VULGATA IN DIALOGUE • 10 (2026) 61–74

Navigating Ambiguity: Jerome's Strategy in Translating the Blessing of Gad (Deut. 33:20-21)

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ABSTRACT • Because of its syntactic ambiguity and philological difficulty, the blessing of Gad (Deut. 33:20-21) represents a challenging text for both exegesis and translation. This article examines Jerome's strategies in navigating these difficulties, demonstrating how he combines a marked formal coherence with the Hebrew text – closely adhering to the lexical arrangement and word order of the Vorlage – with a hermeneutical resolution of syntactic ambivalences. In doing so, he integrates Jewish-rabbinic interpretive traditions into his translation with remarkable ease.

KEYWORDS • Jerome – Vulgate – Deuteronomy 33:20–21 – blessing of Gad – Hebrew text – rabbinic exegesis

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG • Aufgrund seiner syntaktischen Ambiguitäten und zahlreicher philologischer Hürden stellt der Gad-Segen (Dtn 33,20-21) einen herausfordernden Text für Exegese und Übersetzung dar. Der vorliegende Artikel untersucht Hieronymus' Strategien im Umgang mit diesen Schwierigkeiten und zeigt auf, wie er eine ausgeprägte formale Kohärenz zum hebräischen Text – also eine enge Anlehnung an die lexikalische Anordnung und Wortfolge der Vorlage – mit einer hermeneutischen Auflösung syntaktischer Ambivalenzen verbindet. Dabei integriert er bemerkenswert selbstverständlich jüdisch-rabbinische Auslegungstraditionen in seine Übersetzung.

SCHLAGWORTE • Hieronymus – Vulgata – Deuteronomium 33,20–21 – Gad-Segen – hebräischer Text – rabbinische Exegese

The blessings of Moses over the tribes of Israel in Deuteronomy 33 – complex and ambiguous in both content and syntax – present significant challenges for translators and exegetes. This is particularly true for the blessing of the tribe of Gad in Deut. 33:20-21, where syntactic ambiguities and highly polysemous imagery in the Hebrew text (HT) leave room for diverse interpretations.

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https://doi.org/10.25788/vidbor.v10i1.1610

This article analyzes the rendering of this passage in the Vulgate in greater detail, examining how Jerome reflects and resolves the difficulties and ambiguities of the HT. To this end, a detailed semantic and syntactic analysis of the Vulgate text of Deut. 33:20-21 will be conducted. Prior to this discussion, however, a brief look at the Hebrew text and its structure is required.

1 The blessing on Gad (Deut. 33:20-21) in the Hebrew Text

Following the narrative voice's introductory speech (v. 20a), which identifies Moses as the speaker of the blessing on Gad in Deut. 33:20b-21, the actual blessing opens with a *berakah* that is inherently ambivalent and can thus be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, it is possible to perceive the addressed tribe, Gad, as the subject of the sentence. This means the *berakah* is spoken over Gad itself, which in turn is defined by the participle *marḥîv* (מרחיב) – then to be interpreted *attributively* – as the 'one who makes wide', i.e. as a tribe that expands and secures its territory.[1]

On the other hand, however, it is possible to interpret the participle *marḥîv* as the subject and Gad as the (direct) object of the *berakah*. In this reading, the blessing is spoken over the one who 'expands' or 'makes wide' (מרחיב) Gad. Although not explicitly named, this can only refer to God,[2] who is praised for "widening" the tribe of Gad – or rather, Gad's territory.

In both cases, the "widening" of Gad does not (only) refer merely to a spatial enlargement of the land allotment or a territorial expansion, but also (and probably primarily) points to divine protection for the tribe and its territory – a protection that enables Gad to live an undisturbed life in its land without being constrained by its enemies.[3]

This is suggested by the two sentences in Deut. 33:20cd, which transform this introductory assertion about Gad into a metaphor: Gad is compared to a lion (לביא) that dwells permanently and peacefully (cf. שכן, v. 20c), i.e., settles its "widened" area, but nevertheless remains aggressive and capable of defense, i.e. able to tear (טרף) arm and head (v. 20d).[4] The (implicit) subject of both sentences is Gad, meaning that for the second of the two possibilities of reading the *berakah* in v. 20b presented above – i.e.

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1 Cf. Stefan Beyerle, *Der Mosesegen im Deuteronomium* (BZAW 250), Berlin-New York 1997, 219; Eckart Otto, *Deuteronomium 12–34. Zweiter Teilband: 23,16–34,12* (HThK.AT), Freiburg-u.a. 2017, 2253.

2 E. Otto translates: "Gesegnet sei Gad, der Raum verschafft…" ('Blessed be Gad, who provides space…; cf. Otto. *Deuteronomium*, 2213.), i.e. he understands Deut. 33:20b as a *berakah* pronounced over Gad; the participle מרחיב is taken attributively referring to Gad.

3 Cf. Beyerle, *Mosesegen*, 215; Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10–34:12* (WBC 6B), Nashville 2002, 853.

