

מימינו אשדת למו and קרנים מידו לו: Reading Habakkuk 3:4 and Deuteronomy 33:2 in Light of One Another*

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Abstract: Habakkuk 3:4 and Deuteronomy 33:2 have long resisted straightforward interpretation. However, both verses apparently belong to the same tradition of southern theophany and both share a similar syntax and imagery. This short paper argues that both verses can be used to shed light on each other, and that the unusual syntax of the MT preserves an ancient idiomatic expression.

Habakkuk 3:4 and Deuteronomy 33:2 are among the most difficult cruces in the Hebrew Bible. Both verses occur in poetic compositions belonging to the tradition of southern theophany, in which YHWH, in the role of the divine warrior, marches in power from the South.¹ Moreover, in addition to comparable imagery and themes, both Hab 3:4 and Deut 33:2 also share a similar syntax: a prepositional phrase consisting of two nouns one of which has prefixed (ן)ג, followed by -ל + pronominal suffix. However, the use of the preposition מן without a verbal complement is felt to be problematic, and both ancient and modern interpreters alike have struggled with the meaning of these cola.²

Be that as it may, the striking similarity of the two verses has long been recognised, and as early as 1896 C. J. Ball described the cola as synonymous.³ However, whereas discussions

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¹ Various identified as Seir, Sinai, Paran and Teman; cf. Deut 33:2–3; Judg 5:4–5 (cf. Ps 68:7–8); Hab 3; and the theophany from Kuntillet Ajrud (*Kajr* 4.2) (Zeev Meshel, *Kuntillet 'Ajrud (Horvat Teman): An Iron Age II Religious Site on the Judah-Sinai Border* [ed. Liora Freud; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2012], 110–14).

² While מן is relatively uncommon in such verbless prepositional phrases, it is not entirely unattested: cf. כִּי־מִמְךָ הַכֹּל, “for all things (are) from you” (1 Chr 29:14).

³ C. J. Ball, “The Blessing of Moses (Deut xxxiii)” *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* 18 (1896): 119; cf. I. L. Seeligmann, “A Psalm from Pre-Regal Times,” *VT* 14 (1964): 77; Baruch Margulis, “Gen. XLIX 10/Deut. XXXIII 2–3: A New Look at Old Problems,” *VT* 19 (1969): 210, who wrote of Deut 33:2, “[v]erses 2–3a are a self-contained unit, probably a fragment of an archaic poem, of which Hab. iii 3 ff. is in part a variant, in part a free elaboration.”

of these verses have been dominated by the lexical and semiotic issues involved with interpreting the problematic words קרנים (Hab 3:4) and אשרת (Deut 33:2), few have attempted to grapple with the difficult syntax (see below). Ultimately, however, the similarity of syntax in the MT suggests that we may be dealing with an idiomatic expression, according to which the directional prepositions (ן)מ and ל- could be coordinated to convey the sense “to return,” or “to surround.”⁴ Consequently, in what follows I argue that in both verses the use of these mutually opposing prepositions was deliberate and meaningful, and calculated within their analogous poetic contexts to describe the nature of the radiance that surrounds the deity.

Habakkuk 3:4

This verse has typically been read as an ABC climactic tricolon. Thus, in the NRSV it is translated:

A.	The brightness was like the sun;	ונגה כאור תהיה
B.	rays came forth from his hand,	קרנים מידו לו
C.	where his power lay hidden.	ושם חביון עזה

However, as will be argued below, it may also be possible to re-interpret the verse, in order to emphasise the tension inherent in the prepositions in the second colon, in which case, the verse may be read as follows:

A.	(His) brightness is like light;	ונגה כאור תהיה
B.	Rays from his hand surround him,	קרנים מידו לו
C.	And there is his glorious veil	ושם חביון עזה

As such, the tricolon has an envelope structure whereby cola A and C describe the radiance which is introduced in colon B.

Colon A: ונגה כאור תהיה

The feminine form of the verb תהיה has occasioned suspicion, owing to the fact that the noun נגה appears to be masculine (note that in 2 Sam 22:13 the suffixed form is נגהם, rather than the expected נגתם⁵). However, it has been countered that in no other context is the noun actually demonstrated to be masculine.⁶ Moreover, the related noun נגהות, “lustre, brightness,” in Isa 59:9 is apparently feminine. In any case, the basic meaning of the colon is essentially clear.

