ARAMAIC AND THE BIBLE

Targumic Forerunners: How Codex Colbertinus-Sarravianus (G) Demonstrates Targumic Tendencies

by Matthew R. Miller

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Before Targumic texts existed, the Septuagint (LXX) was translated in Alexandria. This translation of the Pentateuch from Hebrew to Greek was the first of its kind and literally the stuff of legend.[1] It is a well-known problem in Old Testament textual studies that the LXX translation does not align exactly with the Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT) standard today.[2] The differences between the LXX and MT raise several questions: 1) are the differences due to different idioms? 2) is there a theological motivation behind the differences? 3) was the LXX translated from a Hebrew *Vorlage* that is different from the MT?

Since most in the Early Church did not know Hebrew, they assumed the priority of the LXX over the Hebrew Scriptures, believing that God had given the LXX to the Early Church in his providence.[3] These problems were not unknown in the Early Church, however. They were not fully documented until Origen's work on the Hexapla. Origen was distressed by the lack of agreement he noticed between the church's Bible and the Hebrew text of his day.[4] He took it upon himself to create a columned Bible—the Hexapla—to provide the material to produce a new recension.[5] He used an asterisk (※) to mark Greek text not originally in the ecclesiastical Greek

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1. For discussions of the *Letter to Aristeas*, see common LXX introductions such as Henry Barclay Swete, *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek*, ed. Henry St. John Thackeray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Natalio Fernandez Marco, *The Septuagint in Context: Introduction to the Greek Version of the Bible* (Boston: Brill, 2000); Jennifer Dines, *The Septuagint*, Understanding the Bible in Its World (New York: T & T Clark, 2004).

2. The question of Old Testament textual criticism would take this article too far afield. The literature for these questions is vast. Standard introductions are Emmanuel Tov (*Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 3rd Edition [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012]) and Ellis Brotzman (*Old Testament Textual Criticism: A Practical Introduction* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994]). For a recent treatment of these questions from the LXX perspective, see Matthew Miller, "The Aristarchian Signs in Codex Colbertinus-Sarravianus" (PhD Diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019).

3. Origen, *Sur les Ecritures: Philocalie, 1–20 et La Lettre à Africanus, ed., trans.,* N. R. M. de Lange, Sources Chrétiennes 302 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1983).

4. Origen, *Origenes Matthäuserklärung I: die griechisch erhaltenen Tomoi. Band 10 of Origenes Werke,* ed., Erich Klostermannj, Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte 40 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 13.14.

5. For a defense of this understanding of Origen's work, see Miller, *The Aristarchian Signs.*

text but corresponding to the Hebrew *Vorlage*, and he used the *obelus* (÷) to mark Greek text without correspondence to the Hebrew *Vorlage*.[6]

The passages marked with an *obelus* are the present focus, since these usually note text that was added in translation. The obelized material demonstrates interpretive tendencies that are common with the Aramaic Targums. The source for the present study is Codex Colbertinus-Sarravianus (G).[7] Documenting all of the *obeli* is outside the scope of the present study. I will focus on three passages that demonstrate Targumic patterns most clearly: Numbers 14, Numbers 17 (16), and Deuteronomy 15:2.

Before exploring these three passages in detail, it is necessary to show the benefits of limiting the present study to one Greek manuscript. Also, an overview of the general Targumic tendencies will help orient the reader to the patterns in the passages.

The Value of Codex Colbertinus-Sarravianus[8]

Codex Colbertinus-Sarravianus is a fourth to fifth century AD Greek manuscript of Genesis through Ruth with *lacunae*. This Greek manuscript preserves a greater number of Origen's Hexaplaric signs than any other Greek manuscript. It preserves the signs with a high degree of accuracy vìs-a-vìs the Hebrew *Vorlage*. When the signs are taken into account, this manuscript serves as a witness to the original LXX translation. Since this manuscript serves as a witness to the original LXX, the translation tendencies shed light on the early interpretive practices of Second Temple Judaism. These practices later appear in the Targums.

