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HALF A CENTURY OF TARGUM STUDY. MARTIN McNAMARA

The Aramaic paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible, commonly known as Targums or Targumim, have in recent years been the subject of intense study. The rapid development of this branch of enquiry has, in fact, been almost incredible.

An idea of the extent of this development can be gathered from the special surveys and bibliographies that have been compiled and published. /1 The present situation in Targumic studies can best be seen in the light of the research and discoveries carried out over the past fifty years. Before considering this contemporary situation, I believe it best to review first the development over the relevant decades.

1. The Situation in 1930

The year 1930 proved to be a turning-point in targumic studies. It marked the end of one era and the beginning of a new approach that is still with us

(i) Targums known in 1930

The Aramaic texts of the Targums available to students in 1930 were basically those that had been known for centuries. For the Pentateuch there was the Targum traditionally ascribed to Onkelos, the Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan and the Fragment Targum. The Targum of Onkelos tends to be a literal rendering, sparing in paraphrase. The form of Aramaic in which it is written is related to the Aramaic of the Bible, and yet somewhat later than this in its grammatical forms. In language, as in the nature of its paraphrase, Onkelos is set off from Pseudo-Jonathan and the Fragment Targum, whose form of Aramaic is related to that of Jewish Palestinian and Galilaean sources. Whereas Onkelos and Pseudo-Jonathan contain a rendering of the entire Pentateuch, the Fragment Targum, as the very name implies, has a rendering of only certain sections, sometimes of just a few words. The Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan continues since 1930 to present special problems, particularly with regard to its relation to the Targum of Onkelos. It is clearly a composite work. While some sections seem to be very old, there are also recent references- such as the mention of the names of the wife and

daughter of Muhammed and of the six orders of the Mishnah. Portions of it are verbally identical with, or very similar to, Onkelos, both as regard language and paraphrase; others are similar to the Palestinian Targum as known from the Fragment Targum in 1930, and now as known from other texts also.

Together with these targums of the Pentateuch, there was also the Targum of the Prophets- the second section of the Hebrew Canon. In style and language, this targum was similar to that of Onkelos.

There were also targums known to all the books of the Writings (the 'Ketubim') with the exception of the books of Daniel, Ezra and Nehemiah- portions of which were in Aramaic in the original. /2

(ii). Date assigned to the Targums

The prevailing view in 1930 with regard to the dating of the Targums was that the oldest was Onkelos. Next came the Targum of the Prophets and, as much more recent, that of Pseudo-Jonathan and the Fragment Targum, the former as not any earlier than the seventh century AD. This dating of the Targums was due mainly to the influence of Gustav Dalman, a scholar who at an earlier stage in his researches thought that sections of Pseudo-Jonathan and of the Fragment Targum could well be very old, even pre-Christian but later changed his mind.

It must be admitted that the date of the available texts of both Pseudo-Jonathan and the Fragment Targum presented a formidable obstacle with regard to assigning an early date to the paraphrases. These were no earlier than the sixteenth century.

(iii) Use of Targums in NT Studies

It was natural that this prevailing view of the date of the Targums should affect the use made of them in NT studies, though in this regard a change had taken place. Earlier some Christian scholars had freely used the targums in the belief that they antedated the Christian era. By 1930 however the targums tended to be set aside whether as witnesses for Jewish beliefs in the time of Christ or for an understanding of the NT itself.

This prevailing attitude was not however shared by all. In 1921 Rendal Harris had written on "Traces of Targumism in the New Testament" in the 'Expository Times' and other scholars re-echoed his sentiments on the utility of the Targums for NT research. The prevalent position however, based as it was

on a presumed late date, could only be effectively countered either by new finds, or by a new approach to the question of dating, or by a combination of both. It remained for the next two decades to provide this.

2. A New Approach 1930-1950 AD

This period opened and closed with an indication of new texts of the Palestinian Targums of the Pentateuch. It was also characterised by a new approach to the study of Jewish tradition and the dating of individual Jewish traditions. The first texts to be published were the fragments of the Palestinian Targum, earlier found in the Geniza of Old Cairo. /3 The texts were quite extensive and represented all five books of the Pentateuch, though the greater part was from Genesis. The manuscripts ranged in date from the late 7th or early 8th century /4 to the 11th century. Thus we were provided with texts, partly at least nine hundred years or so older than the texts hitherto known. Yet despite being so much earlier, the type of paraphrase and language was in the main the same as that of the later texts.