4 Cf. Beyerle, *Mosesegen*, 219; Otto, *Deuteronomium*, 2253.

the participle *marḥîv* refers to (God as) the one who makes Gad wide – a not explicitly marked subject change between v. 20b and v. 20cd (+ 21) must be presupposed.[5]

The next unit of the Gad-blessing, v. 21a-c, does not continue the lion metaphor of v. 20cd, but rather connects thematically, like v. 20cd, to the introductory *berakah* in v. 20b. The focus shifts back to Gad's "widened" (cf. v. 20b) territory – or more precisely, to Gad's own perspective on its land. Deut. 33:21a deals with a seeing (ראה) by Gad, which is directed towards a "first portion" or a "first" (ראשית) that was allotted to him (cf. לו). This statement can – on the one hand – be read as a depiction of Gad's own perception and evaluation of his inherited possession: Gad sees that a "first" (ראשית) has been allotted to him, i.e., a particularly outstanding and qualified share of the land.[6] Read this way, the phrase ראשית לו is syntactically interpreted as an (asyndetic) relative clause, dependent on וירא.

However, it is equally possible to evaluate ראשית לו as a (direct) object of ראה. Based on this assumption, the phrase depicts an act of "selecting" or "choosing" (ראה), and not an act of perception: Gad has "selected" (ראה) or chosen for himself a first portion (ראשית).[7] Read in this light, v. 21a could allude to Numb. 32, where the tribe of Gad – together with Reuben and half-Manasseh – successfully request the former territory of the two Amorite kings Sihon and Og east of the Jordan as their inheritance. And indeed, in this story Gad's territory is some kind of a "first portion", in the sense that Gad is (together with Reuben and half-Manasseh) the first tribe of Israel to be granted a share in the land.

Regardless of how Deut. 33:21a is actually interpreted, Gad's share of the land appears particularly qualified, which is further illustrated and/or substantiated in the syntactically and lexically difficult sentence in v. 21b. If one adheres to the transmitted wording of the MT, the qualification of Gad's inherited possession as a "first" (ראשית) in v. 21a is related to the fact that 'there' (שם), i.e., in Gad's territory, a 'piece of land' or 'portion' (חלקה) of a 'hidden lawgiver / potentate' (מחקק ספון) [8] is located.

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[5] This assumed, though not explicitly marked, shift of subject is sometimes taken as an argument that Gad should be the subject in v. 20b, and that the *berakah* in v. 20b is thus pronounced over Gad as the one "making space."

[6] Cf. Beyerle, *Mosesegen*, 215.

[7] Cf. Otto, *Deuteronomium*, 2253; Martin Rose, *5. Mose. Teilband 2: 5 Mose 1–11 und 26–34. Rahmenstücke zum Gesetzeskorpus* (ZBK 5.2), Zürich 1994, 581.

[8] *sāfūn* (ספון) is taken as a participle passive Qal (from ספן?), referring to *meḥōqēq*. It is often rendered as "hidden" (cf. Beyerle, *Mosesegen*, 225–226). If *meḥōqēq* is understood to refer to God, *sāfūn* would denote a divine presence within the territory of Gad – being "hidden" yet becoming tangible in the "widening" of Gad's territory and in the undisturbed and secure ("lion-like") settlement of the tribe (cf. v. 20). On this reading, the distinctiveness of Gad's territory is interpreted in religious terms. Alternatively, following Otto (*Deuteronomium*, 2253), *meḥōqēq* may be understood in reference to Gad itself, portraying Gad as "lawgiver"; thus, a prerogative otherwise associated with Judah in Gen. 49:10 would here be transferred to Gad. This interpretation is especially plausible if, as Otto suggests, *sāfūn* is removed on text-critical grounds (see below).

Deut. 33:21b is thus to be read as a nominal clause, whose subject is represented by the construct chain חלקת מחקק ספון ('portion of a hidden lawgiver'). The word ספון however can be interpreted as a Qal Passive Participle (m. sg.) of the verb ספן, which is most commonly translated as 'to hide, to cover'.[9] The participle is to be understood as attributively to the noun מחקק ('potentate, lawgiver').

The following sentence, v. 21c, then appears syntactically difficult. In case the MT is read uncorrected, the introductory verb, ויתא, is most reasonably to be connected with the (Aramaic!) verb אתא ('to come'). The subject is probably Gad (or the "hidden lawgiver" mentioned in v. 21b?). This makes the predicate of the sentence itself understandable: "He, i.e. Gad (or the hidden lawgiver?) came (ויתא)." What remains undetermined, however, is how this predicate relates to the phrase ראשי עם ('the heads of the people'). The most plausible interpretation is to take these as an (indirect?) object, but a preposition (אל, 'to', or עם 'with') that would in this case be expected here, is factually missing: "He (Gad) came (to / with) the heads of the people." Thus, the MT proves difficult (and can raise the suspicion of having been transmitted "incorrectly").

One possibility for making this difficult text more intelligible – an approach frequently employed since Robert Gordis[10] – lies in the assumption of a "material error of transposition"[11]. This leads to correcting the two consecutive words ספון and ויתא to ויתאספון ('and they assembled'):[12] Consequently, in v. 21bc Gad's inheritance is qualified as a "portion of a lawgiver, ruler", in which the heads of the people (of Israel) assemble. This likely can be interpreted as an allusion to the granting of the land east of the Jordan river (with the consent of all Israel), narrated in Numbers 32.[13]

It is interesting that the root ראש is found twice in v. 21a.c, reflecting a prominent position of the tribe, as on the one hand Gad's territory is qualified as ראשית and on the other hand the tribe itself (as a social entity) is ranked among the ראשי עם.[14]

The conclusion of the Gad saying is formed by the two sentences Deut. 33:21de, in which Gad remains the (implicit) subject. The tribe is acknowledged to have fulfilled the

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[9] Cf., e.g., *Beyerle*, Mosesegen, 224.

