

## “The Targums: The Light on the Biblical Traditions” – Conference Report

From 20 to 21 May 2025, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw hosted the second International Scientific Conference entitled “The Targums: The Light on the Biblical Traditions,” organised by the University’s Faculty of Theology and the Collegium Bobolanum of the Catholic Academy in Warsaw.

The first speaker, Eveline van Staalduine-Sulman (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam), presented a paper entitled “How to explain an atypical simile? The Targums on the stillbirth in Numbers 12:12.” She showed that the Targums, including also Targum Onqelos, interpret the verse not as a metaphor for leprosy but as a plea for Moses to act on behalf of his sister, Miriam. Her analysis also explored the role of *Tiqqune Sopherim*, noting that while the Targums do not translate them literally, they reflect the core idea of shared kinship and communal identity.

Margaretha Folmer (Leiden University and Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) presented a paper on “The Construct Infinitive and the Divine in Targum Onqelos.” Building on earlier work on Hebrew *b +* and *k +* construct infinitive forms – often rendered as temporal clauses – she analysed their translation in Targum Onqelos (Exodus–Deuteronomy) and Targum Jonathan (Joshua–2 Kings). Her study revealed diverse translation strategies aimed at theological and linguistic precision.

Tomasz Mazurek (Seton Hall University) presented a paper on “The Interpretive Techniques Employed by the Targumists in the Characterisation of Feminine Figures in the Pentateuch.” He identified seven techniques used to reshape female characters – such as filling gaps, altering dialogue, and removing problematic phrases – to highlight their piety, wisdom, and role in God’s plan. Examples

include Hagar as Abraham's lawful wife, Rebecca as God's instrument, and Rachel as caring and wise.

The second session began with Dr. Viktor Ber (South Bohemian University, České Budějovice). He gave a presentation entitled "Translation, Interpretation, and Intertextuality in the Targums to Deuteronomy 13." He analysed three cases of apostasy – prophet (Deut 13:2–6), family (Deut 13:7–12) and city (Deut 13:13–18). By comparing the Hebrew biblical text with its Aramaic version, he identified and discussed differences in their approaches to individual court cases. Additionally, he highlighted intertextual connections that were either omitted or newly established in the targums.

Michał Karnawalski, SJ (Collegium Bobolanum, Warsaw) delivered a lecture entitled "Does TgPss 68:16 Refer to the Episode of Elijah on Mount Carmel?" Analysing various manuscripts, he noted that some Targums expand the verse to include and reject Mount Tabor and Carmel, linking this rejection to Elijah's act in 1 Kings 18. He explored whether this reflects concern over violating Deuteronomic law or another theological rationale, drawing on rabbinic strategies and interpretations.

Christian Brady (Wittenberg University) presented a paper entitled "The Messiah in the Targumim of the Megilloth." He identified fourteen references to the term 'Messiah' in the Megilloth Targums, written as 'King Messiah.' However, the Targum of the Song of Songs is unique in that it mentions two Messiahs: the sons of David and the sons of Ephraim. The introduction of the figure of the Messiah was intended to assure the community of God's imminent reign and encourage them to remain faithful, given that they were living at a pivotal moment in history, when the Lord's deliverance was imminent. Dr Brady then discussed the eschatological function of these references and their significance in shaping the identity of Jewish communities.

The third session began with a presentation by Krzysztof Kowalik (independent researcher) on the topic "Egypt and Midian (Exod 2:1–25) as Preparation for the Calling of Moses in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan." He argued that the Targum not only presents the history of Moses' time in Egypt and Midian, but also his spiritual preparation for his mission. The text adds names and specifies locations,

linking early conflicts to later rebellions and highlighting the formation of Moses and narrative continuity.

Marek Parchem (Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw) presented a paper on “The Decalogue in Targum Neophyti 1 to Deuteronomy” (Deut 5:6–21). He compared the Masoretic text with the Targum, noting that unlike the usually literal TgN, the Decalogue is rendered as an extended midrash focused on God’s “word” as His active agent. The text includes eschatological themes and showcases key Targumic translation techniques.