Targumic Patterns

Before moving to the specific passages, it will be helpful to gain some background about what the different targumic tendencies are. The following characteristics come from McNamara's *Targum and Testament Revisited*.[9]

- The paraphrase must adhere to the biblical text
- Close attention to the details of the Hebrew text
- Interpretation and concern for the unlearned
- Explanation of difficulties and contradictions

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6. Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, 13.14; Origen, *Sur les Ecritures,* 532.

7. Henry Omont, ed., *Vetus Testamentus Graece Codicis Sarraviani-Colbertini quae supersunt in Bibliothecis Leidensi Pariesiensi Petropolitana phototypice edita* (Leiden: A. W. Sijthoff, 1897); Miller, *The Aristarchian Signs.*

8. This section relies on Miller, *The Aristarchian Signs*, 23–5.

9. McNamara, *Targum and Testament*, 101–20. The following bullets are the headings under which more specific examples are given in the chapter.

- Converse translation
- Reverential manner in speaking of God and anti-anthropomorphisms
- Respect for the Elders of Israel: Euphemistic Translation
- Derogatory Translation
- Later doctrine read into the interpretation
- Homiletic nature of certain passages
- Updating of geographical and patronymic terms
- Updating of biblical coins and weights

These patterns range from simple explanation to broad, canonical interpretation. They are unified by concern for the Hebrew text and a desire to explain both the surface and the spiritual significance of the text.

Many of these tendencies are present in the Septuagint text. Most commonly, the translator drew conclusions from the details of the Hebrew text and read later doctrine into earlier passages. For an example of the latter in Codex G, it is common to find the *obelus* before και ααρων when the Hebrew text mentions Moses alone.[10] This addition in translation fits with the ascendancy of the priesthood evident in Chronicles (see 1 Chron 6). The role of the priest became more prominent in the Second Temple period, especially following the Maccabean revolt. The translator consistently placed Aaron at the same level as Moses, subtly interpreting the authority of the priesthood for his readers. According to this slight modification, the priesthood stood at the same level as Moses, since the translator included Aaron in each of the major disputes during the wilderness wanderings. This is but one modest example of a Targumic tendency in the LXX.

The examples before us contain not just simple updating, but significant interpretation of the passages. The additions to the Greek text provide a window into the interpretive practices of the Septuagint translators. These practices show us how certain passages were interpreted and understood. These interpretations bring out details of the text that shed light on the specific problems present in these passages.

A Brief Table of Signs

Throughout this article, I will use several signs to simplify discussions. I am including this section to interpret these signs for the reader.
- The overline ($\overline{ιηλ}$) is used in the text to signify a *nomen sacrum* (sacred name). Words such as Joshua (), God (), Spirit (), and Israel would be abbreviated. This practice was common in early Christian texts.
- The underline signifies the reading that I discuss in the subsequent commentary.
- The Aristarchian signs have been mentioned before. These are the asterisk (÷), the *obelus* (÷), and the *metobelus* (↙). I refer the reader to the earlier discussion

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10. This paragraph is indebted to Miller, *The Aristarchian Signs*, 298.

of the significance of the asterisk and *obelus*. The *metobelus* often closes a reading, though it can have a wider range of uses as well.[11]

Numbers 14 and Exodus 16; 34

Numbers 14 contains the account of Israel's refusal to enter Canaan. In Codex G, obelized readings in this passage make connections to passages in Exodus. Through these connections, the translator adduces the theological significance of Israel's refusal to enter Canaan. I list the relevant passages for the reader's reference, followed by commentary on each passage and a summary of the whole interpretation.[12]

Numbers 14:10

και ειπεν πασα η συναγωγη καταλιθοβολησαι αυτους εν λιθοις και η δοξα κ̅υ̅ ωφθη ÷ εν νεφελη ∠ επι της σκηνης του μαρτυριου εν πασιν τοις υιοις ι̅η̅λ̅

The phrase εν νεφελη stands under the obelus, meaning that these words are not native to the translator's Hebrew text. The sentence η δοξα κυριου ωφθη εν νεφελη is not common in the Old Testament, found only in Exodus 16:10, when Israel complained about lacking food. In that passage the Israelites were at the point of killing Moses when Yahweh intervened. In Numbers 14:10 they are ready to stone him. The translator paid close attention to the Hebrew text, noting that in both passages Israel grumbled and threatened the life of Moses. And the translator inserted a phrase (εν νεφελη) to draw the connection between the two passages.