Another significant development during this period was a renewed interest in the presence of Jewish midrashic and haggadic material in such early Jewish writings as the Septuagint Greek translation, the works of Josephus, and the Biblical Antiquities of Pseudo-Philo. Studies of this sort were preparing the way for a comparative study of Jewish traditions and providing material for the dating of portions at least of the midrash and haggada found in the Targums.

It was inevitable that the finds from Qumran from 1947 AD onwards should in due time affect a portion of scholarly opinion in regard to the value of the Targums for NT research. For one thing, the Qumran texts could be precisely dated, at latest from the first century AD. Then again, the Aramaic material from Qumran provided new evidence for at least one form of Aramaic being used in the Palestine of Jesus' day and, slightly earlier, a form of Aramaic rather similar to that of Onkelos but significantly different from that of the Palestinian Targums. /4 Another significant fact provided by the Qumran finds included the large sections of a Targum of Job and the small fragment of a Targum of Leviticus 16. The latter was again somewhat similar to the Onkelos kind of language and rendering. And last, but by no means least, there is the evidence for the Qumran interpretation of Scripture provided by the scrolls, both in the special scripture

commentaries or pesharim and in other writings of the sect. The Targum school of exegesis, if one may be allowed so to designate it, had in the Qumran school a very definite rival, or at least a body of evidence which could not be ignored: a clearly defined corpus of literature, coming from Palestine or its environs, dating in the time of Christ or shortly before it; possessing a certain understanding of the Scriptures, and in part written in Aramaic.

Despite this, however, interest in the newly maturing targumic approach was only beginning to gather momentum. The new science was greatly aided by another chance find just two years after the discovery of the first scrolls in Qumran. This was the find of the manuscript now known as Codex Neofiti 1 of the Vatican Library. As the enumeration suggests, it is the first manuscript of the Neofiti collection of manuscripts. These once belonged to the Pia Domus Neophytorum, a house founded in Rome for converts from Judaism. The manuscripts of the house and college were sold and transferred to the Vatican Library during the tenure of its last rector who took up office in 1886. This particular manuscript was catalogued as Onkelos and this may have been the principal reason for it not attracting the attention of scholars. A scholar by the name of Alexandro Diez Macho took a special interest in the Onkelos manuscripts and had a microfilm made of the manuscript in the first instance. He gradually came to realise that it was not Onkelos, but a full copy of the Palestinian Targum of the Pentateuch, the only one known to exist. He intimated his identification in 1956.

3. Contemporary Targum Studies 1950- 1979

The stage for modern research in the Targums had been firmly set by 1950. The study of Jewish tradition continued and gathered momentum. Special attention was devoted to midrash, to the Jewish attitude to Scriptures, to their interpretation in the light of new situations, and to the midrashic works in which this understanding of the scriptures was to be found. The study of Jewish midrash was pursued particularly by Madame Renée Bloch in the mid-fifties, but she was ably supported by others, notably Geza Vermes. Mme Bloch also made a detailed study of the criteria to be used for the determination of the age of otherwise undated Jewish traditions.

A work which was to become a classic in the presentation of the case for the use of the Palestinian Targum of the Pentateuch in NT studies was the Cairo Geniza by Paul Kahle,

In the second edition of his work(1959), Kahle expresses himself as follows(p.208):

In the Palestinian Targum of the Pentateuch, we have in the main material coming down from pre-Christian times which must be studied by everyone who wishes to understand the state of Judaism at the time of the birth of Christianity. And we possess this material in a language of which we can say that it was similar to that spoken by the earliest Christians. It is material, the importance of which can scarcely be exaggerated.

Coincidentally, the date of this quote roughly marks the beginning of a new era in the use of the Targums in NT research, and in the use of the Palestinian Targums in particular. /5

The new studies tended to concentrate on the relationship of the Palestinian Targum of the Pentateuch with the NT. The range of such studies can be seen from a glance at one of the surveys or bibliographies noted at the beginning of this essay. Many points of contact between the two bodies of literature were noted. In the Targums, for instance, extensive use is made of such expressions as "The Word(Memra) of the Lord", or of the Lord's Glory(Shekinah), possibly with the intention of safeguarding the divine transcendence. These terms and expressions were seen to have a relevance for the understanding of the use of 'Logos', 'glory' etc., in the Fourth Gospel. It is probably for the same reason that the Targums speak of God communicating his will to his people through his Word(Dibbera, Dibbura) or through his spirit or holy spirit. In this, too, a relationship was seen with certain NT texts, e.g. 2 Corinthians 3.17. In the Palestinian Targum God is occasionally spoken of as "your(their, his...) Father in heaven"; we read of persons having merit "before their Father in heaven". We even find the expression: "Be merciful as your Father in heaven is merciful". The corresponding NT phrases naturally come to mind, and it was natural to conclude that Jesus and the early Christian community were merely using phrases current in the religious vocabulary of the Jews of their time. Other good Targumic phrases and terms of the same sort are " the great day of judgment", " this world-- the world to come", Gehenna, Paradise, redeemer, redemption.