[10] Cf Gordis, Robert. *Critical Notes on the Blessing of Moses (Deut. XXXIII)*, JThS 34 (1933) 390–392, here 390–391. Cf. also Otto, *Deuteronomium*, 2219.

[11] Carmel McCarthy (ed.), *Deuteronomy* (BHQ 5), Stuttgart 2007, 164

[12] Cf. McCarthy, *Deuteronomy*, 164; Otto, *Deuteronomium*, 2219; this reconstructed reading is supposed to be supported by the rendering of Deut. 33:21 in the Septuagint, which at this point attests the formulation *συνηγμένων*. At the same time, Otto correctly observes that the Septuagint, by using the verb *συνάγω* – which is also attested in Deut. 33:5 LXX (as a rendering of אסף) – suggests a connection between these two verses: «Die LXX hat Dtn 33,21 im Horizont von Dtn 33,5 interpretiert» (Otto, *Deuteronomium*, 2219). Cf. also Christensen. *Deuteronomy*, 844. However, it remains to be asked whether the Septuagint, with its wording, actually "translates" and thus attests a verb ויתאספון in its Vorlage, or whether it rather offers an interpretive rendering of a text that is difficult to understand (e.g. … ויתא ספון…).

[13] Cf. Beyerle, *Mosesegen*, 216–217.

[14] Cf. Rose, *5. Mose*, 581.

righteousness of the Lord (יי צדקת v. 21d) and his ordinances (cf. משפטיו); i.e., Gad is characterized as a tribe that realizes the ideal of Israel's faithfulness to the Torah – and in this also responds reciprocally and adequately to the "widening" of its territory (cf. v. 20b).[15]

The brief review of the Hebrew text shows that the blessing in Deut. 33:20-21 is formulated in many places with syntactic ambiguity and also with open and allusive content, thus allowing numerous different interpretations.

2. The blessing on Gad in the Vulgate

With the multifaceted challenges of the Hebrew original in view, the following section examines how Jerome's translation choices in the Vulgate offer a decisive and philologically grounded interpretation of Gad's blessing. For this purpose, the two verses will be analyzed separately, beginning with a close reading of the Vulgate's rendering of Deut. 33:20.

a) A blessed, lion-like tribe (Deut. 33:20)

20a	*et Gad ait*	ולגד אמר	20a
20b	*benedictus in latitudine Gad*	ברוך מרחיב גד	20b

A first striking peculiarity of the Vulgate version is found in clause v. 20b, where Jerome's translation eliminates and unambiguously resolves the ambiguity observed in the Hebrew text. The Vulgate renders the phrase as *benedictus in latitudine Gad* ('blessed in the width (be) Gad') and thereby interprets the *berakah* unequivocally as a praise of *Gad*; that is, it clearly understands and marks the tribal name *Gad* as the subject of the sentence. Applying an analogous interpretation to the Hebrew text, the participle מרחיב would have to be read attributively, modifying the subject *Gad* (i.e., *Gad, the 'Widener'*).

The Vulgate, by contrast, translates the participle מרחיב with the adverbial phrase (of place or circumstance) *in latitudine* ('in width, in the expanse'). This modifies the predicate *benedictus (…) Gad* ('blessed [be] (…) Gad') by specifying the domain or sphere in which the blessing applies – namely the *width*, or *expanse* (of the tribe's territory). This expression, however, corresponds more closely to a hypothetical Hebrew במרחב than to the attested מרחיב of the Masoretic Text.

[15] Cf. Beyerle, *Mosesegen*, 223–224; Otto. *Deuteronomium*, 2253; Rose, *5. Mose*, 581.

In this rendering, the Vulgate shows no dependence on either the LXX or – insofar as can be determined – the *recentiores* or Jewish exegetical traditions.[16] As such, it apparently reflects Jerome's own genuine interpretation of Deut. 33:20.

20c	*quasi leo requievit*	כלביא שכן	20c
20d	*cepitque brachium et verticem*	וטרף זרוע אף־קדקד׃	20d

Regarding Deut. 33:20cd – the sentences containing the lion metaphor – it should first be noted that Jerome appears to translate the Hebrew Vorlage quite literally, even reproducing the word order almost exactly. However, this observation warrants further qualification through a closer examination of the clause's semantics and syntax.

Semantically, particular interest lies in the two verbs *requiescere* (v. 20c) and *capere* (v. 20d), which Jerome employs to translate the Hebrew שכן ('to dwell / encamp', v. 20c) and טרף ('to tear apart', v. 20d). While שכן (v. 20c) denotes a stable / permanent and "effective" dwelling in a specific location,[17] the Latin *requiescere* signifies 'to rest' or 'to repose' – either as a cessation of strenuous activity or as an internal, mental state of tranquility following exertion. Consequently the two verbs are semantically not entirely congruent; Jerome's rendering represents an interpretative choice rather than a strictly lexical ("mechanical") equivalence.

