Problem of the Translation of Toponyms in the Septuagint Based on the Example of “Wool of Miletus” (Ez 27:18)

Abstract: In antiquity, wool was traded between the Levant countries and the rest of the known world. Clean, soft wool was especially desirable because it absorbed dyes perfectly, including the purple for which the Phoenician Tyre was famous. In his “Lamentation over Tyre” (Ez 27:1-36) the Hebrew author, followed by a Greek translator, lists a number of cities and regions with which Tyre traded. Ezekiel’s material is therefore an excellent basis for research into translation techniques used in the translation of toponyms. Their analysis and comparison indicates the existence of several types of translation, among them the technique based on association, which will explain the introduction of Miletus to LXX Ez 27:18 in place of the Hebrew Sahar/Zahar. Evidence will be provided by Greek literary texts and papyrus documents from Ptolemaic Egypt.

Keywords: Septuagint, Book of Ezekiel, toponyms, wool, Sahar/Zahar, Miletus, Lamentation over Tyre

Abstrakt: Wełna w starożytności była przedmiotem wymiany handlowej pomiędzy krajami Lewantu a resztą znanego świata. Pożądano przede wszystkim tej czystej i miękkiej, ponieważ doskonale przyswajała ona barwniki, m.in. purpurę, z której słynął fenicki Tyr. W Lamencie nad Tyrem (Ez 27,1-36) autor hebrajski, a za nim tłumacz grecki wymieniają szereg miast i krain, z którymi handlował Tyr. Dostarczony przez Ezechielu materiał jest dzięki temu doskonałą podstawą do badań nad technikami translatorskimi stosowanych w przekładzie toponimów. Ich analiza i porównanie wskazują na istnienie kilku rodzajów przekładu, a pośród nich techniki bazującej na asocjacji, która pozwoli wyjaśnić wprowadzenie do LXX Ez 27,18 Miletu w miejsce hebrajskiego Sacharu. Dowód dostarczą greckie teksty literackie i dokumenty papirusowe z ptolemejskiego Egiptu.

Słowa kluczowe: Septuaginta, Księga Ezechiela, toponimy, wełna, Sachar, Milet, Lamentation over Tyre
It is a well-known fact that the Greek translations in the LXX version of the Bible are of variable quality. The problems the translators faced can be perfectly illustrated by the way the names of the then everyday products, now difficult to identify, as well as proper names are translated. As Emanuel Tov shows in his short and important article, the canonical books of the LXX contain a total of 27,413 proper names. Unfortunately, he failed to distinguish between the names of persons and toponyms. Nevertheless, Tov’s study indicates a certain regularity – as much as 31% of the total number, or 29% if repetitions are excluded, of proper names appear in their Hellenised form. These percentages are relatively high in the books of the prophets because, as the researcher believes, these books contain by far the highest percentage of geographical names. Tov did not explain how he assigned the towns from the LXX text if he did not find a proper equivalent for the Hebrew original name; he is supposed to have assigned them to appropriate groups with non-Greek and Greek endings because some translators transcribed the name according to the rules applied in Semitic languages (an example is שְׂנִיר Σανιρ; Ez 27:5a), others gave a foreign-sounding word a Hellenised character (יוֹבֵית אַשְׁבֵּעַ/οἶκος Εσοβα; 1 Chr 4:21) or assigned it a different, generally known toponym (Ῥόδιοι-Ῥόδος).

This text, though analysing a number of geographical names, is dedicated to one of them, Miletus, which in an inexplicable way became the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew צָחַר. We will look at how the quality of the Greek Book of Ezekiel is assessed and what strategies the Greek author chose in the selection of toponyms. We will do this on the basis of the list of Tyre’s exporters and importers that feature in the so-called Lament over Tyre (contained in Ez 27:1-24). We will attempt to describe the probable strategies of the Greek translator and we will subject to critical analysis the proposals to unravel the presence of Miletus on the Greek list. We will also put forward our own hypothesis, supported by arguments regarding the choice made by the translator.

1 Tov refers, of course, to the Jewish canon, although in this case it is tantamount to the Catholic one, because only the books that have their Hebrew equivalent in the Masoretic Text are considered. E. Tov, Transliterated Proper Names in the Septuagint: Some Statistics, [in:] Biblical Greek in Context, Essays in Honour of John A.L. Lee, Biblical Tools and Studies 22, J. Aitken, T.V. Evans (eds.), Leuven 2015, pp. 241–245.

