
by

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout the Talmudic era, the Jewish community of Babylonia lived under Persian rule while Zoroastrianism, serving as a state religion, was enjoying something of a renaissance. In Babylonia, known in the later geographical literature as the Persian heartland, Jews lived alongside Persians. Babylonian Jews had also already experienced Persian rule for centuries prior to the Talmudic era under the Achaemenids, and later under the persianized Arsacid dynasty. This alone
should have sufficed to lure a number of scholars into exploring various cross-cultural contacts between the two neighboring religious communities during this period. Until recently, however, scholarship has not been greatly drawn to this field, despite an exhaustive focus, of venerable antiquity, on the relationship between Israel and Persia in the biblical and Second Temple periods, including the Qumran library.

Earlier generations of Jewish scholars with rabbinic training, influenced by the wave of studies on the subject, had, however, enthusiastically taken up the challenge of exploring Persian influence and parallels in the Jewish sources, including, but not prioritizing, the Babylonian Talmud (henceforth, BT) in their efforts. One thinks of, in particular, Joshua Heschel Schorr, Alexander Kohut, and Isidor Scheftelowitz. Notwithstanding the provisos that the scientific study of rabbinic

and Sassanian Periods (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1976); 61; I. M. Gafni, The Jews of Babylonia in the Talmudic Era, A Social and Cultural History (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1990), 32 n. 67. This interpretation is, however, untenable; see my article, “The Story of Rav Kahana (BT Bava’ Kamma’ 117a–b) in Light of Armeno-Persian Sources,” Irano-Judaica (forthcoming).


8. I. Scheftelowitz, Die altpersische Religion und das Judentum. Unterschiede, Übereinstimmungen und gegenseitige Beeinflussungen (Giessen: Verlag von Alfred Töpelmann, 1920); idem., “Ein
texts was in its early days, that of Zoroastrian ones in its infancy, to which access was often by means of second-hand preliminary translations, and that their scholarship might be informed by a radical and polemical undercurrent, their work is nevertheless not without value, and worthy of reexamination.9

Recent years, however, have witnessed a re-awakened awareness of the value of studying Babylonian Jewry within the broad Persian context. Evidently there is much to be done before a comprehensive examination, or even a satisfactory survey, of the impact of Persian culture, in all its aspects, on this Jewish community may be undertaken. This impact would have had many manifestations, and one need not expect them all to be directly acknowledged in the sources.10 The cases of explicit reference to each other in Jewish or Zoroastrian works are of rather limited scope11 and this has led a number of scholars to underrate the degree of cross-cultural contact.12 However, the insular quality of this religious literature would


naturally tend to avoid explicit references. It would, indeed, not be surprising to find various religious and other influences or borrowings dressed up, reformulated, or otherwise judaized. Some areas of Jewish–Persian cross-cultural interaction during the Talmudic era have received more consistent scholarly attention whilst others only recently examined.

The study of Persian loanwords has, on the whole, been one of the more fortuitous fields. Studies by E. S. Rosenthal and Spicehandler with their emphasis on the collation of the variants from good textual witnesses are examples of what is needed. The standard work is by the Hungarian philologist, Telegdi. Of signal importance are the brief lexicographical notes by B. Geiger on the words of reputed Persian origin, in Additamenta ad librum Aruch Completum Alexandri Kohut. More recently, Shaked has devoted a number of studies to Persian loanwords in Babylonian Aramaic, and the new dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic by M. Sokoloff, has expanded the field to include Persian loanwords from the

wenn sie spärlich vorkommen, auf eine unmittelbare Berührung zwischen Rabbinen und zoroastrischen Priestern hinweisen, bei der auch religiöse Fragen erörtert worden sind.” David Winston (“The Iranian Component in the Bible, Apocrypha, and Qumran: A Review of the Evidence,” History of Religions 5 [1965–66]: 183–216, esp. 186) finds the difficulty of dating the Zoroastrian sources prohibitive with respect to examining their relationship with the rabbinic material, preferring to consider the Hellenistic and later Jewish material, much of Palestinian provenance.