Additionally, the δοξα κυριου would connect the present passage with Exodus 33—34 when the glory of Yahweh was revealed to Moses. This phrase, native to the Hebrew text, provides the textual detail that allows the translator to link the Exodus 16, Exodus 33—34, and Numbers 14 textually and theologically. The connection between grumbling and idolatry is suggested by the common theme of the glory of Yahweh. The translator makes this suggestion explicit. These kinds of translations, based on details and close associations, appear to fall under the heading of associative translation.[13]

Numbers 14:18

κ̅ς̅ μακροθυμος και πολυελεος ÷ και αληθινος ∠ αφαιρων ανομιας και αδικιας ÷ και αμαρτιας ∠ και καθαρισμω ου καθαριει ÷ τον ενοχον ∠ αποδιδους αμαρτιας πατερων επι τεκνα εως τριτης και τεταρτης

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11. Miller, *The Aristarchian Signs*, 419–23.

12. The following passages with marks are found in Codex Colbertinus-Sarravianus. The brief commentary on each passage is paraphrased from Miller, *The Aristarchian Signs*.

13. McNamara, *Targum and Testament*, 107.

Numbers 14:18 contains three obelized phrases: και αληθινος, και αμαρτιας, and τον ενοχον. These phrases are not native to the Hebrew text of Numbers 14:18. With these phrases inserted, the verse reads more closely to Exodus 34:6–7 in the LXX. The translator noticed that this verse cited the Exodus passage and inserted the additional words to clarify and explain the connection between the two passages, making explicit what was implied by the abbreviated citation. As in the previous passage, the translator pays attention to the details of the Hebrew text and applies an associative translation.

Numbers 14:21

αλλα ζω εγω ÷ και ζων το ονομα μου ∠ και εμπλησει η δοξα κ̄ῡ πασαν την γην

The phrase και ζων το ονομα μου is obelized in Numbers 14:21. This phrase does not occur anywhere else in the LXX.[14] One may wonder why it was inserted. However, if we understand the Targumic principle of paying close attention to the details of the text, the mystery unravels. In Numbers 14:21, the phrase δοξα κυριου appears again, linking this verse with Yahweh's revelation of His glory in Exodus 34:6–7. Exodus 33:19 states that Yahweh will declare His name and make His glory pass before Moses. In Exodus 34:6–7 He does so. Yahweh declares His name as He also declares His attributes. His name is linked with His attributes.

It is not surprising then to see the translator insert the phrase και ζων το ονομα μου in the text. This addition adheres to the biblical text of Numbers 14:21 and arises from the translator paying close attention to the details of the text.

The passages listed above are not the only obelized passages in Numbers 14. However, their proximity and tendency points to the translator's central theological conclusion: Israel grumbled against Yahweh like they did in Exodus 16. Yahweh planned to them out as He did after the Golden Calf incident in Exodus. Although this passage does not cite idolatry, the translator was sensitive to the presence of language from Exodus and drew the conclusion that the Exodus generation grumbled because they had already forsaken their allegiance to Yahweh. The previous chapter (Num 13) demonstrates that Israel did not believe God and therefore refused to enter the land. The translator joins grumbling against Yahweh and unbelief with idolatry.

The theological tendency of these passages in Numbers falls under the headings of paying close attention to the details of the text and associative translation. The translator noticed that the language in the Hebrew text was native to certain passages only, and therefore drew theological conclusions. These theological conclusions about Numbers 14 appear to be common in the Intertestamental Period, since the New Testament picks them up in 1 Corinthians 10 and Hebrews 3—4.

