As Its Targum Has It: On Some of Rashi's Uses of the Targumim in his Commentary on the Torah

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Introduction[†]

If one is seeking a link between the biblical exegesis of an eleventh-century French Rabbi and some considerably earlier Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Scriptures – the targumim – one could begin by looking at the pages of a Rabbinic Bible. In contrast to the Torah Scrolls that are used in liturgical contexts, *Miqra'ot Gedolot* (as they are called in Hebrew) are study Bibles. In addition to the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible, they contain a range of commentaries on that text gathered together on a single page. The biblical text rests – as it were – on a sea of commentary. The various commentators, separated as they are by time and space, are all united in their conversation with Scripture (and each other). The number of commentaries included on the pages of *Miqra'ot Gedolot* depends on the size of the page and the preferences of the individual editors. However, if we confine our attentions to the Pentateuch, with the exception of the Masoretic Text itself – only two other elements are common to all *Miqra'ot Gedolot*: the Targum of Onqelos and the commentary of Rashi – these two constitute the *sine quibus non* of a Rabbinic Bible.

There is also a halakic link between Rashi's commentary on the Pentateuch and the Targum of Onqelos. As part of the requirement that the weekly Torah portion (or *parashah*) be read twice and its Targum once (שנים מקרא ואחד תרגום; b. *Berakot* 8b), a number of legal codes (such as the *Shulḥan 'Arûk* of Joseph Qaro [1488–1575]) permit the reading of Rashi's commentary in place of Targum Onqelos. So, we could say that Jewish law mandates an equivalence of sorts between Onqelos and Rashi.

[†] This paper was read at *Text, Targum and Testament: A Conference in Honour of Martin McNamara MSC* held in St Patrick's College, Maynooth, on Thursday, 17 November 2011. It was a privilege to participate in the conference and to have the opportunity to honour one of the *geonim* of Irish Scripture scholarship. Thanks are due to Professor Séamus O'Connell for organising the conference and asking me to contribute.

However, in this paper, our focus will be on some of the ways in which *Rashi himself* uses the targumim in his commentary on the Pentateuch. This will not be an exhaustive survey: rather, we shall focus on a small number of examples in order to give some sense of how Rashi employs the targumim in his exegesis – examples that are both typical and untypical.

1. Rashi and His Commentary

Before we examine these specific examples of Rashi's use of the targumim, let us say a brief word about Rashi and his commentary on the Pentateuch. Rabbi Solomon Yiṣḥaqi – the designation Rashi is an acronymic cognomen – was born in Troyes, in the County of Champagne in 1040. The details of Rashi's life are difficult to reconstruct. However, we do know that he spent a number of years studying in the *yeshivot* (Jewish academies of higher learning) of Mainz and Worms under the foremost scholars of his day. This stay in the Rhineland was important in that it allowed Rashi to absorb the learning of the great sages of the early heart of Ashkenaz – a world that was to dwindle and disappear following the massacres of Jews by Crusader bands en route to the Holy Land in 1096. In this way, Rashi and his work became a virtual repository for the learning of a vanished world.

Following his return to Troyes (probably sometime around 1070), Rashi is popularly believed to have supported himself and his family financially through viticulture, confining his scholarly and educational endeavours to such spare time that this activity left him. However, this picture of Rashi as a viticulturist by vocation and a scholar by avocation (represented typically by Salo Wittmayer Baron's famous 1941 essay "Rashi and the Community of Troyes" and reproduced by many others since) has been challenged most recently by Gruber who has pointed out that Rashi's scholarship is distinguished particularly by its professionalism. Basing his conclusions on access to a greater number of Rashi's *responsa* than that enjoyed by Baron and a better understanding of the history of the Jews of mediaeval France, Gruber shows that Rashi was no intellectual amateur or dilettante – rather he was a full-time professional scholar: the founder and head of his own *yeshiva*.[1]

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[1] Mayer I. Gruber, *Rashi's Commentary on Psalms*, BRLJ 18 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 18-19. Salo Wittmayer Baron's classic essay, "Rashi and the Community of Troyes", can be found in *Rashi Anniversary Volume*, American Academy for Jewish Research Texts and Studies I, ed. Harold Louis Ginsberg (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1941), 47-71.

Rashi is remembered for two monumental commentaries he produced: a commentary on the Bible (that part on the Pentateuch is particularly valued) and a commentary on the Talmud. We have already noted how his commentary on the Pentateuch appears next to the biblical text in Rabbinic Bibles. His commentary on the Talmud is no less esteemed, and it too appears beside the text it explains in all standard printed editions of the Talmud. Rashi is, then, the foremost Jewish commentator on Torah – in both its written and oral forms. In the world of traditional Judaism, one does not simply learn Bible or Talmud – one learns them with Rashi's commentaries. His exegetical work constitutes the *vade mecum* of a traditional Jewish education.

