Editorial theory and the range of translations for ‘cedars of Lebanon’ in the Septuagint

Although the Hebrew source text term יָרָה [cedar] is translated in the majority of cases as קֶדֶר [cedar] or its adjective קֶדֶרָן [cedar] in the Septuagint, there are cases where the following translations and strategies are used: (1) κυπάρισσος [cypress] or the related adjective κυπάρισσινος, (2) ξύλον [wood, tree] and (3) non-translation and deletion of the source text item. This article focuses on these range of translations. Using a complexity theoretical approach in the context of editorial theory (the new science of exploring texts in their manuscript contexts), this article seeks to provide explanations for the various translation choices (other than קֶדֶר and קֶדֶרָן). It further aims to determine which cultural values of the translators have influenced those choices and how they shape the metaphorical and symbolic meaning of plants as determined by Biblical Plant Hermeneutics, which has placed the taxonomy of flora on a strong ethnological and ethno-botanical basis.

Introduction

As shown in Naudé and Miller-Naudé (2018), the Hebrew term יָרָה [cedar] is translated in the Septuagint as קֶדֶר [cedar] or with the adjectival form קֶדֶרָן in 65 cases. It was also shown that the botanical terms were interpreted and translated by the translators as a result of their own foreign frame of reference on the basis of the anachronistic and indeterminate botanical data available to them; they provided what they considered a suitable familiar or local substitute (see also Naudé and Miller-Naudé forthcoming a and b). It was further shown that the metaphorical and symbolic meanings of plants needs to be determined by Biblical Plant Hermeneutics, which has placed the taxonomy of flora on a strong ethnological and ethno-botanical basis consonant with the Israelite classification and valorisation of plants (Musselman 2012).

However, as will be discussed in this article, in the remaining cases of the Hebrew term יָרָה, the Septuagint translated the term either as κυπάρισσος [cypress] or the adjectival form κυπάρισσινος or ξύλον [wood, tree]. In some cases, the Hebrew term is not represented at all in the Septuagint. The aim of this article is to provide explanations for these more problematic translation choices in terms of both editorial theory (the new science of exploring texts in their manuscript contexts) and lexicography within a complexity theoretical approach (Marais 2014).1

The hypothesis is that the term יָרָה is utilised in the Hebrew source text to refer to a specific species, namely Cedrus libani, and to convey a specific metaphorical or symbolic meaning, whereas the translators of the Septuagint used Greek terms that were available to them and that provided what they considered a suitable familiar or local substitute. It is further hypothesised that the cultural values of the translators have influenced these translational choices, which shape metaphorical and symbolic meaning in a particular way to strengthen their own ideology. Even when the translators thought they knew what tree was referred to (given their knowledge of Hebrew, botany or earlier translations and traditions), they still frequently read into the text what suited them.

The paper is organised as follows: in the next section editorial theory and the complexity of the translation of the Septuagint is discussed, followed by a description of the complex nature of the translation of the term יָרָה in the Septuagint. An analysis of the translations is conducted to determine both the translation choices and those cultural values which influenced them.

1. This article continues our use of complexity theory to analyse the complexity of the Septuagint as a translation, as first is described by Naudé (2009) as the next important project for Septuagint research.

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Editorial theory and the complexity of the translation of the Septuagint

Research on the Septuagint has been driven primarily by the needs of textual criticism (within the framework of the established paradigms of Classical and Modern Philology) either as a search for the Vorlage or Urtext or as a search for the best or most authoritative final text. For this purpose the ’translation technique’ of a particular writing is investigated to determine which variants might provide data for reconstruction of the parent text or to determine which variants could be attributed to the typical practice of the translator and therefore are not useful for reconstruction. 2

As a reaction to the established paradigms of Classical and Modern Philology, where the dominant focus was on a reconstructed, hypothetical text that is to be interpreted in light of the historical context in which the text was presumably produced (see Lied 2015), New Philology as a philological perspective within the larger field of Editorial Theory provides a model broadly conceived for understanding texts, text production and transmission and for exploring texts in their manuscript contexts. 3 Each individual manuscript (or inscription, tablet, etc.) is viewed as a meaningful historical artefact, and variants found in these manuscripts are viewed as potentially interesting in their own right. The aim of New Philology is to study texts as: (1) integral parts of historically existing manuscripts and (2) to interpret the texts in light of the context of the manuscript and its historical usage (Lied 2015). 4

In light of Marais (2014:37) the duality of the aims of classical text-critical methodology and New Philology must be maintained in a paradoxical, complex relationship. Our view is therefore that the choices of the translator, editor or scribe must be studied in light of the context of the specific manuscript under discussion as well as the alterity of the Israelite and/or Hebrew cultural background or Vorlage (see also Naudé and Miller-Naudé forthcoming b). This is beyond Tov’s multiple-text theory, where the focus is still on the reconstruction as well as the nature and evaluation of the Hebrew text underlying the Septuagint (Tov 2015; see also Worthington 2012). This is also beyond the classification of literalism by Boyd-Taylor (2016:121–131; see also Pietersma 2010:3–21) in ancient Hebrew–Greek translation based on the binary distinction of ’literal’ and ‘free’, which is reductionist. 5