Geonic period and from extra-Talmudic sources, such as magic bowls. The magic bowls from this region, discovered in the hundreds, are our principle primary source for Babylonian Jewish attitudes to magic practices—to which the BT must, perforce, be relegated to a more ancillary role. They are also an important source on Jewish-Zoroastrian syncretistic tendencies in the period.20

The comparative study of Sasanian and Babylonian Talmudic legal dicta was hardly attempted in the past, a rare exception being the little known article by Herbert Finkelscherer, “Zur Frage fremder Einflüsse auf das rabbinische Recht.”21 There has surely been some resistance to examining this field in greater depth.22 It is now, however, becoming the subject of careful examination by Talmud scholar, Yaakov Elman.23 At the same time, Maria Macuch, an expert in Sasanian law, has devoted some studies to Sasanian legal terminology that is found in the BT.24 Among the future challenges, as already being pursued by Elman, will be the identification of legal processes and principles, common to both Sasanian and Talmudic corpora that are not necessarily identified as such in the BT. A vital preliminary step is the careful and clear identification of those elements particular to the legal tradition of Babylonian Jewry. The scholar will need to seek out legal terminology, case formulation, hermeneutics, and so on, notwithstanding the external Aramaic garb, that is paralleled in Sasanian jurisprudence.25 The existence of the law book of the Persian archbishop, Yešobōxt—a Syriac translation of a Middle-Persian original—will surely help in this endeavor.26

On the other hand, Persian literature contemporaneous with the BT—a mine of motifs, images, and ideas—has been explored little by scholars of the BT. An important exception—an article published more than twenty years ago by Daniel Sperber—served well to illustrate the advantages of such exploration for enriching our understanding of the legendary parts of the BT.27 Discussing the story of Rav Kahana’s experiences in the academy of Rabbi Yohanan in Palestine, he summoned evidence from both literary and material (artistic) sources of Persian provenance that provided vital contextual data. The comparative material helped to understand the development of the story and its date.28 Within the Rav Kahana story, the author had absorbed and naturalized Persian literary motifs, suggesting a marked degree of acculturation by the Babylonian Jewish author and prospective audience of the story. The Rav Kahana story is by no means unique. Next, I shall present two further instances of the assimilation of Persian elements in the aggadah of the BT. In the one case, Persian epic works dealing with kings are concerned; in the other, the Persian literature adduced is of a more religious quality, stemming from compositions reflecting a distinctly Zoroastrian outlook.

ARDĀṢĪR, THE STABLE-MASTER OF ARDAVĀN

The legends surrounding the rise of Ardašīr I, the founder of the Sasanian dynasty, are told in a Pahlavi work entitled Kārnāmāg -ī Ardāṣīr Bābagān, “the book of the deeds of Ardašīr, son of Bābag.”29 This work, generally believed to stem from Sasanian times,30 served as a source for later productions that chronicled the history of Ardašīr’s rise and his subsequent rule.


28. I have discussed the significance of these and additional Persian features in this story in my forthcoming article, “The Story of Rav Kahana.”


tory of the Iranian kings but was itself, no doubt, based on earlier sources and inspired by a time-worn custom of relating the legends of past kings.31 In this work we follow the rise of Ardašīr, the son of Bābag, from relative obscurity to becoming the founder of the new Sasanian dynasty. In one of the early scenes we hear that Ardašīr excelled in his riding ability.32 After word of his equestrian skills reached the royal court, he was invited to accompany the nobles when hunting. During the hunt he entered into a dispute with the king’s son that resulted in his demotion from the king’s favor. He was sent to the stables33 and found himself a mere stable-hand for his sovereign, the Parthian king, Ardavān, and prohibited from riding at any time. Nevertheless he escaped from the king, revolted against him, and ultimately defeated and killed Ardavān in battle and became king. Later, in this account, he married Ardavān’s daughter. Tabarî’s account of the rise of Ardašīr also has him marry Ardavān’s daughter, although under different circumstances than in the Kārnāmag version. Tabarî, known to have made extensive use of earlier Persian sources for his history, states that Ardašīr massacred every last one of the Arsacids, men and women, not sparing a single one of them. He then adds the following: “it is mentioned that he left no one alive except a maiden whom he had found in the royal palace. He was struck by her beauty and asked her—she was really the slaughtered king’s daughter—about her origins. She stated that she was the handmaiden of one of the king’s wives.”34 He takes her as one of his concubines. Later, when pregnant she reveals her true status to him and the exciting adventure, which need not occupy us here, marches on.

THE STABLE-MASTER IN PERSIAN AND TALMUDIC SOURCES

The storyteller’s decision to make Ardašīr a stable-hand of the reigning king is neither incidental nor insignificant.35 Apparently, the stable-master was not a

31. On this literature, and Iranian national epic literature in general see E. Yarshater, “Iranian National History,” in The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 3(1), 359–477. Reliable historical information on the founder of the Sasanian dynasty must be sought primarily from other sources, such as the contemporary epigraphic remains. For a recent brief historical account of the history of Ardašīr, see J. Wiesehöfer, “Ardasār,” Encyclopaedia Iranica ed. E. Yarshater, II (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), 371–76.

