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From *Sidus* to *Providentia*: Theological Reinterpretations of *Mazal* in the Translation History of the Targum Qohelet

Abstract: This article analyzes the semantic development and translation history of the Aramaic lexeme *mazal* in Targum Qohelet. Although absent from the Hebrew text, *mazal* appears fifteen times as an interpretive term linking astral language with causality and distribution. Tracing its evolution from an astronomical concept to a theological category in rabbinic literature, the study compares its fifteen occurrences with later Latin, English and French renderings. The shift from astral translations such as *sidus* (“star”) to abstractions like “Providence” reflects interpretive intervention rather than semantic necessity, reshaping the cosmological and theological horizon of the Targum.

Keywords: Targum Qohelet, *mazal*, Aramaic, targumic exegesis, translation history, Providence, *mazel tov*

1. Introduction¹

The Targum to Qohelet (TgQoh) occupies a distinctive position within the corpus of Aramaic biblical translations. Unlike the Targums to the Pentateuch and the Prophets, which generally aim at close correspondence with their Hebrew *Vorlage*, TgQoh belongs to the group of “Late Literary Targums,” characterized by interpretive expansion and exegetical rewriting.

¹ This article is an expanded version of the paper entitled “The Dynamics of the Term *Mazal* in the Translation of the Targums, with Special Focus on Targum Qohelet,” presented at the 2024 International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, held on 29 July 2024 in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

Within this framework, translation functions not merely as linguistic transfer but as a form of conceptual mediation shaped by rabbinic theological reflection. A central feature of TgQoh is the repeated and programmatic use of the term *mazal* (מָזָל), which appears fifteen times despite being absent from the Hebrew book of Ecclesiastes. In the Targum, *mazal* operates as an explanatory category linking cosmic order and the distribution of events with divine governance, thereby mediating between inherited astral language and a theocentric model of providential order. Such interpretive expansion corresponds to a broader targumic tendency in which the *meturgeman* adapts and rearticulates the biblical text in accordance with theological and pedagogical aims (Kuśmirek 2021, 5; Parchem 2023, 60).

TgQoh is generally dated to late antique Palestine, most often to the seventh century, although proposals range from the sixth to the tenth century (McNamara 2003, 169; Knobel 1991, 14–15). It is usually placed after the redaction of the Talmuds but before the Arab conquest (Flesher and Chilton 2011, 243). External and linguistic evidence provide the principal chronological anchors: the earliest reference appears in Nathan ben Yehiel's *Arukh* (1101), establishing a *terminus ad quem*, while the absence of Arabic loanwords suggests a linguistic formation prior to the eighth century (Levine 1978, 68; Knobel 1991, 15).² Within this late antique setting, TgQoh reflects a mature phase of rabbinic thought shaped by concerns regarding causality, determinism, and divine governance (Gottlieb 2014).³

² Levine argues that TgQoh must predate the ninth century, noting its apparent use in *Pesiqta Rabbati* and possibly in the eighth-century *She'iltot*. He rejects direct dependence on *Oqhelet Rabbah*, proposing instead the use of shared midrashic traditions and successive redactional accretions. Linguistic evidence supports this dating: Knobel emphasizes the absence of Arabic loanwords and later linguistic features, pointing to a pre-eighth-century stratum.

³ Leeor Gottlieb situates several Targums of the Ketuvim, especially the Targum of Chronicles, within a post-vernacular phase of targumic production extending beyond the period of spoken Aramaic. In this model, such targums function primarily as learned exegetical compositions produced in the *beit midrash* rather than as liturgical translations, reflecting a consciously literary and scholastic register shaped by earlier rabbinic tradition.

Within this intellectual context, the systematic deployment of *mazal* constitutes a distinctive conceptual feature of TgQoh. While the Hebrew *mazzalot* appears only once in the biblical corpus (2 Kgs 23:5) in reference to celestial bodies, TgQoh introduces *mazal* in passages lacking a Hebrew equivalent, where it functions as a mediating category between astral causality and divine sovereignty. This usage reflects broader late antique rabbinic attempts to articulate the relationship between cosmic order and divine justice, a tension well attested in Talmudic and midrashic literature.

The reception of TgQoh in Western scholarship occurred primarily through Latin and later English translations, whose renderings of *mazal* reveal a significant interpretive shift. Early translations tended to preserve the astronomical register of the term, whereas later versions increasingly reframed it within explicitly theological categories, most notably “Providence.” This development is evident when comparing the Complutensian Polyglot (1517), the London Polyglot (1657), the translation of C.D. Ginsburg (1861), and modern critical editions. The shift reflects broader hermeneutical and theological transformations rather than semantic necessity.