The enormity of Rashi's influence on Judaism – particularly given the rather marginal geographical and intellectual location of Troyes in the Jewish world of his day – is quite remarkable. Numerous scholars have commented upon this enduring influence. Gruber, for instance, sees it as "comparable only, perhaps to that of the Bible and the Talmud before him and the Kabbalah and Modern Zionism after him".[2] In a long essay published in 1941, Solomon Zeitlin has gone so far as to argue that Rashi was "the founder of the Rabbinate in western and central Europe".[3] The Shoah survivor and Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel writes eloquently of the continuing influence and appeal of Rashi:

> I think of Rashi and I feel overwhelmed by a strange nostalgia: my reaction appears to be both intellectual and emotional … Ever since childhood, he has accompanied me with his insights and charm. Ever since my first Bible lessons in the heder, I have turned to Rashi in order to grasp the meaning of a verse or word that seemed obscure … He is my first destination. My first aid … A veiled reference from him, like a smile, and everything lights up and becomes clearer … his passion for delving into a text in order to find a hidden meaning passed on by generations can move, interest, and enrich all those whose life is governed by learning.[4]

For many years, the study of Rashi's biblical exegesis has tended to focus largely on the relationship between two distinct modes of exegesis

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[2] Gruber, *Rashi's Commentary on Psalms*, 7.

[3] Solomon Zeitlin, "Rashi and the Rabbinate: The Struggle between Secular and Religious Forces for Leadership", *JQR* n. s. 31 (1940-41) 1-58, 58.

[4] Elie Wiesel, *Rashi: A Portrait*, Jewish Encounters (New York: Nextbook/Schocken, 2009), x.

thought to be found in his commentaries: *peshat* and *derash* (usually rendered as "plain sense" and "homiletical" respectively). More recently however, scholars (such as the late Sarah Kamin) have begun to question this traditional approach to Rashi's work, noting that he does not seem to distinguish clearly between the two exegetical categories himself. Rather, this distinction between *peshat* and *derash* modes of interpretation was developed and refined by later exegetes, and if anything, we see in Rashi's work only the early stages of such a methodology.[5] In any case, Rashi is often presented as the founder of a school of Northern French (mainly literal) biblical exegesis – a "school" which was continued by his pupils (such as his grandson, Samuel ben Meir – better known as the Rashbam). Indeed, it has been argued that the search for *peshat* exegesis in Rashi's commentaries has more to do with the concerns of later readers – such as the pioneering critical-historical scholars of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* – than with Rashi's actual methodology.

Irrespective of our position on the *peshat/derash* debate, even a cursory glance at Rashi's commentary does reveal the work of a great synthesiser: he combines traditional rabbinic midrashic interpretations with his own (and others') more literal interpretations. However, in this context, it is worth noting that rabbinic midrash – too often dismissed as little more than fanciful wordplay – is not devoid of literal, contextual or philological exegesis, as Isaac Gottlieb has shown in his essay on "Midrash as Biblical Philology".[6]

In terms of the text of Rashi's commentaries, we have no autograph manuscripts. The earliest manuscript so-far known to us – the as yet unpublished Ms Leipzig 1 (a Pentateuch with Targum Onqelos and Rashi's commentary) – dates from the thirteenth century and is from the hand of a scribe named Makhir who claimed to have worked from the autograph of Rabbi Shemaya – a favoured pupil of Rashi;[7] while the first printed edition of the commentary (without the biblical text) was produced in Rome sometime between 1470 and 1472 – indeed this was the first ever book printed in Hebrew. My research has made use of the editions of Berliner (1905) and Chavel (1983) as well as a standard *Miqra'ot Gedolot*.[8]

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[5] Sarah Kamin, "Rashi's Exegetical Categorization with Respect to the Distinction between Peshat and Derash", *Immanuel* 11 (1980) 16-32.

[6] Isaac Gottlieb, "Midrash as Biblical Philology", *JQR* n. s. 75 (1984) 134-61.

[7] Ms Leipzig 1 has been described by Avraham Grossman, "Ms Leipzig 1 and Rashi's Commentary on the Torah", *Tarbiz* 61 (1991-92), 305-15.

[8] *Miqra'ot Gedolot Me'orot: Ḥamišah Ḥumšê ha-Tôrāh* (Jerusalem: Brukman, 1995).

