
It is good to see that after the commentaries on Targum Judges and Targum Samuel a book has been published in the same line with descriptions of the manuscripts and commentary on the text of Targum Zephaniah. The book gives an overview of the text as annotated translation of the Hebrew Zephaniah, as well as the history of its growth and change. For this purpose, Ho studied manuscripts from several traditions: Babylonian, Yemenite, Palestinian, Ashkenazi, and Sefardi. She also included Rashi and Radaq, whenever they had a divergent quotation from Targum Zephaniah. This broad approach gave her more than once the opportunity to trace the origin of a variant reading.

Chapter 2 gives an overview of all the used manuscripts. It is good to read the descriptions and the colophons. It places the manuscripts within the historical background in which they were written. What is unclear, is the method with which Ho made her stemma’s. She introduces the term ‘true variants’ (p. 168), but did not indicate whether these variants refer to the most original text or not. Her criteria are not straightforward, because the criterium ‘they serve an interpretative function’ may as well be used for later interpretations or insertions. The criteria even include errors made at different times in different traditions, but independent of each other: three manuscripts have the same transposition (p. 287), which could well be made independently.

The book has many pleasant sides for the user. Ho uses the same base text as Sperber in his edition, i.e., Or. 2211 (London). This is a beautiful text and the reader can simply follow Sperber’s edition while reading this book. In one case, however, she makes the mistake of introducing a unique reading of the manuscript as the Targum text (p. 338). Ho gives much information on the Hebrew text and its difficulties. She also summarizes many modern solutions for all the problems, even though they have nothing to do with the way the Targum renders the text. Readers who are in the first place interested in the Hebrew text, will be pleased with this approach. It shows the difference between modern commentators and the makers of the Targum at the same time.

The book shows on several occasions that the Targum tried to translate the Hebrew text as a unity. The text is explained as a translation from the Roman times and Ho tries to link the choices of the Targum to its historical and social context (e.g. pp. 212, 227). This procedure gives Targum Zephaniah an unexpected reality and historical roots. Sometimes, the proposals to date certain
renderings feel far-fetched. That the singular ‘master’ in TgZeph 1.9 could refer to a king or high priest, is already speculative, but not impossible. The fact, however, that four Ashkenazi and one Sefardi manuscripts read the plural ‘masters’, cannot easily be regarded as an allusion to ‘Temple functionaries’ (p. 222). The plural is the most logical translation of the Hebrew plural and must in the first place be considered a return to the Hebrew text, especially since it only occurs in the later European manuscripts and not throughout the entire stemma.

The almost literally translated verse 2.4 is connected to Rome, although four Philistine places are mentioned. Since Ekron, the last placename, stood for Caesarea, it could well be connected to the Roman procurators of Judea, who lived in this town (p. 268). ‘From the third century on, Caesarea became a center of great Jewish learning’ (p. 269). Whereas the Targum does not deviate from the Hebrew text and gives no reference to Rome or the Roman procurators at all, Ho still adds the reasoning: ‘If TJ relates in our verse to Ekron as Rome, then it has to be dated before the 3rd century’. It could be, but it is not in the text. Likewise with Ho’s reference to Hellenism (p. 257) as a comment on the phrase ‘a generation who does not desire to return to the Torah’. It is, without textual evidence, pinpointed to a very specific situation: ‘Especially in mind is Hellenism led by the Sadducees in the 1st century BCE-1st century CE’. The links to the early Roman period could well be true, but the Targum text is too general to locate it in a particular date and century.

Ho provides many theological arguments why certain translations were made. Many parallel passages from early Jewish literature are cited, mostly in line with the Targum. Sometimes passages from other Jewish books are not parallel at all (pp. 224–226), what indicates that the Targum went its own way in interpreting Zephaniah. A variety of theological issues is summarized in Chapter 4. Also in this respect, Ho seems a bit overzealous sometimes. The difference between the use of the status constructus מלך and the genitive construction of מלך_plus_ד must be explained on grammatical grounds, not on theological (pp. 196–197). The forthcoming book of Renaud Kuty will give more clarity. Likewise, there is no theological difference between the use of the emphatic superstitum הבש and the construct הבש (p. 207). The variant הוא רבי in 1.4 must not be considered ‘created by ignorance’ (p. 204) en does not mean ‘concerning the house of’, but it means ‘upon those of the house of’. This construction is often used in the Targum to indicate a plural without actually