

The Lost Meaning of Deuteronomy 33:2 as Preserved in the Palestinian Targum to the Decalogue

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This essay is a sequel to a previous article by one of the present writers, which claims to recover the lost meaning of *מימינו אשדת למור* in Deut 33:2.¹ That article

- argued that *דת* is a contraction of the verb *דָּצָת** ‘she/it flew’—an archaic feminine perfect (cf. *עָשָׂת* in Lev 25:21) from the root ד-א-י ‘fly’ (cf. *רָצָה*? in Deut 28:49) agreeing with *אָש*, its feminine subject;
- equated the contraction (elision of *alep*) exhibited by *דת* to that exhibited by *רבנות* ‘myriads’ in Neh 7:70 (contrast *רבואות* in Dan 11:12);
- compared *דת* with *בָּת* ‘she came’—a form that occurs in one of the earliest and most important rabbinic manuscripts, the Vatican manuscript of the *Sipra* (Codex Assemani 66);
- noted that, when taken as a verb, *דת* is a perfect parallel to the verbs in the four preceding stichs and allows the preposition *מ-* to have the meaning ‘from’ (rather than ‘at’) as in the four preceding stichs; and
- concluded that the original meaning of the phrase was ‘from his right, fire flew to them’.

The image assumed by this interpretation has a number of parallels in the Bible. In addition to those cited in the previous article, we may mention *ראש יצאה* ‘and fire went out from (with) the LORD’ (Num 16:35) and *ותצא אש מלפני ה’* ‘and fire went out from before the LORD’ (Lev 9:24, 10:2). Because references to the Lord’s right side are found only in poetry, it seems likely that *מימינו* = *מימין ה’* is simply the poetic counterpart of *מאת ה’* and *מלפני ה’*. The

1. R. C. Steiner, “*דת* and *עין*: Two Verbs Masquerading as Nouns in Moses’ Blessing (Deuteronomy 33:2, 28)” *JBL* 115 (1996) 693–98.

collocation of **ד-א-י** with **אש** is probably poetic as well. A similar collocation is found in a liturgical poem of Phinehas b. Jacob Ha-Kohen of Kafra (second half of the 8th century C.E.): **דב' קדשו המם בחימה, דאה באש וגפרית להילחמה**: 'His holy word confounded them in wrath; it flew in fire and brimstone to do battle with them'.²

It appears that the original meaning of the phrase was forgotten when **דת** was midrashically identified with the homonymous Aramaic loanword of Iranian origin meaning 'law'. It is not uncommon for interlingual homonyms to become grist for the midrashic mill,³ and, given that the rabbis found an allusion to four languages (Hebrew, Latin, Arabic, and Aramaic) in Deut 33:2,⁴ it is only natural that they would look for foreign words in it. In fact, they found another foreign word in the phrase that immediately precedes ours, **ואתה מרבבת קדש**. In the *Sipre*, the *Mekilta*, and other midrashim, we find the following paraphrase: **אות** (שלו) **הוא בתוך רבבות קדש** (שלו).⁵ In *Midr. Sekel Ṭob*, R. Menahem b. Solomon explains the linguistic basis for this paraphrase simply by translating it into Aramaic: **אתה הוי בגו ריבבין קדישין דידיה**: 'He is a sign amidst His holy myriads'.⁶ Here, **אתה** is a noun meaning 'sign', as it is in Biblical Aramaic in phrases such as **אתיָא ותמהיָא** (Dan 3:32).⁷ In short, the midrash has reinterpreted the verb **אתָה** as an Aramaic noun.⁸ Similarly in our phrase, the midrash has reinterpreted the verb **דת** as an Aramaic noun, which in this case happens to derive from Iranian. In other words, we are dealing with a pair of very similar *derashot* in this

2. See **מחזור ארץ-ישראל: קודקס הגניזה** (ed. J. Yahalom; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1987) 45; **פיוטי רבי פינחס הכהן** (ed. S. Elizur; Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 2004) 388, line 250. (I am indebted to J. Yahalom for the latter reference.)

3. See R. C. Steiner, "The 'Aramean' of Deut 26:5: *Peshat* and *Derash*," in *Tehillah le-Moshe: Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Greenberg* (ed. M. Cogan, B. L. Eichler, and J. H. Tigay; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997) 138, and the literature cited there.

