TRANSLATION AS COMMENTARY:
THE CASE OF THE SEPTUAGINT TO EXODUS 32–33

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It has long been recognized that classical commentators on the Pentateuch respond to the same textual difficulties that lead modern scholars to develop source critical hypotheses. Working from the presumption of the text’s unity, these commentators were especially sensitive to apparent contradictions, gaps, or incongruities, and they attempted to show either that these phenomena were in fact not problematic or that they were intentionally present and meaningful. What is true of classical commentaries is no less true of ancient translations. A particularly clear case in point occurs in the Septuagint to Exodus 32–33.

The story of the worship of the Golden Calf and its aftermath presents a banner example of a composite text in the Pentateuch. Exodus 33 in particular consists of a bewildering array of traditions whose identification, extent, and provenance defy clear elucidation. Thus James Muilenburg writes that this pericope “has every appearance of being a catena of originally separate pieces which originally had

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^1 I am honored to contribute this study of the intersection between higher and lower criticism to a volume dedicated to Prof. Shemaryahu Talmon, who has repeatedly taught biblical scholars (among many other things in his distinguished career) how mutually enriching diverse areas of scholarship can be.

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^2 See, e.g., Daniel Boyarin, Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990) 49–56. Many scholars have noted that rabbinic commentary is relevant for synchronic or holistic readings, but it is important to recognize that the rabbis’ keen sense of gaps, contradictions, and discontinuities greatly aids source critics as well. Take, for example, Israel Knohl’s use of rabbinic material in The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 10 n. 12; 18 n. 27; 28 nn. 55, 59; 31 n. 66, etc.

little or nothing to do with each other... . The several parts do not cohere well with each other.”

Similarly, Roland de Vaux notes that the various passages dealing with the giving of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 19-24 and 32-34 “are difficult passages especially with regard to literary criticism and most scholars are in a state of despair, so great is the uncertainty concerning them.”

Yet the Septuagint version of these chapters reads fairly smoothly; many, though not all, of the contradictions or abrupt shifts of focus so evident in the text preserved in the MT and the Samaritan Pentateuch are lacking in LXX. Differences of this sort between LXX and the Hebrew witnesses may be explained, in principle, in a number of ways. It is possible that scribes who transmitted the Hebrew Vorlage on which LXX is based attempted to resolve difficulties found in an older text similar to MT and Samaritan. Alternatively, the differences may result from the exegetical efforts of the translators themselves. Another possibility is that the MT and Samaritan modify the Vorlage of the Greek text. Finally, the two text types may represent variant crystallizations of a narrative tradition, in which case the differences between them are not exegetical in nature. I would like to suggest that

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5 In regard to all the issues discussed below, the MT and the Samaritan Pentateuch do not differ. 4QpaleoExod is extant only for three of the verses examined below; in all three it matches MT and Samaritan against LXX. See P. Skehan, E. Ulrich, and J. Sanderson, ed., Qumran Cave 4, IV: Paleo-Hebrew and Greek Biblical Manuscripts (DJD 9; Oxford: Clarendon, 1992) 123-126.

6 In other words, the exegetical activity of the Greek translators must be distinguished from scribal revision and alteration in the Hebrew texts underlying the LXX. On the latter phenomenon, see, e.g., the material cited in Alexander Rofé, “The Nomistic Correction in Biblical Manuscripts and Its Occurrence in 4QSam,” RevQ 14 (1989) 249, and idem, “Ruth 4:11 LXX: A Midrashic Dramatization,” Textus 20 (2000) 129-140. Often, of course, it is impossible to decide whether the exegetical process occurred in the Vorlage or the translation, though Rofé shows that decisions can at times be made confidently.
in this case the second explanation is strongest: the Greek translators took advantage of the flexibility translation allows in order to produce a narrative that was less problematic than the Hebrew they had in front of them.

This thesis involves two related but distinct claims: (1) Tradents responsible for the version found in LXX of Exodus 32–33 were as aware of certain irritants in the text they received as modern scholars are. The version they produced implies a reading that resembles that of later harmonizing commentators in midrash, medieval rabbinic exegesis, and the work of modern opponents of source criticism such as Umberto Cassuto and R. W. L. Moberly.⁷ (2) The exegetical activity that resulted in this smoother text was the work of LXX translators, not Hebrew scribes who were responsible for the Vorlage. Indeed, it is only because this activity occurred at the translational level that we can properly describe it as exegetical; had it been the work of Hebrew scribes, it more correctly should be termed revisionary.⁸ I will address the first claim by examining several points at which the Septuagint differs from the texts preserved in MT and the Samaritan Pentateuch. I will attempt to substantiate the second claim after this treatment of specific passages.