2 Ibidem, pp. 243–244.
Greek translation of Ezekiel

The quality of the Greek translation of Ezekiel has been addressed by many researchers, who usually focus, as in this article, on analysing selected fragments.\(^3\) There are, however, comprehensive studies, such as Ezekiel: A Commentary based on Iezekiēl in Codex Vaticanus from 2009 by John Olley, which give an overview of the quality of the translation of this book in LXX. In his study, Olley provides a reliable current state of research, which will be referred to below.

The starting point for the assessment of quality and fidelity of LXX Ez for the researcher is the results of the Helsinki school, which are based on the analysis of infinitives and *semi-prepositions*.\(^4\) The comparison of the Greek and Hebrew versions in this respect led the researchers to qualify LXX Ez as one of the most slavish translations. A similar opinion is held by Galen Marquis, who in his two articles,\(^5\) which are analyses of the word order and the lexical consistency, proves that statistically in both cases the compliance reaches 90%.

Tov and Wright, as Olley pointed out, concluded that the Greek version of Ezekiel is inconsistent or the translator undecided; they inferred on the basis of prepositions, pronoun suffixes, particles and conjunctions that reliable statistics require the material/book to be divided into smaller parts.\(^6\) Similar research was performed by Katrin Hauspie,\(^7\) who in her doctoral dissertation analysed

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the concept of literalness, recognizing the nuances associated with the target language and the differences between possible equivalents. Olley added that, although the translation of LXX Ez certainly follows the Hebrew original, this does not mean that the translator was able to fully meet the requirements of literalness, due to numerous external and internal factors influencing him, such as the nuances of the meaning or the translator’s own skills. A separate issue remains the details that originated in Vorlage. Nevertheless, in LXX Ez both “grammatical nightmares” and correct Greek constructions can be found.8

In this context, Tov’s counts of proper names seem relevant. The researcher noted that the situation in the Greek Book of Ezekiel corresponds to the biblical median. Tov found as many as 629 proper names in the LXX Ez, 182 of which seem Hellenistic. This gives 29% of the total number of Greek-sounding names, which is the same as in the entire canon of Jewish books translated into Greek. Of these 629, 135 are individual lexemes, 49 of which seem to be of Hellenistic origin, which gives 36%, a greater percentage of Greek-sounding names than in the entire Bible.9 Given the previously cited studies, which testify to the literalness of the translation of Ezekiel, the variety of toponyms seems puzzling.

Exporters and importers of Tyre

In order to better illustrate the translator’s strategy in this area, we will use a table listing the names of Tyre exporters and importers in Hebrew (based on MT and confronted with BHQ) and Greek with their English equivalents.10 Where necessary, we will add the goods or services related to a given toponym. This specification will enable us to discuss the translator’s strategy quite precisely (though not in every case) and better understand the issue of Miletus from verse 18.

