran and around the world. The Jewish pilgrims every year observe their religious tradition (the celebration of Purim (پوریم [purim])) in this place. This takes place at the end of the month of Esfand (اسفند [esfand]) and early Farvardin (13 to 15 of Adar (آدار [adar]), according to the Jewish calendar) commemorating the anniversary of the deliverance of the Jewish people from mass murder, by Esther the queen of Khashayarsha (486–445 BCE) and her paternal uncle Mordecai. The tradition of commemoration begins with prayers, fasting, breaking the fast, and reading of the Magilla (مگیلا [magila]) scroll, and continues during the days of 14 and 15 of Adar with gift giving, visiting [families and friends], festivities and celebration.

According to well-known historical accounts, Hadassah was a Jewish girl who was chosen by Khashayarsha (the third Achaemenid king) as queen of the court, and because of her beauty was named Esther (Setareh). Esther's paternal uncle, Mordecai, son of Yair (یائیر [ya'ir]) and of the tribe of Benjamin (بنیامین [benyamin]), was the gatekeeper of the Achaemenid court in Susa. He was charged with the rearing of Esther, and it was he who took Esther to the court.

Haman, the minister of Khashayarsha, had planned to mass murder the Iranian Jews. Mordecai learned of this affair and informed the king and because of the position that Esther and Mordecai had in the court, the king prevented this from happening and caused the deliverance of the Jewish people in Iran. Later, in appreciation of this service, the mausoleum of these two individuals turned into one of the important holy shrines of the Jews in Iran.

The caption underneath the photograph showing people standing in front of the mausoleum says, “The Jews of Hamadan in front of the Mausoleum of Esther and Mordecai — Qajar Period (1794-1925 CE)”

¹⁷ A movie about Kambiz Tazarv's visit to the Mausoleum can be found at YouTube at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h9oMFn0arYQ&feature=player_embedded#!.

Figure 3 shows the locked main door to the mausoleum in a photograph of its exterior wall.

Figure 4 shows a plaque mounted on an interior wall. The Persian and English texts on the plaque are translations of each other. While the lighting makes reading the English text difficult, that text says:

Mausoleum of Esther and Mordecai

The mausoleum of Esther and Mordechai [sic] dates back to Il Khanid period (14th century) and was built on the remains of an older building. According to historic narratives, this mausoleum houses the tombs of Esther, the consort of Xerxes, and her uncle Mordechai, who played a significant role in preventing the massacre of Jews in their time. and therefore constitutes one of the pilgrimage spots of this religion's followers.

Figure 5 shows a metal plaque plastered directly to the wall. The plaque contains Hebrew text that gives a complete genealogy of Mordecai all the way back to Benjamin the son of Jacob, establishing that Mordecai is a Benjaminite.

איש יהודי היה בשושן הבירה [ish y'hu-di haya b'shushan habayra]
ושמו מרדכי בן יאיר בן שמעי [shmo mordechai ben ya'ir ben shim'i]
בן שמידע בן בענה בן אילה בן [ben shmida' ben ba'aneh ben aylah ben]
מיבה {מיכה?} בן מפיבושת בן יהונתן בן [mivah {mikhah?} ben mefivoshet ben y'honatan ben]
שאול בן קיש בן אביאל בן [sha'ul ben qish ben avi'el ben]
צרור בן בכורת בן אפיה בן [tz'ror ben b'khorat ben afiyah ben]
שחרים בן עזיה בן שישק בן [sh'charim ben 'uziyah ben shishaq ben]
מיכאל בן אליאל בן עמיהוד [mikha'el ben eli'el ben 'amihud]
בן שפמיה בן פתואל בן פיתון [ben sh'famiyah ben patu'el ben piton]
בן מליך בן ירבעל בן ירוחם [ben malikh ben yiruba'al ben yirucham]
בן חנניה בן זכרי {זכרי?} בן אלפעל בן [ben chananyah ben zivri {zikhri?} ben ll'pa'al ben]
שמרי בן זכריה בן מרימות [shimri ben zakhariyah ben m'rimot]
בן חשים בן שחורה בן [ben chashim ben sh'chorah ben]
גיה בן עזה בן גרא בן בלע [giyah ben 'aza ben gera ben bela']
בן בנימין בן יעקב אבינו [ben binyamin ben ya'aqov avinu]

It means:

Was a Jewish man in Shushan the Capital,
and his name is Mordecai, son of Yair, son of Shimei,
son of Shemida, son of Baanah, son of Elah, son of
Mivah {Micah?}, son of Mephibosheth, son of Jonathan, son of
Saul, son of Kish, son of Abiel, son of
Zeror, son of Bechorath, son of Aphiyah, son of
Sheharim, son of Uzziyah, son of Shishak, son of
Michael, son of Eliel, son of Ammihud,
Shephamiah, son of Patuel, son of Pithon,
Son of Malich, son of Jerubbaal, son of Jeroham,
son of Hanania, son of Zivri {Zichri?}, son of Elpaal, son of
Shimri, son of Zaccariah, son of Meremoth,
son of Chashim, son of Shecoreh, son of
Giah, son of Gaza, son of Bela,
son of Benjamin, son of Jacob, our father.

