

Lieve M. Teugels, *The Meshalim in the Mekhiltot. An Annotated Edition and Translation of the Parables in Mekhilta de Rabbi Yishmael and Mekhilta de Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai. With the assistance of Esther van Eenennaam* (TSAJ 176). Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019. Pp. xiv+477. 159,00€. ISBN 978-3-16-155648-7.

Parables are an important genre in rabbinic literature. A great deal of research has been dedicated to them, to their literary forms and their hermeneutical aspects (especially David Stern) as well as to their detailed interpretation in individual rabbinic writings. Initially, comparison with New Testament parables played an important role (Paul Fiebig, David Flusser); only much later authors put the emphasis on the systematic analysis of the parables in complete midrashim.¹ Lieve Teugels follows in their footsteps with a highly ambitious program to study the parables in all halakhic midrashim, Mishnah and Tosefta. The present volume on the parables in the two Mekhiltot on Exodus is the first within this larger project. To some extent, she follows Thoma's example, but goes far beyond it by first offering a synopsis of both Mekhiltot in translation for every parable, then a synopsis of the manuscripts, the Genizah fragments and early editions of the Hebrew text separately for the two Mekhiltot and a detailed discussion of the textual versions, before proceeding to the commentary on the parable and, where available, to its parallels.

Before the detailed discussion of the individual *meshalim*, Teugels offers substantial introductions to the whole planned series and to this volume. The parables are approached first of all as literature; historical or social/religious questions are dealt with only where relevant. All parables discussed in these volumes are found in midrashim and are therefore defined as midrashic *meshal*: "Since they function in midrash, they need, first and foremost, to be approached as midrash" (9). This has consequences for the delimitation of the text units to be discussed: not merely the parables as such (including *meshal* and *nimshal*), but together with their wider biblical and exegetical contexts, even where an original *Sitz im Leben* apart from the biblical context is probable. In their present context all *meshalim* have to be interpreted in function of their biblical context; the commentary therefore always begins with the quotation of the key biblical verses. Teugels offers a detailed survey of previous research. With regard to Jesus' parables and the rabbinic *meshal*, she clearly prefers Fiebig's form-critical or Goldberg's form-analytical approach to Flusser's distinction between "classical" rabbinic parables, an oral genre for a popular audience and already well established in Jesus' time, and the "late"

1 C. Thoma, *Die Gleichnisse der Rabbinen*, 4 vols. Judaica et Christiana (Bern: Peter Lang, 1986-2000).

rabbinic parable which is said to comprise most midrashic *meshalim* (22). Thoma's series is praised for its "innovative theoretical discussion of its literary character" (29f), above all the insistence on the *chiddush* in every good *mashal* and the organic perspective of the rabbinic *meshalim* on their world. Teugels also gives a thorough critical survey of the work of Arnold Goldberg, David Stern, Yonah Fraenkel, Daniel Boyarin and many others, thus offering a comprehensive review of recent research on rabbinic parables.

In the introduction to the present volume, Teugels dates both *Mekhiltot* to the middle of the third century, although the *Mekhilta de-R. Shim'on* (MRS) is frequently secondary to the one in the name of R. Yishmael (MRI), as demonstrated by Menahem Kahana. Their haggadic material derives from common sources, but the second *Mekhilta* frequently nuances its religious outlook. For the transcription of the Hebrew texts, Teugels bases herself mainly on the *Ma'agarim* of the Academy of the Hebrew Language and on Kahana's edition of the Genizah fragments, checked, wherever possible, against the originals in the respective libraries. As far as checked, Teugels presents an absolutely reliable text.

The main body of the book comprises fifty chapters with as many parables, some of them only in one of the two *Mekhiltot*. The corpus includes not only texts with the classical introduction of parables ("They tell this parable. To what is the matter similar," sometimes in an extremely abbreviated form), but also texts which are rather mere comparisons. Sometimes there are mixed forms between a *ma'ase* and a *mashal*, as in MRI *ed. pr.* on Exod 13:21: only the first edition reads *mashal* (thus Antoninus is not the acting person as in the other textual witnesses, but the tradent of the parable), but all witnesses then add a comparison, "thus" (כך), understood as *nimshal* (115-19). But is such a comparison always preceded by a *mashal*? The reading of the first edition is rather a secondary adaptation of the text. In another case Teugels explains explicitly why she regards a problematic text as a *mashal* (270 or 358; see also 372 where she speaks of "a mixed form sharing some elements of a *mashal*, especially of a *nimshal*").