9 E. Tov, Transliterated Proper Names..., op. cit., p. 243.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>col.</th>
<th>hebrew version</th>
<th>transl. from hebrew</th>
<th>greek version</th>
<th>transl. from greek</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ver. 5a</td>
<td>כְּדֵרֹּס ֶּקֶנְר</td>
<td>cedar from Sanir</td>
<td>κόβρος ἐκ Σανιρ</td>
<td>cedar from Sanir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ver. 5b</td>
<td>כְּדֵרֹּס ֶּקֶנְר</td>
<td>cedar from Lebanon</td>
<td>κυμάρίσσας ἐκ τοῦ Λιβάνου</td>
<td>cedar from Lebanon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ver. 6a</td>
<td>אַלּוֹנִים מִבָּשָׁן</td>
<td>oaks of Bashan</td>
<td>ἐκ τῆς Βασανίτιδος</td>
<td>from Basanitis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ver. 6b</td>
<td>מֵאִיֵּי כִּתִּיִּם</td>
<td>coastlands of Kittim</td>
<td>οἶκοι ἀλσώδεις ἀπὸ νήσων τῶν Χεττιιν</td>
<td>woodland houses from the islands of the Chettiin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ver. 7a</td>
<td>בָּשָׁן אַלּוֹנִים מִבָּשָׁן</td>
<td>oaks of Bashan</td>
<td>κυπάρισσος ἐκ τοῦ Λιβάνου</td>
<td>cypress from Lebanon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ver. 7b</td>
<td>בָּשָׁן אַלּוֹנִים מִבָּשָׁן</td>
<td>oaks of Bashan</td>
<td>οἶκοι ἀλσώδεις ἀπὸ νήσων Ελισαι</td>
<td>woodland houses from the islands of Elisai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ver. 8a</td>
<td>סְפִירִים בְּנֵי סִדות</td>
<td>sages of Sidon and Arvad</td>
<td>κατοικούντες Σιδώνα καὶ Αράδιοι</td>
<td>those who inhabited Sidon and Aradians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ver. 8b</td>
<td>סְפִירִים בְּנֵי סִדות</td>
<td>sages of Sidon and Arvad</td>
<td>κατοικούντες Σιδώνα καὶ Αράδιοι</td>
<td>those who inhabited Sidon and Aradians</td>
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<tr>
<td>ver. 9</td>
<td>בֵּית גַּבַּל</td>
<td>elders of Gabal</td>
<td>πρεσβύτεροι Βυβλίων</td>
<td>the elders of the Byblians</td>
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<tr>
<td>ver. 10</td>
<td>פָּרַס, מְזָס וְלֶדוֹ</td>
<td>Persia and Lud and Put were warriors in army</td>
<td>Πέρσαι καὶ Λυδοὶ καὶ Λίβυες ἤσαν ἐν τῇ δυνάμει</td>
<td>Persians, Lydians and Libyans were in force</td>
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<tr>
<td>ver. 11</td>
<td>בֵּית גַּבַּל</td>
<td>elders of Gabal</td>
<td>πρεσβύτεροι Βυβλίων</td>
<td>the elders of the Byblians</td>
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<td>κόβρος ἐκ Σανιρ</td>
<td>cedar from Sanir</td>
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<td>כְּדֵרֹּס ֶּקֶנְר</td>
<td>cedar from Sanir</td>
<td>κόβρος ἐκ Σανιρ</td>
<td>cedar from Sanir</td>
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<td>ver. 14</td>
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<td>elders of Gabal</td>
<td>πρεσβύτεροι Βυβλίων</td>
<td>the elders of the Byblians</td>
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<td>ver. 15</td>
<td>בָּנָי דְדָן</td>
<td>sons of Dedan</td>
<td>υἱοὶ Ροδίων</td>
<td>sons of Rhodians</td>
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<td></td>
<td>[טְדָן בָּנֵי]</td>
<td>[...] ivory and ebony wood</td>
<td>[...] ivory</td>
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<td>אֶדְמוֹן [עֲרָם]</td>
<td>Edom/Aram</td>
<td>[טְדָנ בָּן]</td>
<td>human beings</td>
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<td></td>
<td>[אֲרָם וְהוֹבְנִים]</td>
<td>[ [...] garnets, purple, embroidered cloth, fine linen, coral, and rubies</td>
<td>[אֲרָם וְרִקְמָה וּבוּץ]</td>
<td>[and Cassia, and gold]</td>
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<td>[טְדָנ בָּן אַרְגָּמָן]</td>
<td>[exchanging]</td>
<td>[אֲרָם וְרִקְמָה]</td>
<td>[wine from Miletus]</td>
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<td>[יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיְהוּדָה]</td>
<td>Judah and the land of Israel</td>
<td>[יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיְהוּדָה]</td>
<td>[and wool from Miletus]</td>
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<td></td>
<td>מִנִית חִטֵּי</td>
<td>Minnith wheat, sweets, honey, oil, and resin</td>
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<td></td>
<td>[יִשְׂרָאֵל וְיְהוּדָה]</td>
<td>[in sale of] grain and perfume and cassia, [and they gave] first honey and oil and resin</td>
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<td>[כָּרִים וְאֵילִים]</td>
<td>camels and rams</td>
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<td>[יְהוּדָה וְיִשְׂרָאֵל]</td>
<td>Ioudas and the sons of Israel</td>
<td>[Εὐδαμος καὶ οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ Ισραηλ]</td>
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<td>[כָּרִים וְאֵילִים]</td>
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<tr>
<td>ver. 23–24</td>
<td>יָדֶן וּכָנֶה וְחָרָן שְׂנִיר בָּשָׁן בִּגְלוֹמֵי תְּכֵלֶת וְרִקְמָה וּבְגִנְזֵי בְּרֹמִים בַּחֲבָלִים</td>
<td>Eden, Canneh, and Chilmad [trading in] rich garments, blue coats, embroidered fabric, varicolored carpets, twisted ropes and strong cords</td>
<td>Χαρραν καὶ Χαννα κλίμα και Χαρμαν [..] οὐ και</td>
<td>Charran and Channa Assour and Charman [..] blue and decorative caskets bound with cords and cypress wood</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The research results obtained by the text critics demonstrate that it is difficult to justify the equivalents introduced by the translator on the basis of the differences in the Hebrew text. The Greek translation of each of these 43 toponyms present in the Hebrew text of Ez 27:1-24 should be considered separately. However, in view of our objective, which is to examine the path from Zahar to Miletus, we will discuss it briefly, trying to point out some of the techniques (if technique, both in the case of unsuccessful translations, is a valid term) noticeable in the above list.

