



**Alexander, Philip S.**

***The Targum of Lamentations: Translated, with a Critical Introduction, Apparatus, and Notes***

The Aramaic Bible 17B

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This is an extremely useful book for all scholars and amateurs who are interested in the interpretation of the book of Lamentations in ancient Judaism and Christianity. The series in which it appeared, *The Aramaic Bible: The Targums*, comprises a variety of different approaches to the problem of translating the Targumim, the Jewish-Aramaic versions of Scripture. Partly this is due to their very different characters, partly to the scholarly profile of the people who translated these translations. In this translation with copious notes, one recognizes without effort the fingerprint of the acribious and erudite scholar who made it. Consequently, the notes that I made in the margin of this book are usually the result of a rethinking of many issues in the light of the author's work, rather than a form of criticism.

The first half of the book is taken by an introduction (1–105) that contains a meticulous presentation of the *status quaestionis* of nearly all relevant issues with regard to this Targum: (1) "The Text of Targum Lamentations"; (2) "The Language of Targum Lamentations"; (3) "The Unity and Integrity of Targum Lamentations"; (4) "The Theology of Targum Lamentations"; (5) "Targum Lamentations and the Masoretic Text"; (6) "Targum Lamentations in the History of Exegesis"; (7) "Targum Lamentations and Jewish Liturgy"; (8) "The Provenance and Date of Targum Lamentations"; and (9)

“Bibliography.” A translation of the “Western” text with a selective critical apparatus and extensive notes, which in fact often approach a full commentary, appear on pages 109–87. The appendix contains a translation with apparatus and very succinct notes of the abbreviated version current in Yemen. The book concludes with several useful indexes. In the bibliography I missed C. M. M. Brady’s PhD dissertation “Targum Lamentations’ Reading of the Book of Lamentations” (Oxford 1999). True, formally it is an unpublished dissertation, but nowadays such books are often more widely disseminated than formally published books, especially if the author chooses to make it available on the Internet, as Brady did ([http://targuman.org/files/Brady\\_TgLam\\_DPhil.pdf](http://targuman.org/files/Brady_TgLam_DPhil.pdf)). Scholarship will have to find a way to deal with such issues.

The book has been carefully edited, and I noted only a small number of typos of minor importance (e.g., 27 should be 24 at 122 n. 72; there should be no dot underneath the first letter of *twb* at 177 n. 61). I fully agree with the author that a scholar should be *peritus/perita trium linguarum*, but, lamentably, not translating Latin texts, as is his habit, nowadays means keeping their contents from a majority of scholars.

There is an issue in this Targum that deserves more attention than it usually gets in Targumic study: the identification of the multiple voices that we hear in it. This problem is even more challenging for Targum Lamentations, as there is not a single personal name mentioned in the original book, though a close connection of all its voices with the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 587 B.C.E. and its accompanying horrors seems virtually assured. Though the author recognizes this problem, some extra considerations may be in order. The Targum in many places explicitly mentions the persons or groups that join in the polyphonous discussion in the book: the prophet Jeremiah, the personifications of Jerusalem and of the people of Israel, and God’s Attribute of Justice. They are not represented as speaking in the same time and place; especially Israel and Jerusalem appear to speak in an environment that is not limited through constraints of time and place, freely addressing God and speaking about events that date to a much later period. Thus they can compare the Roman oppression with that of the Babylonians (4:17, 21-22; 5:11; the sentence in 1:19, as rightly noted by the author, has all the characteristics of a later interpolation), not as an anachronism (*contra* the author, e.g., 172 n. 43) but as a balance of its sad situation somewhere between the destruction of the Second Temple and the expected time of deliverance. I think the Targumist maps the various speaking characters, providing sufficient information to identify them even in the places where they are not explicitly mentioned. Thus one may assume that the voice in 1:18 is that of Jeremiah again and that in 4:20 of the people of Israel, as these passages allude to the passage in 2 Chr 35:25, where Jeremiah and the singers of people are both said to have uttered a lament for King Josiah.

