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Septuagint's understanding of Purim within the history of religion, law, and justice

CHRISTOPH ELSAS

1. Hermeneutic introduction to the understanding of Purim in Esther

According to Esther chapter 3, the festival of Purim traces back to an accusation of Haman, the deadly enemy of Mordechai, and all of the Jews, in the presence of the king of Iran: “Then Haman said to king Ahasuerus, ‘There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom. Their laws (*dâtei/nomoi*) are different from those of every other people, and they do not keep the king’s laws (*dâtei/nomoi*), so that it is not the king’s profit to tolerate them. If it please the king, let it be decreed that they be destroyed ...’” (ESV Est 3:8 f.).

First, I will show how the idea of human life under the government of that day formed the foundation of the festival of Purim and its specific understanding in the Septuagint. Festivals like Purim are connected to the struggle of good against evil seen with the heart, mobilising intensive emotions even when repeated every year.¹

The historical critical method is important to reconstruct the real history around the festival of Purim. But even more important is its mythical description, told in the biblical Book of Esther, including its additions in the Greek Bible. For the symbols of this interpretation of the world are full of a surplus of sense and a variety of meanings. Therefore, by every new exposition, the potential of its message becomes more relevant for the present situation. The Book of Esther particularly includes traditions of the religion and culture of Israel and Iran, both emphasizing that the material world is part of the positive divine order, in a dualism with an eschatological-monotheistic tendency.²

¹ Cf. J. Assmann and T. Sundermeier, “Vorwort,” in: J. Assmann (ed.), *Das Fest und das Heilige: Religiöse Kontrapunkte zur Alltagswelt*, Gütersloh 1991, 9; H. Nielen, *Prozessionsfeste und dramatische Spiele im interreligiösen Vergleich. Eine religionsphänomenologische Studie zu Fastnacht, Fronleichnam, Ašura und Purim*, Berlin 2005, 501.

² C. Elsas, *Mystik in der Globalisierung. Diskurs und Traditionen der Chaldäischen Orakel im Kontext heutiger Religionsbegegnung*, Berlin 2017, 14 f. 42–103.

2. Religion and law

The idea that humans, of early cultures, cannot calculate the fateful world of powers is affirmed by the widespread custom to consult the oracles.³ In the influential *Mesopotamian* tradition, the Akkadian expression *šimtu* is translated “fate, fortune”. According to Mesopotamian ideas, all humankind’s destinies were written on the “slates of destiny.” The gods, too, have a personal destiny, because they are part of the cosmos, but for the ruler and all other humans, the gods are the administrators of their destinies. To be in possession of the slates of destiny meant power for the respective owner among the gods: by converting the written into the spoken word. Accordingly, law was oriented on the idea of the manifestation of the divine will, in astronomic, meteorological and earthly signs (*omina*), with “divination” as the technique to find out and interpret these signs.⁴ In the process of the oracle, the gods are deciding if the powers of chaos are allowed to threaten the human, appealing to their judgement, and if they themselves have demands for him or her. A bad omen may have been a sign for an aggression of the demonic powers of chaos. Then, the process of finding the “law” in the liver of the sacrificial lamb, by the specialist of the oracles, puts the threatening danger in a concrete form to facilitate its control.⁵

Religion and law are indivisible in traditional societies, still today. In the religions of India, the term for religion, *dharmā*, from the verb form of *dharmā*, which can be translated as “support,” denotes the maintenance of an established order – with primary cosmic implications in the early sources. But later on, with primary expression in the system of castes and stages of life, it got the implication of a basic inequality of the individuals for the regulations of legal relationships.⁶

³ H.-J. Klimkeit, “Der leidende Gerechte in der Religionsgeschichte. Ein Beitrag zur problemorientierten ‘Religionsphänomenologie,’” in: H. Zinser (ed.), *Religionswissenschaft. Eine Einführung*, Berlin 1988, 164–184, here 166f.

⁴ Cf. E. Cancik-Kirschbaum, “‘König der Gerechtigkeit’ – ein altorientalisches Paradigma zu Recht und Herrschaft,” in: G. Palmer *et al.* (eds.), *Torah – Nomos – Ius. Abendländischer Antinomismus und der Traum vom herrschaftsfreien Raum*, Berlin 1999, 52–68, here 65; for the Iranian Empire including the Jewish diaspora cf. C. Elsas, “Prozesse kulturgeschichtlicher Prägung bei der Vermittlung heiligen Wissens. Von der assyrischen Prophetie zu den griechischen Chaldäischen Orakeln,” in: E. G. Dafni (ed.), *Gottesschau – Gotteserkenntnis (WUNT 387)*, Tübingen 2017, 207–219, here 208–210.

⁵ H. Neumann, “Zum Problem von Schuld und Sühne in den sumerischen Gottesbriefen,” in: A. Grund, A. Krüger and F. Lippke (eds.), *Ich will dir danken unter den Völkern. Studien zur israelitischen und altorientalischen Gebetsliteratur*, FS für Bernd Janowski, Gütersloh 2013, 594–602, here 598 und 600; cf. H. Neumann, “Recht im antiken Mesopotamien,” in: U. Manthe (ed.), *Die Rechtskulturen der Antike. Vom Alten Orient bis zum Römischen Reich*, München 2003, 55–122; C. Wilcke, “Das Recht: Grundlage des sozialen und politischen Diskurses im Alten Orient,” in: idem (ed.), *Das geistige Erfassen der Welt im Alten Orient: Sprache, Religion, Kultur und Gesellschaft*, Wiesbaden 2007, 209–244, here 239.

⁶ Cf. H.-M. Haufßig, “Religion, Recht und Religionswissenschaft,” in: Palmer *et al.* (eds.), *Torah – Nomos – Ius*, 108–122, here 110 and 119f.