The complex nature of the translation of the term יָרָד in the Septuagint

The term יָרָד occurs 73 times in the Hebrew Bible (Andersen & Forbes 1989:51; Lisowsky 1993/1958:139–140); the feminine form יְרָדָה occurs once (Zph 2:14) as does the form יְרֵד (Ezk 27:24). There are five Greek terms in the Septuagint that translate יָרָד (Muraoka 2010:154). The first translation term is κῆρυς, which is translated as ’cedar’. The second translation term is κέδρος and is used to typify the products manufactured from cedar wood. 6 The third translation term is κυπάρισσος. By referring to ancient authors, Liddell and Scott (1968:1011) translate it with ‘cypress’ (Cupressus sempervirens) or ‘cypress-wood’. Montanari, Goh and Schroeder (2015:1194) have ‘cypress’ as the translation. According to Hatch and Redpath (1998/1902:799), κυπάρισσος is used to translate יָרָד in the Hebrew Bible four times. The fourth translation term is κυπάρισσον. This term is used to typify the products manufactured from cypress wood (Liddell & Scott 1968:1011; Montanari, Goh & Schroeder 2015:1194). According to Hatch and Redpath (1998/1902:799), κυπάρισσον translates יָרָד one time in the Hebrew Bible. The fifth translation term is ξύλον. This term refers to wood that is cut and ready to use as timber or firewood; a piece of wood, log, beam, post; or live wood, tree (Liddell & Scott 1968:1191–1192). The term ξύλον is used two times to translate יָרָד in the Hebrew Bible. The dictionaries of Septuagint Greek provide the same translation values of the Greek terms (see Lust, Eynikel & Hauspie 2003:336, 360, 361; Muraoka 2009:394, 419). In some cases יָרָד was not translated into Greek and deleted. This happened in seven instances. What is further interesting is that none of these terms occurs in the New Testament. According to Muraoka (2010:67) κάρσ is also used as the translation term for שֶׁמֶן and יָרָד. The term κάρσ was also used to translate שֶׁמֶן (Muraoka 2010:67). According to Muraoka (2010:72) κυπάρισσος was also used as the translation term for the terms שֶׁמֶן and יָרָד, while the term κυπάρισσος was also used as translation term for שֶׁמֶן (Muraoka 2010:72). It is clear that there is both significant disparity and significant overlap in these terms for trees and tree products.

It seems where the translation of the term יָרָד in the Septuagint is the term κυπάρισσος: it refers to a species of trees constituting the genus Cupressus of the cypress family, Cupressaceae. As discussed by Naudé and Miller-Naudé (2018), the term יָרָד in the Hebrew Bible refers to the genus and species Cedrus libani within the family of conifers, Pinaceae. In the cases

2 Sollamo (2016:143–153) provides a historical overview of the term ’translation technique’, its usage as a method of inquiry that opens up the Septuagint as a translation in its own right and its contribution to textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible. Sollamo also describes the contribution of the syntax of the Septuagint and the theology and/or ideology of the translators to ’translation technique’. See also Pietersma (2006:1–11).

3 See, for example, Nichols (1990), Driscoll (2010), Suarez and Woudhuyse (2010), Walsh (2010), Suarez and Woudhuyse (2013), Pollock (2015) and Wang (2015). In biblical studies, see especially Lied (2012) and the essays by Lied and Lundhaug (2017), Pollock (2015) redefines philology as ’making sense of texts’ and argues that the New Philology (Editorial Theory) of the 21st century needs historical reflexivity, non-provinciality and methodological and conceptual pluralism (Wang 2015:ix). Three tendencies are distinguished: Firstly, antitheoretical resentment followed from post-modernism. Secondly, there is a tendency toward a minimalist understanding of philology as the craft of collecting, editing and commenting on texts, especially via the use of new technology. A third tendency is maximalist and aims to rethink the very nature of the discipline, transhistorically and transculturally (Pollock 2015:6). The third tendency is the intention of our investigation in this article as well as in future work.

4 According to Nichols (1990), copying is a process that changes texts – not in terms of ’corruption’ but in terms of ’improvement’ (change is adaptation). Editorial practices should respect this diversity in manuscripts. New Philology studies a manuscript as a snapshot of an evolving tradition of ongoing text production and creation of new identities. Texts are to be read in the context of manuscript production and circulation.

5 For an overview of recent developments in translation studies before complexity theory and their relationship to Septuagint studies, see Naudé (2008).

6 As indicated above, the translation of κῆρυς and κέδρος is discussed by Naudé and Miller-Naudé (2018). This article will focus on the range of other translations.
where the term יָרָא in the Hebrew Bible is translated as κόδρος in the Septuagint and the cases where the term יָרָא in the Hebrew Bible is translated as a noun in collocation with the adjective term κόδρος in the Septuagint, it is concluded that there are no shifts in the specific metaphor or symbolic meaning as conveyed in the source text.

In what follows the other translations of the term יָרָא in the Septuagint are described and analysed. It will be determined if there are shifts in the specific metaphor or symbolic meaning as conveyed in the source text.

An analysis of the term יָרָא and its range of translations in the Septuagint

The translation of the term יָרָא in the Hebrew Bible as κυπάρισσος in the Septuagint

In Ezekiel 27:5–6 the term יָרָא is not translated as κόדρος in the Septuagint. Instead, the translators make use of κυπάρισσον with the meaning ‘cypress’.

