sciendo

Perichoresis
Volume 21. Supplement 1 (2023): 21-39
DOI: 10.2478/perc-2023-0008

'DOES GOD EVER FEEL SORRY?' UNDERSTANDING VERBS OF DIVINE EMOTION IN THE PENTATEUCH AND THE TARGUMIC VERSIONS OF ONKELOS, NEOFITI AND PSEUDO-JONATHAN.

AURELIAN BOTICA*

Emanuel University of Oradea

ABSTRACT: In the present study we will direct our attention to the particular instances in which God appears as the subject of the verb נ ח ם in the Pentateuch, where the context describes the reaction of 'regretting' or 'repenting' over a previous decision. In addition, in order to find out whether the Aramaic translators were consistent when trying to avoid anthropomorphisms, we will look at several of the occurrences of the verb in situations where it appears with a human, not a divine subject. This comparative approach will allow us to locate the different dimensions of the semantic field in which a given verb functions. Hopefully the wider the picture of this field, the better the chances are that we will understand the motivations and beliefs that informed the particular choices the translators made.

KEY WORDS: Targums, Anthropomorphism, God, Repentance, Old Testament

Introduction

In this paper we will focus on Aramaic translations of the Hebrew verb of emotion נחם ('to repent', 'regret'), as it appears in Genesis 6: 6-7 and Exodus 32:12, 14, and in the Targums of Onkelos, Neofiti and Pseudo-Jonathan. Although the subject of anthropomorphisms has been amply treated by Targumic scholars, there are virtually no works that deal with the translation of verbs such as these in the Targums. Traditionally they have been labelled *antropophatic*, not *anthropomorphic*, but they fall under the same category as do expressions that attribute human organs (hands, nose, ears, etc.) or actions to God. In the Hebrew literature of the Old Testament there are a number of verbs of emotions that appear to have raised theological problems for

* DR. AURELIAN BOTICA is Professor of ancient Hebrew at the Emanuel University of Oradea, Romania. PhD. Hebrew Union College (Cincinnati, Ohio)

some of the Aramaic translators. In addition to נחם ('to repent', 'regret'), one could mention שנא('to hate, also with the noun form שִׂנְאָה 'hate'), אנף ('be angry'), אהב ('love', also with noun form, אַהֲבָה 'love'). By focusing only on verbs, we do not mean to suggest that Old Testament anthropomorphic language is limited only to verbs of human emotions applied to God. Typically, when scholars have approached the subject of anthropomorphism, they have taken into account both inward (emotions) and outward (organs) entities (Eichrodt 1967: 21; Klein, 2004: 308). Each one of these verbs deserves a study on its own, especially as some of them have a high number of occurrences in the Old Testament.

Survey of scholarly research

One must realize that the problem of anthropomorphisms that modern scholars inherited from antiquity is as alive today as it was when the first Aramaic translators of the Old Testament encountered expressions like 'the feet of God' or 'God repented.' According to A. Marmorstein, 'neither the Tannaim, nor the Amoraim...were unanimous in their views and teachings about the problems of anthropomorphism and anthropopathism' (Marmorsteain 1937: 29ff.). Marmorstein describes the two main schools of translation as the *literalist* and the *allegorical*. The chief representative of the first school was Rabbi Aqiba, 'who preferred the literal exposition, even where anthropomorphic difficulties predominate.' The representative of the allegorical school, Rabbi Ishmael, considered that Torah spoke in the language of human beings, and so, influenced perhaps by the thought of Philo of Alexandria, he adopted the allegorical approach. R. Ishmael considered it a lack of piety to attribute human characteristics to God.

G.F. Moore took a more cautious approach and argued that it is 'an egregious error to think that the Targums attempt to dispose of all the anthropomorphisms in the Scripture' (Moore, 1960: 420; cf. Batnitzky 2000: 21ff.; Urbach, 2005: 38, 44, 152-53). A number of scholars argued that the phenomenon of anthropomorphism appeared earlier, in the worldview of the biblical writers themselves. Thus De Pury notes that, in order to support their view in favor of the Documentary Hypothesis, some linked the presence of anthropomorphism with the Yahwist (J) source (De Pury 1992: 6.1013). Accordingly, the Yahwist source consists of the work of 10th century biblical authors who revised and/or added certain portions of the sacred text of the Old Testament. As we will show, the argument simply fails when one takes into account the presence of anthropomorphisms in passages that the same scholars would attribute to the Deuteronomist source (e.g., Deut 1:27; 9:28; 12:31).

This, of course, raises the important questions of dating and of the historical and geographical contexts in which the Greek and the Aramaic translations took place.

© EMANUEL UNIVERSITY *of* ORADEA

A number of scholars dated the Targums anywhere from the 2nd century B.C. to the 3rd-6th century A.D. (Kaufman 1994:166; Visotzky 1995: 21; Shinan, 2011: 586-88). More specifically, the debate in recent times appears to have focused on the theories of Aramaic translations of the Old Testament, and in particular on the Pentateuch (Klein 1981; McNamara 2001: 308ff). With Marmorstein and Klein we may conclude that there have risen three main approaches that dominated this debate: the *Allegorist*, the *Moderate*, and the *Literalist*. According to the Allegorist school, the Targumic translators intentionally eliminated or toned down all anthropomorphic expressions (Sperber 1973: 37; Komlosh 1973: 103; Grossfield 1972; McNamara 1976: 860). The reasons for this approach varied, ranging from theological concerns to issues of literary aesthetics and/or simple clarification of a difficult style (Grossfeld 1988: 12-14).

