

## SUPPLEMENT

### יציב פתגם and אקדמות

The קריאת of תפילות שבועות are unique in that they contain two פיוטים which interrupt קריאת התורה and קריאת ההפטרה respectively; i.e. אקדמות and יציב פתגם. Both פיוטים were authored for the same reason; to ask רשות from הקדוש ברוך הוא to be מתרגם (translate into the venacular; in this case the venacular of the Jews who lived at the time that the פיוטים were authored), קריאת התורה and קריאת ההפטרה respectively. Why was רשות asked only on שבועות? The simple answer is because שבועות marks זמן מתן תורתנו. Today we no longer read the תורה and הפטרה and then translate the verses into Aramaic. However, we still recite these פיוטים to remember a time when we did. Their practice was that the Torah reader would read a few פסוקים and the translator would then translate. This explains why אקדמות was originally recited after the בעל קורא read a few פסוקים and is still the reason why we recite יציב פתגם after the בעל מפטיר reads two פסוקים.

Philip Goodman in his book, The Shavuot Anthology introduces אקדמות as follows:

*One of the best-known liturgical hymns is Akdamut Millin ("Introduction"), which is chanted to a traditional melody on the first day of Shavuot. Composed in Aramaic by Meir ben Isaac Neborai, a cantor in Worms during the eleventh century, it is an acrostic of ninety lines. The initial letters of each line of the first half of the piyyut are in a dual alphabetical order. The acrostic of the second part spells out the author's name, followed by a benediction: "Meir son of Rabbi Isaac, may he grow in Torah and in good deeds. Amen. And be strong and of good courage." Each line ends with the syllable ta, the last and first letters of the Hebrew alphabet, symbolizing the continuous cycle of Torah study. On Simhat Torah the Pentateuch is concluded with a reading from Deuteronomy, and the Scroll is turned back immediately to begin anew with Genesis.*

*Akdamut Millin was originally sung as a prelude to the reading of the Targum (Aramaic translation) on the theophany at Mount Sinai, following the first verse (Exodus 19.1) of the scriptural reading. This accorded with the early practice of translating into Aramaic, once the lingua franca of the Jews, every few verses of the Torah reading. Later the hymn was chanted before the kohen begins the blessing in order not to interrupt the Torah reading.*

*This piyyut with its mystical aura is a paean to G-d for His creation and for His choosing the people of Israel. It also alludes to the clash between other nations and Israel, who preserve their faith inviolate despite persecutions and the allurements offered to them if they abandon it. It concludes with the promise of rich reward to the faithful in the world to come. This hymn may have been written during the Crusades to counteract the religious disputations which sought to convert Jews.*

I have added the following to provide you some of the history behind the fact that קריאת התורה and the הפטרה were translated into Aramaic.

## THE STORY OF BIBLE TRANSLATIONS BY MAX L. MARGOLIS

### CHAPTER I THE TARGUM

It is not my intention in these pages to add one more reference-work to the many excellent ones which have to do with Bible translations. Bibliographical completeness will not be attempted. I shall confine myself to the Hebrew Scriptures of which alone I may speak with first-hand knowledge, but even so the subject is a vast one. The external or human side needs attention, but the general reader will none the less be interested to learn how the epoch-making translations go with great cultural and religious upheavals and how all of them display certain characteristics which seem to inhere in the oldest and youngest alike.

The Torah which Israel received with joyful readiness at the foot of mount Sinai was in the opinion of the rabbis originally intended for all mankind as a guide to their salvation. G-d spoke not in secret (Isaiah 45. 19), but in the open and free desert, that all men might have access to the revealed Word; indeed the Torah was offered first to the Gentiles, but Esau and Ishmael and other nations were unwilling to forego killing and immorality and stealing which the Decalogue forbids. The rabbis also assert that Joshua had the Torah engraved upon the stones of the altar (Joshua 8. 30-32) not only in the original but also in all the other tongues of the world. Of these translations the nations secured transcripts, but after reading them, they turned their back upon the Torah. Accordingly, the object of the translation would have been to make the Scriptures known to the alien. There is an element of truth in this contention, and we shall come to speak of it in connection with the earliest Greek translation (chapter II). It may suffice for the present to recall the recognition conceded by Maimonides to the two daughter-religions that through them the words of the Torah have been spread to the utmost isles and among many nations. The great Jewish thinker would have accorded unstinted praise to the stupendous efforts of modern Bible societies (chapter VII). Yet for all that the primary object of Bible translation was to serve a need nearer home, that those to whom the original was a sealed book might profit by reading the Scriptures in the language spoken by them.

