

**The Targumim as Background of
the Prologue of the Gospel according to John**

Dr. Pieter de Vries
Department of Theology of the Free University
Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Introduction

The gospel according to John tells us both about the deeds and the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is striking that the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ comprise such a large part of the fourth gospel; teachings that are not characterized by parables, like the synoptic gospels, but by extended treatises. The evangelist makes frequent comments on the actions and teachings of the Lord Jesus. The gospel according to John can be divided as follows:

- John 1:1-18 prologue
- John 1:19-12:50 the book of signs
- John 13:1-20:31 the book of exaltation¹
- John 21:1-25 epilogue

The prologue is a commentary by the evangelist. Before he starts to describe the actions and teachings of the Lord Jesus, he tells us who the Lord Jesus Christ is and what the significance of his work is. What is the background of those things which the evangelist highlights in the prologue? This question must be raised especially with respect to the background of the word λόγος. In the gospel according to John the Lord Jesus is only referred to by this term in the prologue. It is commonly stated that we must refer to Philo or the wisdom literature to answer this question. However, there is also another possibility. It does not exclude the other two options, but it does make them complete. I will argue that the term λόγος in the gospel according to John should be seen primarily against the background of the term מִימְרָא in the targumim.

This relationship was stated several times in the previous centuries. We have in mind the seventeenth-century Hebraist John Lightfoot.² Especially nineteenth-century researchers studied

¹ Usually this part of the fourth gospel is named 'the book of glory.' Following Andreas J. Köstenberger (*The Cradle, the Cross and the Crown*, Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Publishing Group, 2009, 305) I prefer the designation the book of exaltation because we find also in the first mayor unit of the fourth gospel many references to glory.

this relationship. An important example of this is B.F. Westcott.³ The tide turned in the twentieth century. Scholars became more and more convinced that this approach was a dead-end.⁴ This position has been defended up to the present day.

However, other voices have also been heard. Not in the last place this has to do with the discovery of the Targum Neofiti in 1949 and its publication and translation between 1968 and 1979.⁵ Although this is not the case in the Targum Onkelos and Pseudo-Jonathan, the term מִימְרָא does occur in the Targum Neofiti and the Fragment Targum, also in Genesis 1. P. Borgen, Craig A. Evans and Daniel Boyarin, among others, have suggested the targumim as background of the prologue of the gospel according to John.⁶ This article is intended to give an even stronger linguistic foundation for the targumim as the background of understanding the prologue of the fourth gospel than has been given before.

For this study the Targum Onkelos, Pseudo-Jonathan, Neofiti and the Fragment Targumim have been investigated with respect to the Pentateuch, Targum Jonathan with respect to the Prophets and the various targumim with respect to the writings that are found in the Mikra'oth Gedol'oth.⁷ The Fragment Targum is not complete, as the name shows. This is even more the case for the fragments of the geniza from the synagogue of Cairo. That is why they have not been included in this study.

² John Lightfoot, *Horae Hebraicae Et Talmudicae*, 1658-1674, [trans. *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica*, volume 3, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1859], 237-238.:

³ B.F. Westcott, *The Gospel according to John* (London: John Murray, 1881), 2-3.

⁴ See C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John*, second ed. (London/Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: SPCK, 1978), 153.

⁵ The history of the manuscript of this targum begins in 1587, when Andrea de Monte gave the 450 folios, on which it was written, to Ugo Boncampagni. Boncampagni gave them to Collegium Ecclesiasticum Neophytum or Pia Domus Neophytum (this explains the name Neofiti). When this college was closed, the Vatican bought the manuscripts of Targum Neofiti together with other manuscripts. It was assumed that it was a manuscript of Targum Onkelos. In 1949 Alexandro Díez discovered that it was a different targum.

⁶ P. Borgen, "Observations on the Targumic Character of the Prologue of John," *NTS* 16 (1970), 288-295; Craig A. Evans, *Word and Glory: On the Exegetical and Theological Background of John's Prologue* (JSNTSup 89, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993); Daniel Boyarin, "The Gospel of the Memra: Jewish Binitarianism and the Prologue of John," *HTR*, 94/3 (2001), 243-284; *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 89-150.

⁷ For this study I have used the files of The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon Project (CAL) of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, USA, under supervision of Stephen A. Kaufman.

*The Gospel According to John: Hellenistic or Palestinian?*⁸

The question about the background of the prologue of the gospel according to John is closely connected with the character of the fourth gospel as a whole. Should this gospel be characterized as Hellenistic or Palestinian? Since the end of the eighteenth century a great number of New Testament scholars have labeled the gospel according to John as Hellenistic. Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider saw the fourth gospel against the background of the use of λόγος in the writings of Philo.⁹ David Friedrich Strauss considered the fourth gospel to be a myth.¹⁰ In the twentieth century Rudolf Bultmann was one of the most important representatives of the latter position. He saw a confirmation of his opinion in the Mandese writings, which are from a much later date than the gospel according to John. Bultmann also saw a lot of parallels with Hellenistic mystery religions. In this view the gospel according to John is most distant from the original Palestinian Christian religion as it is found in the synoptic gospels.

However, several other voices were heard. Westcott places the message of the fourth gospel within a framework of the following three factors: the gospel proclamation among the nations, the destruction of the temple, and the rise of Gnosticism.¹¹ Adolf Schlatter has stated that the gospel according to John should not be seen against the background of Philo, but of rabbinic parallels.¹² Charles F. Burney already pointed this out in 1922. Although the claim Charles F. Burney that John's gospel goes back to an Aramaic original is not persuasive, the point stands that

⁸ In research literature the words 'Hellenistic' and 'Palestinian' are part of the universally accepted terminology. This is also true for the word Palestine as a reference to the holy land. Due to the current conflict in the Middle East the words 'Palestinian' and 'Palestine' have become politically charged. The use of these scholarly accepted terms should not be seen in light of this conflict. Neither can any conclusion be drawn about the author's opinion of this conflict.

⁹ Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider, *Probabilia De Evangelii Et Epistolarum Joannis, Apostoli, Indole Et Origine* (Leipzig: Lipsiae Sumtibus Jo. Ambros. Barthii, 1820).

¹⁰ David Friedrich Strauss, *Das Leben Jesu kritisch bearbeitet* (Tübingen: Osiander, 1836).

¹¹ Westcott, *John*.

¹² Adolf Schlatter, *Die Sprache und Heimat des vierten Evangelisten* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1902); *Die Theologie der Apostel* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1922); *Der Evangelist Johannes. Wie er Spricht, Denkt und Glaubte*, zweite Aufl. (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1948).

