MOSES AND THE SEVENTY ELDERS: MOSAIC AUTHORITY IN NUMBERS 11 AND THE LEGEND OF THE SEPTUAGINT

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Abstract

This thesis seeks an exegesis of Numbers 11:16-17, 24-25, the so-called "elders story," within a larger wilderness episode involving Moses' bitter complaint, the people's great craving for meat, and the enigmatic Eldad and Medad. While most recent interpreters have considered the elders a curious side-show, occurring nearly inexplicably in both their narrative setting and pentateuchal position, pre-modern interpreters have often drawn more from their configuration. As the first full-length study into the elders of Numbers 11, this thesis seeks to explore what the elders contribute to their own biblical setting by tracing their impact on later generations of Jews and Christians. In particular, it explores the possible links between these seventy elders and the seventy translators of the Legend of the Septuagint in its Hellenistic versions in *Letter of Aristeas*, Philo, and Josephus.

The first two chapters examine the recent history of interpretation of the passage and re-appraise typical interpretative stances toward both the elders' climactic activity as "speaking in ecstasy (ויתנבאו)" and their designation as not only elders of Israel but "their officers (שטריו)." "Prophesying" and "scribes" are presented, respectively, as preferred terms, both philologically and contextually.

The next two chapters critically examine the relationship between Moses and the elders of Numbers 11, vis-à-vis their symbolic presentation as "seventy (שבעים)" (or, with Eldad and Medad included, as "seventy-two") and their potential ability to inherit, represent, and interpret Moses' law-giving authority. In both cases, Moses' burden and cry for his own death in Numbers 11:11-14, brings the necessity of inheritors of his authority closer to the concerns of Numbers 11 and Exodus-Joshua.

The final main chapter examines the many ways the seventy elders of Numbers 11 may be understood as foundational to the framing of the Legend of the Septuagint. As those drawn closer to Moses than any other biblical persona, the seventy elders are uniquely imbued with Moses' authority, biblically and beyond.

Statement of Copyright

Declaration

This work has been submitted to the University of Durham in accordance with the regulations or the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. It is my own work, and no part of it has been previously submitted to the University of Durham or in any other university for degree.

Contents

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Abbreviations

All abbreviations of ancient literature, academic journals, and monograph series follow forms indicated in the *SBL Handbook for Style: For Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies* (ed. Patrick H. Alexander, et al.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2006). Those not covered in the *SBL Handbook* are listed below.

AI	*Ars Interpretandi: Jahrbuch für juristische Hermeneutik*
ANTZ	Arbeiten zur neutestamentlichen Theologie und Zeitgeschichte
ARN	*Avot of Rabbi Nathan*
BRS	Biblical Resources Series
BZAR	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für Altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte
CBSC	The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges
CFTL	Clark's Foreign Theological Library
CompLit	*Comparative Literature*
CSCD	Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine
CTHPT	Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought
DSSCOL	Dead Sea Scrolls and Christian Origins Library
EHLL	*Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*. Edited by Geoffrey Kahn. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 2013.
FCMC	The Fathers of the Church: Mediaeval Continuation
HCS	Hellenistic Culture and Society
Hermeneia	Hermeneia – A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible
HL	Herein is Love
ISBL	Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature
JJSSup	Journal of Jewish Studies Supplement Series
JPSCR	JPS Classic Reissues
JPSTC	JPS Torah Commentary
JPT	*Journal for Pentecostal Theology*
JSJSup	Journal for the Study of Judaism: Supplement Series
KHAT	Kurzgefasstes exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament
LAI	Library of Ancient Israel
LEH	Lust, J., E. Eynikel, and K. Hauspie. *Greek-English Lexicon of the Septuagint*. Rev. ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2003.
MHG	*Midrash Ha-Gadol*
NHMS	Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary

NTA	*New Testament Apocrypha.* Edited by Wilhelm Schneemelcher and Edgar Hennecke. Translated by Robert McLachlan Wilson. 2 vols. Rev. ed. Cambridge: James Clarke, 1992.
OECS	Oxford Early Christian Studies
OTEv	Old Testament for Everyone
OTP	*Old Testament Pseudepigrapha.* Edited by James H. Charlesworth. 2 vols. Repr. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2010.
PBM	Paternoster Biblical Monographs
PPS	Popular Patristics Series
PWord	Preaching the Word
SCMTC	SCM Theological Commentary [=Brazos Theological Commentary]
STI	Studies in Theological Interpretation
SUNYSJ	SUNY Series in Judaica
TBN	Themes in Biblical Narrative
TED/3	Translations of Early Documents, Series 3
TPC	The People's Commentary
WBComp	Westminster Bible Companion
WEC	Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary
Williams'	Williams, Ronald J., and John C. Beckman. *Williams' Hebrew Syntax*. 3rd ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007.
YJS	Yale Judaica Series

A Translation of Numbers 11: 16-17; 24-25

16ויאמר יהוה אל־משה אספה־לי שבעים איש מזקני ישראל
אשר ידעת כי־הם זקני העם ושטריו

16YHWH said to Moses, "Gather[1] to me seventy[2] of the elders of Israel whom you know to be elders of the people and their scribes.[3]

ולקחת אתם אל־אהל מועד והתיצבו שם עמך

"Take them to the Tent of Meeting and have them take a stand[4] there with you.

17וירדתי ודברתי עמך שם ואצלתי מן־הרוח אשר עליך ושמתי עליהם

17"I will come down and speak with you there, and I will withdraw[5] some of the spirit upon you and place[6] it on them.

ונשאו אתך במשא העם ולא־תשא אתה לבדך

"They will bear[7] with you some of the burden[8] of the people so you will no longer bear it alone.[9]"

24ויצא משה וידבר אל־העם את דברי יהוה ויאסף שבעים איש מזקני העם
ויעמד אתם סביבת האהל

24So, Moses went out to the people and told them the words of YHWH, and he gathered seventy elders of the people and stood[10] them[11] around[12] the Tent.

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[1] "Gathering" (**אסף**) occurs elsewhere in the chapter as a whole (11:22, 24, 30, 32), including (perhaps) those "riffraff" who have the craving which begins the episode (**האספסף**, 11:4). Other pentateuchal uses of **אסף** include (1) its prominence as a euphemism for dying ("gathered to one's people/father") or as an act prior to death (gathering the family to the death bed), e.g. Gen 49:1, 29, 33; (2) other gatherings of the elders of Israel, e.g. Ex 3:16 and 4:29 (to hear Moses); Deut 33:5; (3) the Levites gathering to Moses after the Golden Calf; and (4) as a verb for harvesting (e.g. Lev 23:39).

[2] Lit. "seventy man," "class noun," cf. 75n19.

[3] See Chapter 2.

[4] Other pentateuchal uses of hithpael of **יצב** include (1) the people were brought by Moses out of the camp (like here) to take a stand at the foot of the mountain of God (Ex 19:17); (2) the presence of YHWH which (like Num 11:17!) "descended in a cloud" and "stood there with him [Moses] (**ויתיצב עמו שם**)" (Ex 34:5); and (3) Moses and Joshua before the Tent of Meeting prior to Moses' death (Deut 31:14).

[5] See n13 below.

[6] This use of **שים** seems in conscious response to 11:11's **לשום**.

[7] Or "carry."

[8] Although I follow *Williams'* "partitive" use of **בְּ** here (cf. 1 Kgs 17:25), the choice of **ב** instead of **מן** here is worth noting, especially when the sense of their bearing the burden with Moses might be communicated without it (simply by the use of **נשא**, as in Ex 18:22; Deut 1:12) and when the only other use of **במשא** in the Bible is in 1 Chr 15:22 ("by music" or "in oracle"). Is a double-meaning preserved here? See Chapter 5.

[9] See Moses' complaint in Num 11:11 (**לשום את־משא כל־העם**), 14 (**לא־אוכל אנכי לבדי**).

[10] **עמד** indicates the same action as 11:16 but carries other resonances, esp. Ex 33:8-9. See Chapter 5.

[25]וירד יהוה בענן וידבר אליו ויאצל מן־הרוח אשר עליו ויתן על־שבעים איש הזקנים

[25]YHWH came down in a cloud and spoke to him. He withdrew[13] some of the spirit upon him and put it on the seventy elders.[14]

ויהי וכנוח עליהם הרוח ויתנבאו ולא יספו

Then, as the spirit rested[15] on them, they prophesied[16] and did not continue/cease/add.[17]

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[11] אֹתָם (MT), or, "with them," אִתָּם (alternate pointing).

[12] Indicates "circular" or "all around," cf. the quail all around the camp in 11:31.

[13] An unusual word (only otherwise occurring in the qal in Gen 27:36 and Eccles 2:10; cf. "**אצל**," *HALOT*), but the meaning is likely straightforward, i.e. "to draw off" (e.g. παρείλατο, LXX); cf. 45n78.

[14] Here, **איש** may indicate a specific dispensation on each member, rather than just the whole.

[15] Cf. esp. Isa 11:2. Also, GKC §72 נוּחַ instead of נוֹחַ.

[16] See Chapter 2.

[17] MT and LXX (προσέθεντο) =יָסָפוּ; Vulgate (*nec ultra cessarunt*) and *Tg. Onq.* (וְלָא פָסְקִין) =יָסֵפוּ. Cf. "did so no longer," Ex 5:7; 9:28; Ex 11:6; "did not add," Deut 4:2; 5:22; 13:1. See 14n68 and 245n301.

1
Approaching the Elders

Biblical texts invite contemplation, for various reasons. One of the more inviting reasons is perplexity. When a text appears ambiguous, laconic, repetitive, or obviously engaging in double-meaning, the reader's curiosity is engaged and questions about it draw the interpreter closer. One of the more perplexing texts in the Bible has been Numbers 11. Specifically, Num 11:4-35 has repeatedly enticed readers with its ambiguity, brief explanations, and, perhaps most of all, its dual-story structure. Within this one section are two interwoven stories: one about the people of Israel and their craving for meat in the wilderness (11:4) and a second about seventy elders of Israel and their receiving the spirit (11:25). The first story ends with death by divine plague (11:33), the second with prophesying (11:25-26). The common thread leading from one to the other is Moses, who as the leader of this wandering nation-without-a-land feels overwrought by their demands and expectations (11:10) and who as the one standing between them and God feels exasperated about the divinely-ordained corner YHWH has painted him into (11:11).

One profitable way to contemplate this text is to isolate one of its stories and "turn it," examining its possible ranges of meaning—to see it as though through its different facets.[1] Our method of "turning" here is to examine the reception history of this particular text, to look at the various ways other interpreters have, over the years, understood this particular section of the narrative and its implications. In Ricoeurean terms, to examine how readers through the centuries have reactualized the ideal meaning captured in the biblical text and compare their readings of it.[2] My goal here is to provide a brief summary of what interpreters have done with the more perplexing of the two stories in Num 11:4-

[1] *m. Avot* 5.22, *Num. Rab.* 13.15,16.
[2] Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 77.

35, the "elders story," providing some analysis of outstanding questions and concerns which might call for further study along the way.

In order to gain a purchase both on Numbers 11:4-35 (quail and elders) as well as the various moves interpreters make with the elders story in particular, I will outline two major approaches which may be used to characterize this history of interpretation (excepting its pre-modern period, which will receive attention in due time), namely, a *historical-critical* approach and a *literary-narrative* approach. Each of these is not intended to describe a structured "method" of hermeneutics but a more general category approach to the text, each with is own complex set of relations to more carefully articulated interpretative models. These two approaches are thus intended to reflect more affinities than methodological schools of thought.

The Historical-Critical Approach

The most prominent approach, at least since Wellhausen's *Composition*, is the *historical-critical* approach which seeks to describe the composition of the biblical narrative and its historical setting as accurately as possible.[3] For Numbers 11, this means beginning with a heuristic notion of possible sources and traditions from which the book of Numbers might be composed, then proceeding to identify the "strands," "themes," or "layers" of the passage.[4] This approach often resembles the dissection of a woven fabric in order to understand its materials and construction, or the archaeological excavation of a tel, labeling each layer on the way down. In an appeal to clarity,[5] this approach does not walk verse by verse through the pericope as if it conveyed a single narrative, presumably because the chapter does

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[3] Julius Wellhausen, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des Alten Testaments* (3d ed.; Berlin: G. Reimer, 1899); Cp. W.H. Green, "The Pentateuchal Question. IV. Ex. 13-Deut. 34," *Hebraica* 8 (1892): 174–243, for early criticism of this trend; also, see below.

[4] This process of identifying separate stories is not exclusive to the historical-critical approach, but it remains characteristic of it (i.e. not every historical-critical interpreter divides the strands just as not every one who does can be described as an historical-critical interpreter).

[5] E.g. Allen Hugh McNeille, *The Book of Numbers* (CBSC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), 56; John Sturdy, *Numbers* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 84.

not appear to build on itself as a literary unity. What begins (and ends) as a "gluttonous craving" (11:4, 34)[6] is "interrupted" by the "elders story."[7] This approach notes that since the quail story does not depend on any content from the elders story. It is thus presumed to be an earlier story to which the elders were then added.[8]

This process of identifying the *two stories* thus raises questions about which verses necessarily constitute the elders section, and each scholar from this approach offers his or her own specific list.[9] Their strong consensus is that 11:16-17; 24b-30 constitutes the minimum of the elders strand.[10] Apart from this, a divergence emerges in the scholarship regarding 11:14-15, with 11:10-12 marking the furthest possible boundary of textual inclusion.[11] The question on which these differences rests is whether the complaint of Moses (11:10-15) is to be understood as belonging more properly to the story of the quail or the story of the elders.[12] At the extremes, one side assigns only 11:13 of this section to the story of

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[6] All biblical quotations are from NJPS, unless otherwise indicated.

[7] Benjamin D. Sommer, "Reflecting on Moses: The Redaction of Numbers 11," *JBL* 118 (1999): 606. Sommer's own work intentionally bridges literary-narrative and historical-critical approaches (602, 623).

[8] Aaron Schart, *Mose und Israel im Konflikt: Eine Redaktionsgeschichtliche Studie zu den Wüstenerzählungen* (OBO 98; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990), 162; George W. Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness: The Murmuring Motif in the Wilderness Traditions of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968), 97; August Dillmann, *Die Bücher Numeri, Deuteronomium und Josua* (2nd ed.; KHAT 13; Leipzig: Hirzel, 1886), 85. Schart (162n48) cites Horst Seebass as a significant but unconvincing holdout from this view, preferring instead to see the quail story added to the elders story, "Num. XI, XII und die Hypothese des Jahwisten," *VT* 28 (1978): 214–23.

[9] As Green quips, "…while [Knobel (1861)] concedes the unity of the rest of the chapter [i.e. Num 11], others carve it up each in his own peculiar fashion," Green, "Pentateuchal," 178.

[10] Schart, *Mose*, 162–3. It should also be added that 11:26-29 constitute a complementary but secondary sub-narrative depicting "the story of Eldad and Medad," which might, at times, be argued as distinct from "the story of the Seventy," Philip J. Budd, *Numbers* (WBC; Waco: Word, 1984), 124; Coats, *Rebellion*, 176.

[11] For the inclusion of 11:14-15, see Wellhausen, *Composition*, 99; Martin Noth, *Numbers: A Commentary* (trans. James D. Martin; OTL; London: SCM, 1968), 83. For 11:10-12; 14-15, see David Jobling, *The Sense of the Biblical Narrative: Structural Analyses in the Hebrew Bible I* (2nd ed.; JSOTSup 7; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 31 (applying 11:10 to both stories); Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers* (JPSTC 4; Philadelphia: JPS, 1989), xix.

[12] "Es besteht in der Forschung weitgehend Konsens, daß eine Grunderzählung durch eine zweite Erzählung redaktionell erweitert wurde.…[I]n der Forschung [besteht] nur über die Schichtung der Moseklage (V 11-15) Unsicherheit," Schart, *Mose*, 162–3.

the quail[13] while the other side suggests that only 11:12bβ (or none of it)[14] belongs to the elders.[15] These distinctions regarding the complaint of Moses sometimes affect an interpreter's reading of the passage while at other times the interpreter is content simply to describe the layers of the composition without comment on their implications for the meaning of the text. Thus, like de Wette before him,[16] Gressmann imagines a close relationship between prophecy and the *relieving* of Moses' burden.[17] Gray, on the other hand, sees the prophesying of the elders as completely *unhelpful* in "assisting Moses'.[18] Their differing accounts of the burden of Moses are a significant cause for this distinction.[19] Despite these differences, it is clear that attention to the layers or strands of each story develops a keen attention to the *elements* of the pericope as they stand. They especially highlight the importance and duality of the "complaint of Moses" section.[20]

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[13] Sturdy, *Numbers*, 84; Budd, *Numbers*, 124; Schart, *Mose*, 163 (favorably citing V. Fritz [1970]); Hugo Gressmann, *Mose und seine Zeit: Ein Kommentar zu den Mose-Sagen* (FRLANT 18; Göttingen: Vanenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913), 161n6; 168n2; cf. Wellhausen, *Composition*, 99.

[14] Sommer, "Reflecting on Moses," 604. Note that Sommer misreads George Buchanan Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Numbers* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1912), 101–2; J. Estlin Carpenter and George Harford, *The Composition of the Hexateuch* (London: Longmans, Green, 1902), 2:202, as supporting his position for two separate stories which include the full complaint as part of the quail story. Both Gray (97) and Carpenter & Harford-Battersby (2:202) indicate their discomfort in regarding 11:10-15 as a literary unit. Rather they follow Benjamin Wisner Bacon, who sees Num 11:10b-12, 14-15 as from the same source (J) as the rest of 11:4-15 but also assigns these same verses neither to the story of the quail nor to the story of the elders but immediately following Ex 33.1-3, *The Triple Tradition of the Exodus: A Study of the Structure of the Later Pentateuchal Books* (Hartford: Student Publishing, 1894), 141–144, 148–149, 168, 299. S.R. Driver also follows Bacon's analysis, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (5th ed.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1894), 527. Sommer's criticism of more recent scholars (who disagree with him) over-against "turn-of-the-century scholars" (606) (who ostensibly agree with him) is not quite supportable. Gray sees the *final* editor placing the verses (10b-12, 14-18) in their current location without ever affirming them as part of "the stories of the quails and the elders" (107).

[15] Coats, *Rebellion*, 98.

[16] W.M.L. de Wette, *Beiträge Zur Einleitung in Das Alte Testament* (2 vols.; Halle: Schimmelpfennig, 1807), 2:345, as cited in Green, "Pentateuchal," 180. De Wette sees the elders a possible doublet of Exodus 18.

[17] Gressmann, *Mose*, 178.

[18] Gray, *Numbers*, 111, 116.

[19] Along with their respective E (Gressmann, *Mose*, 171) versus JE (Gray, *Numbers*, 98) perspectives.

[20] "…die gesamte Klage (Num 11,11-15) in beiden Erzählungen gut vorstellbar ist;" Schart, *Mose*, 163.

Another consistent feature of the historical-critical approach is the assignment of the verses of Numbers 11 to their various sources (or traditions). Until more recently,[21] this process is not particularly contentious since most scholars agree that the narrative is pre-Priestly, with either separate J and E sections, or the combined JE, accounting for all the extant material.[22] In particular, the elders story is typically associated with E;[23] however, there is much less agreement about how its relationship to other (J)E material is to be best understood. Typically, Exodus 18:12-27, 24:1-11, and 33:7-11 are cited as possible intertextual partners from (J)E but with varying degrees of importance for determining the meaning of the Numbers text.[24] Some suggest that information from the same source in Exodus should be assumed prior to reading subsequent content in Numbers;[25] however, others see material from the same

[21] Recent scholars have considered D or post-D influences more likely: Reinhard Achenbach, *Die Vollendung der Tora: Studien zur Redaktionsgeschichte des Numeribuches im Kontext von Hexateuch und Pentateuch* (BZABR 3; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003), 237; David M. Carr, *Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 267–75; Schart, *Mose*, 165–6.

[22] Basically, J: 11:4-15, 18-23, 31-35; and E: 11:1-3, 16-17, 24-30; as in Driver, *Introduction*, 527; also, Carpenter and Harford, *The Composition of the Hexateuch*, 518, who offer a more nuanced view of 11:14 as supplementary E material and divide 11:24 into J (11:24a) and E (11:24b). Combined JE: Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 4; New York: Doubleday, 1993), 327–8, 340; Gray, *Numbers*, 98–9; Budd, *Numbers*, 129–31, who unhelpfully uses the term "Yahwist" to describe JE (xxiii). However, we should note Wellhausen's dissent in favor of a very late attribution, *Composition*, 100–1; cf. Green, "Pentateuchal"; Gray, *Numbers*, 99. Also, others perceive possible traces of P in 11:18-22, 24a, cf. Rudolf Kittel, *A History of the Hebrews* (trans. John Taylor; 2 vols.; London: Williams & Norgate, 1895), 1:218n4; cf. Gray, *Numbers*, 98.

[23] Gray, *Numbers*, xxxi; cf. Sommer, "Reflecting on Moses," 605. By contrast with J-attribution in Martin Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions* (trans. Bernhard W. Anderson; Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972), 32n119, 123, 273; Noth, *Numbers*, 83. Not from any of the "recognized Pentateuchal sources," notes Eryl W. Davies, *Numbers* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 103.

[24] Gray, *Numbers*, 109–111, 115–117; Budd, *Numbers*, 126, 130–131; Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, 338–9. Compare with P material used in a similar (but contrastive) way with Exodus 16 as discussed in Coats, *Rebellion*, 98–100; Gray, *Numbers*, 98.

[25] E.g. "Ex. 18 and Nu. $11^{16.17a.24b-30}$ are not parallel accounts of the same incident; their motives are completely different, and they may well have been successive incidents in the same source," Gray, *Numbers*, 116.

source as mere variations on a theme.[26] Still others see the differing themes purposely combined into a mosaic.[27] Thus, where Levine draws upon developments in philosophy of governance between Exodus 18 and Numbers 11, with Exodus 24 explaining the basis of that development,[28] Budd sees no relationship between Exodus 18 and Numbers 11 and prefers to refer to Exodus 33 for clarifying material.[29] Gray is similar to Levine, except that he feels his understanding of Exodus 24 only *relates* to Numbers 11 rather than *depends* on it.[30] More recent attempts to define Numbers 11 according to D and post-D strands are likewise illuminating but cannot yet definitively sweep earlier observations and connections into one determinative frame—countervaling forces still prevail, precisely in their inherent tensions. These divergences draw into question the ability of source identifications to convey the meaning of a text. If they cannot be related clearly, then can they be related helpfully? For Numbers 11, source identifications thus provide a range of possible intertextual resonances but without any one obtaining consensus over the others.

Third, in our overview of this approach, historical-critical works assess the primary meaning of the text through a limited range of historical settings. For this approach, the primary meaning of the text lies not in what it says to the reader but what it meant at the time of its original composition or editorial compilation (e.g. Why *here* in the Pentateuch? Why *this* combination of sources?). Often scholars are concerned to analyze properly the way the biblical text has been modified and interpreted through redactional activity (the so-called "diachronic

[26] E.g. Gressmann, who sees Exodus 18 and Numbers 11 as essentially describing the same event (with Exodus 18 being composed earlier and with less prophetic and etiological emphasis than Numbers 11), *Mose*, 176–7.
[27] E.g. Combined JE supports a Davidic monarchy: Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, 342–3; Budd, *Numbers*, xxii, 129–30. J-pitted-against-E paints a specific view of Moses: Sommer, "Reflecting on Moses," 614–24. (Despite his self-described distancing from traditional source identifications, his argument depends on them heavily, cp. 605-606 and 616n37.)
[28] "What was alluded to in Exod 24:11 is spelled out in Numbers 11," Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, 339.
[29] Cp. ibid., 338–9; Budd, *Numbers*, 126.
[30] Gray, *Numbers*, 116.

dimension" of the text)[31] in order to illuminate the Bible's own inner progress and promotion of its "higher ideas."[32] Furthermore, the horizon of the author's (or authors') and editor's (or editors') intent is generally limited to the historical sphere of his near future (and not to future readers in perpetuity). Thus, for Gray, the elders story's portrayal of Moses as an ideal prophet (which, for him, is its main purpose) is related to the time of Amos and how it would have helped in determining true or false prophets.[33] Likewise, Budd and Levine see the theological meaning of the passage (i.e. faith) as directly tied to Josiah-era concerns for political security through support of the Davidic monarchy.[34]

Also in this approach, the historical value of the text is often shown by interpreters through an intentional division from discussions of its theological or religious value, presumably because the historical value critically contextualizes all intended meaning of the text.[35] The primacy of historical meaning in this approach is especially highlighted when discontinuities between narratives or sections of narratives are noted but not pressed into reconciliation. For example, Noth and Gray may note a gap between the assumed governmental role of the elders and the articulated need for meat in Num 11:13, or between the apparently duplicated roles of the judges in Exodus 18 versus the elders of Numbers 11, without feeling obligated to offer an answer for how the final editor holds these meanings together.[36] This is distinct from the other approaches we will discuss

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[31] Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (London: SCM, 1992), 104.

[32] "I have felt it my duty,…to indicate as fully and as faithfully as I could the crudeness and imperfections of these ["crude" and "primitive" religious] ideas as well as the finer and higher ideas that find their expression in other parts of the book. For the highest that the religion of Israel attained to can only be fully appreciated in the light of the lowest which it touched,…to transform and ennoble," Gray, *Numbers*, x.

[33] Ibid., l.

[34] Budd, *Numbers*, 129–31; Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, 342–3.

[35] Gray, *Numbers*, xlii–lii; Driver, *Introduction*, ix, "the scope of [this] work…is not an Introduction to the Theology, or to the History, or even to the Study, of the Old Testament…it is an Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament…."

[36] Gray, *Numbers*, 111, 113, 116; Noth, *Numbers*, 89.

where scholars work to integrate the events and present them as a coherent whole.[37]

Overall, perhaps the most piercing and beneficial questions that result from this approach are: (1) Why are these stories (quail and elders, but also Moses' lament and Eldad and Medad) not told separately? And (2) why are they combined (when they are so different)? Once having probed the text in these historical-critical ways, it seems nearly impossible to consider the elders story of Numbers 11 anything but a difficult text. Once its layers and strands have been laid bare with such (generally) careful observations of the biblical text, some accounting for the compositional nature seems required. Still, as mentioned, where the historical-critical approach offers incisive questions, its ability to provide answers to these questions is less consistent and less persuasive. Any interpretation of the elders story would benefit from an eye toward its placement in its broader contexts (i.e. the rest of Numbers 11; Numbers 10-12; the book as a whole; or the Penta/Hexateuch), even if these contexts are helpfully bracketed for the time being. Consistent explanatory attention to both internal dynamics and external contexts of the story surely contributes to a more persuasive account of the passage.

The Literary-Narrative Approach

The second approach we will examine is the *literary-narrative* approach. In this approach, Numbers 11:4-35 is viewed as a single literary unity. Essentially, this means that although there are contrastive themes or sub-plots within the pericope, the text still holds together in a coherent manner, i.e. communicating harmonious rather than disjunctive or contrary senses. In order to argue this way of looking at the text, scholars typically, first, determine the proper parameters of the literary pericope and, second, highlight a main plot or structure within the delineated frame of text, placing all other themes as sub-plots or complementary

[37] By contrast, *Num. Rab.* 15.21; Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 207, 210.

movements. This focus on the unity of the text leads interpreters to trace (typically verse-by-verse) the narrative logic of the text, i.e. how the ideas of a biblical passage progress from one to the next. Additionally, for those who especially emphasize the *structure* of the text,[38] the message of any individual pericope may be sublimated to the goals and message of an encompassing unit of text.

Thus, in this approach, the primary meaning of a text is in "how the words run,"[39] what text is written and how it is finally configured. In reading biblical *narratives*, the main concern is with what text is written about the characters and events, actions and motivations of the story presented. How the story is then applied to the context of the reader is more divergent, depending first on *how* one sees the "words run" (i.e. what is communicated), second on how one sees the story in relationship to the *rest* of the book of Numbers, and third on *what community* is applying the text.[40] Because most explicitly theological interpreters typically view texts as unities and seek to relate these unities in their recorded sequence to a communal readership (i.e. "this is what the text means for us"), I have grouped most self-consciously theological interpreters under this approach.

Despite this concern for unity, however, the literary unit that is promoted as most strongly dictating the meaning of Num 11:4-35 varies widely. At one extreme, the whole book of Numbers may be deemed to be the primary "story" being told.[41] At the other, each pericope happens within the broad narrative structure of the book but stands more independently of the trajectory of the

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[38] Won W. Lee, *Punishment and Forgiveness in Israel's Migratory Campaign* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); Rolf Knierim and George W. Coats, *Numbers* (FOTL; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005); Dennis T. Olson, *Numbers* (IBC; Louisville: John Knox, 1996).

[39] Eugene F. Rogers, "How the Virtues of an Interpreter Presuppose and Perfect Hermeneutics: The Case of Thomas Aquinas," *JR* 76 (1996): 74. His translation of Aquinas' "salva litterae circumstantia," *De Potentia*, q.4, a.1, c.

[40] The first and third are intimately related, cf. Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 32.

[41] E.g. Lee, *Punishment and Forgiveness*, 279–82; Olson, *Numbers*, 3–7. In each, literary units are set in the context of a perceived theme of the book of Numbers.

whole.[42] In each case, however, there is a shared concern to *retell* the plot of the book and the plots and sub-plots of each section more than simply record a list of the events of the biblical text. By comparison, in more historical-critical works, the book of Numbers is delineated according to sources, traditions,[43] or itinerary, rather than the progress of the text. Only the third option, the itinerary-based structure, is common to both the historical-critical and literary-narrative approaches. But even in these cases, there is a distinction in how much meaning the itinerary carries. For historical-critical approaches, the itinerary primarily indicates the historical locations of events rather than the textually re-enacted *movement* of the people, and because of this sense of movement, literary-narrative works tend to be more illustrative in their descriptions of the itinerary.[44] The movement of the people is assumed to tell a story. Thus, the literary-narrative approach to Num 11:4-35 is configured around a sense of "story." Whether that story remains centered at the macro-level or the micro-level, both levels together tell "a story" as well as "stories" (either "stories within a story" or "a story by means of stories").

Perhaps it is because of this common concern for *story* that, despite arguments for the influence of the structure of Numbers, the structure does not seem to exert any significant influence over the interpretation of many individual episodes.[45] A survey of seven different literary-narrative structures of the book of Numbers and their subsequent readings of the elders story of Num 11:4-35 yields little correlation between the two.[46] Each interpretation offers a consistent sense of journey as well as failure, complaint, or rebellion across the board, as well as

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[42] E.g. Roy Gane supplies an outline of the book but handles each chapter independently and does not refer to his own subheadings during the exegesis which follows *Leviticus, Numbers* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 481–5; 580–8.

[43] E.g. "manna and quail," "water from the rock," etc.

[44] Cp. Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC; Downers' Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1981), 16–17; with Gray, *Numbers*, xxvi–xxix.

[45] For more on the debate over the structure of Numbers, see Lee, *Punishment and Forgiveness*, 1–48.

[46] Wenham, *Numbers*; Milgrom, *Numbers*; Ashley, *Numbers*; Lee, *Punishment and Forgiveness*; Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*; Knierim and Coats, *Numbers*; David L. Stubbs, *Numbers* (SCMTC; London: SCM, 2009).

Moses as one of the complainers or rebels, for whom the elders are given as some kind of solution.[47] Thus, on the basis of *narrative*, Moses' complaint is just one in a series of complaint-events without much specific relation to the journey or the other complaint-events (i.e. Moses acts like the people, but it is the *people* who affect the plot of the journey).[48] By contrast, for instance, I propose the purpose of the journey is not just speed or delay, punishment (death) or reward (life), but the ever-increasing accretion of necessary leadership structures (e.g. elders, Levites, Aaronic priests in Numbers 16-17) and individuals (e.g. line of Phineas in Numbers 21) for life in the land.

For most, the journey simply provides the setting or the cause for complaint more generally—the scene for these events. Even when, for example, Ashley recognizes alternating themes of "Food" and "Leadership" and the challenges to authority within Numbers 11-12, he only acknowledges Numbers 16-17 as another episode of challenge to leadership generally without exploring connections or differences between the two.[49] Likewise, Lee's opposition to Ashley and argument for subordinating the elders story as "secondary" to the quail story does not lead to any additional or divergent insights about the meaning of the elders story (i.e. it is simply an argument about primary or secondary plot-lines).[50] In both cases, the elders relieve Moses' burden in leadership (and a prelude to Numbers 12).[51] So, while debates continue about the structure of the book of Numbers (and the significance of such debates), most literary-narrative approaches render the elders in the context of yet another "complaint story" on the way to the promised land, with little specific significance of its own. Problems with food and problems with leadership seem to be simply assumed as par for the

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[47] However, for Milgrom, "God's Solution for Moses' is equivalent to Moses' diminishment," *Numbers*, 86, 378.

[48] Notably, the quail story is influenced by *theologies*, i.e. as a "delay" in reaching the promised land, as a disease-like "spreading" "discontent" of the old generation, and as a specific "food"-focused "breviary" on sins which waylay the people of God, respectively, ibid., 380; Olson, *Numbers*, 68; Stubbs, *Numbers*, 113.

[49] Ashley, *Numbers*, 206–7, 295.

[50] Lee, *Punishment and Forgiveness*, 129.

[51] Ibid., 128; Ashley, *Numbers*, 207.

course in a journey through the desert,[52] with little reflection as to *why* such extended (and separate) stories would be passed on about these problems. Alternatively, I suggest that stories of leadership and stories of food might carry important theological and individual significance for a people for whom leadership and food continue to be sources of identity and concern in a post-wilderness period and that each of these incidents may be intended to provide meditations on these continuing dynamics for Israel.[53]

Therefore despite differences in ideas about the book of Numbers and its structure and the way these relate to individual stories, in the literary-narrative approach, there is then a strong consensus that the main story of Num 11:4-35 is "complaint."[54] Both the people of Israel and Moses himself are depicted as complaining, i.e. first the people complain, then Moses does.[55] For many, not only do both the people and Moses complain but one leads to the other, with some locating the beginning of the problem as far back as Num 11:1—from the "riffraff" to "the Israelites" (11:4) and then to Moses himself.[56] This parallel of

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[52] E.g. On Num 11:1, "Experiencing the discomforts of travel, the people ungratefully complain" which progresses into 11:4-35, "The next episode is about the Lord's cafeteria menu…," Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 580.

[53] Stubbs, comes very close to this idea but drops the elders story (and what it might say about leadership) from his broader concept of a "breviary of sin," looking exclusively at the food complaint within his structure, *Numbers*, 113.

[54] Knierim and Coats, *Numbers*, 173–8; Lee, *Punishment and Forgiveness*, 128–9. They also emphasize "quail" and "craving," respectively, and tying the complaints of both the people and Moses together as constitutive of the "complication" of the narrative. The attribution of "complaint" is not unique to the literary-narrative approach, but it is more central, Noth, *Numbers*, 83; Dillmann, *Numeri-Josua*, 89 ("*Klage*"). An exception to centering on "complaint" is Pamela Tamarkin Reis, "Numbers XI: Seeing Moses Plain," *VT* 55 (2005): 207–31. In her literary-narrative attempt to refute Sommer, she sees the focus of the text as Moses and his complaint-less, "quail-act" rhetorical style (230).

[55] E.g. John Goldingay, *Numbers and Deuteronomy for Everyone* (OTEv; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 29–30; Stubbs, *Numbers*, 113, 116; Richard N. Boyce, *Leviticus and Numbers* (WBComp; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 148–9; Mike Butterworth, *Leviticus and Numbers* (TPC; Oxford: Bible Reading Fellowship, 2003), 130; William H. Bellinger, *Leviticus, Numbers* (NICOT; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2001), 220–1; Thomas B. Dozeman, "The Book of Numbers," in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (ed. Leander E. Keck; 12 vols.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 2:106; Olson, *Numbers*, 64–7; Ashley, *Numbers*, 207, 210.

[56] Olson, *Numbers*, 61, 64–5, "this fringe group is responsible for both rebellions" (61), "The disquiet...leads to both Moses and God becoming angry" (65); Roger D. Cotton, "The Pentecostal Significance of Numbers 11," *JPT* 10 (2001): 4, "Moses was displeased with the situation…. Moses was doing the same thing the people had done [in 11:1]—complaining…."

complaints immediately raises the question of comparability: Are then both the Israelites and Moses guilty for their complaints? A minority of interpreters answer with some kind of affirmative;[57] however, most, while detecting the spreading of complaint, determine that what is *rebellion* in the people is justifiable *frustration* in Moses, i.e. "there's complaining and [then there's] complaining."[58] Prior to 11:20's claim that the Israelites have "rejected YHWH," this is somewhat wishful thinking, considering the language used by Moses (in repeatedly questioning God's plan and provision, 11:10-15; 21-22) is more severe than the people's (בכה),[59] and his is in opposition to God's call while theirs is the result of more understandable natural hungers (at least initially and albeit in the context of divinely-provided manna).[60]

These determinations about Moses' complaint matter because they often dictate how the elders are God's "answer" to Moses' complaint. From the literary-narrative perspective, the passage consists primarily of two complaints both of which God responds to (and those with more attuned Hebrew notice that the agent of both divine actions is YHWH's רוח).[61] Thus, for those who see Moses'

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[57] Viewing Moses as rebellious or sinful (for various reasons): John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses: Arranged in the Form of a Harmony* (trans. Charles William Bingham; 4 vols.; Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1855), 4:23 (by asking for death); Milgrom, *Numbers*, 376–80 (near apostasy); Boyce, *Leviticus and Numbers*, 149 (lack of intercession); Stubbs, *Numbers*, 116–9 (lacks fortitude, faith).

[58] Butterworth, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 130, 132; cf. Wenham, *Numbers*, 107–8; Ashley, *Numbers*, 207, 210; Olson, *Numbers*, 67. Nancy Ganz is especially keen on this dynamic as an organizing principle, *Numbers: A Commentary for Children* (HL; Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd, 2006), 48. Historical-critical scholars sometimes also reflect this distinction, often by simple word choice (i.e. "complaint" for the people versus "expostulation" or "prayer" for Moses), but again, without making it an organizing principle or central concern, Gray, *Numbers*, 107; McNeille, *Numbers*, 58; L. Elliot Binns, *The Book of Numbers: With Introduction and Notes* (WC; London: Methuen, 1927), 68.

[59] Cp. this word to the consistent use of לון in other wilderness complaint-episodes: Ex 15:24; Ex 16:2-8; 17:3; Num 14:2, 27-29, 36; 16:11, 41; 17:5.

[60] Coats carefully shows how only the *context* (11:20) and not the wording of the people's complaint indicates rebellion, *Rebellion*, 100–7. Contrast to *Sifre* which sees the complaint as mere pretext and not really hunger at all (see 21n93 below).

[61] E.g. "God stops talking and begins to take action through the spirit of God. The Hebrew word for 'spirit'…helps bind together the two actions of God…," Olson, *Numbers*, 68.

complaint as a sin, the elders are either God's gracious answer in spite of his sin[62] or a judgment against him by diminishing him and his authority.[63] For those who see Moses' complaint as an expression of understandable exhaustion, the elders are simply the ever-present aid of YHWH.[64]

Very quickly, though, the question of *how* the elders help Moses comes to the fore. Where historical-critical interpreters are free to regard the elders' activity as an affirming statement about the role of pre-classical, ecstatic prophecy in the redactor's era[65] or of no real relation to helping Moses at all,[66] literary-narrative interpreters typically provide a more thorough account of *how* the elders come to be of help to Moses.[67] In the biblical text, YHWH says that he "will draw upon the spirit that is on [Moses] and put it on [the Seventy]" in order that they may "share the burden of the people" (Num 11:17). Then, in Num 11:25, YHWH indeed draws upon the spirit, places it on the Seventy, and "when the spirit rested upon them, they spoke in ecstasy (**וירתנבאו**) but did not continue" (11:25).[68] The

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[62] Boyce, *Leviticus and Numbers*, 149; Iain M. Duguid, *Numbers: God's Presence in the Wilderness* (PWord; Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 154.

[63] Calvin, *Commentaries*, 4:24–5; Milgrom, *Numbers*, 87; Jobling, *Sense*, 36. Note: Jobling's structuralist approach runs slightly outside the approaches presented here since it is concerned to navigate the "narrative" but by answering a very specialized set of questions which intend to describe a code implicit in the text. Likewise, Mary Douglas may be seen as providing a more supplemental than normative reading of the biblical text, with more code than plot (or sources) determining the meaning of Numbers 11 and its role in the book as a whole, *In the Wilderness: The Doctrine of Defilement in the Book of Numbers* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 158; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993).

[64] R. K. Harrison, *Numbers: An Exegetical Commentary* (WEC; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 186; R. Dennis Cole, *Numbers* (NAC 3B; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 192–3.

[65] Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (trans. D.M.G. Stalker; 2 vols.; Oliver & Boyd: Edinburgh, 1962), 2:8–9; Noth, *Numbers*, 89; Budd, *Numbers*, 130; Dozeman, "Numbers," 107; cf. Gressmann, *Mose*, 179.

[66] Gray, *Numbers*, 111, 113.

[67] A few historical-critical interpretations also offer more explicit accounts, e.g. an association of "ecstasy" with "installation" and a description of the type of spirit-possession and ecstatic prophecy which empowers ongoing leadership, N.H. Snaith, *Leviticus and Numbers* (NCB; London: Thomas Nelson, 1967), 231–2; Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, 339–41, respectively.

[68] Although the NJPS notes that other translations do render **וירתנבאו** "prophesied," nearly all recent interpreters agree with the NJPS that "ecstasy" is really in view here. Exceptions: Ashley, *Numbers*, 213–4 (hard to say what they do); Olson, *Numbers*, 68 ("with words from God"); John R. Levison, "Prophecy in Ancient Israel: The Case of the Ecstatic Elders," *CBQ* 65 (2003): 504–5 (no catatonic state depicted). "Did not continue" (following the MT and LXX) is translated as "did not cease" in

predominant literary-narrative view of the elders' activity is as a temporary sign of a more permanent spirit-possession, and this spirit-possession is most often viewed as efficacious for providing the type of aid in governing that Moses needs to relieve his burden (cf. 11:17).[69] A minority see the type of aid as more "spiritual" in nature, although what this precisely entails is often left undetermined.[70]

Determinations about help in governing or spiritual aid are then typically made without specific textual comment from within the passage. Indeed, the text itself seems uninterested in providing any more resolution to the burden of Moses apart from depositing of some of the spirit on him onto the elders and then their subsequent prophesying,[71] and effect which Moses affirms in 11:29.[72] Thus, different perceptions of what Moses' "burden" is—what it is he cannot carry alone (11:14)—end up determining the final function and purpose of much of the elders story. In the end, whatever the particular interpreter determines Moses needs that is what the elders are seen to provide whether he deserves their help or not.

Beyond questions of whether Moses complains or what he means by his complaint, this speech of Moses provides a point of application for a favorite tool

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Geneva, KJV, Young's, Douay-Rheims, and many German Bibles (following Luther's translation), due to variant versions in *Tgs. Onq.* and Vg. See Translation above.

[69] Calvin, *Commentaries*, 4:34; Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: Volume III, The Pentateuch* (trans. James Martin; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1865), 70; Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 581–2 ("managing people"); Milgrom, *Numbers*, 377, 383; Olson, *Numbers*, 68; Stubbs, *Numbers*, 120.

[70] Ashley views the elders' purpose as "not just administrative sharing, but sharing in spiritual matters" and whose reticence about affirming "ecstasy" allows him to see the elders as "accredited…as prophets," *Numbers*, 210–11; 213–14. Also, Wenham, "spiritual support," Wenham, *Numbers*, 108–9. Gane allows for a non-governmental, "council of "prophets" and is a little more descriptive about the type of help this group might provide (i.e. more leaders to complain to), *Leviticus, Numbers*, 585–6.

[71] Despite going on to propose their purpose, H. Reviv also notes this lack of description in the text itself, "The Traditions Concerning the Inception of the Legal System in Israel: Significance and Dating," *ZAW* 94 (1982): 571.

[72] Cp. Ze'ev Weisman, who wants to draw more distinction between the events of 11:24-25 and 11:26-29, "The Personal Spirit as Imparting Authority," *ZAW* 93 (1981): 226–7. The extension of this thesis means seeing Moses' humble response in 11:29 as unrelated to the actions taken in 11:24-25. Note how Milgrom sees 11:26-29 as an even greater punishment than 11:24-25 but Moses' response in 11:29 as humbly responding to both, *Numbers*, 378.

of literary-narrative approaches: chiasm.[73] Where historical-critical scholars tend to evaluate language as an indicator of the sources compiled in the text, literary-narrative interpreters often see it as an indicator of literary technique, including chiasm.[74] In the case of Moses' description of his burden, Wenham and Gane offer very similar attempts at identifying the structure of the speech; however, in each case, the speech is made to serve the larger purposes of their interpretative framework. Wenham identifies the unification of "the people's demand for food and Moses' plea for aid" within his "angry prayer" and uses this observation to argue for the literary unity of the whole pericope (11:4-35) rather than a combination of two different stories by a later redactor.[75] Likewise, Gane identifies the giving of meat as the center-point of the Moses' "bitter speech" and then characterizes the desire for meat as "the people's unreasonable demand."[76] In the end, despite the utilization of literary techniques, the purpose of the elders is made to fit with Wenham's thesis of a two-movement unity (aid and food) and Gane's proposal of legitimate and illegitimate "grousing," respectively.[77] Comparing these uses of chiasm provokes one to wonder which, if either, emphasis is correct, and if any emphasis can be objectively derived from literary techniques.

It is important to note that these determinations about Moses' burden and characterizations of the structure of Moses' speech are offered only because Moses'

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[73] See Milgrom for a rationale for this methodology and an appropriate distinction between chiasm (ABB'A') and introversion (ABXB'A'), the latter of which is often labeled inappropriately as "chiasm," *Numbers*, xxii. For Milgrom's own (more elaborate) introversion of the passage, see "The Structures of Numbers: Chapters 11-12 and 13-14 and Their Redaction. Preliminary Gropings," in *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel* (ed. Jacob Neusner, Baruch A. Levine, and Ernest S. Frerichs; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 49–61.

[74] I use the term "chiasm" to reflect the ideas of the interpreters whether they use the term properly or not.

[75] Wenham, *Numbers*, 108n2.

[76] Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 581. He presumably characterizes their desire this way because he thinks they should be satisfied with manna alone. But, then why would Moses not respond to them about their ingratitude rather than appeal to God for the meat? Would not only an implied affirmation of the legitimacy of their desire create such a crisis for Moses? One wonders whether his need to see the people as "complaining" (586-588) has not actually obscured his better instincts in analyzing the text (esp. the center point of the chiasm) on its own merit.

[77] Wenham, *Numbers*, 108; Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 580.

own sense of his need to supply meat is pre-determined to be either rhetorically facetious[78] or wrong-headed.[79] The assumption here is that the seventy elders are not empowered to help Moses provide meat for people. But perhaps we should ask: What if they were? Several scholars observe that Moses' own speech in 11:11-14 reflects an integrated complaint of both the need for meat and the burden to carry the people.[80] What if Moses is offering an integrated complaint in 11:11-14 and God is offering an integrated response in 11:16-20? How might the elders be conceived as aids to providing meat? Is such a notion possible? However one parses the stories or strands, Moses' complaint (11:10-15) connects both the elders story and the quail story together[81] (although, generally, neither approach recognizes this).[82] We should perhaps ask: In what way might the elders relate to the quail?

Among literary-narrative interpreters, then, there is also strong agreement that the elders' *spiritual empowerment* comes by virtue of a transferring of the divine—not human—spirit which was upon Moses.[83] This position is consistent even for those who see the withdrawal of the spirit upon Moses as a punishment, i.e. the punishment is a reduction of YHWH's spirit rather than a reduction of his

[78] Reis, "Seeing," 216–7.
[79] Cotton, "Pentecostal," 4.
[80] Wenham, *Numbers*, 108n2; Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 581; Knierim and Coats, *Numbers*, 175; Schart, *Mose*, 163, "Die Klage des Mose hat sich allerdings im Rahmen der Formkritik als wohlstrukturierte Einheit erwiesen"; Lee, *Punishment and Forgiveness*, 128, "Thus verses 14–15 are an integral part of Moses' speech and are a re–narration of verses 11–12. Verse 13 unifies these two separated yet corresponding parts."
[81] Schart, *Mose*, 163; Butterworth, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 132.
[82] Schart makes some nascent proposals that (1) the image of Moses as "wet-nurse (*Amme*)" and (2) the combination of "meat/flesh (*Fleisch*)" and spirit themes of the two stories, both provide points of meaningful contact between the two stories, *Mose*, 165. Likewise, Cole rightly notices the repetition of forms of the word אסף throughout both the elders and quail stories but does little to explore the significance, *Numbers*, 192n52.
[83] From outside the literary-narrative approach, Weisman counters this assessment and calls for a more precise account of the spirit here as a "supra-individual entity" (226) or "personal spirit" (228), "Personal Spirit." Weisman (227) also shares the opinion of Levine and Schart that the verb נוח in 11:25 indicates a distinctive contribution to understanding the permanent way the elders were changed by this otherwise temporary experience, *Numbers 1-20*, 340–1; *Mose*, 164.

own.[84] The concern here seems less about metaphysical substance (which pre-modern interpreters take up in reference to this passage) but more about the *activity of the spirit of God in Moses' life* prior to this event and in the lives of the elders after it.[85] Interestingly, inter-textual references to Elijah's desperation (1 Kgs 19:4) occasionally appear in conjunction with Moses' complaint (11:15),[86] but potential resonances in meaning between this "resting" (נוח) of Moses' spirit to others (11:25) and Elijah's "settling" (נוח) of his spirit on Elisha (2 Kgs 2:15) have been touched on only very minimally.[87] One wonders whether more connection between these complaints might be warranted given the pairing of lament unto death and subsequent episodes of passing on their spirits.[88] There is good reason to consider the implications of a model whereby an institutionalized set of elders is imbued with the divine spirit of the leader who is about to die (or leave).

Furthermore, both those who see the elders primarily as instruments of punishment and those who see them as helpers see the distribution of Moses' spirit as still maintaining Moses' *hierarchy* over the seventy (or, the Seventy).[89] Literary-narrative approaches which want to see God not only establishing new order through the elders often want to recognize his maintenance of that order previously established as both about Moses. For some, this concern for the proper ordering of Moses and the elders is not only a motif for Numbers 11 but a progression of plot whereby the events surrounding the prophesying elders in

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[84] Calvin, *Commentaries*, 4:25; Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary: Vol III, Pentateuch*, 70; Jobling, *Sense*, 36; Ashley, *Numbers*, 211; Stubbs, *Numbers*, 120; Goldingay, *Numbers, Deuteronomy*, 30. Unclear or contradictory on this point: (a) Wenham, *Numbers*, 108 ("Moses' spirit") versus 109 ("God's spirit"); (b) Milgrom, *Numbers*, 87 ("divine spirit"), 89 ("God's spirit") versus 378 ("drawing Moses' power"), 87 ("derive their spirit from Moses"); (c) Olson, *Numbers*, 68 ("spirit of Moses" versus "God's spirit"). Dissenting: Knierim and Coats, *Numbers*, 176 ("Moses' spirit").

[85] Stubbs, *Numbers*, 120; cp. Origen, *Hom. Num.* 6.2.1.

[86] Harrison, *Numbers*, 186.

[87] Ashley, *Numbers*, 211n36; Havilah Dharamraj, *A Prophet Like Moses? A Narrative-Theological Reading of the Elijah Stories* (PBM; Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2011), 178–81.

[88] For a comparison of the passages, see Weisman, "Personal Spirit," 225–34.

[89] Milgrom, *Numbers*, 89; Ashley, *Numbers*, 211; Olson, *Numbers*, 68; Stubbs, *Numbers*, 120.

Numbers 11 actually generate the crisis of prophetic status in Numbers 12 (esp. 12:2, 6-8).[90]

In conclusion, the literary-narrative approach helpfully approaches the text as a whole, working to understand the meaning of the narrative in its entirety. It recognizes that not all questions that *can* be asked of a text *should* be asked of it. It recognizes that many stories communicate meaningfully despite obvious plot gaps and inexplicable occurrences. It affirms a reading strategy where the interpreter decides to share the concerns of the text as the text presents them. In the case of Num 11:4-35, the main goal of these interpreters is to relate the motives and actions of Moses and the people in concert with the divine responses of elders and quail. Whether or not such an account has been successfully rendered is less clear, but this approach certainly provides some benefit despite questions raised here. Even so, the literary-narrative approach lends itself well to assessing the intrinsic uses of language, imagery, inter-textual resonances, and rhetoric which tend to evade the dissecting eye of more historical-critical works.

Conclusion: Ways Forward

From our "turning" of the elders story, we can see two main facets come into focus: (1) *spirit, prophecy, and leadership* and (2) *complaint and ingratitude*. First, through the first facet of the elders story, we can see a vital concern for the leadership of the people of God. Who is qualified to lead them and on what basis? Certainly Moses is, and it is based on the fact that the spirit of YHWH is upon him. It is also at least implied, with the various moves around "prophecy" (Num 11:25-29), that Moses' ability to prophesy, or "act like a prophet," contributes to a sense of assurance about his leadership (whether that prophesying points to Moses' possession of the spirit of YHWH or it contributes on its own to Moses' authentication is not clear). This sense of the importance of "Moses as prophet" overtly bookends Num 11:4-35 through his ideal, prophet-like intervention on

[90] Olson, *Numbers*, 70; Stubbs, *Numbers*, 122-123.

behalf of the people in Num 11:1-3 and his affirmation as better than "prophets" in Num 12:2-3, 6-8.

But Numbers 11 also qualifies Moses' position as sole leader of the people. For some, Moses *loses* his status as prophet and possessor of YHWH's spirit, but for most, Moses is simply *joined* in this role and spiritual state, at least temporarily and albeit still under Moses' authority in some way. Whatever tack one takes, Moses' lonely cry in Num 11:14 (אנכי לבדי) is changed when he gathers the Seventy, when they get same spirit, and when they prophesy (Num 11:24-25).

But why do they take the same spirit? What is it about leadership in Israel that these elders need the spirit that is upon Moses? And why does prophecy seem to satisfy the true sense of joining Moses (as close as they can come without threatening him—in fact, close enough that they *do* threaten him in the eyes of some)? Another way of asking this is: why is not a blessing or filling enough? Why are these men not brought to the tent and given a blessing or "filled" (מלא) with YHWH's spirit (even as the artisans of Ex 28:3 and Bezalel of Ex 31:3; 35:31 were) to do their work as "administrators" and "leaders" (as so many have described these elders)?

To answer this, I think that those who examine the historical situation of the text and the pervasive, active sense of prophesying are more persuasive than those who would simply replace the elders' prophesying with their empowerment as leaders.[91] This latter move likely imports too much of our own modern sensibilities about leadership while the implication of the text is not simply that the elders were given more ability to use the wisdom that they had but that their spiritual and prophetic access to the divine made them better able to deliver the judgments and leadership of God. With this implication, there is an overall heightening of prophecy above other offices and skilled positions among the people of Israel. As demonstrating access to the divine word about the life of the

[91] E.g. Gressmann describes Moses' leadership as entailing active prophesying when he has Jethro say, "Die Fälle, die vor dich gebracht werden, trage fortan Gott vor, damit er sie durch Orakel entscheide und dir die Last des Urteils abnehme," *Mose*, 170.

people, those with prophecy are at least as high as those chosen with authoritative access to the "holy things" of God (e.g. Lev 5:14), the priests and Levites. We can see this as even both Moses and the elders are granted their status *by* their connection to prophecy. This high status of prophecy (and, in all likelihood, its implications for law-giving) makes it closer to that of a "priest" than might typically be considered—mediators of God are perhaps more alike than different. I think more recent attempts to describe the prophesying of the elders as ecstatic speech serve to obscure the status of the elders' prophetic activity, while pre-modern interpreters generally draw out the dynamism of the elders' prophesying more helpfully.

(2) These connections between the elders and oracular prophecy are not far from questions of complaint. Numbers 11:10 and its relationship to 11:4 are still perplexing. What is so terribly wrong with what the people weep about that Moses and YHWH are so upset? Two possibilities have been suggested: (a) They are complaining about food when they have been given manna and this is a sin against God's graciousness that is somehow now particularly egregious in a way not applicable in Exodus 16.[92] (b) They are only ostensibly complaining about meat, and they are really just looking for a pretext to complain about the desert-journey and not being in Egypt anymore (hence, Num 11:18, 20).[93] I suggest, it is also possible that (c) the justification for Moses' and YHWH's anger is not important to the text, i.e. they are allowed to be angry at Israel's weeping even if the reason seems opaque to the reader. Perhaps earlier readers were more prone to presuming God as just in whatever reason he had. In this case, Moses was not

[92] "When they complained about not having food, he gave them manna (Ex. 16)….After giving the Israelites evidence on which to base their trust, he expected them to trust him more and held them accountable for the quality of their faith in his beneficence," Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 587.
[93] "But [the truth] is that they were [only] seeking a pretext…," Rashi, *Pentateuch: With Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth, and Prayers for Sabbath, and Rashi's Commentary* (trans. A. M. Silbermann and M. Rosenbaum; 5 vols.; London: Shapiro, Vallentine, 1946), 53 (Num 11:4). Based on *Sifre* 86. (Throughout "*Sifre*" will refer to *Sifre Numbers*; whereas *Sifre Deuteronomy* will be designated "*Sifre Deut*".)

angry with God for being unjust in His anger but was rather simply tired of being caught in the flow of God's angry words toward his people.

Whichever we decide as it regards the elders story, the people's complaint is mainly the prompt and background to Moses' complaint and helps illustrate the severity of his response. How can Moses complain far more forcefully to God and not be guilty of ingratitude himself?[94] How indeed are the elders God's answer to Moses' *complaint*? In one sense the answer is straightforward: They somehow help Moses in his immediate need (whatever that may be deemed to be). Moses is offered help from the elders and, in contrast to his arguments with God about the quail (thus heightening the anticipation of the great multitude of quail soon to be given), Moses makes no comment about his task of gathering the elders until Num 11:29 (which, at the least, acts as an affirmation of his request granted).

In another sense, the genesis of a council of Seventy is more potent than any immediate concern of Moses. I think the most fruitful way forward here is to examine the way Moses' complaint ends in a wish for death and what concerns that wish then sparks in the story. We have noted how some see a connection here with Elijah, but at a more basic level, we may also consider how inherent in the structuring of the gathered Seventy is a sense of continuity in leadership. A nation led by a single, charismatic individual is at risk if something should happen to him either morally or physically—or indeed, what will happen after he *does* die. Several scholars have noted the surprising appearance of Joshua in the story (as his first appearance in Numbers), but his appearance becomes less surprising once we consider the way Moses' request for death sets us toward a view of who will succeed Moses in leadership. Joshua's entrance on the scene may simply act to reassure readers that at this crucial moment of spirit-transference, Joshua was there.

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[94] Perhaps the people anger God in their initial complaint but are not punished until their greed in Num 11:32 elicits God's second episode of anger in 11:33, this time unto judgment. This way of perceiving the initial complaint protects a parallel of God's tolerance and abundantly gracious reply to both Moses and the people.

Of course, the other candidates for Moses' "successor" are the Seventy. In this case, Moses is not succeeded by a person but an institution. While some see this process (especially as linked with Eldad and Medad) as dispersal and counter-balance to Moses' power, we may equally view it as a sustaining move—providing leadership not just for the immediate assistance of Moses (in which, if measured as helps in leading the people in obeying God, they fail as the subsequent rebellion unfolds) but for generations to come. But such a sustaining and providing force is not often noticed in recent interpretation. Notably, I have found no commentator or exegete of Numbers 11, who notices perhaps the most enduring mark of the elders story in the history of interpretation: the number of elder-scribes who translated the LXX.[95] Likewise, in its reception history, there is a strong association with Numbers 11 in liturgies and theologies of ordination. Of even more assurance than Joshua's presence in the episode is, perhaps, the presence of a continuing institution of elders who may pass on to others the spirit that is given to them. From this view, whatever is happening with the elders, it is not only about leadership and prophecy in the present but confidence in the leadership of the people for years to come. The answer to Moses' complaint is to account for his replacement not just his immediate worry. But to understand more about who may replace and/or extend him beyond his own lifespan, we need to explore further the language of שטר and נבא, terms often thought to contribute little to the overall meaning of the passage and almost never viewed together.

[95] See Chapter 5.

2

Are the Elders Among Israel's Prophets…and Their Scribes?

One of the more remarkable observations that emerges from tracing the history of interpretation of Numbers 11 is the shift around the turn of the 20th-century from a view and translation of Numbers 11:25 as describing "prophesying" elders (the unanimous consensus up to that point) to a view of them as "speaking ecstatically."[1] Similarly but with less dramatic shift over time and with more subtlety in implication, the consistent tendency since the time of the Targums and Vulgate has been to translate and interpret the description of the elders in Num 11:16 not as "their scribes" as in the Septuagint (LXX) but instead as "their officials." The purpose of this study is to reclaim both "prophet" and "scribe" as proper translations of the Hebrew of Numbers 11 and as contributing descriptors of the seventy elders ("the Seventy") portrayed there.

PROPHETS

A Sign of Prophetic Ecstasy Like Saul?

At the climax of one strand of this larger dual-threaded narrative in Numbers 11 stands a bold yet tenebrous conclusion to Moses' complaint (Num 11:24-25, NJPS):

> **24**Moses went out and reported the words of the LORD to the people. He gathered seventy of the people's elders and stationed them around the Tent. **25**Then the LORD came down in a cloud and spoke to him; he drew upon the spirit that was on him and put it upon the seventy elders. And when the spirit rested upon them, they *spoke in ecstasy*[2] (**ויתנבאו**), but did not continue.

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[1] E.g. LXX and *Tgs. Onq., Neof.,* and *Ps.-J.* all translate **ויתנבאו** (Num 11:25) as "prophesied": ἐπροφήτευσαν, **ומתנבן**, **מתנבאין**, **ואתנבון**, respectively. Also, see *Sifre 93; Num. Rab.* 15.19. All Aramaic from *Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon Project*, n.p. [cited 18 September 2014]. Online: http://cal1.cn.huc.edu/showtargum.php.

[2] NJPS notes: "Others 'prophesied.' "

From a narrative perspective, this climactic conclusion to the elders story is a puzzling kind of ending. What is happening here between the elders and Moses and why? Why is a coda added after these verses about Eldad and Medad and their similar prophetic activity back in the camp (11:26)? Are they also "speaking in ecstasy"? And how does any of this answer Moses' initial cry for help in Num 11:11-15?

For both Numbers commentators and scholars of ancient Israelite prophecy, the answers to these questions typically center on what Num 11:25 means when it says the elders **ויתנבאו**. The strong consensus has been that they "speak in ecstasy" (or experience some other kind of prophetic "frenzy"), which acts as a sign to themselves, to Moses, and to the newly-formed nation of Israel that they are now prepared to help him govern the people. This view is then supported by links to Saul's experiences in 1 Sam 10:1-13 and 19:8-24, i.e. even as the surrounding crowds wonder to themselves, "Is Saul too among the prophets?" so the experience of the elders in Numbers 11 is thought to act as an equally temporary event and sign.[3]

However, the reason for translating the word **ויתנבאו** as "they spoke in ecstasy" is often not explicitly stated, nor is what is meant by "ecstasy" defined. Many commentators are simply content to assert something akin to Philip Budd, who avers, "The text implies that this is ecstatic prophecy, the kind in which men are seized and overpowered by divine spirit (cf. 1 Sam 10:10-13; 19:20-24)."[4] Some scholars go further by noting one or more of the following similarities in

[3] Calvin, *Commentaries*, 4:33–5 (they "prophesied" but it was a sign and not inspiration in the classical sense); Keil and Delitzsch, *Pentateuch*, 70–1; Gressmann, *Mose*, 180; Binns, *Numbers*, 70–1; Snaith, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 231–2; Sturdy, *Numbers*, 86; Wenham, *Numbers*, 109; Milgrom, *Numbers*, 89, 380–1; Schart, *Mose*, 163–4; Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, 340; Davies, *Numbers*, 104–5; John H. Walton and Victor H. Matthews, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Genesis-Deuteronomy* (Downers' Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1997), 186; Cotton, "Pentecostal," 7–8; Butterworth, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 132–3; Goldingay, *Numbers, Deuteronomy*, 30; Rad, *OT Theology*, 2:8–9; Simon B. Parker, "Possession Trance and Prophecy in Pre-Exilic Israel," *VT* 28 (1978): 275–7.

[4] Budd, *Numbers*, 128.

both Numbers 11 and the Saul cycle: (a) an indication of spirit possession,[5] (b) the group nature of the encounters,[6] (c) the lack of recorded verbal content of any prophecy,[7] and (d) the use of the hithpael stem of the verb **נבא**.[8] Additionally, these scholars often allude to common assumptions about the development of "the prophetic movement,"[9] referring to both stories as examples of "early Israelite prophecy" as opposed to "later 'classical' prophecy."[10] In these ways, a direct line is drawn from Numbers 11 (the only pentateuchal occurrence of prophesying) to the 1 Samuel events (and thus to broader assumptions about the history of Israelite prophecy), filling in the laconic aspects of Numbers 11 with more explicit renderings in accounts of Saul.[11]

But is this interpretative move justified? In particular, can we say that the elders of Numbers 11 are actually engaging in prophetic ecstasy? On the contrary, when we examine (1) what the presumed history of Israelite prophecy entails (and thereby, what is meant by "speaking in ecstasy," "ecstatic prophecy," or "ecstatic frenzy"),[12] as well as (2) the associations between the events in 1 Samuel and Numbers, the end result substantially supports leaving "prophesying" as the proper descriptor of the elders' activity in Numbers 11. No doubt, the elders do experience a kind of spirit possession, but since nothing in Numbers 11 describes the prophesying of the elders as indicating signs of ecstatic frenzy or "possession trance," I suggest maintaining the elders' activity as "prophesying" retains an intentional link in the narrative to Moses as prophet and his authoritative role in Israel. But in order to articulate this argument fully, we must sketch where Numbers 11 fits within the broader conversation surrounding the history and nature of Israelite prophecy as depicted in the Hebrew Bible.

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[5] Milgrom, *Numbers*, 380–1.
[6] Schart, *Mose*, 164; cf. Sturdy, *Numbers*, 86.
[7] Butterworth, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 133.
[8] Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, 340.
[9] Rad, *OT Theology*, 2:6.
[10] Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 585; McNeille, *Numbers*, 63.
[11] Levison, "Prophecy," 509.
[12] Petersen rightly notes the correct anthropological term is "possession behavior" or "trance," David L. Petersen, *Roles of Israel's Prophets* (JSOTSup 17; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981), 28.

Numbers 11 in Its Interpretative Setting: Questions of Prophetic Ecstasy

At least since the late-19th-century,[13] scholars of the biblical prophets have suggested that Israelite prophecy belongs to the same general phenomenon observable in neighboring ancient societies and in some more contemporary "primitive" cultures, i.e. through intense personal experience, prophets are possessed by the spirit of the God of that nation (here, YHWH) and speak as a divine mouthpiece.[14] The appeal of this "Comparative Religion"[15] approach to biblical prophecy (first advanced by figures like Bernhard Duhm, W. Robertson Smith, Julius Wellhausen, and Hermann Gunkel) has been its ability to account

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[13] Petersen singles out Bernhard Duhm's Isaiah commentary (1892) and Hermann Gunkel's "Die geheimen Erfahrungen der Propheten Israels" (in *Suchen der Zeit*, 1903) as significant early influences, ibid., 25. Also, others of importance: Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels* (2nd ed.; Berlin: G. Reimer, 1883); Bernhard Duhm, *Die Theologie der Profeten als Grundlage für die innere Entwicklungsgeschichte der israelitischen Religion* (Bonn: Adolph Marcus, 1875); cf. Eryl W. Davies, *Prophecy and Ethics: Isaiah and the Ethical Traditions of Israel* (JSOTSup 16; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981), 12–15. These were all, of course, indebted to de Wette and Ewald in important ways.

Significantly and apart from observations about Israel's ANE context, Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg identified the controversy between ecstasy as (a) genuine to biblical prophecy or as (b) foreign intrusion as an extension of the Montanist debate (i.e. Tertullian vs. Origen), and he suggested "the truth lies…in the middle," i.e. biblical prophets engaged in ecstatic *behavior* but without losing their self-awareness (4:397), *The Christology of the Old Testament and a Commentary on the Messianic Predictions* (trans. Theodore Meyer and James Martin; 4 vols., 2nd ed.; CFTL 1-2, 19-20; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1854), 4:396–444. [orig. *Christologie des Alten Testaments und Commentar über die Messianischen Weissagungen der Propheten* (3 vols., 1st ed.; Berlin: Oehmigke, 1854), 1:293–332.] Notably, Hengstenberg confidently converses with those before him, e.g. C.B. Michaelis (1680-1764), based on platonic, rather than comparative religion, terms. Note: Heschel badly misrepresents Hengstenberg's view of ecstasy, A.J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (repr.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007), 2:124.

[14] W. Robertson Smith specifically notes similarities between **נביא** and the Assyrian "god Nebo, whose name is essentially identical with the Hebrew nābî, and who figures as the spokesman of the gods, the counterpart to the Greek Hermes," *The Prophets of Israel and Their Place in History to the Close of the Eighth Century B.C.* (ed. T.K. Cheyne; rev. ed.; London: Adam & Charles Black, 1897), 86. [orig. pub. 1882.] He continues:

> The first appearance of companies of prophets is in the history of Samuel and Saul (1 Sam. x. 3, 10 *seq.*), where they are found engaged in the worship of Jehovah under circumstances of physical excitement closely parallel to what is still seen among the dervishes of the East, and occasionally among ourselves in times of strong religious feeling. Excitement of this sort is often associated with genuine religious movements, especially among primitive peoples. (86)

[15] W. Robertson Smith, *The Religion of the Semites: The Fundamental Institutions* (2nd ed.; London: Adam & Charles Black, 1894), vi.

for the possible origins and development of Israelite religion.[16] To this basically historical frame, Gustav Hölscher (1914) systematically applied Wilhelm Wundt's psychological principles in a comprehensive and widely compelling proposal.[17] As a result, Israel's early prophets were soon considered, like other Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) prophets, producers of prophecy through their psychological proclivity toward, and group cultivation of, ecstatic experiences. It was through these experiences that Israelite religion developed (well-before final forms of Mosaic law).[18]

The development of Israelite religion, it was thought, included changes in the nature of prophecy.[19] As evidenced by distinctions within 1 Sam 9:1-10:12 (esp. 9:9) between the roles of a seer (ראה) and a prophet (נביא),[20] it was felt that early Israelites came into the land with seers capable of divination but picked up, from their Canaanite neighbors, the capacity for pronouncement through ecstatic frenzy.[21] Later, classical prophets of the 8th-century and beyond used both terms

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[16] Cf. Heschel, *Prophets*, 2:124–5; Robert R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 4–5. In his notes, Smith clarifies that the group encounters like 1 Samuel 10, were, to him, the "first appearance" of נביאים in Israel, cf. W. Robertson Smith, *Prophets*, 392. He offers further comparisons to South Asian, Arabic, and Syrian versions of "prophetic exercises", including "violent and ecstatic" forms of "fantastic enthusiasm" (392), and, nearly one hundred years prior to Simon Parker ("Possession," 273-4), regards Saul's "prophesying" in 1 Sam 19:20 with the same distinction between mediumistic and non-mediumistic activity:

> It does not seem that at this early time the prophetic exercises necessarily involved any gift of prophecy in the ordinary sense of the word, but it was recognized that "a divine spirit" [רוח אלהים] came upon those who participated in them…. (392)

[17] Gustav Hölscher, *Die Profeten* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1914); Heschel, *Prophets*, 2:216. "Hölscher's work has remained seminal. Some have denied its validity, others have incorporated insights from it. Virtually everyone has referred to it," Petersen, *Roles*, 26.

[18] Davies, *Prophecy*, 12.

[19] This sense of historical development remains a seminal feature of this classic historical-critical approach. In earlier work, like Hengstenberg, variations in terminology about prophets and in prophetic experience were observed but accounted for within an essentially single entity of "biblical prophecy." Likewise, more recent approaches have not failed to observe variations but have tended to account for those changes in less historically-straightforward ways, e.g. von Rad affirms classic shifts in the 9th and 8th-centuries but argues that no "straight line" can be drawn from earlier ecstatics to later writing prophets since even the terms נביא and ראה are used too interchangably at early stages, *OT Theology*, 2:6–7. Petersen answers this problem with geography instead of history, *Roles*, 98–9.

[20] Heschel, *Prophets*, 2:127.