2. Rashi and the Targumim

Rashi employs a wide range of sources in his commentary on the Torah. The main focus of my research to date has been on the linguistic dimension of Rashi's commentary on Deuteronomy, and in this context, his most frequently cited sources are: the Bible itself; the traditional midrashic collections (such as *Sifre Deuteronomy*); the Targum of Onqelos (as well as other targumim); and the work of the tenth-century Jewish Andalusian grammarians Menaḥem ibn Saruq and Dunash ibn Labraṭ. The following examples offer a short insight into some of the ways that Rashi uses one of these sources: the targumim.

2.1 Deuteronomy 4:10

Our first example comes from two comments by Rashi on lemmata from Dt 4:10: ילמדון (*yilmədûn*: "they learn") and ילמדון (*yəlammēdûn*: "they teach"). Rashi explains the difference between these two verbs (the *qal* and *piel* of the root למד respectively, which in an unpointed text look identical) by giving the renderings of both verbs by Targum Onqelos: ילפון (*yēləpûn*: "they will learn") and יאלפון (*yalləpûn*: "they will teach") the *peal* and *aphel* respectively of the root אלף. Rashi cites the renderings of Targum Onqelos here as they are visually distinctive – even when unpointed.[9] He introduces these quotations without any introductory formula: they simply follow the lemma. This shows that Rashi assumed a close familiarity on the part of his students (and readers) with the text of Targum Onqelos: it needed no introduction whatsoever. Rashi includes short Hebrew phrases after these Aramaic verbs to reinforce further understanding of the nature of the verbs. ילפון (*yēləpûn*: "they will learn") is followed by לעצמם (*lə-'aṣmām*: "for themselves"), while יאלפון (*yalləpûn*: "they will teach") is followed by לאחרים (*la-'ăḥērîm*: "to others"). So here, Rashi uses the rendering of Targum Onqelos to disambiguate potentially confusable verbs.

2.2 Deuteronomy 4:28

Our second example comes from Rashi's comment on the lemma ועבדתם שם אלוהים ("there you will serve gods"). Rashi begins his comment with the formula he most frequently uses for introducing targumic material: כתרגומו (*kə-Targûmô*: "as its Targum has it"). However, in this instance, he

[9] The orthography of Rashi's citation of Onqelos differs in the editions of Berliner, Chavel and the *Miqra'ot Gedolot* from that in the critical edition of Sperber – however, all maintain a difference.

does not actually quote Targum Onqelos which here renders the Hebrew as ותפלחון תמן לעממיא פלחי טעותא (*wə-tifləḥûn tammām lə-'ammayyā' pālḥê ṭa'ăwātā'*: "there you will serve *the nations who worship* idols") – an insertion that appears to absolve the Israelites of the charge of idolatry explicit in the Masoretic Text. Instead, Rashi, while telling the reader to understand the texts "as its targum has it", offers the following understanding in Hebrew: "Since you serve those who serve them [that is, the false gods], it is as if you serve them". So, Rashi's understanding of Targum Onqelos here appears to lay the charge of idolatry squarely back at the feet of the Israelites: a use of Targum Onqelos to confirm the Masoretic Text even though Onqelos appears to differ from it.

2.3 Deuteronomy 32:2

Our third example comes from Rashi's comment on the lemma כשעירם ("like showers") from Dt 32:2. Rashi begins his comment by explaining the nominal element of the lemma [שעירם ("showers") – a hapax] with what he considers to be an equivalent phrase from Scripture: רוח סערה ("stormy wind") which occurs at Ez 1:4, Pss 107:25 and 148:8. The phrase is introduced with one of Rashi's most common technical terms לשון (*lašôn*), as in the formula *X lašôn Y*: *X is equivalent in meaning to Y*. Rashi draws no attention to the fact that the lemma and second word of his scriptural citation share very similar roots – with ס [*samek*] replacing ש [*śin*] (showing an implicit awareness of the interchange of homorganic consonants).

So, Rashi begins this comment by explaining a biblical hapax with the aid of a more frequently occurring phrase from Scripture. (Indeed the second word of the phrase סערה itself occurs some sixteen times in the Tanak). We now come to one of Rashi's most typical uses of the targumim in his commentary. As if to reinforce the scriptural data just given, Rashi now adds Targum Onqelos' rendering of this lemma כרוחי מטרא (*kə-rûḥê miṭrā'*: "winds of the rains"), but he omits the expanding relative clause that follows in the Targum דנשבין (*də-nāšəvîn*: "that blow"). This is introduced with the formula כתרגומו (*kə-targûmô*: "as its Targum has it") already encountered above. Grossfeld has noted that Onqelos' expansion of the biblical text to include the idea of wind is also to be found in *Sifre Deuteronomy*: "this is the east wind that darkens the sky like showers".[10]

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[10] Bernard Grossfeld, *The Targum Onqelos to Deuteronomy*, The Aramaic Bible 9 (Wilmington DE: Michael Glazier, 1988), 89.