Aramaic influences are undeniable in the fourth gospel.¹³ Bultmann as well as Charles H. Dodd, who both placed the fourth gospel against the background of Hellenism – be it in very different ways – acknowledged this.¹⁴ The work of Matthew Black *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* showed the relevance of Aramaic for understanding the Gospels.¹⁵

Incidentally, it has turned out to be not as easy to define Hellenistic and Palestinian Judaism as has been thought. This new insight cannot be solely attributed to the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls. Nevertheless, this discovery does constitute an important factor. The contrasts between light and darkness, truth and falsehood, which are so important in the fourth gospel and which were considered to be characteristic of a type of Judaism that has been influenced by Greek thinking, turned out to be present in the literature of the Qumran community. However, this does not by itself prove that this literature forms the direct background of this language in the gospel according to John, but it makes clear that Palestinian Judaism was more diverse than was usually thought.

Martin Hengel, in his study *Judentum und Hellenismus*, has pointed out that the entire culture of the Middle East in several variations has been marked or influenced by Hellenism since the conquest of the Middle East by Alexander the Great. In the case of Judaism this influence was not only present outside of Palestine, but also in Palestine.¹⁶ This does not mean that there is no ground at all to distinguish between Hellenistic and Palestinian. Just think of the contrast between Hebrew-speaking and Greek-speaking Jews in the Christian church in Jerusalem (notice the place!) in the book of Acts (See Acts 6:1v). The point is that this distinction must be made very carefully. The question of the character of the fourth gospel is also connected with its historic reliability. Richard Bauckham has supplied a lot of arguments to support the view that the fourth gospel is the

¹³ Charles F. Burney, *The Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel* (London: Clarendon Press, 1922). See also Ernest C. Colwell, *The Greek of the Fourth Gospel: A Study of Its Aramaisms in the Light of Hellenistic Greek* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press: 1931).

¹⁴ Rudolf Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, elfte durchgesehene Aufl. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1950); Charles H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953).

¹⁵ Matthew Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1946).

¹⁶ Martin Hengel, *Judentum und Hellenismus* (WUNT 10, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1969); see also Lee I. Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity: Conflict or Confluence?* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999).

account of an eye witness.¹⁷ I agree with him on this point.¹⁸ Anyone who reads the fourth gospel as an eyewitness account will be more willing to reckon with Palestinian and (connected with this) Aramaic influences than they would have been if they did not read it like this. In this article my purpose is to show that we may well think of the Aramaic targumim in this context.

Philo

It has already been mentioned that the writings of the Alexandrian Jew Philo have been considered a possible background for the gospel according to John. This is especially true for the prologue. C.K. Barrett as well as Dodd have defended this position and pointed out parallels between the writings of Philo and the prologue of the gospel according to John.¹⁹

According to Philo this world, which he calls κόσμος αἰσθητός, is the younger son (υἱός νεώτερος) of God, and the λόγος is his eldest son (υἱός πρεσβύτερος). God kept this eldest son with himself.²⁰ The λόγος is the instrument that God used to create the world.²¹ Also the fact that the λόγος, according to Philo, brings light and life, corresponds with the function that the λόγος has in the gospel according to John.²²

Philo can call the λόγος God (θεός), but he does not use the article in such cases.²³ For Philo the λόγος is a δευτέρος θεός. He identifies the Angel of YHWH in the Hebrew Bible with the divine

¹⁷ Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2006); *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History and Theology in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, Michigan; Baker Academic, 2007).

¹⁸ Bauckham states that the beloved disciple is a follower of Jesus from Judah. He himself identifies this beloved disciple with Lazarus. In agreement with Andreas J. Köstenberger (*A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters: Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2009) and P.H.R. van Houwelingen (*Johannes. Het evangelie van het Woord*, Commentaar op het Nieuwe Testament Derde serie, Kampen: Kok, 1997) I think that the traditional view that John, the son of Zebedee, is the author of the fourth gospel, is the most obvious one. Because this question is outside the scope of this article, I will not discuss it further here.

¹⁹ Dodd, *Fourth Gospel*; C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John*, second ed. (London: SPCK, 1978).

²⁰ *On the Unchangeableness of God* 31.

²¹ *On the Cherubim* 127; *On the Creation* 20.

²² *On the Creation* 30, 33.

²³ *On Dreams, That They are God-Sent* 1.228-230.

word (θεῖος λόγος).²⁴ In agreement with the Middle Platonism that was influenced by the Stoa, for Philo the λόγος is the creating reason or the creating organizing principle.²⁵

Wisdom Literature

The wisdom literature is another possible background of the prologue of the fourth gospel. We should then not only think of the book of Proverbs in the Hebrew Bible – where the wisdom song in chapter 8 is especially important – but also Jesus Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon. Apparently the function of the λόγος in the prologue has parallels with the function of the σοφία in the wisdom literature. Incidentally I would like to point out that the wisdom literature itself already provides an indication that the distinction between Hellenistic and Palestinian needs some explanation. Proverbs and Jesus Sirach have Palestinian roots, while the Wisdom of Solomon is of Alexandrian origin.

In Proverbs 8:35-36 we find both the contrast between life and death as well as between love and hate. The prologue of the fourth gospel (John 1:4) also speaks explicitly about life (ζωή), while the contrast between love (ἀγαπάω) and hate (μισέω) and life (ζωή) and death (θάνατος) are characteristic for the fourth gospel as a whole. This is also true for the contrast between light (φῶς) and darkness (σκοτία).

In Jesus Sirach 24:4, 8 wisdom (σοφία) says that it lives (κατεσκήνωσα) in heaven and asks God to have its habitation (κατασκήνωσον) among Israel. Before time began, wisdom says, it was created (Jesus Sirach 24:9). It says that that glory (δόξα) and grace (χάρις) are from its branches (Jesus Sirach 24:16). In Jesus Sirach 24 wisdom is equated with the law (νομός) (Jesus Sirach 24:23v.). In the Wisdom of Solomon we read that God has created everything by his Word and in his wisdom has established human beings to rule over the creation (Wisdom 9:1-2). Wisdom was there when God created the world (Wisdom 9:9).

²⁴ *Questions and Answers on Genesis 3.27; On Flight and Finding 5.*

²⁵ In Platonism νοῦς was more commonly used than λόγος.

Backgrounds within the Hebrew Bible besides Proverbs

Besides the wisdom song in Proverbs 8 we may also refer to some other passages of the Hebrew Bible as background of the prologue of the fourth gospel. Of course, in the first place I am thinking of Genesis 1-2. I would also like to mention Exodus 34:6 and Psalm 86:15. There we read concerning YHWH that He is merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth. Undoubtedly these words form the background of John 1:14 where we read about the glory of Christ that it is full of grace and truth.

In the second part of Exodus the building of the tabernacle is described. Especially texts such as Exodus 29:43 ('And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by my glory'), 29:45 ('And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God' and 40:34 ('Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle') are important. I would also like to mention Psalm 33:6: 'By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.' Finally, I would like to mention Psalm 85:10 where the MT speaks of the dwelling of the כבוד our land (Septuagint: τοῦ κατασκηνώσαι δόξαν ἐν τῇ γῆ ἡμῶν). This study will show that the relationships between the prologue and the fourth gospel and the Hebrew Bible are even stronger if we read the Hebrew Bible in the form that it comes to us in the targumim.