A source-critical juncture in the extant Hebrew version occurs in between Exod 32:8 and 32:9. In vv. 7–8, God directs Moses to descend from Mount Sinai (לָּךָ הָר, v. 7), for the people have built the Golden Calf. Moses does so in v. 15 (יִשָּׁךְ יִרְאֵה). However, in v. 9, God begins a new statement that clashes with its context, not only because it begins unnecessarily with another introduction of direct discourse (יִדְרֹבֵנהָ אָלָ-מְשָׁה, cf. cf. 31:12-17 in v. 7), but because it contradicts the previous two verses. While in vv. 7–8 Moses is told to go to the people, in vv. 9f. God announces His intent to destroy them, in which case there will be no nation for

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⁸ On my use of these terms, see my discussion in A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in uiah 40–66 (Contraversions; Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998) 23–28.
Moses to return to. Further, whereas vv. 7–8 and 15ff. refer to the calf, vv. 9–14 make no reference to this specific sin. The point of tension between vv. 9–14 and the surrounding calf narrative is focused in v. 9, since it is there that the second divine statement is introduced. This whole verse is missing in LXX. Consequently, in LXX the transition is less abrupt in two respects. Because there is no new ‘‘And YHWH said,’’ God does not appear to be making a new statement; rather, the statement in vv. 9ff. is simply part of the previous one. Second, in MT and the Samaritan Pentateuch (as well as 4QpaleoExod\textsuperscript{m}, which includes v. 9), God’s reason for destroying the people is that they are ‘‘stiff-necked,’’ a general statement that does not relate to the calf incident. In LXX, however, the worship of the calf clearly provides the reason for the proposed destruction, since God’s description of that incident in v. 8 immediately precedes His announcement that He will destroy them.\textsuperscript{10} This omission does not remove all the tensions between the insertion and the calf narrative; it remains odd that God first directs Moses to descend to the people and then announces that they will not be there for him to return to them. But the omission of v. 9 reduces the tension sufficiently that the reader of LXX may

\textsuperscript{9} On the distinct nature of 32:9–14, which have no relation to the calf narrative, see especially S. R. Driver, The Book of Exodus (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1911) 351–352, and August Dillmann, Die Bücher Exodus und Leviticus (KEHAT\textsuperscript{2}; Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1880) 339. J. Carpenter and G. Harford-Battersby also regard 7–8 as later than 1–6, but see 9–14 as distinct from 7–8; see The Hexateuch According to the Revised Version (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900) 2.131–132 n. 7. Further evidence of the secondary nature of these verses is found in vv. 11–14, as Alexander Rofé points out to me: in these verses God accepts Moses’ prayer on behalf of the sinful people, but in vv. 15ff., it is clear that their sinful worship is still taking place, which makes it extraordinarily unlikely that forgiveness is already an option.

\textsuperscript{10} The exegetical import of the omission of v. 9 is noted by John W. Wevers, Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus (SCS 30; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990) 523: ‘‘If the omission was intentional—and I can see no palaeographic factors which would make such an omission accidental—it may have been to increase the dramatic effect of the narrative. It could be looked at as a kind of an excuse given by God for not wanting to destroy the people: they are stiff-necked. But to [the LXX] it is Israel’s attribution of the great and central act of redemption by her God to other gods, not the fact that it is stiff-necked, that results in God’s sudden decision to destroy the people.’’ Cf. Carpenter and Harford, Hexateuch, 131: ‘‘It may be noticed that [v.] 9 which seems to make a fresh start is omitted by LXX.’’
not be slowed down by a jarring disjuncture and thus may not attend to the tension at all.\footnote{Tg. Ps.-J. and b. Ber. 32a seem to have noticed the same tension, but they deal with it differently. They maintain that the words סַלְמַנְיָפָא in v. 7 do not mean, “Descend the mountain to the valley where the nation are”; after all, as the commentary of the Maharsha to Ber. 32a notes, it is not clear what Moses would do when he arrives there. Rather, these words mean “Descend from your honored position as leader of this people (who are about to be destroyed).” The superfluous introduction of direct speech in v. 9 also attracts rabbinic attention; see Exod. Rab. 42.2. On the passages from the Targum and Exod. Rab., see further the comments of M.M. Kasher, Torah Shelema (48 vols.; Jerusalem: Beit Torah Shelema, 1927-1995) volume 21, §§55 and 77 and additional references there (Hebrew).}

The preserved Hebrew text of Exod 33:1-5 presents another set of difficulties. In v. 2, God states that an angel will accompany the people to Canaan. In vv. 3 and 5, God disavows any intention to accompany them, lest their sinfulness lead Him to break out suddenly and destroy them. V. 2 allows for two conflicting readings,\footnote{Cf. the remarks of Y. Korah apud Bernard Grossfeld, The Targum Onqelos to Exodus (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1988) 92 n. 3.} one of which fits well with vv. 3 and 5 and one of which contradicts them. A reader’s preference for one or the other reading of v. 2 depends on how the reader understands the word “angel” there. An angel in biblical narrative can mean either a messenger (i.e., a being separate from, and working for, God) or a particular manifestation of the divine, which is identical with God but does not exhaust the fullness of the divine being.\footnote{See the especially clear summary of the issue in Richard Elliot Friedman, The Disappearance of God: A Divine Mystery (New York: Little Brown, 1997) 9-14. See also Shmuel Ahituv, “The Countenance of YHWH,” in Tehillah le-Moshe: Biblical and Judaic Studies in Honor of Moshe Greenberg (ed. M. Cogan, B. Eichler, and J. Tigay; Eisenbrauns: Winona Lake, Ind., 1997) 6, 9-11 (Hebrew).} If “angel” in v. 2 means the former, then that verse, and the passage as a whole, narrate God’s refusal to be in the people’s midst. The angel is a substitute for divine presence and hence a token of divine absence. In this case, v. 2 concurs with vv. 3 and 5. However, for several reasons, it seems that v. 2 intends the latter sense of the word “angel.” First, after declaring that He will send an angel, God states that He (God) will expel the inhabitants of Canaan: ושלחתי לשבך מלך מרים ואכזריו את המ vcכמקים (“I will send an angel in front of you, and I will expel the Canaanites, the Amorites...”). As in passages such as Gen 16:10,
18:1-19:1, and Hos 12:4–5, God seems to be more or less identical with the angel here, since God refers to the angel in the third person but immediately thereafter uses the first person in reference to the angel’s action. Second, this verse recalls Exod 23:20–23. In that context, God’s angel leads the people to the land (and note the parallel description of the land’s inhabitants in 23:28–30). In that earlier passage the people must obey the angel because it incorporates a manifestation of God’s presence or a hypostatized manifestation of God known as God’s “Name” (יהוה אבריך שלחקלך לפורך... ושם ספתי שם שלך יכ רשם בכרו), Exod 23:20–21 (“I will now send an angel in front of you... Take care with him and obey him... for My Name is within him”). The close verbal connection between Exod 23:20–23 and Exod 33:2 suggests that in the latter verse as well the angel is a manifestation of God rather than a substitute for divine presence. According to this reading, Exod 33:2 and 33:3 move in different directions, the former announcing God’s decision to remain in the people’s midst as they travel to the promised land and the latter proclaiming God’s refusal to escort the people to Canaan. Consequently, many scholars view the one or the other as a secondary addition to this passage. LXX resolves the tension by reading a third person verb in v. 2b: καὶ συναποστέλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου πρὸ προσώπου σου· καὶ ἐκβαλεῖ τὸν Ἄμωραῖον (“I will send My angel in front of you, and he will expel the Amorites...”). In this reading, the friction within the passage no longer exists: the angel, not God, banishes the various peoples. The text need not be read to imply that the angel is a