[21] Petersen, *Roles*, 26.

and modified both divination and "nabiism" (ecstastic utterance) into something more peculiar to Israel.[22]

Earlier versions of this history of Israelite prophecy (e.g. Duhm) viewed the prophecy of the 8th-century prophets (esp. Amos 7:14) as shifting religious verification away from earlier claims of divine contact through ecstasy and toward rational and ethical speech for God,[23] Gunkel later advocated for even these "classical prophets" to be allowed personal ecstatic experiences (in their performance but not their acquisition of divine words).[24] Hölscher took those a step further and reclaimed both private possession and public pronouncement of later, classical prophets as in some sense ecstatic, though no longer driven by music and group-enacted frenzy.[25] These later prophets' speech was also now intelligible communication, rather than uncommunicative babble.[26] Finally, in the midst of this period, the discovery (in 1890) of an 11th-century Egyptian travelogue only further confirmed previous theories. In it, an Egyptian elder (and ambassador, trained to converse and act as diplomat), Wen-Amon, observes, while he is in Byblos, a youth seized with his god and speaking divine words. [27] Suspicions of Canaanite ecstasy deriving from Asia Minor (Hittite empire) were seemingly confirmed.[28] The zenith of the "classical prophetic criticism" had been attained.[29]

While opponents of this view percolated throughout its development[30] and the next forty years would provide champions of it, it also provided incubation for larger resistance. By 1960, Gerhard von Rad was still embracing many of these same working assumptions but was able, by that point, to also declare,

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[22] Heschel, *Prophets*, 127–8, summarizing Hölscher.
[23] Davies, *Prophecy*, 14.
[24] Petersen, *Roles*, 25–6; Wilson, *Society*, 7.
[25] Davies, *Prophecy*, 16.
[26] Ibid., 12–13.
[27] "The Journey of Wen-Amon to Phoenicia," translated by John A. Wilson (*ANET*, 25-9).
[28] Rolf Rendtorff, "Reflections on the Early History of Prophecy in Israel," trans. Paul J. Achtemeier, *JTC* 4 (1967): 14.
[29] Von Rad, *OT Theology*, 2:4. Marking the high point: Bernhard Duhm, *Israels Profeten* (2nd ed.; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1922).
[30] Cf. Heschel, *Prophets*, 2:129n63.

> [T]he pendulum swung too far. For the prophets were never as original, or as individualistic, or in such direct communion with God and no one else, as they were believed to be. As we now see, they were in greater or lesser degree conditioned by old traditions which they re-interpreted and applied to their own times. Indeed, at the end of the volume we shall even be faced with the task of restoring them their share of the law. The corrections which the passage of time has forced on the picture painted by "classical prophetic criticism" are of profound importance.[31]

Von Rad saw Israelite prophecy developing in the 9th-century through ecstatic origins, but classical prophets could no longer be seen as so innovative in their religious ideology. In 1962, Johannes Lindblom and Abraham Heschel published books in the same year with almost completely opposite views:

> For Lindblom, inspiration/ecstasy is a religio-historical universal available to all people at all times and is more the result of a personality type than it is a function of cultural or social influence.…Heschel took a tack quite different from that of Lindblom. He denies systematically that Israel's prophets may be construed as ecstatics. He elaborately analyzes the literary prophets and concludes that none of the distinguishing marks of ecstasy, e.g., frenzy, merging with the god, extinction of self, is present in the literature of the classical prophets.[32]

Questions about what ecstasy meant and how it functioned came under continual review. Important criticism of Hölscher and those with similar views continued from I. M. Lewis (particularly against Lindblom's exclusion of social roles)[33] and Robert Wilson (who suggested various possession trances occurred in Israel under various social conditions and was evaluated in various ways),[34] but, for our purposes, most of the interpretative scene is set. We will still want to take up the question of the verb use of **נבא**, but because Numbers 11 is considered evidence

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[31] Von Rad, *OT Theology*, 2:4. [orig. *Theologie des Alten Testaments: BD II, Die Theologie der prophetischen Überlieferungen Israels* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1960).]

[32] Petersen, *Roles*, 27. For a further, concise review of the impact of studies of the law on the role of the prophets during this period, see Davies, *Prophecy*, 16–29.

[33] I.M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion. An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971); cf. Petersen, *Roles*, 27.

[34] Robert R. Wilson, "Prophecy and Ecstasy: A Reexamination," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98 (1979): 321–37; cf. Petersen, *Roles*, 28. For Wilson, the elders of Numbers 11 represented an earlier, Ephraimite positive view of prophetic behavior later viewed negatively (as evidenced by its wilderness context) by Jerusalemites, Wilson, *Society*, 154.

of "early" prophecy in Israel, any continuing conversation about the nature of "prophecy" is mostly tangentially related—almost all of it is focused on the later, classical prophets.[35]

Almost without exception, the current interpretative setting for Numbers 11 considers its *prophesying elders* in the category of early, ecstatic prophecy, with the events of Saul's life (1 Sam 10 and 19, and often, 18:10) for its sole company. Even figures like Gad and Nathan, once thought to be early examples of the same period,[36] now appear too solitary to be "ecstatic." The 18th-century Mari letters provide an example (from outside Canaan) of solitary prophetic messengers (or pairs of them) speaking from a god to a king, as commissioned diviners but without evident ecstasy.[37] Their evidence further problematizes the theories of classical prophetic criticism,[38] but *groups* with visible signs of spirit *possession* and a lack of clear prophetic *content* must be, it is thought, remnants of an older Israelite society. Whatever oscillation and debate has continued around the nature of *classical* prophecy, *early* prophecy, especially in Numbers 11 and 1 Samuel 10 and 19, is still regarded as ecstatic under the "assured results" of historical-critical investigation. To suggest otherwise, likely appears naïve or a form of special pleading. Israelite prophecy, it is argued, did not emerge from

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[35] The tendency is already observable in von Rad, who only briefly addresses the elders in his *OT Theology* (vol. 2), and, in his English stand-alone re-issue, he omits them altogether, along with all of his discussion of the "origins of prophecy," (*The Message of the Prophets* [trans. D.M.G. Stalker; London: SCM, 1968].). The classical prophets are what interests him.
Regarding ecstasy in the classical prophets:

> I conclude that possession trance is not an element of Israelite prophecy, and figures in a history of Israelite prophecy only marginally in discussions of i) the possible impact of Phoenician prophecy on Israelite institutions, especially in the Omride court, and ii) the calumny and mockery to which prophets could be subjected. (Parker, "Possession," 285.)

In light of which, Petersen adds:

> One may only conclude that if the very presence of ecstatic, or better termed, trance or possession behavior in Israelite prophecy is moot, and Parker's analysis surely suggests that it is, ecstasy can hardly be an essential or even regular feature of Israelite prophetic performance. (Petersen, *Roles*, 30.)

[36] Von Rad, *OT Theology*, 2:6, although he openly wonders what can accurately be said about them given their interchanging use of titles.
[37] Only one of them has a dream, Rendtorff, "Early History," 14–15. On "pairs," see Simon B. Parker, "Official Attitudes toward Prophecy at Mari and in Israel," *VT* 43 (1993): 64.
[38] Petersen, *Roles*, 105n41.

nowhere and its indebtedness to its Canaanite, Egyptian, and proto-Aramean predecessors runs deep.[39]

Responses to the Setting: History and Exegesis

At a broader level, concerns of special pleading may be leveled at Heschel's otherwise astute survey of the problem. In particular, Heschel appears unwilling *a priori* to concede the possibility that any of Israel's prophets engaged in ecstatic speech or that any biblical texts (apart from 1 Samuel 19) reveal such activity.[40] Additionally, Heschel makes no mention of recent evidence from Israel's ANE environment (Wen-Amon, Deir 'Alla, or the Mari letters).[41] Such a denial of the historical development of Israelite prophecy is, however, not required in order to argue that Numbers 11 depicts "prophesying" rather than "ecstatic speech." Rather than special pleading, we may firmly acknowledge the presence of such historical development behind the passage, but it is precisely the "behind the text" *position* of this development which requires our attention.

The real interpretative innovation of classical prophetic criticism (which blossomed in the late-19th-century and early-20th century) was not its exegetical insight into the biblical *text* but into *Israel*. Its explanatory power was formidably displayed through its ability both (a) to create a category of *human experience* called "prophecy"[42] (which, consequently, significantly impacted the development

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[39] Von Rad, *OT Theology*, 2:4; Rendtorff, "Early History," 14–15.

[40] *Prophets*, 186, "*nabi'*" applies equally to true and false prophets including "the wild prophets of Baal and…the unbalanced King Saul." Heschel's resistance to Hengstenberg's more moderate position (i.e. ecstatic behavior without loss of self-awareness) is evidence of his entrenched position; see above 27n13.

[41] Petersen, *Roles*, 28.

[42] On the one hand, using the word, "prophecy" enables Hengstenberg and others to use Greek-based terms like "possession," "ecstasy," and "prophecy" in close readings of Judeo-Christian literature. On the other, Smith and others feel a growing awareness of "similar" phenomena outside Israel and Greece. The goal becomes to find more precisely sifted and categorized differences and similarities, as in Wilson's *Prophecy and Society*. Wilson ultimately keeps the (Greek) term "prophecy" in his title but uses it to describe global phenomena of which the Hebrew term **נביא/נבא** is only a part, *Society*, 22–3.

of the social sciences)[43] and (b), more generally, to map the shifts and seams of the biblical text alongside theoretical developments about its *compositional history*. This dual-concern for (a) locating biblical phenomena within social scientific understanding and (b) explaining the development of both Israelite religion and the biblical text made great strides against uncritical assumptions about the historical development of biblical ideas and against presumptions of Israel's uniqueness. However, this approach has also long since been recognized as often masking the distance between the biblical *text* and its own *historical development.*

Earlier, von Rad saw this distance with regard to the individual genius of the classical prophets; i.e. they were not, as Duhm proposed, wholly original, nor isolated individuals; their *texts* reveal the re-working of older ideas and the re-interpretation of previous religious thoughts and experiences.[44] In a more recent example, where previous interpreters *presumed* that Israel's prophets must have been acting like ecstatics in order for them to be called **משגע** ("madman"),[45] Simon Parker has noted that the term is used only as an invective and does not necessarily mean that the classical prophets, in fact, acted in ways common to other ecstatic ANE prophets.[46] It may instead (we might suggest) have been social convention for one prophet to mock another by calling him a "madman" whether he was acting like one or not.[47] Certainly, Israel inherited language and categories

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[43] E.g. Max Weber's high praise for Hölscher in Max Weber, *Ancient Judaism* (ed. and trans. Hans H. Gerth and Don Martindale; Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1952), 455n1. Biblical studies and social sciences encouraged and fed off one another, sometimes at the expense of critical reflection, during this period, e.g. regarding Weber's attempts to distinguish between "office" and "calling" (which initially mapped with later and earlier prophetic forms but ultimately produced confusing results in both biblical studies and sociology), see Petersen, *Roles*, 9–15.

[44] E.g. See reworking of Isaiah's predictions, vis-à-vis von Rad's view that none of them came true, cf. Christopher R. Seitz, *Prophecy and Hermeneutics: Toward a New Introduction to the Prophets* (STI; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 157.

[45] Hengstenberg, *Christology*, 4:403.

[46] Parker, "Possession," 282–3.

[47] Parker uses the concept of literary convention with regard to autobiographical imagery of personal distress in the prophets, ibid., 281–2. He does not suggest it as the source of **משגע** in prophetic discourse, but I consider the possibility of social (like literary) convention worth considering.

about prophecy, but the use of such language does not necessarily indicate Israelite activity or approval. Yes, Israel developed, but it is clearer now that much of that development occurred *prior* to the final form of the biblical text. As such, the final form stands at one end of its own historical process.

There remains almost complete unanimity among scholars that, in the case of the "earlier" prophets, such an end has no real interpretative bearing, certainly not in the case of Numbers 11. Figures like Gad and Nathan, Elisha and Elijah are widely considered to find themselves in the biblical text relatively unchanged from their (probably) 9th-century original context—all the more so with the figures of Saul and the elders of Numbers 11. In part this is probably due to the habits of an older form of exegesis. "The pendulum" to which von Rad refers has not finished its arc. What has been missing is an exploration of evidence from the biblical text which itself may counter the proposed (and still prominent) theory of ecstasy. An *a priori* determination to differentiate Israelite prophecy from ecstasy will not do, but, in principle, if one can show a lack of ecstatic behavior in the biblical text, then placing the role of ecstasy "behind" even this "early" text would be an appropriate interpretative decision. This is admittedly more complicated in the case of 1 Samuel 10 and 19, but in *Numbers 11*, where are the comparable acts of "lying on the ground naked" or reveling in a chain-reaction of musical frenzy?[48] Our approach here does not deny the possible history of Israelite prophecy or of the text, but it probes more closely for what is now present *perhaps* having been modified itself from earlier expressions.

In addition, in the interpretative dynamic between the history of the text and its exegesis, we may still acknowledge, for example, that the elders of Numbers 11, at one time, may have been joined, as a 9th-century Elohist text, to an older narrative about Moses in order to continue to validate the "charismatic" prophecy of a 7th-century conception of monarchy (as Levine proposes and von

[48] See Levison, "Prophecy," 510.

Rad intimates),[49] but whether this, in fact, *exegetes* the text at hand requires further explanation about what precisely is meant by "ecstasy" and "charismatic" through the ages. For example, where Gressmann sees a clearly *verbal* form of ecstasy (which signals a support for later "inspiration-oracles (*Inspirationsorakel*)" as consulted by kings; cf. 1 Kgs 22:1-12; Ezek 21:21-38),[50] Keil and Delitzsch see an ecstasy of *incoherent glossolalia*.[51] Von Rad sees an affirmation of ongoing and nearly-unbounded peripheral ecstatic prophecy,[52] but Levine sees, from the same 9th-century origin, a physical and emotional ecstasy, transformed in the 7th-century, to provide ongoing, non-ecstatic support (through a connection based on the type of spirit-possession detailed) for the central monarchy.[53] Hence, even where there is an apparent unity about the development of Israelite prophecy, there is a lack of needed precision to know what the text is speaking beyond its origins. The areas of much-needed clarity (viz. the relationship between possession and verbal content) often shift and slide in interpretative usage but are all typically brought to the reader under an undifferentiated appeal to "ecstasy." Such an appeal surely requires better precision.

Responses to the Setting: Anthropology and Defining Ecstasy

As Robert Wilson avers, "[V]agueness in the use of the term 'ecstasy' characterizes most of the scholarly discussion." In an attempt to be more precise about the terms, Wilson turns to anthropology, and some philology, for the proper resources for interpreting the biblical text. In Wilson's landmark work, to which many biblical commentators still appeal, Wilson sets about the task of carefully understanding the terms and conceptions provided by anthropological research in order to determine what can be said about ecstasy (sc. "possession trance") and

[49] More recent interpreters have typically seen more D and post-D influence, see Chapter 1.
[50] Gressmann, *Mose*, 179; cf. Wilson, *Society*, 209.
[51] Gressmann, *Mose*, 179; Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary: Vol III, Pentateuch*, 70, "speaking in an ecstatic and elevated state of mind,…just like…'speaking in tongues.' "
[52] Von Rad emphasizes the "ecstatic movement," an "unprecedented" and "new religious phenomenon" being here "legitimized" by the "institutions of Jahwism," *OT Theology*, 2:9.
[53] Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, 340–3.

other prophetic phenomena with regard to the biblical text. Rather than constructing anthropological theories from the biblical text (as some in earlier generations attempted to do), Wilson uses those theories for conceptual clarity, proposing both close readings and a survey of biblical texts:[54] "The value of comparative material is obvious, for it can supplement the meagre biblical data on the nature and function of prophecy."[55] As Wilson himself recognizes, dangers lurk in such a study.[56] Elaboration, which, in fact, introduces concepts into the silences of the text, is particularly vulnerable to criticism. Wilson's work is often meticulous and self-aware, but he also admits that "future detailed studies of specific passages may require the modification of our conclusions."[57]

Wilson's exegesis of Numbers 11 is, in many ways, typical of those before him: The elders are possessed by a divine spirit in order to signal positively their role as an additional "new authority" to Moses.[58] But, as part of his broader work on prophecy, Wilson does offer one particular philological advancement connected to Numbers 11: The Hebrew verb **נבא**, "to prophesy," appears in the Bible in two stems, the hithpael and the niphal. Wilson systematically surveys these uses and makes two vital hypotheses. David Petersen summarizes Wilson's work:

> [Wilson] studies the word *nb'* and hypothesizes that the hithpael originally meant "to act like a prophet" whereas the niphal originally meant "to speak like a prophet." He then surveys the hithpael uses of the root as evidence for prophetic, i.e., possession, behavior.…Further, Wilson observes that the meanings of the hithpael and niphal uses of *nb'* merged at some later point,…[59]

Unnoticed by Petersen but important to us, Wilson bases significant aspects of his hypotheses on previous assumptions about *the dating of the hithpael occurrences*

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[54] Wilson, *Society*, 19.
[55] Ibid., 15.
[56] Ibid., 15–18.
[57] Ibid., 19.
[58] Wilson, "Ecstasy," 331.
[59] Petersen, *Roles*, 29; Wilson, *Society*, 137–8; 153–4.

in Numbers 11 and the Saul cycle.[60] Here, Wilson's presumption is more historical than anthropological, i.e. because the hithpael occurs in Numbers 11 and the Saul cycle, it must also be early and its usage in both must remain constant. Thus, behavior depicted in the Saul cycle applies to the elders of Numbers 11 as well because the hithpael is used in both, and they are both early. Wilson suggests this *despite his own admission* that the hithpael can be used in later texts to indicating speaking like a prophet rather than acting like one.[61] Wilson never explains why prophetic *behavior*, rather than prophetic *speech*, is a necessary implication of Numbers 11's use of נבא; one presumes it is the lack of record of any verbal content. In fact, it seems, Wilson has already decided that something short of "speaking like a prophet" is occurring, the hithpael usage simply agrees with his presuppositions about the dating of the text and what he thinks is occurring in the narrative.

It must be admitted that Wilson is presenting a somewhat *moderate* picture of the elders' activity. He never describes them as exhibiting a "possession trance," only that it is their behavior which matters to the story. A behavior which somehow indicates to the broader society that these elders are "acting like prophets." Wilson's moderation is where his anthropological eye bears its fruit.

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[60] Wilson, "Ecstasy," 331. Although Wilson admits the chapter as a whole reflects editing from a "later" time, he thinks that later ("Judean") editing allowed this positive and earlier ("Ephraimite") view of ecstasy to remain because later editing set it in a negative wilderness context, *Society*, 154. By contrast, Wellhausen thinks even this more positive elders' activity reflects a much later period:

> "Den Stoff zu beiden Geschichten mag er [Jehovist] schon vorgefunden haben; doch ist auch der zu specifisch prophetisch, zu wenig volkstümlich, um alt zu sein. Noch dem Jesaia würde der Gedanke, dass die bürgerlichen Beamten vom Geiste der Weissagung müssen berührt sein, schwerlich gekommen sein; Saul aber ist eine Ausnahme, wie das Sprichwort lehrt. (*Composition*, 100–1)

In Green's assessment,

> Wellhausen alleges that vs. 14–17, 24b–29, which record the institution of the seventy elders, are not by P, J, or E, but are an interpolation subsequent to the time of Isaiah, since in the development of religious thought the notion that civil rulers must have the spirit of prophecy could only have arisen at a very late period. (Green, "Pentateuchal," 180)

Such complications about dating the elders story further problematize the backdrop of Wilson's attempt to set Numbers 11 within his broader scheme.

[61] Cf. Petersen, who thinks the merging of usage is indeed evident in scripture "a fact which makes the case for a distinction between these two conjugations even more difficult to evaluate," Petersen, *Roles*, 29.

Wilson is keenly aware of the anthropological importance of the social location and function of prophets.[62] Hence, whatever "to act like a prophet" means, it must have significance if the society around the prophet *recognizes* the behavior as such.[63] Wilson leaves room for previous assumptions about ecstasy but does not insist on them. By translating the hithpael in this way, Wilson shifts the emphasis from the prophets' ecstatic behavior to the approval of them by the prophets' society, even while presuming such behavior must be non-verbal.

More than one critique of this approach may be levelled, but Petersen's comment is incisive:

> One can only respond to this proposal that *to speak like a prophet* could be and *most likely was often thought to be typical prophetic behavior*. Hence, the hithpael uses could mean the same thing as the niphal occurrences. Both conjugations could mean "to speak like a prophet" since such speaking was, incontestably, typical prophetic action.…In sum, a word study of *nb'* is unlikely to reveal examples of possession behavior within Israelite prophetic activity.[64]

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[62] Wilson, *Society*, 51–88.

[63] And yet, although Wilson conceives the behavior of the elders as *like prophets* and socially-recognized as such, he immediately forsakes this designation in favor of their authorization as something *other than prophets*:

> The story thus indicates that the Elohistic groups that originally created the story viewed possession positively and assigned it an important role in authenticating Israelite *leaders*. (ibid., 153.)

Why Israel's elders should not be authenticated, at least in part, *as prophets* when in fact they act like prophets is not explained by Wilson. He has likely taken the generalized category of an "intermediary" from anthropological studies and generalized one form of intermediary as transferrable to another (as sometimes occurs in other societies but is not indicated here), i.e. Numbers 11 does not say that the elders' "behavior was an indication of divine appointment" as "new authority." That divine approval and authority may *result* from the complex of affirmations about the elders cannot be denied, but there is no philological or narrative reason for completely subsuming and denying their role as *prophets* in that configuration.

For a very similar approach, see Simon Parker, who moves not from history to anthropology but anthropology to history, deciding the prophesying of the elders is non-mediumistic and simply designates "an additional prerequisite for the new form of government" like the "Nuer prophets and Nguni diviners" "who designate persons for, and initiate them into, roles which they then normally perform without resort to such abnormal states," "Possession," 276–7.

[64] Petersen, *Roles*, 29, emphasis added; cf. Heschel, *Prophets*, 186–7. Despite this incisive criticism, Wilson's influence in this regard has been widely followed, often with less caution that Wilson himself shows. The hithpael form has, for many, become the deciding factor of the passage. Many seem to think that Wilson supports the hithpael as always indicating possession trance when it occurs in "early" examples. In an equally strong (and overstated) backlash about the hithpael's significance: "The interpretation of the elders' prophesying as a fall into frenzy does not arise from

Applied to our case, why should **ויתנבאו** mean that their behavior is ecstatic or non-verbal, when (a) the verb used is often applied in biblical texts (albeit supposedly "later" ones) to (non-ecstatic) speech and, (b) even if it were regarding their behavior in an emphasized way, the nature of that behavior would most readily be assumed to be their *speech*? There is real ground here for suspecting that, in this case, Wilson's presuppositions have bent his narrative about the text in mutually reinforcing ways.

Depsite the popularity of Wilson's position, his hypothesis to read **ויתנבאו** in Num 11:25b *as only "behaving" but not "speaking" "like a prophet" is not persuasive.* In searching for proper terms, Wilson causes us to look more closely at the form of the verb and makes room for non-ecstatic interpretation, but having

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the narrative context of Numbers 11; it turns exclusively upon the occurrence of the hithpael of the verb **נבא** interpreted as a fall into prophetic ecstasy," Levison, "Prophecy," 506; cf. Reis, "Seeing," 224.

The state of the question of hithpael and niphal uses of **נבא** is caught up not only in these debates but on debates regarding the nature of the stems themselves, cf. Keith Nigel Grüneberg, *Abraham, Blessing and the Nations: A Philological and Exegetical Study of Genesis 12:3 in Its Narrative Context* (BZAW 332; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 34–66; Joel S. Baden, "Hithpael and Niphal in Biblical Hebrew: Semantic and Morphological Overlap," *VT* 60 (2010): 33–44. Some samples of the problem include the following:

The hithpael is used nearly exclusively in the Torah and Former Prophets (and within the context of three narratives) while the niphal is used with a similar predominance in the Latter Prophets. (Chronicles uses the niphal and hithpael in an equal number of verses.)

However, each of these trends of usage has significant outliers. In the Former Prophets, the story of Micaiah ben Imlah uses the hithpael stem throughout, including in 1 Kgs 22:8 to describe ben Imlah's former, clearly intelligible prophecies to the king of Israel, and then, when it comes to the second recounting the intelligible prophesying of the court prophets, it uses the niphal. Likewise, in Ezekiel 37, each time **נבא** is used it is in the niphal stem, except in verse 10, when suddenly the hithpael is used, and when it is used, the hithpael clearly indicates an intelligible verbal content (cf. Ezek 37:9). 1 Samuel 19:20 uses one example of a hithpael and niphal each.

One possible theory is that the hithpael is used when the intent is to indicate a kind of reciprocal "call and response" activity among prophets. (It is interesting, for example, that the hithpael of Ezek 37:10 is used only after the bones have become living beings.) However, the seemingly solitary activity of Micaich ben Imlah does not follow this.

Finally, Hans-Peter Müller, "**נָבִיא**," *TDOT* 9:134, avers, "The hithpael in particular sometimes takes on a derogatory sense of 'behave like a prophet' (1 K. 18:29; Jer. 14:14; 29:26f.; Ezk. 13:17; a different sense in Jer. 26:20; Ezk. 37.10)." Clearly, this is not always so, but if one were looking for a negative connotation, one might reach for the hithpael before the niphal. All of this may be due to uses of the hithpael in ecstatic situations about which Israel waffled in usage, then later abandoned. A comprehensive suggestion would require further research.

not demurred from his predecessors in the historical and anthropological assumptions about the text, he ultimately reverts to an interpretation of Numbers 11 that is not significantly different from others before him. At the risk of overstating the case, rather than generally sweeping the (still) "authenticating" "possession"[65] activity of the elders under the auspices of "ecstasy," Wilson has swept them into a slightly broader, but no more precise category of prophetic "behavior." Our argument here follows a different path, questioning some of these prior assumptions in hopes of differentiating concepts which more closely parallel the text as we will read it. To do this, we must reconsider our approach.

Modern and Ancient (Greek) Concepts of Possession and Ecstasy

In a sense, the perhaps over-confident severing of the prophets from their role as interpreters of Moses to independent and historically datable generators of religion[66] did "discover" the study of prophecy "as *sui generis* in religion,"[67] but only in the sense of the historical development of the Hebrew Bible and the anthropological phenomenon of "prophecy." In another sense, the phenomenon of prophecy was well-known from antiquity, and its role in the creation of Israelite religion is well-marked throughout its scriptures (e.g. Deut 18:15-22; 34:10; Hos 12:10, 13[11, 14]). Despite an earlier assumption that such activity was a genuine encounter with divine forces (unlike many scholars today), this assumption did not obscure their view of differences; ancient societies knew of the many similarities (and differences) in neighboring forms of "prophecy."[68] Differences between, for instance, Mari court-prophets, who divine answers in

[65] Wilson, *Society*, 153.
[66] Cf. Seitz, *Prophecy and Hermeneutics: Toward a New Introduction to the Prophets*, 77n6, Wm. de Wette thought the prophets were "more historical than anything else in the OT."
[67] Von Rad, *OT Theology*, 2:3.
[68] E.g. Note Wen-Amon's matter-of-fact response to the Byblos prophet for which he already had vocabulary, regard, and the inclination to write it down; Balaam's appearance in both Deir 'Alla inscriptions as harmonious with his depiction as a prophet outside Israel; Isaiah 28:7 looks very like a rebuke of Bacchic frenzy, Heschel, *Prophets*, 2:134.

ways quite different from Wen-Amon's frenzied youth, likely reflect differing theological conceptions in different times and among different peoples.

The presumption that all such activity should sweepingly be labeled "ecstasy," "early," and reflected in relatively "unedited" ways in biblical texts can no longer be accepted. We may well ask whether western biblical scholars of the mid-late 19th-century really "discovered" prophecy (as von Rad claims), or whether they, like their colonialist political colleagues, simply put it on a European map—this time, a map of ideas. Because ancients were well aware and attentive to prophecy's various forms, the inclusion or exclusion of key *details* about the *kind* of activity depicted in biblical prophecy (e.g. the use of משגע) is now recognized as an important facet of their interpretation. Glossing details will not do. More precise framing of the dynamics of ancient prophecy is required because ancient societies themselves saw their activity in differentiated ways.

Using *ancient Greek* contexts for an exploration of biblical texts, instead, has two main advantages: (1) There is substantial evidence to indicate contact between Greek societies and the Levant from times contemporaneous with the Hebrew Bible's canonization *and* its composition.[69] Although we could never confirm it, the possibility remains that Greek and Hebrew prophets knew of one another and distinguished themselves from one another, centuries prior to their closer engagement during the Maccabean period. Whether they ever had this kind of significant contact or not, Greek clarity on issues of divine utterance, originating as they do from a time when similar mechanisms for prophecy are likely to have been in operation in Israel (and its ANE neighbors), garners it special consideration.[70] (2) Additionally, apart from historical affiliations, our own

[69] Cf. Walter Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age* (trans. Margaret E. Pinder; Revealing Antiquity 5; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995); Armin Lange, "Greek Seers and Israelite-Jewish Prophets," *VT* 57 (2007): 461–82.

[70] Extra-biblical examples of ANE prophecy do not seem to warrant the use of concepts unfamiliar to Greek writers, i.e. dreams, frenzy, oracles, and authoritative appeal to spiritual engagements are equally recognizable in both ANE and Greek writings. By contrast, eastern cultural engagements with spiritual entities may be related to western ones, but may require more significant

modern European languages and conceptions often default to categories provided by the ancient Greeks, even when those categories are known to require more precise redefinition.[71] We speak of "possession," "ecstasy," "prophecy," and "oracles," in part, because they refer to known Greek examples and conversations. In establishing whether Numbers 11's elders are "speaking ecstatically" or "prophesying," using Greek terms can help set us quickly and clearly in good stead in what is happening in the text and what we mean by each.

A short introduction to an ancient Greek paradigm is thus helpful and adequate. Questions of ecstasy and frenzy have been part of conversations about the nature of prophecy since ancient times. Ancient Greeks (and Romans) often considered it necessary for a prophet or seer to be *possessed* by a god. Such possession could take many forms (especially including the inspiration of poetry) and may even be *contagious* (e.g. *Ion* 533D–534E). The possession may enable various forms of divine communication, but the best forms required an experience of "ecstatic frenzy." Specifically, the individual should be either:

- *out of their mind* (i.e. unaware of their environment and themselves; e.g. *Ion* 534D), and/or
- *unable to recall what they said* (e.g. *Meno* 99D), and/or
- *speaking incoherently* and requiring a translator of the divine words (e.g. *Timaeus* 72B).[72]

Dreams and visions may also present a type of "ecstasy," but since they are less visible to others, they may be regarded with less awe than other more obviously

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reconfiguration of the concepts involved. For an early, seminal exploration of what this process requires, see Edmund Leach, *Culture & Communication: The Logic by Which Symbols Are Connected: An Introduction to the Use of Structuralist Analysis in Social Anthropology* (Themes in the Social Sciences; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

[71] See 32n42 above.

[72] For more on ancient Greek perspectives on interpretation of prophecy, see Chapter 4.

divine acts, remaining closer to the lesser-regarded category of divination (appearing as more skill than "sight").[73]

Ancient Jewish writers, wanting to avoid the connotations of non-philosophical myth and drunken licentiousness associated with many ancient cults (e.g. those of Dionysus), more easily welcomed dreams and visions as forms of prophetic experience.[74] Likewise, early Christians had to navigate the place of ecstasy in authorized Christian experience, deciding whether prophecy from those out of their senses should be received as authentic (cf. 1 Cor 14:29-33; Terutllian, *Adv. Marcion*, 4.22).[75] By the time Duhm, Hölscher, and others suggested ecstasy as a prime factor in early Israelite prophecy (including Numbers 11's elders), the concept of ecstasy itself as a potentially problematic dynamic in prophecy was nothing new. Where ancient Greeks preferred ecstatic utterances with a loss of self-consciousness or memory of the words spoken as signs of divine origin, Judeo-Christian sources reveal a general preference for intelligible utterances made by the use of the mind.

Debates will continue (using these Greek terms), but despite whatever role unintelligible and ecstatic utterance played in the earlier history of their prophetic activity, the possibility that Israelites developed a preference for intellection and intelligible utterance prior to the finalization of our earliest biblical texts seems quite possible.[76] That Numbers 11 might itself have undergone this kind of

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[73] Cf. Lange, "Greek," 461, citing Pausanias, *Descr.* 1.34.4. On the importance of communal recognition in identifying a trance as specifically a "possession trance," see Parker, "Possession," 273, citing Bourguignon.

[74] Cp. Plutarch, *Gen. Socr.* 588E; Philo, *Somn.* 2.252; cf. John R. (Jack) Levison, *Inspired: The Holy Spirit and the Mind of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 85, 140.

[75] See comments on Hengstenberg above 27n13.

[76] E.g. See comparisons of 4 Ezra 14 and *Sib. Or.* in Chapter 5. Also, see Heschel's arguments and evidence in light of this more modest proposal, *Prophets*, 448–68. Even by von Rad's time, there was no more room for proposals which kept the textual evidence for "ecstastics" at any distance from evidence of later "prophets," *OT Theology*, 2:10. The evidence for both emerges from the same texts. Von Rad proposes that Israel's prophets and historical ecstatics emerged side-by-side; however, he also suggests that labels of Abraham, Aaron, and Miriam as נביאים are anachronisms, ibid., 2:12. Put bluntly, why might not the labeling of the elders of Numbers 11 be likewise? The implied answer is their assumed dating, group appearance, and lack of verbal content. But the first depends on the second and third, and the third is not unlike Abraham. How far can group appearance be taken?

editing or was composed as part of this later stage is all that is required for us to consider the biblical text at hand as evidence of "prophesying" like Moses (or others), rather than restricting it to the "legitimating" "ecstasy" of public officials. Since Mosaic-style prophecy is typically based on Deut 18:9-22's depiction of Moses' mediation of the law, what matters in distinguishing between "ecstasy" and "prophecy" for the purposes of our interpretation is the *possibility* of intelligible communication and the retention of mental awareness.[77]

In light of this, what makes previous sweeping statements of the ecstasy of the elders all the more troubling is its implications for the relationship between the elders and Moses. Not many would propose ecstatic babbling as a quality of Mosaic prophecy, but by describing the elders who have his spirit in this way, interpreters end up drawing different prophetic *expressions* for Moses and for the elders but from the same *spirit*. The question remains whether such a move is warranted. If there is enough support for ecstatic behavior among the elders that it can be deemed to originate from Moses' spirit, then this is indeed an amazing and unexpected instance of ecstasy. However, without such evidence, the likelihood that prophesying from Moses' spirit will be like unto his own should surely remain. What the text *might indicate* about Israelite history should not replace what the text actually says.

Spirit-Possession

Having laid the groundwork for a re-appraisal of ויתנבאו in Numbers 11, we can first begin with the question of possession. As passages like Isa 61:1 (רוח אדני יהוה עלי) and Joel 2:28[3:1] (אשפוך את־רוחי) indicate, biblical spirit possession need not always indicate prophetic ecstasy; in the case of the former, the result is proclamation, in the case of the latter, prophesying. Neither shows any indication

[77] See Wilson for concise argument for Mosaic-styled prophetic mediators, grounded in Num 12:6-8 and Deut 18:9-22, who see God clearly and intelligibly speak for him as Moses did with the Decalogue, *Society*, 156–66. This position is contrasted to a series of engagements with the divine that are clearly rejected, e.g. diviners, necromancers, etc. "Ecstasy" as loss of mind or memory is neither specifically rejected or commended, but intelligible utterance is foundational.

of disjunction in self-consciousness or a lack of memory. Similarly, there is no doubt that the elders of Numbers 11 receive the spirit of YHWH. Numbers 11:25 says,

> וירד יהוה בענן וידבר אליו ויאצל מן־הרוח אשר עליו ויתן על־שבעים איש הזקנים ויהי כנוח עליהם הרוח ויתנבאו ולא יספו

> YHWH came down in a cloud, spoke with him [Moses]. He withdrew[78] some of the spirit upon him and put it on the seventy elders. Then, as the spirit rested on them, they prophesied and did not continue/cease/add.[79]

This clear fulfilment of Num 11:17 is carefully worded to indicate a careful consistency in YHWH's actions. Even the nature of the spirit that is transferred is described in a particular way (i.e. "the spirit *upon Moses*"). Whatever **ויתנבאו** means, it seems indisputably clear that it is the response and consequence of the spirit upon the elders. However, throughout this description, there is no description of any accompanying psychological state. If one's state of spirit-possession may be described as ecstatic *or* non-ecstatic,[80] then there is no evidence for presuming the former state. As in other parts of Israel's scriptures, because a prophet is described as undergoing an experience of the spirit of the YHWH descending on him, it does not mean that he is, by necessity, an ecstatic. Indeed in his examination of biblical prophetic ecstasy, Wilson makes this precise point with regard to "the spirit rested on them" in Num 11:25–26, one of a number of biblical references about which he says, "It should be noted that these expressions indicate possession but do not necessarily imply trance or ecstasy."[81]

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[78] Despite a possible allusion here to the almost equally-cryptic **ואל־אצילי בני ישראל** of Ex 24:11, there is no reason to translate the relatively rare **אצל** here (and in 11:17) as anything different from the traditional rendering, e.g. παρείλατο (LXX). For a fuller appraisal of the options, see Ramban [Nachmanides], *The Torah: With Ramban's Commentary Translated, Annotated, and Elucidated. Bamidbar/Numbers* (ed. Yaakov Blinder, Yoseph Kamenetsky, and Yehudah Bulman; trans. Nesanel Kasnett; ArtScroll; Brooklyn, N.Y.: Mesorah, 2009), 214–7 [Num 11:17].

[79] ET, mine. For more on the three different ways to understand **לא יספו**, see Chapter 5.

[80] Some interpreters presume ecstasy when using the term "possession" while others do not, Wilson, *Society*, 32; cp. Milgrom, *Numbers*, 380–3, who depends heavily on Wilson, keeping the distinctions at the beginning of his discussion but merging them by the end. In classical terms, a seer might be possessed while divining but may very well remain in his/her right mind.

[81] Wilson, "Ecstasy," 325.

Furthermore, biblical commentators may wish to distinguish not just between possession and ecstasy, but between different types of possession. Although both scholars think the end result in Numbers 11 is a form of ecstasy, Baruch Levine and Aaron Schart helpfully distinguish between the two types of ecstasy in Numbers 11 and the Saul cycle by noting potentially two different types of *possession*. Levine notes,

> It is significant that the verb *nûach* "to rest, alight upon" is never used in [Judges and Samuel] to describe the settling of the divine spirit on a human being.[82]

Schart concurs,

> Gegenüber 1 Sam 10 zeigt sich jedoch ein wichtiger Unterschied. In 1 Sam 10,10 „springt" [צלח] der Geist über. Der „springende" Geist…auf Saul springt, kann er nämlich auch wieder wegspringen. In der Ältestenerzählung springt der Geist jedoch nicht, sondern er „ruht" (Num 11,25b).[83]

Both Levine and Schart sense a connotation of *permanence* in the type of possession described here by נוח,[84] an ascription with which almost all other commenatators agree (i.e. whatever the elders *do*, they are forever an institution with spiritual empowerment).[85] Whether we agree that the *kind* of possession can be determined by these kinds of differences in describing the activity of the spirit in each, taken together, these observations create a suitable ground for differentiating the experiences of Saul and the elders of Numbers 11. Their experiences are not identical, in a number of different places, and suitable attention should be given to those differences.

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[82] Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, 340.
[83] Schart, *Mose*, 164.
[84] Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, 341. Levison's suggestion that the very permanence implied by נוח "prompted the narrator in Num 11:25 to add what strikes many interpreters as the odd conclusion that the elders did not prophesy again," is unlikely, "Prophecy," 519. If a narrator wanted to convey impermanence, using a different verb would accomplish that task much more effectively than adding a cryptic emendation about behavior which most see as having no relevance on their experience of possession.
[85] Ashley, *Numbers*, 213–4.

Contagious Frenzy and Intelligible Content

Second, Schart (among others) has further suggested that the experiences of the elders and Saul may be compared and aligned with one another based on their similarity as group-activities of contagious possession. The idea here is that both the elders in Numbers 11 and the bands of prophets which Saul encounters in 1 Sam 10 and 19 are engaged in a form of bacchic frenzy, i.e. dancing or music which creates a contagious atmosphere of divinely-influenced but unintelligible output.[86] This characterization is one of the more persistent but also subtle points in the history of recent interpretation. Whether or not their activity is specifically described as "unintelligible ecstatic utterance,"[87] such a connotation is often implied and almost never demurred from. Not all form a direct link to NT *glossolalia*, but almost all consider one of the key distinctions between "early" prophetic forms and "later" ones is a shift from unintelligible to intelligible content.

We may wonder whether, for our purposes, the distinction matters. Roy Gane's suggestion is worth quoting at length:

> The primary point of early Israelite prophecy was not the content of what Saul said or did as a prophet (unlike later "classical" prophecy by Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc.), but simply the fact that the Lord exercised full control over him. Similarly, the point of prophesying (Hithpael of *nb'*) on only one occasion by seventy elders chosen by Moses (Num. 11:24-26) is not the content of their utterances but the fact that the Lord authorizes them to be

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[86] Schart is less descriptive of what he means by "prophetischen Ekstase," but it is likely that he means something similar to Sturdy,

> some early prophets delivered their message in an abnormal state of mind (*ecstasy*) which could be brought on by wild dancing or by music,… (*Numbers*, 86.)

or Snaith,

> …frenzy,…ungoverned behaviour…[if] a man acts or speaks and is obviously not in control of himself, then some supernatural person must be in control. If he is a Yahweh-man or is in Yahweh's shrine, then it must be Yahweh who is controlling him,… (*Leviticus, Numbers*, 231.)

and Milgrom,

> ecstatic or trance behavior…the precise nature of their behavior is not clear, although it is recognized by the people as prophetic. It was not their speech that marked them as prophets but their behaving in recognizable patterns by which true prophets can be distinguished from pretenders and the mentally disturbed. (*Numbers*, 380.)

[87] Wenham, *Numbers*, 109; also see Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary: Vol III, Pentateuch*, 70; Cotton, "Pentecostal," 7–8; Butterworth, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 133.

> under his control and to be accountable to him as his representatives. Whatever they say when prophesying, they are speaking God's words, not their own.…With a council of "prophets" in the Israelite camp, Moses will no longer be alone in bearing the responsibility for God's will to the people.[88]

Gane demurs from saying whether the content of the elders' speech is intelligible or not, and unlike others, Gane keeps the elders' designation as "prophets," even if such a label is retained only in scare quotes.

In one sense, Gane is right. What matters is that the elders are speaking *divine* words, whether intelligible or not, and that this confidence in their words can be transferred to their roles as *spokesmen to Israel* alongside Moses.[89] Indeed, the elders' closeness to Moses and share in speaking with him to the people is consistent with a broader biblical portrait of a **נביא**. However, in Gane's portrait, the (potentially) unintelligible words of the elders' "prophesying" give way to their (definitely) intelligible speech as councillors; control over their speech occurs in the former, but only "responsibility" in the latter.

In another sense, however, Gane appears cautious without reason to be so. By reading the speech of the elders as *intelligible* prophesying, we gain a sense of *consistent divine control over both*. When they speak at first, they speak intelligibly and recognizably *as prophets*, and although they may (by one vocalization) cease for a time, they may yet take up divine intelligible utterance again in the future. In this way, an understanding of their prophetic utterance as intelligible is not only feasible but *harmonious with other depictions of what the spirit upon Moses does* (i.e. Moses often speaks prophetically and intelligibly). It also provides a greater affirmation of the role of the elders.

In fact, one could argue, the affirmation is almost too great since the next chapter (Numbers 12) seems to take up a conscious concern that such prophets might *eclipse* Moses, but nothing there prohibits the elders here from speaking

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[88] Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 585–6.

[89] For a similar restraint from being caught up too much on the ins and outs of the behaviors accompanying biblical prophecy, see R.W.L. Moberly, *Prophecy and Discernment* (CSCD; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 229–30.

intelligibly and from the spirit upon Moses. The focus of the subordination of other prophets in Num 12:6–8 is on the kind of divine *communication* they experience, not their behavior or articulation.[90] Perhaps prophetic utterances[91] will occur from a future council of elders as a result of dreams and visions (rather than face to face), or perhaps the elders' utterances avoid this distinction and subordination altogether since they prophesy from the same spirit which is upon Moses (rather than by individual encounter with YHWH making himself known to them as with those in Num 12:6) and from the same location (where Moses and God meet face to face). In either case, there is sufficient cause to leave the elders' prophesying as intelligible (and Mosaic) unless otherwise indicated.

We may further support this association of prophesying with intelligibility, with evidence from LXX translation and its reception history. In brief, it is interesting that Paul, as an early Jewish biblical commentator, in 1 Corinthians 14:1–19, clearly distinguishes unintelligible speech as "speaking in tongues (λαλῶν γλώσσῃ)" from "prophesying (προφητεύων)." Paul uses the same word for "prophesying" as the LXX uses in Num 11:25. It is possible that LXX translators merely engaged here in careful source-language consistency (i.e. consistently using a form of προφητεύω/προφήτης for forms of **נבא/נביא**), but it is worth noting that neither the LXX nor Paul sees any need to distinguish two forms of "prophesying," i.e. intelligible versus unintelligible. If LXX translators considered the activity of the elders as ecstatic, it was not forceful enough to compel them to use a different word. Likewise, when needing to make the distinction of intelligibility, Paul does not talk about "prophesying" versus "acting

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[90] Based on an intertextual association between **אצל** in Numbers 11 and **אצילים** in Ex 24:11 but in coordination with Num 12:6–8, Levison suggests the experiences of both Moses and the elders are the same: *they have a divine vision.* We may welcome the attempt to parallel the experiences of Moses and the elders and elements of elders sharing in Moses' face-to-face encounters with YHWH; however, to render the word **ויתנבאו** as "seeing YHWH in an ecstatic vision" stretches the bounds of the meaning of the word, i.e. it seems unlikely that any would read "they prophesied/acted like prophets" and understand "[they had] communal reception of a vision [like on Sinai]," Levison, "Prophecy," 520.

[91] Cf. John 11:49–52; Matt 26:57–68 for examples of prophecy in the context of the council of elders and scribes and of legitimate Mosaic prophets (incl. the Christ).

like a prophet."[92] Instead, he draws on a whole new word, "tongues." He also associates "prophesying" with utilizing his mind while still presenting such utterance sourced in the spirit (i.e. one of the "spiritual gifts [τὰ πνευματικά]," 1 Cor 14:1, NRSV)[93] and directed toward God's people.[94] Paul obviously knows of group-based ecstatic utterance, but he also knows group-situated prophesying. However, he provides no evidence for linking unintelligibility with the verb for "prophesying."

Going back to questions of *group activity,* one wonders: If group activity alone indicates unintelligible ecstasy then what about the situation of 1 Kgs 22:6? There, even though there is also a group of prophets (400 of them!), an intelligible prophecy is able still to be discerned: "'March," they said, "and the Lord will deliver [it] into Your Majesty's hands.'"[95] Similarly, 2 Kgs 3:15 describes Elisha's request for music to aid his prophecy; nevertheless, verse 16 describes Elisha's resulting prophecy as clearly intelligible. Therefore, within parallel biblical context, there is no overriding reason to describe group-prophecy as "unintelligible ecstasy" on its own accord.

We are forced to conclude that what matters for describing a typical bacchic, frenzied event is absent in Numbers 11. Even *music,* which can (as we

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[92] Undoubtedly, Paul knew Greco-Roman traditions of unintelligible prophets and may therefore have wanted to use a different Greek word. His choice here seems to reflect a Jewish decision to maintain a conection between intelligibility and prophecy. Even so, he does not call upon any associations with the elders' ecstasy, e.g. "We know that God speaks through men in two ways: unintelligibly like those of Moses' spirit and intelligibly like the prophets of old. But the two are separate gifts of the spirit." Like those after them, it is unlikely that either Paul or the LXX interpreters saw anything other than intelligible prophesying in the mouths of the elders.

[93] 1 Cor 14:1b, ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ πνευματικά, μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε.

[94] It is notable that Paul never decries speaking from the spirit either in its own (i.e. "tongues", cf. 1 Cor 14:14, NRSV) or in connection with prophesying. His preference is for speaking to people (not just God) and "with [his] mind" (1 Cor 14:19) instead of leaving [his] mind "unproductive" (NRSV; ὁ δὲ νοῦς μου ἄκαρπός ἐστιν, 1 Cor. 14:14b), but none of these statements negates the probability that Paul's sense of prophesying is an act *by* the spirit but *with* the mind.

[95] I am indebted to Prof. Adrian Curtis for this observation. Using his paradigm of "speaking like a prophet" (niphal of **נבא**) and "acting like a prophet" (hithpael of **נבא**), Wilson comments on this passage, "The precise nature of this ["characteristic possession"] behavior [like a prophet] is not indicated in the text, but it must have included coherent speech," *Society*, 210. Interestingly (and left uncommented on by Wilson), the parallel verb used to indicate this prophetic "behavior" in 1 Kgs 22:12 uses the niphal stem of **נבא** there.

have just seen with Elisha) result in intelligible prophesying or (as in 1 Sam 10:5 and 18:10) in unspecified utterance and/or contagious possession,[96] does not occur in Numbers 11.[97] And even though the spirit of God is transferred from Moses to the elders and, in some undisclosed manner, to Eldad and Medad, these transfers occur by purposeful acts of YHWH, *not contagion*. There is no mention of *strong drink* (cp. Amos 7:16), or of any *loss of self-consciousness or memory*. In the end, we are forced to conclude that *the factors which matter most for constructing a contagious group of possessed prophets speaking unintelligibly are simply not present*.

Lack of Verbal Content

Third, some scholars point to the elders' *lack of verbal prophetic content* as reason to label their experience as prophetic ecstasy and thus like that of Saul in 1 Samuel 10 and 19.[98] Starting from the perspective of the 1 Samuel material is perhaps most advantageous here. Beginning his own investigation of Numbers 11, John Levison wonders why *all* the episodes of the Saul cycle are equally considered instances of ecstasy when, of all the Saul stories, only 1 Samuel 19 provides a description of "uncontrolled ecstasy."[99] We may similarly ask why *all* incidents of unrecorded verbal prophetic content should be considered ecstatic. Levison suggests the purpose of 1 Samuel 10 is as a negative contrast to the characterizations of Saul in 1 Samuel 19,[100] of which only chapter 19 can be said

[96] The possession in 1 Samuel 10 appears contagious and musical, but there is no textual evidence in 1 Samuel 10 (e.g. mentions of הטיף, e.g. Ezek 21:2[7]) that might even be construed as incoherent or babbling. See below.
[97] "There is no mention of the influence of music or dance nor of a band of roving ecstatics into whose aura the elders were drawn," Levison, "Prophecy," 511.
[98] "There is no indication of the content of their [the elders'] prophesying, and the sense is therefore probably that of prophetic ecstasy, as in 1 Sam 10:5ff. and 19:20ff.," George T. Montague, *Holy Spirit: Growth of a Biblical Tradition* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), 15.
[99] Levison, "Prophecy," 507–8.
[100] Ibid., 509–10; cf. David G Firth, "Is Saul Also Among the Prophets? Saul's Prophecy in 1 Samuel 19:23," in *Presence, Power, and Promise: The Role of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament* (Downers' Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2011).

to be explicitly ecstatic.[101] Although Levison eventually argues for two differing forms of ecstasy in each chapter, one may well take the slightly different tack of asking why the *experiences* presented (not just the narratives) might not also be understood as contrasting, i.e. 1 Samuel 10 as non-ecstatic and 1 Samuel 19 as ecstatic.

In point of fact, with the unravelling of so many previously held assumptions about early prophecy in Israel, the case of 1 Samuel 19 itself deserves further reflection.[102] However, at least, in the case of 1 Samuel 10, we may begin to ask what is ecstatic about "prophesying" there? One may point to the use of music or the sense of contagious possession, but in what way does "lack of verbal contact" set the episode apart? At a minimum, Wilson's moderation seems more appropriate in both cases (1 Samuel 10 and Numbers 11): "[The elders of Numbers 11] exhibited characteristic prophetic behavior, although the precise nature of that behavior is uncertain."[103]

To put the matter differently, what if the elders' lack of verbal content actually supports their role as Mosaic prophets rather than denies it? We may well ask what would happen to the Numbers 11 story and its implications if content *were* supposed for the elders. In *b. Sanhedrin* 17a, the rabbis presume (as in other rabbinic writings)[104] that the elders prophesy verbally and not ecstatically. They also, in siding with the MT vocalization (but not without noting the difficulty), decide the elders' prophesying has ceased. Thus whatever the content was, it was not worth recording (i.e. their prophetic voice ceased from mouth and page alike). However, they propose that Eldad and Medad *do* continue to prophesy (based on the participle of **נבא** used in their case),[105] and the suggestions they offer

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[101] Levison, "Prophecy," 509.
[102] Similarly, for problems with 1 Sam 18:10, see Arnold B. Ehrlich, *Randglossen zur hebräischen Bibel: Textkritisches, Sprachliches und Sachliches* (7 vols.; Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1968), 3:232 [orig. 1908–1914], although I do not agree with his suggested emendation.
[103] Robert R. Wilson, "Early Israelite Prophecy," *Interpretation* 32 (1978): 12.
[104] Cf. *Sifre 93; Num. Rab.* 15.19.
[105] Later Christian interpreters sometimes follow this distinction, e.g. Basil the Great, *On the Holy Spirit* (trans. David Anderson; PPS 5; Crestwood, N.Y.: St Vladimir's Seminary, 1980), 94 [26.61].

are illuminating. Possible subjects include: the death of Moses and Joshua's succession, Gog and Magog, and the coming quail plague. Additionally, *Shepherd of Hermas*, Vision 2.4, records "The Lord is near to those who return to him," as part of the lost content of "The Book of Eldad and Modat."[106]

It is instructive, I think, to ask, what if any one of these (or something like them) *were* included in Numbers 11? The immediate answer is that the "voice" of the Seventy would suddenly be constrained. Rather than echoing with silent unity, the words of Moses, standing behind him, ready to extend his authority with new Mosaic words of prophecy, the Seventy would be constrained, no longer by Moses' utterances, but by their own. Their authority might well begin to *rival* or conflict with Moses rather than support him. While we may be tempted to deny the Seventy the *ability* to speak, a value on their role as supports to Moses would likely encourage only the silencing of their *words*, not their *mouths*. Part of the disagreement about the elders stems from their flexibility to the vision of generations after them, a flexibility which may in fact be intentional, provided they remain in the spirit which was on Moses.

Signs of Spirit Possession

Fourth and last, one of the primary effects of describing the elders' activity as ecstatic prophecy comparable to the Saul cycle is that it tends to reduce their prophesying as only a "sign" of "the gift of the Spirit" or the deposit of the (divine) spirit which was upon Moses, with no indication that the elders take on any kind of aspect of being "prophets", per se.[107] The point here in arguing for a

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[106] ET, Richard Bauckham, "Eldad and Modad: A New Translation and Introduction," in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures, Volume 1* (ed. Richard Bauckham, James R. Davila, and Alexander Panayotov; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 255. Bauckham's exemplary treatment demonstrates, in part, why our study here does not have space to treat Eldad and Medad more fully on their own. (For example, I suspect there may be a connection between *m. Yad.* 3.5, Num 10:35–36, and the *Book of Eldad and Modat*, unlike Bauckham, but Bauckham demonstrates a palpable connection to James 4:5. The two of which both require more detailed attention to the narrative at large.)

[107] Calvin, *Commentaries*, 4:34; Budd, *Numbers*, 130; Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, 340; esp. Milgrom, *Numbers*, 89, "The function of their ecstasy is not to render them prophets…."

translation of ויתנבאו as "they prophesied" is not necessarily to argue for any long-term occupancy of the elders in a dual "office" of elders and prophets,[108] but to allow for, at the least, a possible temporary identification of the elders *as* prophets. More fully, we will come to see the role a council of Seventy takes on as an institution, able to speak long-term with the authority of Moses, an authority which includes his prophetic ability as signalled here. When they are allowed to fulfill the role of prophets, rather than have their prophesying assigned the role of "sign" alone, then Moses' acclamation of the prophesying activity around them (sc. Eldad and Medad) takes on collaborative significance, and, perhaps more importantly, they are better able to answer Moses' burden (Num 11:11). A look at the logic of 1 Samuel 10 will help us see if an association between 1 Samuel 10 and Numbers 11 supports the kind of "sign of the spirit" which has been read in Numbers 11.

In 1 Samuel 10, Samuel anoints Saul as king and proceeds to tell Saul the different things that will happen to him that day as "signs" (10:7)[109] that he is Israel's נגיד ("prince")—afterward he may "do whatever [his] hand finds, for God is with [him]" (10:7).[110] One of these signs, Saul's encounter with a band of prophets includes an experience where, "the Spirit of the Lord will grip you (צלחה עליך), and you will speak in ecstasy (ויתנבאו) along with them; you will become another man" (10:6). In fact, this is exactly what happens.

Although this is not often articulated clearly, many interpretations of Numbers 11 consider God's withdrawal of the spirit upon Moses from which they prophesy to be no more relevant to their continuing role as elders than it is for

[108] Questions of "office" are difficult to handle, in part because they are riddled with assumptions (mostly from Protestant arguments about authority, taken up and expanded by Weber), cf. Petersen, *Roles*, 9–15.
[109] LXX 10:1, "the sign (τὸ σημεῖον)."
[110] ET, mine.

Saul and his role as king; therefore, the effect of the prophesying in both is reducible to a sign of spirit possession.[111]

There are four key problems with this argument. (1) *Is prophesying irrelevant to the Seventy?* The presumption that prophesying is not relevant to the ongoing work of Israel's נגיד is itself an assumption which may be questioned,[112] and even more so, its relevance to a council of seventy elders, whose constitution is not clearly established elsewhere and is only really being constructed here. Conflation here with other "leadership" groups is a persistent assumption, but not a certain one. (2) *Who is the sign to?* Both cases clearly indicate prophesying as the result of spirit possession, but unlike the 1 Samuel 10 passage, Numbers 11 makes no explicit reference to either Moses or the people needing a "sign." In fact, close attention to the history of interpretation indicates a shifting audience for YHWH's "sign" here, depending on the interpreter: Moses, the elders themselves, or the people. There is little consistency on this point since "sign" is not explicitly part of the passage. (3) *Is Saul's prophesying the sign?* Even taking the potentially foreign logic of 1 Samuel 10 and applying it to Numbers 11, we do not end up with a picture of prophesying as a sign of spirit possession. In 1 Samuel 10, Samuel does not indicate that the supernatural nature of the act of prophesying would signal Saul's new status, but rather the *series* of events together make up the real sign to him (cf. 1 Sam 10:7). If even Saul's prophesying is not, on its own, a sign to Saul, then it seems presumptuous to assume the elders' prophesying is also *inherently* a sign to them. (4) *Is Saul's prophesying a sign of possession?* To be sure, both 1 Samuel 10 and Numbers 11 directly connect the presence of the spirit and the activity of prophesying,[113] the one resulting from the

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[111] As above, the significance of this sign is that it indicates a true transference of the spirit which is upon *Moses*, and the end result is that the elders are spirit-*equipped* to do whatever Moses needs them to do to share in his burdens.

[112] Given the continuous "deliverance" roles given to Israel's prophets (as we have noted already in Hos 12:10, 12[11, 13]), the idea that Israel's נגיד may need similar divine power is not unlikely—roles differentiated only later in the case of David and Nathan, see Rendtorff, Early History, 27-30; 32.

[113] Origen, *Hom. Num.* 6.3.1.

other, but this does not necessarily mean that the *goal* of the divine activity is *solely* to indicate the existence of such a presence. Again, even according to the narrative of 1 Samuel 10, Saul's prophesying does not act as a sign to those around him *of his possession* by the divine spirit but of his potential *inclusion as a prophet*. The bystanders remark in 1 Sam 10:11, "Is Saul too among the prophets?" The question for the reader is whether Israel's **נגיד** is also a **נביא** as Moses was (and as Deborah and Samuel were). It is notable that they do not ask, "Is the spirit of the Lord, too, upon Saul?" It appears that, at least in part, what prophesying *means* is *that someone should probably be considered a prophet*, even if the prophesying only occurs once (or twice, cf. 1 Sam 19). In many ways, properly applying 1 Samuel 10 and 19 to Numbers 11 should be extending the question (if not the answer as well): "Are the elders too among the prophets?" Might not their prophesying by the spirit upon Moses mean they are *Mosaic prophets*?

In fact, the narrative of Numbers 11 suggests just such a question and response: When, in Num 11:26, Eldad and Medad begin to prophesy (**ויתנבאו**) in the camp, presumably in the same way as the elders at the Tent of Meeting, Moses' responds with celebration in 11:29, "Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD put His spirit upon them!" Here Moses clearly acknowledges the presence of the spirit upon those who prophesy, and he also acclaims their status not just as "those who prophesy" but *as prophets*. Rather than keeping that association at a distance, *Moses himself* is depicted as seeing those who prophesy as prophets.[114] Modern interpreters seem to demur from this association at least in part because the MT and LXX describe the elders prophesying activity as ceasing and because there is no further indication that the elders continue to act as prophets.[115] However, keeping the association close,

[114] Eldad and Medad in the first instance and the rest of the elders, by extension. Contrast Weisman, "Personal Spirit."

[115] "By contrast [with Saul], the impact of the experience of prophesying in Numbers 11 is left unexpressed; the elders' ongoing role in Israel's leadership appears not to have been enhanced in any tangible way by their prophesying," Levison, "Prophecy," 512.

perhaps by allowing their prophecy to be intelligible, allows Moses' acclamation to stand as it is and relates the elders' activity more closely with the need of Moses expressed in Num 11:11-15.

Prophesying for a Purpose

Throughout the course of this argument, we have had cause to re-examine the long but distinctively post-Enlightenment history of describing the activity of the elders of Numbers 11 as ecstatic. Having questioned its role in the construction of a history of Israelite prophecy, we then observed the lack of observable signs of ecstasy (i.e. group frenzy, unintelligible speech, drunkenness or music, displacement of mental awareness). We also concluded that other aspects of the texts (and their proposed similarity to 1 Samuel 10 and 19) do not in themselves indicate a possession trance (i.e. particular use of the hithpael of **נבא**, a lack of recorded verbal content, a sign of spirit possession for some other role).

By way of conclusion, we may re-examine the relative benefit of shifting the meaning of **ויתנבאו** from "speaking ecstatically" to "prophesying" and keeping this association close to Moses' own role as **נביא** by considering its impact on a broader reading of the narrative as a whole. Those who read the elders' prophetic activity as spiritual ecstasy and as a sign of spirit possession have had to consider how their reading relates back to Moses' burden which he cried out to God about in Num 11:11-15 and to which the flow of the narrative suggests the elders are God's answer. Despite consensus on the fact that the elders' prophesying is ecstasy and as such a sign of the spirit, a sign of the spirit for *what purpose* in relation to helping Moses is much less consistent.[116] For one the ecstasy is a sign of their new role as those who share in the "burden of leadership" of the people,[117] for another they are to share the "burden of managing the people,"[118] for yet another they are given wisdom and holiness because they are in "critical

[116] Wilson, *Society*, 151.
[117] Olson, *Numbers*, 68.
[118] Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 581.

leadership positions,"[119] or their ecstasy indicates their becoming spirit-inspired scribes who govern the people,[120] and so on. Each of these versions seems to turn on whatever the interpreter has already decided is the *true* "burden" of Moses from 11:11, 17. Whatever his burden is presumed to be, the ecstatic frenzy of the elders establishes them as the answer to that need.

These variant readings are, I think, made possible by a detaching of the elders "prophesying" from their behavior *as* prophets and regarding it instead as a sign of spirit possession. Once this is done, and the prophesying of the elders is neutered of its essence, the elders can take on any Moses-shaped form an interpreter desires, despite the fact that these roles often look surprisingly similar to those given to the appellate judges of Exodus 18.[121]

This kind of transformation of the elders' prophesying into an affirmation of some kind of assistance in governance has long been questioned by more source-critically oriented scholars.[122] For his part, Gray sees no possible relationship between the elders who act ecstatically and Moses' need for help in sharing his burden (11:14). He posits that 11.17b, "they shall share the burden of the people with you…," is an ill-placed editorial addition since it intends that the elders help Moses bear his burden, but to Gray's mind (unlike the previous extrapolations listed above) "the elders received not the power of assisting Moses, but of prophesying."[123] Likewise, McNeille suggests (in direct opposition to John Calvin) that the elders were not granted "wisdom and influence for the purpose of

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[119] Cotton, "Pentecostal," 6.
[120] Dozeman, "Numbers," 106. (Note: This last one is quite close to my own conclusions.)
[121] This similarity causes problems at a source critical level as well for those who see both Num 11 and Ex 18 as originating from JE, see Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, 338. For a more clever form of the general shoulder-shrug response to this confusion, see Ashley, *Numbers*, 207n21, "That similar tasks, in this case the appointment of elders to share the load of Moses, must be done more than once in a relatively short period of time can surprise no one who has been in a position of oversight—even among God's people!" Notably, *Numbers Rabbah* 15.24 more readily acknowledges the differences between Exodus 18 and Numbers 11 and instead locates the problem of repetition between Exodus 24 and Numbers 11, where the Seventy are repeated, i.e. the solution is that Taberah (Num 11:1-3) is the place of death for the first set of Seventy.
[122] Knierim and Coats, *Numbers*, 175–6.
[123] Gray, *Numbers*, 111.

permanently helping Moses."[124] Much of this objection has to do with the main theme of the narrative, the provision of meat. How can these prophesying elders help Moses in his real, self-identified administrative need, the provision of meat to the people? In his characteristically pithy way, Martin Noth sums up the problem, "This is very strange in the present context. Moses is supposed to be "relieved of his burden" (vv. 14-17). How this goal is achieved by putting seventy elders into a state of ecstasy is difficult to imagine…."[125]

I propose that keeping the prophesying of the elders as the activity of prophets means Moses' delight at being given prophets by God can be taken as affirmation that his need has been met. What if what Moses needed from God was not more governors or leaders or administrators but more prophets?[126] As prophets, the elders may yet connect to Moses' need to supply meat, but for now, we can simply face the question of their prophetic status head-on as our best response to the text. Seeing the elders as *prophesying prophets* will limits the number of options for the meaning of the elders' role and guides us closer to some internally-consistent meaning of the text.

Finally, some parallels between the Saul cycle and Numbers 11 notwithstanding, I have proposed that a rethinking of the relationship between the texts is warranted. Specifically, we should (a) maintain openness to a more intelligible, non-ecstatic mode of prophesying envisioned in Numbers 11. (b) We should not label prophesying only as a *sign* of their possession of the spirit but as an indication of a new role as prophets. And (c) I have suggested that this closer connection between the elders' prophesying and their identification as prophets more adequately satisfies the acclamation of Moses (11:29) and his burden (11:11, 17), and that the spirit upon Moses implies a continuity of role, while offering a more internally-consistent reading of the Numbers 11 narrative as a whole.

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[124] McNeille, *Numbers*, 63.
[125] Noth, *Numbers*, 89.
[126] One clue that we may be on the right track with this attempt is the Hebrew word **משא**. Interpreters have always taken its meaning in 11:11, 17 in its predominant form as "burden." But what if this word sparked a double meaning as both "burden" and "oracle"? See Chapter 5.

Several issues remain on the edges (e.g. the precise meaning of לא יספו; the significance of Eldad and Medad), but the aspects we have covered may cause us to rethink not only the way the prophesying of the elders functions in the narrative (of which we have continuing questions about how it answers Moses' burden, especially to provide meat), but it may also result in reconsidering Numbers 11 as an episode separate from 1 Samuel in evaluating the biblical evidence for ancient Israelite prophecy.

SCRIBES

Scribes or Officers?

In most English translations of Num 11:16, YHWH calls Moses to "Gather to me seventy of the elders of Israel whom you know to be elders of the people and their officers (ושטריו)."[127] As such, when it comes to this last descriptor, readers come to the passage presuming that YHWH wants Moses to consider who among his people is already functioning as some kind of authority. If they see the last two descriptors as signaling the same set of candidates (rather than two different sets whom Moses is to combine in a single "Seventy"), the dual-heading implies members who are not only perhaps traditional authorities (i.e. elders) but recognized legal authorities (i.e. officers),[128] perhaps having been set up as such under some previous governing system.[129] Such a view is not far from the meaning implied in both the Vulgate (*magistri*) and *Targum Onqelos* (וסרכוהי), and it should be said from the outset that some kind of local *governing authority* is likely part of the meaning here. Moses, in fact, should look for people who have some *prior affirmation from the people*. The question we will follow is how best to describe the nature of that affirmation. What about who they are (esp. prior to this moment) is being recognized and re-contextualized into the service of

[127] "officers": KJV; NRSV; NJPS; ESV.
[128] I use Weber's terms for various types of authority as a helpful nomenclature of possibilities, without necessarily affirming the validity of each term for each category in any technical sense; for a helpful summary of these available categories from Weber, see Petersen, *Roles*, 12.
[129] Perhaps in the only antecedent reference to שטרים, in Ex 5:6, 10, 14-15, 19.

Moses? I suggest their implied previous training as *scribes* should be considered more highly.

There are two misjudgments about שטרים in Num 11:16 which I propose should be avoided. On the one hand, while reading "officers" may properly invoke some kind of positional authority, the fault of that connotation is its blandness—it permits an indistinct role within an organization for which someone has been nominated or selected for any number of reasons held by an electorate (e.g. officers of a society or association, selected to facilitate the group's various functions). There are no implied qualities which may be associated with the title "officer" except that they are "good for the job."[130] Contrary to this, the ancient context and philology of שטרים indicates something more substantive and specific than social approval alone. The second misjudgment may be seen in the English translation choice, "officials."[131] In this case, the connotation again retains a sense of legal authority but is closer to a government worker, perhaps not a very high level one. The qualifications for such a position are probably moderate and administrative, requiring knowledge of what goes where and to whom. "Official" *may* indicate a higher position but remains open to a lower description like "clerk." Since שטרים is used in instances of mediating commands (e.g. Josh 1:10; 3:2), this administrative mode is not wholly incorrect; however, other indications suggest these particular governing officials were envisaged as having further education than the vast majority of their fellow Israelites. Their positions are likely closer to the level of intellectual elite than middle manager.

Calling for a shift in connotations requires a considered appraisal of the word, including a review of its etymology and usage; however, even when this is completed, we will need to defer a final determination on its meaning *in Num 11:16* until its context there can be more fully explored. Our purpose here is to provide possibility; confirmation is yet a later task.

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[130] See 67n157 below.

[131] NIV; or similarly, *autorité* (Louis Segond), or *Amtleute* (Lutherbibel Standardausgabe).

An initial and significant signal to considering שטרים as scribes, and not just as elected officers or administrative officials, is its etymology. שטרים is a substantival participle not of a verb for overseeing or leadership, but of שטר, a loanword from Akkadian, meaning "to write."[132] To wit, a שטר is not simply a פקיד. But since words can experience changes in usage over time, etymology is not, by itself, a dependable determiner for meaning. By looking at its usage throughout the Hebrew Bible, we can better gauge whether the activities of biblical שטרים confirm their "scribal" role.

It is helpful to distinguish ancient scribes, on the one hand, from tribal authorities, whose authority is more socially inherent and whose execution of that authority may depend on custom rather than legal text, and, on the other hand, from the ruler, whose authority is often bounded by law but who requires assistance (perhaps more literate than himself) in domestically issuing law, recording it, and archiving it, as well as internationally negotiating treaties and receiving them.[133] Both Mesopotamia and Egypt developed significant scribal classes, who navigated this social position, sometimes in counter-distinction to the authorities over them, and always with the highest level of educational rigor of that society.[134] Prior to Hellenization, their position was not to enculturate the populace but to serve the central authorities, both king and priests, often with reference to the military powers and structures exerting and protecting these authorities.[135] As Philip Davies avers, "As writers [imbued with higher learning], the scribal class were in origin servants of ruler or temple. But they became much more than mere clerks."[136]

The biblical usage of שטרים is consistent with this description. שטרים are portrayed as (1) relaying commands (not just customs, including military orders),

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[132] Ludwig Köhler et al., "שׁוֹטֵר" and "שׁטר," *HALOT*.
[133] Philip R Davies, *Scribes and Schools: The Canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures* (LAI; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 15–17.
[134] Ibid., 18–19.
[135] Ibid., 15–17.
[136] Ibid., 17.

(2) settling disputes, (3) representing one segment of national authority structures, and (4) closely engaging and presenting either king or priest.[137] Although both terms modulate in their usage across the corpus, compared to the more commonly used term, ספרים, the שטרים of the Hebrew Bible consistently carry a stronger connection with the centrally-sanctioned authorities (especially שפטים) and are almost always depicted collectively.[138] As such, שטרים appear to exist socially somewhere between ספרים and the king or priests, and in this sense, "magistrate" is a good rendering for their position, provided their origins and training as scribes is not obscured. In effect, שטרים are more consistently depicted as a "scribal elite" than ספרים since the latter may, at times, carry connotations as "transcribers." A careful appraisal of the usage of שטרים in the Hebrew Bible does not remove the label "scribes" from ספרים but allows שטרים to share some of its linguistic domain, especially when such scribes are closely affiliated (rather than opposed) to centralized authority[139] and are granted authority not only to read and interpret law but also execute it. One final note regarding Hebrew usage of שטרים: If readers are hesitant to grant qualities of "scribe" to שטרים in Num 11:16 because the passage does not use the term ספרים, it should be noted that the Hexateuch never uses ספר to refer to people, reserving the label only for texts.[140] In hexateuchal terms, *there is no good reason not to regard the Seventy in*

[137] See table below.

[138] 2 Chronicles 26:11 is the only time שטר occurs in the singular.

[139] Although there is a consistent close association between שטרים and central Israelite authorities, its inclusion as one of a few strata of institutional authority also means it is not wholly synonymous with the kingship or the Temple. By presenting itself in support of these institutions and by having its origins *outside* the promised land, the שטרים present another voice of the "amphictyonic" tradition (to borrow a term from Rendtorff), ready to critique as well as support the presenting centralized authorities, Rendtorff, "Early History," 23. While Davies's depiction of scribes as socially capable counters to political authority better suits the term ספרים, שטרים is not devoid of its own correcting voice (e.g. Ex 5:20-1, שטרים in opposition to Moses) even where that voice is typically used in harmony rather than dissonance with authority, *Scribes*, 18–19. For form-critical support for שטרים as originating in "pre-state Israel," see K.-L. Schunck, "שָׁטַר," *TDOT* 14:608.