The targumim

Is it justified to appeal to the targumim to explain the prologue of the fourth gospel? After all, the targumim are not so old as the fourth gospel. Certainly, we are not allowed to use much younger rabbinic material to explain the New Testament. The period when the targumim that have come down to us were set down in writing, cannot be dated earlier than the end of the first century. However, we should keep in mind that we can be certain that these are written records of traditions that are older and sometimes much older. Moreover there must have been targumim that were older than the ones that we now possess in complete form. The targum fragments among the Dead Sea Scrolls are an undisputable proof of this.

The targumim differ from each other. This is very clear when we compare the targumim of the Pentateuch with each other. Targum Onkelos links closely with the text of the Hebrew Bible, while the other targumim of the Pentateuch are much more like paraphrases.

The consensus among scholars is that Targum Onkelos, the official Targum on the Pentateuch of both Babylonian and Western Judaism, received an initial Palestinian editing in the second century AD and a final Babylonian editing in the third century AD.²⁶ According to scholarly consensus Targum Jonathan to the Prophets originated in Palestine at the end of the first or at the beginning of the second century AD. In Babylon the final editing was done, at least before the Arabic invasion in the seventh century.²⁷ The date of the (tradition behind the) targumim on the Writings varies from around the beginning of the Christian Era to the ninth century.²⁸ Targum Onkelos and Jonathan were written in a Babylonian dialect of Aramaic. Linguistically speaking, the Pseudo-Jonathan, Neofiti and the Fragment Targum have many West-Aramaic or Palestinian features. According to the scholarly consensus, the final editing of Pseudo-Jonathan is dated during the Arabic conquest of the Middle East, no later than the seventh/eight century AD.²⁹ Targum Neofiti to the Pentateuch is usually dated no later than the third century AD. Scholars generally agree that this targum on the Pentateuch is older than the other ones. Especially Targum Neofiti is important for our study, not only because of its age, but also because of its Palestinian background. The Fragment Targum, which used to be called Jerushalmi II as well, is closely connected with Targum Neofiti. In all probability its origin can be dated during the third century AD.

²⁶ Bernard Grossfeld, *The Aramaic Bible*, vol. 6 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 33, 34.

²⁷ Daniel J. Harrington and Anthony J. Saldarini, *The Aramaic Bible*, vol. 10 (Wilmington, Delaware: Glazier, 1987), 13-14.

²⁸ Whereas Targum Onkelos and Jonathan achieved an authoritative status, this is not true for the other targumim on the Pentateuch, nor for the targumim on the Writings.

²⁹ Michael Maher, *The Aramaic Bible*, vol. 1b (Collegeville, Minnesota: Glazier, 1992), 11. Undeservedly the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on the Pentateuch has been ascribed to Jonathan Ben Uzziel because of the letter iota at the title page. It was the first letter of Jerushalmi.

*The frequency of מימרא, שכינה, ד(א)יקר and דבירה in the targumim*³⁰

<i>expres- sion</i>	<i>MT</i>	<i>Onkelos</i>	<i>Ps. Jo- nathan</i>	<i>Frag. Targum</i>	<i>Neofiti</i>	<i>Jona- than</i>	<i>Writings</i>
דבירה ³¹	-	1	19	15	33	16	6
כבוד of YHWH	13 (Pent.) 39 (Proph.) 46 (Writings)	-	-	-	-	-	-
ד(א)יקר of YHWH	-	42/43	128	36/37	116/123	89/90 ³²	107
שכינה	-	55	121	29/30	110/116	177	129
מימרא	-	227/234 ³³	363	161/162	346/456 ³⁴	612	313/ 324 ³⁵

From this survey it becomes clear that ד(א)יקר in connection with YHWH occurs much more frequently in the targumim than that כבוד in connection with YHWH occurs in the Hebrew Bible.

³⁰ This survey is based on the files of The Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon Project (CAL). These files do not contain all varieties that occur in the manuscripts.

³¹ We also find the wordings ד(א)יקר and ד(א)בירה.

³² In Judges 5:5 there is a manuscript that reads יי.

³³ There is a manuscript that reads יי in Exodus 16:3; Numbers 21:5. There is a manuscript that reads פום in Leviticus 27:8. There is a manuscript that reads י- in Genesis 27:8; Exodus 4:1. There is a manuscript that reads יה- in Numbers 3:7. There is a manuscript that reads פקודי in Deuteronomy 28:13.

³⁴ There is a reading that has ד(א)יקר in Genesis 1:29, 2:3 (2x). There is a reading that reads דיי שכינת דיי in Exodus 19:11, 20. There is a manuscript that reads איקר שכינתי in Exodus 33:3. There is a reading that has איקר שכינתיה in Num. 12:5. There is a reading that has יי אלהים in Genesis 2:15, 16, 18; 2:21; 3:1, 8, 21, 22. There is a reading that has יי אלהכך in Leviticus 20:7. There is a reading that has יי in Genesis 6:7; 7:16; 16:11; 19:29; 21:2, 17; 22:8; 25:21; 31:7; 33:5; 43:29; 50:20; Exodus 3:7, 15; 4:21, 22; 7:17, 20, 25; 8:27; 9:1, 5, 23; 10:19, 21; 12:29; 13:17 (2x); 14:24; 16:15; 18:23; 20:11; 31:13, 17; 32:35; 34:1; Leviticus 8:4; Numbers 8:4; 11:29; 14:8, 43; 15:22; 16:7, 28; 21:6; 22:13, 31; 30:6, 9, 13; 31:7; 36:13; Deuteronomy 1:45; 4:4, 23; 28:8, 25, 27; 28:49, 61. There is a reading that has כוונה in Ex. 9:14. There is a reading that has פום in Exodus 21:22; Numbers 26:56; 35:30; Deuteronomy 19:15 (2x). There is a reading that has אנה in Exodus 23:20. There is a reading that has גורה in Exodus 38:21. There is a reading that has י- in Exodus 23:21; Numbers 14:22. There is a reading that has שם קדישא instead of שם מימרי in Exodus 23:21. There is a reading that has ה- (reference to the divine name) in Exodus 32:11. There is a reading that has אולפן אורייתא instead of מימריה בשם in Deuteronomy 11:22 and 13:5. There is a reading that does not mention מימרא in Exodus 9:27; 12:27; 13:8; 14:4, 17; 15:25 (2x); 29:42; 33:12; Leviticus 11:44, 45; 20:8; 21:8, 15, 23; 22:9; Numbers 15:30; 21:16; Deuteronomy 5:24, 25.

