

Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum

27

Alexander Samely

The Interpretation
of Speech
in the Pentateuch Targums



Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum

herausgegeben von
Martin Hengel und Peter Schäfer

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The Interpretation of Speech in the Pentateuch Targums

*A Study of Method and Presentation
in Targumic Exegesis*

by
Alexander Samely



J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck) Tübingen

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I learned that concepts matter from Arnold Goldberg; his insights and questions stimulated the research in the present book and continue to inform my research today. In my memory he is a picture of humane and sad irony, of soft-spoken clarity and intense precision. I understood scholarship the first time I saw him separate what he knew from what he did not know. I fell in love with this activity, and I fell in love with the man. Long live the activity.

Manchester, Summer 1991

A.S.

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Abbreviations

C	Cairo Genizah Fragments of Targum
E	English Bible (verse numbers)
F	Fragment Targum
m	Mishnah
M	Margins of Neofiti
MT	Masoretic Text
N	Neofiti
LXX	Septuagint
par.	parallel
PJ	Pseudo-Jonathan
Pesh.	Peshitta
PRE	Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer (Friedlander)
RSV	Revised Standard Version
Sam. Pent.	Samaritan Pentateuch
TT	Targum Text

Auch in der biblischen Erzählung wird gesprochen; doch dient die Rede nicht wie beim Homer der ausgeformten Kundgabe des innerlich Gemeinten, sondern geradezu im Gegenteil: dem Hinweis auf ein Gemeintes, welches unausgesprochen bleibt.

Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*

Introduction

A. The Priority of the Literary Riddle of Targum

Introductions are written with hindsight. If they address questions of method, they usually wish to present those initial guesses of the author which have turned out to be practical as inherently reasonable. My excuse for following this somewhat dubious procedure is that my preconceived ideas ran counter to some of the received wisdom in the study of targum.

I would now formulate the guesses which shaped the study at the outset as: (a) There are rules to the making of targum which may be discovered by sustained analysis of the written targums *qua literature*. (b) Many of these rules are not covered by the concept of translation, even if the concept is stretched to its limits. (c) The differences between the Hebrew and the Aramaic versions take the *form* of narrative deviations. (d) Behind at least part of the new narrative content stand targumic concerns which are not in themselves narrative or theological, but exegetical. By exegesis, I mean any procedure that in some way accounts for the *words* of a text.

In short, there is a literary riddle of targum, and it requires systematic literary study for its solution. This seems a rather innocuous statement, but it is in disagreement with a substantial group of approaches which try to solve the literary question by means of historical reconstruction. The central assumption behind these efforts is that the written targums of the Pentateuch, with the possible exception of Pseudo-Jonathan, share their basic features, rationale and origin with the oral targum delivered during the synagogue service from the time when Hebrew ceased to be the vernacular.¹ It follows that, since the basic rationale of oral targum is translation, that of written targums must also be translation. Furthermore, only those literary features are vigorously investigated which support what one could call the oral origin hypothesis. It is the function of the search for recurrent structures in the targumic text to collect “oral” characteristics, like spontaneous, un-

¹ See, for instance, R. Le Déaut in the introduction to his splendid *instrument de travail: Targum du Pentateuque*, Vol. I, Paris 1978, pp. 16–18. For a contrasting position, see P. Schäfer, “Targumim”, *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, Vol. VI (1980), p. 217.

conscious, or rhetorical and embellishing modifications.² The precise workings of exegesis do not come much into view. Also, core literary aspects of the targum, i.e. its methods of incorporating new text without breaking the literary rules governing the original, have hardly received attention – and on one occasion, they have served as a criterion to relegate Pseudo-Jonathan from the realm of targum study altogether.³

However, if literary arguments enter into the consideration, as they absolutely must, since the oral origin hypothesis makes claims about the structure of written targums, then a systematic study of literary features *per se* is necessary.⁴ The agenda of this literary investigation cannot be set by any historical hypothesis. Though the search for internal evidence of oral features is legitimate, the significance of its results can only be assessed against the background of the presence or absence of other types of literary structures. Furthermore, some characteristic expectations typically linked to the idea of oral literature must be suspended. Potentially, targumic texts must be followed to levels of literary and functional complexity and to degrees of sophistication and subtlety, which are, rightly or wrongly, thought to be unattainable in oral tradition.⁵

But this is not the end of it. Far from merely claiming the priority of literary methods for the study of the nature of written targums, the premises of the present approach claim such a priority also for the study of their history, at least wherever reference to the content of targum is made. What kind of differences in targumic materials point to a difference of source? Where, in the garb of the narrative, are the hallmarks of targumic theology or theologies? Which narrative modifications reflect recognizable targumic tendencies at all? As long as the formal constraints of the making of targum are not known, a reliable assessment of the status and significance of its theological, polemical or historical content is out of reach. Until then, we are