The Moderate approach may be divided in three subsequent theories. The *topical* system combines the allegorical and the literalist approaches, depending on the terms to be translated and the subjects to which these terms are attributed (Maybau 1870). The *evolutionary* system holds that the anthropomorphic terms underwent a historical process of development, one that intensified during the final stages of translation/redaction (Gingsburger 1891. The *thematic* system focuses on the consistency and theological significance of the usage of the word *memra* ('word' or 'manifestation') in the contexts of the themes of creation, revelation and salvation (Munoz 1974). All three systems allow for the employment of both the *allegorical* and the *literal* schools of translation.

Underlined mainly by Klein, the Literalist approach assumes that anthropomorphisms did not appear to be an issue for the Aramaic translators. There is a wealth of examples where anthropomorphic terms were intensified (rather than toned down), as well as instances where identical words were used both with respect to God and to human beings, for reasons other than theological. Klein allows for certain anthropomorphic tendencies in the Targumim, but explains them as late, pious attempts to remove literal translations of anthropomorphisms. The secondary origin of these changes is evident especially in places where the Aramaic syntax is awkward or where scribal errors occurred. The scribes thus 'introduced only minimal changes, often at the expense of grammar and syntax,' and these 'do not belong to the original strand of the texts' (Klein 1980: 177).

For the most part, the scholarship that we have reviewed so far has dealt little or not at all with the possibility that the Targumic authors may have been influenced by Greek thought in their view of God and the impossibility of him showing regret. In Greek thought, for a being such as God to undergo 'changes', 'modifications' or 'processes' would subvert the logic and hence the reality of the perfection of being.

Aristotle, and classic Attic thought, may have also come under the influence of Pythagorean philosophy with its view of πάθος both as a good 'emotion' and a 'defect.' In its early stages πάθος derived from the term πάσχω – 'that which happens' – and it came to be applied incidents, or events that that took a unfortunate turn (Liddell and Scott 1990). In fact, the word appeared as early as Homer under the form טקנ:פ, with the sense of 'sorrow' (Michaelis 1967: 5.926-39). In this context one may note the Aristotelian association of πάθος with ἐπιθυμίά ὀργή and φόβοζ among other vices.

Given the history of the concept, then, Aristotle's notion of θεὸς ἀπαθής (God impassable) would make perfect sense. And so would his reticence in ascribing any emotions to God. This is how Moltmann explains the Aristotelian concept of θεὸς ἀπαθής , that is, 'God impassible' (Moltmann 1991: 267-71). For Aristotle, 'as actus purus and pure causality, nothing can happen to God for him to suffer.' And as 'the perfect being, he is without emotions.' Copleston also points out that for Aristotle '(a) God could not return our love, and (b) we could not in any case be said to love God' (Copleston 1985: 1.317). For Aristotle, God is 'a substance which is eternal and unmovable and separate from sensible things.' Though 'most good, God remains impassive and unalterable (Ross 1928: XII.7). For some the Aristotelian god is more like an 'It' that 'does not know anything outside of itself' and hence cannot be the object of human worship (Diogenes 1985: 129). This leads us to conclude that, if there ever was any shared background between Greek and Aramaic thinkers, it made little or no direct impact on the worldview of Targumic translators. We know that Hellenistic philosophy had a minimal degree of influence over Palestinian Rabbinic Judaism. The apparent lack of consideration on the part of Palestinian scholars for the writings of Philo of Alexandria, for example, remains a relevant case. But even if contact between the two was minimal, it still remains important to ask why Greek thought shared with Rabbinic Judaism a similar reticence in ascribing human emotions to God.

Overall, we may conclude by observing that, in spite of Klein's weighty contribution to the debate, the views of the *allegorist* and *moderate* approaches appear to command more acceptance in contemporary scholarly circles. This view, summarized by Paul Flesher, asserts that "the Targums have a strong tendency to alter... anthropomorphisms" (Flesher 1996: 38-39). Flesher views the *memra* and *shekinah* of the Lord as attributes, rather than nominal substitutes for God (which would be Klein's position). Thus "instead of God creating, for example, God's memra creates." At other times the action is not performed by God but in front in God, or is rendered in the passive voice. What one must understand, however, is the fact that for most Jews who understood little or no Hebrew a 'targum like Neofiti would have been their Bible' (Flesher 2002: 71). Alexander, however, contends that certain portions of

© EMANUEL UNIVERSITY *of* ORADEA

the Targums were prohibited from being read in the synagogue. This shows that, at least in some circles, people shared a more skeptical attitude toward the notion of the Targums as Scripture (Alexander 1976: 177-179). In Alexander's view the Targum was a pre-rabbinic institution "which the Rabbis attempted to rabbinize and to control," even though "official uniformity was never achieved" (Alexander 1992: 6.330). This notion helps us put into a proper perspective the importance of targumic studies and the hermeneutics of translation/interpretation. Were the Jewish readers as sensitive over the literalness of their translation as are scholars of the same texts today? To what extent did factors like *society* and *culture*, *historical* events and *geographical* location influenced the hermeneutics of the translators? Do certain Targumic traditions fall into clear patterns of hermeneutics that differ from others? Do they exhibit sufficient variations as to defy a comfortable and predictable scholarly classification?