³⁵ There is a manuscript that reads ד- for the second instance of מימרא in Psalm 5:12. There is a manuscript that reads סברות for the second instance of מימרא in Psalm 9:11. There is a manuscript that reads אלהא instead of דיי מימרא in Psalm 11:5. There is a manuscript that reads יהוה instead of דיי מימרא in Ps. 16:8; the first instance in Psalm 68:12; 85:13; 94:22. There is a manuscript that reads עלהי instead of במימריה in Psalm 18:31. There is a manuscript that reads יהוה in the second reference in Psalm 18:31 instead of מימרא ישרי לעלמא. There is a manuscript that has no equivalent for מימרא in Psalm 106:40 and 114:3.

In almost all instances where no equivalent for אֱיִקָר (א) can be found in the Hebrew Bible, אֱיִקָר (א) in the targumim has the notion of hypostasis. In every targum the instances where אֱיִקָר (א) has no equivalent in the Hebrew Bible and is connected with YHWH in the sense of his due praise can be counted on one hand. For שְׁכִינָה and דְּבִירָא we find no equivalent in the text of the Hebrew Bible. The שְׁכִינָה is by definition the indwelling presence of YHWH and דְּבִירָא is by definition the word of YHWH that is revealed to man.

The survey shows that the frequency of אֱיִקָר (א) and שְׁכִינָה respectively do not differ greatly in the same targum on the Pentateuch. In the targumim Pseudo-Jonathan and Neofiti the frequency of אֱיִקָר (א) is only a little higher. דְּבִירָא occurs the least frequently. In the targumim on the Writings we only find instances of דְּבִירָא in the Chronicles and the Song of Solomon. In each of the targumim מִימְרָא occurs most frequently. If we include the varieties where מִימְרָא occurs, the number of instances is the highest in Targum Neofiti. If we do not include them, there is hardly any difference in frequency between Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and Targum Neofiti. In the Palestinian Targumim the number of instances of מִימְרָא, שְׁכִינָה, אֱיִקָר (א) and especially דְּבִירָא is considerably higher than in Targum Onkelos.

I would like to emphasize that מִימְרָא hardly ever occurs independently, but nearly always together with a possessive pronoun, in the status constructus or in a descriptive reference (קָדָם (מִן יוֹי/יוֹי). In connection with YHWH it is always explicitly indicated that it is his מִימְרָא. For most instances of מִימְרָא in the targumim no equivalent can be found in the text of the Hebrew Bible. In these instances the מִימְרָא is always the מִימְרָא of YHWH.

However, מִימְרָא can also be the translation of פִּי (mouth) and קוֹל (voice) and אִמְרָה (speech/word) is always translated as מִימְרָא in the targumim. When מִימְרָא is the translation of פִּי (mouth), קוֹל (voice) or אִמְרָה (speech) in the text of the Hebrew Bible these words are used both of human beings and of YHWH.

In distinction to אִמְרָה, the noun דְּבַר (word/thing/event) is not always translated as מִימְרָא in targumim. Often the targumim use in that case translations such as מִילָא or פְּתָגָם. In Targum Onkelos and Targum Jonathan this is always the case. In these targumim מִימְרָא is never found as a translation of the noun דְּבַר. Studying the expressions of מִימְרָא in the targumim we must reckon

with this variety in use. Still it remains true that most often מימרא is מימרא of YHWH and that it used in this case mostly in the same way as the שכונה and יקר(א) of YHWH.

The meaning of מימרא, שכונה, יקר(א) and דבירא in the targumim

In addition, also when we bear in mind that the instances of מימרא in the survey that has been given in this article, do not always refer to YHWH, it still is the case that מימרא as compared to שכונה, יקר(א) and דבירא is the most all-embracing term used to describe JHWH in relation to his creation and to human beings.

I would stress the fact that מימרא can be the subject in a sentence with שכונה or יקר(א) as object. We do not find any examples in reverse order. Of the terms מימרא, שכונה and יקר(א), יקר(א) is the least important. Often שכונה is the nomen rectum of יקר(א), while the opposite occurs only sporadically. In Targum Neofiti מימרא occurs as nomen rectum in the expression בענני שכונתי מימרי (the clouds of the glory of the Shekinah of my memra) (Lev. 16:2).

However, also שכונה can be the nomen rectum of מימרא. This is clear from the following expressions מימרא דיי דשכונתה (Onkelos: Numb. 11:20; Pseudo-Jonathan: Deut. 31:8; 2 Chron. 19:6) and מימרא דיי ד(י)איקר דשכונתה (Pseudo-Jonathan/Neofiti: Numb. 11:20; Neofiti: Deut. 31:8). I have already mentioned that in the targumim מימרא occurs as a translation of פי (mouth) and קול (voice). In both cases we may think of avoiding anthropomorphisms, although it is also possible to assume that the מימרא of YHWH is an independent entity here that must be distinguished from YHWH Himself. In the targumim, the terms מימרא, שכונה, יקר(א) and דבירא are sometimes used to avoid anthropomorphisms. However, the targumim are not consistent on this point. There where anthropomorphisms could lead to misunderstandings, the targumist tended to introduce the above mentioned terms in the Aramaic text. However, their full use is much broader. These terms may be introduced in the Aramaic text at any place where YHWH communicates with people, although again the targumim are not consistent on this point.

In the targumim the שכונה, דבירא, and יקר(א) of YHWH always refer to the abiding presence of YHWH. Thus it is very difficult to completely exclude the idea of hypostasis.³⁶ By ‘hypostasis’ I mean a manifestation of God in His relationship with people that does not just fully coincide with God.³⁷ I do not mean that this definition of the word ‘hypostasis’ can be fully equated with the way in which this term functions in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. In contrast to מימרא, דבירא *always* refers to the word of YHWH as an independent manifestation of YHWH.

Is it permissible to interpret not only שכונה, יקר(א) and דבירא but also מימרא - and then in most cases where it is used - as a manifestation or hypostasis of YHWH? G.F. Moore did not see a relationship between the מימרא in the targumim and the λόγος of Philo. The מימרא was assumed by him to be no more than a substitute for the tetragram.³⁸ We read the same by H.A. Wolfson.³⁹ Now it must be realized that these researchers expressed their views before the discovery of Targum Neofiti.

Whereas the expression מימרא does not occur in Targum Onkelos and Pseudo-Jonathan in Genesis 1-2, we do find it there in Targum Neofiti and it is almost impossible not to draw the conclusion that the Palestinian targumim were influenced by Philo in this respect or at least point to a same intellectual climate. Just as the λόγος of Philo has a semi-independent status and stands between God himself and creation the same is true of the מימרא in Targum Neofiti.

For Philo the λόγος has the character of a hypostasis. It is an independent manifestation of God, who communicates with the world in this way. This is especially in the light of the use of מימרא in Genesis 1-2 an indication that מימרא, in the targumim, is more than a description of God.