² Cp., for example, R. Le Déaut, “Un phénomène spontané de l’herméneutique juive ancienne: le ‘targumisme’”, *Biblica* 52 (1971), pp. 505–525; M. Klein, “Associative and Complementary Translation in the Targumim”, *Eretz Israel* 16 (1982) (Orlinsky Volume), pp. 134–140; A. Shinan, *The Aggadah in the Aramaic Targums to the Pentateuch* (Heb), 2 Vols., Jerusalem 1979. See below, pp. 150ff.

³ “As to the literary character of this work, PsJ seems unworthy of the designation ‘Targum’...”, A. Shinan, “The ‘Palestinian’ Targums – Repetitions, Internal Unity, Contradictions”, *Journal of Jewish Studies* 36 (1985), p. 87.

⁴ The task was succinctly formulated by Peter Schäfer, “Targumim” (footnote 1), p. 218: “Es stellt sich daher die kaum noch in Angriff genommene Aufgabe, Kriterien für die gattungsmäßige Bestimmung von Targum- und Midraschüberlieferungen zu entwickeln, d.h. sowohl in formaler Hinsicht nach den Charakteristika der Verarbeitung haggadischen und halachischen Materials in Targum und Midrasch zu fragen, als auch in inhaltlicher Hinsicht spezifisch targumische bzw. midraschische Haggada oder Halacha zu identifizieren.”

⁵ With regard to the distinction between midrash and targum, R. Le Déaut says: “L’exégèse y [in targum] est aussi plus limpide, alors que les midrashim présentent déjà des techniques d’une extrême subtilité”, “Une phénomène spontané...”, p. 508.

in the position of someone who tries to understand the meaning of a poem without being aware of its rhythmic pattern, its rhyme scheme and the conventions governing the range of topics appropriate for treatment by its particular form.

B. Targumic Method and Presentation: The Case of Biblical Speech Situations

The present study is an investigation of some 100 targumic passages which represent speech reports in the Pentateuch. They all are *modifications* of these biblical speech reports, either in their narrative setting alone, or also in their utterance wording. This excludes changes of the speech wording which have no bearing on the relationship between speech and surrounding text (as found extremely frequently in the long legal portions spoken by God and also in other utterances).⁶ Apart from these criteria, no others have been applied in the selection of the targumic corpus, though there is regrettably every reason to believe that oversight has taken its toll. The targumic material thus chosen as a basis has a number of advantages. The criterion “speech reports in the Pentateuch” defines a targumic corpus *in advance* of any selection based on the form or content of the targumic passages. Furthermore, speech situations in the Pentateuch occur very frequently and in all its parts, involving the whole range of biblical figures and topics. Any constant or recurring characteristics in their targumic counterparts are therefore likely to be independent of the content of the passages and may point to underlying targumic procedures or features. In the light of the preconceived ideas listed above, the question which leads into the heart of the investigation of targum from a literary point of view is: How does exegesis become narrative? More precisely: What are the methods to reach exegetical results, and what are the conventions governing the presentation of these results in the narrative? Starting from the targumic and biblical passage, the first task is to describe the narrative form of any modifications. The second is to account for the differences between Hebrew original and Aramaic version in terms of exegesis, where possible. Where groups of exegetical procedures emerge from the number of individual analyses, a further question must be asked: What are the presuppositions that allow the application of this exegetical method? To this, the important topic of the view of Scripture embodied in targumic

⁶ These modifications treat speech in no way different from non-speech; its status as utterance does not affect the interpretative procedures. See below, pp. 173f. I have also omitted representing the targumic speech qualification “in the holy tongue” which is often somewhat stereotyped, forms a distinct group and requires an independent examination.

exegesis, we shall attempt to make a small descriptive contribution on the basis of our passages.

A number of characteristics of speech reports make them suitable for the task of description. They have a distinct structure and are easily set apart from any other type of event report, while they partake in the general terseness of biblical prose. Where they include an utterance quoted verbatim, they purportedly bring together two texts of different origin: one is by the voice of the narrator of the Pentateuch, and one by the biblical hero whose utterance is quoted. Reported speech is a narrative event which itself consists of words. Where the targumist is interested in wording, his treatment of speech events will show it. Where he is merely interested in general narrative developments, his treatment of speech events will similarly testify to that approach.