The relationship between the two bodies of literature went far beyond such phrases and isolated terms. In the Targums we find a certain theology or tradition woven around certain persons or events in the biblical narrative, e.g., the events of the Garden of Eden, the sacrifice or binding of Isaac (Genesis 22), the ladder of Jacob (Genesis 28), the well of Jacob, circumcision, the well believed to have followed the Jews during the desert wanderings (cf 1 Corinthians 10.4) and others besides. The binding of Isaac in Jewish tradition was looked on as expiatory and this tradition was regarded by some scholars as the background against which Paul considered the death of Christ. The Targums have much to say on the Torah, identified with divine wisdom, regarded as the Tree of Life and thus salvific. These attributes of the Torah were regarded by scholars as affording St. Paul material for some of his statements on Christ. Thus Paul would have transferred to Christ what Jewish tradition, as found in the Targums, predicated of the law.

It must be stressed that the matter of the relationship of the Targums to the NT was the sole subject studied during this period. Targumics was becoming a branch of study in its own right, with special emphasis placed on the once neglected tradition of the Palestinian Targum, with special attention being devoted to the text of Neofiti. /6

Another point that has received attention is the transmission of the Palestinian Targum. As noted earlier, most of the major texts are late -- from the sixteenth century. How with the aid of early Rabbinic citations and later Jewish writings, its history can be traced back beyond this late date. It is reasonably certain that a text of the Palestinian Targum, almost identical with that of Neofiti, was used by Rabbi Nathan ben Yehiel (died 1106) in the compilation of his dictionary known as the 'Aruk'. The Geniza texts and some early Rabbinic citations take us back beyond this.

The relationship of the Targums to Jewish midrashic (haggadic and halakic) tradition has also been studied. Here the most detailed study has been made by Rabbi Menahem Kasher, author of the huge twenty-five volume work, 'Torah Sheleimah', described in the sub-title as "a Talmudic-Mid-rashic Encyclopedia of the Pentateuch, containing a complete collection of commentary and notes from the earliest Hebrew works up to the Gaonic period". He was already well advanced in his researches when he made the acquaintance of Neofiti. He soon came to believe that its paraphrase was very old and treats of it in detail in volume 24 of his work. /7

The work is devoted to a study of the Aramaic versions of the Bible, with a comprehensive study of Onkelos, Jonathan (i.e., Targum of the Prophets), Jerusalem or Palestinian Targums, and the full Jerusalem Targum of Vatican manuscript, Neofiti 1. The title page further tells us that Kasher's work treats of "the original methods of these Targums, their relation to one another, and the analysis of their use as sources in post-biblical literature." Kasher's position is that Onkelos, Pseudo-Jonathan and Neofiti are basically from the time of Ezra, that the Mishnah depends on the Targums, likewise early (Beth Hillel, Beth Shammai) and later Jewish tradition.

Together with these different studies, attempts were also made to refine the criteria for dating Jewish and targumic traditions.

In what is sometimes referred to as "the Kahle School" a certain attitude was discernible with regard to the Palestinian Targum and its relationship to the NT. The interpretative tradition enshrined in this Targum, if not the Targum itself, was generally assumed to be very old and basically pre-Christian. The Aramaic in which the tradition is now found, tended to be regarded as representing the spoken dialect of Galilee, if not of all Palestine, in the first century AD. Qumran Aramaic would then be a literary language rather than a spoken vernacular. The first position- regarding the antiquity of the tradition- was more strongly adhered to than the latter. As a rule of thumb on the antiquity of Jewish tradition in general, not merely that of the Palestinian Targum, Vermes could give the following: unless the contrary is proved, a Jewish tradition can be presumed to ante-date 135 AD. Positions were less dogmatic with regard to the date to be assigned to the Aramaic of the Palestinian Targum. While this may conceivably be later than NT times- say post 200 AD- the tradition it enshrined was not thereby shown to be recent. The language could change, while the tradition it transmitted was older.

It was inevitable that the positions and presuppositions of the so-called 'Kahle' School should in time be challenged, both as regard the date to be assigned to the Aramaic of the Palestinian Targum and then to the tradition itself. And with the antiquity of the targumic tradition called into question, the very utility of the Targums for NT research would naturally be queried.