The first and most obvious technique, in case a given toponym is not known, is to transcribe the Hebrew term. It should be noted here whether this toponym in the wording known to us from the LXX did not appear in earlier Greek literature. For the most reliable results, we use the TLG (Thesaurus Linguae Graecae) database. The transcribed names in Ez 27:1-24 that were not certified as such before LXX include: שְׂנִיר – Σανιρ (ver. 5a), בָּשָׁן – Βασανίτις (ver. 6a), בִּגְלוֹמֵי תְּכֵלֶת וְרִקְמָה וּבְגִנְזֵי בְּרֹמִים – Μικρόκαλα περιέχοντα τηγάνης και κυπαρίσσινα (ver. 7b), which is the focus of section צוֹר – Σορ (ver. 8b), תּוֹגַרְמָה – Οἶκος Θεργαμα (ver. 14), חֶלְבּוֹן – Χελβων (ver. 18), אוּזָל – Ασηλ (ver. 19), רַעְמָה – Ραγμα (ver. 22), חָרָן – Χαρραν, כַּנֵּה – Χαννα (ver. 23–24).

11 Although transcriptions may also include known toponyms that were not codified in the target language, in this case in Greek.
12 Translating the popular noun בַּיִת into οἶκος, also in toponomastics, seems to be a practice accepted by most Greek translators (cf. 1Chr 4:21).
Following the second technique, the translator identifies the toponym and uses a name common in Greek texts. Although in some cases the result is still a transcription but accepted in the times before LXX. This technique is most often applied to the names of larger areas such as countries and lands: לְבָנוֹן – Λίβανος (ver. 5b), מִצְרַיִם – Αἴγυπτος (ver. 7), צִידוֹן – Σιδών (ver. 8a and 11), אַרְוַד – Αράδιος (ver. 8a and 11), גְּבַל – Βύβλοι (Βύβλος; ver. 9), פָּרַס – Πέρσης (ver. 10), לוּד – Λυδός (ver. 20), פּוּט – Λίβυς (ver. 10), שׁתַּרְשִׁי – Καρχηδόνιος (ver. 12), יָוָן – Ήελλάς (ver. 13), יְהוּדָה – Ἰούδας (ver. 17), יִשְׂרָאֵל – Ἰσραήλ (ver. 17), דַּמֶּשֶׂק – Δαμασκός (ver. 18), עֲרַב – Αραβία (ver. 21), שְׁבָא – Σαβα (ver. 22).