³⁶ When Alan Unterman (‘Shekinah’, *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 14, Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1972, 1350-1351) states that the independent use of שכונה, יקר(א) and מימרא must be purely considered to be an image, he does not sufficiently discount that the targumim, at this point, reflect a rabbinic tradition. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 89v.

³⁷ See Walter Eichrodt, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, Teil. 2/3, viert neubearbeitete Aufl. (Stuttgart: Dietmar Klotze Verlag, 1961), 6v.; G. Pfeifer, *Ursprung und Wesen der Hypostasenvorstellungen im Judentum* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1967), 15.

³⁸ G.F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era*, vol. I (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1927), 417-419.

³⁹ H.A. Wolfson, *Philo*, vol. I (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1949), 247.

This argument is used by Peter Borgen, Daniel Boyarin and Eliezer Segal.⁴⁰ They all assume that the view of the *λόγος* from Middle Platonism was used to explain the relationship between God and the world not only in Philo, but also in the targumim.

Those who see the *מימרא* only as a personal reference of YHWH, cannot explain why this word is used exactly when YHWH communicates with the world. It is true that when *מימרא* is the translation of the mouth (פי), voice (קול), speech (אמרה) or the word (דבר) of YHWH, it is not necessary to assume the idea of hypostasis. But that does not mean that this idea is never present. There where the *מימרא* is inserted without equivalent in the text of the Hebrew Bible, we usually have to assume according to my conviction the idea of hypostasis.⁴¹ What other reason would the targumist have had to speak of the *מימרא* of YHWH rather than simply leaving the tetragram there? I am not suggesting that the idea of hypostasis is present in all instances of *מימרא* in connection with YHWH, but especially when *מימרא* does not occur in the text of the Hebrew Bible, we will have to reckon with the fact that the aspect of hypostasis is there.

In any case it is certain that the *מימרא* is not only explicitly distinguished from YHWH himself in several texts, but that it is also described as a person who acts autonomously. (See Targum Neofiti Ex. 11:4: 'In the middle of the night My *מימרא* will be revealed in the middle of Egypt'; Targum Is. 65:1: 'I allowed Myself to be prevailed upon by my *מימרא* for them that did not seek me.' With respect to the death of the firstborn in Egypt during the Passover night, we see that it is attributed to the almighty word (*λόγος*) of God in the Wisdom of Solomon. Here the Palestinian Targumim strike a similar tone. This lends support to the view that the theology of the *מימרא* is not a development of the younger rabbinical Judaism that is not important for understanding the New Testament, but that this theology developed in the inter-testament period.⁴² With this knowledge of the targumim we are now going to consider the prologue of the fourth gospel. I would like to emphasize that parallels between the *מימרא* in the targumim and the *λόγος* in

⁴⁰ Borgen, 'Targumic Character', 290; Boyarin, 'The Gospel of the *Memra*', 243-284; *Border Lines*, 89-150; Eliezer Segal, *Holidays, History and Halakah* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 2000), 169v.

⁴¹ This is not necessary for an expression like *כמימריה*. It can be translated by 'according to His Word' without any reason to consider the *מימרא* to be a hypostasis. See Targum Neofiti Gen. 1:7.

⁴² The *מימרא* does not occur in the rabbinic literature of the centuries after the fall of the Second Temple. Here the targumim reflect a para-rabbinic tradition. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 89v.

the fourth gospel do not mean that the function of λόγος in the fourth gospel is identical to the function of the מִמְרָא in the targumim; but it does indicate that the use of מִמְרָא sheds light on the use of the λόγος in the fourth gospel.

The structure of John 1:1-18

Is the prologue an original creation by John or has he used an existing hymn and made some additions and modifications? It is certainly possible that John has used an existing hymn. However, the fact that several hapax legomena occur in the prologue does not give sufficient proof to assume the use of an existing hymn, because the language of the prologue can be called typically John-like.⁴³

The prologue of the gospel of John has a high literary content. Beside the Aramaic background this article only deals with the prologue's structure.

Nearly all researchers assume that the prologue consists of three parts. Herman Ridderbos and Frank J. Matera distinguish the following three parts: 1:1-5 (the Word of God in the beginning/the eternal Word); 1:6-14 (the coming of the Word) and 1:15-18) the Word incarnate).⁴⁴ P.H.R. van Houwelingen uses a similar division but places a boundary at 1:13.⁴⁵

Andreas J. Köstenberger suggests a five-fold division: 1:1-5 the activity of the Word in creation; 1:6-8 John's witness concerning the light; 1:9-14 the incarnation of the Word and the privilege of God's children; 1:15 John's witness concerning incarnation; 1:16-18 the final revelation brought by Jesus Christ.⁴⁶ Ferdinand Hahn, who assumes that the author of the fourth gospel has used an existing hymn, considers at least 1:6-8, 1:12b-13 and 1:17-18 to be additions. Also those who do not share the belief that John has extended an existing hymn, can see that it is possible to draw a dividing line not only at 1:5 but also at 1:8.

⁴³ Georg Strecker, *Theology of the New Testament* [trans. M. Eugene Boring, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000], 469.

⁴⁴ Herman Ridderbos, *Het evangelie naar Johannes. Proeve van een theologische exegese*, deel. 1 (hoofdstuk 1-10) (Kampen: Kok, 1987), 36v.; Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Theology: Exploring Diversity and Unity* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 263.

⁴⁵ Van Houwelingen, *Johannes*, 43v.

⁴⁶ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John* (BECNT, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 23.

With respect to content, an important question is where in the prologue we find the pre-existing λόγος and where the λόγος incarnate. This will influence our understanding of 1:9 and, even more, 1:11-13. For 1:9 the question is whether ἐρχόμενον εἰς τὸν κόσμον (coming in the world) refers to human beings or to λόγος as the light. In the latter case it is not necessary (but certainly possible) to understand the coming into the world as the incarnation.

With respect to 1:10-13 Ridderbos as well as Van Houwelingen, Köstenberger and Matera, when considering the coming of the λόγος to his own and the reception of the λόγος, do not have in mind the history before the incarnation but rather the history after it.⁴⁷

I would like to suggest the following division: 1:1-8; 1:9-14 and 1:15-18. The first part 1:1-8 is about the activity of the λόγος with respect to the creation and the course of history, especially Israel's history up to John the Baptist's witness concerning Him. I assume that we should not interpret κατέλαβεν in 1:5 as 'overcome' but rather as 'understand, receive'. It is about the speech of the λόγος that comes from the creation to all nations and especially to Israel in the course of history, but that is not understood by them. Here in other words the same response is mentioned as in the second part of the prologue in 1:10: καὶ ὁ κόσμος αὐτὸν οὐκ ἔγνω (and the world knew him not) and in 1:11 καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβον (his own did not receive him).⁴⁸ In the first part of the prologue there is no positive human response to the activity of the λόγος. Like the first part of the prologue, John 1:9-10a is about the activity of the λόγος in relation to the creation. In 1:10b it becomes clear that this activity has not led to the true knowledge of the λόγος in the world of nations beyond Israel. Next 1:10-13 speaks of the activity of the λόγος among Israel in the what Christians call the Old Testament period of the history of redemption. Now, besides the negative response also for the first time a positive response is mentioned. Those who have received the λόγος and who have received power to become the sons of God, are the

⁴⁷ Ridderbos, *Johannes*, deel 1, 60; Van Houwelingen, *Johannes*, 49-50; Köstenberger, *John*, 36v.; Matera, *New Testament Theology*, 264.

