

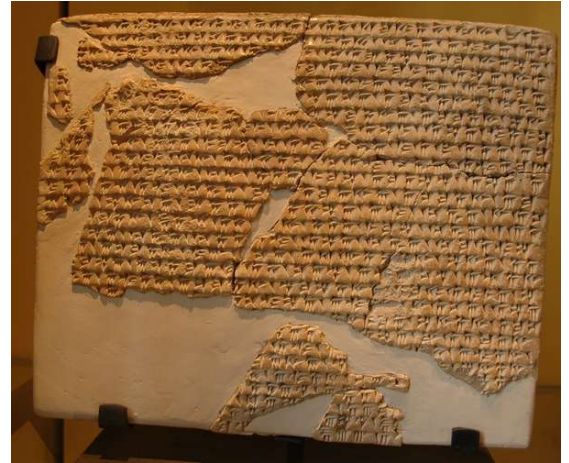
The Furnishings of the Palace at Susa

Located near the base of the Zagros Mountains in western Iran, the Achaemenid king Darius I, the Great (550 – 486 B.C.), built his winter capital and palace complex Susa some 2500 years ago, which was also at the center of his Persian Empire.

Notable for his administrative skills, Darius the Great successfully divided his empire into 20 provinces (satrapies) and collected an annual tribute, developed trade and commerce via land and sea, and standardized coinage, weights, and measures.

At the foundations of the palace complex Susa, inscriptions were found on several fragments of marble, clay, and glazed tiles written in three languages: Old Persian, Akkadian, and Elamite. Scholars called these foundation inscriptions of Susa “DSf,” and they describe how Darius the Great brought craftsmen and materials from all parts of his empire to build the beautiful royal palace of Susa.

The palace which I built at Susa, from afar its ornamentation was brought...the cedar timber, this – a mountain named Lebanon – from there was brought. The Assyrian people, it brought to Babylon; from Babylon the Carians and the Ionians brought it to Susa. The yaka-timber was brought from Gandhara and from Carmania. The gold was brought from Sardis and from Bactria, from here was wrought. The precious stone lapis-lazuli and carnelian which was wrought here, this was brought from Sogdiana. The precious stone turquoise, this was brought from Chorasmia, which was wrought here. The silver and the ebony were brought from Egypt. The ornamentation with which the wall was adorned, that from Ionia was brought. The ivory which was wrought here, was brought from Ethiopia and from Sind and from Arachosia. The stone columns which were wrought, a village by name Abiradu in Elam – from there were brought. The stone-cutters who wrought the stone, those were Ionians and Sardians....Saith Darius the King: At Susa a very excellent work was ordered, a very excellent work was brought to completion.



Foundation Inscriptions DSf
(Louvre Museum)

The book of Esther takes place after Darius the Great, and is a record of God's people interacting with Darius I's son Ahasuerus (Greek: Xerxes). Opening with Ahasuerus hosting a great week-long feast “for all his officials and attendants, the army officers of Persia and Media, and the nobles and the officials of his provinces” in the palace gardens, the book of Esther's description of “the riches of his royal glory and the splendor of his great majesty” is consistent with the magnificence described in the foundation inscriptions.

1) Now it happened in the days of Ahasuerus, the Ahasuerus who reigned from India to Cush over 127 provinces, 2) in those days as King Ahasuerus sat on his royal throne which was at the citadel in Susa, 3) in the third year of his reign he held a banquet for all his officials and attendants, the army officers of Persia and Media, the nobles and the officials of his provinces, in his presence. 4) At that time he displayed the riches of his royal glory and the splendor of his great majesty for many days, 180 days.

5) And when these days were completed, the king gave for all the people present in Susa the citadel, both great and small, a feast lasting for seven days in the court of the garden of the king's palace. 6) There were white cotton curtains and violet hangings fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rods and marble pillars, and also couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl, and precious stones. 7) Drinks were served in golden vessels, vessels of different kinds, and the royal wine was lavished according to the bounty of the king. (Est 1:5-7)

This correspondence provides circumstantial evidence of the historicity of the book of Esther.

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According to ancient history, Ahasuerus (Xerxes) ruled the Persian Empire from 486 to 465 B.C., and the book of Esther recorded a ten years period (483 to 473 B.C.) of his rule. This period was also during the Jews' Exile and captivity in Babylonia.

Esther's accounting of Ahasuerus' third, seventh, and twelfth year of his rule (Est 1:3; 2:16; 3:7) corresponds to the timeline of ancient history.

Ancient Persian history records Ahasuerus' invasion of Greece (480-479 B.C.), during the sixth and seventh year of his reign, which ended in defeat. Upon return from the war, Ahasuerus' advisors recommended the replacement of Queen Vashti, which corresponds to Esther's account (Est 2:16).

However, after the seventh year of reign, there are no ancient record of Ahasuerus' activities, during which a Jewish woman is made queen (Est 2:16-17), Haman's edict to eliminate the Jews throughout the empire (Est 3:1-15), and the edict by Mordecai, Esther's guardian father replacing Haman (Est 2:5-7), permitting Jews to assemble and defend themselves from any assault (Est 8:1-17). This has caused skeptics to question if the book of Esther is a valid historical record.



Gold Persian rhyton
(Met Museum)

While this debate may never reach an indisputable conclusion, archaeological findings continue to validate the details of Esther's account of Persian royal lifestyle.

Among the archaeological excavations of Susa, ornate gold Persian drinking vessels (rhytons) were recovered, which were consistent with the description of "golden vessels of different kinds" recorded in Esther 1:7.

The chronology of ancient historical records, and archaeological findings like DSf and objects continue to affirmed the historicity of the book of Esther, and none have controverted the Bible's account.

References:

1. From the website Livius.org: DSf (<https://www.livius.org/sources/content/achaemenid-royal-inscriptions/dsf/>).