The Psalms are the manna of the Church, and...so ministers instruction and satisfaction to everyone.¹

John Donne

Bread of angels, is made the bread of humankind; Bread from heaven sent, fulfilling all symbols; O marvelous thing! Poor, and humble servants feasting on the Lord.²

Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas, in the hymn *Panis Angelicus*, draws on centuries of exegesis to conceptually link bread references from the length of Christian scripture, yet remains immediately comprehensible to both medieval and modern audiences. The “bread of angels”, a phrase from Ps 78:25, is an allusion to the “bread from heaven” or *panis coelicus* received by the Israelites in Exodus 16. The *panis hominis* it becomes refers both to the Eucharist wafer and the earthly Christ by way of John 6:51, where Jesus claims to be “the living bread that came down from heaven”. Through this concise set of parallels the subject *panis* has undergone at least two linguistic transubstantiations in the space of a few words. It is at the same time both a “what” (manna, Eucharist wafer) and a “who” (Jesus Christ) and, while belonging to “the Angels”, it nevertheless nourishes humans on earth.

¹ Opening line to the “Second Prebend Sermon” in *Sermons*, vol. 7 (ed. Evelyn M. Simpson and George R. Potter; Berkeley: University of California, 1953), 55.
² From the *Panis Angelicus*, actually the final two stanzas of the longer hymn, *Sacris Solemnis*, written for the Feast of Corpus Christi. Lyrics in Latin: “Panis angelicus, fit panis hominum/ Dat panis coelicus, figuris terminum/ O res mirabilis, manducat Dominum/ Pauper et servus et humilis”.
In a more recent era, the poetic John Donne began a sermon by comparing the manna with the book of Psalms, because each “ministers instruction and satisfaction to everyone”. In some way akin to scripture and specifically to the wisdom collection of Tehilim, Donne assumed that the manna was a source of spiritual instruction as well as physical nourishment. These two examples, far removed historically and culturally from the Aramaic targums of Roman Palestine, serve to highlight the longevity of several “exegetical motifs” that arise out of early Jewish and Christian interpretation of the miraculous bread received by the Israelites in Exodus 16. Foremost among these is the belief that the manna was a liminal substance of supernatural origin. As such it displayed both miraculous and mutable properties, making it difficult to identify or define. Second, it was understood to be both a physical food and something more than food that edified the spirit as it sustained the body. In short, like the sacrament of the Eucharist, or Christ on earth, like scripture, or heavenly Wisdom, the manna came to be interpreted as a mediator of divine revelation. Moreover, it was understood as a site of interaction through which humanity and God, earth and heaven, physical and spiritual, came together and co-mingled.

This paper focuses on the unique expansions on Exod 16:15 found in the interpretive translations of the Aramaic targums Neophyti 1 and Pseudo-Jonathan. The biblical text of Exod 16:15 presents a linguistic pun for how the “bread from heaven” promised in 16:4 first came to be called man. The double-voiced wordplay of this verse suggests that the name originated when, upon seeing a mysterious “fine, flaky” substance (16:14), the puzzled Israelites exclaimed to each other הואמן—a question (what is it?) that can also be read as a statement (it is manna). Moses then proclaims that it is bread sent to them by God as promised in v. 4. I shall argue that the interpretive trajectories introduced above arise from exegetical concerns with the grammatical, narratological, and theological particularities of Exod 16:15, the crux of the manna’s haggadic tradition, and its complex interactions with the surrounding chapter. Especially intimate in this interaction

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4 The name “man” is not explicitly stated until Exod 16:31.
5 In fact, even the basic concepts of “bread from heaven” and “manna” may themselves be the exegetical products of the multivocality of Exod 16:15 and its interaction with surrounding verses, rather than its subject.