14 Earliest evidence in Aesop’s Fab. 293,12 (6th century).
15 Several times already in Homer’s works, in the 8th century BC (e.g. Il 3,300).
16 Already in Homer’s works (Od. 15,425).
17 The city-state already mentioned by Prynichus in the 6th century BC (Fr. 9,2), while Aradians were mentioned by Herodotus in the 5th century BC (Hist. 7,98,3).
18 This form was confirmed by Hesiod in the 8th/7th century BC (Fr. 405,1). There is no doubt that Gebal (now Lebanese Jibayl) and Byblos are one and the same town; cf. G.A. Cooke, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel, Edinburgh 1936, p. 299; P.C. Bosak, Leksykon wszystkich miejsc biblijnych, Krakow 2016, p. 347.
19 Persians are mentioned many times, for example, by Herodotus (Hist. 1,4).
20 The first mention of Liadians was found in fragments (Fr. 14,3) of the works of Mimnermus of Colophon, who lived in the 7th century BC.
21 Problems with identification of פּוּט are summarized by lexicographers in: Wielki słownik hebrajsko-polski i aramejsko-polski Starego Testamentu, vol. 2, L. Kochler, W. Baumgartner, J.J. Stamm (eds.), P. Dec (ed. of the Polish edition), serie: Prymasowska Seria Biblijna, Warsaw 2008, pp. 10–11. Lybia was mentioned in the Greek texts quite early; it can be found in the works of Hesiod (Fr. 150,15; 8th/7th BC).
22 The Carthaginians are mentioned already in the 5th century BC by Thucydides (Hist. 1,14,1,1).
23 The antiquity of this name needs no proof. The oldest mentions are to be found in Homer (Il. 2,683).
24 The Greek name Judah was recorded by the mysterious magician Astrampsychus (Sort. cap 7), whose activity dates back to the 4th century. However, as for the author himself, there is no certainty as to when he lived and where he came from. Another source is the Letter of Aristeas (e.g. 47,2) from the period of LXX.
25 Although the Greek version of the name of Israel is evidenced by Manetho (Fr. 6,9), who lived in the times of the LXX, as well as by the LXX itself, it is difficult to suppose that the Jews of Alexandria did not use it in such a version much earlier, even if we do not have material evidence to prove this practice.
26 Evidenced by Theophrastus (Hist. plant. 3,15,3,8) in the 4th/3rd century, by his contemporary astrologer Berossus (Fr. 16,10) and in the receipt with a list of buyers of pickled fish (P. Cair. Zen. 1 59006 from the 3rd century BC).
27 It can be found already in the 6th/5th century BC in the works of Aeschylus (Prometh. 420).
28 Mentioned by Astrampsychus (Sort. 3,1,16) and Theophrastus (Hist. plant. 9,4,2,3).
29 All data acquired from: 1Chr 4,21. All data acquired from: Thesaurus Linguae Greace, op. cit.
The third technique, based on association, seems most important from the perspective of this research. In a situation where the original name is difficult to identify, the translator took into consideration the type of goods exported by this place. In this way, in verse 15, the inhabitants of Rhodes (Ῥόδιοι) are mentioned in the place of an unknown toponym דְּדָן, which interestingly enough, was transcribed in verse 20. The island of Rhodes is believed to have been famous for ivory in the times the LXX was translated. A somewhat more mysterious case is that the widely discussed שׁתַּרְשִׁי identified as Carthage (with the inhabitants of Καρχηδόνιοι; in verse 12). This is puzzling inasmuch as Tarshish, in the Greek version (Θαρσις), was only a few verses away (ver. 16). Much less mysterious is the presence of the wealthy Miletus, famous for his excellent wool, which the translator introduced in place of צָחַר.

Whether it is justified to refer only to associations in such cases, we will prove later in this article.

The fourth type can barely be named a technique because the translation product results either from a manuscript error or an inability to identify the term properly. In the latter case, however, one can speak of a translator’s strategy, whose primary goal was to remain faithful to the Hebrew originals and to translate even those terms that remained foreign to him. Hence, the target language contains toponyms that do not exist in the original or that are erroneously identified with common nouns. The first case can be recognised in ver. 16, where רָאמֹת i.e. corals and rubies, became toponyms Ραμωθ and Χορχο, while the second when the well-known אֲרָם was identified as ἄνθρωπος, not surprisingly though, given how often translators have confused similar consonants ד and ר. 32


31 The meaning of the noun רָאמֹת is uncertain. Several possible meanings are suggested: silk (after sericum suggested by the Vulgate), black corals, pearls, sea shells; Great Dictionary..., op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 219–220; through its association with the Arabic noun כַדְכֹּד it has been assigned the meaning of a bright red object. Linguists identify it as a precious stone, probably ruby (after Is 54:12); Great dictionary..., op. cit., vol. 1, p. 435.