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14 On the divine Name here and elsewhere (e.g., Ps 7:18, 9:3, 20:2-3, 61:9, 92:2, as well as of course Deuteronomy) as a token or hypostasis of divine presence, see Tryggev N. D. Mettinger, The Dehronement of Sashaeth: Studies in the Shem and Kabod Theologies (ConBib, OT 18; Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1982) 123–31. See also Moberly, who notes that the angel in 23:21-23 “embodies the divine presence” (At the Mountain of God, 61, and cf. his more precise presentation of his thesis, 69).

15 Similarly, in Exod 32:34, God responds positively to Moses’ prayer on behalf of the people by sending the angel which will guide them. Because the passage describes a reconciliation between God and the people, it seems that the angel there is also a manifestation of divine presence.

16 Some regard v. 2 as added (Carpenter and Harford, Hexateuch, 1.132; Driver, Exodus, 357; Alexander Roë, The Belief in Angels in the Bible and in Early Israel [2 vols.; Jerusalem: Makor, 1979] 301 n. 28 [Hebrew]). Others see 3 as the addition (Dillmann, Bücher Exodus und Leviticus, 334).
manifestation of God as in Exod 23:20–23. The reading found in LXX does not so much change the meaning of the text found in MT and Samaritan as it compels the reader to adopt a particular understanding of it. The ambiguous Hebrew text reflects a complex editorial history, but the text transmitted in LXX, by siding decisively with one possible reading, in effect camouflages that history. (The addition of v. 2 or v. 3 also results in an unevenness at the outset of v. 3. That verse begins with a long prepositional phrase that attaches not to the immediately preceding sentence in v. 2 but to the sentence in v. 1.) LXX avoids this unevenness by adding the words σαμωσασαι se ["And I will lead you"] at the outset of v. 3, thus transforming that verse into a freestanding sentence.

The exegetical nature of the decision to change the verb in v. 2 from first person to third person becomes clearer when we compare LXX to Tg. Ps.-J., for that Targum also attempts to lead the reader to the interpretation found in LXX. It achieves this goal by adding a word to 33:3, even though it retains the MT’s first person verb: ואיתוהו על ירח ית כנענייה ("And through him [viz., the angel] I will expel the Canaanites..."). In Pseudo-Jonathan’s expansive paraphrase, God makes clear that He uses the angel to achieve His goal while avoiding direct contact with the sinful people. Thus, as in LXX, it is the angel who performs the act of expulsion, and hence the angel is not the same as God. Tg. Onq. and Tg. Neof. were also bothered by this ambiguity, but they propose a reading of v. 3 that correlates well with the other understanding of the passage: they paraphrase ולא אנעל ברברל אפר חמשל אופר לא אספל עקר שטנה מבנייך rather than אפר כנתה rather than אתלעג. In this case, the point of God’s statement in vv. 1–5 is that the divine presence will in fact

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17 Since v. 3 picks up on v. 1 rather than 2, one might conclude that the parenthetical sentence in v. 2 is the secondary insertion rather than v. 3. However, Y. Zakovitch shows that secondary insertions in the Hebrew Bible are often located at some remove from the material to which they are appended. See An Introduction to Inner-Biblical Interpretation (Even-Yehudah: Reches, 1992) 20–21 (Hebrew). Thus it remains possible that v. 2 is original and that a later hand added v. 3, intending it to attach to v. 1.

remain with the people. Consequently, the לֹא מַלְאָךְ and some form of divine presence appear to be identical, as in the reading rejected by LXX and Tg. Ps.-]. ¹⁹