Even for *Buddhists*, disregarding the Hindu rules of caste, it is a preparatory stage to follow ritual and ethical rules, according to *dharma*.⁷

Parallel to *dharma*, the term for religion in today's *Hebrew*, *dât*, denotes in the Bible and in the rabbinic literature either a whole corpus of laws, or a single prescription or instruction⁸ – as in Est 3:8 cited above. *Dât* is a borrowing from Zoroastrian *Iran*, and is equivalent to *dâta* which means “law of the king”. From the time of Darius I (6th century BCE), it was also known as *dâtu ša šarri* since his reign over Babylon. The Daiva-inscription of Darius' son Xerxes demands obedience to the law, established by Ahura Mazda – the creator of the world and god of the king par excellence. As a counterpart we read in the biblical Book of Esra in chapter 7, quoting the edict of the Iranian king Artaxerxes I from the 5th century BCE for the Jews: “law of your god” (of Israel) and “law of the king” (of Iran including Israel),⁹ cf. Est 3,8. Israel's special interpretation of God's law has its foundation in the experience of its freedom not by itself, but by the freedom of God transcending all, including his own wrath.¹⁰ In *Greek* tradition, besides the divine established order Themis, there is a special stress on the personification of human law Dike. Dike is put in concrete forms in the jurisdiction, with the meaning of an execution, controlled by a law court. In Hesiod's poem “Works and Days” from the 8th century BCE, the peasants are associating with the “Eye of Zeus” with the hope of a higher divine justice against the members of the nobility. But it is only in mythology that Dike is connected with the jurisdiction both of Zeus and of the underworld's gods, as guarantors of order. And the administration of justice is referring to a divine authority only by the solemn oath of purification, in front of the committee of the Polis. Religion could grant temporary protection in the temple,¹¹ but since Dracon and Solon around 600 BCE, such a decision was made according to human law.¹²

⁷ Cf. B. Beinhauer-Köhler, “Gerechtigkeit als religiöses Konzept und seine Varianten im Islam,” in: M. Witte (ed.), *Gerechtigkeit*, Tübingen 2012, 157–186, here 158 f.

⁸ Cf. Hausfig, “Religion, Recht,” 109.

⁹ Cf. R. Schmitt, “Dâta,” in: *Encyclopaedia Iranica* VII, Costa Mesa 1996, 114 f., and A. Kuhrt, *The Persian Empire. A Corpus of Sources of the Achaemenid Period*, London and New York 2007, 471–474.

¹⁰ Cf. E. Otto, *Kontinuum und Proprium. Studien zur Sozial- und Rechtsgeschichte des Alten Orients und des Alten Testaments* (OBC 8), Wiesbaden 1996, here 42–45, 309; *idem*, *Theologische Ethik des Alten Testaments* (ThW 3/2), Stuttgart 1994; R. Kessler, *Der Weg zum Leben. Ethik des Alten Testaments*, Gütersloh 2017, here 173.

¹¹ Cf. C. Elsas, “Asyl,” *HrwG* 2 (1990) 91–96.

¹² Cf. W. Schmitz, “Menschliche und göttliche Gerechtigkeitsvorstellungen im archaischen und klassischen Griechenland,” in: H. Barta *et al.* (eds.), *Recht und Religion. Menschliche und göttliche Gerechtigkeitsvorstellungen in den antiken Welten*, Wiesbaden 2008, 155–167, here 158; G. Thür, “Antikes Griechenland,” in: Manthe (ed.), *Die Rechtskulturen der Antike*, 200–231; A. Dihle, “Gerechtigkeit,” *RAC* X (1978) 233–360.

3. God's justice

Apart from the human law, the Greeks nevertheless formulated religious motives and philosophical considerations. For Solon, the Gods are able to break the correlation of retaliation.¹³ In the same age, Anaximander and Heraclitus saw justice as the ruling principle of the universe in the cyclical motion, while Parmenides declared that the reign of justice in this world is granted by Dike having a tight grasp on the chains of "being."¹⁴ Also since about 600 BCE, the belief in an afterlife of the soul, in its reward or punishment in the hereafter for the deeds in life on earth, as well as the Pythagorean teaching of the transmigration of souls, were individualizing responsibility and guilt.¹⁵ In protest against the condemnation of the wise Socrates, according to the Nomos of the Polis of Athens, Plato's philosophy destructed nobility's sense of honour. In his dialogues *Gorgias* and *State*, Plato started from the assumption that it is better to suffer an injustice than to do an injustice.¹⁶ He was arguing that before its incarnation into a material body, the rational part of the human soul was native in that region beyond all sensory experience. Therefore the ethical norms must be oriented on the always partial insight into world's real or intelligible order.¹⁷ It is very interesting both to look back on the development to compare the literary strategies for a just society in Plato's *Nomoi* and in the Book of Deuteronomy.¹⁸

Otherwise, it is noticed in the history of law that Solon's doctrine of Eunoia, like the Egyptian Maat and other early ideas of justice, can be regarded as an image of world order, including "nature" and "culture." Such world-value-orders in mythological cosmologies are often established by a creator god.¹⁹ For example, the Egyptians related Maat, worshipped as the goddess of truth, law and world order, as "daughter of Re," directly to the cosmic solar principle. Accordingly, since the wisdom literature of Egypt's first interim, and that means in the face of a collapsing world order, the idea of *maat* implies the knowledge of an invisible justice, compensating for life on earth with a judgement of all

¹³ Cf. *Klimkeit*, "Der leidende Gerechte," 168.

¹⁴ Cf. *C. A. Boziris*, "Greek justice," in this volume.

