Lectio difficilior potior and an Aramaic Pun—Βεώρ versus Βοσόρ in 2 Peter 2:15 as a Test Case for How a Classic Rule Might Be Refined[1]

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Abstract: *Lectio difficilior potior* ("prefer the more difficult reading"), while still in use in recent scholarship, has been criticized for being overly subjective and of relatively little value as a canon of internal criteria. These criticisms have not been adequately addressed. Yet 2 Pet 2:15 provides a fertile testing ground for the *refinement* of this rule absent text-critical bias. Since every single current edition of the Greek New Testament, and almost all commentators, agree with Βοσόρ due to overwhelming external support, the rule is not needed to prove the superior reading of Βοσόρ. Rather, the near-universal agreement on the reading gives us an opportunity to develop a methodology for determining whether or not Βοσόρ is the *lectio difficilior* compared to Βεώρ, a methodology that would hopefully be free from bias. This methodology, which draws from Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort's distinction between "real and apparent excellence," could then assist in rehabilitating *lectio difficilior potior* as a helpful, if secondary, principle in textual matters.

A few decades ago J. H. Petzer bemoaned the fact that the morass of scholarship on textual criticism had managed to produce virtually no progress in "theoretical development of text-critical methodology" in such a way as to assist in determining "the level of certainty" about a reading.[2] A few key studies since then have rendered Petzer's complaint somewhat outdated,[3] and the appearance of the Coherence-Based Genealogical Method has, regardless of one's view, made the discipline more interesting vis-à-vis methodology.[4] Yet in the area of practical development

1 I would like to thank the following for helping improve this paper: the anonymous peer reviewer for *TC*; the various members of the original audience of this paper at the Bible Faculty Summit in August 2021 (Faith Baptist Bible College in Ankeny, Iowa), especially Tim Miller and Glenn Kerr; Dr. Maurice A. Robinson; and my research assistant Devon Swanson. All mistakes and faulty reasoning remain my responsibility.

2 J. H. Petzer, "A Survey of the Developments in the Textual Criticism of the Greek New Testament since UBS," *Neot* 24 (1990): 80.

3 One thinks especially of the essays in the second half of *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the* Status Quaestionis, ed. Bart D. Ehrman, Michael W. Holmes, and Bruce M. Metzger, 2nd ed., NTTSD 42 (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

4 Tommy Wasserman and Peter J. Gurry, *A New Approach to Textual Criticism: An Introduction to the Coherence-Based Genealogical Method*, RBS 80 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017). For a recent appropriation of their methodology, see Charles L. Quarles, "The Usefulness of Pre-genealogical

and application of internal evidence, Petzer's statement is still relevant. Indeed, as evidenced by significant pushback against blind preference for the shorter reading, some forms of internal analysis may be a *less* stable tool for the text critic than they used to be.[5]

The preference for the more difficult reading, *lectio difficilior potior* (hereafter referred to as LDP), is a case-in-point. Whereas the rule is still utilized today as evidence for one reading over another, the concerns of Emanuel Tov, that LDP is "problematic and impractical," partially due to a lack of "enough controllable cases" of the clear validity of the rule in action, have been only partially addressed.[6]

Yet this is where 2 Pet 2:15 may provide a helping hand: "Balaam [son of] Bosor" (τοῦ Βαλαὰμ τοῦ Βοσόρ) in this verse is adhered to by all current critical/eclectic texts (NA[27+28], SBL 2010, Tyndale House 2018), the Byzantine text (Robinson-Pierpont 2018), and the majority text (Hodges-Farstad 1985).[7] Furthermore, Bruce M. Metzger's second edition of his Textual Commentary thought highly enough of Βοσόρ to give it an "A" ranking.[8] The external evidence by itself is overwhelmingly in favor of this reading, and the minority report (τοῦ βαλαὰμ τοῦ βεώρ) is followed only by the MSS B [Vaticanus] and 453, plus a few ancient versions (albeit also by a surprisingly large number of modern translations, e.g., NLT, RSV, ESV, NASB[95+20], NKJV).[9]

Coherence for Detecting Multiple Emergence and Coincidental Agreement: Matthew 16.2b–3 as a Test Case," *NTS* 67 (2021): 424–46.

5 The debate over the shorter-reading principle has been well documented on pages 106–16 of Eldon Jay Epp's essay, "Traditional 'Canons' of New Testament Textual Criticism: Their Value, Validity, and Viability—or Lack Thereof," in *The Textual History of the Greek New Testament: Changing Views in Contemporary Research*, ed. Klaus Wachtel and Michael W. Holmes, TCS 8 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011). In addition, I would draw the reader's attention to Jeff Miller, "Breaking the Rules: *Lectio Brevior Potior* and New Testament Textual Criticism," *BT* 70 (2019): 82–93, who chronicles the downfall of the rule and why, in his opinion, this is a positive development. Epp ("Traditional 'Canons,'" 115), while recognizing the deficiencies of overly-simplistic expressions of the rule, is less eager to completely drop it, preferring a "compromise formulation."

6 Emanuel Tov, "Criteria for Evaluating Textual Readings: The Limitations of Textual Rules," *HTR* 75 (1982): 439. Although Tov is focused primarily on Old Testament textual criticism, the considerable degree of overlap in methodology between Old and New Testament textual criticism makes his comments relevant for the latter. Indeed, Tov himself spends part of his article (433–34) pointing out the influence of New Testament textual criticism on Old Testament textual criticism. Interestingly, a few decades later, Anneli Aejmelaeus declares, "*Lectio difficilior* is one of those rules often referred to in the discussion of text-critical problems, but it proves to be of little practical value in truly difficult cases" ("Lectio Difficilior and the Difficulties of the Critical Text: A Case Study from the Septuagint of 1 Samuel 14:47," in *XV Congress of the International Organization for Septuagint and Cognate Studies: Munich 2015*, ed. Wolfgang Kraus, Michaël N. van der Meer, and Martin Meiser, SCS 64 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016), 61. Finally, for criticism of LDP that builds off of the work of James R. Royce and Peter M. Head, see Andrew Wilson, "The More Difficult Reading?," *Evangelical Textual Criticism*, http://evangelicaltextualcriticism.blogspot.com/2009/02/more-difficult-reading.html.

7 Westcott and Hort's GNT (1881) has Βεώρ (perhaps on the basis of Vaticanus?) but with Βοσόρ in the margin. See Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1882).

8 Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 635.

9 See Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 635. Also, א* has Βεωορσόρ. I doubt that anybody would disagree with Metzger's conclusion that this "is no doubt due to the conflation of Βοσόρ with a marginal correction –εωρ" (Textual Commentary, 635).

In addition, this writer could find almost no significant commentary on 2 Peter that preferred Βεώρ,[10] though debate exists as to the significance of Βοσόρ.