This study examines the semantic range and translation history of *mazal* in TgQoh. Methodologically, it combines comparative philological analysis with reception-historical investigation, correlating lexical usage with broader theological and cosmological frameworks. First, it situates the term within its philological and rabbinic context as a mediating concept between astral cosmology and divine governance. Second, it analyzes its rendering in the history of translation from the early modern period to the present. The study proceeds from the assumption that translation constitutes an act of conceptual mediation and that the interpretation of key terms such as *mazal* significantly shapes the theological and cosmological horizon of the text.

2. Philological Background of *Mazal*

Any evaluation of the translation history of *mazal* in Targum Qohelet must begin with a clarification of the term’s semantic range across

its earlier linguistic and intellectual contexts. The difficulties encountered by later translators did not stem from lexical obscurity but from the semantic density and historical layering of the term itself. By the time of TgQoh, *mazal* no longer denoted merely a celestial object nor yet a purely abstract notion such as “fortune,” but rather a concept situated at the intersection of cosmology, determinism, and divine governance. This section traces the development of *mazal* from its earliest attestations to its distinctive deployment in TgQoh, thereby establishing the philological foundation necessary for evaluating its later translation history.

2.1. Etymology and Early Biblical Attestations

Etymologically, *mazal* is widely regarded as a loanword from Akkadian *manzaltu* (or *mazaltu*), meaning “station,” “position,” or “abode,” originally denoting the fixed stations of celestial bodies in the night sky (CDA, s.v. *manzaltu*; BDB, 561; HALOT, s.v. מָזַל). A cognate root appears in Arabic *manzil*, referring to a stopping place or dwelling, which likewise preserves the spatial and locational sense of the term. In its earliest stratum, therefore, *mazal* belongs firmly within the semantic field of astronomy.

In Biblical Hebrew, the term occurs only marginally. The plural form *mazzalot* (מַזְלֹת) appears in 2 Kgs 23:5, where it designates celestial bodies or constellations associated with illicit cultic practices during the reign of Josiah. A related form, *mazzarot*, is commonly identified in Job 38:32 within a poetic catalogue of cosmic phenomena. Although some scholars have proposed a technical distinction – understanding *mazzalot* as planets and *mazzarot* as the zodiacal circle – this differentiation is not consistently reflected in ancient translations, most notably the Septuagint, which tends to transliterate both forms without semantic clarification (Driver 1956, 4–8). In all biblical contexts, however, the meaning of the term remains strictly astronomical and lacks any explicit connotation of personal destiny or fate.

2.2. Early Aramaic and Qumran: From Astral Term to Cosmological Concept

In post-biblical Aramaic, the semantic profile of *mazal* begins to expand beyond its strictly astronomical referent. Evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls indicates that, in early Jewish Aramaic, the term continued to denote concrete astral realities. The Genesis Apocryphon from Qumran (1QapGen 7:2), for example, employs *mazal* in a clearly astronomical sense, referring to the ordered stations of the heavenly bodies (Fitzmyer 2004, 56–57). This usage confirms that, in the Second Temple period, *mazal* still functioned primarily within a cosmological register closely aligned with earlier Near Eastern astral conceptions.

The Qumran corpus reflects a milieu in which celestial phenomena are integrated into deterministic and theological frameworks. Texts on calendrical calculation, angelic mediation, and cosmic order portray the heavens as divinely appointed mechanisms governing time and destiny. Although *mazal* does not yet function as a technical term for personal fate, the conceptual groundwork is present: astral structures participate in a divinely ordered cosmic system.

Rabbinic literature builds on this inherited cosmological vocabulary and significantly extends its semantic scope. In amoraic and post-amoraic sources, *mazal* comes to denote not only celestial configurations but also their perceived influence on human affairs. Lexicographical evidence reflects this development: Jastrow records meanings ranging from “constellation” to “luck” or “fortune,” already indicating a shift from a strictly astronomical referent toward a more abstract and existential one (Jastrow 1903, s.v. מָזָל). Astral terminology increasingly serves to articulate causality, destiny, and divine justice.

2.2.1. Astronomical Usage in the Targums to the Pentateuch and to the Prophets

Within the targumic corpus, *mazal* does not function uniformly. In the Targums to the Pentateuch and the Prophets, the term generally preserves its biblical association with the physical heavens. Targum Jonathan to 2 Kgs 23:5 renders Hebrew *mazzalot* with an Aramaic cognate, clearly referring to celestial bodies worshiped illicitly. Similarly, in Isa 47:13, those who “gaze at the stars” are described

using terminology derived from *mazal*, explicitly linking the term to Babylonian astral science. In these contexts, *mazal* designates elements of the cosmic order rather than an autonomous force determining individual destiny.

