

## ANCIENT TARGUMIC TRADITION IN HEBREWS 8:2

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### 1. A TARGUMIC APPROACH TO HEBREWS

The so-named Letter to the Hebrews continues to inspire new approaches because of the so many open and vibrant questions still to be answered. The book edited by Gabriella Gelardini *Hebrews: New Perspectives, New Insights*<sup>1</sup> is an instructive witness to this diversity of approaches and at the same time provides a taste of the serious and enthusiastic work carried out by the *Hebrews Group* of the Society of Biblical Literature. However, if we widen our scope to the many scholars of Hebrews from different continents and languages—sometimes minority groups—it is noticeable that there are relatively few studies which take seriously into account the links between Hebrews and Jewish literature, and more especially targumic literature.<sup>2</sup> We find in some articles and commentaries on Hebrews quotations from Philo of Alexandria, Josephus, the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Apocryphal writings; and, to a lesser degree, the Midrashic writings, the Mishnah, the Tosefta and the Talmud are quoted. However, references to the targum literature are extremely scarce.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Gabriella GELARDINI (ed.), *Hebrews. Contemporary Methods-New Insights* (Biblical Interpretation Series 75), Leiden: Brill 2005.

2. For a presentation of the targum cf. Zeev SAFRAI, «The Targums as part of Rabbinic Literature», in Shmuel SAFRAI (et alia), *The Literature of the Sages. Second Part: Midrash and Targum. Liturgy, Poetry, Mysticism. Contracts, Inscriptions, Ancient Science and the Languages of Rabbinic Literature* (Compendia Rerum Iudicarum ad Novum Testamentum 3b), Royal Van Gorcum: Fortress Press 2006, 243-278.

3. An example is found within the «Hebrews Group» of the Society of Biblical Literature; in the 2009 Annual Meeting devoted to the topic *Reading the Book of Hebrews in its Jewish Context*, none of the four papers mentioned targum: Hananel Mack (Bar-Ilan University), *Echoes of the Judeo-Christian Polemic in the Biblical Commentaries of the Sages*; Joshua Garroway (Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion), *A New Sort of a Priest for a New Sort of People: Reconfiguring Descent in Hebrews and Romans*; Carl Mosser (Eastern University), *Halakhic Controversy and Hebrews 13*; Marius Heemstra, (University of Groningen), *Epistle to the Hebrews: Jewish Christians and the Fiscus Judaicus*.

What is the reason for this oversight? Or in more methodological terms, why do the targumim and targumic traditions help us understand and contextualize Hebrews? They do so for the same reason they help us understand other New Testament books and passages:<sup>4</sup> because they allow us to breathe the New Testament atmosphere, obviously linked as it is to the synagogal background and expressed through these Aramaic versions for liturgical use. The targumim are part of the wide literary scene surrounding the New Testament writings.<sup>5</sup> Importantly, the *Catholic Pontifical Biblical Commission* recognises the targumic influence on New Testament writings:<sup>6</sup>

The Old Testament reached its final form in the Jewish world of the four or five centuries preceding the Christian era. Judaism of this time also provided the matrix for the origin of the New Testament and the infant Church. Numerous studies of the history of ancient Judaism and notably the manifold research stimulated by the discoveries at Qumran have highlighted the complexity of the Jewish world, both in the land of Israel and in the Diaspora, throughout this period.

It is in this world that the interpretation of Scripture had its beginning. One of the most ancient witnesses to the Jewish interpretation of the Bible is the Greek translation known as the Septuagint. The Aramaic Targumim represent a further witness to the same activity, which has carried on down to the present, giving rise in the process to an immense mass of learned procedures for the preservation of the text of the Old Testament and for the explanation of the meaning of biblical texts. At all stages, the more astute Christian exegetes, from Origen and Jerome onwards, have sought to draw profit from the Jewish biblical learning in order to acquire a better understanding of Scripture. Many modern exegetes follow this example.

The Targums and the Midrashic literature illustrate the homiletic tradition and mode of biblical interpretation practised by wide sectors of Judaism in the first centuries.

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4. Cf. for example: Craig A. EVANS, «Targumizing Tendencies in Matthean Redaction», in Alan J. AVERY-PECK – Daniel HARRINGTON – Jacob NEUSNER (eds.), *When Judaism and Christianity Began. Essays in Memory of Anthony J. Saldarini. Volume I. Christianity in the Beginning* (JSJS 85), Leiden: Brill 2004.

5. Works that are not discussed here are the well-known and recognized collection directed by Martin MCNAMARA: *The Aramaic Bible*; the Brill collection directed by Johannes C. de Moor: *Bilingual Concordance to the Targum of the Prophets*; the classical *Biblia Polyglotta Matritensia* directed by Alejandro DÍEZ MACHO with the posterior edition of the *Neophyti targum*; a complementary collection of the *Biblia Polyglotta Matritensia* named *Textos y Estudios Cardenal Cisneros de la Biblia Poliglota Matritense* founded by Federico Pérez Castro; the Verbo Divino collection *Biblioteca Midrásica* directed by Miguel Pérez Fernández containing also targumic works; the recent Brill collection edited by Paul V. M. FLESHER *Studies in the Aramaic Interpretation of the Bible*. For an English bibliography, the recent *Journal for the Aramaic Bible* (1999) which in 2003 became *Aramaic Studies*, may be consulted.

6. Cf. «Approach through Recourse to Jewish Traditions of Interpretation», by Joseph A. FITZMYER, *The Biblical Commission's Document «The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church». Text and Commentary* (Subsidia Biblica 18), Roma: Biblical Institute Press 1995, 74-78. It is to be noted that Fitzmyer, commenting on this section, makes no mention of targum.

