

[Bible] Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, and 1 Kings) (incomplete), with Targum Jonathan, attributed to JONATHAN BEN UZZIEL

In Hebrew, manuscript on parchment

Yemen, early 13th century

v (modern paper) + 23 + v (modern paper) folios on parchment, fragments mounted in modern paper, primary modern foliation in pencil in Arabic numerals in upper-left corner of recto (cited), secondary modern foliation in pencil in Arabic numerals in lower margin of most rectos (except ff. 7, 9, 21-23), erased traces of tertiary modern foliation in pencil in Arabic numerals in lower margin of most rectos (one number off from primary and secondary counts) (original collation indeterminate, modern collation i-v⁴ vi³), no catchwords, ruled in blind (justification 220-233 x 190-200 mm.), written in neat Yemenite square script in brown ink in two columns of twenty-seven lines (except f. 12, twenty-six lines), alternating verse-by-verse biblical and Targum text with complete Babylonian (supralinear) vocalization, names of biblical books added at top and bottom of center margins in a later hand, beginnings of sedarim (chapter divisions) marked by marginal decorative flourishes either in the shape of a stylized hollow samekh (ff. 5v, 7) or, more often, in the shape of a samekh with two branches extending upward (ff. 1v [accompanied by a small letter bet], 4, 7, 10v [accompanied by a small letter tet], 12, 13), no verse numeration, corrections (e.g., f. 10v) and marginalia (e.g., ff. 3, 20) in hands of primary and secondary scribes throughout, kere (proper pronunciation of words whose consonantal skeletons would imply otherwise) also indicated in margins, occasional justification of lines using stretched letters and non-verbal space holders, many losses (sometimes as much as half a column) and some marginal holes and tears throughout resulting from manuscript's preservation in the bindings of books, ff. 1, 12, 18-19 feature additional losses, f. 23 comprises only a small fragment of text, f. 5 bound out of order (should follow f. 8), f. 15 bound backwards, all pages have been silked, many words and vowel signs rubbed, faded, or otherwise obscured on ff. 1v, 2v-3, 4v, 6, 9v-10, 12rv, 13v-14v, 16-17, 18, 19rv, 20v, 22. Bound in modern vellum over board, gilt title and date in Hebrew and English surrounded by decorative tooling around edges of upper board, small gilt flourish on spine, modern paper flyleaves and pastedowns. Dimensions, modern page size 350 x 240 mm., binding 365 x 255 mm.

A substantial and unusually early fragment of the books of Joshua, Judges, and 1 Kings, our manuscript faithfully reproduces the Yemenite version of both the biblical text and its accompanying Aramaic translation according to Targum Jonathan. Future scholarly editions of the Yemenite recension of the Targum to the book of Joshua in particular would greatly benefit from consulting this important witness.

PROVENANCE

1. While the manuscript has no colophon, it is possible to date and localize it approximately to the early thirteenth century in Yemen based on the Yemenite script in which it is written, which bears a significant resemblance to that reproduced by Malachi Beit-Arié, Edna Engel, and Ada Yardeni from London, British Library, MS Or. 2421, a manuscript of Maimonides' *Sefer tohorah* copied in Yemen in the Hebrew year 5055 (1294-1295) – although our text seems older than that (Beit-Arié, Engel, Yardeni, 1987).
2. The work survived as filling material inside several book bindings, as can be seen from the pattern of holes along its outer edges. As explained by Yehuda Levi Nahum, Yemenite Jews would often reuse old, worn manuscripts to bind newer ones, a phenomenon he dubs the “wandering Genizah” (Nahum, 1971).

3. Belonged to Solomon Aaron Wertheimer (1866-1935), a Jerusalem-based rabbinic scholar and antique book dealer who, with the printing of his *Battei midrasbot*, vol. 1, in 1893, became the first person to publish manuscripts discovered in the Cairo Genizah *and* openly acknowledge their source – three years before Solomon Schechter (1846-1915) made his famous journey to Egypt to acquire over one hundred thousand Genizah fragments on behalf of Cambridge University Library. Though he himself never traveled to Egypt or Yemen, he seems to have had an agent who supplied him with antiquities from those locales (Bar-Ilan, 2013).

TEXT

ff. 1-18v, Joshua,

Missing approximately ten or eleven (out of about twenty-eight or twenty-nine) leaves that would have contained the text of Josh. 1:1-2:14a (two leaves), 4:15-5:14a (one leaf), 7:12-8:6 (one leaf), 10:11b-30a (one leaf), 15:14-17:18 (two-three leaves), 18:25-19:38 (one leaf), and 21:34b-22:31a (two leaves).

ff. 18v-20v, Judges 1:1-2:18;

f. 21rv, 1 Kings 11:18-38;

f. 22rv, 1 Kings 12:17-13:4a;

f. 23rv, 1 Kings 16:6-7a, 12-13a, 18-19a, 24.

