

TARGUMIC POEMS FROM THE CAIRO GENIZAH

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Introductory poems have been recognized as a targumic genre for over a century. Many compositions were listed by Zunz in his *Literaturgeschichte* as early as 1865. These had been gathered from Maḥzor manuscripts and editions, and they were related to the targum of the Torah lections for the Festivals. Zunz merely cited the first and last lines of each poem, and provided a brief description of its contents.

Many of the poems listed by Zunz were published by S. Hurwitz in his edition of the *Maḥzor Vitry* (1889); and Moses Ginsburger subsequently published two additional collections of targumic poems (1900 and 1921).

When Paul Kahle (1930) published the first major corpus of Palestinian Targum from the Cairo Genizah, he included as his MS G fragments of a poetic expansion to Exodus 20, from a Leningrad MS. Additional pages of this MS have recently been discovered by Dr. Richard White of Oxford. These new fragments contain the direct continuation of Kahle's passage as well as a new poem to Exodus 15, the Song of the Sea. Also, Yehuda Komlosh (1958) published a collection of targumic poems from a MS at the Jewish National and University Library in Jerusalem a few years ago. And in the Appendix to the edition of the Fragment-Targums, I included introductory acrostic poems to the Ten Commandments of Exodus 20 (1980, Vol. I, pp. 117–124).

These targumic poems served as introductions to the Torah readings for the Festivals or the readings for special Sabbaths. In particular, Exodus 14–15 relates the story of the Exodus from Egypt and is chanted in the synagogue on the 7th day of Passover, the traditional day of the Crossing of the Sea. Likewise, Exodus 19–20, with the story of the Sinai Revelation, was read on *Shavuoth* (Pentecost), the traditional date of the Giving of the Law. In fact, to this very day, most European and American traditional synagogues chant an Aramaic introductory poem on Shavuoth, before the Torah lection—namely, אַקְדָּמוֹת מִיַּלִּין. This, in spite of the fact that targum and other targumic poems are no longer

part of the European (Western) liturgy, which derives largely from the ancient *Babylonian* tradition.

One of the four special Sabbaths that precede the Passover Festival elicited the composition of many introductory poems. In the Palestinian liturgy, the regular order of Torah readings of the triennial cycle was interrupted on these occasions, and special readings were substituted for them. These special readings were often introduced by Aramaic poems.

Finally, Deuteronomy 34, the last chapter of the Pentateuch, which did not serve as a special festival reading in the Palestinian Rite (but which may have been considered as special by virtue of its final position in the Pentateuch), elicited targumic poems, just as it was preserved in the Fragment-Targums (cf. Shinan, 1981, p. 144).

The most celebrated of the introductory poems is אִיזִיל מֹשֶׁה ("Go Moses"), which is known from both Maḥzor Vitry and the Fragment-Targum according to MS Paris 110. It is also found in two versions among the Genizah MSS of Palestinian Targum. This poem tells the story of Moses confronting the Sea of Reeds and ordering it, in the name of the Lord, to split before the Israelites. It serves as an introduction to Exod 14:26–30. The most outstanding aspect of this poem is that a copy of it was recently identified in a 4th–5th Century papyrus in Berlin. As Yosef Yahalom has demonstrated (1978), this proves the very early composition of such alphabetic acrostic poems, going back to at least the Talmudic period. Also, by comparing the various versions of this poem, Yahalom has shown that, whereas the European MSS contain many corruptions and scribal errors, one of the Genizah manuscripts is extremely close textually to the early papyrus, and that it may be used for the reconstruction of lacunae in the papyrus. This is not very different from the situation with MSS of Palestinian Targum—where the Genizah fragments are generally the most reliable.

In the course of collecting Genizah manuscripts of Palestinian Targum in recent years, I have discovered a number of unpublished and hitherto unknown targumic poems. The remainder of this paper will be devoted to a discussion of some of the newly-discovered targumic poems.