Ezekiel 27:5–6

The term יָרָא is contrasted with κύπαρισσος in the Septuagint translation of Ezekiel 27:5–6, which is usually used to translate יָרָא when the term is translated at all.

Out of cypresses from Senir they crafted all your planks. They took a cedar from Lebanon to make your mast. Out of oaks from Bashan they made your oars. Your deck they made of ivory inlaid in pine wood from the coasts of Kittim.

In Ezekiel 31:3 the term יָרָא was translated relatively literally, interpretation occurred to reflect ideological considerations to accommodate political and religious views. The implication is that the translator’s choice of terminology exhibits adaptations to political and religious views. The organisation of meaning is based on the notion of frames (developed by Fillmore 1982), which are detailed knowledge structures or schemas emerging by social as well as physical experience and which form a rich network of meaning. Frames thus represent a complex knowledge structure that allows us to understand a group of related words.

7. In the analysis that follows, the textual variants used in the examples are as follows. Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (1997) is used for the text of the Hebrew Bible and Rahlfis and Hanhart (2006) for the Septuagint text. The translation of the Hebrew is that of the authors, unless otherwise noted. The translation of the Greek is from Pietersma and Wright 2007, as indicated.

8. Unlike similes and metaphors, which highlight the notion of comparativity of an item or action and the term that refers to it, a symbol in literary terms refers to a word or phrase that signifies an object or event, which in turn signifies something else (see Abrams 1999:97, 311). In general, we view meaning as encyclopedic in nature (Evans & Green 2006:206–244), which implies that word meaning cannot be understood independently of the vast system of encyclopedic knowledge to which it is linked. The organisation of meaning is based on the notion of frames (developed by Fillmore 1982), which are detailed knowledge structures or schemas emerging from social as well as physical experience and which form a rich network of meaning.

9. Hebrew words in square brackets indicate the Qere reading.

10. The plural is generic, denoting the species (Bioch 1995:13, footnote 1).


12. A metaphor involves the use of a name or descriptive term to refer to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable. Unlike a simile, a metaphor is a comparison without the use of ‘like’ or ‘as’ and refers to the application of a name or descriptive term to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable. Metaphors are sometimes viewed as condensed or elliptical forms of similes. On the distinctions, see Jenni (1994:34, 37), Abrams (1999:97, 311), and Todd and Clarke (1999:249–68).
empire of the ancient Near Eastern world but was finally defeated in 612 BCE and so was an extinct nation in Ezekiel’s time. In Ezekiel 31:18 applies this lesson from history to Egypt. In Ezekiel 31:3 and 31:8 the Hebrew term גַּם is translated as κυπάρισσος in the Septuagint. As indicated above, the term גַּם is associated with majesty, stateliness and outward power, while the term κυπάρισσος foregrounds the quality of beauty.

**Ezekiel 31:3**

Consider Assyria, a cedar of Lebanon: beautiful branches, dense shade, towering height; indeed, its top went up between the clouds. (CEB)

**Ezekiel 31:8**

No cedar was its equal in God’s garden. The cypress trees did not have anything like its branches, and the plane trees had nothing like its boughs. None of the trees in God’s garden could compare to it in its beauty. Such cypresses do not exist in the Hebrew text. In Aquila it is κέδρος, which is associated with majesty, stateliness and outward power, while the term κυπάρισσος foregrounds the quality of beauty.

The choice of the term κυπάρισσος, which is associated with beauty as a translation in the Greek, explicates the aspect of beauty in the tree metaphor, which is prominent in the Hebrew text as well as its translation into Greek. This is strengthened in the Greek translation by the deletion of ‘dense shade and towering height’; these are features of the cedar but not the cypress. However, it lost the image of the cedar as the world tree (in the Hebrew text), which carries the image of life-giving prosperity. A further aspect for the choice of the term κυπάρισσος in Greek instead of κέδρος is so that Assyria and Egypt as evil powers are not so explicitly associated with the positive qualities that גַּם conveyed. In other words, the translator of the Septuagint does not want to use the qualities associated with κέδρος to apply to the evil nations of Assyria and Egypt and for that reason uses κυπάρισσος.

The term גַּם in Job 40:17 is not translated as κέδρος in the Septuagint but rather with κυπάρισσον with the meaning ‘cypress’.

**Job 40:17**

He stiffens his tail like a cedar; the tendons in his thighs are tightly woven. (CEB)

A possible explanation is that the Septuagint translator of Job used κυπάρισσον to translate the Hebrew simile in order to avoid attributing the positive qualities associated with גַּם to the creature Behemoth described in Job 40:15–24. According to Hatch and Redpath (1998/1902:758) the translations of Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion have κέδρος, renderings which bring the Greek into greater alignment with the Hebrew.

To summarise, it seems that in the cases where the term גַּם in the Hebrew Bible is translated as κυπάρισσος in the Septuagint the translator does not want to associate κέδρος and its metaphoric and symbolic qualities of power and majesty to ideologically negative entities that are described with the term גַּם in the Hebrew text.