Just at what time among the Jews of Palestine Hebrew ceased to be the spoken language of the people is a mooted question. The older view has it that the Jews lost their Hebrew speech in the Babylonian captivity whence they brought back with them the Aramaic. Hebrew and Aramaic are sister languages belonging to the group known as Semitic and comprising in addition Arabic, Ethiopic, and Assyro-Babylonian. There is a close resemblance among them all in structure and vocabulary, and Hebrew is related to Aramaic as Low German or Dutch is to High German. The people, of course, have no ear for resemblances often disguised, plain though they may be to the scholar. In the days of Hezekiah Aramaic was understood by the courtiers; to the common soldier it meant an

unintelligible gibberish. Ezra (in the fifth century) is reported to have read the Law to the assembled people 'distinctly' (Nehemiah 8. 8) ; according to the rabbis, he read 'with interpretation,' that is, with an accompanying rendition into the Aramaic. That, of course, may simply imply the carrying of a custom in vogue at a later period back to Ezra, to whom many other institutions are ascribed. It has been urged that the Aramaic spoken in Palestine was a dialect differing from the Babylonian variety and could not have been imported from the East. It has therefore been argued that the change of speech must have occurred in Palestine itself a century or so after Ezra. But we know now that the Jewish military colony, which settled in Egypt long before Cambyses (529-522), spoke and wrote Aramaic in the days of Nehemiah. We must understand that the change in Palestine was gradual, Hebrew succumbing in the North earlier than in the South. For a time indeed both languages were spoken and understood, until at length Hebrew vanished from the mouth of the people. As late as the second century of the current era Hebrew was still spoken in some nook or corner, but in the main it had become a sacred tongue understood by the learned, but unknown to the unlettered who conversed in Aramaic.

But the Word of G-d was to be understood of the people. Just how early the custom arose for the Scriptures, the Torah and the Prophets in particular, to be read on the sabbath in the synagogue is not known. But when these lessons had become a fixed institution, it followed of necessity that a translation into the people's speech should go hand in hand with the reading of the original. The rabbis call all translations Targum, but the name is specifically applied to the Aramaic version. At first the Targum was oral. Beside the reader stood the Targeman (hence the word 'dragoman'), the official interpreter. A verse, or in the case of the Prophets a connected section not exceeding three verses, was read in the Hebrew and immediately translated into Aramaic. Both the original, from the and the translation, from memory, were to be declaimed in the same pitch, and the interpreter was enjoined not to lean against the desk, but in deferential posture to stand some way off. The translation frequently assumed the character of free exposition with a view to inculcating the interpretation which the schools placed upon a law or custom and in general to bringing down the scriptural word to the comprehension of the common people. The prophetic lessons naturally lent themselves to amplification; the interpreter turned preacher, prefacing his remarks with a direct address to the congregation in some such words as 'O my people, sons of Israel,' or 'The prophet saith.' This freedom had its dangers, especially at the time of the rise of the heresies out of which a new religion was born. The Talmud discountenances the practice of certain interpreters who introduce the law Leviticus 22. 28 ('whether it be cow or ewe, ye shall not kill it and its young both in one day') with the homily: 'As our Father is merciful in Heaven, so shall ye be merciful on earth.' The rabbis themselves enjoin the imitation of divine mercy: 'As He is gracious and merciful, so be thou gracious and merciful.' Nevertheless the plea is made that the commandments of the Torah must not be turned into mere ethical prescriptions. The translator must not wander too far from the original. 'He who renders a verse as it reads, with strict literalness, lies; he that makes additions is a blasphemer.' In Leviticus 18. 21 it is

