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AN EMBARRASSMENT OF RICHES: WHICH TRANSLATION OF THE YERUSHALMI SHOULD YOU USE?

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Not so long ago, the only translation of the Yerushalmi was the one edited by Jacob Neusner, published by the University of Chicago. Then came the Artscroll "Elucidation" (They're honest enough not to call it a translation). A less well-publicized translation is edited by Heinrich W. Guggenheimer and published by Walter De Gruyter. Each of them has its strengths and its weaknesses, which I'll explain.

1. Neusner's translation is the only one that is complete right now. It's size is approximately 9x6 inches, so it's easy to use and store. This translation is entitled A Preliminary Translation. I presume that he intended to come back and do a more thorough edition later, but he hasn't as of this date. The format is consistent throughout most of the volumes: a kind of outlining which may make sense to those who wrote it but which, I have generally found, isn't terribly helpful to the rest of us. (And sometimes, it's downright confusing). The quality of the translation is uneven. Some volumes are very good. But there are some glaring errors in other volumes. Unless you're able to go back and check the translation against the Hebrew, you'll be lost when dealing with those errors. The indices are just awful...almost useless. The volumes run from \$55-\$115 per volume.
2. The Artscroll translations are now rolling out of their "Talmud Factory." Their Yerushalmi version is modeled on their translation of the Bavli. I understand why they did it, but they really should have thought it through more thoroughly. With the Bavli, there's one idea of what a page of Talmud looks like and they simply couldn't wean themselves away from it. But there is no standard page of Yerushalmi and they could have made a much friendlier (and lighter) book. They are large books (12x9 inches), handsomely bound but quite heavy. The Hebrew text, with vowels is provided. There are no indices whatsoever. There are good notes at the bottom of the page but there is an undeniable, and undenied, bias toward ultra-Orthodox thinking in the translation and the notes. The volumes run \$36 per volume.
3. The translation edited by Heinrich W. Guggenheimer (author of The Scholar's Haggadah) is published by Walter De Gruyter. It is not complete but so far there are Berachot, Peah, Demai, Terumot, Ma'asrot, all three Babas and much of Nashim. The volumes are 9x6 inches, so are convenient to store and light enough to use, with sturdy binding. They present the Hebrew text, with vowels and variant readings in a readable font. The translation is good, clear and comprehensible (none of the confusing outlining). There are numerous, clear, useful indices. The volumes (brace yourself) can run over \$200 per book.

So which of these would I recommend? In all honesty, I recommend the Guggenheimer. These translations are superior to the other two "brands" in consistency of translation, ease of use and clarity of the Hebrew text. I have

spoken to the publishers and they plan to reduce the price and will also offer them as ebook. (A more detailed version of this review will appear in the CCAR Journal.)

Here's an example of the Guggenheimer:

In a discussion of curtailing the fanciness of wedding celebrations, there is a discussion about the crowns of the bride and groom:

The following are brides' crowns, that is a city of gold. Rabbi Akiba made for his wife a city of gold, which made Rabban Gamliel's wife jealous. He said to her, did you ever do what she did? She sold her braided hair, gave the money to him so he could study Torah. (Y. Sotah 9:16)

This is the famous story of Rabbi Akiba giving his wife a Jerusalem of gold, which, at first, when he is poor, he has to make out of straw.

Discussion Questions:

1. Will you buy any of the translations? If so, which ones?
2. Let us take up the cause of Rabban Gamliel's wife. She married a rich man and might have come from a wealthy family herself. Should he have responded so harshly? This story, told in one other place in Yerushalmi, is the only mention we find of her. Anyone want to give her a backstory?