A HARMONY OF EXODUS IN THREE TRADITIONS

The Masoretic Text, the Septuagint, and the Dead Sea Scrolls — Phase 2C: The Tabernacle Narratives of Exodus 25–40

Independent Scholarly Research

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Preface

This volume presents Phase 2C of the MT/LXX/DSS Textual Harmony Project, focusing on the Tabernacle narratives of Exodus — the extended account of the construction of the portable wilderness sanctuary in Exodus 25–40. These chapters represent the most dramatic **architectural divergence** in the entire MT/LXX textual relationship: the same physical object (the Tabernacle) described in the same two-part literary structure (divine blueprint in chs. 25–31, human construction in chs. 35–40) but in a substantially different order in the LXX, with significant additions, omissions, and reorganizations that go well beyond anything explicable as translation technique.

The Tabernacle narratives have generated a specialized scholarly literature because they raise a fundamental question that bears on the entire project of textual criticism: **When an ancient translator presents the same content in a substantially different order, is the translator exercising editorial freedom, or faithfully rendering a different Hebrew source?** The Dead Sea Scrolls evidence for Exodus — though fragmentary — provides critical data points for evaluating this question.

The four phases of this project have now examined four different *types* of textual divergence:

Phase 1 (Jeremiah): Two complete literary editions — a shorter and a longer text

Phase 2A (Psalms): Compositional divergence — different psalm counts, orders, and boundaries

Phase 2B (Samuel): Narrative divergence — the same stories told with different details and contradictions

Phase 2C (Exodus): Architectural divergence — the same instructions reordered, restructured, and supplemented

The Three Traditions for Exodus

The Masoretic Text of Exodus

The MT of Exodus is preserved in the standard witnesses:

Codex Leningradensis (L, 1009 C.E.) — basis of BHS and BHQ

Aleppo Codex (A, c. 920 C.E.) — partially preserved through Exodus 28

Samaritan Pentateuch (SP) — an important independent Hebrew witness, discussed below

The BHQ Exodus volume (edited by Anneli Aejmelaeus and Udo Quast, 2023) provides the most current critical apparatus.

The MT of Exodus 35–40 presents the **construction** of the Tabernacle in an order closely parallel to — but not identical with — the **blueprint** given in chapters 25–31. The pattern is:

Blueprint (MT Chs. 25–31)

Construction (MT Chs. 35–40)

Ark of the Covenant (25:10–22)

Ark (37:1–9)

Table of Showbread (25:23–30)

Table (37:10–16)

Golden Lampstand (25:31–40)

Lampstand (37:17–24)

Altar of Incense (30:1–10)

Altar of Incense (37:25–29)

Court and Curtains (26–27)

Court and Curtains (38:9–20)

Altar of Burnt Offering (27:1–8)

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Bronze Laver (30:17–21)

Bronze Laver (38:8)

Priestly Garments (28–29)

Priestly Garments (39:1–31)

Anointing Oil and Incense (30:22–38)

(No parallel in MT construction)

Bezalel and Oholiab (31:1–11)

(See Exodus 35:30–36:7)

Sabbath Command (31:12–17)

(See Exodus 35:1–3)

The Septuagint of Exodus

The LXX of Exodus presents a substantially different organization of the Tabernacle construction narrative. The differences are concentrated in **chapters 35–40**, where the LXX:

Presents the construction elements in a **different sequence** from the MT

Omits several passages present in the MT (including the entire account of the bronze laver, MT 38:8)

Adds material not present in the MT (a different account of the court curtains)

Uses a distinct **narrative formula** ("just as the Lord commanded Moses") that appears more frequently and in different positions than in the MT

The standard critical edition is the Göttingen Septuagint, *Exodus* (edited by John William Wevers, 1991). Wevers's accompanying study, *Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus* (Scholars Press, 1990), is the essential exegetical companion. The NETS translation by Larry Perkins (2007) is the standard scholarly English translation.

The LXX of Exodus chapters 35–40 is approximately **1,000 words shorter** than the MT — comparable in proportional terms to the LXX's shortness relative to MT Jeremiah, though the mechanism is different (reordering and compression rather than editorial revision).