In antiquity, the Hebrew Scriptures were written in scroll form entirely without punctuation, vocalization, or accentuation. Words were separated by spaces, paragraph divisions broke up the flow of the narrative, and four letters (*alef*, *he*, *vav*, and *yod*) were frequently used to mark certain vowels, but even with these devices, the correct pronunciation and parsing of the biblical text into intelligible units were not readily apparent from its appearance. Instead, Jews in that period relied on inherited oral reading traditions, passed down from one generation to the next, in order to determine how exactly the Bible should be properly understood.

In the early Middle Ages, between the sixth and seventh centuries, systems of committing those reading traditions to writing in biblical codices (but not scrolls) developed in Palestine, Babylonia, and eventually specifically in Tiberias (Palestine). The last system (referred to as Tiberian) would, with time, become the standard one used throughout the Jewish world to record the vowels and accents of the biblical text.

In addition, lists of information containing the details of the consonantal skeleton of the Bible, as well as its proper vocalization and accentuation – collectively known as the *Masorah* – were drawn up in order to ensure that scribes would copy the text correctly. The tradition of Aaron Ben-Asher (first half of the tenth century), scion of a famous family of Tiberian *Masorah* scholars, came to be considered particularly authoritative, especially after Rabbi Moses Maimonides (1138-1204) wrote of his decision to use a codex edited by Ben-Asher (the famous Aleppo Codex) as the exemplar for a Torah that he himself copied.

However, the Jewish community of Yemen, whose roots stretch back to antiquity (and possibly to the Second Temple period), remained largely independent in these regards for a significant part of its history. According to Shelomo Morag, the earliest Jews to settle there had inherited an ancient biblical reading and writing tradition that differed from those of other communities in several important ways. As a result, even when, by the ninth century, the Babylonian (supralinear) vocalization and accentuation systems reached Yemen, they did not establish complete hegemony there; some aspects of the older pronunciation continued to be reproduced in various manuscripts, resulting in hybrid Yemenite-Babylonian texts. The same holds true for the period of Tiberian influence, which began to make itself felt even before Maimonides's time, and certainly thereafter (Ya'akov, 2013). While, eventually, Yemenite scribes did switch over to the Tiberian (sublinear) systems (a process that would take longer with regard to the Prophets, Hagiographa, and other texts than with regard to the Pentateuch), they again continued to maintain certain unique readings of the Bible, particularly in the Prophets and Hagiographa, that do not match those of Ben-Asher's *Masorah* (Morag, 1983; see also Qafih, 1950).

In addition to retaining their own unique versions of Scripture, Yemenites also continue (to this day) the ancient practice of reciting the Aramaic translations of the weekly Pentateuch lectionary, as well as of its corresponding *haftarah* (lectionary from the Prophets), during synagogue services. The "official" translation (known in Hebrew by the term *targum*) of the Pentateuch is attributed to the proselyte Onkelos (second century CE), while that of the Prophets is attributed to Rabbi Jonathan ben Uzziel (first century BCE-first century CE). Both of these Targumim seem to share certain translational and interpretive approaches to the biblical text, including an emphasis on the plain meaning thereof, as well as a common literary Aramaic idiom. According to Abraham Tal, this idiom should be dated to the first or early second centuries CE in Palestine, even if some Babylonian Aramaic features did enter in the course of the texts' redaction in the east (Tal, 1975).

The *editio princeps* of Targum Jonathan to the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, 1-2 Samuel, and 1-2 Kings) was published, together with the Hebrew original and two rabbinic commentaries, in Leiria in 1494. The first edition of a specifically Palestinian recension of the Targum was published by Paul de Lagarde in Leipzig in 1872, based on a single manuscript copied in 1106 (Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Cod. Reuchlinianus 3); not long thereafter, the first edition of a Yemenite version of the Targum (for the books of Joshua and Judges only) was published by Franz Praetorius in Berlin in 1899-1900, based on a single manuscript copied in Yemen in 1483 (Berlin, Staatsbibliothek [Preussischer Kulturbesitz], MS Or. 4° 578), as well as a few fragments of the text from other sources.

