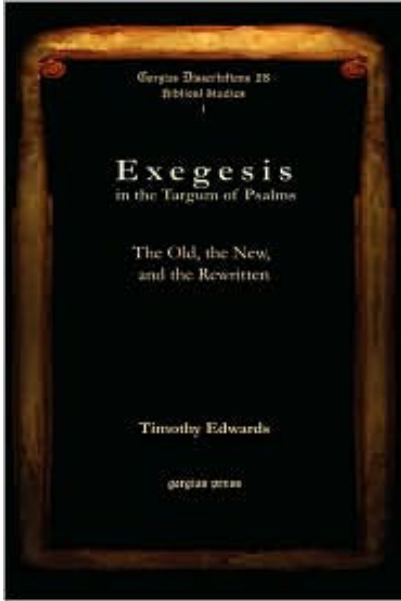


RBL 01/2009



Edwards, Timothy

Exegesis in the Targum of Psalms: The Old, the New, and the Rewritten

Gorgias Dissertations 28; Biblical Studies 1

Piscataway, N.J.: Gorgias, 2007. Pp. xviii + 288.
Hardcover. \$102.00. ISBN 159333432X.

Joachim Vette

Ruprecht-Karls Universität Heidelberg
Heidelberg, Germany

This recently published monograph by Timothy Edwards is an updated doctoral dissertation submitted to the faculty of Oriental studies at the University of Oxford in 2003. It is the first book-length study focusing on the Targum of Psalms (hereafter Tg. Ps.) in more than fifty years and thus a welcome and much-needed contribution to Targum studies as well as Psalm exegesis.

Any scholar working on the Tg. Ps. is handicapped from the outset by the fact that we do not have a critical edition of the entire Targum. Although an unpublished first edition exists of the first two books (E. White, *A Critical Edition of the Targum of Psalms: A Computer Generated Text of Books I and II*), the absence of a full critical edition must limit the possibilities of any study on this Targum, as Edwards readily admits. To compensate for this handicap, Edwards presents a brief but exceedingly well-written summary of research on Tg. Ps. from 1872 to the present. Unfortunately, the Internet addresses he refers to already seem to be out of date (e.g., http://web.tulane.edu/~ntcs/pss/tg_ps_index.htm no longer seems to be active; for similar sites, see http://targum.info/?page_id=11 or <http://cal1.cn.huc.edu/>).

Edwards describes the language of this collection as “Late Jewish Literary Aramaic” without necessarily assuming Palestinian origin. Although the manuscript tradition itself is medieval (Edwards uses the Codex Urbinati-Vaticano 1, Rome 1294, as his base text), the author dates the collection between the fourth and fifth centuries, mainly due to connections between these texts and other Amoraic traditions. Unlike the Septuagint, or even Jerome’s *iuxta Hebraeos*, the translation in Tg. Ps. was never intended to replace the Hebrew Bible but was rather meant to be read and studied in continual connection to its source text. Without this connection, the Targumim lose their *raison d’être*. Edwards thus argues that this Targum, possibly even all Targumim, were not created for liturgical use but rather served an educational function in the rabbinic world of study, leading the student from scripture to tradition.

With this monograph Edwards sets himself a twofold goal: he intends to focus on an “interpretation of whole Psalms, rather than on the presence of exegetical themes throughout the Targum” (19) as well as to examine the relationship of that exegesis to other interpretive traditions, both Jewish and Christian. To this end, Edwards focuses on a selection of psalms that (1) cover all parts of the Psalter, (2) have proven to be significant in Christian exegesis, (3) have demonstrated exegetical expansion in Tg. Ps., and (4) were seen as a distinct group of psalms in antiquity. Based on these criteria, the following psalms are chosen: Pss 1; 2; 45; 68; 80; 137, as well as 24; 48; 82; 94; 81; 93; 92 (the latter group presumed to have been sung on successive weekdays in the temple; see Tamid 7:4).

Edwards views the expansions on the Hebrew text contained in Tg. Ps. as interpretative gap-filling that concretizes the scriptural psalms in areas of chronology, personality (most often the patriarchs, Moses, or the Messiah), historical events, or location, as well as adding thematic amplifications and clarifications to the Hebrew text. While this summary of the exegetical methodology is certainly helpful, Edwards fails to then engage in an analysis of “whole psalms” and the particular interpretation given to these text units by their respective Targumim. Concerning his first self-defined task, Edwards leaves the reader wanting. The precise relationship between a particular Targum and its source text is further obscured by an inconsistent use of cursive script and underlining—especially where different formatting in separate quotations of the same text is used (compare, e.g., the use of cursive script in Ps 1 on pages 89 and 228). Edwards unfortunately does not explain the use of his particular formatting.