A doublet occurs in the Hebrew text of Exod 33:4–6. In v. 4 the people, upon hearing the bad news that God will not accompany them to Canaan, mourn and take off their jewelry. Oddly, in the next verse, God directs them to take off their jewelry, which they (again?) do in v. 6. Consequently, many critics assign vv. 3–4 and 5–6 to different hands.²⁰ While it is possible to explain away this difficulty in a variety of ways,²¹ the text at the very least seems to contain an oddity. This oddity does not appear, however, in LXX. In place of the Hebrew רֹאשׁ תֵּא שָׁבָה אֶת שֵׁדַי נֹלֶלְיָא (“they mourned, and no one put on any jewelry”, v. 4), LXX reads: καταπένθησαν ἐν πενθικοῖς (“they mourned in mourning” [viz., perhaps, “mourning clothing”]). Only in v. 5 does LXX introduce God’s order to remove the jewelry.²² Here again the LXX is far smoother than the Hebrew.²³ The same type of hermeneutic move appears in medieval rabbinic commentaries, who suggest that vv. 4 and 5–6 respectively refer to the removal of different items. For example,

¹⁹ I.e., Tgs. Ονήσιλος and Neofiti offer an understanding recently proposed by Ahituv, “Countenance of YHWH.” This reading also appears in Tg. Pseudo-Jonathan, as the first of two paraphrases of the words רֹאשׁ אֶת שֵׁדַי נֹלֶלְיָא. This first paraphrase, which contradicts not only the second but also Pseudo-Jonathan’s paraphrase of the previous verse, is secondary and was taken from a Targum similar to Neofiti, as Kasher points out, Torah Shelemah, vol. 22, §53.

²⁰ See, e.g., Carpenter and Harford, Hexateuch, 132–133; Dillmann, Bücher Exodus und Leviticus, 344; Rofé, Belief in Angels, 300.

²¹ As Kasher notes (Torah Shelemah, vol. 22, §9), “These four verses (3–6) are among the most difficult in the Torah”—at least for those who presume the unity of the text. Kasher reviews the plethora of explanations suggested by rabbinic commentators, which testifies to the difficulty of the passage.

²² According to LXX, they remove jewelry as well as garments of glory (τὰς στολὰς τῶν δοξῶν). This rendering is in part based on reading הָוָדָר וּדָרָי נְעֵלָיָא, as noted by Le Boulluec and Sandevoir, La Bible d’Alexandrie, 330. Since the term for garments in v. 5 and mourning (perhaps intending mourning clothing) in v. 4 differ, there is no sense of contradiction in the Greek.

²³ On the attempt of the LXX to resolve the problem in the Hebrew, cf. Dillmann, Bücher Exodus und Leviticus, 344; Wevers, Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus, 542; Carpenter and Harford, Hexateuch, 132; Le Boulluec and Sandevoir, La Bible d’Alexandrie, 331.
according to some of the Tosafists, v. 4 refers to the people taking off fine clothing, while vv. 5–6 refer to their taking off crowns. Similarly, ibn Ezra (in v. 4 in the shorter of his two commentaries to the Book of Exodus) maintains that v. 4 describes the people putting on mourning clothing.

Exodus 33:7–11 in the Hebrew versions is a particularly clear addition to its surroundings. This section interrupts the discussion between Moses and God regarding the nation’s journey to Canaan. Moreover, these verses suddenly stray from narrative reporting altogether: they describe not a particular event but a habitual situation, as the imperfect verbs (והש השה יחל) and converted perfect verbs (וַיָּרָא) indicate. Again, harmonistic readings are possible. For example, midrashic texts including Exod. Rab. gloss the verb יחל with the past tense verb, יחל. Similarly, Cassuto asserts that these verses in fact describe a one-time event in which Moses built a temporary tent. This tent recalled the tabernacle, the plans for which (Cassuto argues) God discarded in vv. 1–3 as a punishment for the calf incident. This reading, however, is grammatically quite forced, since Cassuto has to argue that the prefixed verbs are not imperfect forms indicating habitual action, as is normal in biblical prose narrative, but are preterites, such as those found in very old Hebrew poetry. Moberly suggests a variation of Cassuto’s position: he acknowledges that the verbs do indicate ongoing action, but suggests that they describe actions that occurred for a limited time not extending beyond the events of this chapter. Similar reasoning is found in the commentary of Rashi to v. 11 (who maintains that the tent was in use from the time that Israel was forgiven until the tabernacle was completed) and in some midrashic texts such as Seder Eliyahu Zuta (which assert that the tent was in use for

24 See Kasher, Torah Shelemah, ibid.

25 E.g., Exod. Rab. §45.3 and see additional sources in Kasher, Torah Shelemah, vol. 22 §822a.

26 See Cassuto, Exodus, 429–432. The same interpretation is found in Moberly, At the Mountain of God, 64–65, 171–177. Cassuto’s assertion that in vv. 1–3 God had annulled his earlier instructions to build Him a sanctuary follows the reading of ibn Ezra (in his long commentary at v. 3) and Abarbanel; so also Shadal (Luzzatto) to 32:34, 33:3 and 33:13.

27 Cassuto, Exodus, 429–430. So also ibn Ezra (long commentary) at v. 7, citing the preterite prefixed form in Ps 106:19.

28 See At the Mountain of God, 64–65.
forty days after the sin of the calf). LXX agrees with both types of reading. The verbs in vv. 7 and 11 are in the aorist (ἐπηξεν “pitched”, ἔκληθη “called”, ἐγένετο “happened” [v. 7]; ἔλαλησεν “spoke” [v. 11]), indicating that Moses pitched this tent as a one-time event immediately after the people removed their ornaments (so Exod. Rab., Cassuto). Some of the subsequent verbs are in the imperfect (εἰσεπροέετο “used to enter” [v. 8], ἔστατο “used to rise” [v. 9]) or the pluperfect (e.g., ἔστηκεν “would stand” [v. 8]), indicating that after Moses pitched the tent, certain actions described in these verses occurred more than once (so Rashi, S. Eli. Zut., Moerby). While LXX’s rendering of the Hebrew verbs in vv. 7 and 11 is grammatically questionable, it produces a Greek text that flows perfectly well, without the obvious incongruity of the Hebrew text. As a result, the Greek reader does not necessarily receive the impression that the conversation between Moses and God has been interrupted. Rather, at some point in the conversation, Moses took his tent and set it up outside the camp, and the discussion between God and Moses continued there in a somewhat more intense fashion (see v. 11); the tent then continued to be used for some time.