2.2.2. Economic Usage in the Targums to the Writings

A different semantic development emerges in the Targums to the Writings, particularly in Targum Proverbs. Here, *mazal* frequently functions as a translation equivalent for Hebrew terms denoting wealth or material possessions, such as *hon* or *shalal*. In Prov 6:31, for example, the phrase “all the wealth of his house” is rendered as *kol mazal beiteh*, where *mazal* clearly refers to tangible property rather than fate. Comparable usages occur in Prov 13:7, 13:11, and 19:14, where *mazal* denotes economic fortune or inherited assets (Grossfeld 1991, 55–57). In this context, the celestial associations of the term are largely absent, and *mazal* functions within a pragmatic, material register.

2.2.3. *Mazal* as a Deterministic-Theological Category in Targum Qohelet

Against this comparative backdrop, the usage of *mazal* in Targum Qohelet stands out as distinctive. It cannot be reduced either to the strictly astronomical sense or the economic sense characteristic of Targum Proverbs. Instead, TgQoh employs *mazal* as a comprehensive explanatory principle governing the conditions of human life. Statements such as “everything depends on *mazal*” (TgQoh 9:2) or references to events being “decreed by *mazal*” present the term as a mechanism of determinism that operates within, rather than independently of, divine sovereignty.

This usage corresponds closely to late antique rabbinic attempts to articulate a coherent relationship between astral causality and monotheistic theology. Rabbinic literature preserves a well-known tension on this issue, crystallized in the dictum *אין מזל לישראל* (“there is no *mazal* for Israel”) alongside counter-statements asserting that life, sustenance, and progeny depend on *mazal* rather than merit (b. Šabb. 156a; b. Mo‘ed Qat. 28a). TgQoh does not resolve this tension by denying astral influence; instead, it integrates *mazal* into

a theological horizon in which cosmic mechanisms function as subordinate instruments of divine decree.

The *mazal* of TgQoh is not a remnant of popular astrology but an interpretive category employed within a learned exegetical milieu to articulate questions of fate, justice, and divine governance. This philological and theological background explains why later translators struggled to render *mazal* consistently and why its translation history became a site of theological reinterpretation rather than simple lexical equivalence.

2.3. The Rabbinic Context: *Mazal* between Determinism and Divine Sovereignty

The profile of *mazal* in Targum Qohelet must be read within the broader rabbinic discourse on determinism, astrology, and divine governance (cf. Ness 1990, 75–102). Late antique rabbinic literature preserves a sustained and often unresolved tension between competing views regarding the influence of celestial forces on human life. This debate forms an essential backdrop for the targumic usage of *mazal*, which neither simply affirms nor categorically rejects astral determinism, but instead integrates it into a theologically mediated framework.

2.3.1. Rabbinic Debates on Astrology and Fate

The classic rabbinic locus for the discussion of *mazal* is the Babylonian Talmud, where divergent positions appear side by side. Several traditions attribute significant causal power to celestial configurations. Thus b. Mo'ed Qaṭ. 28a states that “life, children, and sustenance depend not on merit (*zekhut*) but on *mazal*,” expressing a view in which key aspects of human existence are governed by forces beyond individual moral agency (cf. Urbach 1975, 137–39). This reflects the persistence of deterministic cosmologies within rabbinic discourse.

At the same time, rabbinic literature preserves a counter-tradition that limits astral influence. The dictum אין מזל לישראל (“there is no *mazal* for Israel”) in b. Šabb. 156a maintains that Israel, by virtue of the covenant, is not subject to astral determinism in the same way as the nations (Ness 1990, 57–74). The coexistence of these views

suggests not a systematic doctrine but an ongoing negotiation between cosmological assumptions and theological commitments.

2.3.2. Mediation Rather than Resolution

Rather than resolving this tension by choosing one position over the other, rabbinic literature frequently adopts strategies of mediation. Midrashic traditions illustrate this approach through narrative and exegetical devices. A well-known passage in Gen. Rab. 44:12 depicts God instructing Abraham to “go forth from your astrology,” thereby affirming both the reality of astral systems and the possibility of transcending them through divine election. Similarly, Gen. Rab. 10:6 states that “there is no blade of grass below that does not have a *mazal* above that strikes it and says, ‘Grow!’,” portraying celestial forces as active agents within a divinely ordered cosmos.

These traditions do not deny astral mechanisms but subordinate them to divine authority. *Mazal* thus functions as an intermediate category – neither autonomous fate nor mere metaphor – through which divine governance is enacted within the created order. This interpretive move allows rabbinic theology to accommodate widespread beliefs in astral influence without compromising monotheistic commitments (cf. Urbach 1975, 141–44).