⁴⁸ Origenes interpreted κατέλαβεν as 'overcome'. In the KJV we find the view that it means 'comprehend'. A previous generation of New Testament scholars generally followed the interpretation of Origenes. Most contemporary New Testament scholars recognize the second view.

believers of the old dispensation. The incarnation of the λόγος, which is first mentioned in 1:14, is the climax of this history of salvation.

1:15 goes back to the conclusion of the first part of the prologue. While the first part of the prologue ends with John the Baptist's ministry, the third part begins with it. In 1:16-18 the meaning of the incarnation is unfolded with the climax that the only begotten Son has declared the Father.⁴⁹ In the final part only the positive responses of John and other New Testament believers are mentioned.

The abovementioned division assumes that not only in 1:9 but also in 1:11-13 the incarnation is not presupposed. It makes clear that each part of the prologue adds something to the previous one. This also means that it becomes less probable that John has edited an existing hymn. In the following part of this article I will show how a comparison between the prologue and the targumim supports the interpretation that is given here and the connected threefold division of the prologue.

John 1:1-3, 10 and the Targum Neofiti and the Fragment Targum on Genesis 1

In Targum Neofiti we read in Genesis 1:1: מלקדמין בהכמה ברא דיי (‘In the beginning created (of) YHWH in wisdom’), while the Fragment Targum reads יי בהכמה ברא. Midrash Rabbah explains us how the targumist came to make this translation. Here a connection is made between Proverbs 8:22 and Genesis 1:1 via the word רשית (beginning). Because Proverbs 8:22 says about wisdom that YHWH had said that He possessed it in the beginning of His ways, Midrash Rabbah states that the word ‘beginning’ in Genesis 1:1 must be seen in relation to wisdom. Midrash Rabbah equates wisdom with the torah.⁵⁰ It is likely that the connection between Genesis 1:1 and Proverbs 8:22 that we find in Targum Neofiti and the Fragment Targum, was already made before

⁴⁹ P⁷⁵ and a¹ do not read μονογενῆς υἱὸς but μονογενῆς θεὸς here. If this interpretation is correct, the prologue does not only begin with the witness that Jesus, as the Word, is God, but also ends with it. Undoubtedly the latter interpretation is the most difficult one. Yet I prefer μονογενῆς υἱὸς. Important as P⁷⁵ and a¹ may be, in my opinion the basis to prefer the most difficult interpretation solely by virtue of these text witnesses is very narrow. Moreover the connection of μονογενῆς and θεὸς is difficult if not intolerable. (Bultmann, *Johannes*, 55-56; Ridderbos, *Johannes*, deel 1, 76; Van Houwelingen, *Johannes*, 55.

⁵⁰ *Midrasj Rabbah* (Tel Aviv: Y. Orenstein, 1997), 3.

the destruction of the Second Temple. In the sequel in Targum Neofiti an indirect connection is made between the wisdom and the *מימרא* as the medium by which YHWH creates the world. There the *מימרא* is repeatedly mentioned as the medium that YHWH used when He created the world. In Targum Neofiti the *מימרא* is for the first time explicitly mentioned in Gen. 1:3. In total we find thirty-one instances of *מימרא* in Targum Neofiti in Genesis 1-2.⁵¹ The fact that Targum Neofiti has *yyyd* instead of *יי* in Genesis 1:1, seems to indicate that there also a connection is made with the *מימרא* of YHWH, who creates the world in His wisdom.

On the basis of this fact it is almost impossible to conclude that there is no relationship between the prologue of the fourth gospel and the Palestinian targumim. It is striking that Targum Onkelos and Pseudo-Jonathan, which speak of the *מימרא* at other places, do not do so in Genesis 1. In Targum Onkelos the first instance is found in Genesis. 3:24 and in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan the first instance is found in Genesis 2:8 and the second one in Genesis 3:24.

Following Alejandro Diez Macho, Boyarin states that this has to do with the fact that these targumim are more rabbinic in nature than the Targum Neofiti and the Fragment Targum. Boyarin states that the rabbis have reduced the use of the expression *מימרא* as much as possible because of the starting points that could be found here for the Christian church to explain the meaning of the person of Jesus.⁵²

I wonder if Boyarin, when he states this in general, does not go too far. After all, in all targumim a great number of instances of the *מימרא* of YHWH can be found. It is, however, certain that the Christian church has connected not only texts out of the Hebrew Bible but also non-canonical texts which speak of the relationship between the *λόγος* or wisdom and the creation, with the Lord Jesus Christ. These texts especially were sore points for the rabbis. They spoke of the relationship between the Torah and the creation of the world. This can explain why *מימרא*, which was an addition to the text of the MT, was omitted in the case of Genesis 1-2. Not only the prologue of the fourth gospel but also the hymn we find in Colossians 1 shows that the creation narrative played in important role in early Christology.

⁵¹ The Fragment Targum only mentions *מימרא* in Genesis 1:27.

⁵² Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 130v.

The targumim about the מימרא and the creation of the world outside Genesis 1

Not only in Genesis 1-2 but also further in the Scriptures the targumim attribute the creation to the מימרא.⁵³ I will mention several instances without attempting to be exhaustive. We read in Targum Onkelos, in Deuteronomy 33:27, that God made the world (עבד) by His מימרא.⁵⁴ Targum Pseudo-Jonathan speaks of making the world by the מימרא in Deuteronomy 32:18. In Targum Neofiti it says in Genesis 6:7 marg.; Exodus 20:11; Deuteronomy 32:15 that the מימרא of YHWH created the world. In each of these texts the verb ברי (to create) is used. This is also true for the Fragment Targum in Deuteronomy 32:15, 18.⁵⁵ From Targum Jonathan I would mention Isaiah 44:24; 45:12 (with עבד); 48:13; Jeremiah 27:5 (with עבד) and Psalm 124:8 (with עבד) from the Targum on the Psalms. It is clear that a Palestinian Jew who heard the reading of the targumim in the synagogue or who studied them himself, occasionally encountered texts that spoke of the creation/making of the world by the מימרא.