14. Miller, *The Aristarchian Signs*, 272.

Numbers 16 (17) and Leviticus 10

Numbers 16—17 recounts Korah's rebellion against Moses and Aaron with the resulting aftermath. Korah and his followers complained that they had the same status as did Moses and Aaron (Num 16:3). They specifically complain about their exclusion from the priesthood (Num 16:10). Yahweh imposes a test, requiring all the involved parties bring censers before Him (Num 16:6–7). Korah and his followers appear before the Tent of Meeting (Num 16:19 and the earth swallowed the families of the rebels (16:31–32) and fire went out from the Tent of Meeting to consume those who were offering incense (16:35).

The circumstances of this judgment prompted the translator to connect this episode to a similar incident in Leviticus 10. In Leviticus 10, Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire before Yahweh. By doing so they forfeited their lives, being consumed with fire that came out of the sanctuary. The following passage contained material that makes these connections clear and shows that the translator paid close attention to the details of the text. The connections made by the translator illuminate difficulties in both Leviticus 10 and Numbers 17 (16).

Numbers 16:37 (17:2)

και προς ελεαζαρ ααρων τον ιερεαν ανελεσθε τα πυρια ÷ τα χαλκα ∠ εκ μεσου των κατακεκαυμενων και το πυρ ÷ το αλλοτριον τουτο ∠ σπειρον εκει οτι ηγιασαν

The key obelized phrase is το αλλοτριον τουτο, modifying το πυρ. Since this phrase occurs under the obelus, it has no correspondence to the Hebrew text. The translator added it by way of explanation. In Numbers, αλλοτριον occurs with πυρ when the text refers to Nadab and Abihu (Num 3:4; 26:61). In both occurrences, Numbers connects back to Leviticus 10. When Nadab and Abihu offered "strange fire" before Yahweh they were consumed. In this passage, the fire (πυρ) was a detail in the text that suggested the previous illicit offering. The translator was explicitly connecting the rebellion of Korah with the illicit offering of Nadab and Abihu.

In this passage the translator connects the sin of Korah with the sin of Nadab and Abihu. The connection illuminates both episodes. Korah and his followers sought to usurp authority that was not theirs, and therefore they had no right to offer incense in worship. Yahweh judged them outside of the Tent of Meeting. They complained that they were not permitted to exercise the same functions as Aaron. Since they were not authorized to perform priestly functions, their offering was rejected and they met the same fate as Nadab and Abihu.

Regarding Nadab and Abihu, little is said in Leviticus concerning their error. The text merely states that they offered "strange fire" before Yahweh. Given the connection the translator makes to Korah, it can be deduced that, at a minimum, Nadab and Abihu were not authorized to offer what they were offering at that time.

The Targumic principles of paying close attention to the details of the text and explaining difficulties are at work, connecting two obscure passages that contain a common judgment.

Deuteronomy 15:2

The previous focal passages showed similar Targumic patterns. The additions linked passages in Numbers to passages in Exodus and Leviticus. The passages in Numbers contained phrases that suggested theological connections to the translator. The next focal passage, Deut 15:2, illustrates a more complex Targumic principle: that of converse translation. A converse translation says the opposite of what the Hebrew text says.[15] As with all Targumic tendencies, converse translation can range from rather extreme changes to slight variations.[16] In this example, the full Hebrew text is reproduced to aid the discussion.

Deuteronomy 15:2

και ουτως το προσταγμα της αφεσεως αφησεις παν χρεος ιδιον ο οφειλει σοι ÷ ο πλησιον ※ σου ∠ ουκ απαιτησεις ※ τον πλησιον σου ∠ και τον αδελφον σου οτι επικεκληται αφεσις κ͞ω ÷ τω σου ∠

וזה דבר השמטה שמוט כל בעל מֹשה ידו אשר ישה ברעהו לא יגֹש את רעהו ואת אחיו כי קרא שֹמטה ליהוה

The translator inserted the final obelized phrase, τω θεω σου, to synthesize the translation of Deuteronomy. The phrase κυριος ο θεος σου is a common phrase in Deuteronomy. When the full phrase did not occur, the translator inserted what was missing so that the different occurrences would read similarly.[17] This pattern fits the Targumic patterns we have already observed.

