

Tomasz Niedźwiedzki

Independent researcher

t.niedzwiedzki@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3129-7375>

The Patriarchs and the Inheritance of the Land in the Targums¹

Abstract: The framers of targumic literature made the patriarchs resemble pious Jews from their own times. The phenomenon could be called the ‘targumization’ of the biblical heroes. On the other hand, some of the biblical personages have been perceived and presented as the non-Jews who were contemporaries of the editors of the Targums – the Gentiles. By modifying the accounts of the interactions between the biblical personages, the ancient Jewish writers carried out their own self-definition and its counterpart – the constitution of the ‘Other.’ The analysis of the differences between the Hebrew Bible and its targumic interpretation not only could help us to understand how the communities that created the Targums perceived other ethnic and religious groups, but it also could explain to us how they defined their own identity among the Gentiles by redefining and updating the status of the patriarchs in their world. One of the areas in which the *meturgemanim* have expressed their identity is the subject of the inheritance of the Land.

Keywords: Targums, patriarchs, inheritance, Jewish identity

Introduction

The promise of the Land was an important focal point for defining Israelite identity already in the Hebrew Bible. The inheritance of Canaan was envisaged as a direct outcome of God’s blessings and as one of the main elements of nationhood (Gen 12:1–8; 15:1–21) (Alexander 2000, 42). The catastrophe of 70 CE and the

¹ In this article, the following abbreviations are used: BerR – Bereshit Rabbah; MT – Masoretic Text; TN – Targum Neofiti; TN^{mg} – Targum Neofiti Marginal Note; TO – Targum Onkelos; PJ – Targum Pseudo-Jonathan.

expulsion of the sons of Jacob from Judea after 135 CE resulted in further idealization of the promised land (Fraade 2009, 237–65). Jews from late antiquity held on to their belief that they are still the only legitimate heirs of the Land. In the dramatic situation of the expulsion from their country, they searched for proof of this idea in their Sacred Writings in order to find consolation for their souls. They wanted to make sure that the exile is only temporary and that after some time they will return to their homeland.²

Already in the tannaitic period, the Sages encouraged their compatriots to dwell in the holy land by claiming that ‘The Land of Israel is the most sanctified among all the lands’ (*mKel* 1:6). According to their opinion, some commandments in Torah, introduced by a formula: ‘When you come to the Land,’³ were specifically linked to and possible to observe only in the Land (Safrai 1983, 202, 212; Lichtenberger 1994, 98–99). By such rulings, they created a strong link between the Land, the Law and their identity.

Targumic writers found a way to express all their affection for the promised land and to depict the hardship of exile by imputing their feelings to the biblical characters. Joseph called Egypt ‘The land of my misery’ (PJ 41:52), even if he lived in clover. The residence of his kinsfolk there has been explicitly defined as ‘The enslavement to the Egyptians’ (PJ 37:17) or as ‘Egyptian exile’ (PJ 37:14), even if nobody expelled his family out of the country or enslaved his relatives. It is evident that targumic paraphrase is no longer about Joseph and his family in Egypt, but about Jews from late antiquity expelled from their country – about their misery, homesickness and lack of independence after the destruction of Jerusalem.

Similar ideas could be found in a speech of Jacob, who explains to Pharaoh that his life was unhappy, because he was forced to dwell outside of the promised land (Gen 47:9):

² The process of idealization of the promised land started already in the biblical times (Deut 12:1; 26:9).

³ Exod 12:25; Lev 14:34; 19:23; 23:10; 25:2; Num 15:2; Deut 17:14; 26:1.

MT: The days of the years of my sojourning are one hundred thirty years – few and evil have been the years of my life.⁴

PJ: The days of the years of my sojournings are one hundred thirty years – few and evil have been the days of the years of my life; for from my youth I fled from my brother Esau and sojourned in a land that is not mine. And now, me having white hair, I came down to sojourn here.⁵

Biblical Jacob does not specify why he considers evil the days of his life. His targumic counterpart is much more explicit in this regard. He defines implicitly Israel as ‘my land’ and highlights inconveniencies of living abroad. He is not aware of the fact that his grumbling about living in Egypt could be offensive to his host. It is so, because these words were not meant to be heard by a foreigner, but were directed to the Jewish compatriots of the *meturgeman*⁶ in order to bewail together the loss of the Land. The situation of Jacob and of other patriarchs, who dwelt only temporarily in the Land as strangers and alien residents,⁷ but firmly believed to come back to it in order to permanently inherit it, was a kind of paradigm for their lives.

The subject of the possession of the Land emerges frequently in targumic rewritings of patriarchal stories. The *meturgemanim* tried to enhance the position of their ancestors (and their own as well) by making their right to the Land more antique, the promise of God unconditional and the extent of their dominion more ample. They frequently used more explicit vocabulary concerning the promised land by calling it ‘inheritance’ [אִרְסָנָא], or by substituting the verbs like ‘to grab, to seize’ with ‘to inherit, to take possession of landed inheritance’ [יָרְסָנָא] (Sokoloff 1990, 46).