32. Āntiṣ, Bombay, 1900 edition: 2–8.

33. Āntiṣ, Bombay, 1900 edition, p. 8, 6: āxwarr-ī stōrān.


35. Ardašīr is also described as a slave of Ardavān in George Pisidas, Heracliados, Acr. II, Migne Patrologia Graeca, 92 (Paris, 1865), 1328. Lowly origins are also ascribed to him by Agathias, believed to have used a Persian source. See A, Cameron, “Agathias on the Sassanians,” Dumbarton
very high dignitary in the Sasanian court hierarchy. In a mid-third century monumental trilingual inscription on the Ka’ba-‘i Zardusht in Persia, relating, incidentally, among others, to the very same Ardashir of our story, his court officials are listed in order of importance. The title, āxwarbed, “stable-master” appears as the twenty-sixth dignitary out of the total of thirty-one. Ardashir’s successor, Šābūr I, who actually set up the monument, lists 66 of his own court dignitaries in the same inscription but the stable-master does not even make his list. Hence, Ardashir’s position, working under such a dignitary, would be particularly ignoble. What is more significant is that the low status of the stable-master within the royal hierarchy appears to have acquired for itself a somewhat proverbial place in contemporary Persian folklore. This may be adduced from a few sources in the BT. In B. Shabbat 113b, in an effort to impress on the audience the immense wealth that the Persian patriarch, Judah I, was alleged to have possessed, it is anonymously asserted that “Rabbi’s stable-master was richer than King Šābūr!” What is implied is that even the lowest member of Judah I’s household was richer than Šābūr. Judah I was, of course, no contemporary of any of the three Sasanian kings by the name of Šābūr. One suspects that the name Šābūr became synonymous with “Persian king” for the early creators of the BT much in the same way as Caesar for the Romans and Xusrō for the later Persians and Arabic historiography became
generic terms for king in their cultures. This might have evolved during the long and eventful reign of Šābūr II, who ruled from 309–79 CE. It is not impossible to imagine that this Talmudic source might have been composed during this period. Of this Šābūr in fact, a story is related in a contemporary source stemming from the northwestern frontiers of the Sasanian sphere of influence, which thoroughly corroborates our impressions of the proverbial humble station of the stable-master in the Iranian literary imagination. Whilst Aršak, the king of the Armenians, was visiting the Persian King of Kings and taking a stroll through the royal stables, the stable-master of King Šābūr II audaciously insulted the Armenian king to his face. He called out: “You [there], king of Armenian goats, come sit on a bundle of grass!” In swift response, the Armenian sparapet, Vasak, who was accompanying the Armenian sovereign drew his sword and slew the stable-master on the spot in a spontaneous display of loyalty towards his Armenian lord. Šābūr, we are then told, however, did not seek vengeance for his loss, but declared his admiration and greatly extolled the subordinate’s loyalty to his master. Devotion to one’s lord is a value to be recognized and esteemed wherever it is found. Evidently the life of Šābūr’s stable-master, however, is portrayed here as quite expendable.