[140] See table below note ***. The closest is the somewhat cryptic Jdg 5:14.

Num 11:16b as scribes. If any scribes are to be found in the Hexateuch at all, then the Seventy of Num 11:16 must surely rank among them.[141]

Characterizing שטרים as "scribes" gains further support when we compare the Hebrew Masoretic text (MT) with the Greek Septugaint (LXX).[142] Presuming consistency of consonantal text between the MT and LXX Vorlage, on every pentateuchal occasion, the LXX renders the Hebrew שטר with γραμματεύς (or a variant thereof), whose etymology similarly accents the Hebrew's scribal foundations.[143] This translation choice remains constant until two texts in 2 Chronicles present both forms of ספר and שטר in the same verse.[144] (See table below.) Given that both are consistently rendered as forms of γραμματεύς, LXX 2 Chronicles chooses forms of κριτής for שטר while allowing γραμματεύς to remain for ספר. In the end, the LXX (even outside the Pentateuch) lends further support to a characterization of שטרים as grounded in scribal activity while incorporating elements of institutional or legal authority.

However, what kind of scribal activity is not evident from the word γραμματεύς alone. To clarify whether γραμματεύς implies a highly educated scribal elite or a more lowly "paper pusher," we must consider a critique which begins in rabbinic understandings (and questions) about Hellenistic Greek renderings of Hebrew terms.

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[141] Given the post-Sinaitic position of the passage, an apprearance of (legal) scribes would not be unexpected.

[142] For a good recent treatment of the variety of texts and processes masked by our colloquial usage of the singular "the" Septugaint (or LXX), see Timothy Michael Law, *When God Spoke Greek: The Septuagint and the Making of the Christian Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 75–9.

[143] LXX Deuteronomy uses the variant, γραμματοεισαγωγεύς (Deut 1:15, 16:18, 29:9, 31:28), which LSJ (359) approximates the meaning as "schoolmaster," but LSJ lists the word as only occurring in the LXX and later patristic citations of the biblical text. We may presume it wishes to accent the שטרים's authority or to distance שטרים from other connotations which γραμματεῖς alone may have carried at the time, but both of these are speculative.

[144] Apart from the exceptions in Joshua and Proverbs, each conveying unusual LXX translations in their own right (the latter is intentionally less literal while the former has all the markings of a different, switched Hebrew *Vorlage*), the LXX always renders *both* Hebrew words with forms of γραμματεύς or a variant. In biblical Aramaic, סָפַר is translated with γραμματεύς throughout while no Aramaic form of שטר occurs.

In his exceptional survey of Hellenistic Judaism, Elias Bickerman examines "Scribes and Sages."[145] In this appraisal, Bickerman proposes that during the Second Temple period, there was a rise in the need for "notaries, accountants, and legists," who "without sacerdotal rank" "supplanted the priest[s] as interpreter[s] of the law" and "as early as 200 B.C.E.…formed a privileged group in the Temple hierarchy."[146] What is important about this proposition for our argument is that he suggests this role is represented by the Greek and Hebrew terms, γραμματεύς and ספר, respectively. For Bickerman, γραμματεύς is not a proper "Greek term for scholars who studied books."[147] That term is γραμματικός. "The whole category of 'biblical scholars,'…is a phantom."[148] The true biblical authorities were, according to Bickerman, the Pharisees, who did not write down their traditions and who were intellectual descendants, not of the ספרים but of the wise men (חכמים). The rabbis, he insists, never called themselves ספרים, and neither Philo nor Josephus ever referred to them as γραμματεῖς.[149]

If Bickerman's hypothesis is followed, then the evidence of the LXX might not affirm either the שטרים or ספרים with any elite skill in handling legal texts, Mosaic or otherwise. Instead, they might be considered by the LXX as merely advanced "notaries," who have no inheritance in Israel's intellectual or interpretative traditions.[150] The question is worth pursuing. Clarification will give us further possible insight into the implications of Num 11:16's use of שטרים.

In his examination of γραμματεύς, Joachim Jeremias agrees with Bickerman that neither later rabbis nor Philo nor Josephus (with one notable exception), used the term to delineate "biblical scholars."[151] However, Jeremias

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[145] E.J. Bickerman, *The Jews in the Greek Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 161–76.
[146] Ibid., 163.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid.
[150] One might think there is a distance in Bickerman's proposal between the biblical scribes of Ezra's day (or prior) and the later dates of the LXX or later Hellenistic Judaism, but Bickerman specifically proposes that Ezra himself is a forerunner of this ספרים tradition, ibid.
[151] "γραμματεύς," *TDNT* 1:741.

maintains that normal biblical usage in the Hebrew Bible and LXX (and at least from the time of Ezra on and to which the New Testament is the last witness of) secures a parallel between γραμματεύς and ספר, both as indicating "ordained theologian[s]."[152]

Jeremias's view of γραμματεῖς as "biblical scholars" (contra Bickerman) finds further support from the very place Bickerman appeals for support against the notion: in Ben Sira.[153] For Bickerman, "Ben Sira's sage [חכם], like a Greek philosopher, is an intellectual."[154] But when Ben Sira himself describes such an intellectual, he does not reach for γραμματικός as Bickerman implies; instead, Sir 38:24 describes the "wisdom of the scribe" as Σοφία γραμματέως [חכמת ספר]. Although later rabbis gravitated to this tradition of "wisdom," it appears that earlier, biblical and Second Temple writers saw nothing problematic about keeping ספרים (and perhaps, at that time, שטרים)[155] together with wisdom (including oral tradition), scribes, and biblical scholarship.[156]

Furthermore, even Josephus' usage indicates a possible connection between שטרים and biblical scholarship of the highest levels (and not just lower notaries). Jeremias's example of one exception in Josephus where the term γραμματεῖς might indicate biblical scholars is in *Bell.* 6:291. In that example, Josephus describes the activities of the Jewish ἱερογραμματεῖς as those engaged in interpreting the prophecies of Jewish scripture as they might apply to the events of their day. The activity is, interestingly, not too dissimilar from that which Josephus describes for himself in *Bell.* 3.352, but more to the point, it is precisely the same vocabulary he uses to describe the שטרים of the Israelites in his version of Exodus 5, as retold in *Ant.* 2.243. So, even if one is tempted to grant an

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[152] Ibid., 1:740.
[153] Although the Greek text is usually referred to as Sirach, for clarity I follow Bickerman here in retaining the term "Ben Sira."
[154] *Jews*, 166.
[155] Even if the particular Hebrew term, שטרים, may have fallen out of use by the time of Ben Sira.
[156] Also, see Sidney B. Hoenig, *The Great Sanhedrin: A Study of the Origin, Development, Composition, and Functions of the Bet Din Ha-Gadol During the Second Jewish Commonwealth* (Philadelphia: Dropsie College, 1953), 174, citing L. Finkelstein.

exception for Philo and Josephus as examples of those who prefigure a rabbinic division between γραμματεῖς and those truly learned in Torah, one finds an exception even there, which maintains a direct connection between the term used in Num 11:16 (שטרים), understood in the context of its pentateuchal antecedent Exodus 5 (as retold in *Ant.* 2:243, ἱερογραμματεῖς), and the term used to most clearly portray biblical interpretation (in *Bell.* 6:291, ἱερογραμματεῖς), viz. the highest levels of scholarship.

Given the evidence, I propose that translating שטריו in Num 11:16 as "their scribes" better retains the now recognized, social importance of ancient scribal elites implicit in the Hebrew and lost in renderings such as "officers" or "officials." While the word does include more consistent connotations of implicit legal (not tribal) authority than ספרים, I think we are better off following the example of the LXX, choosing the same word in translation ("scribes") for the two different Hebrew originals. The context of the passage can preserve connotations of authority; whereas, without translating שטרים as "scribes", modern readers may miss the implicit legal and textual connotations implied.[157] However שטרים is translated, there is sufficient support from etymology, broader biblical usage, and ancient Greek translation to consider the term open to a meaning where the Seventy of Num 11:16 are chosen by Moses in part because of their previous experience as members of a scribal elite (whose domain may include biblical and legal interpretation). This view of the Seventy is one whose implications we shall later revisit, especially in light of Exodus 5 and the Legend of the LXX.

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[157] Schunck in "שָׁטַר," 14:607, agrees with some of the characterization presented but proposes the opposite strategy for translation:

> [O]ne can…assume that the Hebrew root *štr* is first of all associated with the activity of writing. Nonetheless, referring to the *šōtēr* simply as "scribe" would be incorrect, since the OT already uses the word *sōpēr* for "scribe, secretary,"…. The word *šōtēr* must rather be understood as the title of an official whose duties required the ability to write and whose activities included the ability to evaluate written documents. More specifically, the word *šōtēr* in this sense is to be understood as the designation of a lower official or appointee whose tasks might include various spheres and thus vary in nature.

Conclusion

Without belaboring the work above, the end result of our investigation reveals explicit details of the story of the seventy elders of Numbers 11 which are often overlooked: *They are scribes of the people made prophets by the spirit upon Moses.* Each of these designations has been overlooked in the history of interpretation for various reasons, but there are significant reasons to affirm them. With these two signals restored, their presence acts as an interpretative key to a formerly opaque story; its purpose begins to be revealed. The weight of recent interpretative endeavors, particularly in (1) the history of Israelite prophecy and (2) the history of pentateuchal research, has clouded this text. As the only pentateuchal text where the verb **נבא** is used with its issuance from the spirit upon Moses, this text requires careful appraisal and sorting. However, careful attention to the history of interpretation, especially in its early forms but alongside a continued appreciation for the narrative and the advances of recent research, has proven and will continue to prove illuminating.

LXX translations of ***שטר****, including contexts & roles (in lexical forms)**

Reference	ש(ו)טר	שפט	ס(ו)פר***	זקן	Burden	Role
Ex 5:6, 10, 14, 19	γραμματεύς				סבלה (5:4)	Relay commands
Num 11:16	γραμματεύς			πρεσβ-ύτης	**משא** (11:17)	?
Deut 1:15	γραμματο-εισαγωγεύς	κριτής (1:16)			**משא** (1:12)	Settle disputes
Deut 16:18	γραμματο-εισαγωγεύς	κριτής				Settle disputes
Deut 20:5, 8	γραμματεύς					Relay commands
Deut 29:9[10]; 31:28	γραμματο-εισαγωγεύς	κριτής		γερουσί-α		National authority
Josh 1:10; 3:2	γραμματεύς					Relay commands
Josh 8:33 [9:2δ]	δικαστής	γραμματ-εύς		πρεσβ-ύτης		National authority
Josh 23:2	δικαστής	γραμματ-εύς		γερουσί-α		National authority
Josh 24:1	δικαστής	γραμματ-εύς		πρεσβ-ύτης		National authority
1 Chr 23:4	γραμματεύς	κριτής				Levitical authority
1 Chr 26:29	γραμματεύω*	διακίνω*				Ambassa-dors**
1 Chr 27:1	γραμματεύς					King's courtiers
2 Chr 19:11	γραμματεύς	(κρίνω, 19:8)				Levitical authority°
2 Chr 26:11	κριτής		γραμματ-εύς			King's courtier
2 Chr 34:13	κριτής		γραμματ-εύς		סבל	Levitical authority

°In a broader context of settling disputes, see 19:8.

*Verbal participle. Likewise, Prov 6:7, which is not listed. **שטר** = ἀναγκάζω, indicating authority.

Sons of Chenaniah, the director of music (משא**), cf. 1 Chr 15:22; for more on elder-scribes as ambassadors and music as oracle, see Chapter 5.

***ס(ו)פר/ס(ו)פרים (as people, not books) occurs in 2 Sam 8:17; 2 Sam 20:25; 1 Kgs 4:3; 2 Kgs 18:18, 37; 19:2; 22:3, 8-10, 12; 25:19; Isa 36:3, 22; 37:2; Jer 8:8; 36:12 [43:12]; 37:15, 20 [44:15, 20]; 52:25; Ps 45:1 [44:2]; Esth 3:12; 8:9; Ezr 4:8-9, 17, 23; 7:6; 11-12; 21; Neh 8:1, 4, 9, 13; 12:26, 36; 13:13; 1 Chr 2:55; 18:16; 24:6; 27:32; 2 Chr 24:11; 26:11; 34:13, 15, 18, 20. In each case, the LXX (Rahlfs) translates it as γραμματεῖς/γραμματεύς (except Isa 33:18, γραμματικοί; and Jer 36:20, 26, 32 [43:20, 26, 32], left untranslated.

3

The Crisis of Moses' Flesh and the Meaning of Seventy(-Two)

The God of Numbers 11 is a responsive God. He is not deaf to the crying of the people, nor is he passive in responding to them. He likewise attends to Moses' address to him and offers an answer by both word and deed (11:16-17, 25). This much about God's response in the chapter is clear and worth pausing and articulating.[1] The correspondence between human word and divine action is inter-relational here. The pairing is intentional. There is broad consensus on this aspect and few, if any, who would waver from it.[2]

God's Kind of Help

Nevertheless, what *kind* of response YHWH makes is less clear. As detailed previously,[3] while some see God's response of placing "the spirit upon [Moses]" on the seventy elders ("the Seventy") at the Tent of Meeting (11:25) as punishing and, in part, replacing Moses,[4] others see it as honoring and helping him.[5] Most see the response as a kind of help in leadership,[6] but how *long* this leadership help remains and in what form is not clearly understood. What this means for the rest of Moses' life or the rest of Pentateuch is not explained.[7] Are they meant to be individuals offering *en masse* a kind of help in leadership which was ancient and conceptually-available to the biblical writer and his tradition (i.e. another

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[1] This observation may imply theological import either as a characterization about the people (cp. Ps 34:15) or as something distinctive about Israel's God.

[2] Exceptions: Gray sees no "genuine reply" by God to Moses' cry since Moses' cry of alone-ness is not really a request for human help but divine assistance (as opposed to his request for the people's help in Deut 1:9-18), and, in any case, when God's human help does arrive they are of no use since they only fall down in ecstasy and supply none of the meat requested: "[T]he elders received not the power of assisting Moses, but of prophesying," Gray, *Numbers*, 111; cf. 113.

[3] See Chapter 1.

[4] E.g. Calvin, *Commentaries*, 4:24–5.

[5] E.g. Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, 339.

[6] Also termed: "governing" or "administration."

[7] Possible exceptions from recent research include: Ashley, *Numbers*, 214; Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 586; Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, 340, "prophetlike leadership"; Jobling, *Sense*, 36, "The elders do not share in Moses' leadership. They share his spirit of prophecy, but this cannot be an empowerment for leadership."

"helping" episode as in Exodus 18, this time with spirit, prophesying, and elders)? Or, less commonly, are they meant to represent a kind of institutional help—a symbolic connection to an ancient Israelite or later Judaic institution which is here in etiological form (like the Sanhedrin)?

To be fair, these questions of the potential continuing meaning of the elders of Numbers 11 are not directly explained by the text, and some reticence about the elders' future may simply be an attempt to recognize the apparent emphases of the text as it stands. At the same time, the manner of description applied to the Seventy—not least that they are, in fact, *seventy*; a number selected by YHWH—has beckoned many interpreters to question their relationship to other resonant biblical and Jewish institutions (e.g. Ex 24:1, 9–11; or "the Sanhedrin").[8] Still, the connections are usually left to the imagination and without much impact on the overall exegesis of the passage.[9]

Interestingly, there do not appear to be any interpreters who see the destiny of the Seventy as completely dying off[10] or dismantled as a conciliar aid in the immediately-following plague at Kibroth-hattaavah (קברות התאוה).[11] I can find none who considers the help of the Seventy as only applicable to that single

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[8] Cf. E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE - 66 CE* (London: SCM, 1992), 472–3. Typically, commentators do not properly distinguish between historical and literary "sanhedrins."

[9] Major exceptions to this include: *Sifre* 92; *Num. Rab.* 15.19; Rashi, *Pentateuch*, 4:56–7.

[10] Rupert of Deutz comes closest, cf. *De Glorificatione trinitatis* 6 (PL 169:122-3); highlighting this juxtaposition of gift of the spirit and death, he sees the quail-judgment as a response to a kind of blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (cf. Mark 3:29). The majority of interpreters see the prophetic experience as temporary, but the effect as empowering the elders' leadership as permanent despite the judgment episode.

[11] Opinion varies on whether the Seventy also experience some death. The reason for punishment is indicated in the name. The place name in LXX [Μνήματα τῆς ἐπιθυμίας (11:34; also, Num 33:16; Deut 9:22); Μνημάτων ἐπιθυμίας (Num 11:35)] is equally applicable here. The LXX changes the name slightly to reflect its meaning rather than just a static transliteration of a location name (i.e. it does not record something like, Κιβροθ Ἀταυα)—similarly, *Tg. Onq.* קִבְרֵי דְמַשָּׁאֲלֵי. How this targumic version deviates from the Hebrew is somewhat debated; cf. Bernard Grossfeld, trans., *The Targum Onqelos to Leviticus and The Targum Onqelos to Numbers* (ArBib 8; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 99n5; 102. The place name may be translated either "Graves of *the Demanders*" or "Graves of the Problem-makers" (ET, mine), as implied by *Sifre* 86, where 11:4's התאוו תאוה is מתרעמים. (All original *Sifre* text is from *Judaic Classics Library Deluxe*. Version 1.3. 2007.) Grossfeld notes the noun שאילתא may mean "problem." Either way the implication is judgment on the *people* rather than their *desire;* however, leaving desire as the mnemonic likely reminds the readers of its inherent dangers if left unchecked. See Chapter 5.

location in the desert itinerary.[12] Thus, where there is comment at all, there is broad consensus that the need of Moses met by YHWH through the Seventy extends (in the world of the text) at least through the lifetime of Moses himself and probably beyond. Amidst the graves (קברות) of the whole chapter, there is a presumed "life" for the elders alongside, and even after, Moses—an institution which does not depend on the lives of its individual members and which reaches the reader beyond the immediacy of its episode of origin.[13]

Moses' Lament and His Institutional Body

It is this possibility of an *institutional* answer to Moses' despair that we take up here. In particular, I suggest the possibility that Moses' death as articulated in his own complaint triggers a concern for the continuity of Moses' authority, legacy, and connection to God, i.e. "the spirit upon [him]." I propose that an "institutional" Seventy answers the questions posed by Moses' physical finitude. This reality of Moses' burden and physical weakness is the special focus of Numbers 11 and is laid out more explicitly here than anywhere else in the Bible.[14] Where else does Moses speak to YHWH with such utter anger and fragility as here (11:11–15, NJPS)?

> **11**And Moses said to the LORD, "Why have You dealt ill with Your servant, and why have I not enjoyed Your favor, that You have laid the burden of all this people upon me? **12**Did I conceive all this people, did I bear them, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom as a

[12] The closest comes from those who claim the circumference of their aid is only in the desert (usually in the context of Num 11:25b), cf. Levison, "Prophecy," 512; Ramban, *Bamidbar*, 219 [Num 11:17], "regarding [the Israelites'] needs of the moment"; McNeille, *Numbers*, 63, "[v.25b] The effect was purely temporary. It was not an imparting of wisdom and influence for the purpose of permanently helping Moses."

[13] By this, I do not want to foreclose the possibility of a reading (within the world of the text) that includes (some of) the elders in the deaths which follow but to recognize the consensus of enduring help to Moses beyond this particular episode, i.e. even if some do die, it is not enough to impede the implied future role of the Seventy (however they are then constituted). The lack of comment in either direction (that they die and must be replaced or that they do not die and need no replacing) leaves freedom for interpreters to examine the meaning of the Seventy beyond the limits of the world of the text.

[14] "The Kibroth-hattaavah episode (11:4–34) is truly an exception. Here God's wrath…is not followed by Moses' intercession but by his personal complaint," Milgrom, *Numbers*, 377.

> nurse carries an infant,' to the land that You have promised on oath to their fathers? **13**Where am I to get meat to give to all this people, when they whine before me and say, 'Give us meat to eat!' **14**I cannot carry all this people by myself, for it is too much for me. **15**If You would deal thus with me, *kill me* rather, I beg You, and let me see no more of my wretchedness![15]

At one level, the complaint of Moses resonates with any political or religious leader's experience, and many have found encouragement from it to express their own frustrations with leadership.[16] But for the people of Israel, Moses' desperation presents a vulnerability beyond his own personal protest: If Moses dies, where will his authority pass? And if it passes to another person (i.e. Joshua, Num 27:12-23), what will happen after this successor dies? These questions are not necessarily indicative of the *historical* origins of the story (i.e. regarding a historical Moses), but even for a later generation, the place of the elders here presents a bridge beyond Moses' own personal—and now obviously limited—body to an institution which may extend Moses' authority into the future.[17] Put differently, in light of Moses' *appeal for death* (11:15), readers may wonder: What "body" *will* be the vessel for the spirit on Moses after his death and beyond Joshua? Further, does this spirit *need* to be passed to another *before* he dies? Doesn't spiritual transference require a still *living* source?[18]

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[15] Emphasis added. An older strain of historical-criticism placed this complaint between Ex 33:1-3 & 12-13, cf. Gray, *Numbers*, 111, citing Bacon, Triple Tradition. Apart from questions of God's favor, we may note there Moses' desire to know "whom you will send with me" (Ex 33:12).

[16] Luther's comments stand out (in appreciation of Moses' ability to freely complain to God), *Luther's Works, Vol. 54: Table Talk* (ed. and trans. Theodore G. Tappert; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 30–1:

> Moses went so far as to throw his keys at our Lord God's feet when he asked, "Did I conceive this people?" [Num. 11:12]. It can't be otherwise….Surely this is murmuring… [I]t is only speculative theologians who condemn such impatience and recommend patience. If they get down to the realm of practice, they will be well aware of this.

[17] What kind of authority and who qualifies for extending it are questions yet to be answered.

[18] On this latter point, it is interesting to note *where* many Christian interpreters choose to recall Numbers 11, i.e. in surveys of the first books of the OT (Pentatuech, Hexateuch, etc.) and among references in discussions of Luke 10. Additionally, the giving of the Spirit in John 20:22-3 is likewise common. A good example is Cyril of Alexandria, *Comm. in Jo.* (PG 74:720). While there are other parallels between Pentecost and Numbers 11 which could be explored, one way to consider the preference for John 20 is: Where the giving of the spirit at Pentecost fulfills occasions of YHWH's spirit independently coming upon individual Israelites, John 20 presents (like

One way to examine the interpretative promise of such a reading it to survey the history of reception of Numbers 11 while specially looking for ways in which previous interpreters saw the *number seventy* as indicative of *receivers of the spirit and/or authority of Moses.* Not every interpreter who sees seventy as signaling the receiving the spirit or authority of Moses, likewise imagines the numbered set of elders specifically living on after Moses or explicitly continuing as an institution in the life of Israel (they often have their own interpretative goals for the passage which may not explicate this point). Nonetheless, a number of interpreters helpfully describe (or allude) to a way in which these seventy elders receive Moses (or are uniquely capable of doing so). The arc of Moses' lament, which has lobbed high the future authority in Israel, is, in these ways, caught by the seventy elders—by explicitly receiving the spirit upon him and being the right *symbolic shape* for doing so.

By following the commonplace question, "Why *seventy* elders?" we can observe the way other interpreters have seen the potential for symbolic meaning in the Seventy, i.e. not just a happenstance collection of individuals but a purposeful configuration of members. This survey will also provide a way to examine possible mnemonic and intertextual alliances, especially ways Numbers 11 does and does not look like Exodus 24. Rather than performing a dedicated study to the exegetical ins and outs of both passages, I have chosen to allow the possible relationships between them to emerge "along the way." No doubt a more

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Numbers 11) an occasion where the authoritative figure can pass on his own spirit prior to his death/departure. Where God can give a general "divine" spirit anytime, the more personal spirit from Moses or Jesus must be given while they are still alive and/or here on earth.

Karl Barth makes an instructive mistake in this regard, *Church Dogmatics* (ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance; trans. G.W. Bromiley et al.; 31 vols., Study Edition.; London: T&T Clark, 2009), III.2, [357]. He sees Num 11:17,25,29 as an example of the Spirit on an "individual" called "Moses." He notes prior to this,

> The consistent rule confirmed by this exception [viz. Isa 59:21 where a remnant of Israel is said to have the Spirit collectively rest upon it] is that in the reception and possession of the Spirit is the election of individuals and not a communal possession. Only in the New Testament, where the community…is the object of election, is it otherwise.

While Num 11:16,25,29 should indeed be included as an instance of the *Spirit on an individual*, it should *also* be included as one of those "infrequent" instances of *communal reception* and thus, according to Barth, their communal *election*, specially chosen for YHWH's task.

detailed comparison would prove profitable; however, I leave that to future research. With so many gaps in understanding what Numbers 11 is trying to do, an examination of the elders of Numbers 11 seems warranted first before comparing them afresh to the "other" Seventy. In any case, as we will see, following the question *"Why seventy?"* brings *intertextual* questions to the fore while presenting these seventy as appropriate *recipients* of Moses' spirit and authority.

Why Seventy?

Reading God's directive for Moses to gather "seventy"[19] from the elders of Israel, whom Moses knew to be "elders of the people and their scribes" (Num 11:16),[20] many even casual readers pause to ponder: "Why *seventy* elders?" In the history of interpretation, answers to this single question generally follow three different lines. First, (1) there are those few who choose *not* to ask the question. They read the text as a literal historical rendering of events "as they happened" and read "seventy" as a mere descriptor. They proceed without asking "Why seventy?" at all.[21] A second line (2) asks, "What does the number seventy *mean*?"[22] Finally, a third line (3) asks, "Why seventy, *and not seventy-two*?" To these latter readers, seventy is not a seemingly logical number, either for symbolic purposes or as a

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[19] Despite *Num. Rab.* 15:23's concern for why YHWH did not say, "Gather unto Me seventy **אנשים**" but instead said, "seventy **איש**," I consider the singular here unremarkable and an example of what Waltke and O'Connor call a "class noun" ("This use of the singular is found in enumerations, after **כֹּל** and other terms of quantity…," e.g. 1 Kgs 20:1, Jdg 21:12, and Num 16:35), *IBHS*, 7.2.2b. Thus, it is likely a simple designation of "seventy men."

[20] ET, mine. See Chapter 2, cf. Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, 323–4. Or, "secretaries," Snaith, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 229.

[21] By nature, the reasons for this absence must be presumed. E.g. Wenham, who perceives forms of historiography but likewise insists on the Bible's "honesty" and lack of "creating facts," may, by his silence on the meaning of "seventy," be reasonably assumed to hold the "meaning" of seventy here as a factual accounting of the event, see Wenham, *Numbers*, 18 (honesty), 36–9 (symbolism), 108 (silence on seventy).

[22] This question may be asked in a more traditional manner about God, or in a more literary way about the style of the story, i.e. Why does God (or, alternatively, "the story") decide to use *seventy*? In this way, more traditional historical readings do not necessarily preclude symbolic readings. The symbols are simply regarded as "real" to the historical setting rather than "merely literary," e.g. "I only point out why God fixed upon this number," Calvin, *Commentaries*, 4:26–7.

referent to a historical institution; since any institution of the Israelites should be evenly selected from among its "twelve tribes," seventy-*two* makes greater sense.[23] Confusing the matter more, the passage itself offers some reason for the wobble between seventy and seventy-two since the episode of Eldad and Medad (11:26-29) follows the Seventy (11:24b-25) in a confusing way.[24] This wobble becomes a consistent feature in much of the reception history of Numbers 11; questions about the Seventy-*two* persist.

Our discussion will begin with the second line of inquiry: What does *seventy* mean here in Numbers 11? And especially asking: Does it signal any kind of *institutional* relationship to Moses (i.e. portraying them as designated recipients of Moses' spirit or authority, or capable of such)? To do this, we will focus on post-biblical and, more especially, pre-modern uses of the Numbers text.

If the historical-critical approach to the elders story of Numbers 11 may helpfully be described as "diachronic" and concerned to explicate the historical *developments* and situations encased "behind" the ancient biblical text, then the literary-narrative approach may be termed "synchronic" for its efforts to explain the "*existing order*" of ideas as they stand "in front" of the final form of the text and which are thought to be perpetually accessible to all readers of the text. In contrast to these, the *pre-modern approach* (both Jewish and Christian) might be called a "panchronic" approach,[25] where the goal of the interpretation is to see

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[23] *Sifre* 95; *b. Sanhedrin* 17a; *Num. Rab.* 15.19; Snaith, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 229.

[24] The ascription to Eldad and Medad that they are "of those written [about]" but who had not gone out to the Tent of Meeting (11:26) has been ambiguous enough to raise questions as to whether the Seventy should have actually been seventy-two or only sixty-eight—despite the activity of Moses and God toward "seventy" in 11:24-25. E.g. "Seventy-two": Noth, *Numbers*, 90; Levison, "Prophecy," 507; 520–1. "68": Snaith, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 232; Butterworth, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 133.

[25] Childs helpfully cites Sausurre's concepts as "diachronic and synchronic dimensions of a text" (hoping to propose a method of interpretation that involves both), *Biblical Theology*, 204. The framing I offer here attempts to stay even closer to Saussure's original conceptualities, i.e. diachronic is "development," synchronic is "existing order," Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (ed. Charles Bally; trans. Roy Harris; Chicago: Open Court, 2009), 92–5.

Given that Saussure is concerned with linguistic "laws" and not with text, per se, I depart from Saussure in his determination that "there is no panchronic point of view" (94). While this is true for linguistic sounds (i.e. the French "chose" has no meaning apart from its context in French language constructions and cannot find meaning as a sound "šoz") (94), I find the category a useful

each textual iteration for its relationship to all other biblical texts and to the worshipping communities which read them—the meaning "beyond" the text.[26]

This does not mean that pre-modern interpreters never considered the editorialized nature of the biblical text or what the grammar of a particular story-telling style intends to communicate.[27] What it does mean is that such angles toward the text were not the *only* ones available as strategies for reading nor were they even always the most important ones.[28] Thus, for pre-modern communities, often the approach to the text is more as a *theological resource* than either reconstructing the world of the text (historical-critical) or re-telling its content (literary-narrative).[29] Where the theological needs of the community need to draw upon historical or narrative elements, they did so, but where allegorical or spiritual readings of a text are deemed more germane, these elements are drawn out without hesitation.[30] Along with the needs of the community, the pre-modern approach tends to engage the text within the widest-possible set of intra-canonical resonances available; they considered "the σκοπός of Scripture" as the whole of the biblical corpus (as each religious community defines it, e.g. Tanakh

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one for accounting for the effect of verbal resonance in early biblical interpretation (i.e. word-sounds may have meaning when heard in relation to others outside the immediate sequence unit but within the same language and same broader unit of text, e.g. the whole of Scripture). Thus, Sausurre provides a mechanism for describing the way texts modify over time (as language and intention changes), the way they stay the same (as language and intention persists), and the way they relate to other texts (as language interacts inter-textually).

[26] As in Ayres, *Nicaea*, 33n73, "…ancient exegetes…do not presuppose a gap between their own imaginative worlds and those of the earliest Christians."

[27] E.g. Bekhor Shor's *peshat* techniques, Edward L. Greenstein, "Medieval Bible Commentaries," in *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts* (ed. Barry W. Holtz; New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984), 246–7.

[28] On the movement from *derash* to *peshat* in Jewish tradition, David Weiss Halivni, *Peshat and Derash: Plain and Applied Meaning in Rabbinic Exegesis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 6–8, *et passim*. By contrast, an appeal to "the plain sense" seems to be an earlier (at least, 4th-century C.E.) move in Christianity, cf. Ayres, *Nicaea*, 31–2.

[29] E.g. "[E]arly Christian exegetes assume that the mind of the author is to be discerned by a focus on elucidating the text, not by reconstructing the world within which the author wrote and by assuming that such a world was marked by a symbolic universe and by social structures distinct from those of the reader," ibid., 33.

[30] Ayres notes that this type of "judgement of a text" was part of what it meant to be a skilled γραμματικός in the 4th-century (even when the mode of interpretation was just exploring the depth of the plain sense), ibid., 35–6.

vs. Christian Bible).[31] This pre-modern approach is, therefore, presented here as a complementary approach to biblical study, taking its ability to illuminate the text of Numbers 11 with equal seriousness to its later colleagues. We will thus survey side-by-side these approaches to the symbolism of seventy.

Within this question of the meaning of seventy and its potential signal to institutional relationships to Moses, we consider four different examples and sub-positions: (I) Recent attempts to construe seventy as "approximation" (often based on historical reconstruction and/or intertextual uses), (II) the *Pseudo-Clementine* view of seventy-two as "pattern Moses," and (III) Ramban's view of seventy (or seventy-one or –two) as council. Each of these eschews the possibility that the number seventy is merely a historical reckoning and explores instead the possibility of its symbolic contribution to the narrative. Each also looks to various *intertextual* connections to establish what seventy "means" (viz. since "seventy" cannot communicate on its own, questions about "Why seventy?" are actually answered based on which "seventy *and…*" appears to best communicate the force of the passage). As a result, intertextual connections have something to *add* about how the elders receive (or are poised to receive) the spirit and/or authority of Moses. We begin with seventy as a symbol of *approximation*.

I. "Seventy as Approximation" of Familial and Political Authority

Biblical interpretation of a possible symbolic reference requires avoiding the transference of truly foreign meaning onto the text from outside and unrelated contexts, but it must also take the ways ancient authors may have symbolically communicated by use of numeric terms with sufficient seriousness. In the case of Numbers 11, interpreters in recent centuries have navigated this tension by considering the number seventy as representative of an ancient approximation of a large but indefinite number of people.[32] They do not consider this

[31] Ibid., 36.

[32] It is rare to find any description of exactly why seventy (**שבעים**) is a preferred number for this kind of symbolic significance. Presumably, its philological similarity to "oath/swear" (**שבע**) may be

approximation as simply a "round number" (where the actual number of people is close to seventy but recorded to the nearest ten) but instead as a true symbol, a representation of a quantity distinct (and at some relative but not extended distance) from its referent.[33] However, there is sufficient evidence to suggest more to this "approximation" and its relationship to authority than has typically been recognized.

As one example of this perspective, Martin Noth, after deciding the Seventy do not designate a specific historical body, declares: "Therefore the figure seventy must surely be taken simply in the sense of a large number,…."[34] His predecessor, Hugo Gressman, makes a similar determination:

> Die Normierung der Ältesten auf Siebzig ist gewiß durch die „Zahlensymbolik" veranlaßt; trotzdem ist sie ein lehrreiches Zeugnis für die Kleinheit des hebräischen Volkes. Die späteren Erzähler stellten sich vor, daß ursprunglich Mose allein die Israeliten regiert habe, als dann das Volk allmählich wuchs und Mitregenten eingesetzt werden mußten, da genügten immer noch siebzig Mann! In diesem Punkte mag die vorliegende Sage eine ältere Tradition bewahrt haben, obwohl die Zahl siebzig keine historische Geltung beanspruchen kann.[35]

This moderate but ahistorical number yet represents a moderately-sized but historical council and people. Similarly, commenting on Num 11:16-17, Jacob Milgrom declares, "The number seventy is not accidental….As a symbolic number, like seven, it is not intended as an exact number but only as an

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a cause. See Milgrom's note below on "seventy" being symbolic like "seven" (**שבע**), *Numbers*, 86. As well, "seven" is prominent in Israelite narratives (e.g. Noah) and institutions (e.g. Sabbath, Shavuot). Both seven and ten are cyclical (i.e. week and base ten counting).

[33] Like the indefinite (or ahistorical) periods of time are often presented as "three days" (short, indefinite) or "forty days" (long, indefinite). From this view, seventy seems a favorite indicator of a number of persons anywhere between twelve and one hundred. (I am indebted to R.W.L. Moberly for this view of three and forty days in biblical texts.)

[34] Noth, *Numbers*, 89.

[35] Gressmann, *Mose*, 179. Gressmann implies that the size of the number chosen as a symbol indicates a time when such a people could conceivably be governed by something close to seventy people. Gressmann does not consider an equally plausible constraint to the number—that it represents a council around Moses which must not be so large as to impede communication among its members (and thus its usefulness to Moses). Compare with John Calvin, who sees the number as historically accurate (unlike Gressmann) but chosen for its symbolic significance alone without reference to the size of the people or council, Calvin, *Commentaries*, 3:317; 4:27.

approximation of a large group of people."[36] To support his claim, Milgrom cites several other examples in the OT where "seventy" is used in a relation to groups of people.[37] Thus, the argument goes, this seventy is also a symbolic number of an approximate number of people.

This identification of seventy as, essentially, idiomatic is one which cannot occur in isolation. Idiom requires comparative usage. Interpreters spot something different about those uses from other passages which use the same number but appear to resemble strict accounting rather than idiom (e.g. Ezra 8:7, 18).[38] But, perhaps this sense of idiom is merely the result of round numbers, more generally, which draw the eye to a more "approximate" sense without any real "symbolism" at all. Indeed, could we apply the same method to every round number (especially of people) and find similar "approximate" results?

The answer is not quite. Following the assumption that it is large round numbers which might be profitably compared to seventy for symbolic significance, an examination of the number forty (ארבעים) across MT does not produce the same results as seventy (שבעים);[39] units of time are much more frequent, and people nearly absent.[40] Less clear is a look at fifty (חמשים). Like

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[36] Milgrom, *Numbers*, 86. However, he is also quick to note rabbinic tradition in *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezar* 24 and Ramban connecting seventy with the number of the divine council (308). See below.

[37] I.e. Gen. 10; Ex 1:5; 24:11; Deut 10:22; Jdg 1:7; 8:30; 12:14; 1 Sam 6:19; 2 Kgs 10:1-7; Ezek 8:11, Milgrom, *Numbers*, 86.

[38] Otherwise, they would opt for seeing the seventy simply as a record of a number like any other in the biblical text, not symbolic at all. Note: For Gressmann, the interetxtual context of his symbolic seventy may be reduced to just occurrences of "seventy *elders*" despite his description of the number itself as symbolic, cf. his footnotes to the first "Siebzig" in the quote above: "Vgl. Ex. 24,1; Ezech. 8,11," Gressmann, *Mose*, 179n1. Both are examples of seventy *elders*. Milgrom's list is a nearly comprehensive list of every instance of seventy used in connection to people, only missing references in Jdg 9 and Ezr 8; however, his choice to include Genesis 10 might be considered anomalous as an example of seventy *groups* of people rather than a group of "seventy people."

[39] I have chosen MT rather than OT (LXX & MT) on the assumption that cultural sensitivities (if they can be considered consistent at all) from the parent language will be most faithfully reflected and maintained by a Hebrew text. Also, its relative textual stability makes search comparisons simply more feasible.

[40] "Forty days": Gen 7:4,12,17; 8:6; 50:3; Ex 24:18; 34:28, (plus other references to Moses on Sinai); Num 13:25; Ezek 4:6; Jonah 3:4. "Forty years": Ex 16:35; Num 14:33-34; 32:13; 33:38; Deut 1:3; 2:7; Amos 2:10, (plus other references to the wilderness); Jdg 13:1; 1 Sam 4:18; 2 Sam 5:4; 1 Kgs

seventy and forty, fifty is used for groups of people as well as other objects or descriptors,[41] but when it is, the groups of people appear with a similar sense of approximation but of different quality with association surrounding them. These groups of fifty are often used in censuses and sub-units of governance but also as vanguards;[42] whereas, when applied to people, seventy is used almost exclusively of groups of elders, rulers, judges, and ancestral heads or descendants of these categories.[43] As a result, Milgrom et al., are not incorrect in noticing the association of seventy with groups of people as a symbolic one.

In fact, the evidence suggests that even something more could be said about the number than that it is "an approximation of a large group of people."[44] If indeed seventy carries symbolic meaning apart from its instantiation here,[45] its

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11:42; Ezek 29:11. "Forty years old": Gen 25:20; 26:34; Josh 14:7; 2 Sam 2:10. "Land had rest (for) forty years": Jdg 3:11; 5:31. Cp. no occurrences of "forty" people.

[41] E.g. Ex 26:5,10-11; 36:12 (hoops & clasps); Lev 23:16 (fifty days); 25:10 (years); 27:3 (weight); Num 4:3,23 (age).

[42] Census/governance: Ex 18:21,25; Num 31:30,47; Deut 1:15; 1 Sam 8:12; 1 Kgs 18:4,13 (core remnant). Military vanguards: 2 Sam 15:1; 1 Kgs 1:5; 2 Kgs 1:9,11,13; Isa 3:3 (both census and vanguard?). Other groups (unclear categories): Gen 18:24 (starting core); 1 Kgs 2:7,16-17 (men of sons of prophet); 13:7 (horsemen); 15:25 (rebels); Ezra 8:6 (accounting).

[43] This characterization is evident from Milgrom's own list. 1 Sam 6:19 at first seems to constitute an exception, but, in the end, a closer association of "seventy" with "rulers" may actually clarify the text and support its inclusion (since earlier manuscripts are nearly united on the number "seventy" alone with later ones adding "50,000" alongside), cf. Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary* (trans. J. S. Bowden; OTL; London: SCM, 1964), 61. It seems impossible to reconcile such a relatively small number with the "great slaughter" described in the later part of the verse *unless* the seventy smitten by God were of *higher status* than a general group of men from among the people of Beth-shemesh.

A full list of groups of "seventy" in MT: Gen 46:27; Ex 24:1,9; Num 11:16,24-25; Deut 10:22; Jdg 1:7; (8:14=77); 8:30; 9:2,18,24,56; (12:14=40+30=70); 1 Sam 6:19; 2 Kgs 10:1,6-7; Ezek 8:11; Ezra 8:7,18. (In both lists of "fifty" and "seventy," the examples from Ezra are noticeably more accounting-oriented, exceptions that prove the rule.)

[44] Milgrom, *Numbers*, 86.

[45] To be clear, the number seventy in Numbers 11 need not be read so intertextually, as though depending on a symbolic category across the corpus of the Hebrew Bible. It remains possible that the tighter category of "seventy elders" is a symbolic category on its own or even becomes one later and that connections within the biblical corpus need not be drawn across the whole nor on "seventy (people)" alone. The point here is that even if one *does* examine the connections through such a fine frame, the result is more descriptive than has been presented previously and in favor of saying *more not less* about the symbolic potential of "seventy" as a leadership collective. Drawn to its fullest potential, this renewed category of "seventy heads" suggests the Seventy of Numbers 11 could be understood as either a kind of set of kings under Moses or sons from him. This stretches the interpretative ability of the intertextual symbolism to its breaking point. Better to say that it

preponderant usage in MT alongside people might be more properly described as entailing a broad category of "authority" (including both familial and political categories) not just an "approximation." Indeed, Milgrom himself may not be opposed to such a conclusion. In Milgrom's typical "both-and" style, after stating the use of seventy as a typical number of "approximation," he affirms the "well attested" existence of "a council of seventy attached to a ruler" in the Ancient Near East.[46] It is, therefore, in the context of such inscriptions as the 8th-century B.C.E. mention of "Barrakab king of Yaudi" and his seventy "brothers" that Milgrom places the seventy "brothers" "princes/sons" in Jdg 9:5 and 2 Kgs 10:6 and sees the Sanhedrin as another iteration of this same style of "royal council." Familial or political authority seems to follow seventy everywhere.

While some nervousness about the possibility of numeric symbolism becoming its own world apart from the text (rather than supplying clarification of it) is appropriate, perhaps some balance is still possible where something more than approximation is allowed, without displacing it from its biblical milieu. The frequency with which "seventy" is applied to groups of familial and political authorities in MT is a balanced view worth acknowledging. Where "seventy" takes its meaning from intrabiblical usages (and keeps them close to their Hebrew and ANE cultural milieu), "approximation" is not our sole conclusion, *familial and political authority should be present.* This additional description provides an ideal symbolic category for those receiving Moses' authority. It is to this close connection to Moses that we now turn.

II. *Pseudo-Clementine's Seventy as "Pattern of Moses"*

The *Pseudo-Clementine* literature (*Ps.-Clem.*), in the recension we now have it, is most likely 4th-century in origin, but its assumed "basic document (*Grundschrift*)," from which both the *Homilies* (*Hom.*) and *Recognitions*

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lends a sense of authority (either political or familial) to the elders of Numbers 11 than to try to say exactly what *kind* (kings or sons).

[46]Milgrom, *Numbers*, 87, citing *KAI* and Weinfeld.

(*Recog.*) are thought to have been, at least in part, drawn from and built upon, may well originate from the 3rd-century.[47] Extensive levels of redaction and interpolation are widely accepted and are often deemed to warrant multi-level analysis as much as possible—with an eye toward the various layers of interpolation and dependencies beyond the basic document.[48] My analysis here corresponds to scholarly consensus although it does not depend on it (or on any particular theory of textual generation or emendation). The example in *Ps.-Clem.* which corresponds with our focus on seventy as a "pattern of Moses" occurs within an "emended" section of *Recog.* while a more explicit use of the seventy of Numbers 11 resides within (what is presumed to be) another emendation, the *Epistula Petri* and *Contestio,* and will be addressed later.[49]

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[47] Johannes Irmscher and Georg Strecker, "The Pseudo-Clementines," in *New Testament Apocrypha* (ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher and Edgar Hennecke; trans. Robert McLachlan Wilson; 2 vols., rev. ed.; Cambridge: James Clarke, 1992), 2:485. Many, including Strecker, now consider the *Grundschrift* to be equated to a proposed, Κηρύγματα Πέτρου (ΚΠ). I will continue to refer to the older nomenclature since it communicates more readily to the non-specialist and keeps some distance from a debate that need not concern us here. Note: ΚΠ should not be confused with *Pre. Pet.*, also known as *Kerygma Petri* (KP, or κήρυγμα Πέτρου), Wilhelm Schneemelcher, "Kerygma Petri," in *New Testament Apocrypha* (ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher and Edgar Hennecke; trans. Robert McLachlan Wilson; 2 vols., rev.; Cambridge: James Clarke, 1992), 2:34–41.

[48] Due to discussions concerning the separate origins of sections of *Recognitions* from those in *Homilies*, I generally choose to refer to them separately rather than under the blanket term, *Ps.-Clem.*

[49] See Chapter 5. While I am pre-disposed to handle the sections separately for purposes of presentation, I am dependent on Irmscher and Strecker for this proposed differentiation at the redactional level. Specifically, while Hilgenfeld sees *Recognitions* 1.40 as part of the ΚΠ, Strecker cites with approval the reconstruction theory he shares with Bayschlag, Martyn, and Pratscher which assigns our relevant context, *Recognitions* 1.33-44b (and 1.53bβ-71), to "a second Jewish-Christian source-writing" (emended to the putative ΚΠ). Because it parallels Ἀναβαθμοὶ Ἰακώβου (=AJ I) "with which it has a basis (=AJ) in common, it is called the AJ II-source…," Irmscher and Strecker, "Pseudo-Clementines," 2:489.

Note: Ἀναβαθμοὶ Ἰακώβου (AJ I), *apud* Epiphanius, *Adv. Haer.* 30.16.6-9. ET, "{30.16.7} They lay down certain aspects and instructions in the supposed 'Ascents of James,' as though he were giving orders against the temple and sacrifices, and the fire on the altar—and much else that is full of nonsense," Epiphanius, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis: Book 1 (Sects 1-46)* (trans. Frank Williams; 2nd ed.; NHMS 63; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 144. Ἀναβαθμοὶ Ἰακώβου should not be confused with *Ladder of Jacob* (*Lad. Jac.*/LadJac), i.e. "Epiphanius is referring to a 'Ladder of Jacob (the Apostle).'…In contrast to LadJac, Epiphanius' 'Ladder of Jacob' concerns the Temple, sacrifices, and fire on the altar," in H.G. Lunt, "Ladder of Jacob," in *OTP*, 2:404n2.

As part of its broader goal (in Strecker's words) to "sketch a history of salvation – from Abraham to the Church in Jerusalem,"[50] *Recog.* 1.27–39 provides descriptions of Creation, Adam, Noah, Abraham, the Exodus, the altar, the (temporary) sacrificial system, Israel's failure to obey, the death of Moses, and baptism a replacement for sacrifices. According to *Ps.-Clem.* 1.40.3 (in the voice of the Apostle Peter), all these things were set in order by God, in part at least, to set the stage for Israel to believe in the Prophet of God, foretold by Moses (Deut 18:14–15), who is likewise equated to the Christ. But "though they had been trained during so many ages to the belief of these things….not only did they not believe, but they added blasphemy to unbelief," accusing Christ of sin. He continues, mapping the way forward for salvation,

> …but for the Wisdom of God assisting those who love the truth, almost all would have been involved in impious delusion. Therefore He chose us twelve [Peter and the other eleven], the first who believed in Him, whom He named apostles; and afterwards other *seventy-two* most approved disciples, that, at least in this way recognising the *pattern of Moses* (*imagine Moysei*), the multitude might believe that this is He of whom Moses foretold, the Prophet that was to come.[51]

At one level, this is a rather unremarkable passage. In addition to the number of OT-based characters, events, and institutions, which projected the coming of Jesus as the Christ, here *Recog.* reminds us that the NT (specifically Luke 10:1, 17) shows a kind of "reaching back" that Jesus performed in order to signal his alignment with other aspects of the OT. We may note a similarity to other patristic interpreters for whom intertextual relationships across the *scopus* of the two-testament Christian Bible often creates the interpretative frame for understanding what "seventy" means here.[52] Where others are shy to say that Jesus

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[50] Irmscher and Strecker, "Pseudo-Clementines," 2:489. See Chapter 5.

[51] *Recognitions of Clement* 1.40.3-4 (*ANF* 8:88), emphasis added. Latin: Bernhard Rehm and Franz Paschke, *Die Pseudoklementinen II: Rekognitionen in Rufinus Übersetzung* (GCS 51; Berlin: Akademie, 1965), 32. All ET of *Recog.* from *ANF* and Latin from *GCS*, unless otherwise indicated.

[52] E.g. Cyril of Alexandria provides one of the most extensive patristic interpretations of the Seventy of Numbers 11. On his approach: "[T]he literal sense [of the OT] does not always admit of spiritual meanings…[for Cyril of Alexandria] one should select only such elements susceptible

purposely intended to fulfill the number seventy by choice (i.e. acting out on purpose, not just by happenstance), *Recog.* presses forward without hesitation.[53] This aspect is unique but perhaps not especially remarkable.

What stands out more is the idea that seventy-*two* might mark the "pattern of Moses." Where in the OT is Moses ever associated with seventy-*two*? In the life of Moses in the Pentateuch as we have it (which is very likely in substance the same text as the LXX Pentateuch of the 3rd and 4th-centuries C.E.), the only two incidents which approximate this kind of account are those already mentioned: Exodus 24 and Numbers 11. In both cases, there is no indication in the extended critical edition of the LXX of any variant reading which would render for *Ps.-Clem.* "seventy-two" instead of "seventy" in these stories.[54] For something in the NT which is supposed to signal openly (albeit symbolically) to all Israel, this is surprisingly opaque (at least, initially).

It is possible that this Clementine "error" occurs from a growing strength in Christian circles of "seventy-two" as the proper Mosaic number. Such a reading might grow, first of all, from the "seventy-two" variant of Luke 10,[55] alongside

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of proving Christ's mystery which fit in with the σκοπός [purpose of that sacred writer] and are likely to profit hearers," Alexander Kerrigan, *St. Cyril of Alexandria: Interpreter of the Old Testament* (AnBib; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1952), 367, cf. 88. For Cyril, this meant seeing more about Moses' knowledge of the salvation to come than Christ's enactment of it: Ὁ δὲ τὸ τοῦ Χριστοῦ προαναθρῶν μυστήριον,… (PG 69:465A) (ET, "But [Moses] perceiving the mystery of Christ beforehand,…"). All ET of Cyril, mine, but with acknowledged and significant assistance from Matthew Crawford; for related, see his recent *Cyril of Alexandria's Trinitarian Theology of Scripture* (OECS; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[53] Cyril's approach to Numbers 11 is a profitable comparison: his extensive and deliberate numerological approach to Numbers 11 (cf. *Glaphyra* (PG 460-6), where he sees the number seventy as symbolizing "perfection (τελείῳ)" (PG 69:464C) due to (a) the unfolding of salvation and (b) through the Spirit alone, which altogether signals (c) the unfolding plan of salvation yet to come. Seventy as "perfection" also works within his broader symbolic system (cf. his work on Noah, PG 69:65D). Unlike *Ps. Clem.*, for Cyril, without the Seventy of Numbers 11, the disciples could not come to existence, but neither could the Seventy have significance without the disciples (PG 69:464D).

[54] John William Wevers, ed., *Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum, Bd. II, 1, Exodus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 276–8.

[55] Significant manuscripts, Codices Vaticanus (B) (4th-cent. C.E.), Bezae Cantabrigiensis (D) (5th-cent. C.E.), and papyprus 𝔓75 (3rd-cent. C.E.) of Luke 10:1,17 notably reflect Jesus' selection as ἑβδομήκοντα δύο. The idea that LXX Genesis 10's seventy-two might be a significant antecedent to other mentions is an intriguing suggestion, one more complex than Snaith avers. For more on the manuscript evidence for the textual variant, ἑβδομήκοντα δύο, see Bruce M. Metzger,

the ubiquity of the story of the seventy-two translators of the LXX in *Aristeas*[56] and readings of Exodus 24 and/or Numbers 11 as presenting seventy-plus-two, i.e. seventy plus Nadab & Abihu (Ex 24:1) or Eldad & Medad (Num 11:26). Despite the obliqueness of these options as OT "readings," they are not wholly unsupported within Jewish tradition,[57] and, by at least the 4th-century C.E., we have evidence of flexibility in Christian interpretation regarding use of the OT in typological readings.[58] Nevertheless, the idea of "seventy-plus-two" in these pentateuchal passages is never a completely comfortable one.[59] Alternatively, *Recog.* could be working out of its more Jewish mode (cf. *Sifre* 95),[60] by

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"Seventy or Seventy-Two Disciples?," *NTS* 5 (1959): 299–306. Prompted by what he sees as *Ps.-Clem.*'s connection between Luke 10 and Numbers 11, Norman Snaith gets completely muddled (incl. mistaken arithmetic and implying a *NT* variant is "Hebrew") trying to connect these NT variants to MT and LXX counts of the nations (seventy and seventy-two, respectively) and to Ex 24:1 and Num 11:24, 26, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 229.

[56] Or in Christian sources like Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, cf. Abraham Wasserstein and David J. Wasserstein, *The Legend of the Septuagint: From Classical Antiquity to Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 98–103. Despite the now common nomenclature, "Septuagint," both Jews and Christians received the legend with "seventy-two" interpreters as symbolically appropriate. Whether title ("seventy") or number ("seventy-two") came first is impossible to say, Sylvie Honigman, *The Septuagint and Homeric Scholarship in Alexandria* (London: Routledge, 2003), 58.

[57] *Mek.* Ex 18:18 [ET: 2:282] "seventy elders" agreed; "also" = "Aaron" or "Nadab and Abihu."

[58] Regarding "seventy-two," see Epiphanius *De Fide* 4.5. Similarly, see Jobling, *Sense*, 65. From a more structuralist perspective, he sees Exodus 24 and Numbers 11 as including, Moses, Aaron, "and two other named individuals!" Jobling fails to acknowledge that two pairs are presented in the passage, "Nadab and Abihu" (24:9) *and* "Aaron and Hur" (24:14), cf. Gilles Dorival, "La Bible Des Septante: 70 Ou 72 Traducteurs?," in *Tradition of the Text: Studies Offered to Dominique Barthélemy in Celebration of His 70th Birthday* (ed. Gerard J. Norton and Stephen Pisano; OBO 109; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz, 1991), 56–57.

[59] Especially considering how often these particular "plus twos" may be kept at a *distance* from their respective "seventies'"(e.g. Nadab and Abihu for their later failure in Leviticus 10, Eldad and Medad for their heightened humility or continuing, versus ceased, prophesying). *Recognitions* may be profitably contrasted with Basil the Great, *Holy Spirit*, 93–94. Basil sharply distinguishes between the prophesying of the seventy (ceasing) and Eldad and Medad (continuing). Basil's (4th century) reading is close to rabbinic writers (cf. *b. Sanhedrin* 17a; *Num. Rab.* 15.19; *Sifre* 95). For more on the place of Eldad and Medad in Christian tradition, see Dorival, "70 Ou 72," 59.

[60] Neusner dates *Sifre* between 3rd and 7th-cent. C.E., Jacob Neusner, *Sifré to Numbers: An American Translation and Explanation, Volume 1* (BJS 118; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), ix.

By contrast, the rabbis (e.g. *Sifre* 95, *b. Sanh.* 17a, *Num. Rab.* 15.19, *Midrash Esfah; Tanhuma, ad loc.*) feel no need to justify their choice of six as the obvious multiplier. Their concern was more to understand how Moses would be able to choose a number of men *other* than seventy-two since seventy would, by nature of its indivisibility by 12, necessitate a slight against one or more tribes.

Likewise, Calvin considers the need for representation a governmental one (just like the Roman *Centumviri*), now adumbrated for symbolic connection to the eponymous "seventy"

presuming seventy-two (six-times-twelve) as the number implied by the pentateuchal texts—even if the final number recorded is indeed "seventy" and even if seventy-two is never considered *more* symbolic than seventy.[61]

Some combination of these is likely at work. Since the text here starts from an affirmation of Jesus' call of "seventy-two most approved disciples [*probatissimos discipulos*]," we may safely assume it is working with a NT tradition which preserves "seventy-two" as the correct number.[62] From there, it is possible that *Recog.* would feel the need to recall an implied "seventy-plus-two" in order to synchronize the testaments. If any biblical story is being recalled it is probably Numbers 11,[63] but other factors are likely involved.

Perhaps, it would not be surprising, for Ebionite or Jewish-Christians reading the NT as a more continuous fulfillment of the OT to *recall* instinctively (but not *read*) Israel's Scriptures as more harmonious to one version of the NT text than is actually present in the OT text, especially when the number has such symbolic strength in Judaism. Bruce Metzger suggests that just such a prominence

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descendants of Jacob (in MT Gen 46:27; Ex 1:5); for his full argument, see Calvin, *Commentaries*, 3:316–8; 4:26–28. For a similar concern to Calvin's, also finding some bearing in Numbers 11, see Peter Damian's use of Numbers 11 to assuage concerns of Simony, appealing to *ex opere operato*, Peter Damian (1007-1072), *Liber gratissimus* [*Letter 40*].

[61] Within Christian tradition, the Greek text is known as *Septuaginta* not *Septuaginta duo*. Rabbinic texts consistently cite seventy-two translators (*b. Meg.* 9a-b; *Soferim* 1.7-8; *Yalqut Shimoni* Gen 2-3; *Midrash Ha-Gadol* Ex 4:20) but refer to "the story of Ptolemy the King," *b. Meg.* 9a-b (or "changes for Ptolemy the king," *y. Meg.* 71D), not "the story of the seventy-two," when discussing the event, or the "Torah in Greek" for the text itself, cf. Wasserstein and Wasserstein, *Legend*, 55–83.

Also, while our current example from *Ps.-Clem.* features "seventy-two," other places in the Clementine literature more prominently feature "seventy." Additionally, the Eastern Orthodox Church tradition recognizes both the "Seventy apostles" and the "seventy-two" who are entrusted with the true Trinitarian Gospel; cf. (Ps.-)Hippolytus, *On the Seventy Apostles* (*ANF* 5:255-6); Demetrius of Rostov, "The Synaxis of the Seventy Apostles," in *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints, Vol. 5: January* (trans. Thomas Maretta; House Springs, Mo.: Chrysostom, 2002), 113–35. Obviously, this tradition is also able to take advantage of the NT textual variation that more seamlessly connects with the OT text.

[62] *Recog.* 1.40.

[63] Cp. the uncritical suggestion of J. H. Crehan, "Theology and Rite, A.D. 200-400," in *The Study of Liturgy* (ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold; London: SPCK, 1978), 305–6.

of Jewish symbolism may actually account for the NT variant to begin with.[64] He is likely right, but tracing the relationships between six-times-twelve, seventy-two, and seventy is more complex than he supposes.[65] Whatever the reason, we can safely say that a symbolic imagination is at work here more strongly than a *reading* of textual variants. In the end, we are left with seventy-two as at least as symbolic as seventy, or more so since it has the power to override express wording in the OT text.

Further support for a symbolic imagination at work is evidenced by *Recog.* 1.34, where *Ps.-Clem.* portrays the typology of Jacob's descendants as "seventy-two (*septuaginta duo*)" instead of the "seventy-five" or "seventy" in Gen 46:27; Ex 1:5; Deut 10:22.[66] The reference obviously precedes the typology in 1.40 and creates a seamless cross-testament connection to Exodus 24 and Numbers 11, despite a lack of OT support. This connection to Jacob is stronger in reflections on the Hebrew text, but here, seventy-two repeatedly presents itself as a logical, potent, and sufficient numerical symbol in later symbolism, even where it is not present as such in the OT text.

Despite this surprising equation of seventy-two with the "pattern of Moses," the logic inherent in such a move is instructive. While the genitive construction "of Moses (*Moysei*)" grammatically might indicate a "pattern (*imagine*)" which is simply recorded by Moses, *Recog.* indicates a correspondence

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[64] Metzger, "Seventy-Two?," 302–5. Metzger considers seventy-two may be more original because of its occurrence in diverse text types and because seventy is more likely an adjustment of seventy-two than the other way around.

[65] I.e. Persistent *mentions* of seventy-two as *generally* symbolic is not a sufficient explanation for why it should emerge when it does. It is hard to imagine Calvin, for example, arguing for a "general agreement" about his putative "six-times-twelve" arrangement had not just such a suggestion found its way into the early rabbinic literature, *Commentaries*, 4:26. "Six-times-twelve" most likely began in *Aristeas* (or prior) as a rationale for a previous use of "seventy-two," i.e. as an authoritative council (or proto-Sanhedrin) configuration. For more, see below.

[66] No variants are listed for either 1.34 or 1.40, Rehm and Paschke, *Rekognitionen*, 32. Most would not draw on this strand of precedent because the LXX has, instead, "seventy-five"(Gen 46:27, ἑβδομήκοντα πέντε, cf. Acts 7:14; Ex 1:5, πέντε καὶ ἑβδομήκοντα, except Aeth^{C} ἑβδομήκοντα), cf. Brevard S. Childs, *Exodus: A Commentary* (OTL; London: SCM, 1974), 2. Note: The ἑβδομήκοντα ψυχαῖς of Deut 10:22 breaks up the parallel in the LXX (most versions); however, see Codex Alexandrinus (A) of Deut 10:22 for ἑβομήκοντα πέντε as a continuation. Hebrew has "seventy" for all three.

not between Jesus' seventy(-two) and Moses' *record* (i.e. of incidents in the Pentateuch) but his *person*. Unlike the "Mosaic institutions (*Moysei institutis*)" discussed in the preceding chapters (e.g. sacrifices and holy places, *Recog.* 1.39), the "pattern" to which Jesus appeals in 1.40 is not one only established *by* him but *around* him. The pattern is a *personal* one, something by Moses and about Moses, which is repeated by Jesus and about Jesus. By repeating the same *behavior* as Moses, *Recog.* portrays Jesus as saying something about himself—that "this is He of whom Moses foretold, the Prophet that was to come," (1.40) "the Prophet whom Moses foretold, who is the eternal Christ" (1.43).[67]

Jesus says this about himself not just by *associating* himself with the symbolic number seventy-two in some other way, but by actually *calling* seventy-two disciples to himself. *Recognitions'* very next chapter begins by asking what *else* Jesus *did* to prove himself since "it is possible for anyone to imitate a number (*imitari numerum*)" (1.41). It answers by describing the kinds of works and wonders which Moses and Jesus both performed. For *Recog.,* Jesus' claim as the Christ is thus primarily dependent on how Jesus *acts* like Moses, first in Jesus' enacting (or "imitating") the number of called disciples, then in his miracles and wonders like Moses. *Ps.-Clem.* puts forward to show how Jesus is "a prophet like unto [Moses]" (*Recognitions* 1.41; cf. Deut 18:15).[68]

It is thus particularly Moses' action *in Numbers 11* that *Recog.* highlights. Although the "pattern of Moses" may be *numerically* associated with both Exodus 24 *and* Numbers 11, only Numbers 11:24b indicates *Moses* gathering seventy. For *Recog.*, Numbers 11 and Luke 10 thus demonstrate key moments in the lives of Moses and Jesus. Though not many would likely cite such passages in lists of key events in the life of either, *Recog.* holds the event of Numbers 11 as so *recognizably* significant in the life of Moses that when Jesus repeats it, it acts as a

[67] Cf. Deut 18:14-15.

[68] A proper look at what *Luke 10* might be doing typologically would need to dig deeper into the surrounding narrative and associations implied—authority, prophetic speech-acts (shaking dust from feet), public proclamation (in his name; cf. Deut 18:19), and their reception history (inclusive of the Twelve) as tradents of the Jesus-tradition.

navigable point of entry toward the truth about his Messiahship and the salvation of Israel—one of only two aspects which clearly demonstrate Jesus' status as the Prophet foretold by Moses and in his likeness.

As tempting as it may be to transport aspects of the elders onto the identity of the seventy-two disciples (or vice versa), the impulse should likely be resisted. The elders of Numbers 11 cannot be said to be sent-missionaries like the disciples, nor can the disciples in Luke 10 be sustained as recipients of the (divine) spirit upon/of Jesus (although they do perform wonders by *some* means) or meeting Jesus' need in the same way the elders can for Moses. Even where the gathering of the disciples is, for *Recog.*, demonstrating something significant for "the multitude" (i.e. that they might believe), it is not possible to say that demonstration is the "pattern of Moses" (even if, in Numbers 11, public wonders may be found, i.e. gathered elders, descending cloud, and centrality of the tent of meeting, cp. Ex 19:7-10; 33:7-11). At most, we may equate some qualities of the "elders," "scribes," and "disciples."[69]

Something draws these two passages together—the gathering of the appropriate number, I think, certainly. Could it also be in what they were gathered to *do*? I propose they the Seventy, *both* of Numbers 11 and Luke 10, may be seen as *"tradition-bearers,"* i.e. those able to be entrusted with authority and knowledge from the figure they are gathered with.[70] Where the "Church owes its existence" to the preaching and interpretation of the resurrection of

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[69] It is notable (and at first surprising) that the lack of the term "elders (πρεσβύτεροι)" in Luke 10 does not dissuade *Ps.-Clem.* from the parallel. "Elders" may have come to mind for the Gospel-writer, but due to pejorative connotations with persecuting Jewish authorities in that setting, he used a different term. Notice the shift to a more positive usage in Acts 11:30; esp. 14:23.

David Pao and Eckhard Schnabel include Numbers 11 and Genesis 10-11 as the two most likely texts to which Luke is alluding, cf. "Luke," in *Commentay on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 316–7.

[70] E.g. Papias' emphasis on those elders (πρεσβύτεροι) who knew living tradition-bearers of Jesus, *apud* Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.3-4 (LCL, Lake, ET modifed),

> I did not rejoice in them who…recount the commandments of others, but in them who repeated those given from the Lord by faith (τῇ πίστει) and derived from truth itself; but if anyone came who had followed the elders (τοῖς πρεσβυτέροις), what…any of the Lord's disciples had said,…For I did not suppose that information from books would help me so much as the word of a living voice and survivor.

Jesus,[71] one could similarly argue, Israel owes her fundamental identity to the preaching and interpretation of the law of Moses. Both depend on a "handing on" of the interpretation given to them, placing their tradents in places of fundamental importance. Reflecting on this process in Christianity, Bienert notes,

> This handing on…is however for its part something wrought by God. The risen Lord himself selected his messengers…invested them with power through the gift of his Spirit, and sent them into the world. The apostles are thus not solely the direct eye-witnesses for a historical event, essential for its reliable transmission, but at the same time ambassadors (cf. 2 Cor. 5:20) and interpreters of this event…, which they now hand on with the authority of the Spirit of God…. They are…*bearers* of divine revelation….[72]

While Bienert focuses on the selection by "the risen Lord" (probably to include Paul in the scenario), *Ps.-Clem.* appropriately draws our attention to the (perhaps even greater) importance of the selection of the Seventy(-two) *prior* to Jesus' death and resurrection, thus providing substantial continuity to the interpretative perspective and message of the apostles, i.e. they can bear witness to his message and his person on both sides of his death. For our purposes, we might well re-read Bienert's description of the apostles as tradition-bearers (and interpreters of Easter) and ask: What of it does not apply as well to the elders of Numbers 11? Selected by the Lord himself, empowered with his Spirit, reliable bearers of proper interpretation, are all germane. Only their sending out "into the world" seems out of place, and even there, something of the purpose of the Seventy may well be to carry the interpretation of Moses "into the land."

To make the case fully for a parallel between the Seventies as tradition-bearers in Numbers 11 *and* Luke 10 would require saying more about Luke than we can afford to address here, but, for now, we may simply note how "elders" in Numbers 11 enables a category for parallel with the disciples which would not be possible without it. It is not likely that Luke 10 or *Recognitions* would have

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[71] Wolfgang A. Bienert, "The Picture of the Apostle in Early Christian Tradition," in *New Testament Apocrypha* (ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher and Edgar Hennecke; trans. Robert McLachlan Wilson; 2 vols., rev. ed.; Cambridge: James Clarke, 1992), 2:15.
[72] Ibid., 2:15, emphasis added.

recognized the "pattern of Moses" around a number alone. *Recognitions'* descriptor of the disciples as *probatissimos* ("most approved," 1.40) highlights this concern and provides something of a baseline association between elders and disciples. In short, the actions of Moses and Jesus are parallel accounts of the personal gathering of seventy(-two) *worthy* followers (tradition-bearers) around a figure.

Finally, for *Recog.*, this personal worth is also closely associated with the person of Moses. They are anonymous, worthy individuals, but they are significant to *Recog.*'s view of the story of the OT because they are gathered by Moses to himself; they are a "pattern" around him and about him. Further, because Moses' *prophetic* authority is projected past his death (in this case, via Deut 18:15), the significance of the pattern is also projected beyond his lifetime, i.e. because Moses "lives on," so does the pattern. Thus, whether we accept *Recog.*'s *typological* view of this pattern (i.e. as Christian fulfillment), its ability to point to the pattern and its mnemonic appeal prompts us to consider not just other seventies but other seventies of worthy individuals (around a single authority), e.g. Ex 24:1,9; Ezek 8:11; *Aristeas*; *m. Sanh.* 7:1. As a halo formed by and around him, they may yet signify him and his authority beyond his lifetime.

Recognitions highlights (1) the ability for Numbers 11 to signal seventy-two is at least as potent a symbol as seventy in Christian reflections (albeit under the influence of a NT variant, but probably not just that) and (2) the act of gathering "seventy-two most approved disciples" (1.40) around Moses as signaling a personal and potentially institutional relationship with the elders of Numbers 11 and Moses.

Ramban: Seventy as Council of "All Opinions/Powers"

As we have seen, frequently recollections of seventy, implicitly or explicitly, benefit from mnemonic associations with other seventies, and especially mentions

of seventy elders. When Ramban (1194–1270)[73] sees "seventy," his frame is similar, but tuned in a slightly different way. He sees not only a numbered group of people but a *configuration*, a council, whose formation emerges from the corners of the biblical text but whose imaginative re-construction compels consideration, especially as it matches other, previous portraits of seventy as a set number appropriate to those gathered around a single authoritative source, beginning with Moses.

Ramban's use of intertextuality with Num 11:16 is unique. In part, it stems from his abilities to carve his own path in determining what he thinks is the driving force of any particular passage.[74] This sensitivity to a kind of narrative of the passage frees him from an overly onerous duty to exploit every philological nuance, as is sometimes true for Rashi, while maintaining a spiritual sensitivity that often escapes ibn Ezra, both his predecessors. Perhaps most important is his ability to navigate (and critically draw from) the Spanish Kabbalah of his day.[75] The result is an intertextuality which draws not only from the passage and its biblical inter-connections but also outside the Bible in a way which still significantly draws one's attention to the exegetical task. His kabbalistic awareness of seventy veers close to gematria, but his exposition of seventy is still closely related to the narrative of the chapter, to other related biblical passages, and to the elders in particular.

Ramban repeatedly focuses his attention on "this number (המספר הזה)" (sc. seventy), but his specific description of seventy is not really possible without his presupposition of its *conciliar shape*. At the core of Ramban's approach is a

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[73] Also known as Nachmanides or Moses ben Nachman, cf. Joseph Kaplan, "Nahmanides," *EncJud* 14:739–40.

[74] Tovia Preschel provides a clear, brief summary of Ramban's approach, "Nahmanides: As Biblical Commentator," *EncJud* 14:740–1.

[75] E.g. Ramban's comments on Num 11:14 include a section which is explicitly kabbalistic, beginning with the signal ועל דרך האמת and ending with והמשכיל יבין. All Hebrew and ET of Ramban are from ArtScroll edition; I have removed the emended vowel-points and have used *italics*/plain text (rather than plain/bold text) to indicate English emendation/original Hebrew and square brackets for my comments. Ramban, *Bamidbar*, here, 212; on vowel–points, xvii. For comparing Ramban ET's: *Bamidbar* = ArtScroll; *Numbers* = Ramban, *Commentary on the Torah: Numbers* (trans. Charles Chavel; Brooklyn, N.Y.: Shilo, 1975).

view of seventy as a number which "for this number contains within it all {possible} viewpoints, by virtue of its including all {human} powers."[76] His basis for this view is a traditional rabbinic take on the foundational story of the "seventy nations" in Genesis 10–11,

> Our Sages…have mentioned that there are seventy nations *in the world*, with seventy languages.[77] And each one *of these nations* has a constellation in the heavens and a *heavenly* minister [or "prince"][78] above (ושר למעלה כענין) *which determine its affairs* [as in Dan 10:13].[79]

Where some interpreters might see this range of diversity expressed in seventy as diffusive, Ramban sees it as comprehensive. Pictorially, we might say that *rather than facing the nations of the world in a circle arranged outward* (and with further extension, filling the earth), Ramban *arranges the nations of the world inward, toward one another and in representative assembly*.[80]

As he mentions, Ramban's conception of seventy as symbolic of all the nations of the earth is not unique to him. In *b. Sanh.* 17a–b descriptions for the qualifications for members of its seventy(-one) member Sanhedrin are described,[81] one of which is that they *each* speak *all* "seventy languages" of the world.[82] The same "seventy languages" is also related in *Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer* (*PRE*) §24.