By choosing *requiescere*, Jerome may shift the emphasis to the *consequence* of the 'dwelling' that is central in the Hebrew text: the lion's (self-assured) repose. At the same time, this choice heightens the lion imagery, making it more vivid. Furthermore, it is striking that *requiescere* corresponds semantically very closely to the Greek ἀναπαύω, used by the LXX to render the Hebrew שכן in v. 20c.[18] Like its Latin counterpart, ἀναπαύω conveys the connotation of 'resting and recovering (after battle)' (cf. v. 20d LXX) rather than 'taking up (permanent) residence.' Yet it remains open whether Jerome adopted this interpretation/rendering of שכן directly from the LXX or arrived at a similar conclusion independently.

Finally, it is noteworthy that Jerome renders שכן as *requiescere* only twice in his translation: here in Deut. 33:20 and, also within the Blessing of Moses, in Deut. 33:12. By do-

[16] Deut. 33:20ab LXX reads: Καὶ τῷ Γὰδ εἶπεν· Εὐλογημένος ἐμπλατύνων Γάδ. The ambiguity already present in the Hebrew text is likewise reflected in the LXX, since Γάδ may be understood either as the subject – qualified by the attributive participle ἐμπλατύνων ('the one who enlarges') – or as the object of the blessing, referring instead to the one who enlarges Gad (i.e., God). (Cf. Mohrmann, Douglas C.. *Deuteronomion. A Commentary Based on the Text of Codex Alexandrinus* [Septuagint Commentary Series], Leiden 2023, 489).

[17] Cf. Beyerle, *Mosesegen*, 219.

[18] Cf. ὡς λέων ἀνεπαύσατο, συντρίψας βραχίονα καὶ ἄρχοντα (Deut. 33:20cd LXX). The LXX renders v. 20d as an aorist participle (συντρίψας) subordinate and anterior to v. 20c (rather than as an independent clause as in the Hebrew text), depicting Gad as a lion resting (ἀνεπαύσατο) after having crushed "arm and leader," i.e. the power of his enemies.

ing so, he marks (or preserves) a deliberate link with the blessing on Benjamin. In both verses, 'dwelling' (שכן) or 'resting' (*requiescere*) is predicated of a tribe; in Benjamin's case, it clearly refers to proximity to God and is causally linked to God's beneficent action toward the tribe. This theological conditioning of 'dwelling' or 'resting' is also implicitly invoked in v. 20 through the clear allusion to v. 12c. [19]

In Deut. 33:20d, the Hebrew verb טרף ('to tear apart') is rendered as *cepitque* ('and he seized / grasped'). Here again, the semantic fields of the two corresponding verbs are not entirely congruent: while טרף denotes the violent tearing of prey characteristic of a wild animal, the Latin *capere* ('to seize') appears somewhat more 'civilized'. It evokes dominance and control – perhaps 'strength in action' – but places less emphasis on the destructive violence of the act. Thus, Jerome's rendering is once again interpretative. Unlike in v. 20c, however, there is no significant parallel to the LXX, which translates the Hebrew טרף ('to tear apart') as συντρίβω ('to crush / shatter'), thereby evoking an act of violent, military force.

Regarding the *verbal syntax* of Jerome's rendering of Deut. 33:20cd, one first notes that the two coordinated *qatal* forms (וטרף שכן) are rendered by the two Latin perfects *requievit* and *cepit(que)*.[20] At first glance, Hebrew text and Latin translation appear strictly parallel. Yet a more nuanced analysis is required, particularly concerning verbal aspect:

In terms of *aspect*, the Hebrew *qatal* primarily expresses *completeness* rather than *pastness* of an action (perfective aspect). In the *x-qatal* clause of v. 20c, the focus likely lies on a state, i.e a stative condition or a permanent characteristic, rather than a completed past action: *Gad dwells (permanently)…* The following *we-qatal-x* clause in v. 20d most probably serves an intensifying or specifying function: the lion's (i.e. Gad's) tearing of arm and head is not a second, independent act following the first, but rather the manifestation and consequence of Gad's lion-like dwelling.[21]

In the Vulgate text, however, the perfect form *requievit* (v. 20c) can be interpreted aspectually either *aoristic-perfective* (denoting a completed past action) or *resultative* (emphasizing a present state resulting from a past act). If read *aoristically*, v. 20c would focus on a concluded act of resting by the lion-like tribe – contrasting with the stative, enduring dwelling of Gad in the MT. Under this interpretation, *requievit* (v. 20c) and the subsequent *cepitque* would both express completed actions, joined by *-que*: Gad lay down to rest like a lion – and then seized his prey. Such a reading would thus entail a pronounced shift in verbal aspect between the Hebrew and the Latin, despite their outward formal parallelism.

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[19] The first occurrence of שכן in Deut. 33 (v. 12) is rendered in the Vg., more literally, by *habitare*; a similar picture emerges in the LXX, where it is translated by κατασκηνόω.

[20] The enclitic *-que* in the Vg. replaces the more intensifying אף of the Hebrew text.

[21] Cf. Beyerle, *Mosesegen*, 219–220.