Ahasuerus and Alexander: Two Parallels

39. Cf. Shevuʿot 6a. Only a few Sasanian kings are mentioned by name in the BT. Of the Arsacids, Ardavân, the last Arsacid ruler is mentioned once as a contemporary of Rab (B. ’Avodah Zarah 10b). He is also mentioned in the Palestinian Talmud, Y. Pe’ah, 1:1, 15d (cf. Bereshit Rabbah, 35, Theodor-Albeck: 333 [see the Apparat]) as a contemporary of Judah I. Lastly, a place near Pumbedita bears the name of one of the Parthian sovereigns by this name, see B. Ḥevai 51b. The name of another Arsacid monarch, Vologeses, is preserved in the name of the city-port he founded not far from Ctesiphon, see B. Bava Bathra’ 98a; B. Bava Meziza ’a’ 73b; and possibly the Arsacid king, Vardan (Var-danes) lies behind the name of the city Vardis (B. Sotah 10a) or Vardis (B. Ḥevai 49a). See T. Nöldeke, “Zur orientalischen Geographie,” Zeitschrift der Deutschen morgenlandischen Gesellschaft 28 (1874): 100, n. 1. Of the Sasanian kings, there were basically 13 from the first until (including) Yazdgird I, the contemporary of Rav Ashi, but only six distinct names. The name Šābūr is mentioned most, including a number of sources that would suite the first, and other sources, the second Šābūr. Yazdgird I, who reigned from 399–420 CE, a contemporary of Rav Ashi, is mentioned, too (B. Zevah .im 19a, B. Ketubot 61a–b). An obscure allusion to Pēroz (457–84 CE) appears in B. Ḥullin 62b. See B. Heller, “Persische Königsnamen in einem halachischen Merkspruch,” Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschafts des Judentums 69 (1925): 448–449. The name Ardasˇı¯r appears in the name of cities founded by him, or in his honor, Weh-Ardašir (B. Gittin 6a, B. Ḥevai 57b, cf. also B. Yevamot 37b; B. Yoma 18b) and Hormizd-Ardsašir (B. Bava ’Bathra’ 52a), and also in a reference to a board game (B. Ketubot 61b). The late tradition associating the foundation of Hormizd-Ardašir to king Ohrmazd I (272–73 CE) is apparently in error. See J. Markwart, A Catalogue of the Provincial Capitals of Ţīrānshahr, (Pahlavi text, version, and commentary) (Roma, 1931), 19, § 46, pp. 95–96 and R. Gyselen, La Géographie administrative de l’empire sassanide (Paris, 1989), 56. The name one would, perhaps, have expected to find is Warahrān (Bahraṃ). Three kings who ruled consecutively in the late third century CE bore this name and two more until 438 CE.

40. Aršak II, 350?–367/8 CE.
42. General, commander (Pahlavi: spāḥbed).
43. Epic Histories, attributed to P’awastos’ Buzand (The Epic Histories Attributed to P’awstos Buzand (Buzandaran Patmut‘ivnek’), Translation and Commentary by N. G. Garsoian (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 146. A stable-master plays a role, although not quite comparable to anything we have discussed, in leading the Achaemenid monarch, Darius, astray by a ruse during his
AHASUERUS, THE STABLE-MASTER OF BELSHAZZAR

For our comparison with Ardašīr there is, in fact, in the BT an even closer text. In the first chapter of the tractate Megillah select verses from the Book of Esther are analyzed. In B. Megillah 12b the discussion focuses on Vashti’s refusal to appear before the king at his banquet. On learning of her refusal we hear as follows: “Therefore the king was very wroth, and his anger burned in him” (Esther 1:12). King Ahasuerus’ response to her refusal is deemed disproportionate to the situation had she simply declined to come. The question is raised as to what message Vashti could have sent Ahasuerus to warrant this heated response. According to Rava, she sent him the following message: “Oh son of my Father’s stable-master! Father would drink wine before a thousand (cf. Daniel 1:5) and was not satiated. Yet that man (i.e. Ahasuerus) was intoxicated with his wine.” The insult here is multiple and reveals something of the way this story was being read by the Babylonian rabbis. There is the attack on his virility, as being incapable of holding his drink, so to speak. One is reminded of the renowned reference in Athenaeus that Darius had written on his tomb “I could drink much wine and bear it well.” More significantly, perhaps, it is insinuated that Ahasuerus is not of royal blood but a usurper. He had been a servant of the previous king who was Vashti’s father. The citation from Daniel indicates that Vashti is considered the daughter of Belshazzar. In other words, Ahasuerus is a usurper who has married the daughter of the reigning monarch, the last king of the previous dynasty. Elsewhere the BT tells us that Ahasuerus himself killed the previous king, Belshazzar. Finally, Vashti calls him the son of the king’s stable-master. From the context it is evident that this is a gross insult, but the source of such an insult is less clear. There is nothing, of course, in the biblical writings to suggest in the remotest way that Ahasuerus might have served in this capacity. Rather, it would appear that Rava is applying to the biblical story a popular calumny found in Persian tales about kings. This same calumny must have attached itself to Ardašīr as well. In the Persian equestrian culture, where riding one’s mount
meant everything, what could have been more denigrating and humiliating than alleging that one of high rank had been no more than a stable-master? If this is the full significance of the stable-master motif, we also have the motive for revolt. Whilst the Kārnāmag account provides omens of Ardašīr’s future takeover, and the requisite Achaemenid lineage, no other cause is indicated. The personal insult inflicted on Ardašīr justifies his rebellion against his master. This is a theme common to many stories of Persian provenance. In sum, here we have a Talmudic source elucidating a Persian one for us, helping us to fully appreciate Ardašīr’s degradation, as implied in the Persian source we have cited. This allegation against Ardašīr would have made its appearance at an earlier date than the redaction of the current Kārnāmag version, for that version appears to be responding to it in some way. Thus, in addition to a mythical tale of the beginnings of the family, the Kārnāmag has also included a story of a hunt to explain how Ardašīr found himself in the stables to begin with. Hence, it does not dispute this version of affairs but rather directs the reader to understand that this was neither his rightful nor original state. Because it is highly unlikely that this motif traveled from the Jews to the Persians, as the Persian equestrian background would have provided the natural pasture for the conception of such a motif, it must be assumed that it was already current in Persian tales when it entered the BT passages we have mentioned. Rava, the only named authority in these Talmudic traditions, lived in the fourth century CE. This would provide us with an indication of the terminus ad quem for this Persian motif, which, at any rate, is many centuries earlier than the Kārnāmag version we possess. Accepting the hypothesized Persian origins of this motif we can observe in this case that when the creators of the BT wished to bring to life the biblical legends of ancient Persian kings (although not exclusively this topic) they drew inspiration from the popular Persian legends of their contemporary counterparts.