The remainder of this comment goes beyond the lexical meaning of the nominal שעירם to explain the simile "like showers". For this explanation Rashi draws on another of his most frequently cited sources, the recently mentioned *Sifre Deuteronomy*: "Just as these winds strengthen the vegetation and make them grow, so too the words of Torah strengthen and cause to grow those who learn them".

2.4 Deuteronomy 32:10

Our fourth example comes from Rashi's comment on the lemma ימצאהו ("he found him") from Dt 32:10. Rashi has already commented upon the fuller lemma ימצאהו בארץ מדבר ("he found him in a desert region") where he expresses an understanding of this verb in its more usual sense of "to find". However, in the present comment, Rashi presents his Hebrew paraphrase of Onqelos' unusual rendering of the lemma in the sense of "supply". This rendering is introduced by a different formula to that used in the preceding example: ואנקלוס תרגם (*wə-'Ōnqelôs tirgēm*: "[But] Onqelos translated"): "[But] Onqelos translated ימצאהו as 'He supplied all his needs in the desert'". Rashi continues by noting two other instances where Onqelos renders forms of the Hebrew verb מצא with the Aramaic ספק ("supply"): Num 11:22 and Josh 17:16. In his paraphrase of Onqelos, Rashi uses the Rabbinic Hebrew verb ספק which is cognate with the verb used by Onqelos: ספיק (*sappîq*).

Rashi does not express overt disagreement with Onqelos' translation of the verb. So here, rather than using the targumim to reinforce his own understanding of the biblical text, Rashi uses them to present an alternative (and for him an equally valid) understanding of it.

2.5 Deuteronomy 14:6

Our fifth example is Rashi's comment on the lemma מפרסת (*mafreset*: "divided") from Dt 14:6. Rashi explains this word very simply by giving a one-word equivalent: סדוקה (*sədûqāh*). This word is not biblical, but is used in Rabbinic Hebrew to refer to both cloven hooves and split grains. Rashi follows this one-word equivalent with the formula כתרגומו (*kə-Targûmô*: "as its Targum has it"). Here, as in our second example above, he does not give the targumic quotation – just the formula. Again, Rashi assumes that the student (or reader) knows that Targum Onqelos renders מפרסת (*mafreset*) as סדיקא (*sədîqā'*). So, this comment explains a Biblical Hebrew word with a Rabbinic Hebrew one and points to the similarity of

the latter to the Aramaic rendering of the present lemma. As in the previous comment examined, an awareness that the two words (and languages) are cognate is implicit.

2.6 Deuteronomy 32:5

Our sixth example is Rashi's comment on the lemma פתלתל from Dt 32:5 where it is part of the phrase דור עקש ופתלתל (*dôr 'iqqēš û-pətaltōl*: "a crooked, perverse generation"). Rashi's focus in this comment is primarily on the meaning of the lemma; however, he does pay some attention to the morphology of the word.

The comment begins with a *la'az* – a rendering of the word into the Champenois French of Rashi's day using Hebrew script. There are hundreds of these vernacular glosses in Rashi's commentaries, and despite the fact that many have been corrupted over the centuries, they still provide a valuable resource for scholars of mediaeval French. Rashi's *la'az* for the biblical hapax פתלתל (*pətaltōl*) is אנטורט"ילייש (*entortiliés*: "twisted"; Modern French *entortillés*). Following this *la'az*, Rashi expands his explanation of the lemma by giving a Hebrew rendering: "like the thread which one weaves and twists around the central strand".

Rashi's attention then shifts from the meaning of the word to its morphological structure. He explains that it belongs to a class of words he refers to as התיבות הכפולות (*ha-têvôt ha-kəfûlôt*) – "the doubled words" – a reference to the reduplication found in their stems. This morphological observation is supported by four examples of similarly reduplicated stems. The first three of these are biblical: ירקרק (*yəraqraq*: "greenish" from Lev 13:49); אדמדם (*'ădāmdām*: "reddish" also from Lev 13:49); and סחרחר (*səḥarḥar*: "palpitate" from Ps 38:11). However, it is Rashi's fourth example of a reduplicated stem that is of particular interest to us here: it is the word סגלגל (*səgalgal*: "rounded"). This word is not Hebrew, but Aramaic. Indeed it is found in Targum Jonathan to 1 Kgs 7:23 where it translates the Hebrew עגל (*'āgōl*).

