

RBL 04/2003



Grossfield, Bernard

Targum Neofiti 1: An Exegetical Commentary to Genesis, Including Full Rabbinic Parallels

Edited by Lawrence H. Schiffman

New York: Sepher-Hermon, 2000. Pp. xxxvi + 506. Cloth. \$65.00. ISBN 0872031586.

Moshe J. Bernstein
Yeshiva University
New York, NY 10033

Targum Neofiti 1, a virtually complete translation of the Pentateuch into Palestinian Jewish Aramaic, was unearthed in the late 1940s or early 1950s by Alejandro Diez Macho in the Vatican Library, having been overlooked in the past because it had been thought to be just one more manuscript of the standard *Onqelos* targum to the Torah. Immediately with the disclosure of the existence of the text and with its gradual publication, *Neofiti* was claimed by some to be the earliest complete witness to the Palestinian targumic tradition, and its discovery, coming on the heels of Paul Kahle's publication of Palestinian targumic texts from the Cairo Genizah (now available in a magisterial edition by the late lamented Michael Klein), had a ripple effect in its impact on the discipline of targumic studies. First it generated a variety of studies focusing on its own contents and then, moving outward, on the interrelationships of the various textual witnesses to the Palestinian targum and among the targumim in general. There has been no full-fledged commentary to date on any of the books of the Pentateuch in *Neofiti*'s version, much less on the whole of the Pentateuch.

The volume under review is a “revised and expanded version” of Grossfeld’s 1968 dissertation at Johns Hopkins and, according to its preface, was “actual[ly] complet[ed] in 1978” (ix). It was announced as forthcoming around the latter date and, had it appeared then, would have appeared less stale than it does in its recent appearance. The date of the actual completion of the volume seems to have had an impact on its bibliography, which

omits a number of significant works in targumic scholarship that appeared later than 1978.

The volume contains, in addition to introductory material, a transcription of the base text of the *Neofiti* 1 manuscript of the Palestinian targum to Genesis (3–46), produced by Lawrence Schiffman, a rereading that does not always coincide with the “official” publication by Alejandro Diez Macho; brief textual notes (47–52); a commentary on the targum (53–316); English translations of rabbinic texts cited in the commentary (316–448); bibliography (449–459); and indices (460–506).

The first obvious deficiency in the volume as a text of *Neofiti* is the absence of a complete text of the marginalia. *Targum Neofiti* is more than a single version of the Palestinian targum on the Pentateuch; it often contains two or three versions of the same words or phrase, one in the body of the text and the others supplied either interlinearly or in the margins. Some of the marginal and interlinear readings are discussed in the commentary and are noted in the index, but the student of the Aramaic translations who would be well-served by a commentary such as Grossfeld’s should have all textual material in the manuscript available. It would not have taken a great deal of effort, especially granted the very long gestation of the final version of this edition for those variants and supplements to the base text to have been placed systematically in relation to that text.

The editor’s introductory chapter is largely disappointing. He rehashes the arguments for an early date for *Neofiti* proposed by such scholars as Diez Macho, McNamara, and Kasher, with an excessive amount of space devoted to the arguments of the latter without any remark on his rather uncritical employment of alleged rabbinic parallels for the purposes of dating. The view of Goshen-Gottstein that argued for a much later redaction of this targum gets far shorter shrift. Several charts are claimed to indicate that the “early” material in *Neofiti* is four times as frequent as “late” material, but there is far too little discussion of the theoretical and practical aspects of the dating of rabbinic and targumic material, especially in relation to one another. The data on *Neofiti* and Josephus are so meager as to be completely useless.

The brief discussions of the liturgical use of the Palestinian targum and of anthropomorphism in *Neofiti* are superficial. Despite Grossfeld’s claim, it is difficult to prove that *Neofiti* itself was once used in the synagogue, although it does contain material that points back to synagogal usage at some date, probably an early one, in its transmission history. Although Michael Klein’s 1982 book on targumic anti-anthropomorphism is alluded to in a footnote, its arguments, which militate against the

traditional view of the targumim as thoroughly anti-anthropomorphic, seem not to have had any impact on Grossfeld's brief sketch.

Targum studies by now should have moved well beyond the stage where introductions list "deviations from the Hebrew text" as a significant heading. The headings and categories that are employed to classify and explain such "deviations" (which are said to number 1,079) are simply a list of terms without definition or examples. The absence of clarification deprives the list of any value, even were we to accept the overall category of "deviations" as a meaningful one.

The most valuable feature of the volume, of course, is the collection in the commentary of parallels in rabbinic literature to translations in *Neofiti*. For the student of the targumim who may not be well-versed in rabbinic texts, Grossfeld has provided entry into an area that is very significant for the study of the place of the Aramaic versions in the traditions of early Jewish biblical interpretation, but there is little analysis in this section as well, and what Grossfeld has done, in effect, is to offer the future commentator on *Neofiti* some very valuable raw material with which to work. The observations in the commentary regarding *Neofiti*'s translation technique, furthermore, are not founded on a thorough and systematic study of this targum's overall behavior in this realm. Further specific studies of targumic methodology in a number of areas are necessary before an appropriate integrative commentary can be written on any targumic text. Those preliminary studies seem not to have been done on *Neofiti*.

The value of dedicating a large section of the volume to English translations of the cited rabbinic passages strikes this reviewer as minimal. Students of the Aramaic targumim are, on the whole, competent to read rabbinic Hebrew; note that no English translation of the Aramaic text is furnished. If, nevertheless, it was deemed necessary that English translations be included, they should have been inserted within the body of the commentary and would probably have saved a good deal of space and reduced the bulk, and perhaps the price, of the volume as well.

From an aesthetic dimension, as well, the layout of the book leaves much to be desired, in addition to its awkward and nonstandard dimensions. The Aramaic text of the targum is printed too densely, while there is an unnecessarily large amount of blank space on some of the pages of the commentary.

On the whole, then, this commentary on *Neofiti* does not fulfill the expectations of the scholars who have waited for it for two decades. Much of the material anthologized by Grossfeld will be of real value to the author of the next commentary on *Neofiti*, but the

model commentary in English on a Palestinian targum of a single book of the Pentateuch has yet to be written.