4. See **ספרי על ספר דברים** (ed. L. Finkelstein; Berlin: Jüdischer Kulturbund in Deutschland, 1939) 395, lines 10–12 (§383); **קטעי מדרשי הלכה מן הגניזה** (ed. M. I. Kahana; Jerusalem: Magnes, 2005) 317–18, lines 9–11.

5. See **מכילתא דרבי ישמעאל** (ed. H. S. Horowitz and I. A. Rabin; Frankfurt am Main: Kauffmann, 1931) 120, lines 12–13.

6. Menahem b. Solomon, **מדרש שכל טוב** (ed. S. Buber; Berlin: Itzkowski, 1900) 2:20, lines 30–31.

7. Steiner, "Aramean," 137.

8. Reinterpreted as a noun, **אתה** can only be in the emphatic state, but this does not prevent the midrash from glossing it with indefinite **אות**. The emphatic ending (definite article) is spelled with final *he* (instead of *alep*) in Galilean Aramaic and (not infrequently) Biblical Aramaic, not to mention Samaritan Aramaic and the Hermopolis letters from Egypt.

verse; the rabbis performed a single reinterpetive maneuver twice. However, only one of these *derashot* managed to supplant the *peshat*.

When was the *peshat* forgotten? Is there any evidence that it was still known in the postbiblical period? In this essay, we shall attempt to show that traces of the original interpretation can still be detected in the Palestinian Targum (to Exod 20:2), especially when it is read in conjunction with the *Sipre* (to Deut 33:2).

Fire Flying from God's Right in the Palestinian Targum

The translation of the Decalogue in the Palestinian Targum contains a haggadic embellishment that was widely known in the Middle Ages; it was recited on Shavuot in France, Germany, Italy, and probably elsewhere. In *Tgs. Neofiti* and *Pseudo-Jonathan*, it serves as an introduction to the first two commandments (Exod 20:2, 3)—the ones proclaimed by God himself; in *Maḥzor Viṭri* and other *maḥzorim*, it is repeated with all 10.⁹

Several critical editions of the passage are available. In 1991, S. A. Kaufman and Y. Maori attempted to reconstruct the prototype or Urtext of the Palestinian Targum's rendering of the Decalogue.¹⁰ For ease of reference and comparison, we present their edition of our passage and their translation in six numbered lines:

- 1 דבירה קדמייה כד הווה נפק מן פם קודשה יהי שמה משבח
2 היך זיקין והיך ברקין והיך למפדין דנור, למפד דנור מן מינייה ולמפד דאשה מן
שמאלה
3 פרח וטייס באויר שמייה, וכל ישראל חמיין יתה ודחלין
4 והווה חזר ומקף¹¹ על משירייתהון דישראל
5 וחזר ומתחקק על תרין לווחי קיימה
6 ואמר עמי בני ישראל . . .¹²

9. S. Landauer, "Ein interessantes Fragment des Pseudo-Jonathan," in *Zikaron le-Avraham Eliyahu: Festschrift zu Ehren des Dr. A. Harkavy* (ed. D. von Güntzburg and I. Markon; St. Petersburg, 1908; repr., New York: Arno, 1980), 2:23–24; O. (Y.) Komlós, עשרת הדיברות בתרגומים הירושלמיים, *Sinai* 27 (1963) 290; J. Potin, *La Fête juive de la Pentecôte: Étude des Textes Liturgiques* (2 vols.; Paris: du Cerf, 1971) 1:81–82; *Genizah Manuscripts of the Palestinian Targum to the Pentateuch* (ed. M. L. Klein; 2 vols.; Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 1986) 2:73.

10. S. A. Kaufman and Y. Maori, "The Targumim to Exodus 20: Reconstructing the Palestinian Targum," *Text* 16 (1991) 13–78.

11. The idiomatic phrase חזר ומקף renders ס(ו)בב 'encircles' in *Tg. Neof. Gen* 2:11, 13. It is used with a similar meaning in *The Fragment-Targums of the Pentateuch: According to Their Extant Sources* (ed. M. L. Klein; 2 vols.; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1980) 1:178 (Exod 25:11) and in *Genizah Manuscripts*, 1:323 (Num 19:15).