Although our study focuses on a very specific theme, it is hoped that at the end we will have had a better understanding of the methodological approaches that characterized the work of Targumic translators. We will now turn our attention to several of the texts from the Pentateuch where God is described as sharing the human reactions of 'feeling sorry' and 'changing his mind.'

Verbs of 'repentance' or 'feeling sorry'[1]

The verb that describes the act of 'feeling sorry' is נחם. The verb occurs some nine times in this form: One would notice that in Numbers 23:19 and Psalm 110:4, even though the verb appears with God as subject, it conveys precisely the opposite idea of God not feeling regret, as human beings would usually do: "God is not man..., that he should repent"(לא איש אל ויתנחם) It occurs 108 times in the Bible and it has 'two broad semantic domains' (Simian-Yofre 1978: 9.340-55). The first has the sense of 'comforting', 'strengthening', 'ameliorating someone's pain,' or 'feeling sympathy' for someone. Under this form, which is the more frequent of the two, the verb usually appears in the Piel family, especially with the sense of 'comforting.'

In the second sense, נחם connotes the idea of 'regret, feeling sorry, repenting,' or 'changing one's mind.' The biblical authors used this form of the verb with both human beings and God as a subject (Koehler 1994-2000; Stuart 2006: 672). When the verb occurs with God as subject, it usually takes the Niphal form and it describes the notion of God himself 'feeling regret' over a certain event or act that he had previously planned otherwise. One may note, however, Judges 2:18, where the same Niphal form of נחם is rendered as "For the Lord was moved to pity" (כי־ינחם יהוה) because of the suffering of Israel at the hands of her enemies. Evidently the author draws a line

[1] For the English translations we have relied on the ESV Bible Translation. Whenever we departed from the ESV translation, we indicated it by placing the words so translated in *italics*.

distinction here between "regretting" and "feeling pity." The verb occurs several times in the Pentateuch with the sense of God 'being sorry' or 'repenting' (Genesis 6:6, 6:7; Exod 32:12, 14). The verb appears in other books with the same sense as well. Thus 1Samuel 15:10-11: "[the Lord said] I feel sorry (נחמתי) that I made Saul king" (cf. 15:35), 2Samuel 24:16 and Jonah 3:10: "the Lord felt sorry (וינחם יהוה) over that evil" (cf. 1Chronicles 21:15), Jeremiah 18:10: "I will change my mind וְנִחַמְתִּי over the good that I had said I would do" (cf. 26:3, 19), Ezekiel 24:14 and Zechariah 8:14: "I will not feel sorry (ולא אנחם) Joel 2:14 and Jonah 3:9, 4:2: "Who knows if [the Lord] will not turn and feel sorry" (ישוב ינחם), Amos 7:3, 6: "The Lord repented (נחם יהוה) over this thing: It shall not happen. This second aspect, evidently, created some sort of dissonance for many expositors and, here, for Targumic translators, as they may have thought it improper to convey literally the notion of divine repentance. Thus, both Matthews and Wenham show that the biblical authors were more interested to convey the anguish of God, not to deal with aspects of philosophical determinism and theological systematization (Matthews 1996: 341ff.; Wenham 1987: 144-145). In order to understand better the extent of this phenomenon, we will list the main passages where the נחם verb appears in the Hebrew text, along with the translations of the targums Onkelos, Neofiti and Pseudo-Jonathan.

1. Genesis 6:6-7

וינחם יהוה כי־עשׂה את־האדם בארץ ויתעצב אל־לבו׃
ויאמר יהוה אמחה את־האדם אשׁר־בראתי מעל פני
האדמה מאדם עד־בהמה עד־רמשׂ ועד־עוף השׁמים כי נחמתי כי עשׂיתם׃

6 And the LORD *regretted* that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.
7 So the LORD said, 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I *regret* that I have made them.'

(T. Onk.) ותב ייי במימריה ארום עבד ית אינשׁא בארעא
ארי תבית במימרי ארי עבדתינון׃

And the Lord *regretted* in his memra that he made man on earth, (6)...
for I *regret* in my memra that I made them' (7)

(T. Ps Jon) ותב ייי במימריה ארום עבד ית אינשׁא בארעא
ואידיין עליהון במימריה
ארום תבית במימרי ארום עבדתינון׃

© EMANUEL UNIVERSITY *of* ORADEA

And the Lord *regretted* in his memra that he had made man on the earth(6)
and he debated about them in his memra...
'for I *regret* in my memra that I made them' (7)

(Neofiti) והוות תהו מן־קדם ייי ארום ברא ית בר־נשׁא בארעא ואתפייס עם לבה
ארום הוה תהו קדמי ארום בראת יתהון

And *it was regret* from before the Lord that he had created the son of man on the earth and he was reconciled with his heart (6)...
'for there *was regret* before me that I created them' (7)

2. Exodus 32:12, 14

שׁוב מחרון אפך והנחם על־הרעה לעמך׃
וינחם יהוה על־הרעה אשׁר דבר לעשׂות לעמו׃

12 Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people.
14 And the LORD relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.

