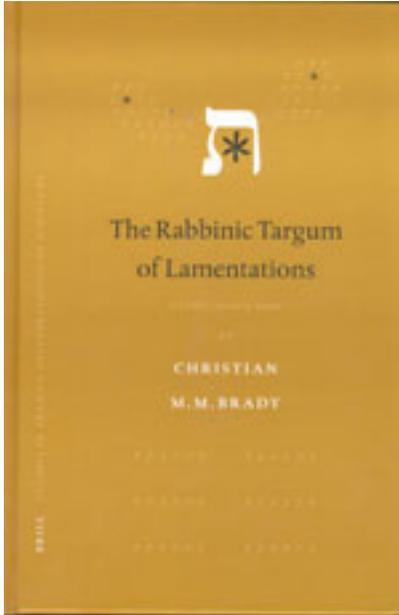


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Brady, Christian M. M.

The Rabbinic Targum of Lamentations: Vindicating God

Studies in Aramaic Interpretation of Scripture 3

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The targums, the classical Jewish Aramaic translations of Scripture, form a peculiar literary genre. Formally looking like translations, they are best described as emulations of books of the Hebrew Bible according to various parameters, one of which is the linear correspondence of the Aramaic words of the targum to the Hebrew words of the original (which is why they occasionally look so much like ordinary translations). The major distinguishing feature when the targum is compared with other ancient versions is the presence of numerous allusions, often very implicit, to Jewish exegetical traditions. The study of the targums is a complex and very large field of research in which a lot of work remains to be done and where many discoveries can still be made in fields such as lexicography, grammar, rabbinic exegesis, history, and theology. Christian Brady has put us in his debt by writing a stimulating book about the way in which the Targum of Lamentations (henceforth TgLam) reflects and modifies the theological outlook of the biblical book of Lamentations on the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple at the hands of the Babylonians in 587 B.C.E. as well as related matters.

After an introduction (1–16) in which key concepts are introduced and discussed, the three chapters—“Israel’s Responsibility” (17–88), “God’s In/action” (89–102), and “Israel’s Response” (103–33)—discuss the central issues of destruction and exile as divine

punishment, of the relation between God's righteousness and strictness, on one side, and his mercy, on the other, and of the desired reaction of the people to attain reconciliation with God. A brief conclusion focuses on "The Theology of TgLam" (134–41). In three appendices we find a discussion of "Textual Traditions and Principles of Translation" (142–46), a transcript of the consonant text of the manuscript used for this book, Codex Vaticanus Urbinatus Hebr. I (147–51), and a translation of the same manuscript (155–67). A bibliography, author index, and index of ancient sources conclude the book. I found the author's survey of the subject of his book competent, clear, and convincing and have little to add to it. Therefore I will only make a few observations about some of the author's presuppositions and his work in general, about the long passage at the beginning of TgLam, about the manuscript used for the book, and about the work on complex targumic texts such as TgLam in general.

The author is very much present in his book, not only through several references to the terrorist attacks of September 2001, but also in his underlying assumptions about the texts with which he deals. Brady assumes a very specific *Sitz im Leben* of both the MT of Lamentations and of its targum, which leads him to conclusions that he gives as certain or nearly certain, while they indeed issue only from these assumptions and, it can be added, are in my opinion not essential for his argument. He supposes that the book of Lamentations was written by an author or authors who had been very close to the actual events being described and reflected upon, as becomes clear from statements such as "the atrocities that the authors had just survived" (8). For the Targum he assumes the authorship of a *meturgeman* or targumist who composed this targum for performance in the synagogue on the Ninth of Av, for a community that would supposedly be able to understand all the implicit references to various rabbinic traditions: "The targumist, interpreting the text for the community gathered on Tisha b'Ab" (104). Although such assumptions do not do much damage, I simply do not see any firm evidence for them, and they may occasionally obscure other options for understanding the nature of the targum.

This is the second book by Christian Brady about the Targum of Lamentations. He apparently realized that the translation and rather brief and eclectic commentary by Étan Levine (*The Aramaic Version of Lamentations* [2nd ed.; New York: Hermon, 1981]) would not be adequate for allowing information to be gained from TgLam, and he wrote his own translation and commentary as a Ph.D. dissertation supervised by Philip Alexander and Alison Salvesen in 1999. It is a pity that it was not published in some form subsequently, although now it can be downloaded from the Internet (http://www.tulane.edu/~ntcs/meg/Brady_TgLam_DPhil.pdf; Brady's online translation of TgLam can be found at <http://www.tulane.edu/~ntcs/meg/tglam.htm>). This dissertation already contains many elements which have been elaborated in the book under review here.