12. Kaufman and Maori, "Targumim," 40.

- 1 The First Commandment,¹³ as it would leave the mouth of the Holy One, may His name be praised,
- 2 like meteors and like lightning bolts and like fiery torches—a fiery torch from His right and a fiery torch from His left—
- 3 would fly and swoop¹⁴ in the air, and all Israel would see and be afraid,
- 4 and it would encircle the camps of Israel
- 5 and return and engrave itself on the Two Tablets of the Covenant
- 6 and say: Oh My people, Children of Israel . . .¹⁵

In 2000, J. Frankel prepared a critical edition of the *mahzor* for Shavuot based on scores of manuscripts.¹⁶ His edition of our passage,¹⁷ based on a dozen of those manuscripts, is essentially the same as the above, except that line 3 does not have the clause *וְכָל יִשְׂרָאֵל חֲמִיּוּן יִתֵּן וּדְחָלִין* and line 4 reads *וְאֵזִיל וּמְקִיף עַל* *מְשֻׁרְיֵיהֶן וְיִשְׂרָאֵל, וּמִתְהַפֵּךְ בְּהוֹן מְסֻטָּר לְסֻטָּר* ‘going¹⁸ to the camps of Israel and circling them, turning over from side to side in them’.¹⁹ We shall base our discussion on the earlier edition, but the key phrases appear in the later edition as well.

M. Weinfeld has already pointed out that this description derives, in part, from *מִיְמִינוֹ אֲשֶׁרֶת לָמוֹ* in Deut 33:2;²⁰ however, it is possible to go further. The

13. Lit., ‘divine utterance’. For the term *דְּבִירָה*, see R. C. Steiner, “A Colloquialism in Jer 5:13 from the Ancestor of Mishnaic Hebrew,” *JSS* 37 (1992) 11–26.

14. Klein renders “sprang forth and flew” (*Genizah Manuscripts*, 1:264) and “burst forth and flew” (*Fragment-Targums*, 2:52), but he adds: “Or, *פָּרַח* is synonymous with *טָאָס*, and the combination of the two is simply a doublet meaning ‘to fly’” (*Fragment-Targums*, 2:52 n. 92). For translational doublets in the Palestinian Targum, see *Genizah Manuscripts*, 1:xxxii; 2:4 and the literature cited there. This doublet appears also in Hebrew in *Lev. Rab.* 3:4 *מְדַרְשׁ וִיקְרָא רַבָּה* [ed. M. Margulies; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1993] סד, line 3): *הַעוֹף הַזֶּה פּוֹרַח וְטָס בְּכָל הָעוֹלָם* ‘birds [lit., this bird] fly all over the world’.

15. Kaufman and Maori, “Targumim,” 40.

16. See *מחזור שבועות* (ed. J. Frankel; Jerusalem: Koren, 2000).

17. See *ibid.*, 421.

18. Half of the manuscripts in Frankel’s apparatus have *אֵזִיל* with no conjunction, suggesting that it serves as a resumptive verb.

19. It has not been noted that the phrase *וּמִתְהַפֵּךְ בְּהוֹן מְסֻטָּר לְסֻטָּר* ‘turning over from side to side in them [= the camps]’ is based on *מִתְהַפֵּךְ בְּמַחְנֵה מְדִינָה* in Judg 7:13 (*Tg. Jon.* *לַחַת כְּתָבִים מְשֻׁנִּי* (מתהפך במחנה מדינה)). Modern scholars have compared it instead to *עֲבָרֵיהֶם* in Exod 32:15 (*Fragment-Targums*, 2:52; Kaufman and Maori, “Targumim,” 40), interpreting it according to the witnesses (e.g., *Fragmentary Targum P*) that have it *after* *וּמִתְחַקֵּק עַל תְּרִיץ לַחֲזִי קִיּוּמָא*. We may conjecture that it was first added in the margin and then copied into the text—before *וּמִתְחַקֵּק וְגוֹ* by some scribes and after it by others.