The מימרא and life (John 1:4)

Do the targumim also connect the מימרא with life? If so, then these instances are important for John 1:4 and 9. Targum Onkelos, Deuteronomy 8:3, speaks of that the human being lives by 'every word coming from YHWH' (מימר מן קדם יוי כל אפקות), whereas the Hebrew text speaks of 'everything that comes out of YHWH's mouth' (כל-מוצא פי-יהוה). Here the targumist has translated פי as מימרא. Judging from the words of the targum, the evangelist could directly connect λόγος with ζῶν. (See Matt. 4:4; Luk. 4:4). Also in Deuteronomy 30:20 Targum Onkelos has translated פי (mouth) as מימרא. There where the Hebrew text has 'obey' (שמע), Targum Onkelos speaks of 'accepting' (קבל) (pa'el of קבל) (See John 1:12). This means that it is said to the people of Israel, according to Targum Onkelos to Deuteronomy 30:20, that it must love YHWH and accept his מימרא, because he is their life. The same is true for Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Deuteronomy

⁵³ This is not true for the majority of manuscripts of the targum on the Psalms in Ps. 33:6. They usually do not read מימרא but *alym*. The reading with מימרא is not mentioned in CAL.

⁵⁴ Here a form of the verb *ycyv* is used, while there are manuscripts that have a form of the verb *db*].

⁵⁵ In Targum Neofiti to Deuteronomy 32:18 the verb *שכלל* (to found) is used in connection with מימרא.

30:20. Targum Neofiti does not speak of accepting the מִימְרָא, but of obedience to the voice of the מִימְרָא.

We read in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Genesis 3:24 that the law was given by the מִימְרָא of YHWH, that he, who observes it, be confirmed and that he may walk in the paths of life to come. We also see a relationship between מִימְרָא and life. There is a manuscript of Targum Neofiti that reads in Deuteronomy 4:4, ‘You who clung to the voice of the מִימְרָא of YHWH, are all alive.’

The מִימְרָא and light (John 1:4-5)

In John 1:9 it is argued that the λόγος is true light. The question is: do the targumim also connect the מִימְרָא with light? In the first place this is true for Targum Neofiti and the Fragment Targum Genesis 1:3. For Targum Neofiti it is also true for Genesis 1:4-5 and 16. Targum Neofiti connects the מִימְרָא with light in the so-called poem of the *Four Nights*, which has been added to Exodus 12:42.

In Targum Jonathan to Isaiah 10:17 a connection is made between the Light of Israel and His mighty מִימְרָא, while the targumist says that YHWH calls the people to accept his מִימְרָא in Isaiah 51:14 (See John 1:14), that his judgement may be a light for the people.

The coming of the λόγος (John 1:11)

John 1:11 speaks of the coming of λόγος. We also find a counterpart of this in the targumim. In Targum Pseudo-Jonathan Genesis 20:1 we read that the מִימְרָא of YHWH comes to Abimelech, and to Balaam in Numbers 22:9 and 20.

Accepting the מִימְרָא (John 1:11-12)

There where we read about ‘hearkening to his voice/the voice of YHWH’ (שמע בקולו/בקול) (יהוה) in the Hebrew Bible, Targum Onkelos and Pseudo-Jonathan always translate it by ‘accepting his מִימְרָא/the מִימְרָא of YHWH (למימריה/למימרא דיי קבל).⁵⁶ The said expression occurs twenty-three

⁵⁶ We find קבל here in the pa‘el.

times in Targum Onkelos and twenty-two times in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan.⁵⁷ It is striking that both Targum Neofiti and the Fragment Targum, in these texts, have the translation ‘hearkening to the voice of his מימרא/the מימרא of YHWH.’ Here the existing Palestinian targumim cannot be seen as background of expressions ‘οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβον’ and ‘ὅσοι δὲ ἔλαβον αὐτόν’ in John 1:11-12.

In Targum Jonathan we find sixty-two instances of the pa‘el of קבל in combination with למימרא, מימרא referring to the מימרא of YHWH. In Isaiah 1:19 and 55:3 MT only speaks of שמע (hearkening) and the context shows that it means hearkening to YHWH. In Isaiah 46:3, 12, 13; 49:1; 51:1, 7; Jeremiah 7:26; 16:12; 17:24, 27; 25:7; 26:4; 34:14, 17; 34: 14, 15, 16; Ezekiel 3:7; 20:8; Hosea 9:17; Zechariah 1:4 the MT speaks of שמע אלי (hearkening to Me) and in Isaiah 51:4; אלי; שׂיבוהק (listen to Me). In these cases the word קול does not occur in the MT. This is also true for Jeremiah 23:18. There Targum Jonathan deviates considerably from the MT. In the targum on the Psalms we find three instances. In Psalm 81:9 we find the haf‘el of קבל and Psalm 95:7 and 106:25 do not have the preposition לְ but בּ.⁵⁸ This is true for the only instance in the targum on Lamentations (1:2).

The name of the מימרא (John 1:12)

In Targum Pseudo-Jonathan the name of the מימרא is mentioned twenty-three times. For Targum Neofiti this number is even thirty-four. In the Fragment Targum we find seven instances and in the Targum on the Psalms nine, four of which are in Psalm 118. It is even more significant in this context that we read seven times about believing (דימן) or not believing in the name of the מימרא of YHWH.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ In Deuteronomy 1:43 the MT reads: אֶת־פִּי יְהוָה הִיא. Here Targum Onkelos has:

וְלֹא קִבְּלִיתוּן וְסִבְּבִיתוּן עַל מִימְרָא דִּיּוּ. This is also true for Targum Pseudo-Jonathan.

⁵⁸ In de MT we read in these places: בַּקּוֹל תִּשְׁמְעוּ.

⁵⁹ Genesis 15:6; Exodus 4:31; 14:31; Numbers 14:11; 20:12; Deuteronomy 1:32 and 9:23.

The glory of the מִימְרָא (John 1:14)

When we translate the Greek verb *σκαηνόω* (to dwell) which John uses in John 1:14, into Aramaic we have the verb *שכַן* (to dwell), from which the noun *שכינה* is derived. In the targumim we find quite frequently the combination of *שכינה* and *א(י)קר*. I would argue that all combinations of *שכינה* and *א(י)קר* in the targumim can be considered to be important for our understanding of John 1:14. A person knowing the targumic tradition – and I assume this was the case with the writer of the fourth gospel - has this combination in his mind.

I would like to add here that Targum Onkelos, in Exodus 33:23, speaks of ‘the word of my glory’ (*דברת יקרי*). Even more importantly, there are texts in the targumim that speak of the glory of the *מִימְרָא* of YHWH. This is true for Exodus 14:4 and 17 in the Fragment Targum. As has been mentioned before, we hear in Targum Neofiti on one occasion of the glory of the Shekinah of My *מִימְרָא*.⁶⁰ It is very significant that this latter instance occurs in the very chapter that describes the ritual of the Day of Atonement. According to Leviticus 16 atonement is made by means of the service of the Aaronite high priest, at YHWH’s command, who appears in the form of his *מִימְרָא*. The gospel according to John clearly shows that the final atonement by the *λόγος* that became flesh, has been established itself.