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[76] כי המספר הזה יכלל כל הדעות בהיותו כולל כל הכחות, Ramban, *Bamidbar*, 212.
[77] cf. *b. Sanhedrin* 17a.
[78] Chavel's translation, Ramban, *Numbers*, 101.
[79] Ramban, *Bamidbar*, 211–12. Ramban further links Dan 10:20 (another reference to a "prince" above a nation), Isa 24:21 (angelic princes over all nations), and Num 29:13–16 via *b. Sukkah* 55b (i.e. seventy bulls represent a feast for the seventy nations outside Israel).
[80] By "representative," I do not mean to entail the kind of proportional ratios suggested by others (preserving tribal voices or a proportional size per member), cf. Gressmann in 79n35 above. In keeping with Ramban's vision, seventy voices together express the symbolic totality of what might be expressed by the languages of the world (totality of membership = totality of body). No voice is left unrepresented. Whatever the true consitutents of the world, their symbolic "wholeness" is what matters. To wit, *all powers are given and held accountable by God; none are excluded and the end cannot said to be nigh until the total has been accounted.* Taking such a view allows us to make connections Ramban misses or did not have access, e.g. the "seventy shepherds" of *1 Enoch* 89.59–90.26, which may represent a symbolic whole rather than constitutive subgroups.
[81] A number based on Num 11:16, cf. *m. Sanh.* 1:6. The reason for the same number for both the membership of the council and the numbers of languages will be clarified by our discussion below.
[82] All ET of Talmud, mine, unless otherwise indicated. All Babylonian Talmud text from Vilna edition, *Talmud Bavli* (17 vols.; Vilna: Romm, 1890).

Ramban cites *PRE* explicitly and then proceeds to use this legend as the rationale for the seventy as a council:

> And in *Pirkei Rabbi Eliezer we find as well*: The Holy One, blessed is He, said to the seventy angels (מלאכים)[83] who surround His Throne of Glory: "Come and let us confuse their language" (*Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer* Ch. 24). And for this *reason* the number of those who went down to Egypt was seventy, and *God* commanded *that* this *be the* number of the judges (בשופטי ישראל) of Israel, for this number contains within it all *possible* viewpoints, by virtue of its including all *human* powers since it comprises all powers, and, *as a result* nothing will be hidden from them (ולא יפלא מהם כל דבר) [cf. Deut 17:8].[84]

In addition to being typically dense with allusion, this type of intertextual maneuvering draws out each connected passage for its maximum impact on the text.[85] His willingness to connect not only Genesis 10, 11, and 46:27,[86] but Num 29:13-16 (the seventy bulls at Sukkot), Exodus 24, and Numbers 11, shows an eye not only for seventies but also the possible comprehensive and conciliar logic behind them. What makes Ramban's moves possible here is his assumption that the seventy nations of the earth not only have angelic *representatives* in heaven but that those same nations were *created* according to their "princes (שרים)" above. Ramban receives this view from *PRE* and other rabbis before him, but it is well represented in other works and spheres as well.[87] The *key text* for this midrash is Deut 32:7-9,[88]

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[83] Note: Chavel incorrectly translates this "kings," Ramban, *Numbers*, 102.
[84] Ramban, *Bamidbar*, 212. Literally: "Nothing will be too marvellous for them."
[85] Perhaps as expected from one who engages Kabbalah.
[86] Also, see MT Ex 1:5 and Deut 10:22.
[87] *PRE*'s translator, Friedlander, helpfully notes some parallels in Augustine, *Civ.* 16.5-6; Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 6.17; and *Recog.* 2.42; cf. Gerald Friedlander, trans., *Pirke de Rabbi Eliezer* (New York: Hermon, 1965), 176n10. (All ET of *PRE* from Friedlander unless otherwise indicated.) Of course, a *biblical* conception in Deuteronomy of seventy as council likely derives, not from intertextual reflection but some antecedent cultural form (see above). Intrabiblical connections reflect Israel's adoption and process of granting their own *meaning* to the symbol. The greater the number and clarifying ability of those connections, the greater we may suppose Israel's level of adoption and attribution of significance.
[88] We might briefly note that Deut 32:7 is also cited in relationship to the Seventy of Numbers 11, in *Sifre Deut* 310, making this pericope worth our attention for additional reasons, cf. Steven D. Fraade, *From Tradition to Commentary: Torah and Its Interpretation in the Midrash Sifre to Deuteronomy* (SUNYSJ; Albany, N.Y.: SUNY Press, 1991), 75–76.

[7]Remember the days of old,	זכר ימות עולם
Consider the years of ages past;	בינו שנות דור־ודור
Ask your father, he will inform you,	שאל אביך ויגדך
Your elders, they will tell you:	זקניך ויאמרו לך
[8]When the Most High gave nations their homes[89]	בהנחל עליון גוים
And set the divisions of man,	בהפרידו בני אדם
He fixed the boundaries of peoples	יצב גבלת עמים
In relation to Israel's numbers.	למספר בני ישראל
[9]For the LORD's portion is His people,	כי חלק יהוה עמו
Jacob His own allotment	יעקב חבל נחלתו

Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer §24 cites MT Deut 32:8 explicitly: "the Most High gave the nations their inheritance." This is then contrasted with 32:9 where "the Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance."[90] Then, citing MT Ps 16:6 as support,[91] *PRE* suggests God cast lots with the angels and his own lot fell toward Israel, resulting in the allocations mentioned and the dispersion described in Gen 11:5. Some editions of *PRE* expand this tradition not only to account for seventy nations and languages[92] but also seventy styles of writing (a theme which occurs elsewhere in rabbinic tradition).[93] For *PRE* (and presumably for Ramban as well), this event of casting lots among the divine council is

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[89] Or, "inheritance," see below.

[90] Friedlander, 177, ET, modified, i.e. "lot" translates חבל, cf. S.R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy* (3d ed.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902), 356.

[91] "Delightful country has fallen to my lot (חבלים); lovely indeed is my estate," NJPS.

[92] In *b. Sotah* 33a, one view suggests angels can only understand certain languages (the language of their assigned nation?); only Gabriel (as God's messenger) knows them all (he teaches all seventy to Joseph).

[93] Friedlander states: "The first editions add: 'Each nation had its own writing and its own language, and He appointed an angel over each people….' Each nation had not only its own language but also its own peculiar style of writing," Friedlander, *PRE*, 177n6. This tradition also picked up in an oft-cited Talmudic explanation for the "square script" of the Hebrew Bible in *b. Sanh.* 21b,

> In the beginning, the Torah was given to Israel in Hebrew writing and in the holy language (בכתב עברי ולשון הקודש). He changed (חזרה) and gave it to them in the time of Ezra and in *Ashurith* [Assyrian] writing and the Aramaic language (בכתב אשורית ולשון ארמי). Israel chose the *Ashurith* writing and holy language for themselves. They left the Hebrew writing and the Aramiac language to the common people…, the Samaritans (כותאי). (ET, mine.)

There is some exegetical reason for this tradition, given the wording in Gen 11:1b, where the original languages and the "words" of the world are distinguished, שפה אחת ודברים אחדים. For a tradition about seventy-*five* languages (given the LXX variation in Deut 46:27), see Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.*, 1.21.

demonstratively proven by the use of the first person plural in Gen 11:7. As *PRE* says: "'I will go down' is not written here, but rather 'Let *us* go down.'"[94] Hence, *the divine council* was present and even required to be with God for the activity of dispersing the nations.

Ramban adds an additional insight that *PRE* does not make explicit. Namely, it reads the Hebrew of Deut 32:8 more closely and finds an affirmation *for a seventy member divine council* as connected to the story of *Jacob's descendants*. As mentioned, Ramban avers, "And for this *reason* the number of those who went down to Egypt was seventy." While this affirmation may at first seem *non sequitur*,[95] a closer examination of Deut 32:8 reveals God not only "gave the nations their inheritance" but also "set the boundaries of the peoples *according to the number of the sons of Israel*."[96] We can therefore understand that, for Ramban, Deut 32:8 testifies to God's choice to predetermine the number of the divine council according to the future number of Jacob/Israel's descendants which then results in the seventy nations of the earth.[97] *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* Deut 32:8 makes the same point more clearly,

> When the Most High gave *the world as* an inheritance to the nations which came forth from the sons of Noah, when He divided alphabets and tongues to the sons of men, he cast lots with the 70 angels, the princes of the nations..., and established the borders of the peoples according to the number of the 70 souls of Israel which went down into Egypt.[98]

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[94] ET of *PRE*, mine; ארדה אין כתיב כאן נרדה; Hebrew from: Dagmar Börner-Klein, *Pirke de-Rabbi Elieser: Nach der Edition Venedig 1544 unter Berücksichtigung der Edition Warschau 1852* (SJ 26; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 263, emphasis original.

[95] While consistently relying on the Hebrew in MT Gen 46:27, Ex 1:5, and Deut 10:22 as all seventies, Calvin utilizes a tradition passed to him of "six-times-twelve" (which, to him, signals a representative form of government), and he argues God's request for "seventy elders" was actually a request for seventy-two, the name "seventy" used only to better recall an Israelite history of blessed ancestry, *Commentaries*, 4:26–7.

[96] ET, mine, emphasis added.

[97] For connections between "Jacob's descendants" and the "sons of Israel," see Gen 46:5, 27; Deut 10:12 (Israel), 22 (seventy ancestors).

[98] As quoted in Driver, *Deuteronomy*, 355–6. Also, see Earnest G. Clarke, trans., *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Deuteronomy* (ArBib 5b; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 90. Clarke cites this passage's close relationship to *Tg. Ps.-J.* Deut 27:8,

> So you shall write on the stones all the words of this Law, *a writing engraved and distinct, read in one language and translated into seventy languages.*

To be sure, Ramban and *Tg. Ps.-J.* carry out the fullest version of the legend,[99] but we should note that it is one which has grown through intertextual reflection, rather than extra-biblical interpolation. Leaving off Jacob's descendants as the original number, the rest of this particular legend may also be confirmed through Qumran and LXX texts as well.[100] In both versions of Deut 32:8, the text (or *Vorlage*) indicates that God sets the number of nations according to "the number of the בני אלהים," i.e. "sons/angels of God," or "divine sons" (NETS), rather than the number of the "sons of Israel" (MT).[101]

Ultimately, we can see three versions of the legend. (1) *PRE* presumes "seventy angels" and supports this based on the first person plural address in Gen 11:7; viz. "let us go down" results in the seventy nations because Deut 32:8 tells us that God set their boundaries according to lots (חבל) cast. (The Table of Nations in MT Genesis 10 is implied but not stated.) (2) Ramban and *Tg. Ps.-J.* develop this alongside the Hebrew text and add a numeric correlation between the divine council, the Table of Nations, *and* Jacob/Israel's descendants, which implies a divine predetermination of the number of the divine council according to Jacob's descendants. (3) LXX and Qumran forego an association with Jacob's descendants and more directly affirm the source of the number of the nations as the result of a prior reality in the number of angelic counselors.

Mishnah Sotah 7:5 and *b. Sotah* 36a record the same command for writing at Ebal. Also, see *Tg. Ps.-J.* Genesis 10:8, [ET, Michael Maher, trans., *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis* (ArBib 1B; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1992), 50],

> *The Memra of* the Lord *was revealed against the city, and with it seventy angels corresponding to seventy nations, each having the language of his people and the characters of its writing in his hand.* He scattered them thence upon the face of all the earth *into seventy languages,…*

[99] For more, see Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (trans. Henrietta Szold and Paul Radin; 2 vols., 2nd ed.; JPSCR; Philadelphia: JPS, 2003), 1:158n72 [Gen 10].

[100] As Friedlander suggests, "The seventy nations with Israel form the human family. Israel has no guardian angel; God is the Guardian of Israel. See LXX, Deut. xxxii.8, for the earliest form of this Midrash," *PRE*, 176n10.

[101] Michael S. Heiser, "Deuteronomy 32:8 and the Sons of God," *BSac* 158 (2001): 52–3. Most LXX versions have: κατὰ ἀριθμὸν ἀγγέλων θεοῦ; some have: υἱῶν θεοῦ. 4QDeut[q] has (with a gap for more letters): [ ]בני אל; 4QDeut[j] has: בני אלוהים. Aquila, Symmachus (both codex X) and Theodotion agree with MT and have: υἱοὶ Ισραηλ. Heiser summarizes the text critical issues and cites other reasons for connecting Deut 32:8 with Genesis 10-11.

The upshot of all this backstory is that Ramban's approach describes a meaning for seventy that is conciliar and polyphonous from first to last: the nations of the earth, the descendants of Jacob, and the judges of Israel all consist of types of *councils of seventy* who need one another's opinion, perspective, or voice. Without the causal relationship between Jacob's descendants, angelic counsel, and seventy nations, each biblical example could exist as individual identities and with potentially different functions. For Ramban, because they are councils of *seventy*, grounded in the divine council of God and repeated in the Table of Nations, he feels confident to declare that seventy must therefore include every possible opinion and all possible powers (cf. "princes") in any situation. Since no opinion or information would be kept from the council of God and no power or perspective left unrepresented in the nations of the world, seventy is *the* number of "all opinions" and "all powers." He is therefore confident that when Deut 17:8–9 speaks of Israel's judges as being capable of *any decision*, it must knowingly imply they number seventy and have no opinion—no possible wisdom—left unknown to them. Ramban's sense of the meaning of seventy is implicitly conciliar and judicial,[102] and it works surprisingly well, if somewhat complexly. The core of the argument remains simple even where later attributes accumulate:[103] Seventy represents a council.

It is within this context, then, that Ramban arrives at the examples of seventy which we more readily expect: Exodus 24 and Numbers 11. For Ramban, it is no wonder that "at the giving of the Torah" (Exodus 24) there were "seventy of the elders of Israel" on whom "the glory of the Divine Presence" rested.[104] They are not simply the "judges of Israel"[105] but fitting recipients of both the "complete

[102] I say "judicial" because the seventy angels "rule" over the nations, and the earthly iteration of this divine reality is the council of seventy "judges," who similarly rule over Israel.
[103] E.g. How good they are; how they function; whether there is one "in heaven" around God or "on earth" in Israel around Moses, etc.
[104] Ramban, *Bamidbar*, 212.
[105] The conflation of "judges" and "elders" in Exodus 24 goes unremarked in Ramban. This is probably because he has the elder-judges of the Sanhedrin already in mind. Rabbinic interpreters typically presume the seventy elders *are* also judges by virtue of their similarity to the Sanhedrin (but not necessarily the reverse, i.e. not all judges are elders and members of the Sanhedrin). Cp.

[or "perfect"][106] number (במספר השלם הזה)" *and* "the glory of the Divine Presence…as it *rests* in the celestial camp (כאשר היא במחנה עליון)…For *the people of* Israel comprise God's legions on earth [cf. Ex 12:41]."[107] In this way, Ramban sees some numerological significance to seventy, but that symbolism is entwined with its *conciliar shape*,[108] i.e. since nearly every mention of "seventy" represents "all powers" and "all opinions" due to its origin in the divine council, "perfect" is a consequential adjective rather than an *a priori* one. Ramban's main objective is to support numerically his understanding of the seventy elders in Exodus 24 as like Jacob's descendants in their perfect/complete states and, moreover, that both of them are such because they are connected (albeit in slightly different ways) to the divine council.[109]

This understanding of the fundamental importance of the divine council and its relationship to seventy only grows as Ramban proceeds from Genesis and Exodus toward Numbers 11. For him, what sets Numbers 11 apart is the clear hierarchy of Moses over the Seventy, and this increases the parallel to the divine council. This headship of Moses as one over the many, he says, alludes to 2 Sam 7:23 ("And who is like your people, Israel, *the one nation in the earth* [גוי אחד בארץ], who God visited as a people and saved…").[110] Ramban's previous

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Louis Ginzberg reliably combines rabbinic lore to show a "seventy elders" *distinct* from, over, and prior to the lower appellate-style judges of Exodus 18 (who are also called "elders;" Numbers 11 selects a *subsequent* set of "seventy elders," following *Num. Rab.* 15.24), *Legends of the Jews*, 1:585–6. Steven Fraade depicts the early rabbinic sages as conceiving Ex 18:13-16; Num 11:16-25; Deut 1:9-18 as essentially synonymous, *Tradition*, 75. Also, cf. *b. Sanh.* 14b.

[106] Ramban, *Numbers*, 102.

[107] Ramban, *Bamidbar*, 212–13.

[108] Cp. Cyril, 85n53 above.

[109] Jacob's descendants are connected by Deut 32:8's affirmation of their predestined relationship; Exodus 24's Seventy are likewise because they are the first iteration of Israel's judges, which must also be seventy in order to have the same authority and complete knowledge that the divine council (and Jacob's descendants) have.

[110] Cp. Philo's conception of divine favor as synonymous with Israel's position as a "boundary people" (between God and the nations; heaven and earth), C.T.R. Hayward, "Philo, the Septuagint of Genesis 32:24-32 and the Name 'Israel': Fighting the Passions, Inspiration and the Vision of God.," *JJS* 51 (2000): 209–26; C.T.R. Hayward, "The One Who Sees God: Israel According to Philo of Alexandria," in *Interpretations of the Name Israel in Ancient Judaism and Some Early Christian Writings: From Victorious Athlete to Heavenly Champion* (Oxford: Oxford

presupposition that the Seventy of Exodus 24 exhibit God's command "*that* this [seventy] *be the* number of the judges of Israel," gives way to its more traditional articulation:

> [O]ur Sages [*b. Sanh.* 2a] received *by tradition* that every Great Sanhedrin (כל סנהדרי גדולה) - which sits in the Temple of God, "in the place that He will choose for His Presence" - should similarly be seventy in number, with the president (הנשיא)[111] over them, just as Moses our Teacher *was over the seventy elders,* and they are thus seventy-one *altogether.*[112]

The formal addition of Moses is not a light one. It does not just bring Israel closer to a pattern established in the heavens; it brings the Seventy of Numbers 11 into its final divine order, an order essential to its ontology as the earthly "legions" of God. Where other interpreters of Numbers 11 may see resonances and typologies to institutions later than the biblical one (e.g. Hellenistic Sanhedrin), Ramban sees *the same essential entity* in them all.[113] The Seventy *are the divine council on earth*, which then becomes the Sanhedrin of later generations.

Additionally, says Ramban, the rabbinic tradition of the seventy-two letters of the divine name can be understood as representing the "seventy princes (שרים)" (over the seventy nations) along with the one God, who is lord over all (and thus implying the additional presence of Israel to make seventy-two).[114] For Ramban, then, seventy, seventy-one, and seventy-two may all connect to the

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University Press, 2005), 156–93. The allusion here in 2 Sam 7:23 is likely intended to link with Ex 3:16b and Gen 50:24 and their uses of פקד in the context of Israel and salvation.

[111] In much rabbinic lore (but perhaps not as a historical reality), נשיא is a title for the president of the rabbinic Great Sanhedrin; cf. Hugo Mantel, *Studies in the History of the Sanhedrin* (HSS 17; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), 1–53.

[112] Ramban, *Bamidbar*, 213.

[113] Ramban may be indebted on this point to his predecessor Rambam (Maimonides; 1135-1204 C.E.) who (despite some similar moves in *Sifre* 92) articulates the continuous tradition of ordination more strongly than anyone else, see *The Code of Maimonides: Book 14, The Book of Judges* (trans. Abraham M. Hershman; YJS 3; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949), 13–16 [14.1.4.1].

[114] The tradition of the seventy-two letters of the divine name stems from the seventy-two letters of each verse of Ex 14:19-21. Kabbalistic uses of these verses charts them in such a way so as to reveal the additional seventy-two-lettered name of God (or seventy-two names of God when connected to Ex 14:19-21), as well, perhaps inscribed on the Urim and Thummim used for holy divination. See A.W. Greenup, trans., *Sukkah, Mishna and Tosefta* (TED/3; London: SPCK, 1925), 50n6; J.D. Eisenstein, "Names of God-In Rabbinical Literature," *Jewish Encyclopedia* 9:164.

council of elders and their re-presentation of the divine council on earth. The wobble between seventy and seventy-two thus continues as a theme even as they also signal different intertextual associations.[115] In Ramban's build-up through the Pentateuch, no other biblical institution functions with such a *similarity to the divine council as the Seventy of Numbers 11*. It is because of this similarity that he then finishes his commentary on Num 11:16 with warnings to Jewish judges.

In his conclusion, Ramban highlights the presence of God, using Ps 82:1-2. In these verses, the picture of God as ruler over the divine council is firmly established together with his authority to remove members from it as needed (as demonstrated, he says, in Ezek 28:1-19).[116] Where other interpreters call upon this same verse to pronounce the *presence of God* among the Great Sanhedrin,[117] Ramban affirms the correlation but focuses on the warning to the divine council as also an equal warning to its earthly counterpart.[118] His warning is not only a practical move but one which highlights the importance of the Great Sanhedrin as the contemporary (albeit only a literary) iteration of Num 11:16. So highly has Ramban placed the Seventy of Num 11:16 and the Great Sanhedrin that elder-judges may think they can do no wrong. Not so, warns Ps 82. The *presence of the Lord* is not only a *blessing* but a *warning*. This move parallels what may be considered the predominant theme of the book of Numbers and an important feature in Numbers 11: The presence of the Lord in the midst of the congregation is not only as blessing but also as dangerous warning toward righteous living.[119] Ramban's exegetical connections deepen and explore similar terrain to Numbers 11.

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[115] For more on the meaning of seventy-two, see below.

[116] Although he does not mention this, one would expect perhaps the story of the Tower of Babel to likewise qualify confidence in such a gathering.

[117] Julius Newman, *Semikhah (Ordination): A Study of Its Origin, History and Function in Rabbinic Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1950), vii.

[118] The effect is similar to *b. Sanh.* 6b's use, but he maintains his focus on the divine as the primary referent point.

[119] Perhaps no better example of this is in the sections prior to Kibroth-hattaavah, Num 10:1-11.3, where the Lord declares the very camp and movement of the people as centered on him, and yet their violation of his holiness results in his fiery anger toward them.

In the end, Ramban manages exegetically to draw considerations of political headship in deputized relationship to Moses and in the form of seventy(-one or -two), into one integrated interpretation by seeing the passage through his tradition, and thus in a conciliar shape which proclaims seventy as representing all powers and opinions. Much of this is made possible by the mnemonic power of seventy; its memorability helps each incident in the biblical text to come to mind. Interpreters may also therefore seek to connect them in some way, uncovering core themes in the texts' development, if not in the order Ramban thinks. The biblical text likely pulls its original association between seventy and political authority from its ANE context, applying the conciliar shape to its own theological constructs which emerge over time with interconnected themes, most of which, Ramban has pulled together here. The logic of Ramban's system may just as well indicate the texts' step-by-step development instead of a divine "system."

Ramban's Seventy as a Linguistic (and Hermeneutical) Council

A real strength of Ramban's approach is not just that it is conciliar but that it is also *linguistic*; that is, based on a council of national languages. Ramban's formulation of the divine council of the seventy does not exist without Deut 32:8, which likewise depends on Genesis 10-11 for its explanation. To wit, there is no council of the seventy angels without reference to their headship over the seventy nations and their languages. This whole rabbinic system, including the significance of the Seventy in Numbers 11, therefore depends on the dispersion of the seventy nations and, especially, seventy languages of the world. Only when all these languages are brought together, could complete knowledge (sc. all powers, all opinions) be brought back into its pre-Babel state, whether in a heavenly council or an earthly one.[120]

[120] I must reiterate how closely and naturally this whole rabbinic thought leads to the legend of Moses' articulation of the law in all the languages of the earth in Deut 27:8, mentioned in 97n98 above.

There is, therefore, a deep relationship between the councils of seventy (especially Numbers 11) and the task of translation, of interpretation. The hermeneutics of language, the hermeneutics of law, and the hermeneutics of judges, are all close at hand.[121] According to Ramban, what it takes to be the people of God, authoritatively downstream from Moses, is to know, speak, and understand the fullness of the wisdom of God (over and inclusive of all knowledge from every nation on earth) as somehow already hidden in the very words of Torah. All future generations require interpreters of that law and wisdom in order to know their law, their God, and their place on earth. In this description, the seventy elder-judges in Numbers 11 become key players, necessary companions to the great but not self-sufficient wisdom of Moses. For Ramban, the meaning of seventy is collective and signals a hermeneutical community, those able to interpret and speak from the whole range of interpretative options.

The ramifications of this kind of thinking are evident throughout the rabbinic sources: Seventy languages must be known by each elder-judge of the Great Sanhedrin (*b. Sanh.* 17b), every word of Torah, having gone forth in all seventy languages (*b. Shabb.* 88b); all seventy judges must not unanimously condemn someone to death since unanimity indicates a lack of all knowledge in a case (i.e. a lack of diversity of opinion means some opinion or knowledge has been withheld) (*b. Sanh.* 17a); the Torah should be written (and interpreted/translated) by the biblical elders into seventy languages (*m. Sotah* 7:5; *b. Sotah* 36a); the Torah may be interpreted/expounded through seventy facets (*Num. Rab.* 13.15,16; hence its need to be "turned," *m. Avot* 5:22).[122] Thus,

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[121] A similar paradigm and conclusion is used in discussions of hermeneutical and translation theory, e.g. Domenico Jervolino, "Translation as a Paradigm for Hermeneutics and Its Implications for an Ethics of Hospitality," trans. Ralph Church, *AI* 5 (2000): esp. 64–5 (on Ricoeur); François Marty, *La Bénédiction de Babel: Vérité et communication* (La Nuit surveillée; Paris: Cerf, 1990); George Steiner, *After Babel* (3rd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
[122] Additionally, *b. Baba Bathra* 14a describes R. Huna as copying the Torah seventy times, cf. Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity with Tradition and Transmission in Early Christianity* (combined with new preface; BRS; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 46. With acknowledged

according to this idealized, rabbinic language, the Seventy of Numbers 11 are those who receive, from the *one* Moses, the capacity to *turn* the *one* Torah he received from YHWH, until they can see all its facets to and applications for future generations. As seventy members, they see all seventy sides and can write and proclaim, in all seventy languages, the words of God, the answers to all the world's needs.

Although this is a *rabbinic* way of seeing a biblical entity, these descriptors plausibly describe the intention of the passage: *To grant all necessary authority to these seventy elders, an authority which could be extended to future generations and is focused on Moses and the Torah which comes through him.* Likewise, such deep connections between linguistics and a council of seventy are full of heuristic potential as we begin to move toward a consideration of the relationship between Numbers 11 and the Legend of the Septuagint.[123] The promise that two different examples of Jewish thinking (Ramban and Septuagint) might both appeal to a similar biblical construct heightens the potential for accessing the meaning of the biblical text.

Ramban's Seventy as a Prophetic (and Mosaic) Council

This hermeneutical collective thus represents Ramban's institutional interpretation of the Seventy of Num 11:16. He does not equivocate on the fact that Moses is, in this passage, at last being supported by a fully-established institution with whom he may now sustain the people through the *prophetic gift* given. According to his commentary on Num 11:16, the Seventy, as an institution, are first established by God at the Giving of the Law in Exodus 24 and are now complete by adding Moses as head in Numbers 11. As he continues into Num 11:17, this sense that Moses' prophetic authority is extended by the Seventy only grows. Despite the various ways in which ואצלתי may be read (i.e. it means "drawing forth;" but is

parallels (via Joel), Acts 2:1-11 records Jesus' disciples gathered together (like a new Sanhedrin?), their expressions being heard in languages "from every nation on earth" (2:5), presumably (according to this tradition) all *seventy* of them.

[123] See Chapter 5.

that withholding from Moses or extracting from him?), Ramban definitively concludes that the Seventy received divine communication by the drawing forth of the spirit upon Moses, which is for prophecy (הנבואה)."[124] Regardless of what ואצלתי might specifically refer to here,

> The general idea regarding…the elders is that their prophecy came only from the spirit that spoke to Moses, and from it, it was *transferred* to them.[125]

This spiritual transfer ("withholding") has a direct impact on the *kind* of prophecy the elders exhibit. It is a prophecy that is *unique* to them, unlike Moses himself and unlike other prophets. Ramban observes that the "withholding" of Moses' spirit occurs at the time of "*God's* speaking to Moses" and that the passage does not explain the content of their prophecy, unlike everywhere else "in the entire Torah, where *it always* elaborates afterward…what God said and what He spoke."[126] The reason it does not do so here, suggests Ramban, is because "the elders…prophesied [but] did not hear *any* speech from the mouth of God."[127] They receive this not face to face with God himself (as is reserved only for Moses), nor in a dream (as is reserved for *other* prophets, cf. Num 12:6),

> Rather, God spoke to Moses, and from the "withholding" of Moses' spirit they knew *the contents of* that prophesy. And this is the meaning of "they prophesied, but did no more":[128] that they did not go on to prophesy on their own, but *rather*, they prophesied exclusively via the prophecy that God said to Moses.[129]

For Ramban, the prophesying of the elders is truly prophesying, but it is also *Mosaic* prophesying. They speak what they understand God to be saying *to Moses.* For our purposes, we may consider this understanding and speaking from and for Moses to continue beyond the confines of the wilderness in a way which Ramban himself struggles to consider.

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[124] Ramban, *Bamidar*, 215.
[125] Ramban, *Bamidbar*, 218.
[126] Ibid., 215.
[127] Ibid.
[128] I.e. He is reading לא יספו in Num 11.25 with MT and LXX, contra *Tgs.* & Vulgate.
[129] Ramban, *Bamidbar*, 215.

Ramban connects the elders' prophesying (by Moses' spirit upon them) to their help for Moses' task of leadership, but despite his previous implications that the Sanhedrin speak with authority derived from the Seventy, he restricts the prophetic voice of the Seventy to Moses' words and tasks in the wilderness alone.[130] He adds a caveat: "in my eyes…all the days of the elders, this [prophesying ability] was done for them, so that they knew all that God commanded Israel through Moses, regarding their needs of the moment and the events of that would befall them in the Wilderness," such that, whenever Moses spoke to the people, the elders knew the content and could prophesy it to each one's tribe.[131] Ramban's reason for this limitation is due to his construal of their activity (prophesying *with* Moses); however, his vision of a continuing authority (i.e. the Sanhedrin) based on their configuration and gifting from God allows us to consider whether his construct may have continued beyond the life of Moses, which then authorized elders in a post-Mosaic age to consider themselves prophets "with Moses" (albeit without hearing Moses speak in person, but speaking *through his text* instead). In any case, for Ramban, Moses no longer needed to bear the complaints alone (viz. he is prophetically assisted by the elders); and this is the meaning of 11:17b, "and they shall bear the burden of the people with you."[132]

Although Ramban's exegesis of seventy is indeed expansive, it has real explanatory value. His ability to see the Seventy *as a council* brings some features closer, especially their totalizing hermeneutical vantage point and their specialized category of "Mosaic prophecy." Numbers 11 is addressed as a passage with central and vivid importance, and our exegetical journey will only further validate its significance as we continue to probe its unique features and impact in reception history.

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[130] He argues this based on *Num. Rab.* 15.25. Note: Although some later interpreters see this punishment as diminishing Moses, *Num. Rab.* 15.25, and thus Ramban, explicitly affirms that "Moses did not diminish" (ET, mine).
[131] Ibid.
[132] In modern commentaries, Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 586, has similarities on this point.

The Meaning of Seventy-Two: Another Biblically-Shaped Council

One confirmation of Ramban's sense of the significance of "seventy as council" and its connection to both the Table of Nations of Genesis 10 and the divine council via Deut 32:8 is the persistent appearance of *seventy-two* in compelling and often parallel ways to *seventy* in biblical and biblically-based texts. Ramban's own explanation for seventy-two is based on the dual-addition of Moses and God to the already significant seventy, but this configuration of "seventy-plus-two" is not sufficiently obvious to account for the *creation* of a Jewish sense of seventy-two. Neither is a sense of fairness to all tribes ("six-times-twelve") capable of this account; it is more appropriate to exegetical situations where fairness and tribes are already part of the descriptive context (e.g. *Sifre* 95; *b. Sanh.* 17a).

In the most extensive and skilled treatment of the question to date, Gilles Dorival concludes that Eldad and Medad (Num 11:26) stand as the *origin* of traditions of seventy-two. Unfortunately, this theory falls flat, in part by his own account, since he admits their presentation as seventy is just as obvious to the passage as it stands and is more likely to be a result of harmonizing tendencies.[133] In short, why would later traditions pick up the symbol of seventy-two from Numbers 11, when it is the more difficult number to see in the text? Only if one is, like Epiphanius (*De Fide* 4.5), presented *initially* with a tradition of seventy-two (for him, in the Legend of the Septuagint), would one find the availability of Eldad and Medad helpful.[134] It is difficult to imagine one seeking to *establish* a connection to the biblical material, choosing seventy-two over seventy.

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[133] Dorival, "70 Ou 72," 52, 60.

[134] Gressmann demonstrates the point: He thinks the inclusion of Eldad and Medad indicates that the biblical author has dueling traditions of seventy and seventy-two already and is trying to include this *preceding* desire to incorporate the symbol of seventy-two into the account: "Man könnte vermuten, daß dieser Erzähler vielmehr 72 Älteste rechnet und daß er zwei vershiedene Traditionen mit einander ausgleischen will, von denen die eine mit der Zahl 70, die andere mit 72 operiert, ein Schwanken, das auch sonst nachweisbar ist," *Mose*, 179n2. His observation also demonstrates how it is easier to see seventy *and* seventy-two in the biblical text than seventy-two on its own.

Again, for a reader presented with a desire to maintain a divisibility by twelve within the world of the text, Eldad and Medad enable such readings of Numbers 11, but other situations which simply want to represent Israel's tribes, apart from any particular pentateuchal narrative, would undoubtedly be better served by the number twelve itself. In short, choosing seventy-two communicates *neither* seventy *nor* twelve, unless one is already looking for such an explanation.

Questions of "seventy or seventy-two" circle around five prominent areas of research, each with their own examples of alternation between the two numbers and with each often looking to the others for possible clarification: (1) the number of elders in Numbers 11, (2) the number of translators in the Legend of the Septuagint, (3) the number of disciples sent out by Jesus in Luke 10, (4) the number of elder-judges in the Great Sanhedrin or important courts of early Judaism, and (5) the number of nations in Genesis 10. (We have already noted a number of these.) An extended proposal for the best solution to all these is not possible here; however, when applied to the text of the LXX, Ramban's coordination of Genesis 10 and Deut 32:8 still presents a council, this time one with seventy-two members. Since *Numbers 11* uniquely confirms *both* seventy *and* seventy-two, its own conciliar shape is both confirmed and a likely contributor to this tradition of alternating numbers, even while it cannot sufficiently count for its origins alone.

As mentioned, MT Deut 32:8 suggests the number of the nations was determined by the number of the "sons of Israel." Given the consistent number "seventy" ancestors (i.e. the literal sons of Jacob/Israel) in Gen 46:27, Exodus 1:5, and Deut 10:22, *and* given the calculation of seventy nations in Genesis 10, the ability for Ramban to see a divine plan implemented in each is greatly eased. He need only connect the number of nations with the number of the divine council, which he does through an appeal to Genesis 11 via *PRE*.

However, in the LXX, these linkages are reversed. First, instead of a biblical *gap* between the heavenly council and the nations, LXX Deut 32:8 indicates the number of nations is *established* according to the "angels of God"

(reflecting the Hebrew Vorlage we find in 4QDeut^{j}, בני אלהים). Second, in the LXX, the number of Jacob's ancestors do not line up with one another (seventy-five, twice; seventy, once), much less with the number of nations or the divine council (LXX Gen 46:27, ἑβδομήκοντα πέντε; LXX Exodus 1:5, πέντε καὶ ἑβδομήκοντα; and LXX Deut 10:22, ἑβδομήκοντα). Third, none of these lines up with LXX Genesis 10's number of nations, which (due to an addition of three and subtraction of one from those listed in MT) adds up to seventy-two.[135]

Nevertheless, the combination of LXX Deut 32:8 and LXX Genesis 10 suggests counting the divine council as numbering *seventy-two*, and given the early textual support for LXX Deut 32:8 along with the probable tendency by later scribes to round numbers and harmonize texts, there is substantial reason to consider the possibility that an earlier (or equally early) accounting for the divine council is *seventy-two* rather than seventy.[136] Although the number of biblical coordinates is not as strong for seventy-two as those for seventy, they are sufficiently foundational (in the creation of the world and as citations from the Pentateuch) to sustain the idea of a seventy-two member divine council. If two "points" can make a typological "line" (i.e. LXX Gen 10 and Deut 32:8), a third point can confirm it: A divine council of seventy-two might well be seen in its earthly manifestation in Israel in LXX Numbers 11, as read *with* Eldad and Medad. In fact, both MT/LXX Deut 32:8 and Numbers 11 are flexible enough to account also for those more rare occasions where the divine council or number of languages or nations is listed as seventy-*one* (e.g. *Aggadat Breshit* 14.32).[137] Together, if such a starting point is admitted (viz. seventy-two or –one as the number of the divine council), then Ramban's suggestion that this number presents "all possibilities" helps also explain other more minor occurrences of the alternation between seventy and seventy-two (such as the total number of diseases

[135] See Dorival, "70 Ou 72," 51, 54, for a good summary.
[136] Also, as Driver notes, similar to *PRE* and LXX Deut 32:8, a tradition of "guardian-angels, presiding over the different nations" but with Israel as belonging to the Lord may be found in Sir 17:17 (albeit, again, somewhat laconically, ἑκάστῳ ἔθνει κατέστησεν ἡγούμενον, καὶ μερὶς κυρίου Ισραηλ ἐστίν), *Deuteronomy*, 356. Also, see Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 6.17.
[137] Dorival, "70 Ou 72," 53n32; Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 1:76n84.

which resulted from sins in the Eden[138] or the total number of the names of God[139]) since both numbers would symbolize the same sense of a "total" number.

It must be admitted that while counting the number of *nations* as seventy-two is more common and is often considered the result of the involvement of the divine council (cf. Augustine, *Civ.* 16.5-6), specific descriptions of the *divine council* as numbering seventy-two tend to be later and rarer (e.g. *Recog.* 2.42; *3 Enoch* 17.6, 8; 18.3; 30.2).[140] However, two more ancient citations are worth noting. Although *1 Enoch* 90.1 counts the number of its shepherds as seventy rather than seventy-two, it counts *half* of seventy as *thirty-six*, thus displaying signs of an original seventy-two now emended.[141] More directly (but still outside the mainstream), *Gospel of Judas* §49-50 (dated to 130-170 C.E.),[142] which describes, "The twelve aeons [with authority over angels] of the twelve luminaries…, with six heavens for each aeon, so that there are seventy-two heavens for the seventy-two luminaries."[143]

The earliest and strongest reference to seventy-two occurs neither about the nations nor the divine council but in *Letter of Aristeas* §50, after it has named all the translators selected for the task, according to the request of King Ptolemy "six from each tribe" (§39, §46). Josephus' version glosses *Aristeas*, naming the total of translators as "seventy" *and* "six from each tribe" (*Ant.* 12:56-7). It appears that in the intervening years between them, Josephus' sense of the stronger symbol (or title?) is "seventy" rather than "seventy-two." And yet, we may likewise observe the lack of difficulty he has with leaving them side-by-side. One solution to this is to consider the latter a rounding of the former; however, we

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[138] Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 1:95n129; cf. Dorival, "70 Ou 72," 52.
[139] See 101n114 above.
[140] Cf. Dorival, "70 Ou 72," 53; Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission* (2 vols.; Downers' Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2004), 1:319.
[141] Cf. Moses Hadas, ed., *Aristeas to Philocrates (Letter of Aristeas)* (trans. Moses Hadas; JAL; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1951), 72.
[142] Henri-Charles Puech et al., "Other Gnostic Gospels and Related Literature," in *New Testament Apocrypha* (2 vols., rev.; Cambridge: James Clarke, 1991), 1:387.
[143] Rodolphe Kasser and Gregor Wurst, *The Gospel of Judas: Critical Edition* (2nd ed.; Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2006), 36.

might also consider the possibility that Josephus knows both as symbols of councils (one based on the Hebrew, seventy; the other based on the LXX, seventy-two) or, better yet, that his own convictions consider seventy the proper number while his source says differently.[144] Josephus' gloss alone is not decisive, but neither is it contradictory. Josephus' own experience with and access to both Hebrew *and* Greek biblical texts (*C. Ap.* 1:42; *Ant.* 1:10-12)[145] may be contrasted with *Aristeas*' LXX-only focus. The parallels are suggestive.

Furthermore, of all the *rabbinic* accounts of the Legend of the Septuagint, only *one* lists the number of translators as "seventy" (*Sefer Torah* 1.8-9), two list the number as "five" (*Sopherim* 1.7; *ARN* §37), and four others mark the number as "seventy-two" (*b. Meg.* 9a-b; *Sopherim* 1.8; *Yalqut Shim'oni* Gen 2-3; *MHG* Ex 4:20).[146] Additionally, all the accounts of the "seventy-two" translators are either positive (i.e. God gave them divine ability to record the same translation, including the same changes from the Hebrew original, despite being separated from one another), while the "seventy" account and one of the accounts of the "five" are both negative appraisals (i.e. as bad as the day of the Golden Calf). Given the trajectory of rabbinic opinion toward the LXX, one might reasonably consider the "seventy-two" accounts reflecting the earlier appraisal.[147] All this suggests that a legend looking for an authoritative formation and focused on the LXX might well have found seventy-two as the appropriate number, for which the attending idea of "six from each tribe," was only later appended.[148] Likewise, there appears to be a somewhat consistent preference for the number seventy-two in Jewish sources focused on the LXX while more Hebrew-leaning accounts

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[144] Dorival notes that Josephus counts the nations as seventy in number, "70 Ou 72," 54.
[145] Louis H. Feldman, "Use, Authority and Exegesis of Mikra in the Writings of Josephus," in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (ed. Martin Jan Mulder; CRINT 2.1; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1988), 255.
[146] Wasserstein and Wasserstein, *Legend*, 51–83.
[147] Cp. the more nuanced and complex proposal that the (positive) story of the miracle of the translation was invented by Palestinian Jewish authorities between ca. 80-117 C.E. in ibid., 91.
[148] Even if some of her conclusions are unpersuasive, support for "six from each tribe" as a later emendation to *Aristeas* is ably covered by Nina L. Collins, *The Library in Alexandria and the Bible in Greek* (VTSup 82; Leiden: Brill, 2000), 137–44.

prefer seventy. Should mishnaic accounts of "that day" which describe early Jewish court membership as seventy-two elders (*m. Zeb.* 1:3; *m. Yad.* 3:5; 4:2)[149] be dated to a time which helped originate support for Greek as an authenticated language for holy writ (*m. Meg.* 1:8; *b. Meg.* 9a-b), the theories here could, I think, become even stronger. Accounts of both seventy and seventy-two as appropriate numbers of Jewish councils (even without the particularly Greek context alluded to) would also be sufficiently determinative for writers of the Gospel of Luke to record either number as appropriate to Jesus' gathering and sending as he turned his misson to Jerusalem.[150] What previously appear to be disconnected but similar variations now begin to appear to carry some symbolic and logical connections.[151]

For Numbers 11, all this means that there is real explanatory value in seeing the elders of Numbers 11 as conciliar in shape (whether read with or without Eldad and Medad). There may yet be more to the interrelationships with Genesis 10 and Deut 32:7-9, especially when we consider the prompt in Deut 32:7 for the hearers to consult their "elders." Might changes in Deut 32:8 and Genesis 10 between LXX and MT be somehow related to the inclusion of Eldad and Medad in Numbers 11? We cannot know. Whatever their development, their

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[149] The *content* of these passages is also enticing to a Diaspora mindset, i.e. sacrifices accepted on behalf of another (who could not make it to the Temple?) and the careful transcription of the Torah (the center of Jewish life outside the land).

[150] Cf. Schnabel, *Early*, 1:316–7.

[151] We have not considered *where* or *when* seventy-two may have originated from the environment surrounding the formation of the Bible. Historical antecedents are less forthcoming than for seventy. One distant possibility arises from a 12th-cent. C.E. description (from John Tzezes) of 6th-cent. B.C.E. Greece, when "seventy-two scholars in the time of Pisistratos… arranged the books of Homer," Collins, *Library*, 101. We may also consider the possibility of scribal adjustments to the list in order to properly account for the nations most troublesome to them (i.e. two of the apparent additions are Καιναν in LXX Gen 10:22; 24), but this does not seem to account fully for other apparent adjustments; cp. Ginzberg in 98n99 above. The possibility of a council of seventy, plus **נשיא** and **אב בית דן**, also remains a possible source. But *m. Hag.* 2:2 is less explicit than that (i.e. allowing for two of the seventy to have these titles as much as having them added), its historicity is questionable (i.e. Efron sees them as a later Pharisaic construction), and *m. Sanh.* 1:6 prefers to debate seventy versus seventy-*one*; Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, eds., "Av Bet Din," *EncJud* 2:716-7; Mantel, *Studies*, 1–53; 102–29; Hoenig, *Great Sanhedrin*, 59, 67; Joshua Efron, "The Great Sanhedrin in Vision and Reality," in *Studies on the Hasmonean Period* (SJLA 39; Leiden: Brill, 1987), 294–5.

connection to ideas of councils, languages, nations, and the particularity of Israel in the world draw Numbers 11 into a fruitful interpretative sphere.

Conclusion

Thus far we may note one persistent notion: "Seventy" is almost never regarded by interpreters as anything other than an odd number, one worth investigating through intertextual resonances. It is, by all accounts, not a normal number. The persistence of this idea emphasizes a basic quality of seventy in Numbers 11: It is a signal—a mnemonic and intertextual signal. That is, when readers (or recallers) of Numbers 11 remark on the story of the elders, they often do so by way of remembering that it is a "story of seventy," arriving with other references to seventy mentally in tow.[152] Exactly which other seventies are best kept in touch with Numbers 11 has been an important part of the preceding argument. Raising such questions as: What relative weight should be given to Exodus 24's unique status as the only preceding "seventy elders" in the Pentateuch? Or how much consideration should the Table of Nations (Genesis 10) or the seventy (MT) descendants of Jacob (cf. Gen 46.27) be given? Such questions may be unanswerable in a definitive way, but their presence is persistent and can help lead to various considerations of similar meaning.

The main purpose of this section has been to examine the attempts throughout the history of interpretation to say something constructive and symbolic about the number seventy as it relates to the elders of Numbers 11. We have done this with special attention to the notion that Israel's elders in Numbers 11 provide an institutional response to Moses' burden and lament unto death. Through a careful reading of each interpreter, the three approaches surveyed all press toward a closer identification of seventy with a council of elders.

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[152] Of the midrashim in *Num. Rab.* 15.17–24, all of which deal with questions or concerns with Num 11:16's "Gather unto me seventy men," only 15.18 fails to mention seventy explicitly. Seventy sounds a clear reverberation in the interpretative landscape of Num 11:16 at a fundamental level.

In summary, (1) With Milgrom et al, somewhat surprisingly, usages of seventy throughout MT draw together to signal a group of people who are *familial or political authorities*, which elders typify. (2) *Recognition*'s oddly-termed "seventy-two" as a "pattern of Moses" depends not only on the number but (in its context) on the *act* of gathering OT equivalents to disciples, viz. elders, *around Moses* (who may, through Jewish traditions of seventy-two, including either the Midrash or the legend of the LXX, signal other encroaching traditions around Numbers 11). (3) Ramban (and this LXX-related corollary of seventy-two) sees the number of elders in Numbers 11 as essentially *conciliar* and able to receive and handle *all powers and opinions* through the spirit and act of *"Mosaic prophecy."* Also, along the way, we have seen how seventy helps us navigate possible implications for later connections to the Sanhedrin (although what this body is and how it works is still unclear). All of this aptly satisfies the *desperation of Moses* and the *crisis of Israel* that we started with.

What we have only touched on is how and why this council of authority centered on Moses should be connected to the dual designations we examined previously: *scribes and prophets.* To do that, we must look closer at who Moses is and how his authority functions in the biblical text.

4
The Lawgiver and His Prophets

Replacing Moses is no simple task. If we consider Moses' two-part cry to the LORD as met not only with the miraculous assistance of meat from the sky but with the provision of an *institution* of *seventy elders*, we find ourselves only partially satisfied. Moses' problem is inherent in his *authority*: He is being crushed[1] under the weight of his own role.[2] The solution then is for him to share this authority with those qualified to undertake it: (a) *elders*, whom Israel already recognizes as worthy candidates for such a role, especially (b) when they number *seventy*—a symbolic number which when used in conjunction with elders (or a similar category) affirms their on-going institutional role—a role that will outlive Moses, taking a portion of his authority into the promised land. But what portion of authority is actually envisaged here and what role of Moses is herein being aided? What does this particular institution *do*?

What kind of authority?

Often interpreters suggest that some kind of "managing" or "governing" powers are granted to the Seventy,[3] usually now from a new basis: the charismatic.[4] This

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[1] Gressmann captures this dynamic nicely when he cites Wellhausen's account of Mohammed in Medina wherein the prophet "wurde…'gleich anfangs von Rechtsuchenden überlaufen, selbst von Juden und Heiden, die gar nicht an seine prophetische Mission glaubten'," *Mose*, 175n2.

[2] LXX translates **משא** in Num 11:11's **משא כל־העם** not with αἴρω (e.g. LXX Num 4:15, 24, 31-32) or even λειτουργία as in LXX Num 4:27 but as ὁρμή; cf. "impulse, inclination, desire," *BDAG,* 724; "rage, fury" LEH, 446. Also, "élan," as in LXX Ex 32:22 "l'emportement (*hórmēma*)," and introduced and annotated by Gilles Dorival, trans., *La Bible d'Alexandrie: Les Nombres* (Paris: Cerf, 1994), 67; "Andrang," Horst Seebass, *Numeri (10,11-14,45)* (BKAT; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1993), 30.

MT may intentionally be playing off different meanings of **משא**—e.g. Numbers 4 might use **משא** to refer to *both* the Levitical responsibilities for carrying physical items *and* bearing the oracular word of YHWH; whereas, LXX Numbers translates each occurrence according to its context, without double-meaning. If it had wanted to maintain the breadth of the Hebrew, it might have chosen λῆμμα, as in LXX Mal 1:1, or more famously, LXX Jer 23:33-40.

[3] For Wellhausen, the elders are clearly "governing": "Mitarbeiter für seine [Mose] öffentliche Tätigkeit," "die bürgerlichen Beamten," *Composition*, 99–100.

"charismatic" quality is usually deemed to be something Moses has, and which appears in others in later Israelite life as experiences of ecstasy, prophesying, or the effect of רוח (i.e. the "spiritual").[5] It is suggested that the real goal of the passage can be found in later biblical writers' wish somehow to ground these experiences in the centralizing and authorizing character of Moses (his "leadership"). The general process envisioned involves taking the intense spiritual experiences of those outside the norm for Israel and simultaneously affirming them and usurping their potentially disruptive place outside the central authority. The idea seems to be: What is happening spiritually outside is good, yes, but it belongs in here as part of the center of Israelite life not outside, and not on its own. The combination leads to, as Noth remarks, "a remarkable combination of institution and charisma, of office and vocation."[6] Whether the intention is to bring the external fire of prophecy into the fireplace of central, Mosaic worship, or whether it is to tame and inoculate the cult from the decentralized and unpredictable forces outside, depends on the interpreters' proclivities.

Interestingly, oftentimes in coordinating these aspects, especially in trying to describe exactly what kind of "help" the Seventy offer, interpreters feel compelled to emphasize one *over* the other: *either* the "charismatic" help over the "governing" *or,* more often, "governing" over "charismatic." This occurs in part, interpreters claim, because the link between them is hard to articulate or declared missing.[7] Usually, in the end, the elders are thought to replace and/or carry on some version of Moses' "charismatic-based leadership" (even if a precise

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[4] Levine's summary is typical: "Numbers 11…records a change in the governance of the Israelites, whereby Moses shared authority with a council of seventy elders (*zeqēnîm*)," *Numbers 1-20*, 311; Calvin, *Commentaries*, 4:26; John Owen, *ΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΟΛΟΓΙΑ: A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit* (London: Darby, 1674), 124; Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary: Vol III, Pentateuch*, 71n1; Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 581–2.

[5] Ashley, *Numbers*, 210–11.

[6] Noth, *Numbers*, 87.

[7] Ibid., 89. Some point only by contrast to the decentralizing, charismatic (and perhaps dissident?) in Eldad and Medad, and less on the preceding story; Gray, *Numbers*, 111–15; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Sage, Priest, Prophet : Religious and Intellectual Leadership in Ancient Israel* (LAI; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 2.

description of that is never fully achieved).[8] This episode in Numbers provides the place where this combined-role of spiritual (or charismatic) gets displayed, often without any real sense of why here.[9]

These typical interpretative moves are understandable, even as they are still deficient in articulating the connection between "charismatic" (or "spiritual") and "leadership" (or "governing").[10] However, if, in Num 11:16, 25, as we have considered already,[11] the effect of the spirit on the elders retains its explicit description as *prophesying* (התנבא) and the elders are allowed to retain their attribution as *scribes* (שטרים; not just "officials"),[12] a reading emerges which bridges these categories: *Moses the "lawgiver" is being supported (and replaced) by his "inspired interpreters."* The leadership which Moses exerts is heavily-impacted by the law-book which comes through him, and in order for the authority of that law-book to continue faithfully, Moses needs to be followed, after his death, by an institution of interpreters, who are not only skilled in reading and writing the law but who are filled with the very spirit upon Moses, the same spirit which Moses engaged to write the words to begin with. This set of Mosaic inspired interpreters, this version of authoritative prophetic-scribes,

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[8] By contrast, Dozeman attempts a laconic combination, not unlike the thesis pursued here: The elders are "inspired writers and interpreters of tradition." Although I would demur from his follow-up, "rather than classical prophets who spoke new words from God," since it depends on what one means by "new words" (i.e. new in theological direction or new in formulation?), Dozeman, "Numbers," 2:107.

[9] Placement of its *Sitz im Leben* often gets more consideration than its particular placement within the Pentateuch, e.g. Davidic monarchy, Levine, *Numbers 1-20*, 342–3. Wellhausen sees such combination as particularly post-Isaianic: "Noch dem Jesaia würde der Gedanke, dass die bürgerlichen Beamten vom Geiste der Weissagung müssen berührt sein, schwerlich gekommen sein; Saul aber ist eine Ausnahme, wie das Sprichwort lehrt," *Composition*, 100–1.

[10] Gray locates the problem in Num 11:17b, which he considers a confusing editorial addition, understandably but mistakenly drawing interpreters to make connections between the "burden" stories: "The connection with Ex. 18[22] is merely verbal, and if v.[17b] be admitted to be editorial, it accounts for the difficulty which commentators have felt (without surmounting) in attempting to decide the difference between the functions of these elders and those appointed in Ex. 18," *Numbers*, 111.

[11] See Chapter 3.

[12] Contra Noth who sees the attribution as clumsily thrown in, an unnecessarily later piling on to what, for him is clearly just a tribal governance system, *Numbers*, 87.

thus not only bridges the narrative gap but fits the narrative context of Numbers well.

Admittedly, the terms, "lawgiver" and "inspired interpreters," are not biblical ones, but their later taxonomy enables us to capture the biblical relationship between Moses and the Seventy elders more clearly than using the overlapping language of the Bible itself, which refers to both as "prophets" (Num 11:29; 12:2, 6-7; Deut 34:10). The fact that both are biblically called by the same term (and "prophets" at that) is essential to our thesis, but differentiating between them will help us watch the process here transcribed. The point then in using non-biblical terms is not to read later concepts "into" the Bible, but more precisely explain what comes out of them.[13]

In biblical terms, we can say these "elder-scribes" are made by YHWH into "inspired prophets," who are "like Moses"—since they are given the exact same spirit which was upon him.[14] What is distinct about the elders story of Numbers 11 is its careful construction around Moses of a group of people who look, in the end, remarkably like him: They are leaders of the people, who are previously trained as scribes and are, here, specially selected by Moses himself before being granted access to the (a) Tent of Meeting, (b) the divine presence, and (c) Moses' very own, divine spirit (which causes them to prophesy). For Israel, these qualities make them well-qualified not only to share in Moses' role as a civil or spiritual authority, but to inherit that other all-pervasive governing authority: the "law-book of Moses."[15]

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[13] One thinks of the claims of the 4th-century formulators of the Nicene creed, attempting the same task, on a different, albeit more central subject to their faith: Christology. This does not mean that such later language and differentiation is required *a priori* to understand the initial terminology properly (it is still possible to know the original terms within their own language system) but that later distinctions and growth in knowledge specify realms which the original text only carves out and begins to identify: the differentiation being newer than the resources of continuity it can appeal to.

[14] מן־הרוח אשר עליך/עליו, Num 11:17/25.

[15] (a) ספר תורת משה, Josh 8:31; 23:6; 2 Kgs 14:6; Neh 8:1; (b) ספר תורת אלהים, Josh 24:26-7, Neh 8:18, cf. Josh 23:1-2//24:1; cp. Deut 31:12, 19; (c) ספר תורת יהוה, Neh 9:3; 2 Chr 13:9; 34:14; (d) תורת משה, Josh 8:32; 1 Kgs 2:3; 2 Kgs 23:25; Mal 4:4[3:22]; Dan 9:11; Ezr 3:2; 2 Chr 23:18 (almost all of which occur in some context of writing); (e) ספר משה, Ezr 6:18; Neh 13:1; 2

In *this chapter*, then, (1) we will first examine Moses as lawgiver, vis-à-vis Moses' relationship to his law-book as depicted in Exodus-Joshua, (2) we will explore that characterization of Moses as a combined "prophet-scribe," (3) who actively presents the divine word given to him, and (4) finally, in pursuit of a precise understanding of what it means to be "authorized Mosaic interpreter," we will compare Jewish and Greek ways to understand the relationship between "divine word," "lawgiver," and "inspired interpreters," especially "prophets." Throughout, we will propose that the elders of Numbers 11 present a unique intra-pentateuchal theological resource (or "grammar") for those seeking to authorize Mosaic interpretation and on-going Mosaic prophecy or law-giving. *In short, Moses is Israel's lawgiver through his role as active prophet-scribe, and the elders of Numbers 11 are set-up to be his authorized and active interpreters by their own inspired, prophetic, and scribal abilities.*

In the *next chapter*, we will take up an example from the reception history of this Numbers 11 story: the Legend of the Septuagint (LXX). In it, we will detail the legend and its most prominent features (as well as some nuances between different versions). Throughout the legend, it will be argued, the elders story of Numbers 11 uniquely provides the theological rationale required to justify and carryout the task recounted: *the authorized translation (i.e. interpretation) of Moses' law-book.* The ways in which the legend conveys the same overall dynamic as well as its precise correlations to the elders story of Numbers 11 ends up providing inordinately fruitful exegesis of Numbers 11 itself.

Chr 25:4. There are undoubtedly hints here to the phases of the development of the law-book, especially when considered alongside mentions of תורת יהוה, which Wellhausen suspects to be originally oral, preceding a written form as תורת משה, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel with a Reprint of the Article "Israel" from the Encyclopaedia Britannica* (trans. J. Sutherland Black; Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1885), 394–7. But that the end-goal of the final redaction is to uniformly attribute all written law to the hand of Moses seems difficult to deny, e.g. Van Seters, who plausibly argues for the Covenant Code (Exodus 19-24, minus a few P-additions) as a post-D attempt to add a "Hammurabi's Code"-style law-book firmly in Moses' mediatory hands, *A Law Book for the Diaspora: Revision in the Study of the Covenant Code* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 47–57.

Israel's Lawgiver: Moses and His Law-book

It is not hard to imagine that questions of Moses' *authority* should naturally follow with questions of Moses' *law-book*. But for readers of Numbers 11, this rarely occurs. At one level, such an absence is understandable since the only reference to any *scribal* practice is the laconic, albeit important, use of שטר (Num 11:16). At another level, the consistent depiction of Moses as carrier of the word of YHWH makes attempts to bracket out the textualization of that word seem almost purposely blinkered.

It actually proves difficult to find any biblical depiction of Moses' authority as *only* that of a civil *or* spiritual leader of the nation.[16] One might think of the Exodus as just such an episode, but its description of redemption for the people is consistently patterned with legal color.[17] Even as we acknowledge his leadership in unifying the "sons of Israel" into a federal body (Ex 4:29-31; 24:4) and in effecting that separate national identity through the Exodus,[18] such a unification does not fully emerge in the Pentateuch (or any of its individual strands)[19] without the consecration of the people under YHWH's divine *law*, which is mediated *by Moses alone*.[20] Moses acts with YHWH in unifying the people *through law* and

[16] Num 30:1 and Num 32:28 come to mind (perhaps Lev 10:20, as well), as instances of using (but still not giving away) personal, governing authority.

[17] The Exodus is obviously deliverance (along with probably early layers about "going out to sacrifice," Ex 3:13; 5:1), but theophany and covenant are consistently wedded to the miraculous deliverance, e.g. Ex 3:12; 6:6-7. Outside Exodus, note deliverance is not always strictly "political," but instead "by a prophet (בנביא)" (Hos 12:13[14]).

[18] Moses' leadership of the Exodus is depicted by the Bible's emphasis on *Moses* as the performer of the miracles required to bring about the deliverance of the people, Deut 34:10-12, even as the overall event is attributed to the dual- (or triple-) pronged work of all the בני עמרם, viz. Moses and Aaron, 1 Chr 23:13; cf. Ex 6:20 (and Miriam, 1 Chr. 6:3; cf. Ex 15:20, אחות אהרן); e.g. Josh 24:5; 1 Sam 12:6-8; Ps 77:20; 99:6; 105:26; 106:16 (and Mic 6:4).

[19] J, E, D, and Dtr additions (or, in the case of E. Blum, et al, "KD") are all consistently depicted as including at least a version of the Decalogue, the Covenant Code, or the Deuteonomic Code; P's redaction is also consistently portrayed as legally-involved, especially in the Sabbath legislation of Ex 20:11. For a terse summary, Van Seters, *Law Book*, 47–53, serves nicely.

[20] Throughout the tradition, Moses maintains his preeminence as mediator of the same divine law under which Israel lives after his death, as classically stated in verse (in the "Blessing of Moses"): Deut 33:4, "the law Moses commanded to us" תורה צוה־לנו משה. However, also note the *ends* of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, plus others:

not just "by signs and portents" (Deut 26:8).[21] Moses is not just a giver of oral decrees,[22] even when originally spoken (e.g. the Decalogue of Deuteronomy 5),[23]

-End of Leviticus: "These are the commandments the LORD commanded Moses (אשר צוה יהוה את־משה) for the people of Israel (אל־בני ישראל) on Mount Sinai," Lev 27:34 (ESV).

-End of Numbers: "These are the commandments and the rules that the LORD commanded through Moses (אשר צוה יהוה ביד־משה) to the people of Israel (אל־בני ישראל) in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho," Numbers 36:13 (ESV).

-End of Deuteronomy: "So the people of the people of Israel (בני־ישראל) obeyed [Joshua] and did as the Lord had commanded Moses (כאשר צוה יהוה את־משה)," Deut 34:9b.

-Near the end of Exodus: "According to all that the Lord had commanded Moses (אשר־צוה יהוה את־משה), so the people of Israel (בני ישראל) had done all the work," Ex 39:42 (ESV); although not at the end of Exodus (in the final form), it is obviously related and completes the refrain of ch. 39 (see below).

-Also, cp. Lev 7:38 (an intra-book use of the same language, marking a section).

<u>*Preeminence of Moses* (in detail):</u>

In Exodus/Leviticus/Numbers: "YHWH said/spoke to Moses [about a law or speech, esp. to the people]" (obviously flowing from the same discourse established and used throughout the deliverance, cp. Ex 6:1; 7:1; 8:1; 9:1; 10:1; 11:1): Ex 17:14; 19:9, 21; 20:22; 24:12; 25:1; 30:11; 31:12; 33:1; 34:1; Lev 1:1; 4:1; 5:14; 6:1, 8, 19, 24; 7:22, 28; 8:1; 12:1; 14:1; 16:2; 17:1; 18:1; 19:1; 20:1; 21:1, 16; 22:1, 17; 23:1, 23, 26, 33; 24:1; chs. 25-26 (spec. at Sinai); 27:1; Num 1:1; 3:5, 11, 40, 44; 5:1, 5, 11; 6:1, 22; 8:1, 3, 23; 9:1, 9; 10:1; 13:1; 15:1, 37; 17:1; 18:26; 25:10; 27:5-6; 28:1; 31:1; 33:50; 34:1, 16; 35:2, 9; 36:13.

In Deuteronomy: "words/law Moses spoke to Israel": Deut 1:1; 4:44; (5:1); 31:1; 31:30 (song). "Moses wrote this law": 31:9, 24. Moses as lone mediator: Deut 5:5, 30-31; "people obeyed *as YHWH commanded Moses*" Deut 34:9b. YHWH to Moses alone about his death/successor: Num 27:12; Deut 31:14, 16. Moses' speech to the people, without prior dictation from God: Ex 35-38. (Bookended by reassurances: Ex 34:35 precedes this section with conveyance of Moses' authority to speak and Exodus 39 repeatedly adds: "as the Lord commanded Moses [כאשר צוה יהוה את־משה]," cp. Lev 8-9, *passim*.)

Along with Elders and Levitical Priests: In Deut 27:1, 9, the co-speakers with Moses (i.e. elders of Israel and Levitical priests) *exhort* the people to follow the "keep the commandment" which has already been established (and a singular entity?) and *lead* them with written and oral practices for the recitation of the law. There association is as re-articulators, not direct mediators.

Along with Aaron: YHWH's relationship to Aaron is more complex but not problematic to the overall thesis. YHWH to Aaron: Lev 10:8; Num 18:1, 8. YHWH to Moses and Aaron: (Ex 11:8; 12:1, 43;) Lev 11:1; 13:1; 14:33; 15:1; Num 2:1; 4:1; 19:1 (notice the תולדת of both Moses *and Aaron* in Num 3:1). Watts notes,

> [T]hough the regulations of Leviticus and the later chapters of Exodus elevate the role of priests and even in a few places Aaron as a mediator of divine law (Lev 10:8; 11:1), the narrative qualifies this characterization by showing Aaron and the priesthood's role in idolatry (Exodus 32; Lev 10:1-3). ["The Legal Characterization of Moses in the Rhetoric of the Pentateuch," *JBL* 117 (1998): 425.]

To this I would add that indeed Lev 10:8-9 provides a statute forever germane to Aaron's descendants specifically, but it also finishes (10:10-11) with a command which clearly indicates the law which they are to teach to the people is that which "the LORD has imparted to [the Israelites] *through Moses*," emphasis added.

[21] Also, Deut 34:10-12. "Signs and portents" applies equally to Moses' activity both in the lead-up to the Exodus (Ex 4:18-11:10) as well as during the Exodus itself (Ex 12:1-17:15). But it is the "signs and portents" of the Exodus (where YHWH outperforms the gods of Egypt, cp. Ex 7:3; Deut 4:34; 6:22; 7:1; 29:2), which indelibly mark YHWH and his people. See, especially, Deut

the divine law finds its final expression in written form. It is this role as *singular mediator of divine writing*, which we are identifying when we address Moses as lawgiver. To rightly see Moses, we likely also need to see his legacy in Israel, his law-book.

At most and despite numerous instances where Moses is depicted as a scribe (e.g. Ex 24:4; 34:27-28; Deut 31:9, 19, 22, 24),[24] one could counter with a more atomized view that the personal authority of Moses is not always and everywhere firmly affixed to his role as *textual* lawgiver, even if such episodes are later swept up into a larger narrative of Moses as tradent of Israel's written law. Particularly once we start to examine incidents where Moses is seen in close proximity to other potentially non-textual authorities in Israel (e.g. Exodus 18 and 24; Numbers 11 and 12), perhaps one could argue that they are there to set up comparisons with Moses' *oracular or prophetic* authority, his personal ability to "hear God," rather than his role as *legal* mediator of a law-book. However, in the Bible, these two categories are not so clearly differentiated. We look in vain for a depiction of "Moses as oracle" over-against "Moses as mediator of divine law". Certainly tensions exist between those claiming the true prophetic word over others deemed false. However, as much as these tensions may map as "new word

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12:32-13:5[13:1-6], which decries any prophet who with "signs and portents" invokes disloyalty to YHWH, even if such signs come true; cp. 1 Kgs 13; 2 Kgs 23:15-18; Deut 28:46.

[22] What comes through Moses' oracular position is described as written at very early stages (e.g. Ex 24:7) and oral communication between YHWH and Moses post-Sinai is passed to the reader in writing (i.e. we know YHWH spoke to Moses because it is written for us).

[23] The Pre-Sinaitic tradition is interesting here. Exodus 18 seems to represent the only unrecorded, unwritten instructions given through Moses. Yet, Ex 17:14-16 shows a propensity toward the written: even Pre-Sinaitic Israel as unified by written decrees in connection with acts of deliverance. Also, the notion that the unifying law comes only as a written "code" and "at Sinai" gets blurred fairly quickly in the Pentateuch. Despite the climax of Sinai's publication (e.g. Ex 34:28-35) and the consistency of Leviticus-Numbers' terminology about YHWH-Moses speech (see above), there is no tidy correlation of between a published, apodictic Decalogue at Sinai, finding fuller, casuistic expression through the oracular role of Moses. In the end, legal speech is everywhere in the Pentateuch and draws from a number of styles, addresses, and scenarios, cf. Albrecht Alt, *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion* (trans. R.A. Wilson; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966); M. Weinfeld, "The Origin of the Apodictic Law: An Overlooked Source," *VT* 23 (1973): 63–75. Nevertheless, it is all written and through Moses, whether it be for the benefit of the people *en masse* or the instruction of various clerics/officers.

[24] Watts, "Moses," 422.

vs. old," they are still not "new word vs. law," claiming Moses as their justification over against one another.[25] Instead, in the Bible, the oracular, prophetic, written, and legal roles of Moses are closely-linked.[26]

Moses and His Deputies

Additionally, a closer examination of those concurrent authorities with Moses in (a) Exodus 18, (b) Exodus 24 and (c) Numbers 12 reveals a *protection for the uniqueness of Moses*, not as the only one capable of deciding law (i.e. judges), joining the divine council (i.e. council of elders) or delivering divine word (i.e. prophets), but (1) as the only one *through* whom others derive their legal authority[27] or (2) as the only one with *unmediated* access to God. Admittedly, neither of these is decisively *textual*, but their protection and description vis-à-vis

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[25] It is true that Wellhausen claims a superiority and historical priority of prophet over law: "It is a vain imagination to suppose that the prophets expounded and applied the law," 399. He is undoubtedly right that most of the prophets did not claim a grounding in the law *of Moses* (though his imagination that they prophesy as if without regard to a proto-Mosaic law code is now widely regarded as implausible). Nevertheless, his orientation only confirms the point at hand: The depiction of Moses is vastly *legal*, and whatever ways Ex-Deut characterizes him as prophetic and oracular, they serve toward an authorization of Moses as mediator of the law not against it. That we have the one example of Malachi 4:4[3:22] ("Remember the law [תורה] of my servant Moses"), which Wellhausen noted for its lone voice of prophet toward law of Moses), and none extolling his prophetic stance against the law demonstrates the point, I think.

[26] In Wellhausen's view, they are, of course, linked in a particular direction: Legislation is the end of prophecy, e.g. "There was now in existence [in the written law] an authority as objective as could be; and this was the death of prophecy," *Prolegomena*, 402. (A death which, to paraphrase Mark Twain, is greatly exaggerated.) Nevertheless, this direction supports the proposal that these "oracular" episodes undergird a written legislation and nowhere stand in opposition to it. *If there ever was a historical movement to fully bifurcate Mosaic prophecy from Mosaic law, it has not lived to see the light of day.* Wellhausen supports this. His appeal to Kadesh (incl. Massah and Meribah) as the site of oracular judgment (as opposed to Sinai as the site of priesthood and written legislation) depicts the virtues of such a site in terms of "the professional activity of Moses" "not as the sum of the laws and usages binding on Israel, but as a process;" the episodes exist as "the foundation…for the living institution of that Torah which still exists and is in force in Israel," ibid., 343.

[27] It is somewhat remarkable, that as much as the Levitical priests are selected as caretakers of the law as well as being descendants of Aaron (who shares in the deliverance and in receiving the divine word) that there is no evidence of an Aaronic (over Mosaic) legal tradition. See 121n18 and 121n20 above. Perhaps the closest we get is with Ben Sira, who spends much longer praising Aaron than Moses, Sir 45:6-22, cp. 44:23b[45:1]-45:5, cf. David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 207. Nevertheless, here and elsewhere, all legal authority intentionally takes its cue from Moses (e.g. Deut 31:9).

Moses' legal status map so precisely with the consistent biblical depiction of all written law coming through Moses and all subsequent authority (i.e. Moses' successors) as founded on that written law that each of these episodes finds its *raison d'être* in the *uniqueness* of Moses as the single mediator of divine law, specifically his law-book. A look at each of these will also help us distinguish them by comparison from the scene in Numbers 11.

