# Rashbam’s Approach to Targum Onqelos in His Commentary to the Torah[[1]](#footnote-1)\*

In northern France of the Middle Ages, exegetes of the simple sense of Scripture were familiar with only one targum to the Torah: that of Onqelos.[[2]](#footnote-2) These scholars commonly referenced Targum Onqelos in their work, and the composition had a significant influence on their commentaries.

The approach taken by Rashi to Onqelos has been widely studied through the years, by both Rashi’s supercommentators and modern scholars.[[3]](#footnote-3) Rashi cites Targum Onqelos in his commentary hundreds of times, and its influence is felt in many other cases where the targum is not explicitly mentioned. The surviving sections of the pentateuchal commentary authored by Yosef Qara explicitly refer to Onqelos on two occasions (Gen. 25:22, 29:17).[[4]](#footnote-4) The approach of Ribash (R. Yosef Bekhor Shor) to Onqelos has only recently been subjected to careful inquiry.[[5]](#footnote-5) Recently, I published an extensive study of the subject, showing that he typically used Targum Onqelos in a manner similar to his predecessors, but also found new and surprising ways to avail himself of the targum.[[6]](#footnote-6) The approach taken by Rashbam (R. Samuel ben Meir) to Targum Onqelos has also not been analyzed in a systematic, compelling manner,[[7]](#footnote-7) a lacuna that the present study seeks to fill.

## Appearances

Targum Onqelos is mentioned explicitly 27 times in Rashbam’s commentary to the Torah.[[8]](#footnote-8) In 25 of these cases, the targum is cited using some form of the root *t-r-g-m*; in the other two cases, this root is not used (Exod. 1:10; Deut. 28:65). Rashbam directly draws on Targum Onqelos in fewer cases than do Rashi and Ribash,[[9]](#footnote-9) but the targum still is the work cited the most often in Rashbam’s pentateuchal commentary.[[10]](#footnote-10) It bears emphasizing that Rashbam never mentions Onqelos by name, apparently due to the proclivity of the former to conceal his sources—an attempt to underscore the originality of his own work.[[11]](#footnote-11)

In eight cases, Rashbam cites the original Aramaic of the targum,[[12]](#footnote-12) while he provides a Hebrew translation of the Aramaic in three instances[[13]](#footnote-13) and in 16 others refers to but does not quote the targum.[[14]](#footnote-14) These data suggest that Rashbam assumed his readers to be familiar with Targum Onqelos, or at least consulted it on a regular basis.[[15]](#footnote-15)

## References Following a Consistent Structure

I have found that Rashbam refers to the targum using a fixed structure composed of four parts:

1) a characterization of the exegetical approach of the targum, using any of the terms ‘its simple meaning’, ‘according to the plain meaning of Scripture’, ‘its meaning according to the context’, and ‘the rabbis interpreted this verse’;[[16]](#footnote-16) 2) a citation of the targum, generally using the term כתרגומו (‘as the targum explains’)[[17]](#footnote-17); 3) a quotation from the targum, or a translation into Hebrew of the targumic text[[18]](#footnote-18); 4) a discussion of the targum’s Aramaic rendering, including clarifications, additional contextual or exegetical considerations, proofs from other verses (introduced by the term כמו [‘as in’]), and application of the interpretation to other cases, using the term וכן (‘a similar usage’).[[19]](#footnote-19)

Rashbam’s uses this scheme consistently,[[20]](#footnote-20) reflecting his programmatic and deliberate approach to the targum. However, most of these elements appear only in some cases, and not wherever the targum is invoked. Following is an example containing all four elements:

a. Interpreting the problematic word אֶגְרוֹף (*egrof*; Exod. 21:18), Rashbam writes: או באגרוף [ONE STRIKES THE OTHER WITH A STONE] OR WITH AN אגרוף: According to the plain meaning of Scripture, אגרוף is to be understood—as the targum understands it as meaning some type of stone or brick. The context of the verse [also proves this interpretation as it] deals with throwing a stone. I found a similar usage in the *Torat kohanim* […] and a similar usage in the verse (Is. 58:4) ‘You strike wickedly with an אגרוף’—with a stone large enough that it could cause death and damage.’ Rashbam here proposes an alternative to the conventional understanding of the word *egrof*,[[21]](#footnote-21) preferring the view of the targum.[[22]](#footnote-22) He 1) characterizes the interpretation as following the simple sense of the verse; 2) references the targum; 3) translates the word כֻרמֵיזָא (a type of stone or brick), used in the targum, to Hebrew; 4) uses context and rabbinic parlance to corroborate the interpretation based on the targum, and applies the novel interpretation to a verse in Isaiah as well.[[23]](#footnote-23)