**The translation of the term גַּם in the Hebrew Bible as κυπάρισσος in the Septuagint**

In Ezekiel 27:24 the hapax legomenon פִּינָה in the Hebrew Bible is not translated as κέδρος in the Septuagint but instead as κυπαρίσσινος, meaning ‘cypress wood’. In Aquila it is translated as κέδρος (Hatch & Redpath 1998/1902:758).

**Ezekiel 27:24**

These were thy trafficciers in gorgeous fabrics, in wrappings of blue and richly woven work, and in chests of rich apparel, bound with cords and cedar-lined, among thy merchandise. (JPS)

As in Ezekiel 27:5-6, 31:3 and 31:8 above, the translator of the Septuagint did not want to use the powerful qualities associated with κέδρος to apply to the commerce of the evil nation of Tyre and therefore used the adjective κυπαρίσσινος.

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14 In Ezekiel 31:3 Symmachus translated the term גַּם with the term κέδρος (Hatch & Redpath 1998/1902:758).
The translation of the term אֶרֶז in the Hebrew Bible as ξύλον in the Septuagint

When the Septuagint translator renders אֶרֶז as ξύλον, a generalisation strategy is being employed in which a term referring to a particular botanical species is rendered by a generic term, as illustrated first by 1 Kings 5:20.

1 Kings 5:20 (English 5:6)

So now order cedars of Lebanon to be cut for me. My servants will work with your servants. I will pay your servants whatever you say is appropriate, for you know that we have no one among us who knows how to cut down trees like the Sidonians.

And now command, and let them cut timber from Lebanon for me, and behold, my slaves are with your slaves, and I will give you the wages of your services according to all that you say, for you know that we have no one who knows how to cut timber like the Sidonians (Pietersma & Wright 2007).

1 Kings 5:20 is part of Solomon’s message to Hiram, king of Tyre (1 Ki 5:16–20; English 5:2–6), in which he requests cedars of Lebanon to build the temple. In Hiram’s reply (1 Ki 5:22–23; English 5:8–9), in which he complies with Solomon’s request, he mentions both cedars and cypresses (verse 22; English verse 8). The reciprocal arrangements of both Hiram (1 Ki 5:24; English 5:10) and Solomon (1 Ki 5:26; English 5:11) are mentioned. From Hiram’s side, he provided Solomon with all the timbers of cedars and cypresses that he desired.

In 1 Kings 5:20 (Solomon’s request) the substitute for אֶרֶז פָּרֹשִׁים is τὰ ξύλα ἐκ τοῦ Λιβάνου, a general phrase meaning ‘trees of Lebanon’. The reason for the Septuagint translator’s use of generalisation as a translation strategy is not immediately clear. Noth (1968:86) suggests that τὸ δέντρον πόρφυρας in verse 20 could mean trees in general, which are then specified first in verse 22 and more specifically in verse 24.

Gray (1977:152) incorrectly views the cedar as ‘not particularly adapted, as a branching tree with a comparatively short trunk, for rough building, for which pine would be more suitable’. He suggests that the ‘long trunked timber’ of the Cilician pine may be visualised in the verse – pine ‘is specifically mentioned in v. 23, so that we may retain “cedar”, which was to be used rather for panelling’ (1977:152). Gray’s understanding of the characteristics of גָּモデル as having a short, branching trunk are based on an incorrect botanical identification of the tree, first promoted by Köhler (1937), although he mistakenly attributes this approach to Noth (1968). The interpretations of Noth and Gray must be rejected because they are not based on Biblical Plant Hermeneutics – גָּモデル refers to a specific species (Cedrus libani) and not trees in general and גָּモデル properly identified botanically does not have a short, branching trunk.

We suggest that the explanation for the translator’s rendering of τὰ ξύλα as τὰ ξύλα ἐκ τοῦ Λιβάνου must rather be sought in translation strategies for making sense of the passage. The subsequent verses of the passage provides important context for the translator’s choices. In 5:22 (Hiram’s reply) the Septuagint has ξύλα κάδστορα and πέτραν [cedar and pine wood] for the Hebrew Λίβανναν καὶ μέλαν [wood of cedars and wood of cypresses]. In 5:24 (Hiram’s contribution) the Septuagint has κέδρος καὶ πάντα καὶ θέλημα [cedars and his every wish] for the Hebrew Λίβανναν καὶ μέλαν [wood of cedars and wood of cypresses according to his every desire]. Because the translator uses a form of κάδστορα or κέδρος for גָּモデル twice in the subsequent verses in the same pericope (verses 22, 24), it is clear that he knows the appropriate Greek equivalent of the Hebrew term (Noth 1968:86). There must, therefore, be an interpretive reason for his use of generalisation as a translation strategy in verse 20.

(The remainder of the passage has additional complexities in the Septuagint concerning the translation of מִן־הַלְּבָנ֗וֹן, which will be explored in a subsequent article.) We suggest that because cypress timber is mentioned alongside cedars in Hiram’s agreement and compliance (verse 24), the Septuagint translator used generalisation as a translation strategy in verse 20 in order to avoid a contradiction between Solomon’s proposal and Hiram’s agreement and compliance. As Montgomery (1951:139) notes, the cedars of Lebanon, mentioned alone in verse 20, were the prime object of Solomon’s request, although both species (cedar and cypress) are mentioned in verses 22 and 24. The translator uses generalisation (the use of τὰ ξύλα ἐκ τοῦ Λιβάνου) as a translation strategy in order to harmonise verse 20 with verses 22 and 24.