⁴ For the reasons of such a negative view of Jacob’s life in the Hebrew Bible, see Lemański 2015, 390–91.

⁵ The translations, if not marked otherwise, are of the author of the article.

⁶ *Meturgeman* is the one, who translated readings from the Hebrew Bible into Aramaic during synagogal liturgy. In the modern literature it is customary to call like that the authors/editors of the Targums.

⁷ Gen 17:8; 20:1; 21:23, 34; 23:4; 26:3; 28:4; 37:1.

2. Prehistory of Inheritance

The Bible considers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to be the addressees of God's promise regarding the Land, and their descendants as their inheritors (Exod 32:13). Ancient scribes moved backward in time the divine decision to apportion the Land to his chosen ones (Deut 32:8–9):

MT: When the Most High assigned to the nations [their] inheritance, when he separated the sons of man, he determined the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel, for the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage.

PJ: When the Most High assigned the world as an inheritance to the Gentiles, who came from the sons of Noah, when he separated the writings and languages among mankind in the generation of the division; at that time, he cast lots on seventy angels, the leaders of the Gentiles, with whom he revealed himself to see the city. And at that time he determined the borders of the nations according to the sum of the number of the seventy souls of Israel who went down to Egypt. And when the holy people fell by lot of the Master of the world, Michael opened his mouth and said, 'Because the good portion for the name of the Memra of the Lord is his people.' Gabriel opened his mouth in praise and said, 'Those of the house of Jacob are the lot of his inheritance.'

The *meturgemanim* envisaged the three sons of Noah as the proprietors of the earth, and their descendants as inheritors. The definite allotment of the land took place in the 'generation of division' – in the times of Babel (Gen 11:7–8). The main point of reference for the action of apportionment of the lands among the nations is Israel, because humanity has been divided into seventy nations according to the number of the progeny of Jacob,⁸ and their borders have been demarcated by taking into consideration the territorial needs of the Israelites. The chronological order of events is subordinated to the importance of the family of Jacob for the entire history

⁸ See PJ 28:3.

of humanity. The Almighty predicted in a way that Israel will be his chosen nation and prepared the earth for its reception. At this stage of prehistory, even if the nations are in some way inferior to Israel, they are nevertheless presented as legitimate heirs of their lands.

The action of giving inheritance was twofold. On the one hand, the territories, languages and alphabets have been assigned to the nations. Simultaneously, the nations themselves were given in inheritance to the angels (Cook 1986, 65–69), who became their leaders and protectors.⁹ The exceptional central position of Israel consists in the fact that she is not counted among the seventy nations (*bSanh* 39a), and she does not have any guarding angel, because she has been inherited and protected by God himself.¹⁰ It is true that Israel is YHWH's inheritance, but the idea of God as the “guardian angel” of Israel is problematic. The Bible states clearly that the leader and guarding angel of Israel is Michael – “one among the first leaders” (Dan 10:13, 21; 12:1). God is “the chief of the host” or “the leader of the leaders” (Dan 8:11, 25) – it means that he is the immediate leader and protector of the angels only (Koehler and Baumgartner 2000, *ad loc.*).

3. Inheritance of Abraham

Biblical Abram was the first man to receive a promise from God to inherit the Land (Gen 13:15; Exod 6:8), even if he was dwelling there only as an alien resident (Gen 17:8). The ancient scribes perceived him as the one, who became the proprietor of the lands of the Canaanite territories shortly after he reached them. According to PJ, God commanded him (Gen 13:17):

MT: Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land,
for I will give it to you.

⁹ The idea has been developed in rabbinic literature, where it is claimed that the guardian angel of the Romans is Samael, “the angel of death,” usually identified with Satan (Feldman 1993, 493–94).

¹⁰ See also Shinan 1985, 77.

PJ: Arise, walk about in the land and seize it widely and broadly [ועיבד בה חזקתא לארכא ולפתיא],¹¹ for I will give it to you.

The *meturgeman* ignored the second part of the verse, according to which the land should be given to Abraham by God only in the future. An impatient scribe made God command his friend to grab the land in the very moment he put his feet on it for the first time. The targumic reworking coincides with the view of R. Eliezer and R. Jacob (BerR 41:10; *bBB* 100a) (McNamara 1992, 55), who claimed that it is possible to make an acquisition of the land by the mere fact of walking upon it. Abraham is perceived as an example for his children regarding taking possession of the lands. Not all the sages, however, shared this opinion.