Since almost all of modern scholarship speaks with one voice for Βοσόρ, this provides us with a unique opportunity to discuss how LDP should function in other circumstances where text-critical preferences would intrude. The point of this paper, then, is not to prove a particular reading via LDP. The point, rather, is to use a particular reading on which virtually everybody agrees to develop some guidelines as to when LDP should and should not be invoked.

The Use of LDP in Textual Criticism

A thorough survey of LDP in modern textual criticism is naturally out of the question, and its austere origins need not be rehashed here.[11] The point of this section is to provide a selective survey of its use and its criticism in order to set the stage for a deeper discussion. I will briefly mention a few key contributions that utilize LPD, then I will focus on Tov's criticisms of the rule, and finally I will examine a couple instances where I feel too much ambiguity exists to invoke LDP as a proof for a particular reading. This will then set the stage for a discussion of Βεώρ versus Βοσόρ.

LDP is alive and well in most modern introductions to textual criticism, though generally qualified.[12] Eugene Nida's 1981 article strongly promoted the value of LDP through the analogy with the Second Law of Thermodynamics, and a variety of articles since then have utilized LDP in some form in their treatment of a textual variant, including, most recently, Joel. E. Lisboa and Thomas R. Shepherd (2015), Tommy Wasserman (2018), and Dan Nässelqvist (2018).[13]

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10 Some commentaries contain Βεώρ as the reading in the particular translation they are using but then do not comment on it; I am ignoring these. A significant exception is Charles Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude*, 2nd ed., ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902), 212–13, though one should compare his data on which manuscripts have Βεώρ with Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 635, and Joseph B. Mayor, *The Epistle of St. Jude and the Second Epistle of St. Peter: Greek Text with Introduction Notes and Comments* (London: MacMillan, 1907), cxcviii.

11 Its history is aptly summarized on pages 105–6 of Epp, "Traditional 'Canons' of New Testament Textual Criticism." The use of LDP as a textual principle was already being debated in the mid–1800s, as we can see with David B. Ford's interaction with J. Griesbach's formulation of the rule ("Scriptural Evidence of the Deity of Christ," *BibSac* 17.67 [1860]: 551).

12 E.g., Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism*, trans. Erroll F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 275–76; Amy Anderson and Wendy Widder, *Textual Criticism of the Bible*, rev. ed., Lexham Methods (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2018), 45–46; J. Harold Greenlee, *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 115, 122, and 124; Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption and Restoration*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 302–3; Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts, *Fundamentals of New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 116–17; Léon Vaganay and Christian-Bernard Amphoux, *An Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, 2nd ed., trans. Jenny Heimerdinger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 81; Benjamin B. Warfield, *An Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1899), 187–88.

13 Eugene A. Nida, "The 'Harder Reading' in Textual Criticism: An Application of the Second Law of Thermodynamics," *BT* 32 (1981): 101–7; Joel E. Lisboa and Thomas R. Shepherd, "Comparative Narrative Analysis as a Tool in Determining the *Lectio Difficilior* in Mark 1:40–45: A Narrative Analysis of Codices Bezea, Vaticanus, and Washingtonianus," *Neot* 49 (2015): 75–89, esp. 86; Tommy Wasserman, "Bringing Sisters Back Together: Another Look at Luke 10:41–42," *JBL* 137 (2018):

Many textual critics are fully aware of the limitations of LDP and the need not to make hasty judgments.[14] Yet in 1982, Tov completely skewered LDP, declaring it "problematic and impractical," despite its "basic validity."[15] Tov's three key critiques of LDP have not, to my knowledge, been thoroughly answered, and thus they can function as a springboard for this study.[16]

First, Tov declares that "the evidence itself does not present enough controllable cases of the replacement of 'difficult' readings by 'easier' ones as to warrant a general rule."[17] Whether or not Tov's criticisms here are overstated is a question for a different sort of article. Yet if Tov is correct, we might posit at least a more limited role for LDP compared to other rules or compared to external principles. Having said that, part of the point of this paper is to offer such a controllable case from which we might better nuance the rule.

Second, the lack of unanimity in distinguishing a scribal error from a deliberate alteration hinders the validity of invoking the rule.[18] In other words, one cannot legitimately claim that scribe x *deliberately* altered difficult reading y into simpler reading z until we can rule out the likelihood that x mistakenly inserted y in place of original reading z or that x mistakenly omitted y to create a new reading z.

Third, Tov focuses on the biased nature of the rule: "What looks like a linguistically or contextually difficult reading to one scholar, is not difficult to another one."[19] The general validity of Tov's point can be demonstrated by the following examples:

439–61, esp. 456–7; and Dan Nässelqvist, "The Question of Punctuation in John 1:3–4: Arguments from Ancient Colometry," *JBL* 137 (2018): 178. See also: Philipp F. Bartholomä, "Did Jesus Save the People out of Egypt? A Reexamination of a Textual Problem in Jude 5," *NovT* 50 (2008): 152; Christopher W. Skinner, "'Son of God' or 'God's Chosen One' (John 1:34)? A Narrative-Critical Solution to a Text-Critical Problem," *BBR* 25 (2015): 343. S. Lewis Johnson Jr. even goes so far as to suggest that a *tense* could be *lectio difficilior* ("Washing One Another's Feet," *Emmaus Journal* 1.2 [1992]: 132 n. 10). Also, Cambry G. Pardee's recent dissertation, "Scribal Harmonization in Greek Manuscripts of the Synoptic Gospels from the Second to the Fifth Century" (PhD diss., Loyola University, 2016) occasionally evokes LDP favorably (e.g., in a discussion of Matt 26:27 on p. 110 and in a discussion of word order in Luke 6:5 on p. 129).

14 See, for example, many of the sources listed in n. 12. Also noteworthy: Westcott and Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, 2:28–29; and Edward Hobbs, "Prologue: An Introduction to Methods of Textual Criticism," in *The Critical Study of Sacred Texts*, ed. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, Berkeley Religious Studies (Berkeley, CA: Graduate Theological Union, 1979), 19.

15 Tov, "Criteria for Evaluating Textual Readings," 439.

16 Tov's criticisms of various internal criteria for textual criticism, including LDP, were also published in his *The Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research*, Jerusalem Biblical Studies 3 (Jerusalem: Simor, 1981), 288–93. These have been critiqued by Moisés Silva, "Review of *The Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research*," *WTJ* 45 (1983): 425–26.

17 Tov, "Criteria for Evaluating Textual Readings," 439.

18 Tov, "Criteria for Evaluating Textual Readings," 439–40. This point is also articulated by Tommy Wasserman, "Criteria for Evaluating Readings in New Testament Textual Criticism," in Ehrman, Holmes, and Metzger, *Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research*, 589.

