



## Protestant Theological University

### **Review of: D. Borner-Klein, Dagmar Börner-Klein (eds.), Jalkut Schimoni zu Josua | Jalkut Schimoni zu Numeri. 2 Vols | Jalkut Schimoni zu Richter | Jalkut Schimoni zu Samuel**

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**Dagmar Börner-Klein (ed.)**

*Jalkut Schimoni zu Josua*, transl. Beat Zuber. Berlin, De Gruyter 2017; Pp. xii + 194. 99,95 €. ISBN 978-3-11-048286-7.

*Jalkut Schimoni zu Numeri. 2 Vols*, transl. Dagmar Börner-Klein, Berlin, De Gruyter 2017. Pp. xiii + 1387. 149,95 €. ISBN 978-3-11-048284-3.

*Jalkut Schimoni zu Richter*, transl. Beat Zuber. Berlin, De Gruyter 2018. Pp. xii + 174. 79,95 €. ISBN 978-3-11-053439-9.

*Jalkut Schimoni zu Samuel*. transl. Beat Zuber. Berlin, De Gruyter 2018. Pp. xiv + 440. 99,95 €. ISBN 978-3-11-053441-2.

In her latest German translation project, Dagmar Börner-Klein tackles the *Yalkut Shimoni*, a monumental medieval Jewish work that, apart from being a fascinating composition as such, also has special importance for the reconstruction of rabbinic texts from the Roman period. This is not the first rabbinic work Börner-Klein has translated.<sup>1</sup> *Yalkut Shimoni* is a much larger work than these predecessors, and will be issued in several volumes. So far, five volumes have published by Walter de Gruyter.<sup>2</sup> Apart from the volumes on Numbers, which are translated by the project leader and editor herself, the other three volumes are translated by Beat Zuber. Other scholars are working on translations of other books of the *Yalkut*, as the work is often briefly called. As *Yalkut Shimoni* offers a running commentary on the entire Hebrew Bible, many more volumes of this translation can be expected to appear in the coming years.

This is not only the first German translation, but the first translation of this Hebrew-Aramaic work ever in any language. Just for this reason this project deserves praise, as translations in modern languages open up otherwise unknown works to larger audiences. This will be accomplished even more by the new, modern, presentation of the work, which includes annotations, indices, and a transparent layout. Nevertheless, for a first translation of such a monumental work, in this time and age, English could have been expected as the more logical target language, as an English translation would reach an even larger audience (including German scholars). I realize that this is an assertion that is open to debate and to which the editor-translator, who has a long-standing

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- 1 The list of her annotated German translations includes: Dagmar Börner-Klein, *Pirke Rabbi Eliezer* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012); Dagmar Börner-Klein, *Das Alphabet des Ben Sira: Hebräisch-deutsche Textausgabe mit einer Interpretation* (Wiesbaden: Marix, 2007), Dagmar Börner-Klein, *Sifre Numeri* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1997); and Dagmar Börner-Klein, *Sifre Zuta* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002).
  - 2 *Jalkut Schimoni zu Josua* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017); *Jalkut Schimoni zu Numeri*, vols. 1 and 2 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017); *Jalkut Schimoni zu Richter* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018); and *Jalkut Schimoni zu Samuel* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018).

reputation of making German translations of rabbinic works, undoubtedly has an appropriate answer.

A word on the nature of *Yalkut Shimoni* and its relevance for the textual history of older rabbinic works, is due. It is not known exactly when the work was first composed, but it must have been before the 13th century, in Ashkenaz, probably Frankfurt am Main. It is attributed to Shimon haDarshan, of whom not much is known. The oldest textual witness of the work, a manuscript of *Yalkut Shimoni* to the Torah, dates from the 13th century. Unlike the Yemenite Midrash haGadol, the other great *yalkut* with which it is often compared, *Yalkut Shimoni* is unique in that its author-redactor explicitly quoted his sources. These amount to more than fifty older rabbinic works, including very ancient ones, e.g. the tannaitic midrash Sifre Zuta, which had only been extant as quotations in the *Yalkut*. Only with the discovery of the Cairo Geniza, direct manuscript witnesses of some of these works have become available. The *Yalkut* quotes, however, also from well-known rabbinic works, such as the Babylonian Talmud and many tannaitic and amoraic Midrashim. Yet these sources are not always quoted literally, or at least not in the way we know them. The way the composer of the *Yalkut* uses these sources requires specific and separate research, as Börner-Klein herself asserts in her introduction to the series. Recently, David Meyer has defended a PhD dissertation in Leuven in which he investigated, based on a small sample from *Yalkut* Genesis, how the *Yalkut Shimoni* uses its source, Genesis Rabbah, in a creative way, probably with a specific purpose, i.e., anti-Christian apologetics.<sup>3</sup>

The separate volumes contain the same general introduction that includes information about the textual witnesses, the critical edition that is the basis of the translation, abbreviations, the use of different types of brackets in the translation, transcription conventions etc. Some corrections and small additions with respect to the first volume (*Joshua*) have been made in following volumes, such as a mistake in the dates of the first printed edition (the dates of the volumes on Prophets, 1521 and that of the Torah, 1526-27, are reversed in the introduction to the *Joshua* volume).