The main section of Edwards’s book is concerned with a detailed comparison between individual statements in Tg. Ps. and other interpretative traditions, including material from Qumran, early translations, rabbinic texts, early Christian texts, and Midrash Tehillim. These comparisons clearly show the author’s expertise and in-depth knowledge

of biblical interpretation in late antiquity. The material gathered here is impressive, and the comparisons yield fascinating insights.

In all these comparisons, Edwards is guided by an important axiom, which he frequently emphasizes: dependence of one text upon another is “perhaps the most difficult relationship to convincingly demonstrate” (28). Similar interpretive statements in different traditions need not indicate dependence. Different interpretations dealing with the same source text using comparable exegetical methodology may arrive independently at the same conclusion. Adopting a term proposed by Weitzman (*The Old Testament in Syriac*, 1999), Edwards refers to this phenomenon as “polygenesis” and remains very cautious throughout in proposing a possible dependence between two sources.

A comparison between Tg. Ps. and early translations of the Hebrew Text (Edwards compares Tg. Ps. 92:13–15 and Aquila, Tg. Ps. 2:3 and LXX, and Tg. Ps. 118:8 and 4QPs^b xxxvi:14, to name a few) reveals that there is little value in pursuing a study of Tg. Ps. for text-critical purposes, as we cannot assume a *Vorlage* different from MT behind Tg. Ps. At most, Tg. Ps. provides us with an essentially independent translation vis-à-vis other biblical translations.

A comparison with the larger Targum tradition (among others, Edwards compares Tg. Ps. 80:16 and Targumim on Gen 49:11, Tg. Ps. 118:14 and Targumim on Exod 15:2, Tg. Ps. 68:28 and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on 1 Sam 15:17, as well as Tg. Ps. 110:3 and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Judg 5:2) shows that various links can be drawn to various Targumim, Babylonian or Palestinian, Torah, or Prophets. It is highly remarkable, however, that no shared traditions can be found between Tg. Ps. and other Targumim on the Hagiographa, not even to the Targum on Job. In regards to rabbinic literature, connections (e.g., Tg. Ps. 1:5 and m. Sanh. 10:3, Tg. Ps. 68:10 and b. Shab. 88b, Tg. Ps. 82:6–7 and Sifre Devarim 306, Tg. Ps. 137:3–5 and Pesikta Rabbati 136a) reveal a much closer connection to Amoraic rather than Tannaitic literature—a strong factor in dating the collection. In regard to Midrash Tehillim, Edwards makes the interesting observation that no instances of a specific relationship to Tg. Ps. can be found, despite the obvious thematic connection between the two collections. All supposed similarities are best explained solely due to their dependence on the same source text.

The Targum of Psalms was thus created by scholar(s) adept in the world of midrash. They presented themselves as knowledgeable and independent in their creative interaction with the biblical text, both adopting and creatively adapting other traditions. Where unique traditions appear in Tg. Ps., they are not unique in terms of “theology” but rather in regard to applying certain rabbinical ideas to texts not otherwise used in this manner. Thus, only Tg. Ps. connects Ps 48 to the hope for future redemption, based on the

paradigm of the exodus, a topic found frequently in connection with other scriptural texts. Even the messianic theology attributed to Ps 45 by Tg. Ps. is not unique in and of itself, or even influenced by Christian exegesis on the same text, but is merely uniquely connected to this psalm by Tg. Ps. In general, Edwards is highly skeptical regarding the use of Tg. Ps. for New Testament studies. Aside from the fact that dating this collection between the fourth and fifth century C.E. would negate any relevance for New Testament studies, Edwards makes a strong case for understanding particular thematic issues present in Tg. Ps. within an inner-Jewish context.

Edwards's book provides a fascinating look into comparative studies within the world of early biblical interpretation. A translation of the many in-line quotations in the text would have made his presentation more accessible for the nonspecialist reader. The book concludes with an appendix including the Targumic texts, an apparatus and translation for all the psalms studied, an extensive bibliography, a general index, and an index of ancient sources used.