It is not the goal of this essay to underline the relevance of targumic approaches. It will suffice to read the previous quotation from the pontifical document.<sup>7</sup> We will simply recall the words of Enric Cortès, a Catalan specialist in Jewish Literature: «Targum is the ring which links the Old Testament to the New».<sup>8</sup>

To reiterate the point, it is unfortunate that specific approaches to Hebrews that take account of targumic literature are very few.<sup>9</sup> Of relatively recent date is Gelardini's dissertation: «Verhärtet eure Herzen nicht. Der Hebräer, eine Synagogenhomilie zu *Tischa be-Aw*».<sup>10</sup> She establishes a relationship between Hebrews and the synagogue background as well as synagogue homilies, mentioning some targumic references.<sup>11</sup> In her work «The Role of the Septuagint in Hebrews», Radu Gheorghita quotes Aramaic versions when explaining Heb 2:3.5; Heb 8:2 and Heb 10:37-38, with some pertinent comments.<sup>12</sup> We could also add our own targumic approach to Heb 12:16-17, Heb 1:3 and Heb 9:22.<sup>13</sup>

Aware of the broad choice available to demonstrate the positive benefits of targum for a better understanding of some verses of Hebrews, we propose to present here just one example: Heb 8:2. To start with, difficulties are encountered in translating the verse, but there is also a need first to comprehend the author's thinking and to find the right words to express it. The study of Heb 8:2 will help to bring to light the capacity of targum to introduce us to the cosmological and

7. Cf. Martin McNAMARA, *Targum and Testament. Aramaic Paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible: A Light on the New Testament*, Shannon: Irish University Press 1972; Alejandro Díez MACHO, *El Targum. Introducción a las traducciones aramaicas de la Biblia*, Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas 1972; Roger Le DÉAUT, *The Message of the New Testament and The Aramaic Bible (Targum)* (Subsidia Biblica 5), Roma: Biblical Institute Press 1982.

8. «El interés del Targum estriba, pues, en ser el eslabón más auténtico entre el Nuevo y el Antiguo Testamento» (Enric CORTÈS, *Los discursos de Adiós de Gn 49 a Jn 13-17. Pistas para la historia de un género literario en la antigua literatura judía* (Colectanea San Paciano 23), Barcelona: Herder 1976, 489).

9. For indirect approaches cf. Roger Le DÉAUT, «Traditions targumiques dans le Corpus Paulinien? (Hebr 11,4 et 12,24; Gal 4,29-30; II Cor 3-16)», *Biblica* 42 (1961) 28-48.

10. We look forward to the as yet unpublished dissertation by Cyril H. CAVE, *The Influence of the Lectionary of the Synagogue upon the Formation of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, University of Nottingham 1960, 108 pp. Cave disagrees with Manson's proposal of a homily for the Day of Atonement, stating that Hebrews is a homily for Shavuot.

11. Gabriella GELARDINI, *Verhärtet eure Herzen nicht. Der Hebräer, eine Synagogenhomilie zu Tischa be-Aw* (Biblical Interpretation Series 83), Leiden: Brill 2006.

12. Radu GHEORGHITA, *The Role of the Septuagint in Hebrews. An Investigation of its Influence with Special Consideration to the Use of Hab 2,3-4 in Heb 10,37-38* (WUNT II.60), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2003, 262.

13. Cf. Jordi CERVERA I VALLS, *Esaú el rebutjat de la comunitat. Tradicions jueves en He 12,16-17* (Col·lectània Sant Pacià 67), Barcelona: Edicions FTC 1999; Jordi CERVERA I VALLS, «Jesús, empremta de Déu (He 1,3)», in Armand PUIG I TÀRRECH (ed.), *Imatge de Déu* (Scripta Bíblica 7), Barcelona: ABCat-PAM 2006, 191-218; Jordi CERVERA I VALLS, «Vessament de sang, culte i perdó (He 9,22)», in Armand PUIG I TÀRRECH (ed.), *La violència en la Bíblia* (Scripta Bíblica 9), Barcelona: ABCat-PAM 2008.

theological thought of the author of Hebrews, as well as to understand the correlations between the worldly sanctuary and the heavenly sanctuary.

The approach adopted in this study will be to focus on an intra-text comparison between the Greek text of Heb 8:2 and the version of Num 24:6 in the Septuagint, which is different from the Masoretic version. Aramaic versions of Num 24:6 in the Onkelos, Neophiti and Pseudo-Jonathan targumim will be seen to be a valuable literary support to draw together, provide a framework for and explain the Hebrew and Greek versions of Num 24:6 and consequently the meaning of Heb 8:2.

It is true to say that this intratextual work has become an exciting and sometimes thrilling past-time, a humble homage to our dearest professor Josep Rius Camps, who in a serious and whole-hearted way, turns his thorough research into an ongoing *divertimento*.

## 2. DIFFICULTIES IMPEDING A FULL UNDERSTANDING OF HEBREWS 8:2<sup>14</sup>

Focusing on the object of our study, a methodological and detailed approach to the verse is left to one side. We will only refer to the essential elements. Let us start by comparing different English versions of the above mentioned verse:

<sup>BGT</sup> Hebr 8:2 τῶν ἁγίων λειτουργὸς καὶ τῆς σκηνῆς τῆς ἀληθινῆς, ἣν ἔπηξεν ὁ κύριος, οὐκ ἄνθρωπος.

<sup>CJB</sup> Heb 8:2 There he serves in the Holy Place, that is, in the true Tent of Meeting, the one erected not by human beings but by *ADONAI*.

<sup>NET</sup> Heb 8:2 a minister in the sanctuary and the true tabernacle that the Lord, not man, set up.

<sup>NJB</sup> Heb 8:2 and he is the minister of the sanctuary and of the true Tent which the Lord, and not any man, set up.

<sup>NRS</sup> Heb 8:2 a minister in the sanctuary and the true tent that the Lord, and not any mortal, has set up.