If, however, *requievit* (v. 20c) is read *resultatively*, the focus shifts to the *state* of repose in which Gad, like a lion, now exists – resulting from the prior act of resting. The perfect *cepitque* (v. 20d), though denoting an action, would then not indicate a temporally subsequent event, but rather a concomitant act associated with this state: Gad rests – yet this rest is not passive withdrawal, but the (self)confident repose of a predator, ever-ready to seize arm and head. In this *resultative* reading, the Latin rendering aligns closely with the verbal-aspectual structure of the Hebrew original, where the 'tearing' does not follow the 'dwelling' as a distinct past event but serves as a characteristic expression of Gad's lion-like, stative dwelling. Given Jerome's profound grasp of the syntactic valences of his Hebrew source, the second interpretation is clearly to be preferred: viewed thus, the Vulgate reflects an exceptionally precise rendering of the Hebrew syntax.

b) Gad's preeminence (Deut. 33:21ab)

The second verse of the Gad blessing, Deut. 33:21, is – as in the Hebrew text – not without its difficulties, particularly for translators. What distinguishes Jerome's rendering is, as already seen in Deut. 33:20, a close proximity to a *Vorlage* that clearly corresponds to, or closely approximates, the (proto)Masoretic Text. This thesis, however, requires further substantiation and detailed development through closer analysis.

21a	*et vidit principatum suum*	וירא ראשית לו	21a
21b	*quod in parte sua doctor esset repositus*	כי־שם חלקת מחקק ספון	21b

The first clause in the Vulgate of Deut. 33:21, *et vidit principatum suum* ('and he saw his preeminence'), appears to mirror the Hebrew *Vorlage* – seemingly even down to the word order. Jerome renders the Hebrew וירא ('and he saw') by *et vidit*. In this instance, the verbal aspect of the Hebrew *wayyiqtol-x* – expressing a (single) completed action within the narrative progress – is aptly captured by the Latin perfect.

Semantically, however, *videre* is somewhat narrower in this context than the Hebrew ראה. As shown above, the Hebrew term can denote not only the act of seeing or (evaluative) perceiving, but potentially also the 'selecting' or choosing of a preeminent piece of land. In the Latin text, the verb *videre* semantically restricts the action to the former: Gad's act of seeing or evaluative perception.[22] The object of this perception is described in the Hebrew text by the polysemous noun ראשית. Jerome renders this as *principatus* ('preeminence'), which he attaches as a direct object to the predicate *et vidit*. In doing so, he decides against the option of reading the element ראשית לו as a relative clause.

The noun *principatus* is attested only here in the Vulgate Pentateuch; and nowhere else in the Vulgate[23] does it serve as a translation for ראשית. Derived from the Latin *princeps*

[22] Cf. Lewis and Short, s.v. vĭdĕo.

[23] Cf. Jos. 11:10; Judg. 5:11; Ps 138:17; Prov. 29:2; Sir. 10:1; Isa. 9:6.

('first one', 'leader'), it can denote a first or highest rank (preeminence), sovereignty, rule, or a 'principality.' Unlike the Hebrew ראשית, which stands for Gad's territory and qualifies it as a 'first part', *principatus* refers to the rank or status of the tribe itself – a preeminence of which the tribe became aware according to Deut. 33:21a.

Deut. 33:21b then functions to illustrate and justify this eminent status (cf. the introductory conjunction *quod*): specifically, that within Gad's portion (*in parte sua*), *a* – or *the* – 'teacher' (*doctor*) was 'stored,' 'laid away,' or 'buried' (*repositus*): *quod in parte sua doctor esset repositus*. Beyond the question of its interpretation, the primary interest in this clause lies in its relationship to the Hebrew text.

21b	*quod*	כי	21b
		שם־	
	in parte sua	חלקת	
	doctor	מחקק	
	esset repositus	ספון	

First, Jerome aptly renders the conjunction כי ('for, because') with *quod* ('that, because'), yet he leaves the adverb שם ('there') untranslated. Furthermore, the Latin adverbial phrase *in parte sua* ('in his portion') corresponds to חלקת in the Hebrew text. In the Hebrew, this functions as the *nomen regens* in a construct relation with מחקק ('ruler, commander') as the *nomen rectum*; that is, the Hebrew text speaks of a 'portion of a ruler.'

Notably, Jerome expressly declines to reproduce this construct connection. Instead, he renders the *nomen regens* (חלקת) as if he had read the formulation בחלקתו ('in his portion' – *in parte sua*) in his source, thus supplying the possessive pronoun *sua*.[24] As for the *nomen rectum* of the construct, מחקק, Jerome interprets it – as he does in Numb. 21:18, where the same term appears – in the sense of a 'lawgiver' or 'teacher of the law'. However, in Deut. 33:21, he renders it not as *dator legis* (as in Numb. 21:18) but as *doctor* ('teacher').[25] Contrary to what is suggested in the *Vulgata Deutsch*, *doctor* should be interpreted here as the subject of the clause rather than as a predicative nominative.

Finally, the verb *repositus* appears to correspond to the notoriously difficult ספון of the Hebrew text. It is evident that Jerome – following a path also suggested by the Masoretic vocalization – reads this as a passive participle (qal) of the verb ספן, which he associates (as proposed above) with the meaning 'covered' or 'hidden'. This leads to his rendering with the verb *reponere* ('to lay aside', 'to store', 'to hide', or 'to bury'). Consequently, in Jerome's interpretation and translation, v. 21b justifies the preeminent status of the tribe of Gad (cf. v. 21a Vg.) by the fact that within Gad's *pars* ('portion'), *a* – or *the* – teacher (*doctor*) is hidden or buried.