32 This commentary is also confirmed by Olley, who adds that the LXX decides on “people,” although the term צָחַר could also refer to Edom; J.W. Olley, Ezekiel: A Commentary..., op. cit., p. 426.
The last group of toponyms were neither identified nor transcribed but were omitted by the translator (or Vorlage), which should also be considered as a translation strategy (unless the reason for the difference is Vorlage). This applies to the unidentified גַּמָּדִים (Gamadites in ver. 11), תֻּבַל and כָּמָשׁ (in ver. 13), which may have caused some trouble. Another situation is found in ver. 19, in which the Greek author completely omitted יָבֵן and יִבְגוֹל. In the latter case, the resignation from the translation can be explained by the presence of Miletus in ver. 18, which belonged territorially to יָבֵן, the area of Ionia mentioned in the Hebrew text. Miletus therefore plays the role of pars pro toto in the Greek text. This phenomenon becomes visible in the specification of geographical lands/countries/islands to which BH and LXX refer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lands in MT</th>
<th>Lands in LXX (and Vul)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ver. 12–15 – Asia Minor (Ionia)</td>
<td>ver. 13 – Ionia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ver. 14 – Armenia (according to the Hittite and Assyrian parallels)</td>
<td>ver. 15 – Rhodes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ver. 16–17 – Palestine</td>
<td>ver. 16–19 – it starts with Damascus. Assyrian data mention Chelbon and Asel in north-east Syria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ver. 18–19 – Syria and Ionia (Javan)</td>
<td>ver. 18 – Ionia (Miletus)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ver. 20–22 – Arabia</td>
<td>ver. 20–22 – Arabia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ver. 23–24 – Mesopotamia</td>
<td>ver. 23–24 – Mesopotamia</td>
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</table>

Wool from Zahar – or from where?

From the above concise analysis it can be concluded that a different toponym in LXX has its source not only in the ignorance of the Greek author, but may

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33 L.C. Allen, *Ezekiel 20–48*, serie: *Word Biblical Commentary* 29, Dallas 2002, p. 86; Allen does not identify Dedan directly, although in the case of MT he seems to follow the Arabic interpretation. This, however, is dealt with by Block, noting that the Syrian identification of Danun is supported by both the sources and the goods traded in the place. D.I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel. Chapters 25-48*, serie: *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids 1997, p. 74; Olley is unsure about identifying Ragma/Ramah. As noted by Σαβα, in the table of nations in Gen 10:7, it was located among the northern groups together with Ρεγχμα and Δαδαν, and in Genesis 25:3–4 together with Δαιδαν and Θεργαμα. Ραμα, confirmed in B, provides some difficulties, although some interpreters identify this toponym with the Israeli Ramah. However, this identification is complicated by different interpretations present in P967 Ρεγμα and in A Ραμα (see:
have placed by him consciously. This is probably the case with Miletus (ver. 18), a centre famous for its wool production, as evidenced by numerous extra-biblical authors, to whom we will return below. Before we focus our attention entirely on Miletus, we should consider whether there is any rational reason for the original toponym, Zahar, to be replaced with Miletus. Numerous studies prove that the problematic toponym Zahar can be interpreted as:

1. Region as-sahra (Arabic: “desert”) – a desert area northwest of Damascus; this suggestion of Rüger is supported by many exegetes, including Zimmerli, Cross, Baltzer, Greenberg.

2. Sēha utnē – “land of Sēha,” a land/country inhabited by Luwians, located in north-western Anatolia. This identification, however, seems unlikely, firstly because of its dating (the history of Sēha dates back to the end of the 13th century BC), and secondly because of its topography (territorially it does not overlap with the Carian Miletus).

3. Suhru/Zuhru – a town known from the Amarna Letters; this is one of Block’s suggestions; he also mentioned the area as-sahra from point 1.

4. Suhār in Yemen – Driver has no doubts that in Ez 27:18 the term refers to a place because each of the goods is accompanied by a toponym. He explains very succinctly that צָחַר corresponds best to Suhār in Yemen as evidenced by the Arabic tradition. He refers to the Dictionnaire détaillé des noms des vêtements chez les Arabes by R.P.A. Dozy. With such an identification it is

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35 He also mentions identification with “white” according to Peshitta; M. Greenberg, Ezekiel 21-37, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary, New Haven–London 2008, p. 557. Some of the contemporary translations (e.g. NAS, NKJ) are also in favour of such a translation, although Wujek also retains the idea of white, enigmatically repeating after the Vulgate about wool of “best colour.”