A second example of generalisation as a translation strategy in rendering גָּモデル is found in Isaiah 44:3. The prophet ridicules the worship of idols, saying that the idol maker expects his prayers to be heard by a block of wood that is suitable for burning.

Isaiah 44:14

He cuts down cedars and acquires a cypress, umbrella pine or an oak. He gets trees from the forest; he plants a spruce and the rain makes it grow.

In this verse, the Septuagint has generalised the various trees and only uses the generic phrase ξύλον ἐκ τοῦ δρυμοῦ [wood from the forest]. By contrast, the translations of κάδστορα,
in Aquila and Theodotion (Hatch & Redpath 1998; 1902:758) aim to represent the term הַאֹהֶל and to connect it to the related term הַאָרֶץ.

**Cases of non-translation in the Septuagint of the term הַאָרֶץ in the Hebrew Bible**

In a number of verses, the Septuagint does not translate the term הַאָרֶץ.

In Jeremiah 22:15–16 Jehoiakim shows little regard for God’s people or God’s word but rather is concerned with royal building projects involving massive amounts of cedar. By contrast, the success of his forefather, Josiah, was not derived from amassing wealth and erecting massive arrangements but by practising justice and defending the poor.

**Jeremiah 22:15**

Are you a king because you compete in cedar? As for your father, didn’t he eat and drink and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him.

Surely, you will not be king, because you are irritated with Achaz your father? They will not eat, and they will not drink; it is better for you to execute judgment and righteousness. (Pietersma & Wright 2007)

The Hebrew of this verse is difficult. The Masoretic accents indicate a reading in which the first sentence ends with the הָאֹהֶל on הַאָרֶץ. The sentence is marked as a question with the interrogative ה- and can be appropriately understood as a rhetorical question. The meaning of the sentence largely depends upon how to read the word הָאֹהֶל. One possibility is to understand the form as a rare Tiph’el participle of the root הָאֹהֶל, meaning ‘to contend with’ (Gesenius, Kautzsch & Cowley 1910; §55h) or ‘to compete with’ (Köhler & Baumgartner 2001; s.v. הָאֹהֶל). This stem formation is also attested with the same meaning in Jeremiah 12:5, where the imperfective form הָאֹהֶל occurs. Another possibility is to read the consonantal text as rather a form of the Hithpael participle from the same root הָאֹהֶל, meaning ‘to be agitated, excited’, a meaning attested in Psalms 37:1, 7 and Proverbs 24:19.

The second sentence in the verse is also difficult. In the Masoretic reading, the sentence begins with the noun הַאָרֶץ [your father] and continues with a negative rhetorical sentence. A precise description of the syntax of the sentence, however, requires a brief explanation of three types of sentences with a nominal constituent at the beginning of the sentence, outside of its canonical place within the sentence. The first construction involves a constituent that occurs at the beginning of the sentence (Naudé 1990:124; Holmstedt 2014:116–117). In topicalisation the constituent is moved to the left of the sentence but inside of the sentence boundary. This can be demonstrated by the fact that the topicalised constituent occurs after interrogatives and the presentative marker hinā. In Psalm 77:8, the topicalised prepositional phrase (םְלֵאָסָי) occurs after the interrogative ה-:

**Psalm 77:8** (םְלֵאָסָי הָאָרֶץ)

Will the Lord forsake Topicalisation forever? (lit. Is it forever the Lord will forsake?)

The second construction, left dislocation, involves a constituent that occurs to the left outside of the sentence and has a resumptive element that occurs within the sentence. In the following verse, both constructions are present. In the first line, topicalisation occurs; in the second line, left dislocation occurs.

**Isaiah 42:3**

A bruised read he will not break, and a faintly burning wick Left dislocation will he not quench it.

Isaiah 42:3 also illustrates the fact that both topicalisation and dislocation allow a negative marker to occur after the constituent that is topicalised or dislocated. However, topicalisation and dislocation differ with respect to interrogatives. As indicated above, a topicalised constituent occurs within the scope of the interrogative. By contrast, a left dislocated constituent occurs outside of the interrogative and is resumed within the interrogative sentence, as illustrated in Genesis 34:23 and 1 Kings 14:29.

**Genesis 34:23**

Their livestock, their property and all their beasts, won’t they be ours?

The third construction is less commonly attested. It shares some features with topicalisation and other features with left dislocation. Like topicalisation, it consists of a constituent that is at the beginning of the sentence and is not resumed within the sentence. Like left dislocation, it exhibits a sentence boundary between the left dislocated constituent and the sentence proper. This construction was identified by Naudé (1990) as a variety of topicalisation and by Holmstedt (2014) as ‘a heavy topic’. One way that a sentence boundary may be explicitly marked is through an interrogative. The distinction between left dislocation and heavy topicalisation involving interrogatives can be seen respectively in the two poetic lines of the following verse:
Zechariah 1:5

Your fathers, where are they?

And the prophets, do they live forever?