**Wicked Alexander of Macedon**

We shall now consider a source that appears in B. Sukkah 51b. Following an enthusiastic description of the greatness of Alexandrian Jewry during the late Second Temple period and perhaps a little beyond, a source for which there is a close parallel in the Tosefta and the Palestinian Talmud, we find the following curt remark attributed to the fourth-century Babylonian sage, Abaye:

> "Alexander of Macedon killed them all.

And Alexander of Macedon killed them all.


50. T. Sukkah 4:6 (Zuckerman, ed., 198); Y. Sukkah 5:1, 55a–b.

51. Thus MS. München 95, but all textual witnesses (as appearing in the material gathered by
As is well known the most famous devastation affecting ancient Alexandrian Jew-ry, considered to have resulted in the destruction of the community, occurred during the Diaspora revolt between the years 115 and 117 CE. The Roman emperor at the time was Trajan, and this is the name we would expect to find here. Indeed, the Palestinian Talmud parallel attributes the destruction to Trajan.\(^{52}\) Hence, this saying attributed to Abaye is unexpected.\(^{53}\) What is surprising besides its gross in-accuracy is how this statement stands in stark contrast to the admirable reputation Alexander of Macedon enjoys in many other Jewish sources, from Josephus to the many other cases preserved in rabbinic literature.\(^{54}\) Awareness of this problem is far from new and discussion on the anomaly of this source, from an historical perspexive, has a venerable bibliography, dating back to the Renaissance era! It has been assumed to be a corrupt reading in one way or another. Various scholars have suggested corrections in the text on the basis of the Palestinian Talmud.\(^{55}\) This reading is however attested in all the manuscripts of the BT and in addition, graphically the two names are so different that this difference can hardly be attributed to a scribal error. It should therefore not be dismissed so quickly as a corruption. Various alternative suggestions have been offered to account for Abaye’s statement, which do not involve such major changes to the text. One direction was to assume confusion between Alexander of Macedon and a different Alexander. The famous exegete, Don Isaac Abravanel, in the introduction to his commentary on the Book of Kings, suggested that Abaye had in mind a later Roman emperor called Alexan-der. He suggested the emperor was Alexander Severus.\(^{56}\) This suggestion, howev-er, has nothing to commend it and was rightfully dismissed by Azariah de’ Rossi.\(^{57}\)

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\(^{55}\) See the marginal notes in the Vilna edition loc. cit. by Gaon Rabbi Eliyahu Gaon and Rabbi Betsalel of Regensburg.

\(^{56}\) Don Yitshak Abravanel, Perush al nevi’im rishonim, (Jerusalem, 5715), 425. He refers to the “24th” Roman emperor, who lived “150 years after the destruction of the temple.”

\(^{57}\) Azariah de’ Rossi, Me’or Enayim, ed. D. Cassel (Vilna, 1864–66), 12:181–87; The Light
After a detailed examination of the question in his historical magnum opus, he advanced his own candidate: Tiberius Julius Alexander. As prefect of Egypt, he had ordered Roman soldiers to attack the Jews in the wake of a riot there. This theory, too, however, cannot be maintained. It entails ignoring “of Macedon,” contradicts the Palestinian Talmud’s historically more credible text, replaces a major slaughter with a minor one (while many thousands of Jews are reputed to have been slaughtered in Tiberius Julius Alexander’s suppression of the disturbances, it does not fit such a complete destruction), and besides all that, assumes the unlikely fact that the BT would have knowledge about chronologically and geographically distant Alexandria concerning the lesser disturbance and not about the principle and slightly more recent destruction.