(Neofiti) חזור כען מן תקף רוגזך תהו 1 קדמך 2 ותנחם על בישׁתא די אמרת
1 למיתי 2 למייתי 2 יתה על עמך׃
7 והוות תוהו קד ייי על בישׁתא די אמר למייתיה על עמא׃

12 Turn now from the anger of your wrath before you and relent of this evil that you have said you will bring upon your people.
14 And there was penitence before the Lord for the evil which He said to bring upon the people

(PJon) תוב מתקוף רוגזך ויהוי תוהו קדמך על בישׁתא דמלילתא למעבד לעמך׃
14 והוה תהו מן־קדם ייי על בישׁתא דחשׁיב למעבד לעמיה׃

12 Turn from your strong anger, and let there be relenting before you over the evil that you have threatened to do to your people.

14 And there was relenting before the Lord over the evil which He had thought to do to His people.

(T. Onk.) תוב מתקוף רוגזך ואתיב ואתיב מן בשתא דמלילתא למעבד לעמך:
ותב יוי מן בשתא דמליל דחשיב למעבד לעמיה:

12 Turn from the strength of your anger, and revert from the evil which you have threatened to do to your people.
14 And the Lord did turn from the evil which He had threatened to do to the people.

Analysis of the terms *memra* and the preposition *qdm*

Before dealing with the texts themselves, it is important to define two of the terms that appear in almost all of the Targumic translations of the texts from Genesis, but not in the Hebrew text: the word *memar* or *memra* (מימרא מימר) and the prepositional phrase 'before/from before' (מקד/קדם). They are crucial for understanding the mindset of the Aramaic translators.

The Word Memra

The word is of Aramaic origins and it probably derives from the form מאמר. In its literal sense it means 'word' or 'speech' (Kaufman 2019; Jastrow 1996: 775; Sokoloff 2002: 670). As we will show later, the translators often used it to connote God's presence or power, or as a linguistic mediatory term substituting for the 'word' of God. Now, the Targumic authors employed *memra* not only in relation to actions that God performs, but also to describe the response of human beings to God. For example they believed in the Memra (Exod 14:31), they were murmuring against it (Exod 16:8) or they were supposed diligently to accept the *memra*.

Scholars have noted several possibilities concerning the function of *memra* in the Targums. The word appears some 28 times in Targum Onkelos on Exodus, for example, out of which 23 times it relates directly to an action that otherwise God would have done (Bohannan 1990: 27-28). As such, Sabourin shows that earlier scholars believed that *memra* was seen as a 'divine hypostasis' which allowed the Jews to satisfy 'he ever intensifying demand for a transcendent, purely spiritual interpretation of God. Such were figures like the Spirit, the Wisdom, the Shekinah, and the Word (memra) of God' (Sabourin 1976: 79-85; Bousset 1970: 288). Koehler too understood the translators to have used *memra* as the 'manifestation of the divine power, or as God's messenger in place of God Himself, where the predicate is not in conformity with the dignity or the spirituality of the Deity' (Koehler 1906). One would note that at times the *memra* 'wipes out the worship of Baal-peor' (T. Neofiti, T. Ps-Jon. to

© EMANUEL UNIVERSITY *of* ORADEA

Deut 4:3) and it may conclude a covenant and enjoin the people, as is evident in T. Neofiti to Deut 4:23 (Drazin 1982: 40). In this context Jastrow refers to the concept of the hypostized "word" that the Targums use "to obviate anthropomorphism" (Jastrow 1996: 75). Along similar lines, a number of scholars have explored the concept of memra in relation to the notion of 'intermediaries,' the most common of which would the symbol of Christ in the Old Testament. This remains a viable dimension to be explored in the larger context of 'memra' studies, but it falls outside the given purpose and limits of this paper. For a starting point, McNamara suggests a plausible degree of indirect synagogal reading of the Targums on Johannine literature, particularly the Gospel of John 1:1 (McNamara 1968: 115-117; cf. Boyarin 2001: 243-84; Wrobel 2016: 4.115-130).

Scholars like D. L. Munoz and L. Sabourin dismiss the idea of *memra* as divine hypostasis, and in turn view it as a 'Jewish attempt to express God's creative and redemptive activity in an appropriate way' (Sabourin 1976: 85). By using this word, the translators removed 'the anthropomorphical representation by saying that God acts and communicates through his memra.' As such we may encounter here a divine attribute, not a divine being per se, used here in a thoroughly monotheistic context which precludes any divine autonomy.

G.F. Moore understood *memra* not necessarily as a substitute for God, but as 'command', 'will', 'teaching', 'inspiration', 'power', 'protection' (Moore, 1922: 41-61). Moreover, he argued that the word may have functioned mainly as a 'buffer-word,' used in places where 'the literal interpretation seemed to bring God into too close contact with his creatures' (Moore 1927: 1.419). Moore adds that various other devices are employed to the same intent, such as the substitution of a passive voice for the active and the "frequent introduction of קדם and מקדם Seen in this way, the *memra* is 'purely a phenomenon of translation, not a figment of speculation.'