As I noted recently in my 2007 review of C. M. M. Brady's book about this Targum (*The Rabbinic Targum of Lamentations: Vindicating God*; see [http://bookreviews.org/pdf/5138\\_5407.pdf](http://bookreviews.org/pdf/5138_5407.pdf)), the beginning of the Targum of Lamentations is a well-composed, complex, literary unit dealing with the sin, punishment, and deliverance of Jerusalem and Israel, which at its beginning compares the fate of Jerusalem with that of Adam and Eve when they were exiled from the garden of Eden and retraces the origin of God's verdict to the people of Israel accepting the testimony of the spies before their entry into the Promised Land; the question "How was it decreed" (i.e., how did God decree) is answered by the words "he decreed on that night that they should weep," not by the immediately following words "(It is) on account of." There is more to this than merely this interesting literary observation. The connection of this book with the beginning of the world (in 1:1) and with what is probably the eschatological age (at the end of ch. 4) brings it in line with three other Targumim to the Megilloth: to Esther (Targum Sheni), Ruth, and Song of Songs. Each of these begins with a list of ten things (kingdoms, famines, and songs, respectively) that start with the beginning of time and conclude with the eschatological age. For some reason the Targumist responsible for Lamentations chose to express the same chronological framework with a different literary form. In other words, these books are put in a historical framework starting with the creation of the world and continuing throughout the history of Israel by means of a sophisticated introduction.

The agreement between these Targumim does not stop here. Their language is likewise of a peculiar but still comparable nature, a type of Aramaic that is best described as a mixture of various types of Aramaic, especially that of the classical Targumim of Onqelos and Jonathan, on the one hand, and the Palestinian Targumim, on the other. The author supposed that these Targumim were originally composed in a relatively pure Palestinian Aramaic that in the course of time was influenced by and adapted to the dialect of the classical Targumim. As there is not a single trace of such assumed "Palestinian" variants of the Targumim to the Megilloth, I think that the most likely model is rather that they were composed in a type of Aramaic where the mixing of forms from various dialects had become a new standard, a type of Aramaic that thus was intended to be neither Eastern nor Western. For a comparable reason I have some hesitation about an early date for this Targum (let us say, fourth–sixth centuries), as the linguistic picture that emerges from the early documents of the Cairo Genizah is completely different from what we see in these Targumim.

But there is more to this date. The author rightly stresses the importance of 4:21–22, where "Rome" and "Constantinople" are threatened with destruction at the hands of "Parthians" and "Persians," for the determination of date and background of this Targum. Without outright rejecting his balanced proposal for a date in the late fifth century, I would like to point out the possibility that the text in the Yemenite version of

4:21, “Rejoice and shout for joy, city of Edom and people of Bisrin [עמא דביסרין],” may in fact preserve a basically correct textual element that was lost in the Western text, namely, with a small correction עמא דקיסרין, “people of Caesarea” (as noted by Alexander, this city is mentioned in Lam. Rab. to this verse; see 175 n. 53, where he identifies it with Caesarea Maritima). This would then probably be Caesarea Mazaca (or Caesarea in Cappadocia) in central Anatolia, modern Kayseri, which was indeed in what could be called “Armenia” in the Middle Ages (apart from this, there was a considerable Armenian presence in Kayseri until the 1915 genocide). In that case, “Constantinople, city of wicked Edom, and people of Caesarea, that is built in the land of Armenia” would be unproblematic: two great Byzantine urban centers would be threatened in this verse. There may in that case be a connection with the Seljuk-Byzantine wars of the 1060s and later, when Caesarea changed hands several times. An additional advantage of this conjecture is that we need not change ארמיניא “Armenia” to רומניא “Romania” or the like, and we would not have to deal with an enigmatic expression “Constantinople which is built in Romania.” It would certainly be worthwhile to see whether there may be a connection between at least some of these Targumim to the Megilloth and eschatological movements among the Jews in the Byzantine Empire. For the moment, however, this option must remain speculative.

A final point I would like to raise is the poetical character of this Targum. Of course the sound, look, and feel of the poetical lines in the Hebrew original is far removed from their equivalents in the Targum. Still, it is clear that this Targum, like that on the Song of Songs, attempted to emulate its poetical character: while releasing the compact style of the Hebrew, elements such as assonance, repetition, and parallelism were retained and even strengthened at times. In my review of Brady’s *Targum of Lamentations* I demonstrated this for the expansive passage in Tg. Lam. 1:1–4 (*pace* the author [38], who supposes the Targum of these verses to be in prose), and *mutatis mutandis* this goes for the rest of this Targum as well; I hope to return to this interesting subject elsewhere.

Philip Alexander’s new translation of the Targum to the biblical book of Lamentations is an extremely learned and erudite work. Not only does it discuss the complex problems of the text, language, and interpretation of this Jewish Aramaic translation, which reflects the full depth of rabbinical interpretation of Lamentations, but it also explores the entire breadth of the hermeneutical environment of Lamentations in the ancient Jewish and Christian context. It is a crowning achievement in the series *The Aramaic Bible*, and the author and the editors of the series deserve our gratitude for it.