## The Purpose of Citing Onqelos

Rashbam uses the targum in a variety of ways. In 19 instances, his purpose in referring to Onqelos is purely lexical: to ascertain the precise sense of a word or expression. In eight cases, his aim is exegetical—explaining the content of a verse.[[24]](#footnote-24) Following are several examples.

Lexical clarifications:

b. In commenting on the problematic terms כמטחוי (*ki-metaḥavey*; Gen. 21:16); ואשחט (*va-esḥat*; Gen. 40:11); צפנת פענח (*tzafenat pa‘neaḥ*; Gen. 41:45); לנתר (*lenater*; Lev. 11:11); ויד תהיה לך (*ve-yad tihyeh lekha*; Deut. 23:13); מזי רעב (*mezey ra‘av*; Deut. 32:24), Rashbam writes כתרגומו (‘as the targum explains’) and relying on the targum to define a term. In one case, Rashbam draws on Onqelos to interpret an ambiguous expression: Num. 11:20 states that Moses will supply meat to the Israelites ‘until it comes out of your nostrils.’ Rashbam refers to the rendering used in the Targum, עד דִתקוּצוּן ביה, i.e., ‘until it revolts you.’[[25]](#footnote-25) By relying on the targum in the above cases, Rashbam was able to limit the length of his comments on these problematic terms.

Explanations of content:

c. Gen. 25:28 states that ‘Isaac loved Esau because there was game in his mouth.’ The verse is ambiguous, leaving unclear whether the mouth referred to is that of Isaac or Esau. Rashbam states that ‘its simple meaning is as the targum explains’, approving of the Aramaic rendering אֲרֵי מִצֵידֵיהּ הֲוָא אָכֵיל, i.e., Isaac ate of the game that Esau brought him.

d. According to Gen. 38:2, Judah married the daughter of a man described as a כנעני (*kena‘ani*), a detail that challenges traditional commentators who wonder how a son of Jacob could have married a Canaanite. Rashbam writes that the problematic word ‘[should be understood] as the targum explains. Similarly (Is. 23:8), ‘Whose traders (*kin‘aneha*) the world honored,’ and (Hos. 12:8), ‘A trader (*kena‘an*) who uses false balances,’ for they surely refrained from marrying Canaanite women!’ Judah then married not the daughter of a Canaanite, but the daughter of a trader.[[26]](#footnote-26)

e. In his final prophecy, Balaam describes Amalek as ‘the first of nations’ (Num. 24:20), which is problematic because Amalek is never deemed by the Pentateuch to be the ‘first nation’. In resolving this challenge, Rashbam relies on the targumic rendering: רֵיש קרָבַיָא דישראל הוה עמלק, i.e., Amalek was the first nation to do battle with Israel.

f. The Israelites are told in Deut. 4:28 that once exiled, ‘there you will serve man-made gods.’ Is Moses stating as a fact, based on his prophecy, that the Israelites will serve strange gods? Here Rashbam relies on the targumic interpretation ותִפלְחוּן תַּמָן לעממַיָא פָּלְחֵי טָעֲוָתָא, which explains that the Israelites would not serve strange gods as such, but they would serve gentiles who in turn served those gods.

In other instances, Rashbam appeals to the targum in interpretations bearing on ritual practice:

g. In Deut. 16:2, the Israelites are commanded, ‘You shall slaughter the passover sacrifice for the Lord, your God, from the flock and the herd’, in contradistinction to the instruction in Exodus (12:21) that Passover offerings come only from the flock. The solution proposed by the rabbis (b. Pesaḥim 70b) is that the word ‘herd’ in Deuteronomy refers not to the paschal sacrifice, but to voluntary sacrifices offered privately by Israelites on the occasion of the holiday. This reconciliation is favored by Onqelos: ותִיכּוׂס פסחא קֳדָם ה' אלָהָך מן בני עָנָא, ונִכסַת קֻדשַיָא מִן תּוׂרֵי. Rashbam writes, ‘The rabbis interpreted this verse as the targum explains it, [and this interpretation makes sense,] for according to the plain meaning of Scripture the Israelites used to offer their freewill offerings on pilgrimage festivals.’ Rashbam adopts the solution offered by the targum to reconcile the two verses and also notes that the targum here adheres to rabbinic tradition—the only time he does so in his commentary on the Pentateuch.