<sup>KJV</sup> Heb 8:2 A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.

We observe that the Greek τῶν ἁγίων is commonly translated as *sanctuary* (NET, NJB, NRS, KJV). The CJB version translates it as *Holy Place*, a non-

14. This study represents a more thorough and detailed study building on an earlier article: Jordi CERVERA I VALLS, «El cel, la tenda veritable (He 8,2)», in Armand PUIG I TÀRRECH (ed.), *Veritat i mentida* (Scripta Biblica 10), Barcelona: ABCat-PAM 2010, 203-234.

specific place with a cultic background. We could ask the translators of this versions what kind of sanctuary or Holy Place they had in mind at the moment of translating the verse. Obviously it refers to a heavenly sanctuary if we read the previous verse (Heb 8:1). The scene where the action of the verse takes place is clearly heavenly: Jesus, as a heavenly priest, serves as a minister of the heavenly sanctuary.

Despite such a clear and unambiguous statement, we must stress the difficulties inherent in translating τῶν ἁγίων, a genitive which can be a neuter plural (*of the holy/sacred things, of the sanctuary*) or also a masculine plural (*of the saints*).<sup>15</sup> The majority of scholars tend to choose *sanctuary* (heavenly, obviously) and they justify it with convincing arguments. But this does not mean that the matter is settled.<sup>16</sup> To be honest, it must be admitted that *sanctuary* is not as precise as we, at a first glance, might think. Indeed, a comparison between heavenly and earthly sanctuaries is sometimes established in not very clear terminology, with a deliberate pedagogical intention on the part of the author of Hebrews.<sup>17</sup> The author purposefully uses a common root (ἅγιος) to link both sanctuaries in a divine atmosphere, in order to associate them within the same design of God, despite their different meanings and locations. It would be easier to refer to each sanctuary with a different word to avoid any confusion, but the author of Hebrews merely points out persuasively the importance of each distinct sanctuary. His arguments and intention are not to reject the earthly one. He establishes a knowing parallelism between earthly and heavenly realities where there is no rejection, only different degrees of Holiness.

We, on the other hand, as distant readers, are sometimes left in a doubtful silence, wondering which sanctuary he is really referring to: the tent in

15. Cf. the different options of ancient and modern scholars in Harold W. ATTRIDGE, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Hermeneia), Philadelphia (PA): Fortress Press 1989, 217-218; Craig R. KOESTER, *Hebrews. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (The Anchor Bible 36), New York (NY) Doubleday 2001, 375; Paul ELLINGWORTH, *The Epistle to the Hebrews. A Commentary on the Greek Text* (The New International Greek Testament Commentary), Grand Rapids (MI): Eerdmans 1993, 400.

16. In Hebrews the adjective *holy* (ἅγιος) appears in the plural usually to refer to the community: *holy brothers* (ἀδελφοὶ ἅγιοι) in Heb 3:1; *saints* or *holy people* (τοῖς ἁγίοις) in Heb 6:10; *all the saints, all God's people* (πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους) in Heb 13:24. These references could allow the translation *saints* to be adopted in Heb 8:2 (*minister of the saints*). It is even more a translation possibility for Heb 9:8 and 10:19 where «τῶν ἁγίων», usually translated as *sanctuary* or *holy place*, could be also translated as *saints*, always with reference to the heavenly Christian community. The heavenly cultical scenography introduced in Heb 8:1 and described in Heb 8:2 could include both realities: the heavenly sanctuary or the heavenly community.

17. Hebrews 9 accounts for almost half of the references to the term ἅγιος in Hebrews (9 out of 19). There, the word ἅγια referring to the sanctuary causes some confusion about which sanctuary exactly it is referring to, the earthly or the heavenly one. The author of Hebrews adapts to the Greek language the Jewish exegetical tradition by associating similar words, here taking ἅγιος, where the earthly sanctuary is expressed by ἅγια (Heb 9,1-3.12.24.25; also Heb 13:11), and the heavenly sanctuary is expressed by τῶν ἁγίων (Heb 8:2; 9:11;10:19).

the desert? The sanctuary of the Jerusalem Temple? The typological heavenly sanctuary which was the model of the meeting tent? A real heavenly sanctuary «erected» by apocalyptic literature? The answer is not easy, but once again the unbreakable link between this heavenly prototype —or apocalyptic sanctuary— and the earthly reality must be stressed. Both are identified and associated with earthly sanctuaries (the meeting tent and the Temple). The links are conclusive. And we believe that this fact throws some light on the significance of earthly cultic realities, whose references are invariably in heaven. Thus, *sanctuary* (τὼν ἁγίων) expresses in Heb 8:2 an indefinite heavenly cultic reality without any need to specify the details of this edifice. Here, the meaning and intention of *sanctuary* places us in a mental «scenography» within a theological concept: the cultic activity of Jesus in heaven, beside God, sitting on his right.

We have sought to explain, briefly but we hope clearly enough, the heavenly and the specific cultic dimension of *sanctuary* in Heb 8: 2, understood as a «theological —non physical— place» where we are to be in contact with God. This theological setting, named in Heb 8:2a as τὼν ἁγίων (*sanctuary*) is quoted, in Heb 8:2b: τῆς σκηνῆς τῆς ἀληθινῆς, and translated as *true tabernacle* (NET, KJV), *true Tent/tent* (NJB, NRS), *true Tent of Meeting* (CJB). First, it must be pointed out that *true* is far from referring to Greek philosophic dualistic terms. The background of *true* is, here, the semitic sense of the Hebrew אמת.<sup>18</sup>

The author of Hebrews, faithful to the Septuagintal use of σκηνή,<sup>19</sup> is also intentionally ambiguous in using this word:<sup>20</sup> Is σκηνή an earthly delimited construction to be inhabited? Is it a specific cultural space in heaven? Is it the building which served Moses as a model? Is the author of Hebrews speaking metaphorically about the heavens? The end of the verse (Heb 8:2c) specifies the complete and fully heavenly creation of this sanctuary and true tent «that the Lord, not man, set up»<sup>21</sup> (ἦν ἑπηξεν ὁ κύριος, οὐκ ἄνθρωπος). But is it possible to make more precise identification?