3.1. Abraham and the Canaanites

The Bible nowhere states that the Canaanites were not the original inhabitants of the Land, or that they had taken possession of a territory that originally did not belong to them.¹² Even if Canaan has been cursed in Gen 9:25–27, still Genesis 10 implies that the settlement of the Canaanites was legitimate. Different biblical texts and intertestamental literature justify their expulsion and extermination in various ways. The main line of argument was that the indigenous inhabitants of the Land are to be eradicated and dispossessed because of their idolatrous practices and inhuman sinful behavior, in particular – sorcery, cannibalism and abominable sacrifices of children to idols (Deut 12:31; Wis 12:1–6) (Berthelot 2011b, 50–57). Other texts underscore God’s sovereign decision to take the Land from the hands of the Canaanites and to give it to his chosen ones (Ps 111:6): ‘He has made known to his people the power of his works, in giving them the inheritance of the nations.’ Some ancient interpreters claimed that Canaan is a slave of Israel

¹¹ See PJ Num 13:20 and Le Déaut and Robert 1978, 157.

¹² This idea is expressed for the first time in the Book of Jubilees (from the second century BCE), and then found repeatedly in rabbinic and targumic literature alike (Berthelot 2011a, 234).

(even if no text from Exodus to Deuteronomy calls for reducing the Canaanites to slavery) (Berthelot 2011b, 50), and argued that what belongs to a slave, belongs to his master (BerR 61:7) (Berthelot 2011a, 240).

The *meturgemanim* approached the subject in their own way. They argued that the presence of different nations in Canaan at the time Abraham arrived there was only temporary (Gen 12:6):

MT: The Canaanites were then in the Land.

TO: The Canaanites were then encamped [שרי] in the Land.

TN: Until then the Canaanites were encamped [שריין] in the Land.

PJ: The Canaanites were then in the Land, for the time had not yet come for the children of Israel to inherit it.

TN and two printed editions of TO introduce as one-word expansion the verb שרי, whose meaning is ‘to pitch a tent,’ ‘to lodge,’ ‘to stay temporarily’ (Sokoloff 1990, 566–67). TN additionally limits the period of the Canaanites’ presence in the promised land by the expression ‘until then’ (Wróbel 2017, 167). Both exegetical devices aim at creating the impression that the existence of foreign ethnic groups in Canaan was only transitory and would end by the arrival of Abraham and his descendants. PJ claims that there is an appointed time for the children of Israel to take the land in possession. This moment and its justification has been defined further in the targumic Abraham cycle, where God makes him a promise concerning his offspring (Gen 15:16):

MT: They shall return here in the fourth generation, for the guilt of the Amorites is not yet complete.

PJ: The fourth generation of your children shall return here to take their inheritance [למירתא], for the guilt of the Amorites is not yet complete.

The Targum explicitly states that the Israelites, after having left Egypt, shall not only come back to the place where Abraham sojourned, but more importantly, to take over the Land. It is explicitly called ‘inheritance’ and perceived as ancient estate waiting

for the arrival of the future descendants of Jacob. The reason why Abraham was only a resident, but not the fully-fledged owner of the promised land, is that the wickedness of its dwellers was not yet at its peak. The inhabitants of Canaan will be dispossessed because of their iniquity.

The attitude of the framers of targumic literature towards the Canaanite land was ambiguous. On the one hand they recognized that the patriarchs did not have there territorial dominion and they claimed that letting the patriarchs' flock graze there at that time would be robbery (TN.PJ 13:7), but on the other hand they highlighted their right to take the land into possession as proper inheritance. Thus, God commanded Abraham to seize the land (PJ 13:17), and stated that Sodom is among the gifts he has given to him (TN 18:17).¹³ It goes against the plain, literal meaning of Gen 10:19, which states that the territory of the Canaanites encompassed among others the city of Sodom (Berthelot 2011a, 236). God in TN considers the city of Sodom as if it lawfully belonged to Abraham: "Since the city of Sodom is among the gifts I have given him, it is not legitimate for me to overthrow it before I inform him" (TN 18:17).¹⁴ One can feel in these passages a certain impatience, a lack of comfort of the ancient writers facing the problem of a not yet fulfilled promise, and urge to make it as quickly as possible a tangible reality. This was a problem they themselves confronted in their own times.

The *meturgemanim* took the divine promise made to Abraham as a point of reference for their reflections about the right to possess the holy land and they put them in the mouth of Balaam (Num 23:19):

¹³ See Wróbel 2014, 155.

¹⁴ R. Joshua b. Levi comments on Gen 18:17: '[The matter may be compared to the case of] a king who gave an estate to his friend. After that the king wanted to cut down from it five barren trees. The king said, "I know that if I would require it from his patrimony, he would not stop me. What difference does it make to me if I ask his permission?" So said the Holy One blessed be he, "I have already given the land as a gift to Abraham: «To your seed I am giving this land» [Gen 15:18]. And these five cities within it are his. But if I would require from his patrimony, he would not object. So what difference does it make to me if I ask his permission?' (BerR 49:2).

MT: God is not a man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?

PJ: Not like the words of a mortal is the *Memra* of the living and enduring God, Master of the entire eternity, the Lord, for man speaks and denies. And also nobody can compare his deeds to the deeds of the sons of flesh, who consult and change their mind about what they decided. But the Master of the entire world, the Lord, said to multiply this people as much as the stars of the heavens and to let them inherit the land of the Canaanites. Is it possible that he speaks and does not do [it]? And is it possible that he will not fulfill what he has spoken?