forbidden to give over of one's seed unto Molech; the Mishnah makes mention of a paraphrastic (free) rendering by which the prohibition was made to refer to sacrificing one's offspring through intercourse with a pagan woman. The abominable Molech worship had become a thing forgotten, and the translators thought themselves justified in applying the scriptural condemnation to a regrettable laxity prevalent in their days. Nevertheless such translators were to be silenced with rebuke. The wording of the original was paramount, and a translator who made the slightest error by investing a Hebrew word with an unwonted meaning was publicly corrected. Among the instances cited are the renderings '(plain) herbs' for 'bitter herbs' (Exodus 12. 8) and 'vessel' for 'basket' (Deuteronomy 26. 2). To quote a parallel from another quarter: when the book of Jonah was read in a Christian church in Africa from Jerome's new Latin version (chapter III), there was an uproar, because the miraculous plant (4. 6), which in the older translation based upon the Greek had been rendered 'gourd,' was now identified with the 'ivy.'

The rabbis looked with disfavor upon written Targums. Translation naturally partook of the character of interpretation, and all interpretation was classed with the oral law. It was believed that when Moses delivered the written Law into the keeping of the priests he also instructed his successor Joshua, and Joshua the elders, and the elders the prophets, and the prophets the men of the Great Synagogue, in all the ramifications of each subject by word of mouth. Writing seemed to bestow a measure of sacredness, and nothing was to rival the Scriptures in authority. 'Only the things written might be written; what was handed down by word of mouth must be transmitted orally.' The written Word of G-d, moreover, was held to be capable of more than one sense; to fasten upon it just one was not permissible. However, it was not so much the written copy that was placed under the ban as the public use of it. Written Targums were found in private possession at an early time. Rabbi Samuel son of Isaac (in the fourth century), on entering the synagogue, remonstrated with a scribe who read from a written Targum. At an earlier period it is reported of Gamaliel the Elder that he had a copy of the Targum of the book of Job immured beneath a layer of stones in the Temple. When a fire broke out on the sabbath, such volumes, as indeed copies of any other translation of the Scriptures, were to be saved along with the scrolls of the original; but the former must then be stored away, withdrawn from public use. The ancients had a wonderful memory, but as the traditional lore grew in magnitude and the retentiveness of scholars weakened, the private volumes were produced and successively recast, until at length they became the public property of the Jewish people. Mishnah, Gemara, Targum, all passed through similar stages of growth, each with its Palestinian recension and its Babylonian counterpart. Just as the Babylonian Talmud supplanted the Palestinian in point of authority, so the Babylonian Targums overshadowed those of Palestine out of which they had grown, the Babylonian schools placing their seal of approval upon a form suitable to the needs of the time.

In the foremost rank stands the Babylonian Targum of the Pentateuch which goes by the name of Onkelos. When in the sequel Aramaic had given place to Arabic as the language

spoken by Eastern Jewry, or when in the West the Jews had adopted the speech of the European nations, this Targum continued to be read and studied. On the eve of the sabbath it was customary to read the lesson in advance, twice in the original and once in the Targum. The wording of the translation was as zealously guarded as that of the original. According to the Babylonian Talmud, the version was the work of Onkelos the proselyte under the supervision of Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Joshua; but the statement, it has been clearly shown, rests upon a misunderstanding; the parallel statement in the Palestinian Talmud speaks of Aquila (Akylas) who translated the Scriptures into Greek (chapter II). Internal evidence points to the times of Rabbi Akiba in which the earlier layers of the Targum must be sought. Thus the language is but slightly tinged with foreign elements, and those are mainly Greek; where the parallel Targums of Palestinian redaction (see below) make mention of Byzantium or Constantinople, Onkelos speaks of the Romans; where Onkelos indulges in amplification of a legal (halakic) or sermonic (haggadic) character, he reproduces matter taught by Akiba and his school. The homeland of the Targum was certainly Palestine: the Aramaic of its diction is unmistakably of the Western variety, but slightly retouched by Babylonian or Eastern idioms. It was in Babylonia, however, that the Targum became authoritative in home and school.