The seeing of the glory of the דְבִירָא/מִימְרָא (John 1:14)

In the MT there is not one verb that is so frequently used in combination with the noun *כבוד* as the verb *ראה* (to see).⁶¹ In the MT there are a number of texts that speak of seeing God/YHWH Himself. Here the targumim usually speak of the seeing of the glory of the Shekinah of YHWH. For example, this is true for Exodus 24:10.⁶² In Exodus 33:20 YHWH says, according

⁶⁰ See p. 14.

⁶¹ P. de Vries, *De heerlijkheid van JHWH in het Oude Testament en in het bijzonder in Ezechiël* (Heerenveen, The Netherlands: Groen, 2010), 71-72.

⁶² According to Targum Onkelos, Jacob says in Genesis 32:30 (MT 31) that he has seen the *מלאכא די* (angel of YHWH) face to face, while Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and Targum Neofiti speak of angels of YHWH. The fact that this text speaks of angels or an angel and not about the memra, glory or shekinah, must be explained from the fact that the angels have already been mentioned in the literary unit to which Genesis 32:30-32:1 (MT 2) belongs. In the case of the singular ‘angel’ of YHWH we will have to think of *that* angel, who is a visible manifestation of God Himself.

to Targum Onkelos, that he cannot see the face of his Shekinah.⁶³ For our understanding of the fourth gospel it is of great importance that Targum Jonathan does not speak about YHWH sitting on his throne in Isaiah 6:1, but about the glory of YHWH sitting on its throne.

Usually we hear about seeing the glory of the Shekinah or the glory of the Shekinah of YHWH. There are much fewer instances of seeing the מִימְרָא. Probably this has to do with the fact that מִימְרָא in itself is connected with ‘hearing’ and not with ‘seeing’. The only instance of seeing the מִימְרָא of YHWH is Deuteronomy 5:24 in Targum Neofiti, as far as I have been able to observe, while the targum in Numbers 14:14 states that the face of YHWH is revealed in his מִימְרָא.

The revelation/explanation of YHWH by His מִימְרָא (John 1:18)

As background of John 1:18 we can also mention the fact that YHWH has revealed himself face to face in His מִימְרָא according to Numbers 14:14 in Targum Neofiti.

Conclusions

We may rightly assume that John, the son of Zebedee, had been familiar with the Hebrew Bible Testament in the form of a targum since he was a child. Later he probably also became acquainted with written forms of the targumim. This study has shown that there are many linguistic connections between the prologue of the gospel according to John and the targumim. Some connections are stronger than others. I would like to mention especially the connection between the מִימְרָא and the creation in Targum Neofiti and the great number of instances where Targum Onkelos, Pseudo-Jonathan and Jonathan speak of ‘accepting the מִימְרָא’. Also the expression ‘believing the name of the מִימְרָא’ I consider as an important indication that when we assume the targumim as background of the prologue of the fourth gospel, that shows more light on the expressions used therein than the writing of Philo or the wisdom literature. I would like to emphasize again that assuming influence of the (tradition behind the) targumim on the prologue of the fourth gospel does not exclude other influences.

⁶³ Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and Targum Neofiti only have אפֿי (my face) here.

While Jesus never referred to himself as the *λόγος*, and John does not give Him this name elsewhere in his gospel, he did use this term, partly influenced by the targumim, in his reflection on the meaning of the person of Jesus; a reflection that is intended to show what Jesus, as the only begotten Son of God, means for our understanding of the creation and of the history of Israel under the old dispensation, leading to the incarnation.

In relation to the texts of the Hebrew Bible that speak of the seeing of the *כבוד* of YHWH, the targumim say that YHWH comes to human beings in the form of his glory, of the Shekinah, and especially of the *מימרא*. Communion with YHWH is always a mediating communion. In the Hebrew Bible the *כבוד* of YHWH is his deepest essence, on the one hand, but on the other hand it does completely not coincide with YHWH. This is clear from the fact that the *עניייה* can be localized in the earthly temple. This is one of the indications in the Hebrew Bible to a plurality in the God of Israel. In the targumim these indications are much stronger. John could not only link up with Philo, but also with the targumim, when he presented the *λόγος* as an independent divine entity that does not entirely coincide with God.

This does not mean that John speaks about the *λόγος* in the same way as Philo does. Influenced by Middle Platonism Philo assumes that God as the Highest Being cannot enter into direct contact with the material realm. Such thoughts are not found in the fourth gospel. In the targumim an important reason for using the notion of the *מימרא* is to avoid anthropomorphisms. This does not play a role with John either. For John it is a mystery that the *λόγος* which is God himself, has become man. Those who see the only begotten Son as the Word incarnate, see God himself (See John 14:9).

Returning to the possible influence of Philo and the targumim on the prologue of the fourth gospel, it is clear that it is valuable to assume the influence of the targumim, especially in the interpretation of John 1:11-12. It leads to a clearer understanding of the prologue's structure. In the light of the targumim the coming to his own cannot refer to the incarnation, but to the coming of *λόγος* that has not yet become flesh, to Israel. Those who have accepted him must consequently refer to the believing remnant of Israel under the old dispensation.

As mediator in creation the λόγος enlightens every human being who comes into the world and he is present in the world. However, the presence of λόγος has not led to true knowledge of λόγος under the old dispensation among the nations. The fact that the Greek word λόγος is male, but neuter in English, makes it more difficult for us to see that John 1:11-13 refers to the history of redemption before the incarnation. If we assume that this is true, it becomes clear that John 1:14 forms the climax of John 1:9-14. The first part of the prologue ends with the witness of John the Baptist. The second part of the prologue leads to the incarnation, while the third part that begins with the witness of John the Baptist, reveals the meaning of the incarnation.

John 1:18 forms both the conclusion of the prologue as also its climax with respect to its content. Now we do not hear about the λόγος anymore, but about the μονογενῆς υἱός. This is a much deeper reference with a much more personal sound. As the only begotten Son Jesus has declared the Father. While in the Hebrew Bible the seeing of YHWH and of his glory is mainly connected with the awe-inspiring majesty of YHWH, the gospel according to John emphasizes the lovely character of the beholding of the glory of Jesus as the λόγος incarnate.

It is not there where the glory of God appears in awe-inspiring majesty that it is revealed in its deepest form, but there where it is most hidden – on the cross of Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. However, with this we have already gone beyond the borders of the prologue. While the Hebrew Bible makes clear that people, in spite of the fact that they have seen God, are allowed to live, the New Testament and especially the gospel according to John teaches that those who look unto God in the form of his Son have life. The fourth gospel makes clear that only a theologia crucis is in the deepest and best sense of the word a theologia gloriae.