In LXX the tent is described as Moses’ own tent (τὴν σκηνὴν αὐτοῦ, v. 7) while in the MT and the Samaritan Pentateuch it is merely “the tent” (הֵיתָן). Thus the extant Hebrew text produces either a gap or an inconsistency. That is, the Hebrew reader either wonders, “the tent’—what tent?’”; or she speculates that “the tent” refers to the tabernacle whose architectural plan is prescribed in chaps. 25–30, which is indeed referred to as רֵעֶם לְפִיו in Exod 28:43, 29:4, 30:16, 31:7 passim. In the former case, one is forced to assume that this verse refers to some other tent whose provenance is unknown (or, as modern critics suggest, whose provenance was


30 On MS variants of the verb in v. 11, see the comments of Wevers, Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus, 546, in light of which it is clear that the variants are not relevant to our concerns.

31 On the frequentative use of the pluperfect in v. 8, see Herbert Weir Smyth and Gordon Messing, Greek Grammar (Cambridge: Harvard, 1966) §1952a or perhaps §1953.

described in a document that has been preserved only in part). In the latter case a problem results from the many contradictions between the tent described here and the tabernacle, not the least of which is that the tabernacle has not yet been built. By identifying the tent as Moses’, LXX removes the potential contradiction between this tent and the priestly tabernacle. Again, LXX is not altering the text here; one can argue, on the basis of Exod 18:7 that “the tent” in this verse really does refer to Moses’ tent, as ibn Ezra and Cassuto point out. But, as we have seen, other interpretations are possible. The LXX, like ibn Ezra and Cassuto, works as a commentary, removing any doubt on the matter and forcing the reader to the less problematic reading.

Exod 33:11 states that God spoke with Moses face to face (פָּנָיו אֵל פָּנָיו). This may surprise the reader who arrives at v. 20 and discovers that humans, including Moses, cannot look at God’s face and live (לֹא תַהֲלֹךְ לַאֲדָמָה אֵל פָּנָיו כִּי לֹא יְהֹואֵם אֱלֹהִים; see also 33:23). The reader of the LXX need not sense any contradiction, since the earlier phrase is rendered as ἐνάρθων ἐνώπιόν (“face to face”) while 33:20 translates μετὰ καθένας (“my countenance”). The Targums solve this problem in

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33 Dillmann (Bücher Exodus und Leviticus, 345), followed by Driver (Exodus, 358), suggests that originally there was a description of making the tent in E. All that is preserved of the story is the people taking off their jewels in Exod 33:5–6 (which presumably were used to build the tent) and the description of the finished product in Exod 33:7–11.


35 Cassuto, Exodus, 430; ibn Ezra (long commentary) at v. 7. Rashi also identifies the tent as Moses’ in his commentary to v. 7, though he does not provide the philological support found in the commentaries of ibn Ezra and Cassuto.

36 The fact that a corrector to the Milan manuscript of LXX (F) reads πρόσωπον in v. 11 as well does not overturn the force of this observation. (For the text-critical information, see John W. Wevers (ed.), Exodus (Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum, vol. 2.1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991) 370.
a similar fashion; *Tg. Neofiti* and *Pseudo-Jonathan*, for example, translate מָמוֹל כָּפֵל מָמוֹל ("speech to speech") in 33:11 but אֵפי ("my face") (Neof.) and כָּפֵל מָמוֹל ("the countenance of my face") (Ps.-J.) in 33:20. Tg. Ps.-J. to 33:11 adds, כָּפֵל מָמוֹל ("But he did not see the splendor of His face"), thus making clear the tension to which the Targum is responding.

The Hebrew versions of Exod 33:12–23 are rendered especially problematic by an overabundance of terms denoting divine presence and by God’s failure to respond clearly to any of Moses’ questions. In v. 13 Moses asks to be shown God’s ways (ָּדֶרֶךְ עַל אֵלֶּה). God responds with a *non sequitur* in v. 14: He tells Moses, “My face/presence will go, and I will give you rest” (וְנֶלַךְ וְנִנֵּאָה לְךָ). From these words it is not clear whether Moses in fact will be *shown* anything, as he had requested in the previous verse; nor do we know how God’s face/presence ("face/presence") in v. 14 relate to the דֶּרֶךְ ("ways") whose revelation Moses entreated in v. 13. Another term relating to divine presence occurs in v. 18, where Moses asks to be shown God’s glory (ָּדֶרֶךְ עַל אֵלֶּה). God’s answer in the next verse does not come to bear on Moses’ request in any clear fashion. God informs Moses in v. 19 that His goodness, not His glory, will pass in front of Moses (וְנֶלַךְ וְנַעֲרֵה לְךָ). Granted, God later says, in v. 22, that His glory (ָּכֶרֶךְ עַל אֵלֶּה) will pass by, but this creates a tension between vv. 20 and 22: Is it the נַעֲרֵה ("goodness") or the כֶּרֶךְ ("glory") that will pass by? Are the glory and the goodness in fact the same thing?