(a) In its pre-Sinaitic milieu, Exodus 18 does not simply depict Moses as able to judge via the oracular word he alone receives, nor as being joined by judges, who are granted the same ability but lower-down the appellate hierarchy. Instead, it carefully presents Moses as the *only one* with oracular authority (vv. 19b-20) *and* the appellate judges as ruling based on what Moses instructs the people (v. 21//vv. 24-26). The end result is not just the establishment of appellate judges as aids to Moses but a re-affirmation of Moses as the only one who "warns" (והזהרתה, Ex 18:20a) and "teaches" (והודעת, Ex 18:20b) righteousness among the people. Additional judging authority need not be a problem, so long as those judges receive their founding authority *through Moses* and so long as Moses' role remains uniquely *unmediated*.

(b) The type of authority (or authoritative activity) which is meant to be conveyed to the seventy elders in Exodus 24 often circles around questions of covenant and elevated position: These seventy are elevated (literally called up the mountain of God, vv. 1-2, 9) to a position like Moses' in order to participate in seeing God and eating with him (vv. 9-11). While many interpreters claim these elders are representatives of Israel at a "covenant meal" with God,[28] Jean-Louis Ska (among others) has effectively argued against this.[29] For Ska, the elders are instead

[28] E.g. Martin Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary* (Old Testament Library; London: SCM, 1962), 196; Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 71.

[29] Jean-Louis Ska, "Vision and Meal in Exodus 24:11," in *The Exegesis of the Pentateuch: Exegetical Studies and Basic Questions* (Forschungen zum Alten Testament 66; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 165–83. See his extensive engagement with many others regarding the "covenant meal" thesis.

privileged to see God, in order that they may take their place like prophets[30] and "belong to the 'divine council'" of God,[31] becoming established as "worthy successors of Moses."[32]

There are many similarities here with Numbers 11, but for now, only two points are required: (1) *Moses is the only legal authority.* If we take Ska's reading of the passage, unlike the judges of Exodus 18, the Seventy of Exodus 24 do not attain legal authority here.[33] In traditional readings, the Seventy elders are more legal but designated by God as fellow-ratifiers of the covenant and do not receive their position *from* Moses. Even so, according to this reading, their position is not here represented as authorities *over* the people but as representatives *on their behalf.* Either way, the Seventy are not established as legal authorities apart from Moses. (2) *Moses as mediator is still protected.* In Exodus 24:3-8, Moses is carefully depicted as the only one recounting (ויספר) the laws and covenant (Ex 24:3, 7). It is also he alone, in 24:2, 12, who God invites *further* up the mountain, after the communal vision and meal they share. (Although an apparently-interpolated Joshua tags along, they are not joined by the elders.) Moses alone will be given the stones of law written by God (24:12), and he alone will worship "near YHWH" (24:2).

In the traditional reading, the Seventy are therefore involved in a legal transaction where they act alongside Moses as representatives of the people, but Moses still has first, unique place among them. In Ska's reading, although set up with access to the divine council,[34] the elders are not privy to any more oracular or written law than the people, and though they truly "beheld God," their vision

[30] They share "the prophetic tradition [wherein] the inaugural vision is the moment when God makes the one he has chosen his official envoy," even if they themselves are not " 'envoys' like the prophets….Their mandate is different." Enticingly, Ska suggests examining Numbers 11 to find out what that mandate is but refrains from doing so himself, ibid., 174, 174n51.
[31] Ibid., 174.
[32] Ibid., 183.
[33] In Ska's reading, the covenant is kept at bay as a separate pentateuchal strand (vv. 3-8) and one which not clearly connected to vv. 9-11 in any case, Ibid., 168.
[34] Ibid., 183.

of God was muted by the "pavement of sapphire" beneath His feet (24:11).[35] Once again, Moses stands alone, with those slated as intermediaries (between himself and the people) still separate from Moses' own uniqueness.

(c) The prompt for Numbers 12 is a question about why Moses should be considered unique in his "prophetic position,"[36] why he should claim "exclusive authority as God's spokesman,"[37] especially if both Aaron and Miriam are also named "prophets" in Israel (in Ex 7:1 and 15:20, respectively).[38] Ostensibly, it should not be a problem (as we will see in Num 11:29) for Israel to have more than one prophet, but the passage again seeks to preserve the singular position and authority of Moses, specifically his completely unmediated access to YHWH (Num 12:6–8).[39] Especially when considered in light of the phrasing used to promote Moses' role, it seems very likely that this unmediated access is not just to preserve Moses as singular *authority* over the people (including his authority over his siblings),[40] but to preserve his position as *conveyor of law*: Num 12:8a specifically draws attention to *Moses' ability* to see the "form of YHWH (תמנת יהוה)." This is in strong contrast to YHWH's specific emphasis on *the people's inability* to see his form in Deut 4:12 & 15 (תמנה). This inability is tied to the very premise of the first commandment(s) as described in Deut 4:13–14 & 15–16. Taken together, it is *because* the people *cannot* see the "form (תמנה)" of YHWH while Moses *can* that Moses is called to speak YHWH's "covenant," "the Ten

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[35] Whether one takes לטהר in Ex 24:10 as "clear" as the sky like the transparent-blue effect of sapphire or "clear [blue]" as the perfect sky-blue color of lapis lazuli, there is a mediated effect to their apprehension that Moses soon surpasses as he ascends.

[36] Gray, *Numbers*, 122.

[37] Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *Journeying with God: A Commentary on the Book of Numbers* (ITC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 79.

[38] Noth and Baltzer note Miriam's status and title, respectively, *Numbers*, 95; *Die Biographie der Propheten* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1975), 46. The significance of Aaron's title is my own suggestion. (Levine disagrees that Aaron could be claiming prophetic status since he believes that theme only occurs in P, not JE, as here, *Numbers 1-20*, 328–9.)

[39] "Die *Unmittelbarkeit* des Mose zu Gott wird hier dadurch ausgesagt, daß es von ihm heißt: Von der Nähe zu Jahwe leitet sich die unbedingte Autorität des Mose ab," Baltzer, *Biographie*, 45–6, emphasis added.

[40] See 121n18.

Commandments" (Deut 4:13).[41] In this law-speaking, he is a prophet like no other.[42] Where other prophets may speak "like Moses" because they can refer to their apprehension of the shapes and forms which *surround* God's revelation, Moses sees the *essence* of divine communication, the thing signified. Again, we may press to keep Moses' personal, leading authority separate from his authority as unmediated mediator of the law, but to do so, is to swim hard against the tide of narrative and probable intertextual allusion. Instead, they protect Moses' authority without denying other categories of leadership so that Israel's confidence in the singular Mosaic source of their law might not be undermined.

Each of these episodes of concurrent authorities (Exodus 18, Exodus 24, and Numbers 12) can best be understood as protecting Moses' unmediated role as deliverer of divine the divine word, with its written aspect often implied, if not directly stated. Where others may receive their authority through another, these do so through him and no other. All other (prophetic) authorities other than Moses are carefully depicted as worthy and honored members of the community but specifically not rivals to Moses himself. There is a set-place for Moses as the only giver of the law-book.

Moses and His Successors

Still further, we can remark on Moses' relationship to his law-book vis-à-vis the later *successors of Moses*. In Deuteronomy and Joshua, the accounts of Moses' relationship to his successors pay special attention to his law-book. Three successors arguably receive the focus of the material: (a) the elders of Israel, (b) the Levitical priests, and (c) Joshua.[43] In different ways, each are given the law of

[41] ET, mine.

[42] Also, see Ska who similarly sees Moses' claim about the Lord appearing to him in Ex 3:16 as a claim to prophetic status, "Vision," 172. Certainly an attribution which Num 12 does not countermand: "Mose zwar mit Prophetie (Dtn 18; Dtn 34,10), …zu tun hatte," Seebass, *Numeri (10,11-14,45)*, 31. See below.

[43] There is a possibility of a fourth inheritor, the tribal שפטים. They are explicitly commissioned in Deut 16:18, and one could argue they have their origins in the Exodus account of Moses' inability to judge the whole nation (Exodus 18). But their absence in Deut 31 and their

Moses to speak to the people, especially as they enter the promised land. This law is given to them by (1) speaking *with Moses* and (2) commissioning them *to write or read it*. Additionally, (3) each of these law-book transitions could be argued to find its beginnings in narratives of Moses' weaknesses in Exodus and Numbers. In order: (a) the "elders of Israel" are depicted as commanding the people *with Moses* in Deut 27:1[44] and commissioned in Deut 31:9 to read the words of the law just written by Moses to the people every seventh year at Sukkot.[45] Numbers 11 may be introducing a subset of those elders (i.e. "their scribes") in answer to Moses' weakness: his complaint and wish for death (11:11-15). (b) The Levitical priests speak *with Moses* to "all Israel" in Deut 27:9 and are commissioned *with* the elders of Israel in Deut 31:9[46] to read the law at Sukkot. Correspondingly, Exodus 4:14 (cf. 7:1) introduces the position of Aaron as replacing Moses' intended role as spokesman to the people after Moses' moment of weakness, arguing a third time with YHWH.[47] (c) Finally, in Deut 32:44, Joshua[48] is depicted as singing the song of Moses (**האזינו**) *with him*, and while he

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subordination to the Levitical priests (**הכהנים הלוים**) in Deut 16:9 questions their status, even as much as they fit the pattern suggested here.

[44] **ויצו משה וזקני ישראל את־העם**

[45] See *next* footnote for Hebrew text. We may note that Deut 31:9 gives the written law to "all the elders of Israel" while Deut 27:1 includes simply "the elders of Israel" as co-speakers with Moses; however, the distinction is not substantial. There is already ambiguity about whether "elders of Israel" pertains to a titled group of elders or is simply a designation for all elders in the nation of Israel. The terms are noted here for their similarity and potential harmony.

[46] **ויכתב משה את־התורה הזאת ויתנה אל־הכהנים בני לוי הנשאים את־ארון ברית יהוה ואת־כל־זקני ישראל** Although our discussion here follows Deuteronomy 27 and orders the elders of Israel before the Levitical priests, we may well note that Deut 31:9 places a much greater initial emphasis on the Levitical priests, and their role as "bearers of the ark of the covenant of YHWH" is emphasized (likely because of its importance as the place where Israel "deposits" its laws, as in various ANE legal traditions, including Israel's own). Note: Deut 31:25-26 and its proximity of elders to mention of Moses' death in Deut 31:27-28. E.g. On Hittite treaty forms which feature "Provision for deposit in the temple and periodic public reading," G.E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," *BA* 17, no. 3 (1954): 60. Other discussions of deposits of law: 2 Kgs 22 [esp., v.8 "the book of the law in the house of YHWH"]; *m. Kelim* 15:6, *m. Sotah* 7:8, *y. Ta'anit* 20b; cf. Carr, *Writing*, 214.

[47] While the founding moment for "Levite" as opposed to "Aaronic" distinction is more precisely cited at Ex 32:25-29, the passages here distinctly adjure the Levitical *priests* (**הכהנים**); so, locating their source-narrative in Aaron's replacement of Moses is more appropriate, cf. Ex 28:1. (This is not to deny the diachronic problems with this depiction, cf. Ex 19:22-24; Ezek 44; as classically detailed in Wellhausen, *Prolegomena*, 152–67.)

[48] On name variant, Josh 13:16; cf. Deut 31:23.

is not commissioned to recite the words before the people in Deuteronomy, other extensive measures are taken to establish his connection to the law—especially in Deut 31:14-15, where he alone is called to the Tent of Meeting in order for YHWH to "instruct him (**ואצונו**)."[49] Care is also taken to demonstrate the "spirit of wisdom" by the laying on of hands, given to Joshua in Deut 34:9; likely intended to parallel with Num 27:12-23,[50] which mentions the spirit in Joshua also by Moses' laying on of hands.[51]

The book of Joshua confirms the intended task of transmitting the law. Repeating themes from Deuteronomy 31, Joshua is admonished to recite the law-book of Moses orally (Josh 1:7-8a) because success in the land depends on his and the people's obedience to these very commands (1:8b-9; 13, 15b-18). He likewise leads the efforts to obey the command of YHWH through Moses to *inscribe the law on stones* at the Jordan and on Mt Ebal.[52] Thus, the book of Joshua intends to communicate that Joshua faithfully *translated* the words and law-book of Moses into the promised land.[53] Moses' most severe failure, in Numbers 20, provides the necessity for Joshua to succeed him (cf. Deut 31:1-3). Interestingly, all three of these successors appear in Deuteronomy 31 (i.e. 31:9, 14), which also contains the

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[49] Likewise, Deut 31:23's encouragement to Joshua is sandwiched between two instances of Moses writing (vv. 22 and 24, the song and the law, respectively).

[50] **קח־לך את־יהושע בן־נון איש אשר־רוח בו וסמכת את־ידך עליו** (Num 27:18)

[51] From which, in part, Jewish tradition (and likely, by extension, Christianity) has drawn its ordination tradition of **סמיכה** (rd. **סמך**), the laying on of hands. This Jewish tradition combines aspects of Num 11:16-17; 24-25 and Num 27:12-23.

[52] Following the parallel of Joshua 8:30-35 (where Joshua writes and reads the law-book of Moses to the people) with Deut 27:4 (as Moses commanded), Joshua 4:4-8; 19-24 (stone memorial at the command of YHWH as soon as they cross the Jordan; as YHWH told Joshua) may very well be intended as a fulfillment of Deut 27:2 (stone memorial inscribed with the words of the law as soon as they cross the Jordan).

[53] Note the signals in Exodus-Joshua for this faithful transmission, with fulfillment of command in victory and law together, passing from YHWH to Moses to Joshua:
YHWH to Moses: (Ex 39:42; Lev 7:38; Lev 27:34; [Num 36:13;] Deut 34:9) **כל/(כ)אשר צוה יהוה את־משה**
Moses to Joshua: (Josh 8:35) **מכל אשר־צוה משה**
YHWH to Moses to Joshua: (Josh 11:15) **כאשר צוה יהוה את־משה עבדו כן־צוה משה את־יהושע**

strongest emphasis on the writing of the law of any place in Exodus-Joshua (cf. 31:9, 11, 19, 22, 24-25).[54]

Moses Above Others

In the end, two main conclusions may be drawn from this material: (1) The only source of legal authority in Israel is the law-book which comes through Moses. In this sense, *he* is Israel's "lawgiver"; he and no other. All legal authority flows through him. (2) The Bible's own characterization of Moses as giver of his law-book flows directly from his combined role as prophet and scribe. Throughout these passages and examples, Moses' ability to see YHWH and to hear him speak in an unmediated fashion is protected and emphasized. He then transmits what he hears and sees either to those who become fellow authorities in Israel or to the nation as a whole. Ultimately, he does this by writing (what is not really his but) YHWH's law into a book, and all access to Moses' law is through its written record. Oracle and writing are therefore a single, authoritative characterization of Moses in Exodus-Joshua. The law-book of YHWH is the law-book that Moses hears and in some ways sees, and that he speaks and writes.

Successors Like Moses

Surrounded by these similar examples, the elders of Numbers 11 emerge within an appropriate category of Moses' successors (viz. "elders of Israel"), following their consistent pattern of generation during a time of weakness for Moses (11:11-15) while protecting his sole, unmediated status (by speaking of their reception of the same spirit upon *him*, rather than a separate or equally-divine spirit). They also demonstrate an exceptional closeness to the divine presence at the Tent of Meeting (on par or closer than that experienced by the elders of Exodus 24) and attainment of prophetic status (like Aaron and Miriam in Numbers 12, but still

[54] "The significance of Moses' writing of the law receives its clearest formulation in Deut. 31," Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Christian Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 133.

enough *unlike* Moses himself)—all this after their specific selection from among a broader group of worthy individuals (with some similarities to the judges of Exodus 18). They emerge as affirmers of Moses' lawgiving role, as well as approximating it in key ways. Far from precluding Moses' role as lawgiver from an exegesis of Numbers 11, the portrait of Moses we can see here demands we keep Numbers 11 *particularly* close to Moses, not just in his weariness or his governing role, but as the giver of Israel's law-book. In fact, the elders of Numbers 11 are placed as closely to the act of law-writing as possible, without actually depicting them as doing so (a depiction which, if present, would confuse and undermine Moses' sole authority). These are themes to which we will return, but for now, we may note that *together this biblical portrait portrays Moses as Israel's lawgiver, a role which combines spiritual-prophetic ability and scribal skills and which describes the same kind of authority as the elders of Numbers 11 (excepting that theirs originates in Moses himself).*

Moses as YHWH's (and Israel's) Prophet-Scribe: To Stand, To See, To Hear, To Speak, To Write

Thus far, having characterized Moses as lawgiver through a particular focus on Moses' relationships to "his" law-book and his successors throughout Exodus-Joshua, we may now look more specifically at Moses as *a prophet-scribe.*[55] Few

[55] Watts, "Moses," 422. I am indebted to James Watts for this characterization even if his descriptions of "prophet-scribe" are somewhat different from my own. As prophet, Watts sees the oracular role of Moses as underdeveloped and observes a general lack of "messenger formulas typical of prophets when he delivers laws to Israel"; instead, Watts observes, "Moses sounds most like other Israelite prophets when his divine message consists of warnings and threats," 419. Watts's view identifies differences between Mosaic prophecy and *other biblical prophecy*, but a view to Moses' social role as mediator between YHWH and the people still stands: Moses still *acts* like a biblical prophet even if some of the signals surrounding him occur in a different register. Watts then adds to the discussion a recognition of Moses' prophetic content as harmonious with prophetic tradition. This does not take away from an identification of Moses as prophetic mediator: Moses is both socially and literalily an Israelite prophet, cf. ibid., 420. As scribe, Watts sees Moses as potentially more *flawed* in his interpretative role as scribe (425) and bold in his modifications of divine law (423) than I do. Still, we agree that Moses is depicted as the single human authority behind all laws, even as they appear contradictory (e.g. "Moses remains the authority for both rulings [in Deut 13 and 18]," 423). For my part, I would prefer to remain open

would demur from attributing both titles to Moses, but it is the inherent combination that we wish to highlight here. Obviously, the recurrence of these attributes in the story of the elders of Numbers 11 signals an important parallel for our discussion, but just *how the parallel functions* must follow on from a close examination of three key observations: (1) Moses' role as prophet-scribe is one which occurs in the center of his own self-identification within Israel and in the center of Israel's corporate life (i.e. Moses *is* YHWH's and *Israel's* prophet-scribe), (2) that role originates from his own activity, specifically standing, seeing, hearing, speaking and writing.

Moses is often regarded as "*the* prophet *par excellence*" in Israel.[56] By which, we can safely say, Moses is considered *the* "spokesman for God" to whom all other Israelite prophets can only approximate in their ministry.[57] As scribe, Moses alone inscribes the law from God himself. While Moses lives, no contemporary of Moses is ever depicted as writing the law at the direction of God. Although his successors *continue* to mediate the law to the people *after* him, the people first *received* the law-book *directly* from Moses. He does not even have Joshua act as his amanuensis; he writes the words of YHWH himself (e.g. Ex 24:4; 34:27-28; Deut 31:9; 19). It is true, as James Watts observes, that, in places, YHWH himself

> serves as scribe (Exod 24:12; 31:18; 32:16; Deut 5:22; 9:10 [& 10:4]), but only Moses reads the tablets before they are destroyed (Exod 32:15, 19; Deut 9:17). Who inscribed the second set of tablets remains curiously [and probably purposely] ambiguous (Exod 34:1, 4, 27-28),…[58]

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about other ways which these contradictions might be navigated other than implying boldness or flaw in Moses (without disregarding these as possible reasons).

[56] Moberly, *Prophecy*, 4.

[57] Ibid., 4, citing observations of Ex 7:1 and Deut 34:10. He reinforces this claim by noting the way Deut 5:22-31 "constitute[s] the basis for God's continuing provision of prophets" in Deuteronomy 18.

[58] Watts, "Moses," 422n35. Others see layers of scribal activity instead of ambiguity: God writes Decalogue; Moses writes "the other laws, that were revealed by God in connection with the Sinai-Covenant," Eckart Otto, "The Pentateuch in Synchonical and Diachronical Perspectives: Protorabbinic Scribal Erudition Mediating Between Deuteronomy and the Priestly Code," in *Das Deuteronium zwischen Pentateuch und Deuteronomistichem Geschichtswerk* (ed. Eckart Otto and Reinhard Achenbach; FRLANT 206; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 16; cf. Moberly, *Prophecy*, 101–15.

Both these roles work together in one continuous process of law-giving. Moses is equally engaged in processes of revelation as he is in communication. As Watts avers, "As prophet and scribe…there is no access to the divine law except through [Moses]."[59]

When these traditions maintain both YHWH and Moses as scribes, they do so not to establish competing forces but to present Moses as a trustworthy mirror of the actions of YHWH himself. God's own activity is dually-conceived as both prophetic (in the sense of speaking his own divine word) and scribal: Moberly notes, "Prof. E.W. Nicholson has suggested to me that the uniqueness of the decalogue resides not only in its being spoken by God, but also in its being written by him; the speaking and the writing belong together."[60] Where others may want to elevate Moses' role as "lawgiver" over his role as "prophet" or place them as equals on a plane of pentateuchal characterizations,[61] Watts is helpfully suggestive of a different configuration: Throughout the Pentateuch, any presentation of Moses as "lawgiver" flows from his roles as both prophet *and* scribe, which are consistently presented in coordinated relationship to one another in the biblical material.[62]

Inasmuch as YHWH has selected Moses as a *prophet* of unique apprehension of the divine presence and law (access to the very mind and words of God), YHWH protects his communication of that apprehension by selecting Moses alone as *scribe* and publishes this communication to the people through the one who has uniquely seen him. For example, the whole course of Deuteronomy conveys a process whereby that which comes from the mouth (Deut 5:27) and finger of God (Deut 9:10) passes through Moses both orally and textually, is

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[59] Watts, "Moses," 425.

[60] *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32-34* (JSOTSup 22; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983), 210n198, citing Nicholson, "Decalogue as Direct Address."

[61] Respectively, James Nohrnberg, *Like Unto Moses: The Constituting of an Interruption* (ISBL; Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1995), 1; Christopher R. Seitz, "The Prophet Moses and the Canonical Shape of Jeremiah," *ZAW* 101 (1989): 5.

[62] E.g. Exodus 24:1-4 as culminating the revelation which began in 20:15-18.

conveyed to all Israel (Deut 31:19; 31:30; 32:45; and partially re-inscribed by them, 6:9; 11:20), and is carried forward by entrusted tradents (elders and Levitical priests, Deut 27:1,9; 31:9; and Joshua, Deut 32:44, 34:9), who bring the words of God to the promised land. It keeps *written* revelation as the central focus. The end-goal of Moses' prophetic activity and message is not relegated to the desert but is written in *the* book (esp. Deut 31:9, 22, 24), which they must carry forward and inscribe again on stone in the land itself (Deut 27:1-8). This process of transmission of revelation and publication is described biblically through the following sequence: *As the prophet-scribe of YHWH and Israel, Moses sees, hears, speaks, and writes uniquely and without mediators.*

As ably argued by Moberly, this prophetic process of Moses is helpfully isolated and captured in Deut 5:22-33;[63] it also carries features which will again appear when we closely examine Numbers 11.[64] In part, what Moberly notes is the awesome visual and aural presence of God in the giving of the law, from which the people recoil but toward which Moses is authorized by the people and by God to step into.[65] We know the episode is not merely theophanic because "'and he added no more [**ולא יסף**]'[66] (5:22aβ) draws a clear line under the divine address, as does the writing of the divine words on stone tablets (5:22b)".[67] Likewise, Moses is directed by the Israelites (and by YHWH, 5:28b) not only to "approach" YHWH but to "hear all that YHWH our God says" (Deut 5:17a, ET mine). Then, "you yourself will tell us all that YHWH our God says to you; we will hear and we will do it" (Deut 5:27b, ET mine). YHWH reaffirms this process in Deut 5:31, "But you stand here with me (**עמד עמדי**),[68] and I will tell you all

[63] In Jewish Bibles, the same pericope is 5:19-30; for simplicity, I follow the Christian versification here.
[64] Deuteronomy 5 and Exodus 19-20; cf. Van Seters, *Law Book*, 47–57.
[65] Watts helpfully notes that this role must be *dually* authorized by both YHWH and the people in order for Moses' role as "lawgiver" to work, "Moses," 425–6.
[66] Cp. Num 11:25b, **ולא יספו**; cf. Deut 4:2, **לא תספו**.
[67] Moberly, *Prophecy*, 6.
[68] Cp. Num 11:24b, **ויעמד אתם**; cf. Num 11:16b, **אל־אהל מועד והתיצבו שם עמך**. Also, Deut 31:14-15, which uses the same terminology of Num 11:16 (**עמד** & **יצב**) with corresponding references to God's presence in the "pillar" (**עמוד**) of cloud.

the commandments, the statues, and the ordinances, that you will teach them…" As Moberly explains:

> Here we have, spelled out with clarity and precision, the prime sense of what is to be a particular kind of mediator – not a priest (though a priest may speak for God, Mal. 2:4–7), but one whose prime responsibility is to speak for God, a prophet (*nāvi*').[69]

At the center of this paradigmatic account is the speech of Moses and YHWH. YHWH speaks to Moses and Moses speaks to the people. And yet, these two middle actions are also flanked by *seeing* and *writing* as well.

First, we should affirm with Moberly that Moses' approach to God means "that proximity to God matters for hearing God."[70] It marks Moses as one who is "standing in the divine presence," a standing that is matched in the prophetic literature by depictions of prophets standing in the divine council.[71] Though perhaps not completely fused, the relationship between "standing with God" and "seeing God" are closely related.[72] "Seeing God" has the advantage of implying a permeable access point through the eyes, through which the presence of God can enter the interior world of the viewer, who is proximate. Whether considering "proximity" or "visual apprehension," both biblical conceptions imply a transformation of the individual in order to sustain their apprehension of God. Even though Moberly extends geographic proximity with YHWH at Horeb/Sinai to a "moral" or "spiritual" proximity with God among the prophets (i.e. in their common moral view with God),[73] a focus on the visual experience over the proximate enables one to more precisely account for (a) the *mechanism* of transformation of the prophet (i.e. through the ingress of visual) and (b) the common *experiences* of Moses and the prophets after him (who "see YHWH," cf.

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[69] *Prophecy*, 7.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid., 9.
[72] I have chosen to focus on the term "seeing," but by it, I mean an "up-close seeing," "face to face"; whereas, the people see from afar and are in some global sense more proximate to God than the rest of the world, they are at a distance compared to the prophet, who approaches and sees what they do not.
[73] *Prophecy*, 9.

Isaiah 6:1). We may consider Deut 5:22-31 as placing emphases on the voice of YHWH and whether the people or Moses are close or far,[74] but the visual is not absent: The depiction of the voice of YHWH is consistently as one which comes "out of the fire" (מתוך[־]האש, vv. 22, 24, 26),[75] which they see and which communicates to them the dangers of being consumed by it (v. 25).[76] The juxtaposition between Moses and the people implies that unlike the people's brief "face to face" encounter with God in the fire (Deut 5:4), Moses is bravely willing to approach what he sees and draw near to it, despite its apparent danger (perhaps, according to a canonical reading, because he had done it before in Exodus 3).

Second, although Moses is not depicted as expressly writing the law in Deut 5:22-31, his role is still one which only a scribe could perform. At a minimum, it is his job to take the inscribed words of the Decalogue, which were once (perhaps)[77] heard orally at Horeb and read them (or, in fact, recite them from memory if they are irretrievably deposited in the Ark of the Covenant, cf. Deut 10:3-5) to the people again here in the plains of Moab. Beyond this, Moses is here commissioned to receive more of the commandments (viz. "all," 5:31), which he has perhaps recorded in Deut 6:1 and beyond,[78] but which in any case must be brought back to the people and announced to them as legally-binding, eventually finding their written form. Again, no one else in Deuteronomy is expressly depicted as the writer of Israel's law (although others undoubtedly were).[79]

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[74] By comparison, Deuteronomy 4 and Exodus 19 highlight the visual aspects of this same encounter more clearly: e.g. in Exodus 19, "the people *saw* the sound" (v. 15a, lit. ET, mine); "when the people *saw* it" (v. 15b); "You shall say to the Israelites: You yourselves *saw* that I spoke to you…" (v. 19), emphases added.

[75] A suppressed alternative aural/visual experience can be observed in 5:23 (hearing from the midst of the darkness; seeing the mountain burning).

[76] Also see the people's verbalized need for a prophet again in Deut 18:16, "If I hear the voice of YHWH my God any more, or ever *see* this great fire again, I will die," (ET, mine, emphasis added); 4:36, "on earth He let you see his great fire"; 4:9, "do not forget what you saw with your own eyes" (including YHWH's saving acts, 4:34, and his acts of judgment in the desert, 4:3).

[77] Deuteronomy 5:5 seems to interrupt a more straightforward reading of Deut 5:4, 6, interjecting Moses as the speaker of the Decalogue, cf. Van Seters, *Law Book*, 55.

[78] This section may extend to either Deut 26:19 (in 27:1, the speaker changes and 27:3 directs re-writing of the law) or 28:68 (in 28:69, there is perhaps a colophon and 28:58 implies what comes before as "written in this book").

[79] A conundrum ably expressed by Childs and one to which we will return, *Introduction*, 134.

Deuteronomy 5:22-31 thus not only depicts Moses as mediator of YHWH's word, but concludes with the invitation for Moses to become Israel's only law-writer. The door of Moses' prophetic-scribal process opens at Horeb with an eye toward its closure in the writing of the law. To close our look at Deut 5:22-31, we need simply note that where these acts of standing and seeing God, hearing his voice, speaking on his behalf, and writing are all taking place with or around Moses, as we will see they do in Numbers 11, readers should take heed to note how closely such a description is to the predominant and exclusive role of Moses, as portrayed in the Bible's own words. When the elders of Numbers 11 are called to "stand" at the Tent of Meeting (והתיצבו, 11:16; ויעמד, 11:24b)—and this in close proximity to both the presence of God, the written covenant, and the place where YHWH regularly speaks to Moses (Ex 33:9)—all within the immediate context of YHWH's descent and words to Moses (וירדתי ודברתי, 11:17; וירד…וידבר, 11:25) and followed by their prophesying and affirmation as prophets (ויתנבאו, 11:25; נביאים, 11:29), the story strongly suggests the elders' participation not just in Moses' passing on "governing" authority or something "spiritual," or even receiving the law from Moses the lawgiver, but underlines their participation in Moses' *process* of lawgiving.

An Active Prophet-Scribe

It is the *active* nature of this process of divine revelation and communication—i.e. lawgiving—to which we now turn. From a certain standpoint, one might read the above description with a sense of passivity regarding the actions of Moses, i.e. Moses *passively* sees and *passively* hears, and one might even think of Moses' oral repetition of the law as a kind of *passive* replication, his writing as a divine form of "automatic writing," without any active agency on the part of Moses.

However, another reading should be considered. Modern cultures have been increasingly inundated with visual, audio, and written stimuli, and consumption of these stimuli have in the process perhaps become rote, repetitive,

and even addictive. As a result, some recent studies on ancient aural and visual practices suggest we are blind to their importance in ancient life.[80] Rather than mass consumers of visual, audio, and written stimuli, ancients were apparently more often arrested by their apprehension of statues, frescoes, epigraphs, speeches, and poetry. Reconsidering the importance of these practices to ancient life helps correct our tendency to view these activities as more passive in nature. Recent studies suggest, whether ancient or modern, aural and visual practices are more *active* processes than typically acknowledged. "Active" does not necessarily suggest the kind of *willfulness*, which some ancients commend. It might, but there is (at the least) an *agency* in seeing and hearing, which can easily be missed.[81]

For example, an aural approach to the transmission of divine word might consider the breath (רוח) of God, which is often depicted as part of the speech of God,[82] the exhaling of his pronouncements connoting his "spirit" or "presence." From this view, Moses' active "listening" is not just about ears receiving vibrations of sound but receiving the personal presence of God, all the more since this

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[80] Aural and Visual Studies exemplified here sometimes overlap with the rise of "Performance Theory," which examines a number of different fields (e.g. daily social gatherings, public rituals, communication and semiotics, ethnography, etc.) through the lens of "performance discourse" or "performativity," cf. Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction* (2nd ed.; London: Routledge, 2003), 13. As with other developing disciplines, each of these is plagued by similar in-house conversations about their limits and potential benefit, cf. J.M.F. Heath, *Paul's Visual Piety: The Metamorphosis of the Beholder* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 42. Moses' "performance" as prophet-scribe could well be examined on its own but is only briefly touched on here, cf. Keith A. Stone, *Singing Moses's Song: A Performance-Critical Analysis of Deuteronomy's Song of Moses* (Ph.D. diss.; Harvard University, 2013). Both Heath's work and that of Carol Harrison provide excellent recent examples of the profitability of these approaches when applied to biblical and theological discussions of the transmission of divine word and teaching, cf. Carol Harrison, *The Art of Listening in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Likewise, David Carr's work, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart* is especially helpful for giving Mesopotamian, Greek, and Israelite examples of what he calls the "education-enculturation" or "socialization" of elites, including aural-visual practices of recitation, cf. 9-14, 31-2, 180-2, 207-9.

[81] Taking the visual as an example, W.J.T. Mitchell's chart on the "Genealogy of Images," details something of this possible agency: e.g. an image can, if depicted materially or graphically, require *perceptual* skills of vision, as well as *mental* skills for making ideas of those perceptions; or, if depicted verbally, an image may require *aural* skills of perception instead and a different set of mental skills for making those aural cues into ideas about the image; as cited in Heath, *Visual*, 49.

[82] Cf. 2 Sam 32:2; Isa 59:21; Ezek 2:2; cp. Gen 1:2-3; Ps 33:6; 104:29-30; 147:18.

reception is unmediated. Likewise, if Moses is taught a song (שיר) by God in Deuteronomy 32, which he is instructed to teach to the people (Deut 31:19), especially to "the elders of your tribes and your scribes (זקני שבטיכם ושטרים)" (Deut 31:28; ET, mine),[83] then the tune or cantilation of the song is implied. Moses is actively engaged in the process of listening to the revelation from God, whether deliberately *attuning* himself to the pronunciation, breath, or tunes of YHWH or simply being a *responsive agent*, thus implies not a source of variation from tradition but a properly personal and involved prophet.

The consensus of these recent aural and visual approaches leads us to consider the processes of sight and sound as not merely bio-mechanical exchanges but engagements with human faculties of language, thinking, and emotion. As such, any biblical texts may be fruitfully re-examined to pursue the impact of this more careful description on the basis of their ancient milieu alone. In our case, special evidence for the impact of these processes may be found in their evident and consistent concern to promote Moses. Whether they consciously recognize it or not, repeated ascriptions and authorizations of Moses are likely there to comfort readers of the dangers inherent in Moses' role. If there were no active agency in Moses' activity, his name alone would be sufficient for unification and authority, i.e. "and YHWH put his word in the mouth of Moses and he wrote it here." Instead, the remembrances of his character (viz. Num 12:6-8; Deut 34:7, 10) assure hearers of his ability to faithfully transmit the law of YHWH, precisely *because* there is some agency in Moses' activity as prophet-scribe: The greater the

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[83] There are significant variants in the manuscripts of this verse ranging from expansions of the referents intended to contractions of them. *Expansion:* LXX Deut 31:28, τοὺς φυλάρχους ὑμῶν [ראשי שבטיכם] καὶ τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους ὑμῶν [זקניכם] καὶ τοὺς κριτὰς ὑμῶν [שפטיכם] καὶ τοὺς γραμματοεισαγωγεῖς ὑμῶν [שטריכם]; cp. Deut 1:15; 5:23. *Contraction:* "the elders of your tribes and scribes," i.e. a single set of elders derived from scribes across the tribes. The translation here represents a mediating position which could be read as hendiadys or coordination, cf. IBHS 4.4.1b (c)-(d); *Williams'* §72.

The hendiadys mode presents itself more readily when read in light of a similar possibility in Num 11:17, זקני העם ושטריו. It also echoes the equally problematic *Letter of Aristeas* §310, "the priests and the elders of the interpreters" οἱ ἱερεῖς καὶ τῶν ἑρμηνέων οἱ πρεσβύτεροι. (To be clear, since the LXX expands rather than contracts the referents, *Aristeas* is not likely to be a reading of LXX Deut 31:28.)

holiness of the activity, the greater the need for reassurances that the activity was performed according to the will of God.

Certainly there are understandable motives for resisting this more active reading of Moses' role. Emphasizing Moses' passivity in his hearing and writing of the law, may better reassure readers (especially later ones) that the divine law has been passed down *without corruption* from Moses himself:[84] He simply and faithfully repeats the words he hears. He is a good "listener" in that he accurately records the very words of God, which he then also faithfully textualizes. In this light, biblical narratives of Moses' abilities and ascriptions of honor present him as a virtuous, passive tradent. He is not malicious and his records of the divine word are trustworthy because they are grounded in his own various experiences of the divine.

The bias in this way of conceiving Moses is a textual one: what matters are the words of the *text* of the divine law, words without variation. However, another way of conceiving Moses is not just as faithful *transmitter* or accurate recorder of the divine words, but as faithful, performing *interpreter* of the divine word. In this more active way of conceiving Moses, what matters are not just the *words* of the law but the person receiving them. Their ability to see and hear God makes their apprehension of the words full and assured, especially able to transmit

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[84] I say "later ones" because earlier, more creative phases of Scriptural production tend to recognize more active attributions about those who produce them, i.e. before Moses' law-book is fixed, recipients of the law-book want to be assured of his virtue and ability to produce such a text. But *after* such a book is established, the need for those attributions of virtue move to the text's *interpreters*, see below, e.g. Ezra's encomium in Ezra 7; Ben Sira's in the prologue to Sirach. Not until *m. Avot* 1:1's affirmations of the chain of tradition do we get a more passive depiction of the agents involved, i.e. they heard and passed down what they heard faithfully, cp. Josephus, *C. Ap.* 1:36–41, where a continuous list of names of the priestly caretakers of the text is properly preserved but this is alongside a more *active* description of the prophets' ability to know the distant past by the inspiration of God. Also, Josephus considers the role of the priests as caretakers of the biblical text as an active and interpretative one, not just passing on texts, cf. *Bell.* 3:352.

Eventually, the interpretative resources for the Scriptures are also written and fixed (e.g. Mishnah, New Testament), with the subsequent movement by Jews and Christians toward *written, authorized interpretations* and resources, rather than *oral, authorized interpreters*. The loss of interpreters is not complete, however, since even the new, written interpretations require interpreters, i.e. rabbis and presbyters trained in the written authoritative interpretations who offer interpretations of those interpretations.

to a new generation or location of hearers. They are thus considered capable of re-producing the word, perhaps even with variation, because they know the essence of the words to be communicated. They faithfully (though perhaps not in the same way every time) convey the words of God to the people.[85] In this scenario, what makes for faithful transmission is the *liveliness* of the words, reflecting the liveliness of the prophetic experience and message received. The fact that they contain variation is not necessarily a sign of *in*fidelity but fidelity. Through multiple, even varied re-tellings, the truth—now *including* what is more or less central to the law—is conveyed.[86] The tradent, Moses, knows and has likely been transformed by the sights and sounds of God, and his reproduction of those sights and sounds is attended to with a similar active attention to the way he received it. Only then is communication faithfully completed. All this is to suggest there is likely an interpretative aspect to Moses' somewhat shrouded role as Israel's prophet-scribe. To pierce behind that shroud into the mechanics of his role is a tenuous prospect, but the main reason it should nevertheless be regarded with such care is because there is more to it than the mere passing on of written words. Indeed, there is more to written words than is often acknowledged.

From Active Prophet-Scribe to Multiple-Mosaic Authorship

Beholding this "Moses" as an active prophet rather than mere divine stenographer, also presents an opportunity to consider his central role as both originator of the law and modifier of it, i.e. as a legal interpreter as much as a legal conveyor. This interpretative role gets played out in his role as scribe. In his discussion of the characterization of Moses in the Pentateuch, Watts sees Moses' role as scribe as

[85] Any lecturer or preacher can recognize the feeling of having given the "same" lecture or sermon, while knowing variations have been applied depending on the group gathered before them, all to the same purpose of *communicating* the material intended. Why should biblical prophets (or laws) be restricted to the same words in each iteration?

[86] Again, the idea of determining what is more or less central to the idea of a passage is a familiar one to any biblical scholar who utilizes the best textual criticism at their disposal: Any interpretation which utilizes an idea found only in, say, MT and not in the LXX, is more suspect than one found presented (though in differently expressed ways) in both.

like that of other ancient scribes who not only record, but also teach and interpret. Moses thus freely modifies and presents differing points of view within the one law of YHWH.[87] In a sense, despite the arguments of B. Levinson and others, it is not, in fact, later communities who modify the law.[88] According to the biblical text itself, we must acknowledge, at some level, such modifications are *from Moses*, and they are consistent with his acts as a scribe of YHWH.

Just how such a single "Moses" produces variations within the law-book that appear at such historical and theological distance from one another has been variously explained by appeals to the compositional nature of the Mosaic text (with incumbent theological motivations in each strand) and/or the narrative requirements of Israelite law, among other theories. But these theories tend to mask the fundamental centrality of Moses as both originator and modifier of the law-book. They presuppose that such modifications were undertaken in the name of Moses, but without much concern for how such modifications might yet be harmonized. However, we may better account for these changes if we consider *"Mosaic authorship" as more than a singular, passive occurrence; rather, one where other participants may join the Mosaic role and reproduce his activity, albeit under special (Mosaic) circumstances (i.e. those which do not undermine Moses as their source, which recognizably convey Mosaic spirit, prophecy, or authority).*

By consciously proposing flexibility into the role of Moses, we begin to make space for a kind of Mosaic authorship that extends beyond Moses himself.

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[87] This is a depiction which others have argued is ensconced by clearly seeing the Pentateuch's compositional sources, e.g. Joel S. Baden, *The Promise to the Patriarchs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 5–6; 156–7. Those sources are purposely enshrined, despite their differences, in order to communicate that the views of various Jewish communities are welcome in biblical tradition. Where Baden focuses on the text holding different views at the same time, Watts attaches importance to Moses as the presenter of those views. I follow Watts' focus on Mosaic authority over Baden's more canonical move (although, of course, the canon supports this Mosaic authority), but I would also extend that centralizing "Moses" not just to a character in the Pentateuch who has his own literary voices but also to the community who see themselves in living continuity with that character.

[88] Bernard M. Levinson, *Deuteronomy and the Hermeneutics of Legal Innovation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Rather than fictionalizing the single actor, "Moses," as a manipulatable masthead for various theological agendas, to whom later writers (somewhat disingenuously) appeal as "single-Mosaic authorship,"[89] when they actually know better, we may instead consider ancient Mosaic authorship as always intending a "multiple-Mosaic authorship." By this, I mean the idea of multiple individuals, who see themselves operating by Mosaic prophecy, spirit, and/or authority, to add or subtract lines of biblical texts which suggest (or have been traditionally ascribed to) Moses as their original author/writer. We might call these individuals, "Mosaic writers" to help distinguish their own sense of Moses as remaining in the role of "author."

But how did such later communities *justify* their own consistent appeal to Moses as *the author* of their law-book, while knowing it consisted of multiple human agents?[90] I propose Numbers 11 answers this need uniquely. By identifying a consistent council of individuals from the highest echelons of Hebrew society (elders), who are designated as scribes, and most importantly, imbued with the spirit upon Moses, later scribes may well have viewed their own modifications, indeed their own bodies and minds, not as operating on their own justifications, or even divine ones, but as the result of the prompting of Moses himself. *In short, only those scribes who were communally regarded as proper interpreters of Mosaic law and regarded themselves as imbued with the spirit of Moses likely regarded themselves authorized by God and the community to modify the words of Moses.*[91]

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[89] By "single-Mosaic authorship," I mean the notion of a single actor, called Moses, as author, situated historically in the chronology of the events described about him in the Bible.

[90] Cf. Brevard Childs's suggestion that the perplexing and perennial problem of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch depends on our willingness to hear the persistent appeal *within the canon* (as well as beyond) for the *writings* of Moses, during time periods when at least sections of the Pentateuch existed in *composite* forms. How are we to explain this? Childs wonders. We must keep our eye on Moses as *writer of the law,* suggests Childs, even where our later investigations of his writings makes us suspect they are not his alone, *Introduction*, 132–5.

[91] There is considerable overlap in the position I am presenting here with the model presented by Eva Mroczek, "Moses, David and Scribal Revelation: Preservation and Renewal in Second Temple Jewish Textual Traditions," in *The Significance of Sinai: Traditions about Divine Revelation in Judaism and Christianity* (ed. George J. Brooke, Hindy Najman, and Loren T. Stuckenbruck;

Numbers 11 provides just such a category of scribes to which others may have appealed and belonged, and it presents such a category precisely where it would need to be to justify changes and development in the Mosaic law: Within the law-book of Moses himself. Such an *intra-pentateuchal* resource could well have provided the kind of authorization later modifiers of the Mosaic law required to carry out their tasks of changing and developing the very *text* of Moses' own words, without violating Moses' own status as sole author of his law-book.[92] All this becomes possible when the ascriptions of scribe and prophet are equally applied to Moses and his seventy elders with the full active agency they likely intend.

With or without this model for multiple-Mosaic authorship, the elders of Numbers 11 are likely, like Moses, not only carriers of Mosaic text but interpreters of it. To establish this further, we need to say more about biblical and Jewish conceptions of interpreters of divine communication, especially the Mosaic law-book.

Prophet-Scribes as Biblical (& Mosaic) Interpreters

To be sure, the word "interpreter" rarely occurs in the Hebrew Bible;[93] instead, for most of the biblical record, the role of an interpreter of divine communication

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TBN 12; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 91–115. My work supplies a possible biblical basis for the same rationale she and others, like Hindy Najman, propose in framing what appears to be evident in Second Temple texts. For more, see Chapter 6.

[92] Cp. Albertz, who proposes a similar purpose for Numbers 11, but based on an elaborate historical reconstruction, complete with code named interests, such as "Eldad and Medad" as "the D composition," Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period* (trans. John Bowden; 2 vols.; OTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 2:478–9. My own model is much more flexible. Any group of scribes in any period who saw themselves as communally regarded and inspired scribes could well have felt justified in modifying the Mosaic text, based on Numbers 11. How this does and does not relate to the conception of Moses as author of Genesis, for example, is much more complicated, and is not a necessary corollary to this proposal.

[93] *"Interpreter":* מליץ is used in Gen 42:23 for the one clear moment of linguistic translation in the Hebrew Bible. It is also used in Isa 43:27; Job 33:23; and 2 Chr 32:31 for mediating messengers (or envoys), angelic or human (LXX for these, either missing or variants). Neh 8:8 famously describes deputies of Ezra "reading the book of the law of God, explaining (מפרש) and making it understandable so [the people] could discern the reading" (ET, mine), which is clearly an example

is simply designated as "prophet," with Moses as the prophet above all others (Num 12:6-8; Deut 34:10-11). Prophets articulate, enact, and even modify the divine words which come through them,[94] and despite reasoned theories about an "oral stage" in the development of biblical prophecy,[95] the prophets of Scripture are, in their final form, often "writing prophets," even from the earliest stages. Thus, a chain of divine communication develops where Moses is the ultimate prophet-scribe, and Joshua and Samuel and others are also depicted as prophets who write, faithfully and consistently in the wake of Moses' authority and writing.[96] Others, like Jeremiah, are presented carefully with verifying authorization for their skills as priest[97] and/or scribe[98] and their spiritual authority, which sometimes dovetail (if rarely) with appeals to the law-book of Moses.[99]

This does not mean that there was no development in Israelite prophecy, but simply that *prophets are consistently depicted as interpreters of divine communication, in some harmony with Moses.* There is good reason to consider even pentateuchal mentions of prophesying as maintaining a strong tie to scribal practices, even though they occur "early" in Israel's envisioned history (i.e. as depicted). Likewise, although one should avoid describing post-Mosaic era prophets as "interpreters of Mosaic law" in an anachronistic way to the probable

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of interpretation, probably exegetical and linguistic in nature, cf. Neh 13:23-4. Finally, Ezra 4:7 includes and example of "translation" (מתרגם). The LXX uses forms of ἑρμηνεύω in Gen 42:23 and Ezr 4:7, as well as other occasions outside the MT text-tradition (e.g. LXX Esther 10:3λ [OG F:11]; 2 Macc 1:36; LXX Job 42:17β). Otherwise: LXX Isa 43:27, "rulers" (ἄρχοντες); LXX Job 33:23 (LXX minus); LXX 2 Chr 32:31 "envoys" (πρεσβευταῖς).

[94] For an account of this transition, e.g. William M. Schniedewind, *The Word of God in Transition: From Prophet to Exegete in the Second Temple Period* (JSOTSup 197; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

[95] See Chapter 2.

[96] *Joshua:* Admittedly, נביא is not directly applied to Joshua in the Bible, but his repeated acts as agent of Moses in Exodus 17:9-14; Deut 31//Josh 24; Deut 34:9; and beyond, provide the basis for his firm attribution as prophet in Jewish tradition (see Rashi, *Meg.* 3a); for writing, see Deut 27:2-8 fulfilled in Joshua 8:30-35 and, probably, Josh 4:1-8, 19-24; also, Josh 24:26. *Samuel:* prophet, 1Sam 9:9; writing, 1 Sam 10:25; in the wake of Moses: 1 Sam 12:6-8.

[97] Jer 1:1.

[98] Perhaps, Jer 36:2; 36:28, where the imperative is directed to Jeremiah, even though he uses Baruch to fulfill it. Jeremiah 8:8 may also indicate deep familiarity with the interpretative role scribes play, cp. Jer 36:32, cf. R.K. Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations* (TOTC; Downers' Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1981), 34.

[99] E.g. Jer 15:11; Isa 63:11-12; Mal 4:4.

developments of the books involved, the situation of their relationship is less discordant than was once supposed, i.e. there is consistent evidence of rapprochement between the prophets (and their tradition-based and tradition-building ways) and Moses (never-minding the origins of either). Functionally, a consistent appeal to the story and covenants of Israel (within which Moses plays a critical role) functions to draw Moses and the prophets together despite a lack of consistent appeal to specific legal texts.[100] Common appeals to Moses and the prophets as equally empowered interpreters of the same divine source place the authority of each on a similar plane while keeping Moses firmly in the foundational position.[101] In the midst of this, Numbers 11 is often regarded a further bolstering of this harmony between Moses and prophecy, even if the kind of prophecy envisaged is debated. Not until Ezra, do we find the obvious high point of both scribal interpretation and the Mosaic ideal. Ezra, is four-times recorded as "scribe" in his encomium in Ezra 7,[102] each with a tie to Moses and/or the law and commandments of YHWH.

As the biblical period gives way to the Hellenistic, the language of "interpreters" becomes more precise, and as the biblical text becomes more fixed, there is an increasing involvement of the spirit (of prophecy) in interpretation.[103] Those who "interpret" are often ideally depicted not just as "prophets" (although that also continues, e.g. 1 Macc 4:46; 9:27; 14:41) but also as "inspired scribes" (e.g. 4 Ezra 14:23-48).[104] As such, by the end, those who are authorized to write and interpret holy writ are configured in very similar ways to the one whose text

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[100] For a good overview of the approaches to prophecy and the books of the prophets since de Wette, see Seitz, *Prophecy and Hermeneutics*, 75–92.

[101] Indeed, if all prophecy is from YHWH, as is law; yet law is privileged (albeit only occasionally so in the prophets) and never overruled by prophetic forces, what else could we call biblical prophecy except additional comment and interpretation of law?

[102] **ספר** (Heb. & Aram.) in Ezra 7:6, 11-12.

[103] **פשר** Daniel 4:6[9], 15[18]; 5:11-14, cp. spirit of understanding Isa 11:2; Ps Sol. 17:37 (18:7); also, cp. *Jubilees* 1:7, 26.

[104] John R. Levison, *Of Two Minds: Ecstasy and Inspired Interpreters in the New Testament World* (DSSCOL 2; N. Richland Hills, Tex.: Bibal, 1999), 37–56; Levison, *Inspired: The Holy Spirit and the Mind of Faith*, 125–45, whose examples include: Sir 39, 1QpHab, 1QH, 4 Ezra; cf. Mroczek, "Moses."

they are interpreting, the same basic grammar of "prophet-scribes" (or, sometimes, "inspired scribes") persists for Moses, prophets, and later interpreters of both, only Ezra provides something of a gap in this pattern.

As a result, we may propose that the elders of Numbers 11 are sufficiently similar to other biblical prophet-scribes who interpret divine communication and/or Moses' writ to suggest they function as successors and interpreters of Moses' words and authority. Yet, there is likely more to how Numbers 11 formulates this interpretative alignment in these prophetic elder-scribes, much of it coming to light when we compare the precise-wording of Numbers 11 with Greek conceptions of prophecy.

Literary, Inspired, and Divinely-Dependable Prophets of Moses the Lawgiver

Both since there is a greater wealth of explanation about the way prophecy works in Greek writings and because (as we have seen before) so much of our own thinking stems from Greek conceptions, a brief comparison of Numbers 11 (and incumbent presumptions from broader Hebrew thought) with Greek conceptions of prophecy will be in order. Our comparison will follow three ideas about both Hebrew and Greek prophets: (1) their *literary* qualities (preserved in the elders' ascription as "scribes"), (2) their inspired (or "magnetized") qualities (preserved in their depiction as having the specifically-described "spirit upon Moses" rest on them), and (3) their ability to present YHWH as he is known in the law-book of Moses (as one who is philosophically dependable and consistent, unlike Greek gods) because of their closeness to Moses and his speech (as preserved in the nearness to him at the time of YHWH's speaking). By the end, the number of possible connections between the elders of Numbers 11 and an ideal category of Mosaic interpreters will greatly increase from the more minimal account we have just proposed.

(1) As previously discussed,[105] the ideal context for Greek prophecy was one where the seer (μάντις) was out of her mind while receiving inspired sight or sound. However, what we have not yet noted is the social situation of this seer's activity: In one classic understanding, after delivering the divine communication, the seer is then *interpreted* by "prophets" (ὑποκριταί; προφῆται), who perform (like an actor) the seer's content for those who need it,[106] and who, some suggest, even shape the form which this oracular word takes.[107] This process of divine sight or sound followed by interpretation is, in fact, similar to some examples we have of Hebrew prophecy, albeit occurring within the Hebrew prophet himself (rather than between seer and prophets). Summarizing the definition of Manfred Weippert, Armin Lange suggests two-stages for ANE prophets (including those from Israel), (1) receiving and (2) communicating:

> The prophet receives a divine message and communicates it to his/her audience. Although prophecy is mostly aural in character, in many cases, the communication of the message to the audience is achieved in written [viz. "literary"] form.[108]

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[105] See Chapter 2.

[106] Plato, *Tim.* 71E-72B. All Greek of Plato from LCL, Lamb or Shorey.

[107] According to Gregory Nagy (using the example of the Pythia, the seer at Delphi but convinced of a broader pattern at work), although the seer "controlled the *content* of the mantic utterance[,] I infer that the *prophētēs* controlled the *form*. The standard transmission of this form,…was the poetic form of dactylic hexameter. Accordingly, I see no reason to doubt that the *prophētēs* was involved in the poetic formalization of prophecy," Gregory Nagy, *Pindar's Homer: The Lyric Possession of an Epic Past* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 163 (emphasis modified). Cf. Plutarch, *Pyth. orac.* 396C-397D, suggests inspiration is a process of inspiring the mind and soul of the Delphic priestess (rather than her mouth) with visions and/or light such that it is her own craft which produces the versed oracles (which explains why their form is so poor, especially compared to Homer).

[108] Lange, "Greek," 464. E.g. Amos' sighting of the summer fruit in 8:1-2, or Jeremiah's of the almond tree in 1:11-12; both enabling etymological links to the prophetic word to follow, קיץ/קיץ & שקד, respectively, Abraham Avni, "Inspiration in Plato and the Hebrew Prophets," *CompLit* 20 (1968): 60. Borrowing Jean Bottéro's categories and following Martti Nissenen, Lange describes this type of prophecy as a form of "inductive divination", Lange, "Greek," 463. Lange's impression is that direct/inspired prophecy is a widespread ANE phenomenon (perhaps even the source of its later Greek forms, 482), i.e. as "found in most Ancient Near Eastern cultures" (463), but Bottéro specifies that the phenomenon "does not seem to have been very widespread—and it was even less valued, by the literate in any case—in Mesopotamia proper, with the exception of certain periods and certain milieus," Jean Bottéro, *Mesopotamia: Writing, Reasoning, and the Gods* (trans. Zainab Bahrani and Marc Van De Mieropp; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 106. *Israel then remains the largest repository of this kind of prophecy in the ANE.* Lange, helpfully adds that we

There is thus an implied "literary" quality to Hebrew prophecy, sights and sounds must be put into word which equally express the content encountered. Although we do not normally consider it, we may well propose that phrases and aspects of Mosaic law might be "seen" or "heard" by later interpreters in just such a similar way to these prophets, their task being equally divine and equally oracular to those we now regard more strictly as "prophets."[109] What qualities would be necessary for such interpreters? An ability with words (scribes) and an ability with perceiving divine communication (prophets). Thus, the descriptor of "prophet-scribe" might not just *parallel* Moses or other divine communicators, it may signal their same ability to interpret and shape divine word.

(2) Greek prophecy was also often considered infectious, especially in response to music or drunken inducement.[110] However, more individualized experiences of infectious prophecy were also cited, especially in dealing with the only really divine *texts* of Greek life: not of the lawgivers, but the poets.[111] Plato's *Ion* describes a classic case. In it, Plato's Socrates succeeds in pressing his point to a

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have access to it mostly as *literary* (i.e. books of) prophecy as distinguished from *written* (i.e. records of) prophecy, Lange, "Greek," 464.

[109] This might be especially true in times prior to a firm textualization of Mosaic law, which was likely undertaken and recognized as such in order to stabilize the source from which an increasing number of interpretative questions might be posed. In earlier stages, the object might rather be clarifying than guarding the Mosaic word at hand.

[110] Again, see Chapter 2.

[111] Especially Homer and, to a slightly lesser-extent, Hesiod, cf. Plato, *Resp.* 377D; Plutarch, *Pyth. orac.* 396D. While there is ambivalence form the philosophers about how to regard the poets' texts (as we will see), their divinity is more assured (and thus more problematic) than the case of the divinity of the laws of early Greek lawgivers.

Greek *lawgivers* are the founding geniuses of civilized societies (the more ancient the better, Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.154-6). Their laws are often considered from the gods (Plato, *Leg.* 624A) or at least ratified by them, but for many, what matters is their ability to produce virtue and thus approximate divine ideals (Plato, *Leg.* 630B-632D; 634E-635D). Divine origin is thus acknowledged as desirable, but too close an association threatens to curtail an evaluation of it from reason, i.e. the praise it seeks by appealing to divine origination (highest virtue must be divine, Plato, *Resp.* 613A). Broadly speaking, Greek lawgiving is both divine and human, but one never wholly at ease with itself. Also, see Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (trans. John Raffan; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), 116; for a recent, compelling contribution, cf. Stephen Halliwell, *Between Ecstasy and Truth : Interpretations of Greek Poetics from Homer to Longinus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

rhapsode of Homer named Ion:[112] Poets and rhapsodes function not by art (τέχνη) but by the divine power (θεία δὲ δύναμις) upon them, which acts like a magnet (μαγνῆτιν).[113] By this power, "the Muse inspires (ἐνθέους) men" who inspire others, holding "them in a connected chain."[114] Although Hebrew prophets would likely demur from connotations of ecstasy, they might still hold to a similar notion of correlation and infectious divine action. Where Plato sees the acts of the rhapsodes reproducing the acts of the poets by virtue of the same spirit upon them, Numbers 11 may see the acts of the elders reproducing the acts of Moses by virtue of the same spirit upon him and them. Although YHWH shares in the process of transmission (i.e. "YHWH withdrew from Moses the spirit which was upon him and put it on the sevety elders," 11:25) thus eliminating the possibility of accidental or impersonal spiritual transmission, the elders are still definitively correlated to their source, not just the divine but also Moses.

(3) Finally, Greek philosophers register appreciation for true prophetic speech,[115] but they also regard the divine source of that speech (the gods as displayed in poetry) as suspect. Plato, for example, can sense divine poetry's power as "delightful"; he is just not convinced that it is "beneficial."[116] The philosophers, like Plato, appeal to higher understandings of the divine, apart from their texts.[117] The content of Greek divine writing is therefore (to the philosopher) not infallible, even though it is inspired. This ambivalence is nowhere present in the

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[112] Ion himself displays something like our aforementioned literary qualities since he is not only able to re-perform the *words* of Homer but to understand Homer's thought as well as recite his words, since "the rhapsode ought to make himself an interpreter (ἑρμηνέα) of the poet's thought to his audience; and to do this without knowing what the poet means is impossible," *Ion* 530C.
[113] *Ion* 533D; "For this stone not only attracts iron rings, but also imparts to them a power (δύναμιν) whereby they in turn are able to do the very same thing as the stone, and attract other rings; so that sometimes there is formed quite a long chain of bits of iron and rings, suspended one from another; they all depend for this power on that one stone," *Ion* 533D-E.
[114] *Ion* 533E.
[115] Cf. Plato, *Phaedr.* 244D.
[116] *Resp.* 606E-607D [Book 10].
[117] E.g. Canon 1: God is good, *Resp.* 379B-380C; Canon 2: God is unchanging, *Resp.* 380D-383C. For a superb short survey of the consistent critique of popular mythical and poetic traditions by those more philosophical or historical in conviction, incl. esp. Herodotus, Plato, Strabo, and Diodorus, see John M.G. Barclay, ed., *Flavius Josephus, Translation and Commentary: Volume 10, Against Apion* (trans. John M.G. Barclay; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 260n627.

Jewish Scriptures, and this is something of a point of pride among Hellenistic Jews.[118] This later pride is in direct descent from the singularity and dependability of YHWH throughout the Jewish Scriptures (e.g. Deut 6:4). Where Greek encounters with the divine are full of inspired refractions of truth and virtue, biblical access is pointedly singular and even cultic. By virtue of their placement at the Tent of Meeting and their presence in the midst of YHHW's speech with Moses, none of the variability found in the philosophers' critiques of the poets can find bearing on them. They are, like their divine source, dependable and trustworthy.

Through inquiring about Greek-style qualities within the more laconic Hebrew description of Numbers 11, stronger affirmations of the elders as divinely inspired Mosaic interpreters emerge. The spirit-connection depicted as resting on the elders (כנוח, 11:25) carries similar connotations to *Ion*'s "magnetic" possession. The elders are not depicting usual prophets (i.e. those inspired directly by YHWH) but those touched and affected *through* Moses. Literary qualities alive in minds such as Amos' (or Pythia's) are likewise available and likely awakened in the elders through their qualities as scribes. Through such inquiry, parts of the story in Numbers 11 which seemed to lie dormant suddenly contribute to the schema presented all within a frame which is harmonious to Hebrew thought. Where Hebrew נביאים, generally, *might* be considered intepreters of Mosaic law, these elders look more and more like true Mosaic interpreters—prophets from his YHWH-inspired oracular stream of divine communication. Perhaps tilting the term "prophets" toward its Greek meaning (rather than its origins in נביא),[119] Numbers 11 depicts *a lawgiver with his prophets*.

[118] On virtue as determining validity and divinity of laws in Josephus' defense of Jewish law, see ibid., 259n620.

[119] However unfortunate some consider the LXX choice of προφήτης to be as a translation of נביא, the alignment suggests others have considered these paths before us, cf. Heschel, *Prophets*, 187.

These associations and insights only grow as we carry these conceptions into the reception history of Numbers 11. Their conciliar function re-enters and as an authoritative council of authorized and inspired Mosaic interpreters, the elders of Numbers 11 appear to uniquely support the Legend of the Septuagint, especially. To paraphrase John Barton,[120] I will argue that what *later* generations *thought* constituted the necessary requirements for authorized tradents of Mosaic scripture reflects how they read those requirements in Mosaic scripture; they therefore present to us a significant reading of the passage—a reading which works in remarkable ways.

[120] John Barton, *Oracles of God: Perceptions of Ancient Prophecy in Israel After the Exile* (repr.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), ix.

5
Did Moses' Seventy Write the LXX?

What does it take to translate well? What does it take to interpret the words of someone's past writing such that what comes out one's own end of the transaction is not a net-loss, but a net-gain to one's audience? The complexity of the endeavor can be both commonplace but may yet also be exceptionally demanding, requiring not just equating lexicons but interpreting the effect of the choices made. Likewise, the intensity of the transaction may be minimal when under-taken by a trader from a foreign land shaking currency and pointing for exchange, or else nearly all-encompassing, for instance, if what is before the translator is the words of the one and only God engaging humanity with his word-encapsulated divinity. The practice of biblical translation thus lies at this latter end of the spectrum and has only come into existence by the courageous acts of those compelled (by one means or another) to grasp the nettle of the difficulties involved in passing the divine word from one setting to another. What it really took for the first biblical translators to attend to their task, we will never know, nor why they did so. Rather, what we can better know is the way that task has been remembered, and within it, we will suggest, what matters for its authorization and acceptance. In particular, we will see what, if anything, the elders story of Numbers 11 may bring to those engaged in enacting and/or remembering the first biblical translation. In light of this comparison, the elders of Numbers 11 truly shine; their place both in the life of Moses and in the life of Israel is hereby seen in its fullness.

Where last chapter we explored the extension and contribution the elders of Numbers 11 make to Mosaic lawgiving *within* the biblical text, here we consider (and support) those claims as applied to Mosaic lawgiving, particularly as translation. As alluded, the first we know of biblical translation is from a legend surrounding the Greek translation of the Hebrew law, the legend of the LXX, whose nomenclature bears striking resemblance and enticing possibility to readers

of Numbers 11's elders. We begin slightly ahead of ourselves (without introductory formalities and with examples whose attention to the original Hebrew scriptures is less-guarded than many think they ought to be) in order more fully to engage the mechanics and consequences of the task present.

The Legend of the LXX and Oral Tradition

In Hilary of Poitiers' *Tractus super Psalmos* 2.2-3, Hilary tells us a story:

> In the middle period of the law, before the only begotten son of God…was born as man, at the request of King Ptolemy seventy elders translated the books of the Old Testament from the Hebrew text into Greek. It had already been established by Moses previously that in the entire assembly there should be seventy teachers. For that same Moses, although he had committed to writing the words of the [Old] Testament, nevertheless communicated separately, from hidden sources, certain more secret mysteries of the law to seventy elders, who would continue as teachers after him.
>
> The Lord mentions these teachings in the Gospels, when he says, "The scribes and Pharisees sit on the seat of Moses. For this reason, do and observe everything that they tell you. But do not behave as they do." (Mt. 23:2-3) Therefore [i.e., this proves that] their teachings have remained in later generations, namely, the teachings received from the writer of the law himself, and preserved in this office of seventy elders.
>
> Accordingly, the elders, when translating these books, had acquired the higher knowledge of these hidden teachings in conformity with the Mosaic tradition, and were able to translate words and expressions which in Hebrew are ambiguous and in themselves indicate different realities with an unambiguous and non-metaphorical use of words, so as to indicate the [true] properties of the things signified. They were able to "control" the polysemous aspect of the [Hebrew] words by their knowledge of the [oral] teaching.
>
> And thus it comes about that those who translated later, who [also] translated according to diverse methods, have given many a misleading translation to the Gentiles. For being ignorant of that secret tradition which originated from Moses, they rendered with uncertainty, relying only on their own notions, that which had been expressed in a polysemous fashion in Hebrew. [He shares an example from Gen 1:1.]…[Thus,] the authority of the seventy translators remains absolute.[1]

[1] ET, Adam Kamesar, "Hilary of Poitiers, Judeo-Christianity, and the Origins of the LXX: A Translation of 'Tractus Super Psalmos' 2.2-3 with Introduction and Commentary," *VC* 59 (2005): 271–2, paragraphs modified.

What Hilary details here is a remarkable depiction of the creation of the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible,[2] the Septuagint.[3] It is also his own invention. Or, if he inherited it from another, his is the earliest remaining evidence we have of this particular story. What is new in his story is not the so-called "Legend of the Septuagint (LXX)." That we have in various forms from the 2nd-century B.C.E. through Hilary's time in the fourth century CE and beyond.[4] Instead, as Adam Kamesar (Hilary's very-able translator and commentator) points out, what is new about Hilary's story is his combination of the Legend with the rabbinic idea of the "unbroken chain of oral tradition."[5]

In rabbinic tradition (which has its origins prior to Hilary), this notion of a chain of Mosaic oral tradition is primarily connected, not to the Legend of the LXX, but to the Great Sanhedrin (סנהדרן גדולה),[6] and, by extension, to the biblical story of the elders of Numbers 11.[7] Not only their number[8] but their quality and authority is justified by the rabbis in the Seventy of Moses:[9] as those

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[2] Like others, Hilary imagines the original seventy elders translating the whole of the Hebrew Bible, including the Psalms (hence his addressing the story in that context); whereas, most scholars agree that the earliest versions of the legend describe just the translation of the Pentateuch.

[3] Kamesar, "Hilary," 267. Throughout this chapter "the Seventy" will refer to the elders of Exodus 24, Numbers 11, or the legendary translators; "LXX" or "Septuagint" will refer to the Greek text tradition.

[4] Wasserstein and Wasserstein, *Legend*, 27–50 (Hellenistic versions); 51–94 (rabbinic); Giuseppe Veltri, *Libraries, Translations, and "Canonic" Texts: The Septuagint, Aquila and Ben Sira in the Jewish and Christian Tradition* (JSJSup 109; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 31–77. I will abbreviate this title with the capitalized, "Legend."

[5] Often cited as first example: *m. Avot* 1:1. Similar concern for an unbroken chain of tradents of written text (who perhaps likewise provide an unbroken chain of interpretation): Josephus, *C. Ap.* 1.36-41.

[6] Kamesar, "Hilary," 275, citing Schürer. However, we should note that this is likely a Talmudic construction and not historical reality, i.e. there was no historical Great Sanhedrin, which inherited the oral tradition of the Great Assembly from the Zugot, Efron, "Great Sanhedrin," 290–303; Sanders, *Judaism*, 472–90.

[7] *m. Sanh* 7:1; *b. Sanh.* 16b-17a; *t. Sanh.* 3:9; *Sifre* 92; *Num. Rab.* 15.19; several of these include Eldad and Medad as part of the originally-considered seventy-two elders, two of whom withdraw from the Tent of Meeting encounter.

[8] "Seventy" or "seventy-one" depending on whether one counts Moses in the re-created company, *m. Sanh.* 7:1.

[9] Almost all the explicit justifications for the Sanhedrin are pointed at Numbers 11, not the Seventy in Exodus 24. One exception is *m. Rosh Hash.* 2:9, which references Exodus 24:9 (not Numbers 11) in order to claim that any court of three judges may rightly escape criticism based on their

elders *were* so the Sanhedrin *should be*.[10] It is to them that this oral tradition (or, Mishnah) is initially given, and it is consistently presented as a second Torah, an oral text to accompany the written one (e.g. *Num. Rab.* 14.10).[11] However, as an "oral text,"[12] it is not changeless, and Hilary's story helpfully draws out this human dynamic in its transmission. At its earliest stages, these "words of the scribes" are entrusted to Moses' Seventy (again through Num 11:16),[13] but they also accumulate interpretative *layers* as they pass from generation to generation of scribal sages (חכמים),[14] ultimately resulting in a "cumulative tradition, which is said to originate in the divine revelation at Sinai."[15] The Jewish people need this *oral* tradition because the *written* words alone are sometimes obscure (סתומה);[16]

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right formation; to wit, their anonymity protecting them in the same way the "seventy elders" were not personally identifiable, nor open to personal critique. On courts of "three (judges)," see *m. Sanh.* 1:1.

[10] E.g. *b. Sanh.* 17a-b.

[11] "The Blessed One gave two Torahs (תורות) to Israel, the written Torah and oral Torah.…He gave them an oral Torah to be distinct from the rest of the nations. It was not given in writing so that the Ishmaelites (ישמעאלים) might not falsify it as they did the written Torah, saying they are Israel," *Num. Rab.* 14.10 (ET, mine). (All *Midrash Rabbah* original text from *Jewish Classics Library Deluxe*—which is based on Margoliot.) Also, cf. *b. Sanh.* 21b. See Chapter 3.

[12] That a "text" can be "oral," especially one which, in rabbinic tradition, is so carefully inscribed on the minds of rabbinic disciples, see Martin S. Jaffee, *Torah in the Mouth: Writing and Oral Tradition in Palestinian Judaism, 200 BCE - 400 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 5, et passim; Veltri, *Libraries*, 8; Carr, *Writing*, 6, "The mind stood at the center of the oral–written interface."

[13] Through a verbal connection between Eccl 12:11's אספות and Num 11:16's אספה, *Num. Rab.* 14:4 affirms that the collected words of these later sages began when Moses heard them from YHWH and the elders (here depicted as the first Sanhedrin), in turn, heard them from Moses, cf. *Num. Rab.* 15.22; *Tanhuma* (B) *behaaloteka* 25.

[14] The classic sequence in *m. Avot* 1:1 goes from Moses to Joshua, then Joshua to the elders, and from the elders to the Great Assembly. A more synthetic view, requires the insertion of the prophets, as in *m. Peah* 2:6, but, in any case, as *m. Yad.* 4:3 implies, the prophets must still give way to the "'elders,' who are akin in their legal authority to the rabbis," Fraade, *Tradition*, 77. The elders act as the critical tradents throughout. Their initial placement with Moses grants them this authority, even if one of their number (Joshua, cf. Num 11:28, who is with Moses at the Tent) is often singled-out as the first link, and even though there is no depiction of elders standing with Moses *hearing the law* on Sinai. Exodus 24 has them ascend the mountain; Numbers 11 has them approach the speaking presence of God ("I will speak with you," 11:17a; "[YHWH] spoke with him," 11:25a). For one example where the oral tradition passes directly from Moses to the elders, see *Num. Rab.* 14.4, citing Num 11:16.

