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**CULTURAL INTERFERENCES IN THE TRANSLATION OF THE HEBREW
TERMS FOR THE CANAANITE GODDESS “ASHERAH” IN THE SEPTUAGINT**

by

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Dissertation submitted in accordance with the requirements for the Degree of Magister
Artium in the Faculty of Humanities, Department of Classical and Near Eastern Studies at the
University of the Free State

Date submitted: 2 July 2012

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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation hereby handed in for the qualification of Magister Artium at the University of the Free State, is my own independant work and that I have not previously submitted the same work for a qualification at/in another university/faculty.

*To my parents, Jaco and Diane Smith,
and my sister, Tasha Smith,*

*and in loving memory of my grandparents,
Aubrey and Ann O'Brien.*

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Abbreviations

AD	Anno Domini
ANET	Pritchard, J. B., ed. 1969. <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament</i> . Princeton: Princeton University
BC	Before Christ
BHS	Elliger, K., W. Rudolph, <i>et al.</i> , eds. 1997. <i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> . 5 th ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.
BM	British Museum number
COS	Hallo, W. W., and K. Lawson Younger, eds. 1997/2000/2002. <i>The Context of Scripture</i> . 3 vols. Leiden/Boston: Brill.
CPJ	Tcherikover, V. A., A. Fuks, A., and M. Sterd, eds. 1957-1964. <i>Corpus Papyrorum Judaicarum</i> . 3 vols. Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press; Jerusalem: Magnes.
CTA	Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum
K	Symbols for texts from the Kouyunjik Collection in the British Museum
KTU	Dietrich, M., O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartin. 1976. <i>Die Keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit Einschliesslich der Keilalphabetischen Texte Ausserhalb Ugarits</i> . I. Alter Orient und Altes Testament 2, 4. Kevelaer: Neukirchen-Vluyn.
KJV	King James Version
LXX	Septuagint
LXX ^A	Codex Alexandrinus
LXX ^B	Codex Vaticanus

- MT Masoretic Text (text of the Bible in Jewish tradition)
- NETS Pietersma, A. and B. G. Wright, eds. 2007. *A New English Translation of the Septuagint: And the Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included Under that Title*. New York/ Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- NKJV New King James Version
- PE *Preparatio evengelica*, written by Eusebius

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1. Background

The Hebrew term אֲשֵׁרָה/ אֲשֵׁרָה which refer to the image of the goddess Asherah is translated with three different terms in the Septuagint¹, these are: ἄλλος, ἄλση (grove/s); δένδρα (tree) and Ἀστάρτη, Ἀστάρταις (Astarte/s). The different contexts wherein the Hebrew terms function within the Hebrew Bible do not sketch a clear image of what an “asherah” looked like (refer to Chapter 4), and the lack of iconographic or archaeological data which can with certainty be linked to the goddess further complicates the matter (refer to Chapter 3). The question to be posed then is why did the translators of the Septuagint translate the Hebrew terms referring to the goddess Asherah in the manner in which they did. A preliminary answer to this question, which will also function as a working hypothesis, is that the notable different socio-cultural frames wherein the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint originated and functioned influenced not only the manner in which the translators of the Septuagint understood the Hebrew terms referring to the goddess Asherah, but also the manner in which they translated these terms.

Josephus in his *Antiquities of the Jews* (*Ant.* 12:11-12:118) indicates that the Torah was translated into Greek in Alexandria, Egypt, during the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, while the translation of the post-Pentateuchal books may have originated in Palestine (refer to Chapter 5). The other origin accounts of the Septuagint, which is that of Aristeas and Philo, also indicate that the Torah was translated in Alexandria. The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible was thus intended for a Jewish community, which were essentially Hellenes in terms of language, culture and social status (refer to Chapter 5). Their status as “Hellenes” however allowed them to continue practicing their own religion, which in turn justified the need for a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. The socio-cultural frame within which the intended audience of the Septuagint functioned thus differed extensively from that of the

¹ In the current study the term “Septuagint” is used to refer to the Greek translation of the various books of the Hebrew Bible. The various biblical books were translated in a period stretching over various centuries, by different translators, in Egypt and Palestine.

Hebrew Bible. As a result, the extent to which the translators of the Septuagint were familiar with the socio-cultural frames within which the Hebrew Bible functioned can be questioned. Furthermore the translators' knowledge of the deities referred to in the Hebrew Bible should also be questioned because this issue directly relates to their translation choices regarding the Hebrew terms referring to Asherah (refer to Chapter 6).

In light of the above mentioned there are thus grounds for the investigation of possible cultural interferences in the translation of the Hebrew terms referring to the goddess Asherah in the Septuagint.

1.2. Research problem

In order to investigate the possible cultural interferences which may have influenced the translators of the Septuagint, the following research questions are posed:

- How was the goddess Asherah depicted in extra-Biblical sources, which include textual, iconographic and archaeological data?
- How was the goddess Asherah depicted in the Hebrew Bible, and do these depictions support the Septuagint's rendering of the Hebrew terms referring to the goddess?
- How did the socio-cultural frame within which the intended audience of the Septuagint functioned influence the manner in which the Septuagintal translators understood and translated the Hebrew Bible?

1.3. Research design

1.3.1. Theoretical framework

Narrative frame theory (Baker 2006) will act as theoretical framework for the current study (refer to Chapter 2). This theory offers a mechanism whereby the possible cultural interferences that influenced the translation of the Septuagint can be described and explained within the relevant frames and compared to the contextual frames of the Hebrew source text.

1.3.2. Research methodology

The following methodology will be applied regarding the respective research questions:

- An overview of extra-Biblical textual, iconographic and archaeological data, gleaned from a literature study, will be presented, in order to gain insight into what an image of the goddess Asherah may have looked like.
- A contextual examination of all the occurrences of the Hebrew terms referring to the goddess Asherah, as well as the Septuagint's rendering thereof, will be conducted.
- The origin accounts of the Septuagint as well as the influence of Greek culture on the Jews in Hellenistic Egypt and Palestine will be discussed in order to gain insight into the socio-cultural frame wherein the intended audience of the Septuagint functioned. The manner in which this frame influenced not only the translation of the goddess Asherah, but also the renderings of other deities referred to in the Hebrew Bible will be examined.

1.4. Aim and relevance of the study

The aim of this study is to describe the manner in which the translators of the Septuagint translated the Hebrew terms for the goddess Asherah, and to explain their translation choices. The relevance of this study is to portray the prominence of interference in translation, and to specifically illustrate, in the context of this study, the different forms that cultural interferences can assume.

1.5. Layout of chapters

Chapter 2 provides a presentation of the theoretical framework applied in the current study.

In Chapter 3 a brief overview of textual, archaeological and iconographic evidence/data gleaned from a literature study will be presented in order to gain a better understanding of

what an image of the goddess may have looked like within the broader context of the ancient Near East.

A contextual examination of all the occurrences of the Hebrew terms referring to the goddess Asherah, as well as the translation thereof in the Septuagint will be conducted in Chapter 4. This examination will prove invaluable in that it will provide insight into the manner in which the goddess Asherah was portrayed in the Hebrew Bible, and if this portrayal justifies the translation choice of the translators of the Septuagint.

The socio-cultural frame of the intended audience of the Septuagint will be explored in Chapter 5. In order to do so the origin accounts regarding the Septuagint as well as the history of the Jews in Egypt and Palestine during the Hellenistic period will be presented in order to gain insight in the socio-cultural frame wherein the Septuagint had its origin. Secondly the translation techniques and the unique vocabulary utilised in the Septuagint will be briefly discussed in order to further highlight the difference between the socio-cultural frame of the Septuagint vis-à-vis that of the Hebrew Bible.

The influence of the socio-cultural frame of the intended audience of the Septuagint on the translators perception and understanding of the deities referred to in the Hebrew Bible will be discussed in Chapter 6, as well as its influence of the manner in which the Hebrew terms referring to the goddess Asherah was translated.

In Chapter 7 conclusions to the current study will be presented

Chapter 2

Narrative Frame Theory

2.1. Introduction

The theoretical framework to be applied in this study, namely narrative frame theory (Baker, 2006), will be described in this chapter. Narrative frame theory is useful to the study at hand, as it offers a mechanism whereby the possible interferences that influenced the translation of the Septuagint can be described and explained within the relevant frames and compared to the contextual frames of the Hebrew source text. The discussion that follows regarding narrative frame theory draws extensively on the work of Mona Baker and takes the form of a summary of the relevant elements of the theory. It is, however, also important to give a brief overview of other significant developments in translation studies.

The current chapter consists of three sections. In the first of these the development of descriptive translation studies will be discussed. In section two the influence of culture on language and translation will be discussed. In section three, an overview of the most important elements of narrative frame theory and the importance thereof for the current study will be provided.

2.2. From prescriptivism to functionalism and descriptivism

Translation practice is characterized by a history of change. As early as 46 B.C. Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 B.C.), a Roman orator and prolific author in various genres (Speaks, 1995: 145-146) stated in his *De optimo genere oratorum* that he preferred translating ‘sense-for-sense’ rather than ‘word-for-word’ (Munday, 2011: 19). Jerome (c. 347-420 A.D.) referred, in his letter to Pammachius, that various translators in the past have translated sense-for-sense; among others these are Terence (translating Menander), Plautus and Caecilius (both translating comic poets), St. Anthony, Hilary the Confessor, and even the Apostles (e.g. Mark 5:41). This debate, literal vs. free translation, lasted up until the second half of the twentieth century (Munday, 2011: 19). This period may be referred to as the pre-linguistic period in translation, because during the 1950s and 1960s the topic of the debate shifted to

linguistic issues, which lasted until the 1990s, when the focus yet again shifted (Munday, 2011: 35).

The linguistic period showcased a vast array of theories ushered in by the discussion concerning 'equivalence'. Eugene Nida distinguished between two forms of equivalence. Formal equivalence required that the message in the target language should match as closely as possible to the source language. By contrast, in dynamic equivalence the relationship between the target audience and the target message should be substantially the same as the relationship that existed between the source audience and the source message (Nida, 1964/2000: 153-167).

A second important development during the linguistic period was *skopos* theory. The *skopos* is understood as a "technical term for the aim or purpose of a translation", this "aim" or "purpose" leads to an "action" which in turn leads to a "result/target text" (Vermeer, 1989/2000: 226). The "aim of any translation action, and the mode in which it is to be realized, are negotiated with the client who commissions the action" (Vermeer, 1989/2000: 226). Nord (1997, 2005) in turn highlighted the importance of the translation brief provided by the client requesting the translation, which emphasized the importance of the function of the intended translation. This marked the move to a functionalist approach to translation. Naudé (2008: 232) indicates that in Nord's view only the translator is qualified to judge whether the translation process was successfully conducted, and that "according the functionalist approach, a translation is viewed adequate if the translated text is appropriate for the communicative purpose defined in the translation brief."

Furthermore it is important to briefly refer to the shift from a normative analysis of translations to a descriptive analysis. This approach to translation theory was ushered in by Even-Zohar's polysystem theory (see Even-Zohar, 1990), and was also marked by the influence of postcolonial translation theory (see Robinson, 1977; Bassnett & Trivedi, 1999) and Derrida's (2001) emphasis on "relevant translation". The descriptive approach to translation ushered in a new shift in translation studies. This meant that a translation was no longer considered good, faithful or indifferent in terms of its adherence to the source text, but

rather evaluated in terms of the ideology, translation strategies, cultural norms, etc. of the translator (Naudé, 2008: 243). The value of descriptive approaches to translation thus lies within the emphasis on the specific cultural setting wherein the source text and also the target text functioned (Naudé, 2008: 232-233).

This shift ushered in a new period in translation practice that could be described as the interdisciplinary period. Among others topics, this period was concerned with the following subjects, as noted in the titles of papers given at the 1992 translation conference at Vienna: history, transnational cultures, postmodernism, hermeneutics, intertextuality, philosophy, specialized terminology, medicine, law, linguistics and translation theory (Munday, 2011: 187).

For the current study the 'cultural turn' in translation studies is of utmost importance (see Snell-Hornby, 1995; Bassnett & Lefevere, 1984). Trivedi (Trivedi, 2007: 280) notes that translation was traditionally observed as "a transaction between two languages," but after noticing that culture portrays a significant role in translation, language was observed as "being in effect a vehicle" of culture. Language thus "defined and limited the particular world-view of its speakers" (Trivedi, 2007: 280). Language and translator's usage of language thus act as cultural mediators between two world views, or narratives, which will become evident in the discussion of the narrative frame theory that follows in 2.4.

It is however necessary to briefly discuss the relationship between culture, language and translation.

2.3. Culture, language and translation

Katan (2004: 3) notes that culture is a system for "making sense of experience", and that in turn each culture functions as a frame wherein reality is interpreted. Common attitudes, beliefs and values are reflected in these experiences and, according to Kramersch (1998: 6),

influence the manner in which members of a specific culture use language to express themselves. Language can thus not be separated from the culture wherein it has its origin.

Kramersch (1998: 3) highlights three ways in which the relationship between language and culture is made evident:

- Language **expresses** cultural reality – “Words people utter refer to common experience.”
- Language **embodies** cultural reality – “The way in which people use the spoken, written, or visual medium itself, creates meanings that are understandable to the group they belong to.”
- Language **symbolizes** cultural reality – “Language is a system of signs that is seen as having itself a cultural value. Speakers identify themselves and others through their use of language; they view their language as a symbol of their social identity.”

What is important to the current study is that culture can also be viewed in a more historical perspective. Some mannerisms that belong to a specific culture may have their roots in past events and experiences which over time have become solidified in the given culture, and it is thus safe to say that “the culture of everyday practices draws on the culture of shared history and tradition” (Kramersch, 1998: 7). Although there may not always be a logical explanation for why a certain practice forms part of the activity of a certain culture, it is nonetheless practiced because it carries cultural significance.

Before the invention of writing around 3000 B.C. culture was preserved by storytelling and the like. The invention of writing changed the scene of oral tradition drastically, since culture could be preserved for future generations by the means of written culture. In this regard Kramersch (1998: 8) notes that language is not a “culture-free code ... but, rather, it plays a major role in the perpetuation of culture, particularly in the printed form.”

Various difficulties, however, arise when these ‘cultural texts’ are to be translated. Katan (2004: 7) refers to two extreme views concerning the translation of cultural texts. The first

view indicates that any text can be translated without any loss of its cultural significance, while the second view indicates that no text can be translated without loss of its cultural significance.

Katan (2004: 7-16) refers to three levels of translation:

- The **technical** level – “Communication is explicit, and ideas are consciously transmitted. It is scientific. In terms of language, it is the proposition or the dictionary denotative meaning that needs to be translated.”
- The **formal** level – “Translators are implicitly expected to understand the requirements of different markets, and this means that translators need to understand the cultures towards which they are translating.”
- The **informal/ out-of-awareness** level – “the mediator should be able to intervene and mediate”, here the ‘mediator’ refers to the translator.

These levels of translation prove to be very important to the study at hand which examines the ways in which the cultural significance of the Hebrew source text was taken into account while translating it into Greek.

We now turn to a brief discussion of the relevant and most important elements of narrative frame theory.

2.4. Narrative frame theory

2.4.1. Narrative and narrative type

In narrative frame theory the term “narrative” refers to human events and experiences. These events and experiences are the modes through which we experience the world (Baker, 2005: 5). These “narratives” are able to change on a daily basis, because we as humans are exposed

to new events and experiences daily (Baker, 2006: 3). In this regard four types of narratives are distinguished, which are discussed below.

i. Ontological narratives

Ontological narratives are confined to the individual's experiences and events, in other words the individual's personal history (Baker, 2005: 5). However, these narratives are not isolated from the world, but rather are shaped by collective narratives, which consist of the combination of various individual narratives to form an understanding of the individual which would be lost without the collective narrative (Baker, 2006: 28). It is inevitable that conflict arises between the individual narratives that form part of the same collective narrative. If these differences are not dealt with, "ontological abandonment" may occur (Baker, 2006: 31). Nazi Germany and Apartheid South Africa are clear examples of ontological narratives (Baker, 2006: 30).

Gergen and Gergen (1997: 175) distinguish between three types of ontological narratives:

- **Stability narratives:** These individual narratives show no signs of change, and are orderly and predictable. They appear to be stagnant.
- **Progressive narratives:** These narratives are characterised by positive change and display a pattern of improvement.
- **Regressive narratives:** These narratives are characterised by negative change. They display a pattern of decline.

Baker (2006: 32) notes that translating ontological narratives is "extremely challenging". The cause of this is the very personal nature of these narratives, and because of that they are not easily interpreted by a translator who has no personal experience of them.

ii. Public narratives

These narratives have a larger scope than the individual's narratives and include the narrative of the larger social and institutional formations (Baker, 2005: 5). Individuals may associate

themselves or distance themselves from public narratives according to the public narrative's adherence to their own ontological narratives (Baker, 2006: 33). Public narratives are subject to change, and may change during a few years or even months. The survival of these narratives is dependent on "them being articulated in other dialects, languages, and non-domestic contexts" (Baker, 2006: 33, 38). Examples of public narratives are "Western democracy", "Islamic fundamentalism", "Christian fundamentalism" and "gay rights", etc. (Baker, 2006: 33).

Baker (2006: 36) notes that translators portray "a crucial role in disseminating public narratives within their own communities". Translators also have the freedom to promote ideologies within a community, or they may be opposed to local ideologies and choose to promote their own thoughts and agendas within their translation (Baker, 2006: 36).

iii. Conceptual (disciplinary) narratives

These narratives function as stories and explanations which scholars in any field form about an object of inquiry. These narratives may have a large and influential impact or they may have a limited impact (Baker, 2005: 6). An example of a conceptual narrative that had influence outside of its specific field of research was Darwin's theory of natural selection (Baker, 2006: 39).

As is the case with public narratives, conceptual narratives are also subjected to the mindsets of the translators interpreting and translating these texts. Baker (2006: 43) notes that translators are free to "choose to accept and promote or contest and challenge a given conceptual narrative".

iv. Meta-narratives

These narratives are what history is made of and people and their lives are embedded in them, such as industrialization for example (Baker, 2005: 7). Like the other narratives already mentioned, these narratives are controversial (Baker, 2006: 45), and the individual or a group

is free to accept or distance themselves from these narratives. The Holocaust and the “War on Terror” are examples of meta-narratives (Baker, 2006: 45-46).

Baker (2006: 48) notes that if these meta-narratives are to travel “across linguistic and cultural boundaries” and are to develop into “global meta-narratives” the role of translators cannot be down played.

2.4.2. Narrative functions

The different types of narratives discussed above are able to function in different ways. Five narrative functions are distinguished below.

i. Temporality

The events that are contained in a narrative are not necessarily chronologically ordered, but the order in which events are placed carries meaning (Baker, 2006: 50). Institutional authorities insist on narratives being sequentially ordered; the translator may thus be forced to order the events that are contained in the narrative into another sequence than the one in which it was experienced for ideological reasons (Baker, 2006: 51). The order in which events in a narrative take place matters (Baker, 2006: 53). Because the sequential order carries meaning, any other sequence will convey a different meaning.

ii. Relationality

A single event in a narrative is meaningless if it functions on its own. The different events that forms a narrative are to be understood as a whole, only then can a narrative carry meaning (Baker, 2005: 8). Baker (2006: 62) notes that “a narrative consists of different parts that make up a whole, but the viability and coherence of that whole depends on how the parts mesh together, how they are made to live together”. Narratives are embedded in different “temporal and spatial settings”. As a result, translating these narratives into another temporal

and spatial setting is problematic, because the target text can never be a real equivalent of the source text (Baker, 2006: 62, 64).

iii. Causal emplotment

Causal emplotment entails that independent events in a narrative carry significance. It “overrides the chronological or categorical order” in the given narrative (Baker, 2005: 8). This means that two or more individuals may agree on the facts of independent events, but not agree as to how these events are to be understood in the narrative as a whole (Baker, 2005: 8).

Another feature of causal emplotment is that certain events may be understood as more significant or influential than others, and may be experienced “as turning points in the context of the overall narrative” (Baker, 2006: 68). This “weighting” of events can be altered by translators when translating narratives “that lend a different weighting to the elements of the original narrative” (Baker, 2006: 69).

iv. Selective appropriation

Not every experience or event can form part of the overall narrative; it is inevitable that some experiences and events are “excluded and others privileged” in the forming of a narrative (Baker, 2005: 9). Baker (2006: 72) notes that it is “a question of our location in time and space, and our exposure to a particular set of public, conceptual and meta-narratives” that influence us to decide what experiences and events are significant and are to form part of our narrative.

v. Narrative accrual

Narrative accrual entails that a community may have been exposed extensively and repeatedly to a narrative or a set of narratives that caused this exposure to lead to “the shaping of a culture, tradition, or history” (Baker, 2005: 9).

2.4.3. Framing, frame ambiguity and frame space

Now that an understanding of the term “narrative” is formed, it is necessary to explore the characteristics of the “frames” wherein these narratives are embedded. Baker (2006: 106) defines the term framing as follows: “Framing is defined as an active strategy that implies agency and by means of which we can consciously participate in the construction of reality”. Katan (2004: 50), following Bateson, describes the concept of “framing” as follows:

A frame can be thought of as a picture frame. What is within the picture, and hence the frame, is to be understood in terms of the title of the picture while what is outside the picture and its frame is to be understood from a wider frame. This wider frame will, however, affect our interpretation of the picture. Each frame will in turn be subjected to a yet wider frame. These frames can be added to, each affecting the interpretation of what is framed below.

In this regard Lakoff (2006: 24, 47) notes that frames should also be understood as “cognitive clues” that aids us in understanding occurrences, and furthermore that frames function as “a structure of expectation ... a body of knowledge that is evoked in order to provide an inferential base for the understanding of an utterance.” Wendland (2010: 28) defines a frame as “a psychological construct that furnishes one with a prevailing point of view that manipulates prominence and relevance in order to influence thinking and, if need be, subsequent judgment as well.”

i. Frame ambiguity

The possibility of interpreting events in two or more distinct ways can promote competing narratives “with important implications for different parties” (Baker, 2006: 107). Frame ambiguity is often found where two opposing parties try to legitimise their own interpretation of experienced events. These differences are part of everyday life and should be reflected in the narratives we create, but these ambiguities are mostly “resolved or obscured” in translations of the narrative in question (Baker, 2006: 108).

An example of frame ambiguity is found in the English translation of Victor Hugo's *Bug-Jargal* (The Slave-King) (Baker, 2006: 108). While Hugo's text represents an ambivalent attitude to slavery, the English translation provides the reader with a text that is unequivocally anti-slavery.

ii. Frame space

As the term "frame space" suggests, framing is in its very nature restricted and the agency thereof is also restricted through the context in which it functions (Baker, 2006: 109). Translators operate in a certain frame space and their agency is also restricted to the context wherein the translator functions. As the case is with any restriction, it is in some instances possible to challenge these limits set upon them (Baker, 2006: 110). In this regard Baker (2006: 110) notes that translators "can make use of various other routines that allow them to inject the discourse with their own voice (in other words to actively frame its narrative) while signalling their intention to stay within the prescribed frame space for their activity". Translation can thus be a frame in its own right (Baker, 2006: 106). There are, however, instances when translators step outside of their frame space. An example is found in Aphra Behn's preface to the English translation of Fontenelle's *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes habités*, where she states that it was necessary for her to add to the text in order to improve the reader's understanding of it (Baker, 2006: 110).

2.4.4. Temporal and spatial framing

Temporal and spatial framing entails the embedding of specific texts, which may function within a different temporal and special frame, into a narrative which emphasizes the narrative it depicts (Baker, 2006: 112). This equips us to establish links between the text and the current narratives which are familiar to us. Baker (2006: 112) indicates that this type of "embedding" does not require any intervention in the text itself, but that such intervention cannot be ruled out. "The meaning(s) and interpretive potential of a text or utterance, then, are always decisively shaped by their spatial and temporal location" (Baker, 2006: 112).

2.4.5. Framing narratives in translation

Translators are active members of society and they are responsible for the translations they produce. Translators do not merely receive translation assignments from others, but they also actively choose their own assignments (Baker, 2006: 105). Translators have an ethical responsibility to adhere to existing ideologies in the narratives they translate, or to dissociate themselves from the existing ideologies by not translating the narrative in question (Baker, 2006: 105).

Translators also act as reframers of the narratives they translate. In this regard Baker (2007: 158) notes that “processes of (re)framing can draw on practically any linguistic or non-linguistic resource to set up an interpretive context for the reader or hearer” and “language users can also exploit features of narrativity (temporality, relationality, selective appropriation and causal emplotment) to frame or reframe a text or utterance for a set of addressees”. Wendland (2010: 34), referring specifically to framing of biblical narratives, distinguishes three additional types of modified frames (such as “deframing” mentioned above). The first of these is “deframing”, which entails rendering a text periphrastically, thus causing domestication, or rendering a text literally, thus causing foreignization. A second type of modified framing is referred to as “hyperframing” where the translated text is accompanied by various aids (e.g. introductions, footnotes, illustrations, cross-references, glossary entries, etc.) in order to “match the cognitive frames that were most likely evoked for the hearers of the biblical SL text.” The third type is referred to as “coframing” where the various usages of frames are complemented by various other reference frames such as the “organizational communicational” and “intertextual” reference frames (for further discussion see Wilt & Wendland, 2008).

2.5. The importance and application of narrative frame theory to the study at hand

In the context of this study the Hebrew source text (Hebrew Bible) and the Greek target text (Septuagint) should be understood as two different narratives embedded in two distinct contextual frames. The translators of the Septuagint functioned as agents of cultural mediation between these two narratives. The Hebrew text as narrative was embedded in its own temporal and spatial frame. When the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek, the

temporal and spatial frame of the Hebrew source text was uprooted and embedded into a new temporal and spatial frame (refer to Chapter 5).

The importance of the narrative frame theory to this study at hand, as mentioned before, is that it offers a mechanism whereby the possible interferences that influenced the translation of the Septuagint can be described and explained within relative frames compared to the contextual frames of the Hebrew source text.

The narrative frame theory will be applied to this study as follows:

- Firstly, the contextual frame wherein the goddess Asherah functioned within the larger context of the ancient Near East will be discussed (Chapter 3).
- Secondly, Hebrew terms referring to the goddess “Asherah” will be examined within the contextual frames wherein the Hebrew source text was embedded, and the Greek translation of the Hebrew terms referring to the goddess “Asherah” will be examined within the contextual frames wherein the Septuagint as target text was embedded (Chapter 4).
- Thirdly, the socio-cultural frame of the intended audience of the Septuagint will be examined in order to gain insight into their knowledge of the socio-cultural frame of the Hebrew Bible (Chapter 5).
- Lastly, the manner in which deities referred to in the Hebrew Bible were translated in the Septuagint will be discussed. Its influence on the Greek translation of the Hebrew terms referring to the goddess Asherah will also be described (Chapter 6).

Chapter 3

Representations of goddesses which are purported to be the goddess Asherah in the context of the ancient Near East

3.1. Introduction

The Hebrew Bible as narrative was embedded in its own temporal and spatial frame. When examining the context wherein the Hebrew terms for the image of the goddess “Asherah” functioned it is also necessary to take into account this broader frame of the Hebrew Bible. This “broader frame” encompasses the entire ancient Near East¹. After examining extra-biblical data for Asherah, which are not confined to one specific location, it becomes evident that not much can be said of the goddess Asherah when the sole focus remains on Biblical evidence of the goddess. It is therefore of utmost importance, not only to examine the context of the Hebrew Bible as such, but also to reach further and examine the broader context wherein the goddess functioned, that is the ancient Near East as a whole. In this chapter a brief overview² of textual, archaeological and iconographic evidence/data gleaned from a literature study will be presented in order to gain a better understanding of what an image of the goddess may have looked like within this broad context.

3.2. Overview of textual data in Asherah studies

i. Texts from Ras Shamra/Ugarit

Ugarit (modern Ras Shamra) is located on the Syrian coast, and it is here where, as Kuhrt describes, “extensive and diverse archives” have been found (1995: 300). These texts describe various aspects of the Canaanite state, including its history, society and culture, during the period of c. 1400 to after 1200 B.C. (Kuhrt, 1995: 300). These texts are a valuable source of the religion and cult, which were previously known only from the polemic account provided in the Hebrew Bible (Kuhrt, 1995: 304).

¹ For the purpose of this study Egypt is also included when referring to the ancient Near East.

² The overview will consist only of a brief discussion of the most significant discoveries, seeing that a more in-depth study falls outside the scope of the current study.

Certainly the most extensive description of the goddess Asherah (*atrt* ('Aṭirat) in Ugaritic) is found in a text known today as the “Baal Cycle” (COS 243-73; ANET 129-35, 138-42). The Baal Cycle is classified as a poetic mythological text whereof only fragmented tablets remain today. These tablets were discovered at Ras Shamra during the French excavations conducted during the years 1929, 1930, 1931 and 1933 (Ginsberg, 1969/2011: 107).

The leading roles in these texts are portrayed by the storm god Baal and the warrior goddess Anath. The goddess Asherah however also functions within these texts, where she is referred to as “Lady Asherah of the Sea” and the “Progenitress of the Gods” (Ginsberg, 1969/2011: 113). Asherah is furthermore portrayed as the consort of the god El, the chief deity of the Canaanite pantheon, with whom she had seventy divine children (Smith, 2008: 142).

ii. Babylonian/Sumerian texts

The Babylonian name for Asherah is Asheratu (appearing as a personal name from the time of Hammurabi, 18th century), the consort of Amurru. Asheratu is mentioned in a Sumerian votive inscription (BM 22454) from the 18th century. In this inscription Asheratu is bestowed with the following titles: “daughter-in-law of An”, “Lady of voluptuousness and happiness” and “Lady with patient mercy” (Livingstone, 1995: 185). Asheratu furthermore appears in various god-lists such as K. 3089, which indicates that she had a temple dedicated to her in Babylon (Livingstone, 1995: 185).

iii. Hittite texts

Asherah/'Aṭirat is depicted in a Late Bronze Age Hittite myth (COS 149; ANET 519). In this myth the god Elkunirsha, his consort Ashertu and the Storm-god are depicted in a storyline where Ashertu attempts to seduce the Storm-god. Smith (2008: 82-83) indicates that this myth has a Canaanite (West Semitic origin, seeing that two of the figures playing leading roles therein can be identified with the chief deity of the Canaanite pantheon and his consort. The god Elkunirsha is literally rendered as “El, creator of the earth”, while Ashertu is identified as Asherah (Ugaritic Athirat) (Smith, 2008: 82-83).

iv. Other texts

The identification of Asherah in Arabian and Phoenician sources is problematic and a discussion in this regard falls outside the scope of the current study (cf. Day, 1992a: 485). The identification of Asherah with Qedeshet in Egyptian sources will be discussed in Section 3.2 below, where Qedeshet probably should be understood as an individual deity (cf. Cornelius, 2004: 94-98). Asherah is however mentioned in one of the Amarna letters. The text of *Taanach* No. 1 (Albright, 1969/2011: 442) represents a letter found at Taanach, which is dated to the fifteenth century B.C. In this letter reference is made to “a wizard of Asherah” (line 20). Albright (1969/2011: 443) notes that the Akkadian word *ummanu* “wizard” which is used in this text has the general sense of “learned, skilled man” in both Phoenician (*ammun*) and Hebrew (*omman*). These wizards, Albright (1969/2011: 443) stated, are to be identified with the “prophets of Asherah” who feature both in the time of Elijah as well as in the Baal Epic.