The author, taking as his point of departure publications by Philip Alexander (in *Abr-Nahrain* 24 [1986]: 1–26) and himself (in Paul Flesher, ed., *Targum and Scripture: Studies in Aramaic Translation and Interpretation in Memory of Ernest G. Clarke* [Leiden: Brill, 2002], 175–83), rightly regards the four verses at the beginning of the targum text, which are more expansive than any other part of this targum, as a kind of coherent brief theological treatise. I would have liked him to elaborate on the literary nature and contents of this treatise a little bit more extensively, as such a study is bound both to give us some insight in the literary strategy of the targumist and to provide a clearer view of the theological starting point of the targum, both of which confirm the coherence of this passage.

His concise report on its contents is: “The opening verse of TgLam begins a systematic presentation of the history of God’s people that will continue through verse 4. The targumist begins with a comparison of Adam and Eve’s punishment with that of the exiles’ banishment from Jerusalem in the first verse of the book. Verse 2 moves on to the scene of the Israelites’ lack of faith in the wilderness (Num. 13–14) and verses 3 and 4 describe sins in the monarchical period” (18). Although this survey is basically correct and although he elaborates on some points, there is much more to be said about the form and contents of this passage.

First, it is important to realize that in most targums it is not rarely vital to determine who is supposed to be speaking. It seems that we are dealing with a dialogue here. Jeremiah apparently poses a question, namely, how it came about that God decreed (גזר) the sad fate of Jerusalem and the people of Israel at the hands of the Babylonians, a tragedy of the same magnitude as the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden. The Attribute of Justice, which probably must be assumed to speak the rest of the passage TgLam 1:1–4, first notes in a passage that is strongly reminiscent of Ezra 4:11–22 that Jerusalem’s sorry situation is the result of her own sins and then gives an unexpected answer to Jeremiah’s question: many centuries before, on the night when the spies sent out by Moses returned with a bad report about the Promised Land, the people of Israel started to weep, and God became angry and decreed (גזר) that they would be weeping in the future in the same night also, but then about the destruction of the temple. The theological problem raised by this statement—that the people of Israel would have been unable to prevent their punishment, which was foreseen and even ordered by God many generations before—is solved by the observation that they were punished for their own sins, which they committed just prior to the fall of Jerusalem, and had been given the opportunity for repentance through the admonishing of Jeremiah, but refused to accept it. All this constitutes an interesting expression of Rabbi Akiba’s famous dictum in *m. ’Abot* 3:15: “Everything is foreseen; yet free will is given.” Verses 3 and 4 specify Jeremiah’s reproaches and also indicate the relation between punishment and sin, the fact

that both Judah and Israel sinned and the observation that their sins were of both main types: against God and against their fellow Israelites. Finally, from the sins of Israel the Attribute of Justice returns to the theme with which it started: Jerusalem's desolate state, apparently alluding to *m. Ta'an.* 4:8 or a comparable text. Its answer to Jeremiah's question, with its implicit discussion of divine foreknowledge, sin, the option of repentance and punishment, is hemmed in between two passages about the sad state of Jerusalem. Thus the entire passage spoken by the Attribute of Justice is in the form of a kind of ring composition.

This coherent and highly allusive text is composed in a remarkable type of artful and stylized prose characterized by a number of literary instruments such as repetition, parallelism, and assonance, aspects of which Brady not rarely comments upon, though he does not attempt to fit them in one coherent literary picture. I compiled the following, hardly complete, list of such striking literary phenomena, some of which apparently originated in aspects of the Hebrew text, whereas others were added by the targumist. Apart from evident aesthetic reasons, this literary strategy especially serves to make this passage into a literary and conceptual unity.