The largest group of new compositions is related to Exod 12:2, which designates Nisan as the "first of the months." In the synagogue liturgy, Exodus 12 is read on the Sabbath before the new moon of Nisan, about two weeks before the beginning of the Passover Festival. The beginning of the passage הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם, "This month shall be for you," lends itself to the name of this special Sabbath, שַׁבַּת הַחֹדֶשׁ. A popular theme of poems composed for this occasion is the debate among the twelve months

of the year, as to which would be selected as the “first of the months.”¹ An example of such a poem was previously known from MS Paris 110 (Klein, 1980, Vol. I, pp. 72–73). Each month cites an important event in the history of Israel that took place—or would eventually take place—within it. This is followed by a refrain that is repeated by each of the months. The conclusion is God’s decision in favor of Nisan, as expressed in Exod 12:2. The following are excerpts from several such poems:

Cambridge University Library MS T-S NS 186.21r

- .1 א'תכנשו כל ירחיה דעל תרי עשר
- .2 סדריה בכן א'רח פריקיא דמפרק
- .3 כניא חביבא : בכן אחיב אייר במילא
- .4 בי יתפרק עמא מנטלא דבי יסק להון
- .5 נחתת טלא יתמטר להון מנא למיכליא
- .6 פֿזֿ אנא הוא דנסיב כלילא דבי יתפרקון
- .7 עמא בית ישראל :
- .17 ואמר אלול בי יאתי פורקנא דבי
- .18 יקום לטורא ענוחאנא ויחוח לוחיא
- .19 זמנא תניאנא ישוי יתהון בארונא פֿזֿ
- .20 זמן חשרי אמר אנא מעתד לטבן
- .21 לעלמא רחומא יתפרקון בי משויבין
- .22 דבי יום כפורא לחייבין ויום רעוא
- .23 לסליחת חובין פֿזֿ :

verso

- .7 מלכא רמא אמר בנבואחא
- .8 למַהִימַן ככל ביתא דין ניסן איחרעיחי לגאולת[א]
- .9 דהוא קדמי לירחי שתא דכֿ ידחא הֿ לכון דגֿ

Translation:

1. (*Alep*) All of the months gathered together, in their twelve
2. orders. In which month shall be the deliverances, that He will perform [for]
3. the beloved children. (*Bet*) Then ²Iyyar responded with a word:

1. This motif may be compared with the debate among mountains as to which would be the site of the Revelation, and God’s ultimate selection of Mount Sinai. See the Targumic Tosefta to Jud 5:5 (Sperber, 1959, p. 54) and Tg Ps 68:16, 17 (Diez Merino, 1982, p. 127). Also compare the debate between heaven and earth in the various Palestinian Targumim to Exod 15:12.

4. Let the extolled nation be delivered in me, for in me the fall of dew
5. will evaporate for them, [and] the manna will rain down for [them] to eat.
6. *Reffrain*] It is I who shall take the crown, for in me, the people
7. of the house of Israel will be delivered.
17. (Waw) And [°]Ellul said: Let the deliverance come in me, for in me
18. the humble one (= Moses, cf. Num 12:3) will ascend the mountain and bring down the tablets
19. a second time; [and] he will place them in the ark. *Reffrain*.
20. (*Zayîn*) Tišrê said, in turn: I am always destined for good.
21. The beloved one[s] will be delivered— in me [they] shall be saved,
22. For in me is the Day of Atonement for sinners, and the day of good will
23. for the forgiveness of sins. *Reffrain*.

verso

7. (Mem) The Exalted King [then] said in prophesy
8. to the trusted one of His household (= Moses, cf. Num 12:7): I have selected this Nisan for [the] redemption,
9. For it is first among the months of the year; as [it is] wr[itten:]
Th[is] month shall be for you, et. seq.

A second poem describes the months as casting lots in order to determine which one of them will assume primacy over the others.

Oxford Bodleian Ms. Heb. e73, folio 29v

17. בה שעתה מתכנשין כל ירחייה אמדין אלין לאילין אתון כען
18. נרמי נבוין בינינן ונידע בה' דן מנן ישראל מתפרקין והיידן
19. מינן נסב כלילה
20. [אייר] אתעני ואמר בי הנון מתפרקין ואנה הוא דנסב כלילה
21. [דבין] אשתוב נח צדיקה מן מוי דמבולה ואיעל לתכותה בשלם
22. ונפק בשלם

17. At that moment, all the twelve months gathered together and said to one another: Come, now,
18. Let us cast lots among us, that we might know in which of us Israel is to be redeemed; and which
19. of us will take the crown.
20. [[°]Iyya]r responded, and said: They shall be delivered in me, and it is I who will take the crown,
21. [For in me] the righteous Noah was saved from the waters of the flood; and he entered the ark safely (cf. Gen 7:11, 13).