Certainly the most striking characteristic of all the texts presented above is that they refer to the goddess Asherah and not to her image, as is the case in the Hebrew Bible. In these texts Asherah is presented as a distinguished goddess, the consort of the chief deity El and the mother of the minor gods in the Canaanite pantheon. The Asherah identified in the Hebrew Bible is however a dethroned version of the goddess found in the texts of the ancient Near East, in the polemic view of the Hebrew Bible the goddess is reduced to an image whose precise visual characteristics are unknown.

3.3. Overview of archaeological and iconographic data in Asherah studies

i. Kuntillet Ajrud

Kuntillet Ajrud is an isolated site located 50 km south of Elath on the main route from Kadesh-Barnea to Elath. During excavations at this site two large stone jars (pithoi) were discovered. These jars were covered with writing exercises (the alphabet and other practice

texts) as well as drawings (Ahituv, 2008: 313). Various other inscriptions were discovered at this site, but none so alluring as those depicted on the so called “Pithos A”. But do these inscriptions mentioning “Asherah” refer to the goddess or her symbol? And is there any connection between the inscriptions and the drawings?

The first problem arises when translating the Hebrew text (Figure 1) on Pithos A, which reads: *lyhwh šmrn wl'šrth* (Dever, 1984: 21). Uehlinger (1997: 140) suggests that it is clear that the term *'šrth* is a feminine common noun with a third person masculine singular suffix. If this is the case then the inscription should read: “Yahweh and His asherah” – referring to the symbol of the goddess and not the goddess herself (which is also the case in the Hebrew Bible). If this is the case, then one can hardly refer to Asherah as the consort of Yahweh. Uehlinger (1997: 141) however also refers to three similar inscriptions from Ebla, which reads: “Rashap of Ada-NI and his Adamma”; “Rashap of Duneb ... and his Adamma” and “Kura and his Adamma”. Each of these ‘goddess references’ are also feminine common nouns with third person masculine suffixes. Other examples include the Mesopotamian *^dNa-bu-ú-a* “my Nabû” and the Ugaritic (KTU2 1.3: 11-13) *lgšr. tql. ksp. ṭb ... l'nth. tql. ḥrs* “To Gašaru a shekel of pure silver ... to his ‘Anat, a shekel of gold” (Ahituv, 2008: 224).

An alternative reading of the inscription is presented by Dijkstra (2001: 29) who states that some scholars are of the opinion that the last letter in *'šrth* does not indicate a possessive pronoun (therefore not “His asherah”), but that *'šrth* rather represents an archaic spelling of the name *'ašērātā* (asherata) – that is Asherah. In this regard it is made evident by Zevit (1984: 45-46) (referring to the Khirbet el-Qôm inscription, but stating that the evidence can be applied to the Kuntillet Ajrud inscription) that the inscription should read “Yahweh and Asherata”, rather than “Yahweh and his Asherah”. Zevit (1984: 45) reasons that the *he* in *'šrth* should be interpreted as a *mater lectionis* indicating a final vowel *ā* marking, which in the case of the inscription indicates a double feminine of the name *'šrt*, which would be *'ašērātā*. This usage of the *he* is well attested from literature dating from the 8th century BC (Zevit, 1980: 14). The usage of the *he* in this form is preserved in the feminine termination *at* (e.g. Genesis 48:7; Joshua 19:44; 1 Kings 9:10; 2 Kings 12:22; 2 Chronicles 24:26, 8:6; Psalm 16:6, 60:13, 108:13) (Zevit, 1984: 46). Zevit (1984: 46) concludes that *'ašērātā* is an authentic Hebrew formation.

Let us turn now to the drawings. The following depictions are found on Pithos A:

- Two grotesque standing figurines and a lyre player (Figure 1).
- A stylized tree, two ibexes and a lion (Figure 2).
- A cow suckling her calf (Figure 3).
- Five standing figures (Figure 4).

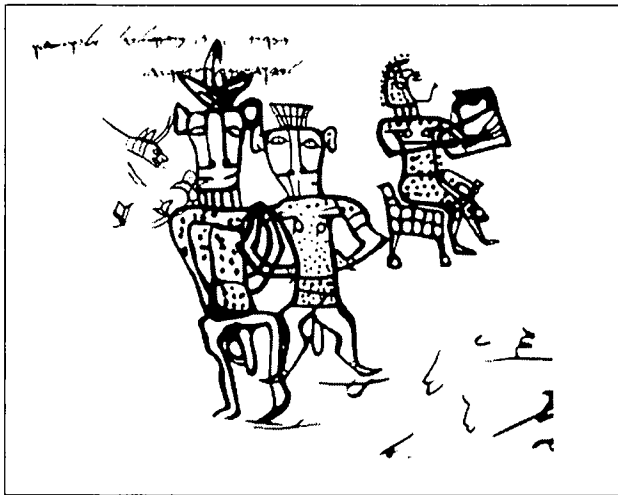


Figure 1 (Dever, 1984: 22)

The two grotesque figures and a lyre player (Pithos A)

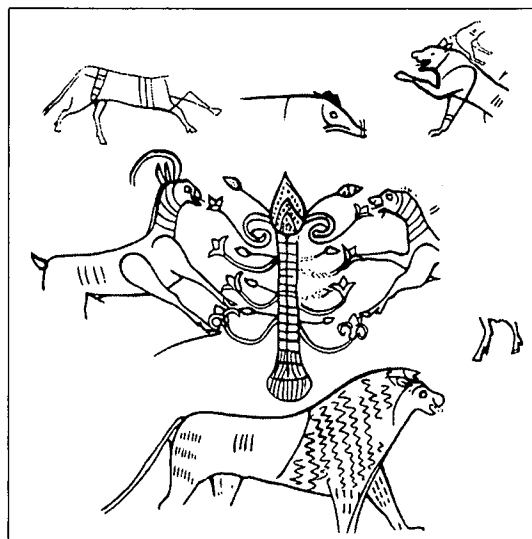


Figure 2 (Dever, 1984: 26)

A stylized tree, two ibexes and a lion (Pithos A)

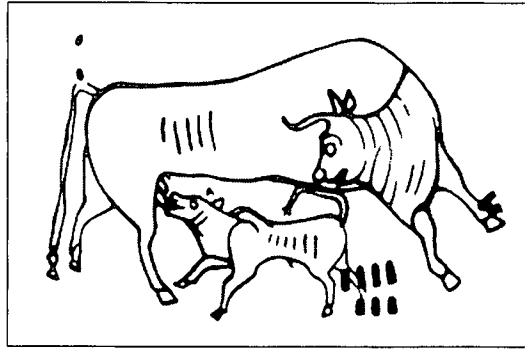


Figure 3 (Dever, 1984: 27)
A cow suckling its calf (Pithos A)

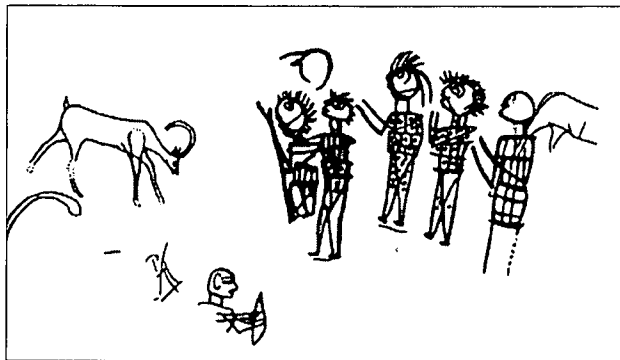


Figure 4 (Uehlinger, 1997: 147)
The five standing figures on Pithos A

Dever (1984, 2005) and various other scholars identify the two standing figures as representations of the Egyptian dwarf god Bes (Figure 5), “who is often portrayed bow-legged, with a lion head and crown, wearing a spotted leopard skin” (Dever, 2005: 163). The figure on the left represents a male figure; this is supported by a phallus or a tail of the leopard skin, visible between the legs. The right-hand figure is that of a female (Beset), because it is portrayed with breasts (Dever, 2005: 163-164). The right-hand figure is however also depicted with a phallus or a tail and cannot positively be identified as a female (see Keel & Uehlinger, 1998: 218ff); in Figure 5 the female Besets are not indicated with phalluses or tails. In this regard Uehlinger (1997: 144) notes that no decisive evidence has yet been discovered, which supports the locality of Bes. Bes amulets discovered in Israel dated to the Iron Age period, were largely imported from Phoenicia and Egypt. Meyers (2005: 33)

however points to the presence of the theophoric names of the god Bes in the Hebrew Bible as well as other Iron Age inscriptions: “surprisingly, names with *bs* (Bes) elements are among the few non-Yahwistic theophoric names of the Iron II Age”. Bes was therefore known in ancient Israel, but not necessarily identified with Yahweh.

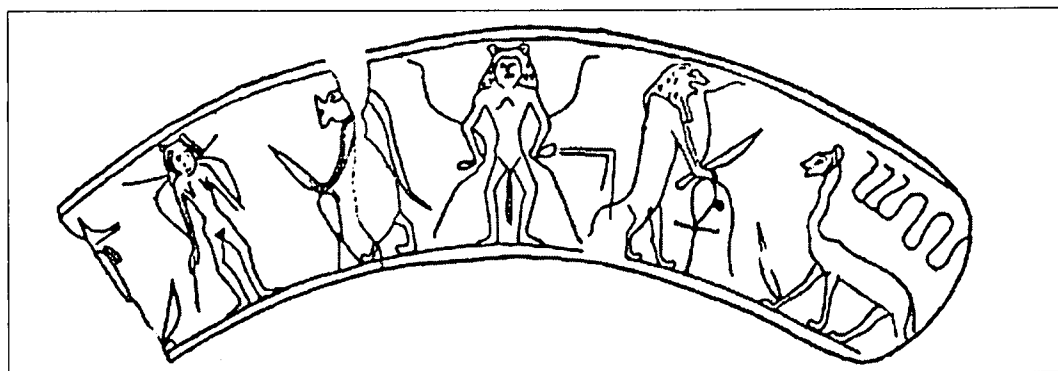


Figure 5 (Bosse-Griffiths, 1977: 102)

A magic knife with figures of male and female Bes, from a Twelfth-Dynasty tomb at Thebes (Ramesseum).

The seated lyre player (Figure 1) to the right of the two Bes figures is identified as the goddess Asherah by Dever (2005: 164-165). Dever's argument is based on the resemblance between the “throne” of the seated figure and that of “lion thrones”, which are solely reserved for deities and are common features in ancient Near Eastern iconography (Figures 6 and 7), it is, however, not clear whether the seated figure in Figure 7 is that of a deity or a ruler. Zevit (2001: 386-7) mentions two features that may identify the lyre player as a deity. The first of these is that various artifacts from Syria-Palestine, which are contemporary with Pithos A, depict scenes where various figures are standing, while the deities are depicted as seated. The second feature is the chairs with lion feet, to which Dever (1984, 2005) also refers. Zevit (2001: 387) however also indicates that these two features do not necessarily indicate that the lyre player, depicted on Pithos A, is that of a deity. Zevit (2001: 387) in this regard refers to Egyptian art where lyre players are depicted as both standing and seated; furthermore other artifacts from Western Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, and the Aegean, depict lyre players as clothed, which is also the case with the figure on Pithos A. Lastly, Zevit (2001: 387) mentions two North Syrian scaraboids (dated to the 8th century) whereupon standing lyre

players are depicted as approaching a seated figure (compare Figure 6). Cornelius (2009: 82), however, indicates that it is uncertain whether the lyre player on Pithos A represents a female, and furthermore states that the figure does not present any “clear-cut divine attributes”. Whether this lyre player can be identified with Asherah, as Dever (above) stated, is also questionable, this idea is rejected by Hadley (2000: 144ff), while Lewis (1998: 46) indicates that the figure is not presented in the center of the drawing, which is odd for a representation of a major goddess.

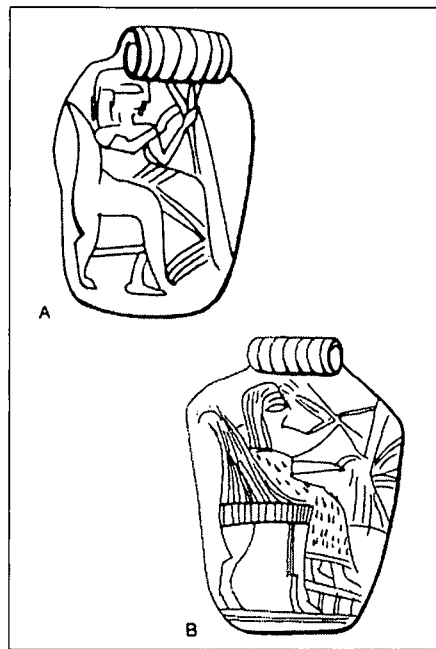


Figure 6 (Dever, 1984: 23)

Two Late Bronze II gold pendants depicting enthroned female (?) deities from Ugarit

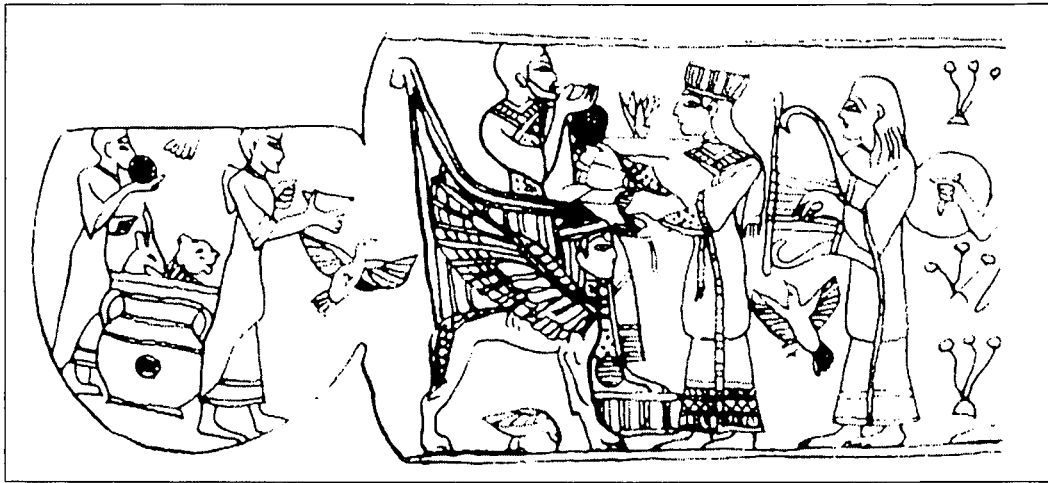


Figure 7 (Dever, 1984: 24)

A Late Bronze/Iron I ivory from Megiddo, with a processional scene

The most important question to be asked is if the inscription serves as a “commentary” on the various scenes depicted on Pithos A? If it is the case, to which of the drawings does the inscription refer? If *'šrth* is to be understood as an archaic personal name, may it then be plausible that the seated female figure may be the goddess Asherah, even if Zevit (2001) provides evidence that proves otherwise? If *'šrth* is to be understood as a common noun, which would be grammatically correct, then which one of these figures is a depiction of Asherah? In this case the stylized tree (Figure 3) may be an option and it would certainly support the Septuagint’s translation of the Hebrew terms referring to Asherah. It is also not uncommon for female deities to be depicted as standing on the back of a lion. Dever (2005: 177) identifies Asherah as the goddess depicted as such on an Egyptian New Kingdom stele depicting a goddess standing on a lion and giving all three of her names: “*Qedeshet*” (“Holy One,” or Asherah-Hathor); Anat; and Astarte (Figure 8).³ The representation on Pithos A is still that of a tree, and not a goddess, and it is questionable whether the tree is in any manner connected with the lion below it. It may, however, also be that the inscription on Pithos A is not to be connected to any of these random drawings, as Dijkstra (2001: 30) states: “(the) texts and drawings were written and painted criss-cross and there are not elements of a ritual design on a cultic object.” This lack of connection between the drawings and the inscriptions,

³ Cornelius (2004) however does not necessarily equate *Qedeshet* with Asherah, this will be discussed in (v) below.

as indicated by Keel and Uehlinger (1998: 240) and much earlier by Beck (1982), seems to carry more weight than the other theories presented by Dever.



Figure 8 (Dever, 2005: 178)

Egyptian New Kingdom stele depicting *Qedeset*

ii. Khirbet el-Qôm

The inscription referred to here (Figure 9) was removed from a pillar in a burial cave located near Khirbet el-Qôm, which is identified as the biblical Makkedah. Reading the inscription is obscured by three factors, the first of these is that the natural uneven surface of the stone was smoothed by tools that left horizontal and vertical ridges on the surface, secondly some of the letters were incised on the surface with greater force than others which were hardly incised at all and almost unreadable, thirdly various ghost letters appear on the surface which may be the result of someone tracing the existing letters (Zevit, 1984: 39; Hadley, 1987: 50).

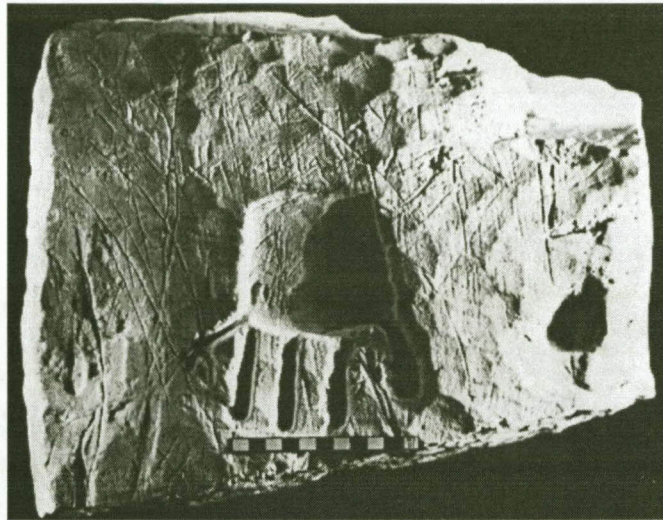


Figure 9 (Zevit, 1984: 45)

The Khirbet el-Qôm inscription

Dobbs-Allsopp *et al.* (2005: 409) provides the following transcription and translation:

- 1 '*ryhw . h^éšr . ktbh*
- 2 *brk . 'ryhw . lyhwh*
- 3 *wmšryh l'šrth hwš' lh*
- 4 *l'nyhw*
- 5 *l'šrth ...*
- 6 *r[...] ĥ*

Uriah the rich commissioned it. Blessed was Uriah by YHWH, and from his enemies by his (YHWH's) Asherah he has delivered him. (Written) by 'Oniyahu ... by his Asherah.

In this inscription, as was the case with the Kuntillet Ajrud inscription, the term *'šrth* has a suffixed personal possessive pronoun, grammatically indicating “his asherah” rather than “his Asherah”. This rendering may also however be contested, as was the case with the inscription from Kuntillet Ajrud mentioned above. The only conclusion to be made from the el-Qôm inscription and the inscription on Pithos A is that they clearly link the goddess Asherah with the Yahwistic cult, but unfortunately they do not indicate what the symbol of the goddess may have looked like.

iii. Iron Age II pictorial inscription from Jerusalem depicting two deities?

During excavations at the Ophel in Jerusalem, during the 1920s, a shard of an Iron Age II jug was discovered. The shard depicted two humanlike figurines (Figure 10), with traditional Canaanite motifs, suggesting that the figures were representative of two deities (Gilmour, 2009: 87).

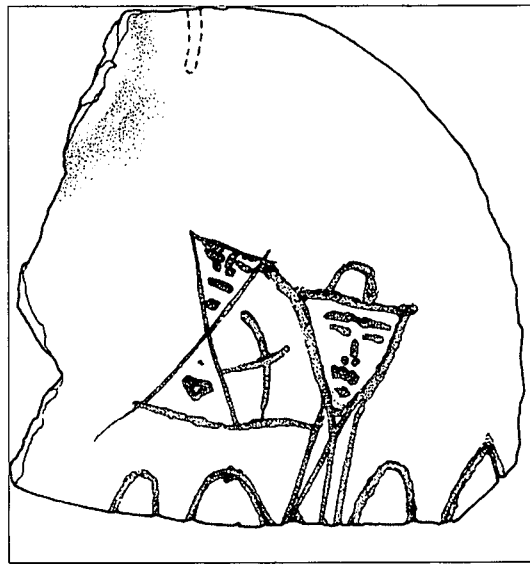


Figure 10 (Gilmour, 2009: 87)
The two figurines on the shard.

The figure on the left, in the form of an inverted triangle, depicts a male deity. Especially the headdress indicates that this figure is that of a deity. These types of headdresses are also found on bronze deity figures dated from the Middle Bronze Age through to the Early Iron Age (Gilmour, 2009: 93). Specific examples are those found at Megiddo area BB and Hazor Area B, stratum XI (Gilmour, 2009: 93).

The absence of a phallus on the figure, however, raises the question of whether the figure is male. Gilmour (2009: 99), in this regard, notes that if this figure represented another female figure it would most likely also have been depicted with a pubic triangle. This lack of gender

identification could further support the view that the figure should be identified with Yahweh, because Yahweh is described as having both male and female characteristics in the Old Testament (Gilmour, 2009: 99).

The figure on the left depicts a female deity, in the form of two triangles. The prominent pubic triangle depicted on the female figure indicates that the figure is that of a deity (Gilmour, 2009: 94). Specific examples of this imagery are found on Late Bronze plaques and figures found at Lachish, Gezer and Tel Batash (Gilmour, 2009: 95).

Gilmour (2009) identifies the female figure with that of the Canaanite goddess Asherah. He draws extensively on evidence found at Kuntillet Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qôm, which identifies Asherah as the consort of Yahweh. The pillar figurines (discussed in section iv below) found at various sites in Judah during the 8th and 7th centuries BC furthermore indicate the presence of a female deity during the Iron Age II period (Gilmour, 2009: 98). The pillar figurines are also identified with the Iron Age II naked goddess plaques and imagery (Gilmour, 2009: 98).

iv. Female terracotta pillar and plaque figurines

According to Vriezen (2001: 61) the plaque female figurines predate the pillar figurines. The plaque figurines are dated to circa the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. When these figurines phased out the pillar figurines came into use. The majority of the pillar figurines were discovered in Judea and according to Vriezen (2001: 61) may be referred to as the "Judean type". Vriezen (2001: 62) indicates that the plaque figurines represent female deities, and describes the different representations on the plaques as follow (figure references inserted by the researcher):

They are a figurine representing a naked woman supporting her breasts with both hands [Figure 11]. They may also be formed in the shape of a naked woman standing on a lion or horse, with her hair in two curls on both sides of the head (cf. the headdress traditionally used to depict the Egyptian goddess Hathor: hathor curls), with prominent pudenda and with one

or both hands holding branches at her sides [Figure 8]. They also occur as plaque-pendants with a stylized representation of a head with Hathor curls, breasts, navel and pudenda from which, in some examples, a twig is growing [Figure 12].



Figure 11 (Vriezen, 2001: 60)
A plaque figurine from Tell Zazor

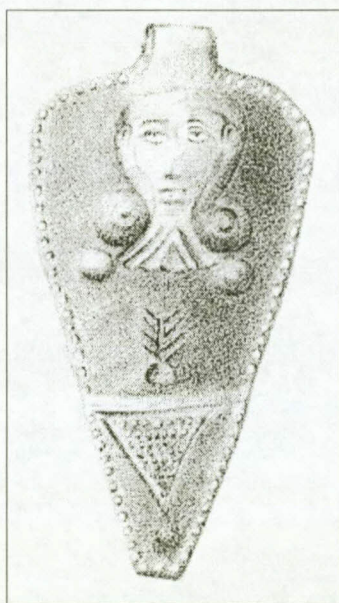


Figure 12 (Vriezen, 2001: 63)
A metal plaque pendant, with tree motif, from Tell el-Ajjul

The pillar figurines (Figure 13 and 14) differ from that of the plague figurines in that their main emphasis is on the face and breasts, probably indicating a nurturing figure. Merlo (2010: 1) notes that the pillar-shaped body of the pillar figurines should not be interpreted as representing a pole or a tree (which would support the view of the Septuagint), but that it rather represents a long robe. A pillar figurine discovered at Mt. Nebo in Transjordan has a ridge at the bottom of the base, possibly indicating the end of the robe (Merlo, 2010: 1). Vriezen (2001: 66) indicates that these figurines were mostly discovered with other cultic objects, and in tombs. Dever (2005: 180), however, states that these pillar figurines were found in “all sorts of contexts, nearly all *domestic*: in houses; in cisterns, pits, and rubbish heaps; and in debris of all kinds. But they are *relatively rare* in tomb deposits, as well as in clear cultic contexts” (emphasis inserted by the researcher). Dever (2005: 181) concludes that these figurines were associated with households and ongoing life rather than personal cults and funerary rituals.

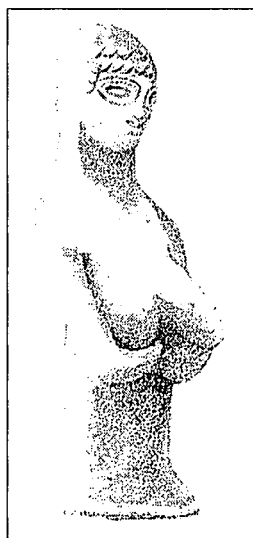


Figure 13 (Vriezen, 2001: 60)

A molded face female pillar figurine from Jerusalem

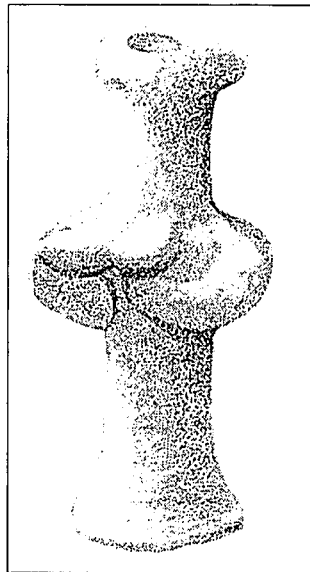


Figure 14 (Vriezen, 2001: 60)

A pinched face female pillar figurine from Tell Beer-Sheba

Dever (2005: 187) rather interprets these pillar figurines as talismans, i.e. magical charms, which were supposed to secure that what was asked of the deity in whose cult it was used. The over emphasized breasts would “suggest the overall notion of ‘plenty’, the god’s abilities to nourish the human family” (Dever, 2005: 187). Dever (2005: 187-8) also suggests that these talismans were “prayers in clay” (a term coined by Zevit (2001: 274)) addressed to the goddess Asherah of which it was a representation. Dever (2005: 194) subsequently rejects the notion that these figurines may have been votives, a votive being a representation of what was desired. If a mother desired a child then a small doll like figure would have been presented argued Dever (2005: 193), and questions why the sexual organs are not depicted, whereas the breast are – was lactation asked for and not safe delivery during childbirth? Meyers (2005: 28-29), in contrast to Dever, identifies these pillar figurines as votives – she suggests that these figurines could hardly be expected to represent a goddess: “They wear no crowns and carry no objects that would symbolize divine power, nor do they have any of the elaborate costume or jewels that denote the high rank of a deity. In fact, they are often rather crude.”

v. A ewer and a goblet from Lachish

A painted goblet (Figure 15) discovered in the Fosse Temple at Tel Lachish (dated to the Late Bronze Age, 13th century BC) depicts a motif (repeated four times on the goblet) of a pubic triangle flanked by two ibexes, which are obviously feeding from the sides of the triangle (Vriezen, 2001: 62).

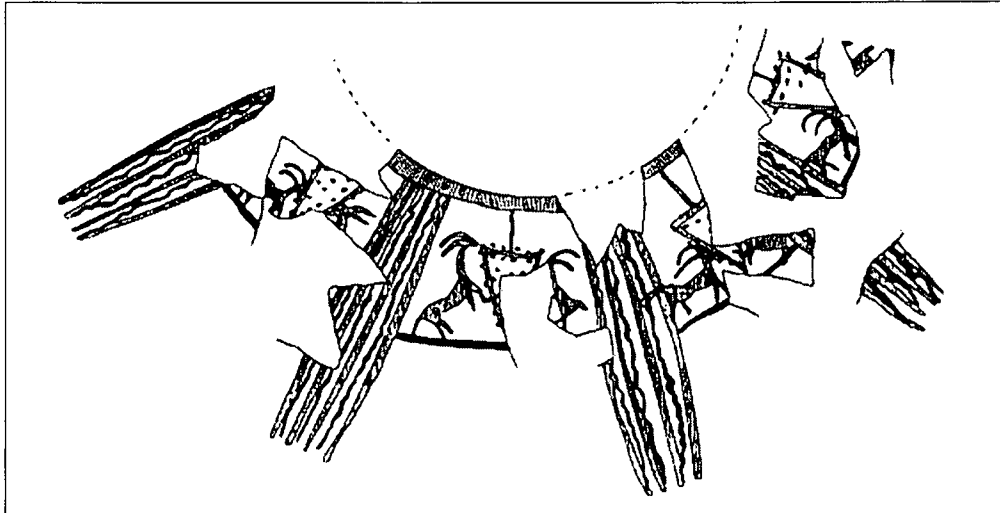


Figure 15 (Vriezen, 2001: 64)

Goblet from Tel Lachish

This motif bears similarities with the other depictions discussed above. Flanking ibexes were also depicted on Pithos A from Kuntillet Ajrud (Figure 2); they were however flanking a stylized tree rather than the pubic triangle as is the case with the goblet. Furthermore, the pubic triangle motif was a prominent feature on the plaque figurines discussed in (ii) above (Figures 8, 10 and 12) and seems to be a prominent feature in depicting goddesses.