19 Tov, "Criteria for Evaluating Readings," 440; cf. 444. One must, of course, craft arguments for a more difficult reading as much as possible from the perspective of the scribe, not the modern scholar (Metzger and Ehrman, *Text of the New Testament*, 27). Yet it is precisely here where we run into the issue of too conveniently inputting into the mind of the scribe what we would like to see, and I believe Royse's criticism of Metzger on precisely this point is very apropos. See James R. Royse, "Scribal Tendencies in the Transmission of the Text of the New Testament," in *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 464–65. See also

Nida invokes LDP in Mark 5:42 for the second occurrence of εὐθύς because it is easy to see how a scribe would create "stylistic improvement" by dropping it.[20] Thus the double use of εὐθύς would be the *lectio difficilior*. Yet it is not clear the degree of awkwardness that such a repetition creates; furthermore, one is forced to ask whether or not Mark's extreme affinity for εὐθύς would render it likely that a scribe would want to eliminate that word.[21] How concerned, really, would a scribe be with stylistic improvement on a defining feature of a particular author?[22]

To put it another way: eleven words exist between the first occurrence of εὐθυς and the second in Mark 5:42 (assuming the validity of the second), yet only eight words exist between the εὐθύς of Mark 1:28 and the εὐθύς [or εὐθέως] of Mark 1:29. While a mere handful of manuscripts exist that omit one of the two ευθ* words in Mark 1:28–29, the number and quality of those manuscripts are insignificant compared to those that omit it in the later text, with more words between them.[23] This casts doubt upon the likelihood of a copyist considering the presence of εὐθύς or a cognate, within close proximity to itself, as a problem that needs to be corrected, with the possible exception of the copyists of W [032] and Θ [038].

Consequently, what is arguably the authorial style may be in direct opposition to a preference for the more difficult reading. Indeed, the decision of which rule to favor over others has occasionally been pointed out as a methodological weakness of the eclectic method in general.[24]

To clarify: the point is not that Nida is necessarily wrong in suggesting that the second εὐθύς is authentic. The point is simply that LDP is of little use here.

For our second example, in 1 Thess 2:7, Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland specifically evoke LDP in favor of *νήπιος* (though only after focusing on the external evidence). They state,

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Ernest C. Colwell, *Studies in Methodology in Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, NTTS 9 (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 155.

20 Nida, "'Harder Reading' in Textual Criticism," 105. For a brief critique of Nida's article *vis-à-vis* Mark 6:22, see J. M. Ross, "The 'Harder Reading' in Textual Criticism," *The Bible Translator* 33 (1982): 138–39. Also, as Maurice A. Robinson pointed out to me (personal e-mail, 3/25/2022), surely those wishing to argue for the authenticity of the second εὐθύς would be better served by arguing from accidental haplography due to the initial *epsilon* in consecutive *ἐξέστησαν* plus εὐθύς, rather than intentional modification.

21 Utilizing an Accordance search of [εὐθέως <OR> εὐθύς—2], we see the two words occur a total of 18x in Matthew and 7x in Luke but 42x (in 41 verses) in Mark, which is almost half of the total occurrences in the entire New Testament (Accordance 11 [OakTree Software, 2018]). For a discussion of the significance of Mark's εὐθύς, see Rodney J. Decker, "The Use of εὐθύς ('Immediately') in Mark," *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 1 (1997): 90–121. In Accordance, "εὐθύς—1" refers to a separate word, an adverb cognate which occurs only 8x in the New Testament, and thus I have omitted it from the discussion (see, e.g., Joseph H. Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 4th ed. [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1896; repr. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2015], 259).

22 The possibility that a scribe might create a reading aligned more with authorial style is discussed in Wasserman, "Criteria for Evaluating Readings," 592.

23 I am here utilizing Barbara Aland and Kurt Aland et al., eds., *Novtum Testamentum Graece*, 28th rev. ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012).

24 E.g., Eldon Jay Epp, "The Eclectic Method in New Testament Textual Criticism: Solution or Symptom?," *HTR* 69 (1976): 213–14; James R. Royse, "Scribal Habits in the Transmission of New Testament Texts," in *The Critical Study of Sacred Texts*, ed. Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, Berkeley Religious Studies (Berkeley, CA: Graduate Theological Union, 1979), 145.

> The tendency we can observe here is related to embarrassment caused by the word νήπιοι, to which modern exegetes are also sensitive. But in preferring the term ἤπιοι such critics ignore the fact that this word is not a part of the Pauline vocabulary. *νήπιος is far more typically a Pauline word.…* νήπιος is actually the harder reading (lectio difficilior; cf. Rule 10), and the exegetes should accept it.[25]

Again, if authorial style is allowed to factor in to the discussion, could not a case be made that ἤπιοι is the *lectio difficilior*? In other words, it is not at all clear that if a scribe wished to substitute a less awkward word than νήπιοι, he would utilize a word, ἤπιοι, that in the words of Aland and Aland is "not a part of the Pauline vocabulary" (excluding 2 Tim 2:24), a word that does not even occur in the Septuagint. Would not a reasonable scribe perhaps consider ἤπιοι an oddity and replace it with the much more common Pauline term, νήπιοι,[26] perhaps not even considering the supposed awkwardness of the term's use here (an awkwardness that may, in fact, be a modern construction)? One is justified in asking how often a scribe would utilize a *rarer* biblical word to correct a more *common* word.[27]

Again, the point here is not that Aland and Aland are necessarily wrong in their conclusion. The point is rather that the invocation of LDP is open to objection, especially when it would favor authorial style.[28]

These two examples, among many, strike home Tov's objection on the frequent subjectivity of LDP and raises the question as to how well we can get into a scribe's mind. Methodological restrictions as to what can constitute LDP were lacking in both cases. In the next section, I will attempt to establish 2 Pet 2:15 as a test case that takes seriously Tov's objections without completely throwing LDP out the window.

Βόσορ in 2 Peter 2:15

As noted, the evidence for Βοσόρ is so overwhelming that it can be established on the basis of external evidence alone, and no current published edition of the GNT disputes it. Indeed, I will go a step further and suggest that the surprisingly large number of English translations that prefer Βεώρ do so precisely for the same reason that a handful of ancient scribes and translators did (we will return to this point later).

Yet in order for Βοσόρ versus Βεώρ to function as successful test-case for LDP, we will place it in the dock and direct the following pointed questions at it:

1. Does the preferred reading, Βοσόρ, actually make sense?
2. Could Βοσόρ have become Βεώρ (or vice versa) accidentally?
3. Would a scribe have had good reason to think that Βοσόρ was a mistake and thus change it?

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25 Aland and Aland, *Text of the New Testament*, 279 (trans. Rhodes, emphasis added).

26 Ten occurrences in Paul (not counting 1 Thess 2:7): Rom 2:20, 1 Cor 3:1, 13:11 (5x), Gal 4:1 and 3, and Eph 4:14. Outside of Pauline literature, the word only occurs 4x in the New Testament.