Colon B: קרנים מידו לו

The interpretation of the second colon is a more complex task. Setting aside for the moment the difficult question of קרנים, a literal translation of this verse results in the awkward expres-

⁴ I define “idiomatic” according to the definition found in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as: an expression “natural to a native speaker.” As such, it is accepted usage rather than strict literal sense or grammaticality that is instrumental for determining the meaning of the expression. Consequently, it is not necessary for the syntagm to be widely attested, nor is it necessary for the nouns to be identical in both verses. What matters is the coordination of the two prepositions, and that this semantic relationship could be readily understood by the linguistic community within which (and for whom) these cola were composed.

⁵ Cf. Joüon, §94.e; GKC §95.a.

⁶ Cf. J. J. M. Roberts *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah: A Commentary* (OTL; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 134, n. 21.

sion: “קרנים from his hand to him.” This difficulty is usually resolved by treating לו as a reflexive pronoun and supplying a verb: “קרנים (are) from his very own hand.”⁷ This is evidently how the Greek and Latin translators understood the verse: LXX: κέρατα ἐν χερσὶν αὐτοῦ; Barbarini (Barb.): κέρατα ἐκ χειρὸς αὐτοῦ; Vulgate (Vg.): *cornua in manibus eius*; although, the LXX and Vg. apparently read בידו rather than מידו, and left the problematic לו untranslated. Modern commentators have often resorted to (at times quite drastic) emendation.

Baruch Margulis, for example, proposed the transposition of כאור and מידו and the insertion of הליכות עולם לו from the end of v. 6 to supply the referent of שם in the final colon:⁸

<p>“A glow issues from His hand He is crowned (lit. “has”) with rays like the sun His procession is eternal There his ‘strength’ is hidden”</p>	<p>וננה [מידו] תהיה קרנים [כאור] לו הליכות עולם לו ושם חביון עזה</p>
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Michael O’Connor proposed a revocalisation based on the deletion of the two *matres lectionis* from מידו, and the redivision of the remaining consonantal text of the MT to restore מדלו which he understood to be a Hebrew cognate of Ugaritic *mdl* “lightning-bolt”:⁹

<p>“The radiance of His lightning is like the beams of the light The name¹¹ of the covering is His Strength”</p>	<p>וננה¹⁰ כאור תהיה קרנים מדלו ושם־חביון עזה</p>
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And Nili Shupak, finding echoes of Egyptian solar imagery in the verse, preferred to see the *lāmed* as a genitive and suggested the deletion of the *mēm* in מידו as dittography, reading קרנים ידו (תהיה) לו, “his hand will be rays.”¹²

By far the most extensive emendation, however, is that of Albright, who revised almost the entire verse:¹³

<p>“<Yahweh> attacked like a bull (?) Provided with tossing horns Rejoicing in the day of His triumph”</p>	<p><יהוה> יננה צאבר (?) תהיה קרנים מידו <ת> לו ושמח ביום עזה</p>
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Yet, even after such extensive revision, most translators have continued to struggle with the meaning of this colon and have felt the need to paraphrase the verse.

At the heart of this difficulty, the dual noun קרנים has necessarily played an important role in determining the overall meaning of the colon. Interpretations have tended to follow one of three alternatives: (1) קרנים = “(animal) horns”: This option is reflected in both the Greek

⁷ Modern translations include: NRSV “come forth from”; JPS “gives off rays on every side”; NIV and ESV “flashed from”.

⁸ Baruch Margulis, “The Psalm of Habakkuk: A Reconstruction and Interpretation,” *ZAW* 82 (1970): 414–15.

⁹ Michael P. O’Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 234–35.

¹⁰ Note the emendation of ננה to *ננהה; cf. ננהות, “lustre, brightness” (Isa 59:9), and the inversion of the clauses in the English translation. Even so, this reconstruction is rendered highly unlikely by the presence of the preposition in the middle of a construct chain.

¹¹ On the interpretation of שם as name, see below.

¹² Nili Shupak, “God from Teman and Egyptian Sun God: A Reconsideration of Habakkuk 3:3–7” *JANES* 28 (2001): 105.

¹³ W. F. Albright, “The Psalm of Habakkuk,” in *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy Dedicated to T. H. Robinson*, (ed. Harold H. Rowley; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1950), 11, 12.