A ewer (known as the Lachish ewer, Figure 16) was found in the near vicinity of the Fosse Temple, where the goblet discussed above was also discovered. On the ewer a tree is depicted which is flanked by ibexes. The artwork is accompanied by an inscription. Dever (2005: 226) provides the following translation: “Mattan: an offering to my Lady Elat”. “Mattan” is interpreted as the person offering the gift, but it could also be translated as “a gift”. In this

regard Vriezen (2001: 63) translates “mattan” as “a gift”. “Elat” should be understood as the feminine form of “El”, which in turn may be interpreted as Asherah (Vriezen, 2001: 63; Dever, 2005: 226).

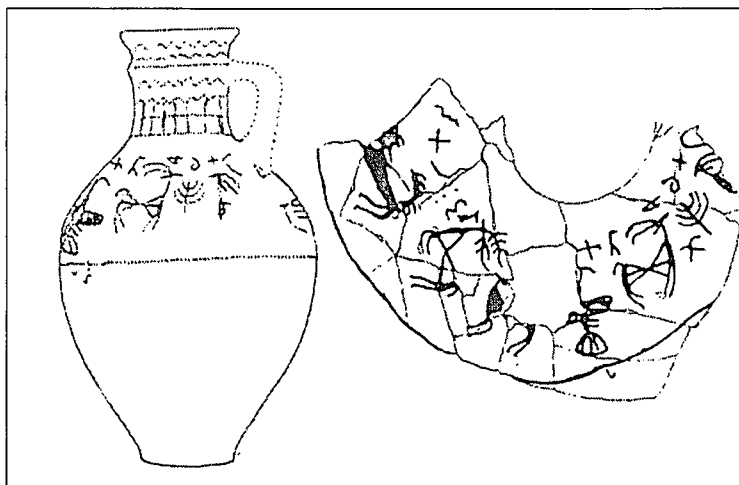


Figure 16 (Dever, 2005: 226)

The Lachish ewer

It was Hestrin (1987) who noticed the connection between the Lachish goblet, the Lachish ewer and the various plaque figurines, indicating that the pubic triangle, the tree and the plaque goddesses were interchangeable motifs depicting the goddess Asherah. Hestrin’s (1987) overall assumption however equated *Qudshu* with Asherah, because of the inscription on the Egyptian New Kingdom plaque figurine (Figure 8). To gain more clarity on this equation it is, however, necessary to investigate whether there is any concrete connection between Asherah and *Qudshu*.

vi. Depictions of *Qedeshet*⁴

Cornelius (2004: 94-99) gives a brief but comprehensive overview of the debate surrounding the Asherah=*Qedeshet* equation, and most importantly opts for an independent understanding of the goddess *Qedeshet*. Concerning the depiction of Asherah (?) on Egyptian New

⁴ In Hieroglyphs the goddess’ title reads *Qedeshet*. Although *Qudshu* has become a popular term, it is incorrect seeing that it is a masculine form of the god Ilu and not of his consort (Cornelius, 2009: 81).

Kingdom stela (Figure 8) Cornelius (2004: 96) indicates by means of various examples that *Qedeshet* was observed as an independent goddess in ancient Egypt, examples hereof are as follows:

- She had a temple dedicated to her in Memphis, together with other Egyptian deities.
- She was called by the title “great of magic”, a title referring to goddesses with the royal crown (Figure 17).
- On various stelae her name “is written with the female deity determinative and she carries the titles of Egyptian goddesses”.
- She is also depicted with other Egyptian deities, such as Reshep, Min and Anat (Figure 18 and 19).

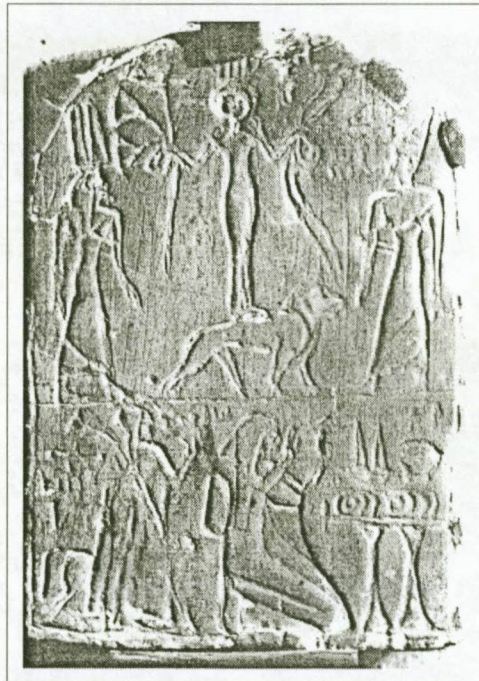


Figure 17 (Cornelius, 2004: plate 5.7)

Qedeshet



Figure 18 (Cornelius, 2004: Plate 1.1)

Anat

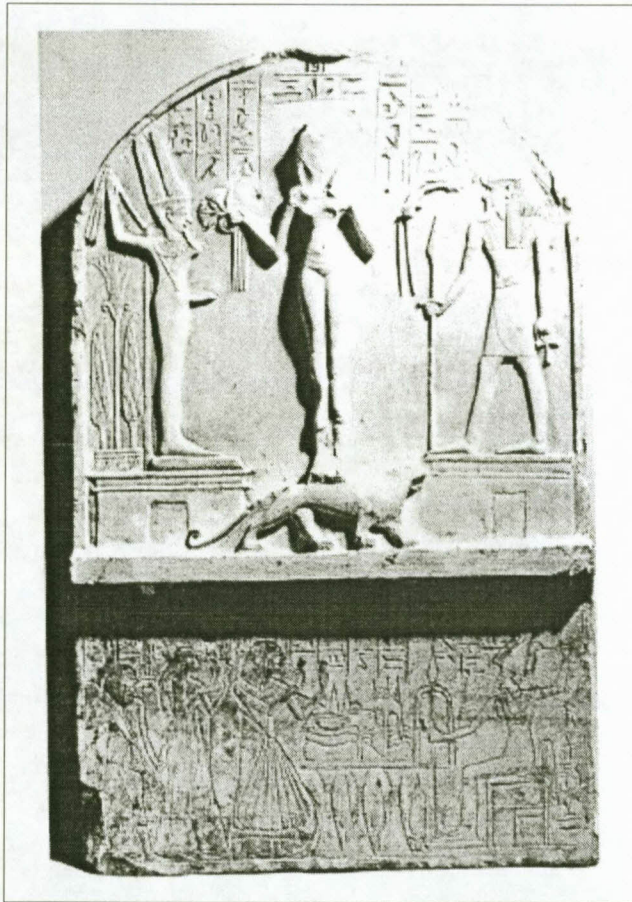


Figure 19 (9, 2004: Plate 5.1)

Qedshet

It is clear that *Qedeshet* was an individual goddess, indicating that it may therefore not be possible to equate her with Asherah, especially on the Egyptian stela (Figure 8) mentioned above.

Furthermore Cornelius (2004: 99) notes that for the other Canaanite goddesses, such as Anat, Astarte and *Qedeshet*, iconographic items have been discovered with their names on it, but in contrast no items have been discovered with the name “Asherah” on it. Some scholars however still identify *Qedeshet* with Asherah, but even if *Qedeshet* is an epithet of Asherah, other goddesses also carry the title. Although Ugaritic texts cannot directly be applied to the iconography, these texts do give the idea that Asherah was the senior goddess in the Canaanite pantheon; thus the ‘*Qedeshet*’ iconography of a young(er) goddess is not what one would expect for such a senior goddess” (Cornelius, 2004: 100).

Cornelius identified a few iconographic examples (Figure 20) that might be representations of Asherah, but still notes that there cannot with any certainty be said that these are indeed representations of Asherah. These are however proposed because they seem to depict a senior goddess, which Asherah was.



Figure 20 (Cornelius, 2004: Plates 2.4; 2.5; 3.9)
Seated and standing bronze figures from Ugarit

vii. The Taanach cult stands

Two cult stands were discovered at Taanach, the larger of the two stands was discovered by Sellin in 1902 and the smaller one by Lapp in 1968. Both of these stands may, according to Zevit (2001: 320), be dated to circa the late tenth century BC.

The larger stand (Figure 21) consists of five registers displaying a series of lion and sphinx reliefs. On the bottom register between the two sphinxes a stylized tree is depicted as flanked by two ibexes/goats. Concerning this motive Zevit (2001: 322) states that this was a popular motif throughout the ancient Near East as “a conventionalized indication of the powers of fertility, though not of a specific deity.” On the left side of the stand a male figure holding a snake is depicted. Zevit (2001: 324) indicates that this figure may be a motif of a (storm) god combating a snake, which is a well-known motif “from other inscribed artifacts where the god is depicted as wielding a club in an upraised hand and either spearing or holding an upright snake with the other upright snake with the other.

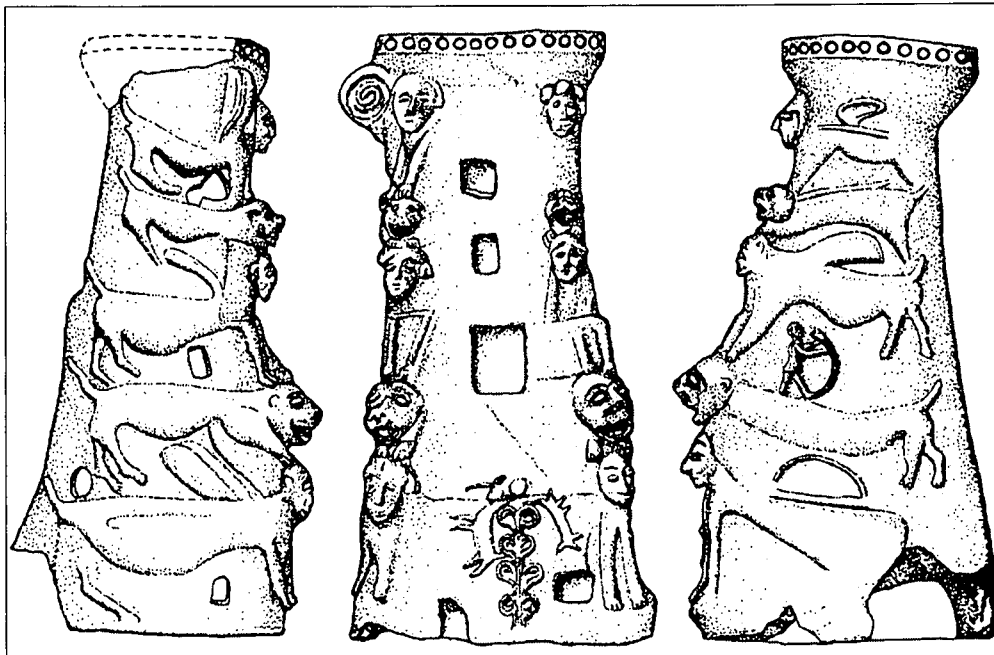


Figure 21 (Zevit, 2001: 318)

The larger cult stand from Taanach

The smaller stand (Figure 22) consists of four registers. On the first (bottom) register a nude female figure is depicted as touching the ears of two lions standing next to her on both sides. Zevit (2001: 322) indicates that this figure can be identified as a *potnia therion* “mistress of the animals”. Cornelius (2009: 81) however indicates that the female figure cannot positively be identified as a goddess, seeing that she is not standing on the lions or holding the lions in a domineering fashion, and can thus not be identified as a *potnia therion*.

On the second register two sphinxes are found, and on the third the controversial stylized tree with flanking ibexes/goats are depicted. The fourth register depicts a sun disc with a calf underneath it. The sun disc is a popular symbol in the ancient Near East, not necessarily being a deity itself, but rather indicating the divinity of the calf below (Zevit, 2001: 322-323).

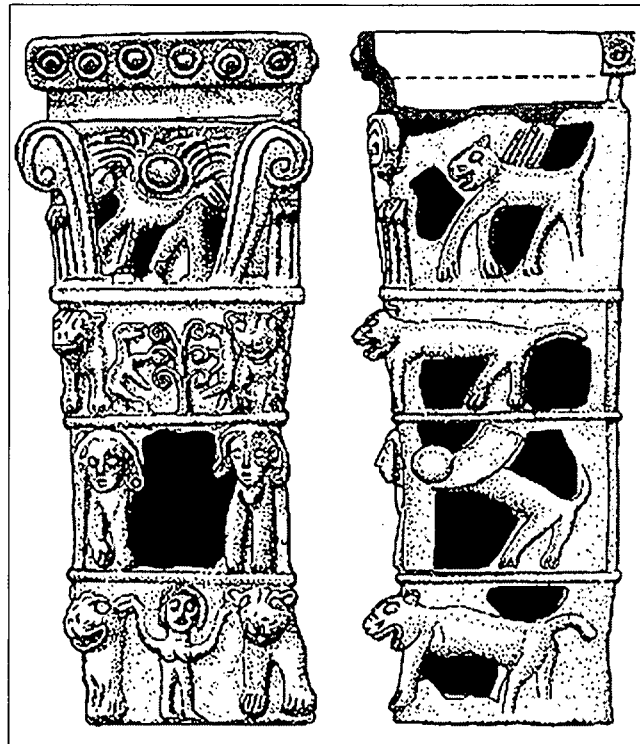


Figure 22 (Zevit, 2001: 319)
The smaller stand found at Taanach

3.4. Conclusion

In this section a brief overview was presented of the most relevant textual, archaeological and iconographic data in Asherah Studies. The differing opinions of the various scholars concerning the archaeological and iconographic data indicate that interpreting these data is a daunting task leaving one with obscure answers. Even when these artifacts are accompanied by inscriptions, the task of interpreting is not necessarily made any easier. One should also guard against ulterior motives when interpreting these artifacts, keeping in mind always that we cannot force these artifacts to be what they are not.

Having said this the researcher feels it necessary to repeat again what Cornelius (2004: 99) stated, namely that for the other Canaanite goddesses, such as Anat, Astarte and *Qedeshet*, iconographic items have been discovered with their names on it, but in contrast no items have been discovered with the name “Asherah” on it. This is clearly proven by the various artifacts presented above. The Kuntillet Ajrud inscription includes the word *'šrth*, but it is not clear whether it refers to any of the various figures on the pithos. The same can be said for the Egyptian New Kingdom plaque, which refers to *Qedeshet*. *Qedeshet* was however an individual goddess, and probably not an epithet of Asherah. The various other artifacts that are not accompanied by inscriptions are even harder to interpret. It cannot be said with certainty whether any of these figures are indeed an image or representation of the goddess Asherah. If this is the case, and none of these artifacts can with any certainty be identified with Asherah, then it is also impossible to identify the various tree motifs (e.g. various plaque figurines, Lachish ewer, etc.) as images/representations of the goddess Asherah. In this regard Frevel (1995) strives to minimize the connection between the goddess and the tree, while Keel (1998) challenges Frevel’s attempts and insists that real and artificial trees were manifestations of the goddess in Palestine. The evidence presented does not however indicate that a tree, of any form, was indeed an image of the goddess Asherah. The only goddesses who can unmistakably be dubbed as “tree goddesses” are those identified in Egyptian iconography.

The idea of a tree-goddess is clearly depicted in Egyptian art. Goddesses associated with mothering and nurturing was frequently connected to trees. Hathor, Nut and Isis is

represented as a woman with a tree on her head, as a tree with an upper half of a woman growing out of it, or a semi-personified tree with arms (Oaks & Galin, 2005:332). Keel (1978) refers to three Egyptian forms in which the relation between a tree and its goddess can be constructed.

It is clear that what an image of the goddess Asherah looked like is in reality a mystery in itself. What is certain however is that the goddess Asherah, as represented within the Ugaritic texts as well as the other texts referred to in Section 3.1, was more than a mere image of a tree as the translators of the Septuagint suggests.

In the following chapter the forty occurrences of the image of the goddess Asherah in the Hebrew Bible, as well as its translation in the Septuagint, will be examined contextually. This contextual examination proves to be of utmost importance seeing that it will provide two additional contextual frames wherein the goddess Asherah functioned.

Chapter 4

A Contextual Examination of the Hebrew term אֲשֵׁרָה/ אֲשִׁירָה referring to the goddess Asherah in the Masoretic Text and the translation in the Septuagint.

4.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter extra-biblical data were presented. These data consisted of archaeological/iconographic data and textual data pertaining to the goddess Asherah. They were inconclusive in that they did not provide a definite answer to what an “asherah” was. In this chapter this question will be explored within the context of the Hebrew Bible. A contextual examination of all the occurrences of the Hebrew terms referring to the goddess Asherah, as well as the translation thereof in the Septuagint will be conducted. This examination will prove invaluable in that it will provide insight into the manner in which the goddess Asherah was portrayed in the Hebrew Bible, and whether this portrayal justifies the translation choices of the translators of the Septuagint.

4.2. A Contextual Examination of the Hebrew term אֲשֵׁרָה/ אֲשִׁירָה in the Masoretic Text and the translation in the Septuagint

The Hebrew Bible provides a unique narrative frame wherein the Hebrew terms referring to the goddess Asherah function. In the previous chapter a “visual” frame was presented wherein goddesses were depicted in human form, implying that they were understood as being goddesses. In the previous chapter a narrative/textual frame was also presented, which indicated that Asherah was understood as being a goddess. The frame provided in the Hebrew Bible however does not imply that the goddess is intended, i.e. the references to the goddess Asherah do not depict her as being a deity, but rather that of a representation of the goddess, an inanimate object (this is also mirrored in the Septuagint’s translation of the terms).

The Hebrew term אֲשֵׁרָה/ אֲשִׁירָה refers to the goddess Asherah occur in forty instances in the Hebrew Bible (from here on referred to as the Masoretic Text, abbreviated as MT). In

each of these occurrences the term functions as a common noun denoting an image or a representation of the goddess rather than as a personal name for the goddess. The reason for the usage of a common noun to refer to Asherah in the MT is uncertain (it will however be discussed below), but it does however influence the translation of the terms in the Septuagint (from here on abbreviated as LXX), which also utilizes common nouns.

The LXX translates the Hebrew term אֲשֵׁרָה / אֲשֵׁרָה in thirty-eight instances (the omission of 1 Kings 14:15 and Jeremiah 17:2 will be discussed below). The LXX translates the Hebrew term אֲשֵׁרָה / אֲשֵׁרָה with three different terms: ἄλσος, ἄλση (grove/s); δένδρα (tree) and Ἀστάρτη, Ἀστάρταις (Astarte/s). The name Astarte is used in two instances in the LXX to refer to Asherah, indicating “a” goddess rather than denoting the image (Astarte, being an individual goddess, should not be equated with Asherah).

4.2.1. Contextual examination of the MT and LXX texts

In terms of practicality the MT verses referring to Asherah will be categorized into ten contextual groups indicating the manner in which the image of the goddess in question was to be destroyed. The importance of these classifications cannot be overstated, because they provide crucial “clues” which will aid the researcher in distinguishing what a representation or an image of the goddess Asherah may have looked like. Knowing what an asherah looked like will in turn aid the researcher in determining why the LXX translators translated the Hebrew terms in the manner which they did (Chapter 5), and what interferences were crucial in this translation process (Chapter 6).

The following contextual groups are distinguished:

- asherah(s) that were cut off/down
- asherah(s) that were burned with fire
- asherah(s) that were planted/ pitched
- asherah(s) that were made
- asherah(s) that were built

- asherah(s) that idols were made for
- asherah(s) that were crushed to pieces/dust
- asherah(s) that were pulled out
- asherah(s) that were erected/set up/raised
- asherah(s) with no specific descriptions

In each group basic translations of the Hebrew verses, prepared by the researcher, will be presented. These translations are relatively literal intending only to provide insight into the contexts wherein the image of the goddess Asherah functioned. For each of the verses in the LXX the Greek text as well as an English translation, taken from the New English Translation of the Septuagint (NETS) (Pietersma & Wright, 2007) will be provided. The NETS translation is based on, where available, the Göttingen Septuagint, while Rahlfs' manual edition was used for the remainder of the books (Pietersma & Wright, 2007: xix). Rahlfs' (1935) edition of Judges is based on two main textual traditions, namely Codex Alexandrinus (LXX^A) and Codex Vaticanus (LXX^B), for this reason both these translations will be taken into account in this study concerning the book of Judges. The LXX^A is a Greek codex, containing both the Old and New Testaments, dating from the 5th century. The Old Testament part of the codex includes all the books found in the LXX, with the addition of Psalm 151:3, 4 Maccabees and the 14 Odes, the latter inserted after the text of Psalms (Slayton, 1992: 1069). The LXX^B is one of a few extant ancient Greek Bibles. The codex contains both the Old and New Testament, and it is notable that the books of Maccabees are not included in the text. During the 10th or 11th century the text of the codex was overwritten and provided with accents and breathing marks, a situation that makes a precise palaeographic dating of the text impossible. The text of the Old Testament is similar to that of the LXX text which Origen used in the 5th column of his Hexapla (Parker, 1992: 1074).

4.2.2. The contextual groups

In this section the contextual groups referred to in the previous section will be applied to the MT. Each MT verse will be accompanied by the LXX's translation of the Hebrew verse, in order to indicate how the translators of the LXX text translated both the term "asherah" and the manner in which it was to be destroyed. A brief discussion of each verse will also be

presented, wherein the main focus will lie on the nature of the Hebrew term “asherah” and which function(s) it had within Israelite religion.

i. asherah(s) that were cut off/down

- **The verb כרת**

All of the occurrences of the verb כרת in the MT is in the Qal form, and can be translated as follows: cut off; cut down; to fell and exterminate (to cut out) (Koehler & Baumgartner, 2001: 500).

Exodus 34:13

MT

כִּי אֶת־מִזְבְּחֵיהֶם תִּהְצֹן וְאֶת־מַצְבְּתָם תִּשְׁבֵּרוּן וְאֶת־אֲשֵׁרֵי הַכְּרָתוּן:¹³

But you will tear down their altars and you will shatter their pillars and you will cut down his asherahs.

LXX

τοὺς βωμοὺς αὐτῶν καθελεῖτε καὶ τὰς στήλας αὐτῶν συντρίψετε καὶ τὰ ἄλση αὐτῶν ἐκκόψετε καὶ τὰ γλυπτὰ τῶν θεῶν αὐτῶν κατακαύσετε ἐν πυρί.

Their altars you shall tear down, and their steles you shall break, and their groves you shall cut down, and the cast images of their gods you shall burn with fire.

This verse forms part of the section recounting the restoration of the Covenant between God and the Israelites after the golden calf incident, and focuses particularly on exclusive Yahweh worship (Rendtorff, 2005: 63-64). This theme is a popular theme in the Old Testament aimed especially against the growing syncretism among the Israelites (Durham, 1987: 460). The Israelites were not to worship the gods of the neighbouring nations, nor were they to associate

themselves with these nations (Henry, 1994: np). This inhibition is materialized in this verse (Exodus 34:13) in that the Israelites are required to remove all the idols of the surrounding nations from amongst them and to rid themselves of the temptation to serve them (Kaiser, 1998: np).

In the MT verse the “altars” and the “pillars” are described as belonging to “them” (their), while the asherah is described as belonging to “him” (his), the asherah is the only cultic item in this verse assigned to a singular possessive (Wiggins, 1993: 98). In this regard Wiggins (1993: 99) notes that it may be possible that the biblical author intended to indicate that the “asherahs” belonged to a specific person (Yahweh?), and utilizing the masculine plural noun אֲשֵׁרִיִּי he may have wanted to dissociate the “asherahs” from the goddess Asherah. The LXX “rectifies” the coherence of the MT in that it assigns a plural possessive to אֲשֵׁרִיִּי. The Greek verse is also extended in that it adds και τὰ γλυπτὰ τῶν θεῶν αὐτῶν κατακαύσετε ἐν πυρὶ “and the cast images of their gods you shall burn with fire” which is noted in Deuteronomy 7:5 and 25 in the MT (Durham, 1987: 460). This extension echoes the rehearsal of the Law given to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 4-26, specifically concerning the command to destroy the idolterous practises of the Canaanites in the land which the Israelites were to possess (Hindson & Kroll, 1994: np). The Greek extension may function as an attempt by the translator to harmonise the Exodus and Deuteronomy accounts.

Judges 6:25

Because Judges 6:25, 26, 28 and 30 are part of the same contextual unit, the discussion of these verses will follow after the Hebrew and Greek texts of Judges 6:30.

MT

25 וַיְהִי בַלַּיְלָה הַהוּא וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ יְהוָה קַח אֶת־פֶּרֶךְ־הַשּׁוֹר אֲשֶׁר לְאַבְיָה וּפַר הַשְּׁנִי שֶׁבַע
שָׁנִים וְהַרְסֵתָ אֶת־מִזְבַּח הַבַּעַל אֲשֶׁר לְאַבְיָה וְאֶת־הָאֲשֵׁרָה אֲשֶׁר־עָלָיו תִּכְרֹת:

And it happened in that night that Yahweh said to him: “Take the young bull of your father, namely the second bull (of) seven years old, tear down the Baal altar of your father and you will cut down the asherah that is beside it.”

LXX

LXX^A

Καὶ ἐγενήθη τῇ νυκτὶ ἐκείνῃ καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ κύριος Λαβὲ τὸν μόσχον τὸν σιτευτὸν τοῦ πατρός σου, μόσχον τὸν ἑπταετῆ, καὶ καθελεῖς τὸ θυσιαστήριον τοῦ Βααλ, ὃ ἐστὶν τοῦ πατρός σου, καὶ τὸ ἄλσος τὸ ἐπ' αὐτῷ ἐκκόψεις·

Translation A (LXX^A)

And it came about in that night that the Lord said to him, “Take your father’s fattened calf, the seven-year-old one. And you will pull down the altar of Baal that is your father’s and cut down the grove that is beside it,

LXX^B

Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῇ νυκτὶ ἐκείνῃ καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ κύριος Λαβὲ τὸν μόσχον τὸν ταῦρον, ὃς ἐστὶν τῷ πατρί σου, καὶ μόσχον δεύτερον ἑπταετῆ καὶ καθελεῖς τὸ θυσιαστήριον τοῦ Βααλ, ὃ ἐστὶν τῷ πατρί σου, καὶ τὸ ἄλσος τὸ ἐπ' αὐτὸ ὀλεθρεύσεις·

Translation B (LXX^B)

And it came about in that night that the Lord said to him, “Take the calf, the bull that belongs to your father, and a second, seven-year-old calf. And you will pull down the altar of Baal that belongs to your father and destroy the grove that extends up to it,

Judges 6:26

MT

וּבְנִיתָ מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ עַל רֹאשׁ הַמְּעוֹז הַזֶּה בַּמַּעְרָכָה וְלִקְחָתָ אֶת־הַפָּר הַשְּׁנִי²⁶
וְהַעֲלִיתָ עֹלָה בְּעֵצֵי הָאֲשֵׁרָה אֲשֶׁר תִּכְרַת:

And build an altar to Yahweh your God on the top (of) the rock in that row and take the second bull and you will offer a burnt offering with the wood of the asherah that you will cut down.

LXX

LXX^A

καὶ οἰκοδομήσεις θυσιαστήριον κυρίῳ τῷ θεῷ σου τῷ ὀφθέντι σοι ἐπὶ τῆς κορυφῆς τοῦ ὄρους Μαῶζ τούτου ἐν τῇ παρατάξει καὶ λήμψῃ τὸν μόσχον καὶ ἀνοίσεις ὀλοκαύτωμα ἐν τοῖς ξύλοις τοῦ ἄλλους, οὓς ἐκκόψεις.

Translation A (LXX^A)

and you will build an altar to the Lord your God, who appeared to you on the peak of this Mount Maoz, in proper order, and you will take the calf and offer up a whole burnt offering with the wood of the grove that you shall cut down.”

LXX^B

καὶ οἰκοδομήσεις θυσιαστήριον κυρίῳ τῷ θεῷ σου ἐπὶ κορυφῆν τοῦ Μαουεκ τούτου ἐν τῇ παρατάξει καὶ λήμψῃ τὸν μόσχον τὸν δεύτερον καὶ ἀνοίσεις ὀλοκαύτωμα ἐν τοῖς ξύλοις τοῦ ἄλλους, οὓς ἐξολεθρεύσεις.

Translation B (LXX^B)

and you will build an altar to the Lord your God on the peak of this Maouek, in proper order, and you will take the second calf and offer up a whole burnt offering with the wood of the grove that you shall destroy.

Judges 6:28

MT

וַיִּשְׁכְּמוּ אַנְשֵׁי הָעִיר בַּבֶּקֶר וְהִנֵּה נִתֵּן מִזְבַּח הַבַּעַל וְהָאֲשֵׁרָה אֲשֶׁר-עָלָיו כָּרְתָהּ וְאֵת
הַפֶּר הַשְּׁנִי הָעֵלָה עַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ הַפְּנוּי׃²⁸

And the men of the city got up early in the morning, and behold, the altar of Baal (was) torn down, and the asherah that was beside it was cut down and the second bull, it was offered on the built altar.

LXX

LXX^A

καὶ ὄρθρισαν οἱ ἄνδρες τῆς πόλεως τὸ πρωί, καὶ ἰδοὺ κατεσκαμμένον τὸ θυσιαστήριον τοῦ Βααλ, καὶ τὸ ἄλσος τὸ ἐπ' αὐτῷ ἐκκεκομμένον, καὶ ὁ μόσχος ὁ σιτευτὸς ἀνηνεγμένος εἰς ὄλοκαύτωμα ἐπὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον τὸ Οὔκοδομημένον.

Translation A (LXX^A)

And the men of the city arose early in the morning, and see, the altar of Baal broken down, and the grove beside it cut down, and the fattened calf offered up for a whole burnt offering on the altar that had been built!

LXX^B

καὶ ὄρθρισαν οἱ ἄνδρες τῆς πόλεως τὸ πρωί, καὶ ἰδοὺ καθήρητο τὸ θυσιαστήριον τοῦ Βααλ, καὶ τὸ ἄλσος τὸ ἐπ' αὐτῷ ὠλέθρευτο· καὶ εἶδαν τὸν μόσχον τὸν δεύτερον, ὃν ἀνήνεγκεν ἐπὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον τὸ ὠκοδομημένον.

Translation B (LXX^B)

And the men of the city arose early in the morning, and see, the altar of Baal had been pulled down, and the grove beside it had been destroyed, and they saw the second calf that he had offered up onto the altar that had been built.

Judges 6:30

MT

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אַנְשֵׁי הָעִיר אֶל־יְהוָה הֲוָצֵא אֶת־בְּנֶךָ וְיָמַת כִּי נָתַן אֶת־מִזְבַּח הַבַּעַל וְכִי כָרַת
הָאֲשֵׁרָה אֲשֶׁר־עָלָיו:

Then the men of the city said to Joash: “Bring out your son that he may die, because he tore down the Baal altar and because he cut down the asherah that (was) beside it.