27 In addition, surely an unintentional scribal change, via either accidental dittography of *nu* or accidental haplography of *nu*, remains far more likely, since ἐγενήθημεν ends with *nu* while the immediately subsequent νήπιοι begins with *nu*. Whatever textual position one takes, an accidental change can explain it more easily than a deliberate one. I am grateful to Dr. Robinson for pointing this out (personal e-mail, 3/25/2022).

28 Indeed, though Metzger's *Textual Commentary* is forced to reflect the committee consensus that the correct reading is νήπιοι, this does not stop Metzger himself, along with Allen Wikgren, from adding a dissenting note: "Despite the weight of external evidence, only ἤπιοι seems to suit the context" (562).

These three questions draw heavily from Westcott and Hort's helpful distinction between "real and apparent excellence," worth quoting in full here:

> For if it be a scribe's correction, it must have some at least apparent excellence, and if it be original, it must have the highest real excellence. Contrast of real and apparent excellence is in any given variation an indispensable criterion as to the adequacy of the evidence for justifying reliance on Transcriptional Probability.[29]

Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman recast this principle in the following way: "In general, the more difficult reading is to be preferred, particularly when the sense, on the surface, appears to be erroneous but, on more mature consideration, proves to be correct."[30]

1. The reading must make sense: Βοσόρ *as an Aramaic pun*

First, the preferred reading must make sense, within the context, as something the original author may have said.[31] We will defend here the popular understanding that Peter is either making or repeating an Aramaic pun based on בשר, "flesh."[32] Theodore Zahn's suggestion that it is a matter of misunderstanding the pronunciation has not gained traction among modern scholars and thus need not be discussed.[33] The more recent suggestion by Christopher M. Hays that the author of 2 Peter made a mistake based on the lists of kings in the LXX will be discussed below. We will also acknowledge here that the author of 2 Peter need not have necessarily invented the pun himself; it may be part of a tradition going back to an earlier time.[34]

The position that Βοσόρ in our text is the Greek rendering of the Aramaic (and Hebrew) word for "flesh" has been held to by a number of significant scholars, including Richard J. Bauckham, Martin Luther, Douglas J. Moo, Thomas R. Schreiner, Duane Frederick Watson, and Ben Witherington.[35] Three key reasons may be advanced as to why Βοσόρ as a pun for

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29 Westcott and Hort, *New Testament in the Original Greek*, 2:28–29.

30 Metzger and Ehrman, *Text of the New Testament*, 302–3.

31 This is generally acknowledged by textual critics. In the case of Βοσόρ in 2 Pet 2:15, however, some suggest that the original author made a "mistake" (e.g., J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, BNTC [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1969], 342–34), though perhaps an understandable one (Christopher M. Hays, "A Fresh Look at βοσόρ: Textual Criticism in 2 Peter 2:15," *Filologia Neotestamentaria* 17 [2004]: 105–9). Hays's article will be interacted with later.

32 The consonants for the Aramaic and biblical Hebrew word are identical. I acknowledge that authorship of 2 Peter is highly controversial yet fortunately irrelevant to this article's conclusion. In so far as this article is concerned, I am primarily alternating between "Peter" and "the author" for convenience's sake, leaving aside the issue of authorship for other publications.

33 Theodor Zahn, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. John Moore Trout et al., 3 vols. (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock 1977), 2:292. Zahn's suggestion is that Peter, hearing Num 22 read in Hebrew and "interpreted in Aramaic," may have misunderstood what he was hearing, perhaps mistaking a *tsade* with an *ayin*, for example.

34 I am grateful to the anonymous peer reviewer for suggesting this.

35 Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, WBC 50 (Dallas: Word Books, 1983), 267–68; Martin Luther, *The Epistles of St. Jude Preached and Explained*, trans. E. H. Gillett (Coppell, TX: Odin's Library Classics, 1859), 107 ("the son of Βοσόρ,—that is to say, flesh"; though Luther also mentions "Beor" as meaning "fool"); Douglas J. Moo, *2 Peter and Jude*, NIVApp (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 128; Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 354; Duane Frederick Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style; Rhetorical Criticism of Jude and 2 Peter*, SBLDS 104 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), and Ben Witherington III, *A Socio-rhetorical Commentary on 1–2 Peter*, Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians 2 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic), 359. The earlier commentator E. H. Plumptre tries to have his cake and eat

"flesh" makes sense. First of all, notwithstanding the arguably ambiguous portrayal of Balaam in the account of Num 22–24 and the conflicted interpretation among the patristics, the fact remains that the character Balaam frequently appears as a paradigm for immorality, both within the patristic literature, in other Second Temple literature (e.g., Philo, *Mos.* 1.268), and even elsewhere in the New Testament (Jude 11, Rev 2:14).[36] Indeed, the rabbis quoted in b. Sanh. 105a17 utilize wordplay to make somewhat coarse suggestions about both Balaam's method of divination and his relationship with his donkey.[37]

This leads to the second point, that the context strongly supports a characterization of Balaam as "the son of the flesh."[38] The word *σάρξ* features prominently in 2 Pet 2 (vv. 10 and 18), and both times is clearly linked to an immoral lifestyle (cf. also Jude, vv. 7, 8, and 23). The entirety of 2 Pet 2 deals with the character of the false teachers, portraying them as guilty of "sexual misbehavior without boundaries," among other things.[39] These false teachers follow after "the way of Balaam," set in stark opposition to "the straight way." Consequently, the use

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it to, so to speak, by favoring both the Galilean dialect theory and Βοσόρ as "flesh" (*The General Epistles of St. Peter and St Jude, with Notes and Introduction*, The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1890], 184–85). Other commentaries are at least sympathetic to the possibility of Βοσόρ referring to "the flesh" (e.g., Ceslas Spicq, *Les* Épitres *de Saint Pierre*, Sources Bibliques [Paris: Gabalda, 1966], 238). On the other hand, Jörg Frey dismisses the possibility, suggesting that it is an inadequate explanation (Jörg Frey, *Der Brief des Judas und der zweite Brief des Petrus*, THNT [Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2015], 297—"bieten keine wirkliche Erklärung"; a similar dismissal can be seen in Daniel J. Harrington, "2 Peter," in *1 Peter, Jude and 2 Peter*, SP 15 [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003], 273). Jerome H. Neyrey seems to prefer the idea that Βοσόρ was meant to be viewed as a literal patronym (*2 Peter, Jude: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB [New York: Doubleday, 1993], 215). Finally, some commentators accept the reading but are hesitant to assign significance, e.g., D. Edmond Hiebert (*Second Peter and Jude: An Expositional Commentary* [Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1989], 120): "No fully satisfactory explanation for the name Βοσόρ is currently available."