(κέρατα) and Latin (*cornua*) and is accepted by many modern translations.¹⁴ Advocates of this reading generally assume a Canaanite background for the verse, citing literary and iconographic evidence from Ugarit and the ancient Near East.¹⁵ According to this reading, עִזָּה in the next colon is understood to be thematically related to קרניים as a reference to the deity's power.¹⁶ (2) קרניים = "lightning": This reading likewise assumes a Canaanite and wider Near Eastern background to the verse, this time imagining the Storm-God holding a two (or three) pronged shaft of lightning.¹⁷ While this proposal allows a certain degree of harmonisation within the tricolon, the reader is left to wonder in what sense the deity's power could be "hidden"¹⁸ if it is contained within the shaft of lightning in his hand. Moreover, it should be noted that nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible is קרניים used with the sense of lightning.¹⁹ (3) קרניים = "rays of light":²⁰ This interpretation requires closer consideration. First, it should be noted that while in the Hebrew Bible the noun קֶרֶן is nowhere used with the sense of "rays" or "light," in the immediate context of Hab 3:4 some sort of luminary imagery, paralleling ננה and הורר in the preceding cola, seems apposite. Consequently, קרניים in Hab 3:4 has often been compared to the cognate verb קָרַן in Exod 34:29–30. The interpretation of this verb has also attracted much attention, with opinion divided between those who understand it to mean that the skin of Moses' face spouted horns,²¹ and those who understand it to mean the skin of Moses' face had a shining appearance.²²

¹⁴ Cf. Albright, "The Psalm of Habakkuk," 11–12; Jack M. Sasson, "Bovine Symbolism in the Exodus Narrative," *VT* 18 (1968), 386; Theodore Hiebert, *God of My Victory: The Ancient Hymn in Habakkuk 3* (HSM 38; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 18; Kedar-Kopfstein, B. 2004. 'Qeren'. In G. J. Botterweck, H. Ringgren and H. Fabry (eds.) *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* Vol. XIII. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 7.188. 167–74; Robert D. Haak, *Habakkuk* (Leiden, New York: E. J. Brill, 1992), 86–88. Dahood took a slightly different view and interpreted קָרַן as wings, but the comparative basis of this interpretation has been convincingly refuted by Lipinski (cf. Haak, *Habakkuk*: 86)

¹⁵ E.g. the horns depicted on the Baal stele from Ugarit. Louvre AO 15.775 = RS 4.427 (image reproduced in Mark S. Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle: Volume 1: Introduction with Text Translation and Commentary of KTU 1.1–1.2* [Leiden; E.J. Brill, 1994], 107); cf. Haak, *Habakkuk*: 87–88. Gary Rendsburg also accepts the reading קרניים = "horns"; although interprets the imagery against Egyptian royal iconography (Gary A. Rendsburg, "Moses as Equal to Pharaoh," in Gary M. Beckman and Theodore J. Lewis, eds., *Text, Artifact, and Image: Revealing Ancient Israelite Religion* [Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2006], 216–18, esp. nn. 46–47).

¹⁶ Cf. Haak, *Habakkuk*: 87; David Tsumura, "Janus Parallelism in Hab. iii 4," *VT* 54 (2004): 125; repr. *VT* 63 (2013): 113–16, notes that the word pair אַז and קָרַן occurs two other times in the Hebrew Bible (1 Sam 2:10; Ps 89:18), and both times קָרַן clearly means "horn."

¹⁷ Eaton's reconstruction reads:

"And a glitter as of lightning (כֹּאֵר) appears,
Twin prongs which project form his hand,—
Even there is the covering of his power!"

J. H. Eaton, "The Origin and Meaning of Habakkuk 3," *ZAW* 6 (1964), 145, 148; cf. O'Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*: 234–35; Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 134–35.

¹⁸ On the interpretation of חִבְיִין, see below.

¹⁹ קָרַן is the more common noun, especially in the context of theophany, cf. Exod 19:16; 2 Sam 22:15 = Ps 18:15; Ps 97:4; Zech 9:14.

²⁰ E.g. Theodor H. Gaster, "On Habakkuk 3,4," *JBL* 62 (1943), 345; cf. David Tsumura, "Janus Parallelism in Hab. iii 4," 124–28, who understands קרניים Hab 3:4 to signify both horns and light (more on which below).

²¹ Cf. William H. Propp, "The Skin of Moses' Face—Transfigured or Disfigured?" *CBQ* 49 (1987): 375–86; Rendsburg, "Moses as Equal to Pharaoh," 216–18, esp. nn. 46–47.