37 According to Aharoni, Zuhru/Suhru should be identified with either Lachish or the Biblical city of Zoar (see: Gen 19:20-23,30), which he himself located on the southern coast of the Dead Sea. Y. Aharoni, The Land of the Bible. A Historical Geography, transl. A.F. Rainey, Philadelphia 1979, p. 172.


impossible to avoid some anachronism, because the sources that the Driver (indirectly) recalls are many centuries younger than the Biblical text. The topography is also questionable. Could the fame of the fleece of Yemen’s sheep reach as far as Tyre? Moreover, the Arabic territories were mentioned by the Hebrew author only in verses 21–22, and it seems that he moves quite consciously and smoothly across the Mediterranean.

4. Brilliant colour צָחֹר, which Peshitta interprets as “white” (similarly to BTP translators).40 “Those who ride on white donkeys (צָחֹרוֹת אֲתֹנוֹת), seated on saddle rugs, and those who travel the road, Sing of them” (Jgs 5:10).

What was then the interpreter’s motivation when he decided to change the name of the centre that supplied Tyre with wool of excellent quality?41 Is the exact localization/interpretation of צָחֹר of any significance?

Miletus wool

When it comes to Miletus, Olley mentions that it is a toponym completely incompatible with the sites enumerated by the BH authors and LXX translators. As noted above, a similar issue applies to the island, or rather the inhabitants of Rhodes. Since the island replaced Dedan that provided Tyre with ivory and ebony wood, the reasons for mentioning Rhodes may be found in the kinds of imported goods. Did the island really trade in this valuable commodity? Olley’s findings do not facilitate the inquiries. He claims that “probably the Rhodians originally bought ivory from Egypt and Ethiopia,”42 yet he fails to support it with a source. It seems that the ivory from Rhodes was so renowned to be immortalised in well-known literary sources.43

But archaeology comes in handy. Richard D. Barnett claimed that craftsmen had been processing ivory in Cameiros/Camiros, Rhodes, since the 7th century BC, that is in the times well before LXX was created.44 In Rhodes, bone

43 No information can be found in literary sources about the ivory trade both in Rhodes itself and in its largest cities: Camiros, Ialyssos or Lindos (after Thesaurus Linguae Grecae, op. cit.).
artifacts dating from the 9th and 8th century BC were also found and identified as Phoenician. It cannot therefore be ruled out that this island was believed by the translator to have been an “ivory island.” An additional clue, which should certainly be ruled out in the case of Miletus, is the apparent similarity of the Hebrew consonants in the name דתן and in the name of Rhodes, if we take into account that the first consonant is pronounced as ר, and the final נ is related to one of the dependent cases (acc. sg. or gen. pl. as in the translation but referring not so much to Rhodes as to its inhabitants, Rhodians).

In the case of Miletus, the investigation seems easier because there may be several explanations here, although none of them can be regarded as the only one that is appropriate:

1. Firstly, the wool from Miletus was famous for its high quality; it was praised both by Pliny the Elder (HN 8.190) and Strabo (Geogr. 12.716). Its fame goes as far back as the 7th century BC (although textile manufacturing was already practiced in the Bronze Age), and it was appreciated until the end of Roman times. According to Athenaeus, coats made of Milesian wool were worn by the inhabitants of Sybaris (Deipnosoph. 12.17). It was desired not only for its high quality, but also for its exceptional ability to absorb dyes.

2. Secondly, the translators could associate the region called צחר phonetically with Sēhas utnē, a region inhabited by the Luwians in northwest Anatolia, documented by the Hittites in the 15th–18th century BC. Commentators,


47 φέρει δ’ ὁ περὶ τὴν Λαοδίκειαν τόπος προβάτων ἀρετὰς οὐκ εἰς μαλακότητα μόνον τῶν ἐρίων, ἢ καὶ τῶν Μιλησίων διαφέρει. After: Thesaurus Linquae Graecae, op. cit.

48 ἐφέροντ’ ὅσι Συμβαρίται καὶ ἱμάτια Μιλησίων ἐρίων πεποιημένα. For: ibidem.