2.3.3. *Mazal* in Targum Qohelet as Rabbinic Synthesis

The usage of *mazal* in Targum Qohelet reflects precisely this mediating strategy. TgQoh employs the term systematically as a key explanatory principle across multiple contexts. Deterministic statements echo one strand of rabbinic tradition, while passages portraying *mazal* as allotted or regulated by God reflect the countervailing emphasis on divine sovereignty (Levine 1978, 62–66).

TgQoh thus presents a synthetic theological vision in which *mazal* is neither rejected nor absolutized but integrated into a hierarchical cosmology where celestial forces function as instruments of divine decree. Such synthesis corresponds to broader late rabbinic interpretive tendencies, in which divergent traditions are juxtaposed and harmonized rather than resolved doctrinally (Schäfer 1997, 130–33).

2.4. Implications for the Translation and Reception of *Mazal*

This rabbinic synthesis has direct implications for the later translation history of TgQoh. Translators encountering the term *mazal* faced not merely a lexical choice but an entire cosmological and theological construct for which no straightforward equivalent existed in Christian theological vocabulary. The tendency of later translators to render *mazal* as *providentia* (“providence,” “foresight,” “Divine providence”) reflects an attempt to resolve the very tension that TgQoh seeks to preserve – namely, the coexistence of determinism and divine governance – by collapsing it into a single theological category (Walton 1657; Ginsburg 1861).

Understanding the rabbinic context of *mazal* is therefore essential for evaluating these translation strategies. What may appear, from a later theological perspective, as inconsistency or ambiguity within TgQoh is in fact a deliberate feature of its rabbinic worldview. The next section examines how this complex conceptual inheritance was negotiated, reshaped, or at times obscured in the early modern and modern translation history of Targum Qohelet.

3. The History of Translation: From *Sidus* to *Providentia*

It is important to recall that the first decisive act of conceptual mediation did not occur in early modern Europe but within the Targum itself. The *meturgeman* had already transformed the Hebrew *Vorlage* by introducing *mazal* as a structuring explanatory principle. Later translators therefore did not confront a neutral lexeme but a term embedded in a carefully constructed rabbinic cosmology. The history of translation thus represents a second-order mediation layered upon the original exegetical intervention of the *meturgeman*.

Against this background, the semantic and theological complexity of *mazal* outlined in the preceding sections provides the necessary framework for understanding its subsequent reception. When Targum Qohelet entered early modern Christian scholarship, it did so not as an autonomous Jewish exegetical work but as part of a broader humanist engagement with the “original languages” of Scripture. Within this intellectual environment, the rendering

of *mazal* was shaped as much by confessional commitments and theological priorities as by strictly philological considerations.

3.1. Early Modern Contexts: Humanism, Hebraism, and the Targum

The inclusion of targumic texts in early modern polyglot Bibles must be understood within the broader intellectual program of Christian Hebraism. This program sought to recover the “original languages” of Scripture while at the same time integrating Jewish learning into a theologically regulated Protestant hermeneutic (Burnett 2012, 83–101, 233–45).

The material form in which targums circulated in Christian Europe also shaped their reception. Aramaic texts were embedded within Latin paratexts – translations, glosses, and typographical conventions – that aligned them with Christian scholarly norms. As studies of early sixteenth-century manuscripts show, this framing recontextualized the Targum within a Christian interpretive framework (Houtman, Staaldvine-Sulman, and Kirn 2014). Such conditions provide essential context for understanding how terms such as *mazal* were rendered.

3.2. Alfonso de Zamora and the Complutensian Polyglot

The earliest sustained Western engagement with Targum Qohelet occurs in the context of the Complutensian Polyglot (1514–1517). Alfonso de Zamora, a Jewish convert to Christianity trained in rabbinic learning, was responsible for preparing the Aramaic text and its Latin translation. Zamora’s rendering of *mazal* as *sidus* (“star,” “heavenly body,” “constellation”) may be understood as an effort to preserve the cosmological structure already articulated by the *meturgeman* rather than to recast it within a new theological framework. By selecting a term that maintains the astral register of the Aramaic, Zamora avoids reducing *mazal* to an explicitly theological abstraction.

This translation choice reflects both Zamora’s linguistic competence and his position at the intersection of Jewish and Christian intellectual worlds. While working within a Christian scholarly enterprise, Zamora retained a sensitivity to the conceptual vocabulary of rabbinic literature. His use of *sidus* allows the Latin reader

to encounter the cosmological dimension of TgQoh without immediately resolving it into doctrinal categories. In this respect, Zamora's translation preserves the tension inherent in the targumic text between astral causality and divine governance.