²² Cf. Menahem Haran, "The Shining of Moses' Face: A Case Study in Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Iconography," in W. B. Barrick and J. R. Spencer, eds., *The Shelter of Elyon, Essays on Ancient*

Here, too, the textual witness is mixed: the Vg. (apparently following Aquila)²³ translated the verb קרן with the adjective *cornutus*, rendering the line *cornuta erat facies sua*, “his face was horned,” while the LXX supplied the verb δεδόξασται, “it shone” (which is typically used in the LXX for כָּבַד); although it has been suggested that this may reflect an interpretative choice determined by the context.²⁴ Nevertheless, there is evidence that later Jewish tradition also understood קרן in Exod 34:29–30 to mean that Moses’ face “shone.” Thus, 2 Cor 3:12–18, which is almost certainly influenced by the LXX (cf. δόξαν; esp. v. 18), refers to the veiling of Moses’ glory. Similarly, the Targums refer to the זיו, “splendour” of Moses’ face: *Tg. Onq.* סני זיו יקרא דאפודי, “the resplendent glory of his face increased”; *Tg. Ps.-J.* אשתבהר זיו איקונין דאנפוי, “the resplendent visage of his face shone”; *Tg. Neof.* נהר זיו איקרהון דאפוי, “the resplendent glory of his face shone.”

Further still, explicit references are found in Philo of Alexandria, who supplies an extended description of Moses’ radiant appearance in his *Life of Moses* 2.70, in which Moses’ face is described as “shining like the sun” (ἡλιοειδοῦς φέγγους ἀπαστράπτοντος), and in *Sifre Zutta*, which, in a midrash on Num 27:20, explicitly identifies the קרן of Exod 34:29–30 with the קרנים of Hab 3:4, describing them as בקרנים שיוצאין מנגלגל המה, “like the ‘rays’ (קרנים) that come from the wheel of the sun.”²⁵ As observed by J. J. M. Roberts, the weight of this exegetical tradition cannot be easily dismissed.²⁶

However, the basis for seeing קרן as an allusion to “rays of light” is not limited to late interpretations only. Seth Sanders and David Tsumura have collated considerable evidence for the existence of an association between horns and light in ancient Mesopotamia and Ugarit. The most compelling evidence comes in the form of a pair of Mesopotamian astronomical texts, which include a lexicographical treatment of the Sumerian word *SI*, in which it is explicitly stated that *SI* can mean both “horn” (*qarnu*) and “radiance, shining, light” (*šarūru*).²⁷ However, this evidence is not entirely without problems. From the data amassed by both Sanders and Tsumura it is evident that the equation between horns and light is predominantly conceived in relation to the moon (or in the case of *Enūma Anu Enlil*, cited by Sanders, a solar eclipse). Consequently, the most obvious inference is that קרן/*qarnu* represents a metaphorical expression referring to the “horns” of the crescent moon.²⁸ Be that as it may, Sanders has observed that in

Palestinian Life and Literature in Honor of G. W. Ahlström (JSOTsup 31; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 159–73; Brevard S. Childs, *Exodus: A Critical and Theological Commentary*, (OTL; London: Westminster Press, 1974), 609–10; Seth L. Sanders, “Old Light on Moses’ Shining Face,” *VT* 52 (2002): 405.

²³ Cf. Samuel R. Driver, *The Book of Exodus in the Revised Edition: With Introduction and Notes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911), 375.

²⁴ Cf. Jack M. Sasson, “Bovine Symbolism in the Exodus Narrative,” 386.

²⁵ Cf. Jacob Neusner, *Sifre Zutta to Numbers* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2009), 231. The *Sifre Zutta* passage is particularly interesting insofar as it is an elaboration on the הוֹד, “glory,” of Moses, and therefore has a clear resonance with Hab 3:3. Note that the interpretation קרן = “shine,” was not universally accepted in the midrashic tradition with some sources understanding Exod 34:29–30 to mean that Moses’ face was horned—cf. Rimon Kasher, “The Mythological Figure of Moses in light of Some Unpublished Midrashic Fragments,” *JQR* 88 (1997): 19–42; Sanders, “Old Light on Moses’ Shining Face,” 405, and n. 14.

²⁶ Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 134.

²⁷ Sanders, “Old Light on Moses’ Shining Face,” *VT* 52 (2002): 400–6; cf. William H. Propp, “The Skin of Moses’ Face—Transfigured or Disfigured?” *CBQ* 49 (1987): 381. In CT 26 43 viii 5–10, *SI* is also associated with two other terms connoting light: *šētu* and *nūru* (cf. Sanders, “Old Light on Moses’ Shining Face,” 403, and n. 9).

²⁸ This is seen particularly clearly in the Eblaite incantation text cited by Tsumura, “Janus Parallelism in Hab. iii 4,” 126.

