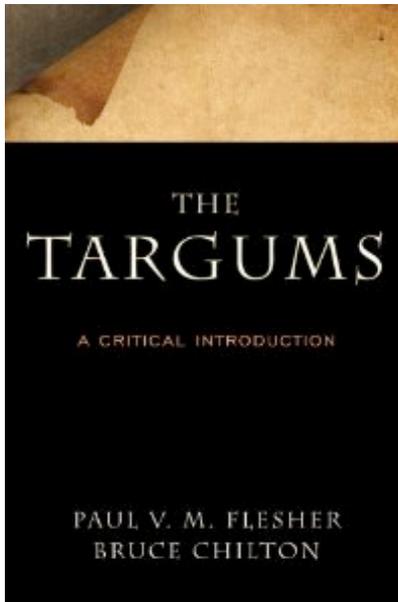


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**Chilton, Bruce, and Paul V. M. Flesher**

***Targums: A Critical Introduction***

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For much of its history as a discipline, targumic studies has occupied a peripheral place in the consciousness of scholars with interests as diverse as the biblical versions, text criticism, Aramaic studies, New Testament backgrounds, and rabbinic Judaism. The main risk of nurturing such a passing interest in Targum studies is that it may inadvertently encourage an acquaintance with the literature that is equally passing. This volume by Flesher and Chilton mitigates this risk by offering a “critical introduction” to the targumic literature that seeks to illuminate not only the literature itself and its relationship to early Judaism and Christianity but also its academic study. The complementarity of the authors’ own particular interests and expertise in targumic studies and a certain sympathy of approach have no doubt encouraged this joint venture, despite all the challenges that such an approach undoubtedly entails.

Following a very brief introduction (ch. 1), the first meaningful section (“Getting Started”) begins with a definition of “Targum” (ch. 2), which follows the current trend of focusing on the formally distinctive feature of its translational approach, namely, that the Targum is a seamless blend of highly literal translation of the Hebrew text and at times expansive interpolations. While increasingly “de rigueur” among those working in targumic studies, the emphasis on more formal definitions of Targum and the helpful illustration of it

offered here is welcomed—if only to disabuse some readers of a misconception of Targum as little more than an ancient exercise in expansive elaboration.

This corrected understanding of the Targum is reflected in the first two of seven rules offered by the authors as principles that describe, rather than define, the targumic approach to translation (ch. 3). Beyond these two rules, a set of five secondary rules are offered (e.g., occasional omission of words) that nuance the Targum's approach to integrating its interpretation with the translated text. The illustration of these rules with examples in both Hebrew and English texts is helpful, though predictably there is little space to explore at any length the tensions that might exist between the rules or any kind of hierarchy of their application. Indeed, the authors' disinterest in claiming that the translators followed each rule suggests a significant "rowing back" from any serious intent to construe these as prescriptive and confirms the status of these rules as a heuristic device for further explicating the nature of the targumic approach to translation.

The basic but competent survey of rabbinic literature that concludes the opening section (ch. 4) has the feeling of an excursus—albeit one that is understandably required by the authors' interest in the relationship between the Targums and rabbinic Judaism. That the picture of rabbinic Judaism offered by the authors is inflected by the work of Jacob Neusner is far from surprising, given their prefatory acknowledgment of his influence on them and the work under review. While not all of Neusner's work has been equally influential, the continuing influence of especially his early work on scholars such as Chilton and Fleisher and many others suggests that the authors' declaration of a "post-Neusnerian" era for the study of rabbinic Judaism may be slightly premature.