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37 This reading of *Tg. Ps.-J.* to 33:11 follows the printed editions. The British Museum MS reads כָּפֵל מָמוֹל instead of כָּפֵל מָמוֹל כָּפֵל מָמוֹל כָּפֵל מָמוֹל כָּפֵל מָמוֹל כָּפֵל מָמוֹל כָּפֵל מָמוֹל כָּפֵל מָמוֹל כָּפֵל מָמוֹל כָּפֵל מָמוֹל כָּפֵל מָמוֹל כָּפֵל מָמוֹל כָּפֵל מָמוֹל כָּפֵל מָמוֹל כָּפֵל מָמוֹל כָּפֵל מָמוֹל כָּפֵל מָמוֹל כָּפֵל מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹל כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמ operands. 38 Thus the Targumim assimilate Exod 33:11 to Num 12:8, where the phrase פֵּסְאָה כָּפֵל מָמוֹl instead of פֵּסְאָה כָּפֵל מָמוֹl כָּפֵל מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמוֹl כָּפֵl מָמ operands. 39 Recognition of the apparent contradiction between 33:11 and 33:20 also motivates the comment in *b. Ber.* 63b, as noted in the commentary of the Maharsha ad loc., cited in Kasher, *Torah Shelemah*, vol. 22 §50. Other midrashic commentaries face the tension differently: *Pesiq. Rab. Kah.* §7 (p. 471 in the edition of B. Mandelbaum [New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1987]) maintains that in v. 20 God does not make a blanket assertion and that at times God is visible, at least to Moses. In some midrashim it is clear that Moses does see God’s face; see the sources cited in Kasher, §45*. 
The plethora of hypostases goes on. According to vv. 12 and 17, God knows Moses by or by means of “name,” (זרע־תנ בְּשֵׁם), a phrase whose meaning in this context is not wholly transparent but which calls to mind technical terminology for a token of divine presence in Deuteronomy and related literature.40 (The “name” is invoked by God in v. 19, but there the term is specifically identified as the tetragrammaton and thus is less likely to call to mind a particular conception of divine presence.) In v. 23, we learn that Moses cannot see God’s face/presence but that he can see God’s back (רֹאשׁ אֵל אַחֲרֵי וְצִיָּה לֹא רָאָה). The non sequiturs in these verses and the tension among their many terms denoting divine presence, only some of which Moses can know, lead modern scholars to reconstruct the text in a variety of ways. It is difficult to decide whether the present Hebrew text results from the conflation of originally independent traditions, the supplementation of a core text with later additions, the re-ordering of material, or a complex combination of these processes;41 but the plethora of possibilities itself testifies to the difficulty one confronts when reading the Hebrew.

The reader of the Greek text, however, faces a much less trying experience. LXX has fewer terms for divine presence or hypostases, so that the text does not move in several different directions at once. Instead of asking to see God’s “ways” in v. 13, in LXX Moses asks to see God Himself (ἰμφάνισον μοι σεαυτόν). God’s response in v. 14 relates more clearly to Moses’ request in v. 13: “I Myself will go with you (Αὐτὸς προσπορεύομαι σοι) and give you rest.” Similarly, the Greek makes no reference to God’s “goodness” in v. 19, but refers to God’s “glory” (τὴν δόξαν μου), which is what Moses had asked to see in v. 18 (Δείξον μοι τὴν σεαυτοῦ δόξαν).42

40 See above, n. 13.

41 Martin Noth, for example, maintains that 33:18–23 comprise a series of three supplements to 12–17; see Exodus: A Commentary (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962) 257. Cf. Childs, Exodus, 595. For various attempts to reorder the verses in order to create a more readable and more logical text, see Dillmann, Die Bücher Exodus und Leviticus, 343–348, Carpenter and Harford, Hexateuch, 2.133 n. 12a, and especially the extensive reconstruction in Rofé, The Belief in Angels, 300–305. Some midrashim also propose what amounts to reordering the text; see Exod. Rab. §32.8 and §45.4; Midr. Tehillim (Buber) 90 89.

42 As noted by Le Boulluec and Sandevoir, La Bible d’Alexandrie, 334. The same resolution of the problem is found in two MSS of Tg. Onq, which render MT’s with יִרְאוּ מְנַכֵּר (see
Consequently, vv. 13–23 flow smoothly in LXX: vv. 13–14 deal with God’s self, and vv. 18–19 deal with God’s glory. (LXX⁸, along with various minuscules and a correction to the Milan text are even smoother: in both 13 and 18 Moses asks to be shown God’s self [ἐξοικτόν]. Thus in Vaticanus and related texts Moses’ questions are consistent, and God’s answers are much less baffling than in the Hebrew. He twice asks to see God’s self, and he is allowed to do so to a limited degree: God passes before Moses with God’s glory, and Moses will see God back but not His face.) Finally, we may note that in LXX God’s name no longer appears in vv. 12 and 17, where we read simply that God knows Moses more than anyone else (οἰδά σε παρὰ πάντας). In contrast, the word “name” (ὄνοματί) does appear in v. 19, where its appearance, as noted above, is not problematic. The same understanding of the phrase in vv. 12 and 17 appears in Rashi’s commentary to v. 12 — “I recognize your importance more than that of the rest of humanity”.