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[24] Cf. Beyerle, *Mosesegen*, 212.

[25] Cf. Beyerle, *Mosesegen*, 209.

This interpretation of the text is remarkable insofar as it shows no dependence on the LXX[26], but rather presupposes a widely attested rabbinic-Jewish exegesis of Deut. 33:21. Both in the Targumim (cf. TO, TgN, TgPsJ on the verse) and in the halakhic Midrash (Sifre Devarim 355.6), Deut. 33:21b is understood as an allusion to the grave of Moses, located within the territory of Gad.[27] Specifically, the verse serves to localize the burial site – at least tentatively – since Deut. 34:6 (intentionally) withholds any precise information. Thus, Sifre Devarim 355.6 provides the following explanation for Deut. 33:21b:

זו קבורתו של משה שנתונה בחלקו של גד [28]
('this is the grave of Moses, which was given [i.e. placed] in the portion of Gad…').

In the subsequent passage, a somewhat more elaborate explanation is found: [29]

ומה תלמוד לומר כי שם חלקת מחוקק ספון
מלמד שהיה משה מוטל בכנפי שכינה בארבעת מילים מחלקו של ראובן וחלקו של גד
ומלאכי השרת מספידים עליו ואומרים יבוא שלום ינוח על משכבו

> And what does Scripture teach: *…for there the portion of the lawgiver was hidden* [Deut. 33:21b]?
>
> This teaches that Moses was laid within the wings of the *Shekhinah*, four miles distant from the portion of Reuben and the portion of Gad.
>
> And the ministering angels lamented him, saying: '*He shall enter into peace, they shall rest on their beds* (cf. Isa. 57,2)'.)

Finally, a very concise rendering of 33:21b is found in Targum Onkelos (TO) [30]:

אֲרֵי תַמָּן בְּאַחסָנְתֵּיה מֹשֶׁה סָפְרָא רַבָּא דְיִשְׂרָאֵל קְבִיר

> 'For there, in his [i.e. Gad's] inheritance, Moses, the great scribe of Israel, was buried.'

A comparative reading of Deut. 33:21 Vg. and these approximately contemporaneous rabbinic sources strongly suggests that Jerome drew upon the exegetical traditions found therein, effectively treating these as the self-evident meaning of Deut. 33:21b. In this framework, the 'lawgiver' hidden within Gad's allotment (cf. Deut. 33:21b MT) is

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[26] Deut. 33:21b LXX reads: ὅτι ἐκεῖ ἐμερίσθη γῆ, ἀρχόντων συνηγμένων ἅμα ἀρχηγοῖς λαῶν. The LXX reflects a reinterpretation of the Hebrew text: חלקת is understood verbally (cf. ἐμερίσθη γῆ), ἀρχόντων is syntactically ambiguous (either with γῆ or συνηγμένων), and the plus γῆ shifts the focus to the distribution of land. Thus, the LXX presents vv. 20d-21c more explicitly than the MT as a retrospective allusion to the allotment of Gad's Transjordanian territory (Numb. 32; Deut. 3), portraying it as a legitimate act carried out by assembled leaders and tribes ('λαοί') of Israel (ἀρχόντων συνηγμένων ἅμα ἀρχηγοῖς λαῶν). Cf. Beyerle. *Mosesegen*, 212; Mohrmann. *Deuteronomion*, 486–487.

[27] Cf. Beyerle, *Mosesegen*, 209.

[28] Louis Finkelstein (ed.), *Sifre on Deuteronomy*, New York 1969, accessed via Sefaria (www.sefaria.org/Sifrei_Devarim.355.6?lang=bi), transcription: ME.

[29] Louis Finkelstein (ed.), *Sifre on Deuteronomy*, New York 1969, accessed via Sefaria (www.sefaria.org/Sifrei_Devarim.355.6?lang=bi), transcription: ME.

[30] Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon Project (ed.), *Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon. Targum Onqelos to the Pentateuch*, Cincinnati 2005, accessed via Logos Bible Software, transcription: ME.

identified as Moses; hence, Gad's principatus is manifested in the fact that Moses' (hidden) grave lies within its territory. That Jerome viewed this interpretation of the MT as almost axiomatic is evidenced by his translational restraint: he remains fundamentally faithful to the Hebrew, translating מחוקק simply as *doctor* without any explicit mention of Moses or the inclusion of explanatory glosses, in contrast to the Targumim. Jerome evidently presumes his audience's familiarity with the underlying tradition, treating a reading that modern scholars would categorize as quintessentially '*Jewish*' as being entirely transparent to a readership typically defined as essentially '*Christian*'. [31]

Furthermore, the pointed verb *reponere* (cf. *repositus*) in Deut. 33:21b, which Jerome employs to render the Hebrew ספון, might also suggest a reference to the rabbinic texts cited above. Indeed, it serves as a remarkably apt Latin equivalent to the Rabbinic Hebrew מוטל ('laid down' or 'deposited'; cf. *Sifre Devarim* 355.6, where Moses is described as 'laid down' in the wings of the *Shekhina*). This raises the question of whether Jerome, by selecting this at first glance 'unusual' verb, is subtly invoking the elaborate burial tradition exemplified in *Sifre*? While this hypothesis is difficult to prove – as the striking semantic convergence remains the sole piece of evidence – it remains a compelling possibility…