The maker of the plaque seems to have twice written “ב” [“v”] when he should have written the look-alike “כ”

[“kh”]. The two words as written are not names, but in each, if a “כ” is substituted for the “ב”, the result is a well-known, plausible Biblical name. In each case, the plausible name is shown in curly brackets after the literally correct name.

The first two lines of this plaque are identical with the first eleven words of Esther 2:5 which says:

איש יהודי היה בשושן הבירה ושמו מרדכי בן יאיר בן שמעי בן קיש איש ימיני.
[ish y’hudi haya b’shushan habayra shmo mordechai ben ya’ir ben shim’i ben kish ish yemini.]

and means:

Was a Jewish man in Shushan the Capital, and his name is Mordecai, son of Yair, son of Shimei, son of Kish, a Benjaminite.

The plaque has seven names between “Shimei” and “Kish”. The very next sentence, Esther 2:6 says that Kish was exiled from Jerusalem along with Jechonia (יכניה [y’khoniya]), the King of Judah. The reign of Jechonia began and ended around 598 BCE [40]. The events of *M’gillat Esther* took place around 474 BCE, some 124 years later. By *M’gillat Esther*’s reckoning there were four generations, each an average of 31 years between Esther and Kish. By the plaque’s reckoning, there were 11 generations, each an average of 11.27 years between Esther and Kish. It appears that the number of generations since the exile in *M’gillat Esther* is too small and the number of generations since the exile in the plaque is too large, as people neither had children at the age of 31 nor at the age of 11. The more plausible number of generations since the exile is six or seven, corresponding to having children on average at around ages 18 through 20.

On the other hand, the two Kishes may not be the same person, because the four consecutive ancestors of the Kish in the plaque are identical to the four ancestors mentioned in Samuel (שמואל [shmue] I 9:1 of the Benjaminitic Kish who is the father of King Saul, leading to the conclusion that the Saul and Jonathon mentioned in the plaque should be the King Saul and his son Jonathan. However, it does not make sense that the Kish that is the father of King Saul participated in the exile that took place some 400 years later.

This list of names shares many names with two other genealogies for Mordecai, namely those found in two medieval commentaries (מידרשים [midrashim]), ספרי דאגדתא על אסתר [sifray da’agadeta ‘al ester] and ילקוט שמעוני אסתר רמז [yalqut shim’oni ester remez] 1053. No two pairs of lists are identical; each contains names that are not in any of the others; and each lacks names that are in at least one of the others. One of these lists shows that perhaps one of the unidentifiable names, זכרי [zivri {zikhri?}], might be זבדי [zavdi]; that is, the maker of the plaque substituted “ר [r]” for its look-alike “ד [d]”.

Figure 6 shows one of the tombs inside the mausoleum. It, as both are, is draped with a burgundy colored cloth, and it lies before a representation of the Ten Commandments in Hebrew, in which each commandment is represented by its first two or three words.

Figure 7 shows a corner of the tomb of Esther. Note the plaque giving her name in Hebrew, Latin, and Persian letters.

Figure 8 shows a corner of the tomb of Mordecai. Also it has a plaque giving his name in Hebrew, Latin, and Persian letters.

Figure 9 shows a reproduction, with permission of Georg Gerster, of his 1976 aerial photograph of Hamadan, which has been published in *The Past From Above: Aerial Photographs of Archaeological Sites* [33]. To this reproduction has been added a red circle marking the place of the mausoleum in the city.