Through these interpretive translations in 33:12–17 the LXX avoids another potential tension. As we have seen, after Moses asked to be shown God’s ways in the Hebrew of 33:13, God responds in v. 14 that His face/presence will go and He will give Moses rest. If one decides not to view God’s answer as a non sequitur, then the Hebrew text could be taken to imply that Moses will be shown God’s face—in contradiction to vv. 20–23. But this is not the case in LXX. By translating Μέν μου (“face”) in v. 14 simply as “Myself” (Αὐτός), LXX removes any potential disparity between that verse and vv. 20–23, where מני is rendered more literally with τὸ πρὸσωπόν μου (“My face”).

A similar tendency to reduce the number of terms for divine presence and divine nature by equating various Hebrew terms is found in the Targums. Tg. Onqelos (followed by Ps.-J) to v. 13 reads, אדרנכי כנני ת אורח צרכך (“Show me now the way of your goodness”). The addition of the last three words connects v. 13 to v. 19, implying an identity of דרך (“goodness”) and דרך (“way”). As we have seen, LXX handles the problem by eliminating each of the terms; the result in both versions is to limit the number of competing terms and hence to limit the confusion. An analogous attempt at equating various terms for presence is evident in Tg. Ps.-J., where זאני ארקא שכותאי in v. 23 (“My face,” “My presence”) is rendered זאני ופנין (“the

face of the glory of My Indwelling’). Ps.-I. thus brings together terms used to translate נֶחֱטַל (v. 18) and נָשִׂי (v. 15 and 20). The terms also translate pronouns that refer to God in vv. 3 and 16, while these terms together translate כִּבְרָד in v. 22. By means of the prolific use of these Aramaic terms to translate several Hebrew terms, Ps.-I. suggests that throughout vv. 12–23 all of these Hebrew terms refer to a single manifestation or token of divine presence.\(^{43}\)

How are these differences between the Hebrew and Greek texts to be explained? As we have seen, there are three possible explanations: (1) the Hebrew underlying the Greek preserves an older version of the text, while the MT and the Samaritan Pentateuch are later revisions; (2) the Hebrew underlying the Greek resulted from scribal alteration of an older text similar to the MT and the Samaritan Pentateuch; or (3) the translators of the LXX worked from a text more or less similar to the MT and/or the Samaritan Pentateuch, and they introduced these changes for some reasons. The third possibility is the strongest.\(^{44}\) Several of the differences between LXX and the Hebrew texts work only in the translation and cannot be reproduced in the Hebrew. In particular, the varied renderings of מִשְׁמַר are feasible in translation, but not in an original text. The same is true of the two approaches to translating שֶׁ in Exod 33:12, 17, and 19. Against possibility (1) we can further note that it is difficult to understand how a text that coheres fairly well would have been altered to a text full of gaps, non sequiturs, and inconsistencies. In other words, the principle of lectio difficilior praeferenda, writ large, suggests that the Hebrew text in this instance is older, and that the Greek text facilitates the reading process by simplifying and eliminating problems.

\(^{43}\) However, Tg. Ps.-I. translates מִשְׁמַר in v. 14 differently, since in the Hebrew that verse might be taken to imply that God’s face can be seen if one reads it as a positive response to Moses’ request in v. 13. Thus v. 14 is translated in Ps.-I., following b. Ber. 7a: עָמַר דָּאָר רִידוּבְעַג (‘Wait until the countenance of my anger has left and then I will give you rest’). Tg. Ps.-I. reconciles the various terms for divine presence and divine nature in vv. 12–23, but eliminates the term for divine presence in v. 14 (as he does in v. 11), since the term מִשְׁמַר cannot be easily harmonized with the diverse terms used elsewhere in the chapter. This is the same strategy the LXX adopts, though the LXX’s method of eliminating the term for divine presence in v. 14 differs.

\(^{44}\) Cf. Wevers’ proposal regarding the relationship between MT and LXX in Exodus generally, Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus, xv.
What do the differences between the Hebrew and the Greek texts in these chapters imply? In this case, LXX clearly functions as a commentary.\textsuperscript{45} It intends not to alter or revise the text (in the way that scribes who altered Hebrew texts themselves did) but to explain it; indeed, we have seen that the LXX elucidates the text in ways that midrashic and medieval rabbinic interpreters of the Hebrew do as well.\textsuperscript{46} Thus we need not assert that the LXX translators effectively emended the text.\textsuperscript{47} For example, in Exod 33:19 they did not argue that the Hebrew should have

\textsuperscript{45} The exegetical aspect of LXX in general is widely acknowledged. See Emanuel Tov, \textit{Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible} (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 124–128; idem, \textit{The Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research} (rev. ed.; JBS 8; Jerusalem: Simor, 1997) 45–50 and 172–180 (with further bibliography, 50); Sidney Jellicoe, \textit{The Septuagint and Modern Study} (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968) 321–322. For cases in which the LXX confronts apparent contradictions and gaps or harmonizes various texts, see Michael Fishbane, \textit{Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) 177 n. 38, 221–224. While Fishbane deals specifically with legal passages, we have seen in this essay that the same tendency is evident in aggadic passages as well. In many of the cases cited in these sources, it is difficult to be sure whether the exegesis occurred already in the Hebrew \textit{Vorlage} or in the Greek translation. Cf. above, n. 6.