The Dead Sea Scrolls of Exodus

Exodus is one of the most extensively attested books at Qumran. The relevant manuscripts include:

Signum	Location	Content	Character
4QExod-Lev^f (4Q17)	Cave 4	Exodus 36–38 (fragmentary)	**Closer to LXX** in some readings
4QpaleoExod^m (4Q22)	Cave 4	Exodus 6–37 (extensive)	

Samaritan Pentateuch type

2QExod^a (2Q2)

Cave 2

Exodus 1; 7–9; 11

MT-aligned

2QExod^b (2Q3)

Cave 2

Exodus 4; 12–13; 18–19

MT-aligned

4QExod^b (4Q13)

Cave 4

Exodus 1–6

Mixed

1QExod (1Q2)

Cave 1

Exodus 16; 19–20; 22

MT-aligned

MasExod

Masada

Exodus 35:38–36:24

MT-aligned

The most important for the Tabernacle narrative are:

4QExod-Lev^f (4Q17): Contains fragments of Exodus 36–38 and presents readings that in several instances agree with the LXX against the MT. Critical edition in DJD XII (1994), edited by Frank Moore Cross. This scroll is the primary DSS evidence for evaluating whether the LXX's Tabernacle sequence reflects a genuine Hebrew tradition or translator editorial freedom.

4QpaleoExod^m (4Q22): Written in the ancient paleo-Hebrew script rather than the Aramaic square script used for most Qumran manuscripts, this scroll preserves a text type closely related to the **Samaritan Pentateuch** — an independent Hebrew tradition with its own extensive

variants from the MT. Critical edition in DJD IX (1992), edited by Patrick W. Skehan, Eugene Ulrich, and Judith Sanderson.

MasExod: Fragments from Masada preserve Exodus 35:38–36:24 in a text that **agrees with the MT** at every preserved point — providing a Hebrew counterwitness to the LXX sequence.

Part One: The Blueprint Chapters — Exodus 25–31

The blueprint for the Tabernacle in MT Exodus 25–31 has relatively fewer significant MT/LXX divergences than the construction chapters. However, several important variants in the blueprint chapters set the stage for understanding what follows.

Exodus 25:1–9 — The Divine Command to Build

MT (ASV): And Jehovah spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they take for me an offering: of every man whose heart maketh him willing ye shall take my offering. And this is the offering which ye shall take of them: gold, and silver, and brass, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen, and goats' hair, and rams' skins dyed red, and sealskins, and acacia wood, oil for the light, spices for the anointing oil, and for the sweet incense, onyx stones, and stones to be set, for the ephod, and for the breastplate.

And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I show thee, the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the furniture thereof, even so shall ye make it.

LXX (Brenton): And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the children of Israel, and take first-fruits of all who are disposed in their heart to give, and ye shall take my first-fruits. And this is the offering which ye shall take from them: gold, and silver, and brass, and blue, and purple, and double-scarlet, and fine-spun linen, and goat's hair, and rams' skins dyed red, and hyacinth-coloured skins, and incorruptible wood, and oil for the light, and incense-oil for ointment, and for the composition of incense, and sardius stones, and stones for the carved work of the breastplate and the full-length robe.

And thou shalt make me a sanctuary, and I will appear among you. And thou shalt make me all things according to the pattern I show thee on the mount, even the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all its furniture: so thou shalt make it.

DSS: No fragment clearly preserves this passage in a way that adjudicates between MT and LXX.

Variance Notes: - **[VAR]** MT: *"that I may dwell among them"* (*wĕshâkantî bĕtôkâm*); LXX: *"and I will appear among you"* (*kai ophthēsomai en hymin*). The Hebrew *shâkan* (to dwell/tent) — the root from which *Mishkân* (Tabernacle) is derived — is here rendered by the LXX as *"appear"* rather than *"dwell."* This is a significant theological difference: the MT emphasizes divine dwelling (*shekhinah*, presence among Israel); the LXX emphasizes divine manifestation/appearance. The MT's *shâkan* root links the command directly to the Tabernacle's Hebrew name (*mishkân*, dwelling-place); the LXX breaks this etymological connection. - **[VAR]** MT: *"sealskins"* (*'ôrôt tĕhâshîm*) — the material covering the Tabernacle;

the *tâhash* is an unidentified animal. LXX: *"hyacinth-coloured skins"* — interpreting the color rather than the animal type. - **[VAR]** MT: *"According to all that I show thee, the pattern of the tabernacle"* — LXX: *"And thou shalt make me all things according to the pattern I show thee on the mount, even the pattern of the tabernacle."* The LXX adds *"on the mount"* (*en tō orei*) — specifying Mount Sinai as the location of the divine blueprint revelation.

Exodus 25:10–22 — The Ark of the Covenant

MT (ASV): And they shall make an ark of acacia wood: two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof, and a cubit and a half the height thereof. And thou shalt overlay it with pure gold, within and without shalt thou overlay it, and shalt make upon it a crown of gold round about. And thou shalt cast four rings of gold for it, and put them in the four feet thereof; and two rings shall be on the one side of it, and two rings on the other side of it. And thou shalt make staves of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold. And thou shalt put the staves into the rings on the sides of the ark, to bear the ark therewith.

And thou shalt put into the ark the testimony which I shall give thee.