36 See George W. Coats, "The Way of Obedience: Traditio-Historical and Hermeneutical Reflections on the Balaam Story," *Semeia* 24 (1982): 57, 59; J. R. Baskin, "Origen on Balaam: The Dilemma of the Unworthy Prophet," *VC* 37 (1983): 22–25. See the helpful discussions in the following sources: Baskin, "Origen on Balaam," 31, endnotes 1 and 3; Frey, *Der Brief des Judas und der zweite Brief des Petrus*, 296; Gilmore H. Guyot, "Balaam," *CBQ* 3 (1941): 236; Walter C. Kaiser, "Balaam Son of Beor in Light of Deir ᶜAllā and Scripture; Saint or Soothsayer?," in *Go to the Land I Will Show You: Studies in Honor of Dwight W. Young*, ed. Joseph Coleson and Victor Matthews (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 106; Pheme Perkins, *First and Second Peter, James, and Jude, Interpretation* (Louisville: John Knox, 2012), 185; Charles H. Savelle, "Canonical and Extracanonical Portraits of Balaam," *BibSac* 166 (2009): 397–99; and Nicholas R. Werse, "Second Temple Jewish Literary Traditions in 2 Peter," *CBQ* 78 (2016): 121. Also, it is interesting that in *Conf.* 65, Philo discusses the meaning of Balak's name, while later in 159 he argues that Balaam's name means "useless" [*μάταιος*; or "vain"].

37 *The William Davidson Talmud*. Online: https://www.sefaria.org/Sanhedrin.105a?lang=bi.

38 Technically the word *son* does not occur in the text, but Peter is obviously mimicking a patronymic formula, as we can see by a comparison with Luke 22:23–38. Having said that, I will acknowledge that when other New Testament authors wish to create such a theological (nonliteral) patronymic formula, the word "son" (*huios* or *teknon*) is explicitly stated (e.g., John 12:17, Acts 4:36, and 2 Thess 2:3; cf. also LXX 1Sam 25:17). This does not, however, preclude the author's omission of "son" for various reasons.

39 Peter H. Davids, *Living in Light of the Coming King: A Theology of James, Peter, and Jude*, BTNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 221.

of Βοσόρ to refer to "the flesh," stands in continuity with Peter's point up until now, even developing it.[40]

Third, of all the works in the entire New Testament, 2 Peter is probably the *most* likely to utilize a multilanguage pun.[41] The author's skillful use of wordplay of various kinds has been recognized by key scholars, and quite possibly Peter has already alluded to the infamous *korai-pornai* pun in 2:14.[42] Despite the author's (arguably) Hellenistic style, 2 Peter evidences a Jewish, and possibly even a Hebrew or Aramaic style at some points.[43] Also, bilingual puns are not that rare when two languages interact in a society.[44] Consequently, Βοσόρ makes more sense as a pun for "flesh," a metaphorical patronym, than a literal patronym. Again, as noted above, the author of 2 Peter himself need not have invented the pun but may have drawn from an older tradition.[45]

Gene L. Green is one of the few scholars to offer any substantial critique of Βοσόρ as a pun on the Hebrew and/or Aramaic term for "flesh." He asks, appropriately enough, why the word occurs with dual *omicrons* rather than the more expected dual *alphas*, *basar*.[46] Yet on further reflection, this critique would seem to assume a uniform pronunciation of the vowels of an Aramaic term centuries before the Masoretes attempted to standardize the pronunciation via vowel markings.

Furthermore, even if we allow for the Masoretic vowel markings, the Aramaic term has, as its default vocalization (i.e., without a suffix), a vocal *shewa* followed by a *patakh* (see Dan 7:5), while the Hebrew has two *qamats*.[47] If we focus specifically on transliterated words in the LXX, we note that each of these vowels can be rendered by an *omicron* in the LXX (though obviously the LXX translators were not working from the Masoretic text per se). By comparing the standard Masoretic text with the Septuagint specifically for transliterated words, we see

40 Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style*, 119.

41 For a definition of *pun/wordplay*, see Chrys C. Caragounis, *The Development of Greek and the New Testament: Morphology, Syntax, Phonology, and Textual Transmission* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 464–65. For our purposes, I would suggest that the oral and mental intersection of Βεώρ/Βοσόρ/σάρξ can be legitimately called a pun because by altering the expected word, βεώρ, to the unexpected word, Βοσόρ, Peter evokes a third word, σάρξ, in the mind of his audience, a word which now has a different function than originally expected (i.e., a spiritual patronym, not a literal one). Finally, although studies on puns in Scripture are rare, the reader should note the recent article by Timothy A. Gabrielson, "Filling the Empty: An Unnoticed Pun in James 2:20–23," *BT* 70 (2020): 357–67.

42 E.g., Witherington, *Socio-rhetorical Commentary on 1–2 Peter*, 358; Thomas J. Krause, *Sprache, Stil und historischer Ort des zweiten Petrusbriefes*, WUNT 2/136 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck), 278–97; Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 354; Watson, *Invention, Arrangement, and Style*, 119.

43 See the discussion in Watson *Invention, Arrangement, and Style*, 31; and Michael Green, *2 Peter and Jude: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 19–20 (Green even speaks of the "Aramaic thought" [27] of the author). Anders Gerdmar is doubtful that Hellenistic is a helpful characterization (*Rethinking the Judaism-Hellenism Dichotomy: A Historiographical Case Study of Second Peter and Jude*, ConBNT 26 [Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell], 18–29).

44 A popular example: in a debate over which country's children are more well-behaved, a German would be well-justified in asserting to an American that "German children are *kinder*."

45 As the anonymous peer-reviewer noted, this would depend on the degree that the author of 2 Peter knew Aramaic.

46 Gene L. Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 289. Hays, "Fresh Look at βοσόρ," 105, raised the same issue years earlier.

47 See William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 51 [Hebrew: בָּשָׂר] and 400 [Aramaic: בְּשַׂר].

the following examples: (1) In Dan 2:1, the third vowel in the Masoretic rendering of Nebuchadnezzar's name is a *patakh*, rendered as an *omicron* in the LXX (similarly, the *omicron* that begins οθαλι in Ezra 10:28 corresponds to a *patakh* in the MT). (2) in Neh 3:4, מְשֻׁלָּם is transliterated as μοσολλαμ, meaning that the initial vocal *shewa* corresponds to an *omicron* in the LXX. Having said that, מְשֵׁיזַבְאֵל is transliterated as Μασεζεβηλ, so this is not consistent even within the same verse. (3) In Ezra 10:23, the proper name יְהוּדָה is rendered as Ιοδομ, where the second *omicron* (not the first) corresponds to a *qamets* in the Hebrew.[48]

My point here is *not* that the LXX translators perfectly reflect the original vocalization, centuries before the Masoretes; this is highly unlikely. My point is simply that the vowels used to vocalize Βοσόρ by the Masoretes can indeed correspond to *omicron* in the LXX centuries earlier. Consequently, a critique of the pun viewpoint on the basis of the vowels used in the Greek is not convincing.[49]

Green's second objection is stronger. He asks, "Would the first readers have any hope of understanding this oblique critique?"[50] At first glance, one would assume the answer to that would depend on how well Aramaic was known amongst Peter's audience. That Aramaic had a presence in Asia Minor in the fifth and fourth century BCE is well attested[51], though to what extent it was understood in the first century (CE) in Anatolia is unclear. Surely, however, the Jewish diaspora would have brought some knowledge of Aramaic among Jewish communities to Anatolia, and it must be considered a reasonable possibility that the designated reader of the scroll of 2 Peter would have understood some Aramaic words. If the destination of 2 Peter was not Anatolia, but rather someplace closer to Jerusalem, then that possibility grows significantly (the Bar-Kokhba letters, after all, include Aramaic, Hebrew, *and* Greek).

