Like other rabbinic writings which expound the biblical information about the place, time, and circumstances of God’s gift of the Torah to Israel, the targumim of the Pentateuch regard Exodus chapters 19 and 24 as one continuous narrative, in such a way that the one chapter can be read in the light of the other.¹ No fewer than six targumim are extant for the whole of Exod 19, namely Targum Onqelos (= TO); Pseudo-Jonathan (= PJ); Fragment Targums in the manuscripts Paris 110 (= FTP), Vatican 440 (= FTV), and Cairo Geniza manuscripts (= CG); and Neofiti (= TN) with its marginal and interlinear glosses.² Exodus 24, however, is represented in its entirety only by TO, PJ, and TN, with FTP preserving targum of verses 10–11, and FTV the single verse 10. These targumim often share with other rabbinic texts common understandings of key words and expressions in the narratives: thus the description of Israel as God’s אֶרֶץ in Exod 19:5 evokes from all extant targumim the notion that Israel are חָיָּה “beloved,” in common with the Mekilta de R. Ishmael Bašodesh 2:48–53 on this verse; and the interpretation of all extant targumim of Exod 24:11 that those who ascended Sinai appeared to eat and drink in God’s presence is shared with Rav’s understanding of this verse preserved in b. Ber. 17a. Indeed, many examples of interpretation shared by the individual targumim

¹ This is most evident in the chronological scheme set out in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan Exod 19:1, 3, 9, 10–13, 16, continuing into Exod 24:1, 16, with which compare and contrast b. Shab. 86b, 88a; Mek. de R. Ishmael Beshallah 2:1; 3:4ff.

and other rabbinic sources have been noted over the years, and there
is no need to rehearse them here.\(^3\)

By way of contrast, this paper will attempt to discern and comment
upon the differing emphases and concerns which a close reading of the
individual targumim bring to light. In particular, it will investigate the
stances of the several targumim towards the giving of the Torah and
three central matters: the place of the Temple and its relationship to
Torah; the Synagogue and Beth Ha-Midrash and their relationship to
Sinai; and the mystical traditions associated with the theophany at Sinai
as suggested by the targumim. Careful analysis of these items may help
us to elucidate the varied ways in which the targumists understood the
gift of the Torah to Israel, and their conceptions of the meaning of
this central biblical event for their hearers and readers.

1. The Giving of the Torah, the Temple,
and the Temple Service

The Bible itself suggests that Sinai was a sanctuary, at least for the
occasion of the giving of the Torah.\(^4\) Thus, like Zion in later times, it
is a mountain on which the Divine Presence is revealed (Exod 19:2,
11, 18–24; 24:9–18). Consequently, it has set boundaries which, if
transgressed, lead to the death of the offender (Exod 19:12–13), and in
whose vicinity only those who have sanctified themselves may congregate
(Exod 19:10–11). Although the Bible has not yet told of the appoint-
ment of sacred ministers, there are nonetheless priests at Sinai (Exod
19:22, 24); an altar is set up (Exod 24:4, 6), and sacrificial blood is dashed upon the altar

\(^3\) See, for example, Roger le Déaut, \textit{Targum du Pentateuque II Exode et Lévitique} (Paris:
Cerf, 1979), 152–61, 199–203; Bernard Grossfeld, \textit{The Targum Onqelos to Exodus} (ArBib 7;
Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1988) on chapters 19 and 24; Martin McNamara, Charles
2; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1994), 79–83, 103–5; Israel Drazin, \textit{Onkelos on the
Torah שמות Exodus} (Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing House, 2006/5766), 116–24,
158–66. For a detailed study of these chapters, discussing relationships between the
targumim and other rabbinic texts, see also Jean Potin, \textit{La Fête juive de la Pentecôte}, (2
vols.; Paris: Cerf, 1971). In this volume, Diana Lipton places targumic and Talmudic (as
well as Christian) interpretations of “God’s back,” from the second Sinai ascent (Exod
33:12–23), in conversation with one another; see “God’s Back! What Did Moses See on
Sinai?” 287–311.

\(^4\) On this point, made explicit by the Ramban, see further Nahum Sarna, \textit{The JPS
Torah Commentary Exodus} (Philadelphia/NewYork/Jerusalem: Jewish Publication Society,