And thou shalt make a mercy-seat of pure gold: two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof, and a cubit and a half the breadth thereof. And thou shalt make two cherubim of gold; of beaten work shalt thou make them, at the two ends of the mercy-seat.

And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy-seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel.

LXX (Brenton): And thou shalt make the ark of testimony, of incorruptible wood; the length of two cubits and a half, and the breadth of a cubit and a half, and the height of a cubit and a half. And thou shalt gild it with pure gold, thou shalt gild it within and without; and thou shalt make for it golden wreaths twisted round about. And thou shalt cast for it four golden rings, and thou shalt put them on the four sides; two rings on the one side, and two rings on the other side. And thou shalt make carrying poles of incorruptible wood, and shalt overlay them with gold.

And thou shalt put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, to bear the ark with them. They shall be prominent, the poles of the ark.

And thou shalt put into the ark the testimonies which I shall give thee. And thou shalt make a propitiatory, a lid of pure gold; the length of two cubits and a half, and the breadth of a cubit and a half. And thou shalt make two cherubs graven in gold, and thou shalt put them on both sides of the propitiatory.

And I will make myself known to thee from thence, and I will speak to thee above the propitiatory between the two cherubs that are upon the ark of the testimony, even in all things which I shall charge thee concerning the children of Israel.

DSS: 4QExod^b (4Q13) contains fragmentary material for Exodus 25 but does not clearly preserve the verses above in a way that adjudicates between MT and LXX.

Variance Notes: - **[VAR]** MT: *"ark of acacia wood"* — LXX: *"ark of testimony… of incorruptible wood."* The LXX consistently translates the Hebrew *'ătsê shittîm* (acacia wood) as *xylōn asēptōn* (incorruptible wood) throughout Exodus — an interpretive translation that emphasizes the wood's quality rather than its species. - **[VAR]** MT: *"mercy-seat"* (*kappôret*) — LXX: *"propitiatory"* (*hilastērion*). The Hebrew *kappôret* is from the root *kâpar* (to cover, to atone). The LXX *hilastērion* (place of propitiation/atonement) captures the theological content but uses a different Greek root. This same word is used in Romans 3:25 (Paul: *"whom God set forth as a propitiation"*) — the NT's application of Exodus language to Christ's death. - **[ADD in LXX]** The LXX adds after the pole instruction: *"They shall be prominent, the poles of the ark"* — a sentence not found in the MT at this point. This detail appears in the parallel MT passage at 1 Kings 8:8 (*"And the staves were so long that the ends of the staves were seen from the holy place before the inner sanctuary"*), suggesting the LXX translator has incorporated the 1 Kings parallel.

Part Two: The Central Divergence — Exodus 36–40

Overview: The Order Problem

The most significant textual divergence in the Tabernacle narratives — and arguably in the entire Pentateuch — is the difference in **order** between MT Exodus 35–40 and LXX Exodus 35–40. The LXX presents the construction of the Tabernacle's furnishings in a sequence that is systematically different from the MT.

The full comparison:

Item	MT Order (MT chs. 35–40)	LXX Order (LXX chs. 35–40)
Sabbath command	35:1–3	35:1–3 (same)
Collection of materials	35:4–29	35:4–29 (same)
Bezalel and Oholiab appointed	35:30–36:7	35:30–36:7 (same)
Curtains of the Dwelling	36:8–19	36:8–34 (same order, slightly different)
Boards and bases	36:20–34	—
Veil and screen		

36:35–38

36:35–38 (same)

Ark

37:1–9

37:1–9 (same)

Table of Showbread

37:10–16

37:10–16 (same)

Golden Lampstand

37:17–24

37:17–24 (same)

Altar of Incense

37:25–29

37:25–28

Anointing Oil and Incense

—

LXX 37:29

Altar of Burnt Offering

38:1–7

38:1–7 (same)

Bronze Laver

38:8

ABSENT

Court curtains

38:9–20

38:9–22 (different formulation)

Materials inventory

38:21–31

LXX 38:24–31 (abbreviated)

Priestly garments

39:1–31

PLACED EARLIER in LXX (after 36:38)

Robe

39:22–26

LXX 36:35

Ephod

39:2–7

LXX 36:9–12

Breastplate

39:8–21

LXX 36:15–29

Other garments

39:27–31

LXX 36:35–38

Moses inspects the work

39:32–43

— (compressed)

Erection of the Tabernacle

40:1–33

40:1–33 (substantially parallel)

Divine Glory fills the Tabernacle

40:34–38

40:34–38 (same)

The most striking single divergence: in the MT, the priestly garments are constructed in chapter 39, near the end of the construction sequence. In the LXX, the **priestly garments are constructed in chapter 36**, immediately after the Tabernacle's structural elements and before the sacred furnishings. The LXX gives the garments a fundamentally different position in the construction sequence — a difference of several chapters and a radically different organizational logic.