If the BT versions reading Alexander of Macedon cannot be respectfully removed, they may, at least, be reasonably accounted for. It may be possible to explain how this statement came about by comparison with the Zoroastrian traditions. One should note that Alexander of Macedon had a totally different reputation in traditional Zoroastrian historiography than that which he enjoyed in the West. Ultimately, the Persian and Arab authors would succumb to the foreign influence of the Alexander-romance literature that had penetrated the East and would incorporate him more favorably into their tradition, but this was a much later development. He was for traditional Zoroastrian texts the most hated mortal ever known to Zoroastrianism. Beyond the predictable grievance for conquering the ancient Persian Empire and supplanting the native Persian Achaemenid dynasty, the Zoroastrian sources also accredit him with the destruction of much of the Zoroastrian religious tradition and the devastation of their country and cities. In Pahlavi
Zoroastrian religious works the epithet, *gizistag*, “accursed,” is typically appended to his name. He is also associated in these texts, somewhat unexpectedly, with Egypt.63 The following lines, appearing in the Pahlavi composition, *Ardā Wirāz Nāmag*, should serve as a good example:

Then the accursed Evil Spirit . . . misled the accursed Alexander the Roman, resident of Egypt, and sent him to the land of Iran with great brutality and violence and fear (?). He killed the Iranian ruler and destroyed and ruined the court and the sovereignty. That wicked, wretched, heretic, sinful, maleficient Alexander the Roman, resident of Egypt, took away and burnt those scriptures, namely all the Avesta and Zand . . . He killed many of the high priests and the judges and Herbads and Mobads and the upholders of the religion and the able ones and the wise men of Iran.64

The cataclysmic destruction he allegedly brought about has a central place in the Zoroastrian writings on the history of the evolution and transmission of their religious tradition.65 Thus, from the perspective of a subject of the Sasanian empire, the author of the words attributed in the BT to Abaye may well have been familiar with, and, indeed, influenced by the Persian attitude towards Alexander of Macedon, and it would not be so surprising to find him attributing to Alexander of Macedon, the “accursed Alexander the Roman, resident of Egypt,” an evil that the Romans inflicted on the illustrious and ancient Jewish community of Egypt.66


64. Ardā Wirāz Nāmag, 1, 3, cited from Fereydun Vahman, *Ardā Wirāz Nāmag* (London and Malmo, 1986), 191. This work is generally considered to have been written in the late Sasanian era, but the beginning, including the section we are citing, may have been written after the Muslim invasion of Persia. Nevertheless, the attitude to Alexander of Macedon portrayed here reflects the earlier period, see the following note.


66. On the possible connection between Zoroastrian traditions on the loss of their holy scriptures by Alexander the Great, and early traditions on the loss of the Jewish holy writings, see S. Pines, “A Parallel between Two Iranian and Jewish Themes,” *Irano-Judaica* 2, eds. S. Shaked and A. Netzer (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1990), 43–44.
We have examined two cases of Persian influence on sources from the BT. In the case of the Esther source, it seems that the BT has taken a typical Persian topos and applied it to the biblical retelling portraying the biblical protagonists as characters familiar from such as the Iranian Xwadāy-nāmag (Book of Lords) tradition. Familiarity with some Persian original should be taken for granted. For the source on Alexander of Macedon, it would appear that the impact of the Zoroastrian antagonism towards Alexander lies behind the BT’s attribution of the destruction of Alexandrian Jewry to him. As for the conduit for this activity, it is unnecessary to posit a Babylonian Jewish community well read in the Middle Persian literature of the kind where such themes abound. In fact, probably few Persians were. Rather, one suspects that the transfer of these themes was facilitated by the largely oral character of the Persian literature. Jews would probably have been exposed to works of this genre, the popular literature of the ruling nation. As we have seen, the identification of these cultural exchanges serves not only to enrich the Talmudic palette, but may also contribute towards a better understanding of the Persian sources, themselves.

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67. The manner by which oral traditions were transmitted is considered by Mary Boyce, “The Parthian Göşän and Iranian Minstrel Tradition,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1957): 10–45.