Paper Tustep conference 1-3 okt 2014


Lieve Teugels


Comparing Rabbinic Parables


The project "Parables and the partings of the ways" at Utrecht University involvest studying the thematic and structural development of new testament and early rabbinic (tannaitic) parables. My postdoc research consists of providing an annotated edition and translation of the tannaitic parables. This edition will consist of a digital part, and an accompanying printed volume. The total material consists of 200 to 300 parables, culled from 8 rabbinic works. The rabbinic works in which the parables are embedded are all published, some in good critical editions, and some in older editions that do not live up to the standard of modern textual criticism. For all parables, several textual witnesses, manuscripts and early printed editions are available, many of them online in the form of transcribed texts published digitally on websites of universities and research centers. So far we have obtained the permission of the center that has transcribed most witnesses (the Bar Ilan Torat Hatannaim site http://www.biu.ac.il/js/tannaim/) to use (copy and paste) the material on their website. Where it regards locked PDF files, they send me the unlocked files. In the future we may need transcriptions from other sources for which we will not receive permission to publish them, or manuscripts that have not yet been transcribed.

We are still in the beginning stage of the work and are trying to establish, 1. What information the digital edition should contain; 2. What it will look like and what will be searchable; 3. Which program we will use to make it; 4. What will be included in the printed book. Thomas Kollatz is working with us to set up and organize the digital edition.

In the preparatory stage of this work, I have been doing comparative research of several parables, using ordinary word processors (Ms Word, Google docs) and Adobe Acrobat. I studied a set of about 20 sample parables and described their content and function in the co-text of the larger work. As to the texts itself, I compared textual witnesses for the individual parables, and compared parallels in other rabbinic sources. For some parables I have made synoptic tables of their textual witnesses, each with their English translation, using Ms Word. All this was aimed at getting to know the sorts of differences between the witnesses and trying to establish how the edition should be set up: whether we will make a full critical edition or rather diplomatic transcriptions that can be presented synoptically.

In this presentation I will very briefly set out the specific issues of textual criticism of rabbinic texts (as compared to e.g. the Old and New Testament), and present the textual witnesses, synoptically displayed, of one two sample parables, each with their own issues. Thomas Kollatz will give a first demonstration of an experimental digital workspace he has designed so far for entering and comparing the parables (surprise for me too). My expectation of this presentation is to hear about experiences, and receive tips, warnings etc. of scholars who are engaged in similar projects.