To the scholars of the Babylonian Talmud this Targum is 'our Targum,' the one in general currency and universally recognized, as opposed to the rendering of this or that scholar operating in his own personal capacity. 'As we translate' is a frequently recurrent mode of citing it. In particular it was Rab Joseph the Blind (died in the year 323) who was familiar with the Targum, although other scholars before and after him quote from it. In the main the Targum ascribed to Onkelos exhibits a marked fidelity to the wording of the original, yet not at the cost of intelligibility; only here and there the literal rendering is given up so as to inculcate a legal point, and in the poetic passages the text is somewhat freely expanded with a view to weaving in a homily of the rabbis. It is certainly free from all the spurious renderings of the kind referred to above, which the rabbis discountenanced. The production apparently was suffered to reach the people only after it had passed muster under the critical eye of the responsible leaders. It is indeed a learned piece of work. It was meant to supersede the ampler and more popular versions upon which it probably rests. In revising the older models the author proved rather editor, excising any feature that seemed objectionable. He gave to the people that which in his opinion they most stood in need of and in a manner suitable to their comprehension.

It is fortunate, however, that the other Targums to which authority was denied did not wholly perish. We have for the Pentateuch a parallel Aramaic translation which is spoken of as the Targum of Jerusalem or the Palestinian. It used to go erroneously by the name of Targum Jonathan; it is therefore frequently referred to as Pseudo-Jonathan. Side by side with the complete text runs a parallel recension extant in a fragmentary condition. In point of redaction this Targum is certainly posterior to Onkelos; in Genesis 21, 21 the names given to Ishmael's wives are apparently those of Mohammed's. On the other hand,

elements of high antiquity are not wanting, as when in Deuteronomy 33. 11 we read: 'The enemies of the high priest Johanan shall not survive.' Moreover, it has preserved traces of an older norm of law (halakah), and points to many variations from the received Hebrew text. In general, the Palestinian Targum embellishes the text with setmonic (liaggadic) expansions; in it are also found objectionable renderings castigated by the rabbis.

Our Targum of the Prophets was, like that of Onkelos, edited in Babylonia, but we possess scanty remains of a Palestinian recension. According to the passage in the Babylonian Talmud which ascribes the Pentateuch Targum to Onkelos, the author of the translation of the Prophets was a disciple of Hillel by the name of Jonathan son of Uzziel. The Babylonian teachers (Amoraim) were well acquainted with it, and here again Rab Joseph is responsible for most of the citations. It naturally contains both older and more recent matter, but it is free from polemics with Christianity. In the Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Malachi) the subject-matter lent itself to paraphrastic embellishment, while in the historical books (Joshua, Kings) there is on the whole a scrupulous adherence to the letter. The Targums to the third section of the Scriptures (the Writings, Ketubim: Psalms -- Chronicles) are peculiar to the Palestinians. They never appear to have received official sanction. Some, like those on the Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, and one of the three on Esther, partake of the nature of midrashic works, while others, like the translation of the Psalter (contrast, however, the lengthy homily to Psalm 91), are literalistic. The Targum of Proverbs seems to have been taken over from the Christian Syrians (chapter III), as is shown by the language and the points of contact with the Septuagint. In all of them old material stands side by side with later elements, as when in Psalm 83. 7 the Hungarians are mentioned. The Samaritans, likewise, possess an Aramaic translation, naturally confined to the Pentateuch which alone they recognize as Scripture.

The chief importance which attaches to the Aramaic Targum lies in the fact that it enables us to gain an insight into the interpretation of the Scriptures at a time when tradition had not yet wholly died out. Not only those Targums which received official sanction, but also those less authoritative, keep close to the sentiments of the Synagogue, and constitute an invaluable source of information concerning the religious development in post-biblical times. Naturally the ideas which run through the Targum are identical with those which the talmudic-midrashic literature opens up to us; moreover, they have their points of contact with an older period in which the later writings of the biblical collection itself had their origin. When Maimonides engaged in warfare upon the notion which ascribed bodily form to the Deity, he was able to point to the authority of the Targums, of Onkelos in particular. The scholars may full-well know that the prophets indulge in similes likening the Creator to the creature and that the scriptural modes of speech are merely accommodations to the human ear; not so the ordinary folk. For their sake the human traits attributed to the Deity are sedulously toned down. Thus G-d does not smell the sweet savor of an offering, but accepts it with pleasure; on the Passover night He does not pass over the Israelites, but spares them; He does not go before the people, He leads it; instead of G-d hearing or