Mirosław Wróbel (The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin) concluded the first day with a presentation entitled “The expression ‘second death’ in the Apocalypse of St. John (Rev 2:11; 20:6–14; 21:8) in the light of the Targumic traditions.” He noted the term appears only in Revelation (2:11; 20:6,14; 21:8), but parallels exist in Targums to the Pentateuch and Prophets. He explored its context in Revelation, examined Targumic uses, and highlighted intertextual links between the two traditions.

On the second day (21 May), Prof. Craig Morrison, O. Carm. (Gregorian University, Rome) spoke on “Biblical Metaphors for God in the Targum, especially the Heart of God.” He examined how the Targums avoid anthropomorphisms by often translating ‘heart of God’ as ‘power,’ ‘Memra,’ or ‘will.’ Although ‘heart’ appears frequently in reference to humans, it is rarely applied to God and is not translated literally in such cases.

Tomasz Niedźwiedzki (independent researcher) spoke on “The Inheritance of Israel in the Targums of Genesis.” He showed how the Targums present God’s promise of the land as unconditional, timeless, and made before the patriarchs. The land is not only inherited but also purchased by the patriarchs, with documents affirming Israel’s exclusive claim. This interpretation served as a source of hope during foreign rule and even points to future global expansion.

Bruce Chilton (Bard College) spoke on “Targumic Development and New Testament Intersectionality,” examining the layered evolution of the Targums and their connections with New Testament texts. He highlighted shared theological themes – like divine judgment and mercy – and presented parallels ranging from verbal echoes

(e.g., Mark 9:47–48 and Tg. Isa 66:24) to broader motifs, such as the kingdom of God. Chilton argued that understanding the Targumic context sheds light on Jesus' teachings and the Aramaic traditions shaping early Christian memory.

Marek Baraniak (University of Warsaw) opened the final session with a paper on “The Messianic Secret from the Perspective of the Targumim.” He explored the idea of the hidden Messiah in both Jewish and Christian texts, referencing Wilhelm Wrede's theory of Jesus' concealed identity in the Gospels. Baraniak connected this to Jewish apocalyptic traditions and Targumic references to the Messiah as ‘the revealed one’ (אֲתִגְלֶה), absent in the Hebrew Bible but common in Targums. He argued that the New Testament's portrayal of a hidden Messiah reflects broader Jewish expectations, not a Christian invention.

Anna Maria Wajda (John Paul II Pontifical University, Kraków) spoke on “Jotham's Fable as a Key to Targum Sheni Esther 7:9–10.” She explored the role of fables in ancient Middle Eastern literature, focusing on their moral and political messages. Comparing Jotham's fable (Judg. 9:6–15) with the tree debate in Targum Sheni, she examined the symbolism and cultural significance of the trees involved, highlighting their didactic function.

Dorota Muszytowska (Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw) presented a paper on “The Disappearance of Enoch in the Targums, New Testament, and Henochic Literature.” She explored the unclear meaning of Enoch's disappearance in Gen 5:24 and how it shaped later traditions. Comparing Targum Neophyti, Onqelos, Pseudo-Jonathan, 1 & 2 Enoch, and Hebrews, she analyzed how various Jewish and Christian texts interpreted this motif and its possible interconnections.

Anna Kuśmirek (Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw) concluded the conference with a lecture on “What Did Eldad and Medad Prophecy in the Targums?” Comparing Num. 11:26 in the Masoretic Text and Targums Onqelos, Neophyti, and Pseudo-Jonathan, she showed how the Targums expand on the biblical silence with added details, especially in Neophyti and Pseudo-Jonathan. These additions reflect messianic, eschatological, and

apocalyptic themes, while revealing distinct translation strategies across the Targums.

This two-day conference built on an initiative that began during the first Targums conference in Warsaw in 2022. Building on that experience, the current conference once again formed part of an international research trend with eminent foreign specialists and representatives of Polish academic centres in attendance. Participants presented sixteen high-quality papers on various topics related to the Targums. These papers shed light on the interpretation of the Hebrew Bible and subsequent events in Jewish and Christian traditions. The conference will contribute to the further development of, and wider recognition for, Targum studies in Poland and beyond. As well as serving as a platform for academic discussion and networking, the conference provided an opportunity to foster and develop scholarly cooperation.

*Anna Kuśmirek*