h. In Deut. 16:9, it is stated that ‘You shall count off seven weeks; [start to count the seven weeks] when the sickle is first put to the standing grain.’ The verse, however, is unclear regarding the moment when the counting is to begin. Rashbam writes, ‘as the targum explains.’ In doing so, he takes his lead from Onqelos, who writes, מִשֵירָיוּת מַגְּלָא בַּחֲצַד עֻמרָא דַאֲרָמוּתָא, i.e., the counting is to begin on the day the omer is harvested, in keeping with the accepted rabbinic interpretation.

## Rashbam as a Supercommentator on the Targum

Rashbam did not limit his use of Targum Onqelos to himself to lexical and exegetical inquiry. In three cases, he seeks to clarify the precise intention of the targum,[[27]](#footnote-27) in all three cases disputing Rashi’s understanding of Onqelos.

i. This dynamic is most conspicuous in Rashbam’s commentary on the words לא תלך רכיל בעמך (‘you shall not go *rakhil* among your people’; Lev. 19:16). Rashi and Rashbam disagree on both the sense of the Hebrew verse and that of the targum, the latter of which will be discussed here. Onqelos interprets, לָא תֵיכוׂל קֻרצִין בעמך.[[28]](#footnote-28) Rashi understands this Aramaic expression to refer to eating while winking: ‘It seems to me that their custom was to have a bit to eat in the home of a person who accepted what they had said, and this was final confirmation that what he had said was valid and he would regard it as true, and that act of eating is called ‘eating winks,’ in the sense of ‘winking his eyes’ (Prov. 6:13), for it is the way of talebearers to wink and insinuate their tales so that others who are listening will not understand.’ Rashbam, disagreeing with Rashi, argues that the targum refers to sharing rumors: ‘The targum for this phrase, לא תיכול קורצין, means ‘do not broadcast gossip.’’[[29]](#footnote-29) Significantly, at the beginning of the gloss, Rashbam gives a different interpretation of the verse from that appearing in the targum, so it is clear that his discussion of the targum serves not to explain the verse, but to clarify the interpretation given it by Onqelos.

j. In Gen. 26:26, we encounter the problematic phrase ואחזת מרעהו (*va-aḥuzzat me-re‘ehu*). In his comments to the verse, Rashi quotes the targumic translation סיעת מרחמוהי, which he translates to Hebrew as ‘an escort of his friends’. According to this understanding, the initial mem of the Hebrew is not a part of the base word, but a preposition with the sense of ‘from’ or ‘of’. Rashbam thus begins his extensive comments to this verse: ‘*Va-aḥuzzat mere‘ehu*: As the targum explains, a group of his friends. [*Mere‘ehu* is to be understood] as in the verse (Jud. 15:6) ‘and gave her to his friend (*lemere‘ehu*).’ The mem [in the word *mere‘ehu* is not a preposition; rather it] is like the mem in the word *meria‘*, ‘He makes a *teru‘ah* sound (*meria‘*) and a *teqi‘ah* sound’ (m. Rosh ha-Shanah 4:9) and like the mem in the word *mesev*, ‘I am going to turn around (*mesev*) the weapons’ (Jer. 21:4).’[[30]](#footnote-30) Rashbam opines that the mem is not a prepositional prefix, but a part of the root.[[31]](#footnote-31) Both he and Rashi adduce proof for their interpretations from the targum, and it seems that Rashbam lengthy comment is not merely an attempt to explain the verse, but also meant to clarify the meaning ascribed to the verse by the targum. It is quite possible that in this case, the disagreement between Rashi and Rashbam resulted from the use of conflicting versions of the targum.[[32]](#footnote-32)