Bearing in mind the fact that at the time of the creation of targumic literature Jews were no longer in possession of the land of Canaan, the expansion of PJ emerges as particularly dramatic. The *meturgenanim* asked themselves, how is it possible that the Land fell into ‘the wrong hands.’ They were disorientated, because they perceived the promise of the land given to Abraham as unconditional and definitive. Such perception, however, is not fully compatible with the biblical theology of inheritance of the Land (Ezek 33:24–26). Harsh prophetic oracles disabusing Judeans from theological naivety regarding eternal occupation of Canaan have been ignored by targumic interpreters (Allen 1990, 153), who preferred to focus their attention exclusively on these aspects of the divine promises that are favorable to Israel (Gen 48:4).

4. ‘Purchase’ of Inheritance

In the ancient Jewish literature, the important issue was the legitimization of the right to the land. One of the ways to do so was to claim that the ancestors not only possessed the land as an inheritance, but also additionally, even superfluously, paid for the property that already belonged to them.

4.1. Abraham and Ephron the Hittite

When Sara died in Hebron, Abraham wanted to buy there a grave from the Hittites, descendants of Canaan, in order to bury her. The patriarch's request directed to Ephron has been slightly reworked in the Targums (Gen 23:4):¹⁵

MT: Give me property [אחזת] among you for a grave.

PJ: Sell me an inheritance [אחזנת] among you for a grave.

How is it possible to 'buy' an inheritance? Rather it can only be inherited. The solution for the riddle is to be found two verses earlier in the story (TN 23:2), where Hebron is called 'the city of the four patriarchs',¹⁶ and as such reckoned the timeless burial site of the patriarchs even before any of them were buried there. Why then has Abraham decided to 'buy' the territory, which apparently belonged to him? The book of Jubilees presents this act as 'the last trial' of the patriarch (*Jub.* 19:3–4, 8–9):¹⁷

When Abraham went to mourn for her [Sarah] and to bury her, we [angels] were testing whether he himself was patient and not annoyed in the words that he spoke. But in this respect, too, he was found to be patient and not disturbed, because he spoke with the Hittites in a patient spirit ... This was the tenth test by which Abraham was tried, and he was found to be faithful [and] patient in spirit. He said nothing about the promise of the land which said that the Lord would give it to him and his descendants after him. He pleaded for a place there to bury his dead [and] he was

¹⁵ See also TN^{mg} 23:4; TN.PJ 23:9 (Wróbel 2014, 203) and TO.TN.TN^{mg}.PJ 23:20.

¹⁶ The fact that Hebron was also called Kiriath-arba (lit. 'the city of the four') was without doubt the spur for such an interpretation. The place, according to ancient Jewish exegesis, was the burial place of Adam, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Koehler and Baumgartner 2000, *ad loc*; McNamara 1992, 120).

¹⁷ In ancient Judaism, there was a circulating tradition about the ten tests of Abraham. Ancient sources provide different groups of these tests grouped in various orders. *Jubilees* is the most ancient of them (Kugel 1998, 325).

found to be faithful and he was recorded on the heavenly tablets as the friend of the Lord.¹⁸

According to the ancient source, Abraham as the rightful owner of Hebron was not obliged to pay for the burial cave. Nevertheless, he decided to acquire what already belonged to him and it has been counted to him as an act of extraordinary patience and forbearance. Targumic interpreters share this tradition about Abraham's last trial as they have written that Abraham bought his 'inheritance.' They additionally claimed that the title deed for possession of the field was in the hands of the family of Jacob and stored in the palace of Joseph in Egypt. The document stated that there is no portion for Esau in the burial place (TN.PJ 49:21). It was signed by Esau himself (PJ 50:13), who supposedly renounced his right to the land. The title deed was presented to Esau, when he wanted to prevent the burial of Jacob in the cave of Machpelah.¹⁹ Surprisingly enough, Esau's body has been buried in the cave, after he was decapitated by the order of Joseph (PJ 50:13). It means that even if Esau was not no longer considered as one of 'Us,' he was still somehow very loosely related to it.

4.2. Jacob and the Shechemites

A similar device concerning the 'purchase of inheritance' has been applied in the history of Jacob (Gen 33:19):

MT: [Jacob] purchased from the hand of the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, for one hundred pieces of money the plot of land on which he had pitched his tent.

¹⁸ Translation from Kugel 1998, 326.

¹⁹ Esau was not the only one claiming the right to the burial place in ancient Jewish literature: 'When they [the sons of Jacob] went up to bury our father Jacob, the sons of Heth came to protest against the burial. Naphtali ran like a hind and brought the title from Egypt and pacified [the Hittites] through his brother' (BerR 98:17).

PJ: [Jacob] purchased the inheritance [אִתְּחַנַּת] of the field where he pitched his tent from the hand of the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, for a hundred pearls.²⁰

R. Yudan bar Simon comments on this verse in the following way:

This is one of three places, [proving] that the nations of the world cannot ridicule Israel by saying to them, “You have stolen them with your hands” (BerR 79:7).