Yet even without Aramaic fluency, evidence exists that the Greek Βοσόρ had become associated with σάρξ perhaps as early as the second century, albeit for the wrong reasons.

The first piece of evidence comes from the Christianized version of the *Sortes Astrampsychi*. The *Sortes* is a fascinatingly odd magical-question-and-answer document, somewhat analogous to a modern magic eight-ball, though much more complicated and mathematically oriented.[52] The original edition can tentatively be dated to somewhere between the late first century to early third century.[53]

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48 In this last instance, it is quite possible that the LXX translator was viewing a completely different word than what we see in the MT, since generally speaking the LXX translators render this Hebrew word differently. My point, however, is that the LXX translators are not consistent with how they reflect MT vowel pointing, not surprising considering the Masoretes came centuries later.

49 Also, in light of 1 Sam 30:9–10, Βοσορ in the LXX does not consistently render only one set of vowel markings.

50 G. Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, 289.

51 E.g., Wolfgang Röllig, "Asia Minor as a Bridge between East and West: The Role of the Phoenicians and Aramaeans in the Transfer of Culture," in *Greece between East and West: Tenth–Eighth Centuries BC*, ed. Gunter Kopcke and Isabelle Tokumaru (Darmstadt, Germany: Philipp von Zabern, 1992), 100 (Röllig writes, "All of this may help us understand why it is that in the 5th and 4th centuries BC an Aramaic influence could make itself felt in Asia Minor rather quickly."); Frank Moore Cross Jr. "An Aramaic Inscription from Daskyleion," *BASOR* 184 (1966): 7; Richard S. Hanson, "Aramaic Funerary and Boundary Inscriptions from Asia Minor," *BASOR* 192 (1968): 3–11.

52 A helpful description of how the *Sortes Astrampsychi* functioned can be found in David Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 182, and Randall Stewart, "The Textual Transmission of the 'Sortes Astrampsychi,'" *Illinois Classical Studies* 20 (1995): 138–39. For the text itself, I am relying on the editions found in the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae database (http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu).

53 Stewart, "Textual Transmission of the 'Sortes Astrampsychi,'" 137–38, following T. C. Skeat.

The original *Sortes* was quite pagan and utilized the names of pagan gods (both Egyptian and Greco-Roman) to provide the answers.[54] Somewhere along the way, however, this popular book was "Christianized," with some of the more scandalous questions swapped out with more appropriate ones.[55] In the later Christianized version of the *Sortes*, Βοσόρ is apparently considered a proper name and is linked to *σάρξ*.[56]

In the Christianized *Sortes* 3.1.10, Βοσόρ occurs in a list of biblical and extrabiblical proper names including, Eve, Azaria, Nahum, Adam, Enoch, Methuselah, and Lamech. Βοσόρ is nestled between Μελχά and Ζαμβρί. Each name is preceded by a number designated by letters, plus the verb *ἐρώτησον* (i.e., these are the people one is supposed to question; in the Christianized version, such names as Adam and Noah have replaced pagan deities). The significant takeaway is that at least one Christian redactor of *Sortes* considered Βοσόρ a proper name, despite the extreme rarity of the term in Greek up until this point.[57]

Second, and even more significantly, in one manuscript of *Sortes* 4.38.1t, in one of the headings for the answers section, it states, *λη* Βοσόρ *σάρξ*. Thus the name Βοσόρ" is directly linked with the Greek term for "flesh." This is despite the fact that up until this point, in the entirety of published Greek literature, the two words have never occurred within such proximity of each other (see note 56).

Here is the point: somehow, somewhere, within early postapostolic Christian pop-culture, we have evidence that Βοσόρ was both considered a proper name and was linked to the Greek term for "flesh." This increases the likelihood that 2 Peter or an even earlier tradition could have produced such a bilingual pun years earlier and expect to be understood.

The second cluster of evidence that Βοσόρ came to be seen as meaning "flesh" in early Christianity is that some patristic commentaries clearly equate the two. Cyril of Alexandria, for example, when commenting on the LXX Isa 63:1, the geographical locations Εδωμ and Βοσόρ (the exact spelling as in 2 Peter), states, "Edom can be translated either 'of wheat' or 'of earth,' Bozrah [Βοσόρ] as either 'of flesh' or 'fleshly.' So they are asking, 'Who is this one from the earth, this earthling?' The scarlet garments from Bozrah means that his clothes were reddened from flesh, or rather, from blood."[58] Similar exegesis can be found in Didymus the Blind (*Comm.*

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54 Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 184. Gerald M. Browne argues strongly that the work originated in Egypt in the 200s CE ("The Origin and Date of the *Sortes Astrampsychi*," *Illinois Classical Studies* 1 [1976]: 53–58).

55 Stewart, "Textual Transmission of the 'Sortes Astrampsychi,'" 139 n 19.

56 I performed three searches in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* database (University of California, 2014; online: http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/). The first two searches covered βοσόρ, ὁ, ἡ and βοσόρ (the second set of results essentially duplicates the first, except that it omits one of the *Sortes* references and the two occurrences in Josephus, for some reason). The end result is that besides 2 Pet 3:10, up through the first century CE (searching with "Date [earliest]") according to the *TLG* database the word only occurs in the LXX (12x), twice in Josephus (*A.J.* 4.173 and 12.340), and twice in the *Sortes* 3.1.10 and 4.38.1t. The *TLG* lists *Sortes* as pre-first century, but this is highly doubtful, especially the version of it that is extent. Understandably, the usage in the LXX and Josephus refers to geographical locations. The third search I performed in *TLG* is as follows: Βοσόρ, ὁ, ἡ or βοσόρ and *σάρξ*, -*κός*, ἡ within twenty words near first word. The only lexical hit of any kind before the postapostolic era (beginning with Origen, *Hom. Pss.* 2.8.22) was *Sortes* 4.37.4 (which, technically, should probably not be classified as earlier than Origen).