18. «The opposite of *true* can be *false*, but in Hebrews the earthly sanctuary is not a false sanctuary, since God himself commanded that it be built» (KOESTER, *Hebrews*, 376).

19. Surprisingly, the Septuagint use of σκηνή encompasses in a single word three different kinds of habitation: a tent (אהל), a tabernacle (מִשְׁכָּן) and a hut (סכה). This illustration of limited Greek vocabulary can only be explained by the fact that σκηνή becomes a common denominator of different historical periods of Israel (nomadic, sedentary, exiled) and specially of the different cultic periods (itinerancy, Jerusalem centralization, destruction, reconstruction). Cf. W. MICHAELIS, «σκηνή», in Gerhard KITTEL – Gerhard FRIEDRICH (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, VII, Grand Rapids (MI): Eerdmans 1995, 369.

20. Hebrews accounts for ten of the twenty times that σκηνή appears in the New Testament. The author of Hebrews, being responsible for half of the neotestamentary citations, shows his particular intention to develop notably a christological discourse around the categories and characters of the Old Testament cultic activity. In fact, the author of Hebrews develops a Judea-christological approach to the ancient cult. Because of this he does not mention typical Greek terms such as ἱερόν and ναός. Faithful to his Jewish roots, he only uses ἄγια and σκηνή.

21. NET version.



## 3. NUMBERS LXX 24:6 IS BEHIND HEBREWS 8:2

The 27th critical edition of Nestlé-Aland's New Testament indicates Num LXX 24:6 as a parallel text of Hebrews 8:2:

Heb 8:2:                   καὶ τῆς σκηνῆς τῆς ἀληθινῆς, ἣν ἔπηξεν ὁ κύριος  
Num LXX 24:6:       καὶ ὥσει σκηναὶ       ἃς ἔπηξεν κύριος

The quotation from Num 24,6 is part of the third Balaam oracle (Num 24,3-9) where Israel is praised for the beauty of her houses and tents: «How goodly are thy habitations, Jacob, and thy tents, Israel!» (Num 24:5)<sup>22</sup> and also for her fertility, solidity and pride, all gifts of God (Num 24:6):

As shady groves (ὥσει νάπαι σκιάζουσαι), and as gardens by a river (καὶ ὥσει παράδεισοι ἐπὶ ποταμῶν),<sup>23</sup> and as tents which God pitched (καὶ ὥσει σκηναὶ ἃς ἔπηξεν κύριος), and as cedars by the waters (ὥσει κέδροι παρ' ὕδατα).<sup>24</sup>

The scholars of Hebrews who pay attention to this link usually mention it as a secondary feature.<sup>25</sup> Buchanan and his alertness to detecting Jewish background

22. Lancelot C. L. BRENTON, *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*, London: Hendrickson 1998, 209.

23. «En 24,6a, la LXX dit des habitations des Hébreux qu'elles sont "comme des vallons qui ombragent", là où le TM affirme: "comme des torrents, elles se sont étendues". La LXX n'offre pas une traduction, mais une exégèse où se trouve introduite l'idée d'ombrage qui, dans *Nombres*, évoque la protection divine (voir 9,18.22 et 10,34); la substitution du mot "vallon" au TM *nahal*, "torrent", reste énigmatique; il est vrai cependant que les torrents coulent dans les vallons: la LXX a-t-elle voulu substituer à une métaphore un peu rude une métaphore plus rassurante?» (Gilles DORIVAL, *La Bible d'Alexandrie. Les Nombres*, Paris: Cerf 1994, 139).

24. «La traducción [griega] de Números es muy literal, pero no servil, como lo prueba el hecho de que el traductor ha introducido muchas variaciones. Por ejemplo, en el léxico, porque interpreta con diferentes expresiones griegas una sola expresión hebrea y, al contrario, traduce con una sola palabra griega diferentes términos hebreos. También en el contenido, porque explica y aclara pasajes ambiguos o poco claros, tiende a simplificar la exposición de los acontecimientos, armoniza referencias con pasajes de otros libros del Pentateuco e introduce numerosos matices de contenido ausentes del modelo hebreo. Esto queda patente, por ejemplo, en la versión de la historia de Balak y Balaam y sus oráculos (caps 22-24)» (Natalio FERNÁNDEZ MARCOS – María Victoria SPOTTORNO DÍAZ-CARO [coord.], *La Biblia griega Septuaginta. I El Pentateuco* [Biblioteca de Estudios Bíblicos 125], Salamanca: Sígueme 2008, 295-296).

25. Eduard RIGGENBACH, «Der Brief an die Hebräer», in Robert RÜBEL (ed.), *Pastoralbriefe, Hebräerbrief und Offenbarung Johannis* (Kurzgefasster Kommentar zu den heiligen Schriften Alten und Neuen Testaments, 5), Munich: C.H. Beck 1898, 121; Friedrich SCHRÖGER, *Der Verfasser des Hebräerbriefes als Schriftausleger* (Biblische Ustersuchungen 4), Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet 1968, 203; August STROBEL, *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (Neue Testament Deutsch 9/2), Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1991, 91; ATTRIDGE, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 218 n.19; William L. LANE, *Hebrews 1-8* (Word Biblical Commentary 47a), Dallas (TEX): Word Books 1991, 205; Ceslas SPICQ, *L'Épître aux Hébreux II. Commentaire*, Paris: Gabalda 1953,

in Hebrews takes a significant step forward and not only remarks that Num LXX 24:6 is the basis of Heb 8:2,<sup>26</sup> but he further shows that the Greek version of the Septuagint has some variants compared to the Masoretic text. He comments only on those of Num 24:7, and not those of Num 24:6. Gheorghita broadens the scope of the question by comparing the Greek and the Masoretic text of Num 24:6 including the Aramaic, Syrian and Latin versions in his analysis.<sup>27</sup>

We read in Num 24:5: «How beautiful are your tents (אהליך), O Jacob, and your dwelling places (משכנותיך)». This sentence introduces the countryside metaphor of Num 24:6:

They are like valleys stretched forth (בנחלים נטוין), like gardens by the river's side (כנגת עלי נהר), like aloes that the LORD has planted (כאהלים נטע יהוה), and like cedar trees beside the waters (כארזים עלימים).