LXX

LXX^A

καὶ εἶπαν οἱ ἄνδρες τῆς πόλεως πρὸς Ἰωασ Ἐξάγαγε τὸν υἱὸν σου καὶ ἀποθανέτω, ὅτι κατέσκαψεν τὸ θυσιαστήριον τοῦ Βααλ καὶ ὅτι ἔκοψεν τὸ ἄλσος τὸ ἐπ’ αὐτῷ.

Translation A (LXX^A)

And the men of the city said to Ioas, “Bring out your son, and let him die, because he has broken down the altar of Baal and because he has cut down the grove beside it.”

LXX^B

καὶ εἶπον οἱ ἄνδρες τῆς πόλεως πρὸς Ἰωασ Ἐξένεγκε τὸν υἱὸν σου καὶ ἀποθανέτω, ὅτι καθεῖλεν τὸ θυσιαστήριον τοῦ Βααλ καὶ ὅτι ὠλέθρευσεν τὸ ἄλσος τὸ ἐπ’ αὐτῷ.

Translation B (LXX^B)

And the men of the city said to Ioas, “Bring out your son, and let him die, because he has pulled down the altar of Baal and because he has destroyed the grove beside it.”

Contextually these verses form part of the narrative concerning the “calling” of Gideon as a judge in Israel, and represents the only account of resistance towards the cult of Baal in the book of Judges (Rendtorff, 2005: 102). In this narrative a continuation of the theme mentioned in Exodus 34:13 (above) is noted, which describes the rapid decline of the spiritual condition of the Israelites merely a century after entering the Promised Land (Hindson & Kroll, 1994: np). Yet again the goddess Asherah is depicted as playing an important role in Israel’s demise.

The Hebrew expression אֶת־פֶּרֶךְ־הַשִּׁיר in verse 25 is a problematic reading, which the translator of the Greek text wished to rectify. The LXX has a different reading, namely τὸν μόσχον τὸν σιτευτόν, which is suggested by the text critical apparatus in the Biblia Hebraica

Stuttgartensia (BHS) as being based on a different Hebrew text (probably אֶת־הַפָּר הַשֵּׁנִי). The LXX reading is displayed in the LXX^A, while the LXX^B has τὸν μόσχον τὸν ταῦρον, which is similar to the Hebrew reading in the MT. Similarly וַפָּר (further on in the verse) is also translated in the Greek text with τὸν μόσχον, possibly to maintain coherence within the verse. Furthermore הַשֵּׁנִי is deleted in the LXX (yet again in the LXX^A, but not in the LXX^B), therefore removing the mention of a “second” bull. Wolf (1998: np) notes that bull worship was associated with the Canaanite deities Baal and El, and that the bull(s) referred to in this verse may have been reserved as a sacrifice on the altar of Baal which Gideon destroyed.

In the MT of verse 25 the term הָאֲשֵׁרָה contains a definite article indicating that the symbol rather than the goddess is intended. Soggin (1987: 124) identifies the Asherah (referring to the symbol with a proper name) as a symbol of a deity with the same name, and Boling (1975: 134) identifies the asherah as a “sacred grove” or a “sanctuary replica” thereof. In the two LXX versions of verse 25 presented above the LXX^A uses the verb ἐκκόψεις (from ἐκκόπτω) to indicate that the grove in question was “cut down” (Louw & Nida, 1989), while the LXX^B indicates that the grove was “destroyed” (ὄλεθρεύσεις from ὄλεθρεύω) (Louw & Nida, 1989). The LXX^A reflects the MT in regard with the manner in which the asherah was to be removed.

In the MT of verse 26 the definite article הָאֲשֵׁרָה indicates that the asherah intended is that of the image rather than the goddess, this is further supported by the fact that the wood of the asherah was to be used as “fuel” for the “burnt offering”, which Soggin (1987: 124) describes as a “deliberate piece of sacrilege”. Binger (1997: 127) however notes that it may be the case that “we are dealing with a very elegant propagandistic attempt to reduce the goddess to a thing that one can cut down and burn.” The two versions of the LXX however follow the same pattern discussed in verse 25, where the text of the LXX^A reflects the MT in regard with the manner in which the asherah was to be removed.

In the MT verse 28 the same pattern in regard with הַשָּׁנִי is noted. In verse 25 this Hebrew term was deleted in the LXX^A, which is also the case in the present verse, while the LXX^B translates the term both in verse 25 and in the present verse. The LXX's version of verse 30 follows the same pattern observed in verse 25 in regard to the manner in which the asherah was to be destroyed.

2 Kings 18: 4

MT

4 הוּא הִסִיר אֶת־הַבָּמוֹת וְשָׁבַר אֶת־הַמִּצֵּבֹת וְכָרַת אֶת־הָאֲשֵׁרָה וְכָתַת נְחָשׁ הַנְּחֹשֶׁת אֲשֶׁר־
עָשָׂה מֹשֶׁה כִּי עָרַדְתִּים הָהָמָה הָיוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מְקַטְרִים לוֹ וַיִּקְרָא־לוֹ נְחֹשֶׁתָן:

He removed the high places and he destroyed the pillars and he cut down the asherah and he crushed the copper snake that Moses had made because until those days the sons of Israel were burning incense to it and he called it Nehushtan.

LXX

αὐτὸς ἐξήρην τὰ ὑψηλὰ καὶ συνέτριψεν πάσας τὰς στήλας καὶ ἐξωλέθρευσεν τὰ ἄλση καὶ τὸν ὄφιν τὸν χαλκοῦν, ὃν ἐποίησεν Μωυσεῆς, ὅτι ἕως τῶν ἡμερῶν ἐκεῖνων ἦσαν οἱ υἱοὶ Ἰσραὴλ θυμιῶντες αὐτῷ, καὶ ἐκάλεσεν αὐτὸν Νεεσθαν.

He removed the high places and smashed all the steles and utterly destroyed the groves and the bronze snake that Moyses had made, for until those days the sons of Israel had been making incense offerings to it, and he called it Neesthan.

Contextually this verse forms part of the recount of the religious reform of Hezekiah, especially with regard to “internal political strength, perhaps in preparation for the rebellion” against foreign cults (Hobbs, 1985: 250) (See also the discussion on Deuteronomy 7:5 in this regard). During the reign of Ahaz, Hezekiah’s father, Israel’s idolatrous practices escalated, to the extent that not only the foreign idols were worshipped, but even the Nehushtan, which Moses made by the command of God for the good of the Israelites, was idolized (Henry,

1994: np). The positive aspect of Hezekiah's reign, as Fricke (1972: 246) notes, was his removal of the items which caused Israel to falter.

The removal and destruction of the Nehushtan is problematic. Gray (1977: 670) notes that the connection between the destruction of the Nehushtan and the goddess Asherah is obvious, because serpents were identified with Asherah. This is however questionable, seeing that no "real" depictions of Asherah can be identified (cf. Chapter 3). Swanson (2002: 460) rejects the connection between the Nehushtan and the Canaanite cult, and opts for a new understanding with regard to the destruction of the serpent (cf. Shanks, 2007: 58-63). Swanson identifies the Nehushtan as a symbol (to be compared with the Egyptian Uraeus, a royal diadem) of Egyptian influence in Israel, which had to be removed when Israel became a vassal of Assyria in 701. Swanson's novel idea however still does not explain why the Israelites were described as burning incense to the Nehushtan, which was an obvious act of devotion.

In the MT a singular form **הָאֲשֵׁרָה** is used (the LXX however uses the plural form), indicating that here it referred to a specific asherah (Wiggins, 1993: 113). That the asherah is accompanied by a definite article indicates that the image rather than the goddess is intended here. This is supported, as Binger (1997: 128) notes, by the presence of the **נְחֹשֶׁתַן** which is also an object venerated as a deity by the Israelites. In the LXX's rendition the translator uses the verb ἐξολέθρευσεν (from ἐξολέθρεύω) to indicate that these groves were "destroyed" or "removed" (Louw & Nida, 1989) rather than "cut down" as in the MT.

2 Kings 23:14

MT

וַיִּשְׁבֹּר אֶת־הַמַּצֵּבֹת וַיִּכְרֹת אֶת־הָאֲשֵׁרִים וַיִּמְלֵא אֶת־מְקוֹמָם עֲצָמוֹת אָדָם:¹⁴

And he broke down the pillars and he cut down the asherahs and he filled their place (with) the bones of men.

καὶ συνέτριψεν τὰς στήλας καὶ ἐξωλέθρευσεν τὰ ἄλση καὶ ἔπλησεν τοὺς τόπους αὐτῶν ὀστέων ἀνθρώπων.

And he smashed the steles and utterly destroyed the groves and filled their sites with human bones.

This verse forms part of the account of the reign and reform of Josiah. Hobbs (1985: 335) interestingly notes with regard to the pillars and asherahs that were to be abolished that “the existence of these items in Jerusalem prior to the purge is presupposed but nowhere mentioned.” Hindson and Kroll (1994: np) however equates these religious items with those installed three hundred years earlier by Solomon for his idolatrous wives, which miraculously withstood the reforms of both Asa and Hezekiah, only to be demolished three hundred years later during the reign of Josiah. The altar in Bethel (verse 13), Patterson and Austel (1998: np) note, evolved from the earlier worship of the golden calf to that of a pure form of Canaanite worship. Patterson and Austel further also note that the scattering of human bones on “their places” defiles these objects forever; it may however in the researcher’s opinion refer to the symbolic death of the Canaanite cult, because these objects was now where they belonged, that is with the dead.

In the LXX’s rendering the translator uses the verb ἐξωλέθρευσεν (from ἐξολεθρεύω) to indicate that these groves were “destroyed” or “removed” (Louw & Nida, 1989) rather than “cut down” as in the MT, therefore following the same pattern as referred to in 2 Kings 18:14 (above) is followed here.

- The verb עָגַג

All of the occurrences of the verb עָגַג are in the Piel form, and can be translated as follows: cut through; cut off and cut to pieces (Koehler & Baumgartner, 2001: 180).

Deuteronomy 7:5

MT

כִּי־אֵם־כֹּה תַעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם מִזִּבְחֹתֵיהֶם תִּהְיוּ וּמִצִּבְתָּם תִּשְׁבְּרוּ וְאֲשֵׁירֵיהֶם תִּגְדְּעוּן וּפְסִילֵיהֶם⁵
תִּשְׂרֹפוּן בְּאֵשׁ:

But this you will do to them: you will tear down their altars and you will shatter their pillars and you will cut off their asherahs and you will burn their idols with fire.

LXX

ἀλλ' οὕτως ποιήσετε αὐτοῖς: τοὺς βωμοὺς αὐτῶν καθελεῖτε καὶ τὰς στήλας αὐτῶν συντρίψετε καὶ τὰ ἄλση αὐτῶν ἐκκόψετε καὶ τὰ γλυπτὰ τῶν θεῶν αὐτῶν κατακαύσετε πυρί:

But thus you shall do to them: you shall break down their altars and smash their steles and cut down their groves and burn the carved objects of their gods with fire.

Contextually this verse falls within the further instructions given to the Israelites after the Lord gave the Ten Commandments through Moses. In this section the “future relationship” between Israel and the surrounding nations are dealt with, where the Israelites are banned from having any kind of association with the foreign nations (Von Rad, 1966: 67). The religious paraphernalia mentioned in this verse, namely “altars”, “pillars” and “asherahs” are the same things Hezekiah challenged in 2 Kings 18:4 (above). In this regard Birch *et al.* (2005: 295) note that Hezekiah’s “actions may, therefore, be construed as religiously conservative, affirming a ‘good, old-time’ religion.” Christensen (1991: 158) indicates that the foreign cults had to be removed in order to distance Israel from all temptation to worship them. In this regard Lamparter (1997: 52) indicates that if Israel were to worship these foreign idols, their holiness would be affected.

In the MT this verse, there occurs one of only three instances of an unusual spelling of asherah namely אֲשִׁירָה, which, as Wiggins (1993: 99) notes, is the “plene” spelling. Lamparter (1997: 50) provides an interesting rendering of the term אֲשִׁירָה, which he translates as “Kultpfähle” (cultic poles), a translation similar to that of the New Afrikaans

Bible Translation where אֲשֵׁרָה is rendered as “gwyde pale” (sacred poles). Both these translations imply a cultic function. The text of the LXX reflects the MT with regard to its translation of the asherah and the manner in which it was to be destroyed.

2 Chronicles 14:2

MT

וַיִּסַר אֶת־מִזְבְּחֹת הַנֹּכַר וְהַבְּמוֹת וַיִּשְׁבֵּר אֶת־הַמַּצְבֹּת וַיַּגְדַּע אֶת־הָאֲשֵׁרָיִם:²

For he removed the foreign altars (literally, the altars of the foreign) and the high places and he shattered the pillars and he cut off the asherahs.

LXX

καὶ ἀπέστησεν τὰ θυσιαστήρια τῶν ἀλλοτρίων καὶ τὰ ὑψηλὰ καὶ συνέτριπεν τὰς στήλας καὶ ἐξέκοψεν τὰ ἄλση

And he removed the altars of the foreigners and the high places and smashed the steles and cut down the groves.

Contextually this verse concerns the righteousness of Asa, and his reform of the cult in Judah (Wiggins, 1993: 121). Dillard (1987: 117) notes that the Chronicler in his account mostly repeats the positive judgment on the reign of Asa which is found in 1 Kings 15. This verse forms part of the parallel version of the reign of Asa in 1 Kings 15. Payne (1998: np) indicates that the account of the reign of Asa in 1 Kings comprises a mere sixteen verses, which “do not even touch on major sections in 2 Chronicles” (e.g. 2 Chronicles 14:3-15:15 and 16:7-10). The Chronicler in the current verse (2 Chronicles 14:2) presents his own expanded account of 1 Kings 15:12. The Chronicler’s version omits the reference to the “cultic prostitutes” and the “idols made by his fathers” (Dillard, 1987: 117), and rather opts to introduce his own account. In this regard Japhet (1993: 706) indicates that the Chronicler’s account of 1 Kings “relates to idolatry, and even its abolishing in less extreme terms ... probably following the Deuteronomic precept in Deut 7:5.”

Wiggins (1993: 121) notes that “the chronicler’s account could also be construed as evidence for a deliberate hiding of other foreign elements in the cult of Judah”, therefore omitting the part that mentioned that his predecessors made idols. Wiggins (1993: 121) questions why the Chronicler added the extra mention of the “asherahs” to his account if he wished to deliberately hide the foreign elements? In regard to this Myers (1965: 83) notes that they may have been some sort of cult objects “exemplifying some of the characteristics of Asherah”, Myers draws a comparison between the image and the deity, but does not speculate on the nature of the image. Payne (1998: np) however indicates that the “Asherah poles” were made from wood and were to be associated with the Canaanite deity Baal, whose “goddess-consort” Asherah was.

2 Chronicles 31:1

MT

1 וּכְכֹלֹת כָּל-זֹאת יָצְאוּ כָל-יִשְׂרָאֵל הַנִּמְצָאִים לְעָרֵי יְהוּדָה וַיִּשְׁבְּרוּ הַמַּצֵּבֹת וַיִּגְדְּעוּ
הָאֲשֵׁרִים וַיִּנְתְּצוּ אֶת-הַבְּמֹת וְאֶת-הַמִּזְבְּחֹת מִכָּל-יְהוּדָה וּבִנְיָמִן וּבְאֶפְרַיִם וּמְנַשֶּׁה עַד-
לְכֹלֵה וַיָּשׁוּבוּ כָל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אִישׁ לְאֻחָזְתּוֹ לְעָרֵיהֶם: ־ס

When this ended all Israel (that were) present went out to the cities of Judah and they shattered the pillars and they cut off the asherahs and they broke down the high places and the altars out of all Judah and Benjamin and in Ephraim and Manasseh till (they) finished then they went back, all the sons of Israel, (each) man to his possession to their cities.

LXX

Καὶ ὡς συνετελέσθη πάντα ταῦτα, ἐξῆλθεν πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ οἱ εὐρεθέντες ἐν πόλεσιν Ἰουδα καὶ συνέτριψαν τὰς στήλας καὶ ἐξέκοψαν τὰ ἄλση καὶ κατέσπασαν τὰ ὑψηλὰ καὶ τοὺς βωμοὺς ἀπὸ πάσης τῆς Ἰουδαίας καὶ Βενιαμὴν καὶ ἐξ Ἐφραϊμ καὶ ἀπὸ Μανασσῆ ἕως εἰς τέλος, καὶ ἐπέστρεψαν πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ ἕκαστος εἰς τὴν κληρονομίαν αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς τὰς πόλεις αὐτῶν.

And when all this was finished, all Israel found in the cities of Ioudas went out and demolished the steles and cut down the groves and completely dismantled the high places and

altars from all over Judea and Benjamin and from Ephraim and from Manasse. And all Israel – each one – returned to his inheritance and to their cities.

Contextually this verse forms part of Hezekiah's reform, specifically the provision for the temple and its personnel (Dillard, 1987: 248) and his campaign against the Canaanite idolatry (Payne, 1998: np). This verse parallels the removal of the cultic "intruders" in 2 Kings 18:4, only that the bronze snake is not mentioned in the chronicler's account (Myers, 1965: 183). In this regard Japhet (1993: 962) notes that "what was still a matter of significance for the Deuteronomist has become an obsolete reference for the Chronicler, with no need for repetition."

In the MT account of 2 Kings 18:4 the asherah was presented in singular form, with the possibility of referring to a specific asherah, whereas the Chronicle account uses a plural form. Wiggins (1993: 123) notes in this regard that the usage of the plural form "asherahs" may point to an intentional avoidance of the singular form, which could be understood as a reference to the goddess, or "as evidence that the actual connotations of the asherah may have been forgotten".

ii. asherah(s) that were burnt with fire

- The verb שרף

All of the occurrences of the verb שרף are in the Qal form, and can be translated as follows: To burn completely (Koehler & Baumgartner, 2001: 1358).

Deuteronomy 12:3

MT

וְנִתְצַתּוּ אֶת־מִזְבְּחֵיהֶם וְשִׁבְרֵתָם אֶת־מַצֵּבֹתָם וְאֲשֵׁרֵיהֶם תִּשְׂרֹפוּן בְּאֵשׁ וּפְסִלֵי אֱלֹהֵיהֶם³
תִּגְדַּעוּן וְאִבְדָּתָם אֶת־שְׁמֵם מִן־הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא:

And you will tear down their altars and shatter their pillars and you will burn their asherahs with fire and you will cut down the idols (of) their gods and you will destroy their name out of that place.

LXX

καὶ κατασκάψετε τοὺς βωμοὺς αὐτῶν καὶ συντρίψετε τὰς στήλας αὐτῶν καὶ τὰ ἄλση αὐτῶν ἐκκόψετε καὶ τὰ γλυπτὰ τῶν θεῶν αὐτῶν κατακαύσετε πυρί, καὶ ἀπολεῖται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτῶν ἐκ τοῦ τόπου ἐκείνου.

And you shall chop down their altars and smash their steles and cut down their groves and burn with fire the carved objects of their gods and blot out their name from that place.

This verse forms part of a collection of laws and prescriptions similar to those found in Exodus and Leviticus (Rendtorff, 2005: 79) with the main emphasis on where the Israelites were to worship (Hindson & Kroll, 1994: 346-347). Von Rad (1966: 92) indicates that the Israelites were not merely ordered to abstain from these foreign cultic practises, but that they were required to remove and demolish the objects associated with these practises. Von Rad (1966: 92) further indicates that the reason for this was that these cults managed to resurface in Israel, and specifically within the cultic domain of God. Madvig (1998: np) notes that it is not certain whether the names of the Canaanite deities or the name of the Canaanite people were to be destroyed, but states that both may have been intended (cf. Deuteronomy 7:24). In this regard Lamparter (1997: 72-73) emphasises that here a theme of holiness versus profanity is evident.

Wiggins (1993: 100) indicates that this verse presents a chiasmic pattern:

וְנִתְצָתֶם אֶת־מִזְבְּחֹתֶם

וְשִׁבְרֹתֶם אֶת־מַצְבְּחֹתֶם

וְאֲשֵׁרֵיהֶם תִּשְׂרֹפוּן בָּאֵשׁ

וּפְסִילֵי אֱלֹהֵיהֶם תִּגְדְּעוּן

וְאִבְדֹתֶם אֶת־שָׁמַם מִן־הַמָּקוֹם הַהוּא

Wiggins (1993: 100) notes that in this structure the “asherahs” are positioned parallel to the “idols (of) their gods”, which may indicate that at least in this verse the asherahs were reckoned as forming part of the idols of the foreign gods, thus qualifying the asherah as a deity. The LXX translates the Hebrew of this verse as in Deuteronomy 7:5, “**וְאֲשֵׁרֵיהֶם** :**וְאֲשֵׁרֵיהֶם תִּשְׂרֹפוּן בָּאֵשׁ** :**וְאֲשֵׁרֵיהֶם תִּשְׂרֹפוּן בָּאֵשׁ**”- indicating that the groves are cut down (ἐκκόπτω), and not burnt, and likewise the carved objects are burnt and not cut down.

Another interesting observation concerning the Greek text is made by Rösel (2006: 248), who indicates that the LXX differentiates between the “altars” of the official Yahwistic cult and those of the local pagan cults. Rösel (2006: 248) indicates that the neologism θυσιαστήριον “offering place” is used to refer to the “altar” of the Yahwistic cult, while the common term βωμός “altar” is used when referring to the pagan cults. The “altar” referred to in this verse is one belonging to a pagan cult.

2 Kings 23:6

MT

וַיֵּצֵא אֶת-הָאֲשֵׁרָה מִבַּיִת יְהוָה מִחוּץ לִירוּשָׁלַם אֶל-נַחַל קִדְרוֹן וַיִּשְׂרֹף אֹתָהּ בְּנַחַל קִדְרוֹן
וַיִּדְק לְעָפָר וַיִּשְׂלֹךְ אֶת-עֲפָרָהּ עַל-קִבְרֵי בְנֵי הָעָם:

And he brought out the asherah out of the house of Yahweh outside of Jerusalem to the valley Kidron and he burnt it in the valley Kidron and he crushed (it) to dust and he threw its dust over the grave of the sons of the people.

LXX

καὶ ἐξήνεγκεν τὸ ἄλσος ἐξ οἴκου κυρίου ἔξωθεν Ἱερουσαλημ εἰς τὸν χειμάρρουν Κεδρων καὶ κατέκαυσεν αὐτὸν ἐν τῷ χειμάρρῳ Κεδρων καὶ ἐλέπτυνεν εἰς χοῦν καὶ ἔρριψεν τὸν χοῦν αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν τάφον τῶν υἱῶν τοῦ λαοῦ.

And he brought out the sacred grove from the Lord's house, outside Ierousalem, to the Wadi Kedron, and burned it in Wadi Kedron and pulverized it to dust and threw the dust of it into the grave of the sons of the people.

This verse forms part of the account of the reign and reform of Josiah. Josiah's reform is noted to be more severe than that of Hezekiah before him (Hindson & Kroll, 1994: 740). Hobbs (1985: 333) indicates that the valley of Kidron was utilized as a graveyard from the time of the First Temple Period, and was a suitable place for the asherah as well as other pagan cult paraphernalia to be dumped. Gray (1977: 734) however indicates that the Kidron Valley was a suitable place to "dump" the asherah because it was "the natural dumping-ground for refuse from the Temple, which would be swiftly swept away by the winter floods of the wadi." The asherah was however ground to dust, indicating that it was utterly destroyed. It was scattered on the graves not to defile the asherah (seeing that it was already defiled), but to indicate that it was where it belonged, as the reformers thought, with the dead (Hobbs, 1985: 333), indicating the "death" of a cult.

2 Kings 23:15

MT

15 וְגַם אֶת־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ אֲשֶׁר בְּבֵית־אֵל הַבְּמָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יִרְבֵּעַם בְּיַד־נְבַט אֲשֶׁר הִחֲטִיא אֶת־
יִשְׂרָאֵל גַּם אֶת־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ הַהוּא וְאֶת־הַבְּמָה נָתַץ וַיִּשְׂרֹף אֶת־הַבְּמָה הַרַק לְעֶפֶר וְשָׂרַף
אֲשֶׁרָה:

And even the altar that (was) in Beth-el the high place that Jeroboam, son of Nebat, had made who made Israel to sin, even that altar and the high place he tore down and he burned the high place. He crushed it to dust and he burnt *asherah*.

LXX

καί γε τὸ θυσιαστήριον τὸ ἐν Βαιθηλ, τὸ ὑψηλόν, ὃ ἐποίησεν Ἰεροβοαμ υἱὸς Ναβατ, ὃς ἐξήμαρτεν τὸν Ἰσραηλ, καί γε τὸ θυσιαστήριον ἐκεῖνο καὶ τὸ ὑψηλὸν κατέσπασεν καὶ συνέτριπεν τοὺς λίθους αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐλέπτυνεν εἰς χοῦν καὶ κατέκαυσεν τὸ ἄλσος.

And indeed the altar in Baithel, the high place that Ieroboam son of Nabat made, who made Israel sin – and indeed that altar and the high place he pulled down. And he smashed its stones and pulverized them into dust and burned the grove.

This verse, like the previous one (2 Kings 23:6), forms part of Josiah's reform. During Josiah's reform even the cult places, built by Solomon centuries before, that withstood the reform of Hezekiah, were destroyed (Patterson & Austel, 1998: np). Hobbs (1985: 335) notes that some scholars are of the opinion that the latter part of this verse should be understood as an addition to the text, seeing that high places could not possibly be burnt down, Hobbs however goes further in stating that additions to texts usually have an explanatory function rather than an obscuring one. Hobbs (1985: 335) further notes that the burning of the high place may have had a symbolic action only. According to the text critical apparatus in the BHS, the LXX reads καὶ συνέτριπεν τοὺς λίθους αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐλέπτυνεν (אֶת־אֲבָנָיו וַיִּדָק) “and broke in pieces the stones of it”, where the MT has וַיִּשְׂרֹף אֶת־הַבְּמָה הַרַק (וַיִּשְׂבֵר) “and he set on fire the high place and crushed it”. The LXX does not indicate, as does the

MT, that the high places were burnt with fire, and may support, as noted above, that the latter part of the verse is a later addition.

In this verse the asherah mentioned is in the singular form (אֲשֵׁרָה) without an article or pronominal suffix. Wiggins (1993: 119) however notes that a definite asherah is intended here and therefore we would expect the use of an article. But it may be, Wiggins suggests, that the author intended to refer to the goddess herself, who is finally destroyed seeing that this is the last mention of the *asherah* in the Deuteronomistic History.

The term *καί γε* used in the LXX translation is an important term and should be discussed briefly. Several Greek revisions, namely that of Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotiom had their origin in Greek-speaking Judaism. These revisions were to be used as alternatives to the text of the LXX, the former claiming to be more closely representative of the Hebrew text (Dines, 2004: 81). It was later however discovered that these “new” revisions were not really new revisions or translations, in that they were most likely “built on earlier revisions” (Dines, 2004: 81). The most significant of these earlier revisions is now known as the *kaige* revision (Greek *καί γε*). This “revision” was first noticed in a fragmentary scroll (8Q_{Hev}WIgr) discovered near Naḥal Ḥever in 1952. Scholars such as Kahle (in Dines, 2004: 82) identifies this scroll as a new translation, while Barthélemy (1998) recognized that the text was that of the LXX with minor revisions intended to make it more reflective of the MT. The most prominent feature of the scroll was its consistent usage of *καί γε* “and indeed” to render the Hebrew אַךְ “and also”. This feature was however not limited to this scroll, but featured in other LXX texts too, such as Judges, Lamentations, Song of Songs and Ruth (Dines, 2004: 82). This *kaige* “revision” should not be understood as an “organized project (Dines, 2004: 83), but “instead, one must envisage a continuum from the Greek Pentateuch all the way to Aquila in which approaches and attitudes to translation are trying to find ways of bringing the Greek into a closer quantitative alignment with the Hebrew” (Gentry, 1998: 228-229).

- The verb **בער**

The single occurrence of the verb **בער** is in the Piel form, and can be translated as follows: to kindle; to light with fire; to keep a fire burning and to burn down (Koehler & Baumgartner, 2001: 146).

2 Chronicles 19:3

MT

אָבֵל דְּבָרִים טוֹבִים נִמְצְאוּ עִמָּךְ כִּי־בִעַרְתָּ הָאֲשֵׁרוֹת מִן־הָאָרֶץ וְהִכִּינוֹתָ לְבָבְךָ לְדַרְשׁ
הָאֱלֹהִים:

Yet good words were found with you, since you have kindled the asherahs out of the land and you have set your heart to seek God.

LXX

ἀλλ' ἡ λόγοι ἀγαθοὶ ἠυρέθησαν ἐν σοί, ὅτι ἐξῆρας τὰ ἄλση ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς Ἰουδα καὶ κατηύθυνας τὴν καρδίαν σου ἐκζητῆσαι τὸν κύριον.

But good features were found in you, because you removed the groves from the land of Ioudas and directed your heart to seek out the Lord.”

Contextually this verse falls in Jehoshaphat’s involvement with Ahab, specifically the seer Jehu’s address towards Jehoshaphat (Dillard, 1987: 143). Jehu’s message to Jehoshaphat was a negative one, as was also the case when the former condemned the dynasty of Baasha in Israel (1 Kings 16), but he did however acknowledge that there was “good” to be found in Jehoshaphat (Payne, 1998: np). This “good” which Jehu referred to was to be found in Jehoshaphat’s removal of the asherahs in Judah, and because he sought for God. In this regard Japhet (1993: 769) notes that “true worship” of God is not found in the “annihilation of idolatry”, but rather in the “preparation of the heart”.

Wiggins (1993: 122) indicates that the feminine plural form of the term asherah, namely **הָאֲשֵׁרוֹת**, indicates that the author did not wish to “disguise” the identity of the goddess, while masculine plural forms accomplish this purpose. The intention of the author was not to indicate that the asherah was a remaining threat, but rather functioned as a reminder to the Israelites of the reasons for their exile (Wiggins, 1993: 122). In the Septuagint’s version the Hebrew verb **בער** is translated with the verb ἐξήρας (from ἐξαίρω) which means to “remove” or “get rid of” (Louw & Nida, 1989).

iii. asherah(s) that were planted

- The verb **נטע**

The occurrence of the verb **נטע** is in the Qal form, and can be translated as follows: To plant or to pitch (Koehler & Baumgartner, 2001: 694).