seeing, it is said that it was heard or revealed before Him; the hand that covers Moses becomes the protecting Word, just as the wind which He blows is the Word which He speaks; the finger of G-d is reduced to a blow from before Him, G-d's feet are His glorious throne, and G-d's staff is the staff wherewith miracles are wrought. Actions unbecoming G-d, as when He meets Moses to slay him (Exodus 4. 24), are ascribed to His angel. Just as G-d must not be humanized, divine appellations may not be used of human beings. Moses is to be to Aaron a master, not a G-d. The sons of G-d who took the daughters of man for wives were not even angels, for angels do not go a-wooing, but sons of rulers. There cannot be any comparison between the Lord and the G-ds. 'Who is like unto Thee among the G-ds? who is like Thee, etc.' (Exodus 15. 11) is made to read: 'There is none beside Thee, for Thou art G-d, O Lord; there is none except Thyself.' All personification of inanimate objects is wiped out. The promised land does not flow with milk and honey, but yields those products; the sword does not come, but murderers with the sword; Ezekiel does not eat the scroll, but listens attentively to its contents; and the proverb: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge' is paraphrased into the statement that the fathers have sinned and the children are beaten. Thus in deference to the ordinary intelligence which may take a figure of speech literally all the poetry of the original is sacrificed, and the elevated style of the sacred writers is reduced to commonplace. Where the honor of the Jewish people or of the heroes of biblical times is involved pains are taken that nothing of a derogatory character may adhere to them. Israel is not 'a perverse and crooked generation,' nor 'a foolish people and unwise,' but 'a generation that hath changed its deeds and is become changed, and a people that received the Law and learned not wisdom.' Rachel does not steal her father's household G-ds, she merely takes them; Jacob does not steal Laban's heart, as the Hebrew idiom has it, he just hides from him his departure; indeed he departs, he does not flee; nor does Israel flee from Egypt, he departs. Moses does not marry a Cushite woman, but a beautiful woman; Leah's eyes were pretty, not weak. An extreme case occurs in Genesis 49. 14 f., where the sense of the original is turned into its very opposite. Instead of becoming a servant under taskwork, Issachar, according to the rendering of Onkelos, shall conquer the provinces of nations and destroy their inhabitants, levying tribute upon them that are left over.

In all the points mentioned the Targum carries to an extreme a tendency which we meet with in the other ancient versions; it will therefore be unnecessary to revert to the subject again. The process indeed ascends higher up. A rabbinic tradition enumerates eighteen (or eleven) cases where the scribes 'corrected' the original reading. If Ezra is credited with introducing the corrections, we must bear in mind that in the opinion of the rabbis the ready scribe who headed the Great Synagogue not only collected the sacred writings but also edited their text. As a rule the aim is to wipe out undignified expressions concerning the Deity. To cite one example, the original reading in Habakkuk 1. 12 is said to have been 'Thou die not' in the place of the present correction: 'we die not.' There is doubt in the minds of scholars whether some of the instances adduced by the rabbis may not rest on conjecture. On the other hand, there is reason to believe that the text has been altered in a

much greater number of places. Thus where the sacred writers spoke of cursing G-d the text was made to say 'bless' for 'curse.' It is a euphemism pure and simple. Sometimes the alteration betrays itself by its form, as when in Judges 18. 30 a suspended 'n' marks the transformation of Moses, the ancestor of the Levite who ministered at the idolatrous shrine of the Danites, into Manasseh. And when at length the text had become stable, alterations which no longer could be introduced into the text itself were enjoined upon the reader who tacitly substituted a different word in the reading. Thus words which proved offensive to a more refined taste were eliminated. The culminating point, however, was reached in the translations, official or unofficial. The ancients were rather distrustful of the comprehension of the common people, and fidelity to the letter was readily sacrificed when it was felt that the scriptural truth might be obscured and the Word of G-d be brought into disrepute with the ignorant. If to-day we have largely, though not wholly, outgrown the apprehensions of the ancients, it is because we have a laity trained in a way of looking upon the Scriptures which is itself the outcome of the unremitting efforts of those earlier translators and their authoritative sponsors.