1. Repetition: גזר, "to decree" (in Jeremiah's question and the Attribute of Justice's answer); דין, "to punish"; תרך, "to expel"; ספד, "to mourn"; יתב בלחוד, "to sit alone"; סלק (af), "to bring up"; ליליא ההוא and ההוא ליליא, "that night"; תשעא יומין באב, "the ninth day of Av"; בכא, "to weep"; עממא, "the nations"; חרב, "to destroy"; מן יד, "at once"; עלל, "to enter"; צדא, "to lay waste"; רשע (af), "to do evil things", and רשיע, "evil"; לב, "heart"; פולחנא, "work" (in the sin and the punishment of Judah)

2. Synonyms, near synonyms, and other parallel words: אוכלוסין, "multitudes" // עממין, "nations"; מס, "tribute" // כרג, "head-tax"; מתרברבא בעממא, "exalted among the nations" // שליטא באפרכיא, "powerful among the provinces" (nations // provinces < MT); סלק (af), "to bring up" // נתן, "to give"; שביל, "path" // תרע, "gate"; אנה, "to sigh" // ספד, "to mourn"; בטל (pa), "to interrupt" // פסק, "to stop"

3. Antonyms: מלא, "to be full" // אתרוקן, "to be emptied"; מתרברב, "(being) exalted" // מכיד, "humble"; חבר, "friend" // בעיל דבב, "enemy"

4. *Figura etymologica*: בשר בשורתא, "to bring news"; בכא בכותא, "to weep"; תוב בתתובתא, "to return in repentance"; פלח פולחנא (af), "to cause to perform work"; חנג חנגין (pa), "to dance dances"

5. Assonance: כגבר דמכתש סגירו על בסריה, "like a man who is stricken with leprosy on his flesh"; וקרתא דהוה מליא, "The city that had been full" // כארמלא, "to dance dances"

“and came to look like a widow.” It seems rather likely that these cases of assonance in the first verse, together with the rhyming of a number of words, are a deliberate emulation of the striking assonance and rhyme in the Hebrew text of Lam 1:1. There are more possible instances, but as is usually the case it is not easy to distinguish deliberate from accidental assonance.

Whereas a thorough examination of rabbinic and other texts, as laid down in the author’s dissertation, lies at the basis of his understanding of the text, the status of his text of TgLam itself remains somewhat unclear. He uses the text of Codex Vaticanus Urbinas Hebr. I, incidentally adducing the evidence of other manuscripts, but for his translation and comments silently emends many of the errors in the manuscript, rarely adduces the evidence from other manuscripts, and sometimes translates an evidently incorrect form of a word or sentence without notifying the reader that the reading and translation are highly uncertain. I can fully understand the practical reasons underlying this approach, as one could hardly expect the author to make a full text edition of TgLam also, but I think it would have been better to present them explicitly.

In order to demonstrate, first, the coherence and literary unity of TgLam 1:1–4 and, second, the corruptness of the manuscript and the need to emend it in numerous places, I give my own translation of 1:1–4, listing in the footnotes places where it is necessary to emend the text of Urbinas I; the author’s list would have been somewhat different but not necessarily shorter. In this translation, I divided the text into units of information, which gives a good idea of its structure, although it is hardly the only possibility to structure it in every instance. I will not indicate the agreements with and differences from earlier translations, such as those of Alexander and Brady himself, as I hope to return to this interesting passage elsewhere.

(1) Jeremiah the prophet and high priest said:

“How was it decreed about Jerusalem and its people¹
that they would be punished with expulsion and that there would be mourning about them with Echa
(‘how?’),

just as Adam and Eve were punished² with expulsion from the garden of Eden,
and the Master of the World mourned about them³ with Echa?”

The Attribute of Justice spoke and thus said:

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1. Read עמה, “its people,” instead of עמהא, “its peoples.”
 2. Read אאדדנו, “they were punished,” instead of the obscure אאדדנ.
 3. Read עליהון instead of עליהון.

“Because of the multitude of her guilt, (and the) revolution and rebelliousness that they committed inside her,⁴

she will be sitting alone,
like a man who is stricken with leprosy on his flesh, who is sitting alone,

and (for the same reason) the city that had been⁵ full of multitudes and many nations became empty of them and came to look like a widow.

and the one who was exalted among the nations and powerful among the provinces,
and to whom tribute was brought up,
turned to be humble,
and to give head-taxes after this.

(2) When Moses, the prophet, sent emissaries to reconnoiter the land,
the emissaries returned and brought up a bad rumor about the land of Israel,
and that night was the ninth day of Av.