We note that the Septuagint version of Numbers 24:6 completely changes the Hebrew sentence «like aloes that the LORD has planted» (כאהלים נטע יהוה) for: «like tents set up by the Lord» (καὶ ὡς ἐν ἄλσεσιν ὡς ἔπηξεν κύριος).

Why this change of *aloes* (אהלים) for *tents* (σκηναί)? The answer is understandable if the premasoretic text is consulted, where it says אהלים: the Masora reads it as *aloes* (*ahalim*) and the Septuagint reads it as *tents* (*‘ohalim*). There are clearly two possible, different and parallel readings of the same Hebrew word. Both readings are important because both have been transmitted: one in the Masoretic version; the other is found, centuries before, in the Septuagint.

Which of the two readings of Num 24:6 is the earlier? The question is a bold one. Wevers says that aloes «is a kind of tree, probably the agallochs or aloes, a resident tree of Indic origins, whose wood when burnt is sweet-scented. The word is not a native Semitic word, but borrowed».<sup>28</sup> Is this non semitic origin of *aloes* (*‘ahalim*) enough to accept the oldest reading of *tent* (*‘ohalim*)? The discoveries of the Dead Sea Scrolls lead to an affirmative answer: 4QNum<sup>b</sup> (also quoted 4Q27) writes, in Num 24:6, נטה (to stretch out, to spread) instead of the Masoretic נטע (to plant), expressing, in the middle of the first century before Christ, the same reading as the Septuagint.<sup>29</sup> Vermes says that נטע (to plant) is replaced everywhere —except in targum Onkelos— by נטה (to stretch out, to

235; James SWETNAM, «The Greater and More Perfect Tent. A Contribution to the Discussion of Hebrews 9,11», *Biblica* 47 (1966) 91-106, 102; ELLINGWORTH, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 402.

26. «This verse is based on the LXX version of Num 24,6-7» (George W. BUCHANAN, *To the Hebrews. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* [Anchor Bible 36], New York [NY]: Doubleday 1972, 133).

27. GHEORGHITA, *The Role of the Septuagint in Hebrews*, 82-84.

28. John W. WEVERS, *Notes on the Greek Text of Numbers* (Septuagint and Cognate Studies Series 46), Atlanta (GE): Scholars Press 1998, 404.

29. Cf. Nathan JASTRAM, *Qumran Cave 4. VII. Genesis to Numbers* (Discoveries in the Judean Desert XII), London: Clarendon 1994, 236-237. Wevers says: «The verb נטע, however, does not mean «pitch» and here 4QNum<sup>b</sup> reads the expected נטה, which is commonly rendered by πῆγνυμι



spread).<sup>30</sup> Faced with this evidence, Dorival establishes a relationship between this well known Septuagint reading and Heb 8:2: «Il semble bien que He 8,2, se réfère a 24,6c dans le texte de la LXX, lorsqu'il parle de la tente véritable que le Seigneur a plantée au ciel».<sup>31</sup>

To sum up, the term אהלים —which can either be read as *aloes* or *tent*— allows us to access a premasoretic version of Num 24,6 prior to the III<sup>rd</sup> century bce. From the references that we have, we can deduce that the reading of *tents* ('*ohalim*) as it appears in the Septuagint and Qumran precedes the reading of *aloes* ('*ahalim*) from the Masoretic text. There is here a most interesting phenomenon of a double and multiple translation of the same Biblical text, caused by the different reading of one word. Thus one of the two translations, the Septuagint version, is adopted by the author of Hebrews when describing the celestial plane.

#### 4. THE PALESTINIAN TARGUMIM SHARE THE SAME READING OF THE SEPTUAGINT IN NUM 24:6

This clear example of double and parallel readings of the same word in a sacred and fixed text becomes even more interesting when looking at the Aramaic versions of Num 24:6, which usually share the Septuagint reading of '*ohalim* (tents), adding its particular scenography and theological message.<sup>32</sup> Díez Macho states that the Palestinian targumim (TgN and TgPsJon), the Samaritan version, and other minor Aramaic versions (with the exception of TgO) read אהלים as '*ohalim* (tents).<sup>33</sup> Le Déaut, McNamara and Díez Macho focus on a detail that may help us make a good reading of Hebrews 8:2. In their view, Num 24:6 in the Palestinian targumim refers to the heavens because they are the *tent* of God.<sup>34</sup>

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as here. Whether or not one should read or is another matter. What is clear is that Num presupposes the reading of the Qumran text (WEVERS, *Notes on the Greek Text of Numbers*, 404-405).

30. Geza VERMES, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism* (Studia Post-Biblica 4), Leiden: Brill 1961, 158.

31. DORIVAL, *La Bible d'Alexandrie. Les Nombres*, 445. Wevers also links this text with Heb 8:2 (John W. WEVERS (ed.), *Septuaginta. Vetus Testamentum Graecum. III.1. Numeri*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1982, 289).