¹⁵ Cf. *Dihle*, "Gerechtigkeit," 243.

¹⁶ Cf. *E. Flaig*, "Ehre gegen Gerechtigkeit. Adelsethos und Gemeinschaftsdenken in Hellas," in: *J. Assmann, B. Janowski and M. Welker (eds.), Gerechtigkeit: Richten und Retten in der abendländischen Tradition und ihren altorientalischen Ursprüngen*, München 1998, 97–140, here 137; *O. Höffe*, "Kontexte der Gerechtigkeitsfrage," in: *Assmann, Janowski and Welker (eds.), Gerechtigkeit*, 227–243, here 230.

¹⁷ Cf. *A. Dihle*, "Die Krise der Legitimation gerechter Ordnung im Griechenland des fünften Jahrhunderts v. Chr.," in: *Assmann, Janowski and Welker (eds.), Gerechtigkeit*, 141–226, here 145 f.

¹⁸ Cf. *A. C. Hagedorn*, *Between Moses and Plato. Individual and society in Deuteronomy and Ancient Greek Law (FRLANT 204)*, Göttingen 2004.

¹⁹ Cf. *J. Assmann*, *Maat. Gerechtigkeit und Unsterblichkeit im Alten Ägypten*, München 2001 (1990). *Barta et al. (eds.), Recht und Religion*, 22.

dead. Just then the idea of justice became important, even if the Egyptian also used magic to master that judgement, identifying himself or herself with the idea of *maat*, in a negative confession of sins (Book of the Dead, chapter 125).²⁰ Jan Assmann showed that in Egypt the principle of wisdom had its base in widening the horizon of success beyond death. In Egypt the most constant is also the most holy. Maat, as goddess, represents the orders of human living. This wisdom is the original birthplace of the idea of justice which takes legal action from below, from the state's subjects. With the divine Pharaoh the state is the realisation of justice: in pharaoh's creating law this justice is released from violent suppression, and in the net of social ties it is freed from the yoke to be transitory.²¹

In the Mesopotamian idea of justice, judging and releasing are nearly synonymous. Based on conjurations by prayers for the king's health, it is the god of the sun who, in his process of judgement oriented towards healing, and freeing from sins, achieves, by his judicial "illumination of the darkness" against the demonic powers, salvation from death.²²

In Zoroastrian Iran the divine world order *asha/arta* is an outflow of the order of Ahura Mazda's creation, and is realized by this Wise Lord exclusively according justice. It is the special character of this basic order that is in a dualistic contrast to the Lie (*druj*), being the world order created by the devil Ahriman. This means, every experience of suffering goes back, if not to human's "damaging works" (*vinas*), then to the penetration of Ahriman's world order, or to human "partisanship for Ahriman" (*ahrimanakih*).²³

In Israel's monotheism God's justice gets a double face; the "law" is concerned about the purity of God's people, and in this respect about particular exclusiveness, while on the other side, there is a cosmic universal orientation in the prophetic announcement and in the apocalyptic hope – that the God of the people will reveal himself as the God of the world in powerful judgement (Isa 41:1–4) with king Cyrus of Iran as his instrument.²⁴ Like the biblical narrative of God's power of judgement in the flood, and his new way with humankind in generosity,²⁵ the psalms are stressing that God's justice has the character of

²⁰ Cf. *Klimkeit*, "Der leidende Gerechte," 172.

²¹ Cf. *J. Assmann*, "Gerechtigkeit und Monotheismus," in: C. Hardmeier, R. Kessler and A. Ruwe (eds.), *Freiheit und Recht*, FS für Frank Crüsemann, Gütersloh 2003, 78–95, here 84–87.

²² Cf. *Assmann, Janowski and Welker*, *Gerechtigkeit*, 9–35, here 9; *B. Janowski*, "Die rettende Gerechtigkeit. Zum Gerechtigkeitsdiskurs in den Psalmen," in: R. Achenbach and M. Arneith (eds.), "Gerechtigkeit und Recht zu üben" (Gen 18,19). *Studien zur altorientalischen und biblischen Rechtsgeschichte, zur Religionsgeschichte Israels und zur Religionssoziologie*, FS für Eckart Otto, Wiesbaden 2009, 362–376, here 364 f.

²³ Cf. *Klimkeit*, "Der leidende Gerechte," 169; cf. 175 f.

²⁴ Cf. *O. Kaiser*, *Der Gott des Alten Testaments 3: Jahwes Gerechtigkeit, Wesen und Wirken* (UTB 2392), Göttingen 2003, 376.

²⁵ Cf. *F. Crüsemann, W. Dietrich and H.-C. Schmitt*, "Gerechtigkeit – Gewalt – Leben. Was leistet eine Ethik des Alten Testaments?" in: B. M. Levinson and E. Otto (eds.), *Recht und Ethik*

judging and releasing. It is especially in Israel's theology of wisdom that God's justice holds the place of world order. But it falls into the crisis when the agreement with wisdom collapses due to the lack of worldly evidence. An attempt to individualise evidence is condemned to fail, but is tested paradigmatically in the Book of Job; God's justice facilitates orientation for the human to a deeper integration into the life of the whole creation – not restricting itself to satisfy the interests of only some of its parts.²⁶

In religious anthropology, the processes of suffering and violence are turbulences on the surface of a basic order. God's justice and salvation are positive expressions of this hope, while the counterpoint is the punishment. In shamanistic magic perceptions of the world, the imbalances in the cosmos are connected with protecting core threatening fields of energy, manipulated by ancestors, ghosts, or gods. Justice here happens by affective regularities and magic rituals. The concepts of *Karma* in Hinduism and Buddhism, too, can be seen as equivalents to the concepts of "God's justice" in monotheistic religions. For good or bad decisions are causing the process of purification by reincarnation, while protecting gods and/or demons are representing the balancing process of justice.²⁷ Supplemented in the Zen Buddhism of Eastern Asia, the traditions of mystic Daoism are pioneering for the individual to escape the world of compulsions. Otherwise there *dao* denotes a way to follow, as the way of life and the "way" of the cosmos.²⁸

4. Law and justice

Earlier religion and law were developed further by the state in order to legitimise itself and a net of loyalties, and to facilitate the social justice model. When early rulers were undertaking the contact to the gods, ideas of justice were at work as legitimation and as normative guiding principles for the handling of govern-

im Alten Testament, Münster 2004, 145–169, here 154, 159; Kessler, *Der Weg zum Leben*, 438 f.; Otto, *Theologische Ethik*, 95, 100, 107; 1996, 311.