A slightly different interpretation is offered by Robert Hayward. He, for example, reaches the conclusion that 'originally a term bearing a particular and distinctive theology of the Divine Name and Presence, it was used sparingly in carefully chosen contexts.' But 'at some point in the tradition the content of Memra was lost: how or why we do not clearly know.' Hayward believes that, if *memra* was originally used only with a few distinct verbs, later its use spread to 'verbs of speaking, and thence Memra may be subject of virtually any verb, becoming a mere periphrasis or substitute for the Tetragram' (Hayward 1974: 412-18). As with other authors, Michael Kline concurs with Moore that the word *memra* is not a divine hypostasis, but a nominal substitute in place of God's name or pronoun (Klein 1980: 172). It is not clear whether Klein shares Hayward's theory that *memra* may have been initially employed only with select verbs, but he agrees with Hayward that the use of *memra*

'appears arbitrary and unmotivated by theological considerations' (Klein 1980: 175). Perhaps we may never fully understand the worldview of the Aramaic translators with respect to *memra* and the possibility that God allowed mediators like that to work on his behalf. It still is plausible to say that the concept may have been used at times euphemistically in order to mediate the personal manifestation of God in unusual or sensitive situations (Grossfeld 1986: 19).

***The Preposition 'before/from before'* (מקדם/קדם).**

One of the elements that, along with *memra*, seems to create a temporary buffer between God certain sensitive situations is the prepositional phrase 'from before' (מן־קדם). For example, instead of saying 'God regretted,' the Aramaic translators would render the Hebrew as 'and there was regret from before the Lord.'

Klein shows that in its basic form the preposition קדם is used 196 in the Targum Onkelos with reference to God. In his view, the Aramaic translators employed קדם 'out of deference to high office or nobility, and not related to the nature of the Deity.' As such, it is 'used as an expression of respect.' Klein argues that this linguistic phenomenon occurs as the 'natural result of the idiomatic variance between biblical Hebrew and Targumic Aramaic,' or 'simply, as the translation of a biblical phrase that was understood figuratively' (Klein, 1979: 502-507).

A slightly different argument was made by Klein in 'The Preposition קד ('Before'): A Pseudo-Anti-Anthropomorphism in the Targums.' In his view, different scholars 'assumed that these translational adjustments were a result of the refinement of Israel's concept of the Deity' (Klein 1982: xxiii). The adjustments Klein refers to were meant 'for the avoidance of Biblical anthropomorphisms, or for the obviation of direct relationship between man and God' (this echoes Moore's 'buffer-word' theory). Klein disagrees with this interpretation and, after a brief analysis of several sensitive verses, he concludes that the translators employed the preposition קדם or the prepositional phrase מקדם not only with reference to God, but also before verbs with human subjects. The use of the preposition 'before' is a substitution for *the nota accusativi*, or for other more direct prepositions, and is 'common in both the divine and the human contexts.' As in the case with the word memra, Klein denies the use of קד/קדם as a means of avoiding or circumvoluting anthropomorphisms (Klein 1982: xxvi). True, it may function 'as an expression of deference to a respectable person or institution,' but all such usages 'apply equally in reference to man or God.'

© EMANUEL UNIVERSITY *of* ORADEA

Analysis of Genesis 6:6-7

MT	Gen 6:6	וינחם יהוה
	6:7	כִּי נחמתי
ONK	6:6	ותב ייי במימריה
	6:7	אֲרי תבית במימרי
NEO	6:6	והוות תהו מן־קדם ייי
	6:7	ארום הוה
PS JON	6:6	ותב ייי במימריה
	6:7	ארום תבית במימרי

It is our view that, if we read closely the translations of Genesis 6, we can say that the Targums are intentionally consistent in using the *memra* or other forms of mitigating the verbs of repentance with God as a subject. This being said, the question still remains if in Genesis 6:6 and 6:7 the Targumic translators employed *memra* as a normal Aramaic literal device or as a means to possibly as a means to protect God from the charge of excessive human emotionalism.

The truth is that God is portrayed in Genesis as a hesitant Creator, whose creation has departed from his will to the point that it grieves him to his heart. The two verbal constructions used to express God's feelings are וינחם and ויתעצב אל־לבו. As we already stated, the first form occurs in the Niphal and it has the sense of 'feeling regret' or even that of 'repenting.' In the Pentateuch it is the only verbal form used whenever God changes his mind with respect to a prior action or decision in relation to his people. In this case, one might say that 'Yahweh's nhm is an act of identification with human frailty' (Simian-Yofre 1978: 9.343). The expression ויתעב is usually translated as 'it grieved him' or 'he worried [in his heart]' (Kohler 1994-2000). Meyers points to the sense of "mental distress... grounded in the acts of others," (Meyers 2001: 11.278-280). Wenham too see here a state "expressing the most intense form of human emotion, a mixture of rage and bitter anguish" (Wenham 1987: 144-145). Although this

verb falls outside the topic of our study, it nevertheless adds a helpful dimension to the concept of divine emotions. In this case, out of the three versions only Pseudo-Jonathan feels obligated somehow to ammend the MT to 'he debated about them in his memra' (ואידיין עליהון במימריה).

