CHAPTER ONE

THE TARGUM TO THE LATTER PROPHETS IN THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES

Any attempt to reconstruct the early history of Tg Prophets has perforce to proceed with minimal assistance from ancient sources. Since even the one clear talmudic statement on the authorship of this Targum, the locus classicus of b. Meg. 3a, may be no more than a réchauffé of a tradition in the Jerusalem Talmud (j. Meg. 1:9) concerning the Greek version of Theodotion, there has been ample scope for the widely divergent views on the origin and development of Tg Prophets that have been propounded since early last century. The following survey is concerned mainly with work done on Tg Latter Prophets during this period, paying special attention to studies which have a bearing on the Twelve Prophets.

GENERAL SURVEY

From Gesenius to Dalman

At the beginning of our period of review the traditional ascription of Tg Prophets to Jonathan ben Uzziel (as b. Meg. 3a) still had powerful supporters. Among these was Wilhelm Gesenius who, in the introduction to his commentary on Isaiah, affirmed that Jonathan was the author of the Targum and set about refuting the arguments of Johannes Morinus, Isaac Voss and others in favour of a post-talmudic date of origin (pp. 66-68). Gesenius reasoned that, since Aramaic was the language of Palestine in the time of Christ, the need for an Aramaic translation of the Hebrew scriptures must have been felt already in that period (p. 67). He was not impressed by the claim that the Targumic treatment of messianic passages such as Isa. 53 was influenced by Jewish-Christian polemics, for, generally speaking, messianic references are retained in Tg Prophets regardless of any Christological use to which they may have been put by the church. Nor could Gesenius accept that the mention of Armilus in Tg Isa. 11:4 derived from the post-talmudic era, since the idea of the ‘Antichrist’ is as old as the New Testament, and the name Armilus is, in any case, of uncertain origin (pp. 67-68). As positive evidence for the early origin of Tg Prophets, he pointed to the purity of the language in which it is written and to the absence of references, as he thought, to the fall of the Second

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CHAPTER ONE

Commonwealth (p. 68). Moreover, consideration of the style of this Targum in both the Former and Latter Prophets suggested that it was the work of a single author (pp. 69-71).

Some confirmation of Gesenius’ position on the early origin of Tg Prophets, if not on its authorship, was forthcoming a few years later when C.A. Credner published his study of the Peshitta version of the Twelve Prophets. We shall be returning to this significant little work later in this chapter, but may anticipate Credner’s conclusion that the influence of Tg Prophets is already discernible in the Bible text used by Ephraem Syrus, and that written Targums must therefore have been in existence by the third century A.D., and probably for some considerable time before then.

Leopold Zunz, whose chief claim to fame in the Targumic field rests on his suggestion that there once existed a complete Palestinian Targum to the Prophets (see below, ‘The Palestinian Question’), also defended the traditional authorship of Tg Prophets in his chapter on the Targums in Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden.\(^2\) Taking the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek for analogy, Zunz suggested that there must have been written Aramaic translations of most of the Hebrew Bible by the time of the Hasmoneans (p. 65), while at the same time he accepted the tradition that the official version of Tg Prophets was composed by Jonathan ben Uzziel (p. 66). And although Abraham Geiger assures us in his review of the book that Zunz subsequently rejected the view that this Targum represents to any significant extent the work of the said Jonathan,\(^3\) the original position remains unchanged in the second edition of 1892.

Gesenius’ viewpoint and the arguments by which he supported it are echoed in the commentaries on the Twelve Prophets published by Laurenz Reinke between 1856 and 1870.\(^4\) Each of the commentaries includes a review of the ancient versions for the book in question, with the sections on the Targum consisting mainly of translations into German of those parts which deviate from the MT. Observations of a more general nature are made in the volume on Malachi. Reinke was especially impressed by the argument that a Targum originating in the talmudic era would not have interpreted messianic texts in a manner detrimental to the interests of the Jewish constituency for which it was composed (p. 69).

Abraham Geiger did not attach any historical value to the tradition of b. Meg. 3a as regards the literary activity of Jonathan ben Uzziel, though he did allow the existence of a Palestinian proto-Targum.\(^5\) Following what Pinkhos Churgin later dubbed ‘the fanciful hypothesis first formulated by

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\(^2\) Die gottesdienstlichen Vorträge der Juden, historisch entwickelt (Berlin, 1832). The volume was described by Emil G. Hirsch as ‘the most important Jewish work published in the nineteenth century’ (JE 12, p. 701). References are to the second edition (Frankfurt, 1892).

\(^3\) In WZJT 3 (1837), p. 250.

\(^4\) Der Prophet Malachi (Giessen, 1856), pp. 67-77; Der Prophet Zephanja (Münster, 1868), pp. 21-31; Der Prophet Haggai (Münster, 1868), pp. 30-34; Der Prophet Habakuk (Brixen, 1870), pp. 38-52. Cf. also his Zur Kritik der älteren Versionen des Propheten Nahum (Münster, 1867), pp. 55-64.

\(^5\) Urschrift und Übersetzungen der Bibel (Breslau, 1857; Frankfurt, 1928), pp. 163-64.