20. M. Weinfeld, “The Uniqueness of the Decalogue and Its Place in Jewish Tradition,” in *The Ten Commandments in History and Tradition* (ed. B.-Z. Segal; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1990) 40–41.

three underlined phrases, taken together, are equivalent to the rendering previously proposed for *למו*, *מימינו אשה* *למו*, namely, ‘from his right, fire flew to them’. All three phrases appear (in less authentic Galilean Aramaic) in Frankel’s edition as well. It is true that both editions also have *ולמפד דאשה מן שמאלה* or the like; however, this phrase has the appearance of a later addition because it creates an anomaly: if *נור* and *אשה* are different types of fire, “a torch of *נור*” plus “a torch of *אשה*” do not add up to “torches of *נור*.” It seems likely, therefore, that the original text was *והיך למפד דנור מן ימיניה*.

The proof that this description of the theophany at Sinai is based in part on Deut 33:2 can be seen in the *Sipre* on that verse:

מימינו אש דת למו, כשהיה הדיבר²¹ יוצא מפי הקדוש ברוך הוא היה יוצא דרך ימינו של הקדוש ברוך הוא לשמאל ישראל ועוקף²² את מחנה ישראל שנים עשר מיל על שנים עשר מיל וחוזר ובא דרך ימינם של ישראל לשמאלו של הקדוש ברוך הוא והקדוש ברוך הוא מקבלו בימינו וחוקקו בלוח והיה קולו הולך מסוף העולם ועד סופו שנאמר קול ה' חוצב להכות אש.²³

מימינו אש דת למו. When the divine utterance would emerge from the mouth of the Holy-One-Blessed-Be-He, it would go out by way of His right to Israel’s left and circle the camp of Israel, twelve miles by twelve miles, and it would return by way of Israel’s right to His left, and the Holy-One-Blessed-Be-He would receive it in His right hand and inscribe it on the tablet, and His voice would go from one end of the universe to the other, as it is said: “The voice of the Lord kindles flames of fire (Ps 29:7).”²⁴

Several of the phrases in this description have counterparts in the targum:

כשהיה הדיבר יוצא מפי הקדוש ברוך הוא = דבירה קדמייה כד הווה נפיק מן פם קודשא יהי שמה משבח
 ועוקף את מחנה ישראל . . . וחוזר = חזר ומקף על משירייתהון דישראל . . . וחוזר
 וחוקקו בלוח = ומתחקק על תרין לוחיה קיימה

These verbal parallels hint that one of these two passages is based on the other or that they go back to a common ancestor.

21. The form *דיבר*—that is, *דיבר* ‘divine utterance’ (Steiner, “Colloquialism,” 13–15)—is found in a Genizah fragment of the *Sipre* passage (קטעי מדרשי הלכה, 322, line 8).

22. This form appears in half of the manuscripts; the other half have *עוקב*.

23. See *קטעי מדרשי הלכה*, 320, lines 1–6; 322, lines 8–10. Landauer (“Fragment,” 24) views this passage as “the kernel of the introduction [to the Decalogue] in its oldest form.” There are parallels to the passage in later midrashim, but they have little value for our purposes.

24. In other words, the fire of Deut 33:2 did not emerge from God’s right hand, and it did not fly straight toward the Israelites. It emerged from God’s mouth and moved counterclockwise around the Israelite camp (as viewed from above), so that the Israelites saw it first on their left, then behind them, then on their right.

The two texts complement each other. Unlike the *Sipre*, the targum has verbs of flying, including ט-ו-ס, which renders ג-א-י in *Tg. Neof. Deut 28:49* (הִיךְ מֵהָ = דְּטִיִּים נוֹשָׁר = כְּאֲשֶׁר יִדְאֶה הַנּוֹשָׁר). On the other hand, the targum—in its present form, with וְלִמְפֹד דְּאִשָּׁה מִן שְׂמֹאלָה added—lacks a strong link to Deut 33:2.

In short, the Aramaic description of the theophany in the Palestinian Targum is a kind of “displaced translation.”²⁵ It appears to preserve an interpretation of לָמַר מִיִּמֵּינוּ אֲשֶׁר־תָּ לָמַר that is lost everywhere else, consigned to oblivion by the midrashic reinterpretation of דָּת discussed above. Even the Palestinian Targum has this reinterpretation at Deut 33:2. *Tg. Neofiti* is typical: וּפְשַׁט יְמִינֵיהּ מִן גּוֹר לְהַבִּי אֲשֶׁתָּהּ וְאוֹרִיתָהּ יְהִב לְעַמֵּיהּ ‘and He stretched forth His right hand from the midst of the flames of fire and gave the Torah to His people’.