A true critical edition of the Targum was subsequently printed by Alexander Sperber in Leiden in 1959, based primarily on seven Yemenite codices from the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries, as well as the aforementioned Codex Reuchlinianus and two European texts from the thirteenth century and 1486, respectively. Despite the numerous critiques leveled at this version for its reading and transcription errors (Gordon, 1974), as well as its disproportionate reliance on the Yemenite tradition of the Targum without sufficiently taking into consideration the Babylonian and European recensions (Díez Merino, 1994; Smelik, 1995), it remains the best one available (though see the work of Díez Macho, 1957, as well as Martínez Borobio, 1989 and 1998, on the extant Babylonian fragments). Indeed, both Harrington-Saldarini, 1987, and Dray, 2006, relied on Sperber's text unquestioningly in composing their translations of Targum Jonathan to the Former

Prophets and commentary on Targum Jonathan to 1-2 Kings, respectively (Smelik, 1995, by contrast, was much more critical and collated a number of European manuscript witnesses as well).

The present manuscript contains fragments of the text of most of Joshua, as well as small sections of Judges and 1Kings, each biblical verse followed by its translation according to Targum Jonathan. Both the Hebrew and the Aramaic are vocalized with Babylonian vowel signs, and the traditional division of the text into *sedarim* (not to be confused with Christian *capitibus*, though serving the same basic function) is marked by a *samekb* in the margins. Comparison of the Hebrew text of Joshua in this manuscript with the list of differences between the Yemenite and Masoretic recensions provided by Joseph Qafih reveals that our version indeed matches the Yemenite tradition almost entirely (Qafih, 1950). Similarly, comparison of the Targum reproduced here very closely mirrors the version printed by Sperber in his aforementioned edition, although several important differences in both the consonantal skeleton and its vocalization do exist.

Some unique features of this manuscript worthy of mention include: later marginal additions of alternate, more expansive translations of Targum Jonathan to Josh. 5:14 and 6:1 (f. 3); the layout of the list of the kings of Canaan given in Josh. 12:9-24, which in many copies of the book is split up into columns throughout the passage but is here represented mostly as plain text, with only a few verses (vv. 12-16) laid out that way (f. 10); and a gloss added in the margin of Judg. 2:1, which interprets the phrase "the angel of the Lord" as referring to Phinehas, based on a rabbinic tradition quoted in the early chronological work *Seder olam* (f. 20).

This manuscript is missing about ten or eleven (out of about twenty-eight or twenty-nine) leaves from the book of Joshua (see Text, above). (One wonders, in this context, whether the erased foliation present at the base of the recto of each leaf, whose count is consistently one number ahead of the count in the upper-left corner of the recto, indicates anything about the manuscript having previously contained more leaves when it was first discovered.) In addition, parts of many of the outer or inner columns of the manuscript were lost when it was used in the bindings of other books.

The size of the fragment, as well as its early date, makes this an enormously important work. Michael L. Klein, in his catalogue of Targumic Genizah manuscripts housed in the Cambridge University Library, lists only thirty-six fragments of Targum Jonathan to the book of Joshua, none of which covers more than a chapter of the book (Klein, 1992). In addition, while it is true that Yemenite biblical codices in general are somewhat plentiful, especially in American collections (as explained by Goshen-Gottstein, 1962; see Isaac, 1999, for a survey of several American and European libraries), the vast majority of these texts were copied in the seventeenth century or later (see, for example, the catalogues of Yemenite manuscripts compiled by Golb, 1972, and Tobi, 1982); in the words of Moshe Goshen-Gottstein, "the 13th century [Yemenite] parchment codices are rare" (Goshen-Gottstein, 1962, p. 46). Indeed, none of the Yemenite sources used by Sperber in his critical edition of Targum Jonathan to the Former Prophets was produced before the fourteenth century, and the same can be said of the many Yemenite biblical manuscripts and fragments – including *baftarot* collections – sold by major auction houses in the past twenty-five years. This manuscript, then, stands out as an unusually early witness to the Yemenite textual and reading traditions for a significant portion of the books of the Former Prophets and their Targum.

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ONLINE RESOURCES

The Aleppo Codex from Tiberias, c. 920 (MS Jerusalem, Ben-Zvi Institute, 1)

<http://www.aleppocodex.org>

Maimonides's *Sefer tohorah* from Yemen, 1294-1295 (London, British Library, MS Or. 2421)

http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=or_2421_fs001r

Editio princeps of Targum Jonathan to the Former Prophets (Leiria, 1494)

Joshua and Judges: http://rosetta.nli.org.il/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE14727002

I-II Samuel: http://rosetta.nli.org.il/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE14754680

I-II Kings: http://rosetta.nli.org.il/delivery/DeliveryManagerServlet?dps_pid=IE16273347

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