²⁶ Cf. H. Spieckermann, "Gerechtigkeit Gottes II. Altes Testament," RGG⁴ 3 (2000) 718–720; H. Reimer, "Gerechtigkeit und Schöpfung," in: Hardmeier, Kessler and Ruwe (eds.), *Freiheit und Recht*, 414–428, here 426; Kessler, *Der Weg zum Leben*, 469, 473; M. Witte, "Von der Gerechtigkeit Gottes und des Menschen im Alten Testament," in: idem (ed.), *Gerechtigkeit*, 37–68, here 54 f.; A. Graupner, "Die Welt ist in Verbrecherhand gegeben. Hiobs Anklage und Gottes Antwort," in: A. Graupner and M. Oeming (eds.), *Die Welt ist in Verbrecherhand gegeben? Annäherungen an das Theodizeeproblem aus der Perspektive des Hiobbuches*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 2015, 1–20, here 19 f.; Kaiser, *Der Gott des Alten Testaments*, 289; M. Oeming, "Jetzt aber hat mein Auge dich geschaut." Was hat Hiob über Gott und seine Gerechtigkeit gelernt?" in: Graupner and Oeming (eds.), *Die Welt*, 21–41, here 37 and 39.

²⁷ Cf. R. Friedli, "Gerechtigkeit Gottes I Religionswissenschaftlich," RGG⁴ 3 (2000) 717 f.

²⁸ Cf. Klimkeit, "Der leidende Gerechte," 170, 179.

ment in balance with society as a whole.²⁹ In Eastern Asia, the Confucian ethic is expecting, especially from the upper ones, that the fulfilment of the virtues oriented toward harmony in society will result in justice. While Hinduism takes several orders as the basis for several professions, in Buddhism, justice finds its expression as compassion according the ways to *Nirvâna*.³⁰

In the Old World, according to the Egyptians, the community-building action starts with the goddess Maat, and she is referred to in the cult for the preservation of the cosmic order of her father Re, the creator and god of the sun whose "son" is also the pharaoh.³¹ There is a difference between justice and law. For justice is establishing just action, without the possibility to punish deviation. But action according to the law can be unjust, if it follows unjust laws. Egypt's answer to this problem was the idea of a judgement in the hereafter,³² first for facultative accusing or getting accused, and later as the judgement of everybody to pass into the sphere of eternal life, called the "house of Osiris."³³ And yet on earth, besides the rational legal proceedings according to the laws (*hpw*) of the respective pharaoh's edicts,³⁴ people in Egypt had the possibilities of the trial by ordeal, of protecting curses and of writing letters for assistance in law enforcement by a god.³⁵

In contrast, Mesopotamia's history of law contains collections of laws, with a frame like the Codex Hammurabi to legitimate the king as the lord of the law, and simple collections with a descriptive function in the school tradition.³⁶ Here

²⁹ Cf. Barta et al. (eds.), *Recht und Religion*, 25.

³⁰ Cf. Klimkeit, "Der leidende Gerechte," 178f., and Y.-B. Kim, "Gerechtigkeit VII. Mis-sionswissenschaftlich," RGG⁴ 3 (2000) 715f., here 715.

³¹ Cf. E. Otto, "Gerechtigkeit I.1. Alter Orient und Altes Testament," RGG⁴ 3 (2000) 702–704, here 702; K. Koch, "Šadaq und Ma'at. Konnektive Gerechtigkeit in Israel und Ägypten?" in: Assmann, Janowski and Welker (eds.), *Gerechtigkeit*, 37–64, here 43.

³² Cf. Assmann, Janowski and Welker (eds.), *Gerechtigkeit*, 10f.

³³ Cf. D. Ansoerge, *Gerechtigkeit und Barmherzigkeit Gottes. Die Dramatik von Vergebung und Versöhnung in bibeltheologischer, theologiegeschichtlicher und philosophiegeschichtlicher Perspektive*, Freiburg – Basel – Wien 2009, 54–73; J. Assmann, "Tora und Totenbuch als Codices der Rechtfertigung. Kodifizierung und Kanonisierung von Recht in der Alten Welt," in: Grund, Krüger and Lippke (eds.), *Ich will dir danken*, 519–538, here 530 and 533.

³⁴ Cf. E. Otto, "Die Rechtshermeneutik des Pentateuch und die achämenidische Rechts-ideologie in ihren altorientalischen Kontexten," in: M. Witte and M. T. Fögen (eds.), *Kodifizierung und Legitimierung des Rechts in der Antike und im Alten Orient (BZAR 5)*, Wiesbaden 2005, 71–116, here 82; E. Otto, *Altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte. Gesammelte Studien*, Wiesbaden 2008.