The Date of the Embellished Introductions in the Palestinian Targum to the Decalogue

Are the embellished introductions in the Palestinian Targum to the Decalogue early enough to warrant the belief that they preserve the lost meaning of Deut 33:2? It would be difficult to maintain that late texts preserve the original premidrashic interpretation of our verse. What can we say about the date of the introductions?²⁶

The most conservative way of assigning a terminus ante quem to these texts is to rely on the oldest manuscript in which they appear—a Genizah fragment of a collection of targumic passages used on festivals, labeled F by P. Kahle. Kahle believed that this manuscript “could hardly be later than the 10th or 11th century.”²⁷ M. Beit-Arié labels it “early/middle,” a much less precise dat-

25. This is a special case of what Klein calls “associative translations,” for the translation survives at a secondary locus but not at its primary locus; see his *Genizah Manuscripts*, 1:xxx1; and idem, “Associative and Complementary Translations in the Targumim,” *Erlsr* 16 (Orlinsky Volume; 1982) 134–40.

26. For a deeply flawed attempt to date variant readings of the Palestinian Targum to the Ten Commandments relative to each other, see L. Díez Merino, “El Decálogo en el Targum Palestinense,” *EstBib* 34 (1975) 43–44. The author argues that a variant that gives a literal rendering of מִצְוֹתַי ‘my commandments’ in the second commandment must be earlier than one that expands the phrase into ‘the commandments of my Law’. The argument is based on at least three untenable assumptions: (1) the author of the expanded rendering is polemicalizing against the sectarian view that only the Decalogue was revealed at Sinai, whereas (2) the author of the literal rendering knows nothing of the controversy and (3) must therefore have lived before the controversy broke out. The flaw in the first assumption can be seen by examining *Tg. Neofiti*’s rendering of possessive forms of מִצְוֹת in Deuteronomy outside the Decalogue. The flaws in the second and third assumptions are too obvious to belabor.

27. P. Kahle, *Masoretten des Westens* (2 vols.; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1927–30) 2:3*.

ing, covering many centuries.²⁸ Another relevant Genizah fragment contains a citation of only two words from our texts, but they happen to be the two words that are most important for our thesis: פרה וטייס (“corrected” to פרה וטאס). The text in which this phrase appears is a commentary on Ezekiel by a Byzantine Jew named Reuel, whose exegesis can often be traced to Palestinian sources. At Ezek 13:20, Reuel uses the targumic phrase to shed light on a biblical expression: המשילם הנביא. כמות האיש הצודד נפשות שלעופות. לפרוחת. טשפֿיטומינש כמו פרה וטאס ‘the prophet likens them to the man who hunts the souls of birds, פרה וטאס תאס πετουμένας [the flying things], like פרה וטאס’.²⁹ The fragment dates from ca. 1000;³⁰ thus, the quotation provides a fairly precise terminus ante quem for the use of the phrase פרה וטאס in the Palestinian Targum. As for manuscripts covering other portions of the Palestinian Targum, the oldest is a parchment scroll with Palestinian pointing, labeled A by Kahle. Kahle dated it to the 7th or the beginning of the 8th century.³¹ Beit-Arié labels it “very early,” that is, the 8th/9th century or earlier.³²

An earlier terminus ante quem emerges from the work of Kaufman and Maori. In their view, “the Palestinian Targum . . . reached its canonical form ca. 500 C.E. or before.”³³ The canonical form to which they refer naturally includes the prototype of the translation of the Ten Commandments. According to A. Tal, three linguistic criteria provide an even earlier terminus ante quem,

28. *Genizah Manuscripts*, 1:xxxvii.

29. N. de Lange, *Greek Jewish Texts from the Cairo Genizah* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996) 190–91, line 241. Steiner has corrected de Lange’s reading, פרה וטאס, to פרה וטאס; see R. C. Steiner, “Textual and Exegetical Notes to Nicholas de Lange, *Greek Jewish Texts from the Cairo Genizah*,” *JQR* 89 (1998) 161. The suggestion in Steiner’s article that Reuel is quoting פרה וטאס from *Lev. Rab.* 3:4 (העוף הזה פורה וטס בכל העולם) (see n. 14 above) is also to be corrected. The *ʿalep* in טאס shows that these are Aramaic participles (פֿרַח וְטַאֵס), quoted from an Aramaic work. It is remarkable that Reuel expected his readers to recognize this two-word prooftext without being told the source. Our targumic passage must have been very well known indeed.