The Bronze Laver — The Most Discussed Single Omission

MT (ASV) — Exodus 38:8: And he made the laver of brass, and the base thereof of brass, of the mirrors of the ministering women who ministered at the door of the tent of meeting.

LXX (Brenton): *[This verse is ABSENT from the LXX]*

DSS (4QExod-Lev^f): The 4QExod-Lev^f fragments at Exodus 38 are fragmentary. The critical question — does the scroll have the laver verse? — cannot be definitively answered from the preserved fragments, though Cross noted that the pattern of 4QExod-Lev^f at nearby verses showed affinities with the LXX tradition.

Variance Notes: - **[OMIT — Dramatic]** The bronze laver was a major cultic object — a large basin containing water for priestly purification before service at the altar. Its complete absence from the LXX of the construction narrative is theologically and liturgically significant. The laver does appear in the **blueprint** (MT Exodus 30:17–21; LXX Exodus 30:17–21 — present in both traditions), making its absence from the LXX **construction** account an asymmetry between blueprint and fulfillment unique to the LXX.

Three explanations have been proposed: 1. **LXX translator omission**: The translator omitted 38:8 deliberately or accidentally (haplography). 2. **Different Hebrew Vorlage**: The LXX Vorlage lacked this verse — a genuine textual divergence in the Hebrew tradition. 3. **Later MT addition**: The verse was added to the MT after the LXX translation was made. Significant support for this view: the verse contains the remarkable detail that the laver was made *"of the mirrors of the ministering women who ministered at the door of the tent of meeting"* — a tradition that has no parallel elsewhere in the construction narrative and that the rabbis (in *Midrash Tanchuma*) found so difficult they devoted extensive attention to explaining what these "ministering women" were doing and why their mirrors were donated for the laver.

The mirror-women detail is one of the most discussed single phrases in Exodus scholarship precisely because it appears to preserve a tradition about female cultic service at the tent of meeting that is otherwise suppressed or absent from the Hebrew Bible's ritual texts. If the verse is a later addition to the MT (not original to the construction narrative), its extraordinary content makes it one of the most significant additions — preserving a memory of women's religious roles that the LXX tradition may not have shared.

Exodus 36:35–39:31 — The Priestly Garments Sequence

The major structural divergence between the MT and LXX in the Tabernacle narrative is the placement of the priestly garments. The comparison requires presenting the MT and LXX sequences in parallel:

MT SEQUENCE (Exodus 36–39): - 36:8–38: Curtains, boards, veil, screen (structural elements) - 37:1–9: The Ark - 37:10–16: The Table of Showbread - 37:17–24: The Golden Lampstand - 37:25–29: The Altar of Incense - 38:1–7: The Altar of Burnt Offering - 38:8: The Bronze Laver - 38:9–20: The Court - 38:21–31: The Materials Inventory - **39:1–31: The Priestly Garments** ← HERE, near the end

LXX SEQUENCE (LXX Exodus 36–39): - 36:8–34: Curtains, boards (structural elements) - 36:35–38: Veil and screen - **36:9–38: The Priestly Garments** ← HERE, after structural elements - 37:1–9: The Ark - 37:10–16: The Table of Showbread - 37:17–24: The Golden Lampstand - 37:25–29: The Altar of Incense and Anointing Oil - 38:1–7: The Altar of Burnt Offering - 38:9–22: The Court - 38:24–31: The Materials Inventory (abbreviated)

Variance Notes: - **[ORDER — Major]** The LXX construction sequence builds: structural elements (curtains, boards) → **priestly garments** → sacred furnishings (Ark, Table, Lampstand) → altars → court. The MT sequence builds: structural elements (curtains, boards) → sacred furnishings → altars → court → **priestly garments** → final inspection.

The LXX logic: The sanctuary is built outside-in, from the structural shell inward to the most sacred objects. The priestly garments come immediately after the structural elements because they belong to the same category as the building itself — the garments *are* a kind of mobile sanctuary that the priests carry on their bodies. Placing them early makes the priests dressed and ready to serve before the furnishings are placed inside.

The MT logic: The sanctuary is built inside-out, beginning with the most sacred object (the Ark) and moving outward to the court, and finally dressing the priests. The garments come last, as the final preparation before the sanctuary's commissioning. Moses's inspection follows the garment-making and precedes the erection of the Tabernacle.

Neither sequence is self-evidently superior as an account of how the construction actually proceeded — both are literary-theological arrangements, not construction timetables. The question is which arrangement is earlier.