3.3. The London Polyglot and the Theological Reframing of *Mazal*

A decisive shift occurs with the London Polyglot (1657), edited by Brian Walton. By the mid-seventeenth century, Christian engagement with Hebrew and Aramaic texts had become more theologically self-conscious and confessionally circumscribed (Burnett 1996, 233–45). Walton's handling of *mazal* reflects this change. Rather than employing a single lexical equivalent, he renders the term variably as *sidus* ("star," "heavenly body," "constellation"), *sors* ("lot," "fate," "destiny"), *felicitas* ("happiness," "good fortune," "success," "prosperity"), and, most significantly, *providentia*.

This lexical variability is not accidental. The introduction of *providentia* marks a theological intervention that reframes the targumic concept within a Christian doctrine of divine governance. Where TgQoh presents *mazal* as a mediating mechanism through which divine decrees are effected in the world, Walton's translation often bypasses this intermediate level, attributing causality directly to God. The result is a partial "des-astrologization" of the text, in which the cosmological texture of the Aramaic is selectively flattened in favor of theological coherence.

3.4. Ginsburg and the Canonization of "Providence"

This interpretive trajectory reaches a more fixed form in the nineteenth century with the work of Christian D. Ginsburg. In his English translation and commentary on Ecclesiastes, Ginsburg consistently renders *mazal* as "Providence" in key passages, thereby normalizing a theological reading that had been only intermittently adopted by earlier translators. Writing in a period marked by both Protestant biblical scholarship and a critical stance toward astrology, Ginsburg presents TgQoh as articulating a rational and morally ordered theology, largely stripped of its astral cosmology.

Yet this consistency comes at a cost. As the targumic usage surveyed in Sections 1 and 2 demonstrates, *mazal* in TgQoh

functions across a spectrum that includes technical astrological references, deterministic statements, and polemical warnings. Rendering all these instances under the single rubric of “Providence” obscures the internal coherence of the targumic worldview and imposes a conceptual uniformity foreign to the Aramaic text.

3.5. Modern Translations and Renewed Philological Sensitivity

More recent translations and critical editions mark a cautious departure from this theological domestication. While the English translation by Knobel represents an intermediate stage – oscillating between “Providence” in explicitly theological contexts and more concrete renderings such as “stars,” “planets,” or “fortune” where the text resists abstraction (Knobel 1991, 63–68) – subsequent scholarship has moved more decisively toward preserving the semantic openness of *mazal*. Scholars such as Díez Merino, Taradach and Ferrer, and Fisher increasingly opt for renderings such as “fortune,” “fate,” or other context-sensitive equivalents that reflect the ambiguity of the original Aramaic rather than resolving it prematurely into doctrinal categories (Díez Merino 1987, 112–18; Taradach and Ferrer 1998, 94–101). Particularly significant in this regard is Deborah Fisher’s 2022 dissertation, which offers a new critical edition of the Targum text alongside an English translation that consciously avoids the “Christianizing” tendencies of earlier versions, most notably the consistent identification of *mazal* with “Providence.” Instead, Fisher adopts a restrained translational strategy aimed at preserving the polyvalence of the targumic concept (Fisher 2022, 214–29).

Seen against this background, the translation history of *mazal* in Targum Qohelet emerges as a site of sustained theological negotiation. Each stage – from *sidus* to *providentia* and beyond – registers not only a lexical choice but a decision about how Jewish cosmology is to be understood, appropriated, or reshaped within different scholarly and confessional contexts. The following section will examine these translational strategies in detail by analyzing the fifteen occurrences of *mazal* in TgQoh and their treatment across early modern and modern translations.

4. Distribution and Usage of *Mazal* in Targum Qohelet

The interpretive history outlined in the preceding section can be tested concretely only through a systematic analysis of the fifteen occurrences of *mazal* in Targum Qohelet (all citations of TgQoh follow Sperber 1968). These instances do not form a homogeneous group; rather, they display a range of functions that reflect the semantic scope of the term as reconstructed in Sections 1 and 2. For analytical clarity, the occurrences may be grouped into four overlapping categories: (A) *mazal* as divinely allotted fortune; (B) *mazal* as a principle of cosmic determinism; (C) *mazal* as an astrological mechanism; and (D) *mazal* as a polemical or negative category. This classification is heuristic rather than rigid, yet it allows recurring translational patterns to emerge with greater precision.