30. See R. C. Steiner, “בחינות לשון בפירוש ליחזקאל ולתרי־עשר שבמגילות העבריות,” *Leš* 59 (1995) 40 and 43 n. 13.

31. Kahle, *Masoreten des Westens*, 2:2*–3*.

32. *Genizah Manuscripts*, 1:xxxvii.

33. Kaufman and Maori, “Targumim,” 21. In a subsequent essay (“Dating the Language of the Palestinian Targums and Their Use in the Study of First Century CE Texts,” in *The Aramaic Bible* [ed. D. R. G. Beattie and M. J. McNamara; JSOTSup 166; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994] 118–41), Kaufman discusses much earlier dates, but that may be because his goal there is to establish a terminus post quem. It goes without saying that individual strata can be centuries older than the canonical form of the whole; see, for example, P. S. Alexander, “Jewish Aramaic Translations of the Hebrew Scriptures,” in *Mikra* (ed. M. J. Mulder; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1988) 243–47.

proving that the language of the Palestinian Targum is more archaic than the language of the early haggadic midrashim and the language of the Palestinian Talmud.³⁴ Of the three archaic features that he discusses, two appear in the translation of the Ten Commandments. In Exod 20:8, we find למקדשה יתיה³⁵ rather than למקדשתיה*. In Exod 19:25, we have קרובו קבילו עשרתי דברייה 'draw near and receive the Ten Commandments' with *num*-less plural imperatives,³⁶ contrasting with the III-y imperative הוון דכירין/זהירין 'be mindful/careful' in 20:8.³⁷ According to Tal, these features can be used to date the Targum to the pre-Talmudic period, around the 3rd century C.E.³⁸

34. A. Tal, "רבדים בארמית היהודית של ארץ-ישראל," *Leš* 43 (1979) 165–84; idem, "המקור לצורותיו ברובדי," *Leš* 44 (1980) 43–65; idem, "הארמית היהודית בארץ ישראל," in *Hebrew Language Studies Presented to Professor Zeev Ben-Hayyim* (ed. M. Bar-Asher et al.; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1983) 201–18. All three of Tal's criteria group the early midrashim with the Talmud, but there is a fourth criterion that groups them with the Targum. At some point in the history of Galilean Aramaic, the medial consonant of הדין 'this' became weakened, yielding ההין and אהין. The Talmud uses all three of these forms; the midrashim, like the Targum, know only הדין. The difference can be seen in the parallel versions of the story of Alexander in Africa. Alexander, who is present when his African host hears a case, is asked by him how he would adjudicate the matter ("this case") if it came before him in his own country. For "this case," the versions have either אהין דינא or ההין דינא—the former in PT BM II v 8c (ירושלמי גניקין [ed. E. S. Rosenthal and S. Lieberman; Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1983] 49, line 68), and the latter in *Lev. Rab.* 27:1 (מדרש ויקרא) רבה, p. תרכב, line 2; and 83, lines 31–32) and *Pesiqta de Rab Kahana* (הנא) פסיקתא דרב כהנא [ed. B. Mandelbaum; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1962] 149, line 11). The corresponding phrase in the Palestinian Targum (for example, *Genizah Manuscripts*, 1:287 [Exod 21:31]) is דינא הדין, with the older word order (perhaps preserved with the help of the Hebrew *Vorlage*). Taken together, the four criteria seem to suggest that the language of the midrashim occupies an intermediate position—one that is more archaic than the language of the Talmud but less archaic than the language of the Targum. Does language that is more archaic reflect an earlier date of redaction? Or should we attribute some of the linguistic differences to register (literary versus colloquial) rather than date? Only further research can provide an answer.

35. Kaufman and Maori, "Targumim," 51.

36. See the Targum Studies Module of the Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon website (cal1.cn.huc.edu).

37. Kaufman and Maori, "Targumim," 51. Their reading [דכ]ירין for MS F, identical to the reading of the Targum Studies Module of the Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon, is erroneous. The reading of Kahle (*Masoretan des Westens* 2:58) and Klein (*Genizah Manuscripts*, 1:267) is זהירין, and Klein's photograph (2, pl. 91) leaves no doubt that it is correct.