The interesting *obelus* occurs at the beginning of the verse. Strictly speaking, the reading ÷ ο πλησιον is not native to the Hebrew text. The corresponding Hebrew text reads ברעהו, which is a prepositional phrase. The reading in the Greek text does not occur in a prepositional phrase. Since Origen sought to mark formal equivalence in his text critical work, this reading was obelized.[18] This reading disambiguates the subject of the Greek text, making clear that the subject of the verb is not the relative pronoun ο.

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15. McNamara, *Targum and Testament*, 110.

16. McNamara, *Targum and Testament*, 111.

17. Miller, *The Aristarchian Signs*, 300.

18. Miller, *The Aristarchian Signs,* 44. Miller discusses Origen's criterion of formal equivalence. A formally equivalent translation represents every detail of a text in the translation. This philosophy of translation does not require slavish adherence to the idiom of the source language.

What makes this reading interesting is that the Greek text gains an ambiguity because the translator changed the person in the translation. The Hebrew text at the point of the *obelus* is אשר ישה ברעהו. In this sentence, רעה is the object of the preposition ב. The pronominal suffix is 3ms in Hebrew, while the Greek translation the second person pronoun is used. In Greek, ο πλησιον does not occur in a prepositional phrase. The Greek translator altered the translation so that the neighbor was no longer receiving the help; in Greek, he was the agent. The Hebrew text does not show any ambiguity about the subject of the verb ישה. It also views one's neighbor as the recipient of one's beneficence. The Greek translation, while taking its cues from the Hebrew text, provides a converse translation.

The *obelus* before ο πλησιον clues the reader in that the Greek translation does not correspond to the Hebrew text. Assuming that the reader did not have the Hebrew text for quick comparison, the subsequent asterisks demonstrate that the translation has departed from the Hebrew parent text. Immediately following ο πλησιον, we read ⸔ σου. This pronoun has a corresponding element in the Hebrew text. However, its corresponding element is a 3ms pronominal suffix. So although the asterisked reading corresponds to an element in the Hebrew text, the converse translation still holds.

The problems continue to multiply at this point. The reading ο πλησιον is obelized, marking that it does not correspond to the Hebrew text. The reading σου occurs under the asterisk, marking that it is native to the Hebrew text. However, if one reads the text without the obelized reading, the grammar becomes nonsensical. The converse translation reads against the Hebrew text, making the job of establishing a Greek text that is formally equivalent to the Hebrew text nearly impossible at this point. It is important to note, though, that even this converse translation takes its cues from the Hebrew text.

Conclusion

The LXX translation was both a translation and a commentary. In this way it was a forerunner of the interpretive tradition that is now preserved in the Aramaic Targums. Insofar as Codex G testifies to the original LXX text, the material that Origen obelized illuminates the original translator's theological and interpretive tendencies. The kinds of interpretive patterns range from simple theological tendencies (such as placing Aaron alongside Moses throughout the controversies) to more canonical readings (connecting the refusal to enter the land to the idolatry of the golden calf). The examples set forth in this paper illustrate a few key elements of Targumic translation.

These findings are significant due to the date of the LXX text relative to the dates of our Targumic texts. The LXX text predates the Targumic texts by at least half a millennium. The LXX therefore serves as a witness to an interpretive tradition that was later codified in Aramaic. While the particular interpretations treated in this

paper do not occur in any extant Aramaic text, the tendencies do. These tendencies predate the New Testament by about 200 years. It seems to be a logical conclusion, therefore, that the interpretive patterns attested by the later Aramaic texts were already current in the synagogue at the time of Jesus Christ.[19]

Therefore, it behooves students of the New Testament to take seriously the Aramaic Targums. The exegetical and hermeneutical methods employed there were current in the time of the New Testament. If we are committed to employing a hermeneutic consistent with that used by Jesus and the Apostles, the Targums would be an excellent place to being to learn how to interpret the Scriptures.

19. Howell examines key phrases in the Aramaic Targums, the Greek translations of which find their way into key Christological passages in the New Testament. For a full treatment, see Adam Howell, "Finding Christ in the Old Testament through the Aramaic Memra, Shekinah, and Yeqara of the Targums" (PhD Diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015).