

TARGUM ONQELOS TO EXOD 10:5, 10:15, NUMB 22:5, 22:11

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In a previous article in this journal, I noted that in five places in the Pentateuch (Exod 5:19, 10:10, 32:12, 32:22, Numb 11:1), the Hebrew word *rā/rā'āh* operates as a bilingual pun.<sup>1</sup> In all these cases, the word connotes both «evil, bad» (its Hebrew meaning) and «Ra» (the name of the Egyptian sun-god).<sup>2</sup> The verse which has attracted the most attention is Exod 10:10: **רֵא רָעָה נֹגֵר פְּנֵיכֶם**, «see that evil/Ra is before you». At least five scholars have agreed that in this passage the word *rā'āh* alludes to the Egyptian sun-god.<sup>3</sup> This interpretation is further assured by the expressions *'ên hā'āreṣ* «the eye of the land» in Exod 10:5 and *'ên kol hā'āreṣ* «the eye of the whole land» in Exod 10:15. A.S. Yahuda noted that this idiom refers to Ra, who was so termed in Egyptian literature.<sup>4</sup> The Egyptian phrase is *ir.t r'* «eye of Ra», used to designate the sun and, by extension, Egypt too.<sup>5</sup> Thus, when the author states that the locusts will cover (Exod 10:5) or covered (Exod 10:15) «the eye of the (whole) land», he refers to the blotting out of the sun and the darkening

- 1 G.A. Rendsburg, *The Egyptian Sun-God Ra in the Pentateuch*, «Henoah» 10 (1988) 3-15.
- 2 For other examples of this technique, see G.A. Rendsburg, *Bilingual Wordplay in the Bible*, VT 38 (1988) 354-357.
- 3 *Kitve ha-Rav Dr. Joseph Seliger* (ed. L. Seliger; Jerusalem: Ha-Ivri, 1930) 190 [unavailable to me]; J. Bloch, *Is the Egyptian Sun God Re Mentioned in the Bible?*, JSOR 14 (1930) 57; S. Rosenblatt, *A Reference to the Egyptian Sun God Re in the Rabbinic Commentaries on the Old Testament*, JBL 60 (1941) 183-185; U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967) 126; and Rendsburg, *The Egyptian Sun-God Ra in the Pentateuch*, 5-8. See also Midrash Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah 15a-15b, Midrash Leqah Ṭov on this verse, and Rashi on this verse.
- 4 A.S. Yahuda, *The Language of the Pentateuch in its Relation to Egyptian* (London: Oxford University, 1933) 62-63.
- 5 A. Erman and H. Grapow, *Wörterbuch der ägyptische Sprache* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1926-31) 1.107.

of the sky during the locust attack.

Naturalists know that this point is not an exaggeration; rather, this is a very real possibility during the flight of an extremely thick swarm of locusts.

Everyone who has treated this pericope, including those scholars who recognize the reference to Ra in Exod 10:10, has failed to put forward one additional datum to further bolster the argument.<sup>6</sup> I refer to Targum Onqelos' rendering of the aforementioned expressions «the eye of the (whole) land». Remarkably, Onqelos departed from his usual word-to-word translation, and instead wrote 'ên šimša' dē'ar'ā', literally «the eye of the sun of the land», in Exod 10:5, and 'ên šimša' dēkol 'ar'ā', literally «the eye of the sun of the whole land» in Exod 10:15.<sup>7</sup> In both cases, he inserted the word šimša', «sun», in the middle of the phrase.<sup>8</sup> There can be little doubt that Onqelos realized that 'ên (kol) hā'āreš refers to the sun. To make the point clearer for his readership, he included the word «sun» in his rendering of the Hebrew phrase into Aramaic.

The only other places where the Hebrew expression 'ên hā'āreš «the eye of the land» appears in the Bible are Numb 22:5, 22:11. These passages place us in a Moabite setting, but king Balak refers to the Israelites as 'am yāšā' mimmišrayim, «a people came out of Egypt».<sup>9</sup> Accordingly, we can understand why the author uses the same phrase here again. The Israelites are a people who covered Ra and come forth from Egypt. Furthermore, consistent with his practice in Exod 10:5, 10:15, Onqelos again inserted the word «sun» in his translation 'ên šimša' dē'ar'ā'.

In closing, let me note that this article is yet another example of the convergence of two approaches to biblical scholarship: the modern with his

6 I too am remiss, since I failed to mention the evidence to be discussed below.

7 See B. Grossfeld, *The Targum Onqelos to Exodus* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1988) 27.

8 I take this opportunity to acknowledge the keen eye of my colleague Richard A. Shore of the Cornell University Department of Mathematics. It was he who first brought the Onqelos passage to my attention, with his query to me about the inclusion of the word šimša'.

9 This phrase is the title of a famous article by a noted Egyptologist; see R.J. Williams, 'A People Come Out of Egypt': *An Egyptologist Looks at the Old Testament, Congress Volume Edinburgh 1974* (SVT 28; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975) 231-252. But as far as I am able to determine, no one, neither an Egyptologist nor a biblicist, has noted that the idiom 'ên hā'āreš in this section reflects Egyptian *ir.t r'*.

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attention to the cultures of the ancient Near East and the traditional approach with his attention to classical Jewish sources. Time and again modern scholarship has revealed information from the ancient world which has confirmed the insights of earlier Jewish sages.<sup>10</sup> In the present instance, Onqelos' insertion of the word *šimša'* into his rendering of the Hebrew expression *'ên (kol) hā'āreš* is elucidated by our knowledge of ancient Egyptian religion and literary expression.<sup>11</sup>

*Ricevuto il 30.1.90*  
*Presentato da Angelo Vivian*

*Riassunto a cura della Redazione*

*In un precedente articolo pubblicato in «Henoch», 10 (1988) 3-15 l'A. segnalava l'ambivalenza del termine rā' / rā'āh in alcuni passi del Pentateuco, dov'è adombrato il nome proprio del dio del sole egiziano, Ra. In questo nuovo contributo l'A. richiama l'attenzione sul fatto che in Ex 10, 5; 10, 15 e Num 22, 5.11 il Targum di Onqelos, discostandosi dal consueto letteralismo, traduce un'espressione come «l'occhio della terra» con «l'occhio del sole della (o di tutta la) terra», avvalorando così ulteriormente l'ipotesi del possibile riferimento a Ra.*

10 For other examples, see G.A. Rendsburg, *Janus Parallelism in Gen 49:26*, JBL 99 (1980) 291-293; and G.A. Rendsburg, *Hebrew RHM = 'Rain'*, VT 33 (1983) 357-362. The most celebrated example is Maimonides' explanation of the prohibition against the use of honey in the sacrificial cult in Lev 2:11, now confirmed by a host of ancient Near Eastern data. See most recently B.A. Levine, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989) 12.

11 I here append a list of corrigenda to my article *The Egyptian Sun-God Ra in the Pentateuch*:  
Page 5, line 1, word 4, read: Pharaohs.  
Page 5, line 20, read: ראו כי רעה נגר פניכם.  
Page 7, line 2, word 7, read: Pharaoh's.  
Page 9, line 20, word 12, read: is  
Page 10, note 33, line 5, word 12, read: Jeroboam.