k. Traditional commentators were given pause by the words משנה תורה (*mishneh torah*), used to refer to the king’s Torah scroll in Deut. 17:18. Rashi interprets the phrase as denoting ‘two Torah scrolls’, and later in the same gloss adds, ‘Onqelos translated פתשגן (*patshegen*), interpreting משנה in the sense of sharpening and speech.’[[33]](#footnote-33) Rashbam writes, ‘My grandfather explained in [his] Chronicles[[34]](#footnote-34) [commentary that משנה תורה means] ‘two scrolls of the Torah.’ The targum translates פתשגן. [But the word משנה] is not connected to the same root as the word (6:7) ‘ושננתם—you shall sharpen them.’’ Rashbam seems to agree with the explanation given by Rashi. If this is correct, then the ensuing discussion of the targum is intended not to advance the interpretation of the verse, but to clarify the meaning of the targum: contrary to the proposal found in the text of Rashi that Onqelos understood משנה to denote sharpening, Rashbam stresses that sharpening is not the sense indicated by the targum.[[35]](#footnote-35)

It is clear from the foregoing that Rashbam not only used the targum as a tool for interpreting Scripture, but also sought to interpret and clarify the targum—evidence of the great importance that he attached to the targum as a fundamental work deserving exegesis in its own right.

## Use of the Targum to Another Passage

In most cases where Rashbam refers to the targum, he avails himself of the Aramaic rendering of the verse under discussion. He makes use of the targum on *other* passages in only three cases; in each case, we must explain why he chose to appeal to the targum to a verse other than the verse at hand.

l. Joseph’s admonition to his brothers אל תרגזו בדרך (‘do not *tirgezu* on the way’; Gen. 45:24) has been given a number of interpretations. Rashbam proposes a fundamental distinction between the Biblical Hebrew root *g-r-z*, which he argues has the sense of fear, and the identical root in Biblical Aramaic, which he describes as denoting anger.[[36]](#footnote-36) He goes on to apply this novel argument to other verses. For his second example, he writes, ‘Similarly (Deut. 28:65), ‘The Lord will give you there a *lev raggaz*—a fearful heart,’ as the targum there explains *raggaz* as ‘*deḥil*—fearful.’’[[37]](#footnote-37) The Hebrew verse in Genesis is rendered by Onqelos as לָא תִתנְצוׂן באורחָא, in the sense of quarreling, and Rashbam therefore does not employ it as evidence of his interpretation.

m. Rashbam interprets the words ‘it shall be when תקראנה war’ (Exod. 1:10), spoken by Pharaoh, thus: ‘כי תקראנה: means ‘should it occur.’ as in the phrase מקראי קדש (Lev. 23:2 and passim) [which Onqelos translates into Aramaic as] מערע קדשא, “a holy occurrence”.’ The proof offered by Rashbam is from the targum to Leviticus.[[38]](#footnote-38) The Hebrew phrase in Exodus is understood by the targum as וִיהֵי אֲרֵי יְעָרְעִנַנָא קרב. Why Rashbam did not refer to this translation is not clear, unless he implicitly intended the words ‘should it occur’ as a Hebrew translation of the targum.

n. Rashbam interprets the words רמה בים (‘he *ramah* in the sea’; Exod. 15:1) as תרגום של השליך, and in doing so apparently utilizes the targumic rendering of או השליך עליו (‘or he cast upon him’; Num. 35:20), which Onqelos understands as או רְמָא עֲלוׂהִי.[[39]](#footnote-39) The Hebrew words in Exodus are rendered by the targum as רְמָא בְיַמָא, a literal translation unhelpful for understanding the problematic word, which Rashbam thus declined to give as evidence in his commentary.

Rashbam utilizes the targum to a verse other than that in question, less often than do Rashi and Ribash,[[40]](#footnote-40) a fact in keeping with the general data indicating that Rashbam used the targum less than did his colleagues. Regardless, his able use of the targum to explain far-flung verses demonstrates his proficiency and thoroughgoing knowledge of the targum.

## Debating the Targum

Though Rashbam views the targum as an important work and typically cites it to support his interpretations, as previously illustrated, there is one notable instance in which he explicitly disagrees with Onqelos.

o. Num. 21:30 states that וַנירָם אבד חשבון (‘*vanniram* was lost Heshbon)’, which Onqelos renders as פְּסַקַת מַלכוּ מחשבון. Rashbam writes: ‘וַנִּירָם means “we threw them out” from where they were, [just like] (Deut. 3:6) ‘We proscribed them (ונחרם אותם).’ […] If the interpretation of this word were as the targum explains [that it is a noun, not a verb], the word would have to be vocalized וְנִירָם, with a *sheva* under the *vav*.’ Onqelos apparently understood that the base word of ונירם was ניר, i.e., sovereignty.[[41]](#footnote-41) Contrary to this view, Rashbam argues that as vocalized, the word can be understood only as a verb—not a noun.

