

A Jewish Targum in a Christian World: An Encounter

Research Project 2008-2013

1. Summary

Jewish communities in Europe often lived in a Christian surrounding. They studied and transmitted the text of their Targums in this environment. There are many hints that textual and codicological variants relate to the history of the various Jewish communities and especially to the influence – either positive or negative – of the Christian environment. Therefore, this project aims to answer the following question: How do the diverse appearances of the authoritative Aramaic Bible translation, especially that of the Books of Samuel, relate to the internal development of the several Jewish communities and the external influences of the Christian surroundings?

2. Institutional environment

Protestant Theological University of the Netherlands (PThU), location Kampen, Departments of Biblical Studies and Church History; in cooperation with the Evangelical Theological Faculty (ETF), Leuven, Departments of Church History and Old Testament, and the VU University at Amsterdam, Department of Biblical Studies.

3. Duration of the project

1 March 2008 – 28 February 2013

4. Research team

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6. Description of the research programme

Renewing perspective and purpose

Until now, the Targum has mostly been studied as a non-historical text, as if it had had no contact with its environment. The focus lay on the Eastern texts, i.e. Babylonian and Yemenite, which are closer to the original Targum. The Targumic texts of European Jewry form a somewhat neglected field of research. The edition of Targum Samuel is based on a Yemenite text (MS Or. 2210, British Museum) and the Yemenite tradition is better represented than any other tradition. Emmanuel Martínez Borobio edited the older, Babylonian tradition. The Western traditions of the text, i.e. the Italian, Ashkenazic and Sefardic, however, are poorly represented in Sperber's edition and never investigated on their own. Kasher studied and edited the large expansions, but did not place them in the history of European Jewry.

Research into the traditions of the Targum shows that Western Jewry, mainly living in a Christian surrounding, had a richer text than the Jews in the Islamic world. Furthermore, this text is codicologically different from that in the East. This project investigates the Western text – represented in 31 complete manuscripts and about 30 fragments – asking why it was expanded, and when and where the expansions were brought in. It also investigates which codicological characteristics were developed within the Jewish communities and which were adopted from their Christian environment. Therefore, it investigates parts of the history of European Jewry, in its internal development but especially in interaction with its Christian surroundings. The investigation of the encounter between the two rather closed religious systems will enrich our knowledge of the interaction between these religions and may in a more general way contribute to our understanding of living in a multicultural society.

Theoretical framework

There are at least five different ways of approaching ancient texts that are delivered to us in various text types, spread over a considerable number of manuscripts. Two of them aim at the origins, trying to restore the original composition or at least the original final recension. A third possibility is to edit the earliest attested text. Martínez Borobio did this for the Targum of Samuel. Two other approaches focus on the history of the text's transmission. This project follows one of the latter approaches in trying to restore the historically accepted texts. This has the advantage that scribes are not seen as falsifiers of the text, but as helpful publishers, making the text accessible, intelligible, and sometimes even freshly relevant to their immediate audiences.

Problems and perspectives

Historical research has brought to light that Christians were always interested in Hebrew and Aramaic texts, though for various reasons. Their own Bible, the Vulgate, was 'only' a Latin translation. They were aware of the errors in its transmission, trying to cope with these flaws by making lists of corrections, the *correctoria*. The Church made efforts to learn Hebrew and Aramaic to improve their Vulgate. The Vienna Council of 1311/12 even prescribed that universities had to teach these languages. There was also a very negative side. Christians accused rabbis of falsifying the Hebrew Bible and forced them to censor their own Hebrew and Aramaic texts. Since there was contact between Jews and Christians, hostile as well as friendly, the question arises whether this left any traces in the textual and codicological appearances of the Targum. The answer is expected to be positive, since traces have already been found on different levels.