CT 26 43 viii 5–10 the semantic range of *SI* is expanded to include both the affective: *šuharruru*, “to daze,” and the physical: *arāmu*, “to mask,”²⁹ suggesting that the metaphorical conception extended beyond the physical appearance of the moon to encompass abstract qualities associated with its radiance.

In light of this comparative evidence, Tsumura has suggested that Hab 3:4 could be interpreted as a Janus parallelism, in which קרניים should be understood to refer to *both* “horns,” and “light” (and indeed such multivalence lies close to the heart of metaphor).³⁰ However, Sanders put the case even more strongly:

The early first-millennium Mesopotamian astronomical and lexical sources attest to an ancient understanding of light as material which explains the crux of Moses’ shining face. Moses’ face could, quite literally, *radiate* horns, and the need to translate the term as *either* divine radiance *or* physical protuberance is merely a side-effect of our conceptual categories, irrelevant to ancient Israelite ideas.³¹

Consequently—however one opts to construe the imagery of Exod 34:29–30 and Hab 3:4—there can be little doubt that such figurative language was at home in the ancient Near East.

The dual ending (קרניים) in the MT of Hab 3:4 need not be considered particularly problematic;³² the imagery might be of radiance flowing from both above and below a closed hand, or else it may be that the suffix was supplied reflexively owing to the fact that horns (not to mention the subsequent יד, “hand”) are typically found in pairs.³³ Alternatively, and this is perhaps a preferable solution, it might be that קרניים was originally vocalised as a substantive masculine plural participle קרניים, i.e. “the radiations” (cf. the *hip’il* participle מִקְרָן, Ps 69:32), which was later misunderstood and repointed as a dual noun in subsequent editions.³⁴ In any case, it should be noted that in the *Sifre Zuta* passage cited above, the dual form is used of rays issuing from the surface of the sun, a context in which the dual suffix can hardly be limited to a literal pair.

Returning to the question of syntax, the next difficulty relates to the meaning of מִיָּדוֹ. Following the interpretation קרניים = “rays,” it is tempting to read this as “rays (emanated) from his hand.”³⁵ However, if that is in fact what the verse describes, the omission of the verb (e.g. שָׁלַח, יָרַד, יָצָא, or even in the context זָרַח, cf. Deut. 33:2a) is surprising. As noted above, the LXX and Vg. apparently read בִּידוֹ in accordance with the expected conventions of a descriptive nominal clause. But, as attractive as it may be, this solution is not satisfactory: the witness of Barb. and the virtually identical syntax in Deut 33:2 attest to the plausibility of the MT’s reading. Furthermore, given that the construction לוֹ... (מִן) is the more difficult reading, it is not easy to see how it could have entered the text.

It is possible, however, that this perceived difficulty may have arisen due to the manner in which subsequent translators have tended to punctuate the text. That is, it is generally assumed that קרניים is the subject of the clause and מִיָּדוֹ is the predicate, while לוֹ functions as a reflexive pronoun. Consequently, there is a tendency to separate לוֹ and treat it as though it were periph-

²⁹ Sanders, “Old Light on Moses’ Shining Face,” 403, and n. 9.

³⁰ Tsumura, “Janus Parallelism in Hab. iii 4,” 126.

³¹ Sanders, “Old Light on Moses’ Shining Face,” 405. Italics in the original.

³² Pace Rendsburg, “Moses as Equal to Pharaoh,” 217, n. 47.

³³ Note that Tsumura’s Janus parallelism would also supply a suitable explanation for the dual ending.

³⁴ This confusion probably arose due to the fact that קָרָן usually takes the feminine plural קָרָנוֹת.

³⁵ There is no *prima facie* reason to translate יָד as anything other than “hand.” Attempts to read יָד as “side” are championed by those who prefer to read קרניים as a reference to horns. If “rays” is deemed an acceptable translation of קרניים, then the image is simply of light emanating from the deity.

eral or ancillary to the clause.³⁶ However, an alternative possibility is that קרנים מידו could be treated together as a noun phrase forming the subject of the clause, and that לו could be understood as the predicate. This is distinct from the genitival relationship that would ordinarily be expressed through the construct state; rather, the preposition מן designates the source of the קרנים (i.e. “rays from his hand”).