Rashbam offers his own interpretation in addition to that indicated by the targum in two other locations, where it stands to reason that he did not agree with Onqelos.

p. At Lev. 19:16, Rashbam views the words ‘you shall not go like a peddler’ as referring to ‘someone who goes from city to city [hawking merchandise]. [The phrase means ‘do not be a gossip’; a gossip is referred to as a רכיל] because he goes around from one person to another to tell tales. The targum for this phrase, לא תיכול קורצין, means “do not broadcast gossip”.’

q. In interpreting the words משנה תורה (Deut. 17:18), Rashbam writes, ‘My grandfather explained in [his] Chronicles [commentary that משנה תורה means] ‘two scrolls of the Torah.’ The targum translates פתשגן. [But the word משנה] is not connected to the same root as the word (6:7) “ושננתם—you shall sharpen them”.’

It may be that Rashbam referred to the targum in his commentary to these verses not to emphasize that he contested its interpretation, but because he sought to interpret the targum differently from the way chosen by Rashi in his glosses on the same verses, as explained above.[[42]](#footnote-42)

Regardless, it is evident from the above examples that Rashbam related to the targum much as he did to the rabbis. Just as he did not shy away from offering interpretations at odds with rabbinic teaching in his efforts to uncover the simple sense of Scripture, he did not hesitate to disagree with the targum when he believed its renderings were not in keeping with the straightforward sense of a verse.

## Conclusion

The Targum of Onqelos was the principal pentateuchal targum on which medieval Jews in northern France, among them Rashbam, relied. When he referenced Onqelos, Rashbam used a consistent format composed of four elements. His use of the targum is varied: in most instances, his purpose is lexical—to explain the precise sense of a biblical word or expression. In about one-third of cases, his purpose is exegetical—to interpret a verses contents. In three cases, Rashbam cited the targum in order to consider its precise intention (while finding fault with the conclusion reached by Rashi in that regard), an indication of the great importance that Rashbam ascribed to the targum. Nevertheless, despite the high esteem in which he held the targum, Rashbam infrequently permitted himself to disagree with it in his quest to uncover the simplest sense of Scripture. Targum Onqelos is the work quoted most often in Rashbam’s commentary to the Torah (outside of rabbinic literature), and his use of it demonstrates extensive knowledge of the targum to the Torah. However, the use of the targum in Rashbam’s commentary is more limited than that in the work of Rashi and Ribash in both scope and range of uses, due to the characteristic brevity of Rashbam’s glosses.