For MRI, Teugels normally takes MS Oxford as the base text for her translation, but sometimes corrects it on the basis of the other textual witnesses, normally with good reasons; but there are cases where such corrections do not seem to be necessary (thus MRI on Exod 14:13 'שע' דומין באותה שע', where Teugels, p. 156 declares דומין to be "redundant and ungrammatical"). The constant comparison of the parables in MRI and MRS is of great interest. In one case (the parable of the father, his son and his friend, on Exod 14:15) Teugels concludes: "Over all, the text of MRS is better readable and appears more polished than that of the versions of MRI" (163). Should the version of MRS be

more “original” or is it the result of a good revision of the text before it? As Teugels remarks on the parable of the defeated robbers (on Exod 15:17-18), here again the text of the manuscripts of MRS runs better than that of MRI: “This is not necessary [sic] a sign of originality but may, rather, indicate that an editor smoothed out the seams and unevennesses in the text” (336). This is certainly correct and may also explain why the first edition of MRI also frequently has a more polished text than the other witnesses. The synopses of MRS are especially valuable because they offer a broader textual basis than what can be found in the edition of Epstein-Melamed (for the great majority of the passages there are fragments from the Genizah; thus there is no need to rely on the Midrash ha-Gadol). Together with the synopses of MRI they allow a closer look on the textual traditions of both Mekhiltot, showing the frequent connections between them where several times texts of MRS are closer to one or the other textual witness of MRI than the textual witnesses of MRI among themselves. This may be expected in the haggadic portions of the Mekhiltot, but it is most welcome to see it in such detail for such a substantial body of texts.

Commenting on the well-known parable of the slave who buys a rotten fish (MRI and MRS on Exod 14:5), Teugels raises a methodically interesting point: Whereas Thoma and Lauer, discussing the parallel in the *Pesiqta de Rav Kahana*, write that the parallel does not fit the *nimshal* in all details and therefore probably existed as a folktale apart from the biblical context, she maintains: that a story “also occurs in other contexts does not necessarily mean that it is not an original part of the midrash ... rabbis can have selected from folkloristic elements to construct their meshalim ... such folkloristic elements are part of the ‘cultural code’ on which midrash necessarily draws” (127). More generally, the commentary shows well tensions between the parable and its explanation, where the “*nimshal* does not match the *mashal* completely” (99), thus possibly pointing to an independent history of the parable. Highly interesting is the commentary on the parable of the blind and the lame, its anthropology and its connections with Plato’s *Phaedrus* (235-37). The commentary might sometimes be more detailed. In MRS on Exod 4:13 (99f) I would have expected some words on the statement that God pressed Moses for six days before Moses retracts on the seventh day. The numbers are not biblical; where do they come from? But overall the commentary is sufficiently detailed and shows well how the parables are bound up with the biblical text and serve well to elucidate it.

In any volume of this size and complexity there will inevitably be some slips. For example, “Brad” (26) refers to Brad Young, as is clear from the context. Thoma’s (1932-2011) work on the parables is no longer “an ongoing series” (29). The right column on p. 159f should be MRS, not MRI. In the parable of the blind and the lame, Teugels translates its version of Lev. Rab. 4:5: “He will bring the

soul and force it into the body” (in agreement with the Soncino translation), but “and force it” (וּזְרָקָה) is not part of her Hebrew text; it only occurs in the printed text of *Leviticus Rabbah* and seems to be imported from the parallel in the *Bavli*. Misprints are very rare, but they occur (e.g., 357 “de” instead of “the,” 362 “do” instead of “due”; 455 n. 806 the Hebrew word order of 2 Sam 15:6 is mixed up). But there is nothing to distract from the high quality of this volume.

The volume is an important contribution to the analysis of early rabbinic parables, especially of their literary character and their close connection with midrash. It is also remarkable for its contribution to the textual tradition of the parables, demonstrating their much higher textual stability than commonly might be expected. It also offers important insights into the relationship between the two *Mekhiltot* in their haggadic parts. It is the result of meticulous and solid research. Lieve Teugels is to be congratulated on her achievement. We look forward to the promised forthcoming volumes.

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