The Septuagint translator does not employ a rhetorical question in the first sentence but rather renders the sentence as a negative statement. In this way, the translator conveys the pragmatic import of the sentence but not its syntactic form. More importantly, the Septuagint seems to understand rather than the word יִהְיֶהוּ כֶּדֶר as a Hithpael participle from the root כָּדֶר with the meaning ‘to be agitated, excited’. The Septuagint translator then renders the prepositional phrase בָּאָרֶז as the preposition beth followed by the personal name Ahaz (Ἀχαζ) or, following Codex Alexandrinus, Ahab (Ἀχαβ), rather than the common noun ‘cedar’. Finding an explanation for the Septuagintal translation is not easy. While it would be possible to posit that the Septuagint translated a different Vorlage reading מְלַס (or מְלַס) instead of מְלַס, resulting in understanding the word as the proper name Ahaz or Ahab rather than the common noun מְלַס [cedar], this seems unlikely in light of the fact that in the previous verse (22:14), the translator represents מִלַּס with ἐν κάσπε (see Vonach 2011:2772). In addition, the revision of Symmachus again has κάσπος (Hatch & Redpath 1998/1902:758), the expected rendering of מְלַס.

A second possibility is exemplified by Lundbom, who, after describing the difficulties of the Hebrew text, characterises the Septuagint reading as follows: ‘it cannot be right’ because ‘the MT’s “in cedar” suits the context perfectly and is a key word in the larger structure to which the present oracle belongs’ (Lundbom 2004:138). In other words, the Septuagint translator made a mistake. However, the fact that there are two divergent Septuagint readings, both with proper names of previous Israelite kings, suggests rather interpretive translation strategies rather than mistakes or an alternative Vorlage.

A third possibility is hinted at by Van Selms (1972:272–273, especially note 21), who suggests that the deviations of the LXX are a misinterpretation of the Hebrew text. In a similar vein, Vonach (2011:2772) suggests that the translator implemented the change because he did not understand the rhetorical question of the Hebrew text. However, neither author specifies precisely how a misunderstanding of the Hebrew text might have produced the rendering of the Septuagint translator, especially since Josiah and not Ahaz (or Ahab) was the father of Jehoiakim.

We want to suggest that the starting point for the translator’s divergent understanding of the Hebrew text lies in the difficulty in determining where the first sentence of the verse ends and the second sentence begins. In an unpointed text without the benefit of the Masoretic accents as a guide to intonational pauses, the Septuagint translator had to rely on syntax and meaning. By interpreting the word יִהְיֶהוּ כֶּדֶר as a Hithpael participle meaning ‘to be agitated’, the following prepositional phrase יִהְיֶהוּ כֶּדֶר beginning with the preposition beth should indicate the person with whom the subject was agitated. This posed a problem, because the root יִהְיֶהוּ does not form the basis of a personal name. By understanding the following word יִהְיֶהוּ כֶּדֶר as appositional to יִהְיֶהוּ rather than as a heavy topicalised constituent of the following sentence, the Septuagint translator thinks that perhaps the Hebrew should be יִהְיֶהוּ כֶּדֶר, thus referring to Ahaz, a king of Judah and one of the predecessors of Jehoiakim. The rendering of the translator of Alexandrinus reflects the same interpretive strategy of the syntax of the Hebrew, but the translator decided upon a different royal name, אָבִי, a king of Israel and not of Judah, but one who like Ahaz was deemed an evil king who did not promote justice. More importantly, as Keil (1980:339) notes, Ahab had built a palace of ivory (1 Ki 22:39), thus providing an example of a king who erected a splendid palace but did not promote justice. The verse then provides an example of translators grappling with a difficult Hebrew text and using the translation strategy of generalisation for the purposes of harmonisation to create a coherent text.

Other cases of non-translation in the Septuagint of the term יִהְיֶהוּ כֶּדֶר in the Hebrew Bible occur in 1 Kings 6:16, 18 (the entire verse is omitted) and 22. The pericope in 1 Kings 6:15–22 is about the interior of the temple, its inner woodwork, the partition of the shrine and the decoration of the temple (Montgomery 1951:149; Gray 1977:167) and it has been well described by Gray (1977:167) as ‘disjointed’. The complexities and indeterminacies of the textual history of the Hebrew of 1–2 Kings vis-à-vis the Greek of 3–4 Kingdoms are summarised by Law (2015), who describes the various viewpoints concerning the extent to which the Septuagint was based on a proto-MT text, the extent to which the Hebrew text was still fluid at the time of the translation of the Septuagint and the extent to which later editors of both Hebrew and Greek texts played a role. In particular, he says (Law 2015) that:

… one’s view on who was responsible for the divergences in the Greek and Hebrew traditions will determine the extent to which the translator might have been responsible for theological interpretation. If the translator was faithful to his Vorlage, which was different from the MT, his influence is relatively light and the responsibility for major theological emphases should be attributed to those who modified the
earliest Hebrew text. If, however, the translator is responsible for differences, he is the one to whom ideological changes should be attributed. (p. 159)

Law (2015:158–159) concludes that an analysis of 3–4 Kingdoms requires an examination of textual criticism, ‘translator technique’ and literary criticism. We suggest rather that Septuagintal scholarship must employ editorial theory (i.e. text criticism, including the history of each text and their interrelationships) and a description of translation strategies (as employed by translation studies scholars; see Baker 2011; Van Rooyen & Naudé 2009). The study of translation strategies includes an analysis of the ideological and theological stances of the translators as conveyed by their translation choices as well as the ways in which the broader literary context has affected their concern to produce a coherent text.