In Genesis 7:6-7, to translate the Niphal form וינחם, the Neofiti employs the form twwh of the verb 'to be' followed by the noun 'regret' (תהו) and the prepositional phrase 'before the Lord': והוות תהו מן־קדם ייי ('and there was regret before the Lord'). Jastrow points to the sense of "be astonished", "pause" and "regret, repent" (Jastrow 1996). Similarly, Kaufmann notes the equivalent הוה תהו קדמי for the Hebrew נחמתי in verse 7, with the sense of "there was regret before me' (Kaufman 2019). As opposed to Neofiti, Onkelos and Pseudo-Jonathan use the verb bwt ('to turn back' or 'regret') with the prepositional phrase במימריה ('in his memra'): וְתֵב ייי במימריה 'and the Lord turned [regretted] [repented] in his memra.' It is interesting to observe that in one form or another the verb נחם is found in other passages from all three Targums: Neofiti, Pseudo-Jonathan, and Onkelos. Likewise, the word appears in the larger body of Targumic and later Syriac literature, where it conveys the sense of 'comforting' someone, an equivalent to the Piel of the MT. What is rather interesting is that the term does not occur with the sense of 'feeling sorry' [in oneself] or 'regretting,' which we have already documented in the Hebrew text. This semantic particularity may be responsible for Targums choosing alternative modes to render the Niphal form of the Hebrew text. As a preliminary conclusion, we may say that in employing the concept of memra and choosing certain linguistic alternatives to a literal translation, the authors created an image of God that seems a bit different from the picture of Genesis 6:6-7.

Exodus 32:12, 14

MT	Ex 32:12	שׁוב מחרון אפּך והנחם על־הרעה
	14	וַינחם יהוה על־הרעה

© EMANUEL UNIVERSITY *of* ORADEA

ONK	12 14	תוב מתקוף ואתיב מן בשׁתא ותב יוי מן בשׁתא
NEO	12 14	חזור כען מן תקף ויהוי תהו קדמך ותנחם על בישׁתא והוות תוהו קד ייי
PS JON	12 14	תוב מתקוף ויהוי תוהו קדמך והוה תהו מן־קדם ייי

When we come to the passage in Exodus 32:12, we observe both similarities with, and differences from, the way the Aramaic translators operated in Genesis 6. Speaking of similarities, Targum Onkelos maintains the same preference for the verb תב, as an option for both Hebrew imperatives שוב ('turn' or 'change') and והנחם ('relent yourself'). Neither *memra* nor any intervening prepositional phrase are being used by Onkelos. The Aramaic translators do not seem to be bothered by the image of God changing his mind with respect to the punishment of his people.

Regarding Pseudo-Jonathan, if in Genesis 6:6-7 the translators chose the verb תוב both times to render the Niphal form והנחם , in Exodus 32:12 they use it only once out of three verbs of human emotions. And that is a direct, word-for-word equivalence: the Aramaic תוב for the Hebrew imperative שוב. But this was to be expected. Where the translators differ from their Genesis 6 choice is in the way they translated the well-known והנחם יהוה. As we indicated already, instead of using the formula במימריה ותב ייי ('and the Lord regretted in his memra'), they opted for the larger and more indirect phrase: והוות תהו מן־קדם ייי ('and there was regret before the Lord'). Evidently, we will never know whether the same hand or a different hand was responsible for this change. But the fact still remains that translation of Exodus 32 reflects a slightly

different approach from that of Genesis 6, even though the picture of God is somewhat identical.

Neofiti, on the other hand, remains consistent with the terminology that it employed when in Genesis 6. The Aramaic translator did not opt for the verb תוב in Genesis 6 and is not opting for תוב here either, in spite of the fact that it had the verb at his disposal; תוב appears at least 16 times throughout Neofiti to the Pentateuch. First, for the Hebrew imperative שׁוּב Neofiti uses חזור ('turn back'), in the formula חזור כען מן תקף רוגזך ('turn back now from the might of your wrath'). In spite of the longer wording, the emphasis in Aramaic is just as strong as in Hebrew. Second, for the Hebrew imperative number two, והנחם ('relent yourself'), Neofiti appeals again to terminology that it already used in Genesis 6: ויהוי תהו קדמך ('let there be regret before you'). This phrasing is more complex than in Hebrew and the preposition קדם also seems to put a bit of a distance between God and the emotions of regret that the Hebrew text implies. Finally, for the Hebrew והנחם Neofiti uses for the first time in our passages the direct equivalent נחם. It is worth noting that the Aramaic נְחֵם appears 11 times in Neofiti to the Pentateuch, and yet the translators did not use it even once in Genesis 6:6-7, where the Hebrew direct equivalent נחם appears twice. At this point it is only a conjecture, but it is plausible that Neofiti to Genesis may have had a different translator than did Neofiti to Exodus. Neither Onkelos, nor Pseudo-Jonathan employed this verb in passages that describe divine 'sorrow' or 'regretting,' even though all three of the Targums had at their disposal the verb.

It is also worth noting that in Exodus 14:5 and 13:17 these distinctions seem to disappear when the subject of 'changing one's mind' is a human being, not God. In the second example, all three Targums change the meaning from 'regret,' which was is used by the MT both here in the previous passages (והנחם), to 'break one's heart,' or 'be afraid.' Since we do not know whether the Targums would have inserted the preposition 'before' in this case as well, it is difficult to speculate whether the 'divine' context would differ from the 'human' with respect to the application of this verb. Finally, in Ex. 14:5 all versions use the Hebrew הפך with the sense of turning one's heart from a previous decision. Here, then, the Targums agree literally with the MT.

