

QUEEN ESTHER STORY COMES ALIVE IN 'PERSIA'.

The reading of the Megillah, the story of Esther and Mordecai found in the biblical Book of Esther, is a familiar occurrence to Jews during the religious holiday of Purim, which begins at sundown on Saturday.

Dr. Sholom Pearlman, professor of oral sciences at the University of Colorado School of Dentistry, stood amid the partially reconstructed ruins of the winter palace of the Persian king Ahasuerus at Susa in the country called Iran in 1978 and read how Esther and Mordecai saved their people from destruction decreed by the hated Haman in about 474 B. C.

Susa is called Shushan, the capital of Persia, in the Book of Esther. It is in southwestern Iran, not far from the border with Iraq.

Pearlman said the archeological team had uncovered the foundations of the palace that was built by King Darius, the father of Ahasuerus, also known as Xerxes I. The dig was started by the French in 1874. The foundations outlining individual rooms and courtyards as well as the outer walls of the palace have been uncovered over the years.

Artifacts found in the early years were taken to the Louvre in Paris by the French.

Because the site was far away from a supply of stone, the walls were built of clay and covered with enameled tiles. Some of these tiled walls are on display in the Louvre but you also can see examples in buildings and homes in Susa. The old palace was an inviting source of building materials for the nearby town.

The palace at Persepolis was being built at about the same time and the same mason's marks can be seen in the stone used for the foundation plates at both palaces. Persepolis also has been excavated and the ruins there are more extensive and in much better shape than at Susa. They help give an idea of what the palace at Susa was like.

As told in the Bible story, Esther was raised by her cousin Mordecai an artisan at Susa. After King Ahasuerus rid himself of Queen Vashti, he chose Esther as his new queen, not knowing she was a Jewess.

Ahasuerus appointed Haman as the leading prince. Mordecai, who had gotten into the habit of loitering around the palace entrance, his ears open for word about what was happening to Esther, soon ran afoul of Haman by refusing to bow down to him or pay him homage. Rather than punish Mordecai alone, Haman resolved to wipe out all the Jews in the kingdom.

Esther got word of the plan and told the king, who sided with his queen and her cousin. The king ordered Haman hanged on the same gallows the tyrant had prepared for Mordecai.

During the excavating, pieces of jewelry and other items were found at what is believed to be an apartment - all very feminine and regal, indicating the private apartment of a queen.

It was confirmed that a line of sight from the inner court to the royal throne would have put Esther exactly where the story said she was when she approached the king.

The immense palace is estimated to have had walls 60 feet high and its length was about a quarter-mile. It was decorated with colored tiles in mosaic patterns, jewels, silver and gold artwork. Colorful tapestries hung from the ceilings and the floors were marble and onyx.

Pearlman also visited the town of Hammadan, site of the tomb of Modecai and Esther.