4.1. *Mazal* as Divinely Allotted Fortune

Several passages employ *mazal* to denote the conditions of life allotted to human beings, particularly in relation to wealth, success, and companionship. In TgQoh 3:9, human effort is said to be effective only when “assisted by *mazal* from above” (מסתייע במזל מלעילא). The phrasing retains a vertical cosmological orientation, suggesting a heavenly source that mediates divine bestowal. Zamora’s *sidere bono* (“under a favorable star,” “with a good star,” under fortunate auspices”) preserves this astral register, whereas later translations frequently substitute abstract theological language, such as “Providence,” thereby suppressing the intermediary dimension (Zamora 1517; Walton 1657).

A similar dynamic appears in TgQoh 4:9, where two righteous individuals are described as being “strong in *mazal*.” Interpreting this phrase as “strong in Providence” produces a conceptual tension, since divine providence is ordinarily something to which one is subject rather than a capacity one possesses. Renderings such as “good fortune” or “favorable destiny” more adequately reflect the targumic idiom, which presupposes that *mazal* can vary in strength and efficacy (Knobel 1991, 65).

In TgQoh 5:17–18 and 6:2, wealth and enjoyment are explicitly said to be given to a person “in his *mazal*.” Here, the targumic

text distinguishes between divine agency and the mechanism through which divine gifts are distributed. Translators who render *mazal* directly as “Providence” collapse this distinction, whereas translations that retain the notion of an allotted portion or fortune preserve the layered causality of the Aramaic (Levine 1978, 60–63).

4.2. *Mazal* as a Principle of Cosmic Determinism

A second group of passages presents *mazal* as a general principle governing the course of events. TgQoh 9:1 states that the destinies of the righteous and the wise are “decreed by *mazal*” (במזל אֲתִגְזֹר), combining juridical language with cosmological causation. Zamora’s *sidere* maintains the sense of a decree inscribed in the heavens, whereas later translations increasingly assimilate this determinism to divine predestination (Walton 1657; Ginsburg 1861).

The most explicit formulation occurs in TgQoh 9:2: “Everything depends on *mazal*.” This statement echoes the deterministic strand of rabbinic tradition articulated in b. Mo‘ed Qat. 28a, yet within TgQoh it functions descriptively rather than polemically. Notably, even translators inclined toward theological abstraction occasionally revert here to astral language, indicating an awareness that *mazal* cannot be fully subsumed under the category of providence without residue.

TgQoh 9:11 further complicates the picture by associating “time and chance” with the respective *mazal* of individuals. The plural form (מזלהון) underscores the distributive and differentiated nature of destiny, reinforcing the idea that *mazal* operates as a structured yet variable system rather than as a monolithic decree.

4.3. *Mazal* as Astrological Mechanism

In several passages, *mazal* appears in contexts that presuppose technical astrological knowledge. TgQoh 7:15 attributes the occurrence of good and evil to the מזלֵיא under which human beings were created, an unmistakable reference to natal astrology. Here, even theologically motivated translators are compelled to acknowledge the astral sense of the term, rendering it as “stars” or “planets” rather than “Providence” (Walton 1657; Ginsburg 1861).

Similarly, TgQoh 7:27 portrays Solomon as determining the relationships between the מזליא, implying the calculation of celestial configurations. In TgQoh 10:6, the prosperity of Edom is attributed to its being “in *mazal*,” a politically charged statement that further demonstrates the explanatory reach of the term. The reluctance of some translators to preserve astral language in this verse reflects not philological uncertainty but theological discomfort with attributing success – even temporarily – to Israel’s adversaries through a divinely sanctioned cosmic mechanism.

4.4. Polemical and Negative Uses of *Mazal*

Finally, several passages employ *mazal* in explicitly negative or cautionary contexts. TgQoh 9:3 describes the human condition as an “evil *mazal*,” an idiomatic expression that resists theological abstraction. Translating this phrase as “evil Providence” would be conceptually incoherent within a monotheistic configuration, prompting even otherwise consistent translators to resort to terms such as “misfortune” or “bad fate” (Ginsburg 1861).

The tension culminates in TgQoh 11:4, which warns against “looking to the מזליא.” This admonition does not negate the existence or efficacy of astral forces but cautions against their misuse as objects of divination. The verse thus echoes the rabbinic stance that acknowledges cosmic determinism while rejecting astrological practice as a guide for religious or ethical decision-making.

The patterns identified in this section are summarized in Table 1, which follows the summary below and presents all fifteen occurrences of *mazal* alongside their renderings in selected early modern and modern translations.