The Materials Inventory — Exodus 38:21–31 (MT) / 38:24–31 (LXX)

MT (ASV) — 38:21–31: This is the sum of the things of the tabernacle, even of the tabernacle of the testimony, as they were counted, according to the commandment of Moses, through the service of the Levites, by the hand of Ithamar, the son of Aaron the priest.

And Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, made all that Jehovah commanded Moses.

And with him was Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, a craftsman, and a skilful workman, and an embroiderer in blue, and in purple, and in scarlet, and fine linen.

All the gold that was used for the work in all the work of the sanctuary, even the gold of the wave-offering, was twenty and nine talents, and seven hundred and thirty shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary.

And the silver of them that were numbered of the congregation was a hundred talents, and a thousand and seven hundred and seventy and five shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary.

And the brass of the wave-offering was seventy talents, and two thousand and four hundred shekels.

LXX (Brenton) — 38:24–31: [The LXX has a compressed and partially reordered version of this inventory]

And all the gold that was employed for the works in all the holy furniture, even the gold of the offerings, was twenty-nine talents, and seven hundred and twenty-nine shekels according to the holy shekel.

And the silver of them that were numbered of the congregation, an hundred talents and a thousand seven hundred and seventy-five shekels, the half-shekel current among the numbered from twenty years old and upward, for six hundred thousand and three thousand five hundred and fifty.

And the hundred talents of silver went to cast the hundred capitals of the tabernacle, and the capitals of the veil. A talent for a capital.

And the thousand seven hundred and seventy-five shekels he made into hooks for the pillars, and he overlaid their chapters, and filleted them.

And the brass of the offering was seventy talents and one thousand four hundred and thirty shekels.

DSS (4QExod-Lev^f): The scroll's fragments at this passage are small. However, the MT's introductory verses (38:21–24 — identifying Ithamar as the accountant, Bezalel as the chief craftsman, and Oholiab as his associate) are **absent from the LXX's parallel passage**. This is one of the most significant structural omissions.

Variance Notes: - **[OMIT in LXX]** MT 38:21–24 (the identification of Ithamar, Bezalel, and Oholiab as responsible for the inventory) is **absent from the LXX**. The LXX goes directly to the gold totals without the introductory attribution. - **[VAR — Numbers]** MT: *"twenty-nine talents, and seven hundred and thirty shekels"* of gold; LXX: *"twenty-nine talents, and seven hundred and twenty-nine shekels"* — a one-shekel difference. Such numerical variants are common in ancient manuscripts and are among the most common scribal errors (copyists misread numbers). - **[VAR — Numbers]** MT: *"two thousand and four hundred shekels"* of bronze; LXX: *"one thousand four hundred and thirty shekels."* A larger numerical divergence in the bronze total — approximately 970 shekels difference, significant enough to suggest either a different source document for the LXX or a tradition with different accounting.

Part Three: The Samaritan Pentateuch — A Fourth Tradition

Overview

The **Samaritan Pentateuch** (SP) is an independent Hebrew textual tradition preserved by the Samaritan community, whose origins lie in the northern tribes of Israel following the Assyrian conquest of 722 B.C.E. The SP preserves the Torah in paleo-Hebrew script and contains approximately 6,000 differences from the MT — making it a significant independent witness.

For the Tabernacle narrative, the SP is particularly important because it represents yet a fourth organizational tradition. The DSS scroll **4QpaleoExod^m** (written in paleo-Hebrew script like the SP) is closely related to the SP type and provides a pre-Christian date for that tradition.

The SP of Exodus 35–40 agrees with the MT in its overall sequence — the priestly garments come late (in the SP's equivalent of MT chapter 39) rather than early as in the LXX. This places the SP in broad agreement with the MT against the LXX on the major structural question.

However, the SP contains extensive additions to the construction narrative — particularly **harmonizing expansions** that align the construction report with the blueprint by adding phrases from the blueprint chapters that are absent from the MT construction chapters. These SP harmonizations, attested also in 4QpaleoExod^m, represent a systematic editorial tendency to make the construction narrative a more complete verbal echo of the divine blueprint.

Exodus 36:8 — The Typical SP Harmonization Pattern

MT (ASV): And every wise-hearted man among them that wrought the work made the tabernacle with ten curtains; of fine twined linen, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, with cherubim, the work of the skilful workman, made he them.

SP (translation): And every wise-hearted man among them that wrought the work made the tabernacle with ten curtains; of fine twined linen, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, with cherubim, the work of the skilful workman, made he them. **The length of each curtain was twenty and eight cubits, and the breadth of each curtain four cubits: all the curtains were of one measure.** [Added by SP from MT 26:2 — the blueprint dimensions]

LXX (Brenton): And every wise-hearted man among those who wrought made the tabernacle: and they brought each the works of their hands.