[15] Fraade, *Tradition*, 70. This idea of not only transmission but transformation (of the text and of the rabbinic disciple who recites it) is central and persuasively argued by Fraade. From it, I have derived the idea of layering, with all its incumbent helpfulness and deficiencies.

[16] Kamesar, "Hilary," 278. E.g. *b. Zeb.* 53a ילמד סתום מן המפורש. Other germane examples of this occluded or ambiguous sense include the following:

the oral makes them clearer, generation by generation. Additionally, the authorizing presence (or spirit)[17] of God to create (or reveal) the new layers of interpretation are granted by the chain of סמיכה (Jewish ordination by the laying on of hands), which itself is based in important ways on the elders story of Numbers 11.[18] Therefore, in rabbinic literature (which Hilary is reflecting), oral tradition, Great Sanhedrin, and Numbers 11, form a single thread of conceptual framing, which include important and active interpretative tradents of oral tradition as links in the chain.[19]

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(1) In *Aris.* §129 the dietary laws are particularly unclear (δεισιδαιμόνως), but, in some way, so is all the Jewish law. Note: Although δεισιδαιμόνως tends to be used pejoratively (i.e. "superstitiously"), it can also mean "religiously," cf. "δεισιδαιμονία," *LSJ* 375, and ought to be taken in this more positive sense (but still requiring clarification) here since the view of the Jewish law is described throughout *Aristeas* as highly divine and therefore in need of special handling, cf. *Aris.* §31.

(2) In *Bell.* 3.352, Josephus tells us about himself (in the third person), "He was able to decide about the judgments of dreams, the ambiguities of God's sayings and especially of the sacred books (τὰ ἀμφιβόλως ὑπὸ τοῦ θείου λεγόμενα τῶν γε μὴν ἱερῶν βίβλων), nor was he ignorant of the prophecies, as he was a priest himself and of priestly descent," ET, mine; cf. John R. Levison, *The Spirit in First-Century Judaism* (AGJU 29; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 202–3. In both cases, it is *priests* who have the ability to interpret the ambiguities rightly.

[17] Obscured in Kamesar's translation (but included in his notes), the original Latin (*hi itaque seniores libros hos transferentes et spiritualem secundum Moysi traditionem occultarum cognitionum scientiam*) leaves room to suggest that the oral tradition of Moses includes the "spiritual," Kamesar, "Hilary," 270. Whether this is in manner of interpretation or by enabling through God's spirit, as in Numbers 11 is a little less clear; however, Kamesar himself leans toward Num 11:17 as its origin (276).

[18] Newman, *Semikhah*, 2. This defense is consistent in the literature. Even though there is no explicit laying of hands in Numbers 11, parallels with Joshua, combined with *m. Avot* 1:1 seem to be regarded as sufficient. It is perhaps notable that this authorizing presence still appears a step removed from the kind of internal empowerment suggested in both Philo and Paul. That the work of the spirit may result in transformation of the individual is likely not doubted by a theology of סמיכה (the onset of wisdom by the Spirit, for example, is pervasive in the Hebrew Bible, e.g. Deut 34:9; Isa 11:2; Daniel 5:11), but neither is the locus of authority placed on what happens *inside* the ordained rabbi. For more on the complexities of ethical empowerment by the spirit of God in Paul (and Philo, among others), see Volker Rabens, *The Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul: Transformation and Empowering for Religious-Ethical Life* (2nd ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013).

[19] These same themes of (a) continuity of teaching (or doctrine) (//oral text), (b) continuity of authoritative acts (or functions) (//Great Sanhedrin), and (c) continuity of spirit (or grace) (//סמיכה), are transposed into Christian discussions most prominently in continuing controversies over what is meant by "apostolic succession." See Michael Ramsey, *The Gospel and the Catholic Church* (repr.; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2009), 69–72. Likewise, controversies over what ordination means run along similar tensions, i.e. What is imparted to those ordained in the receiving of the "laying on of hands"? Teaching, authority, or ontological transformation? Whichever is intended, each finds some grounding in Numbers 11; hence, early Christian

There is a hint in the rabbinic tradition about how (like Hilary suggests) oral tradition and LXX might relate—a hint which also clarifies what Hilary means by "hidden sources" and "secret mysteries." It starts with a meditation on how the collected sayings could be spoken to Moses and yet also accrue more layers of interpretation. The oft-quoted response is that all the words spoken by all the sages throughout all the ages (with their own authorship and time-frame indicated) were first spoken by God to Moses (*Ex. Rab.* 47.1).[20] Because of this, yes, there is agency required by later rabbinic tradents, but there is also nothing really new: "The words of the Scribes are compared to the words of the Torah, thus…the former are as true as the latter."[21] There exists a simultaneous value on the primacy and authority of Moses *along with* a value on the temporally-later oral laws.

In fact, rabbinic oral laws are often preferred to the written Scripture (מקרא).[22] The oral laws are valued not just for their clarifying ability but because they are what make the Jewish people distinct, and for this, they are hallowed by a tradition of secrecy. If all the nations had the oral law (i.e. if they had the proper interpreters of Moses), Jewish belief would no longer be distinct. For example, *Pesiqta Rabbati* 5 says,

> Moses asked that the Mishnah also be in written form like the Torah. But the Holy One…foresaw that the Nations would get to *translate the Torah*, and reading it, say, *in Greek*, would declare: We are Israel; we are the

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ordination texts cite the elders story of Numbers 11 as the most consistent OT text read on those occasions, based on Paul F. Bradshaw, *Ordination Rites of the Ancient Churches of East and West* (New York: Pueblo, 1990).

[20] "What the scribes are destined to innovate was already shown by God to Moses," *b. Meg.* 19b; ET, Reuven Kimelman, "Rabbi Yokhanan and Origen on the Song of Songs: A Third-Century Jewish-Christian Disputation," *HTR* 73 (1980): 582. "Even that which an advanced disciple will some day teach before his master was already said to Moses at Sinai," *Yerushalmi Peah* 2.6 [17a]; ET, Fraade, *Tradition*, 230n4. Perhaps the most expanded version of this tradition is in *Ex. Rab.* 47.1 where God gives Moses not just the Torah but "in order (על הסדר): Bible (מקרא), Mishnah, Talmud, and Aggadah." Moses asks whether he should write them all down, to which God responds that he will give only the Bible in writing because a time will come when the wicked will take their writing from them—but the oral "Mishnah, Talmud, and Aggadah" will keep them distinct.

[21] Harry Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds., *Midrash Rabbah: Numbers* (trans. Judah J. Slotki; 2 vols.; 2nd ed.; London: Soncino, 1951), 2:580 [*Num. Rab.* 14.4].

[22] Kimelman traces this especially in Rabbi Yokhanan, Kimelman, "Yohkanan," 581–2.

> children of the Lord. The scales would appear to be balanced between both claims, but then the Holy One…will say to the Nations: What are you claiming, that you are My children? I have no way of knowing other than that My child is he who possesses My *secret lore* (*mysterion*). The Nations will ask: And what is Thy *secret*? God will reply: it is the *Mishnah*.[23]

This rabbinic response to the threats of Christians seeking the label of "the true people of the God of Israel," especially by means of the LXX, was accurately reported, and responded to, in the *Ps.-Clementine* literature. *Ps.-Clem.'s* Peter (in *Epistula Petri* [*Ep. Pet.*], 1.2-2.1) writes:[24]

> I [Peter] earnestly beseech you [James] not to pass on to any one of the Gentiles (τῶν ἐθνῶν) the *books* of my *preachings* (τῶν ἐμῶν κηρυγμάτων) which I [here] forward to you, nor to any one of our own before probation. But if some one of them has been examined and found *worthy*, then you may hand them over to him *in the same way as Moses* handed over his *office of a teacher* (τοῖς τὴν καθέδραν αὐτοῦ παρειληφόσιν) to the *seventy*. Wherefore the fruit of his caution is to be seen up to this day. For these who belong to his people {sc. rabbinic Jews} *preserve* everywhere the same rule in their belief in the one God and in their line of conduct, the Scriptures with their *many senses* (πολλὰ νευρουσῶν) being unable to incline them to assume another attitude. Rather they attempt, on the basis of the rule that has been handed down to them, to *harmonise* the contradictions of the Scriptures, if haply some one who does not know the traditions is perplexed by the *ambiguous utterances* (πολυσήμους φωνάς) of the prophets. On this account they permit no one to *teach* unless he *first learn* how the Scriptures should be used.…In order that the same may also take place among us, hand over the books of my preachings in the *same mysterious way* (τῆς ἀγωγῆς μυστηρίου) to *our seventy* brethren that may prepare those who are candidates for positions as *teachers*.[25]

In order to know they are the true people of God, these Jewish Christians know they need not just access to the same *written* word as the Jews, but they need

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[23] *Pesiq. Rab.* 5 [24b]; ET, ibid., 582, emphasis added in *italics*.

[24] For dates and formation of the *Ps. Clementine* literature, see Chapter 3.

[25] Unless otherwise indicated, all ET of *Ps.-Clem.* taken from Johannes Irmscher and Georg Strecker, "The Pseudo-Clementines," in *New Testament Apocrypha* [*NTA*] (ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher and Edgar Hennecke; trans. Robert McLachlan Wilson; 2 vols., rev. ed.; Cambridge: James Clarke, 1992), 2:483–541; here, 2:493–4, emphasis added. All Greek of *Ps.-Clem.* taken from Bernhard Rehm, Johannes Irmscher, and Franz Paschke, eds., *Die Pseudoklementinen I: Homilien* (2nd ed.; GCS 42; Berlin: Akademie, 1969).

access to its proper *interpretation*, which likewise needs to be secured by *worthy interpreters* and in an authoritative configuration (i.e. "in the same way as Moses").[26] Although the interpretation is now Christian, they seek to make it secure through the same pattern established by Moses: seventy worthy interpreters who can keep the secret, true understanding of the Scriptures as contained in Peter's books. Whether these Christian Seventy ἀδελφοί are meant to be the same Seventy as those in Luke 10:1, 17 remains unclear.[27] It is clearer that they are meant to be *elders* (specifically, elders who keep *books*). The *Contestatio* [Διαμαρτυρία], which follows directly after *Ep. Pet.*, clarifies and addresses these seventy as "the elders (πρεσβύτεροι)" (1.1).[28] As in Hilary's version of the Legend, then it is "seventy elders" who are given the correct, secret interpretation, only, this time, in *Ps.-Clem.,* the oral interpretation ("preachings") has taken a written form which must be guarded (in order to preserve their Christian identity).[29]

This idea of a hidden tradition is not unlike the theme of orally transmitted *Jewish* distinctiveness in *Ex. Rab.* 47.1, *Num. Rab.* 14.10, and *Pesiq. Rab.* 5 above. In fact, an idea quite like "seventy secret book-holders" is first presented as a *Jewish* concept in 4 Ezra 14:45–48. Ezra is instructed by God to "make public" the

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[26] See similar themes in 2 Tim 3, i.e. worthy tradents (proven through suffering) (vv.10–11), with entrusted oral instruction (v. 14), and trained in "the sacred writings" (v. 15).

[27] While it remains possible that *Ep. Pet.* conceives of this letter occurring during the lifetime of the Seventy of Jesus, here regathered, I think it more likely that *Ep. Pet.* does *not* follow *Recognitions* on this count, i.e. claiming the pattern of Moses for Jesus himself in Luke 10. It likely chooses not to because such a move would complicate the transmission, i.e. if Jesus gave *his* Seventy the secret teachings, then Peter would have to recollect those and/or faithfully transmit them to the *his* Seventy. Instead, he simply acts like Moses (and Jesus). There is some evidence (e.g. Cyprian) that other Christian bishops re-created this "council of elders," a πρεσβυτέριον (although none claims a set number of seventy), between themselves and their presbyters (elders), Crehan, "Theology and Rite," 306, 310–11.

[28] *NTA* 2:494. The *Contestatio* also lays out clear qualification and regulations for who, how, and when others may be carefully added to those entrusted with the secret books of Peter's interpretation, books which must be hidden from general view. (Hesitancy in ordination is similarly commended in 1 Tim 5:22, χεῖρας ταχέως μηδενὶ ἐπιτίθει.)

[29] Also, "Moses delivered the law of God orally to seventy wise men that it might be handed down in continuous sequence," *Ps.-Clem.*, *Hom.* 3.47 (*NTA* 2:533), and "The prophet Moses having by the order of God handed over the law with the elucidations to seventy chosen (men) that they might prepare those who were willing among the people, after a short time the law was committed to writing," *Ps.-Clem.*, *Hom.* 2.38 (*NTA* 2:533). Both of these (which appear from a different quadrant of *Ps.-Clem.*) are followed by descriptions of how errors crept into the tradition, highlighting the distance between the oral and the written.

first "twenty-four books" he has just created (through inspired oral prophesying to a set of "five scribes"), allowing both "the worthy and the unworthy [to] read them" (4 Ezra 14:45, NRSV). However, he is also instructed to

> keep the seventy [books] that were written last, in order to give them to the wise among [his] people [i.e. חכמים]. For in them is the spring of understanding, the fountain of wisdom, and the river of knowledge. (4 Ezra 14:46-7, NRSV)

Apart from the usual consensus that the twenty-four public books here represent the Hebrew Bible,[30] we should especially notice (with commentator Michael Stone) the emphasis which is laid on tradents (with hints of Mosaic authority) in this passage:

> Unlike Dan 8:26; 12:4; *2 Apoc Bar* 20:3 and other places, this is not a command to seal up the apocalyptic revelation to the end but to transmit it to the wise of the people.…The series of wisdom terms is nicely paralleled in *2 Apoc Bar* 59:7, where in the list of things revealed to Moses on Sinai, are "the root of wisdom, and the riches of understanding, and the fount of knowledge."[31]

While we must admit that there is nothing explicitly "clarifying" about the esoteric books given to these proposed tradents, nonetheless, at an historically early stage, 4 Ezra explicitly connects (a) spiritual inspiration of a scribe like Moses (a theme we will come back to) to (b) worthy tradents, caretakers of an equally-valued esoteric tradition, given alongside the written Scriptures. These books are given either for the personal edification of the Jewish leadership or for training them for insights into their legal or political decision-making; either way, their esoteric nature seems bent on exoteric benefit, enabling the written tradition to be lived out (i.e. interpreted) with increased divine direction. Not only are the

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[30] Although Stone is correct that a count of "twenty-four" *books* occurs here for the first time (later confirmed in rabbinic tradition, e.g. *b. Bava Batra* 14b; *Num. Rab.* 15.22), in light of this study, further connection between "prophets," "elders," and "books" may be warranted (also, see *C. Ap.* 1.37, where the umbrella term for writers for the twenty-two books is "prophets"), cf. Michael E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra: A Commentary on the Book of Fourth Ezra* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 441. If this is granted, then both *Gos. Thom.* 52's "twenty-four prophets" and Rev 4:4's "twenty four elders" may likewise be references to the Hebrew Bible (from approximately the same time of composition).

[31] Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 441.

Scriptures divinely secured, their implementation in the community is also blessed by God. These same concerns are undertaken in the Legend of the LXX.[32]

Through each of these examples we can see a theological grammar about scriptural transmission at work. In all four (Hilary, *Ep. Pet.*, *Ex. Rab.* 47.1 et al., and 4 Ezra), a *secret interpretative tradition* has been passed on to *worthy tradents*. In three of the four (assuming we allow the Great Sanhedrin its role), the tradents of secret, oral tradition are the *"seventy elders,"* and in the fourth (4 Ezra), "seventy" and "elders" are close by (i.e. as "seventy secret books given to elders").[33] In two of the four (Hilary and *Ep. Pet.*), the tradition passes *from oral to written*, and, in fact, by implication, so do the last two (4 Ezra through initial oral pronouncement; *Ex. Rab.* 47.1 et al. through its eventual written form in the *Mishnah*, etc.). That these themes (seventy, worthy elders who are given oral, esoteric interpretation to the Scriptures which is eventually written) would find themselves united in the Legend of the LXX is thus not surprising, especially where each has ties to a pattern of authority which is (initially) anchored *in Moses*.

In a somewhat cobbled-together manner, Hilary's contemporary, Epiphanius, asserts all these themes in his version of the Legend of the LXX. Of all the versions of the Legend of the LXX, Epiphanius is the most explicit (and perhaps least exegetically sound) about connecting the typologies of Numbers 11 and the Legend. Because his assertions are so unguarded and distant from the original formulations, they cannot be taken as express confirmation of our argument here (i.e. that Numbers 11 provides essential typological elements to the

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[32] In addition to these features (and the ones regarding inspiration covered below), 4 Ezra 14 and the rabbinic version of the Legend of the LXX also share a tantalizingly close numerological connection: five and seventy. In rabbinic versions, the only two negative examples, *Sopherim* 1.8 and *Sepher Torah* 1.7, use the terms "five elders" and "seventy elders," respectively; however, *Avot R. Nat.* B §37 also uses "five elders" (in a more neutral manner). See Chapter 3.

Whether "five" and "seventy" have found their way from 4 Ezra to the Legend or vice versa is difficult to say, Wasserstein and Wasserstein suggest it has importance in dating rabbinic changes in the Legend, but rabbinic usages of "five elders" as an authoritative configuration may be more explanatory. Likewise, "five elders" may fit with the five alphabets traditionally "granted to Japhet and his descendants," Wasserstein and Wasserstein, *Legend*, 73.

[33] In *Ps.-Clem.*, it depicts secret books given to seventy elders, see above.

Legend and, vice versa, the Legend providing heuristic value to Numbers 11). But when taken in the context of its development, his version does provide a crass pastiche of the same concerns which Hilary more adroitly navigates. In *De mensuris et ponderibus*, he claims:[34]

> [H]aving received the letter [from Ptolemy] and read it,…without delay writing the books with gold, in the Hebrew language, they [the Jews] sent the twenty-two exoteric books and seventy-two which were esoteric.[35] (6.3.1)

and

> [T]hey selected seventy-two men from among the doctors, six men from each tribe, as Moses had done when he received a command from God to take seventy men. Eldad and Modad, the two who were extra, prophesied in the camp.[36] (3.4.1)[37]

Epiphanius represents typological appeal at its highest; no theological resource of the Old Testament is left out from the miracle of the LXX.[38] Together Hilary and Epiphanius signal earlier awareness to typological connections between the Old Testament and the Legend, which more recent interpreters have often mentioned without reference to these earlier sources. The manner of their appeal to the Old

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[34] All ET of *De mens. et pond.* taken from Michael E. Stone and Roberta R. Ervine, *The Armenian Texts of Epiphanius of Salamis* De Mensuris et Ponderibus (CSCO 583; Leuven: Peeters, 2000). (The Armenian is likely the earliest source.)

[35] "Twenty-two" books, Josephus, *C. Ap.* 1.38; "ninety-four" total, 4 Ezra 14:44; hence, the need for "seventy-two" rather than "seventy" (a number he clearly knows). In *De Fide* 4.5, Epiphanius claims "seventy-two" is often called "seventy" in scripture, supporting this judgment by *conflating Exodus 24 and Numbers 11*, "[A]lthough the seventy men were called to the mount, with Eldad and Medad, they are seventy-two," Epiphanius, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis, Books II and III. De Fide* (trans. Frank Williams; 2nd ed.; NHMS 79; Leiden: Brill, 2013), 658.

[36] Cf. *Sifre* 95; *Num. Rab.* 15.19; *b. San.* 17a.

[37] Also in *De mens. et pond.* 6.4.1, Epiphanius conflates a midrash on Numbers 11 (cf. n36) with the biblical setting of Exodus 24, "[T]hen they sent the seventy-two translators as has been mentioned, selected from among the doctors of the Jews, just as Moses did when he went forth to the mountain at the Lord's command; as it was said, 'Take seventy men with you and go forth to the mountain.' And considering how to avoid strife among the people, he took six men from each tribe."

[38] His miraculous account later extends to also include (a) the seventy-two being divided into thirty-six cells of two each in order to write all the law in each cell (another originally rabbinic tradition which he borrows) and (b) the inclusion of Simon the elder (from Luke 2:25-35) as one of the original LXX translators who specifically and boldly guarantees the wording of Isa 7:14, whose reward is living for 344 years until Jesus is born (3.5.1-21).

Testament texts tells us, then, about their own concerns, of course, but it also illuminates what they saw as put forward by the biblical texts (about Moses), which they could then draw from.

Coming full-circle to Hilary, then: As Kamesar suggests, Hilary is almost certainly drawing from this *Ps.-Clem.* tradition of a secret, clarifying oral tradition when he composes his version of the Legend of the LXX, and yet, Hilary also promotes the notion that the oral tradition, once left only to the Jewish elite, has found its climactic fulfillment in the very *public* and *written* LXX.[39] Because Hebrew is so "ambiguous (*ambigua*)," he acknowledges and thanks God for the translation.[40] Undoubtedly, the claim here is that once written in Greek, the formerly private Hebrew vocalization of the Scriptures—full of spiritual vitality—has, through authorized interpreters trained to represent Moses, become public and available to all.[41] For Hilary, the wisdom accrued through rabbinic judgments (at least up through the time of Christ)[42] is somehow packed into the very vowels of the LXX.[43] In a Hellenistic age, Jews would have celebrated such a result. (Josephus remarks that Eleazar the high priest at the time of the Legend of the LXX would have kept the laws to himself—indicating their value—except that it was "our traditional custom [in the Hellenistic age] to make

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[39] Interestingly, he does not seem to claim an end to, or denial of, the rabbinic *Mishnah*, but neither does he seem concerned by that: the LXX Bible is enough. In this more positive appraisal of Jewish oral tradition, Hilary has an affinity with a branch of patristic thought which had an appreciative regard for rabbinic "spiritual" interpretation (i.e. מדרש) while sometimes simultaneously decrying Jewish "literalism" (i.e. הלכות), especially among the general Jewish populace. E.g. Eusebius takes it a step further by complimenting those rabbis who "dive into the deeps" and "test the meanings of words"; those "interpreters and expounders of the meaning of the Scriptures," he says are "as it were [those] grown grey in mind," as cited in Guy G. Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom: Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism* (2nd ed.; SHR 70; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 119; cf. Kamesar, "Hilary," 269.

[40] Unusual for a version of the Legend of the LXX, Hilary (like Jerome) does not record a miracle, per se, in the act of translation.

[41] Kamesar suggests *ambigua* means "Hilary is probably alluding here to the special ambiguity of the Hebrew language as it appeared in written form, in which there were only consonants," "Hilary," 280.

[42] Ibid., 276.

[43] See his example on the three possible meanings of *brsith* (בראשית), definitively judged as "beginning (*in principio*)" through the LXX, *Tract. in Psal.* 2.2. Latin taken from Hilary of Poitiers, *Tractatus super Psalmos. I, Instructio Psalmorum. In Psalmos I-XCI* (ed. J. Doignon; CCSL 61; Turnhout: Brepols, 1997).

nothing of what is good into a secret," *Ant.* 1.11). But in a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy that Hellenistic Jews set in motion, a greater increase in biblical awareness simultaneously enabled decentralized interpreters to emerge, the control over which rabbinic Judaism is clearly keen to recover and Christianity likewise keen to maintain.

Moses and His Seventy Elders: Interpreters Matter

What makes all this possible—what enables Hilary to bring the Legend of the LXX and oral tradition together—is the single biblical concept: *Moses and his seventy elders.*[44] Hilary reaches for this configuration because he wants to guarantee that the divine word he has is the right one. The Jewish-Christian crisis makes both sides aware that no written text is itself perfectly perspicuous. (Although Hilary seems to think the Greek considerably more perspicuous than the Hebrew.) What matters in this crisis was not whether you have the biblical *text*, but that you have the right *interpretation* of that text, which must be brought to you by the right *interpreters.* The interpreters *matter*. What those interpreters *know* about the biblical text—what they have been trained in—is vital. Hilary reaches for the best biblical (and rabbinic) construct of those interpreters he knows of with which to comfort his people: Moses and his seventy elders.

As we will soon see, the configuration of "seventy(-two) Mosaic elders" also stands at the center of the earliest (and Hellenistic) versions of the Legend of the LXX (although remarkably, for Philo, it is prophesying Mosaic "elders" not seventy of them who do the translating),[45] for the same reason. There is

[44] To borrow, a phrase from Hans-Jürgen Becker, *Auf der Kathedra des Mose: Rabbinisch-theologisches Denken und antirabbinische Polemik in Matthäus 23, 1-12* (ANTZ 4; Berlin: Insitut Kirche und Judentum, 1990), 34, "Mose und seiner Ältesten."

[45] I have "elders" here in scare quotes because Philo does not call them πρεσβύτεροι, but every description of them is in accordance with those he otherwise calls "elders," i.e. (1) their quality—he implies they are ἀριστίνδην (*Mos.* 2.31) and says they are the "most highly esteemed of the Hebrews [whom the high priest] kept at his side" (σκεψάμενος τοὺς παρ᾽ αὐτῷ δοκιμωτάτους Ἑβραίων), *Mos.* 2.32, ET, mine, cf. 197n145 below (cp. to his praise for elders, e.g. *Migr.* 198)—

remarkably little concern for which manuscripts are being consulted (despite the vast debates on the meaning of σεσήμανται in *Aristeas* §30).[46] The Legend (at least in its earliest forms) is far more concerned about the text's *interpreters*.

My suggestion is that the Hebrew Bible knows this problem, too. Built into the process of the lawgiving by Moses (i.e. the hearing, speaking, and writing of the law) is the problem of the interpretation of that law, which needs to be executed and interpreted beyond Moses' death. There is no doubt that this need is partially met in Deuteronomy's tribal "judges and scribes" (שפטים ושטרים, 16:16-20) and Levitical priests (הכהנים הלוים, 18:1-14; 27:9; 31:9), who were meant to interpret the law in cases brought to them, in ritual instances where cultic decisions had to be made, and in explaining the law to all Israel. Deuteronomy 17:8-9 even establishes something of a high court, at the cultic center, with both the Levitical priests and the somewhat cryptic, singular "judge (השפט)," whose decisions are ultimately binding. And yet, rabbinic lore and even parts of the Hebrew Bible itself[47] attach some of the ultimate decision-making to those other outlying biblical authorities: namely, *prophet(s) and elders*.[48] There may be historical reasons for this complex matrix of leadership (i.e. judges, scribes, priests, prophets, and elders), which the Bible is ultimately, unharmoniously a

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and (2) their role as ambassadors (πρέσβεις), who by connotation and traditional practice were indeed "elders."

Why Philo does not call them "elders" is potentially two-fold: (1) He has no direct access to *Aristeas'* account since the symbolism of either "elders" or "seventy-two" would have surely been too great to resist mention. (2) His descriptions of those sent is of such high caliber that he cannot even bear to really call them "translators," much less "elders" or "ambassadors." Their status can only be approximated by less human, more divine labels like "prophets" and "hierophants" (οὐχ ἑρμηνέας ἐκείνους ἀλλ' ἱεροφάντας καὶ προφήτας, *Mos.* 2:40), even then never landing on a single term for them throughout the whole episode. We should not fear "elders" too high a term for Philo's translators but too low a one.

[46] As Benjamin Wright notes, "Almost all commentators note the difficulty of the passage. The verb has been variously translated as 'edited,' 'copied,' 'transmitted,' or 'written'," *Praise Israel for Wisdom and Instruction: Essays on Ben Sira and Wisdom, the Letter of Aristeas and the Septuagint* (JSJSup 131; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 306n22. See Emanuel Tov, "The Septuagint," in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (ed. Martin Jan Mulder; CRINT 2.1; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1988), 166–7.

[47] See Chapter 4.

[48] I say "prophet(s)" to reflect both the singular in Deut 18:15-22 while recognizing the reality in other biblical depictions of overlapping prophetic voices, including corporate ones like Numbers 11.

product of. But historical occurrences survive because they carry some currency. In the case of Moses' seventy elders, (a) its currency may be its flexible attitude toward lay leadership (i.e. elders may be priests but need not be). This is no doubt true, but they would not be unique in this since שפטים are also not restricted to priestly membership. (b) Their currency could be in their configuration as a council. I think this is closer to the mark, as we have already indicated in some of our previous discussion.[49]

However, even closer to the mark is, I think, (c) the *intellectual and religious life* of the Seventy and their *closeness to Moses*. Proper (and ultimately authoritative) interpretation requires not just authority (as is given to the Levitical priests), or virtue and justice in decisions (as described about the judges in both Ex 18:21 and Deut 16:18-20), but also *qualities of discernment and insight, i.e. lived wisdom and care with words, which are idealized in the Hebrew Bible in the prophecy and scribal skills of Moses.* These qualities enable a performance of Moses' law and are particularly beneficial for those seeking to create new law, or layered interpretation which looks like new law. Those interpretative performances, which require the highest level of confidence because of their difference from currently received tradition, find their surest authorization in *prophesying* or *scribally performing (in virtue, setting, and/or interpretative ability) like Moses.* When they do this, they look like authorized interpreters of Moses, like Israel's "teachers,"[50] in the highest possible way (as Hilary, the rabbis, and *Ps.-Clem.* have claimed). They enable Moses to remain the author while they can become his "writers" (perhaps literally in writing, or in some other way shaping the verbal form of the divine speech coming from Moses to their audience).[51]

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[49] See Chapter 3.

[50] See ET quotes above, Hilary, *Tractus*, 2.2-3; *Ep. Pet.* 1.2-2.1.

[51] See Chapter 4 and below on Philo's view of Mosaic, literary scribes. There are similarities here to Hindy Najman's concept of "Mosaic Discourse" in *Seconding Sinai: The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism* (JSJSup 77; Leiden: Brill, 2003), and similar themes, especially on the role of interpretative authority, in *Past Renewals: Interpretative Authority, Renewed Revelation and the Quest for Perfection in Jewish Antiquity* (JSJSup 53; Leiden: Brill,

While the Seventy of Exodus 24 display some of those qualities—namely, they are "with Moses" *at Sinai* in a way which forever marks them, potentially as prophets,[52] as separate from the people, and as near to the law—they nevertheless receive nothing from *Moses*. They eat, see, and "not die" alongside Moses in the presence of God, and perhaps these qualities might be further mined for their significance in demonstrating the worship life of Israel; however, when we compare them to the Seventy of Numbers 11, these remain somewhat passive actions.[53] Although they may have been selected by God from among the people, they may also have been previously selected by the people themselves. Given this array of attributes, there is relatively little to work from in any attempt to account of their virtue in that biblical episode.[54]

Ultimately, I think the best way of "seeing" the Seventy in their full biblical array is to look at them through the eyes of the earliest versions of the Legend of the LXX. These versions saw something in the construct of "Moses and his (seventy) elders," which helped them lionize the LXX by relying deeply on qualities of those elders expressed in Numbers 11. By a close reading of those versions, followed by a look again at the Numbers 11 elders story, we will arrive at our fullest (but I think proper level of) exegesis.

2010). Worth noting, especially in the context of the Legend of the LXX, Benjamin Wright's brief exploration of the LXX and *Aristeas* in light of Najman's own, *Praise*, 332–3. For more on the relationship between Najman's work and this study, see Chapter 6.

[52] See Ska, "Vision."

[53] It is perhaps telling that their one explicit appearance in the Mishnah is on account of their anonymity, *m. Rosh Hash.* 2:9.

[54] In *Migr.* 201, Philo likely uses a combination of Exodus 24 and Numbers 11 to describe the number seventy as one "intimately associated (γνώριμος)[54] with the *wise Moses* (Μωυσέως τοῦ σοφοῦ); for the men picked out (ἐπιλελεγμένους) for their excellence (ἀριστίνδην)…and all of them elders (πρεσβυτέρους), not in age but in good sense (φρονήσει) and counsel (βουλαῖς) and judgement and ways of thinking (γνώμαις) worthy of men of old (ἀρχαιοτρόποις)."

His use of the term ἐπιλελεγμένους is close enough to LXX Ex 24:11's term for the seventy elders, ἐπιλέκτων "chosen, picked," that it seems likely he is drawing on an allusion to their selected status there. Numbers 11 also remains an exegetical possibility because these men are "picked" *for* their "excellence," "good sense," "counsel," and "judgement," and Num 11:16 is the most descriptive of this selection process for "seventy elders," i.e. LXX Num 11:16 records the command of YHWH to Moses, "Gather (Συνάγαγέ) for me seventy men from the elders of Israel, *whom you personally know* (οὓς αὐτὸς σὺ οἶδας) that they are elders of the people and are their scribes," NETS, emphasis added.

Of all the texts of the Bible, arguably none describes as close a relationship to Moses as the elders of Numbers 11.[55] If one were to try and write a description of those qualified to carry out the lawgiving office of Moses, one could hardly do better than what is described of the elders there. In Numbers 11, the elders are described as:[56]

(1) Called for by God
   - "YHWH said to Moses: Gather to Me…" (v. 16)
   - "He gathered…" (v. 24)

(2) In an institutional and communal number
   - "…seventy…" (vv. 16, 24)

(3) Elders, a culturally revered subset of the population
   - "…elders…" (v. 16)

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[55] Joshua may, of course, be considered closer: his proximity and enduring presence at Sinai (Ex 24:13) and the Tent of Meeting (Ex 33:11) and in victories of battle (Ex 17:9-14; Josh 11:23), his inheritance of Moses' authority (הוד; Num 27:20) and a spirit of wisdom (Deut 34:9) through the laying on hands (סמך; Num 27:18, 23; Deut 34:9), sharing in some of the lawgiving of Moses (Deut 32:44), his demonstration of wonders (Josh 3:5-8), and his role as cultic founder (Josh 8:30-35) and covenant mediator (Josh 24:22-24) like Moses.

An argument for the elders as closer than Joshua is based on: (a) his inclusion as already *one of the elders*, based on his presence with them in Num 11:28, the presumption in Num 27:18 of a spirit (of wisdom) already upon him before the special laying on of hands in Num 27:23 (//Deut 34:9), and the concurrence of his time of influence with "the days of the elders" (Josh 24:31); and (b) the possibility that the "spirit upon Moses" (Num 11:25) is one which is closer to Moses even than the special dispensation of authority/wisdom in Num 27:20, 23, which uniquely signals Joshua as the leader of the conquest of the land but does not grant him an ontologically *closer* relationship to Moses since that had already been given in Numbers 11, i.e. he may only become a "first among equals" rather than different in spirit from them. (Aaron and the Levites, too, are set as co-inheritors of Mosaic authority, see Deut 31:9 for whom Lev 9 acts as their ordination service in much the same way as Num 27 for Joshua and Num 11 for the elders.) Also, similar language is applied to both the elders and Joshua in Ex 19:7-10 and Deut 31:14-15, respectively.

I think the best way to consider Joshua is as the one chosen to complete Moses' specific (prophetic) task as deliverer, cp. Elisha's fulfillment of tasks (i.e. the anointing of Hazael and Jehu, 2 Kgs 8:13; 9:3) given to Elijah in 1 Kgs 19:15-16. The difference being Elijah's spirit (2 Kgs 2:9,15) came to an end in Elisha, where Moses' continues in the Seventy. It remains possible that the Elijah/Elisha pattern influenced the one seen in Moses/Joshua & the Seventy rather than vice versa.

[56] ET, mine.

(4) Selected from among the people
    - "…of Israel…" (v. 16)
        - Or alternatively (to ##3-4): a selected "seventy" from an already existing authoritative group called " the elders of Israel" (e.g. Ex 3:16, 18; 4:29; 12:21; 17:5-6; 18:12; 24:1, 9; Lev 9:1; Num 16:25; Deut 27:1; 31:9; Josh 7:6; 8:10)

(5) Known (and approved) by Moses
    - "…whom you know to be…" (v. 16)

(6) Due to their select and scribal status already demonstrated among the people
    - "…elders of the people and their scribes (שטריו/γραμματεῖς αὐτῶν)…" (v. 16)
    - "…from the elders of the people…" (v. 24)

(7) Brought within the Tent of Meeting, the location of the most intimate relationship between Moses and YHWH (Ex 33:11; also, the place of ordination, from Moses to others, cf. Lev 9:31-34)
    - "Take them to the Tent of Meeting…" (v. 16)
    - "…and [Moses] stood them around the Tent…" (v. 24)

(8) Permitted to be with Moses in the presence of God and his word to Moses
    - "…and they will take their place there with you. And I will come down and speak to you there."[57] (v. 16)
    - "…and YHWH came down in a cloud and spoke to him…" (v. 25)

(9) Recipients of the spirit upon Moses
    - "…and I will withdraw the from the spirit upon you and place it upon them." (v. 17)
    - "He withdrew some of the spirit which was upon him [Moses] and out it on the seventy elders." (v. 25)

(10) Carriers of the people with Moses

[57] Or "…and let them take their place with you."

- "They will bear with you some of the burden (**במשא**) of the people…"[58] (v. 17)
- Specifically called to be the helping community (sc. council) of Moses, so he will not be alone.
- "…so that you will no longer bear it alone." (v. 17)

(11) Prophesied as a result of the spirit upon Moses resting upon them.[59]

- "Then, as the spirit rested on them, they prophesied and did not add."[60] (v. 25)

Admittedly, the above represents only one way to read the biblical text, and a more minimalist interpretation of the passage that does not seek to attribute so much to the elders is certainly possible. While arguments may be made both for and against this reading, the approach here is to let this more maximal reading have its day. To let the possibility remain that nearly every word is assumed to be geared toward establishing the elders in the eyes of the reader, and, in particular, to see if ancient readers (or indirect inheritors) of this biblical text may have indeed viewed this passage with this kind of impact for its authority structures and legends.

With this reading in mind, we will be able to see how for both Numbers 11 and the legend of the LXX, *the elder-translators are the trusted tradents of Mosaic law.* Because of their deep similarity to him as lawgiver, as both scribe and prophet, the elder-translators may be trusted to carry the law of Moses beyond his death to the generations that follow and to the texts that those generations require to come to know the law. While *Aristeas* and Josephus angle toward a promotion of the elders as scribes like Moses and Philo describes the translators more as prophets like Moses, neither emphasis excludes the other and neither is content to

[58] Or, "bear the people with you by oracle," as in Williams, means/instrument §243 instead of §251, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax* (3rd ed.; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007). Also, see Jer 23:33-40; Deut 9:22.
[59] On "prophesied" versus "spoke ecstatically," see Chapter 2.
[60] See Translation.

style them exclusively within these sub-themes (i.e. they are not just scribes in Aristeas and prophets in Philo)—the emphasis on being Moses-like remains central.

The Legend of the LXX

Having reviewed Numbers 11 in some detail, our discussion continues here with a more detailed exploration of the legend of the LXX, and in particular, with its earliest, Hellenistic forms. This legend of an apocryphal group of seventy (or seventy-two) translators (who are the first to render the Hebrew Bible into Greek) has a deep connection with the text that bears its name. From its inception,[61] this most famous and relied-upon Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible has been marked by an authorial attribution and title based on this legend: *Septuaginta* (Latin for "seventy"; hence, "LXX").[62]

At one level, this label, LXX, is meant simply to distinguish this textual tradition from other possible Greek translations of the Hebrew Scriptures, i.e. it is the LXX we are consulting not Theodotion, Symmachus, or Aquila (as one might in Origen's *Hexapla*).[63] At another level, however, *the name connects the text*

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[61] Debates about relative dates of the earliest LXX texts and earliest versions of the legend (i.e. *Letter of Aristeas*) continue. Our earliest account of someone using the LXX text is from Demetrius the Chronographer (*apud* Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 1.21 and Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 9.21, 29), who likely lived during the reign of Ptolemy (IV) Philopater (221-205 B.C.E.). On questions of dating and previous oral layer, see Honigman, *Homeric*, 81–91; 128–30; Tessa Rajak, *Translation and Survival: The Greek Bible of the Ancient Jewish Diaspora* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 34. On Demetrius, see Henry Barclay Swete, *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek* (2nd ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914), 17–8; Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.-A.D. 135)* (ed. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Martin Goodman; 3 vols., Rev. & exp. ed.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1973), III.i:513–7.

[62] The title *Septuaguinta* is used by Augustine (*Civ.* 18:42), and ἑβδομήκοντα is subscripted in some early manuscripts (e.g. Codex Vaticanus [B], 4th cent. CE) and seems to have been the common ascription since at least the time of Origen's *Hexapla*, cf. Eberhard Nestle, "Septuagint," in *Dictionary of the Bible* (ed. James Hastings; 5 vols.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1898), 4:438. Also see Nestle for reflections on "Septuagint" as the preferred English title versus other languages' more numerically obvious nomenclature, e.g. *i Settanta, die Siebenzig* [archaic], *la Septante*.

[63] Cf. Martin Noth, *The Old Testament World* (trans. Victor I. Gruhn; London: Adam & Charles Black, 1966), 322–3. On "*the* LXX," despite known problems identifying any one clear Greek text, see Rajak, *Translation*, 16–20; Christopher R. Seitz, *The Character of Christian Scripture:*

precisely to a *particular* legend that authenticates its antiquity[64] and supports its authority as holy Scripture.[65] Although the legend has multiple textual iterations, all reflecting on the same, basic origin story, it begins with three closely-related Hellenistic versions: the so-called *Letter of Aristeas*; Josephus, *Antiquities* 12.11-118; and Philo, *Moses* 2.25-44.[66]

The basic relationship between these three accounts is fairly well established. *Aristeas* is dated by scholarly consensus as the earliest (200-100 B.C.E.),[67] although when (and if) various sections were interpolated later is still debated.[68] Philo follows next chronologically, but his dependence on *Aristeas* (as we have it now) for the legend is unlikely.[69] Whether he has *Aristeas* in front of

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The Significance of a Two-Testament Bible (STI; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 73–4; Law, *When God Spoke Greek: The Septuagint and the Making of the Christian Bible*, 75–9.

[64] Cf. Josephus' arguments in *C. Ap.* 1.1-218, cf. John M.G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE - 117 CE)* (HCS 33; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 361–3. Also, Aristobulus and Eupolemus on Moses anteceding (and even surpassing) the Greek philosophers (*apud* Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 13.12, *OTP* 2:839, and *Praep. ev.* 9.26.1; *OTP* 2:865). Both Aristobulus and *Aristeas* set the LXX translation at the time of Ptolemy (II) Philadelphus, for credibility and precedence of the work.

[65] Wright, *Praise*, 297–314.

[66] Scholars unanimously hold these three as oldest (over later rabbinic and patristic iterations): Wasserstein and Wasserstein, *Legend*, 19–50; Martin Hengel, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture: Its Prehistory and the Problem of Its Canon* (trans. Mark E. Biddle; OTS; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2002), 25–41; Hadas, *Aristeas*, 73–84. In what follows, all ET of Josephus taken from LCL, Thackeray or Marcus; ET of Philo taken from LCL, Colson and/or Whitaker; ET of *Aristeas* taken from Hadas, *Aristeas*, unless otherwise indicated.

[67] Schürer, *History*, III.i:679–84 (2nd cent. B.C.E.); P.M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (3 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 2:970–2 (c.160 B.C.E.) ; cf. Rajak, *Translation*, 50 (200-100 B.C.E.); Honigman, *Homeric*, 128–30 (c.150 B.C.E., maybe 160's).

[68] Despite other possible sources, "the style of the work as it survives now is uniform and [without] grounds for positing…later interpolations," Schürer, *History*, III.i:680. Honigman argues for a "remarkably homogenous work" such that any investigation into prior layers is "only a limited interest," *Homeric*, 25–7. Collins convincingly suggests a series of interpolated "seventy-twos" in *Aristeas*, *Library*, 137–44. Also see Hadas on Février below.

[69] "It is altogether possible that Philo used an independent tradition," Hadas, *Aristeas*, 22. *Contra* Dorival, who suggests Philo has two traditions in front of him, I think it is highly unlikely that Philo could read an account which coordinates "seventy-two elders" *and* "seventy-two days" spent in translation without commenting on the symbolism inherent in at least *one* of the numbers, cf. "70 Ou 72," 49; Collins, *Library*, 165. Since his version bears no such comment, that section was not likely before him.

However, since the "seventy-twos" are some of the most likely later interpolations and other similarities, perhaps Philo read a *version* of *Aristeas*, even if his "having read *our* Aristeas" (as Moses Hadas eventually decides) is not convincing, *Aristeas*, 25–6, 26n33, emphasis added; cf. Philo's source as "*Proto-Aristeas*" document, Collins, *Library*, 137–44; 164–9. Collins's conception

him or not, his version carries *unique emphases* on the Legend, which set it apart from the other two. After Philo, Josephus is next to recall the Legend. At first, briefly but importantly, as a justification and promotion for his own work, a re-telling of "the sacred Scriptures" (τῶν ἱερῶν γραμμάτων) (*Ant.* 1.10-17), and later, he repeats the Legend in a more extensive manner than Philo but more abbreviated than *Aristeas* (*Ant.* 12.11-118; purposely adumbrating *Aristeas* at 12.57, 100).[70] Unlike Philo, Josephus' version is *explicitly* based on some version of *Aristeas* since he invokes the "book of Aristeas" (τὸ Ἀριστaίου βιβλίον) as a text others may reference to supplement his rendition of the facts.[71]

The differences between the legend in Josephus and in *Aristeas* are more minor than those in Philo, who is more self-consciously philosophical. As Moses Hadas notes, regarding Josephus' rendition of *Aristeas*: "the more significant divergences [from *Aristeas*] are in the direction of making the account inoffensive to non-Jews and more credible to them."[72] This judgment is technically correct, but it is perhaps more illustrative to note that *Aristeas* is self-consciously "literary" (including genres and expression, which are well-recognized by critics of Hellenistic literature);[73] whereas, Josephus is self-consciously "historical" (tying up his version of the Legend with his sense of its context, "These, then, were the

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of recensions in *Aristeas* has merit, even where her placing one putative recension in direct response to another is unconvincing, e.g. *Library*, 157.

[70] Also, a brief rendition in *C. Ap.* 2.45-47.

[71] *Ant.* 12.100, ὡς…εἶναι μαθεῖν ἀναγνόντι τὸ Ἀριστaίου βιβλίον, ὃ συνέγραψε διὰ ταῦτα.

[72] E.g. Aristeas is explicitly pagan and does not pray, *Aris.* §17, cp. Josephus *Ant.* 12.23; "Ptolemy does *not* bow down before the Law seven times ([as in *Aris.* §]177), his courtiers do *not* wait on table for the translators ([*Aris.* §]186), he does *not* decree that informers take possession of those who fail to release Jewish slaves," Hadas, *Aristeas*, 21.

However, these differences should not be over-emphasized, e.g. *Aris.* §177-8, cp. Josephus, *Ant.* 12.90-1, equally communicating Ptolemy's highest regard for the Jewish law. With Jennifer Dines, "Josephus' alterations are often of a stylistic nature, reflecting literary fashions of the first century CE…" *The Septuagint* (Understanding the Bible and Its World; London: T&T Clark, 2004), 71.

[73] See Hadas, *Aristeas*, 54–9, who is particularly good on this point; also cf. George W.E. Nickelsburg, "Stories of Biblical and Post-Biblical Times," in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period: Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Qumran Sectarian Writings, Philo, Josephus* (ed. M.E. Stone; CRINT 2.2; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1984), 78.

things done by Ptolemy Philadelphus in appreciation and honour of the Jews").[74] In a less ideologically clear divergence, Josephus also presents the number of translators as "six from each tribe,"[75] as *Aristeas* does,[76] but then renders their total as "seventy" (*Ant.* 12:57, 86) rather than "seventy-two" translators (*Aris.* §50).[77] Whether this label should be considered a careless error as Josephus' Loeb editor, Ralph Marcus, suggests,[78] is quite debatable and not necessarily an insignificant question.[79] Much like other interpreters of Numbers 11 we have examined, Josephus' inclination toward seventy *over* seventy-two is biblically more understandable and typologically more appealing. Nevertheless, Josephus is broadly similar to the text of *Aristeas* that he so ardently appeals to.[80] Whether his version of *Aristeas* was precisely like the one we now have before us or not, there is a definite "family resemblance" between the versions of the legend in Josephus and *Aristeas*; the two are often helpfully considered together.

Much of the work done on the legend of the LXX considers these various Hellenistic iterations for their differences often to the exclusion of their broad similarities. Through contrast, one text's intentions or milieu may be identified over-against another and differing arguments made for which way historical dependencies may run. But for our purposes, all three versions represent attempts by later Jewish authors to support and defend the translation of the LXX as Jewish holy writ. Several recent studies point to the way Aristeas accomplishes this (summarized here based on the work of Benjamin Wright): the *Aristeas* legend[81] (1) demonstrates an attempt by (at least a portion of) the Jewish community to

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[74] Josephus, *Ant.* 12.118. Additionally, the Legend is part of Josephus' rationale for the whole of *Antiquities,* which itself is his second *historical* volume, cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 1.1-5, 10-17.
[75] ἓξ ἀφ ἑκάστης φυλῆς, *Ant.* 12.39, 49.
[76] ἀφ' ἑκάστης φυλῆς ἕξ, §39, §46.
[77] He keeps the number of days of translation the same: "seventy-two" (ἑβδομήκοντα καὶ δυσίν, *Ant.* 12.107; cf. ἑβδομήκοντα δυσί, *Aris.* §307).
[78] *Ant.* 12.57 [31n.b].
[79] See Dorival, who not only notices the precise nature of the shift but is, rightly I think, unwilling to gloss the change because of the symbolism he sees as inherent in both seventy and seventy-two, "70 Ou 72," 45–6.
[80] Also, see Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.45-7, for another appeal to the LXX's storied authority.
[81] I would argue that this also applies to Josephus' version inasmuch as it does not deviate from *Aristeas'* main goals and means.

transfer *authority* of the Hebrew text to that of the LXX by (2) use of terminology from Alexandrian *textual scholarship* (a) to establish that the Hebrew text used in producing the LXX was the "best available" and (b) thus capable of becoming a *sacred translation*.[82]

Although Philo communicates this transfer primarily through a discussion of *prophecy* with allusions to the Eleusinian *mysteries* (among other prophetic vocabulary terms), rather than Alexandrian grammarian scholarship, a similar dual-purpose (viz. transferring authority and making a sacred translation) is identifiable in all three versions of the legend, each using Greek categories harmoniously applied to Jewish ends. On the other hand, scholars like Tcherikover[83] and Orlinsky[84] have highlighted the intensely *Jewish* roots of the Legend.[85] Each of these Hellenistic texts is no doubt engaged in its own identity struggle with both Jewish and Greek cultural values;[86] however, each is also indebted to biblical conceptions. Since the process envisaged is one meant to persuade Jews (albeit Hellenistic ones), none draws on Greek language and concepts alone.

Lawgiving in the Legend: Another Seventy Elders?

The presumption that Jewish readers and writers drew upon theological resources from their own Scriptures and tradition in order to persuade and defend the LXX is not new. Numerous previous studies (over hundreds of years) have probed the Legend's typological foundations; however, the pursuit has almost always been

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[82] Benjamin G. Wright III, "Transcribing, Translating, and Interpreting in the Letter of Aristeas: On the Nature of the Septuagint," in *Scripture in Transition: Essays on Septuagint, Hebrew Bible, and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honour of Raija Sollamo* (JSJSup 126; Leiden: Brill, 2008), 154–55.
[83] Victor Tcherikover, "The Ideology of the Letter of Aristeas," *HTR* 51 (1958): 59–85.
[84] Harry M. Orlinsky, "The Septuagint as Holy Writ and the Philosophy of the Translators," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 46 (1975): 89–114.
[85] More recently, see Noah Hacham, "The Letter of Aristeas: A New Exodus Story?," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 36 (2005): 1–20.
[86] Rajak helpfully summarizes John Barclay's work on the forces at work in Hellenistic identity: "identities are both local and trans-local; cultural self-expression is full of ambiguity; and contestations of power are frequent, be they internal, with other diasporas or (perhaps most telling) with the host community," *Translation*, 93; citing *Diaspora*, 2–3.

with an exclusive focus on Exodus 24. That Numbers 11 has a role is not unheard of, but typically, it has been considered as a *supporting* example to the primary typology of Exodus 24[87]—as perhaps *together* presenting a biblical institution of "seventy elders" around Moses (and only in *Aristeas* and Josephus).[88] Since "Moses and his seventy elders" do occur in both pentateuchal passages and since there is a real focus on the activity of the elder-translators of the Legend, such a parallel comparison is appropriate.[89] However, the precise ways Exodus 24 and Numbers 11 may together or separately correspond to the Legend has not been sufficiently considered. Tracing past ways biblical typology in the Legend has been explored will narrow our attention on the activity and symbolic construction inherent in the elders story of Numbers 11.

Exodus 24 and the Legend of the LXX: Advantages and Gaps

Historically, Exodus 24 has been drawn into comparison with the Legend not only because of the possible numerical connection but due to the unique word choice used in LXX Ex 24:11 to translate "not one of them perished" after they "saw the God of Israel." The verb used (διαφωνεῖν) usually means "to disagree,"[90]

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[87] Hadas, *Aristeas*, 71–2 (example of confusing the numbers, 70+2); Tov, "The Septuagint," 161 (70=original to the legend?); Rajak, *Translation*, 52 ("echoes are plain"); Collins, *Library*, 142n75; Exceptions: Noah Hacham, "New Exodus," 3n6 (72 better explained by Num 11); Dorival, "70 Ou 72," 57–8 (both Ex 24 and Num 11, but Num 11 best).

[88] Philo is excluded from such studies since his version does not include "seventy" or "elders." *Aristeas'* use of "seventy-two" instead of "seventy" has not inhibited the connection. Despite *Aristeas'* "seventy-two" being consistently dated prior to Josephus' "seventy," the assumption has been that *Aristeas'* develops his original source material from "seventy" to "seventy-two"; and therefore, Josephus is assumed to be re-directing the tradition back to its "seventy" origins, which are more biblically based. See Hadas, *Aristeas*, 70–2; Tov, "The Septuagint," 161. Despite this consensus, the rationale for why *Aristeas* might make such a move is uncertain. Both Hadas and Collins suggest (in different ways) the reason is to try and integrate an allusion to both "70" and "12" at the same time, cf. *Aristeas*, 72; *Library*, 142. Whether "seventy-two" actually accomplishes such an integration is doubtful.

[89] This focus on the importance of the elders is displayed in Azariah de' Rossi's title for the legend, הדרת זקנים [Mantua, 1573; cf. Azariah de'Rossi, *The Light of the Eyes* (trans. Joanna Weinberg; YJS 31; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001)].

[90] Hadas, *Aristeas*, 71.

and earlier interpreters of *Aristeas* considered its negation in LXX Ex 24:11 as a plausible indicator for the origins of the Legend within the LXX itself.[91]

The exegetical and typological reasoning seems to be as follows: Based on their common role as "intermediaries" between Moses and the people (biblically at Sinai and in the legend at Alexandria), the biblical Seventy, who accompanied Moses to the mount of lawgiving did not die when they saw the Almighty, and the Legendary Seventy(-two), who accompanied the law in its process of translation, did not disagree with one another over the words and ideas chosen.[92] These translators chose to see themselves in the biblical text and translate the LXX with a clever use of a word holding the double-meaning. This conflates the Legend and the LXX text in ways which most scholars of either the LXX or the Legend would not be comfortable with today.

These and other recent uses of LXX Ex 24:11 provide three important implications:

(1) Implied in this comparison is not only the possible "midrashic ingenuity"[93] utilized by the creators of the legend but an *a priori* identification of both sets of "seventies" as *intermediaries* between Moses and the people. This is an implied association worth highlighting: What is intrinsically *intermediary* in the

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[91] "That the *number* 70 and the legend of their wonderful *harmony* may be due to Ex 24[11], where 𝔊 reads καὶ τῶν ἐπιλέκτων τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ οὐδὲ **διεφώνησεν** οὐδὲ εἷς, was first pointed out by Daniel Heinsius [1580-1655] in *Aristarchus sacer*, ch. 10," Nestle, "Septuagint," 4:439 (emphasis modified). (Note: Rahlfs' edition records the slight variant: "τοῦ Ισραηλ οὐ διεφώνησεν".) H. St. John Thackeray, *The Septuagint and Jewish Worship: A Study in Origins* (Schweich Lectures 1920; London: British Academy, 1921), 12, explains further (emphasis added):

> The origin of the traditional number of the translators and their miraculous agreement in the later accounts has been traced in the LXX itself, in the narrative of the law-giving. We read of seventy elders who form a link between Moses and the people. They ascend the mount but a little way and worship from afar. Jewish fancy seems to have identified these mysterious elders with the translators, the intermediaries between Moses and Israel of the dispersion. The Greek states (v. 11) that not one of them perished, i.e. they were privileged to escape the usual death-penalty for a vision of the deity. But the verb used for "perish" (διαφωνεῖν) was unusual in that sense; "not one disagreed" was the more obvious meaning. Hence, it seems, arose the legend of the translators' supernatural agreement. Hence, too, from their supposed presence on Sinai, the belief that they shared the lawgiver's *inspiration*.

[92] This reading follows a possible LXX-based reading, one not concerned with harmonizing with MT Ex 24:11.

[93] Hadas, *Aristeas*, 71.

acts of the seventy elders? There seems to be an assumption that the "seventies" of Bible and legend are *conciliar* in shape and function; they imply a body of those "around Moses," "of the people," or both. Following this line of thought, Moses Hadas reads the texts through a later phase of Jewish history, saying: "Seventy was the traditional number for a supreme council, both for the Sanhedrin and for other bodies."[94] Thus, the Legend represents a traditional reading of the biblical "seventies" as the basis for a similarly numbered supreme council. In this case, one necessary for the act of translation undertaken:

> [Even] if the actual work [of translating the LXX text] was [historically] performed by a smaller number,[95] they were an authorized body and comparable in function to Moses' seventy.[96]

In this light, the translators of the Legend of the LXX *are indeed "Moses' seventy."* The "seventies" of Exodus 24 and the legend of the LXX both represent authorized bodies functioning as *intermediaries*.[97] And yet, being selected from among the elders of the people and taking their stand between the Tent of Meeting and the camp, the Seventy of Numbers 11 can also be accounted as intermediaries.

(2) In addition, we can press this older view of the legend's origins further. While LXX Ex 24:11 may use οὐ διαφωνεῖν to indicate a lack of *disagreement* among the elders, it may also indicate a lack of *perishing* or *loss*, i.e. "the chosen sons of Israel did not perish, not one (οὐδὲ εἷς)."[98] Instead of conflating the Legend and the LXX text, might the LXX text have shaped the Legend to *both* ends, not only their complete agreement in the legend but their lack of dying? It is not necessary for us to assume the precise historical reconstruction wherein the

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[94] Ibid. As examples of "other bodies," he cites Josephus' selection of "70 men to be rulers of Galilee" in *War* 2.570; 4.336.

[95] Hadas thinks "five" as in *Sopherim* 1.8 is a more historically plausible.

[96] Hadas, *Aristeas*, 73.

[97] For more on both conciliar shape and intermediary function of Exodus 24's elders, see Ska, "Vision," 174, 183.

[98] ET, mine; cp. NETS, "And not even one of the chosen of Israel perished." This reading is in keeping with the sense in MT Ex 24:11: ואל־אצילי בני ישראל לא שלח ידו, "Against the noble* ones of Israel, he did not raise his hand." [*or "chosen," Hadas, *Aristeas*, 71; "chief men," Ska, "Vision," 165; following , I אצל. See Koehler et al., "אָצִיל" *HALOT*.]

writers of the Legend read both these themes from the LXX text. While this remains possible, it is less suppositional to see these *themes* present in both the biblical text and the Legend. More to the point, writers of the both the LXX and the Legend chose words or warning and relief at agreement (e.g. διαφωνεῖν) because there is something inherent in the act of Jewish lawgiving that draws questions of "perishing" and "agreement" to the fore.[99] Both the LXX Exodus 24 and the Legend draw on *both* themes: *a lack of disagreement and perishing*. A successful Jewish lawgiving event requires both in unique ways.[100] Without seeking competition between the two, we will, however, in the end, see how Numbers 11 also maintains both values: (a) in their undivided prophetic activity and (b) in their survival in the midst of the presence of God.

More recently, (3) Harry Orlinsky's widely accepted comparison of *Aristeas* and Exodus 24 makes no use of "comparing seventies" or of midrashic readings of the LXX (though his departure from earlier typology is rarely recognized). Instead, he focuses on the combination of (a) tribes present (b) through their elders (c) at the reading aloud of the law.[101] He sees these three as present in both Exodus 24 and *Aristeas* and, through these elements, as both occasions of the *canonization* of holy writ.[102] The solemnity and "closing" of the LXX in *Aristeas* is often noted as occurring when a pronouncement of "no changes" should occur to the text (§310-11). Although it may also be marked by the reading aloud of a text, as Orlinsky rightly notes, the similarities between this final imprecation and similar biblical expressions in Deut 4:2; 5:19[22]; 13:1[12:32], which warn "do not add," are also striking.[103] This wording does not

[99] Although the elders of Ex 24:1-2; 9-11 do not appear to have any legal function (that takes place with all the people at the foot of the mountain, vv. 3-8); however, I admit the close juxtaposition may present (and has presented) readings which see them in such a function.
[100] See remarks Chapter 4 on Deuteronomy 5 and Watts's observations on the need for double-authorization, Watts, "Moses," 425.
[101] Orlinsky, "Holy Writ," 98.
[102] Ibid., 94–8 (Ex 24:3–4,7–10; Aris. §§41–51; §§308–11).
[103] Wright, *Praise*, 308.

occur in Exodus 24, but it does occur in Numbers 11:25, perhaps with similar concerns.

Together, these three typological connections between Exodus 24 and the legend of the LXX—(1) conciliar intermediaries, (2) unique agreement and lack of perishing, and (3) instruments for validating holy writ—represent this view's chief contributions. Exodus 24 represents some real possibilities for how Jewish conceptions may be seen shaping and directing the Legend.

However, this almost exclusive attention to Exodus 24 as the typological foundation of the legend exhibits at least three significant gaps. (1) As Orlinsky himself notes, although both *may* exhibit a connection to tribal ratification of divine law (i.e. "twelve pillars for the twelve tribes," Ex 24:4; "six from each tribe" as "seventy-two," *Aristeas* §46, §50), the elders of Exodus 24 are essentially *passive* where the elders of *Aristeas* are *active* participants in the act of lawgiving:

> In the biblical account of the Revelation at Sinai [Exodus 24], the elders constituted mere witnesses to the event; their roles were quite passive. In the Letter [of *Aristeas*], on the other hand, after the Torah itself is lauded for containing "such great things," the qualities of the elders are praised—even by Hellenistic standards—beyond the usual literary amenities. There is good reason for this: the elders in the Letter were not mere witnesses to the event of the translation, *they were the authors of the event; they personally brought the Greek Torah into being!* And for that…they are described as the most learned in God's Law, and (but only secondarily) in worldly (i.e., Greek) wisdom too. *Divinely inspired and learned in the Law, they came as close as was possible to being facsimiles of Moses the Lawgiver.* Divine inspiration…was theirs in the highest possible degree.[104]

Rather than *receivers* of the law (a role that belongs to the Jewish πολίτευμα, instead),[105] Orlinsky rightly shows the translators as *active* imitators of Moses, those worthy to receive the law from him and transmit it faithfully to the people.

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[104] Orlinsky, "Holy Writ," 99, emphasis added.

[105] *Aristeas* §310; Josephus, *Ant.* 12:108. The group assembled to verify and canonize the translation does not exclude the translators—it specifically includes the priests and elders of the translators—but it is the complete unity of these active participants in the translation with the passive representatives to which the moment speaks, both hearing what Demetrius reads and affirming it together.

(2) In fact, if *Aristeas* were concerned with mere representational force in its presentation of the elder-translators, it could achieve the same feat without recourse to the number seventy-two at all: "elders" and "all the tribes" would do. "Seventy-two" has no direct referent in Exodus 24, and as such, it is hard to see (as some have suggested) how "seventy-two" is an "improvement" on "seventy" as a typological symbol or how it recalls "seventy" and "twelve" at the same time, unless one already assumes it is and does.[106] In rationalizing the apparent tautology, some have suggested that Exodus 24 is foundational to *Aristeas* (and thus later versions of the Legend) because it entails all three symbols ("twelve tribes," "seventy" *and* "seventy-two" elders) through "seventy plus two" in the story of Exodus 24, but the narrative is not so clear. At least three different pairs in the story may be the "plus two" alluded to by *Aristeas*.[107]

As biblical stories go, Numbers 11 demonstrates a more straightforward "plus two" to the "seventy elders" in the presence of Eldad and Medad (11:26-7) than Exodus 24. Noah Hacham puts the possibility of a Numbers 11-based "seventy-two" most clearly:[108]

> [I]t seems that not only the twelve tribes but also the very number of the 72 elders have crucial meaning. This number is a variation of the 70 elders, a usual number of the leadership of the people (e.g. Exod 24:1,9; Num 11:16). This variation derives from the story in Numbers 11, in which except of [sic] the 70 elders who were stationed around the Tent and prophesied, Eldad and Medad prophesied in the camp, thus 72 elders prophesied. By using this number *Aristeas* alludes to this story, in order to

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[106] *Contra* Collins, *Library*, 142, "[T]he number 'seventy-two' can be considered an improvement on 'seventy' because it includes both the seventy elders at Sinai and also the twelve tribes who were present when the Law was received."

[107] Various "plus twos" proposed for Exodus 24 as a biblical "seventy-two," include Aaron and Hur, Aaron and Moses, and Nadab and Abihu. See Dorival, "70 Ou 72," 57, "un groupe de soixante–douze, par adjonction d'Aaron et d'Or" (Ex 24:14); Hadas, *Aristeas*, 72, "Moses and Aaron" (Ex 24:1, 9); Snaith, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 229, "Nadab and Abihu" (Ex 24:9).

[108] Notably, Hadas suggests an alternate proposal that *Aristeas* is not in fact a development from an original "seventy" story but instead represents a variant tradition: "the two numbers are frequently confused," *Aristeas*, 72. Such a proposal is plausible and even likely, but it necessarily indicates that "seventy-two" is a number *Aristeas* inherited which has now been shaped into something having to do with even representation of the tribes rather than Exodus 24 as the originating *reason* for including "seventy-two" in the legend. In this scenario, the question shifts slightly from "Is Exodus 24 the best typological basis for 'seventy-two'?" to "Is it the best basis for the *tribal rationale* of *Aristeas* assuming seventy-two as a given?"

> equate the 72 translators' authority to that of the 72 prophesied [sic, prophesying] elders who supported Moses.[109]

Further, the only *rabbinic* source for an accounting of "seventy-two elders" comes in connection with *Numbers 11*. In that explicitly *pentateuchal* context, Moses is worried about offending the tribes by selecting "seventy," as it is not divisible evenly by twelve; so (at the direction of God), he selects six elders from each tribe from which two must be subtracted by lot: hence, Eldad and Medad.[110] However, the *creation* of such a midrash is most likely to occur in the context of an exegetical conundrum facing an explanation for "seventy elders" at the tent (Num 11:24) alongside Eldad and Medad as those "written about (בכתבים)" (Num 11:26) for which the existence of the twelve tribes provides an answer. For *Aristeas,* the presentation of "six from each tribe" has more likely been integrated as gratuitous (proto-)rabbinic support for communal authorization of the elders.[111]

All this indicates that what really draws the attention of typical readers of the Legend to the seventy elders (either in Exodus 24 or Numbers 11) is something about the number seventy(-two) which recalls, not the elders' representative status, but their *closeness to Moses.* They see something symbolic in the number reminding them of a recurring institution of elders around Moses and, with sights set on Sinai's lawgiving and his Seventy close by, determine the association to be close enough. This may be true *in part*, but the gaps also draw us closer to examining Numbers 11's more *active* Seventy(-two).

Finally, (3) a typology based on Exodus 24 struggles to connect with Philo's version of the Legend; it is not uncommon for studies in the legend of the LXX to pass over Philo's account with considerably less comment.[112] This may be due to its brevity, but it may also be due to suspicions about Philo's style, which is

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[109] Noah Hacham, "New Exodus," 3n6.
[110] *Sifre* 95; *Num. Rab.* 15.19; *b. Sanh.* 17a.
[111] For the oddities of this section, including the possible interpolation of "six from each tribe," see 174n68 above on Collins, and, on communal authorization, see n202n171 below.
[112] Dines, *Septuagint*, 64–70; Wright, *Praise*, 309–13, are notable exceptions.

suspected of including more of his own ideas than those about his subject.[113] Since all authors (*Aristeas* and Josephus included) undoubtedly coordinate their perspective to the events they are discussing, this bias against Philo is unnecessary and unfortunate. Be that as it may, Philo's account has trouble finding a basis in Exodus 24 because it contains no "seventy(-two) elders" and no "tribes." Neither is there a specific ratification event with a set of Jewish representatives. (There is an implied "reading aloud" and "lack of disagreement" in the activity of the elders among themselves, but neither is in the context of a ratification event.)[114]

Instead (and to point in favor of Philo's account), the affirmation for the translation is recognized by a festival more than a court-event. Like the other two versions, it is from outside as well as inside Israel; that is, it is (a) evident to all who know both languages, Greek and Hebrew (*Mos.* 2.40), and (b) among both Jews and Gentiles (*Mos.* 2.41). But the site of their acknowledgement is at the feast of tents, where both Jews and Gentiles gather "to do honour to the place in which the light of that version first shone out, and also to thank God" (*Mos.* 2.41). For Philo, the very fact that its goodness is openly evident to all is essential to why the LXX should be regarded as the supreme and authoritative divine writings of the world (*Mos.* 2.25). There is then, an *authorization* (what Orlinsky calls "canonization") in Philo's account, but one which is more distant from an Exodus 24 typology.

Similarly, the theme of complete agreement affirmed by older interpreters of the legend (viz. οὐ διαφωνεῖν in Nestle and Thackeray) is not derived from Exodus 24 in Philo's account but is still present (and in even stronger ways than in

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[113] See Wasserstein and Wasserstein, *Legend*, 39–40, where the authors connect aspects of Philo's account to his view in other places and determine (in one section, 40), "Philo seems not to be drawing on an external tradition but rather to be importing the detail from himself for the purposes of [his broader work]."

[114] "Reading aloud" may be implied in *Mos.* 2:37-38 where the translators are granted the same Greek words, both one to another and to each corresponding Hebrew original. Presumably, in the world of Philo's story, the way they would discover this would be through reading their translations to one another. "No disagreement" is implied by the utter agreement described in the same section. For the present point, it is important that Philo states the matter in its positive formulation with no indication of LXX Ex 24:11's οὐ διαφωνεῖν.

Aristeas) since the translators each prophesy "the same word for word" (*Mos.* 2.37).[115] Through this prophetic (and literary) model,[116] Philo presents the LXX as "word-for-word and sense-for-sense,"[117] an identical replica of its Hebrew source text. As a result, to Philo, "the language of the [Bible] *was* originally Hebrew…, but it *is* Hebrew no longer."[118] LXX has completely displaced the Hebrew text, and in many respects, is more philosophically dependable than the original.[119] Philo's usage of the LXX confirms this perspective,[120] and he has clearly described the events of the Legend according to his own understanding. And yet, his description is not radically different from *Aristeas* or Josephus, who likewise hold the LXX as Jewish holy writ at the highest level. Again, the prophesying elders of Numbers 11 appear strongly warranted as potential typological supports, those found previously but perhaps less strongly in Exodus 24 (sc. authorization and complete agreement).

In the end, previous approaches to the biblical typology of the legend beckon for further work in exploring the Legend or its potential typologies. By making Numbers 11 a supporting doublet of Exodus 24, both pentateuchal passages and the Legend of the LXX have appeard flattened. Some aspects of Exodus 24 have lost their distinctive features (i.e. how tribes and elders are

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[115] LXX Exodus 24 may signal a complete lack of disagreement ("not one [disagreed]" LXX Ex 24:11; viz. absolute mutual affirmation of one another's opinion), but it lacks the mechanism for a miraculous re-articulation in and through the mind of each elder the same words of law, completely correlating to one another and to Moses (viz. absolute synchrony of mind and speech).
[116] Kamesar argues that Philo's consistent view of the LXX, which is reflected here and elsewhere, is as much "literary" as it is "prophetic" because its writer(s) (Moses and perhaps others) have written it with "the specific objective of εὐαρμοστία, and [in] 'accord with nature'," indicating an expectation for its interpreters to come to it with "technical skill…at the highest level," "Philo and the Literary Quality of the Bible: A Theoretical Aspect of the Problem," *JJS* 46 (1995): 68.
[117] See Adam Kamesar, "Biblical Interpretation in Philo," in *The Cambridge Companion to Philo* (ed. Adam Kamesar; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 67–71. For this phrase as well as its technical implications, see 205n187 below.
[118] Yehoshua Amir, "Authority and Interpretation of Scripture in the Writings of Philo," in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (ed. Martin Jan Mulder; CRINT 2.1; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1988), 443.
[119] Also, cf. Winston, who agrees with this, terming it "noetic" prophecy (i.e. where content can be effected by the mind of the prophet), "Two Types of Mosaic Prophecy According to Philo," *JSP* 4 (1989): 49–67.
[120] Kamesar, "Biblical," 71; Amir, "Philo," 442.

configured separately, what this event means for the elders as a separate event from Numbers 11), and Numbers 11 has lost its *context,* having been reduced to "another mention of seventy elders." Although the comparisons to Exodus 24, have affirmed a vital aspect of a particularly Jewish view of the Legend (i.e. it is a canonization of the LXX as holy writ), the way this occurs in the Legend—through not only assent but active participation of gifted Jewish elders—lies just beyond the pale of discussion.