The next two pericopes serving for R. Yudan as prooftexts for the supposed ‘permanent title to the land’ (Aberbach and Grossfeld 1982, 201) are Gen 23:16 concerning the cave of Machpelah (see above) and 1 Chr 21:25 regarding the site of the Temple bought by David.

Hamor, the chieftain of Shechem, confirms that the land was not only acquired, but also inherited by Jacob. He said to the brothers of Dinah (Gen 34:10):

MT: The land is before you – remain and trade, and settle in it!

TO: The land is before you – remain and make merchandise in it and inherit [וְיָרְשׁוּהָ] it!

As a result, both Hebron and Shechem emerge as everlasting inheritance of Israel, given by God, bought from the hands of foreigners and recognized by the ‘Other’ as the legitimate possession of the patriarchs and their descendants.

5. Inheritance of the Children of Jacob

The subject of inheritance in Canaan occupied frequently the *meturgemanim*'s minds. Proof for that are the numerous mentions in Genesis Targums about it – also in the pericopes that are not

²⁰ TO: ‘lambs.’

concerned with the issue. Even the birth of Gad becomes an occasion to make Leah exclaim (Gen 30:11):

MT: Fortune has come [בא גַד]!²¹

PJ: Good fortune has come! His sons are certainly destined to inherit their heritage [למירוה אהסנתהון] in the east beyond the Jordan.

The last words of Jacob (Gen 49) are full of references to the inheritance of his sons. The most problematic, it seems, was the situation of Simeon and Levi, who did not receive their own separate portion in the division of the land. Concerning these two, the ancient interpreters have reworked the words of Jacob (Gen 49:7):

MT: I will divide them in Jacob, scatter them in Israel.

TN: If Simeon and Levi dwell together, there is neither nation nor king that can stand against them. I will divide the inheritance of Simeon in the midst of the house of Jacob and I will multiply the inheritance of Levi in the midst of the tribe(s) of the sons of Israel.

The expansion provides the reason for the dispersion of the tribes of Levi and Simeon as being due to their combined power, which would have the capacity to destroy any nation (Grossfeld 2000, 293). The lack of separate inheritance, which was reckoned a punishment in the Bible, became an occasion to praise the abilities of the sons of Jacob and the tribes called by their names. Jacob's decision is presented as a preventive measure against destruction of foreign nations, which as weaker should be protected against the supreme military faculties of Simeon and Levi. Still, Judah claims: 'My power is greater than the power of Simeon and Levi' and that he alone, with bare sword in his hand, is able to slaughter the entire population of Egypt (TN 44:18), making it clear that he poses much greater danger to the foreign nations, than his two brothers. The 'Other' is made a clear point of reference regarding his inheritance (Isa 65:8–9):

²¹ *Qere* (*Kethib*: 'Successfully!' [בגד]).

MT: Thus says the Lord: ‘As the must is found in the bunch of grapes, and they say, “Do not destroy it, for there is a blessing in it,” so I will do for my servants’ sake, and not destroy them all. I will bring forth from Jacob a seed, and from Judah an heir of my mountains. My chosen ones shall inherit it, and my servants shall settle there.’

TJ: Thus says the Lord: ‘As Noah has been found innocent in the generation of the flood, and I said not to destroy him in order to establish the world from him, so I will do for my righteous servants’ sake, in order not to destroy all. I will bring forth from Jacob a seed, and from Judah an heir of my mountains. My chosen ones shall possess it, and my righteous servants shall dwell there.’

Just as Noah, who was different from all the inhabitants of earth in his time, due to his blamelessness, and as such saved from destruction, thus also the descendants of Judah, who are distinguished from the Gentiles because of their righteousness and God’s choice, will not be destroyed, but will possess the place of YHWH’s abode.

Another problem the *meturgemanim* encountered is the fact that Ephraim and Manasses, even if they were not the children of Jacob, became his legitimate inheritors, and that in their persons Joseph has received a double portion of the land. Ancient writers explain that it was due to Joseph’s attitude towards foreign women. Not only did he not surrender to the advances of the daughters of the alien kings and rulers, but also he did not even raise his eyes to look on them (TN 49:22). That was the very reason why he was given in reward the inheritance bigger than that of his brothers. The attitude to the ‘Other’ became once again a decisive factor influencing the allotment of the land (Niedźwiedzki 2016, 153–54).

6. ‘Inheritance’ in Egypt

There is no mention in the Hebrew Bible about the patrimony of Israelites outside the land of Canaan. Still, according to targumic renderings, Israel inherited some territories also in Egypt. The reason for that could be that in the time targumic literature took its shape,

many Jews lived in various parts of Egypt for generations. This fact could have led the *meturgemanim* to the conviction that their co-religionists became the owners of this land by usucaption. They wanted to make sure that their proprietorship is recognized and respected in the foreign territory.