49 Miletus was located at the seaside, which facilitated the development of purple dye industry. I. Benda-Weber, Textile Production Centres..., op. cit., pp. 173–175.
lexicographers and the author of the submitted text insist, however, on as-
ṣahra, a desert area northwest of Damascus, i.e. territorially unrelated to
Miletus or on Suhru/Zuhru mentioned in the Amarna letters. The last
two identifications seem more rational given the absence of ר in the Hettite
name and the Hebrew author’s knowledge of the topography of the Eastern
Mediterranean territory, more specifically of the Levant.
3. Thirdly, we may be dealing with yellow/light-coloured wool (cf. Jgs 5:10).
The name has the same core as the adjective צזר. Such identification also
perfectly corresponds to the Milesian product, namely wool with a fleece
perfect for dyeing, i.e. certainly bright or white (in the perception of the
ancient).

Conclusions

It is difficult to determine how Miletus found its way onto LXX pages as an
equivalent to the troublesome צזר; are we dealing here with a simple association
or should we seek an explanation at the lexical layer? The analysis done above
enables us to propose a few feasible solutions and dismiss those less likely.
1. If the authors of LXX heard of Ṣēhas utnē and were able to associate this
name with a particular region, they could have come to the conclusion that
in the absence of a similar name in the Eastern Mediterranean, reference
should be made to a place whose wool had been (and still was) a familiar
brand, which in this case would have been Miletus, located in the southwest,
unlike Ṣēhas utnē, which is located at the northwest coast of Asia Minor.
Strict geographical consistency may not have been of much importance to
the Alexandrians: it was important that Miletus and Ṣēhas utnē were also
located in the west of Anatolia. This theory is difficult to defend because

50 The great dictionary..., op. cit., vol. 2, p. 96; M. Greenberg, Ezekiel..., op. cit., p. 557.
51 D.I. Block, The Book of Ezekiel..., op. cit., p. 76; see: article by W.F. Albright, The Town of
Selle (Zaru) in the Amarnah Tablets, “The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology” 10 (1924),
p. 6–8, devoted to the identification of Zuhru.
52 We omit the proposal to locate the original Sahar (based on šuhār) šuhār in Yemen, which
we considered unlikely. See: W. Zimmerli, F.M. Cross, K. Baltzer, Ezekiel. And the Com-
mentary..., op. cit, p. 67.
53 This explanation has many analogies in other Semitic languages: Syrian, Arabic, Ugric.
54 To this day, sheep farming in the area around the ancient city of Miletus is one of the
important economic branches of the whole region.
of chronology. It is difficult to imagine that the 13th-century “Sêba land” would remain vividly in the awareness of the Hellenised Alexandrian Jews.

2. Perhaps the blame for the introduction of Miletus into the text can be found in the text itself, in the quality of Vorlage used by the translator. This problem becomes apparent in the case of the aforementioned 177, which in the 15th century was associated with the island of Rhodes, while in the 20th century it was transcribed as Dedan. Some commentators, like Block, regard this onomastic coincidence unproblematic, identifying the two places differently, among other things, by the goods imported from them.

3. The strategy chosen by the translator, who in Ez 27 faced many onomastic and topographic difficulties, seems to be the most likely explanation for the “Miletus problem.” As we have argued, he followed various methods to solve them, while at the same time doing his best not to distort the harmony of the text; at times he transcribed the unknown toponyms if he could not identify them, at times he resorted to associations, guided by his intuition. The third of the translation techniques seems to best explain the occurrence of Miletus. Even if the translator was able to associate Sahar with as-sahra proposed by contemporary commentators, he may have decided to use a place famous for producing excellent wool. Even if the interpretation of Sahar was colour-oriented, Miletus wool was still perfectly suited for translation. Evidence of its fame is provided by Strabo, Pliny, Athenaeus, Cicero, and Virgil (the latter even mentioned the Miletus-Tyre cooperation in the production of woollen purples, if this is how Georg. 3,306 should be understood55). Papyrus texts – P.Cair. Zen. 3 59430 and P.Cair. Zen. 2 59195 – are an additional argument regarding the fame of Miletus wool as well as the place from the LXX Ez translation. They testify to the import of Miletus wool in the 3rd century BC to the translator’s homeland – Ptolemaic Egypt – and indicate the popularity of woollen clothing production in the country of the pharaohs of the Hellenistic period.56

55 (...) quamvis Milesia magno vellera mutentur Tyrios incocta rubores; the ancient import of wool from Miletus into Tyre seems, especially in the context of the desired properties and colours of Miletus wool, which enables the absorption of dyes, to be very obvious.

References


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