The early date assigned to the Aramaic of the Palestinian Targum was an obvious target for attack, since abundant material from Qumran was available for comparison. Some specialists in the history of Aramaic maintained that its peculiar forms showed that it was post 200 AD at the earliest. As against this, others maintained that the use of the Qumran material in this discussion was decisive and possibly not justified. The Qumran material represented the literary form of the language, whereas the Aramaic of the Targums would represent the spoken language, at least of Galilee. Another form of the argument for a late date for the Palestinian Targum runs as follows: the Qumran and literary documents represent the literary Aramaic of the schools of Judea prior to the destruction of these in the Bar Cochba revolt (135 AD), when the centre of Jewish life and literary activity moved to Galilee. Any literary work prior to 135 AD would be in this literary language. Since the Palestinian Targums are not, they are to be dated as post 135 AD. In a doctoral dissertation on the language of the Targum of the Former Prophets, A.Thal (Rosenthal) concluded that the Targum of the Prophets and Onkelos were composed before 135 AD, while Neofiti is to be assigned a date later than this.

The objection, however, was not limited to the question of language. The methodology used by scholars in their employment of targumic evidence in NT studies was queried. It was stated that they presumed rather than proved that the targumic tradition was old. They were accused of circular reasoning, proving from their relationship to the NT that the Targums were old and using them in NT research since they were presumed to be ancient.

The absence from Qumran documents of such typically targumic concepts and expressions as Memra, Shekinah, and Dibbera led some to query the age of the usage of these in Judaism.

Another point made in these criticisms is that because an identical or similar expression or tradition is found in both Targums and the NT, the dependence must be on the part of the latter. Could it not as easily have been the other way about - that the relationship is due to the dependence of Jewish tradition on the NT. This observation has been made with regard to such expressions as "Father in heaven". It has more recently been put forward with regard to the Aqedah or binding of Isaac theology i.e., the Jewish theol-

ogy found in the Palestinian Targum on the expiatory nature of the sacrifice of Isaac and, for that reason, used as a presumed background to Paul's teaching, this Jewish theology has been considered as later than the NT and formed precisely as a Jewish reaction to NT and patristic teaching on the atonement !!

Thus it is that at the present moment we have reached a critical stage in the study of the Targums in their relationship to the NT. On the one hand serious NT scholars are turning ever more to the Targums in their study of the NT message, while the relevance of the Targums and of the whole operation is being called into question by others.

4. Criticism of Criticisms.

Ours is an age of criticism, so much so in fact that some are calling for the criticism of criticisms. In the Biblical field we are seeing the relevance of archaeological evidence for biblical research being called into question, for instance in the evaluation of the patriarchal traditions, and of the traditions relating to the Exodus and the settlement. The strengths and weaknesses of such established methods as Source and Form Criticism are queried. It is not in the least surprising that such a new science as that of targumic research should have its presuppositions, methods and conclusions called into question. In fact it is only good and proper that it should, since it is only by criticism that methodology is refined. Genuine criticism raises real problems. New sciences tend to make some sweeping assertions.

What, we may ask, is likely to be the outcome of this criticism with regard to the value of the Targums for NT studies? Will it be shown, or has it been shown, that the targumic tradition, and that of the Palestinian Targum in particular, is too recent to be used prudently in this research? Is the Aramaic of the Palestinian Targum definitely post 200 AD?

I do not think that the ground gained by this recent targumic research will so easily be shown to be irrelevant. The arguments in favour of the antiquity of the tradition are too strong for this. The evidence with regard to individual instances of a relationship, the Aqedah tradition for instance, will have to be seriously evaluated to see whether we can show that Jewish tradition is really dependent on Christian teaching, not vice versa. This is work

that must go ahead, but scarcely calls for suspension of judgement on the relevance of the Targums, and of the Palestinian Targum in particular, for NT study. There is one important truth, however, that these new criticisms point up, and that is that the methodology to be employed in the use of targumic evidence in NT research needs to be further studied and refined. This is a matter to which I intend to return at a later date.

Notes

1. In 1967 the Biblical Institute Press, Rome, published a small booklet, entitled: Targum and New Testament (A Bibliography together with a NT Index.) Fourteen pages were devoted to the bibliography of writings on the subject and the remainder (74 pages) to the index of NT passages studied in these writings. The author was Peter Nichols, O.F.M.Conv.