³⁵ Cf. S. Allam, "Recht im pharaonischen Ägypten," in: Manthe (ed.), *Die Rechtskulturen der Antike*, 15–54, here 34; J. F. Quack, "Göttliche Gerechtigkeit und Recht am Beispiel des spätzeitlichen Ägypten," in: Barta et al. (eds.), *Recht und Religion*, 135–153, here 138f.; S. Allam, "Religiöse Bindungen im Recht und Rechtswirksamkeit in Altägypten," in: Barta et al. (eds.), *Recht und Religion*, 109–1134, here 115, 117; D. Ansoerge, *Gerechtigkeit und Barmherzigkeit Gottes. Die Dramatik von Vergebung und Versöhnung in bibeltheologischer, theologiegeschichtlicher und philosophiegeschichtlicher Perspektive*, Freiburg – Basel – Wien, 54–73 ("Gerechtigkeit und Barmherzigkeit Gottes in den Religionen des Alten Orients").

³⁶ Cf. Otto, "Die Rechtshermeneutik," 78.

the king is engaged by the empire's god to be for his subjects like Shamash, the god of sun and justice, who is thought to hand over law and justice (*kittum u mišarum*) to the king. But also, Shamash and the whole divine world is only receiving and transmitting law and justice from beyond the pantheon.³⁷ *Kittum* can be translated as "what is well established, truth, law," while *mišarum* embodies a dynamic principle.³⁸ Accordantly, the kings defended and expanded the order transmitted by the gods with all the skills at their disposal, feeling the extermination of their enemies to be their duty in the cosmos.³⁹ On the other side, according to the ideal of justice, the king is obliged to act loyal to his gods, as his subjects have to be loyal to the higher ones, and to push through his task as the highest authority for legislation: to resolve conflicts and to protect the weak in the society by acts of justice (*mišarum*).⁴⁰ Therefore, the so called Job poems of Mesopotamia are paradigms of heard complaints, because the turning of the threatened victim to the god is answered by the god's turning to the prayer.⁴¹

Only with the Persians the king's jurisdiction in the ancient orient got the function of permanently unchanging laws (*dâta*-) to push through, by the fight for Ahura Mazda's justice in the world against *drauga*-, the "Lie, the Non-Order," even without a collection of laws. For in Iran the *arta* of the king's jurisdiction is clearly connected with the *dâta* of the cosmic order, like in Egypt the jurisdiction of the pharaoh with *maat*. Yet king Darius I. claimed that he has got by the grace of Ahura Mazda a friend of the law, by restoring the right order in fighting against the kings of Lie.⁴² Here the term *khvarenâ* is important for Iran's tolerance in religion and law. *Khvarenâ* denotes the reason for welfare, withdrawn from human control, and means especially the king's "charisma." This individual gift from beyond causes respect also for the local forms of law, with the argument that the empire's god is assigning to every people a place (*gathu*), associated with its *dâta*.⁴³

Nevertheless, as far as Israel is concerned, Eckart Otto stresses a reservation even against this Iranian Empire's ideology, favourable for its own law. With Israel's creation story of Genesis 1 the traditional legitimacy of Iran's king of kings is done away: not Iran's Ahura Mazda, but the God of the Jewish people

³⁷ Cf. Otto, "Die Rechtshermeneutik," 79 f.

³⁸ Cf. G. Pfeiffer, "Gerechtigkeit aus der Perspektive der altorientalischen Rechtsgeschichte," in: Witte (ed.), *Gerechtigkeit*, 15–35, here 17.

³⁹ Cf. S. M. Maul, "Der assyrische König – Hüter der Weltordnung," in: Assmann, Janowski and Welker (eds.), *Gerechtigkeit*, 65–77, here 77.

⁴⁰ Cf. Otto, "Gerechtigkeit I.1," 702.

⁴¹ Cf. Klimkeit, "Der leidende Gerechte," 171; O. Loretz, *Götter – Ahnen – Könige als gerechte Richter. Der 'Rechtsfall' des Menschen vor Gott nach altorientalischen und biblischen Texten*, Münster 2003 (AOAT 290) 177–210: "Der Rechtsfall des leidenden Gerechten" im biblischen Hiob-Buch, in sumerischen und akkadischen Texten; Ansoerge, *Gerechtigkeit und Barmherzigkeit*, 71.

⁴² Cf. J. Wiesehöfer, "Gerechtigkeit und Recht im achaimenidischen Iran," in: Witte/Fögen 2005, 191–203, here 192 f.

⁴³ Cf. Otto, "Die Rechtshermeneutik," 89 f.

is the creator of the world.⁴⁴ And yet, in the 7th century BCE, there has been a subversive reception of the loyalty oath for the Neo-Assyrian king Esarhaddon; in Deuteronomy's concept of the *berit* between Israel's God and his people.⁴⁵ Now in Israel's Persian and Hellenistic time, the Torah piety correlates with *berit*, and is called justice.⁴⁶ Jan Assmann is right that only in the context of a religion with the god himself as legislator it became possible to think society's judgement and God's judgement may differ substantially.⁴⁷ Kingship then is replaced by the Torah, and being much more than a codex, the Torah is certifying God's bond with his people in the sense of a contract.⁴⁸ In the story of Cain with the human experience of inequality, social relations are breaking while God remains in his relation (Gen 4:9–15): the guarantee for justice, and the judge (*šôpet*) per se (Gen 18:25).⁴⁹

In the correlation with human action and welfare, as deed and effect, God supports by pushing through the effect, and not by bringing a conduct strange to human's action. But there is again and again thankful remembrance of the divine origin of positive ethical behaviour, as it is testified in Isa 45:8, after Iran's king Cyrus is called God's instrument for Israel's salvation: "Shower, O heavens, from above, / and let the clouds rain down righteousness (*šādâq/dikaiosynê*); / let the earth open, that salvation and righteousness (*sedâqâ/dikaiosynê*) may bear fruit; / let the earth cause them both to sprout; / I the Lord have created it" (ESV 2016).⁵⁰ When asking for justice the Psalms' prayer book teaches that praise and thanks will free the human from his emergency in self-isolation, admitting the lamentation, as is shown with the crossing of lamentation and praise in Psalm 71.⁵¹ But while Israel's prayers cry to their God as the just judge, they refuse themselves the revenge.⁵² In the development of prophecy Habakkuk's teaching of "patient faithfulness" (2,3 f.: *émûnâ*) as the sign of a *šaddîq* became an important answer in the apocalyptic waiting for the eschatological victory of God's justice.⁵³

⁴⁴ Cf. Otto, "Die Rechtshermeneutik," 103.