It is possible to interpret this latter alternative in either of two ways. The first option is to translate the preposition -ל as a genitive: “the rays from his hand (are) his own.” This option has found some support in modern translations.³⁷ The second option is to emphasise the push-and-pull dynamic implied by the directional connotations inherent in the two prepositions.³⁸ In which case, the literal expression: “the rays from his hand (are) to him,” might be paraphrased “the rays from his hand (return) to him.” The imagery is of rays flowing continually—both away from and back to—the divine presence. It should also be noted that there is no implicit direction for the flow of radiance. Consequently, this colon may reflect an idiomatic expression, effectively meaning: “the rays from his hand surround him.”³⁹

This expression has a more active sense than the analogous phrase ונגה לו סביב, “and brightness was around it” (Ezek 1:27), and emphasises the deity as the source of radiance.⁴⁰

Colon C: ושם חביון עזה

The appeal of the latter interpretation of Colon B is that it also lessens the difficulty of the final colon. This colon is usually interpreted: “And there his strength was hidden.” However, there is also considerable disagreement in the versions regarding this colon, and it too has been subjected to extensive emendation.⁴¹ Some, following the LXX (ἔθετο) and Syriac (ܠܡܨܚܪ), restore the verb √שׂים, “put, place,”⁴² while others have preferred to read the noun שׂים, “name.”⁴³

Andersen, following the MT in reading the locative particle שׁם “there,” was inclined to see “heaven” in the preceding verse as the most suitable referent for שׁם. However, if Colon B is understood to describe the radiance surrounding the deity, then קרנים may itself be a suitable referent. Accordingly, שׁם should be understood to function as a deictic particle relating directly to the preceding colon.⁴⁴

³⁶ A few have grappled with the meaning of לו; cf. Haak, *Habakkuk*, 83. However, Haak’s method was to separate it from the colon, treating it instead as the introduction to the next Colon:

“The earth is full, indeed, of brightness, true light!

Horns come from his hands.

To him, indeed, there is crawler, his strength.”

³⁷ Cf. Shupak, “God from Teman and Egyptian Sun God,” 105.

³⁸ That is if the preposition -ל is understood to have the sense “to, towards,” e.g. בא לְעִיר, “he came to the city” (1 Sam 9:12); ויָשָׁב לוֹ אֶת שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ, “and he returned his wife Sarah to him” (Gen 20:14; note that in this example לוֹ designates the object of the verb √שוב, “to return”), and מן is understood to refer to the source of origin, e.g. הָיְהוָה מִסִּינַי בָּא, “YHWH comes from Sinai” (Deut 33:2); אֱלֹהֵי מִתְיָמָן, “God comes from Teman” (Hab 3:3).

³⁹ Indeed Margulis may have been hinting at this interpretation when he noted that the Peshitta has ܠܡܨܚܪ, “which may have preserved a variant (and superior?) reading סביבו” (Margulis, “The Psalm of Habakkuk,” 414, note b).

⁴⁰ Cf. Ezek 1:4; note the care taken by Ezekiel to avoid anthropomorphisms esp. Ezek 1:26–28.

⁴¹ Patterson, “The Psalm of Habakkuk,” 169 argues for extensive emendation, deleting *mēm* and treating *šîn* as a relative particle preceded by a pleonastic *wāw*.

⁴² Cf. Roberts, *Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, 135.

⁴³ O’Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure*, 234–35 reads “The name of his covering is ‘his strength’”; cf. Patterson, “The Psalm of Habakkuk”: 168.

⁴⁴ An analogous use of שׁם is found in Exod 20:21 הַשֵּׁם הָאֱלֹהִים אשר־שׁם הערפל אל־הערפל אשר־שׁם האלהים, “And Moses

The *hapax legomenon* חִבְיִין has also occasioned some difficulty. The LXX reads ἀγάπησιν, presumably derived from √חִבַּב, “love”; however, this makes little sense in the context and may reasonably be disregarded. An alternative, proposed by Cyrus Gordon, is that חִבְיִין, together with חִבִּי (which the MT has pointed as a *qal* imperative) in Isa 26:20, should be identified with the horned deity *hby*, who is apparently named in an Ugaritic narrative concerning the inebriation of El (KTU 1.114, r. 18–20).⁴⁵ However, Scott Noegel has recently challenged this interpretation of KTU 1.114, r. 18–20 (and, by extension, Hab 3:4 and Isa 26:20), arguing that the conventional interpretation of the Ugaritic passage directly contravenes what we understand of ancient Near Eastern demonology and social perceptions of the effects of alcohol.⁴⁶ Consequently, Noegel has argued that rather than a DN, *hby* should be identified instead with the Akkadian root *hbb* “to murmur, babble,” and understood as an epithet of El. In light of this difficulty it is helpful to consider other explanations for חִבְיִין.