1. \* The translations of Rashbam’s commentary on the Pentateuch cited in this article are based on Martin Lockhshin’s translation with minor adjustments to fit the discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For a brief survey of the limited availability of Palestinian targums in Europe, see Y. Komlosh, *The Bible in the Light of the Aramaic Translation* (Tel-Aviv: Dvir, 1973) pp. 38–40; A. Shinan, *The Embroidered Targum - The Aggadah in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of the Pentateuch* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1992) pp. 35–40 and n. 130. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For a survey of current scholarship, see E. Viezel, ‘The Place of Targum Onkelos in Rashi’s Commentary on the Pentateuch’ (M.A. Thesis, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2003) pp. 1–14. The status accorded the targum by Rashi is subject to disagreement among scholars; see E. Viezel, ‘Targum Onkelos in Rashi’s Exegetical Perception’, *Tarbiz* 75 (2006) pp. 345–358; R. B, Posen, ‘Rashi’s Attitude towards Targum Onkelos’, *Rashi - The man and his Work*, A. Grossman and S. Japhet (eds.) (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center, 2009) pp. 275–293, and see the many references to earlier studies there. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Most of Qara’s commentary to the Torah has been lost. It therefore is impossible to produce an analysis of his approach to Onqelos. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For a survey of existing scholarship, see J. Jacobs, *Bekhor Shoro Hadar Lo: R. Joseph Bekhor Shor between Continuity and Innovation* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2017) p. 36 and n. 7–8 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See Jacobs, *Bekhor Shoro*, pp. 35–59 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Rosin made do with a single sentence noting the fact that Rashbam was familiar with Targum Onqelos, while stating that Rashbam sometimes uses that targum as a source for his interpretation of verses and in other instances disagrees. See D. Rosin, *R. Samuel b. Meir als Schrifterklarer* (Breslau: F. W. Jungfer’s Buchdruckerei, 1880) p. 60. Poznanski very briefly noted this familiarity with Onqelos; see S. Poznanski, *Mavo’ `al hakhme Sorfat mefarshe ha-miqra* (Warsaw: Mekize Nirdamim, 1913) p. 47. Melamed notes that a quote from the targum is reproduced in Rashbam’s commentary in several instances and that Rashbam interprets the quote in one of these cases; see E. Z. Melamed, *Bible Commentators* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1978) pp. 481–482. Recently, Drazin has demonstrated how scriptural exegetes availed themselves of Targum Onqelos through the ages, concluding that until the thirteenth century, the targum served solely as a resource for arriving at the simple sense of Scripture. His study found that Rashbam used the targum in the same manner as Rashi, Ribash, and other commentators. According to Drazin, the medieval rabbinic scholars who also used the targum as a source of homiletic and esoteric interpretations were Abraham Ibn Ezra (on a limited basis) and Nahmanides (extensively). See I. Drazin, ‘Nachmanides and Targum Onkelos’, *Oqimta - Studies in Talmudic and Rabbinic Literature* 1 (2013), pp. 505–524. Concerning the use of Targum Onqelos by Ribash, see Drazin, ‘Nachmanides,’ p. 512. On consideration of the supercommentaries on Rashbam, it transpires that S. Z. Mi-Pozen, *Keren Shmuel* (Pozen, 1707) discussed references to the targum in only two cases (Num. 21:30; Deut. 17:18), while M. I. Lockshin, *Rashbam on the Torah* (Jerusalem: Chorev Publishing house, 2009), commented on every instances in which Rashbam refers to the targum. Concerning references to Targum Onqelos in Rashbam’s commentary to the Song of Songs, see S. Japhet, *The Commentary of Rabbi Samuel Ben Meir (Rashbam) on The Song of Songs* (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies, 2008) pp. 53–54. On references to Onqelos in Rashbam’s commentary to Job, see S. Japhet, *The Commentary of Rabbi Samuel Ben Meir (Rashbam) on the Book of Job* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2000) pp. 49, 215–217 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. This figure is a revision of those given in previous studies: Rosin counted 23 appearances of Targum Onqelos (Rosin, *R. Samuel b. Meir*, p. 60 n. 2–5); Melamed listed 17 appearances (Melamed, *Bible Commentators*, pp. 481–482); and Japhet stated that the targum was mentioned 19 times in Rashbam’s commentary to the Torah (Japhet*, Rashbam on Job*, p. 49 n. 2). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. There are 488 instances in Rashi’s commentary; see Viezel, ‘The Place’, p. 15. Ribash mentions the targum 79 times; see Jacobs, *Bekhor Shoro*, p. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For the sake of comparison, Menaḥem ben Saruq is mentioned by name 10 times, and Rashi only seven. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Cf. Japhet*, Rashbam on Job*, p. 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Gen. 38:2; 45:24; Exod. 1:10; Lev. 1:16; 19:16; 23:2; Deut. 17:18; 28:65. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Gen. 26:26; Exod. 9:30, 21, 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Gen. 21:16; 25:28; 40:11; 41:45; Exod. 15:1; Lev. 11:21; 19:20; Num. 11:20; 21:30; 24:20; Deut. 4:28; 16:2, 9; 23:13; 24:6; 32:24. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. There were many copies of Targum Onqelos in Western Europe during the time of Rashbam. These were used by Jews to fulfill the practice of privately reading the weekly Torah portion twice in the original Hebrew and once as rendered by a targum. At a later point, Rashi’s commentary replaced Targum Onqelos as the text of choice to accompany the two readings of the Torah portion; see A. Gross, ‘Spanish Jewry and Rashi’s Commentary on the Pentateuch’, in Z. A. Steinfeld (ed.), *Rashi* *Studies* (Jerusalem: Bar Ilan University, 1993) pp. 27–55; J. S. Pankower, ‘The Canonization of Rashi’s Commentary on the Pentateuch’, in H. Kreisel (ed.), *Study and Knowledge in Jewish Thought* (Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University, 2006) pp. 123–146. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. This element appears four times: Gen. 25:28; Exod. 21:18; Deut. 16:2, 32, 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. This is the most common element. It occurs in 23 instances and is omitted only at Exod. 1:10; 15:1; Num. 21:30; Deut. 28:65. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. This element appears 11 times; see nn. 11–12 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. This final element appears in nine instances: Gen. 26:26; 38:2; 41:45; Exod. 21:18; Lev. 1:16; 19:20; 23:2; Deut. 16:9; 17:18. On the systematic distinction between the formulae כמו (‘as in’) and וכן (‘a similar usage’), see Jonathan Jacobs, ‘Inner-Biblical Exegesis in the Commentary of Rashbam on the Bible – Rashbam’s Terminology in Referring to a Cited Verse’, *REJ* 168 (2009), pp. 463–480.