Deuteronomy 16:21

MT

לֹא-תַטֵּעַ לָךְ אֲשֵׁרָה כָּל-עֵץ אֲצִל מִזְבַּח יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה-לָּךְ : 21

You will not plant/pitch for yourself an asherah, any tree/wood beside the altar of Yahweh your God which you will make for yourself.

LXX

Οὐ φυτεύσεις σεαυτῷ ἄλσος, πᾶν ξύλον, παρὰ τὸ θυσιαστήριον κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ σου, ὃ ποιήσεις σεαυτῷ.

You shall not plant for yourself a grove, any tree beside the altar of the Lord your God which you will make for yourself;

Contextually this verse forms part of the rehearsal of laws given to Israel, specifically the commandments concerning leaders (Hindson & Kroll, 1994: 345). Until this moment Moses acted individually as the leader of Israel, but here at Sinai additional leaders were assigned to assist Moses in this task (Madvig, 1998). The prohibition in this specific verse requires the Israelites to refrain from “planting” any asherahs next to the altar of God. Von Rad (1966: 115) indicates that “the prohibition of erecting *Asherim* and *Masseboth* beside the altar of Yahweh certainly, presupposes a number of sanctuaries and not the centralization of the cult”.

In this verse אֲשֵׁרָה is qualified by כָּל-עֵץ, and the obvious conclusion to be made would be that this verse indicates that an asherah was a tree. Koehler and Baumgartner (2001: 864), however indicates that in this specific verse כָּל-עֵץ refers to the material (wood) rather than the source (tree), therefore opting for the translation “any sort of wood”. This translation is furthermore supported by the meaning of the verb נָטַע which indicates that the asherah was “planted”, Koehler and Baumgartner (2001: 694) however indicates that this verb could also be translated as “to pitch”, that is to set something up, which would not be referring to a tree. This is furthermore supported by the LXX’s translation of עֵץ with ξύλον. Although φυτεύσεις indicates that the asherah was “planted” (Louw & Nida, 1988/1989), it does not qualify the asherah as a tree, neither does πᾶν ξύλον. Binger (1997: 123) indicates that ξύλον “is never used of any kind of living tree but has the rather exclusive meaning of timber and other kinds of ‘dead wood’.” This would also support the “alternative” understanding of the Hebrew verse, and indicates that the Greek translator at least in this verse did not understand the Hebrew asherah to be a living tree, and that ἄλσος should maybe be understood here as a “sacred precinct” as Olyan (1988: 3) has indicated, rather than a grove.

iv. asherah(s) that were made

- The verb עשה

All of the occurrences of the verb עשה are in the Qal form, and can be translated as follows:

To make and to manufacture (Koehler & Baumgartner, 2001: 890).

1 Kings 14:15

MT

וְהָקָה יְהוָה אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל כַּאֲשֶׁר יְנוּד הַקָּנָה בַּמַּיִם וְנָתַשׂ אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵעַל הָאָרֶזְמָה הַטּוֹבָה¹⁵
הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לְאֲבוֹתֵיהֶם וְזָרַם מֵעֵבֶר לְנָהָר יַעַן אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ אֶת־אֲשֵׁרֵיהֶם מִכְעִיסִים אֶת־
יְהוָה:

Yahweh will strike Israel as the reed is shaken in the water, and He shall pluck out Israel from this good land that He gave to their fathers and He shall cast them away across the river seeing that they have made their asherahs, grieving Yahweh.

LXX

This verse is omitted in the Septuagint. Pietersma and Wright (2007: 247) indicate that the Hebrew text underlying the Old Greek text of 1 Kings is similar, but not identical to the MT. Pietersma and Wright (2007: 247) note that the MT is more extensive than the Hebrew text underlying the Old Greek. Seeing that the Old Greek text and its underlying Hebrew source are less extensive, this may be the reason why 1 Kings 14:15 does not form part of the Greek text.

Contextually this verse forms part of the account of the death of Jeroboam's child (De Vries, 1985: 178). After Jeroboam's child fell ill, the king sent his disguised wife to the blind prophet Ahijah, who previously predicted that Jeroboam would be king. The deceived prophet sent Jeroboam a message of rebuke stating that because of his sins his kingdom will fall and all his people will be scattered (Patterson & Austel, 1998: np). Furthermore Fichtner

(1979: 217) notes the underlying influence which the forbidden gods, and the Israelites' worship of them, had for the Babylonia Exile.

This verse indicates that it was possible to “make” an asherah. If Kings 14:9 (“but you have done more evil than all who were before you, for you have gone and made for yourself other gods and molded images to provoke Me to anger, and have cast Me behind your back” [NKJV]) is considered it may indicate that the asherah was an image of a deity which was in the form of a moulded image, since here the verb “make” is also used to indicate how the gods came into being.

1 Kings 16:33

MT

וַיַּעַשׂ אַחָאָב אֶת־הָאֲשֵׁרָה וַיּוֹסֶף אַחָאָב לַעֲשׂוֹת לְהַכְעִים אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִכָּל מַלְכֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הָיוּ לְפָנָיו:³³

And Ahab made the asherah and Ahab did more to anger Yahweh, God of Israel, than all the kings of Israel who were before him.

LXX

καὶ ἐποίησεν Ἀχααβ ἄλσος, καὶ προσέθηκεν Ἀχααβ τοῦ ποιῆσαι παροργίσματα τοῦ παροργίσει τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἐξολεθρευθῆναι· ἐκακοποίησεν ὑπὲρ πάντας τοὺς βασιλεῖς Ἰσραὴλ τοὺς γενομένους ἔμπροσθεν αὐτοῦ.

And Achaab made a grove, and Achaab added to do provocations to provoke to anger so that his life might be destroyed; he did more evil than all the kings of Israel who were before him.

This verse forms part of the account of the reign of Ahab, the son of Omri. De Vries (1985: 204) indicates that Ahab was accused of various “unthinkable sins”. The first of these was that he married Jezebel, the daughter of the Phoenician king Ethbaal, both notorious baalists. De Vries (1985: 204) notes that Solomon also married other foreign princesses, including one

who was the Pharaoh's daughter, but the difference was that Jezebel was "extremely assertive and intolerant". Ahab's second "unthinkable sin" was that he worshipped Baal and built an altar and temple dedicated to Baal in Samaria (De Vries, 1985: 204). A third related sin was that Ahab made an asherah, an image of the goddess Asherah (De Vries, 1985: 204).

The LXX adds *παροργίσματα* "offensive things/provocations", which does not have an equivalent in the MT of the current verse. The text of the LXX also adds *τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἐξολεθρευθῆναι· ἐκακοποίησεν* "his life might be destroyed; he did more evil". The LXX provides a more extensive verse which emphasises the sinfulness of Ahab, which exceeded that of the kings before him.

In this verse as well as in 2 Kings 13:6 a reference is made to the asherah of Samaria. Binger (1997: 127) and Wiggins (1993: 110) indicate that the article defines the asherah, referring not to the goddess, but rather to a specific asherah, that being the one of Samaria. The LXX's translation of *הָאֲשֵׁרָה* with *ἄλσος* in this verse is problematic in that it is not possible to "make" a grove, unless an image of a grove is intended, which would however raise the question why an image of an image would be made?

2 Kings 21:3

MT

³ וַיִּשָׁב וַיְבִן אֶת־הַבָּמוֹת אֲשֶׁר אָבִד חֲזַקְיָהוּ אָבִיו וַיִּקַּם מִזְבְּחֹת לַבַּעַל וַיַּעַשׂ אֲשֵׁרָה כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אַחָאָב מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ לְכָל־צָבָא הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיַּעֲבֹד אֹתָם:

And he built again the high places that Hezekiah, his father, had destroyed, and he raised up altars for Baal, and he made an asherah, as Ahab the king of Israel had made, and he bowed down to all the host of heaven and served them.

καὶ ἐπέστρεψεν καὶ ὤκοδόμησεν τὰ ὑψηλά, ἃ κατέσπασεν Εζεκίας ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἀνέστησεν θυσιαστήριον τῇ Βααλ καὶ ἐποίησεν ἄλση, καθὼς ἐποίησεν Αχααβ βασιλεὺς Ἰσραηλ, καὶ προσεκύνησεν πάσῃ τῇ δυνάμει τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ ἐδούλευσεν αὐτοῖς

And he turned back and built the high places that Hezekias his father had pulled down, and he erected an altar to the goddess Baal and made groves, just as Achaab, king of Israel, had done, and did obeisance to all the host of heaven and was subject to them.

This verse forms part of the account of the reign of Manasseh. During Manasseh's reign he rebuilt the high places which his father, Hezekiah, destroyed, the Canaanite cult was reinstated and he introduced an astral cult in Judah (Patterson & Austel, 1998: np). Gray (1977: 706), with regard to the Canaanite cult, indicates that Manasseh ran an official cult for both Baal and Asherah in the Temple area in Jerusalem.

The MT's plural מִזְבְּחֹת "altars" is rendered with the singular θυσιαστήριον, and the singular אֲשֵׁרָה is rendered with the plural ἄλση. The LXX refers to a single altar and multiple asherahs, while the MT refers to multiple altars and one asherah. It should also be noted that the LXX utilizes a feminine article τῇ in conjunction with Βααλ, indicating, as the NETS translation reflects, that a female Baal is intended. This "incorrect" usage of the feminine article questions whether, at least in this verse, the Greek translator was familiar with the god Baal, and furthermore if he was unfamiliar with Baal could he possibly provide a trustworthy rendering of what an asherah was?

Wiggins (1993: 115) notes that the "pure" form of the asherah, without an article and pronominal suffix, may point "to an even later time when the original meaning of אֲשֵׁרָה was forgotten, or else it has ceased to be a threat, or perhaps the writer had one specific asherah in mind."

2 Kings 21:7

MT

7 וַיִּשֶׂם אֶת-פֶּסֶל הָאֲשֵׁרָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה בְּבַיִת אֲשֶׁר אָמַר יְהוָה אֶל-דָּוִד וְאֶל-שְׁלֹמֹה בְּנֹו
בְּבַיִת הַזֶּה וּבִירוּשָׁלַם אֲשֶׁר בָּחַרְתִּי מִכָּל שְׁבֵטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשִׁים אֶת-שְׁמִי לְעוֹלָם:

And he put the idol of the asherah that he made in the house which Yahweh said to David and to Solomon his son: "In this house and in Jerusalem which I have selected out of all the tribes of Israel I will place My name for eternity."

LXX

καὶ ἔθηκεν τὸ γλυπτὸν τοῦ ἄλσους ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ, ὃ εἶπεν κύριος πρὸς Δαυιδ καὶ πρὸς Σαλωμων τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ Ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ τούτῳ καὶ ἐν Ἱερουσαλημ, ἣ ἐξελεξάμην ἐκ πασῶν φυλῶν Ἰσραηλ, καὶ θήσω τὸ ὄνομά μου ἐκεῖ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα

And he put the carved image of the grove in the house of which the Lord has said to David and to Salomon his son, "In this house and in Ierousalem, which I chose out of all the tribes of Israel, I will also put my name there forever."

This verse recounts the counter-reform of Manasseh, whose "religious policy stands in blatant contrast to Hezekiah's reform" (Rendtorff, 2005: 148). For a further discussion on the reign of Manasseh, refer to 2 Kings 21:3 (above).

2 Chronicles 33:7 is the parallel account of the current verse. In the Chronicler's account הָאֲשֵׁרָה is substituted with הַסֵּמֶל "the idol", indicating that the Chronicler understood the asherah to be an idol. In this regard Gray (1977: 707) states that it is obvious that Asherah was understood as a goddess since idols were made of her. The logic of the verse proves to be problematic-- it is stated that an "idol" was made for הָאֲשֵׁרָה, which implies that an idol was made for an idol. Wiggins (1993: 116) indicates that this verse provides evidence that the "asherah" was the image of the goddess Asherah. This would however only be possible if הָאֲשֵׁרָה is taken to refer to the goddess in this verse. The equivalent of אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה is absent

in the Septuagint. The Septuagint does not indicate that image was made, however it is suggested by “carved image”.

2 Chronicles 33:3

MT

וַיִּשָׁב וַיִּבֶן אֶת־הַבָּמוֹת אֲשֶׁר נָתַן יְחִזְקִיָּהוּ אָבִיו וַיִּקַּם מִזְבְּחוֹת לְבַעַלִּים וַיַּעַשׂ אֲשֵׁרוֹת
וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה לְכָל־צָבָא הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיַּעֲבֹד אֹתָם:

And he built again the high places which Hezekiah, his father, tore down and he raised up altars for the baals and he made asherahs and he bowed down to all the host of heaven and he served them.

LXX

καὶ ἐπέστρεψεν καὶ ὠκοδόμησεν τὰ ὑψηλά, ἃ κατέσπασεν Εζεκιας ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἔστησεν στήλας ταῖς Βααλιμ καὶ ἐποίησεν ἄλση καὶ προσεκύνησεν πάσῃ τῇ στρατιᾷ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ ἐδούλευσεν αὐτοῖς.

And he turned and built the high places that his father Hezekias had pulled down and erected steles to the she-Baalim and made groves and did obeisance to all the host of the sky and was subject to them.

Contextually this verse forms part of the account of Manasseh’s reign (for further discussion, refer to 2 Kings 21:3 above). The Chronicler’s account of 2 Kings 21:3 renders the singular asherah in 2 Kings as a plural. Dillard (1987: 266), however, indicates that the usage of the plural should not be understood as an attempt by the Chronicler to enhance Menasseh’s apostasy, but should rather be understood as influenced by the other plurals used within the immediate context of the asherahs. Dillard (1987: 266) furthermore states that “the Chronicler uses the term ‘Asherah’ ten times, only once is in the singular, suggesting again a preference for the plural form rather than a theological motive.”

This verse is the Chronicler's account of 2 Kings 21:3. The LXX renders the Hebrew מִזְבְּחוֹת "altars" with στήλας "steles", which is most likely a misreading of מַצְבֹּת for מִזְבְּחוֹת, the former being commonly associated with Baal (e.g. 2 Kings 3:2, 10:26 and 27) Dillard (1987: 266). Furthermore the LXX again utilizes a feminine article ταῖς with Βααλιμ, indicating that Baal was a female deity?

Isaiah 17:8

MT

וְלֹא יִשְׁעָה אֶל־הַמִּזְבְּחוֹת מַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו וְאֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ אֶצְבְּעֹתָיו לֹא יִרְאֶה וְהָאֲשֵׁרִים וְהַחֲמָנִים⁸

And he will not gaze towards the altars, the product of his hands, and that which he made (with) his fingers he shall not see either the asherahs or the incense stands.

LXX

καὶ οὐ μὴ πεποιθότες ὄσιν ἐπὶ τοῖς βωμοῖς οὐδὲ ἐπὶ τοῖς ἔργοις τῶν χειρῶν αὐτῶν, ἃ ἐποίησαν οἱ δάκτυλοι αὐτῶν, καὶ οὐκ ὄψονται τὰ δένδρα αὐτῶν οὐδὲ τὰ βδελύγματα αὐτῶν.

and they will not trust in the altars nor in the works of their hands, which their own fingers have made, and they will not look at their trees nor at their abominations.

This verse forms part of the lament concerning the destruction of Syria and its capital Damascus (Watts, 1985: 238). Groyan (1998) however indicates that a large part of the prophecy relates to Israel rather than Syria. Sweeney (1996: 256) notes that the focus in Isaiah 17: 8 is "humanity's recognition of YHWH", which places this verse within a central position of Isaiah 17:1-18:7 which concerns the consequences of Israel's punishment.

Watts (1985: 238) indicates that the description of the Hebrew הַמִּזְבְּחוֹת "the altars" as "the product of his hands" is curious, seeing that "product of his hands" is never used with altars in the MT, but rather with idols. Watts (1985: 238) notes that although "the altars" and "the asherahs or the sun pillars" may be a later addition to the MT, they do however form part of

the text in 1QIsa^a (Isaiah Scroll). The LXX's rendition of the verse differs to an extent from that of the MT. While the MT has "he will not gaze", the LXX reads "they will not trust", the LXX also do not refer to the MT's "incense stands", translating rather with "abominations". The LXX translates אֲשֵׁרִים with δένδρα in this instance, which is only one of two instances where this term is used in the translation of the Hebrew term in the LXX. The other instance where אֲשֵׁרִים is rendered with δένδρα is in Isaiah 27:9-- only the translator of Isaiah used this specific term to refer to the asherah.

v. asherah(s) that were built

- The verb בנה

The occurrence of the verb בנה is in the Qal form, and can be translated as follows: To build; rebuild (Koehler & Baumgartner, 2001: 139).

1 Kings 14:23

MT

וַיִּבְנוּ גַם־הֵמָּה לָהֶם בְּמוֹת וּמִצְבּוֹת וְאֲשֵׁרִים עַל כָּל־גִּבְעָה וְנִבְהָה וְתַחַת כָּל־עֵץ רֵעָנָן²³

And they themselves built for themselves high places and pillars and asherahs upon every high hill and below every green tree.

LXX

καὶ ὠκοδόμησαν ἑαυτοῖς ὑψηλὰ καὶ στήλας καὶ ἄλση ἐπὶ πάντα βουνὸν ὑψηλὸν καὶ ὑποκάτω παντὸς ξύλου συσκίου·

and they built for themselves high places and poles and groves on every high hill and under every shady tree,

This verse forms part of the account of the reign of Rehoboam, the son of Solomon. Rehoboam allowed rival worship centres and pagan fertility practices (ritual prostitution) to spread throughout the land, and as a result Israel was invaded by Shishak I, Pharaoh of Egypt (Patterson & Austel, 1998: np). Gray (1977: 342) indicates that the **וּמִצְבוֹת** previously functioned as memorials where the Hebrew fathers received theophanies, but were associated with the “local nature shrines of Canaan” by the time of the kings. Furthermore Gray (1977: 343) notes that the “sacred trees/poles”, i.e. the asherahs, symbolized the “receptive and productive element in nature under the stimulus of rain”, the latter being supplied by the storm god Baal. Gray however does not express any view on why such a “sacred tree” would be located underneath another tree. It is also indicated in the verse that the asherah was “built”, which would indicate that it was some sort of construction, such as the “high places” which are also described as being built in this verse. This problem is further complicated by the verse’s mention of “pillars” which were also “built”. The nature of the asherah is obscured in this verse. In this regard Wiggins (1993: 108) notes that the masculine plural form of the term asherah is used, which leads Wiggins to conclude that the author wished to disguise the origin of the term and its association with the goddess Asherah.

vi. asherah(s) that idols were made for

- The noun **מפלצת**

The common noun **מפלצת** can be translated as follows: an abominable image and an idol (Koehler & Baumgartner, 2001: 618).

1 Kings 15:13

MT

¹³ וְגַם אֶת־מַעֲבָה אָמוֹ וַיִּסְרֶהָ מִגְּבִירָה אֲשֶׁר־עָשְׂתָהּ מִפְּלִצָּת לְאֲשֶׁרָה וַיִּכְרֹת אֶסָּא אֶת־
מִפְּלִצָּתָהּ וַיִּשְׂרֶף בְּנַחַל קָרְרוֹן:

And even Maachah, his mother, he removed her from (being) queen mother, because she made an idol for the asherah, and Asa cut of her idol and he burned (it) in the valley Kidron.

LXX

καὶ τὴν Ἀνα τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ μετέστησεν τοῦ μὴ εἶναι ἡγουμένην, καθὼς ἐποίησεν σύνοδον ἐν τῷ ἄλσει αὐτῆς, καὶ ἐξέκοψεν Ἀσα τὰς καταδύσεις αὐτῆς καὶ ἐνέπρησεν πυρὶ ἐν τῷ χειμάρρῳ Κεδρων.

And he also removed his mother Ana from being a leader, because she conducted a meeting in her grove, and Asa cut down her hiding-places and burned them with fire at the Wadi Kedron.

This verse, as well as its parallel in 2 Chronicles 15:16 (below), forms part of the account of Asa's reform. At the onset of Asa's reign it is clear that his grandmother Maacha, the queen mother, still had a hand in the religious demise of Judah. Patterson and Austel (1998: np) however indicate that during the purge of the land "even the politically and religiously powerful Maacha was able to be disposed of once and for all."

Gray (1997: 349-350) indicates that the nature of the Hebrew term **מִפְלֵצָה** is problematic. In the MT this term functions as a noun only in this verse. In Job 9:6 the term functions as a verb, which refers to an earthquake, therefore denoting shock and terror. In Psalm 55:5, Isaiah 21:4 and Ezekiel 7:18 the root of the term is also utilized. Gray (1977: 350) goes on to describe the usage of the term in the current verse as "orthodox substitute for a concrete term", but notes that it is remarkable that the term is not used in this manner anywhere else in the MT. Koehler and Baumgartner (2001: 618) define the term as follows: "a horror", "an idol", "a lewd depiction of the Asherah" or "an abdominal image". With regard to the "lewd depiction" as identified by Koehler and Baumgartner as a possible definition of **מִפְלֵצָה**, Gray (1977: 350) notes that especially regarding the "gross sexual rites of the cult", i.e. of the Asherah cult, the term may also be understood as referring to a "phallic emblem". This suggestion however raises the question why a "phallic emblem" would be made for the goddess Asherah, when goddesses (as indicated in Chapter 3) were usually connected with

depictions of pubic triangles? In this regard the researcher opts for the translation “idol”, seeing that the discussed suggestions lack definite plausibility.

The MT text is problematic in that it suggests that an idol was made for the asherah, which is to be understood as an idol too. Wiggins (1993: 109) notes that it is possible that the asherah in the MT may be an example of “whole classes” which indicates that “a prominent asherah may have assumed a particular status as ‘the asherah.’” The Septuagint’s version of this verse however differs extensively from that of the MT, which may indicate, as Binger (1997: 111) suggests, that the Septuagint’s translation is based on a different Hebrew text. It is also interesting to note that the Septuagint’s account provides the queen mother with a different name in this verse (Ana), while “Maacha” is maintained in the MT of 1 Kings 15:13, 2 Chronicles 15:16 and even in the LXX’s version of the latter.

2 Chronicles 15:16

MT

וְנִסְמַעְכָּה אִם אָסָא הַמֶּלֶךְ הִסִּירָהּ מִנְבִּירָהּ אֲשֶׁר-עָשְׂתָהּ לְאֲשֶׁרָה מִפְּלֶצֶת וַיִּכְרֹת אָסָא
אֶת-מִפְּלֶצֶתָהּ וַיִּדְק וַיִּשְׂרַף בְּנַחַל קִדְרוֹן:

And even Maachah, the mother of king Asa, he removed her as queen-mother, because she made for asherah an idol and Asa cut down her idol and he crushed (it) and burned(it) in the valley of Kidron.

LXX

καὶ τὴν Μααχα τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ μετέστησεν τοῦ μὴ εἶναι τῇ Ἀστάρτῃ λειτουργοῦσαν καὶ κατέκοψεν τὸ εἶδωλον καὶ κατέκαυσεν ἐν χειμάρρῳ Κεδρων.

And he removed his mother, so she would not be ministering to Astarte, and he cut down the idol and burned it in the Wadi Kedron.

This verse is the parallel account of 1 Kings 15:13, recounting the reign of Asa (for a further discussion of the context of this verse refer to the discussion of 1 Kings 15:13 above).



The Chronicler's account of 1 Kings 15:13 in the MT is very similar to the account of 1 Kings 15:13. The only notable difference is that the asherah was also "crushed" in the Chronicles account, while it was only burnt in Kings. The LXX's version however differs extensively from both the MT verses, as well as the Greek account of 1 Kings 15:13. In the Septuagint's account אֲשֵׁרָה is translated with Ἀστάρτη, referring to the goddess Astarte rather than Asherah (in 2 Chronicles 24:18 "asherah" is also translated as "Astarte"). Smith (2002: 129) indicates that some of the characteristics and roles portrayed by Asherah were later ascribed to Astarte. Examples of these are that Asherah is referred to by the title *rbt* in Ugaritic texts (e.g. KTU 1.3 V 40; 1.4 I 13, 21 etc.) which was later used to refer to the goddess Astarte. Another example Smith (2002: 129) refers to is that Asherah is described as a mother goddess in Ugaritic texts (e.g. KTU 1.4 II 25-26, IV 51 etc.), while Astarte is also described as such in Phoenician inscriptions (e.g. KAI 14:14). It is however uncertain whether the translators of the Septuagint were aware of this, or if they merely "misread" the Hebrew word. It is however clear that at least in this verse the Septuagint translators understood אֲשֵׁרָה as referring to a goddess, and not to an image.

vii. asherah(s) that were crushed to pieces/dust

- The verb שבר

The verb שבר is in the Piel form and can be translated as follows: To smash into fragments (Koehler & Baumgartner, 2001: 1404).

2 Chronicles 34:4

MT

וַיִּנְתְּצוּ לְפָנָיו אֶת מִזְבְּחוֹת הַבַּעַלִּים וְהַחֲמָנִים אֲשֶׁר־לְמַעַן הַמַּעֲלִיָּה גִדְעוּ וְהָאֲשֵׁרִים
וְהַפְּסָלִים וְהַמַּסְכּוֹת שָׁבַר וְהַדָּק נִיזְרַק עַל־פְּנֵי הַקְּבָרִים הַזֹּבְחִים לָהֶם:

They tore down the altars of the baals in his presence, and the incense stands that (were) on high above them he cut down, and the asherahs and the carved images and the molten images he smashed into pieces and its dust he scattered over the surface of the graves (who) sacrificed to them.

LXX

καὶ κατέσπασεν κατὰ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ τὰ θυσιαστήρια τῶν Βααλῖμ καὶ τὰ ὑψηλὰ τὰ ἐπ' αὐτῶν καὶ ἔκοψεν τὰ ἄλση καὶ τὰ γλυπτὰ καὶ τὰ χωνευτὰ συνέτριψεν καὶ ἐλέπτυνεν καὶ ἔρριψεν ἐπὶ πρόσωπον τῶν μνημάτων τῶν θυσιαζόντων αὐτοῖς

And he pulled down in front of him the altars of the Baalim and the high places on them, and he cut down the groves and demolished the carved and smelted items and pulverized and threw them upon the memorials to those who has sacrificed to them,

Contextually this verse forms part of a shortened account of Josiah's reform, the account in 2 Kings 23 being more extensive (Wiggins, 1993: 124). Josiah was responsible for one of the most thorough reforms recounted in the Hebrew Bible; and most notable was that he rediscovered the Torah and "restore(d) Israel's commitment to God's Book" (Payne, 1998: np).

The most notable difference between the MT's and the LXX's version is that the Hebrew verse indicates that the "sun pillars" were cut down, while the "asherahs" and the "carved images" and the "molten images" were smashed to pieces. The LXX's account however indicates that the "groves" were "cut down" (the sun pillars nowhere in sight) but not "pulverized". The MT's account implies that the image of the asherah was something which could be "smashed into pieces"; it is however distinguished from the הַפְּסָלִים "carved

images” and the **הַמִּסְכוֹת** “molten images”, which indicates that an asherah was neither a “carved” or “molten” image (refer to 1 Kings 14:15 for a contradicting view).

- The verb **כתת**

The verb **כתת** is in the Piel form and can be translated as follows: To crush to pieces (Koehler & Baumgartner, 2001: 507).

2 Chronicles 34:7

MT

וַיִּנְתֵן אֶת-הַמִּזְבְּחוֹת וְאֶת-הָאֲשֵׁרִים וְהַפְּסָלִים כָּתַת לְהַדֵּק וְכָל-הַחֲמָנִים גָּדַע בְּכָל-אֶרֶץ
יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיָּשָׁב לִירוּשָׁלָּם: 7

And when he tore down the altars and the asherahs and the idols he crushed into dust and he cut down the sun pillars in all the land of Israel, then he turned back to Jerusalem.

LXX

καὶ κατέσπασεν τὰ ἄλση καὶ τὰ θυσιαστήρια καὶ τὰ εἰδῶλα κατέκοψεν λεπτὰ καὶ πάντα τὰ ὑψηλὰ ἔκοψεν ἀπὸ πάσης τῆς γῆς Ἰσραὴλ καὶ ἀπέστρεψεν εἰς Ἱερουσαλὴμ.

he also pulled down the groves and the altars and demolished the idols into smithereens and cut down all the groves from off the land of Israel and returned to Ierousalem.

This verse also forms part of the shortened account of Josiah’s reign as discussed in 2 Chronicles 34:7 (above). These two verses (MT and LXX) present a similar pattern to that found in 2 Chronicles 34:4. In the Hebrew verse the asherah is yet again grouped with the idols which were “crushed” to dust, while the “incense stands” were cut down. In the LXX’s account the sun pillars are yet again missing, the asherahs are said to be “cut down”, while the idols are “demolished into smithereens”. For further discussion refer to 2 Chronicles 34:7 above.

viii. asherah(s) that were erected/set up/raised

- The verb נצב

The verb נצב is in the Hiphil form and can be translated as follows: To place and set up (Koehler & Baumgartner, 2001: 714).

2 Kings 17:10

MT

וַיִּצְבּוּ לָהֶם מִצְבוֹת וְאֲשֵׁרִים עַל כָּל-גְּבוּעָה גְבוּעָה וְתַחַת כָּל-עֵץ רֵעָן:¹⁰

And they set up for themselves pillars and asherahs on every high hill and below every green tree.

LXX

καὶ ἐστήλωσαν ἑαυτοῖς στήλας καὶ ἄλση ἐπὶ παντὶ βουνῷ ὑψηλῷ καὶ ὑποκάτω παντὸς ξύλου ἀλσώδους

And they erected for themselves steles and groves on every high hill and under every woodland tree,

Contextually this verse forms part of the account of the reign of Hoshea and the fall and restoration of Samaria. Hoshea, when rising to the throne, attempted to rid Israel of the Assyrian yoke, he however failed in his attempt, which in turn sealed Israel's fate: They would eventually be exiled to Mesopotamia and Media (Patterson & Austel, 1998: np). Patterson and Austel (1998: np) indicates that this Divine intervention was needed because the Israelites continued to practise idolatry; their apostasy included "setting up sacred shrines and Asherah poles, the following of pagan incense customs, worshipping at cultic high places, and even open idolatry." In this regard Fricke (1972: 227) emphasises that Israel's

idolatry was a direct violation of the command against the worship of idols that God commanded through Moses.

