Profile Targum Esther Sheni

Excerpt from: Database of Anonymous and Pseudepigraphic Jewish Literature of Antiquity, c. 200 BCE to c. 700 CE, ed. A. Samely, R. Bernasconi, P. Alexander, and R. Hayward

Researcher: Robert Hayward

Editions, translations and selected studies


The sign # is used for entries which the Targum would share with the entry for the biblical book ‘Esther’, that is, points which, while important for the structure of Targum Sheni, are created directly from the original Hebrew text by producing very largely the same sentences in the same sequence.

1. Self-Presentation of the text

1.1.5. Important text witnesses attest to a heading which is not integrated with the body of the text or with any introductory frame, implying one or more of the kinds of information under 1.1.1–4. The title Targum Sheni is found as a heading of this text in the First Rabbinic Bible (Bomberg, Venice, 1517); and from the same period we hear of a Targum Jerushalmi of Esther, also dubbed Sheni, from the Meturgeman of Elias Levita. The Targum Jerushalmi of Megillat Esther is quoted by Rashi in his commentary on Deut. 3.4, where he cites what is the text of Targum Sheni Est. 1.11; and he seems to refer to the same Esther Targum again in commenting on 1 Kgs. 10.19, where he speaks of it as Aggadat Megillat Esther. It would seem that this same text is designated by Tosafot bMeg 12b as ‘Midrash’, whereas Tosafot bHag 11a speak of Targum to Megillat Esther. Reference to individual words and phrases of the Targum which we now know as Targum Sheni is to be found in the ‘Arukh of Nathan b. Yehiel, a contemporary of Rashi, who quotes it often. Of the manuscript witnesses to the text, MS Nürnberg, Municipal Library Solg. MS 1.7.20 places this text immediately following the First Targum of Esther: it is introduced by an abbreviation of the words Targum Aher, ‘Another Targum’. 1.6. The approximate word count or other indication of comparative size is: c. 15,200 words, determined by copying and pasting the CAL electronic text (following Grossfeld’s critical edition) into an OpenOffice document and using word count.

1.7. The text’s Inventory Profile should be seen in the light of the following further information on completeness, thematic progression, aesthetic effects, etc. The end of the text in all MSS and prints presents the closing words of Est. 10.3, ‘and spoke peace to all his descendants’, translated into Aramaic, the translation remaining very close to the Hebrew text. Only three witnesses add anything to this, namely the Paris and first Parma MSS which add ‘of the house of Israel’; and the British Library MS 2375, which adds ‘in his prophecy for/to them’. The beginning of the Hebrew text of Esther, ‘And it came to pass in the days of Ahashverosh’, in all witnesses is translated into Aramaic only after a preceding meta-linguistic discussion of five instances of the phrase ‘and it came to pass in the days of …’, all of which are held to portend trouble. This meta-linguistic discourse continues, and is discussed further in this section, below. The text signals, by the means described here, that its principal concern is the narrative of Esther as given by the Hebrew Bible. All MSS witnesses, except only British Library MS 2375 and Paris Hebrew 110, set the Hebrew text of Esther along with the Aramaic Targum, the latter either interlined or alternating with the Hebrew text, or set in a column parallel with the Hebrew. The Copenhagen MS