In summary, it must be noted that Jerome, in his translation of Deut. 33:21a-b, follows the Hebrew text very closely, reproducing it with considerable precision. Above all, however, there is a discernible effort to render a syntactically ambiguous and difficult Hebrew passage intelligible in Latin. This leads him to clarify the text at numerous points where it is semantically or syntactically polyvalent, thereby performing a significant act of interpretation. It is striking that Jerome, quite naturally, perceives Deut. 33:21 not simply as a "Jewish" text, but as one read through a distinctly Jewish lens, with the translation even incorporating specific rabbinic interpretative traditions. It should further be noted that the rendering/interpretation of Deut. 33:21b in the Vulgate (as well as in *Sifre Devarim* and the Targumim) does not represent a flowery embellishment or a fanciful 'over-interpretation' of the Hebrew Text, but rather remains well within the spectrum of its linguistic possibilities.

c) Gad, or *doctor* Moses? (Deut. 33:21c-e)

21c	*qui fuit cum principibus populi*	ויתא ראשי עם	21c
21d	*et fecit iustitias Domini*	צדקת יהוה עשה	21d
21e	*et iudicium suum cum Israhel*	ומשפטיו עם־ישראל׃	21e

[31] It remains questionable whether the confessional distinction between "Jewish" and "Christian" does not constitute, at least in part, a modern anachronism that obscures the open space of debate of Late Antiquity, in which "Jewish" and "Christian" – and later also "Islamic" – voices engaged in a lively exchange of ideas and concepts and in sustained dialogue.

As demonstrated above, the Hebrew text of Deut. 33:21 consists of three consecutive statements concerning Gad: first, v. 21a refers to Gad's 'seeing' (ראה), which is further illustrated in v. 21b; second, v. 21c addresses Gad's 'coming' (אתא); and finally, v. 21d-e underscores Gad's righteousness and fidelity to the Torah. In the Vulgate, however, Deut. 33:21c and 21d-e appear much more closely integrated than is the case in the Hebrew text.

Primarily, Deut. 33:21c in the Vulgate does not constitute an independent narrative clause with Gad as the subject as in the Hebrew text, but is formulated as a relative clause (introduced by the pronoun *qui*). This relative pronoun *qui* refers back either to the *doctor* mentioned in v. 21b or to the tribe of Gad itself (for further discussion, see below). This figure – whether Gad or the *doctor* – serves as the grammatical subject of v. 21c, but also of the two main clauses in v. 21d-e. Consequently, the verbs *fuit* (v. 21c) and *fecit* (v. 21d, and elliptically in v. 21e) also refer to this same subject.

Thus, the two formally independent main clauses in v. 21d-e, which are already tightly linked by ellipsis (the shared verb *fecit* appearing only in v. 21d and being presupposed in v. 21e), are further concatenated by the common subject established by the relative pronoun *qui* in v. 21c. This structural unity is reinforced by the syntactic coordination through *et* in v. 21d-e. Content-wise, however, a shift is recognizable: moving from a description of attributes or status within the relative clause (*qui fuit*..., v. 21c) toward a representation of active deeds (*et fecit*... *et <fecit>*, v. 21d-e).

A particularly salient question now arises concerning the identity of the *subject* (or theme) of the relative clauses. Before this can be discussed, however, we must first examine the three clauses of v. 21c-e Vg and the translational choices made within them. Regarding v. 21c, it should be noted that the Hebrew phrase ראשי עם ('heads of the people') is rendered as *principes populi* (cf. *principibus populi*). Jerome thus selects a translation that remains strictly faithful to the literal wording of the Hebrew text – in contrast e.g. to the Septuagint's rendering ἀρχηγοῖς λαῶν ('chiefs of peoples' [plural!]). At the same time, the keyword *principibus* picks up the same lexical root found in the noun *principatum* (v. 21a). This corresponds to the Hebrew text, where the root ראש is likewise attested in both v. 21a (ראשית) and v. 21c (ראשי).

The verb form ויתא, which presents significant difficulties in the Hebrew text, is rendered in the Vulgate as *fuit (cum)* ('was with'). This makes it improbable that Jerome perceived ויתא as a form of the (Aramaic) verb אתא ('to come'). Consequently, the most plausible explanation for this verb form from the perspective of modern exegesis does not seem to have been available or self-evident to Jerome. Conversely, however, his translation remains difficult to explain on the basis of the Hebrew *Vorlage*. It thus remains an open question whether Jerome was influenced by the Septuagint's rendering (συνηγμένων) and adopted this idea for his own translation, or whether he attempted a free rendering of what he presumed to be the sense of an otherwise insoluble expression. Alternatively, did Jerome perhaps read the sequence ויהי את ('he was with...')

in his *Vorlage* instead of ויתא – consisting of almost the same consonants – which he then aptly rendered as *fuit cum*?