In 1972 Bernard Grossfield's ' A Bibliography of Targum Literature' (Concinnati / NYork) appeared, with 1054 entries. In 1977 a second volume of Grossfield's work was published, bringing the number of entries to 1852. Grossfield felt the need for this second volume because of the deficiencies of his first attempt and the continued growth in this particular field of study. Others besides Grossfield himself had noted the deficiencies of his first edition and his bibliography was supplemented by such Targum scholars as Michael Klein (in Biblica 55, 1974, 281-285) and Alexandro Diez Macho, M.S.C. (1974).

In 1974 another authority in Targum studies, Roger Le Déaut, C.S.Sp. contributed two major studies on the subject: "The Current State of Targumic Studies" and " Targumic Literature and NT Interpretation", both in Biblical Theology Bulletin (Vol.4, 1974, 3-32 and 243-289). The essays represent papers delivered to the Society of Biblical Literature, evidence of the interest of this learned Society in this new branch of study. Still in 1974 a special publication in this field was begun, intended to keep interested scholars abreast of the research being published and in progress in this branch of learning. It was the Newsletter for Targum Studies, edited in Victoria College, Toronto.

In the entry on "Targums" in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Supplementary Volume (1976), and to a lesser extent in the supplement to the second printing of The NT

and the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch (Rome, Biblical Institute Press, 1978), the present writer gave a review of recent studies on the Targums, concentrating on trends and likely future directions.

The continuing interest in this new field of research is clear from the entries in the Newsletter for Targum Studies and in Elenchus Bibliographicus of the quarterly Biblica, edited by Peter Nober and published by the Biblical Institute, Rome.

2. All these Targums have been available in print for some centuries before 1930, and were all provided with Latin translations. Some of them had English translations, as for instance all the known texts of the Targums of the Pentateuch which had been translated by J.W.Etheridge (London, 1862,1865). With the exceptions of the Targums of the books of Chronicles, all the texts had been printed, together with Latin translations, in Walton's London Polyglot Bible (1653-1657). Only at a later date did manuscripts of the Targums of Chronicles become known. These were published respectively by M.F.Beck and D.Wilkens in 1680 and 1715. Later more easily accessible Aramaic texts of the Targums were made available, notably that of Onkelos, edited by A.Berliner (1884) and those of the Prophets and Hagiographa by P.de Lagarde in 1872 and 1873 respectively.

Since the beginning of the Golden Age of Jewish Studies in 1850, quite an amount of research has been done in Jewish tradition, including the Targums. The Aramaic of Palestinian sources and of the Targums had also been studied and a grammar produced by G.Dalman: Grammatik des jüdisch-palästinischen Aramäisch (1894; 2nd ed. 1905). The bearing of the Targums on the study of the NT also received attention.

3. These were published by Paul Kahle in 1930 in his monumental work Masoreten des Westens II. Das paläst- inische Pentateuchtargum. Die paläst- inische Punktation. Der Bibeltext des Ben Naftali. Kahle published fragments from six different mss of the Palestinian Targum.

4....and of such Palestinian (and Galilean) texts as the Aramaic sections of the Palestinian Talmud and Misrashim.

5. Two years previously Stanislaus Lyonnet of the Biblical Institute, Rome had written on the importance of the targum- ic paraphrase of Deuteronomy 30:12-14 for an understanding of Romans 10:6-8. In Paris Pierre Grelot was devoting his

attention to the same question, In the early sixties Roger Le Déaut was beginning to produce the first of his many contributions on the subject. His doctoral thesis, La nuit pascalle. Essais sur la signification de la Pâque juive à partir du Targum d'Exode XII 42 (Rome, 1963) was the first major monograph on the subject in modern times. From the mid-sixties right down to our own day studies of the kind Kahle would have desired have come in rather rapid succession. The pace has accelerated particularly during the past decade.

6. The text of Neofiti was published in five volumes between 1968 (Genesis) and 1978 (Deuteronomy), together with Spanish, French and English translations and with extensive introductions by the editor (A. Diez Macho), introductions with an indication of recent writings on the subject. The same editor is also producing a critical edition of all the Targums. The first volume with the Palestinian Targum of Numbers (Neofiti, Pseudo-Jonathan, Geniza texts, Fragment Targum, with a Spanish translation of Pseudo-Jonathan) has already appeared as part of the Madrid Polyglot (Biblia Polyglotta Matritensia, Madrid, 1977). Other editions of the Targums have also been made.

Grammars of Neofiti have also been written, but as yet for the most part have been unpublished. Studies too have been made of the age to be assigned to the form of Aramaic found in the Palestinian Targum.