Yet another poem on this same subject introduces the zodiacal sign of each month into the debate. For example:

Cambridge University Library MS T-S H11.51, folio 4r

.4 אמר ניסן

.5 לאייר דאת מתיל בתורה דליג את פרוק: o
יהיך.6 הוי ידע בעגלה דאתעביד דבר תורין
דעבדון

.7 הוא ואת דמה ליה:

folio 4v

.8 אמר ניסן לתשרי []

בכף מאזנים את

והיך את פרוק: o

מתחננין בך

צומין דתענין

ובי אינון אכלין

צלי ופטירין: o

4. Nisan said
 5. to ^olyar: Since you are likened to the ox (Taurus), how then can you be the redeemer?
 6. Know that the (golden) calf that they made was the son of an ox;
 7. and you resemble it.

verso

8. Nisan said to Tišrê: You are in the pan of the balance (Libra); how then can you be a redeemer?
 (People) are beseeching in you; and abstaining and fasting; whereas in me, they eat roast (paschal lamb) and unleavened breads.²

In all, there are at least six distinct compositions based upon the same midrashic motif of a debate between the twelve months. These poems were read or chanted in the synagogue on *Shabbat haḥōdeš*, as midrashic introductions to the Torah lection from Exodus 12.

Among the Genizah manuscripts, there are two targumic poems that were first published by Fleischer (1967–8, pp. 272, 277 n 32), and again by Heinemann (1973, pp. 365–366). As Heinemann pointed out, the language of these texts, and particularly the Greek loanwords, are of special significance. In the first poem, we find the words אליסון (= ἑλέησον, ‘save us’) and קיריס (= Κύριος, ‘Lord’); and in the second, we

2. In this MS many of the original readings are crossed out and replaced by interlinear or marginal glosses. These generally constitute improvements in the text, and have been followed in our translation.

have פולמוס (= πόλεμος, 'battle, dispute'), אגוסטוס (= Αὔγουστος, 'August One, God'), and איגיפטוס (= Αἴγυπτος 'Egypt'). The following are the passages:

Cambridge University Library MS T-S H 12.11, folio 6v

25. אליסון מה משבח הדין ירחא דביה איתפרקו אכהן ובנין: .25
 26. בפלגות ליליא איתגלי קיריס וימיניה פשוטה על ישראל: .26
 27. גיברי דמצראי איתעברו לשמא חולף דשעבידו ית עמא .27
25. (*Alep*) O save us! How glorious is this month, in which fathers and sons were redeemed.
 26. (*Bet*) At midnight, the Lord was revealed, and His right hand was spread over Israel.
 27. (*Gimel*) The mighty of the Egyptians became a ruin, because they had enslaved the people.

Oxford Bodleian Ms. Heb. e73, folio 29r

- אל פביטין דהחודש הזה .4
 נטילת רשות .5
 אתרמי פולמוס ביני ירחייה כד שלא אגוסטוס לארעה דאיגיפטוס .6
 אחון כען נרמי נבזין על מזלין ונידע בהיידן מנן ישראל מתפרקין .7
 געה ניסן והא כדן אמר להון קבילו מני כל דנאמר לכון ניסן אמר .8
 להון שחוק פומיכון דאנה הוא אבוהון ואנה הוא דפרק להון מן שעבודה .9
 החודש הזה לכם .10
4. *Alphabetic Acrostic of "This month shall be for you"*
 5. *Obtaining permission [to read the lection]*
 6. There arose a dispute among the months, when the August One sent to the Land of Egypt.
 7. Come let us cast lots on the zodiac, that we might know in which of us Israel is to be redeemed.
 8. Nisan roared, and said this to them: Hearken to me—[to] all that I shall tell you. Nisan said
 9. to them: Silence your mouths, for I am their father, and it is I who shall deliver them from bondage.
 10. (12:2) *This month shall be for you.*

Heinemann has argued that in post-Christian times *Kyrios*, and probably *Augustus* and *eleison*, would not have been used in the composition of Jewish liturgy— though they might have survived in works of an earlier period. The fact is that *Kyrios* is quite common in the targumic poems. For example, the Israelites are called פריקוי דקיריס or רחימוי דקיריס, "the redeemed/beloved ones of Kyrios," in the famous משה אוזיל דקיריס, "the redeemed/beloved ones of Kyrios," in the famous משה אוזיל דקיריס. Also, the poem on the death of Moses, that we shall refer to shortly, begins with, "Kyrios said to Moses from amidst His *šekînā*." If Heinemann's early dating is correct, then it is to be applied to quite a number of targumic poems.