57 I say "at least one editor" because Βοσόρ is a textual variant here (specifically, for *Sortes* 4.38). Of the other two editions accessible in *TLG*, the *ecdosis prior* has λη Ἰερρεμίας preceded by λξ Δαυείδ and followed by λθ Μάρκος. *Oracula*, on the other hand, has δεκὰς λη^η (this particular edition uses numbers instead of names for the headings).

58 Robert Louis Wilken, trans. and ed., with Angela Russell Christman and Michael J. Hollerich,

Zacch. 1.24) and Eusebius (*Comm. Isa.* 2.7). In addition, Theodoret of Antioch (400s CE), twice in his writings, when interpreting Isa 63:1, explicitly identifies Βοσόρ as *σάρξ*: (1) *Comm. Isa.* 571–572 (Ἐδὼμ δὲ τὴν ἐρυθρὰν ὀ[νομ]άζουσι γῆν, Βοσὸρ δὲ τὴν σάρκα), and (2) *Expl. Cant.* 81.120 (σημαίνει δὲ τὸ μὲν Ἐδὼμ τὴν γῆν, τὸ δὲ Βοσὸρ τὴν σάρκα).

The point is this: some key church fathers, when interacting with the LXX Βοσόρ as a place name, saw a deeper meaning in that it referred to "the flesh," that is, physicality. How could they have done so without some latent understanding (or long-standing tradition) that Ββοσόρ originally meant "flesh" (regardless of whether or not they understood Hebrew or Aramaic)?

To summarize: somehow, within the first few centuries of Christianity Βοσόρ was associated with *σάρξ* within certain circles. This increases the likelihood that Peter, or perhaps an earlier tradition, could have developed a wordplay with Βοσόρ and be understood.

To my knowledge only one alternative to Βοσόρ as a pun has been defended with any amount of detail in recent literature. Hays builds his argument on the following facts: (1) Both Βοσόρ and Βοσόρra "interchangeably identified a single city" in the LXX; (2) LXX Gen 36:32, 1 Chr 1:43, and Job 42:17 ("Edomite king lists") demonstrate that LXX translators confused *Bela'* with *Balak*; and (3) in each of those three texts, "the *only* other occurrences of the name Beor outside of the Balaam narratives," Βοσόρra occurs in the context.[59] Consequently, Hays argues for the possibility that "the author of 2 Peter inadvertently replaced Balaam's true patronymic (βεώρ) with a similar name (βοσόρ) with which it occurred in close and repeated conjunction."[60]

A few points can be made in response. First, Hays's thesis assumes that the author of 2 Peter was more familiar with the details of three LXX Edomite king lists than he was with the actual story of Balaam, which *unambiguously*, in the LXX, calls Balaam the "son of Beor" (Num 22:5; 24:3, 15; 31:18, Deut 23:5, and Josh 13:22). That the author of 2 Peter could make a mistake based on three obscure LXX texts while ignoring (or being ignorant of) the actual LXX texts that form the basis for his story would seem to strain credulity, if we assume he was using the LXX in the first place (a debatable point).

Second, let us assume, for the sake of argument, that the author of 2 Peter was more familiar with those three other texts than he was with the details in Numbers. Yet in each of the texts Hays discusses (LXX Gen 36:32, LXX 1 Chr 1:43, and LXX Job 42:17), we *still* have the expression "son of Beor," albeit as a description of Balak (υἱὸς τοῦ Βεωρ, υἱός Βεωρ, and ὁ τοῦ Βεωρ, respectively). If the author of 2 Peter was interacting with these texts, why would he gloss over these clear references to "son of Beor" and get confused by city names, instead?

Third, it is debatable to what extent 2 Peter even uses the LXX (compared to 1 Peter, which almost always uses the LXX).[61] For example, 2 Pet 2:22's quotation of Prov 26:11 is much closer to the Hebrew than the LXX.[62] Furthermore, since this is probably the only direct quotation of

Isaiah: Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators, The Church's Bible (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 491. The LXX of Isa 63:1a reads: Τίς οὗτος ὁ παραγινόμενος ἐξ Εδωμ, ἐρύθημα ἱματίων ἐκ Βοσορ. The Hebrew for ἐκ Βοσορ is מִבָּצְרָה. The Latin *Vulgate* reads, *de Bosra*.

59 Hays, "Fresh Look at βοσόρ," 108–9.

60 Hays, "Fresh Look at βοσόρ," 109.

61 Karen H. Jobes, "The Septuagint Textual Tradition in 1 Peter," in *Septuagint Research: Issues and Challenges in the Study of the Greek Jewish Scriptures*, ed. Wolfgang Kraus and R. Glenn Wooden, SCS 53 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 311–31.

62 Richard N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 179. I have confirmed Longenecker's point with my own examination. For example, the Hebrew pattern is "noun + participle," similar to 2 Pet 2:22's *κύων ἐπιστρέψας*, whereas the LXX inserts a *ὅταν* between *κύων* and *ἐπέλθῃ*, which is a subjunctive.

the Old Testament in 2 Peter, we are left with an epistle that is clearly not reliant on the LXX.[63] Consequently, the suggestion that the author of 2 Peter made a mistake based on a faulty reading of the LXX loses strength if, in fact, he was not even relying on the LXX in the first place.

Fourth, Balaam as the son of Beor is attested even in a nonbiblical text.[64] Given the fact that 2 Peter is well-versed in obscure material (e.g., his use of the extremely rare verb ταρταρόω in 2:4), it is possible that Peter would have known that Balaam's father (or ancestor) was Beor even without direct access to LXX manuscripts.

In conclusion, Hays's suggestion is significantly less attractive than the idea that the linguistically savvy author of 2 Peter created or reproduced a bilingual pun that fits perfectly both with the context of chapter 2 and the perception of Balaam during that era. Thus Βοσόρ, from the perspective of the epistle's author, makes sense.

2. *Is a transcriptional accident likely?*

It is at this point that many invocations of LDP go astray.[65] In order to truly prefer reading A over reading B via LDP, one must first demonstrate that neither A nor B are likely to have come about by accident. For our purposes, we must ask the question: could a scribe have *accidentally* altered Βοσόρ into Βεώρ or vice versa?

Since both words have a *beta*, an *omicron*, and a *rho*, this is a legitimate question. We will focus primarily on the consonant "s," since vowel sounds would be much more subject to accidental alteration via differences in accent, et cetera (the reader may consider how "washing machine" becomes "w*or*shing machine" in some spoken US dialects).

In theory, a scribe working by himself could have accidentally added or omitted a sigma, possibly due to sloppy writing on the *exemplar*. If two scribes were working together, one dictating and one writing, then perhaps one could argue that a different accent or even a small cough would have either vocally omitted or created an "s" sound in the ears of the one copying.