The transfer of the lands took place apparently in distant past, when Joseph had (almost) unlimited power over Egypt. During the first visit of his ten brothers in this land, he made them a promise (Gen 42:34):

MT: You shall trade [תסחררן] in the land.

TN: You will inherit [תהסגוןן] the land.

Joseph emerges here as the one who is aware of his power and considers himself the owner and the heir of the land.²² As such, he is able to give it to the members of his family as an ‘inheritance.’ When Jacob and his family finally arrive in Egypt, Joseph keeps his word (Gen 47:11):

MT: Joseph settled his father and his brothers, and gave them landed property [אחזקה] in the land of Egypt, in the best part of the land.

PJ: Joseph settled his father and his brothers, and gave them inheritance [אחסגא]²³ in the land of Egypt, in the best part of the land.

The last stage of the transfer of the land was the arrival in the indicated region, taking it in possession, and the construction of new buildings (Gen 47:27):

MT: Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen. And they settled down [ויאחזקו] in it, and were fruitful and multiplied greatly.

PJ: Israel settled in the land of Egypt, and they built for themselves *Batei Midrash* and palaces in the land of Goshen. They

²² See TO 49:24: ‘He inherited the kingdom.’

²³ The same variant in TO and TN.

inherited in it an inheritance [וְאִהְיֶנּוּ בְּהָ אֲחֻסְנָתָ] of fields and vineyards, and they extended their range and multiplied greatly.

Thus, the settlement of Jews in Egypt in late antiquity has been presented as much more antique, spearheaded already in the time of the patriarchs. The ancestors, after they came into possession of the land, were expanding the territory occupied in Egypt. Their level of prosperity was much higher than the Egyptian average, as among the locals it was only Pharaoh,²⁴ who owned a palace, while the family of Jacob has built numerous buildings of this kind. The mention of fields and vineyards underscores the extent of the ‘inheritance’ and its excellent quality. The reason for such reworking is probably that the *meturgeman* reckoned his compatriots living in exile more prosperous and resourceful than the ‘Other.’ Repetition of the root חֶסֶךְ is a stylistic device stressing the point that the territories in Egypt inhabited by Jews in late antiquity are truly their legitimate ancient inheritance.

7. Future Inheritance

The inheritance of Israel is not limited to Canaan and Egypt, in the *meturgemanim*’s view, but it is to be extended over much broader geographical areas. The writers could have been inspired by the wishes Rebecca received from her kinsfolk (Gen 24:60): ‘May your seed inherit the gate of their foes.’ The Bible does not specify who the ‘enemies’ are and which territories shall be ‘inherited.’ It becomes much more explicit in the prophecies of targumic Balaam, whom the *meturgemanim* made constantly go back to the subject. He refers among others to the conquest of pagan lands by the Israelites (Num 23:24):

MT: Look, a people rises up like a lioness, and lifts itself like a lion! It does not lie down until it has eaten the prey and drunk the blood of the slain.

²⁴ See TN Gen 12:15; 45:2, 16; 47:14; 49:23; Exod 8:20.

TO: Here is a people, who rests like a lioness, and arises like a lion. It will not rest in the land until it has done massacre, and has inherited the property of the Gentiles [ונכסי עממיא יירת].²⁵

In another mention, he claims that Israel will disinherit her own oppressors (Num 24:8):

MT: [God] shall devour the nations, his foes, and gnaw their bones. He shall strike with his arrows.

TO: The house of Israel will consume the properties of the Gentiles, those who hate them. And they will delight in the spoils of their kings and inherit [יהסנון] their land.²⁶

It seems that all the Gentiles in general have been identified with the ‘haters’ of Israel and as such destined to become the spoil of the Israelites. The identification is confirmed in one of the previous verses (Num 23:9):

MT: Here is a people living alone, and does not reckon itself among the nations!

TO: Here is a people, who in its aloneness is destined to inherit [דיהסנון] the universe and will not be judged to destruction like the Gentiles.

PJ: This people alone is destined to inherit [למהסן] the universe, because they are not being led by the laws of the nations.

While both targumic interpretations can be deciphered in an eschatological key that Israel would inherit the world to come, a more literal meaning is also possible. TO implies that the Gentile nations will be annihilated, that Israel will take their place and possess all their lands (Kuśmirek 2011, 241–45).²⁷ PJ provides the reasons why the chosen nation should become the unique owner of the universe – because it protects itself against ‘the infiltration

²⁵ The expression ‘and has inherited the property of the Gentiles’ replaces the biblical idea of drinking blood, which could be abhorrent to the *meturgemanim* (Kuśmirek 2011, 289–90).

²⁶ TO tones down ‘cannibalistic character’ of the biblical metaphors (Kuśmirek 2011, 337).