⁴⁵ E. Otto, "Recht im Antiken Israel," in: Manthe (ed.), *Die Rechtskulturen der Antike*, 151–190, here 162 f.; vgl. Kaiser, *Der Gott des Alten Testaments*, 23 f.

⁴⁶ Cf. Witte (ed.), *Gerechtigkeit*, 44 f.; Kessler, *Der Weg zum Leben*, 199, 224, 235. 531f and 537; Otto, *Kontinuum und Proprium*, 105 f., 107, and 1994, 70.

⁴⁷ Cf. Assmann, "Gerechtigkeit," 89 f.

⁴⁸ Cf. Assmann, "Tora und Totenbuch," 524; Koch, *Šadaq und Ma'at*, 42, 52 and 55f; An-sorge, *Gerechtigkeit und Barmherzigkeit*, 74–139: "Gerechtigkeit und Barmherzigkeit Gottes im Alten Testament."

⁴⁹ Cf. Witte (ed.), *Gerechtigkeit*, 41 f.; Otto, "Gerechtigkeit I.I.," 703.

⁵⁰ Cf. Koch, *Šadaq und Ma'at*, 56 and 58 f.

⁵¹ Cf. K. Liess, "Von Gottes Gerechtigkeit erzählen. Zum Lob Gottes in Psalm 71," in: Grund, Krüger and Lippke (eds.), *Ich will dir danken*, 223–237, here 235.

⁵² Cf. E. Zenger, *Ein Gott der Rache? Feindpsalmen verstehen*, Freiburg 1994, 140; J. Dietrich, "Schadenfreude und Rachedenken in den Sprüchen und Psalmen," in: Grund, Krüger and Lippke (eds.), *Ich will dir danken*, 80–92, here 90.

⁵³ Cf. Otto, "Gerechtigkeit I.I.," 703f; Witte (ed.), *Gerechtigkeit*, 43.55.

5. The Esther story

According to the Esther story, the former queen of the Iranian Empire loses her position when she refuses to obey an order of the king, and in his residence at Susa he instates the beautiful Esther as the new queen. No Persian knows that she and her relative Mordechai – who also has a high position at the king's court – are Jewish. But then it comes into conflict with the new order of the king that all have to prostrate in the face of the king's representative, Haman, in humble devotion. For when Haman shows his arrogance, displaying his power, Mordechai reveals in public that he himself is a Jew who reserves such gesture of admiration to the one God of the whole world, if human government is making absolute itself. As a result, Haman's artful badness achieves an order of the king that an ethnic group, revolting with own laws against Empire's rules, should be exterminated in Iran's whole sphere of influence, according to the ancient orient's tradition of fighting against the chaos, threatening the order. Haman, consumed by hatred, decides the day of extermination by drawing lots (*pur*). But Mordechai is causing a sensation in the residence by practicing Israel's sacred rituals of mourning. In this way, he informs the Jews of all provinces, and demands at the door of the palace to intervene for getting his rights from the king (Est 4:1–8).⁵⁴

In this situation Esther shows her solidarity with the Jewish community, by fasting with them three days, and risking going to the king to win him over by her cleverness. The king has to recognize in Mordechai the trustworthy subject, and in Haman the – in his striving for power – false man, who, according to Zoroastrian dualism, is striving, as a follower of the evil Ahriman, against Ahura Mazda's good world order. Esther is successful, and she reveals herself also to be Jewish, now begging the king for her ethnic group with its religion. With that statement all conditions become inverted. Until then, Iran's king Ahasuerus was characterized as incompetent, issuing laws based on his mood and without proving the situation. But now, in submission to the grace of God, instead of all self-righteousness,⁵⁵ queen Esther opens his eyes to Israel's God as the lord of world's history, challenging him, as in former times as Iran's king Cyrus, to be the instrument for his justice. According to worldly rules nobody would expect what happens next; the king understands his former injustice and orders that Haman has to honour Mordechai. And because he had planned to kill this honourable person and all Jews, Haman shall be killed himself, and be put on show at the gallows he had erected for Mordechai. He now empowers Mordechai and Esther for a new edict in his name instead of the Empire's edict for the extermi-

⁵⁴ Cf. *W. Dommershausen, Ester (NEB AT)*, Würzburg 1980, 24.