\textsuperscript{46} This observation suggests the possibility that the similar comments in LXX and rabbinic texts may stem from what James Kugel terms “a common store of biblical exegesis inherited by diverse, and in some cases antagonistic, Jewish groups and circles that flourished in Palestine and elsewhere in the centuries just before and after the start of the common era” (James Kugel, \textit{In Potiphar’s House: The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts} [New York: HarperCollins, 1990] 265). However, in the cases at hand, the similarities are not sufficiently far-reaching to make such an assertion with confidence. It remains just as likely that the similarities exist because various translators and exegesists arrived independently at similar solutions to the same problems.

\textsuperscript{47} We have seen that the translators left v. 9 out entirely, though even here one might argue that they do so for the sake of clarity, and hence the omission functions exegetically. Similarly, in 33:3, the LXX translates as if the Hebrew read \textit{גָּificador}, but here too the goal may be to clarify. The translators inform us that the angel is acting on behalf of God; while it is God who banishes indirectly, on a literal level the actual work is done by the angel. Like later rabbinic commentators, the LXX intends to assert that \textit{דְּרוּי} in v. 4 does not refer to the same objects as \textit{דְּרוּי} in vv. 5–6, and hence it paraphrases rather than rewrites the former verse.

Another possible exception to this tendency to avoid deviations from the Hebrew may be evident in many miniscules of LXX Exod 34:1. According to the Hebrew text (and most manuscripts of the LXX), God announces that He will write on the new tablets a copy of
read כבוד ("glory") rather than ווב ("goodness"); rather, they understood ווב to be identical to כבוד and therefore translated both with a single Greek word δόξα ("glory, i.e., goodness"). The goal of this translation cum commentary is to make the text clearer and easier to read specifically at those places that are most baffling to a reader who presumes the text's unity and coherence. By saying this, I do not intend to imply that the Greek translators entertained any doubts about Mosaic authorship or the unity of the text. Their exegetical work differs from that of, e.g., Cassuto and Moitel to these passages. These modern scholars react specifically to the claims of source criticism, but LXX merely responds to incongruities and unreadabilities. While these are the same incongruities and unreadabilities that what had been on the first set of tablets. But according to Exod 34:27–28 Moses writes commandments on the tablets. The tension can be resolved through a variety of harmonistic readings, or it can lead to a source-critical solution. (For examples of the former, see Moitel, At the Mountain of God, 101–105, and Kasher, Torah Shelema, 22.125–127. Regarding the latter, see especially the comments of Aryeh Toeg, Lauding at Sinai [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1977] 76–77 [in Hebrew], and cf. the somewhat more complicated solution of Driver, Exodus, 364 and 374.) Some LXX miniscules at 34:1 propose a different solution. They read not γράφω (matching the Hebrew text's כותב), but γραφήν, thus implying that we should read כותב. (For a list of manuscripts, see Wevers, Exodus [Göttingen edition], 374.) By using an aorist imperative, these texts adjust 34:1 to 34:27 and avert the possibility that the reader will sense any contradiction.

48 As some MSS of Tg. Ong. do (see above, n. 42); surely the copyists of Ongelos who introduced this wording did not intend an emendation of the MT. The equating of כבוד and ווב plays a crucial role for Moitel's exegesis in At the Mountain of God, 76–77.

49 At times the translators render the text smoother at points where moderns do not find any source-critical problem. Thus at 33:19 LXX reads, καὶ καλέσσω Ἰσαὰκ τῷ ἁγίῳ κύριος ἐναντίον σου (as if the Hebrew intends יִקְרָאָה בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה לְמִמְּךָ, instead of יִלְךָ לְמִמְּךָ), κύριος ἐναντίον σου (as if the Hebrew intends יִקְרָאָה בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה לְמִמְּךָ, instead of יִלְךָ לְמִמְּךָ). The Greek avoids the oddity of God referring to Himself in the third person—"verdeutlichend," as Dillmann remarks (Bücher Exodus und Leviticus, 348). Similar cases may be found in LXX to 32:26 and 32:34, on which see Tov, Text-Critical Use, 46. Some changes respond to theological problems. In 33:5, the LXX renders καὶ δεικνύω σοι ἀπειράσας σοι, as if the Hebrew read ἀρξάμενος οὐκ ἐνεξε ἐν αὐτῷ but ἀρξάμενος οὐκ ἐνεξε ἐν αὐτῷ. The LXX thus avoids the suggestion that God did not know what He intended to do, precisely the same interpretation given by Saadia Gaon, according to ibn Ezra in his short commentary at 33:5). A similar issue occurs in LXX to the end of 33:13. Some differences between LXX and MT are of a narrowly text-critical nature. LXX to 33:5 translates the Hebrew as if it read not לָכֵן, as noted by Le Boulluec and Sandevoir, La Bible d’Alexandrie, 330, and Wevers, Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus, 542.
would later lead to the development of source-critical or tradition-historical proposals, of course the LXX translators did not set out to respond to any suspicions that motley documents underlie the Hebrew text. Rather, the translators saw a text that either could be understood (rather, be misunderstood) to contradict itself, or could be read to cohere. They translated in such a fashion as to make the latter possibility inevitable, and thus their activity in one respect belongs to the same category as midrash.

Yet by so doing, they may have provided a form of confirmation to the modern source critic. The translation achieves its goal only by introducing interpretations that might be termed strong misreadings: “you should understand שֵׁם to mean כֹּבד; you should understand בֵּית לֵבָן to mean self; you should understand that this text uses פֵּאָה to mean three distinct things and שֵׁם to mean two.” What this method of translating refuses to countenance is the notion that the original text cannot in fact be read coherently—a possibility that the translator could not imagine, but which the modern critic can sense by observing how hard the translator had to work to make the text flow.