32. «La LXX dépend d'un modèle qui, au lieu de '*ahalim*, lisait '*ohalim*, come la Pesh, Targ. Jo. Et le targum du Sam», (DORIVAL, *La Bible d'Alexandrie. Les Nombres*, 445).

33. McNamara argues for the antiquity of some traditions of the Palestinian Targum of Numbers, especially Numbers 21 and Numbers 24: (Martin McNAMARA, «Early Exegesis in the Palestinian Targum [Neofiti 1] Numbers Chapter 24», *Proceedings of the Irish Biblical Association* 16 [1993] 57-79).

34. Cf. Alejandro DÍEZ MACHO, *Neophyti 1. Targum Palestinense Ms de la Biblioteca Vaticana. Tomo IV. Números. Edición Príncipe, Introducción y Versión castellana*, Madrid: CSIC 1974, 232 n.10; Martin McNAMARA- Ernest G. CLARKE, *Targum Neofiti 1: Numbers – Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Numbers. Translated, with Apparatus and Notes* (The Aramaic Bible 4), Collegeville (MIN): Liturgical Press 1995, 137; Roger Le DÉAUT, *Targum du Pentateuque. Traduction*

This targumic interpretation associates *tent* with *heavens*, showing the common Ancient Middle East cosmological vision of heavens, understood as a large tent, God's tent of dwelling (cf SI 19,4-5). This fact proves that the Palestinian targumim follow the same reading of the Septuagint in Num 24:6.

Targum Neofiti Num 24:6 says:

כש(מייח) דמתח (ייי) לבית־שכינה לה

(«Like the heavens [which God has spread out] as the house of his Shekinah»).

At first glance, we might feel we have here a very free Aramaic version, far from the Masoretic text («like aloes that the LORD has planted»), and from the Septuagint («like tents that the LORD has pitched»). However, the Neofiti targum follows the Septuagint reading of tents (*'ohalim*) since it understands heavens—because of their curved form—as the large tent of God created himself, for his own divine dwelling place. The text is corrupt in this verse, and the words placed between parenthesis are the reconstruction of the critical editions according to the fragmentary targum (TJ II) and other minor targumim.<sup>35</sup>

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan Num 24:6 says:

זיו אפיהון ינהר כזיו רקיעין דיברא ייי ביום חניין לבריאת עלמא ומתחניון  
ליקר שכינחא

(«The expression of their faces shall shine as the appearance of the firmaments which the Lord created on the second day of the creation of the world and extended for the Glory of the Shekinah»).

The Pseudo-Jonathan context of this verse is the groups of disciples in the houses for the study of Torah (חבורין בבית־מדרשיהון), whose faces shine (זיו אפיהון) like the firmament. This version also insists on a heavenly curved space (firmament), created by God himself, as a heavenly dwelling place for his presence. The Torah study houses are a shining earthly image of the firmament. Here, too, a later Septuagint reading of *'ohalim* (tents) can be accepted.<sup>36</sup>

In Num 24:6, Targum Onkelos<sup>37</sup> makes its own reading, different from the Palestinian targumim and closer to the Masoretic version: «Like streams that are led away, like a watered garden by the Euphrates, as aromatics planted by the Lord...»

*des deux recensions palestiniennes complètes avec introduction, parallèles, notes et index. Tome III. Nombres* (Sources Chrétiennes 261), Paris: Cerf 1979, 231, n.15.

35. Díez MACHO, *Neophyti I*, 232 n. 9. For other parallel targumic fragments cf. Alejandro Díez MACHO (ed.), *Targum palaestinense in Pentateuchum. Additur targum Pseudojonatan ejusque hispanica versio. L. 4. Numeri* (Biblia Polyglotta Matritensia. Series IV), Madrid: CSIC 1977, 232-233.

36. McNAMARA – CLARKE, *Targum Neofiti I: Numbers – Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Numbers*, 259, n.18.

37. We consulted Alexander SPERBER, *The Pentateuch according to Targum Onkelos, The Bible in Aramaic based on Old Manuscripts and Printed Texts*, Volume 1, Leiden: Brill 1959.

(כבוסמ׳א דנצב י״י).<sup>38</sup> Grossfeld says that the allusion to «aromatics» is more to the fragrant, aromatic wood than the tree itself, hence the targum translated it as «aromatics».<sup>39</sup>

In conclusion, the Palestinian targumim and minor versions reflect an *‘ohalim* (tents) reading like the Septuagint. The Onkelos targum adopts an *ahalim* (aloes) reading like the Masoretic text. After the partial textual approach to the three Aramaic versions of Num 24:6, we can broaden the scope to the whole verse in the three different versions in order to reach, if possible, a theological understanding:

TgO Num 24:6: «Like streams that are led away, like a watered garden by the Euphrates, like aromatics which the Lord has planted, like cedars that were planted by the waters».

TgN Num 24:6: «Like overflowing torrents, so shall Israel overflow on your enemies. Like gardens planted beside sources of water, so shall their cities be producing sages and sons of the Law. Like the heavens <which God has spread out> as the house of his Shekinah, so shall Israel live and endure for ever beautiful and praised, and like the water cedars, praised and exalted among his creatures».

TgPSJon Num 24:6: «As streams of water which grow stronger, so are they, of the house of Israel, dwelling as groups growing stronger by the teaching of the Law; and as gardens planted by the river torrents, so are their disciples as companions in their schools. The expression of their faces shall shine as the appearance of the firmaments which the Lord created on the second day of the creation of the world and extended for the Glory of the Shekinah. They are exalted and raised up over all the nations as the cedars of Lebanon which are planted by the springs of water.»

