



Aramaic Studies Summer 2011: Introduction

In 2007 the four contributors to this volume began work on a research project devoted to creating a new conceptual framework for the analysis of ancient Jewish literature. The corpus to be investigated was defined as including all complete or near-complete works of anonymous or pseudepigraphic Jewish literature outside the rabbinic Bible to the end of the Talmud. The two main outcomes are:

1. A list of important literary features, based on a fresh empirical examination of several hundred works and brought into a systematic order;
2. A Database of literary Profiles of most of these works.

The list of literary features is the document included here in the Appendix, under the title 'Inventory of Structurally Important Literary Features' or 'Inventory' for short; while the Database of Profiles, which uses the Inventory categories to produce descriptions of the individual texts, will be published online during 2012, linked from www.manchester.ac.uk/ancientjewishliterature. At the time of writing, the team is still engaged in the task of creating Database Profiles. This volume contains nine Profiles of Aramaic texts, constituting an excerpt from the Database and appended to four articles dealing with the following texts: Targum Onqelos Genesis, Targum Esther Shenì, Targums Qohelet, Canticles, and Lamentations, and Genesis Apocryphon and its part-texts.

This volume thus provides case studies for the analysis of Aramaic texts from different periods of Jewish Antiquity. The articles set out to test some new ideas for the literary description of the Targums and Genesis Apocryphon, using the categories of the Inventory and revisiting some of the earlier scholarship. The article by *Samely* introduces the Project and the Inventory as a whole, and uses Targum Onqelos Genesis as a fairly straightforward example of the group of texts usually referred to as Targums. The other Targums discussed in this volume by *Hayward* and *Alexander* pose, each in its own way, profound problems for the analysis of literary structures. The genres of the Targums Esther Shenì, Qohelet, Canticles, and Lamentations have long been considered as problematical, and the allusion in the article titles to the

labels that Alexander Sperber used for them acknowledges that (see further the Introduction to Alexander's paper). By contrast, as the paper by *Bernasconi* shows, the Genesis Apocryphon would perhaps not appear quite so complex to us, if we possessed it in its entirety. In its incomplete state, however, it too is a 'hard' case for literary analysis. The methodology of the Inventory presupposes that the role of a literary feature within the text as a whole can be assessed. Therefore the attempt to apply the Inventory to a fragmentary text such as Genesis Apocryphon constitutes an experiment. Its results may have wider implications for Qumran texts and other sources extant only as fragments.

Part of the original motivation of the Project was dissatisfaction with the way undefined genre labels were used in the scholarly discussion. They often appear to hinder, rather than help, a clear analysis of the literary constitution of documents. The antidote to this dissatisfaction, we discovered, was not to produce a new, competing set of genre labels but to go deeper, down to the level of single potentially significant literary features. Accordingly, the Inventory provides a descriptive schema for creating Profiles in a modular manner, with tens of features coming together to determine key aspects of a text's literary surface. So while the Inventory does not itself define historical genres, it offers a range of defined features from which scholars can select and justify those they consider to be crucial for the genre of a text, considered alongside factors from its social and historical context.

The Inventory is the result of many discussions devoted to specific texts and the conceptual and terminological problems they pose for literary description. Initially conducted only among the members of the team, such discussions later also involved a wider circle of colleagues working in ancient Jewish literature. During an international symposium in Manchester in early 2009, and through presenting papers at a variety of scholarly gatherings between 2008 and 2010, team members garnered substantive responses from a number of colleagues, including George Brooke, John Collins, Shamma Friedman, Duncan Kennedy, Bernard Jackson, Armin Lange, Bernard Levinson, Chaim Milikowsky, Günter Stemberger, Loren Stuckenbruck and Avraham Walfish. The importance of their encouragement and criticisms is gratefully acknowledged. Prof. Stemberger was an advisor from the start of the Project. Prof. Friedman chaired sessions devoted to the Project twice, at the 2009 congress of the World Union of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem and at the 2010 meeting of the European Association for Jewish Studies in Ravenna. Prof. Friedman now acts as consultant to the Project for the analysis of Talmudic sources. We learned much from responses in other contexts also, including the 2009 Rome and New Orleans meetings of the Society of Biblical Literature and the 2010 congress

of the International Organization for Targumic Studies in Helsinki. It became clear that there was great readiness from many scholars to engage with the ideas of the Project.

Among the refinements and modifications we made in response to colleagues are the following. We have adopted a clearer strategy for explaining the theoretical concepts behind some Inventory categories which, in particular insofar as they relate to text linguistics, tend to be more familiar to European-trained scholars than to those from an Anglo-American background. We have narrowed down the notion of ‘intertextuality’ to what can be usefully presented through Inventory categories. We have taken on board the problematic status of the term ‘biblical’ and the need to avoid unwarranted implications that a text was canonical. We came to realize that the Inventory merely provides part of the raw material for defining ‘genres’ of ancient Jewish literature, because the social functions of texts must also enter into such definitions. We have accepted that the boundaries of the Project corpus of texts, clear as they may be intuitively, are neither self-explanatory nor totally consistent; pragmatic factors enter into defining them and are now acknowledged. Having said this, the basic parameters of the Inventory have stood firm, and so has its grounding in an empirical re-examination of the ancient Jewish texts as envisaged at the beginning of the Project. The opening paper in this volume addresses key methodological assumptions and gives a pointer to the theoretical background. A monograph explaining the Inventory in detail is planned for 2013.

While the papers in this volume arise, generally speaking, from a shared methodological outlook, and I for one have benefited tremendously from the team’s regular discussions of texts, the articles and Profiles here collected represent the views of their respective authors.

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We are furthermore grateful to Willem Smelik, President of the IOTS, for inviting us to speak at the Helsinki meeting and for asking us to develop our papers to the point where they can constitute this theme issue of *Aramaic Studies*.

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