The devotion of the second major section of the volume to the pentateuchal Targums allows Fleisher to introduce the uninitiated reader to both the texts and the methodological challenges they pose for scholarship. Following an introduction to the texts themselves that differentiates Pseudo-Jonathan, Onkelos, and the Palestinian Targums according to linguistic dialect and approach to translation and expansion (ch. 5), Fleisher offers an illustrated synopsis of his own longstanding interest and endeavor in the analysis of the sources and developmental history of the Palestinian Targum tradition (ch. 6). A synoptic approach familiar to students of the Gospels allows him to discern a Proto-Palestinian Targum source along with a source drawn on uniquely by Pseudo-Jonathan. While the slightly apologetic tone of the chapter reflects an awareness that the nature and, in some circles, unfashionability of source-critical approaches has limited its reception, the clear presentation of the approach and its results serves to illustrate its contribution to deepening our knowledge of the Palestinian Targum tradition.

Following a treatment of the relationship between Onkelos and the Palestinian Targums (ch. 7), whose results are rather inclusive and suggest the need for further work, Flesher moves on to discuss the pentateuchal Targums in rabbinic literature (ch. 8). Most interesting is the observation of the theoretical preference of the Palestinian rabbis (as reflected in the Yerushalmi) for Greek translation of the Bible at the expense of Aramaic, despite the appearance of Palestinian Targum texts in Palestinian rabbinic literature. In discussing the dating of the Targums of Israel (ch. 9), Flesher takes up a thorny and much-debated issue within targumic studies, coming to the conclusion that Onkelos/Proto-Onkelos probably originated between 50 and 150 C.E., with the Palestinian Targums appearing sometime between 150 and 400–450 C.E., by which time Pseudo-Jonathan had latterly appeared. Quite apart from the dates arrived at (which may be and will be debated), Flesher's reflections on a methodology that incorporates an understanding of the history of the text's development with a knowledge of Jewish Aramaic linguistic development are welcome, as is the recognition that this work is only beginning and should continue along the lines indicated and exemplified by the recent work of Robert Hayward ('Red Heifer and the Golden Calf: Dating Targum Pseudo Jonathan,' in Flesher, *Targum Studies*, 1:9–32, repr. in Hayward, *Targums and the Transmission of Scripture*, 234–58). In addition we might suggest that this process of dating the Targums must now be intentionally related to further investigation of and correlation with the attitudes and dispositions to the Targums seen in the rabbinic literature.

In the third major section of the volume, the pentateuchal Targums give way to the Targums of the Prophets and the Writings. After a prefatory introduction to the origins and authorship of Targum Jonathan to the Prophets, Chilton recapitulates his studies of Targum Isaiah and engages with scholarship that has responded to his work (ch. 10). His previously published interest in the issue of the Messiah in Targum Isaiah is resumed as a means of demonstrating the imposition of two exegetical frameworks he associates with the Tannaitic and Amoraic traditions that successively shaped the Targum of Isaiah. Encouraged by the reception of his ideas and undeterred by critique of them, Chilton proceeds to explore the remainder of Targum Jonathan (ch. 11) in light of them while at the same time surveying the work of others (e.g., W. Smelik, *The Targum of Judges* [Leiden: Brill]). Chilton's energy is expended in explaining how and why various books within Jonathan only appear to display his Amoraic framework but not a Tannaitic one—a question that is answered largely with reference to the willingness of the Amoraic meturgemanim to redact and indeed censor the work of their Tannaitic predecessors. While not all will be persuaded by this extension of his analysis and some will wish for a fuller and deeper coverage of books beyond Isaiah, Chilton's résumé does certainly give

the introductory reader a helpful insight into some of the questions that have exercised both him and other scholars laboring in the Targum of the Prophets in recent decades.

The fact that the Targums of the Writings are treated less extensively (ch. 12) is hardly surprising, given that these texts have attracted less interest from students of the Targum generally and indeed from the authors themselves. While Targum Esther receives the fullest treatment thanks to its existence in two quite different and quite fascinating versions, the chapter offers a helpful survey of the rest of the Targums of the Writings, briefly summarizing their translational character, text editions, language, and dating in relation to rabbinic literature. Moreover, the authors offer a welcome caveat to those tending to date these texts late by reminding readers that, while they are likely to be *later* in general than the Targums of the Pentateuch and Prophets, the traditions they preserve are not necessarily as *late* as has been previously supposed by some.