4.5. Summary

Taken together, the fifteen occurrences of *mazal* in Targum Qohelet reveal a coherent yet multifaceted conceptual model. *Mazal* functions simultaneously as allotted fortune, deterministic principle, astrological mechanism, and polemical category. The translation history surveyed in Section 3 demonstrates that later translators struggled to accommodate this semantic range within their own theological frameworks, often resolving the tension by selectively

emphasizing or suppressing particular aspects of the term. A consistent reading of TgQoh, however, requires recognizing that these diverse functions are not contradictory but complementary, reflecting a rabbinic cosmology in which divine governance operates through structured cosmic intermediaries.

5. Theological Implications

The preceding analysis has shown that *mazal* in Targum Qohelet functions as a coherent yet polyvalent concept within a late rabbinic cosmological framework. Philologically derived from an astral lexeme, its semantic range expands to include determinism, allotted fortune, and the mechanisms of divine governance. TgQoh integrates these dimensions into a unified explanatory system: the fifteen occurrences reveal not inconsistency but contextual differentiation across economic, deterministic, astrological, and polemical registers.

This semantic breadth is constitutive of the Targum's theological vision. TgQoh articulates a model of mediated causality in which divine sovereignty operates through structured cosmic intermediaries. The systematic insertion of *mazal* – absent from the Hebrew Vorlage – signals deliberate conceptual expansion rather than incidental glossing. The *meturgeman* thus emerges not as a neutral translator but as an active theological interpreter who reframes Qohelet's reflections on chance and injustice within a coherent cosmological horizon. In doing so, the Targum participates in a late antique synthesis of astral determinism and divine sovereignty.

Mazal is neither an autonomous force competing with God nor a mere metaphor for divine will. It designates an intermediate mechanism through which divine decree is enacted within the created order. This configuration reflects broader rabbinic strategies for negotiating the tension between astral causality and monotheism: celestial structures are acknowledged as operative yet remain subordinate to divine authority.

The principal tensions surrounding *mazal* arise not within TgQoh itself but in its reception. Early modern translators faced the challenge of rendering a concept for which Christian theological vocabulary offered no stable equivalent. Zamora's consistent use

Table 1. Renderings of *Mazal* in Targum Qohelet across Early Modern and Modern Translations¹

This table presents the fifteen occurrences of *mazal* in TgQoh and their renderings in selected Latin, English, and French translations from the sixteenth to the twenty-first century. It highlights the gradual shift from astral terminology to theological abstractions.

Ref.	TgQoh (Aram.)	Zamora (1517)	Walton (1657)	Ginsburg (1861)	Knobel (1991)	Levine (1978)	Manns (1992)	Taradach & Ferrer (1998)	Fisher (2022)
3:9	ܡܙܠܐ (ܡܙܠܐ)	<i>sidere bono</i>	<i>providentia</i> (de supra)	by Providence (from above)	by providence (from above)	by Providence (from above)	<i>par le destin</i> (d'en-haut)	<i>par la Providence</i> (d'en-haut)	by fortune (from above)
4:9	ܡܙܠܐ	<i>sidere bono</i>	(felicitate)	(who lead successfully)	in fortune	(who lead successfully)	<i>pour le destin</i>	<i>la bonne fortune</i>	good fortune
5:17	ܡܙܠܐ	<i>sidere bono</i>	<i>in providentia sua</i>	in his providence	by providence	in his providence	<i>son sort</i>	providence	by fortune
5:18	ܡܙܠܐ	<i>sidere bono</i>	<i>in sortem suam</i>	in providence	by providence	in providence	<i>dans son sort</i>	providence	by fortune
6:2	ܡܙܠܐ	<i>sidere bono</i>	<i>in sortem suam</i>	in his providence	by providence	in his providence	<i>son sort</i>	providence	through fortune
7:15	ܡܙܠܐ	<i>sidurum</i>	<i>syderum</i>	the planets	the planets	the planets	<i>le sort sous</i>	planètes	the constellations
7:27	ܡܙܠܐ	<i>sidera</i>	<i>sydera</i>	the planets	the planets	the planets	<i>le destin</i>	planètes	the constellations
9:1	ܡܙܠܐ	<i>sidere</i>	<i>providentia</i>	the planet	by providence	according to the planet	<i>selon le sort</i>	providence	by fortune
9:2	ܡܙܠܐ	<i>sidere</i>	<i>sideribus</i>	upon providence	(the same) destiny	<i>au sort</i>	providence	the same fate	—
9:3	ܡܙܠܐ	<i>sidus malum</i>	<i>fatum malum</i>	a great misfortune	evil providence	a great misfortune	<i>un sort mauvais</i>	providence	bad fortune
9:9	ܡܙܠܐ	<i>sidere bono</i>	<i>ex providentia</i>	through destiny	by providence	through destiny	<i>ton sort</i>	providence	through your fortune
9:11	ܡܙܠܐ	<i>sidere eorum</i>	<i>pro sorte eorum</i>	their planets	to their planets	according to the planets	<i>selon leur sort</i>	[bonne] étoile (lit. leurs planètes)	their destinies
10:6	ܡܙܠܐ	<i>sidere bono</i>	<i>in felicitate sua</i>	in his good star	good luck	by good star	<i>selon son sort</i>	—	in his fortune
11:4	ܡܙܠܐ (bis)	<i>sidera</i> (bis)	<i>in asiris & asira</i>	the planets (bis)	the constellations (bis)	the planets (bis)	<i>le sort</i> (bis)	planètes (bis)	the constellations (bis)