In 1 Kings 6:16, the Septuagint omits mention of cedar.

In 1 Kings 6:20, the Septuagint also reflects a text that is harmonised within the context by removing redundancies.

By comparing verse 22 in the Hebrew text, it is clear that the Hebrew text is repetitive: ‘He also overlaid the altar with cedar’ (verse 18); ‘...and the entire altar belonging to the shrine, he overlaid with gold’ (verse 22). The Septuagint does not have this repetition: ‘And he made an altar’ in verse 20 is followed by the last four words of verse 21 ‘in front of the Debir and overlaid it with gold’. Verses 20–22 focus on the gold that is overlaid (Vonach 2011:905–906) and most of the Greek translations omit mention of the cedar of the altar, including Codex Vaticanus. However, mention of ‘cedar’ [κίτρινον] is included in Origen, Codex Alexandrinus, Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion (Hatch & Redpath 1998; 1902:758; Rahlfs & Hanhardt 2006:640). By omitting reference to the cedar of the altar in verse 20, a coherent and less repetitive text results with a focus on gold. As Montgomery notes (1951:151–152), the decorative aspects of the description of the temple and especially its lavish use of gold are in accordance with other temple descriptions from the ancient Near East. We suggest, therefore, the Septuagint translator (or an editor of the Hebrew text) has removed the redundancy of mention of cedar in this verse to produce a coherent text.

Mention of cedar is also removed from the following verse, which is part of the description of the building of Solomon’s palace.

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The Septuagint translator has produced a coherent text of verse 16 within the context of the pericope by removing the redundant information that the panelling of the room is cedar. He also removed the information concerning cedar on the floor to avoid a description that contradicts the information in verse 15 that the floor boards were cypress and not cedar. As noted in the quotation by Law (2015:159) above, it is impossible ultimately to know whether the harmonisation of verse 16 with verse 15 is the work of the Greek translator or a Hebrew editor. Either the translator deleted from a Hebrew source text to harmonise or the translator used a Hebrew text that was later edited in divergent ways. The translator wanted a coherent text and that is what he produced at the end.
This verse (7:3/7:40 LXX) is part of the pericope of 7:38–50 (LXX). In verse 39, the use of cedar wood is mentioned: ‘… it was built on four rows of cedar pillars, with cedar beams on the pillars’. Near the end of the pericope, cedar wood is mentioned again in verse 49. In verse 40, the Septuagint omits the redundant mention of cedar.17

A few verses later in 7:7 (7:44 LXX), the Septuagint again omits reference to cedar.

1 Kings 7:7 (7:44 LXX)

And he made the porch of the throne where he was to judge, even the porch of judgment: and it was covered with cedar from floor to floor (ASV).

The Septuagint has produced a less redundant and more coherent, streamlined text by omitting reference to cedar.

Verse not translated in the Septuagint

One verse (1 Ki 6:18) in which אֶרֶץ occurs in the Hebrew is not translated in the Septuagint.

1 Kings 6:18

The cedar inside the temple was carved in the form of gourds and open flowers. All was cedar. No stone was seen.


For the broader context of the pericope in which this verse occurs, see the preceding discussions concerning verses 16 and 20 above. As Montgomery (1951:149–150) and Gray (1977:168) have shown, this verse (6:18) is largely redundant in repeating information from verses 15 and 16. Lundbom (2004) suggests that:

... this verse and the phrase “he prepared a shrine” from verse 19 ... interrupt the description of the shrine by relating to the decoration of the main hall, suggesting secondariness. (p. 242)

The term κέδρος occurs in the Septuagint but not as translation of the term אֶרֶץ in the Hebrew Bible

In four verses, the term κέδρος occurs in the Septuagint but not as a translation of the term Kavanaugh occurs in the Hebrew Bible. The first instance occurs in Psalm 37:35 (36:35 LXX).

Psalm 37:35 (36:35 LXX)

I have seen a wicked, powerful person spreading himself like a leafy indigenous tree.

In this verse, the Hebrew has a generic description of a tree, which is characterised as ‘native’ or ‘indigenous’ and ‘leafy and/or luxurious.’ The Septuagint has a specific tree, the cedars of Lebanon. Weiser (1962:313) explains the discrepancy between the Hebrew and Greek by positing that the Septuagint has the original reading; he thus follows Biblia Hebraica in proposing to emend the participle μεταστάσαντα to μεταστατάντα [become high]. The Septuaginta Deutsch explains the Greek as a free translation of a corrupted Hebrew text (Bons et al. 2011:1603); in other words, there is no translation strategy involved that could explain the translation.

We suggest rather that the Greek translator employed a translation strategy of explicitation by replacing a generic term with a specific one. The translator of Psalms uses cedars of Lebanon symbolically to refer to a powerful, evil person; the use of a specific tree creates a more powerful simile. What is very interesting is that the translator of Psalms has a different ideological viewpoint concerning the symbolic use of cedar from that of the translator of Ezekiel. Whereas the translator of Ezekiel did not want to use cedar metaphorically to refer to powerful evil persons, as exemplified in Psalm 37:65 (36:35 LXX) the translator of Psalms does not have a problem in referring to impious wicked persons as cedars of Lebanon.