In Deut. 33:21d-e, Jerome remains consistently close to the Hebrew text. The only 'variation' lies in his rendering of the noun צדקת ('righteousness', v. 21d) – a singular construct state – as the plural *iustitias* ('righteousnesses'), while conversely, the plural phrase משפטיו ('his judgments', v. 21e) becomes the singular *iudicium suum* ('his judgment') in the Latin.[32] However, this does not constitute a significant shift in meaning. Finally, there is no discernible influence from the LXX in the Vulgate's rendering of these final sentences, as in the LXX the concluding verses of the Gad blessing appear as statements concerning God.[33]

Regarding the content, v. 21c thus emphasizes that the entity represented by the relative pronoun *qui* – whether Gad or the *doctor* – was with the eminent leaders (*principes*) of the people (Israel); that is, he belonged to them or became part of their ranks. The clauses v. 21d-ee, however, make assertions concerning the fidelity to the Torah and/or the teaching and judicial activities of the presupposed subject – consistent with the Hebrew text.

Given the communicative situation presupposed in the text (Moses blessing the tribe of Gad), it may initially seem self-evident that this tribe, Gad, is the intended subject of v. 21c-e (meaning that *qui* in v. 21c refers grammatically to the subject implied in v. 21a). Read in this sense, v. 21c records that the tribe was granted a preeminent role within Israel, largely due to its special status highlighted in v. 21a-b (cf. *principatus*), as reinforced by the lexical link between *principatus* (v. 21a) and *principes* (v. 21c). In this light, v. 21d-e serve – as noted above – as commendations of the tribe's adherence to and practice of the Torah.

On the other hand, *qui* is also congruent with *doctor* in v. 21b and could thus also refer to the latter, such that the second half of the Gad blessing essentially consists of statements regarding *Moses*, who is 'deposited' or buried within Gad's territory. In this reading, v. 21d-e can be coherently understood as an allusion to Moses' central role as the mediator and teacher of divine instructions. Clause v. 21c, however – which would then emphasize Moses' status as being 'with the leaders of the people' – might initially appear curious or redundant, given that Moses was not merely one among many other leaders… Yet, it is striking that the phrase *principibus populi* is also attested in Deut. 33:5, suggesting a deliberate intertextual link between the two verses.[34] Deut. 33:4-5 (Vg.) –

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[32] It should be noted, however, that צדקת may theoretically be read as *ṣidqōt*, and ומשפטיו perhaps – albeit only speculatively – reflected in Jerome's text as ומשפטו, cf. 4QDeut^{h} (frag. 11-15).

[33] Cf. δικαιοσύνην κύριος ἐποίησεν καὶ κρίσιν αὐτοῦ μετὰ Ἰσραήλ (Deut. 33,21de LXX). The LXX reinterprets the Hebrew evaluation of *Gad's* faithfulness as a statement about *God's* righteous action (δικαιοσύνη) and justice (κρίσις) toward Israel. Cf. Mohrmann, *Deuteronomion*, 489.

[34] This connection between Deut. 33:5 and 33:21 is also present in the Hebrew text and is established by the verb אסף attested in both verses. Cf. Beyerle, *Mosesegen*, 211.

part of the poetic frame encapsulating the individual tribal blessings (cf. Deut. 33:1-5; 26-29) – initially focuses on Moses as the mediator of the law during the Sinai theophany (v. 4). Deut. 33:5 (Vulgate!), however, qualifies Moses as king (*rex*), standing before the 'most upright one' (*rectissimus*, i.e., God), in whose presence the princes of the people and the tribes are gathered. This passage highlights the assembly of the people for the theophany and the establishment of the covenant, as well as Moses' preeminent mediatory role. If the *doctor* (= Moses) is accepted as the subject, Deut. 33:21c can thus be perceived as a – somewhat more concise – reference to the "*mattan tōrāh*"-imagery established in Deut. 33:4-5. Ultimately, it must be noted that Jerome's translation remains ambivalent here, allowing for both interpretative possibilities.

3. Conclusion

In summary, a detailed analysis of the Vulgate version of Deut. 33:20-21 demonstrates that Jerome's translation reflects a profound awareness of the various possibilities and interpretative options inherent in the Hebrew text, while simultaneously functioning as a distinct act of interpretation. Regarding the numerous passages where the MT is syntactically and conceptually ambiguous, the Vulgate performs a remarkable balancing act: Jerome maintains a fundamental and primary proximity to his *Vorlage*, extending even to the word order. Notable, however, is his hermeneutical approach of combining fidelity to his *Vorlage* with a selective 'disambiguation' that renders the text intelligible for his Latin readership without entirely sacrificing the inherent theological complexity and polyvalence of the original (cf., for instance, the various options for interpreting the lion metaphor in v. 20c-d, or the clauses in v. 21c-e Vg, which may coherently refer to either Gad or the *doctor*, Moses). The *sapor* – the distinct 'flavor' – of the Hebrew text thus permeates the Latin rendering in a manner that a Latin-speaking audience could fully appreciate.

The most striking feature of the translation, however, lies in the integration of Jewish exegetical traditions. Jerome receives and incorporates rabbinic interpretations (cf. the allusion to Moses' grave in v. 21), which he nevertheless leaves implicit and refrains from explicit, explanatory glosses. He thus takes for granted that a 'Christian' audience would be familiar with 'Jewish' tradition. This can only be understood when Jerome's translation is situated within a Late Antique discursive space where 'confessional' boundaries did not function as insurmountable barriers for ideas and concepts.