TWO IN ONE: RENDERINGS OF THE BOOK OF ISAIAH IN TARGUM JONATHAN

Bruce Chilton

The Targumim have been intensively studied since the discovery of Neophyti I, a Targum of the Pentateuch, by Alejandro Díez Macho. Pentateuchal Targumim continue to be a topic of considerable controversy in regard to their dating, their purposes, and their interrelationships. Targum Jonathan to the Prophets has proven much easier to reach agreement about.

The theory of the formation of the Isaiah Targum in two principal phases was first advanced in 1982.\(^1\) The theory holds that prior to the revolt of Simeon bar Kosiba (bar Kokhba) in 132 CE, the first exegetical framework of the Targum of Isaiah was produced. That exegetical framework organized then current translations of the Hebrew text into a powerful vehicle of opposition to the Romans and propaganda for the restoration of the Temple. During the fourth century, the second exegetical framework of the Isaiah Targum was developed. With its completion, the whole of the Hebrew text of Isaiah was rendered, and the perspective of the translation as a whole was coordinated with the concerns of the Babylonian academies (especially Pumbeditha’s, where the work was encouraged under Joseph bar Hyya).

After the theory of two exegetical frameworks was developed for the Targum of Isaiah, it was applied to the Targum of the Former Prophets, the Targums of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and the Targum of the Minor Prophets.\(^2\) Today, then, the development of Targum

---


2 The paradigm is applied in D. J. Harrington and A. J. Saldarini, Targum Jonathan of the Former Prophets (ArBib 10; Wilmington: Glazier; Edinburgh: T. &
Jonathan in two major phases appears to be a matter of consensus. Even claims to offer radical departures from the consensus wind up confirming it. For example, it has recently been asserted that the Targum Jonathan was not intended for popular usage in synagogues, but for academic reflection. In fact, the original theory of two frameworks called attention to the disparity between the rabbinic experts who produced the Targumim and the synagogues which were the targets of the operation. The rabbis were put in the position of attempting to influence practices of interpretation over which they held no authority a priori. They were striving to rationalize, within their own theologies, interpretative traditions which were of long standing in some communities. Moreover, the difference between the interpretation of the first framework and the interpretation of the second framework is manifest. Propaganda for revolt and homilies for settled accommodation to the Sassanids obviously represent different perspectives. The theory of exegetical frameworks accommodates tensions between academy and synagogue, and among academies.

The consensus, then, is faring well in its second decade, although continuing historical work will no doubt be welcomed. The challenge which most pressingly remains to be faced, however, is of a different order. While the differences in the interpretative strategies of the distinct frameworks within Targum Jonathan have been widely recognized, little analysis of the particular characteristics of the frameworks as readings of Isaiah has been offered.

To some extent, no doubt, that has been a consequence of conventional attitudes among Targumists. For much of the time since 1949, interest in the Targumim has been greatest among those concerned with the New Testament and Christian origins. Such scholars will be

---


---

4 In this connection, it is interesting that interpreters developed the practice of consulting non-Rabbinic speakers in the process of translation; cf. Gen. Rab. 79.7 (on Gen 33:19) and Chilton, The Glory of Israel, 3-4.