Two Types of Stories, Two Types of Translation?

The *effect* of Philo's work is, then, not as divergent a version of the Legend as it might first appear, but questions remain about his *method:* his lack of "seventy(-two) elders" and, especially, his inclusion of *miraculous prophecy* are noticeably distinct from *Aristeas* (and Josephus). Setting these two traditions at odds with one another is relatively commonplace, and Werner Schwartz has labeled the alternatives as the (1) "philological" (*Aristeas*/Josephus) versus "inspirational" (Philo) models of biblical translation.[121] These are generally accurate ways to describe the emphases in the alternative versions of the Legend (with notable exceptions in each), but I suggest the tension is better understood as dialectical than contradictory, even as Moses' own role entails both "scribe" (philological) and "prophet" (inspirational). In the case of the Legend, an *exclusive* focus on either side will not accurately reflect *either Aristeas*/Josephus *or* Philo and will likewise miss the combined force present in Numbers 11 (prophet *and* scribe; philological *and* inspirational).

Schwartz rightly observes that these different versions of the Legend of the LXX reflect not just a difference in how the material is presented but a difference in theological values. To put the matter clearly, in order to transmit the word of God (written or oral) faithfully, does one trust: the (1) precise, careful, and philologically-skilled *scribe* or the (2) dynamic, inspired, and spiritually-gifted

[121] *Principles and Problems of Biblical Translation: Some Reformation Controversies and Their Background* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 20–5.

prophet? In both approaches, the goal is to reach back to *God's presence in his word*. Because the Legend focuses on this question of proper transmission, the values used to communicate it emerge from *and* participate in longer theological trajectories (i.e. they *reflect* values which came before them and *create* values after them).

Readers of the Legend (and of Numbers 11) often need to recognize their own interpretative position as theologically or philosophically downstream of forces already at work in their own milieu, which may push them toward viewing either the scribal or the prophetic as the more valuable.[122] Earlier forces, like Plato's *Ion*, which contrasts the magnet-like *inspiration* of the rhapsode's interpretation and the *art-based interpretation* of the craftsman, may set in opposition forces, which, in a Jewish *Weltanschauung*, may in fact coexist. Having removed the suspicion of mythology from divine writing, Judeo-Christian thinkers are free to see convergence where Plato saw separation. Specifically, Hellenistic Jews were free to conceive of Moses' law as both *philosophical* and *divine* (e.g. "for their legislation is most philosophical and flawless, inasmuch as it is divine," *Aris.* §31). Where Greek philosophers had to find truths about god(s) through the fallibly-inspired poets, the presentation in Jewish Scripture of a god who is simple and good, meant it could be accessed as divine and philosophical knowledge. This creates a nexus for *interpretation* not found in the same way in other Hellenistic literature.

Where Plato's *Ion* indicates the rhapsode as the best interpreter of any particular poet through inspiration (*Ion* 533D-535A), it also presents the best interpreter of any craft to be a craftsman in that art by that art (*Ion* 536C-539E). If Moses' law is both divine and philosophy, who is the best interpreter: the Mosaic rhapsode or the Mosaic philosopher? Both involve the ability to speak about what Moses is "thinking" (*Ion* 530C), but the question presented by *Ion* is: By what means does that occur? *Ion* is certainly not the only way this tension in

[122] Likewise, I readily admit my own context has influenced me to consider how they may both remain together.

Greek interpretation was handled,[123] but it is helpful in laying out a tension which remains and is yet reconfigured in Judeo-Christian thought. For those downstream of Moses, the answer to rhapsode or philosopher is "either or both." *Aristeas*, for example, shows multiple signs of influence from philosophy, but these do not necessarily come with an accompanying suspicion of divine action as other Greek philosophers may be inclined to do with myth.[124] Likewise, Philo is more comfortable calling on corybantic-style possession, but he carefully words the event so that philosophical agency is not completely excluded (i.e. their thoughts ascend to God's thought rather than being bypassed). Both avenues of interpretation find grounding in their similarity to the philosophical-divine nature of Jewish law *and* in the combined scribal-prophetic authorization of Moses.

Still, even in a constructive form, there is admittedly a tension between scribe and prophet (even if the Jewish God is more dependable and able to bring them together). The tension is pervasive in scope, theological in nature, and worth tracing its impact. It animates both Jewish and Christian tradition.

Rabbinic tradition has indeed allowed a *growth* in oral tradition (through *prophet*-like sages), but each layer added, typically, has a defined limit and ancillary placement to an attentively fixed biblical *text*, particularly in its Hebrew form. Like lengths of parchment, *Ex. Rab.* 47.1 portrays the unrolling of the complete written-oral complex of rabbinic text to Moses: "in order: Bible (מקרא), Mishnah, Talmud, and Aggadah."[125] Even though Moses is only permitted to

[123] E.g. Allegory presented another way of sifting philosophy from the poets, cf. G.R. Boys-Stones, *Post-Hellenistic Philosophy: A Study in Its Development from the Stoics to Origen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), chapters 1–3; G.R. Boys-Stones, "The Stoics' Two Types of Allegory," in *Metaphor, Allegory, and the Classical Tradition: Ancient Thought and Modern Revisions* (ed. G.R. Boys-Stones; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 189–217.

[124] "The points I have briefly run over have shown you that all these norms have been regulated with a view toward righteousness. Nothing has been set down carelessly but through writing—and not by myth—so that (ἀλλ' ἵνα) through the whole of life and in all practices we may practice righteousness towards all people, remembering the power of God," *Aris.* §168, ET, modified.

[125] See above 159n20.

write down the first section,[126] each subsequent generation sews their own segment of divine word to the one before it; until, at long last (as determined by a later community), the roll is re-constructed in its original, divine, Sinaitic form. From this perspective, it is no wonder that the LXX finds no quarter in the final Jewish canon (i.e. there is no "place" for a Greek Torah in an extended and continuous Hebrew canon, despite the fact that there obviously once was such a place in, at least, Hellenistic Jewish conceptions).[127]

Nevertheless, the story of *Aristeas'* elder-translators, who do not divine any new words by any obvious spiritual empowerment but only apply careful, wise, and diligent skill to their craft, might well resonate with many rabbinic *scribes*.[128] Despite rabbinic use of the elders of Numbers 11 to authorize the idealized delivery of oral tradition, such layers of revelation are pictured as arriving in distinct dispensations and with definitive end-points. To transmit the word of God, Jewish scribes must carefully transcribe the words of Torah (here, meant in the broadest sense, including Talmud) on both physical and mental parchment.

Christian tradition has been less consistent in its self-understanding, torn as it has been between a unified Greek Bible (i.e. LXX+NT, with incumbent prophetic benefits, e.g. LXX Isa 7:14's oft-trumpeted prophecy of the Virgin) and an older, more "original" version of the OT, the Hebrew Bible,[129] as the more authentic, written word of God to Jews to accompany the NT. From early stages, Christians have couched their reception of Scripture in *prophetic* vs. *scribal* terms,

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[126] מקרא here may refer to Torah/Pentateuch alone.

[127] Wasserstein and Wasserstein develop an engaging theory of where the *Legend* of the LXX (viz. the "Ptolemaic Changes") fits in a *post*-LXX rabbinic understanding, but examining the *rabbinic* forms of the Legend for what they might signal about Jewish understanding *at the time* of LXX has, to my knowledge, remained unexplored.

[128] *Scrolls and Elders:* Josephus, *Ant.* 12.89-90; *Aris.* §§176-7, notably the laws (νομοθεσία) are written on parchment in gold (cf. rabbinic tradition about Alexandrian scrolls that had the divine name so appointed, cf. *Sopherim* 1.9). *Hands & Washing: Aristeas* and Josephus show concern for pure hands in scribal work (cf. *m. Yad.* 3.2-5); *Aris.* §§305-6. Josephus describes them "washing their hands in the sea…and purifying themselves," *Ant.* 12.106. Cf. *Mekhilta,* Ex 12:1, where like Philo, there is concern for a "pure" spot where revelation may occur outside the promised land, thus citing Dan 8:2; 10:4; Ezek 1:3; Jacob Z. Lauterbach, trans., *Mekhilta De-Rabbi Ishmael* (2 vols., 2nd ed.; JPSCR; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), 1:4 [Heb. lines 62–7].

[129] I recognize that LXX traditions may in fact reflect older *Vorlage* than Hebrew ones, but this has not yet changed the perceived "trade-off" between the LXX and the Hebrew (especially MT).

with some parallels to the classic dichotomy between "Scripture" (or "Word") and "Tradition."

Augustine, explicitly recalling the Legend of the LXX, claims that the inspiration of God can be found in both the LXX *and* the Hebrew Bible. His rationale is so similar to those of both Philo and Numbers 11 that he is worth quoting at length:

> For the *same Spirit that was in the prophets* when they spoke [in the Hebrew Bible] *was present also in the seventy men* when they translated them [into the LXX]; and the Spirit could have said something else also, as if the prophet had said both things, because it would be the same Spirit Who said both. The Spirit could also have said the same thing in a different way, so that even though the words were not the same, the same meaning would still shine forth upon those who rightly understood them. He could also have omitted something, or added something, so it might be shown in this way that the work of translation was accomplished *not by the mere human labour* of one slavishly interpreting the words, but by the power of God filling and directing the mind of the translator.[130]

Like Philo's prophetic translators of the LXX ("they became as it were possessed, and, under inspiration, wrote,…as though dictated to each by an invisible prompter," *Mos.* 2:37) and Num 11:25's spirit-enabled prophesying elders, Augustine's fundamental value is to receive the "same meaning" as that which God spoke to (and through) the biblical prophets.[131] The mechanism by which both the translators and the prophets speak becomes the link required: the prophesying Spirit. The Spirit provides, through prophecy, a re-articulation of the same "word of God."

His position famously contrasts Jerome's who claims the translators of the LXX were just that: *translators* (i.e. philologists, scribes).

> Aristaeus, a champion of…Ptolemy, and Josephus, many years later, made no mention of such an incident [that the translators were placed in separate

[130] Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans* (ed. R.W. Dyson; trans. R.W. Dyson; CTHPT; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 885 [13.43], emphasis added.
[131] Here, Augustine is following patristic tradition of calling the whole of the Hebrew Bible, "the prophets," since the whole was thought to prophesy about Christ (cf. Lk 24:25-27), e.g. Justin Martyr's version of the Legend, *Apol.* 1.31; see translation and discussion in Wasserstein and Wasserstein, *Legend*, 98–100.

> cells to do their work], but write that they [the Seventy] were all gathered together in one apartment [*basilica*][132] and consulted and did not prophesy. For it is *one thing to be a prophet, quite another to be a translator.* In the one case, the spirit foretells what is to come; in the other, *learning and abundance of words* translate what is known.…[Otherwise] the Holy Spirit composed from the same books one set of testimonies through the Septuagint [sc. seventy] translators, and another one through the apostles [i.e. NT citations of the Hebrew Bible];[133] so that what the former passed over in silence, the latter pretended that it was written down.…They [the Seventy] translated before the coming of Christ, and what they did not know, they expressed in doubtful terms. What we write after His Passion and Resurrection is not so much *prophecy as it is history*.…I am not condemning, I am not reprehending the Septuagint [sc. seventy] translators, but I am preferring the apostles to them with confidence. Christ speaks to me through the lips of those who, I read, have been set above the prophets in spiritual gifts;…[134]

Jerome's intention is not to deny the initial inspiration of Scripture. But, following the Apostles' commitment to *careful, philological translation* of the Bible,[135] Jerome understands this inspiration not as a *word behind* the text (like Augustine, the same word in two forms), but as a *word in* the text, especially "the" Hebrew text:

> We do not say this because we wish to rebuke the Septuagint translators, but because the authority of the apostles and of Christ is greater; and wherever the Septuagint [sc. seventy] translators are not at variance with the Hebrew, there the apostles took their examples from their translation;

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[132] Cf. *t. Sukk.* 4:4 בסלקי גדולה (in Alexandria). Latin from Jerome, *Apologia Aduersus Libros Rufini* (ed. P. Lardet; trans. P. Lardet; CCSL 79; Turnhout: Brepols, 1982), 2.25.

[133] Previously, he cites the following NT//Hebrew parallels: Matt 2:15[//Hos 11:1], 23[//Isa 11:1]; John 7:38[//Prov 8:4]; 19:37[//Zech 12:10]; 1 Cor 2:9[//Isa 44:4]

[134] *Dogmatic and Polemical Works* (trans. John N. Hritzu; FC 53; Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1965), 148 [2.25]. Germane to this point and to our previous discussion of the secrets known by the LXX translators, Jerome remarks in the preface to his *Hebrew Questions on Genesis* that he thinks the LXX translators purposely withheld from Ptolemy,

> …the mystical teachings in the Holy Scriptures, and especially those things which promised the coming of Christ, lest the Jews might appear to worship a second God also. For the king, being follower of Plato, used to make much of the Jews, on the grounds that they were said to worship one God. [C.T.R. Hayward, *Jerome's Hebrew Questions on Genesis* (OECS; Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 29.]

[135] This commitment is not a "Word" over "Tradition" perspective since it is actually the *practice* of the Apostles (cf. OT citations) and the practice of the *church* (cf. his support for Theodotion' Daniel) which determine for Jerome which *texts* should be *philologically* attended to.

> but, where they differ, they quoted in Greek what they had learned from the Hebrews.[136]

The distance between Jerome's and Augustine's arguments is thus not just a preference for one translation over another, but for which *mechanism* of re-articulation is *valued* as the best access the original word of God (as affirmed by the Apostles). Perhaps for Jerome, and certainly for many readers of Numbers 11 after him, the contrast inherent in MT Num 11:25b is paradigmatic:

וַיְהִי כְּנוֹחַ עֲלֵיהֶם הָרוּחַ וַיִּתְנַבְּאוּ וְלֹא יָסָפוּ

For them, inspiration begins through prophetic utterance, but it ceases (securing the word of God *in* the text). What carries the word forward is not more prophecy, but faithful, authorized, and philologically-trained *scribes* like Num 11:16's **שטרים**. Generations of believers can access the word of God through the text carefully preserved for them to read. For Augustine, and readers of Numbers 11 like him, the activity of the valued mechanism is *prophecy*. Theirs is more like *Targum Onqelos* and (ironically?) Vulgate Num 11:25b:

וַהֲוָה כַד שְׁרָת עֲלֵיהוֹן רֽוּחַ נְבֽוּאָה וּמִתנַבַן וְלָא פָסְקִין

cumque requievisset in eis spiritus prophetaverunt nec ultra cessarunt[137]

In this view, "prophecy" does not cease. If God speaks through two different *inspired writers* using different words, the truly divine word can be accessed equally through *both* versions (LXX and Hebrew), *and* future generations have access to this divine word through God's continuing gift of *prophets* to re-speak his words again whenever needed.

These later Christian divisions are helpful in that they sharpen the values at stake in the Legend. However, questions remain: Were the earliest versions of the Legend themselves so divided? And must we maintain that same dichotomy for the elders of Numbers 11? It is helpful to remember that these Christian "types" of translation are two steps removed from original Mosaic authority (and run,

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[136] *Dogmatic and Polemical*, 160 [2.34].

[137] *Biblia sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem* (edited by R. Weber, et al.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2013).

appropriately, through a third value: apostolic appropriation of that authority). Although Augustine and Jerome draw directly from the Legend of the LXX and the Legend draws from Mosaic authority, our focus remains trying to see the biblical text through its later Hellenistic reception, as that reception stands. (1) Any tendency to bracket Philo's account as merely ecstatic or Philonic and without recognizing its *scribal* contribution to such a project should be resisted. Similarly, Num 11:25's "prophesying" is often dismissively labeled as "ecstasy" when *scribes* are explicitly portrayed as active participants. (2) Likewise, Aristeas is not so unconcerned with *divine* activity or the presence of God's spirit in the transmission of the LXX, and its (3) pronounced focus on the virtues and interpretative (not just scribal) ability of the translators are aspects which speak not just to their "learning" and "philological" abilities but to their own transformation into ones like Moses, through training (i.e. instruction, παιδεία) in his laws. In short, Philo is more "philological," and *Aristeas* and Josephus are more "inspirational," than they are typically regarded, and both have a concern for virtue, which I propose is a valued component of their process in making Mosaic holy writ. Further, and most importantly for our discussion, by examining these aspects of the Legend, each clarifies the meaning of the elders story of Numbers 11 in a significant way.

Bringing Moses Near: Virtuous Interpreters, Mosaic Prophecy, and God's Holy Law

Here is the argument before us: the virtue of the LXX translators in both Philo and *Aristeas*/Josephus, Philo's careful depiction of their prophetic performance, and *Aristeas* and Josephus' concern that the divinity of the text be matched by the divinity of the translation process, all further illuminate the Seventy of Numbers 11 as *authorized Mosaic interpreters*. Following this order (as it progresses in Numbers 11), we will simultaneously reconfigure some typical assumptions about these versions of the Legend and show how their conclusions resonate with implicit and explicit meaning in Numbers 11. These are each grounded in the

fundamental attempt to bring Moses and his law into being in a new place and a new way.

The person of Moses and the text of his law hold a special place in the mindset of Jews in the Diaspora. Not simply because they are ascribed foundational honor, but because their situation is not unlike the Israelites of the wilderness period: They are outside the land. This may have been particularly keen for Jews in Alexandria, where the Legend takes place. Its Egyptian locale provided constant reminders that they were (in some ways) *not* where God "meant" for them to be (cf. Deut 17:16; 28:68), and yet, so how had their founder been: from Egypt, outside the promised land.[138] Moses never entered into "God's rest" (Ps 95:11), and yet, he was able to attain the highest praise of God, a fact universally recognized within Palestine and without. What way forward, then, might Moses direct them toward? How could Egyptian Hellenistic Jews have what Moses had: complete faithfulness before God outside the land of Israel?[139]

Moses had one thing they never could: the presence of God in the Tabernacle. Yet, perhaps to a Hellenistic Jews mind, the climactic result of the Tabernacle was not in the animal sacrifices, which facilitated Jewish participation in that presence, but in the *law-giving voice of God*, now able to be heard from it, which might enter their minds and lives and through them demonstrate God's

[138] I fully recognize the maneuvers made by Philo and others to distinguish themselves as Greeks rather than, or over, Egyptians; however, the distinction should not be overdrawn in a society where the wisdom of ancient Egyptians was often combined with Ptolemaic identity (e.g. statues of Ptolemy II himself in Pharaonic garb) while simultaneously despising Egypt's "lower" elements, e.g. *Aris.* §138; cf. Bezalel Bar-Kochva, *The Image of the Jews in Greek Literature: The Hellenistic Period* (HCS 51; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 97; Barclay, *Diaspora*, 175n114. Hellenistic Egyptians never dismiss Egypt completely and are pre-disposed to consider ways of "cleansing" the land of its past, including past enslavement of the Hebrew people, cf. Noah Hacham, "New Exodus." The emergence of the LXX in Egypt as a "reverse Exodus" return there, in contravention of Deut 17:16, is not lost on recent readers of *Aristeas*, see ibid.; Rajak, *Translation*, 53–4. Additionally, we may note this only follows after Ptolemy himself has become a "reverse Pharaoh" by setting prisoners free, *Aris.* §20; Josephus, *Ant.* 12.25.

[139] These kind of putative questions are matched in their complexity only by their importance. They are worth pondering, even if only to orient more closely to the possibilities of the texts examined.

goodness to all.[140] Despite the wondrous beauty of the Temple described in *Aristeas* §§51–120a (itself a way of visually bringing the place of God near),[141] when asked, "What is of like value with beauty?" one of the elder-translators answers, "Piety, for piety is the first degree of beauty," outward value brought inward. Another, in *Aristeas* §234, when asked, "What is the highest form of glory?" is even more explicit:

> To honor God, and that not by offerings and sacrifices but by purity of spirit and of the devout conviction that all things are fashioned and administered by God according to His will.[142]

Aristeas is inclining here specifically *away* from sacrifices, and, combined with the more law-focused exegesis of Eleazar (*Aris.* §§128–68), the sending high priest, the *whole* of *Aristeas* is committed to promoting the particular teachings of Moses, not just as particular truth, but as the way to dependable, *philosophical* truth, as well. But how to bring the law of Moses *to Egypt*? No doubt they did so with some hesitation and careful attentiveness,[143] but also with a conviction that the ultimate good inherent in the law was needful for Greeks to hear and for Jews to make known.[144]

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[140] For Philo, the Decalogue was especially important as it was apprehended "by intellection" (through "mental sight") by all the Israelites (ἄνευ προφήτου καὶ ἑρμηνέως, *Spec.* 3.7; cf. *Praem* 2; *Decal.* 19), Kamesar, "Literary," 58; cf. Winston, "Mosaic Prophecy," 50. It thereby constituted an invitation to a Jewish version of the Eleusinian mysteries, where the masses could "see" God, aided by Moses the *hierophant* (*Som.* 1.164), and themselves, becoming priests and prophets to the world, through their knowledge of the Jewish law and worship of God (*Abr.* 98; *Spec.* 2.163–7), cf. Amir, "Philo," 436; Barclay, *Diaspora*, 175. On Elusinian mysteries, see Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 285–90.

[141] See J.M.F. Heath, "Greek and Jewish Visual Piety: Ptolemy's Gifts in the Letter of Aristeas," in *The Image and Its Prohibition in Jewish Antiquity* (ed. Sarah Pearce; JJSSup 2; Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2013), 38–48. Notably, *Aristeas* tries not only to redeem Egypt by bringing Palestine to it, but in some ways, by bringing Egypt to Palestine, especially when it describes the Jordan with flood-plain fertility like the Nile, *Aris.* §116.

[142] Cp. God as the "starting point" for every moral act, *Aris.* §189; §201; §235 (cited below); Josephus, *Ant.* 1.14.

[143] On hesitation: *Aris.* §126; Josephus *Ant.* 1.12, 12.54. Also, see Honigman and Rajak, who note the hesitation may have more to do with the habit of kings to keep treasures than with any Jewish wariness in making Jewish law into a new language, *Homeric*, 41–53; *Translation*, 55–63.

[144] At least, this appears to be the motive for the Legend; we cannot presume to know much about what motivated the actual translation.

The Legend of the LXX leans into Moses, just as an authority, but in his pentateuchal setting, and claims the position of being outside the land as the terrain of the proclamation of the law. It is no wonder then, that Numbers 11's profound transfer of authority to the Seventy provided resources they needed to make another proclamation, this time in Greek. In order to reconfigure Moses' law, they had to reconfigure *him*. And to do that, they had to pick not just philologically-equipped "Bible-nerds" or open-hearted, empty-minded "ecstatics," through whom text and spirit might pass, respectively; they needed men *worthy of the task*.

The Mosaic Virtues of the Translators (Philosophical Piety and Literary Scholarship)

In *Aristeas,* Josephus, and Philo, the translators are praised for their personal virtue mainly in Ptolemy's request and in the descriptions of the high priest's choice in sending them[145] but at other times as well. They are called:

- "men of exemplary life (ἄνδρας καλῶς βεβιωκότας), elders, who possess skill in the law (ἐμπειρίαν ἔχοντας τοῦ νόμου) and ability to translate" (*Aristeas*)[146]
- "good and true (καλοὺς καὶ ἀγαθούς)" (*Aristeas*)[147]
- "good men (ἄνδρας ἀγαθούς),…elders, who, because they have been proved by time, have skill in the law (ἐμπείρως ἔχουσι τῶν νόμων) and an ability to make their translation accurate (τὴν ἑρμηνείαν αὐτῶν ἀκριβῆ)" (Josephus)[148]

[145] <u>*Skilled Court-Elders:*</u> Philo, *Mos.* 2.32, "those *at his side*, most highly esteemed of the Hebrews (τοὺς παρ'αὐτῷ δοκιμωτάτους Ἑβραίων), who were trained in the teaching of their fathers and the Greeks" (ET mine, emphasis added; cf. "παρά," *BDAG* B.1.a.β.). *Aris.* §§121-2, "men…well qualified to be sent on embassies (πρεσβείας), and [did this] whenever there was need."
[146] §39.
[147] §46.
[148] *Ant.* 12.49, ET, mine.

- chosen "according to merit (ἀριστίνδην)…those translating the law (διερμηνεύσοντας)" (Philo)[149]
- "those at his side [sc. high priest's], most highly esteemed of the Hebrews (τοὺς παρ᾽αὐτῷ δοκιμωτάτους Ἑβραίων), who were trained in the teaching (ἐπεπαίδευντο παιδείαν) of their fathers and the Greeks" (Philo)[150]
- "…men most excellent (τοὺς ἀρίστους ἄνδρας) and of outstanding scholarship (παιδεὶᾳ διαφέροντας), to be expected in persons of such distinguishing parentage.
- "They had not only acquired proficiency in the literature (γραμμάτων) of the Jews, but had bestowed no slight study on that of the Greeks also.
- "They were therefore well-qualified to be sent on embassies (πρεσβείας), and performed this office whenever there was need.
- "They possessed great natural talent for conferences and discussions pertaining to the Law.
- "They zealously cultivated the quality of the mean [sc. middle way] (and that is the best course), and eschewing crude and uncouth disposition, they likewise avoided conceit and the assumption of superiority over others.
- "In conversation it was their principle to listen attentively and to reply appropriately to every question.
- "All of them observed this behavior, and it was in such conduct that they most desired to surpass one another; all were worthy of their leader and of his virtue (τῆς περὶ αὐτὸν ἀρετῆς). One could see how they loved Eleazar…" (*Aristeas*)[151]

[149] *Mos.* 2.31.
[150] *Mos.* 2.32. ET, mine.
[151] §§121-2.

- "It was not only the king who admired them, but also the philosopher Menedemus…" (Josephus)[152]
- "[T]hey solved [the king's questions testing their wisdom] with happy and well-appointed answers…" (Philo)[153]
- "[E]very day they would come to…[make] their salutation to the king…When they had washed their hands in the sea, as is the custom of all Jews, and had offered prayer to God, they addressed themselves to the interpretation (ἀνάγνωσιν)[154] and clarification (διασάφησιν) of each passage." (*Aristeas* [& Josephus])[155]
- "[T]aking the sacred books, [they] stretched them out towards heaven with the hands that held them, asking of God that they might not fail in their purpose. And He assented to their prayers…" (Philo)[156]

This is high praise indeed. Of course, the Legend exhibits other high praise, as well, e.g. for the king,[157] for Aristeas and his companion, Andreas,[158] and, highest of all, for the lawgiver[159] and his law,[160] but the praises for the translators remain distinct and central. In *all three* Hellenstic versions, the Legend not only recognizes the translators' personal virtues (i.e. excellence, goodness, wisdom) but

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[152] *Ant.* 12.101.
[153] *Mos.* 2.33.
[154] Implies "reading aloud," (like a performer), see Kooij, "Perspectives on the Study of the Septuagint: Who Are the Translators?"
[155] §304-5; cf. Josephus *Ant.* 12.106.
[156] *Mos.* 2.36.
[157] Especially in Philo, *Mos.* 2.28-30. <u>*Ptolemy:*</u> Philo describes Ptolemy as a mirror to Moses, and one who is nearly like him, except in lawgiving. The memorials of Ptolemy's greatness of mind are remembered in song throughout the cities and lands he left behind; whereas, the *wonderful* memorials of Moses' *wisdom* are the *sacred books* he has left behind (*Mos.* 1.4). The LXX thus fills this gap. Also, in *Aristeas*, Ptolemy also appears as a "reverse Antiochus IV," 2 Macc 5:16 records Antiochus IV Epiphanes later profaning the Temple by taking the very (kinds of) items Ptolemy II has sent ("the votive offerings [ἀνατιθέντα] that other kings had made to enhance the glory and honor of the place" [NRSV]).
[158] Esp. Josephus, *Ant.* 12.53.
[159] Explicitly as "Moses" in *Aris.* §144†; Philo, *Mos.* 2:40; not named in Josephus' account of the legend (no doubt due to its lack in *Aristeas*, but his identity in connection to the legend is clear in *Ant.* 1.10-18).
[160] Esp. *Aristeas* §31, §139, §312, and above all, §§167-9.

pious and scholarly ones as well (i.e. ritual purity, prayerfulness, proficiency in training, teaching, and language). In fact, it is this lack of bifurcation between personal, pious, and scholarly credentials that is perhaps most important for our comparison to Numbers 11. The ancient writers of the Legend assume that personal virtues and piety are not ancillary to the scribal task of translation but central to it.

There are three likely reasons for this: (1) Under the combined weight of this highly philosophical and divine legislation, Hellenistic Jews considered scholarship in the Mosaic law not just a matter of *in*forming its readers and hearers[161] but also of *trans*forming them, and no individual was better set to become a more virtuous person than the Jewish scribe, who dedicates himself to its study. Sirach 39:1-8 is especially illustrative on this point, especially since it shares the same Hellenistic Jewish provenance. The scribe depicted there has many similarities to the ones in the Legend. The scribe…

a) is deeply engaged in Jewish law and sayings (vv. 1-3)
b) "serves among the great and appears before rulers" (v. 4a-b, NRSV)
c) travels among foreign peoples (v. 4c, i.e. on embassies?)
d) learns what is good and evil (v. 4d)
e) prays to God for help and in thanks when he does (vv. 5, 6d)
f) is filled with a spirit of understanding (v. 6a-b)
g) demonstrates this wisdom (his own) under the direction of God (vv. 6c-8)

These activities are interconnected[162] and remarkably visible in the Legend's ascriptions detailed above. They begin with surrendering oneself (Πλὴν τοῦ ἐπιδιδόντος τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ, 39:1) to study the Jewish Scriptures (law, prophets, and sayings; 39:1-2a; cf. Prologue to Sirach). Through that study, the scribe is also

[161] E.g. Josephus, *Ant.* 1.6, "I had…already contemplated describing…the great lawgiver *under whom they were trained in piety and the exercise of the other virtues,*" emphasis added.
[162] Rabens sees, rightly, I think, devotion to study, relation to God, and divine spiritual assistance as coordinated activities, *Holy Spirit*, 148, although "seeking an intimate relationship with [God]" is less sure.

trusted and honored (also, cf. Sir 38:32b–34a) and is driven to prayer in order to be continually pardoned and filled by God's provision; the wisdom he gains, he then dispenses anew. In one sense, then, the idealized scribes of the Legend are being presented exactly according to Jewish expectation. Their scribal profession is not an indifferent or neutral aspect of their pious and virtuous lives; it is the engine driving it.[163] Their virtues are cultivated and not (only) inherent.

(2) It is also likely that the translators are being presented as those "worthy" not just "of their leader [Eleazar] and his virtue" (*Arist.* §122), but of the lawgiver, Moses, himself, and his law, and their virtues. Worth, in this case, is ascribed by a sense of correspondence to and commendation from those authorities known to the reader (high priest, law, and Moses) to those unknown, the Seventy. Their worthiness is expressed by their virtues, and those virtues are part and parcel of their philosophical mode. *Aristeas* and Josephus point to this philosophical coordination most clearly: As mentioned above, part of the motive indicated for translating the Jewish law in the first place was due to its "most philosophical" nature.[164] This description of the law is later matched by the king's banquet, where as Josephus describes it, the king, "after waiting for what seemed a sufficiently long time, began to *philosophize* (φιλοσοφεῖν) and asked each one of them about problems of nature."[165] The translators then answer very well and prove themselves such that the king in *Aristeas* praises them,

> to the philosophers, of whom not a few were present, "I think the *virtue* (ἀρετή) of these men is extraordinary and their *understanding* (συνιέναι) very great…" And the *philosopher* Menedemus of Eretria said, "True, Your Majesty;…"[166]

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[163] Likewise, Josephus encourages readers of this history to engage it with their minds set on God in order to understand it, *Ant.* 1.15.

[164] *Aris.* §31.

[165] Josephus, *Ant.* 12.99, emphasis added.

[166] *Aris.* §200–1, emphasis added. This unification of virtue, piety, and training in knowledge of philosophy and law (or politics) is not a requirement of Greek thinking. Plato's *Meno* specifically problematizes the relationships between these. Plato's Socrates doubts that *virtue* can be taught (95A; 96B–D), suggesting instead that it comes as *divine* gift (like possession) and without granting knowledge of itself to its recipient; therefore, when statesmen (in particular) exhibit virtue, it is not necessarily to be commended to their *knowledge* (100A–B). Whether this view is consistent with *Aristeas*' later Platonic context (which had greater resources for bridging these

And again,

> [T]he king greeted them all and spoke kindly to them, with others present, especially the *philosophers*, joining in the commendation. For in their *conduct* and *discourse* these men were *far in advance* of the philosophers, for they made their *starting-point from God*.[167]

This theme of philosophical quality reaches its climax, however, in the depiction of the lawgiver himself. In *Aristeas'* denouement, when the translation has been accomplished, it bears its first Gentile fruit[168] in the king himself:

> The whole work was read out to [Ptolemy] also, and he marveled exceedingly at the intellect (διάνοιαν) of *the lawgiver*.[169]

Inasmuch as the law is the result of the lawgiver, and the translators are trained by the law, the transmission of virtue and philosophical ideal is mapped here as reinforcement to the readers of the Legend: What has been accomplished is worth being proud of, even before your neighbors, the Greeks, and it has been accomplished through the embodied virtue of these men.

In this way, when *Aristeas* says, "[I]n what follows I shall give you an account of *the translation*,"[170] and then follows it with the longest, most elaborate description of the *translators' virtues*,[171] it likely means what it says: For the writers of the Legend what matters for making the translation is not just (as Jerome

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earlier difficulties) or not, we may still note how *Jewish* belief promotes an integration of these themes more easily, i.e. *God* gives *knowledge* of his law which results in higher *virtue*. *Virtue* and *knowledge* need not be distinct from one another nor the divine in the Jewish thought presented here. (Also, perhaps Jewish emphasis on training *all* Israel in law undermines Plato's critique of *paid* Sophist lecturers, making virtue more available to all while elevating Jewish elites even more.)

[167] *Aris.* §235, emphasis added.

[168] The LXX's benefit to the Gentiles is a notable theme in Philo as well, *Mos.* 2.41-4.

[169] *Aris.* §312, emphasis added.

[170] §120, emphasis added. *Translation and Interpretation: Aris.* §§38-9, μεθερμηνεύω, ἑρμηνεύω; Philo, 2.31, διερμηνεύω; Jos. *Ant.* 12.48-9, μεθερμηνεύω, μεταγράφω, ἑρμηνεία. The task as a whole is described with a variety of words, each with a range of meanings, e.g. *Aris.* §§10-11; §32; §39; §§45-6.

[171] Perhaps these personal demands are all the more true when a group must agree on a text's meaning as the authorized one, e.g. "choosing elders, men of exemplary life, who possess skill in the law and ability to translate*, so that agreement may be found,*" *Aris.* §39, ET, modified, emphasis added, i.e. without incumbent qualities of wisdom and forbearance, agreement may never be reached, even among linguists. On the need for communal decision-making among the translators, see *Aris.* §122; Josephus, *Ant.* 12.109.

suggests) people *philologically* competent in Hebrew and Greek.[172] More importantly, they had to be *like* Moses,[173] philosophical and eminent,[174] reflecting his wondrous thoughts.[175] In order for readers to have confidence in the translation which comes through them, readers had to be reassured that those performing the task were steeped in the παιδεία of Moses,[176] a παιδεία which not only trained their mind but their wills and emotions to become like Moses.[177] Although all three sources use different terms to describe the training of Moses and the training of the translators, all of them depict their correlation in philosophical (sc. Hellenistic educational) terms.[178] As one of the translators in *Aristeas* §256 answers the question, "What is *philosophy*?"

> It is to *deliberate* well over every contingency," he explained, "and not to be carried away by impulses, but to ponder the injuries which are the outcome of the passions, and to perform the duties of the moment

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[172] *Contra* Hadas, *Aristeas*, 59. We may note that this seems to include not just the knowledge of vocabulary and syntax but literature and conceptual models available in the target language.

[173] The idea that Moses' interpreters need to be "like" him was first brought to my attention by *b. Qidd.* 76b where עמך in Num 11:16 is interpreted as requiring the elders there (and all subsequent elders of the Sanhedrin) to be like Moses ("with you" = "like you") in their genealogical purity; however, this rabbinic concern for proper lineage is only obliquely referenced in the Legend in *Aris.* §121's "just as disguishing parentage has gained (ἅτε δὴ γονέων τετευχότας ἐνδόξων)," ET mine.

[174] Compared with Acts 7:22 (ἐπαιδεύθη Μωϋσῆς ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ Αἰγυπτίων), one of the ways the translators are "like Moses" is implicit in their bi-cultural education. Philo takes this a step further, describing Moses' training as occurring at the hands of Egyptians, Assyrians, and Greeks, the latter of whom teach him ἐγκύκλιον παιδείαν (*Mos.* 1.23), which includes the study of rhetoric, Kamesar, "Literary," 60.

[175] As Plato says to Ion about rhapsodes: "the necessity of being conversant with a number of good poets, and especially with Homer, the best and divinest poet of all, and of apprehending his thought (τὴν τούτου διάνοιαν) and not merely learning off his words, is a matter of envy; since a man can never be a good rhapsode without understanding what the poet says," *Ion* 530C.

[176] On Joshua, explicitly in these terms (as prophet like Moses and instructed in παιδεία through him), see Josephus, *Ant.* 4:165.

[177] Cf. *Aris.* §278 (virtuous=self-control); Philo, *Det.* 119-20 (virtuous=good emotions).

[178] (1) Philo—Moses: taught by philosophers from Egypt, Greece (παιδεία), and Assyria (*Mos.* 1.23); Translators: men trained in Hebrew and Greek learning (παιδεία)(*Mos.* 2.39).

(2) Josephus—Moses: only one with a properly worthy conception of God (historically accurate and most ancient)(*Ant.* 1.15-16; cf. 1.18-25, following Philo, *Opif.* 12); Translators: men of high learning (παιδεία) (*Ant.* 12.118).

(3) *Aristeas*—Moses: "wise" and "all-knowing" (§139); Translators: men of distinguished learning (παιδεία)(§43). For more on Hellenistic education, see Carr, *Writing*, 187–99.

> properly, with *emotions moderated*. But to acquire a regard for these things we must *pray* to God.[179]

Study, virtue, and prayer, all three together, mark the kind of law, lawgiver, and translator conveyed.

We should note that *in Philo*, this same alignment of virtue (not just philological ability) may be implied by the interpreters' similar qualifications as those in *Aristeas.* However, Philo also depicts the translators as setting themselves in

> the most suitable place in the district, where they might find peace and *tranquility* and the soul could commune with the laws with none to disturb its privacy…[there they sat] in seclusion within none present save the elements of nature…the genesis of which was to be the first theme of their sacred revelation[180]

Philo's passage is resonant with other sections of his work where he describes the tranquility of soul necessary to mature, grow in wisdom, and even become a capable interpreter.[181] Such a mode is part of the interpreters' training and one that is virtuous and necessary for approaching the biblical text. To anticipate our argument slightly, these men are, to paraphrase Num 11:16, thereby "known to be scribes." They are distinguished and capable by training and obedience to that training.

So, virtue may be present because it is part of scribal life, or because it is part of what is required to properly convey Moses, or (3) it may be part of *performing* a good translation. As much as lawgiving is a performance,[182] so is law-*interpreting*. The words ἑρμηνεύω can connote either "to translate" or "to

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[179] Also, *Aris.* §243 on "fearlessness" and other sections following, detailing other common Hellenistic virtues, Hadas, *Aristeas*, 195n243.
[180] Philo, *Mos.* 2.36-7.
[181] *Aristeas* §261 ("tranquility of soul"); §287 ("cultivated minds"); §292 (pure mind); *Mos.* 2.40, τῷ Μωυσέως καθαρωτάτῳ πνεύματι, implies a pureness in mental connection to Moses' spirit. Philo's own experience of inspiration in *Plant.* 24-26 compares well to his idealized vision of tranquility as the starting place for maturation in *Migr.* 189, culminating in "seeing clearly," the "imperishable," and being an "elder," which is symbolized by "seventy," in *Migr.* 197-201. On his experiences together with his education resulting in his maturation "not only as a philosopher, but also as interpreter" of Moses, see Levison, *First-Century*, 193.
[182] See Chapter 4.

interpret,"[183] but the translators are depicted as those capable of proper "literary" translation, which itself is characterized by an openness to adding illustrative words, e.g. "adornment, paraphrase, and variation."[184] Their translation is not depicted as a matter of simple linguistics (if there be such a thing),[185] by hack interpreters (*interpretes,*[186] or marketplace dragomans) and their rough, source-oriented "word-for-word" literalism.[187] They are characterized as scholars and

[183] For a recent appraisal of the intimate conceptual relationship between translation and interpretation, see Chapter 3.

[184] Kamesar, *Biblical*, 68.

[185] E.g. *Aris.* §§10–11 clearly signals the linguistic requirements of "translation (ἑρμηνεία)" (§11; into a new language?), as opposed to "transcription (μεταγραφή)" (§10; transliterated?), and yet, in that same context (οὐ μόνον μεταγράψαι ἐπινοοῦμεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ διερμηνεῦσαι, §15), the relational aspect of the work is in full force since it is here that Aristeas suggests clemency for Ptolemy's Jewish slaves (§§12–15).

[186] S. P. Brock, "To Revise or Not to Revise: Attitudes to Jewish Biblical Translation," in *Septuagint, Scrolls and Cognate Writings: Papers Presented to the International Symposium on the Septuagint and Its Relation to the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Writings (Manchester, 1990)* (ed. George J. Brooke and Barnabas Lindars; SBLSCS 33; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 310–13; cf. Kamesar, "Biblical," 67–8.

[187] Kamesar explains the unique case of Philo, who in *Mos.* 2:40 describes the translation of the LXX as ὡς μίαν καὶ τὴν αὐτὴν ἔν τε τοῖς πράγμασι καὶ τοῖς ὀνόμασι. Kamesar suggests this is a philosophically-consistent (both within Philo himself and within his Stoic-influenced presuppositions), albeit unrealistic description of translation, i.e. the perfect correlation of (a) "signifying" "words" with the (b) "signified" "concepts" and (c)"external realities" of the original Hebrew and its meaning, "Biblical," 68–9. In other words, Philo does not choose between the "word-for-word," source-oriented literalism *or* the "sense-for-sense," target-oriented paraphrasing, he claims "both sense-for-sense and word-for-word!" (69). In the end, there was no need for Philo's LXX translators to present multiple words or different words to convey the correct sense, in each and every case, they achieved by divine aid, the perfect word, i.e. the LXX is decidedly *not* literary (69-70).

However, I would argue, that even if Philo's presentation of the *LXX* is as a literal translation, his presentation of the *translators* is as literary because they are described as those "who had received an education in Greek as well as their native lore (τὴν Ἑλληνικὴν ἐπεπαίδευντο παιδείαν)." If we can reasonably presume this schooling of such highly acclaimed and successfully tested elders included rhetoric (i.e. was "regular school training," Kamesar, "Literary," 60), then their impact on the LXX can be presumed to be as *capable* of literary quality as Moses'. In *Migr.* 71-2, the λόγος προφορικός (articulated speech) of some is "betrayed" by their lack of schooling (ἐνκύκλιος μουσική), which implies training in rhetoric, ibid., 59. Moses' schooling in Egypt in *Mos.* 1.23 is precisely this type (ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία), and through it, Moses can guarantee "the literary quality of the Bible," ibid., 59, 65. Since "τέχνη is an essential element of the process by which the divine message came to be formulated in 'nouns and verbs',…it is only logical to assume that τέχνη was also viewed by Philo as an indispensible component of the literary fibre and excellence of the [Hebrew] text, in accordance with conventional [Hellenistic] thinking," ibid., 66. As we will see, this makes perfect sense in Philo's description of the LXX translators, since they communicate with Moses through intellection, *keeping* their intellectual capacity (presumably including their literary skills); it is *through them* that Moses' literary words became perfectly

scribes, "literary translators" (or *oratores*)[188] whose task of "interpretation" requires a participation in the life intended by the source text and applied with appreciative awareness (not distant disdain) to the target language.[189]

But with such scant description of their actual translation output,[190] how can we claim them as "literary"? Mainly, it is the style and description of their education.[191] As mentioned, the style of *Aristeas* is itself very literary, and it would seem a harsh disjunction to presume that translators described with such variety of language published a text with so little. Also, the kinds of qualities needed for literary translators fit more closely with the descriptions of the elder-translators (e.g. the combination of knowledge and discretion in Quintilian, *Inst.* 10.1.5-9; the needs of a real orator who is expected to select the word *suitable*, not simply a word *corresponding*).[192] There is an implied art to the task to which they are set. Such literary descriptors of men imply literary men.[193]

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corresponding literal words. In short, they are literary interpreters for a literary author of an originally literary work, now rendered through their correspondence in a completely literal way.

[188] Describing the text of the LXX not the Legend, but addressing ancient manners of translation nonetheless, see Arie van der Kooij, "The Old Greek of Isaiah in Relation to the Qumran Texts of Isaiah: Some General Comments," in *Septuagint, Scrolls and Cognate Writings: Papers Presented to the International Symposium on the Septuagint and Its Relation to the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Writings (Manchester, 1990)* (ed. George J. Brooke and Barnabas Lindars; SBLSCS 33; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 207.

[189] Part of the elevation of the translators is their capability in both their own esteemed and very divine legislation, as well as a profound ability in Greek literature. The author of *Aristeas* and Philo particularly seem to see this state as the height of intellectual prowess.

[190] While the Legend is *about* the LXX, this does not necessarily mean that all readers of the Legend will also read the LXX or have understand its actual translation technique. Orlinsky conflates this point by describing the Legend's translators in the context of what he sees as "word-for-word" literalism in the LXX. Since then, James Aitken has suggested the LXX is more rhetorical than it is often given credit for, James K. Aitken, "The Significance of Rhetoric in the Greek Pentateuch," in *On Stone and Scroll: Essays in Honour of Graham Ivor Davies* (ed. James K. Aitken, Katharine J. Dell, and Brian A. Mastin; BZAW 420; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 507–22. But Benjamin Wright's work is perhaps most important here, *Praise*, 275–95. Whatever the actual LXX technique, the distance between the LXX and the time of the Legend is significant enough that the LXX has become independent of its source text. It is no longer being read as a "word-for-word" (or interlinear) text. It is probably considered peculiar Greek, but if the Legend has any relationship to the LXX text as a guide to reading, it will set up readers to consider the text as coherent on its own, perhaps even holy in its odd rhetoric, see Kamesar, "Literary," 55.

[191] See 203n178 above.

[192] In Philo's exceptional view, when the translators' minds move and are moved toward the precise, choice Greek word they know for the Hebrew one they need to render, they are both acting like Quintilian commends (10.1.5-9) *and* preserving the original like they said they would

Why is "literary translation" part of a discussion on the virtues of the translators? Because according to this characterization, the words of the Jewish law must *pass through* just and tranquil souls to find their "accurate" form as a literary translation.[194] Here again, we see the scribal task as one of the soul as much as the hand. It also indicates a potential openness to paraphrase and adornment. A mode evident in Deuteronomy and in some Second Temple texts, which here finds an expression as the best way to translate or interpret the Mosaic law. It may even be the case that the interpretation of the words of the law was thought to be *limited* to this unique moment, when a whole council could both modify *and close* the expression presented.[195] Such a literary and philosophical approach to the law may have been particularly appealing to Jews of the Diaspora, who not only appreciated the consistency and beauty of the law but its adaptive ability.[196]

Mosaic Virtue of the Elders and Numbers 11

Numbers 11:16 records YHWH specifically calling Moses to:

אספה־לי שבעים איש מזקני ישראל אשר ידעת כי־הם זקני העם ושטריו

(i.e. ἀλλὰ τὴν ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἰδέαν καὶ τὸν τύπον αὐτῶν διαφυλάττοντας, *Mos.* 2.34). They are finding the word both suitable *and* corresponding.

[193] E.g. *Aris.* §31 suggests the whole purpose of *this* translation is to make the laws finally accessible to "authors and poets and…historians" (viz. the literary guild).

[194] *Aris.* §31-2; §310.

[195] Historically, the opening and closing of a new version of Scripture may have taken centuries. That does not prevent the Legend from portraying the process in an equivalent, albeit briefer, single event. We might draw on the example of the "Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed," which, although it did not re-render biblical text, certainly felt it was expounding Christian Scripture. It is often recalled in popular memory simply as "the Nicene Creed," or as one large council, which authoritatively clarified biblical truth, when in fact it took two councils and 56 years, more if one adds the Filioque. This creed (depending on whether one is referring to the Nicene Creed proper or the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed) is also, sometimes, like the Legend remembered by the number of representatives who agreed on it, e.g. "the faith of the 318 fathers" or "…of the 150 fathers," Jaroslav Pelikan, *Credo: Historical and Theological Guide to Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Faith; Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition, Vol. 4* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 60.

[196] E.g. Philo comments on Moses' allowances in Passover regulations in Num 9:1-14, "The same permission also [is] given to those who are prevented from joining the whole nation in worship not by mourning but by absence in a distant country," *Mos.* 2.232.

> "Gather to me seventy of the elders of Israel whom you know to be elders of the people and their scribes"[197]

This call by YHWH presents an explicit selection by Moses of these elders over others. At first, their selection looks like it might only be based on their additional role as "scribes," i.e. Moses simply needs to take note of the elders of Israel who also have the ability to write down what he says. However, if that were the case, we might expect it to say:

אספה־לי שבעים איש מזקנים ישראל [אשר ידעת כי־הם] שטריו[198]

> "Gather to me seventy from the elders of Israel, [whom you know to be] their scribes."

Because they are additionally designated as "elders of the people" and not just "elders of Israel," it suggests a reading where the particular virtues (and not just occupation) of these elders are implied as present and noticeable to Moses. Previously, we considered this additional label as signaling qualifying and personal virtues which were somehow close to Moses (since they were known to him as "elders of the people"). Now, in light of the Legend of the LXX, we are prepared to see more. We can add to "elders of the people known to Moses" the appellation, "…who are also their scribes." Where we once might have considered these labels (narrowing the scope of candidates to a small subcategory), now, having seen the role education may play in preconceptions about a scribe's virtues, perhaps they are not just virtuous "elders of the people" *and* "their scribes," perhaps they are virtuous "elders of the people," in some part, *because* they are "their scribes".

Two questions come to the fore: (1) In the world of the text, how and where could they have earned such an education? (2) What specifically qualifying virtues are implied that Moses could somehow know about? First, (1) the idea that some of the elders of the Israelites could have gained a scribal education before

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[197] ET, mine.
[198] For apposition of a leadword and subclass noun, see *IBHS* 12.3b.

entering the desert is not fanciful. Indeed, such an enculturation can be presumed by the antecedent presence of שטרים in Exodus 5. After having gathered all the elders of Israel together[199] and with Aaron speaking the words and performing the signs given to Moses, thus inclining the people to worshipping belief (Ex 4:29–31), Moses and Aaron approach Pharaoh but fail to convince him to "let [the Hebrews] go a distance of three days into the wilderness to sacrifice to the LORD [their] God" (Ex 5:3; cf. 1–5).[200] In Ex 5:6, Pharaoh turns to two groups of people to increase the Hebrews' hardships:

את־הנגשים בעם ואת־שטריו[201]

> …the [Egyptian] taskmasters of the [Hebrew] people and their [Hebrew] scribes.[202]

These scribes are the necessary *translators* and *interpreters* of Egyptian authority. Whether they are needed to *linguistically* translate between the Egyptian taskmasters and the Hebrew laborers is possible but not required.[203] Either way, history is replete with examples of this class of local authority (often drawn from the more educated and skilled laborers),[204] whose existence depends

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[199] Exodus 4:29 (ויאספו את־כל־זקני בני ישראל) is quite similar to Num 11:24 in word choice.

[200] Note the proximity to Num 11 of the next mention in Hebrew Bible of a "three days journey (דרך שלשת ימים)" (after a repetition of Ex 5:3 in Ex 8:23): Num 10:33 (i.e. another possible sign of memorable intertextual connections between the passages).

[201] ET, mine. Unlike Num 11:16, the recurrence of specific object-indicator את means the second group is different from the first and not a subcategory of them. Also, the narrative makes the distinction clear, cf. Ex 5:14 (NJPS), "And the foremen of the Israelites, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten. "Why," they were asked, "did you not complete the prescribed amount of bricks, either yesterday or today, as you did before?" Again, as in other places in English translations, the emphasis on the authority of the שטרים over against their educational training has pressed the translators' choice of "foremen" here (versus "officers" in Num 11:16 [NJPS]) when the philological connotations and the LXX (οἱ γραμματεῖς; Ex 5:6, 14; Num 11:16) should like lead one to render "scribe" in all three cases.

[202] ET, mine.

[203] The countervailing forces, *in the world of the text*, seem to be (a) the length of time in residence in Egypt (i.e. how could the Hebrews *not* speak Egyptian if they have remained in Egypt for "430 years," Ex 12:40?) versus (b) the ghettoization of the Hebrews, particularly in Goshen, Ex 8:22; 9:6 (i.e. Egyptian officials were able to distinguish Hebrews from the general populace in order to oppress them, and language could have been one of those differences). Neither is made explicit.

[204] As an example from Jewish history, on 21 September 1939, Gestapo Director Reinhard Heydrich issued the following as part of a directive about how Jews in occupied Poland would be governed:

on clearly communicating (viz. translating or interpreting) *from* the centralized overlords *to* those under their authority in manner which the latter can understand and obey. They are also responsible for managing the on-the-ground response to those directives. In this role, both historical-critical and rabbinic biblical interpreters suggest the scribes function as authoritative "elders," as demonstrated by their direct access to Pharaoh (e.g. Ex 5:15).[205] They are Israelite political authorities, responsible for translating legal texts and exercising governing authority, across cultural lines.

To this, we need only *add* that, in their role as local Jewish authorities, they were *likely* highly educated, *as scribes*, perhaps by the Egyptians themselves. We need not presume that their status before the people was based on their age alone, especially when the vocabulary and social scene exhibit other features. This education is probably more than the ability to write; it is a class distinction—one more specific than a member of a council of tribal elders. Josephus, in fact, depicts just such a class as the core of Israelite leadership. In his extra-biblical account of Moses as the general of a combined Egyptian/Hebrew military campaign against the Ethiopians, Moses is…

> summoned by Thermuthis[206] and by the king, [wherein he] gladly accepted the task, to the delight of the *sacred scribes* (ἱερογραμματεῖς) of *both nations* [Egyptians and Hebrews].[207]

> II. Councils of Jewish Elders.
> 1. A Council of Jewish Elders is to be established in every Jewish community, which as far as possible is to be created from the leading persons and rabbis. Up to 24 male Jews (depending on the size of the Jewish community) are to belong to the Council of Elders.
>
> It is to be made entirely responsible, with the meaning of the word, for the exact and prompt fulfillment of all instructions which have been or will be given.
> 2. The councils are to be informed that the toughest measures will be taken in the event of the sabotage of such directives…
>
> (J. Noakes and G. Pridham, eds., *Nazism: A History in Documents and Eyewitness Accounts: 1919-1945* [2 vols.; New York: Schocken Books, 1988], 2:1052, emphasis added.)

[205] E.g. Noth, *Exodus*, 54–5, "an older tradition [within J]" "in which Moses is not mentioned" "in which the Israelites deal collectively with Pharaoh…through some such group…as the 'elders'…in vv. 15ff., the 'foremen'"; *Ex. Rab.* 5.18, "The scribes are the elders of Israel (השוטרים אלו זקני ישראל)," cf. *Num. Rab.* 15.20.

[206] Pharaoh's daughter and his adopted mother, *Ant.* 2.224, 232.

[207] *Ant.* 2.243, emphasis added. Recall in Chapter 2: Josephus, *Bell.* 6.291.

Granted, this portrait is taken outside biblical boundaries; nevertheless, it is illustrative of the kinds of individuals who are being drawn from in Numbers 11. His word choice is important here: He does not describe both sets of leading authorities with the favored and expected term from Greek and LXX parlance, γερουσία.[208] They are equated with Egypt's own scribal elite. Not unlike Daniel 1 and before their oppression, Israel's Scriptures may well imagine a Hebrew elite, educated alongside Egyptian pupils, participating in Egyptian court, and sub-administering authority among their people and district. Such a view has long been accepted as plausible for Moses' own education and status,[209] there seems good reason in Exodus 5 to consider extending it. In short: Who exists as viable candidates to help Moses? Scribes, trained in ways like Moses, now distinctive like him in cultivated virtues.

(2) But what are those virtues specifically? On these, we must admit the text is silent.[210] Numbers 11:16 is not like Ex 18:21 or Deut 1:15 with their lists of qualifying virtues; instead, we are only given indicators: They are elders (a) *of the people* and their scribes, who (b) *Moses knows* to be so. Where Watts suggests the rhetoric of authority in the Pentateuch is directed at dual-ends (i.e. to lend

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[208] E.g. LXX Ex 3:16 4:29; 24:9; LXX Deut 5:23; 21:2-4; 27:1. 1 Macc 12:6; 2 Macc 4:44; 11:27. Is it telling that LXX Num 11:16 does *not* use γερουσία for זקנים? The difference from Ex 24:9 is notable, but the significance is difficult to assess. Does a lack of γερουσία indicate a lower assessment of the Seventy in Numbers 11 or a higher one? In light of Ex 24:9 and Deut 27:1, one might say "lower" since the context of authority in these two passages is very high. However, in light of Exodus 5, one would say "higher" since they may be a subset of elders with the highest level of scribal training. Since the history of reception of the passage never (not once!) ascribes the elders of Numbers 11 to a position *lower* than other elders in any other biblical text, I have chosen to consider them in light of the latter.

[209] See Acts 7:22 and 203n174 above.

[210] Instead of silence, rabbinic tradition suggests the שטרים of Exodus 5 are not just the same *category* of individuals from which the elders are taken, but the same *individuals.* By doing this, the rabbis can explain why they should be chosen over others (viz. what their virtues are): According to Ex 5:14, they were willing to suffer blows for the people; *Sifre* 92; *Num. Rab.* 15.20. In an alternative midrash (*Num. Rab.* 15.24), this could not be the case since all continuity between the pre-exodus elders and post-exodus elders is broken; the first set of seventy elders of Exodus 24 receive delayed punishment by death at Taberah (Num 11:1-3) for seeing YHWH (not averting their eyes) on the day of lawgiving. (He refused to destroy them at Sinai on account of the sacredness of the day.)

divine and human authorization to Moses),[211] the rhetoric of authority in the Legend and Numbers 11 is to lend general communal and Mosaic authority to the elders.[212] In both the Legend and Numbers 11, the people are rhetorically encouraged to recognize with each text that "these men[213] are the best from *among you* and they are chosen by (the authority of) Moses."[214] They emerge from entities which themselves are already communally approved: the Temple leadership and the שטרים (likely a subset of "the elders of Israel"), respectively. Descriptions of the elders such as "men of exemplary life" (*Aristeas* §39) and "[those] most highly esteemed of the Hebrews" (Philo, *Mos.* 2.32) only add to a communal appraisal and reception, which was already evident from their institutional origins. While Numbers 11's elders' virtues are not specifically named, that lack of specification actually serves to heighten their association with Moses personally, instead of deflecting their moral identification to some less-personal list of characteristics.[215] What selection could be stronger than those selected from among the highest-circle of Israel's elders *and* personally selected by Moses?

In conclusion, through the eyes of the Legend, Moses' selection in Numbers 11 of "elders of the people…their scribes" creates an ever-tightening

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[211] "Moses," 425.

[212] Their additional ratification by God comes later in the Legend and in Numbers 11, when they both pass through the presence and word of God unscathed.

[213] In both the Legend and Numbers 11, it is not the men at the event who are actually in need of commendation, it is the product received by the community beyond them. In Numbers 11, that product is the institution of "seventy elders" (neverminding that such an institution was not in continuous existence from the desert onwards; as a product of Israel's Scripture, it exists as a resource for extending Mosaic authority). For the Legend, that product is the text of the LXX itself (never mind that such a text never has a continuous or single autographic form, as a product of Jewish life it exists as an authoritative textual tradition).

[214] While the office of "high priest" (*Aristeas* and Josephus), or combined "high priest and king" (Philo), may appear to signal "Aaron" more than "Moses" to some, priestly claim to the "seat of Moses" (Matt 23:2) is not inherently incongruous (despite the ever-changing landscape of Jewish politics). In the Legend, the law and authority of Moses clearly originate at the Temple in Jerusalem.

[215] Cp. Ex 18:21; Deut 1:13, 15. Integrating aspects of Deuteronomy 1 into Num 11, *Sifre* 92, "'…seventy men:' They should be wise, strong, experienced, and conciliatory," ET, Neusner, *Sifré Numbers*, 90. Similarly, *Num. Rab.* 15.23 mines for virtues when it claims איש indicates exceptional *individual* virtue.

loop around a very specific set of Israelites—a set previously-selected, communally-approved, and prepared in ways like Moses to be qualified for the highest authority, virtue, and ability to deal with legal texts. When this set is accompanied by the personal selection of Moses, their ability to interpret Moses as lawgiver is strong and not limited to their philological abilities.

Mosaic Prophets and Scribes in Philo's Legend of the LXX

From our discussion above, it is important to observe that in *all three* Hellenistic versions of the Legend the performance of the translation of the LXX is not done through *oracles/seers* but through *virtuous and educated scribes from the Temple*. This distinction represents a choice about what is required to transmit not just divine word or even divine text, but more particularly, Mosaic-divine legislation; whereas, *prophets* alone are necessary for the former, it is *divinely-guided scribes* who are required for the latter (including prophetic scribes). Whether this requirement is part of a broader Second Temple pattern for those writing, re-writing, or exegeting Mosaic writ is a question beyond our purview, but within this context of this Hellenistic Legend, there is apparent pressure to preserve the role of scribe in the interpretation of Mosaic law, even where the divine activity within or around that scribe is perhaps described differently. We will first turn to Philo's consistently scribal view of his Mosaic prophet-interpreters (along with their cultic overtones), before probing cultic implications which both Philo and *Aristeas* share when detailing the divine activity guiding the completion of the LXX. Each of these has heuristic impact on the elders story of Numbers 11, which will remain our focus throughout.

We can call this preservation of the role of the scribe a "choice" because it is possible, within both Greek and Jewish contexts, to imagine this task of translation as one which only requires "inspiration," with the need for scribes essentially bypassed and an ecstatic prophet alone (or with an amanuensis) writing the holy writ of Israel in Greek. For a view like Augustine's, where the translators act by the enabling of the spirit of God, figures like the eponymous Sibylline

Oracles, might suffice. Do those who re-speak the words of Scripture actually need to be able to read or remember them if they are properly prompted by the divine? We can, therefore, imagine a putative form of the Legend trying to appeal with even greater authorization *because* its tradents *do not* have scribal training. Such a move would put greater emphasis on *divine* agency during the process of textual transmission, simultaneously decreasing the agency of the fallible *human* components to the process.[216] Tynnichus in *Ion* 534D,[217] or, more famously, the prophet Muhammad in Qur'an 7:157,[218] provide examples of precisely this kind of

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[216] Of course, with the example of the Sibylline Oracles, whose characterization in the Christian Cumean version is precisely like that where Plato describes in *Meno*—i.e. "[their] memory of what had been said ceased with the inspiration," "Sibylline Oracles, Prologue," translated by J.J. Collins (*OTP* 1:328 [line 85]; cp. *Meno* 99D)—the problem of possible human error is simply passed from oracle to amanuenses. Like Plutarch's *Pyth. orac.*, the problem is detected in the *form* of the prophecy, i.e. "because not all the verses preserve metrical accuracy…This is the fault of the secretaries, who did not keep pace with the flow of speech or even were ignorant," "Sibylline Oracles, Prologue" (*OTP* 1:328 [line 85]).

Such a gap is precisely what 4 Ezra 14 is attempting to block by demonstrating not only the inspiration of Ezra but of his scribes, Stone, *Fourth Ezra*, 119–20; 428–32, citing Hans Lewy. Ezra's "five scribes" were "trained to write rapidly" (4 Ezra 14:24, i.e. so that they can "keep pace"), but in the event of Ezra's inspiration, they were likewise inspired with the ability to write "what was dictated, using characters they did not know" (4 Ezra 14:42, i.e. so proving the final form reflected divine, not human work). In 4 Ezra's case, then, a small amount of human agency remains (i.e. the ability to write fast), but there is also an increase in divine activity to prevent known problems. Ezra himself does not follow the Sibylline pattern (as we will see). For more on 4 Ezra's use of "five scribes," twenty-four public books, and seventy secret ones, see above.

Ezra himself does not follow the Sibylline pattern because his "heart poured forth understanding, and [his] wisdom increased in [his] breast, for [his] spirit *retained its memory,* and [his] mouth was opened and no longer closed" (4 Ezra 14:40b-41, emphasis added), ibid., 429.

[217] "For this reason God takes away the mind of these men [poets] and uses them as his ministers, just as he does soothsayers and godly seers, in order that we who hear them may know that it is not they who utter these words of great price, when they are out of their wits (νοῦς μὴ πάρεστιν), but that it is God himself who speaks and addresses us through them. A convincing proof of what I say is the case of Tynnichus…."

[218] "They [Muslims] follow the (most illustrious) Messenger, the Prophet who neither reads nor writes and has therefore remained preserved from any traces of the existing written culture and is free from any intellectual pollution,…And he relieves them of their burdens…," Ali Ünal, trans., *The Qur'ān with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English* (Somerset, N.J.: Tughra, 2008), *ad loc.*

This passage notably occurs *directly after* the closest qur'anic parallel to the elders story of Numbers 11. Moses, who has just been given the Tablets, "chose of his people *seventy men*" (7:155, emphasis added). These men offend God (some Islamic traditions hold that they did not believe Moses was God's prophet because they did not see God speak to him, cf. ibid., 351n37, an interesting contrast to Ex 24:9–11) and are threatened with death (cf. *Num. Rab.* 15.24). The qur'anic commendation of Muhammad is both in partial parallel with Deut 18:15-22, a warning to

move, i.e. untrained poets or illiterate prophets, respectively surrendered to divine forces without mental awareness of the style or previous knowledge of the characters of the language they write. Indeed, some scholars have apparently interpreted Philo's account in just this way, as a complete spirit-possession of the translators such that the agency of their scribal minds is nullified.[219]

And yet, this is not the form which the Legend takes in its earliest versions. A closer look at Philo's account of the Legend reveals his careful articulation. The precise form of inspiration and prophesying which the LXX translators perform is presented in and through their scribal training rather than in negation of it. Perhaps more importantly, their prophesying is described as the same as *Moses'* and with direct correspondence to the elders of Numbers 11.

Philo's view of the legend takes its remarkable turn when he explains: While sitting in the ideal tranquil setting that they selected, considering the correlation between the creation before them and the first of what they were about to interpret sacredly (ἱεροφαντησειν),[220] they all

> as if possessed (ἐνθουσιῶντες), prophesied (προεφήτευον),…, not each one something different, but all of them the same nouns and verbs (ὀνόματα καὶ ῥήματα), as if a prompter were invisibly giving them instructions (ἀοράτως ἐνηχοῦντος). (*Mos.* 2.37)[221]

The result of this inspiration is a translation which corresponds in every way to its source.[222] The translation is indeed so close that not only can it replace the Hebrew original, but those who are able to read both will call

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believe *this* prophet, and a reason to believe (i.e. he is not like Moses, he could not have invented these laws).

[219] E.g. "Philo reports no translation by committee *à la* the *Letter of Aristeas*; God answered the translators' prayers by taking the matter out of their hands. In effect, God accomplished the translation using the translators as writing instruments," Wright, *Praise*, 311.

[220] Also meaning, "initiate," "interpret," "inspired," e.g. *Cher.* 42 (teaching the worthy); *Det.* 13 (words of God); *Deus* 62 (sacred oracles); *Conf.* 149 (books of Kings inspired); *Somn.* 1.207 (wise men); *Mos.* 2.149 (priests), 153 (Moses initiating Aaron); *Decal.* 41 (even the least); *Spec.* 1.323 (unworthy students corrupting study); *Virt.* 108 (Jews as initiated), 163 (Moses); *Prob.* 14 (disciples of wisdom), 74 (Persian magi); *Legat.* 56 (bad politicians interpreting laws).

[221] ET, Kamesar, "Biblical," 66.

[222] Cf. *Mos.* 2.38-39. See 205n187 above.

> the authors not translators (ἑρμηνέας) but hierophants and prophets (ἱεροφάντας καὶ προφήτας). To them it was granted to be in communion, through sheer thought (λογισμοῖς εἱλικρινέσι), with the most pure spirit of Moses (τῷ Μωυσέως καθαρωτάτῳ πνεύματι). (*Mos.* 2.40)[223]

For Philo, the closeness of the translations is paralleled only by the closeness of the translators to Moses, and the mechanism for that translation is explicitly by the "spirit of Moses". This alone is enough to make us consider Numbers 11:16, 25 as an important and biblically contributing parallel since it is only there that a phrase like "spirit of Moses" occurs (τοῦ πνεύματος τοῦ ἐπ' αὐτῷ [Μωυσεῖ], LXX Num 11.25, cf. v.17, 26, 29).[224] And yet, this association is rarely made, perhaps because of the power which the words "possessed" and "prophesied" (*Mos.* 2.37) often exert over readers of the story. In the same way, readers of Num 11:25 tend to see the elders' prophesying as "ecstatic utterance" so readers of Philo's version of the Legend imagine a similar kind of seer-styled μανία here, as if they have lost control of their mental faculties.[225] There appears to be a tendency to see a mutually exclusive dialectic between "scribe" and "prophet," "philology" and "inspiration". Granted, Philo himself suggests they *not* be called "translators" but "prophets" instead, but the relationship between these two terms, especially in light of Philo's views on "prophecy," requires care.

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[223] ET, Kamesar, "Biblical," 67.

[224] Only three passages in the Hebrew Bible unite the concepts of Moses and spirit, with Numbers 11 providing the only instance describing the spirit as that which was "upon Moses": Num 11:16-17, 25-26, 29; Num 27:18; Deut 34:9. For the possible relationship between these, see 170n55 above.

[225] Some remarkable examples occur, distancing Moses' spirit or prophecy from the elders' prophecy in Numbers 11:

(1) In the midst of careful distinctions about Philo's three views of Moses' prophecy, Winston comments, "It goes without saying that the biblical picture of Mosaic prophecy is generally non-ecstatic (the one exception is recorded in Num. 11)," "Mosaic Prophecy," 52.

(2) Similarly, Kaufmann confidently proclaims, "Although apostolic prophecy was utterly different—Moses is not accompanied by a band of ecstatics but by his faithful servant Joshua—we do hear of ecstasy having been produced on one occasion by Moses' 'spirit' (Num 11:25)," *The Religion of Israel: From Its Beginnings to the Babylonian Exile* (trans. Moshe Greenberg; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 236.

Since, as Amir avers, "Philo, alone among Hellenistic Jewish writers, makes free use of pagan cult terminology,"[226] knowing not only how Philo *uses* terminology but also *redefines* them is vital. Even as we can see a range in Greek conceptions of possession and prophesying,[227] so Philo clarifies his own usage, carefully placing Moses and the translators within his construct. By the end, I will argue, his attempt is not to deny the translators their intellectual awareness as translators but to transpose them to Philo's highest category of prophecy, one which combines the roles. Winston names this "hermeneutical prophecy" and identifies it as the prophetic mode Moses takes most often as prophet of God's laws. To see the LXX translators in this light and to compare them with the elders of Numbers 11 requires briefly tracing some recent arguments from scholarship on Philo.

Philo's Moses as Hermeneutical Prophet

Unlike rabbinic tradition, our argument goes, Philo does not see Moses as simply a "transcriber" for God.[228] He does not simply write God's words; he has a share in their authorship.[229] How can Philo do this and retain his sense of God as the true author of Scripture? One suggestion is that Philo sees Moses acting within a particular kind of inspiration described by Plato in *Timaeus* 72A–B, made more pronounced in Plutarch's *Pyth. orac.*, which allows for more human agency in an inspired prophet.[230]

> Though their accounts differ in many respects, Plato and Plutarch concur on one point: they show that the concept of inspiration, as understood at many points in Philo's spiritual milieu, left room for *autonomous linguistic activity* on the part of the human being. Both authors assume that *such autonomous activity does not detract from the authenticity of the Divine word* which finds expression in the saying.[231]

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[226] Amir, "Philo," 435.
[227] See Chapter 4.
[228] Kamesar, "Literary," 57.
[229] Amir, "Philo," 433–4; cf. *Sac.* 94.
[230] Ibid., 435. See 149nn106-7.
[231] Ibid., 437, emphasis added.