Let us dwell for a moment on another linguistic aspect of the poems, namely, that of dialect. All of the poems cited thus far are written in the dialect of the Palestinian Targumim, as we know it from MS Neofiti, the Fragment-Targums and the Genizah MSS. There are, however, several pieces that display characteristics of Onqelos, such as ארי and חזי, instead of ארום and חמי, or accusative suffixes such as ואשלחניך, rather than ואשלח יתך. The explanation lies in the history of the targumim in general. Some of these poems, which were originally composed as introductions to the Palestinian Targum for festive occasions, survived as liturgical compositions even after the Palestinian Targum was replaced by Onqelos. In some cases they were appended to the Onqelos text; and in others they were preserved as separate collections, in booklets. This is very similar to the history of the Targumic Toseftot (Klein, "*Targumic Toseftot*"). It is therefore not unusual for some of these poems to have undergone an "Onqelosization" of their language. In fact, the collection of poems published by Komlosh (1958, pp. 469–475) underwent precisely this type of transformation. Fortunately, the ancient copyists were not entirely consistent, leaving behind vestiges of the original Palestinian dialect. Without entering into a complicated long-running debate, I believe that there is *similarity of process* between this transformation of the Poems and Toseftot and the transformation that some early Palestinian Targum underwent in order to produce the Pseudo-Jonathan Targum—namely, a partial and inconsistent "Onqelosization."

One of the most unusual new texts from the Genizah is a targumic poem to Exod 12:2, containing lunar omens. These signs, based on the color and position of the moon, are first presented in a general context and then are interpreted according to their occurrence in each of the twelve months. The following is the first half of the poem, and a tentative translation.³

Cambridge University Library MS T-S H11.51, folio 1v

- .7 אתבחר זהרה לקידוש ירחין:
 .8 לעידנין ולזמנין: ולריח ג' חוחין ו' ביה
 .9 סימנין: ועוד סימונין [כד] הוא סלק
 .10 חכימין מתבוננין גלי עיניך ואמור

3. I would like to thank Profs. Jonas C. Greenfield, Stephen A. Kaufman and Michael Sokoloff for their helpful suggestions regarding some of the readings and translations in this difficult text.

folio 2r

1. the lookout to raise his eyes, and survey the moon (the circle).
(*Dalet*) For if, when
2. it rises, its horns are even, then the world is in danger.
3. (*Hē*) Now if you see the moon pointing southward, and its other horn
4. inclined (pointing) to the north, (*Waw*) then that shall be a sign for you: beware
5. of evil, for from the north oppression shall come forth (cf. Jer 1:14).
6. (*Zayin*) If the moon was seen pointing to the north, and its other
7. horn inclined to the south, (*He*) there will be great rejoicing in (to) the entire
8. royal court. There will be cheap prices and abundance in the world.
9. (*Tē*) The sign of the moon inclined to the south is good: the year will be bounteous,
10. with abundance in the world. (*Yōd*) If its (the moon's) face is green in the north,
11. there will be inflation and famine in the world. (*Kap*) If it is eclipsed
12. in the middle of Nisan, many men will go forth from the Sanhedrin (i.e., be executed?)

folio 2v

1. (*Lamed*) May this ever be a trusty sign for you, that in it [Nisan] the pure animals
2. will be consumed (in a raid?). (*Mēm*) If it is red like blood
3. in Iyyar, a king from the north will vanquish his colleague.
4. (*Nūn*) A great fire will fall upon mankind, and all
5. people will be smitten for [their] sin. (*Samek*) If it is red and eclipsed
6. in Siwan, there will be confusion among those who go out
7. to sea. (*ʿAyin*) And orders will be issued against donkeys/caravans(?)
8. and wild beasts, for them to be killed. (*Pē*) If its face
9. is green [during Tamm]uz, there will be misfortune/a great storm(?)
10. (on the high sea). (*Šadē*) There will be a great outcry by every pregnant woman,
11. not from pangs of labor; they will go to death. (*Qōf*) If it stands
12. [up]right, and is eclipsed in the midst of the month of Av, there will be death

folio 3r

1. in Egypt, and famine in the south; for the Nile will
2. be dry, and will not rise. And all the sons of Arabia will hunger
3. for bread.

