APPENDIX B

THE TEXT OF DEUT 32:43

The original text of Deuteronomy 32:43, as a whole, is notoriously difficult to reconstruct. Indeed, G. Ernest Wright judiciously remarks that it “simply cannot be reconstructed with certainty.” Nonetheless, I venture to propose the following reconstruction, and for the following reasons.

43 Rejoice, O nations, with his people, and let all the gods worship him. Surely, the blood of his servants he will avenge; he will take vengeance on his adversaries and make atonement for the land of his people.

This verse is represented in the differing textual traditions by a varying number of cola: both the Massoretic Text and the Samaritan Pentateuch preserve four; Qumran (4QDeut4) contains six, and the Septuagint has eight.

MT:

Rejoice, O nations, with his people, 
for the blood of his servants he will avenge.
He will take vengeance on his adversaries 
and make atonement for his land, his people.

4QDeut4: 2

Rejoice, O heavens, with his people [or, with him], 
and let all the gods worship him.
For the blood of his sons he will avenge, 
and he will take vengeance on his adversaries.
He will repay those who hate him, 
and will make atonement for the land of his people.

LXX: 3

eυφράνθητε, οὐρανοί, ἀμα αὐτῷ, 
καὶ προσκυνασάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες υἱοὶ θεοῦ. 
eυφράνθητε, ἔθνη, μετὰ τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ, 
καὶ ἐνισχυσάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες ἄγγελοι θεοῦ. 
ὅτι τὸ αἵμα τῶν υἱῶν αὐτοῦ ἐκδικεῖται, 
καὶ ἐκδικήσει καὶ ἀνταποδώσει δίκην τοῖς ἔχτροις, 
καὶ τοῖς μισοῦσιν ἀνταποδώσει, 
καὶ ἐκκαθαριεῖ κύριος τὴν γῆν τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ.

Rejoice, O heavens, together with him, 
and let all the sons of God worship him.

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Rejoice, O nations, with his people,  
and let all the angels of God praise him.  
For the blood of his sons he will avenge,  
and he will avenge and repay vengeance to [his] enemies.  
He will repay those who hate [him],  
and the Lord will cleanse the land of his people.

Although it is possible that a tendency to parallelism underlies the Septuagint and Qumran texts, it is probably to be rejected on the basis that only partial parallelism truly exists. Instead, whereas colon 1 of the MT is given genuine parallel in 4QDeutq (a parallelism doubled in the LXX), cola 2-3 of the MT are expanded into an awkward tricolon in both 4QDeutq and the LXX, leaving MT colon 4 without parallel in either 4QDeutq or the LXX. Moreover, it is plausible that Qumran colon 5 (cf. LXX colon 7): אֲלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, was inserted to consciously or unconsciously match the same parallel thought of v. 41. Thus, I adopt as the most likely original a five cola structure for this verse, climactic in both its form and function. And in this climactic five cola format, it parallels v. 39—likewise pivotal in its theology.

In the initial call: “Rejoice, O nations,” I adhere to the MT—manifestly the more difficult reading, as it is seemingly out of place, out of parallel, 4 and possibly offensive in its commendation of the “Gentiles/nations.” 4 To its favor, however, the reading of Qumran frames the Song in an artful inclusio: the closing call to “Rejoice, O heavens” (v. 43) echoes the initial “Hear, O heavens” (v. 1). The LXX witnesses to both readings in what is apparently an expanded conflation of the two traditions.

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4 I.e., with “gods” (see below).

5 The reading of 4QDeutq, השמים ("heavens"), rids of any possible offence (as might be particularly felt among the sectarians of that era).
The Hebrew text follows with the terse לְבָנָּה. And what the MT states concisely, the LXX expands—seeking, in part, to explicate the ambiguity latent in this (consonantal) construction. The initial colon, in reading אָמַּא אוֹתוֹ, “together with him,” understood a different vocalization of the Hebrew consonants—לְבָנָּה. Its parallel is rendered μετὰ τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ, “with his people,” following the pointing of the MT with its implicit preposition. This implicit preposition is made explicit in one medieval Massoretic manuscript which reads: לְבָנָּה נָּא, “with his people.” Thus, the BHS editor proposes an original reading of לְבָנָּה בָּנָּ—explicitly, “with his people”—which would have suffered the ravages of accidental scribal contraction (haplography) to become what we presently find in the MT. This solution, however, is misplaced, for the MT is sufficient as it stands—particularly as poetry, which often omits “extraneous” grammatical or syntactical elements for the sake of brevity and beauty. Furthermore, the shorter reading adopted here better explains the origins of the other variants.