The basis for the translation is the only critical edition of the work, by Hyman and Shiloni.<sup>4</sup> From now on I will refer to this as “the edition.”

3 See David Meyer, *La nature éditoriale du Yalkut Shimoni. Une étude exploratoire des citations de Bereshit Rabbah XXII, 8-10 dans le Yalkut Shimoni*, Dissertation (Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, KU Leuven, 2018); Ursula Ragacs, “Der Yalkut Shimoni – ein Werkzeug der christlich-jüdischen Kontroverse des Mittelalters?,” *FJB* 30 (2003): 91-101.

4 Arthur B. Hyman and Yitshak Shiloni, *Yalkut Shim'oni 'al ha-Torah*, 9 vols. (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1973-1991); Arthur B. Hyman, Yitshak Shiloni, and Isaac N. Lerer, *Yalkut Shim'oni 'al Nevi'im Rishonim* (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1999).

For the Torah, the basic text of the edition is the only complete manuscript of *Yalkut Shimoni* (on the Torah): Ms. Heb. B. 6 (Oxford). For the volumes on the Former Prophets (that includes Joshua, Judges, Samuel), the basic text of the critical edition is the *editio princeps* (Saloniki, 1521). Besides the basic text, the translation contains some differences compared to the edition: it has a different, less extensive system of notes, the references to the rabbinic sources of the *Yalkut* are listed in the side margin, whereas in the edition these are underneath the text.<sup>5</sup> Besides the sources, the side margins of the translations contain the references to the pages in the edition, in round brackets. The pages of the edition, rather than the pages of the translation, are also the basis of the indices. Moreover, the translation, like the edition, contains references to paragraph markings, made by one of the scribes: in the edition these are called *remazim*, in the translation they are rendered as paragraph marks (§).

The various indices in the translations do indeed “fill a gap” with respect to the edition, as Börner-Klein correctly states in her introduction. The critical edition does not include any indices, and since the page numbers of the edition are used in the indices of the translation, the indices are in fact also indices to the edition. The indices occasionally also refer to the pages of the translation: in such cases the page number is marked between square brackets. The translations each contain five indices: (1) biblical references; (2) the (rabbinic) sources of the *Yalkut*; (3) scribal cross-references to paragraphs in different sections of the *Yalkut* (the *remazim*) (4) foreign loan words; and (5) rabbinic sources quoted in the introduction and footnotes in the present translation (not to be confused with (2)).

As to the rules followed for the transcription of Hebrew words, the editor states that she follows the “Lokkumer Richtlinien.” It may be obvious for a German scholar what these are, but I (as a non-German user who is bound to use the only translation in a modern language) had to look up what these guidelines are, namely those of the “Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.” It would be helpful if this were to be clarified in the following volumes. For lists of names of rabbis, abbreviations of Talmud tractates, and weekly Torah readings (*parashiot*), the editor refers to the seventh edition of the *Einleitung in Talmud und Midrasch* by Strack-Stemberger,<sup>6</sup> which is a bit strange because we are now up to the 9th edition of this reference work (published in 2011). It is probable that these

5 Hyman has published a detailed separate volume about the sources of YS, with cross-references and parallels: Aaron Hyman, *The Sources of the Yalkut Shimeoni on the Prophets and Hagiographa, together with parallels, notes and complete cross-indexes from the source books to the Yalkut* (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1965).

6 Hermann L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Einleitung in Talmud und Midrasch*, 7th ed. (Munich: Beck, 1982).

lists have remained unchanged in the following editions of Strack-Stemberger since the 7th edition, but still it is confusing to see that edition mentioned here, and the 9th edition in the bibliography, without any explanation. Having mentioned the bibliography, this is of course very complete and divided in two sections: “text editions,” and “secondary literature.”