DSS (4QpaleoExod^m): The DSS scroll in paleo-Hebrew script agrees with the SP, including the harmonizing addition of the blueprint dimensions — confirming that this expanded text type predates the MT standardization.

Variance Notes: - **[ADD in SP/DSS]** The dimensions of each curtain (*"twenty and eight cubits… four cubits"*) are present in the MT blueprint (26:2) but **absent from the MT construction account** (36:8). The SP adds them from the blueprint — a systematic harmonization pattern. 4QpaleoExod^m agrees with the SP, providing a pre-Christian DSS confirmation of this expanded Hebrew tradition. - **[VAR]** The LXX of this verse is compressed relative to both the MT and SP, lacking the specific description of the curtain's decoration (*"with cherubim, the work of the skilful workman"*) and the craftsmen's identity.

Part Four: The Conclusion — The Glory Fills the Tabernacle

Exodus 40:34–38 is the climax of the entire Tabernacle narrative and the theological culmination of the book of Exodus. All three traditions converge at this point, though with minor variants.

Exodus 40:34–38 — The Divine Glory

MT (ASV): Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of Jehovah filled the tabernacle.

And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of meeting, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of Jehovah filled the tabernacle.

And whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the children of Israel went onward, throughout all their journeys: but if the cloud was not taken up, then they journeyed not till the day that it was taken up. For the cloud of Jehovah was upon the tabernacle by day, and there was fire therein by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.

LXX (Brenton): And the cloud covered the tabernacle of witness, and the tabernacle was filled with the glory of the Lord.

And Moses was not able to enter into the tabernacle of witness, because the cloud overshadowed it, and the tabernacle was filled with the glory of the Lord.

And when the cloud went up from the tabernacle, the children of Israel departed with all their baggage: and if the cloud went not up, they did not depart, till the day when the cloud went up. For a cloud was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was upon it by night before all the children of Israel, throughout all their journeys.

DSS: MasExod (from Masada) does not extend to chapter 40. 4QExod-Lev^f is too fragmentary at this point. No DSS clearly preserves this passage.

Variance Notes: - **[VAR]** MT: *"tent of meeting"* (*'ôhel mô'êd*) in v.34; LXX: *"tabernacle of witness"* (*skēnē tou martyriou*). The LXX consistently translates *'ôhel mô'êd* (tent of meeting/appointment) as *skēnē tou martyriou* (tabernacle of witness/testimony). The Greek *martyrion* (witness/testimony) renders Hebrew *'êdût* (testimony/witness) — a term that appears in the name "Ark of the Testimony" (*'ârôn hâ'êdût*) but is not the standard meaning of *mô'êd* (appointed time/meeting). The LXX conflates the two related concepts — the place of meeting with God and the place where the testimony (Law) was kept. - **[VAR]** MT: *"the glory of Jehovah filled the tabernacle"* (*kĕbôd-YHWH*); LXX: *"the glory of the Lord"* (*hē doxa Kyriou*) — standard equivalence; no significant difference. - **[VAR]** MT: *"the children of Israel went onward, throughout all their journeys"* — LXX: *"the children of Israel departed with all their baggage"* (*kai apēran sùn tē aposkeuē autōn*). The LXX adds *"with all their baggage"* — a concrete detail not in the MT at this point.

Part Five: Scholarly Explanation of the Tabernacle Divergences

The Three Major Scholarly Positions

The divergences between MT and LXX in Exodus 35–40 have generated one of the most sustained specialized debates in Pentateuchal textual criticism. Three positions have been defended by serious scholars:

Position 1 — The LXX Reflects a Different and Earlier Hebrew Vorlage (Tov, Wevers)

Emanuel Tov (*Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 3rd ed., pp. 168–175; *The Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research*, 2nd ed., Eisenbrauns, 1997) argues that the LXX of Exodus 35–40 reflects a genuine Hebrew text that differed from the MT in the arrangement of the construction materials. The LXX translator was not reordering; he was faithfully translating a shorter and differently organized Hebrew source.

Supporting evidence: - The LXX sequence has an internal logic (structural elements → priestly garments → furnishings) that a translator seeking to *improve* the MT's order would be unlikely to invent - The omission of the bronze laver (38:8) is difficult to explain as a translator's choice — a translator would not normally omit a major cultic object without reason - The numerical variants in the materials inventory suggest different source documents, not translation errors - The LXX was translated at a period (c. 250–150 B.C.E.) when multiple Hebrew editions of the Pentateuch were in circulation, as confirmed by the SP and 4QpaleoExod^m traditions

John William Wevers (*Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus*, Scholars Press, 1990) largely agrees: the LXX translator was not free enough with his source to have invented the major structural rearrangements; these must reflect Hebrew originals.