This kind of inspiration can be connected not only with Philo's "spiritual milieu" but with his three kinds of Mosaic prophecy (*Mos.* 2.188–191): [i] hermeneutical, [ii] question and answer, and [iii] predictive. The second two of these three kinds of prophecy Philo describes in detail in *Mos.* 2 (leaving his analysis of the [i] first to *Spec.* 1–4). They include [ii] questions and answers between the Moses and God (a mixture of human and divine interaction) (*Mos.* 2.190) and [iii] predictive prophecy in which Moses was possessed and "no longer in himself (οὐκέτ' ὢν ἐν ἑαυτῷ)" (*Mos.* 2.250), i.e. prophecy "in the strict sense" (*Mos.* 2.191).[232]

This latter form of prophecy reveals similar features to [iii.a] "ecstatic" prophecy (e.g. the language of being no longer in oneself can be "used of one whose mind is displaced [Plato *Ion* 534B *QG* 3.9; cf. *Her.* 70]"),[233] but, in fact, it *may be* more like the [iii.b] "philosophic frenzy," or complete mental absorption in the "vision" given, like that described above in *Timaeus* and Plutarch.[234] If so, it renders Moses passive but not unaware "of his own prophetic words, or…[of the fact] that God prompts the words he speaks."[235] Whereas ecstatic, [iii.a] predictive prophecy may be considered "psychic invasion," [iii.b] philosophical, predictive prophecy represents "psychic assent".[236] If this is the case, Philo's Moses is not only unique in his [i] heremeutical prophecy but in his [iii] predictive prophecy as well (since examples of ecstatic frenzy are more clear in the cases of Philo's Noah and Patriarchs, not Moses).[237] Nevertheless, even this latter form of [iii.b] Mosaic prophecy is still a kind of "seizure" that renders Moses a passive instrument of God's spirit in order to render a prediction of the future (e.g. *Mos.* 2.280). In the end, none of these [ii or iii] best fits the kind of prophecy which Philo's LXX translators experience; instead, because Philo describes their activity (1) as *translators* of *law* by "communion [with Moses] through sheer thought" and (2) as

[232] Winston, "Mosaic Prophecy," 49–50, 54.
[233] Ibid., 54.
[234] Ibid., 53–4.
[235] Ibid.
[236] Ibid., 60.
[237] Ibid., 54.

occurring within an environment of *tranquil seclusion*, their experience is more akin to Philo's highest level of Mosaic prophecy: [i] hermeneutical prophecy.[238]

> Philo describes this [i] first type of prophecy in almost hushed tones,
>
> Now, the first kind must be left out of the discussion. They are too great to be lauded by human lips; scarcely indeed could heaven and the world and the whole existing universe worthily sing their praises. Besides, they are delivered through an interpreter (ἑρμηνέως), and interpretation and prophecy are not the same thing. (*Mos.* 2.191)

This latter distinction between interpretation and prophecy is often confusing, perhaps because it sounds something like Jerome's philological concerns, as if Philo were likewise exalting philology over inspiration. But this does not fit the context (nor Philo's prophetology). Instead, Philo is *elevating* this particular form of prophecy, describing it earlier as "divine utterances,…spoken by God…with His prophet for interpreter (ἑρμηνέως)" (*Mos.* 2.188). A *combination* of interpretation and prophecy is therefore in view. Since prophecy "in the strict sense" typically implies *passivity* (with or without the surrendering of mental awareness), Philo must find another category; he cannot possibly "reduce the duality of Moses' position as receiver and author of the law to an exact formula."[239] In the end, he chooses a prophecy that acts like an interpretion,[240] where the main feature is the *active mind* of the prophet:

> In sharp contrast to [iii] ecstatic prophecy, [i] divine voice or noetic prophecy does not render its recipient passive. Although no separate account is given by Philo of this mode of Mosaic prophecy, we may discern its nature from his description [in *Decal.* 31-35, where Philo describes the organ of hearing the word of God as through]…"the mind possessed by God (*entheou dianoias*)…." It is clear from this description that the inspired mind [in this situation] far from being preempted or rendered *passive*, is rather extraordinarily quickened and sharpened.[241]

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[238] Winston also calls it "noetic" (54) or "legislative" (50) prophecy.

[239] Amir, "Philo," 437, commenting on *Mos.* 2.191.

[240] In *Spec.* 1.65, Philo uses "prophet" and "interpreter" together but in that case, "Nothing of what he says will be his own, for he that is truly under the control of divine inspiration has no power of apprehension when he speaks but serves as the channel for the insistent words of Another's prompting."

[241] Winston, "Mosaic Prophecy," 54, emphasis added; e.g *Spec.* 3.91.

The distinction between kinds of prophecy is essentially based on what kind of human organ God is using. In the case of prophets "in the strict sense," God "makes full use of their organs of speech to set forth what He wills."[242] In the case of Moses' "hermeneutical prophecy" it is his *mind* which is the focus, and it is with this mind that Moses acts as Israel's *lawgiver*.[243] Unlike [iii.a] ecstatic prophecy which Philo only uses to predict the future (something beyond the ability of a finite mind):

> Moses' *promulgation of the special laws*, however, communicated to him by [i] the divine voice (*Mos.* 2.188), is understood to involve the active participation of the prophet's mind.…the activation of man's higher mind or his intuitive intellect…[244]

Far from obviating Moses' intellect, God uses it *uniquely*:

> In Philo's mystical thought, true *prophetic power is rooted* in the special *intellectual capacities* that God has graciously bestowed on his chosen ones, and of the latter Moses stands out as a unique exemplar of unsurpassed excellence.[245]

And all of this takes place in an atmosphere quite unlike prophetic frenzy (e.g. "out of one's mind"):

> [In] the noetic form of prophecy exemplified by Moses in his legislative capacity…it is very likely that this prophetic state is characterized by total calm and serenity. Commenting on…[key prophetic text] "And I stood between the Lord and you" (Deut. 5.5), he notes that this verse indicates that the "mind of the Sage, released from storms and wars, with calm still weather and profound peace around it…is superior to men but less than

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[242] *Spec.* 1.65; cf. *Spec.* 4.49; also, see *Her.* 259 (only the good or wise may be truly be inspired).
[243] Cf. *Spec.* 3.91; *Mos.* 2.264-5. On the latter, John Levison focuses on Philo's coverage of Moses' prophetic pronouncements of the Sabbath (Exodus 16) in *Mos.* 2.259-69, which he sees as not fitting within Philo's types of Mosaic prophecy, Levison, *First-Century*, 173; cf. John R. Levison, *Filled with the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 182, 392–3. Given Winston's analysis (which Levison somewhat side-steps, *First-Century*, 210n38), I think it more likely that the second event (*Mos.* 2.264-5) corresponds to "hermeneutical prophecy" (a) since Moses retains his *mind* (2.265) but also undergoes inspiration, (b) since Philo's hesitancy in his description ("conjectures of this kind are closely akin to prophecies") is likely due to its being "out of order" but exegetically necessary, i.e. he is discussing Moses' acts of [iii] explicit prophecy, two of which about the Sabbath are classically predictive but the middle of which is (c) Moses issuing a law (in content part of the Decalogue, but in act, like a special law).
[244] Winston, "Mosaic Prophecy," 56, emphasis added.
[245] Ibid., 58, emphasis added.

> God" (*Som.* 2.229; cf. *Fug.* 174; *Deus* 10–12)….the apogee of the human ascension to God.[246]

Philo's LXX Translators as Mosaic Prophets

Philo's LXX translators qualify for every one of these identifiers of hermeneutical prophecy. They are indeed described "as if possessed (καθάπερ ἐνθουσιῶντες)" (*Mos.* 2.37), but this term in Philo fits those of *all three* types of Mosaic prophecy.[247] What matters in evaluating Philo is not inspiration/possession, but (1) what kind of possession (voice or mind; legal or predictive), (2) what kind of environment (mentally and physically).

Walking through each of these, we may note, (1) in *Mos.* 2.37, the LXX translators "prophesied" not differently from one another but each *in unity* "as if a prompter were invisibly giving them instructions." This invisible and individual style of prophesying does not have any of the markers of predictive or "mentally unaware" prophetic activity. Instead, it implies a *hidden, mental* reception of silent stimuli, which is occurring the same within each member of the group. No speaking or active coordination can be in view; each must be left to his own task in this description of remarkably identical, mentally-coordinated prophesying (which could only *later* become apparent, hence the two-part description of what took place, *Mos.* 2.37, 40). In *Somn.* 164, Philo specifically describes the need for the "eye of our soul" (a mental and spiritual location) to receive illumination, and he pleads with Moses "prompt (ὑπήχει) us!"[248] For the LXX translators, this prompting happens not by text[249] but, as *Mos.* 2.40 describes, by Moses' spirit.

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[246] Ibid., 61.

[247] E.g. [i] *Congr.* 132; [ii] *Mos.* 2.192, [iii] 280.

[248] ET, mine. In the appendix to LCL, Philo, vol. 5, 601, Colson and Whitaker write, "*Prompter.* This is perhaps as near as we can get to the meaning of *ὑπήχει.* But the word, which is frequently used by Philo, seems to carry with it the thought of a voice heard inwardly and not audible in the ordinary sense," cf. *Mut.* 139, for an example of Philo's own experience of this in reading Hos 14:9–10.

[249] Indeed, the original text in Philo's version is not even expressly consulted. Is this then an event like 4 Ezra 14, where the text comes through the spirit alone? There are certainly similarities (see 214n216 above) as another instance of a scribe like Moses being inspired to write the law, cf. Levison, *First-Century*, 204–7. But given the care with which the translators handle the "sacred

Even the correspondence between "the words and their proper meanings" (2.39)[250] and the correspondence between the translators and Moses (2.40) is described with the same verb, συντρέχω. In *Mos.* 2.40, the translators' LXX text is said to indicate their standing as prophets, as those who were "granted to be in communion, through sheer thought, with…Moses." Their prophesying is thus not described as inspiration of their tongues but *their minds*, and not with God's spirit, but *with Moses'*.[251] And, with regard to the kind of prophesying in view, we may simply note that it is clearly not predictive, and it does entail the very laws of Moses. If it can be claimed as a form of *Mosaic* prophecy at all, it must fall into the *legislative* and *hermeneutical* kind. It remains possible that they fall in the same category as the prophecy of the scriptural/legislative prophets, a category addressed below and with very close associations with Moses nonetheless.

(2) Our evaluation of the physical and mental environment of the translators begins in *Mos.* 2.34, where the LXX translators are described as considering (λογισάμενοι παρ' αὑτοῖς) their task carefully, selecting an appropriate place, and, in *Mos.* 2.35-6, directing their minds and souls in prayer. These acts display a reasoned and calming process, their wise minds already directing them to the ideal place. The island of Pharos is described as devoid of "impure conduct" (2.34) and not too loud ("the loud din and booming of the surging waves grows faint…before it reaches the land").

> Judging this to be the most suitable place in the district, where they might find peace and tranquility and the soul could commune with the laws with none to disturb its privacy, they fixed their abode there… (2.36)

These descriptions are not aesthetic filler for Philo, they serve a purpose: the proper communion between text and translators (and between translators and spiritual source). What better place could a scribe imagine (cf. *Sir.* 38:24)? What

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books" with their prayers in *Mos.* 2.36, a wholesale negation of even their implied presence seems unlikely.

[250] ET, Kamesar, "Biblical," 67.

[251] See below on λογισμοῖς εἰλικρινέσι as indicating mind-to-mind communication.

else could happen here except holy writing? Furthermore, the site itself seems to give birth to the possession and prophecy which follow:

> with none present save the elements of nature, earth, water, air, heaven, the genesis of which was to be the first theme of their sacred revelation… (2.37)

Such generative notions are, for Philo, closely related to the very nature of the mind. In *Opif.* 69-71, he describes the mind of humanity as "the image of God" because of its ability, through wisdom, to bring forth from natural settings the wonders of human engineering and activity, and once so stimulated, the human mind is struck by a "sober intoxication" which possess it to want to know the divinely-ordained "patterns and the originals of the things of sense which it saw here." It is no wonder then that such natural beauty would rightly enable the translators' work. It corresponds very closely to the kind of setting necessary for hermeneutical prophecy and is welcoming to the right use of the translators' minds, rather than the obviation of them.[252] Lastly with regard to setting, there is a correspondence in Philo's description between his purity of the translators' location and the spirit of Moses with whom they are able to have communion with, i.e. both are described as "clean, pure (καθαρός)". In one of the few instances, where Philo describes not just the "prophetic" but the "legislative" mind of Moses he describes that mindset as "pure (καθαρός)":

> This is Moses, the mind of purest quality (καθαρώτατος νοῦς), the truly "goodly" who, with a wisdom given by divine inspiration, received the art of *legislation* and *prophecy* alike… (*Congr.* 132, emphasis added)

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[252] Levison argues that inspiration from such a state of serenity, not only corresponds to Moses' own prophetic activity but to Philo's state of mind during his own work as an allegorical interpreter of Moses, *First-Century*, 258:

> [T]he spirit's guidance of Moses' mind in *Vit. Mos.* 2.264-65 and his own mind in *Som.* 2.252 reflect a similar experience in which mental faculties are illuminated rather than obviated. The resemblance of these descriptions to discussions of Socrates' *daemonion* in *De genio Socratis*, moreover, substantiates the conviction that inspiration entails intellectual illumination. The guidance of Moses' mind to the truth and the instruction of Philo's mind by the spirit correspond to the first century CE Greco-Roman conviction that inspiration, in the case of extraordinary people such as Socrates, transpires when "…the messengers of daemons pass through all other people, but find an echo in those only whose character is untroubled and soul unruffled, the very people in fact we call holy and daemonic" (*Gen. Socr.* 589D).

With such a detailed attention to correspondence, we may, I think, safely assume that Philo likewise considered the translators' minds "pure," the necessary state for hermeneutical Mosaic prophecy. Philo has, it seems, carefully scripted the translators and their setting as those most capable of co-prophesying the law with Moses.

Elders of Numbers 11 as Mosaic Prophets

Lest we stray too far from our focus, let us consider the elders of Numbers 11 in light of Philo's notion of the LXX translators as Mosaic hermeneutical prophets. Perhaps the most significant insight is the consistent parallel between the LXX translators and Moses himself. Philo presents a set of entrusted tradents who prophesy like him and with him. They are Mosaic prophets. They execute their task of interpreting, translating, and re-writing Mosaic law, not by focusing on their philological skill, nor by consulting one another for collective wisdom, but by acting prophetically and by inspiration of his spirit. The parallels to Numbers 11 are striking.

When YHWH declares his answer to Moses' complaint in Num 11:16-17, he declares not only what Moses should do ("Gather to me seventy elders of Israel, who you know to be elders of the people and their scribes")[253] but what *He* will do,

וירדתי ודברתי עמך שם ואצלתי מן־הרוח אשר עליך ושמתי עליהם

> "I will come down and speak with you there, and I will draw upon the spirit that is on you and put it upon them."

When YHWH first announces this decision, the purpose is not entirely clear. Is the removal of Moses' spirit a punishment, a diminishment of divine favor?[254] This view would be more persuasive if this "take and give" were all that occurred

[253] ET, mine. For the moment, we are passing over "and set them around the Tent of Meeting," ET, mine, but see below.
[254] See 13n57.

between Moses and the elders (i.e. no subsequent prophesying) and if there were then some clear shift in governing authority from that time on, i.e. ruling Israel together as a council (even if Moses remained the head of such a council). Instead, the subsequent narrative maintains Moses' unique legal and prophetic authority until he dies, even where his successors are ordained prior to his death.

YHWH does, of course, clarify the purpose somewhat in 11:17b:

ונשאו אתך במשא העם ולא־תשא אתה לבדך

> "They will bear with you some of the burden of the people and you will no longer bear it alone."[255]

This "burden" language is not novel in Numbers 11 to the stories of Moses. Exodus 18:22 and Deut 1:12 both discussing "bearing" the people, but both the syntax and context are different here. The syntax of Numbers 11:17b is more emphatic than its sister passages:

- ונשאו אתך (Ex 18:22b)
- איכה אשא לבדי טרחכם ומשאכם וריבכם (Deut 1:12)
- ונשאו אתך במשא העם ולא־תשא אתה לבדך (Num 11:17b)

Both the elders' *joining* Moses and the insistent elimination of Moses as the *only one* to bear the burden ("you shall no longer bear them alone") are made more explicit. The intense loneliness of Moses' complaint in Num 11:14–15 is matched by the absolute removal from that lone position in 11:17b.

לא־אוכל אנכי לבדי לשאת את־כל־העם הזה כי כבד ממני[256] 14

But what is so lonely about Moses' position at this stage, especially *after* the provision of helpers in Exodus 18?[257] Our answer to this question points to Moses' needs in his *prophetic* role and the *prophesying* result of YHWH's spirit-removal

[255] ET, mine.

[256] Moses sense of "carrying the people" here is almost a separate theme, one more proper to God's motherly role in the Exodus and wilderness period, cf. Ex 19:4; Num 11:12; Deut 1:31, cp. Deut 1:12. The relationship between these two themes is likely parallel to the same seam in the combined work of deliverance (Exodus) and constitution of a people (Sinai), both instantiated through YHWH (the speech-actor) and his prophet (the spokesman).

[257] Both canonically and (likely) compositionally, Numbers 11 is subsequent to the episode in Exodus 18.

from Moses (an element not found in either of these other pentateuchal "burden" passages).

Whereas both Exodus 18:15–27 and Deuteronomy 1:9–18 indicate Moses' burden in giving legal judgments to disputes among the people (indicated by שפט and ריב),[258] his burden *in Numbers 11* is expressed in their "weeping (בכה)" (11:4, 10),[259] a weeping directly resulting from "intense desire" or "craving (התאוו תאוה)" (11:4; cf. v.34), especially for "meat" (בשר). It is tempting here to follow Moses' own devolution and begin to consider how it is that Moses is supposed to supply the people *with meat*, and then how the elders help him do so.[260] However, meat is what the people *want* but not perhaps what the people *need.* Indeed, the people have all that they *need* in the desert: food, water, leadership, and the word of YHWH.[261] It is this last provision of God which the people need (cf. Deut 8:2–3) here.[262] Their very wants and desires need a response from through the word of YHWH, and it is in Moses' *sole* capacity to give it to them as their prophet. Supplying meat will only temporarily satiate their craving. Without a word of YHWH, they will continue to weep in response to various "strong desires" which will afflict them. The story emphasizes this focus through its place-name: Graves of Craving (קברות התאוה).

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[258] While the שרים and שטרים of Deut 1:15 may indicate separate roles from the שפטים in 1:16, all three are responses to Moses' burden in 1:12, even if one wants to try and suggest the former handle ריבות (1:12) while the latter issue משפטים (1:17), cp. Deut 17:8, where the cases under the jurisdiction of both שטרים and שפטים (Deut 16:18) are lexically described using both ריבות and משפט.

[259] Later, YHWH tells Moses to report back to the Israelites that this weeping was "rejecting YHWH" (11:21) and a desire to return to Egypt (11:18), filling in the initial laconic expression. Rather than giving a reading which navigates these complexities, we will, for this sake of this argument, focus on the repeated (and likely mnemonic) focus on "weeping (בכה)" and "desire (אוה)."

[260] Like Noth, *Numbers*, 89.

[261] It is perhaps tempting to dismiss this kind of distinction between "want" and "need" as overly pious or apologetic, but the wilderness narratives of Numbers hinge on just this kind of challenge to human desires (jealousy, pride, cultic-sexual cravings, etc.). Cf. Francis Watson who rightly sees the central problem of the narrative, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 362–4.

[262] Of course, another way of putting the theme of Deuteronomy 8 is not just their need for the word of YHWH but their *need to need* the word of YHWH, i.e. they need "testing" as much as YHWH's word to perform and cling to in the midst of it.

The Burden of Testing and the Burden of the Oracle

This reading pivots on the word: **משא**. It may function in one of two ways,[263] with each in harmony with a press toward the *prophetic* role of Moses. (1) **משא** may be read here relative to its near-homophone of מסה, "testing." Deuteronomy 9:22 notably describes its itinerary as Taberah, Massah (מסה),[264] and Kibroth-Hattaavah, which has no parallel order in the Numbers narratives, but precisely corresponds to the order of the occurrence in Numbers 11, if one replaces מסה for **משא**.[265] Since the narrative in Numbers 11 depends on a reading for **משא** as at least in part signaling "burden," one cannot imagine a putative, earlier version of Numbers 11 where **משא** here read instead as מסה. However, if the burden presented to Moses in Numbers 11 is not the burden of their own legal disputes, but the burden of the "testing" of their natural desires, as expressed here in a desire for meat—but equally resonant with the cravings for water in Exodus 17 (מסה, v.7) and Numbers 20:2-13[266]—then perhaps reading **משא** "burden," as evoking the *challenges* of **מסה** "testing," helpfully explains both the severity and the responses of YHWH and Moses. Their cravings (properly displayed in the desire for "meat" since it is not the same as the *necessity* for bread or water) are not just a problem here, but elsewhere. What they need is not just food supply but proper *training of their desires*: to come to Moses and YHWH not with weeping but with requests for things desired.[267] They need *a prophet* whom they can properly approach and hear from.

(2) Perhaps more interesting and more substantiated elsewhere in biblical writ is reading **משא** as a different double-entendre, both as "burden" but also as

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[263] See 225n256 for a possible third way, where the "burden" of the people is their survival in the wilderness, whose "carrier" is, in part, Moses, this time in his role as "the prophet *as deliverer*," e.g. Hos 12:13 [12:14].

[264] I know of no variants of Deut 9:22, reading תבערה, <u>משא</u>, and קברות התאוה.

[265] In the sequence of Deuteronomy 9, the narrative timing of verse 22 fits precisely with Numbers 11, i.e. post-Golden Calf and pre-scouting the land.

[266] The desire for food, answered in both manna and quail in Exodus 16, set close to need for water in Exodus 17.

[267] Cp. *Tg. Ps-Jon.* Num 11:4, וגיורייא דאתכנשו ביניהון <u>שאילו שאילתא</u>.

"oracle" (or even "music" in 1 Chr 15:22). Such a double-meaning is well-known in Jeremiah 23:33-4, 36, 38, and its usage as "oracle" is as equally prevalent as "burden" (e.g. Isa 21:1; Nah 1:1; Zech 12:1; Mal 1:1).[268] Grammatically, the most likely possibility is one which reads "burden" but with overtones of "oracle," making way for both the quail and the prophesying elders, in such a way that neither is a surprise. Less likely, but no less intriguing is reading in light of 2 Kgs 9:25 where the verb **נשא** and the noun **משא** are used together to indicate the issuing of a divine pronouncement—thus rendering Num 11:17b as "They will speak with you in (giving) the oracles (of/to) the people and you shall not speak to them alone." Reading with the idea of "oracle," the burden of Moses is not only the weight of leadership (i.e. dealing with their desires) but their need to be given a new word from God (which may itself need to speak to their desires). In light of Moses' desperate state, where he is desiring death (Num 11:15), the reader of Numbers 11 feels the need not just for an occasional "prophet like Moses" but an institution of prophetic-lawgivers, his authorized interpreters and re-enactors, who will carry his prophetic spirit, after his body is deceased. A need palpably felt, as well, by Philo, his fellow Jews in the Diaspora, and those who initiated the actual translation of the LXX.

Prophecy by the Spirit upon Moses

Thus we come to Num 11:24b-25, which fulfills YHWH's command for Moses to gather and for the elders to receive the spirit upon him, but with the additional event of prophesying:

> ויאסף שבעים איש זקנים מעם ויעמד אתם סביבת האהל…ויאצל מן־הרוח אשר עליו ויתן על־שבעים איש הזקנים ויהי כנוח עליהם הרוח ויתנבאו ולא יספו

> [Moses] gathered seventy elders of the people and stood them around the Tent.…[Then YHWH] withdrew some of the spirit upon him and put it

[268] Cf. Wilson, *Society*, 257–60 (a Judean prophetic speech form); Pieter Arie Hendrick de Boer, "An Inquiry into the Meaning of the Term Maśśā'," in *Oudtestamentische Studiën* (Leiden: Brill, 1948), 5:197–214.

on the seventy elders. Then, as the spirit rested on them, they prophesied and did not add.[269]

First, (1) in light of our discussion of **משא**, it is now perhaps more noticeable that the elders' "prophesying" structurally stands in precisely the place of fulfillment for the sharing of Moses' "burden":

- "[1] I will draw upon the spirit that is on you and [2] put it upon them. [3] They will carry the burden of the people with you and you shall not carry it alone." (11:16–17)

- Then YHWH…[1] drew upon the spirit that was on him and [2] put it upon the seventy elders. And when the spirit rested upon them, they [3] prophesied…. (11:25)

Apart from other important arguments about the philology of the hithpael of **נבא** used here and its usage elsewhere in the biblical literature, the structure of command and fulfillment signals a careful choice of words by the biblical writer here. If such a striking event is later ceased (i.e. reading "…they did not continue" in 11:25b), the Seventy may remain as those fully capable of producing Mosaic prophecy. Even where *b. Sanh.* 17a denies the elders continued their prophesying (while noting that linguistically it could be read as its opposite, cf. Deut 5:19[22]), it does not deny that what took place was, in fact, prophecy. In light of our reading of Philo's version of the Legend, we may also note that although Philo's view of hermeneutical prophecy has much to commend to a view of the elders of Numbers 11 (i.e. their prophesying may be viewed consistently with their status as scribes), more importantly, Philo sees their prophesying as the same kind as Moses', whatever the precise description of that type. In Numbers 11, the fulfillment of the needs (*and spirit*) of Moses by prophesying elders sets their prophesying as Mosaic.

Second, (2) again in light of Philo's LXX Legend, the *manner* of YHWH's action is striking. (a) Like in Philo, there is a close *correspondence between inspiration and prophesying*. It is specifically only *after* the spirit rests on the

[269] ET, mine, choosing "add" since it captures two of the three options.

elders that they are able to prophesy. Prophesying is, indeed, evidence that the spirit rests on them, but conversely, it is the spirit which gives forth prophesying. This is not an unheard of result of biblical inspiration (and 1 Sam 10:10 often comes to mind), but it is not the only result. As one of only a few pentateuchal instances of such spiritual activity (e.g. Ex 31:3; 35:31; Num 24:2) and the only instance in the Pentateuch of the verb "to prophesy (נבא)," the correspondence of the two should be held on to. At a minimum it means that whatever comes through the mouths of the Seventy is directly corresponding to the spirit on Moses. *That* spirit is the source of their words, not their own spirits.

(b) Unlike Philo, who identifies the *spiritual source* of the translators as "the spirit *of* Moses" (*Mos.* 2.40), the spirit described in Numbers 11 is "the spirit which is *upon* you [him]" (emphases added). This is a unique phrase used nowhere else in the biblical literature. It is not a straight affirmation of the "spirit of YHWH" or "spirit of God," but neither is it a straightforwardly "personal spirit" like 2 Kgs 2:15 (although it should be noted that there the verb used is, in fact, "rest [נוח]" as here).[270] The difference between the two is best illuminated by the precise way Philo envisions Moses. In his closest thing to an interpretation of the elders story of Numbers 11,[271] Philo describes Moses' spirit as sharing in the divine spirit, its wisdom and its indivisibility (i.e. Moses' spirit and authority from God are not diminished by sharing).[272] In both cases, the spiritual source of the prophesying is identified as the same of that of the lawgiving authority.

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[270] Cf. 17n87 Overall, I agree with Rabens that verbs surrounding spirit activity in MT should not be over-emphasized as separate kinds of acts, *Holy Spirit*, 46.

[271] Philo falls into that age-old problem for exegetes of the Bible, wherein they begin at Genesis 1, but never seem to get past Sinai. This particular sidebar comes amidst a larger discussion on the spirit of God in Gen 6:3.

[272] In this last view, Philo represents the earliest version of a parable about the nature of God's spirit being like lamp/fire, which does not diminish when it is passed to a new source. This parable is shared by *Sifre* 93; Origen, *Hom. Num.* 6.2.1 (whose version looks more like *Sifre* than Philo); also, cf. Augustine, *De Trinitae* 6.1.1 (although separated from his use of Num 11:17 in 5.14.14, where he argues the spirit on Elijah and Moses are both the spirit of God). Here is the passage from Philo:

> Such a divine spirit, too, is that of Moses, which visits the seventy elders that they may excel others and be brought to something better—those seventy who cannot be in real truth even elders, if they have not received a portion of that spirit of perfect wisdom. For

This spiritual source is distinctive. *The Seventy of Numbers 11 stand in marked contrast to any other source of authority in Israel in that they explicitly inherit the same spirit upon Moses.* Where others may prophesy by the spirit of God, or inherit the text of Torah, or are affirmed in their role as judges, only the Seventy can be said to prophesy from the very spirit upon Moses. These Seventy are thus enabled as well as authorized in a way unlike others, with all the insights into *hidden or obscure parts of his law* and with all the potential to produce *new layers of Mosaic insight.* Whatever may be said about the ceasing of the elders' prophesying (i.e. "and they did not add/cease/continue"), the spirit of Moses is never revoked from them, and the possibility of its distribution for the purposes of germinating later prophesying, is (by the evidence of Philo and rabbinic traditions of סמיכה) something which later generations felt were available to them. The birth of the institution of the Seventy elders which occurs here is a Mosaic and spiritual one.

(c) Like Philo, the manner of the elders' prophesying does not share any *details of its content*. Unlike Hilary or Jerome, Philo engages in no specific comparisons between the content of the LXX and the content of the Hebrew original: What matters is the precise correspondence, without remainder and completely unified. Similarly, the elders of Numbers 11 prophesy no recorded content, and therefore, the emphasis of the story remains focused on their complete unity. There is no record of divisions between themselves nor of any possible disagreement with the antecedent authority of Moses. This sets them in a position of maximum, future authority. Whenever the text of Moses is finished

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> it is written, "I will take of the spirit that is on thee and lay it upon the seventy elders" (Numb. xi. 17). But think not that this taking of the spirit comes to pass as when men cut away a piece and sever it. Rather it is, as when they take fire from fire, it is still as it was and is diminished not a whit. Of such a sort is the nature of knowledge.…If, then, it were Moses' own spirit, or the spirit of some other created being, which was according to God's purpose to be distributed to that great number of disciples, it would indeed be shredded into so many pieces and thus lessened. But as it is, the spirit which is on him is the wise, divine, the excellent spirit, susceptible of neither severance or division,…the spirit which…though it be shared with others or added to others suffers no diminution in understanding and knowledge and wisdom. And though the divine spirit may stay awhile in the soul it cannot abide there, as we have said. (*Gig.* 24–28)

and set, whoever takes the seats of this assembly may speak as if one voice on behalf of Moses, despite what happens in closed chambers. They are not contracted to any particular interpretative angle or mandate apart from the words of Moses himself.

(3) Continuing in light of Philo, we may further note that the *location* of Numbers 11 is purposely detailed and conducive to prophecy. Where Philo's ideal location is the picturesque shores of Alexandria, pure and clean and without distraction, Numbers 11 presents the ideal location for prophetic utterance, the Tent of Meeting, where, in Ex 33:7-11, Moses and YHWH were known to talk together. In precise parallel, the elders of Numbers 11 are described as:

(1) coming to the tent (33:8//11:24);

(2) receiving the descending cloud of presence (33:9a//11:25a);

(3) listening to YHWH speak with Moses (33:9b//11:25a); all of this

(4) with Joshua present at the Tent (33:11//11:28).

And in precise distinction:

(5) In Ex 33:8, 10, the *people* are present in synchronous harmony with Moses—when he is at his Tent with YHWH, the people arise and stand and worship, each at the opening of his tent (איש פתח אהלו)—but in Num 11:10, the people are not worshipping *but weeping*, each at the opening of his tent (איש לפתח אהלו).

Likewise, rather than allowed inside the Tent,

(6) the elders are set around it (11:24), *between* the people and the place where Moses and YHWH meet, a symbolically and ritually rich depiction.[273]

[273] This topography (a) depends on a unification of the Tabernacle and the Tent of Meeting into a single entity (which, I would argue, against current historical-critical consensus, is purposefully completed in Numbers 7-9, cp. 7:1, 7:89; 9:15-17), (b) assumes concentric circles with the Tent/Tabernacle at the center with a "buffer zone" between it and "the camp," and (c) makes the best sense of the directions indicated in the passage (especially, the overflowing of the רוח from the circle of elders around (סביבת) the Tent to Eldad and Medad in the camp in concentric parallel with the overflow act of the רוח around (סביבות) the camp with quail, cp. Num 11:24, 31). Cf. some support for this in Jobling, *Sense*, 57.

The Tent provides the holiest, most appropriate setting for ordaining those capable of speaking for Moses. It is critical to the book of Numbers, and its prominence in Num 7:89 assures a source for the on-going laws ("laws for the journey) that Israel needs through Moses. In many ways the Tent is the portable version of Sinai, the place from which YHWH speaks and continues to speak to his people (e.g. Num 12:5). Having gathered there for their ordination, it would seem the Seventy are thereby capable of carrying with them some of the spirit of God (which spoke with Moses) wherever they are re-assembled (quite literally), in part, because of the *place* where they started was the source of Mosaic authority. A later initiation in the land would not be a viable beginning since the key conversation between Moses and YHWH never occurs there. Neither is Sinai a possible origin since the key to unified legal authority remains locked on Moses as the law's single source. Only after Moses has descended from the mountain and the Tabernacle established (as the site of God's presence) could Moses' first authorized, prophetic interpreters be inaugurated, which is almost precisely when they are. From one point of view, there is a strong centralization of prophecy here; although, it may likewise be said that here is the starting place for *all* authorized prophecy, the standard by which decentralized prophecy may then be evaluated.[274]

Philo's Moses as Literary Scribe

Coming back to a consideration of Philo's Legend of the LXX, Philo's appreciation for Moses as hermeneutical prophet still leaves us some distance from how such prophetic authority finds its way into biblical text: How does any of this prophesying (by Moses or the translators) find expression in (or from) Hebrew? The answer is through Philo's conception of the λόγος ἐνδιάθετος ("internal speech") and the λόγος προφορικός ("enunciated, articulated

[274] In *m. Sanh.* 5:1, one of the main responsibilities of the Great Sanhedrin is to judge who is a false prophet (i.e. not like Moses; cf. Deut 18:15-18).

speech"),[275] along with his view of Moses' education.[276] Through a combined reading of *Migr.* 47–52; 71–81; and *Det.* 39–40, Adam Kamesar argues that, in Philo's understanding, when God speaks to mankind he does so through the "mind-to-mind" speech, the λόγος ἐνδιάθετος,[277] without "nouns and verbs," which are instead the product of λόγος προφορικός.[278] This latter type of λόγος is associated with Aaron as Moses' "interpreter (ἑρμηνέα) and prophet (προφήτην)" (*Det.* 39; cf. *Migr.* 78–81). Through such roles, the oracles of God, the λόγος ἐνδιάθετος, take shape in the world as the λόγος προφορικός, i.e. in "nouns and verbs."[279] As much as Aaron articulates Moses' mind in Ex 7:1, Moses articulates God's mind in the written words of the Bible. Kamesar further notes that this written form comes into being both through Moses' own proficiency in philosophy *and* through his art (τεχνή) of rhetoric, which he learned in his schooling (*Mos.* 1.23).[280]

> [T]he revelation which Moses receives from God indeed comes through him via the sight of the mind. But that revelation must pass through the human agent(s) Moses (and Aaron), and be "technically" elaborated by him (them).[281]

The end result is a biblical text which is (according to philosophical and literary ideals) excellent, brought into being by prophet-scribes, who rightly interpret the word of God through mind-to-mind communion with him.

Philo's LXX Translators as Mosaic Scribes

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[275] Kamesar, "Biblical," 71; Kamesar, "Literary," 59.
[276] Kamesar, "Literary," 59–60.
[277] "When there is direct communication from God to man, that communication does not take place verbally. Rather, man apprehends the divine revelation via intellection, which Philo usually describes as a form of mental sight or vision," ibid., 58.
[278] Ibid., 59.
[279] Ibid., 59n18. This careful terminology is consistently applied by Kamesar both here and in our translation of the legend, *Mos.* 2.37, to indicate "'parts of speech' as known from Plato's writings," Kamesar, "Biblical," 66n4.
[280] Kamesar, "Literary," 60.
[281] Ibid., 61.

What is missing from this is, of course, how this literary, biblical word becomes the *LXX*. Kamesar answers this with a swift and accurate assessment:

> [T]he Seventy were [perhaps] able to communicate with Moses (in his capacity as ever-living author of the Pentateuch) by means of [λόγος ἐνδιάθετος] rather than [λόγος προφορικός]. That is, they communicated with him, or with his ideas, on a thought-to-thought basis, without the use of verbal language. This would not be surprising, for we know that the Greek gods, and the angels of the Judeo-Christian tradition, communicated with each other in this fashion and not with their voices. Accordingly, Philo may have believed that if the translators had achieved, perhaps by a kind of divine grace, a thought-to-thought communion with the Mosaic legacy, it would hardly have been difficult for them to reproduce it on the mere level of enunciated language [i.e. λόγος προφορικός].

We may press this view of Kamesar's *one step further*.[282] The process of reproducing the enunciated language of the LXX was not difficult for them, not only because they had access to Moses' mind but because *they themselves were scribes, sufficiently educated to match Moses' own mind,* step for literary step. For Philo, the thought-to-thought communion was one, which, although by possession, did not obviate their minds. Through their own education, virtue, location, and piety Philo depicts them as perfectly shaped vessels for the corresponding words of Moses to pass through.

We cannot well imagine Philo being satisfied with pious but simple tradesmen (cf. Sir. 38:24-34), suddenly and without schooling or literary skill, establishing the kind of connection with Moses wherein the proper Greek words would (even if divinely spoken) perfectly come to mind and down onto "paper." If Philo's account were *this* miraculous, there would be no need for the "right men" to come to Alexandria at all (almost any old bloke would do!) for their minds would simply have to be able to hear words vocabulary which they did not previously know (whether Greek or Hebrew would not matter since an unknown

[282] Since Kamesar's object has been to describe the literary quality of the LXX in Philo's thought, the precise correlation between Philo's view of Moses' biblical text (in Hebrew) and that of the LXX is sufficiently proven by Philo's "word-for-word and sense-for-sense" depiction here. He has not pressed for the implications for Philo's LXX interpreters likely because he has not needed to.

word in Greek may sound just as foreign as one in Hebrew). It seems much more consistent with Jewish and Philonic conceptions to consider the LXX translators themselves as those *trained and schooled and pious* like Moses, *availing themselves* to God (Mos. 2.34, 36), and finding *their minds synchronously capable* of finding the right words. To use Philo's own geometric analogy (*Mos.* 2.39), "square-shaped" Mosaic words likely need a "square-shaped" tunnel to pass through in order to find their "square-shaped" Greek equivalent. That tunnel is the LXX translators, made more demanding and more philosophically possible by Philo's own consistency of thought (including his definition for Mosaic prophecy as inclusive of mental activity, even scribal activity).

Elders of Numbers 11 as Mosaic Scribes

At first, readers of Numbers 11, may see the scribal qualities of the elders fading from view. Having received the appropriate schooling and character training to be worthy of the selection of Moses, are the Seventy of Numbers 11 then shifted completely into a mode as prophets? In view of our reading of Philo's version of the Legend (both as hermeneutical prophecy and as literary textualization) and numerous preceding parallels to Numbers 11, a more integrated view of the Seventy is worth consideration. The place most appropriate for our consideration is Num 11:17aβ, 25aβ:

והתיצבו שם עמך וירדתי ודברתי עמך שם

> "Have them take a stand there with you, and I will come down and speak with you there." (Num 11:16bβ-17aβ)

ויעמד אתם סביבת האהל וירד יהוה בענן וידבר אליו

> "[Moses] stood them around the Tent, and YHWH came down in a cloud and spoke with him." (Num 11:24bβ-25aβ)[283]

This section of the story not only functions *symbolically* in parallel with Exodus 33:9a, 11a, but *functionally*. In the same way YHWH does not speak with

[283] ET, mine.

Moses in Exodus 33 without adding something to the characterization and function of Moses, neither does he speak to Moses *with the elders present* in Numbers 11 without imparting something to them. I propose that along with the *symbolic* authority, which they obtain when all the people see them with Moses in the presence of God,[284] Numbers 11 is imparting *verbal* authority to the Seventy: the capacity to deal rightly with the "nouns and verbs" of Moses' communication with God.

In the first section, YHWH prescribes a detailed sequence of events so that the elders are in the same place as Moses (שם twice, in 11:16-17) before commencing his dialogue with him. In the subsequent fulfillment section, the orientation is slightly modified[285] so that the elders do not directly participate in the conversation between God and Moses but are nevertheless nearby. The text does not specify whether Moses entered the Tent while the Seventy stood outside, or whether on this occasion he remained outside the Tent (or at its entrance) while the cloud descended.[286]

The effect of these words is all the more noticeable when it becomes nearly the only distinguishing difference between the Seventy and subsequently figured Eldad and Medad, who receive both the spirit and the ability to prophesy (11:26). In that case the spirit is more clearly identified as YHWH's, but more noticeably they are simply not "there". Although we cannot probe the dynamics of the Eldad and Medad episode here, their presence in the narrative prompts an important question: If YHWH could perform the same feat without Eldad and Medad being at the Tent, why summon the Seventy at all? Posed in a different

[284] This symbolic authority is (already) granted in a stronger way in Exodus 24.

[285] והתיצבו and ויעמד אתם are essentially the same in content with different resonances: והתיצבו connotes "presenting" oneself to God or king, with significant examples in Ex 19:17 and Num 31:14, where the people and Joshua, respectively, are commanded to present themselves in the presence of God (at Sinai and the Tent of Meeting). The shift to encircle (סביבת) Moses is rather more specific than simply being in the same place.

[286] This lack of specificity can be contrasted with both Ex 33:9-11 and Num 12:5, where the cloud and the entrance to the Tent go together.

way, what prompted the biblical writer(s) to depict the elders *at* the Tent *with* Moses rather than apart from him to begin with?

The only answer to this seems to be proximate distance to the verbal communication between Moses and God. They need to be "there," *with* him; it is part of their bearing his burden. Whether literally or figuratively, the Seventy then are there to "overhear" between God and Moses. They are not privileged to pierce the inner circle, to share in the "original" declarations of Mosaic lawgiving, but they are the next ring out, privileged to apprehend the verbal (if not oral) exchange and entrusted with it.

While Numbers 11 does not depict the elders *writing* laws with Moses or written interpretations (or clarifications) of those laws, the capacity to do so would likely depend upon this kind of access: not just governing authority or scribal capacity, but "*overhearing*" the conversation between Moses and God. In a remarkable way, the rabbinic idea of an oral tradition (despite never being grounded in this part of the passage)[287] finds a nearly identical expression here; except here, the proximate distance between Moses, Joshua, and the elders is not handed from one to the other, but shared communally and spiritually. It is more dramatic and unwieldy than typical rabbinic traditions.

The elders' scribal abilities are put to good use here. Likely assumed to have been trained to be keen minds and experts in memorization, the elders are well-endowed tradents of divine, verbal communication. And if ever there were a need for writing down shared words between YHWH and Moses (real or imagined), the Seventy elders of Numbers 11 would stand a ready institution for such a task.

The Bible never depicts anyone else *writing* Mosaic law, but it leaves persistent clues of the possibility. Philo helpfully delineates the possible mechanism for just such an occurrence. As mentioned, in Philo's mind, Aaron (as

[287] Typically, as detailed above, oral tradition is exegetically grounded at Sinai but transferred to the Sanhedrin, who themselves find their *number* and *qualifications* illuminated in Numbers 11 (but not explicitly their oral tradition).

Moses' "prophet," cf. Ex 7:1) put Moses' words into articulated form. Kamesar remarks on the implications:

> In these passages [about Moses and Aaron], Philo is speaking of the communication of the divine revelation generally, and does not refer specifically to the composition of the Pentateuch. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that *Philo attributes the authorship of other biblical books to "friends" or "associates" of Moses.*[288] It is thus not out of the question that he viewed Aaron as a sort of *associate in the composition of the Pentateuch itself.*[289]

Inasmuch as Philo depicts the LXX translators and the Seventy of Numbers 11 in these same terms, he illumines an intrabiblical mechanism for others to join Moses in drawing from his authorial and authoritative connection with God, while leaving room for others to articulate the specific words and forms of both the LXX and the Pentateuch. While in both cases Philo imagines a very faithful and literal representation of the source text into target text, others in the course of biblical history may have had more layered or literary approaches to such an author–writer relationship.

Initiation by Survival: Moses as Hierophant and Aristeas' *Danger Averted*

Finally, in our review of the Legend of the LXX and its application to Numbers 11, we will note strong cultic aspects to Philo, *Aristeas*, and Numbers 11, which are not often probed. Each of these shares an awareness of divine activity that is neither miraculous, nor inspired, nor scribal, but vital nonetheless: God cares about access to his words. He makes them difficult and/or dangerous to obtain. The God of the Legend and of Numbers 11 maintains the value of his words by preventing their capricious or accidental use. Because both the Legend and Numbers 11 present exoteric moves of previously esoteric divine words, various barriers of caution (and yet also invitations to inquire) are mixed and on display.

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[288] Kamesar cites occasions in reference to the writers of the Psalms: "*Plant.* 39; *Conf.* 39; *Som.* 2.245," "Literary," 60n25.

[289] Ibid., 58–60, emphasis added.

We begin with the observation that, on occasion, Philo compares Moses to the hierophant,[290] who represents his God and whose human activity is not so much "teaching" the masses as "helping them see,"[291] a heuristic enlightenment of the mind's eye so that the occluded sacred becomes clearly understood to the initiated.[292] For Philo, the sacred thing to be seen is a "vision" of divine truth,[293] which only Moses has seen in full,[294] and which others can come to see through the Mosaic law, the "sacred oracles" of God brought through Moses' prophetic activity.[295] In addition, Philo also describes Jeremiah as a hierophant, indeed a fellow and inspired student of Moses from whom Philo desires to learn.[296] This coordination of qualifications catches our eye as only here and in Philo's version

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[290] E.g. *Leg.* 3.173; *Post.* 173; *Gig.* 54.

[291] In *Somn.* 1.164, Philo combines the two describing Moses as both hierophant and prompter.

[292] Amir, "Philo," 436. As Burkert assess the evidence, in the most popular mystery cult, the Eleusinian mysteries, masses were initiated through a pilgrimage and other rituals but which culminated, primarily, in visual experience: seeing the hierophant emerge by torchlight and corn cut by the hierophant in silence, *Greek Religion*, 288. Whatever the experience, the benefits were (a) having own's perceptions corrected through the experience (cf. Aristotle, *Fr.* 15) and (b) attaining eternal life, ibid., 286, 290. Philo repeatedly draws on these themes of "initiation of the masses" and "seeing the sacred" to promote the Jewish law as universal, highly desirable, creating an initiated subset of the populace, and sacred.

[293] More precisely, it is "direct knowledge of the Divine" through the "unified vision of the world of intelligible Forms," a capacity inherent in the human mind as "an inseparable fragment of the Divine Logos" (and therefore not in need of "the Platonic doctrine of *anamnēsis*," cf. H.A. Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (2 vols., rev. ed.; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1947), 2:3–8), but it needs "the initial stimulus of sense-perception," perception "quickened" by divine help through the Scriptures/Moses, Winston, "Mosaic Prophecy," 56–7; cf. Kamesar, "Literary," 58.

[294] Moses' ability to communicate through intellection with God is consistently based on LXX Deut 5:31 σὺ δὲ αὐτοῦ στῆθι μετ᾽ ἐμοῦ, e.g. *Somn.* 2.227; *Mos.* 2.190. The Israelites get a partial but clear view of God's communication when at the giving of the Decalogue in LXX Ex 20:18, πᾶς ὁ λαὸς ἑώρα τὴν φωνήν. There the words came "not expressed via 'nouns and verbs', which are apprehended by the sense of hearing, but rather that the divine message was visible to the eye of the soul [*Migr.* 48]," Kamesar, "Literary," 58; cf. Amir, "Philo," 435–6; Winston, "Mosaic Prophecy," 50.

[295] Winston, "Mosaic Prophecy," 58–9. See appeals by Philo toward Moses to illuminate those willing to be taught and to his readers to understand the sacred oracles with him by paying attention to Moses and those initiated in the ways of Moses, including himself, *Cher.* 48-9; cf. *Somn.* 1.164; 2.1-3.

[296] *Cher.* 49,

> I myself was initiated under Moses the God-beloved into his greater mysteries, yet when I saw the prophet Jeremiah and knew him to be not only himself enlightened, but a worthy minister of the holy secrets, I was not slow to become his disciple. He out of his manifold inspiration gave forth an oracle spoken in the person of God to Virtue the all-peaceful.

of the Legend does he use these three terms together: possessed, hierophant, and prophet. In Philo's Legend, the task "to translate" is itself actually termed "to hierophant."

By using this language, Philo presents the Mosaic law, on the one hand, as worthy of pursuit. Beseeching Moses, inquiring of Jeremiah, Jews are trained and Greeks are invited to seek the wisdom of God found within. Once one begins to "see" the divine patterns and works of God, then one knows what it means to be not just truly Jewish but truly human. Moses, Jeremiah, Philo, and the law itself provide avenues to this apprehension. While ostensibly one could attain this enlightenment on one's own, in practice, it is hardly achievable. There are barriers, including the need to see the real (allegorical) meaning of the law and not just its surface meaning. Although Philo is not opposed to the good help of inspiration or the miraculous, his consistent use of the image of the hierophant allows for more intellectual pursuits of the truth. A μύστης (or candidate for initiation) is not one who must experience the miraculous: One must simply be *willing* to be guided and to see.

Aristeas is likewise unconcerned with miraculous actors and describes the Mosaic legislation as consistently beneficial but in need of special handling. For *Aristeas*, there is a heightened awareness of the dangers in mishandling the biblical text. At the beginning, the legislation is described as having avoided, as yet, mention by Greek writers because it is "flawless" and "divine" (§31). Rather than these qualities making it cited more often, they result in caution. Similarly, Ptolemy's freeing of Jewish slaves (§§15–20, §37), request for proper manuscripts (§30, §46), delivery of the ideal location (§§301–7), all in order to perform the task may be politically motivated, but it is hard to avoid the conclusion they are also in correspondence with what is required to translate the text properly according to Jewish sensibilities of holiness. In particular, the king's request for seventy-two translators ("six from each tribe") (§39), makes the most sense against

a Jewish backdrop,[297] and it is coupled with more expressly intra-Jewish concerned such as the proper washing of hands (§306). The text is known to be difficult to understand, hence Aristeas' personal inquiries to Eleazar (§§128–169), without which presumably readers and hearers of Jewish law would assume they were incoherent or merely mythical (cf. §168). These precautions are far more important to the process of translation than the kinds of translation theory concerns which typically mark our present context. Presumably, to know a translation was done rightly, (potential) readers of the LXX wanted to know: Was it done "properly"? This included very spiritual and religious concerns as well as political and philosophical ones.

This mode in *Aristeas* (which is reflected in Josephus, although perhaps slightly muted) is above all evident in the completion of the LXX, which is marked first with a serious imprecation on any who would alter what was produced and agreed upon by the proper process just then completed (§§310–11). This is followed with stories of Greeks who had previously and inadequately attempted to perform the translation (§§312–6). These were not mentioned at the beginning of the narrative as reasons why the translation had not been attempted. Their inclusion here at the end, instead, is because they are part of a rhetorical warning and solemnification. Its message is clear: "The process of translating this very divine and complicated text is now complete. Do not attempt to replicate it on your own; you will not be able to. Indeed, God does not want you to. He has provided and approved of this production every step of the way. There have been no manic displays of frenzied inspiration which generally accompany suspicious, mythical Greek texts. Instead, the very proper and orderly ways of the God of the Jews have been followed, and they are properly (i.e. philosophically) divine and pious in every way." In immediate response to these stories of warning, King Ptolemy does what every survivor of divine threat should do: "[H]e bowed deeply and gave orders that great care be taken of the books and that they be watched

[297] See Chapter 3. No ready Greek precedents for the number have, to my knowledge, been suggested.

over reverently (συντηρεῖν ἁγνῶς)" (§317). He has escaped judgment and has been rewarded with initiation, he and all Greek readers.

The Elders of Numbers 11: Invitation and Initiation

The elders story of Numbers 11 invites a similar investigation. Although the later episode of Eldad and Medad presents Moses hopefully proclaiming his desire for "all YHWH's people be prophets" (11:29), the earlier acts of dispensing Moses' burden to the Seventy are performed for the ultimate benefit, not just of Moses, but the people of Israel and the implied reader. This disastrous nation (and its riffraff, cf. 11:4) are the ones in need of proper leadership, and they are therefore invited, despite the failures incurred by their ancestors (from which the nation only barely survives), to be guided and led—to be, in some sense, initiated into the proper system YHWH establishes. By YHWH and his hierophants, they are beckoned.

But they are also warned. Apart from the deaths at the "Graves of Craving," there are also cultic barriers to the people's engagement with the words of YHWH. They cannot approach the Tent of Meeting. Indeed, the Seventy could only do so on this one, invited occasion, and their survival in the cloud of the presence had to be regarded as remarkable. When YHWH's own actions initiate Eldad and Medad—who were themselves some way authorized, "among those recorded (בכתבים)" (11:26)—Joshua (along with the implied reader) is alarmed. Any prophesying outside the cultic center should be (at least initially) suspicious.

Above all, even the Seventy, who are proper individuals in the proper configuration (with its implied unity *and* mechanism for conciliar self-correction), granted the very spirit upon Moses and prophesying under the direct guidance of the cloud of the presence at the Tent of Meeting, require the addendum: ולא יספו (11:25bβ). About which, we should briefly say the following:

(1) If it is read as *"and they did not cease,"* then it acts as an encouragement of God's provision, first to those in the desert but presumably to every inheritor of the institution (real or imagined) thereafter. To the invited and initiated of Israel's survivors (in every age), YHWH's provision of Moses as lawgiver of Israel did not die with him. God continues to speak though the carefully constrained and formulated institution of Seventy *elder-prophet-scribes,* imbued with the spirit which was upon Moses, those fully capable of interpreting and performing every aspect of Moses' leadership.

(2) If it is read as *"and they did not continue,"* then the statement adds re-assurance: The prophetic voice of Moses is not unbounded, it has spoken and has ended. It is now dependably stable. But its meaning is not inaccessible, YHWH has provided an institution of Seventy *elder-scribes*, who have been given the spirit of Moses and who once shared in his prophesying and who could potentially do so again, if needed. Until then, they remain skilled and trained conduits of Moses' own thoughts and ways and capable of rendering authoritative interpretations of his law.

(3) Finally, if it is read as *"and they did not add,"*[298] then the statement adds a warning and affirmation about the words of YHWH: They are finite. YHWH has spoken through his servant Moses, and his words are not to be added to. However, we must conclude, that such a finitude may yet be interpreted "literally" *or* "literarily." Future interpreters of such a statement may themselves render the word of YHWH with a sense of strict adherence and with as close a mirroring of the Mosaic wording as possible. Others may feel compelled to explain the word of YHWH as clearly and evocatively as possible, mirroring the "sense" of the original, not its literal words. For these latter interpreters, adherence to the finitude of the word of YHWH ended with Moses, indeed, but the injunction required of the interpreter is not to "not add" any *words* but to "not

[298] Based on the close associations each parallel occurrence in Deut 4:2; 5:19[22]; and 12:32[13:1] has with Mosaic authority and based on the way "do not add" can carry a broader variety of implications possible in each instance (i.e. it can be read that way in each occurrence), I prefer this reading.

add" any *ideas* (or especially, any commands or additional gods). In the case of this latter (literary) approach, we ought to recognize that even the authors of the Legend of the LXX, all three of whom—in different ways (and nearly as strongly as any rabbinic imprecation of later centuries)[299]—declared severe warnings on any additions or changes to the LXX, but did, themselves, modify the words of the LXX in their own interpretations.[300] These variations might be explained by their historical context (i.e. the distance between the fixity of the textualized LXX and the relative fluidity of personal interpretation), but proving such a distinction is difficult. In either case, the words of Moses may stand, and the job of the Mosaic interpreter (whatever his sense of connection to Moses) is not to add *for himself* to the "word of YHWH" which came only through Moses.[301]

In the end, the combination of warning and invitation in the context of the Seventy of Numbers 11 is not navigated by rules and imprecations alone, but by human interpreters, whose cadre of qualifications established them as navigable bridges to the divine word of YHWH through Moses.

Conclusion

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[299] E.g. The colophon at the end of Moshe ben Asher's Codex of the Prophets from the Cairo Geniza, Paul E. Kahle, *Cairo Geniza* (2nd ed.; New York: Praeger, 1959), 91–96.

[300] Josephus provides the strongest example, given his self-proclaimed intentions in *Ant.* 1.17, "The precise details of our Scripture records will, then, be set forth, each in its place, as my narrative proceeds, that being the procedure that I have promised to follow throughout this work, neither adding nor omitting anything."

And yet, gaps and additions in his execution of the same are notable, prompting his translator (Thackeray, 1.17.n.b.) to remark, "In fact he 'adds' some curious legends, on Moses in particular, and there are some few pardonable omissions."

[301] Thinking about this aspect in terms of the LXX and those who focus on it, the LXX verb in Num 11:25 (καὶ οὐκέτι προσέθεντο) has been assumed to relate to the elders' previous prophesying, i.e. "they no longer continued [to prophesy]", "they did not repeat [their prophesying], cf. Dorival, 294-5, "ils n'ajoutèrent plus"; Wevers, 175-6, "was not repeated."

But because the context is to do with prophesying, Jewish LXX readers may well have considered other connotations. In Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2:169, God as source of law implies the law's unchangeableness, unlike the shifting nature of the prophesying and gods of the Greeks around them.

In light of this and the fact that both the middle voice of προστίθημι and the use of οὐκέτι may be rendered differently (i.e. as an "indirect middle" and as an indicator of logical conclusion, respectively), it remains possible that some readers read this clause as "and they prophesied and accordingly did not add *for themselves* [to what God had rendered to Moses]", cf. Wallace, 419-23; "οὐκέτι," *BDAG*.

Admittedly, this view of the elders story of Numbers 11 is a maximal view of its potential meaning. It may well be read (and has been read) with parts of the whole excluded. What remains remarkable about the story is how almost every aspect of the story contains a substantial cord to specifically Mosaic authority, the severing of any of which renders the cord weaker but still capable of pulling the authoritative words of YHWH through his lawgiver into the realm of the readers of Israel's Scriptures: prophesying, spiritual empowerment, scribal ability, exceptional learning, communal approval (i.e. virtue and elders of the people), collective agreement (i.e. peaceful prophesying in unity), hearing the word of God, and being initiated into seeing the presence of God (to name some of the major themes presented). Almost any one these, deposited from God and/or Moses onto a single individual of the Israelite community, could very well warrant heeding obedience from the rest of the community for generations to come, much less a group (an institution!) of such well-endowed Mosaic envoys of YHWH. What ultimately emerges is a conceptual frame for a set of Mosaic interpreter-translators, whose multiplicity of qualities and capabilities are uniquely like Moses himself, and so uniquely helpful for authoritatively transmitting the Mosaic law into a new context, with precision and meaning, and we find these qualities uniquely presented in the elders Numbers 11. Their abilities so acknowledged may now be read in the biblical text with the depth of meaning and theological contribution to the life of Israel which they have so often missed. It is this contribution, which we see echoed through later generations, especially throughout the legend of the Septuagint, but also in layers of stories about the Sanhedrin and Oral Torah (secret or not). These generations of believers no doubt desired to ground their life and activity with God in Israel's Scriptures and found Numbers 11 an exceptional resource, either explicitly by referring back to its text or indirectly having lived out its purposes within their communal life for so long.

6
Gathering the Elders

The Results of this Study

"Then YHWH said to Moses, 'Gather to Me…'" For many readers of Numbers 11, the activity of God in this passage is somewhat perplexing but ultimately inconsequential (see Chapter 1). It is, for them, an odd and mystical bit of a larger—initially comical then tragically fierce—story of God's wrath in the desert, yet again. What God must have been doing throwing his spirit about at the Tent of Meeting with seventy old men, seems, to many, something "over there." They are, in a sense, reading from the position of the people in the camp: They are not sure what all the fuss is about, but it does not seem to be helping matters much; we are all still quite hungry. A few others get mildly excited when Eldad and Medad pop up next to them, doing something exciting nearer to them. Some readers wish to get a taste of that "overflow" hitting them, perhaps a sighting of "the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament." However, the interpreters most keen on finding out "what's going on over there" have been pre-modern Jewish commentators and ancient Christian ones. Perhaps because they are more sensitive to the direction of the action: "Gather *to Me,*" YHWH says, and they intend to follow, not dissuaded by quail, plagues, or a beleaguered Moses.

Five key terms have proved vital. (1) First, for more modern interpreters, the hurdle of **ויתנבאו** has to be overcome (see Chapter 2). Whatever YHWH is doing at the Tent, if it is a lot of flailing about and/or babbling incoherently in ecstasy, there is not much to consider. Once seen, those mad-looking old men are not worth much contemplation. Sure, they will come back claiming to be ready to take charge (perhaps over things they had not taken charge of before or in ways they had not before), but not much is likely to change "back in the camp." However, if **ויתנבאו** indicates "prophesying," and the first and only instance of it in the Pentateuch, then the consequences are very high indeed. For whatever we

think of "speaking in ecstasy" (Num 11:25, NJPS), we likely think quite a lot of "prophesying," with so much of the later biblical material so full of it. Could YHWH be speaking through these old men? By exploring the development of the "history of ancient Israelite prophecy" and comparing it to both to the philological evidence and to other frames of reference (including Greek conceptions of prophecy and ecstasy, as well as ANE and NT contexts), we were able to re-consider what centuries of readers of Numbers 11 often already assumed: Once the spirit upon Moses rested upon them, the elders prophesied.

(2) Second, the obstacle of שטרים presents itself. Although not obscure, the term is not readily recognizable. It is traditionally translated "officers" or "officials." Again, whatever happened "over there" at the Tent (even if it *was* prophesying), what emerged was basically what went in: a group of helpers, now properly assigned to Moses. Perhaps the same or better than the "staff" he had been given in Exodus 18, this group of helpers were YHWH's answer to Moses' most serious "grumbling" to date. (It is the desert after all, and the people's behavior is only getting worse.) However, upon closer inspection, שטרים is translated by the LXX as "scribes (γραμματεῖς)," which connotes much more than simple "officials," especially when viewed in relation to post-rabbinic and NT developments. We were then able to establish its philological standing as something "scribal" with a fair degree of certainty, with just a wisp of a previous episode in Exodus 5 somewhere in faint memory, awaiting possible connections.

(3) Our third term due for clarification was the number "seventy" (see Chapter 3). When taken alongside its neighbor, our fourth term (4), "elders," the chances of some kind of mnemonic connection to "other seventies" begins to grow stronger. Recalling Exodus 24 seems a prudent move, but it often raises as many questions as it answers. What could be happening here in Numbers 11 that didn't already happen there? The idea that this is a ready-made group of "special helpers" for Moses (perhaps from an alternative pentateuchal tradition) appeals and often settles the matter. However, when compared across the length of the

biblical text, seventy (שבעים), both in its ANE context and in its usage within the Hebrew Bible indicates something stronger—with tribal or familial authority. When examined through the vantage point of an ancient Christian writer (*Ps.-Clem.'s Recognitions*) and a Jewish pre-modern interpreter (Ramban), the chances that seventy signals a select group of counselors (or, perhaps, envoys as in Luke 10) whose number of membership indicates the fullest possible cadre of wisdom, help, and perspectives (especially as it connects through Deut 32:8 to Genesis 10) comes very strongly to the fore. Is this merely wishful thinking on the part of an "old-style" of interpretation? If so, then why indeed are these, not just old men, but "elders (זקנים)" numbered "seventy." The case seems even stronger when, even if we add Eldad and Medad to the (perhaps) original seventy to get "seventy-two elders," the same symbolism and same intertexual linkages (albeit through LXX Deut 32:8 and LXX Genesis 10) emerge supporting the theory. Like YHWH, surrounded by his heavenly host, so in Numbers 11, Moses emerges from the Tent no longer with a simple set of "special helpers," but a full counsel of prophetic scribes. Those "back in the camp" may, in fact, be feeling the need to sit up and notice "what's going on" after all.

But why "prophetic scribes?" we might begin to wonder. As it happens, "prophet" and "scribe" are, we have seen through a detailed review of Exodus-Joshua (see Chapter 4), the key categories that the Bible uses to establish Moses' own, unique, and authoritative position within Israel. His law-book and the words contained therein, emerge from this combined role. With this awareness, we then notice that amongst Moses' successors and deputized legal authorities, "elders" take a special role (especially "elders of Israel"). They speak the law with Moses and are presented in close association with him in lieu of his impending death (in Deuteronomy). When applied "back" to the story of Numbers 11, we can see, now even more clearly, that Numbers 11 is not only Moses' low-point, but one where his own physical limitations are accented. By his wish for death, Moses' end strikes a chord of warning for the over-arching biblical narrative:

What will happen when Moses dies? Who will continue his office of prophet-scribe of YHWH (and of Israel) for him? But no sooner have we asked the question, then the answer is coming from the lips of YHWH himself, "Gather to Me seventy elders of Israel…."

And yet, there is more to the story. What really is YHWH doing after all? If He were only establishing a council of prophetic and scribal elders, whose symbolic strength lay prominently displayed in their number seventy, and their role as successors laid out with relative clarity (given the apparently competing, or at least countervailing, interests of a Mosaic personal deliverer in Joshua and Mosaic cultic leaders in the priests and Levites) in Exodus-Joshua (with special emphasis in Deuteronomy), then why require a narrative at all? Why is there a story here?

By following a strain of the history of reception of Numbers 11, which a few have hinted at, but none have really explored, we came to see profound parallels between the elders of Numbers 11 and the Legend of the LXX, their numerical namesake (see Chapter 5). We saw parallels such as the need for a set of trustworthy tradents, descended from Moses, who might keep the written law-book and its rightful interpretation (or Written and Oral Torah). Such a capacity depends on a set of worthy, even specially selected (i.e. "true elders," those "whom you know to be elders," Num 11:16), members of the congregation, whose position of respect may then be infused with the same spirit on Moses or with a scribal ability like unto his own (or both), such that they might know, read, interpret, and communicate his word rightly to others. Those with such an apprehension exist not only in a recognizable number (seventy) or emerge from a recognizable category of authority (elders) but come to their state of awareness (a) by careful schooling (esp. in the law-book of Moses) and (b) by the result of divine action (esp. inspiration by divine spirit, but also an availability to divine action through purity and right living). Their ability to be shaped and formed, to

perhaps overhear the words of YHWH, and simply *not to die* when confronted by such powerful divine work, signals their profound authority.

Indeed, their authority is such that they may well answer certain inherited puzzles about Moses' role in the life of the believing communities descended from him (see Chapters 4–5): (i) How can we have a text which bears marks of multiple authorship while attached to only one authoritative person? Numbers 11 uniquely provides a mechanism for such single "authorship" with multiple "writers." (ii) How can we have such on-going layers of authorized (and indeed *un*authorized) interpretation of a single, static written word from God? Who could ever claim to interpret rightly and judge it over anyone else? Again, Numbers 11 has consistently been cited and utilized (as the Legend of the LXX, among other glimpses, shows) to verify such claims: sometimes by its claim to communal approval and interpretative and conciliar unity, sometimes by its claim to spiritual connection to Moses and YHWH's prophetic word through him, and sometimes by its claim to the highest levels of scholarship and formation in wisdom above any other.

At last (still within Chapter 5), our fifth term (5), "they did not add" or, its opposite, "they did not cease," both indicated by ancient sources (MT, LXX, *Tg. Onq.* and Vulgate) and both possible by the same consonantal Hebrew (לא יספו), comes into play. And then again, it doesn't. Among those readers already pre-disposed to disregard the activity at the tent, their stopping at this said activity does not really change things (i.e. whatever they might have been doing, they have stopped); likewise, those who think they continue are equally unaffected (i.e. whatever odd thing they were doing, they apparently keep on doing but we never hear again about why or when). For those now convinced more happened at the Tent than first supposed, the phrase presses emphases, but only so far. Ultimately, their authority stems from Moses and is assured by their experience with Moses and YHWH at the Tent. Their story is told to the camp; their

prophetic, scribal, and cultic ability to replace and interpret Moses continues one way or another.

The Implications of this Study

I. Biblical Exegesis.

If the above sketch of the meaning of the narrative of the elders of Numbers 11 is accepted, there is still much work to be done on the chapter as a whole. Work ahead includes a thorough re-appraisal of the function and meaning of Eldad and Medad, along with how they and the Seventy together may yet work in harmony with the quail story to create a coherent narrative as a whole (presuming there is one to be discerned). This whole would then best be laid in relationship with passages before it (especially Numbers 10:35-36 and its possible connections to Eldad and Medad) and after it (especially Numbers 12 and the crisis of prophecy visible there). Within the whole of Numbers, viewing Numbers 11 as providing a positive institution alongside a negative narrative sets a possible paradigm for other Numbers episodes (specifically Numbers 12; 16-17; and 20) and their presence as mitigated etiologies for institutions, needful before the entrance to the land (prophets, Levites, and Aaronic priests, respectively). Whether such a frame might be partnered with a rhetorical analysis of both law and narrative sections of Numbers appears promising but remains to be seen.

II. History of Prophecy.

Of all the planks in the old model(s) of the history of ancient Israelite prophecy, Numbers 11 remains one of the last. After our closer examination here, its inclusion in such a scheme deserves re-consideration. Indeed, without its support, there is considerable reason to re-conceive episodes in the Saul cycles as well. Narrative analysis of these episodes is worth consideration, given diminishing confidence in philological and source-based results.

III. Mosaic Authorship and Philo Studies.

Given the possible frame provided by Numbers 11 for Israelite authorities to self-identify *within* Moses' spirit and authority, the possibility they did so increases as a result of this study. Likewise, since Philo is our oldest unambiguous claimant to a single Moses authoring a five-fold Pentateuch (*Aet.* 19), our closer examination of Philo's own theories of what he considers the "authorship of Moses" (based on Kamesar's research, likely inclusive of Aaron; based on this study, open and active authoring activity occurring through the LXX translators, also, cp. Jeremiah in *Cher.* 49) might be in order. A more accurate tracing of the development of Mosaic authorship, differentiating biblical data, from early Hellenistic and even later Hellenistic evidence is promising and due for re-consideration.

IV. Formation of the Mosaic Canon ("Mosaic Discourse"/Rewritten Bible).

This study has intentionally bracketed evidence emerging from those scholars working in Second Temple conceptions of Mosaic and prophetic authority (e.g. Hindy Najman and Eva Mroczek).[1] This is because of the many powerful over-laps which immediately emerge from their comparison. In particular, Najman's work and my own both recognize similar gaps in the composite character of the Mosaic legislation and the way those gaps are later bridged using the authorial and prophetic voice of Moses speaking beyond his own life, i.e. through others who take on "the voice—of Moses himself."[2] Where Najman examines (especially through Deuteronomy) various Second Temple texts which revise and expand (but also claim to be) the Torah of Moses (and from him) through "re-creation[s] of the Sinai experience,"[3] my work seeks to exegete a pentateuchal passage which

[1] Cf. Najman, *Seconding*; Najman, *Past*; Mroczek, "Moses," esp. 92–5; Also, George J. Brooke, "Prophets and Prophecy in the Qumran Scrolls and the New Testament," in *Text, Thought, and Practice in Qumran and Early Christianity: Proceedings of the Ninth International Symposium of the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature, Jointly Sponsored by the Hebrew University Center for the Study of Christianity, 11–13 January, 2004* (ed. Ruth A. Clements and Schwartz; STDJ 84; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 31–48.

[2] *Seconding*, 40.

[3] Ibid., 17.

provides a theological grammar for an institution of similar Mosaic authorship. Both provide means for seeing what may look to us like "'new' law—perhaps even what we might regard as a significant 'amendment' of older law…as the Law of Moses."[4] My work also provides a means for articulating *how* that Mosaic voice gets *inside* the scribes and prophets acting in Moses' stead, i.e. through cultic closeness like Moses, *paideia* in Mosaic law, and inspiration from the same spirit which was on Moses. Ultimately, I suggest that Numbers 11 may play a role not unlike Sinai in shaping some later Second Temple conceptions about extending Mosaic authority, writ, and speech.

V. Hellenistic Mosaic Authority (Septuagint and Sanhedrin Studies).

This study shows the strength of considering Numbers 11 as the primary typological foundation for the Legend of the LXX. Work in the Legend itself would also likely benefit from a more integrated approach to the three earliest Hellenistic versions of the Legend; what the Legend as a whole is accomplishing and what individual agendas the different versions (vis-à-vis comparison to the other two) are pursuing may yet benefit from such a interpretative approach (as utilized here). Additionally, in-roads have appeared between Hellenistic and rabbinic conceptions of the Legend of the LXX and the Sanhedrin as well.

VI. Reception History and the Genealogy of Jewish and Christian Doctrines.

Finally, the methodological approach here of revisiting pre-modern sources for their heuristic fruit will perhaps encourage further work like it. Where Childs's Exodus commentary opened exciting interpretative possibilities, its necessarily separate sections also limited its capacity for integrative understanding, especially in tracing the interpretative options and decisions taken across the centuries. While narrower and limited in many ways, perhaps when applied to particularly influential passages, the approach taken here may bear particular fruit in tracing

[4] Ibid., 13.

the intersection between theology and biblical exegesis. In particular, I hope this study will benefit those tracing the genealogy of the doctrines of inspiration and ordination (both in their Jewish and Christian forms). Given the impact Numbers 11 has on biblical interpretation, its framing of the "powers" undergirding Mosaic authority and Mosaic interpretation may help others working to set those powers in constructive tension. Likewise, although I have not stressed it as much, Numbers 11 has a deep history in influencing concepts of ordination both in Christian and Jewish tradition. My own conviction is that it not only acts as a "source text" to draw from, but a starting point, a theological grammar for all future conversations of what ordination means (with its underlying assumption that it is elders/presbyters who are ordained).

"And they added no more…And they did not cease…"

In gathering the elders, our viewpoint has both become focused and our horizons expanded. Their transformation into Mosaic authorities began in the biblical text and has risen through the centuries, and although occluded for a time (still present yet unseen), their appearance again may well be at hand, with extended benefits in multiple areas. In gathering them, we see them. In seeing them, we see so much more—their life and their impact. Where their depicted persons surely stopped speaking millennia ago, their voices have surely not ceased.

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