In the second verse, the translator of Ezekiel uses κέδρος to translate 적용 [cypresses from Senir].

Ezekiel 27:5

(out of) cypresses from Senir they made for you a whole deck; they took a cedar from Lebanon to make a mast over you.

A cedar from Sanir was built for you, fillets of timber of cypress were taken from Lebanon to make fir-tree masts for you. (Pietersma & Wright 2007)

This verse is explained above, where it is argued that the two terms for the trees used for the planks of the ship and its mast were switched so that cedar, the tallest and most powerful tree, is not used in symbolic reference to a wicked kingdom.

17 In 1 Kings 7:6 (7:43 LXX), Origen adds κέδρος (Rahlfs & Hanhart 2006:640) as do Alexandrinus and Aquila (Hatch & Redpath 1998/1902:758). The Hebrew text does not include mention of cedar in this verse.
In the third verse, the Hebrew term רעゼל [pine] is translated with κεδρός [cedar].

**Isaiah 60:13**

Let Lebanon’s glory come upon you, cypress, elder tree, and pine, to glorify the site of my sanctuary, and I will honour my royal footstool.

In this verse, there are three names of trees [cypress, elder tree and pine]. These three trees in the same order occur in the second part of Isaiah 41:19, where the Septuagint translates only two terms κυπάρισσος and λευκός [cypress and white poplar]. As argued in more detail in Naudé and Miller-Naudé (2018), the Greek translators had difficulties finding translation equivalents for multiple trees in a list. As a result, some of the translation equivalents reflect Greek terms that provided, in the translators’ view, a suitable familiar or local substitute. In some cases, the Hebrew term is simply not translated. In Isaiah 60:13, the use of κέδρος for the third tree term is probably triggered by the connection to Lebanon with which the cedar was associated.

In the fourth verse, the Hebrew term שֶׁרֶשֶׁת is translated with the adjective κεδρίνος.

**2 Chronicles 3:5**

He paneled the walls of the main room with cypresses, covered them with fine gold, and decorated them with palm trees and chains. And he lined the great house outside with cedar wood and gilded it with pure gold and engraved palms on it and chains. (Pietersma & Wright 2007)

In this verse, the Septuagint substitutes ‘cedar’ for ‘cypress’ because the temple is associated with cedar wood. The Septuagint translator is harmonising what is known elsewhere about the panelling of the temple through using the translation strategy of substitution. In other words, the Septuagint translator sees cypress as a base timber and cedar as a luxurious wood for panelling; he therefore corrects the Hebrew text. Rudolph (1955:203) explains the MT rendering by arguing that the wood is not so important because the Chronicler is focussing on 1 Kings 6:13, 22, which emphasises gold. See the preceding discussion on 1 Kings 6:16, 18, 22 in 1 Kings 6:16, 6:20 and Isaiah 60:13 as discussed above in which the Septuagint removes the redundant references to cedar in order to focus on gold.

What is very interesting about the translator’s strategy in this verse is its connection to the translation strategy in Ezekiel 27:5 as discussed above. In that verse, the translator employed a strategy of substitution in employing the phrase κυπαρίσσιον ἐκ τοῦ Λιβάνου for the phrase מְלֹאכָּע לָעָֽם for ideological reasons, namely, to avoid symbolically representing Tyre with the grandeur of the cedar. In 2 Chronicles 3:5, the glorious reputation of the temple is elevated through the substitution of cedar for cypress. The translation strategy (substitution), the ideology, and the symbolic valorisation of cedar and cypress are the same – it is only the objects to which they are applied that differ in the two verses.

**Conclusion**

In this paper, we have examined those cases in which the Hebrew source text term גְּלָם [cedar] is not translated with its usual Septuagintal equivalent κέδρος [cedar] or its adjective κέδרίνος but rather with one of the following: (1) κυπάρισσος [cypress] or the related adjective κυπαρίσσιος, (2) ξύλον [wood, tree] or (3) non-translation/deletion of the source text item. We have demonstrated that employing editorial theory and determining the translation strategy of the Septuagintal translators within the broader frameworks of complexity theory and Biblical Plant Hermeneutics provides an insightful methodology for explaining the Septuagintal readings.

Most Septuagintal research is text critically oriented in looking for the Vorlage of the Septuagint translators, but the focus on the search for the source text is reductionist in light of the complex nature and interrelationships of the Hebrew text and the Septuagint text, because both were textually fluid. The focus rather should be on the extant texts and a description and explanation of the kinds of differences between texts, as promoted by editorial theory. In addition, the notion of ‘translation technique’ as used by many Septuagintal scholars is outdated. Translation strategy (e.g. Baker 2011; Naudé 2008; Van Rooyen & Naudé 2009) should be used instead and the entire range of translation strategies should be considered.

Finally, we have demonstrated that in certain cases, it is very clear that the choice of translation strategy relates purely to ideological concerns of the translators. In other cases, there is a far more complex interplay of ideological concerns with textual and contextual concerns. Finally, in some cases, it is clear that the Septuagint translators were not able to make a precise botanical identification of the names of trees in series and attempted to convey a local or contextual substitute for the tree.

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Authors’ contributions

C.L.M.-N. and J.A.N. jointly conceptualised, researched and wrote the article.

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