The most common solution is to identify both חִבְיִין and חִבִּי with the Heb. root √חִבָּא, “to withdraw, hide,” which occasionally appears in the form of a לִיָּה verb √חִבְהָ.⁴⁷ Significantly, this same root (חִבָּא/חִבִּי/חִבְהָ) is attested in both Talmudic and Targumic literature, and the noun חִבְיִינָא, “hiding place,” is attested in Tg. Cant. 2:14, and Tg. Qoh. 10:20.⁴⁸ The nature of the relationship between Heb. √חִבָּא/חִבְהָ and its later Aramaic cognates is not entirely clear, but in light of the Aramaic evidence and the witness of Tg. Jon.: מִטְמָרָא, √טִמְרָא “to hide,” and Vg. *abscondita*, “was hidden,” it seems satisfactory to interpret חִבְיִין as a noun meaning “hiding place,” and to translate the clause along the lines: “where his power lay hidden.” Note, however, that HALOT, interpreting חִבְיִין as “covering, veil,” proposed the reading “his strong covering,” i.e. “there (was) his strong covering,” which makes good sense as a description of the radiance emanating from and surrounding the divinity.

Finally, Nahum Waldman has demonstrated that עֹז often occurs together with other terms for “majesty, glory” and may carry similar connotations.⁴⁹ Accordingly, it is possible to translate the colon: “And there (i.e. contained within the rays) was his glorious veil.”⁵⁰

Deuteronomy 33:2

מִיְמִינוֹ אֲשֶׁרֶת לְמוֹ

In the syntactically parallel clause in Deut 33:2, it is אֲשֶׁרֶת that is/are said to emanate from God’s “right (hand)” (מִיְמִינוֹ). The crux, אֲשֶׁרֶת, has attracted numerous attempts at clarification and emendation, the most plausible of which have been conveniently summarised by Gary Rendsburg and there is no need to review the secondary literature again here.⁵¹

drew near to *the cloud where God was.*” In this verse the referent of שָׁמַיִם is unambiguously the cloud surrounding and concealing the deity. In Hab 3:4 the conjunction might be understood to function in a similar manner to אֲשֶׁר in Exod 21:21, insofar as it introduces a dependent clause.

Alternatively, as suggested to me by Dr. Llewelyn (personal communication), the deictic particle might also be part of the performance and does not need to refer internally to the text.

⁴⁵ Cyrus H. Gordon, “*Hby*, Possessor of Horns and a Tail,” *UF* 18 (1986): 129–32, esp. 130; cf. Rendsburg, “Moses as Equal to Pharaoh,” 217, n. 47; P. Xella, “Haby,” *DDD*: 377.

⁴⁶ Scott B. Noegel, “He of Two Horns and a Tail,” *UF* 38 (2006): 537–42.

⁴⁷ Cf. *GKC*, §75 00–qq.

⁴⁸ For both the verb and the noun cf. Jastrow.

⁴⁹ For the translation of עֹז as *glory* or *majesty*, rather than strength see Nahum M. Waldman, “A Note on Ezekiel 1:18,” *JBL* 103 (1984): 616, n. 23.

⁵⁰ Cf. JPS, which translates עֹזָה as “His glory.”

⁵¹ Gary A. Rendsburg, “Hebrew ’šdt and Ugaritic *išdym*,” *JNSL* 8 (1980): 81–84.

In light of the above reconstruction of Hab 3:4, it is interesting to return to C. J. Ball's lexical proposal, identifying אֲשַׁר with the Syriac √אֲשַׁר, "to pour, to stream."⁵² Ball noted that אֲשַׁר is frequently used to denote the pouring out of light and, as such, he saw this colon as synonymous with Hab 3:4, translating the colon: "at His right He had streaming rays."⁵³ This interpretation seems to be supported by Rendsburg's identification of a possible Ugaritic cognate *išdym* in UT8 (= KTU 1.45), a mythological text apparently dealing with the sun goddess Špš.⁵⁴ As Rendsburg notes, the apparently similar imagery of both Deut 33:2 and KTU 1.45 "[is] too close to be accidental."⁵⁵

Finally, in Deut 33:2 the pronoun used is the (archaic) 3mp pronominal suffix לָמוֹ, "to them." The Targums apparently understood this as לָנוּ, "to us."⁵⁶ In the context, either reading is plausible; but not within the idiomatic reflexive sense described above. It is, therefore, interesting to note that the LXX has the m.s. genitive pronoun μετ' αὐτοῦ, "with him," and this reading may in fact be superior, as לָמוֹ could easily be the result of dittography from the preceding line (וּזְרָחַ מִשְׁעִיר לָמוֹ) and the emendation לוֹ results in an even closer parallel with Hab 3:4.