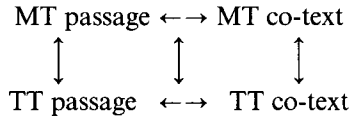
Furthermore, the mechanisms of direct and indirect speech have been at the centre of a great deal of research in linguistics and cognate subjects. The discussion of targumic exegesis will from time to time draw on some of the results of this research, where they allow a more precise understanding and description than would have been possible otherwise. Since speech and its situational setting has been the subject of much research, the descriptive tools for tracing the targumic path of interpretation of speech are sharp and varied.

C. Comparing Targumic Speech Reports with their Biblical Counterparts

We have already mentioned that the study of targumic form, where the latter cannot be captured by the notion of translation, must take as its starting point the differences between the text of the Hebrew original and that of targum. In the workshop parts of this study (chapters 1 to 6), the following procedure will be adhered to in describing targumic modifications. First, the point of difference is located by a comparison of the Masoretic Text (MT for short) and the Targum Text (TT). In a second step, the change this modification brings about in the relationship between neighbouring parts of the text is investigated. Following a terminological convention which distinguishes the non-linguistic setting of a text (named context) from its purely linguistic environment, the co-text,⁷ we shall call those neighbouring parts of the text co-text. By incorporating the new relationship between

⁷ For this distinction see, e.g., G. Brown and G. Yule, *Discourse Analysis*, Cambridge 1983, pp. 46ff.

(modified) text and (often unmodified) co-text in the comparison and description we lay the basis for an understanding of how new material is integrated into an on-going and basically unchanged *narrative*. The description of the textual evidence thus involves a number of comparisons which are represented as vertical arrows in the following figure, with horizontal arrows indicating textual neighbourhood.



In a third step, the procedure that leads from the Hebrew to the Aramaic version is discussed. In this, exegetical activity is presupposed, and for this exegetical activity there must be a historical subject, the targumist, i.e. the person who was responsible for putting an exegetical idea in this targumic form. The targumist, as occurring in these pages, is but an abstraction from the text for which he is responsible. Where I refer to the targumist as “he”, I do not wish to prejudge the historical question whether he was a man or a woman, even if, given what we know about male predominance in rabbinic intellectuality, the likelihood of the latter alternative is remote. Similarly, the singular should not be taken to imply that there could not have been many. Where I refer to the targumist as deliverer of an Aramaic version in the synagogue setting, I use the term *meturgeman*. In describing changes and making comparisons, I shall use the term “speech report” for any clause containing a *verbum dicendi*, and “utterance” or “speech” for any quotation thus introduced. I shall translate Hebrew and Aramaic *waw* always as “and”, not in disregard of its range of meanings at the juncture of sentences, but in a deliberate attempt to mark this openness, albeit inadequately.

Linguistics and the modern study of texts – wherever I was aware of their results, understood them and found them useful – enter principally at two points into the present investigation. One is my description of targumic and Hebrew texts; terms like “cohesion” will be used in the description of the textual dependencies, and the notion of “co-text” has already been mentioned. The other occasion at which results mainly from pragmatics, discourse analysis and speech act theory may be mentioned, is in attempts to describe a way to derive targumic from original text, as a reconstruction in modern terms of the path of targumic interpretation.⁸

⁸ Which is of course not the same as declaring them legitimate interpretations – the question of legitimacy has no useful role to play in the *description* of rabbinic or targumic interpretation. See also below, p. 169.

D. The Structure of the Study

In the first part of the study, devoted mainly to modifications whose effect is highly visible primarily on the narrative level, the discussion proceeds from changes in the speech report (chapter 1) to additional event reports (chapters 2 and 3). In a second part, where the textual reason for a modification is often more obvious, I deal first with the internal unity of the speech unit (= speech report plus utterance) as perceived by the targumist (chapter 4), and then mainly with coherence of the Pentateuch as a whole (chapter 5). As a last section presenting passages, chapter 6 is devoted to the targumic concern with apparent repetitions in the biblical text. At the end of this part of the study there follows a complete list of all passages, their targumic distribution and brief indications of their modifications.

Interspersed with the interpretation of targumic passages are ten discussions. Their function is to introduce recurrent descriptive issues where the occasion arises; they prepare the ground for a synthetic presentation of targumic characteristics in the final chapter.

Throughout the presentation of targumic passages, the Pentateuch targums are referred to by the following abbreviations: PJ for Pseudo-Jonathan (Rieder edition), N for Neofiti and M for its marginal text (Díez Macho edition), O for Onkelos (Sperber edition), F for Fragment Targum (Klein edition) and C for Cairo Genizah Fragments (Klein edition). In the case of the latter two, I refer to individual manuscripts using the sigla in Klein's editions.⁹

The two last chapters start out with a brief account of the main differences between the various targumic texts (pp. 143ff) and a discussion of apparent traces of the situation of synagogue delivery in Neofiti's renderings of direct speech (pp. 150ff). Chapter 8 is devoted to the question of targumic form and exegesis. Basing my argument on the targumic corpus presented in this study, I make an attempt to explicate fundamental formal features of targum.