¹ Text of TgQoh cited according to Sperber (1968). Translations follow Zamora (1517), Walton (1657), Ginsburg (1861), Knobel (1991), Levine (1978), Manns (1992), Taradach and Ferrer (1998), and Fisher (2022). Latin and French renderings are cited in the original language. Parenthetical expressions reflect explanatory additions in the respective editions.

of *sidus* preserves the cosmological register of the Aramaic, whereas the growing preference for *providentia* reflects a hermeneutical shift toward minimizing intermediate causal structures. Yet this theological reframing proved unstable: even translators inclined toward abstraction reverted to astral or fatal terminology in contexts involving astrology or explicitly negative *mazal*. These oscillations reveal competing cosmological assumptions rather than mere lexical inconsistency.

6. Conclusions

The translation history of *mazal* in Targum Qohelet makes clear that even a single lexeme can register profound intellectual change. Across five centuries, its shifting renderings reflect evolving conceptions of cosmology, causality, and the boundaries between philology and theology.

In the sixteenth century, Zamora's translation of *mazal* as *sidus* allowed the cosmological dimension of TgQoh to remain visible within Christian Hebraism. From the seventeenth century onward, however, *mazal* was increasingly rendered as *providentia* or "Providence," reflecting theological reorientation rather than semantic constraint. Within early modern and modern frameworks, cosmological intermediaries were often subordinated to a more immediate doctrine of divine governance, narrowing the semantic range of the targumic term.⁴

This consolidation was never complete. Passages involving natal astrology, political fortune, or explicitly negative *mazal* exposed the limits of a univocal theological rendering. Contemporary scholarship, shaped by historical-critical philology, increasingly favors

⁴ The expression *mazal tov* (Yiddish: *mazel tov*) derives from rabbinic Hebrew, where *mazal* originally denoted a constellation, zodiacal influence, or destiny. Already attested in the Geonic period (ca. seventh–eleventh centuries), the phrase initially referred to an auspicious astrological sign or favorable fate rather than to "congratulations." Under the influence of medieval Jewish astrology, *mazal* remained associated with stellar destiny, but in later Yiddish and modern Hebrew usage (especially from the eighteenth–nineteenth centuries onward) *mazel tov* came to mean "congratulations," acknowledging that a favorable destiny has already manifested itself.

context-sensitive translations that preserve semantic plurality rather than harmonizing it doctrinally. The trajectory from cosmological specificity to theological abstraction and, more recently, to philological plurality demonstrates how translation reshapes the perceived architecture of a text.

Recovering the conceptual integrity of *mazal* does not entail adopting its cosmology. It requires recognizing that TgQoh articulates a coherent model of mediated divine governance within a hierarchically ordered cosmos. Attentiveness to the semantic and translational history of the term thus sharpens methodological self-awareness and clarifies the delicate boundary between philology and theology.

Od *sidus* do *providentia*: Teologiczne reinterpretacje terminu *mazal* w historii przekładu Targumu Koheleta

Abstrakt: Artykuł analizuje rozwój semantyczny oraz historię przekładu aramejskiego leksemu *mazal* w Targumie Koheleta. Choć termin ten nie występuje w tekście hebrajskim, w Targumie pojawia się piętnaście razy jako pojęcie interpretacyjne łączące język astralny z kategoriami przyczynowości i rozdziału zdarzeń. Studium śledzi ewolucję znaczeniową *mazal* – od pojęcia astronomicznego do kategorii teologicznej w literaturze rabinicznej – oraz porównuje jego wystąpienia z późniejszymi przekładami łacińskimi, angielskimi i francuskimi. Przejście od tłumaczeń astralnych, takich jak *sidus* („gwiazda”), do abstrakcji teologicznych typu „Opatrzność” stanowi wynik ingerencji interpretacyjnej, a nie konieczności semantycznej, przekształcając kosmologiczny i teologiczny horyzont targumu.

Słowa kluczowe: Targum Koheleta, *mazal*, aramejski, egzegeza targumiczna, historia przekładu, Opatrzność, *mazel tow*

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