According to this reconstruction, the colon may be translated along the lines:

streams (of light?) from his right (hand) surround him.

A Word on the Imagery

The imagery of divine radiance is at home amongst biblical descriptions of the deity; e.g. Ezek 1:27–28; Psalm 104:2. But figurative and descriptive language associating the deity with luminosity also abounds throughout the ancient Near East.⁵⁷ The motif is well known from the solar cults of Egypt,⁵⁸ but it is in the Mesopotamian concept of *melammu*⁵⁹ and its cognates that the closest parallels for the imagery of Hab 3:4 and Deut 33:2 are to be found. *Melammu* has three principal characteristics: 1) it is frequently conceived as an aura surrounding a deity, individual, or object; 2) it is frequently associated (if not identified) with radiance;⁶⁰ 3) it is a representation of that deity's, individual's, or object's power. In the words of Irene Winter:

⁵² C. J. Ball, "The Blessing of Moses (Deut xxxiii)": 119.

⁵³ Ibid, 118. In his discussion of the syntax Ball suggested emending the 3.m.s. pronominal suffix to a 1.c.p. pronominal suffix (at least for Deut 33:2); cf. C. J. Ball, "The Blessing of Moses (Deut xxxiii)": 119–20.

⁵⁴ Rendsburg, "Hebrew 'šdt and Ugaritic *išdym*," 81–84.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 83.

⁵⁶ Cf. Tg. Onq.; this seems to be influenced by the targum's understanding that the subject of Deut 33:2 is the giving of the Law, which apparently derives from the same tradition as the MT's "fire of the law," and is therefore of questionable authority.

⁵⁷ Cf. Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 115–121.

⁵⁸ E.g. the propagandistic theophany of Thutmose III: "The Divine Nomination of Thut-mose III," translated by J. A. Wilson (*ANET*, 446–47).

⁵⁹ CAD M.2 (Chicago: Oriental Institute Chicago, 1977), 9–12.

⁶⁰ Shawn Aster has recently demonstrated that the equation of *melammu* with radiance is especially commonplace from the Sargonid period (beginning in 720 BCE) onward, Shawn Z. Aster, *The Phenomenon of Divine and Human Raidance in the Hebrew Bible and in Northwest Semitic and Mesopotamian Literature: A Philological and Comparative Study*, (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2006), 74–79.

Insofar as *melammu* is visible, radiant and has the power to overwhelm one's enemies, it conveys not just a passive physical aura, but a sort of vital force-field or energy contained within and emanating from the entity it surrounds.⁶¹

If it is understood that Hab 3:4 and Deut 33:2 preserve a reflex of a similar conception, then the pairing of קרניים and עז in Hab 3:4 may have been deliberately calculated to evoke connotations of strength and power.⁶²

Concluding Remarks

The remarkable similarity in the unusual syntax of both verses suggests that, in this instance, the MT may have preserved an idiomatic expression, according to which the directional prepositions (וּ)ב and -ל could be coordinated to convey the sense “to return,” or “to surround.” However, the difficulty attested in the versions in knowing how to translate these verses suggests that the essence of this expression had been lost by the time of translation (although echoes of it might be perceived). This impression is reinforced by the efforts of the versions to make the verses conform to more familiar grammatical conventions. Ultimately, the mutual intelligibility of Hab 3:4 and Deut 33:2 attests the centrality of luminary imagery in the theophany tradition and, from a text critical point of view, makes extreme emendations of either verse *a fortiori* unlikely.

⁶¹ Irene. J. Winter, “Radiance as and Aesthetic Value in the Art of Mesopotamia (With Some Indian Parallels),” in B. N. Saraswati, S. C. Malik, Madhu Khanna (eds.) *Art: The Integral Vision: A Volume of Essays in Fleicitation of Kapila Vatsyayan* (New Delhi: D. K. Printworld, 1994), 126.

⁶² Cf. Tsumura, “Janus Parallelism in Hab. iii 4,” 124–28. Dr. Llewelyn has observed (personal communication) that יד “hand,” may belong to the same conceptual domain as “horn” and “strength.” As such the imagery that unites the last two cola is associated with strength and power, and it is therefore quite likely that the “radiance, brightness” described in this tricolon belongs to the same conceptual matrix.