²⁷ According to the Targums to Gen 49:10–12 it is the Messiah from the tribe of Judah, who will do bloodbath on the Gentiles and will rule over all the kingdoms (Kuśmirek 2020, 108–12).

of pagan customs' (Vermes 1961, 146). The idea of the conquest of the world by the seed of Abraham is shared with *Jubilees*, and is supported in the writings of Josephus and Pseudo-Philo (Vermes 1961, 146):

I shall give to your seed all of the land under heaven and they will rule in all nations as they have desired. And after this all of the earth will be gathered together and they will inherit it forever (*Jub.* 32:19).²⁸

The idea that the 'Other' should be completely destroyed and dispossessed is a very dangerous one. It emerges also in non-Jewish literature and led, in the course of the human history, to many atrocities. We should not forget, however, that the Targums were created and read by the communities, which, in all probability, had no access to military force, and at that time were not able to put such ideas in practice. Dangerous as they were, these verses remained in late antiquity only utopian visions of the disinherited, an expression of their frustration and desperation, reaction to the uncertainty of the future, kind of imagined recompense for the loss of so greatly desired independent state.

8. Summary

The divine promise of the Land was a source of consolation for targumic writers in the times of foreign domination. They not only meditated upon it, but also reworked it by adjusting it to the needs of their communities and to the historical moment.

First of all, the divine decision to apportion the land of Canaan to the Israelites has been presented as predating the patriarchs by centuries. At the time of the tower of Babel, God distributed the surface of the earth among nations in order to prepare the place for his chosen ones. Israel has become the main point of reference, when God decided to divide mankind into seventy nations and to ascribe to them certain territories. Uniqueness of the sons of Jacob

²⁸ Translation from: Wintermute 1985, 117–18.

stems from the conviction that every nation has been given an angel as a leader and guide, while in the case of Israel this function should be performed by God in person without intermediaries. Only Israel, and not any other nation, is praised by angels, as they announce that she will enjoy privileged relationship with the Almighty. All that is said many centuries before the emergence of Israel in order to strengthen the idea of the inheritance of the Land. The line of thought is following: the apportionment of the Land has been made by God in prehistory, so it is indisputable. Just as Israel is the inheritance of YHWH, so Canaan is the inheritance of Israel.

The divine decision to give the Israelites the land of Canaan emerges as timeless, unconditional and much more ancient than in the Bible. All the more dramatic in these circumstances emerges the ambiguous situation of the patriarchs and of Jews contemporary to the *meturgemanim* as well, who, despite the promise, were not in full possession of the Land. The voices of the patriarchs merge with the voices of their descendants, as they complain that living in foreign countries is onerous and burdensome. They define it explicitly as ‘exile,’ ‘enslavement’ or ‘misery.’

The Land (in particular Hebron and Shechem) is presented not only as inherited, but additionally as redeemed and owned by the patriarchs from the autochthonic inhabitants of Canaan. The ancestors of Israel were in possession of the written documents confirming their exclusive right to dwell in the Land (PJ). The ‘Other,’ in the persons of Eliezer, Ishmael and Esau, is envisaged as a dangerous enemy scheming to deprive Israel of this privilege.

By a reworking of the patriarchal stories, the *meturgemanim* wanted to teach their readers that the right to the Land and the amount of territory ascribed to the tribes depended on the adequate attitude towards foreigners. The descendants of the patriarchs should be distinguished from the Gentiles by their righteousness, and they should follow the example of Joseph, who remained immune even to the foreign women of noble parentage. Such a conduct resulted in allotment of bigger territory in Canaan than usual.

The eternal inheritance of Israel, given by God, bought from the hands of foreigners and recognized by the ‘Other’ as the legitimate possession of the patriarchs and their descendants is not limited

only to the lands of the Canaanites. It embraces also some territories in Egypt, inherited already in the times of Joseph. In the future, Israel is believed to expand beyond measure its territories and to become the unique owner of the entire world.

Patriarchowie i dziedzictwo ziemi w Targumach

Abstrakt: Edytorzy literatury targumicznej upodobnili patriarchów do pobożnych Żydów pochodzących z ich własnych czasów. To zjawisko można by nazwać „targumizacją” biblijnych bohaterów. Z kolei niektóre z biblijnych postaci były postrzegane i prezentowane jako im współcześni poganie. Poprzez modyfikowanie opowiadań o interakcjach pomiędzy biblijnymi postaciami starożytni żydowscy pisarze dokonali samodefinicji i określili „innego”. Analiza różnic między Biblią Hebrajską a jej targumiczną interpretacją nie tylko może nam pomóc zrozumieć, jak wspólnoty, które stworzyły Targumy, postrzegały inne etniczne i religijne grupy, lecz także może wyjaśnić, jak definiowały one własną tożsamość przez przededefiniowanie i uaktualnienie statusu patriarchów. Jednym z obszarów, w którym *meturgemani* wyrazili swą tożsamość, jest temat dziedzictwa ziemi.