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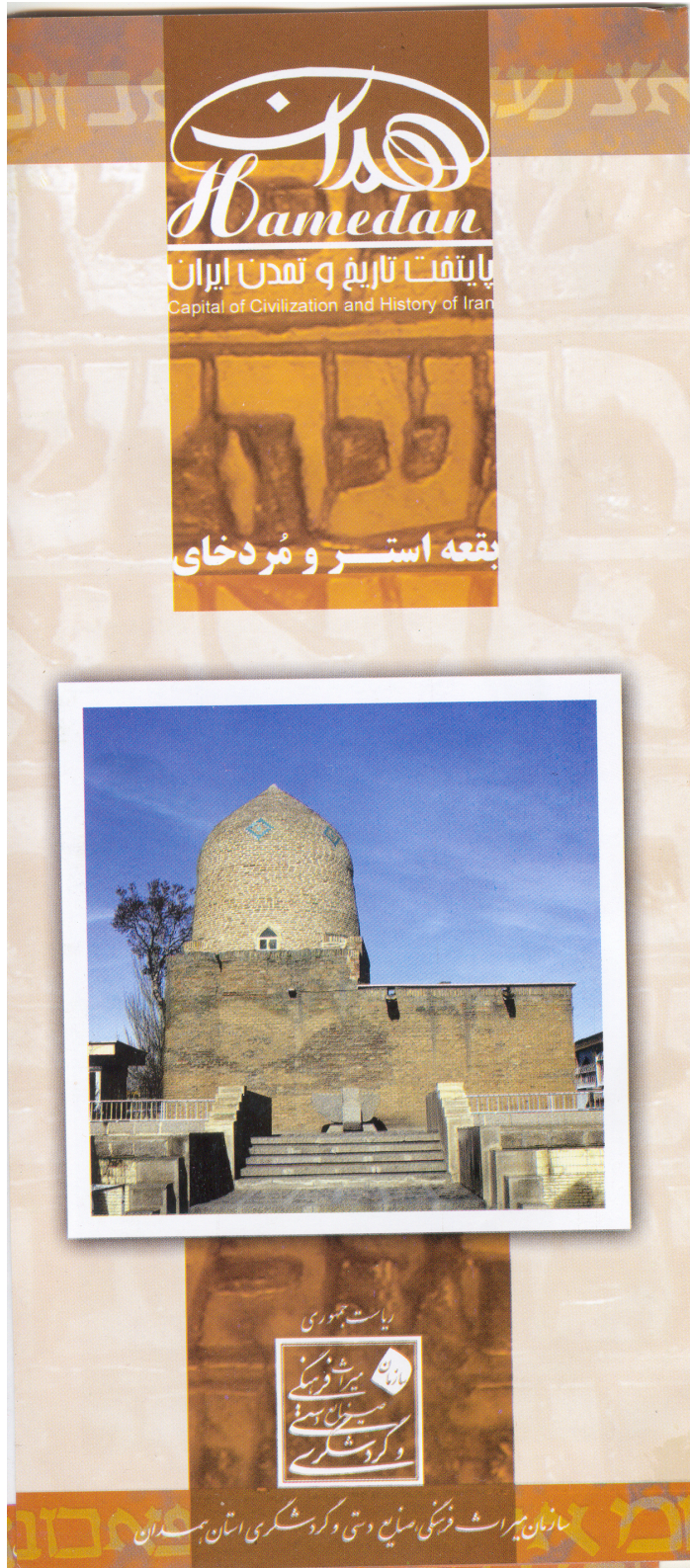


Figure 1. Cover of Mausoleum Brochure

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ

از جمله یادمانهای مذهبی بجای مانده از کلیمیان در همدان، آرامگاه استر و مردخای است. این مکان همه ساله پذیرای زائرین کلیمی و بازدید کنندگان زیادی از نقاط مختلف ایران و جهان است. زائرین کلیمی همه ساله مراسم مذهبی خویش (جشن پوریم) را در این مکان اجرا می کنند. این مراسم در اواخر اسفند و اوایل فروردین ماه (۱۳ تا ۱۵ آذر-طبق گاهشمار کلیمیان) در سالروز بزرگداشت نجات کلیمیان از قتل عام، توسط استر ملکه خشایارشا (۴۴۵-۴۸۶ ق.م) - و عموی وی مردخای، انجام می شود. مراسم بزرگداشت با دعا و نیایش، گرفتن روزه، مراسم افطار و خواندن طومار مگیلا آغاز و طی روزهای (۱۴ و ۱۵ آذر) با دادن هدایا، دید و بازدید و بزم و شادمانی ادامه می یابد.

«هَدَسِه» بنا بر روایات مشهور تاریخی، دختری کلیمی بود که از جانب خشایارشا (سومین پادشاه هخامنشی) به عنوان ملکه دربار انتخاب شد و به دلیل زیبایی اش استر (ستاره) نام گرفت.

عموی استر، مردخای - پسر یائیر و از نژاد بنیامین - نگهبان دربار هخامنشی در شوش بود. او تربیت استر را بر عهده داشت و هم او بود که استر را به دربار برد.

«هامان» وزیر خشایارشا، نقشه قتل عام کلیمیان ایران را در سر داشت. مردخای از این ماجرا مطلع شد و شاه را آگاه ساخت و به جهت موقعیتی که استر و مردخای در دربار داشتند، شاه جلوی این اتفاق را گرفت و سبب نجات قوم کلیمی در ایران شد. بعدها به پاس این خدمت، آرامگاه این دو تن به یکی از زیارتگاه های مهم کلیمیان ایران تبدیل شد.



کلیمیان همدان در کنار بقعه استر و مردخای - دوره قاجاریه

Figure 2. Interior Page of Mausoleum Brochur



Figure 3. Main Door of Mausoleum



Figure 4. Plaque Describing Mausoleum's Contents



Figure 5. Plaque Describing Mordecai's Genealogy



Figure 6. One Tomb in Front of Ten Commandments



Figure 7. Esther's Tomb



Figure 8. Mordecai's Tomb



Figure 9. Georg Gerster's Aerial Photograph of Hamadan with Added Annotation