And when the people, the house of Israel, heard this bad message,
which they told about the land of Israel,
the people lifted up their voices and the people, the house of Israel, wept in that night.

At once the anger of the Lord grew strong against them,⁶
and he decreed that they would be weeping in that⁷ night throughout their generations
about the destruction of the temple.

And when⁸ it was said in prophecy to Jeremiah, the high priest,
that Jerusalem would be destroyed at the hands of the evil Nebuchadnezzar,
if they would not return in repentance,

at once he entered and admonished the people, the house of Israel, and they refused to obey.
Then the evil Nebuchadnezzar entered and laid waste Jerusalem,
and burned the temple with fire on the ninth day of the month of Av.

In that night the community of Israel wept profusely,

4. Read into **ומרד דבגוה עבדין**, in agreement with Ezra 4:15 and 19, instead of the obscure **ומה דבגוהא בגין**.

5. Read **הוה** instead of **הוה**.

6. Read **עליהון** instead of **עליהון**.

7. Read **ההוא** instead of **הדא**.

8. Read **כד** instead of **כד**.

and tears streamed over her cheeks.

There is no one who will speak comforting things to her heart,
of all the idols that she loved to go after.
For that reason her friends have done evil against her;
they turned to being enemies for her.

(3) The house of Judah went into exile
because they had oppressed orphans and widows,

and because of the work that they let perform their brothers,
the children of Israel, who had sold themselves to them:
they did not proclaim liberty for their slaves and handmaids
who were of the seed of Israel.

For that reason they were likewise delivered into the hands of the nations,
and the community of the house of Judah was sitting in the midst of the nations,
and did not find rest
from the hard work with which they oppressed her.

Everyone who pursued her overtook her,
while she was hiding between the boundaries, and they caused anguish to her.⁹

(4) All the time that Jerusalem was built up,
the children of Israel refused to go up
to appear before the Lord
three times a year,

and because of the sins of Israel,
Jerusalem was laid waste

and the paths of Zion became mournful,
because no one entered her.
At the time of her feasts
all her gates lay waste.

The priests¹⁰ were sighing¹¹

9. The manuscript evidence and the problems with the interpretation of this passage seem to indicate that the text is corrupt here.

10. Read כהניא instead of כהנתא.

because they had interrupted the sacrifices,
the virgins were mourning
because they had stopped to go out

on the fifteenth day of Av
and on the Day of Atonement,
which is the tenth day of Tishri,
to dance dances.

Also her heart is very bitter.”

Note that the sins mentioned in verses 3–4 are all found in some form in the book of Jeremiah: oppression of orphans and widows in 7:6 and 22:3; denying freedom to fellow Israelites in the seventh year in 34:8–17 (note that “the children of Israel who sold themselves to them” is a near quote from the targum to Jer 34:14, so Brady’s proposal on p. 35 to understand this passage in the light of 1 Kgs 12 seems less likely). The refusal to go up to Jerusalem we meet in its reversal in the future, and likewise the dancing of the girls of Israel, in Jer 31:5 and 3, respectively.

There is a more general consideration about publications dealing with complex, often rather long, targum texts with an involved history such as TgLam. In many cases the establishing of the text, translation, and commentary is a process that depends on so many different factors that it is virtually impossible for one person to deal with all these aspects within a reasonable span of time.

It can be added that improvements in these fields often come separately and more or less haphazardly, instead of through a continuous exertion of one author. In the traditional style of scholarship, these problems could hardly be solved, as it was not practicable to assemble a team in one location that could address all these issues together and to keep a continuously updated text with translation and commentary available to all. In this case the author had to start from the beginning and had to be selective in the subjects that he tackled. Modern information technology, however, allows scholars to work together on one project even when they are thousands of miles apart and to produce results that can be preserved in electronic form and modified whenever the need arises. It is therefore to be expected that future editions, translations, and commentaries will be the personal product of specific researchers to a limited degree only and will be changed and added to in whatever ways the actual situation requires. They can then serve as a reliable base for further research. The plans of the International Organization for Targum Studies (IOTS)

11. Read ׀ניח׀ instead of ׀ניח׀.

for new editions of all the rabbinic targums offers an ideal starting point for such enterprises, which will in due time make the production of good and useful monographs such as Christian Brady's much easier than any scholar would have surmised only a few years ago.