© EMANUEL UNIVERSITY *of* ORADEA

Conclusion

Version	Genesis		Exodus	
MASO-RETIC	6:6	וינחם יהוה	32:12	שׁוב מחרון אפך והנחם על־הרעה
	6:7	כי נחמתי	14	וַינחם יהוה על־הרעה
ONKELOS	6:6	ואתיב יי במימריה	12	תוב מתקוף ואתיב מן בשׁתא
	6:7	ארי תבית במימרי	14	ואתיב יוי מן בשׁתא
NEOFITI	6:6	והוו תהו מן־קדם יי	12	חזור כען מן תקף ויהוי תהו קדמך ותנחם על בישׁתא
	6:7	ארום הוה	14	והוות תוהו קד יי
PSEUDO JONA-THAN	6:6	ואתיב יי במימריה	12	תוב מתקוף ויהוי תוהו קדמך
	6:7	ארום תבית במימרי	14	והוה תהו מן־קדם יי

We have noted in our review of secondary literature that a significant number of scholars do not think that the *memra* in Genesis 6 and Exodus 32 functions as a substitute for God. Even though adding the *memra* renders the translation a little bit awkward, neither Onkelos nor Pseudo-Jonathan seem to alter intentionally the Hebrew image of God. Targum Neofiti, on the other hand, does not employ the word *memra* but introduces more often the preposition מן־קדם/קדם. We believe that the use of מן־קדם/קדם in these cases falls outside of the context of 'deference' presented by Klein. Even though these expressions appear as if they were intended to protect

God from the weakness of 'regret,' in reality the translators may never have intended to do this in the first place. As Simian-Yofre argued, what we have in God is a 'change in purpose incidental to the circumstances, not a modification of the circumstance' (Simian-Yofre 1978: 9.345). On a more theological note, Stuart argues that "God never desired to destroy his people in the first place, so was willing to repent in response to Moses' appeal" (Stuart 2006: 672). As such, one need not reject "God's flexibility and responsiveness as if he cannot change direction in accord with his own purposes."

As Michael Klein showed, the Targumic translators had to walk a 'middle golden path' when choosing the best translation of the MT (Klein 2011: 4). One would understand their predicament, given the ominous tone of the Talmudic saying that 'He who translates a verse literally is a liar; but he who adds to it is a blasphemer' (b. *Kiddushim* 49a). What we find, instead, is that when it comes to the central question of the avoidance of anthropomorphisms, 'the targumim are not consisten (Shinam 2011: xiff.). Often times, texts that one would expect the authors to impose an anthropomorphism on were translated literally; and texts that would seem ordinary to a Jewish audience were not. It is plausible that overall there existed a hesitancy on the part of the translators that one did not find when the texts of Genesis 6 and Exodus 32 were first drafted. The lack of consistency in staying with a certain vision of translation makes this conclusion difficult to maintain.

The scholarly debate on the translation of anthropomorphisms by the Targum is as intensified today as it has ever been. On the one hand, Hayward believes that, since expressions like 'memra,' or '[from] before the Lord,' occur in so many problematic passages and with so many different verbs, that it is impossible to know exactly how they were used in the early stages of the formation of the Targum. Klein too has shown that these concepts are used both in 'human' and 'divine' contexts, which makes almost impossible that the authors used them as buffer-words against strong anthropomorphisms. On the other hand, authors like Sperber and Sabourin, among many others, contend that the Targums used different ways to circumvent anthropomorphisms, or used the 'memra' as an allusion to a divine hypostasis active in the world. The evidence presented here, I believe, illustrates this disagreement. We have seen examples where verbs like 'to be angry' and 'to regret,' while attributed to God, function so only indirectly, as if to create a functional distinction between the human and the divine experience of such emotions. In spite of this, the final meaning of the passage is unmistakably clear: the 'regret' comes from God, and so does the 'anger.' It is conceivable, then, that at the end this distinction may just reflect our failure to understand fully the mindset of the translators and the unique nature of the language. As Max Kadushin put it, 'the Targum then is not consistent...The idea of God's other-

© EMANUEL UNIVERSITY *of* ORADEA

ness is a very indefinite idea; it permits of exceptions and it ignores inconsistencies' (Kadushim 1972: 330).

Bibliography

Alexander PS (1976) The Rabbinic Lists of Forbidden Targumim. *JJS* 27:177-99.

Alexander PS (1992) Targum. In Freedman DN (ed) *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 volumes. New York: Doubleday. 6:320-31.

Bohannan P (1990) *Targum Onkelos to Exodus: an English Translation of the Text with Analysis and Commentary*. New York: Ktav.

Boyarin D (2001) The Gospel of the Memra: Jewish Binitarianism and the Prologue to John. In *Harvard Theological Review* 94.03: 243-84.

Diogenes A (1985) *Philosophy for Understanding Theology*. Atlanta: John Knox.

Batnitzky L (2000) *Idolatry and Representation*. Princeton: Princeton.

Bromiley GW (1979) Anthropomorphism. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 1:136-139.

Copleston F Jr (1985) *A History of Philosophy*. New York: Doubleday.

De Pury A (1992) Yahwist ("J") Source. In *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. New York: Doubleday. 6:1012-20.

Eichrodt W (1967) *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 2. Philadelphia: Westminster.

