messenger, and even though Jacob states in verse 31, "I have seen deity face to face" (*rā'îtî 'ĕlōhîm pānîm 'el-pānîm*), it has been read as a reference to a messenger for millennia. This is reflected in the received version of Hos 12:4–5, which makes reference to the tradition and refers to the entity first as an *'ĕlōhîm* and then as a *mal'āk* (although the latter is likely itself an early interpolation).[7] Similarly, the Samaritan Pentateuch was selective in those passages that were emended, but it influenced the reading of nearby passages that it had left untouched. The comprehensive approaches of later Greek and rabbinic authors and editors are products of much more systematic and self-conscious literary conventions that cannot be so arbitrarily retrojected into the mid-first millennium BCE. The clearest and most definitive evidence that one need not change all the occurrences to influence interpretation is the fact that the vast majority of Jewish and Christian readers have interpreted the texts over the millennia precisely as those interpolations would have them read.

THE MESSENGER OF YHWH AS DIVINE AGENT

The interpolation theory best accounts for those passages in which the identity of the messenger overlaps or appears to be conflated with that of the deity. This does not fully explain the perpetuation and accommodation of these ostensibly conflated identities down through the ages, though. These passages grate against today's reflective conceptualizations of self, constructed as they are on binary Aristotelian notions of classification.[8] However, for ancient audiences, whose intuitive perspectives regarding the individual as both partible and permeable were far more salient, and who intuitively accepted the communicability of agency in their sociomaterial interactions with deity, the notion of a divine messenger somehow endowed with divine agency was no more the logical paradox than was the endowment of a cultic image with that agency.[9] One passage

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[7] I would suggest that *'ĕlōhîm* in verse 4 is intended to parallel *'ēl*, "deity," in verse 5. This results in the phrase *wāyyāśar 'ēl*, "he contended with El," at the beginning of verse 5—a tidy etiology for the name *yiśrā'ēl*. Instead, the *mal'āk* is interpolated, *'ēl* is reread as the preposition *'el*, and the etiology vanishes. Note Sommer's (2009, 41) reading: "in Hosea 12 the being who wrestled with Jacob was not a *mal'akh* who also could be called an *'ĕlōhîm*; rather, it was the God Yhwh, who can also be termed a *mal'akh*."

[8] Jonathan Jong (2015, 16) quips, "the ghost of Aristotle haunts us still."

[9] Anyone who has ever spoken to a deceased loved one via a gravestone is likely aware it only becomes a paradox when a reflective account is required. The act itself is quite intuitive. The presencing of deity in the societies around Iron Age Israel and Judah prototypically used inanimate objects, however, so the messenger is a bit idiosyncratic as a medium for divine agency (but this is likely just a product of its incidental creation via textual interpolation).