Hobbs (1985: 232) indicates that in this verse the asherah is associated with pillars, which was also a feature of Yahwism (Genesis 35:14), but clearly functions within a Canaanite cultic setting in this verse. The asherah in this verse is also associated with living trees, as they were “set up” underneath them. That the asherah was set up clearly indicates that it was an idol of some sort and not a living tree, this is further supported by the verse indicating that the idol was stationed under a living tree, indicating that there should be a distinction between an asherah and a living tree. Hobbs (1985: 232) states that the “precise nature of an ‘asherah’ as a cult object is not known, but the clearly deuteronomistic expression “on every high hill and below every green tree” represents a “stereotyped description of behaviour associated with pagan worship.”

- The verb עמד

The verb עמד is in the Hiphil form and can be translated as follows: To set up and erect (Koehler & Baumgartner, 2001: 841-842).

2 Chronicles 33:19

MT

וְתִפְּלְתוּ וְהִעֲתֵר-לוֹ וְכָל-חַטָּאתוֹ וּמַעַלּוֹ וְהַמְקִמּוֹת אֲשֶׁר בָּנָה בָהֶם בְּמוֹת וְהָעֵמִיד
הָאֲשָׁרִים וְהַפְּסָלִים לְפָנַי הַכֹּנְעוּ הֵנָּם כְּתוּבִים עַל דְּבַרֵי חוֹזֵי:

... and his prayer, and intercede for him, and all his offence, and his treachery, and all the places in which he built high places and set up asherahs and idols before he was humiliated. Behold, they are written among the words of Hozai.

προσευχῆς αὐτοῦ, καὶ ὡς ἐπήκουσεν αὐτοῦ, καὶ πᾶσαι αἱ ἁμαρτίαι αὐτοῦ καὶ αἱ ἀποστάσεις αὐτοῦ καὶ οἱ τόποι, ἐφ’ οἷς ὠκοδόμησεν τὰ ὑψηλὰ καὶ ἔστησεν ἐκεῖ ἄλση καὶ γλυπτὰ πρὸ τοῦ ἐπιστρέψαι, ἰδοὺ γέγραπται ἐπὶ τῶν λόγων τῶν ὁρώντων.

of his prayer, and how he listened to him, and all his sins and his acts of apostasy and the places on which he built the high places and set up there groves and carved items before he repented, behold, they are written in the accounts of the seers.

This verse forms part of the account of the reign and misdeeds of Manasseh. In contrast to his pious father, Hezekiah, Manasseh single handedly did more than the other idolatrous kings before him, to finally bring the kingdom of Judah to its knees, and devoted the larger part of his reign to “thoroughgoing paganism” and a “renewed subjection to Assyria” (Payne, 1998: np). The Chronicler’s version of the reign of Manasseh has its parallel in 2 Kings 21; the Chronicler’s account however presents a more extensive list of Manasseh’s activities (Japhet, 1993: 1012). It is interesting to note however, as Wiggins (1993: 124) does, that the Chronicler’s version of this verse differs to a great extent from that of 2 Kings 17, which reads “Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh—all that he did, and the sin that he committed—are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?” (NKJV). The latter account does not refer to the idolatrous deeds that Manasseh had performed, and may indicate that the Chronicler used a different source text than that 2 Kings. In this verse the asherah is grouped with the idols, both being “set up”, it may be that the asherah was distinguished from the other idols.

The MT provides the name of an unknown prophet at the end of the verse, namely הוֹזַי “Hozai”; the LXX however reads the common noun ὁρώντων “seers”. Dillard (1987: 268) suggests that it is possible that there may be a haplography for the wāw of the pronominal suffix; if this is the case then הוֹזַי should read הוֹזַיִו “his seers”. If the latter is the case, the question is raised: Whose seers are referred to by “his seers”? Did Manasseh have his own group of seers, or should הוֹזַי rather be understood as a personal name as the MT suggests? The researcher follows the MT’s reading in this regard.

- The verb קום

The verb קום is in the Qal form and can be translated as follows: To rise and stand up (Koehler & Baumgartner, 2001: 1086).

Isaiah 27:9

MT

לְכֹן בְּזָאת יִכָּפֵר עֵוֹן יַעֲקֹב וְזֶה כָּל-פְּרֵי הַסֶּר חֲטָאתוֹ בְּשׁוּמוֹ כָּל-אֲבָנֵי מִזְבֵּחַ כָּאֲבָנֵי-גֶר
מִנְפָצוֹת לֹא-יִקְמוּ אֲשֵׁרִים וְחַמְנִים:

Therefore in this will the evil of Jacob be covered, and this will be all the fruit to take away his offence when he makes all the stones of the altar as lime stone that are crushed to pieces, the asherahs and the sun pillars will not rise.

LXX

διὰ τοῦτο ἀφαιρεθήσεται ἡ ἀνομία Ἰακωβ, καὶ τοῦτό ἐστιν ἡ εὐλογία αὐτοῦ, ὅταν ἀφέλωμαι αὐτοῦ τὴν ἀμαρτίαν, ὅταν θῶσιν πάντας τοὺς λίθους τῶν βωμῶν κατακεκομμένους ὡς κονίαν λεπτὴν· καὶ οὐ μὴ μείνῃ τὰ δένδρα αὐτῶν, καὶ τὰ εἰδῶλα αὐτῶν ἐκκεκομμένα ὡσπερ δρυμὸς μακρὰν.

Because of this the lawlessness of Iakob will be removed. And this is his blessing, when I remove his sin, when they make all the stones of the altars broken pieces like fine dust, and their trees will not remain, and their idols will be cut down like a forest far away.

This verse is part of the account of the destruction of Tyre and the implications thereof for Israel (Watt, 1985: 350). In this prophecy one of the causes of Israel's exile is stated, namely that they "reject(ed) YHWH for pagan deities" (Sweeney, 1996: 349). In the MT verse the asherahs are grouped with the sun pillars (in 2 Kings 17:10 above the asherahs were grouped with pillars too), and it is said that it will not "rise", that is they will not be "set up". The LXX uses the term δένδρα "trees" to refer to the Hebrew asherah, only one of two instances

where this term is used in the LXX to refer to the asherah. In the LXX's text it is indicated that the asherahs "will not remain" (MT "rise"). The sun pillars are also missing in the LXX (compare 2 Chronicles 34:4, 7), while *καὶ τὰ εἰδῶλα αὐτῶν ἐκκεκομμένα ὡσπερ δρυμὸς μακρὰν* "and their idols will be cut down like a forest far away" is added to the LXX (not in the MT).

ix. asherah(s) that were pulled out

- The verb **נָתַשׁ**

The verb **נָתַשׁ** is in the Qal form and can be translated as follows: To pull out and remove (Koehler & Baumgartner, 2001: 737).

Michah 5:13

MT

וְנָתַשְׁתִּי אֲשֵׁרֵיךָ מִקִּרְבְּךָ וְהִשְׁמַדְתִּי עָרֶיךָ :¹³

I will pull out your asherahs from your midst and I will desolate your cities.

LXX

καὶ ἐκκόψω τὰ ἄλση σου ἐκ μέσου σου καὶ ἀφανιῶ τὰς πόλεις σου·

and I will cut off your groves from among you and annihilate your cities.

Contextually this verse forms part of the account of the purging of the false religions (Smith, 1984: 43). Wiggins (1993: 127) and Smith (1984: 43) indicate that **עָרֶיךָ** "your cities" is unexpectedly paralleled with **אֲשֵׁרֵיךָ** "your asherahs". Wiggins notes that some scholars substitute **עָרֶיךָ** with **בַּעֲלֵיךָ** "your baals", which would present a more fitting parallelism, while Hillers (1976: 356, 359-360) opts for "your idols". Wolf (1982: 132) suggests

substituting “your asherahs” with “your enemies”. Mays (1976: 127) however indicates that “Asherim were paired with *maṣṣēbōt* (e.g. Deut. 7.5, 17.21f.); perhaps v. 14 is a secondary expansion added to include the other members of the offensive pair. Or ‘Asherim’ and ‘cities’ may be paired to represent the categories of military and cultic as a conclusion to the original saying.”

The MT verse indicates that the asherah was to be “pulled out”, it may however be that this is intended in the metaphorical sense which should be understood as “remove” (נתש can also be translated as such). The LXX text however indicates that the asherahs were cut off.

x. asherah(s) with no specific descriptions

The verses below provide no definite indication as how an image of the goddess Asherah may have looked.

Judges 3:7

MT

וַיַּעַשׂוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה וַיִּשְׁכַּחוּ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ אֶת־הַבַּעַלִּים
וְאֶת־הָאֲשֵׁרוֹת:

And the sons of Israel did evil in the eyes of Yahweh and they forgot Yahweh their God and worshipped the Baals and the asherahs.

LXX

LXX^A

Καὶ ἐποίησαν οἱ υἱοὶ Ἰσραὴλ τὸ πονηρὸν ἔναντι κυρίου καὶ ἐπελάθοντο κυρίου θεοῦ αὐτῶν καὶ ἐλάτρευσαν ταῖς Βααλιμ καὶ τοῖς ἄλσεσιν.

Translation A (LXX^A)

And the sons of Israel did what was evil before the Lord, and they forgot the Lord, their God, and served the she-Baalim and the groves.

LXX^B

Καὶ ἐποίησαν οἱ υἱοὶ Ἰσραὴλ τὸ πονηρὸν ἐναντίον κυρίου καὶ ἐπελάθοντο κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ αὐτῶν καὶ ἐλάτρευσαν τοῖς Βααλιμ καὶ τοῖς ἄλσεσιν.

Translation B (LXX^B)

And the sons of Israel did what was evil before the Lord, and they forgot the Lord their God and served the Baalim and the groves.

This verse is part of the account of the judge Othniel. Israel yet again forgot the Lord and resorted to worshipping the Canaanite deities Baal and Asherah, which angered the Lord, who in turn delivered them to the Mesopotamian king Cushan-Rishathaim. The Lord sent the judge Othniel to rescue the Israelites from their oppressor (Wolf, 1998: np).

Lipiński (in Day, 1986: 400) indicates that **הַאֲשֵׁרוֹת** here is a scribal error for “Ashtaroth”, because Ashtaroth is mentioned in various verses with “the Baals” (e.g. Judges 2:13, 10: 6; 1 Samuel 7:4, 12:10). Ashtaroth was the epithet by which the Canaanite goddess Astarte was known as in the Hebrew Bible, Ashtaroth being the plural form of Astarte, the consort of Baal (Day, 1992b: 491). Wiggins (1993: 102) indicates that the plural forms **הַבְּעָלִים** and **הַאֲשֵׁרוֹת** indicates that “classes of deities were being served rather than individual deities”, while Soggin (1987: 43) indicates that these “terms are indicative of polytheistic paganism in general”. This may be the case when referring to the proper name “Baals”. Smith (2002: 76) notes that the Hebrew term “the baals” represents “various divine ‘lords’ or gods.” The LXX versions presented above are similar to that of the MT; the only notable difference is that the text of the LXX^A refers to “she-baalim”, using the feminine article τοῖς in conjunction with Βααλιμ.

1 Kings 18:19

MT

19 וְעַתָּה שְׁלַח קִבְץ אֵלַי אֶת-כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל-הַר הַכְּרִמָּל וְאֶת-נְבִיאֵי הַבַּעַל אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת
וְחַמְשִׁים וְנְבִיאֵי הָאֲשֵׁרָה אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת אֲכָלֵי שֻׁלְחַן אִיזָבֵל:

And now send, assemble to me all Israel to Mount Carmel and the prophets of the Baal four hundred and fifty and the prophets of the asherah four hundred, those eating (at) the table of Jezebel.

LXX

καὶ νῦν ἀπόστειλον συνάθροισον πρὸς με πάντα Ἰσραὴλ εἰς ὄρος τὸ Καρμήλιον καὶ τοὺς
προφήτας τῆς αἰσχύνης τετρακοσίους καὶ πενήκοντα καὶ τοὺς προφήτας τῶν ἄλσων
τετρακοσίους ἐσθίοντας τράπεζαν Ἰεζαβελ.

“And now send, assemble all Israel for me at Mount Carmel, and the four hundred prophets of shame and the four hundred prophets of the groves, since they eat at Iezabel’s table.”

Contextually this verse forms part of the account of Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel. Rain was withheld from Israel for three years because of the sin of Ahab, who instated Baal worship as an official state religion (Patterson & Austel, 1998: np). The dispute between who is the true God, who can withhold rain, was settled on Mount Carmel, which was probably the oldest and most important Baal shrine in Palestine (Gray, 1977: 385).

According to the text critical note provided in BHS the “prophets of the asherah” is indicated as a gloss. Binger (1997: 114) notes that this does not hinder the significance of the verse, but rather indicates that the person who later inserted the gloss was familiar with the goddess, which was probably still known (refer also to Day, 1986: 400). Furthermore Binger (1997: 114) indicates that the manner in which the term **הַבַּעַל** is translated in the LXX differs from the “usual” translation thereof. Binger states that the LXX usually only transcribes the name, but in this instance it is rendered as “shame”, that is “the prophets of shame”.

2 Kings 13:6

MT

אֵף לֹא־סָרוּ מִחַטָּאוֹת בַּיַּת־יֶרֶבֹעַם אֲשֶׁר־הִחֲטִי⁶

אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהַהֲלִיךְ וְגַם הָאֲשֵׁרָה עָמְדָה בְּשֹׁמְרוֹן:

Nevertheless they did not turn away from the sins of the house of Jeroboam by which he caused Israel to sin; he walked in it and even the asherah stood in Samaria.

LXX

πλὴν οὐκ ἀπέστησαν ἀπὸ ἁμαρτιῶν οἴκου Ιεροβοαμ, ὃς ἐξήμαρτεν τὸν Ισραηλ, ἐν αὐταῖς ἐπορεύθησαν, καὶ γε τὸ ἄλσος ἐστάθη ἐν Σαμαρείᾳ.

Yet, they did not depart from the sins of the house of Jeroboam, who made Israel sin; they walked in them, and indeed the grove stood in Samaria.

This verse forms part of the account on the reign of Jehoahaz. Jehoahaz excelled in the sins of his father, Jehu, and because of his sins the Lord allowed Hazael, the Aramean king, to be a thorn in Jehoahaz's flesh throughout his reign. Jehoahaz eventually repented, but the "state religion of the golden calves was allowed to remain, as was the cultus connected with the Asherah pole in Samaria" (Patterson & Austel, 1998: np). In this regard both Gray (1977: 596) and Fricke (1972: 166) indicate that Jehu's reform in Samaria was not that thorough or successful, seeing that the asherah remained in Samaria.

The plural **מַחַטָּאוֹת** is translated in the LXX^A with a singular noun ἁμαρτας whereas the Codex Vaticanus uses the plural form ἁμαρτιῶν. In this regard Wiggins (1993: 112) notes that the LXX^A's version singles the asherah out as the most prominent sinful act of the king.

2 Kings 23:4

MT

4 וַיִּצַו הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־חִלְקִיָּהוּ הַכֹּהֵן הַגָּדוֹל וְאֶת־כֹּהֲנֵי הַמִּשְׁנָה וְאֶת־שְׂמָרֵי הַסֵּף לְהוֹצִיא
מִהֵיכַל יְהוָה אֵת כָּל־הַכֵּלִים הָעֲשׂוּיִם לַבַּעַל וְלְאֲשֵׁרָה וּלְכָל צָבָא הַשָּׁמַיִם וַיִּשְׂרָפֵם מִחוּץ
לְיְרוּשָׁלַם בְּשָׂדֵמוֹת קִדְרוֹן וַנִּשָּׂא אֶת־עַפְרָם בֵּית־אֵל:

And the king ordered Hilkiah the high priest and the priests of the second order and the guards of the door, to bring out of the temple of Yahweh all the vessels that were made for the Baal and for the asherah and for all the host of heaven, and he burned them outside of Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron and he took the ashes to Beth-el.

LXX

καὶ ἐνετείλατο ὁ βασιλεὺς τῷ Χελκία τῷ ἱερεῖ τῷ μεγάλῳ καὶ τοῖς ἱερεῦσιν τῆς δευτερώσεως καὶ τοῖς φυλάσσουσιν τὸν σταθμὸν τοῦ ἐξαγαγεῖν ἐκ τοῦ ναοῦ κυρίου πάντα τὰ σκεύη τὰ πεποιημένα τῷ Βααλ καὶ τῷ ἄλσει καὶ πάσῃ τῇ δυνάμει τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ κατέκαυσεν αὐτὰ ἔξω Ἱερουσαλήμ ἐν σαδημῶθ Κεδρων καὶ ἔλαβεν τὸν χοῦν αὐτῶν εἰς Βαιθηλ.

And the king commanded Chelkias the great priest and the priests of the second order and those who guard the threshold to bring out of the Lord's shrine all the vessels made for Baal and for the grove and for all the host of heaven, and he burned them outside Ierousalem in sademoth of Kedron and took their dust to Baithel.

Contextually this verse forms part of the account of the reign of Josiah (see also 2 Kings 23:7 below), and focuses especially on the renewal of the covenant which was followed by a new religious reform (Patterson & Austel, 1998: np).

The MT's reading בְּשָׂדֵמוֹת "in the fields" or "in the open country" is problematic, because it is not supported by the physical topography of the Kidron Valley (Hobbs, 1985: 332). The Codex Vaticanus reads ἐν σαδημῶθ "in sademoth" (understanding a proper name), while LXX Luciani has ἐν τῷ ἐμπυρισμῳ του Χειμαρρου "in the furnace by the streambed (of

Kidron)”, which may be influenced by the MT text of Jeremiah 31:40, which reads: “And the whole valley of the dead bodies and of the ashes, and all the fields as far as the Brook Kidron, to the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east, *shall be* holy to the LORD. It shall not be plucked up or thrown down anymore forever.” (KJV)

In this verse asherah is mentioned in combination with Baal and the hosts of heaven. In this regard Wiggins (1993: 177) notes that “it plays with the connection between all kinds of idolatry, but separates idolatry into three different members” and furthermore states that the vessels which were removed are specifically linked to the “individual god Baal, the individual goddess Asherah and the *unspecified* mass of the heavenly host” (emphasis mine). It may be that in this verse there is a reference to the goddess rather than the image, but unfortunately this is not supported by the grammatical structure of the Hebrew term.

2 Kings 23:7

MT

וַיִּתֵּץ אֶת־בְּתֵי הַקְּדָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר בְּבַיִת יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר הַנְּשִׁים אַרְגוּת שָׁם בְּתֵים לְאַשְׁרָה:⁷

And he tore down the houses of the male prostitutes that (were) at the house of Yahweh, where the women wove there houses for the asherah.

LXX

καὶ καθεῖλεν τὸν οἶκον τῶν καδησιμ τῶν ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ κυρίου, οὗ αἱ γυναῖκες ὕφαινον ἐκεῖ
χεττιν τῷ ἄλσει.

And he tore down he house of the kadesim that were in the house of the Lord, there where the women were weaving chettiin for the grove.

Contextually this verse forms part of the account of the reign of Josiah (refer to 2 Kings 23:4 above), and focuses especially on the renewal of the covenant which was followed by a new religious reform (Patterson & Austel, 1998).

In this verse the translation of the Hebrew **בְּתִיִּם** is problematic. The LXX translates the Hebrew term with *κετιυ* “tents”, which Hobbs (1985: 333) notes may be understood as a transliteration of the Hebrew term **בְּתִיִּים** “tunics, while the LXX Luciani translates with *στολας* “robes”. Montgomery (1951: 539) suggests, as Driver (1936) had earlier, that the Hebrew **בְּתִיִּם** may be related to the Arabic *batt* “garment”. Furthermore Smith (2002: 114) notes that the Hebrew term may be understood as “clothes”, which alludes to the custom of hanging clothes on sacred trees during the nineteenth- and twentieth-century in Palestine. This would support the LXX’s view of an image of the goddess Asherah being that of a grove/tree. In this regard Gray (1977: 734) notes that these “robes” may have been intended to be worn by the servants of the goddess Asherah. Wiggins (1993: 118) however identifies the **בְּתִיִּים** as the shrines wherein the goddess would have been worshipped.

2 Chronicles 17:6

MT

וַיִּנְבֶּה לִבּוֹ בְּדַרְכֵי יְהוָה וְעוֹד הִסִּיר אֶת־הַבָּמוֹת וְאֶת־הָאֲשֵׁרִים מִיְהוּדָה: פ

And his heart soared in the ways of Yahweh and furthermore he removed the high places and the asherahs out of Judah.

LXX

καὶ ὑψώθη καρδία αὐτοῦ ἐν ὁδοῦ κυρίου, καὶ ἔτι ἐξῆρεν τὰ ὑψηλὰ καὶ τὰ ἄλση ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς Ἰουδα.

And his heart was exalted in the way of the Lord, and he furthermore removed the high places and the groves from the land of Ioudas.

Contextually this verse forms part of Jehoshaphat’s reform (Dillard, 1987: 133). Myers (1965: 98) describes Jehoshaphat as “one of the Chronicler’s favourite kings of Judah, along with Hezekiah and Josiah”. Furthermore Myers (1965: 98-99) notes that the Chronicler

indicates that the success of Jehoshaphat's reign was due to his "loyalty to the tradition of his father in following Yahweh and his consequent rejection of Baal".

Japhet (1993: 748) refers to the difficulty concerning the "high places" referred to in the current verse. Japhet states that the removal of the high places in the current verse is contradicted in 2 Chronicles 20: 33 where it is indicated that the high places remained: Howbeit the high places were not taken away: for as yet the people had not prepared their hearts unto the God of their fathers (KJV). In this regard Japhet (1993: 748) notes that "we tend to regard the 'high places' as a typological stigma rather than a historical observation", which was a "major factor in the Deuteronomistic view of the cult, lost its central position and became something of an abstract measure for the righteousness of a king".

Wiggins (1993: 122) notes that no parallel verse to 2 Chronicles 17:6 is found in the account of Kings, which may suggest "that the asherahs had lost some of their potential threat, and has become simply cultic objects to be removed in the interests of orthodoxy, in the eyes of the Chronicler."

2 Chronicles 24:18

MT

18 נִיעַזְבוּ אֶת־בֵּית יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיהֶם וַיַּעֲבְדוּ אֶת־הָאֲשֵׁרִים וְאֶת־הָעִצְבִּים וַיְהִי־קֶצֶף
עַל־יְהוּדָה וְיִירוּשָׁלַם בְּאִשְׁמָתָם זֹאת:

And they forsook the house of Yahweh, God of their fathers, and they served the asherahs and idols, and rage came upon Judah and Jerusalem through this sin of theirs.

LXX

καὶ ἐγκατέλιπον τὸν κύριον θεὸν τῶν πατέρων αὐτῶν καὶ ἐδούλευον ταῖς Ἀστάρταις καὶ τοῖς εἰδώλοις· καὶ ἐγένετο ὀργὴ ἐπὶ Ἰουδαν καὶ ἐπὶ Ἱερουσαλημ ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ταύτῃ.

And they abandoned the Lord, God of their fathers, and were subject to the Astartes and to the idols. And wrath came upon Ioudas and upon Ierousalem on that day.

This verse forms part of the account on the reign of Joash. Joash is described as doing what is right before the Lord during the part of his life when he was instructed by Jehoiada. After the latter's death, Joash however "fell into apostasy" (Myers, 1965: 137).

This verse (like the previous one, 2 Chronicles 17:6) has no parallel account in Kings. Japhet (1993: 848) notes that "the definition of idolatry given here is unique" in that **הָאֲשֵׁרִים** is a term frequently utilised by the Chronicler, but the specific term used in the current verse for "idols", namely **הָעִצְבִּים**, only occurs in three instances (the current verse, 1 Chronicles 10:11 and 1 Samuel 31:9). Here the Hebrew **הָאֲשֵׁרִים** is translated as *Ἀστάρταις* in the LXX, which was also the case in 2 Chronicles 15:16 (for discussion on Astarte refer to the notes on the latter verse). In that the plural "Astartes" is used, the question should be raised whether the goddess Astarte is referred to here, or if her symbol is intended?

2 Chronicles 34:3

MT

³ וּבְשִׁמוֹנָה שָׁנִים לְמַלְכוֹ וְהוּא עוֹדֵנוּ נֶעַר הֵחֵל לְדַרוֹשׁ לֵאלֹהֵי דָוִד אָבִיו וּבְשָׁתַיִם עָשָׂרָה שָׁנָה הֵחֵל לְטַהֵר אֶת־יְהוּדָה וִירוּשָׁלַם מִן־הַבָּמוֹת וְהָאֲשֵׁרִים וְהַפְּסִלִים וְהַמַּסְכּוֹת:

And in the eighth year of his reign, and he (was) still a boy, he began to seek after the God of David, his father, and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places and the asherahs and the carved images and the molten images.

LXX

καὶ ἐν τῷ ὀγδόῳ ἔτει τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ--καὶ αὐτὸς ἔτι παιδάριον--ἤρξατο τοῦ ζητῆσαι κύριον τὸν θεὸν Δαυὶδ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ. καὶ ἐν τῷ δωδεκάτῳ ἔτει τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ

ἤρξατο τοῦ καθαρίσαι τὸν Ἰουδαν καὶ τὴν Ἱερουσαλημ ἀπὸ τῶν ὑψηλῶν καὶ τῶν ἄλσεων καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν χωνευτῶν

And in the eighth year of his reign – and he was still a lad – he began to seek the Lord, God of David his father. And in the twelfth year of his reign he began to purge Ioudas and Ierousalem of the high places and the groves and smelted items.

Contextually this verse forms part of a shortened account of Josiah’s reform, the account in 2 Kings 23 being more extensive (Wiggins, 1993: 124). Josiah was responsible for one of the most thorough reforms recounted in the Hebrew Bible; and most notable was that he rediscovered the Torah and “restore(d) Israel’s commitment to God’s Book” (Payne, 1998: np).

In this verse the asherah is grouped with the carved and molten images, but it should be noted that the asherah is the only of these images which is called by a specific name, distinguishing the image of the goddess from the other images. Japhet (1993: 1022) however indicates that the grouping of the asherah with the molten and graven images may indicate that the asherah was a statue of some sort.

Jeremiah 17:2

MT

כִּזְכֹּר בְּנֵיהֶם מִזְבְּחֹתָם וְאֲשֵׁרֵיהֶם עַל-עֵץ רֵעֵן עַל גְּבְעוֹת הַגְּבָהוֹת:²

As their sons remember their altars and their asherahs beside the green tree upon the high hills.

LXX

The text of this verse is omitted in the Septuagint; the Hebrew text upon which the Greek translation is based differs from that of the Masoretic text (Pietersma & Wright, 2007: 876), and this may be the reason why the current verse does not form part of the LXX text.

Contextually this verse recounts the sin of Judah and its consequences (Craigie *et al.*, 1991: 223). Feinberg (1998) notes that that “sin, especially idolatry, had become an integral part of Judah’s life. It had been etched on their very natures and on their temple worship.”

Craigie *et al.* (1991: 223) indicate that several manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible add כל in conjunction with על-עץ (cf. also the Syriac version of the Old Testament and the Targum), which follow the longer Deuteronomistic phrase “on every high hill and under every green tree”. In this verse, as in 1 Kings 14:23, the asherah is mentioned together with a tree, in this verse however the asherah is stationed next to the tree while in 1 Kings it is stationed under the tree, therefore distinguishing between the asherah and the tree.

4.3. Conclusion

The references to the goddess Asherah in the Hebrew Bible provides no consistent answer to what the image of the goddess Asherah may have looked like. However they do indicate that in some instances the asherah may have been constructed of wood. If this is the case then it is rather obvious why no clear examples of Asherah idols have survived to this day. These references also suggest that the image of Asherah may have been constructed of the same material that the molten images were made of, indicating that the asherah image took on the form of an idol, the form of which is unclear. The asherah could also have been built and erected, indicating that it was some sort of construction. The only evidence in the Hebrew Bible indicating that the asherah may have been a tree of some sort is the verses referring to it being cut down/felled, burnt, planted and pulled out (the latter being questionable).

The question posed at this stage is: Does the evidence found in the Hebrew Bible support the archaeological and iconographic evidence presented in the previous chapter (Chapter 3), and vice versa? Firstly, the view of an asherah, in the Hebrew Bible as being “made” may be supported by the fact that the various pillar and plaque figurines were made. The asherah as a molten image would also support this, seeing that the pillar figurines were made in molds,

and some of the plaques were made of metal. It is however, as mentioned in the previous chapter, it is uncertain if these figurines were actual representations of the goddess Asherah. Secondly the view of asherahs in the Hebrew Bible being “planted” supports the tree imagery that was depicted on the various artifacts presented in the previous section. Why would drawings be made of asherahs as trees, if the worshipper could actually plant a tree? Thirdly most of the archaeological evidence found could certainly be “crushed to dust”, and would support the view in the Hebrew Bible of these images being crushed. No archaeological evidence presented in Chapter 3 however indicates man-made constructions which could be described as an asherah; the reference hereof in the Hebrew Bible is quite obscure.

It is evident that both the textual and the physical evidence indicate a vast array of possibilities of what an asherah may have looked like. The archaeological and iconographic evidence lacks written evidence linking these objects to Asherah, while the textual evidence lacks direct images linking the destruction methods to a description of what an asherah may have looked like. The conclusion may be made that for some obscure reason the authors or redactors of the Hebrew Bible did not want to directly indicate what this asherah was to which they often referred. In this regard Livingstone (1995: 188) indicates that the Hebrew terms referring to the goddess Asherah in some instances in the Hebrew Bible actually do refer to the goddess rather than her image. Livingstone (1995: 188) notes that the usage of the articles with divine names (as is the case with asherah in the Hebrew Bible) is not uncommon. The presence of the article may suggest that the term refers to the general term for the specific deity, but Livingstone indicates that the article is used in conjunction with the term אֱלֹהִים in various instances, referring to the Israelite God. It may be the case that the Israelites did understand the asherah to be a goddess, but their reference to her in the Hebrew scriptures is obscure, which poses the question: If the Hebrew witness to asherah is obscure, how did the Septuagint translators know how to translate this term?

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter the translators of the Septuagint translated the Hebrew terms referring to the goddess Asherah with three different terms. When considering these Greek terms it becomes clear that the translators of the Septuagint distinguished between two basic “explanations” of what an asherah was. The first of these is

that the image of the goddess was a tree, and the second was that the goddess was actually the goddess Astarte. The latter rendering of the Hebrew asherah is however a “misinterpretation” on the side of the Septuagint translators, seeing that both Asherah and Astarte are identified as individual deities within the Hebrew Bible as well as in ancient Near Eastern literature. The question which should be posed is why the Hebrew term asherah was translated as “grove(s)” and “tree(s)”?