Flesher P (1996) Anthropomorphism. In Neusner J (ed) *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period*, 2 volumes. New York: Macmillan.

Flesher P (2002) Targums as Scripture. In Flesher P (ed) *Targum and Scripture: Studies in Aramaic Translations and Interpretation in Memory of Ernest G. Clark*. Leiden: Brill. 61-78.

Gingsburger M (1891) *Die Anthropomorphismen in den Thargumim*. Brunschweig.

Grossfeld B (1972) Bible: Translations, Aramaic (Targumim). IN *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. volume 1. Jerusalem: Keter.

Grossfeld B (1988) *The Targum Onkelos to Genesis*. Bates City: Michael Glazier.

Jastrow M (1996) *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli, Yerushalmi and Midrashic Literature*. New York: Judaica Press.

Kaufman S (1994) Dating the Language of the Palestinian Targums and Their Use in the Study of First-Century Texts. In Beattie DRG and McNamara M (eds) *The Aramaic Bible. Targums in Their Historical Context* JSOTSup. 166. Sheffield: JSOT. 118-41.

Klein M (1979) The Preposition *qdm* (Before): A Pseudo-Antianthropomorphism in the Targums. *JTS*: 502-507.

Klein M (1980) The Translation of Anthropomorphisms. *VTS* 32: 162-177.
Klein M (2011) The Aramaic Targumim: Translation and Interpretation. In Avigdor Shinan et al. (eds) *Michael Klein on the Targums: Collected Essays 1972*-2002. Leiden: Brill.
Klein W et al. (2004) *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.
Koehler L, Baumgartner W *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Leiden: Brill, Bible Works module.
Komlosh Y (1973) *The Bible in Light of the Aramaic Translations*. Tel Aviv.
Costaz L (1997) *Syriac-English Dictionary* Beiruth: Imprimerie Catholique.
Marmorstein A (1937) *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God. Essays in Anthropomorphism*. London: Oxford.
Matthews KA (1996) *Genesis 1-11:26*, NAC. Nashville: Broadman & Holman.
Maybau S (1870) *Die Anthropomorphien und Anthropopathien bei Onkelos und die spatern Targumim*. Breslau.
McNamara M (1968) Logos of the Fourth Gospel and Memra of the Palestinian Targums. *The Expository Times* 79.4: 115-117.
Meyers C (200!) ב צ ע . In Botterweck GJ (ed) *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 11:278-80.
Michaelis W (1967) πάθος. In Friedrich G (ed), Bromiley GW (transl) *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 5:926-39.
Moltmann J (1991) *The Crucified God*. San Francisco: Harper Collins.
Moore GF (1922) Intermediaries in Jewish Theology. *HTR* 15:41-61.
Moore GF (1960/1997) *Judaism*, 2 volumes. Peabody: Hendrickson.
Munoz D (1974) *Dios-Palabra: Memra en los Targumim del Pentateuco*. Granada: Instutition San Jeronimo.
Munoz D (1977) *La Gloria de la Shekina en los Targumim del Pentateuco*. Madrid: Consenjo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas.
McNamara M (1976) Targums. In *The Interpreters' Dictionary of the Bible*. Supplement. Nashville: Abingdon.
McNamara M (2001) Some Targum Themes. In Carson DA et al. (eds) *Justification and Variegated Nomism*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic.
Ross M (1928) *The Works of Aristotle*. London: Clarendon.
Sabourin L (1976) L. The Memra of God in the Targums. *BTB* 6:79–85.
Simian-Yofre H (1978) ם ח נ In Botterweck G and Ringgren H (eds) *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 9:340-55.
Sokoloff M (2002) *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods*. Ramat-Gan, Israel: Bar Ilan University Press.
Sperber A (1973) *The Bible in Aramaic*. Leiden: E.J. Brill.

© EMANUEL UNIVERSITY *of* ORADEA

Shinan A (2011) Targum. In Baskin JR (ed) *The Cambridge History of Judaism and Jewish Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 586-88.
Stuart DK (2006) *Exodus*, NAC. Nashville: Broadman & Holman.
Urbach E (1994) *The Sages*, Abrahams I (transl). Cambridge: Harvard University.
Visotzky BL (1995) Text, Translation, Targum. *Fathers of the World*, WUNT 80. Tubingen: Mohr [Siebeck]. 106-112.
Wenham GJ (1987) *Genesis 1-15*. WBC. Waco: Word Books.
Wrobel MS (2016) The Gospel According to St. John in the Light of the Targum of Neofiti to the Book of Genesis. *Biblica et Patristica Thoruniensia* 9 (4):115-130.

Online resources

Aristotle *Metaphysics*, translated by Ross WD (transl) http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/metaphysics.html.
Joseph HA *Finding Christ in the Old Testament Through the Aramaic Memra, Shekinah, and Yeqara of the Targums,* SBTS Dissertation, (https://oatd.org/oatd/record?record=handle%5C%3A10392%5C%2F4948).
Kaufman S *The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon*. Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College, 2019. Bible Works 10 Module.
Koehler K (1906) Memra. *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (Jewish Encyclopedia.com, the complete 1906 full text).

This article was first published in "Semanatorul- The Sower", No. 1, vol. 4, ISBN: 978-1-912120-47-5, ISSN: 2515-3218, 2018. Used by permission from the publisher