Targum Onkelos expresses, like the Masoretic text, a bucolic and allegorical undefined setting —associated with the Euphrates— where Israel is an image of well-being, fertility and God’s protection: Israel is a real, living paradise. For their part, the Palestinian targumim Neophiti and Pseudo-Jonathan show Israel as the earthly reflection or image of God, seen in the Temple and the Torah. Then, the earthly sanctuary is an image or reflection of the heavenly sanctuary —understood as the same heaven— with a pitched curve, like a tent. Thus, the Torah, the sages, the houses of study, are an image or reflection of divine wisdom. The Palestinian targumim express in Numbers 24:6 a rabbinical thought, mainly focused on the Torah and its study, although the targum breathes with the

38. SPERBER, *The Pentateuch according to Targum Onkelos*, 265; Bernard GROSSFELD, *The Targum Onkelos to Leviticus and the Targum Onkelos to Numbers. Translated, with Apparatus, and Notes* (The Aramaic Bible 8), Collegeville (MIN): Liturgical Press 1988, 136.

39. GROSSFELD, *The Targum Onkelos to Leviticus and the Targum Onkelos to Numbers*, 137, n. 11.

reading of אהלים as a «tent» ('*ohalim*) when speaking of the heavens and firmaments spread out as the Shekinah's living space.

The Palestinian targumim associate the *Jacob tents* reference of Numbers 24:5 with the Tent which was used as a sanctuary (משכן זימנא)<sup>40</sup> by the Israelites. With this association, the Palestinian targumim show a pre-Christian cultic reading of the verse, pointing to the fact that Israel's visibility is mainly represented by the sanctuary of the Temple. Numbers 24:5-6 is, in the mouth of Balaam, an exaltation of Israel's identity expressed in the Palestinian targumim by the Temple and, later, because of rabbinic influence, by the Torah, the two earthly dwelling places of God. The symbolism water-Law is well described in Num 24:6,<sup>41</sup> allowing allegorical readings which place us in the atmosphere of the first centuries of the Christian era, when rabbinic Judaism established a deep theological context for the Torah. This forceful rabbinic stamp on the Palestinian versions of the targum is an attempt to bring old allegories referring to the earthly sanctuary back to the Torah, while maintaining and respecting the earthly and heavenly symbology of the tent.

In conclusion, targumic versions of Numbers 24:6 add some consistency to the double reading of אהלים for «tents» ('*ohalim*) and for «aloes» ('*ahalim*). The Onkelos targum agrees with the Masoretic text in defining Israel as a paradise space, and the Palestinian targum joins the versions of the Septuagint and the Qumran where the tents of Israel become a reflection of heaven, seen as an immense tent. Palestinian versions of the targum in Numbers 24:5-6 express a Jewish tradition which associates the divine presence in the earthly sanctuary with the divine presence in the great sanctuary made up by the heavens in a tent-like shape. The author of Hebrews also draws on this tradition when associating both sanctuaries in his writings, the earthly one and the heavenly one.

## 5. A MEANINGFUL AND RESPECTFUL READING OF NUM 24:6

The Samaritan version of the Pentateuch also follows the reading of '*ohalim* (tents) in Numbers 24:6. The Hebrew transcription says נטע יהודה בִּאהֲלִים;<sup>42</sup> likewise, the Syriac version of the Peshitta which also translates in Numbers 24:6: *tents*.<sup>43</sup> Philo, relating the third Balaam oracle, probably influenced by the Septuagint, mentions Num 24:6 in *Vita Mose I*, 289:

40. VERMES, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism*, 157.

41. Cf. VERMES, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism*, 158; Le DÉAUT, *Targum du Pentateuque*, 231.

42. August F. VON GALL, *Der Hebräische Pentateuch der Samaritaner. Vierter Teil. Numeri*, Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann 1916, 327.

43. Cf. A. P. HAYMAN, «Numbers» in *The Old Testament in Syriac according to the Peshitta Version. Part I, fascicle 2. Part II, fascicle 1b. Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua*, Leiden: Brill 1991, 77; Cf. אהל, in «List of Hebrew Words», in P. G. BORRONE- K. D. JENNER, *The Old*

How goodly are thy abodes, O army of Hebrews; thy tents are shady as groves (αἱ σκηναὶ σου ὡς νάπαι σκιάζουσαι), as a paradise on the bank of a river, as a cedar by the waters.<sup>44</sup>

It must be emphasized that this reading is also adopted by Christian tradition in the Latin Vulgate version: «ut tabernacula quae fixit Dominus».<sup>45</sup> Origen, too, is close to the allegorical targumic readings of Num 24:6, adapting the Jewish metaphors to Christianity.<sup>46</sup> His homily on Num 17:4 shows different interpretations of Num 24:6, but all of them are based on the Septuagint and targumic reading of *'ohalim* (tent).<sup>47</sup> He comments on the sentence «tents planted by the Lord», stating that it is necessary to step out of this world to see which are the tents planted by the Lord, and they are, without doubt—he says—the same ones shown to Moses as the model to be reproduced in the desert.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, Origen interprets that Paul, like Moses, built heavenly tents—churches—in accordance with the model of heavenly tents seen by Moses. Finally he links the «tents planted by the Lord» with the heavenly and eternal tents of Lk 6:19.<sup>49</sup>

Rashi, in his *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, also explains the two possible readings of Num 24:6. He quotes the Masoretic text and the Onkelos targum, and explains that מִרְיָאֵהֳלִים refers to the aromatic plant of Ps 45:9: «myrrh and aloes» (מִרְיָאֵהֳלִים). But he does not overlook the other reading, a detail which shows that this alternative and parallel tradition maintained its relevance throughout the centuries. Rashi says:

Another explanation is LIKE TENTS WHICH THE LORD HATH PLANTED—i.e., like the heavens which are stretched forth as a tent (cf. Is 40,22).<sup>50</sup>

*Testament in Syriac according to the Peshitta Version. Part V. Concordance*, Leiden: Brill 1997, 943.