The last example of a new composition is an alphabetic acrostic poem on the Death of Moses (Deuteronomy 34). It describes Moses' refusal to accept the fate of all men and his blaming Adam for bringing death upon him. Adam, aroused from his eternal rest in the cave of the

Machpelah (with the Patriarchs), skillfully defends himself, adducing the argument of predestination. I present this charming piece in full:

Oxford Bodleian Ms. Heb. e 25, folio 64r

10. אמר קיריס למשה מן גו שכינתה : כגין מה את
 11. דחיל מן מותה : גורית על כל ביריתה : דע דתמן אינון כל אבהתה :
 12. הלא משה כד שמע מלתה : ובהיא שעתה אזל לחברון רבתה : זעק
 13. וקרא לאדם מן גו קבורתה : חמי לי למה חטיתה כגו גנתה : טעמת
 14. ואכלת מן אילן דעתה : יהבת לכניך בכיתה ואליהה : כל גנתה
 15. הוות קודמיך ולא שבעתה : למה כפקודוי דקיריס מרדתה : מן
 16. את אמר ליה אדם בחוכמתה : נדע אן אית כך דעת בינתה : סימן
 17. קשה הוא דן דעוררת יתי מן שנתה : ענה ואמר אנה הוא
 18. משה דקבלית אוריתה : פתח פמה ואמר ליה אתכוונן מה קריתה :
 19. צפי דתרין אלפין דשנין (: קדמת יתי אוריתה : קביל עליך
 20. משה כס מותה : רשום הוא שמי למותה ולי מה אוכחתה : שמע
 21. משה וננזלת ביה דמעחה : תתניח נפשך עם כל אבהתה 0
10. (^o*Alep*) The Lord said to Moses, from amidst the *shekhina*: (*Bet*) Why is it that you
 11. fear death? (*Gimel*) I have decreed (it) upon all creatures. (*Dalet*) Know, that all the patriarchs are there!
 12. (*Hē*) Now, when Moses heard that word, (*Waw*) (and) at that moment, he went to Hebron the capital; (*Zayin*) he cried out,
 13. and called to Adam (from) in the tomb: (*Hēt*) Tell me! Why did you sin in the Garden? (*Ṭet*) You tasted
 14. and ate from the Tree of Knowledge! (*Yōd*) Imposing upon your children wailing and lament. (*Kap*) The entire Garden
 15. lay before you, yet you were not satisfied. (*Lāmed*) Why did you spurn the laws of the Lord? (*Mēm*) Who
 16. are you? Said Adam to him, sagaciously: (*Nūn*) let us see whether you have any knowledge [or] understanding.
 17. (*Sāmek*) This waking me from my sleep is a bad sign. (^c*Ayīn*) He answered and said: it is I,
 18. Moses, who received the Torah! (*Pe*) He (Adam) opened his mouth, and said to him: Ponder upon what you have read.
 19. (*Ṣade*) Observe! that the Torah preceded me by two thousand years. (*Qōp*) Accept for yourself,
 20. O Moses, the cup of death. (*Rēš*) My name had been recorded for death, so why do you rebuke me?
 21. (*Šīn*) Moses listened, and he shed a tear; (*Tāw*) May your soul rest with all the patriarchs.⁴

4. A very similar poem has come to light most recently, and will be published by Prof. Moshe Bernstein of Yeshiva University.

In conclusion, introductory poems are a far more common targumic genre than previously assumed. The Cairo Genizah manuscripts have thus far produced over a dozen new compositions. These poems are related to the Torah readings for festivals and special sabbaths. They are of Palestinian origin and go back to the early Rabbinic period—probably the first two or three centuries of the Common Era. They were written in the dialect of the Palestinian Targumim, and in those cases where they were linguistically transformed to conform with Onqelos, there are recognizable vestiges of their original dialect.

In the framework of this article, I was only able to present a sampling of excerpts from several varied poems. I hope to publish the entire collection in a future volume of genizah manuscripts of Palestinian targum to the Pentateuch.

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