Nonetheless, I would suggest that it would have to be an incredibly fantastic coincidence that the right set of circumstances, at just the right time, would have omitted an "s" and caused some vowel changes that would create what just happens to be the name of Beor's actual father (or ancestor) in Numbers. Conversely, it would have been a fantastic coincidence that the accidental addition of an "s" sound would have created the *exact* word that produces a sophisticated Greek-Aramaic pun that fits so well in the context. Surely, if ever Occam's Razor were to be evoked in textual criticism, it would be here! Thus the possibility of a mistake seems to be highly unlikely, though not completely impossible.

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63 See the discussion in D. A. Carson, "2 Peter," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic), 1047.

64 The reader should note the fascinating "Deir ʿAlla Inscription" discovered in 1967 near the Jordan River, which is about "Balaam son of Beor." A description and translation can be found at the Livius website (https://www.livius.org/sources/content/deir–alla–inscription/). A helpful introduction to the text can be found at Osama Shukir Muhammed Amin, "The Bal'am Text from Deir Alla," *World History Encyclopedia*, https://www.worldhistory.org/image/10089/the–balam–text–from–deir–alla/. A more academic discussion, closer to the original discovery, can be found in Jacob Hoftjizer, "The Prophet Balaam in a Sixth Century Aramaic Inscription," *BA* 39 (1976): 11–17.

65 Tov states, "This rule does not take into consideration simple scribal errors.… After all, by definition, every scribal error creates a *lectio difficilior*" ("Criteria for Evaluating Textual Readings," 439).

3. *Yet does* Βοσόρ *look like a "mistake" that might be changed by a scribe?*

That either Βεώρ or Βοσόρ were *created* by mistake is unlikely. Yet does the latter reading *look* like a mistake? To this we must answer a resounding "yes," at least to anybody that does not remember their Aramaic. The evidence is that despite the fact that *not a single current Greek New Testament* has Βεώρ, nonetheless a significant number of modern translations have Βεώρ, including the NLT, RSV, ESV, NASB^{95+20}, and (surprisingly) the New King James.[66]

Yet why would a translation do this? On the one hand, it is highly likely that the original Revised Version (1881) was simply following Westcott and Hort when they included "Beor," which would then explain the RSV, ASV, and perhaps even the ESV.

On the other hand, some translations that had a Greek base text with Ββοσόρ still changed it to Beor, for example, the NLT (NA^{27} and UBS^{4}) and the NKJV (*TR*). I believe two possibilities exist in such cases: first, the committee may have thought an ancient scribe had made a mistake and thus seemingly corrected the odd Βοσόρ to Βεώρ (as the Old Testament attests). Second, the committee may have believed that Βοσόρ was a nonstandard spelling variation and thus, for the sake of consistency, altered it to Βεώρ—this is probably why the NKJV, for one, has "Beor."[67] Regardless, in either situation the committee misunderstand the reason for "Bosor." The NET (which reads Βοσόρ) is surely correct when it suggests in a footnote: "Although many modern translations … read 'Beor' here, this is due to harmonization with the OT rather than following a variant textual reading."[68]

Consequently, if Βοσόρ looked like a mistake or an odd spelling variant to educated, modern translators, surely we must concede the possibility that the word would also look like a mistake to an ancient Christian scribe who probably did not know Aramaic or Hebrew but knew the LXX Old Testament stories fairly well.

With this final point, we have fulfilled Westcott and Hort's "real excellence" vs. "perceived excellence" qualifications. The original reading, Βοσόρ, possesses real excellence as a sophisticated pun. Yet the alternative reading, Βεώρ, possesses perceived excellence precisely because it would correct Βοσόρ to what many scribes would know as the *real* name of Balaam's father.

In light of this test-case, I would like to suggest that LDP has some limited value, *after* the external evidence has been considered, and *when* the following questions are asked: (1) Does the preferred reading make sense? (2) Can we rule out the likelihood that either the preferred reading or the secondary reading could have been a mistake? (3) Would a scribe have had good reason to think that the preferred reading was a mistake, resulting in that reasonable scribe correcting it?[69] Only if these three questions can be answered with a "yes" (without recourse to conspiracy theories) should LDP then function as evidence for a particular reading.

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66 I do not have access to the full history of the Nestle-Aland editions in regard to 2 Pet 2:15; earlier editions might have had βεώρ, thus influencing some translations. Yet the NLT, at least, was based on the 27th ed., which has βοσόρ.

67 The preface to the New King James Version states that "the King James spelling of untranslated [i.e., transliterated] words is retained, although made uniform throughout" ("Preface," in *The New King James*, International Bible Society ed. [Nashville: Nelson, 1983], iv; "Isaiah" and "Elijah" are given as examples). I am grateful to translator Glenn J. Kerr for pointing this out to me.

68 See note 57, at "2 Peter 2:15," *The NET Bible*, https://netbible.org/bible/2+Peter+2.

69 This raises the question of to what extent we can guess on what a reasonable scribe would intentionally do in correcting another manuscript. For future investigation, it might be helpful to explore legal literature's reasonable person as an analogy for the study of textual variants, including the argument that "empirically observed practice or perception" provides for a better foundation of the concept than "normative ethical commitment" (Alan D. Miller and Ronen Perry, "The Reasonable Person," *New York University Law Review* 87 [2012]: 323–92). If applied

Conclusion

We have seen that Βοσόρ vs. Βεώρ in 2 Pet 2:15 offers a unique situation for examining the application of LDP. This is due to the fact that Westcott and Hort's paradigm of *real* versus *perceived* can be clearly seen, since (1) Βοσόρ makes sense, but only if one is knowledgeable of Aramaic and/or Hebrew, and (2) the likelihood of the scribe's misunderstanding Βοσόρ and correcting it to Βεώρ is reflected in the tendency of some modern translation committees.

Consequently, LDP may be rehabilitated somewhat from various criticisms. By examining LDP in a place where textual and methodological biases do *not* matter, we may establish a methodology for utilizing LDP fairly and objectively in cases where such bias will undoubtedly play a role. It is hoped that the future will produce more studies devoted to eliminating the subjectivity of the internal canons.[70]

to textual criticism, perhaps scribal habits *as evidenced by empirical evidence* should be used as the starting point for what, in fact, a scribe is likely to do (e.g., James R. Royse's influential *Scribal Habits in Early Greek New Testament Papyri* [Leiden: Brill, 2007]), even if this demonstrates that some of the classical canons of internal reading are, in fact, less reliable than one might think.

70 I echo here Tommy Wasserman's statement that "methodological progress lies in greater control and precision in the application of external and internal criteria" ("Criteria for Evaluating Readings," 579). Also, one should read Royse, "Scribal Habits," 143–45, for one of the most significant critiques of the subjectivity inherent in many claims made about what scribes are likely to do and when a particular internal canon should be utilized in favor of a reading.