At this juncture, I adopt the additional line: “and let all the ‘gods’ worship him,” following principally the testimony of 4QDeut4. Although in the canons of textual criticism the “longer reading” is generally considered to be secondary, it is almost certainly in this instance primary. This reading is substantiated, in large measure, by the LXX tradition and provides the parallel colon necessary to conform this portion to the prevailing structure of the poem. The LXX manifests a lengthy conflate reading, in part proclaiming: καὶ προσκυνασάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες νῦν θεοῦ... καὶ ένισχυσάτωσαν
I would posit that both phrases here represent the reading of Qumran, expressed in synonym.  

By adopting the reading “(of) his servants” in the third colon of the proposed reconstruction, I maintain the witness of the MT against the testimony both of 4QDeut and the LXX: respectively וְנָב and τῶν ὑπὸν αὐτοῦ, “(of) his sons.” וְנָב (or a related form) is represented in several instances earlier in the text, and it is perhaps because of these earlier occurrences that this variant originally (and unintentionally) arose. The reading of the MT, however, better fits contextually, paralleling its prior occurrence in 32:36. Moreover, Psalm 79, which patterns its plea after the development in this Song of Moses, climaxes in the cry: יְהוָה יְשַׁעְתָּנֻךְ (v. 10), intimating that the text tradition of Deuteronomy 32:43 current with the psalmist likewise read וְנָב.

Lastly, the Massoretic Text’s rather obscure reading at the verse’s close—ostensibly “his land, his people”—is better understood as an archaic form of the construct chain. This is made interpretively explicit in the readings of the Samaritan Pentateuch and

6 The LXX is known to render ἀγγέλων Θεοῦ or πρὸς Ἰάκω βιον as ἀγγέλων Θεοῦ, e.g., Deut 32:8 and Ps 96:7 (LXX).

7 The question may yet be asked: What caused the abbreviation of the MT? Whereas accidental scribal deletion (due to, e.g., homoioteleuton) seems unlikely, the explanation of van der Kooij is plausible. He suggests that the shortening of the proto-MT to 140 cola—or 70 verse lines—was deliberate, in order to conform the structure of the Song to the “number of the (seventy) sons of Israel” (v. 8; cf. Targum Pseudo-Jonathan). He notes that “the changes of Deut 32.43 are closely connected with the change of verse 8: the corrections of both verses reflect a great interest in the significance of ‘the sons of Israel’, the people of Israel, for the nations.” Arie van der Kooij, “The Ending of the Song of Moses: On the Pre-Masoretic Version of Deut 32.43,” in Studies in Deuteronomy: In Honor of C. J. Labuschagne on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday, ed. F. García Martínez et al. Vetus Testamentum Supplements, ed. J. A. Emerton et al., vol. 53 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 100.

8 Deut 32:5, 8, 19, and possibly 43a (cf. LXX).
Qumran (יְדֵעַ הַמַּדָּא), supported by the Septuagint (ῥῆν γὺν τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ). It is possible that the transcribers of the Masoretic tradition unconsciously inserted the 3ms suffix here, influenced by the presence of two such suffixes immediately preceding and one following, but a better alternative is that of Sanders who argues for the originality of the Masoretic reading—but as a construct, interpreting "the waw at the end of יְדֵעַ הַמַּדָּא as a meaningless affix. Such affixes are rare in biblical Hebrew but most of them are found at the end of the nomen regens in a construct chain. Here we find forms like יְדֵעַ הַמַּדָּא 'the animals of' [as in Gen 1:24]. . . . It is probably best to compare them with the Akkadian ending –u which could be attached to a nomen regens in every grammatical case. The Masoretes did not recognize the rare ending and vocalized it as a personal suffix. The proper vocalization would probably be יְדֵעַ הַמַּדָּא."

It is of interest to note here that the culmination of this verse and of the Song speaks of the bloody vengeance of God wreaked upon his enemies "making atonement for the land of his people." Earlier in the Torah, it had been revealed that the blood of the murdered pollutes the land; it is only atoned for by the execution of the murderer (Num 35:33). God's honor, his people, and their land are all intimately tied; and the enactment of God's vengeance restores all three. God is concerned with holistic atonement.

9 However, the accentuation of the MT suggests that this construction should be viewed as asyndetic (with an understood waw), as is made explicit in the Targums and the Peshitta.


11 This blood pollution was further applied to the pagan child sacrifices committed by God's people (Ps 106:38).