Under the rubric of “Targums in Late Antique Judaism,” a fourth section includes a miscellany of studies, including first a survey of “Aramaic in Judaism.” Notwithstanding the challenges of analysis posed by the Targum’s use of translational Aramaic, the size of the targumic textual corpus ensures its relevance to any discussion of Jewish Aramaic in antiquity. That this feels more like an excursus than a chapter of direct relevance to the introduction to the Targum does not detract from its value in surveying the current state of affairs. An actual “excursus” on the language of Jesus within the discussion is, in this light, even further beside the point, yet its inclusion is hardly surprising and will be useful to some, given the longstanding interest in the Aramaic background to the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus. Indeed, the suggestion (281) of a future focus on the wider textual resources of Judean Aramaic has been taken up independently by the present author in a modest way (“Re-solving the Son of Man ‘Problem’ in Aramaic,” in *Who Is This Son of Man? The Latest Scholarship on a Puzzling Expression of the Historical Jesus* [ed. L. Hurtado and P. Owen; LNTS; New York: T&T Clark, 2011], 50–60.)

In “Targum and Translation in the history of Rabbinic Literature” (ch. 14), the authors offer a careful and thoughtful discussion of the rabbinic witness rewarding the practice and theory of translating scriptures and the status/sacrality of these translational texts. While they do treat the question of the Targums in teaching and study (especially insofar as its addressed in the Tannaitic midrashim), they do not find themselves persuaded by the pedagogical emphasis endorsed in Fraade’s influential article (“Rabbinic Views on the Practice of Targum, and Multilingualism in the Jewish Galilee of the Third-Sixth Centuries,” in *The Galilee in Late Antiquity* [ed. L.I. Levine; New York: JTS, 1992], 253–86) and find strong support instead for their position that the synagogue is the primary and most important context in which to understand the function of the Targums. In “Targums as Scripture and Hidden Interpretation” (ch. 15), the authors offer some

speculations based on the synagogal use of the Targum and the presumed inability of the majority of attenders to distinguish between the meaning of the Hebrew and that ascribed to it by the Aramaic Targum. While there is little by way of evidence offered, some of the inferences are plausible and thought-provoking. Finally, in “Ancient Scripture Translations” (ch. 16), the reader is supplied with a basic summary of the translational approaches adopted in a wide, though not comprehensive, range of ancient versions. While the limits of such a survey are evident—not least given the lack of consistency within a single version (e.g., Septuagint)—the structuring of the survey with one eye on the formal definition of Targum offered by the authors at the outset facilitates its contribution to the volume.

The fifth and penultimate section takes up the Targum’s relation to early Christianity—again an opportunity for Chilton to return to territory familiar to him and readers acquainted with his earlier work in this area. After supplying a taxonomy of relationships between the Targumim and the New Testament (ch. 17), the question of retroversion of the sayings of Jesus is taken up (ch. 18). Although this topic does relate clearly to translation and Aramaic, the actual relevance of it for the purposes of a volume introducing the Targums is less clear, particularly given the translational nature of much of the Aramaic we find in the Targums. Nevertheless, the insights and method offered by Chilton will undoubtedly be of interest to those with a specialist interest in this subject. The final chapter in this fifth section, “Memra in the Fourth Gospel” (ch. 19), continues Chilton’s interest in the targumic usage of the Aramaic term *memra*, often translated by “word,” and how it resonates beyond the targumic corpus. He joins McNamara in arguing that *memra* does indeed inform the usage of the Logos in John’s Gospel and that this latter usage is not purely or merely christological. The erroneous impression that *memra* functions primarily as a hypostasis in targumic usage is helpfully corrected by Chilton in favor of a recognition of its role as characterizing God’s activity in commanding. Whether or not this targumic background has influenced the usage of Logos in John’s Gospel, however, especially in the prologue, where it features so famously, is less certain, though certainly not implausible.