In order to answer the above mentioned question, the socio-cultural frame wherein the intended audience of the Septuagint functioned must be examined, in order to gain insight into the manner in which the translators of the Septuagint, as agents of cultural mediation, understood and translated the Hebrew bible. This then will be explored in the following chapter.

Chapter 5

The socio-cultural frame of the Septuagint and its influence on the translation of the Hebrew term referring to the goddess Asherah.

5.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter a contextual examination of both the Hebrew terms referring to the goddess Asherah as well as its translation in the Septuagint was conducted. The result of this examination indicated that the translators of the Septuagint texts translated the Hebrew terms with three different terms ἄλσος, ἄλση “grove(s)”, δένδρα “tree” and Ἀστάρτη, Ἀστάρταις “Astarte(s)”. The terms ἄλσος, ἄλση “grove(s)” were shown to be the most appealing translation choice. The reason for this choice in translation is not obvious-- it is not supported by the non-biblical texts or the iconographic and archaeological data provided in Chapter 3. In some instances the contexts of the Hebrew texts, discussed in the previous chapter, may support the Septuagint’s rendering, but unfortunately the majority of these contexts do not.

The next step to be taken in the current study is to determine why the translators of the Septuagint translated the Hebrew terms in the manner which they did. The translators of the Septuagint functioned as agents of cultural mediation between two different contextual frames (refer to Chapter 2). The first of these represents the original intended audience of the Hebrew source text, while the second represents the target audience of the Greek translation of it. The authors of the Hebrew Bible knew that their audience was familiar with the term “asherah”, and thus it was not necessary to elaborate on what an “asherah” was. Whether the translators of the Septuagint were familiar with what was referred to by the term “asherah” is uncertain, and within this uncertainty lies the answer to why they translated the term in the manner which they did.

In the current chapter the researcher will attempt to answer the above mentioned question. In order to do so, the contextual frame, and specifically the socio-cultural frame, of the intended audience of the Septuagint will be explored. The latter is however no easy task seeing that the

translation of the various books of the Hebrew Bible were conducted independently by different translators in a period stretching over several centuries (Jobes & Silva, 2000:31).

In light of the above mentioned factors, the current chapter will consist of two sections. The first of these will focus on the socio-cultural frame of the target audience of the Septuagint. Secondly the translation techniques and the unique vocabulary utilised in the Septuagint will be briefly discussed in order to further highlight the difference between the socio-cultural frame of the Septuagint vis-à-vis that of the Hebrew Bible.

5.2. The socio-cultural frame of the target audience of the Septuagint

5.2.1. The origin of the Septuagint

The term “Septuagint” may imply that the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible is a homogeneous unit. This view, as indicated by Jobes and Silva (2000: 31), is influenced by the invention of the codex (2nd century AD). Jobes and Silva (2000: 31) furthermore note that the individual books of the Hebrew Bible were translated by various translators over several centuries, and that each of these translations were written on a separate scroll. When these individual scrolls were bound in one volume, i.e. a codex, the homogeneous nature of the Greek texts was created. In this regard Dines (2004: 2) indicates that the term “Septuagint” had two basic references in antiquity. The earliest Jewish sources distinguish only the Torah as the “Septuagint”, while the Christian authors since the 2nd century AD used the term to refer to the Greek translation of all the books of the Hebrew Bible. Tov (2008: 22), however states that “we should not think of the translation as an organized project, but probably more in terms of individual translations carried out without planning in Palestine and also in Egypt.”

The Letter of Aristeas is the earliest surviving account of the origin of the Greek translation of the Hebrew Torah (Jobes & Silva, 2000: 33). The date of composition of the letter is a subject of extensive scholarly debate. A discussion on this subject however falls outside of

the scope of the current study, but the date which has gained wide scholarly acceptance is that of the middle to the latter part of the second century BC (refer to Honigman, 2003; Dines 2004 and Wasserstein & Wasserstein, 2006).

The title of the work as a “letter” is misleading; the author of the Letter of Aristeas refers to the account as a “discourse”, Josephus as “the book of Aristaios” and Eusebius, the bishop of Caesarea, as “on the translation of the law of the Jews” (Bartlett, 1985: 11). Honigman (2003: 1) notes that the fact that the “Letter” of Aristeas” is written in the first person, as well as containing a personal address (to Philocrates) does not necessarily indicate that the work should be classified as a “letter”, seeing that “dedicating a work to a nominal addressee was common in Greco-Roman literature”. Furthermore Honigman (2003: 1) indicates that the length of the composition is also unusual for a letter, and therefore suggests that Josephus’s indication of the “letter” being rather a “book” is preferable.

Dines (2004: 28) describes the genre of the letter as containing “a narrative which itself includes a travelogue, a symposium and an apologia for the Law, to mention only a few elements.” Honigman (2003) describes these “sub-genres” as “digressions”. Honigman (2003: 15) outlines the four digressions as follows: The first of these is the description of the gifts that the Egyptian king sent to the Temple in Jerusalem (comprising chs 51b-83a); the second recounts the journey from Alexandria to Jerusalem (chs 83b-120); the third is the Apology for the Jewish Law by the High Priest Eleazar (chs 128-71) and lastly the Symposium (chs 187-300). Interesting to note however is that from the 322 chapters that the Book of Aristeas consists of, only 50 are devoted to the “translation motif” of the Greek translation of the Torah, namely chs 9-11, 28-50, 121, 172-3 and 301-16 (Honigman, 2003:13).

Bartlett (1985:15) indicates that while the letter of Aristeas reflects Hellenistic language and culture, the overall Jewish character of its theological teachings is evident. Dines (2004: 31) notes that the author of the letter of Aristeas clearly had a “working knowledge” of Judaism, and this combined with his overall “enthusiasm for all things Jewish” questions his non-

Jewishness, which leads to the conclusion that the author of the Letter of Aristeas was clearly a Jew writing with a Jewish agenda (Dines 2004: 30).

Cook (2009: 248) indicates that the Jewishness of the letter is “unmistakably evident”; this is noted specifically in the emphasis on the Levitical laws presented in the letter. Cook (2009: 248, 250) further notes that although the author of the letter equates God with Zeus or Dis (paragraph 15 of the letter) he still “shows his true colours” in that even though he claims that Greek philosophy is an advantage, he still “seems to stick to the law of Moses, and more specifically the Levitical laws to demonstrate his fundamental Jewishness”. Collins (2000) however identifies various elements within the letter of Aristeas that question its “Jewishness”. The first piece of “evidence” which Collins (2000: 119-120) refers to is the detail concerning Demetrius of Phalerum. Collins especially emphasises the role which Demetrius had in the sanctification of the Septuagint. Demetrius, as indicated by the Greek biographical doxographer Laërtius, was devoted to the cult of Sarapis. In this regard Collins questions why Demetrius, given his religious conviction, would have had any role in this sanctifying ceremony. Collins (2000: 122) furthermore questions the “Jewishness” of the Greek translation of the Torah in indicating that the translation was destined for the library of Alexandria, which she describes as “part of the Temple of the Muses, a religious institution in the eyes of the Greeks.” In this regard Honigman (2003: 16) notes that the Book of Aristeas provides evidence for an Alexandrian Jewish literary tradition which was “eager to blend Greek forms and Jewish topics and, thus, to demonstrate that Jewish culture was an integral part of Greek culture.”

Turning to the content of the Letter of Aristeas, below a brief description is given regarding the origin of the Greek translation of the Torah (translation taken from Shutt, 1985):

Aristeas writes that king Ptolemy II Philadelphus’s librarian, Demetrius of Phalerum, who undertook the great task of collecting all the books in the world, discovered that the Jewish Law was not part of the collection as yet. When the suggestion was made that the law of the Jews should be included, the librarian indicated that these laws should be translated:

(ii) Demetrius replied, "Translation is needed. They use letters characteristics of the language of the Jews, just as Egyptian use the formation of their letters in accordance with their own language. The Jews are supposed to use Syrian language, but this is not so, for it is another form (of language)."

The king then ordered that a letter in this regard should be sent to Eleazar, the high priest of the Jews, in order to initiate the translation project:

(38-39) We have accordingly decided that your Law shall be translated into Greek letters from what you call the Hebrew letters, in order that they too should take their place with us in our library with the other royal books. You will therefore act well, and in a manner worthy of our zeal, by selecting elders of exemplary lives, with experience of the Law and ability to translate it, six from each tribe, so that an agreed version may be found from the large majority, in view of the great importance of the matters under consideration.

Eleazar accepted Ptolemy's request, and indicated in a letter the names of the seventy two translators who were chosen for the task. Aristeas described the chosen translators as follows:

(121) Eleazar selected men of the highest merit and of excellent education due to the distinction of their parentage; they had not only mastered the Jewish literature, but had made a serious study of the Greeks as well.

The Jewish translators, upon their arrival in Alexandria, were brought before Ptolemy, who in turn honoured them with a banquet. The translators were then taken to an island (Pathos), where all their needs were met, to start the task of translating the Hebrew Law:

(302-303) They set to completing their several tasks, reaching agreement among themselves on each by comparing versions. The result of their agreement thus was made into a fair copy by Demetrius.

(307) The outcome was such that in seventy-two days the business of translation was completed, just as if such a result was achieved by some deliberate design.

After Demetrius received the translation, it was read aloud in the company of an assemblage of Jews as well as the translators. After listening to the translation the priests responded with the following:

(310-311) “Since this version has been made rightly and reverently, and in every respect accurately, it is good that this should remain exactly so, and that there should be no revision.”

As it was customary the Jews commanded that anyone that altered, changed or deleted any part of the text would be cursed. This action would ensure that the translation would be preserved as is. Subsequently Ptolemy sent the translators back to Eleazar.

The Letter of Aristeas is a very important source describing the origin of the Greek translation of the Torah, but Aristeas was not the first to connect the origin thereof to Ptolemy II Philadelphus and his librarian Demetrius (Müller, 1996: 58). The Jewish historian Aristobulus was the first to do so. Aristobulus is described by Dines (2000: 33) as an “early apologist for the compatibility of the Jewish faith and Greek philosophy.” Müller (1996: 60) states that the relationship between the writings of Aristobulus and that of Aristeas is uncertain. It may be possible that these two accounts independently drew from the same common tradition, or that Aristeas may have built his account on that of Aristobulus.

Only a few fragments of Aristobulus’s account on the origin of the Greek translation of the Torah are preserved. Aristobulus is quoted by the Christian writers Clement of Alexandria (third century A.D.) and Eusebius of Caesarea (fourth century A.D.), as extracted from the work of Alexander Polyhistor (first century B.C.), a non-Jewish author (Dines, 2000: 34). Only in the third fragment a reference to the Greek translation of the Torah is found, where Aristobulus demonstrates to the reader that Pythagoras, Plato and the other Greek novel ideas were taken from “earlier, partial versions of the Mosaic law” (Dines, 2000: 34):

Before the dominion of Alexander and the Persians, other had translated accounts of the events surrounding the exodus from Egypt of the Hebrews, our countrymen, and the disclosure to them of all the things that had happened as well as their domination of the land, and the detailed account of the entire law ... but the complete translation of everything in the law occurred at the time of the king surnamed Philadelphus ... who brought great zeal to his undertaking, while Demetrius of Phalerum attended to matters relating to these things. (Translation taken from Holladay, 1995: 152-5; 157).

Clement of Alexandria, however, offers a more detailed version:

It is said that the scriptures both of the law and the prophets were translated from the dialect of the Hebrews into the Greek language in the reign of Ptolemy the son of Lagus, or, according to some, in the time of Ptolemy surnamed Philadelphus, when Demetrius of Phalerum brought to this task the greatest zeal, [and] attended to the matters of translation with painstaking accuracy. (Translation taken from Holladay, 1995: 157).

The first extract presented indicates that others have translated accounts of the exodus of the Jews up until the detailed account of the law, before the Greek translation of the Torah was undertaken during the rule of Ptolemy II Philadelphus. The account of Clement indicates that the law as well as the prophets were translated during the reign of Ptolemy II, whereas Aristeas only indicates that the law was translated.

Philo of Alexandria was a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher, who also wrote of the origin of the Greek translation of the Torah in Book 2 of his 'Life of Moses' (*De Vita Mosis* 2.25-44). Müller (1996: 61) describes Philo's account as a "shortened edition of Aristeas or an independent adaption of the same legend." Philo indicates the following in his account:

Some people, thinking it a shame that the laws should be found in one half only of the human race, the barbarians, and denied altogether to the Greeks, took steps to have them translated. (*De Vita Mosis* 2.27, translation taken from Colson, 1996)

Philo further indicates in his account that Ptolemy was divinely inspired and consulted the high priest Eleazar in this regard, who in turn appointed translators. It is also indicated that the translations produced were identical. In contrast to Aristeas's account, Philo does not mention the number of translators or that they laboured over the translation for seventy two days. Philo also does not indicate that the translation was read aloud to and approved by the Jewish community (Dines, 2000: 65). Philo does however emphasise the literalness of the Greek translation:

How great an undertaking it was to make a full version of the laws given by the Voice of God, where they could not add or take away or transfer anything but must keep the original form and shape (*De Vita Mosis* 2.24, translation taken from Colson, 1996).

It is clear that Philo's account of the origin of the Greek translation of the Torah "marks the beginning of a stress on the supernatural character of the translation" (Dines, 2000: 70).

Josephus, a Jewish Historian, gives his account of the origin of the Greek translation of the Torah in his *Antiquities of the Jews* (*Ant.*). Josephus's account can be described as a paraphrase version of the Letter of Aristeas. Josephus mostly alters Aristeas's account stylistically to represent the literary fashions of the first century A.D. (Dines, 2000: 71).

Concerning the contexts of these two accounts, the only prominent difference between Aristeas and Josephus is that Josephus indicates that there were seventy translators, but does mention that six were chosen from each tribe, whereas Aristeas indicates that there were seventy two translators:

We have also chosen six elders out of every tribe ... but it does not seem to me to be necessary to set down the names of the seventy [two] elders who were sent to Eleazar ... (*Ant.* 12.56-57, translation taken from Whiston, 1996).

According to these accounts of the origin of the Greek translation of the Torah had its origin in Alexandria and its intended audience was Jews residing there. Whether the remainder of the Septuagint, i.e. the post-Pentateuchal books, originated in Alexandria is questionable. Tov (2010: 6, 9) questions whether the gentiles in Egypt would have had motif to translate these books, and if they were capable of such a cross-cultural endeavour, keeping in mind that the Torah was translated by Palestinian Jews. Accounts concerning the origin of the Greek translations of the post-Pentateuchal books are lacking, but there is scholarly support for the Palestinian origin of some of the post-Pentateuchal books (see Cook & van der Kooij, forthcoming). Tov (2010: 9-11) provides the following list, in order of decreasing probability, of Greek translations of post-Pentateuchal books which have a possible Palestinian origin:

- Esther. The Greek translation of the book Esther contains a colophon that states that the book was "translated by Lysimachus, the son of Ptolemaius, of the people in Jerusalem". The Greek translation is also considered to be a possible example of Hasmonaean propaganda.

- Ecclesiastes. The Greek translation of the book of Ecclesiastes may have been translated either by *kaige-Theodotion* or Aquila.
- Sections of the Greek translation of Samuel-Kings, Canticles, Lamentations and Ruth.
- Psalms. Tov however states that there are no convincing arguments for a Palestinian origin of the Greek translation of Psalms.
- I Esdras and Daniel. These translations may have, together with the translation of Esther, been translated by the same translator, although Tov indicates the lack of convincing evidence.
- I Maccabees. The Greek translation of this book is “slavishly literal”.
- Judith and Tobit.

5.2.2. The influence of Greek culture on the Jews of Palestine and Alexandria

Alexander the Great’s conquests mark a climax in the contact between Greeks and Jews, which became much closer than before (Bartlett, 1985:1). Alexander’s taking of an Iranian princess as a bride, as well as his request that his officers follow his intercultural example can be described as his unrealistic ideal of fusing both Eastern and Western cultures. More practically this fusion is noted in his instruction that thirty thousand Persians should be schooled in the Greek language. This “transcultural idealism” as Puchala (2002: 12-13) refers to it, may however be entirely mythical, barely outliving Alexander himself.

The introduction of Hellenistic culture to the Eastern civilisations was not the main intention of the Greeks/Macedonians. Cohen (1995: 69) describes “as best as one can see, the *purpose* of the various colonizing programs was military, economic, or political, not cultural.”

Nevertheless the adoption/integration of various Greek customs and practises was widespread “and adoption of them an accommodation to the conqueror’s world” (Grabbe, 2008: 140-141).

Various Eastern civilisations however resisted Greek political domination in a struggle to maintain or restore native rule. The Jews, unlike many failed attempts by other (e.g. the resistance forces in Egypt) was successful in gaining independence from the Greek rule

(Grabbe, 2008: 149). Two distinctive forms of resistance were posed by anti-Greek rebels, the first being armed rebellion attacks, while the usage of anti-Greek propaganda was also noted (Grabbe, 2008: 150-151). These propaganda generally took on the form of literary texts (especially oracles and prophecies) which kept the hope alive that the Greek overlords would be overthrown in the future. These texts as well as the rebellious attacks generally opposed Greek political domination, which did not necessarily extend to the extermination of Greek culture. This is noted especially in the Hasmonaean state, where the Seleucid reign was successfully overthrown, while no attempt was made to exterminate Greek cultural elements (Grabbe, 2008: 150).

Not all of the Jews were however opposed to the Greek dominion. A Jewish migration from Judea to Egypt during the rule of Ptolemy I is recorded in Josephus's *Antiquities of the Jews* and his *Letter against Apian* (*Ant.* 12.11.1 § 3-10; *Ap.* 1.22 § 209-12). Josephus describes Ptolemy taking Jerusalem off guard while posing as a worshipper sacrificing at the Temple on a Sabbath. Ptolemy I took Jews from both Judea and Samaria to Egypt, while other Jews migrated to Egypt at a later stage. Other accounts of Jews migrating to Egypt during the rule of Ptolemy I is non-existent, Grabbe (2008: 282) however suggests two possible dates. The first being when Ptolemy I took control over Coele-Syria during the Diadochi period (320 B.C.), or during the battle in Gaza (312 B.C.). During the battle in Gaza the Jews however voluntarily migrated to Egypt. Other dates between 320 and 312 BC can however not be ruled out.

The Jews residing in Egypt were fully integrated within the Greek Hellenistic society. This integration is illustrated in what is known as the Zenon archive, discovered at Darb-el-Genza in the Fayum (ancient Philadelphia). The archive consists of papyri containing correspondence between Zenon, the agent of Apollonius the finance minister of Ptolemy II, and various individuals he met on his business travels to Palestine and southern Syria. "The result is a wealth of material throwing light on the trade, administration, culture and (only to a certain extent) historical events in Palestine and Egypt for this period" (Grabbe, 2008: 52).

Grabbe (2008: 53) notes that the large number of references to Jews in these papyri indicates that the Jews of Egypt were “one of the variety of ethnic groups in Egypt carrying on its daily life much as the others. There is no indication that the Jews were singled out for special treatment (either positive or negative) or that they were less integrated into society than the other groups. Vis-à-vis the native Egyptians, however, the Jews were generally treated as Greeks.” In this regard Modrzejewski (1995: 79-80) indicates that the Jews were accepted by the Greeks of Egypt as fellow Hellenes because the inhabitants of the conquered Asiatic and Semitic countries who could speak Greek and were “willing servants of the royal dynasty” were also qualified as ‘Hellenes’. The Egyptians, even if they mastered the Greek language, still remained Egyptians. Furthermore Modrzejewski (1995: 81) indicates that the origin of any Hellene, be it from authentic cities (e.g. Athens or Crete) or conquered territory could not be a ground for discrimination, “everyone was free to practise the worship and follow the customs of his ancestors” and specifically regarding the Jews “without relinquishing his Jewish faith, he could be Greek in language, culture, and social status.”

The Jews were thus fully integrated within the Greek society. This is supported by the various occupations Jews held in Egypt, as mentioned in the Zenon papyri. These are: business contractors (CPJ 1.24), brick makers (CPJ 1.10), potters (CPJ 1.46), guards (CPJ 1.12), scribes (CPJ 1.137), policemen (CPJ 1.25) and tax farmers (CPJ 1.19; 1.107). Grabbe (2008: 145-146) indicates that this integration is further noted in the various categories of Jewish names in Egyptian society. These are: Graecized Hebrew names which were used in documents (e.g. Βαππίκας for בַּרְוֹךְ); Greek names phonetically close to their Hebrew originals (e.g. Μνασέας for the Hebrew מְנַשֶּׁה) Hebrew names translated into Greek (e.g. Δώρον for the Hebrew דָּוִד); Greek names including the theophoric element *Theos* (e.g. Theophilos and Dositheos), where the Greeks would have names of the actual Greek deity (e.g. Apollos); dynastic names, thus honouring the ruling family (e.g. Ptolemy and Cleopatra); and lastly pure Greek names (e.g. Demetrius and Apollonius).

Above it was mentioned that because the Jews in Egypt were regarded as “Hellenes” they could continue to practise their faith, even if they were integrated within Greek society in terms of language, culture and social status. This is supported by the existence of synagogues

in Egypt, documented as early as the reign of Ptolemy III Euergetes (246-221 BC). These synagogues were known as *προσευχαί* (cf. CPJ 111.35), a term coined by the Hellenistic Jews. Wasserstein and Wasserstein (2006: 8) note that “the term clearly denotes a place of prayer” and that “organised communal prayer was an essential part of the function of the institution”. Wasserstein and Wasserstein (2006: 8) further note that the presence of synagogues in Ptolemaic Egypt justifies a need for a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. Or “at least some portions of their scriptures that were read as part of the service in their synagogues” (c.f. Hengel, 1980: 93).

From this brief overview it is clear that the Jews from Alexandria/Egypt were fully integrated in the Alexandrian society. They had the same privileges as the other Hellenes, and despite being Hellenistic in terms of language, culture and social status, they could still practice their own religion. Because of this it is clear why they would have wanted the Torah to be translated into their own language, being Greek. The Jews residing in Palestine were also influenced by Greek culture, which was generally not opposed, and give the increasing influence of the latter the need for further Greek translations of other books of the Hebrew Bible is obvious.

5.2.3. Overview of various translation techniques utilised in the Septuagint

Below a brief overview of various translation techniques utilised by the translators of the Septuagint will be provided. An extensive discussion as well as reference to various examples falls outside of the scope of the current study. The overview presented highlights the difference between the socio-cultural frames of the Greek translator’s vis-à-vis that of the Hebrew Bible and its influence not only on translation technique but also on the vocabulary utilised.

Before turning to the various translation techniques utilised, the unique character of the Septuagint vocabulary will be discussed. Joosten (2011: 2) describes the importance of an understanding of Septuagint vocabulary as follows:

The challenge posed by the special vocabulary of the Greek bible is at the same time an exciting opportunity. The attempt to distangle the processes leading to the divergence in meaning or usage leads one to explore the thought world of the biblical authors and the way in which they navigate between two cultural domains: the one that produced the religious ideas formulated in the Hebrew Bible, to which they subscribe, and the Hellenistic culture of which they are part. One becomes witness to the struggle of the translators to find a fitting Greek expression for the biblical message as they comprehend it. Although investigation of the Greek vocabulary of the bible will not always result in clear cut definitions, it will almost invariably enhance one's understanding of the intercultural and trans-cultural nature of the Septuagint.

Certainly the most striking feature of Septuagint vocabulary is its Hebraic nature, referred to as Hebraism. Joosten (2011: 7) indicates that Septuagint vocabulary tends to reflect Hebrew phraseology, grammar and style rather than that of Hellenistic Greek. Joosten goes further in stating that words in different languages rarely have the same meaning, which in the case of the Septuagint means that various Greek words are used within "unnatural" contexts, i.e. contexts in which they do not naturally occur. This phenomenon causes the Greek words used within these contexts at a later stage to obtain the meaning of the Hebrew word it renders. The example that Joosten (2011: 7) provides of this so called "lexical stereotyping" is that of the Hebrew word **בְּרִית**, which is rendered in the Septuagint as **διαθήκη**. Joosten notes that the latter does not normally refer to a "treaty" or a "covenant" in Hellenistic Greek, but because of its repeated usage within this context this meaning is "forced" upon it.

The translators of the Septuagint also used different translation techniques while translating the Hebrew Bible. One of these techniques was that of literal translation (refer to Pietersma, 2010), an example is the Septuagint's rendering of **בִּי** "please" as **ἐν ἐμοί** "by me" or "in me", thus interpreting the Hebrew term as a preposition with a first person singular suffix, which is an example of extreme literalism. Wright (2010: 30) indicates that the translators translated on "word level" rather than "clause or discourse level", with the effect hereof is that figurative Hebrew sayings translated into Greek often lacked its figurative meaning. This effect is also noted in the translation of Hebrew idioms as a literal translation that lacked the intention of the original. The translators, however, did not in all instances translate Hebrew

idioms literally. In some instances they opted for free renderings, or a combination of both literal and free renderings (refer to Joosten, 2010). The translators of the Septuagint also inserted substitutions, additions and doublets into the translated text in order to improve the readability thereof (refer to Sysling, 2007). Rösel (2006) and Joosten (2011) indicate that the translators also coined their own words, which are referred to as “neologisms”. An example hereof is the neologism θυσιαστήριον “offering place” which was created to distinguish the official offering place from the pagan altar, the latter being referred to as βωμός “altar”. When translating names, the translators of the Septuagint provided Greek equivalents for the Hebrew names, or opted to merely transliterate the name (refer to Hiebert, 2010). When faced with harsh anthropomorphisms referring to God, the translators opted to rather insert a substitution in their translation (refer to Sysling, 2007), an example hereof is found in Exodus 24:10 where the translated Hebrew reads “and they saw the God of Israel” (KJV) and the Septuagint renders “and they saw the place where the God of Israel stood”.

5.3. Conclusion

In this chapter it was shown that the context wherein the Septuagint had its origin differed immensely from that wherein the Hebrew Bible functioned. The intended audience of the Septuagint were Hellenistic/Alexandrian and Palestinian Jews whose socio-cultural frame were very different from that of the original audience of the Hebrew Bible. The Jews in Egypt, being Hellenes in terms of language, culture and social status were however able to continue to practise their own faith, which in turn explains why they would have wanted to have the Hebrew Bible translated into Greek. The nature of the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible further highlights the difference between the frame wherein the Greek version originated and the frame wherein the Hebrew Bible functioned. This is proven by the unique character of the vocabulary utilized by the translators of the Septuagint as well as the various translation techniques they applied. This cultural “difference” between these two texts may also have influenced the manner in which deities, referred to in the Hebrew Bible, were translated by the translators of the Septuagint. This possibility will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Translating deities

6.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter the socio-cultural frame of the intended audience of the Septuagint was explored. It was shown that the intended audience of the Septuagint functioned within a different cultural frame than that of the original audience for whom the Hebrew Scriptures were intended. The fact that the Jews were influenced by Hellenism poses the question whether they were still familiar with the “culture” of the Hebrew Scriptures, which in turn questions whether they were indeed familiar with the deities referred to in these Scriptures. In order to answer this question the manner in which the translators of the Septuagint translated deities which are referred to in the Hebrew Bible within this cross-cultural context has to be investigated. This exercise will in turn shed light on the motive behind the translators’ translation of the Hebrew terms referring to the image of the goddess Asherah. Examples of other cross-cultural translations of deities in the Bronze Age and the Greco-Roman period will also be provided, which may aid the understanding of the manner in which the translators of the Septuagint viewed and translated deities.

6.2. Translation of deities in the Septuagint

i. Ashtoreth and Ashtaroth

Ashtoreth (עשתרת) and its plural Ashtaroth (עשתרות) is the Hebrew form of the divine name Astarte. The goddess is attested in Ugaritic, Phoenician, Akkadian, Egyptian and Greek texts (Wyatt, 1999: 109). In most instances the translators of the Septuagint render the terms as Ἀστάρτη, Ἀστάρταις respectively, but in three instances it is translated with ἄλση “grove” (Isaiah 7:3, 4, 12: 10), which is the same translation used to translate אֲשֶׁרֶה. Furthermore, אֲשֶׁרֶה is also translated with Ἀστάρτη in two instances (2 Chronicles 15:16, 24:18). The translators of the Septuagint clearly recognised a relationship between these two goddesses

(Astarte however was an individual goddess, refer to Chapter 3), even if their inconsistent translation tends to prove the opposite.

ii. Baal and Baalim

The Hebrew name **בעל** is a Semitic noun which means “lord, owner”, and when used as a proper name it refers to the Canaanite (North West Semitic) god Baal, who is referred to extensively in Ugaritic texts (Herrmann, 1999: 132). Koehler and Baumgartner (2001: 143) indicates that the term as well as the plural **בעלים** also refer to “the nameless, numinous beings which are known to appear at wells, trees, rocks, etc. as the owners of the place, and whose influence was initially limited to the place itself”, an example hereof is Baalpeor that refers to the Baal of Peor.

The Hebrew references to Baal and the Baalim in the Hebrew Bible are transliterated as **Βάαλ** and **Βάαλιμ** in most instances in the Septuagint. In the account of Elijah and the prophets of Baal described in Judges 18, the Hebrew **בעל** is translated in two instances as **αἰσχύνη** that indicates that the prophets were “prophets of shame” (Judges 18:19 and 25). De Vries (1985: 223) indicates that in Judges 18:19 and 25 the translators of the Septuagint translated the Hebrew **בעל** rather with the mock-name **בושת**.

In two instances, 2 Chronicles 28:2 and Jeremiah 9:14 the Hebrew term Baalim is translated as **εἰδωλον** “idol” with no clear reference to the intended deity. The Hebrew Baalberith **בעל ברית** occurs in two instances in the Hebrew Bible, in Judges 9:4 it is transliterated as **Βάαλβεριθ**, while in Judges 8: 33 it is literally rendered as **Βάαλ διαθήκης** “Baal of the covenant”.

In various instances the Septuagint’s rendering of Baal/Baalim is accompanied with a feminine article, which indicates the translator understood Baal to be a female deity (Judges

2:13, 3:7, 10:6, 10; 1 Samuel 7: 4; 1 Kings 18:19, 25; 2 Kings 21:3; 2 Chronicles 24:7, 33: 3; Jeremiah 2:8, 32, 7:9, 11:13, 17, 12:16, 19:5, 23:13, 27, 32:29, 35; Hosea 2:8, 13:1; Zephaniah 1:4). The reason for this translation choice is unknown. While the confusion with the goddess Baalat may provide a possible answer, the term בעלת is however not used to refer to a deity in the Hebrew Bible, but rather as a place name (Joshua 19:44; 1 Kings 9:18; 2 Chronicles 8:6) (Mullen, 1999: 139).

iii. Bel

Bel (בל) is the name the Babylonian god Marduk assumed upon his exaltation (Abusch, 1999: 543). The Hebrew term is transliterated as Bēl in Isaiah 46:1, while it is translated as βέλος “spear/arrow” in Jeremiah 50:2. Marduk is frequently depicted with both lightning bolts and spears. In the relief below Marduk is clearly depicted with lightning bolts and a spear in a sling on his side. Whether the translators of the Septuagint were aware of this feature is questionable, especially since the context of the verse requires a personal name, and not a common noun.