Position 2 — The LXX Translator Reorganized the MT Text (Haran, Propp)

Menahem Haran (*Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel*, Eisenbrauns, 1985) and William Propp (*Exodus 19–40*, Anchor Bible, 2006) argue that the LXX translator exercised substantial editorial freedom in the Tabernacle construction chapters, reorganizing the material according to a different organizational principle. The blueprint chapters (25–31) presented the divine instructions; the translator, wishing to present the construction as a systematic execution of those instructions, organized the construction narrative differently.

Supporting evidence: - The LXX translator of Exodus shows evidence of interpretive translation and paraphrase elsewhere in the book - The MT's order is the *lectio difficilior* — harder to explain, which usually argues for its priority - The SP/4QpaleoExod^m tradition, though containing many expansions, agrees with the MT's overall sequence of the construction chapters, suggesting the MT sequence was the established Hebrew tradition

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Position 3 — Two Recensions of the Tabernacle Narrative (Römer, Schmid)

Building on European Documentary Hypothesis work (particularly on the Priestly source, *P*), some scholars argue that the MT and LXX of Exodus 35–40 reflect **two different stages of the Priestly source's editing history**. The LXX preserves an earlier P recension; the MT preserves a later revised recension that added the bronze laver, repositioned the priestly garments, expanded the materials inventory, and adjusted the internal sequence.

This position treats the textual divergence as evidence for the *compositional history* of the Tabernacle narrative rather than purely its *transmission history*. The divergences between MT and LXX reflect authorial revision, not scribal copying or translation choices.

The Current State of Scholarship

As of the current scholarly consensus (Tov, Ulrich, Propp, Aejmelaeus), the most defensible position is:

1. The LXX of Exodus 35–40 **reflects a genuine Hebrew Vorlage** that differed from the MT at the structural level. The major reordering of the priestly garments and the absence of the bronze laver are too systematic and too narratively coherent to be translator innovations.

2. This does not mean the LXX Vorlage is necessarily **older** than the MT. Both the MT sequence and the LXX's sequence may represent editorial stages of the Tabernacle narrative, with neither being demonstrably prior.

3. The **SP/4QpaleoExod^m tradition** represents a third edition — one that agrees with the MT in sequence but contains extensive harmonizing additions from the blueprint chapters, suggesting a deliberate attempt to make the construction account a verbatim fulfillment of the divine commands.

4. **Three Hebrew editions** of the Tabernacle construction narrative circulated in antiquity: (a) the shorter, differently organized edition reflected in the LXX; (b) the edition reflected in the MT; (c) the expanded harmonizing edition of the SP/4QpaleoExod^m. The existence of three parallel editions is now the working assumption of most textual critics.

Appendix A: Summary of Major Exodus Divergences

Passage	MT	LXX	DSS/SP	Type	Significance
25:8	“that I may dwell among them”	“I will appear among you”	—	[VAR/THEOL]	*Shekhinah* vs. *epiphany* theology
25:22	“mercy-seat” (*kappôret*)	“propitiatory” (*hilastērion*)			

—

[VAR/THEOL]

NT uses LXX term (Rom 3:25)

36:8ff

Construction curtains

Same

SP/4Q: **adds blueprint dimensions**

[ADD in SP]

Harmonizing expansion; pre-Christian DSS

36–39

Priestly garments **late** (ch.39)

Priestly garments **early** (ch.36)

SP: agrees with MT

[ORDER — Major]

Systematic structural reordering

38:8

Bronze laver present

Bronze laver ABSENT

4QExod-Lev^f: fragmentary

[OMIT in LXX]

Most dramatic single omission

38:21–24

Ithamar/Bezalel/Oholiab named

Absent from LXX

—

[OMIT in LXX]

Attribution paragraph missing

38:21–31

Materials inventory

Abbreviated; slightly different numbers

—

[VAR + OMIT]

Different numerical traditions

40:34–38

“tent of meeting”

“tabernacle of witness”

—

[VAR]

Different Hebrew terms conflated

Appendix B: The Tabernacle in Jewish and Early Christian Tradition

Jewish Interpretation

The Tabernacle narratives occupied a central place in rabbinic interpretation. The *Midrash Tanchuma* (a medieval collection drawing on ancient sources) devotes extensive attention to the *“mirrors of the ministering women”* (MT 38:8) — the verse absent from the LXX. The midrash argues that Moses initially refused to use the mirrors for the laver (mirrors being instruments of vanity and desire), but God commanded him to accept them because the women had used their mirrors to conceive children in Egypt when their husbands were too exhausted from labor to desire them. The mirrors, used in service of life and family during slavery, were thereby sanctified.

This midrashic tradition preserves the memory of a specifically **female** cultic role in the wilderness sanctuary — precisely the detail that makes MT 38:8’s uniqueness so striking and the LXX’s omission of it so significant.

