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## ESTHER IN ANCIENT JEWISH THOUGHT

The book of Esther was a conscious reaction to much of the conventional wisdom of its day, challenging beliefs regarding the Jerusalem Temple, the land of Israel, Jewish law, and even God. Aaron Koller identifies Esther as primarily a political work, and shows that early reactions ranged from ignoring the book to “rewriting” Esther in order to correct its perceived flaws. But few biblical books have been read in such different ways, and the vast quantity of Esther-interpretation in rabbinic literature indicates a conscious effort by the Rabbis to present Esther as a story of faith and traditionalism, and bring it into the fold of the grand biblical narrative. Koller situates Esther, and its many interpretations, within the intellectual and political contexts of Ancient Judaism, and discusses its controversial themes. His innovative line of inquiry will be of great interest to students and scholars of Bible and Jewish studies.

AARON KOLLER is Associate Professor of Near Eastern and Jewish Studies at Yeshiva University. He is the author of *The Semantic Field of Cutting Tools in Biblical Hebrew* (2012).

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## *Acknowledgments*

It gives me much pride to be able to say that this book emerged directly from teaching an undergraduate class on the book of Esther. In the context of preparing that class, certain patterns in the early reception history of Esther began to seem clear to me. After the semester, I wrote what I thought would be a short paper showing that the reactions to Esther in Hellenistic and Roman times were overwhelmingly negative.

Moshe Bernstein, my first teacher in the intellectual history of that era, was kind enough to read that paper. Besides his usual detailed critical comments, he made the suggestion to unpack some of the inordinately dense footnotes I had included, include all the rabbinic material I repeatedly had written that space precluded treatment of, and see if there wasn't a book here. It took a few more years of research and thinking, but I hope the present work justifies his intuition. At a much later stage, Moshe read a complete draft of the book, saving me from numerous errors, adding some of his own insights, and generally improving the book.

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colleagues – who happen also to be good friends – provided feedback and encouragement: Ari Mermelstein and Joseph Angel, from within Yeshiva University, and Michael Tzvi Novick, whom we'd like to claim (we did, after all, study ancient Hebrew phonetics together in a seminar at Yeshiva University many years ago), but who more properly belongs to Notre Dame. Without these readers, the book would be a far inferior work to what it is now.

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guidance have refined the analyses offered here. More significantly, a story about a woman who knows how to deploy her sparkling personality, dazzling interpersonal skills, penetrating intellect, and profound beauty in the service of the greater good can only be about Shira. It is to her, with love, that this is dedicated.

## *Abbreviations*

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| AB     | Anchor Bible  |
| ABD    | David Noel Freedman, <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> (New York: Doubleday, 1992)               |
| ANRW   | <i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt</i>   |
| AT     | Alpha Text  |
| BN     | <i>Biblische Notizen</i>  |
| BZAW   | Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft                               |
| CBQ    | <i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>  |
| CBQMS  | Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series  |
| CEJL   | Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature   |
| Cowley | A. E. Cowley, <i>Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C.</i> (Oxford University Press, 1923) |
| CRINT  | Compendia rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum   |
| DSD    | <i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>   |
| HAR    | <i>Hebrew Annual Review</i>   |
| HSS    | Harvard Semitic Studies   |
| HTR    | <i>Harvard Theological Review</i>   |
| HUCA   | <i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>  |
| JAJ    | <i>Journal of Ancient Judaism</i>   |
| JANES  | <i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society</i>  |
| JAOS   | <i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>   |
| JBL    | <i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>   |
| JJS    | <i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>  |
| JNES   | <i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>  |
| JPS    | Jewish Publication Society  |
| JQR    | <i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>  |
| JRS    | <i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>   |
| JSIJ   | <i>Jewish Studies: An Internet Journal</i>  |

*List of abbreviations*

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|              |   |
|--------------|---|
| <i>JSJ</i>   | <i>Journal for the Study of Judaism</i>   |
| <i>JSOT</i>  | <i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>   |
| <i>JSP</i>   | <i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>  |
| <i>JSQ</i>   | <i>Jewish Studies Quarterly</i>   |
| <i>JTS</i>   | <i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>   |
| LXX          | Septuagint  |
| MMT          | Miqṣat Ma'asē ha-Torah  |
| MT           | Masoretic Text  |
| <i>PAAJR</i> | <i>Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research</i>  |
| <i>RB</i>    | <i>Revue Biblique</i>   |
| <i>REJ</i>   | <i>Revue des Études Juives</i>  |
| SBL          | Society of Biblical Literature  |
| SBLDS        | Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series  |
| STDJ         | Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah   |
| <i>TAD</i>   | Ada Yardeni and Bezalel Porten, <i>Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt</i> (Winona Lake, IN: distributed by Eisenbrauns, 1986) |
| TSAJ         | Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum  |
| <i>VT</i>    | <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>  |
| <i>ZAW</i>   | <i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>   |