I noticed a problem in the references to (one of) the sources of the *Yalkut*. These references occur in three places: in the side lines, in the scribal cross-references to paragraphs, and in the footnotes. For works for which more than one critical edition exists, the translations do not indicate which edition of the source-work has been used (by either the critical edition, the translation, or both). Focusing on the *Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael*, this problem is pregnant because the names of the tractates, as well as their division in chapters, differ in the two current editions by H. S. Horovitz and I. A. Rabin, and that by J.Z. Lauterbach.<sup>7</sup> Whereas Lauterbach uses the original division of the Mekhilta in *masechtot*, H-R employ a complicated (and in fact corrupt) mixed system of the more common Babylonian *parashyot* and the original *masechtot*, resulting in such units as “Vayehi Beshalach,” “Vayassa Beshalach,” “Amalek Beshalach” and “Amalek Yitro.” In Lauterbach, the first of the above is called “Beshalach,” the second “Vayassa,” and the third and fourth are combined in “Amalek.” Moreover, the chapter divisions within the tractates are also different in some cases. For example: Beshalach chapter 2 in Lauterbach is Vayehi Beshalach chapter 1 in Horovitz Rabin, because in the latter, the first chapter is called “petichta.”

In the presently reviewed translations of *Jalkut Schimoni* these two editions are used indiscriminately, now quoting one and then the other. The reader who wants to look up the reference is therefore at loss. Here are a few examples of hard to find, and sometimes mistaken, references yielded by this confusion:

- In the footnotes to the translation *Jalkut Schimoni zu Numeri*, there are two references to Mekhilta Beshalach 3 (p. 510 note 296, and p. 218 note 314). The two referenced texts are, however, not found in Lauterbach’s Mekhilta tractate Beshalach, but in Vayassa 4. This mistake is caused by the “double” reference to the tractates in H-R, where it is indeed in Beshalach Vayassa 4.

7 S. Horovitz and I. A. Rabin, eds., *Mekhilta d’Rabbi Ismael cum variis lectionibus et adnotationibus edidit H. S. Horovitz. Defuncti editoris opus exornavit et absolvit I. A. Rabin* (Frankfurt a. M.: J. Kauffmann, 1931) (short ‘H-R’); Jacob Zallel Lauterbach, ed., *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael. A Critical Edition on the Basis of the Manuscripts and Early Editions with an English Translation, Introduction and Notes* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1933) (short ‘Lauterbach’).

- In the edition of *Yalkut Shimoni Numbers*, p. 221, there is a reference to a “remez” that is identified by Hyman and Shiloni as “Mekhilta Beshalach Vayassa 3.” This “double” reference to the tractates (Beshalach and Vayassa) is typical for the edition of the Mekhilta by Horovitz and Rabin, but it is not found in Lauterbach. In the translation *Jalkut Schimoni Numbers*, p. 520, the exact same reference is found, which indicates that the translator here follows the edition of Horovitz-Rabin (or rather simply takes over Hyman and Shiloni’s reference).
  - Conversely, in the side margin of *Jalkut Schimoni zu Samuel*, on p. 318, “Mekhilta Beshalah 3” is marked. In the edition of Lauterbach, the referenced passage is indeed found in Beshalah 3. The translator deliberately changed the reference, because in the edition, on p. 364, the reference is to Mekhilta Beshalach, as it is in the edition of H-R (Vayehi Beshalach 2). Here the translator therefore deliberately followed Lauterbach rather than H-R.
- This jumping back and forth between the two editions of the Mekhilta, each with their own, mutually exclusive, divisions, is a confusing situation that should be cleared up in the following volumes. I focused only on the Mekhilta, but there may be similar issues with references to other rabbinic works, as the divisions of these texts in units is a notorious problem.

A word on the German translations. Not being a native or even near-native speaker of German, I am not competent to give an evaluation of the literary quality of the translation. Yet, the fact that I do not have problems using it, may be an indication that the language is straightforward and modern, without too many idiomatic German expressions. When it is necessary to reveal the Hebrew word used in the original, but impossible to render this in sound German, the Hebrew word is given between brackets in Hebrew type. Also, Greek loan words are given between brackets in Greek script when relevant. These are useful features for scholarly users of the translations, who must be the majority.

Concluding my review, this project is an amazing enterprise, and I am confident that Börner-Klein and her team will conclude it in due time. A translation of this monumental work, even in German, makes it accessible to a much larger audience than the small circle of Jewish students and scholars of Jewish Studies to which it is confined now. The translation is easy to use, featuring a transparent layout and using various font types and spaces for easy reference. Moreover, the volumes are also available as e-books that are parts of various digital packages offered to (academic) libraries. In this way they will become accessible to many library users. As I spelled out, there are some issues with the references to the *Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael* that should be cleared up in

following volumes, and that can hopefully be corrected in those that have already appeared. The index is, apart from its obvious function for users of the translation, an indispensable tool for users of the existing critical edition. For this reason alone, the translations should be acquired by every library that is frequented by students of Jewish and Biblical Studies.

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