⁵⁵ Cf. *P. Nagel*, "The *dikaios* concept in the 'additions' to the Esther narrative – considering its theological value," in this volume.

nation of the Jews; on that day, decided by lot (*pur*), the Jews were now allowed to exterminate their enemies. But Mordechai and Esther use their legal power, granted by the king, for the request of all Jewish families to remember every year in the joyful festival of Purim: this wonderful salvation of the powerless by the one God in whom they are trusting, as the Lord of history.⁵⁶ A lot is reminiscent of the exodus story with the following festival of Pesach, though the heroes there are Josef, and then Moses, but now it is the man Mordechai and the woman Esther:⁵⁷ Even if both stories are basically different on the point of fleeing from Egypt or staying in Iran, it is very conspicuous that, according to Israel's calendar, Purim is celebrated on the 14th/15th of Adar and Pesach is celebrated on the 14th/15th of Nissan.⁵⁸

6. Law and justice in the Hebrew and in the Greek Book of Esther

Now we have to look for the special theologies of Esther and of Esther LXX whose so-called "additions" are "better described as Expansions A-F, adding more than 50 % to the amount of words in the Greek book."⁵⁹ According to Emanuel Tov, LXX Esther is a rewritten version of MT, and was "considered to be authoritative by ancient Judaism and Christianity alike," though in due course, it was "rejected within Judaism."⁶⁰ Now the Hebrew text of the Esther story is remembered annually in public at Purim as an example for the justice of history. But it is just according to a free translation of MT, if in LXX Est 9:1 we read: "On the very day when the enemies of the Jews hoped to gain the mastery over them, the reverse occurred: the Jews gained mastery over those who hated them (ESV)." By the use of terms like "threat" or "rest" in the context, there is also an association to the ideas of JHWH's war.⁶¹ Like, for example, the psalms

⁵⁶ Cf. *M.-T. Wacker*, "Tödliche Gewalt des Judenhasses – mit tödlicher Gewalt gegen Judenhass? Hermeneutische Überlegungen zu Est 9," in: F.-L. Hossfeld and L. Schwienhorst-Schönberger (eds.), *Das Manna fällt auch heute noch. Beiträge zur Geschichte und Theologie des Alten, Ersten Testaments*, FS für Erich Zenger, Freiburg – New York 2004, 609–637, and esp. *M.-T. Wacker*, *Widerstand – Rache – verkehrte Welt. Oder eadem*, "Vom Umgang mit Gewalt im Esterbuch," in: K. Butting, G. Minnaard and M.-T. Wacker, *Ester*, Wittingen 2005, 35–44, here 36.

⁵⁷ Cf. *K. Butting* in: Butting, Minnaard and Wacker, *Ester*, 23–29: "Von einer Theologie der Befreiung zu einer Liturgie des Widerstands," and 45–52: "Eine eigene Schrift entsteht."

⁵⁸ Cf. *Nielen*, *Prozessionsfeste*, 156f., and for the history *H.M. Wahl*, *Das Buch Esther: Übersetzung und Kommentar*, Berlin – New York 2009.

⁵⁹ *E. Tov*, *The LXX Translation of Esther. A Paraphrastic Translation of MT or a Free Translation of a Rewritten Version*, HOUTMAN_f29_507_526.indd (www.emmanuel.tov.info/docsvaria/204.varia.est-lxx.pdf?v=1.0), 508.

⁶⁰ *E. Tov*, *The LXX Translation of Esther*, 524f.

⁶¹ Cf. *B. Ego*, "Die Geschichtskonzeption des Esterbuches als Paradigma historischer

with associations of the Exodus, the Book of Esther is describing God's hidden action: now blessing Israel even far from Israel's land and temple.⁶² That is a description of history in debating with the Persian idea of empire, and with the Hellenistic claim for power, about Israel's possibilities under the different forms of foreign rule.⁶³

It is according to the wisdom literature to recognize God's justice in conditions turned over in power. Part of it is the idea of the bad plan and the good plan of action reverting to the person responsible.⁶⁴ But on the one side, the counter-edict of Mordechai and Esther, in the Hebrew version, contains the possibility of an understanding in the sense of protection for the own women and children, including Israel's self-defence against an organized attack, instead of killing the enemies' women and children. The Septuagint is clear, interpreting it in the sense of also further minimisation of violence.⁶⁵ On the other side, the abandonment of spoils, which is stressed in Esther 9 three times (in verses 10, 15, and 16), is pointing ahead to the exchange of gifts at Purim in verses 19 and 22: Jewish people do not take away anything from anybody, but are generous to each other and to the poor.⁶⁶ It belongs to Purim's subversive carnival motif that according to the Book of Esther, the marginalised Jewish culture adopts essential institutions of the dominant Persian culture, like legislation (8:11 and 9:20–32), festivals (8:16 and 9:20 ff.), and presence in the general public (6:10 f.).⁶⁷

But Haman stands for the inhuman deadly enmity, without the slightest scruple, making himself absolute against Israel's monotheism and fighting against it with all means. Such deadly enmity the Hebrew Book of Esther associates with Agag, Amalek's king and Haman's ancestor (3:10), while the Septuagint associates it with the Hellenistic rule. For both versions releasing laughter and noise are the answer, resisting such a deadly enemy according to the carnival character of Purim.⁶⁸ That is done trusting in God's action in history, even if the Hebrew version does not speak of God at all. Clearly, only the Septuagint's expansions are stressing again and again that Israel's threat is a fight between superhuman

Sinnkonstruktion in der Spätzeit des Alten Testaments," in: P. Mommer and A. Scherer (eds.), *Geschichte Israels und deuteronomistisches Geschichtsdenken*, FS zum 70. Geburtstag von Winfried Thiel, Münster 2010, 85–105.

⁶² Cf. Ego, "Geschichtskonzeption," 87, 98 f.

⁶³ Cf. Ego, "Geschichtskonzeption," 88, 102.

⁶⁴ Cf. Ego, "Geschichtskonzeption," 95, 97.

⁶⁵ Cf. Wacker, "Tödliche Gewalt," 615 f. and *eadem*, Ester, 36.

⁶⁶ Cf. Wacker, "Tödliche Gewalt," 614; Ego, "Geschichtskonzeption," 98.

⁶⁷ Cf. Wacker, "Tödliche Gewalt," 617.