Codicology. The fact that European Jews began to copy complete Hebrew/Aramaic Bibles, instead of parts of it, appeared to be affected by the Christian habit to make complete Bibles. The custom to add the Targum and several commentaries to the Hebrew Bible in separate columns may have been adopted from the Christian custom to add commentaries in the margin of their Vulgate, the *glossa ordinaria*. Further investigation must bring to light whether the Christian environment affected other codicological characteristics, or *vice versa*.

Polyglots. Christian interest in Targumic texts culminated in the sixteenth century. A Christian editor printed the first Hebrew-Aramaic Bibles (Venice, 1516/17 and 1524/25). Universities in Spain asked for Aramaic manuscripts with a Latin translation, made by the convert Alfonso de Zamora. Christian printers composed polyglot Bibles, also including the Targum with a simpler Latin translation.

Text. The turning of 'Rome' into 'wicked Rome' (1 Sam. 2:6) might be due to the riots against Jewish communities in Christian Europe. The reference to Rome is omitted in the Roman Catholic Polyglots of Antwerp and Paris and turned into a threat against Aram in the Anglican London Polyglot. This is one of the examples of a Christian intervention in the text itself.

Liturgical texts. Attention must be paid to the status of the liturgical texts – prayer books and *haftarot* collections – especially within the Ashkenazic tradition. Do these books have the same version of the Targum of Samuel or do they differ from it? If the Jews adopted Christian habits in this respect, then it is to be expected that these texts are even richer in liturgical language.

Method of working

The contacts between Jews and Christians, the transmission of an Aramaic text and the history of the various European regions make it necessary that this is an interdisciplinary project, run by scholars of Biblical Studies and Church History. It is impossible to study the entire Targum Jonathan to the Prophets. Therefore, a selection has to be made. The text of Targum Samuel is chosen as the basic text, because in Kampen much material and expertise on this text is available as the result of previous projects. Basically, there are four sub-projects, based on the stemma of manuscripts:

Targum Samuel in Sefarad (ms. Johanna Tanja, PhD-student, 1 fte, 4 years) investigates the history of Sefardic Jewry, especially after the *Reconquista*, and places the extant manuscripts and editions within this history. Special attention must be paid to the position of converted Jews after the expulsion of the Jews in 1492, who copied Targumic texts for Christian universities and the Complutensian Polyglot.

Targum Samuel in Ashkenaz (dr. Hector Patmore, postdoc researcher, 0,8 fte, 3 years), investigates the history of Ashkenazic Jewry and places the extant manuscripts and editions within this history. Special attention must be paid to the complete Hebrew and Aramaic Bibles, made in the tradition of the Christian Atlantic Bibles.

Targum Samuel in the Rabbinic Bibles (Hans van Nes, PhD-student, 1 fte, 4 years) investigates the history of Ashkenazic Jewry after the invention of printing and places these editions within this history. Special attention must be paid to the cooperation of Jews and Christians in Vienna, also producing the second Rabbinic Bible, which for a long time functioned as *textus receptus* for Jews and Christians, and to the making of the London Polyglot.

The Latin Translations of Targum Samuel (dr. Eveline van Staalduine-Sulman, postdoc researcher, 0,4 fte, 4 years) investigates the five extant manuscripts and editions including a Latin translation of the Targum text, in order to conclude how the Jews explained their text to the Christians or how the Christians interpreted the Targum themselves. Special attention must be paid to the history of the bilingual Bibles and other texts that the Church produced in the Middle Ages to correct the Vulgate.

Each sub-project is divided into three phases: (a) a description of the history of those Jewish communities that produced the extant Targumic manuscripts and editions, combined with the general history of Judaism in its Christian surrounding and with the general history of codicology in that period; (b) an inventory of all possible influences of the Christian surrounding on the textual and codicological appearances, and (c) the subject of the exchange of texts between the two religions: answering in detail the questions when, where and how exchanges between Judaism and Christianity took place. This phase can also fill in details in the mediaeval and Renaissance history of Christianity's interest in the Hebrew and Aramaic Bible.