Viezel identified a consistent five-part structure in references to the targum contained in Rashi’s pentateuchal commentary: 1. an interpretation proffered by Rashi himself; 2. a reference to the targum; 3. a quotation from the targum; 4. some discussion of the targum; 5. an additional exegetic source unrelated to the targum. See Viezel, ‘The Place’ pp. 15–16. Both commentators thus share the second, third, and fourth parts of the reference structure; it may be assumed that Rashbam was influenced by Rashi in drawing up his own structure used for citing Onqelos. The disparity in the first and fifth elements is a function of the fact that Rashbam’s glosses are quite brief and quote external sources only on rare occasion. I found no such consistent structure in Ribash comments that refer to Onqelos; see Jacobs, *Bekhor Shoro*, p. 47 n. 33 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. With the exception of only Lev. 19:20 (the order is 4 followed by 2); 23:2 (the order is 4, 2, and 3). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. For an accounting of proposed definitions, see Lockshin, *Rashbam*, p. 255 n. 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Nahmanides, like Rashbam, understands Onqelos as using *egrof* in the sense of a stone. This understanding, however, is not incontestable. See R. B. Posen, *Parshegen - Exodus* (Jerusalem: Parshegen Institute, 2014) p. 407. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. For further discussion of this gloss, see J. Jacobs, ‘“Extrapolating One Word from Another” - Rashbam as an Interpreter of the Bible on its Own Terms’, *Shnaton - an Annual for Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies*, 17 (2007), pp. 226–227 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Viezel drew attention to the varied use that Rashi makes of Onqelos; see Viezel, ‘The Place’, pp. 45–54. Rashbam, for his part, uses the targum in his glosses to Job and the Song of Songs only as a linguistic resource; see Japhet*, Rashbam on Job*, p.49; Japhet, *Rashbam on Songs*, p. 53. Viezel argued that Rashi used the targum most commonly for lexical aims; see Viezel, ‘The Place,’ p. 52. Gamliel, however, argued that in Rashi’s commentary to the Torah, only one-tenth of references to the targum served a lexical purpose; see C. Gamliel, ‘Lexical Definitions in Menaḥem’s *Maḥberet* and Rashi`s Commentary’, *Mehqarim Belashon* 17 (2017), pp. 221–236. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. See Lev. 1:16; 19:20. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. There are a number of variants in the text of Onqelos here; see A. Sperber, *The Bible in Aramaic Based on Old Manuscripts and Printed Texts*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1959) p. 63; R. B. Posen, *Parshegen - Genesis* (Jerusalem: Parshegen Institute, 2013) p. 703. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. A similar phenomenon exists in Rashi’s commentary; see Viezel, ‘The Place’, pp. 29–34; Posen, ‘Rashi’s Attitude’, pp. 282–285. For a parallel phenomenon in the commentary of Ribash, see Jacobs, *Bekhor Shoro*, pp. 51–59 [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. The different approaches to understanding the Aramaic here are considered at length by R. B. Posen, *Parshegen - Leviticus* (Jerusalem: Parshegen Institute, 2016) pp. 404–408. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Rashbam adduces two other verses to corroborate his understanding of Onqelos. Some have argued that Rashi came to retract his interpretation of the targum and ultimately accepted the view of Rashbam; see Lockshin, *Rashbam*, p. 371 n. 17 [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Later in the same gloss, Rashbam extends his novel interpretation of the word *mere‘ehu* to the appearance of the word in Prov. 12:26. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. For an explanation of the disagreement between Rashi and Rashbam, see Lockshin, *Rashbam*, p. 61 n. 77–78 [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. The manuscripts and editions of Onqelos preserve two different textual variants. Rashi quotes the Aramaic translation as סיעת מרחמוהי (the same version given in the commentary of David Qimḥi), while in several other sources, the text reads סיעת רחמוהי, without the first mem. The latter version appears to be that with which Rashbam was familiar. On textual changes in the targum, see, e.g., Sperber,*The Bible in Aramaic*, p. 40; Posen, *Parshegen - Genesis*, pp. 505–506. Concerning textual difficulties in Targum Onqelos and awareness of this problem among medieval exegetes, see R. B. Posen, *The Consistency of Targum Onkelos’ Translation* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2004) pp. 161–163. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. This passage was added to the commentary of Rashi by his disciple Shema‘yah of Troyes; see J. S. Penkower, ‘Rashi’s Corrections to his Commentary on the Pentateuch’, *JSIJ* 6 (2007), pp. 175. Rashbam may have known that the passage was an addition, in which case his argument is not with Rashi, but with his student Shema‘yah. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Concerning this version, see *Perush ha-Torah, Rashbam*, D. Razin (ed.) (Breslau 1882) p. 216 n. 10; Lockshin, *Rashbam* p. 485 n. 14 [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. This understanding is shared by *Rashbam*, D. Razin, p. 216 n. 12; Lockshin, *Rashbam* p. 485 n. 16. *Keren Shmuel*, p. 60, took the view that the argument “[But the word משנה] is not connected to the same root as the word (6:7) ‘ושננתם—you shall sharpen them”’ refers not to Onqelos, but to Rashi, mentioned at the beginning of the gloss. If so, Rashbam does not disagree with Rashi’s understanding of the targum. However, this reading is improbable. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. See Dan. 3:13; Ez. 5:12. According to Touitou, this insight is an expression of the ‘straightforward explanations of Scripture that emerge daily’ given in the commentary of Rashbam; see E. Touitou, *Exegesis in Perpetual Motion - Studies in the Pentateuchal Commentary of Rabbi Samuel Ben Meir* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 2003) p. 14 [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. At Deut. 28:65 as well, Rashbam refers to the targum, interpreting לב רגז as דחיל. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. At Lev. 23:2 as well, Rashbam makes use of the targum: 'כל לשון קריאה שאצל מועדים לשון קביעת זמן הוא[…] וכן התרגום "מערע קדיש"', בבקשה להשלים את התרגום של המשפט הזה see the reservations expressed by Lockshin, *Rashbam*, p. 378 n. 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Japhet understood from this case that Rashbam felt the Hebrew words of Scripture ought to be interpreted according to the meaning of the Aramaic targum; see Japhet*, Rashbam on Job*, pp. 216–217. Rashi and Ribash also considered there to be a close link between the Hebrew and the Aramaic; see Posen, ‘Rashi's Attitude,’ p. 86; Jacobs, *Bekhor Shoro*, pp. 50–51 [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. See Jacobs, *Bekhor Shoro*, pp. 45–51. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. See Lockshin, *Rashbam*, p. 435 n. 63 [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Another case in which Rashbam may have intended to express disagreement with the targum is his commentary to Deut. 32:24, where he first quotes Onqelos but then offers another possibility based on rabbinic tradition. Rosin noted two further instances in which he believed Rashbam took issue with the targum: Gen. 49: 9, 16. Rosin, *R. Samuel b. Meir*, p. 60 n. 5. However, it seems most likely that Rashbam’s dispute there is with Menaḥem ben Shelomoh, author of *Sekhel Tov*; see J. Jacobs, ‘To what Degree was Rashbam’s Familiar with *Midrash* *Leqah Tov*?’, in Avraham Reiner (ed.), *Ta-Shma: Studies in Judaica in Memory of Israel M. Ta-Shma*, Allon Shevut 2011, pp. 486–487 [↑](#footnote-ref-42)