Again, this comment shows Rashi's close familiarity with the targumim (in this instance Targum Jonathan) and his assumption of the same on the part of his readers and students. The comment is also noteworthy in that it illustrates how Rashi saw no problem in placing an Aramaic example alongside Hebrew ones for comparative linguistic purposes. We can interpret this as stemming from Rashi's (again unstated) awareness of the close relationship between Hebrew and Aramaic. We

might also venture an interpretation of Rashi's inclusion of this illustrative example from the Targum Jonathan alongside three biblical ones as indicative of his viewing the targumim as equal in status to the Tanak itself. This is the only example I have found of Rashi employing targumic data in this comparative philological way in his commentary on Deuteronomy.

Taken as a whole, this comment gives us a glimpse of Rashi as a master teacher. We can imagine him, as *rosh yeshiva*, presiding over *shiurim* (singular: *shiur* שעור) – lectures on Scripture and its interpretation – with his students seated around him, bringing them to as full an understanding of a biblical hapax through a number of strategies. He begins by translating it into his (and presumably their) mother tongue – Old French. This vernacular gloss is then supplemented by an explanation in Hebrew that seeks to explain the word by reference to contemporary *realia* – the world of weaving. With the meaning fully explained, he then draws his students' attention to the noteworthy morphology of the word – its reduplicated stem – and offers them four examples of similarly structured words, three from the Tanak and one from Targum Jonathan. So we here witness Rashi the teacher presuming a knowledge of three languages, familiarity with the Hebrew Bible and the Targumim, and an awareness of grammatical terminology (things, I'm sure, we would all like our own students to possess).

2.7 Deuteronomy 3:4

Our seventh and final example – an example inspired and informed by the eighteenth chapter of Martin McNamara's recently published *Targum and Testament Revisited* on the geography of the Palestinian Targums of the Pentateuch – is the lemma חבל ארגב (*ḥevel 'Argōv*: "the district of Argob") from Dt 3:4.[11] The focus of Rashi's comment is the toponym Argob. He begins by quoting Onqelos' rendering of the lemma בית פלך תרכונא (*bêt pālak Tərākônā'*: "the area of the province of Trachonitis").[12] This quotation is introduced by yet another introductory formula: מתרגמינן (*mətargəmînān*: "we translate").

Rashi then begins a most interesting expansion. He states: "I have seen [that] the Jerusalem Targum [by which he means *Targum Sheni*] of the Esther scroll calls a palace a תרכונין [*tərākônîn*]. I have learned [from this]

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[11] Martin McNamara, *Targum and Testament Revisited: Aramaic Paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

[12] Note that Rashi gives Targum Onqelos' rendering as תרכונא (*Tərākônā'* – with *tau* not *teth*).

that חבל ארגב [*ḥevel 'Argōv*] means *the province of the royal palace*. That is to say, the province is named after [the palace]".

3. Conclusion

One hopes that this short presentation of a small number of Rashi's comments has offered some sense of the many and varied ways in which he uses the targumim in his commentary on the Pentateuch. Across the commentary on Deuteronomy as a whole, his most frequent use is to explain biblical words and phrases with the simple instruction *kə-Targûmô* "[understand it] as its Targum has it" followed by the rendering of Onqelos. He also uses the renderings of Onqelos to supplement or reinforce his own Hebrew explanations of words. Sometimes he cites Onqelos to provide alternative interpretations. In the examples given above, we even saw Rashi draw upon the targumim to provide comparative linguistic data and a creative use of the Second Esther Targum.

Clearly, Rashi was as familiar with the targumim as he was with the Tanak. This familiarity with, use of, and dependence on the targumim clearly illustrates the continuity of the rabbinic tradition (since, more often than not, Rashi agrees with the renderings of Onqelos). As previously noted, Rashi presumes a similar familiarity with the targumim on the part of his students and readers. This in itself is an extremely important point in trying to discern the original audience for whom Rashi produced his commentary. The view sometimes encountered that the commentaries were written for ordinary people – if such people have ever existed – is highly unlikely given Rashi's presumption of intimate familiarity with targumim – a familiarity untypical of the common folk of his day.

In conclusion, in engaging with Rashi's exegesis we get a vivid sense of the educational milieu from which his work arose and a sense of the man himself as a scholar whose endeavours were inspired by his faith and as a profoundly knowledgeable, resourceful and imaginative teacher. In order to lead his students to as full an understanding of Scripture as possible, he makes use of the full range of resources available to him – chief among them Targum Onqelos. In these regards, he resembles the man whose lifework we are here to honour today: Rev. Professor Martin McNamara.