The final section of the volume offers “Conclusions and Prospects” and begins with a discussion of the Akedah in early Jewish and Christian interpretation (ch. 20). This again resumes Chilton’s prior interest in the interpretive history of Gen 22 especially but not only in relation to targumic literature. The value of such an exercise at the end of the volume lies less in its tracing of targumic resonance with rabbinic and Christian interpretations—which by this time has already been offered ample coverage—and more in the discussion of targumic interpretation of Gen 22 in the light of the latter’s interpretation in the literature of the Second Temple period more broadly. In the volume’s concluding chapter (ch. 22), “Targums in the Rabbinic World and Beyond,”

Flesher begins by probing briefly the fate of the Targums during the Geonic and medieval periods. The brevity of the treatment reflects, at least in part, the decline in Aramaic and thus inevitably the use of the Targums themselves, especially within the synagogue, but it also offers a tacit endorsement of Flesher's encouragement that more research is needed in these areas. Much the same might be said of the suggestive connections drawn by Flesher between the hermeneutical practices of the Targums and the production of later non-Aramaic translations. Even more interesting are Flesher's musings regarding the targumic qualities of biblical interpretation as we find it in the visual medium of film. Unsurprisingly, the most salient parallels to a targumic approach are found in the use and especially expansion of biblical text in the filmic dialogue or narratorial voice—a phenomenon that Flesher helpfully illustrates with reference to films depicting the life and passion of the Christ.

A single appendix, "The Parallel Expansions of Genesis 28–50," offers a tabular reproduction of parallels found in all the pentateuchal Targums and reflects the particular character and complexity of the work on the pentateuchal Targums by Flesher and Mortensen. While more introductory readers will be unlikely to brave the mass of data assembled here in support of Flesher's earlier discussion, the inclusion of the appendix does at least make it more likely that those with a serious interest in the source analysis of these Targums may more thoroughly acquaint themselves with the evidence.

The provision of a very full bibliography at the end (and requisite general index) will be of great benefit to all readers, and the decision to minimize the distraction of overly fulsome footnotes by appending bibliographies to each chapter is perfectly reasonable. These are, on the whole, quite current and very helpful, and thus the absence of such bibliographies at the end of some chapters (e.g., chs. 19 and 21) is felt all the more keenly. The glossary, too, will be helpful for those coming to the book without much knowledge of terms that have been and continue to be used in scholarly discussions of the Targum.

In reflecting on the volume as a whole, it is clear that both authors' long and distinguished involvement in various aspects of the academic study of the Targum poses real opportunities and particular challenges in undertaking an introduction of the sort attempted here. On one hand, the complementary nature of the authors' primary expertise allows them to draw extensively on their own considerable work in particular areas. The attendant danger—not entirely avoided in this case—is that the volume may feel less like a fresh "introduction" and more like a compendium of the authors' previous work supplemented by the work of others at various points. While there has evidently been an effort to relate the work of the two authors (see esp. chs. 10 and 11), one might have wished for more of this—if only to confirm the unity of vision and approach that one glimpses periodically in comparing the respective contributions. Indeed, the

willingness to co-author a volume such as this should be encouraged, even if the risks of doing so could have been more fully mitigated on this occasion.

Despite the authors' disclaimer from the outset that this volume would not offer a "state of the art" of targumic studies, the truth is that this is precisely what they have done in many areas, including those in which they themselves have taken the scholarly lead. Moreover, that a "state of the art" should be offered in a "critical introduction" seems entirely right and appropriate, and the authors should be warmly congratulated for providing one of this quality and scale. While the volume does not quite offer the unity of vision and organizational coherence one might expect of an introduction penned by a single author, the compensation is a fully fledged and wide-ranging criticality that should be widely appreciated. Whether such a volume should be known as a critical introduction or, according to the current fashion, a companion, it is surely destined to be kept close at hand by any who have an interest, however passing, in the study of the Targum.