Figure 23

Marduk pursuing Anzu who stole the Tablets of Destiny

(Available at <http://www.bible-history.com/ibh/Babylonian+Gods/Marduk/>)

iv. Chemosh

Chemosh (כִּמּוֹשׁ) was the chief deity of Moab (Koehler and Baumgartner, 2001: 481), and is transliterated as Χαμώς in the Septuagint (Numbers 21:29, Judges 11:24, 1 Kings 11:7, 33, 2 Kings 23:13, Jeremiah 48:7, 13).

v. Dagon

Dagon (דַּגּוֹן) is the Hebrew variant of the Mesopotamian and West Semitic deity Dagan, who functions as the god of the Philistines in the Hebrew Bible (Healey, 1999: 216). In each of its occurrences in the Hebrew Bible the term is transliterated as Δαγών in the Septuagint (Judges 16: 23; 1 Samuel 5:2-5, 7).

vi. Gad and Meni

The deities Gad (גַּד) and Meni (מֵנִי) are mentioned together in Isaiah 65:11. Gad was a West Semitic deity of good luck (Ribichini, 1999: 339) and Meni a deity of fate (Sperling, 1999: 567). In the Septuagint Gad is translated as δαίμων and Meni as τύχη. Jobes and Silva (2000: 22) notes that the Alexandrian Jews may not have been familiar with the deities referred to in the Hebrew text, and that may have led the translators to substitute the names with the Greek words “demon” and “fate” which could have been understood as deities. In this regard Seeligmann (1948: 99) indicates that these two Greek words should be understood as references to the Hellenistic deities Agathos Daimon and Tyche.

vii. Merodach

Merodach (מֶרֶדַּח) is a Babylonian deity also referred to as Marduk and Bel (Abusch, 1999: 548). The Hebrew term is found only once in the Hebrew Bible and is transliterated as Μαρωδαχ (Jeremiah 50: 2).

viii. Milcom and Molech

Milcom (מלכּם) is the deity of the Ammonites (Puech, 1999: 575) and Molech (מלך) the chief deity of the Ammonites (Stiebing, 2009:267). Milcom occurs in three instances in the Hebrew Bible, the first of these is omitted in the Septuagint (1 Kings 11:5), the second translates with βασιλεύς “king/ruler” (1 Kings 11:33) and the third transliterates as Μολχολ. Molech is translated in five instances as ἄρχων “ruler” (Leviticus 18:21, 20:2-5) and in one instance as βασιλεύς “king/ruler” (1 Kings 11:7), and in two instances transliterates with Μολοχ (2 Kings 23:10 and Jeremiah 32:35).

With specific reference to the translation of Leviticus 18:21 Büchner (2010: 116-117) provides two possible solutions to why the Septuagint translators translated the Hebrew in this manner. The first of these is that the “refashioning of the prohibition emphasizes the act of giving seed or offspring as an act of service to be rendered to a ἄρχων.” A second possibility, as indicated by Büchner, is that the Alexandrian community may have identified the ἄρχων with Ptolemy in “veiled language” or as a representation of a deity within the Dionysian cult, the latter being a popular cult among the Ptolemies.

As the examples above indicated there is no clear technique used by the translators of the Septuagint when translating the names of deities and even the translation of specific deities are shown to be very inconsistent. In some instances names were merely transliterated (e.g. in some instances Baal and Bel, Chemosh, Dagon, Merodach, and in some instances Milcom and Molech). Astoreth was identified as the Hebrew variant of Astarte and was translated as such. A literal translation was given in the translation of Baalberith as “Baal of the Covenant”. The names of deities were also interpreted (e.g. Gad and Meni, Milkom and Molech), and misinterpreted (e.g. the usage of the feminine article with the masculine god Baal, Astoreth as a grove, and Bel as a spear). In the next section examples of cross-cultural translation of deities in the Bronze Age and the Greco-Roman period will be provided in order to gain insight into the manner in which deities were translated, and if these techniques prove helpful in understanding the manner in which the Septuagint translators translated deities.

6.3. Cross-cultural translation of deities during the Bronze Age and the Greco-Roman period

During the Bronze Age various textual and non-textual genres contained cross-cultural translation of deities; among these are treaties, letters, myths, rituals and prayers (Smith, 2008). Assmann (1997: 45) indicates that cross-cultural translation is possible because the names of deities are more than mere references, they also have meaning, “the meaning of a deity is his or her specific character as it unfolded in myths, hymns, rites, and so on.” Assmann furthermore notes that this “meaning” creates the possibility of comparing deities with similar “meanings” and similar characteristics. Assmann (1997: 45) however warns that this “similarity” between deities does not indicate that the deities are to be understood as international deities, but merely as deities who are comparable.

An example of this kind of “translatability” of deities is found in the correspondence between two deities lists, these are the Sumero-Akkadian list (RS 92.2004) and the Ugaritic list (KTU/CAT 1.148.23-44). Smith (2008: 45-46) provides three examples of translatability found in these lists. The first of these is the correlation between two sun-deities, the female Ugaritic Shapsu and the male Sumerian ^dUTU which appear in the same slot. In this regard Smith notes that “the high correlation of function supersedes the otherwise common procedure of equating deities of the same gender.” In the second example, the Ugaritic goddesses referred to as the Kotharathu are found in the same slot as Sassuratu. The Kotharathu (or Kosharoth) are known as “the female skilful ones” that appear in Ugaritic mythological texts concerning human conception, and in the “pantheon” texts indicated as the equivalent of the Mesopotamian Mother-goddesses (Pardee, 1999: 491). The Akkadian Sassuratu are also known as “womb goddesses” most active in the process of gestation (Smith, 2008: 46). The final example Smith (2008: 46) provides is that of Kothar and Ea, which are both associated with waters, but differ in role and status. The Ugaritic Kothar (or Koshar) is known as a “craftsman deity” (Pardee, 1999: 490) and not a major god such as Ea, the latter not being associated with the manufacturing of goods (Smith, 2008: 46).

Another example of this type of translatability is also found in the Hittite myth (ANET 519) which was discussed in Chapter 3, concerning the god Elkunirsha, his consort Ashertu and the Storm-god, which is equated with the Ugaritic El, Asherah and Baal.

During the Greco-Roman period various textual and non-textual genres contained cross-cultural translation of deities; among these are multi-lingual texts, treaties, blessings and curses, world and local histories and philosophical discourse (Smith, 2008). Assmann (1997: 51) provides an interesting example (below) which is found in Apuleius of Madaurus's eleventh book of the *Metamorphoses*, which was written during the 2nd century A.D.

My divinity is one, worshipped by all the world under different forms, with various rites, and by manifold names. In one place, the Phrygians, first-born of men, call me Pessinuntine Mother of the Gods, in another the autochthonous people of Attica call me Cecropian Minerva, in another the sea-washed Cyprians call me Paphian Venus; to the arrow-bearing Cretans I am Dictynna Diana, to the trilingual Sicilians Ortygian Proserpina, to the ancient people of Eleusis Attic Ceres; some call me Juno, some Bellona, others Hecate, and still others Rhamnusia. (*Metamorphoses* 11.2, translation taken from Hanson, 1989: 299).

Assmann (1997: 48-49) translates *Metamorphoses* XI, 5, wherein the goddess referred to above reveals who she really is, as follows: "the Egyptians who excel by having the original doctrine honor me with my distinctive rites and give me my true name of Queen Isis." Isis is depicted as a universal deity in this regard.

Smith (2008: 252) gives Philo's translation of the Phoenician Sanchuniathon as an example of cross-cultural translation of deities. Smith indicates that Philo, when translating deities "generally uses Greek names known in the classical and late classical periods, but sometimes he uses indigenous terms. Occasionally he uses both, with an explicit translation of divinity." In this regard Smith (2008: 253) provides five examples to illustrate the manner in which Philo translated deities. The quotes, as provided by Smith, are all taken from Attridge and Oden 1981:

- "... they called him Beelsamem, which is 'Lord of Heaven' in Phoenician, Zeus in Greek" (PE 1.10.7)

- “Chousor practiced verbal arts including spells and prophecies. He is, in fact, Hephaistos” (PE 1.10.11)
- “Kronos whom the Phoenicians call El” (PE 1.10.44 = 4.16.11; also 1.10.29)
- “The Phoenicians say that Astarte is Aphrodite” (PE 1.10.32)
- “The Egyptians call him Thouth and the Alexandrians Thoth and the Greeks translated his name as Hermes.” (PE 1.9.24)

6.4. Conclusion

From the examples provided above it is clear that deities were generally cross-culturally recognized as resembling other deities, which in turn made it possible to “translate” these deities. Furthermore the examples indicate that the translators given the task to translate these deities took great care to assure that the “meaning” of their names was transmitted truthfully in the form of a known god to the intended audience of the translated text. Even if the intended audience of these translations were not necessarily familiar with the deities mentioned in the original text, the translators still recognized the deities as divine and translated them as such in their translated text. Proper transmission of divinity was key.

A cross-cultural recognition of deities is not present in the Septuagint’s translation of deities referred to in the Hebrew Bible. The translation of Gad and Meni may be described as such, but if so it is an exception. The inconsistent rendering of deities in the Septuagint indicates not merely a lack in consistent translation technique, but specifically a lack in cross-cultural knowledge and understanding of the deities referred to in the Hebrew Bible, which in turns questions the validity of the Greek renderings of the Hebrew terms referring to the goddess Asherah.

Chapter 7

Summary and conclusion

7.1. Introduction

In the current study research concerning the Septuagint's rendering of the Hebrew term אֲשֵׁרָה/ אֲשֵׁרָה referring to the goddess Asherah was conducted. In the Septuagint the Hebrew term is translated with three different terms, these are: ἄλλος, ἄλση (grove/s); δένδρα (tree) and Ἀστάρτη, Ἀσάρταις (Astarte/s). It was indicated that in order to understand the Septuagint's renderings of this term it was necessary to investigate the different cultural frames that may have interfered with the translation process. In order to study these frames narrative frame theory (Chapter 2) was utilised. This theory offered a mechanism whereby the possible cultural interferences that influenced the translation of the Septuagint could be described and explained within relative frames and compared to the contextual frames of the Hebrew source text.

7.2. Extra-biblical textual, iconographic and archaeological data in Asherah studies

The Hebrew Bible as narrative was embedded in its own temporal and spatial frame. When examining the context wherein the Hebrew terms for the goddess "Asherah" functioned it is also necessary to take into account this broader frame wherein the Hebrew Bible functioned. This "broader frame" encompasses the entire ancient Near East¹. When examining extra-biblical data in Asherah studies which are not confined to one specific location, it becomes evident that not much can be said of the goddess Asherah when the sole focus remains on Biblical evidence of the goddess. It was therefore of utmost importance, not only to examine the context of the Hebrew Bible as such, but also to reach further and examine the broader context wherein the goddess functioned, namely the ancient Near East as a whole. In order to do so a brief overview of textual, archaeological and iconographic evidence/data was presented that provided a better understanding of what an image of the goddess may have looked like within this broad context (Chapter 3).

¹ For the purpose of this study Egypt is also included when referring to the ancient Near East.

The most striking characteristic of the textual data presented was that they refer to the goddess Asherah and not to her image, whereas the image is referred to in the Hebrew Bible. The presented texts depicted Asherah as a distinguished goddess, the consort of the chief deity El, and the mother of the minor deities of the Canaanite pantheon. This depiction of Asherah stands in stark contrast with the goddess referred to in the Hebrew Bible. The goddess Asherah identified in the Hebrew Bible is a dethroned version of the goddess found in the texts of the ancient Near East-- in the polemical view of the Hebrew Bible the goddess is reduced to an image with an uncertain nature.

It was evident that the differing opinions of various scholars, pertaining to the presented iconographic and archaeological data, indicated that interpreting these data is a daunting task leaving one with obscure answers. Even when the artefacts were accompanied by inscriptions, the interpreting task was not made any easier. It was also necessary to guard against ulterior motives when interpreting these artefacts, keeping in mind that we cannot force these artefacts to be what they are not.

In this regard Cornelius (2004: 99) states that for the other Canaanite goddesses, such as Anat, Astarte and *Qedeshet*, iconographic items have been discovered with their names on it, but in contrast no iconographic items have been discovered with the name "Asherah" on it. This was clearly proven by the various artefacts presented. The Kuntillet Ajrud inscription includes the term Asherah/asherah, but it is not clear to which of the various figures on the pithos does this term refer, if any. The same can be said for the Egyptian New Kingdom plaque, which refers to *Qedeshet*. *Qedeshet* was an individual goddess, and probably not an epithet of Asherah. The various other artefacts that are not accompanied by inscriptions are even harder to interpret. It cannot be said with certainty whether any of these figures are indeed an image or representation of the goddess Asherah. If this is the case, and none of these artefacts can with any certainty be identified with Asherah, then it is also impossible to identify the various tree motifs (e.g. various plaque figurines, Lachish ewer, etc.) as images/representations of the goddess Asherah. In this regard Frevel (1995) strives to minimize the connection between the goddess and the tree, while Keel (1998) challenges Frevel's attempts and insists that real and artificial trees were manifestations of the goddess in Palestine. The evidence presented does not indicate that a tree, of any form, was indeed an

image of the goddess Asherah. The only goddesses who can unmistakably be dubbed as “tree goddesses” are those identified in Egyptian iconography.

It is thus clear that what an image of the goddess Asherah looked like is in reality a mystery in itself. The presented iconographic and archaeological data provided a “visual” frame wherein goddesses were depicted in human form, implying (even though the artefacts did not function as representations of the goddess in question) they were understood as being goddesses. This was further supported by the “textual” frame provided in the extra-Biblical texts presented, which also indicated that Asherah was understood as a goddess and not a mere image.

7.3. Contextual Examination of the Hebrew term אֲשֵׁרָה / אֲשֵׁרָה referring to the goddess Asherah in the Masoretic Text and its translation in the Septuagint.

The Hebrew Bible provides a unique narrative frame wherein the Hebrew term referring to the goddess Asherah functioned. This frame does however not imply that the goddess was intended, i.e. the references to the goddess do not depict her as being a deity, but rather that of a representation of the goddess, an inanimate object.

The Hebrew term אֲשֵׁרָה / אֲשֵׁרָה referring to the goddess Asherah occurs in forty instances in the Hebrew Bible. In each of these occurrences the term functions as a common noun denoting an image or a representation of the goddess rather than implicitly referring to the goddess by name. The reason for the usage of common nouns to refer to Asherah in the Hebrew Bible is uncertain, but it does influence the translation of the terms in the Septuagint, which also utilizes common nouns. The name Astarte is used in two instances in the Septuagint to refer to Asherah, indicating “a” goddess rather than denoting the image. The goddess Astarte, being an individual goddess, should however not be equated with Asherah (Chapter 3).

The contextual examination (Chapter 4) of both the Hebrew term referring to the goddess Asherah as well as its translation in the Septuagint proved to be invaluable in that it provided insight into the manner in which the goddess Asherah was portrayed in the Hebrew Bible. It was also shown that the contexts provided in the latter did not always lend favour to the Septuagint's renderings. The references to the goddess Asherah in the Hebrew Bible provided no consistent answer to what the image of the goddess Asherah may have looked like. It indicated that in some instances it may have been constructed of wood. If this is the case then it is rather obvious why no clear examples of Asherah imagery have survived to this day. It is also implied that the image of Asherah may have been constructed of the same material that the molten image were made of, thus indicating that the image took on the form of an idol, of which the form is unclear. The asherah could also have been built and erected, indicating that it was some sort of construction. The only evidence in the Hebrew Bible indicating that the asherah may have been a tree of some sort (supporting the Septuagint's translation) is the verses referring to it being cut down/felled, burnt, planted and pulled out (the latter being questionable).

It was evident that the references to the goddess Asherah in the Hebrew Bible did not provide any clear answer to what an Asherah may have looked like. The archaeological and iconographic data (Chapter 3) lacked written evidence linking these artefacts to the goddess Asherah, while the Biblical evidence lacks direct images linking the destruction methods to a description of what an asherah may have looked like. The conclusion may be made that for some obscure reason the authors or redactors of the Hebrew Bible did not want to directly indicate what this asherah was that they often referred to. In this regard Livingstone (1995: 188) indicates that the Hebrew terms referring to the goddess Asherah in some instances in the Hebrew Bible actually do refer to the goddess rather than her image. Livingstone (1995: 188) notes that the usage of the articles with divine names (as in the case with asherah in the Hebrew Bible) is not uncommon, the presence of the article may suggest that the term refers to the general term for the specific deity, but Livingstone in this regard indicates that the article is used in conjunction with the term אֱלֹהִים in various instances, referring to the Israelite God. It may be the case that the Israelites did understand the asherah to be a goddess, but their reference to her in the Hebrew scriptures is however obscure, which posed the

question: If the Hebrew witness to asherah is obscure, how did the Septuagint translators know in which manner to translate this term?

7.4. The socio-cultural frame of the Septuagint and the influence thereof on the translation of the Hebrew terms referring to the goddess Asherah.

The translators of the Septuagint functioned as agents of cultural mediation between two different contextual frames (Chapter 2). The first of these represents the original intended audience of the Hebrew source text, while the second represents the target audience of the Greek translation thereof. The authors of the Hebrew Bible knew that their audience was familiar with the term “asherah”, and thus it was not needed to elaborate on what an “asherah” was. Whether the translators of the Septuagint were familiar with what was referred to by the term “asherah” is uncertain, and within this uncertainty lies the answer to why they translated the term in the way that they did. In order to answer this question the contextual frame, specifically the socio-cultural frame (Chapter 5), of the intended audience of the Septuagint was explored. This was no easy task seeing that the translation of the various books of the Hebrew Bible was conducted independently by different translators in a period stretching over several centuries (Jobes & Silva, 2000:31).

The accounts of Aristeas, Aristobulus, Philo and Josephus indicate that the Greek translation of the Hebrew Torah originated in Alexandria, Egypt. The intended audience of the Greek translation of the Hebrew Torah was Hellenistic/Alexandrian Jews whose socio-cultural frame was very different from that of the original audience of the Hebrew Torah. The Jews in Egypt, being Hellenes in terms of language, culture and social status were able to continue to practise their own faith, which in turn explains why they would have wanted to have the Hebrew Torah translated into Greek. Whether the remainder of the Hebrew Bible (the post-Pentateuchal books) originated in Alexandria is questionable. Tov (2010), among other scholars, is in favour of a Palestinian origin of some the post-Pentateuchal books. Accounts concerning the origin of these translations are unfortunately lacking, but there is scholarly support for the Palestinian origin of the following books (in order of decreasing probability): Esther, Ecclesiastes, sections of Samuel-Kings, Canticles, Lamentations, Ruth, Psalms, 1 Esdras, Daniel, I Maccabees, Judith and Tobit. The Jews residing in Palestine were also

influenced by Greek culture, which was generally not opposed, and given its increasing influence, the need for further Greek translations of other books of the Hebrew Bible is obvious.

The nature of the Greek version of the Hebrew Bible further highlights the difference between the frame wherein the Greek version originated and the frame wherein the Hebrew Bible functioned. This is proven by the unique character of the vocabulary utilized by the translators of the Septuagint as well as the various translation techniques they employed.

The evidence presented (Chapter 5) highlighted the cultural difference between the context wherein the Hebrew Bible originated and that wherein the Septuagint originated. The intended audience of the Septuagint functioned in a different cultural frame from that of the original intended audience of the Hebrew Bible. In that the Jews were influenced by Hellenism posed the question whether they were still familiar with the “culture” of the Hebrew Bible, which in turn questioned whether they were indeed familiar not only with the goddess Asherah, but also with the other deities referred to in the Hebrew Bible.

7.5. Translating deities

The cultural difference between the Hebrew Bible and the Septuagint may also have influenced the manner in which deities referred to in the Hebrew Bible were translated by the translators of the Septuagint (Chapter 6). Examples of cross-cultural translation of deities during the Bronze Age, as well as during the Greco-Roman, period were provided. These examples indicated that deities were generally cross-culturally recognized as resembling other deities, which in turn made it possible to “translate” these deities. Furthermore the examples indicated that the translators given the task to translate these deities took great care to assure that the “meaning” of their names was transmitted truthfully in the form of a known god to the intended audience of the translated text. Even if the intended audience of these translations were not necessarily familiar with the deities mentioned in the original text, the translators still recognized the deities as divine and translated them as such in their translated text. Proper transmission of divinity was of utmost importance.

It was shown that cross-cultural recognition of deities is not present in the Septuagint's translation of deities referred to in the Hebrew Bible. The translation of Gad and Meni may be described as such, but if so, it is an exception. Inconsistent translation was noted in the Septuagint's translation of Ashtoreth/Ashtaroth, Baal/Baalim, Bel, Milcom and Molech. Confusion was also noted in the translation of deities, examples hereof were the equation of Ashtoreth/Ashtaroth with ἄλση "grove" (as is also the case with Asherah), the usage of a feminine article with Baal that indicates that the translators understood Baal to be a female deity, rendering Bel as βέλος "spear/arrow", and lastly translating Milcom and Molech as βασιλεὺς "king/ruler" and ἄρχων "ruler". In other instances the Hebrew terms were merely transliterated, indicating that the translators were not familiar with the terms, examples hereof are found in the translation of the following deities: Baal/Baalim, Bel, Chemosh, Dagon, Merodach, Milcom and Molech.

The inconsistent rendering of deities in the Septuagint indicates not merely a lack in consistent translation technique, but specifically a lack in cross-cultural knowledge and understanding of the deities referred to in the Hebrew Bible, which in turns questions the validity of the Greek renderings of the Hebrew terms referring to the goddess Asherah.

7.6. Conclusion

In the summary provided above as well as the preceding chapters it has become evident that the socio-cultural frame wherein the Hebrew Bible originated differed to a great extent of that wherein the Septuagint had its origin. The Septuagintal translators, influenced by Hellenistic culture, were no longer familiar with the various deities referred to in the Hebrew Bible. This lack of cross-cultural recognition and knowledge of deities may have been the leading factor in the Septuagint's inconsistent and confused renderings of the various deities referred to in the Hebrew Bible, and specifically its rendering of the goddess Asherah. This unfamiliarity with the goddess Asherah is furthermore supported by the lack of extra-Biblical data and scant Biblical data supporting the Septuagint's renderings.

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Summary

In this study the cultural interferences that influenced the way in which the Septuagintal translators translated the Hebrew term אֲשֵׁרָה/ אֲשֵׁרָה referring to the goddess Asherah is examined. In the Septuagint the Hebrew term is translated with three different terms: ἄλλος, ἄλση (grove/s); δένδρα (tree) and Ἀστάρτη, Ἀστάρταις (Astarte/s). In order to understand why the translators translated the Hebrew term in this way is necessary to examine the various cultural frames which may have influenced their translation choices. In order to do so narrative frame theory was applied which offered a mechanism whereby the possible cultural interferences that influenced the translation of the Septuagint could be described and explained within relative frames and compared to the contextual frames of the Hebrew source text.

Before examining the contexts wherein the goddess functioned within the Hebrew Bible, it was first necessary to understand how the goddess Asherah was perceived in the broader frame of the ancient Near East. In order to do so the most relevant extra-Biblical textual, iconographic and archaeological data in Asherah studies is presented. The various extra-Biblical texts presented indicated that Asherah was a distinguished goddess, the consort of the chief deity of the Canaanite pantheon and mother to the minor deities. These textual data provides a “textual” frame wherein Asherah is understood as being more than a mere image, which is the case in the Septuagint. Even though the iconographic and archaeological data was inconclusive, it did provide a “visual” frame wherein goddesses were depicted in human form.

Secondly a contextual examination of the Hebrew term אֲשֵׁרָה/ אֲשֵׁרָה referring to the goddess Asherah in the Hebrew Bible as well as its translation in the Septuagint is conducted. It showed that the Hebrew term referring to the goddess functioned only as a common noun (reducing the goddess to a mere image) in the Hebrew Bible and was also translated as such in the Septuagint, except for two instances where the latter translates with “Astarte/s”. The contexts wherein the Hebrew term functioned within the Hebrew Bible did not in all instances lend favour to the Septuagint’s renderings thereof. The only evidence in the Hebrew Bible indicating that the image may have been a tree of some sort (supporting the

Septuagint's translation) is the verses referring to it being cut down/felled, burnt, planted and pulled out.

Thirdly in order to understand the Septuagint's translation of the Hebrew term the socio-cultural frames wherein the Septuagint originated was examined. The Septuagint originated in Alexandria and Palestine, both greatly influenced by Hellenistic culture during the centuries wherein the translation process was conducted. The translators of the Septuagint functioned as agents of cultural mediation between the context wherein the Hebrew Bible originated and the context wherein they lived, but because of this great cultural divide it is questionable whether they were still familiar not only with the goddess Asherah, but also with the other deities referred to in the Hebrew Bible.

Lastly the way in which deities in general were translated by the Septuagintal translators are examined. When considering the inconsistent and confusing way in which deities are rendered in the Septuagint it is clear that cross-cultural recognition of deities are not present in the Septuagint. This lack in cross-cultural knowledge of deities' questions the validity of the Septuagint's rendering of the Hebrew term אֲשֵׁרָה/אֲשֶׁרָה referring to the goddess Asherah.

In conclusion it is suggested that the socio-cultural frame wherein the Septuagint originated as well as the lack of cross-cultural knowledge of deities influenced the manner in which the Septuagintal translators translated the Hebrew term אֲשֵׁרָה/אֲשֶׁרָה referring to the goddess Asherah.

Opsomming

In hierdie studie word die kulturele interferensies wat bygedra het tot die Septuagint se vertaling van die Hebreeuse term אַשְׁרָה/אֲשֵׁרָה wat na die godin Asjera verwys ondersoek. In die Septuagint word die Hebreeuse term met drie verskillende terme vertaal: ἄλλος, ἄλση (bos/se); δένδρα (boom) and Ἀστάρτη, Ἀστάρταις (Astarte/s). Om te verstaan hoekom die vertalers die Hebreeuse term op hierdie wyse vertaal het, is dit nodig om die verskillende kulturele rame wat hulle vertaal keuses beïnvloed het te ondersoek. Narratiewe raam teorie word in die verband aangewend, omdat dit 'n meganisme bied waardeur die moontlike kulturele interferensies wat die Septuagint se vertaling kon beïnvloed het, kan beskryf en verduidelik binne relatiewe rame wat vergelyk kan word met die kontekstuele raam van die Hebreeuse bronteks.

Voordat die kontekste waarin die godin binne die Hebreeuse Bybel funksioneer, ondersoek kan word, is dit eerstens nodig om die groter raam waarin die godin gefunksioneer het, naamlik die ou Nabye Ooste, te ondersoek. In die verband is die mees relevante buite-Bybelse tekstuele, ikonografiese en argeologiese data in Asjera studies aangebied. Die buite-Bybelse tekstuele data dui dat Asjera 'n gesiene godin was, die gade van die hoofgod van die Kanaänitiese panteon, en die moeder van die mindere gode. Hierdie data bied 'n "tekstuele" raam waarin Asjera meer as net 'n blote beeld verstaan word, wat wel die geval is in die Septuagint. Alhoewel die ikonografiese en argeologiese data onoortuigend was, bied dit wel 'n "visuele" raam waarin godinne uitgebeeld word in menslike vorm.

Tweedens is 'n kontekstuele ondersoek van die Hebreeuse term wat verwys na Asjera, sowel as die vertaling van die term in die Septuagint, gedoen. Daar is aangedui dat die Hebreeuse term slegs as 'n selfstandige naamwoord (dus gereduseer na bloot 'n beeld) funksioneer binne die konteks van die Hebreeuse Bybel, en dat dit ook as sulks vertaal is in die Septuagint, behalwe vir twee gevalle waar "Astarte/s" gebruik is. Die kontekste waarin die Hebreeuse term in die Hebreeuse Bybel gefunksioneer het, het nie ten alle tye steun verleen aan die Septuagint se vertaling daarvan nie. Die enigste bewyse in die Hebreeuse Bybel wat aandui dat die beeld moontlik die voorkoms van 'n boom kon gehad het (en so die Septuagint se

vertaling steun) is die verse wat aandui dat die beeld afgekap, verbrand, geplant en uitgepluk is.

Derdens is die sosio-kulturele raam waarin die Septuagint sy oorsprong het, ondersoek, om op so 'n wyse insig te bekom aangaande die Septuagint se vertaling van die Hebreeuse term. Die Septuagint het sy oorsprong in Aleksandrië en Palestina, waarvan beide grootliks beïnvloed was deur Hellenistiese kultuur. Die Septuagint vertalers het as agente van kulturele mediasie opgetree tussen die konteks waarin die Hebreeuse Bybel ontstaan het, en die konteks waarin hulle hulself bevind het. Die aansienlike kulturele skeiding bevraagteken egter of hulle steeds bekend was nie net met die godin Asjera nie, maar wel ook met die ander godhede waarna daar in die Hebreeuse Bybel verwys word.

Vierdens is die wyse waarop godhede in die algemeen deur die Septuagint vertalers vertaal is, ondersoek. Die inkonsekwente en verwarrende wyse waarop godhede in die Septuagint vertaal is, dui daarop dat daar geen duidelike trans-kulturele herkenning van godhede in die Septuagint aanwesig is nie. Hierdie tekortkoming bevraagteken die geldigheid van die Septuagint se vertaling van die Hebreeuse term wat na Asjera verwys.

Die gevolgtrekking wat gemaak word is dat die wyse waarop die Septuagint vertalers die Hebreeuse term wat na Asjera verwys vertaal het beïnvloed is deur die sosio-kulturele raam waarin die Septuagint ontstaan het. Hierdie wyse van vertaling is ook beïnvloed deur die tekort aan trans-kulturele herkenning van godhede in die Septuagint.

Key words

Asherah

Contextual examination

Cross-cultural recognition of deities

Cultural interferences

Deities

Descriptive translation studies

Extra-Biblical data

Hebrew Bible

Hellenism/ Greek culture

Narrative frame theory

Septuagint

Socio-culture frame

Translation Studies