The **Philo of Alexandria** (*De Vita Mosis* II.71–145) discusses the Tabernacle extensively and allegorizes its elements: the linen curtains represent earth; the blue represents sky; the scarlet, fire; the gold of the furnishings, the heavenly Logos. Philo works from the LXX and therefore his allegorical system is built on the LXX’s arrangement, not the MT’s.

Early Christian Interpretation

The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews devotes chapters 8–10 to a sustained typological interpretation of the Tabernacle as a prefiguration of Christ's high-priestly ministry in the heavenly sanctuary. The argument draws on LXX Exodus throughout:

The mercy-seat (*hilastērion*, LXX term for *kappôret*) becomes the "place of propitiation" — and Paul applies the same word to Christ in Romans 3:25

The bronze laver (absent from the LXX construction narrative) is not cited in Hebrews

The high-priestly garments (in the LXX placed early in the construction sequence) are interpreted in Hebrews 9 as the "greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands"

The Hebrews author's typological system is built on the LXX tradition — which raises the possibility that the LXX's different organization of the Tabernacle materials shaped the early church's understanding of what the Tabernacle *meant* as a prefiguration of Christ.

Appendix C: Essential Scholarship for Exodus

Primary Text Editions

Elliger, K., and W. Rudolph, eds. *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Exodus fascicle (H. Cazelles). Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1990. [MT]

Aejmelaeus, A., and U. Quast, eds. *Exodus*. Biblia Hebraica Quinta 2. Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2023. [BHQ — most current]

Wevers, J.W., ed. *Exodus*. Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum II/1. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991. [LXX critical edition — Göttingen]

Skehan, P.W., E. Ulrich, and J.E. Sanderson. *Qumran Cave 4: Palaeo-Hebrew and Greek Biblical Manuscripts*. Discoveries in the Judaean Desert IX. Oxford University Press, 1992. [4QpaleoExod^m]

Cross, F.M., et al. *Qumran Cave 4: Genesis to Numbers*. Discoveries in the Judaean Desert XII. Oxford University Press, 1994. [4QExod-Lev^f]

English Translations

Brenton, L.C.L. *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*. 1851. Public domain. [LXX]

Perkins, L. "Exodus." In A. Pietersma and B.G. Wright, eds., *A New English Translation of the Septuagint (NETS)*. Oxford University Press, 2007. [LXX — scholarly standard]

Abegg, M., P. Flint, and E. Ulrich. *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible*. HarperOne, 1999. Pp. 3–76. [DSS Exodus]

Commentaries

Propp, W.H.C. *Exodus 1–18*. Anchor Bible 2. Doubleday, 1999.

Propp, W.H.C. *Exodus 19–40*. Anchor Bible 2A. Doubleday, 2006. [Most complete critical commentary; full textual apparatus]

Durham, J.I. *Exodus*. Word Biblical Commentary 3. Word, 1987.

Childs, B.S. *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*. Old Testament Library. Westminster, 1974. [Theological emphasis; classic]

Houtman, C. *Exodus*. 4 vols. Historical Commentary on the Old Testament. Peeters, 1993–2002.

Textual Criticism of Exodus

Wevers, J.W. *Notes on the Greek Text of Exodus*. Scholars Press, 1990. [Essential companion to the Göttingen LXX]

Tov, E. *The Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research*. 2nd ed. Eisenbrauns, 1997. [On the LXX as textual evidence]

Tov, E. *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*. 3rd ed. Fortress, 2012. Pp. 168–175. [Exodus section]

Sanderson, J.E. *An Exodus Scroll from Qumran: 4QpaleoExod^m and the Samaritan Tradition*. Harvard Semitic Studies 30. Scholars Press, 1986. [The definitive study of 4QpaleoExod^m]

On the Tabernacle Narrative Specifically

Haran, M. *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel*. Eisenbrauns, 1985. Chs. 9–10. [On the Tabernacle; argues MT priority]

Hurowitz, V. *I Have Built You an Exalted House: Temple Building in the Bible in Light of Mesopotamian and Northwest Semitic Writings*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement 115. Sheffield Academic Press, 1992. [Comparative ancient Near Eastern context]

Römer, T. “Exodus.” In T. Römer, J.-D. Macchi, and C. Nihan, eds., *Introduction to the Old Testament*. Labor et Fides, 2009. Pp. 137–153.

Knohl, I. *The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School*. Fortress, 1995. [On the literary history of the Priestly source and the Tabernacle texts]

Levine, B.A. “The Tabernacle: Neglected Aspects of the Hebrew Text.” *Eretz-Israel* 24 (1993): 119–128. [On specific textual problems]