⁹ The page numbers indicated for C refer to Volume I of M. Klein, *Genizah Manuscripts*.

I. Accounting for the Narrative and the Text

1. The Setting of Biblical Speech: Persons, Places, Times

A. Speakers and Addressees

Who speaks, and to whom, are two of the most basic elements in the make-up of a speech situation. The positions of speaker and addressee regularly engage the interest of the targumists in their interpretation of biblical speech reports. Sometimes the wording of the utterance is only of secondary importance. Consider the following striking speech report:

(1) Gen. 31 : 46

MT: And Jacob said to his brothers: "Gather stones!", and they took stones and made a heap and ate there by the heap.

PJ: And Jacob said *to his sons whom he called* his brothers: "Gather stones!", and they gathered stones and made a heap and ate there by the heap.

(similar M, C (C, p. 63))

According to the testimony of the book of Genesis, Jacob had only one brother and he was not present in the situation. The resulting problem and its solution may serve as a first illustration of some of the themes of this study. The targumic concern in this passage is the consistency of the Hebrew Pentateuch: How does this mention of "brothers" fit in with the complete silence about any brothers besides Esau in the rest of the Tora?¹

The targumic solution has two aspects: one is the new identity of the addressee, the other is the way the original addressee is also preserved in TT. The sons of Jacob, identified by PJ as the real addressees of the order, fit the situation perfectly: they are, according to MT, at hand, they may fittingly be commanded by Jacob to do such things as piling up stones, and there is perhaps even a reason why he should call them "brothers". In the exchange between Laban and Jacob preceding the passage above, Laban claims in verse 43: "The daughters are my daughters, the sons are my sons, the flocks

¹ Gen. R. (74 : 13) gives the same solution as the targums, after formulating the problem thus: "How many brothers had he then? – But one, and would that he had buried him."

are my flocks, and all that you see is mine.”² If Jacob is Laban’s son-in-law, and his children are Laban’s children, then they can presumably be called “brothers” by Jacob, as far as his father-in-law is concerned.³ The decision of whether such an extremely subtle point is made here or not depends largely on the expectations of sophistication brought to the targum and sustained by it. We can leave the question open, though the study as whole can be seen to present evidence for considerable sophistication on the side of the targumists.

As for the preservation of the word “brothers”, despite the fact that its function is taken over by “sons”, it opens the topic of the presentation of targumic exegesis. It will noted that the targumist is not satisfied to replace the original addressee by his conclusion about the real reference of that term, but proceeds indirectly to justify or explain the original wording. Though this is a particularly elaborate way to retain the original expression (in translation) where a substitution would have been easy, it is by no means unique. This is another aspect of targumic activity to which attention will be paid later when dealing with what happens to original lexical items.⁴

There are other examples of interest to the targumist in the terms occurring in the speaker position, quite independently of the content of the utterance. Speaking cities and countries are a case in point.⁵

(2a) Gen. 18 : 20

MT: And the Lord said: “The cry of Sodom and Gomorrah, how is it great! And their sin, how very grave!”

N: And the Lord said: “The cry of *the people of* Sodom and Gomorrah, how is it great! And their sin, how very grave!”

(M dissimilar)

(2b) Deut. 9 : 28

MT: “Lest the land, from which you have brought us, say: ‘The Lord was not able to bring them to the land of which he spoke to them, and because he hated them he brought them out to kill them in the wilderness.’”

O: “Lest the *inhabitants of the* land from which you have brought us, say: ‘The

² PJ renders: “The daughters *you have married* are my daughters and the sons *they have borne* are considered to be my sons . . .”

³ Note that in Gen. 31 : 24, where again Jacob’s “brothers” are mentioned, PJ identifies them as “his relatives, who had come with Laban” (cp. RSV “kinsmen”). N unflinchingly has “brothers” in both places.

⁴ The phrase “is called” serves the same purpose elsewhere. In Gen. 27 : 27 Isaac says “See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed!” PJ takes “field” as a reference to the sanctuary, but retains the term by having Isaac say that the sanctuary “is called” a field.

⁵ See also Neofiti’s and PJ’s version of Gen. 11 : 9: “ . . .because there the Lord con-founded the language of all *the inhabitants of* the earth.”

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