44. Cf. McNAMARA, «Early Exegesis in the Palestinian Targum (Neofiti 1) Numbers Chapter 24», 62.

45. Weber links the Latin version with Heb 8:2 (Robert WEBER, *Biblia Sacra. Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem. Tomus I. Genesis-Psalmi*, Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt 1969, 215).

46. Cf. «House or tent, inhabitants or alien?», in F. LEDEGANG, *Mysterium Ecclesiae. Images of the Church and its Members in Origen* (Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 156), Leuven: Peeters 2001, 302-307. Cf. also DORIVAL, *La Bible d'Alexandrie. Les Nombres*, 445-446.

47. Cf. Louis DOUTRELEAU (ed.), *Homélies sur les Nombres II. Homélies XI-XIX. Texte latin de W. A. Baehrens (G.C.S.)* (Sources Chrétiennes 442), Paris: Cerf 1999, 284-299.

48. DOUTRELEAU, *Origène. Homélies sur les Nombres II*, 294-295.

49. DOUTRELEAU, *Origène. Homélies sur les Nombres II*, 296-297. Commenting on the meaning of «for ever» in Ps 61:4 and 15:1 he states that «for ever» means «the tent pitched by the Lord and not by man (Heb 8:2)» (LEDEGANG, *Mysterium Ecclesiae. Images of the Church and its Members in Origen*, 305).

50. M. ROSENBAUM – A. M. SILBERMANN (tra.), *Pentateuch with Targum Onkelos, Haphtarot and Rashi's Commentary. Translated into English and Annotated. Numbers (vol IV)*, New York (NY): Hebrew Publishing Company 1933, 118 i 118b.

Rashi, however, justifies the verb *to plant* (נָטַע) in connection with *tent*, arguing that Dan 11:45 also speaks about *planting tents* (וַיִּנְטַע אֹהֶלִים).<sup>51</sup>

The Samaritan and Syriac versions of Numbers 24:6, Philo, Jerome in the Vulgate and Origen all keep the reading and allegorical content of אֹהֶלִים in «tents». This version was preserved both in the Jewish tradition as well as in the Christian tradition close to Judaism (parallelly to the Masoretic text), reaching Rashi who respectfully quoted it.

#### 6. HEB 8:2 REVEALS THE THEOLOGY OF THE SEPTUAGINT VERSION AND THE TARGUM OF NUM 24:6

The biblical cosmovision contemplates heavens as a immense vault referred to as a *firmament* (רָקִיעַ). This is expressed on several occasions by means of the image of a huge tent stretched between both sides of the firmament for a divine dwelling.<sup>52</sup> This cosmic image shapes the mind of the Septuagint and Palestinian targumim, which consider the tents of Israel in Numbers 24:5-6 as an earthly image of God's tent in the heavens, and also consider the meeting tent as the earthly tent where God also dwells. This associated and parallel image is useful for the author of Hebrews for expressing the association between the earthly and heavenly ministry of Jesus who, in the earthly tent, offered his own body in sacrifice, and now, in heaven, continues his priestly activity.

According to the thought of Hebrews, the different worldly models of the cultic tent—or sanctuary—and the heavenly tent are not contradictory nor do they cancel each other out but, on the contrary, are complementary and correspond to each other. The earthly cult is a reflection of the heavenly cult. The worldly tent or sanctuary is an expression—or a chance to experience—the fullness of the heavenly tent. In other words, the cult deployed at the earthly sanctuary, as deep and authentic as it may be, will never be more than just that—earthly. However, the cult deployed in heaven is obviously fully heavenly. Hence the enormous difference between the mediating capacity of the worldly priest and the mediating capacity of the Christ, who deploys his priesthood in heaven. The message brought by this comparison becomes undeniable when Heb 8:2 speaks of the great priest Jesus Christ as a minister of this heavenly sanctuary.

We are convinced that the parallel between Heb 8:2 and Num LXX 24:6 is much more than textual: Heb 8:2 is full of the wholly heavenly atmosphere that the Jewish tradition expresses when understanding the firmament as the dwell-

51. Greenstone takes notice of this in his commentary on Numbers: «LXX renders «like the tents (cf. Dan 11.45), and is followed by some early Jewish and Christian versions» (Julius H. GREENSTONE, *Holy Scriptures with Commentary. Numbers*, Philadelphia [PA]: JPS 1939, 264).

52. Cf. Is 40,22.



ing tent of God and the earthly sanctuary as a reflection of the heavenly one.<sup>53</sup> Without the targum, the parallelism between Heb 8:2 and Num LXX 24:6 would be but a «textual coincidence». However, the different versions of the targum in Numbers 24:6 recreate the rich and diverse interpretations the text underwent and which, in the case of the Palestinian targumim, agree with the Septuagint reading, obviously pre-Christian. The targum —supported by the Samaritan version, the Syriac one, Qumran, and Philo— shows us the validity and freshness of this Jewish tradition which the author of Hebrews draws on in his text in order to illuminate his comparative discourse.

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## Resum

Les versions dels targums Neofiti, Pseudo-Jonatan i Onkelos de Nombres 24,6 emmarquen i expliquen les dues lectures que el text masorètic i la LXX fan del mot אהלים que el llegeixen, respectivament, per *àloes* ('*ahalim*) i per *tenda* ('*ohalim*). Els targums palestinenecs coincideixen amb la LXX quan evocuen els cels com una gran tenda on Déu hi habita i on les tendes d'Israel —i en especial el santuari— són un reflex d'aquesta presència divina. L'autor d'Hebreus, més enllà de les semblances textuals d'Heb 8:2 amb Nombres LXX 24,6, utilitza aquesta tradició jueva quan parla del temple terrenal i del temple celestial.

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53. «The Author's [of Hebrews] allusive language and thought is supported by the particular form of the Num 24,6 LXX and not its Hebrew equivalent» (GHEORGHITA, *The Role of the Septuagint in Hebrews*, 84).