

Targum

The Aramaic translation of the Tanach is known as the Targum and was used by the Jews as early as the Second Temple period. The noun Targum (תרגום) is derived from the verb Targum (תרגם) means a document written in Aramaic. The Aramaic passages in the Tanach (Genesis, Jeremiah, Daniel, and Ezra) were originally called to as “Targum” while the Hebrew was called “Mikra”.¹

Ezra 4:7: And in the days of Artaxerxes, Mithredath Tabeel and the rest of his colleagues wrote with peace, to Artaxerxes, the king of Persia, and the script of the epistle was written in Aramaic (וּמְתָרְגָּם) and explained in Aramaic.²

According to Mishnaic interpretation, the verb “Targum” refers to a translation from Hebrew into any other language and the noun “Targum” may refer to the translation of the Tanach into any language other than Hebrew. However, the use of the term “Targum” by itself only means the Aramaic version of the Tanach.¹

Targum Onkelos is the Babylonian Targum to the Torah. The work has been identified with Aquila of Sinope. According to the Jerusalem Talmud Megillah 71c, “Aquila the proselyte translated the [Torah] in the presence of R. Eliezer and R. Joshua, who praised him in the words of [Psalm 45:3].”¹ Some believe that the name “Onkelos” originally referred to Aquilla but was applied to the Aramaic translation instead of the Greek translation. However, we may never know who the author was since the author takes great pains to avoid any type of personification or identification. Since Talmudic times, the Yemenite communities recite the Targum Onkelos alternately with the Hebrew verses of the Torah in the synagogue.

Targum Yonatan is the Babylonian Targum to the Nevi'im [Prophets] section of the Tanach. Talmudic tradition attributes its authorship to Yonatan ben Uzziel. It is similar in style to the Targum Onkelos. Since Talmudic times, the Yemenite communities recite the Targum Yonatan alternately with the Hebrew Haftorah verses of the Nevi'im in the synagogue. The Talmud in Berachot 8b states: “The Gemara says that if [one] reads the Parshah twice each week and its Targum once, ‘his days and years are lengthened.’”³ Many people believe that this Targum refers to Targum Yonatan as well as to Targum Onkelos.

Targum Yerushalmi was the only officially recognized Targum of the Torah and the Nevi'im (Prophets). This targum was frequently cited by early authors including Rashi and David Kimhi. Eighty extracts from the Targum Yersuahalmu are contained in the Codex Reuchlinianus (written in 1105). The quotes in this Targum are mostly haggadic additions – frequently traceable back to the Babylonian Talmud – indicating that the Nevi'im portion of this Targum belongs to a later period.¹

The Tehillim (Psalms) and Iyov (Job) Targumim “form a separate group, and, in the view of their entire agreement in diction, hermeneutics, and use of the Haggadah, may have a common origin.”¹ The Mishlei (Proverbs) Targum differs from other translations of the Tanach because it contains Syriac characteristics and was seen as originally intended for use by Jews who spoke the Syriac dialect. This Targum contains very few haggadic paraphrases. The Hamesh Megillot

(Five Megillot) Targumim – Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther – are generally classed together because they are essentially detailed haggadic stories. The Esther Targum is the only one of the five that has specified rules for reading according to halachah (Jewish Law). The Divrei Hayamim (Chronicles) Targum “This Targum follows the Palestinian Targumim both in language and in its haggadic paraphrases, although it shows the influence of the Babylonian Talmud also.”¹

¹Bacher, Wilhelm. Targum. Jewish Encyclopedia, 1906.

²“The Complete Jewish Bible.” chabad.org Chabad, n.d.

³“Berachot 8b.” shemayisrael.co.il Shema Yisrael Torah Network, n.d.

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