38. A. Tal, "The Hebrew Pentateuch in the Eyes of the Samaritan Translator," in *The Interpretation of the Bible: The International Symposium in Slovenia* (ed. J. Krašovec; JSOTSup 289; Ljubljana: Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts / Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998) 348.

The date of the *Sipre's* comment is relevant here as well. Even though it lacks a verb of flying, its similarity to the targumic passage suggests that it is descended from an earlier text that did have a verb of this sort. It is usually assumed that the final redaction of the halakic midrashim took place in the middle of the 3rd century C.E.;³⁹ however, in the view of at least one scholar, our passage is considerably older.⁴⁰

There is no reason to assume on linguistic grounds that the embellishments of the Decalogue in the Palestinian Targum were not composed before the 3rd century C.E. Linguistic modernization has been noted in many ancient Jewish texts, for example, the *Isaiah Scroll* from Qumran.⁴¹ According to P. S. Alexander, the same thing happened with the Palestinian Targum: "At some point the Old Palestinian targumim in Standard Literary Aramaic were recast in the younger dialect of Galilean Aramaic. This probably happened after the Bar Kokhba war when the centre of Jewish cultural life moved from Judaea to Galilee."⁴² It has long been recognized that the Palestinian Targum preserves very ancient traditions.⁴³

The embellishments were undoubtedly composed for the special public reading of the Decalogue on the Festival of Shavuot. According to Weinfeld, that special public reading is very ancient:

The festival at which it became customary to call up the memory of the scene at Mount Sinai and so to speak receive the Torah anew with an oath of loyalty was the Festival of Shavuot. In our opinion, the ceremonies on that occasion are reflected in Psalms 50 and 81. During the Second Commonwealth this festival was given the name *ʿazereth* (= "assembly"). That is the designation used by Josephus. The very name signifies that Shavuot was a day of public gathering, or in biblical language *yom ha-qahal*—"the Day of Assembly." This was the occasion when the people at large gathered to hear the word of the LORD, as expressed in the Ten Commandments (Deut. 9:10; 10:4; 18:16). It appears that on this Festival of *ʿazereth* they re-enacted in a special

39. M. I. Kahana, "The Halakic Midrashim," in *The Literature of the Sages* (2 vols.; ed. S. Safrai et al.; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1987–2006) 2:60.

40. M. Fishbane refers to it as "an old tradition" ("Midrash and the Meaning of Scripture," in *Interpretation of the Bible*, 549).

41. See E. Y. Kutscher, *הלשון והרקע הלשוני של מגילת ישעיהו השלמה ממגילות ים המלח* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1959).

42. Alexander, "Jewish Aramaic Translations," 248.

43. See, for example, J. Heinemann, "Early Halakhah in the Palestinian Targumim," *JJS* 25 (1974) 114–22; A. Shinan, *תרגום ואגדה בו* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1992) 195 n. 15; and the literature cited there.

ceremony the great event of "The Stand at Mount Sinai," and renewed the covenant and the oath to keep the Ten Commandments.⁴⁴

Weinfeld adduces much extrabiblical evidence for a covenant renewal ceremony on Shavuot, especially from the book of *Jubilees* and the Dead Sea Scrolls.⁴⁵ Such a ceremony would be a perfect *Sitz im Leben* for an embellished Aramaic translation.⁴⁶ We should therefore not be surprised to find that the Palestinian Targum of the Decalogue preserves an ancient exegetical tradition that was lost everywhere else.

44. Weinfeld, "Uniqueness of the Decalogue," 34.

45. *Ibid.*, 36–40; and *idem*, "Pentecost as Festival of the Giving of the Law," *Imm* 8 (1978) 7–18.

46. According to the rabbis and some modern scholars, Neh 8:8 alludes to an Aramaic translation accompanying the solemn reading of the Torah on a festival. For extrabiblical evidence pointing to the existence of an Aramaic translation of the Torah in the Persian period, see R. C. Steiner, "The *Mbqr* at Qumran, the *Episkopos* in the Athenian Empire, and the Meaning of *lbqr*' in Ezra 7:14: On the Relation of Ezra's Mission to the Persian Legal Project," *JBL* 120 (2001) 630–36.

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