Słowa kluczowe: Targumy, patriarchowie, dziedzictwo, tożsamość żydowska

Bibliography

- Aberbach, Moses, and Bernard Grossfeld. 1982. *Targum Onkelos to Genesis: A Critical Analysis Together with an English Translation of the Text (Based on A. Sperber's Edition)*. New York: Ktav.
- Alexander, T. Desmond. 2000. "Beyond Borders: The Wider Dimensions of Land." In *The Land of Promise: Biblical, Theological and Contemporary Perspectives*, edited by Philip Johnston and Peter Walker, 35–50. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press.
- Allen, Leslie C. 1990. *Ezekiel 20–48*. World Biblical Commentary 29. Dallas, TX: Word Books.
- Berthelot, Kattel. 2011a. "The Canaanites who 'Trusted in God': An Original Interpretation of the Fate of the Canaanites in Rabbinic Literature." *Journal of Jewish Studies* 62:233–61.
- Berthelot, Kattel. 2011b. "The Original Sin of the Canaanites." In *The "Other" in Second Temple Period: Essays in Honor of John J. Collins*, edited by Daniel C. Harlow et al., 49–66. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Cook, Edward M. 1986. *Rewriting the Bible: The Text and Language of the Pseudo-Jonathan Targum*. PhD diss., University of California.
- Feldman, Louis H. 1993. *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World: Attitudes and Interactions from Alexander to Justinian*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

- Fraade, Steven D. 2009. "The Temple as a Marker of Jewish Identity Before and After 70 CE: The Role of the Holy Vessels in Rabbinic Memory and Imagination." In *Jewish Identities in Antiquity: Studies in Memory of Menahem Stern*, edited by L.I. Levine and D.R. Schwartz, 237–65. Texte und Studien zum Antiken Judentum 130. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Grossfeld, Bernard. 2000. *Targum Neofiti I. An Exegetical Commentary to Genesis Including Full Rabbinic Parallels*. New York: Sepher-Hermon Press.
- Koehler, Ludwig, and Walter Baumgartner. 2000. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. 4th ed. Leiden: Brill. CD-ROM Edition.
- Kugel, James L. 1998. *Traditions of the Bible. A Guide to the Bible as It Was at the Start of the Common Era*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kuśmirek, Anna. 2011. *Balaam i jego wyrocznie (Lb 22–24) w tradycji targumicznej*. Rozprawy i Studia Biblijne 42. Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Vocatio.
- Kuśmirek, Anna. 2020. "«Jacob's Blessing» (Gen 49:1–28) in Targumic Interpretation." *Collectanea Theologica* 90 (5): 95–122. <https://doi.org/10.21697/ct.2020.90.5.06>.
- Le Déaut, Roger, and Jacques Robert. 1978. *Targum du Pentateuque: Traduction des deux Recensions Palestiniennes complètes avec Introduction, Parallèles, Notes et Index; Genèse*. Sources Chrétiennes 245. Paris: Éditions du Cerf.
- Lemański, Janusz. 2015. *Księga Rodzaju. Rozdziały 37–50. Wstęp, przekład z oryginału, komentarz*. Nowy Komentarz Biblijny 1.3. Częstochowa: Edycja Świętego Pawła.
- Lichtenberger, Hermann. 1994. "«Im Lande Israel zu wohnen wiegt alle Gebote der Tora auf»: Die Heiligkeit des Landes und die Heiligung des Lebens." In *Die Heiden, Juden, Christen und das Problem des Fremden*, edited by R. Feldmeier and U. Heckel, 92–107. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 70. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- McNamara, Martin. 1992. *Targum Neofiti I: Genesis. Translated, with Apparatus and Notes*. The Aramaic Bible 1A. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press.
- Niedźwiedzki, Tomasz. 2016. "Joseph's Two Garments. The Reception of Joseph in Targum Neofiti." *Aramaic Studies* 14:147–83.
- Safrai, Shmuel. 1983. "The Land of Israel in Tannaitic Halacha." In *Das Land Israel in biblischer Zeit: Jerusalem-Symposium 1981 der Hebräischen Universität und der Georg-August-Universität*, edited by Georg Strecker, 201–15. Göttinger Theologische Arbeiten 25. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Shinan, Avigdor. 1985. "The 'Palestinian' Targums – Repetitions, Internal Unity, Contradictions." *Journal of Jewish Studies* 36:72–87.
- Sokoloff, Michael. 2002. *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period*. 2nd ed. Dictionaries of Talmud, Midrash and Targum 2. Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan University Press.
- Vermès, Géza. 1961. *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism: Haggadic Studies*. Studia Post Biblica 4. Leiden: Brill.

- Wintermute, Orville S. 1985. "Jubilees (Second Century B.C.)." In *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, edited by J.H. Charlesworth, 2:35–142. Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company.
- Wróbel, Mirosław S. 2014. *Targum Neofiti 1. Księga Rodzaju. Tekst aramejski – przekład – aparat krytyczny – przypisy*. Biblia Aramejska 1. Lublin: Gaudium.
- Wróbel, Mirosław S. 2017. *Wprowadzenie do Biblii Aramejskiej*. Lublin: Gaudium.

Received: 2025.10.11.

Accepted: 2025.12.04.

Statements

Author Contributions: Not applicable.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Acknowledgments: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.