⁶⁸ Cf. Wacker, "Tödliche Gewalt," 615, 617 f. and 622–625; Wacker, Ester, 42 f. and M.-T. Wacker, "Das Ester-Buch der Septuaginta," in: Butting, Minnaard and Wacker, Ester, 73–77; Wacker, Ester, 39, 41; also K. Butting, "Vom Sexismus zum Antisemitismus," in: *eadem*, Minnaard and Wacker, Ester, 9–22; Butting, "Esters Widerstand," in: *eadem*, Minnaard and Wacker, Ester, 30–34; Wacker, *Das Ester-Buch*, 39.

powers, and that it is only God who is able to decide it in the end.⁶⁹ As again in Hitler's Third Reich, the Jews in the empires after Alexander the Great were refusing the concept of rule in its connection with the ruler cult – on their part connecting law not with power but with justice.⁷⁰

In the Hebrew version, practicing the Jewish religion is picked out as a central theme only for the situation of conflict. But in the interpreting additions to the Septuagint's Greek translation, we find a description of Jewish life having circumcision as an external mark (LXX Est 8:17). In dreams, God's guidance is felt, addressing God with fervently hoping prayers, and practicing loyalty to the Torah. For expansion C, according to the ideas in the generations shaped by Hellenistic and Roman culture, Esther is the model of a Jewish woman who is married to a non-Jew in a high position of power – with great inner conflicts, nevertheless making a genuine effort to live according the laws of Israel's God. The wife of the Jews' enemy, Haman, confirms that her husband in doing Mordechai harm, but when according to the king's new order he has to honour Mordechai, she then predicts that Haman will fall, and not the Jew: because "the living God is with him" (LXX Est 6:13). The Septuagint puts such a confession, sounding monotheistic, into the mouth of this Persian woman, and in its expansions A, B, and E it describes the Persian king as having absolute rule, but ruling according justice: willing to reward Mordechai for his loyalty, and with his authority, in the beginning, entrusting a high position of power to Haman who is, according to the Septuagint, a Macedonian prince.⁷¹

But the Macedonian Haman is characterised by a double abuse of that position of power: first trying to pass to the Macedonians the power over the Iranian Empire, and second, trying, to exterminate Mordechai's and Esther's people, though it is really one of the groups most loyal to the Persian king. At the end, according to the Septuagint's expansion E, as a result the king awards the Jewish people the right, from this time on, to live in public according to its own laws. That is a model of a privilege law, for the king, in expansion C to chapter 4, gives the impression to be filled with divine glory – for the Persians with *khvarena* from Ahura Mazdâ, and for Esther with the power from the one God of the world, to help the powerless – and it is according to the king's own statement the highest God who vested him with unlimited power.⁷²

⁶⁹ Cf. Wacker, "Tödliche Gewalt," 619.

⁷⁰ Cf. M.-T. Wacker, "Mit Toratreue und Todesmut dem einen Gott anhangen. Zum Esther-Bild der Septuaginta," in: F. Crüsemann *et al.* (eds.), *Dem Tod nicht glauben. Sozialgeschichte der Bibel*, FS für Luise Schottroff zum 70. Geburtstag, Gütersloh 2004, 312–332, here 315; C. Elsas, "Herrscherkult," *HrwG* 3 (1993) 115–122; Butting, "Esters Widerstand," 19 f., and K. Butting, "Von einer Theologie der Befreiung zu einer Liturgie des Widerstands," in: Butting, Minnaard and Wacker, *Ester*, 23–29, here 28 f.

⁷¹ Cf. Wacker, "Tödliche Gewalt," 622.

⁷² Cf. Elsas, "Prozesse kulturgeschichtlicher Prägung," 132–139; Wacker, *Widerstand*, 74 f.; Wacker, "Toratreue und Todesmut," 326 f., and *Dommerhausen*, *Ester*, 1980, 26–32 to the

In expansion A at the beginning of LXX Esther, Mordechai's dream will be the key for understanding the events as a drama with cosmic dimensions. Around Esther the roaring of two fighting dragons causes the fight of all peoples, against "the people of the just" (*dikaíōn éthnos*) who, after crying to God, get help "as from a small source." The interpretation of the dream in expansion F at the end of LXX Esther identifies the dragons as Mordechai and Haman; the "people of the just" as the Jews, practicing their religion under foreign rule; and "the small source" as Esther. Accordingly, the expansions framing Esther's trust in God, are citing two letters of Iran's king, as spread in the whole Empire: The first letter orders the extermination of the Jews, as "a misanthropic ethnic group, threatening the security of the state" (B: 4 f.). But the second letter orders the appreciation of the Jews, as subjects living "according to the most just laws" and "sons of the highest, greatest, living God" (E: 15 f.).⁷³ After this testimony, for the congruence of the world power's administration of justice with God's justice, the end of chapter 9 concludes for Purim that by Esther's legislative power, with this double legitimisation, this festival was established permanently. According to the Septuagint, it even looks like she wrote it down in the annals of the Iranian Empire for global remembrance.⁷⁴

prayers of Mordechai (4:17a-i) and Ester (4:17k-z) and to Ester's audience at the king's throne (5:1a-f, 2ab).

⁷³ Cf. *Wacker*, *Widerstand*, 76; *Wacker*, "Toratreue und Todesmut," 628; *Dommershausen*, *Ester*, 39-44, for the king's favour for the Jews (8:7-11, 12a-v, 13-17), and *C. Elsas*, "Convergences of Zoroastrian Kingship from Heaven and Jewish Kingdom of God versus Hellenistic Kingship," in: E. G. Dafni (Ed.), *Divine Kingdom and Kindoms of Men/Gottesreich und Reiche der Menschen* (WUNT 432), Tübingen 2019, 77-85.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Wacker*, "Toratreue und Todesmut," 324, 326 f.