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Christian M. M. Brady, *The Rabbinic Targum of Lamentations: Vindicating God* (Studies in the Aramaic Interpretation of Scripture 3). E. J. Brill; Leiden, 2003. Pp. ix + 187. ISBN 90 04 12163 3

In this study Brady examines the exegesis of the book of Lamentations reflected in its rabbinic Targum (TgLam).<sup>1</sup> While the biblical book of Lamentations is a response to the horrific disasters that befell Judah in the early sixth century BCE, TgLam is a response to Lamentations, probably from the seventh century CE.<sup>2</sup> As indicated in the title of Brady's monograph, the targumist brought the book of Lamentations in line with contemporary rabbinic beliefs and 'vindicated God' by demonstrating that the punishment that Jerusalem had to suffer was the proper judgement of the righteous God over the sinful people. The targumist carefully

<sup>1</sup> The investigations for this review have been supported by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO).

<sup>2</sup> On the question of the date of TgLam see also Brady, 'The Date, Provenance, and *Sitz im Leben* of Targum Lamentations', *JAB* 1 (1999), 5-29.

avoids the suggestion — sometimes present in the Hebrew text — that Jerusalem's punishment was disproportionate to its crimes.

Brady argues that TgLam presupposes a liturgical context. Although the custom that the scriptural reading in the synagogue was translated into Aramaic is well established, the question whether the extant written Targumim were used for this purpose is a debated issue (especially because according to rabbinic sources the *meturgeman* was prohibited from using a written translation). In the case of TgLam, however, 'the text itself indicates that it was crafted with a synagogal audience in mind' (p. 5) and that the targumist sought to bring his audience into the text as 'the Congregation of Israel dwelling in exile' (TgLam 2:19), which could be reconciled with God through repentance and rabbinic worship.

Chapter One, the largest chapter of the book, deals with Israel's responsibility. The targumist uses a number of techniques to emphasise Israel's responsibility in precipitating the destruction of Zion. These exegetical devices include the use of מִדַּת דִּינָא 'the Attribute of Justice' to explain why the horrific events have come upon Israel, and the use of the interpretative principle of מִדָּה כְּנֶגֶד מִדָּה 'measure for measure' to show that the form of Israel's punishment is directly related to its sin. TgLam 1:3, for example, makes clear that the House of Judah has become as a widow, because she herself oppressed the widows.

Characteristic of TgLam is its dramatic heightening and its intensification of violent or sexual imagery. In this respect TgLam is unique among the targumim, because other targumim tend to soften harsh biblical language. Thus Jerusalem's 'uncleanness' in Lam. 1:9 becomes the 'blood of her menstruation' in TgLam. In 1:15 'the Lord has trodden as in a wine press, the virgin daughter of Judah' has been rendered as 'the nations entered ... and defiled the virgins of the House of Judah until the blood of their virginity was caused to flow like wine from a wine press...'. A special form of this dramatic heightening is the use of converse translations. The Hebrew הִיָּתָה לְמַס in Lam. 1:1, for example, is translated twice. It is interpreted both as a remark about Jerusalem who has become a vassal (the simple meaning) and as a reference to Jerusalem as the recipient of tributes from the nations in earlier days (the converse translation).

Brady pays due attention to the translation of the first four verses of TgLam, which are extremely expansive. In these opening verses TgLam gives a systematic presentation of the history of God's people, which was a history of rebellion from the very beginning. TgLam 1:1–4 constitutes a theological prologue to the whole book and contains a number of allusions to Midrashic traditions (e.g. the association of אֵיכָה 'how?', the first word of Lamentations, with אֵיכָה 'where are you?' in Gen. 3:9.<sup>3</sup>

Chapter Two addresses the role of God in Jerusalem's misfortune. It is significant that TgLam does not seek to diminish the severity of the text or distance God from the acts of aggression. On the contrary, TgLam sometimes intensifies God's active role in the destruction of Jerusalem. Even in those cases where it mentions the hostile armies that came to destroy Jerusalem, it makes clear that they could not have succeeded in their attack had Jerusalem not been given over to them by God (see e.g. TgLam 1:19). It is also remarkable that the targumist did not have any difficulty

<sup>3</sup> See also Brady, 'Targum Lamentations 1:1–4: A Theological Prologue' in *Targum and Scripture: Studies in Aramaic Translation and Interpretation in Memory of Ernest G. Clarke* (ed. Paul V.M. Flesher; SAIS 2; Leiden 2003) 175–183. (This volume is reviewed elsewhere in this journal.)

in speaking about God's anger, and sometimes even inserts this anthropopathism into the text.

Chapter Three discusses Israel's response. While in the book of Lamentations there is only one clear call to repentance (3:40–42), in TgLam repentance is a recurrent theme. The Targumist asserts that Jerusalem had the opportunity to repent, and thereby stave off punishment, but refused to do so (e.g. TgLam 1:2) and elaborates on the call to repentance in the centre of the book (3:40–42). At the end of book (5:21) '(restore us...) that we may be restored (וְנִשְׁוּב)' is modified to 'and we will return in complete repentance (בְּתוֹבוֹתָא שְׁלֵמָתָא)'.

The proper response consists not only of repentance and returning to God, but also of adherence to fundamental rabbinic principles and practices. There are two passages where these principles are most prominent. The first is 2:18–19. The biblical text contains a call to the people to pray to God throughout the night in the hope that He might intercede. In TgLam this has become a call to the congregation to study Torah and Mishnah in the night (perhaps referring to a custom of nocturnal commemorations on *Tisha b'Ab*) and to pray in the House of the Congregation (the synagogue). The second is 3:25–30. In this verse the targumist modifies the 'yoke' of the Hebrew text to 'the yoke of the commandments' and introduces the notions of faith and obedience. He also adds a remark about 'the unity of the name of the Lord', which refers to the recitation of the *Shema*.

Chapter Four contains the conclusions. TgLam is primarily concerned with responding to the text of Lamentations. It reflects an attempt to vindicate God, to acquit Him of any perceived guilt and to bring Lamentations into line with contemporary rabbinic theological beliefs. It also sought to direct its audience to proper rabbinic worship through repentance and the study of Mishnah and Torah.

The book contains three appendices. The first appendix gives a very short survey of the textual history of TgLam. A distinction can be made between the western tradition attested in European and North African manuscripts, and the Yemenite tradition.<sup>4</sup> The Yemenite tradition is derived from the Western text and revised with the aim of achieving a closer resemblance to the MT. For this reason Brady has chosen an important textual witness to the western tradition as the basis for his study: Codex Vaticanus Urbinas Hebr. 1. The second appendix gives the text of this manuscript. The third appendix is a complete translation of TgLam into English.

The series Studies in the Aramaic Interpretation of Scripture was launched in 2002. The book under review is the third, valuable contribution to this series. To those who consider a book review not to be complete without some critical remarks we have little to offer, except for an editorial detail. It is a pity that throughout the book footnotes at the bottom of the pages do not run parallel with the references in the main text, but come one or two pages later.

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<sup>4</sup> See A. van der Heide, *The Yemenite Tradition of the Targum of Lamentations. Critical Text and Analysis of the Variant Readings* (Studia Post-Biblica 32; Leiden 1981).