

Avoiding Misunderstandings in Some Difficult Places in 2 Chronicles

*Working paper. 2018. Peter Schmidt.
Quotes by NASB.*

The book of 2 Chronicles includes some difficult text passages. A clear translation can only be achieved if we first gain a good understanding of the text ourselves. I take up some of the problems and comment on them in detail. Hopefully, this will make the work of other exegetes and translators a bit easier. Feedback is welcome.

Commentaries referred to (in chronological order)

Keil (KD, 1870[?], Engl. repr. 1989)
Rudolph (HAT, 1955)
Williamson (NCBC, 1982)
Dillard (WBC, 1987)
Japhet (OTL, 1993)
Selman (TOTC, 1994)
Thompson (NAC, 1994)
Boda (Cornerstone, 2010)
Handbook (UBS, 2014)

Bible versions referred to

English versions are referred to by their commonly known abbreviations.
GECL = German common language version (“Gute Nachricht Bibel”)
GHFA = German “Hoffnung für alle” (Hope for all) version

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2Chr 5:5 etc. – “Priests and Levites”, or “Levitical priests”?

The data

In some places, the MT uses the phrase **הַכֹּהֲנִים הַלְוִיִּים** *hakkōh^anîm halwiyyim*, literally ‘the priests the Levites’. In Chronicles, this happens at 2Chr 5:5; 23:18; and 30:27 (1Chr 9:2 seems less of a problem, as it appears to be a list).¹ The verses read as follows:

- (1) 2Chr 5:4-5: ⁴Then all the elders of Israel came, and the Levites took up the ark. ⁵They brought up the ark and the tent of meeting and all the holy utensils which were in the tent; the Levitical priests brought them up.
- (2) 2Chr 23:18: Moreover, Jehoiada placed the offices of the house of the Lord under the authority of the Levitical priests, whom David had assigned over the house of the Lord, to offer the burnt offerings of the Lord, as it is written in the law of Moses – with rejoicing and singing according to the order of David.
- (3) 2Chr 30:27: Then the Levitical priests arose and blessed the people; and their voice was heard and their prayer came to His holy dwelling place, to heaven.

The problem

The question is whether two groups are in view, or whether only the priests are meant, and “Levites” is an apposition. In all of these places in 2Chr, textual variants add a ׀ w^a ‘and’ in between the two nouns,² but HOTTTP always decides against it. That the *Waw* was dropped by accident and by falling back on a fixed phrase, is not an entirely satisfying explanation, because *both* phrases – the one with *Waw* and the one without *Waw* – occur frequently. The *Handbook* addresses the problem, but does not clearly connect all these places. It is probably best if translators deal with all of them in the same way. NASB, for example, consistently speaks of “the Levitical priests” (see above).

The views of some commentators

The commentators talk about this question regarding 2Chr 5:5. Keil (1870) calls the phrase “inexact”, adds the “and”, and points out that “the tabernacle itself ... was borne ... only by Levites”. Williamson (NCBC, 1982) sees the whole clause as a later edition, which in my view does not really solve the problem, because *hakkōh^anîm halwiyyim* occurs elsewhere too. Anyway, he thinks the phrase “should be understood as referring to only one category of official, namely the Levitical priests, as at Deut 17:9; Josh 3:3, etc.” (Keil also mentions those places, but thinks of an unintentional omission of the *Waw* here in Chr.) Dillard (WBC, 1987) says “..., it is a clear concern of the Chronicler to accentuate the differences between the two offices (1Chr 23:24-32). The Levites were charged with the transfer of the ark (5:4; 1Chr 15:2/11-15; Num 4:24-28), ...”. But if that is so, then adding the “and” – which he prefers – does not help much: the question remains who did what. Japhet (OTL, 1993) says about the phrases with and without “and”: “...; either reading is possible. ... in Chronicles the two forms are interchangeable, and equally appropriate. ... Whether the addition (or omission) of the *waw* is editorial or textual is impossible to determine..” But then I would like to see other examples of appositions naming two distinct groups. Selman (TOTC, 1994) says “‘Levitical priests’ is a deliberate phrase ... based on Deut 17:9; 18:1, etc.” He further explains:

Since it was the Levites’ special responsibility to carry the ark ..., their final action in doing so is specifically mentioned before they take up their temple-based ministries (vv. 12-13). That the ‘levitical priests’ assisted them in bringing the Tent of Meeting and all its sacred furnishings is not surprising if this is the Tent from Gibeon (cf. 1Chr 16:39; 2Chr 1:3). The priests had been based there, while the ark in Jerusalem had been cared for only by Levites (1Chr 16:37-42).

In my view, this is not a clear-cut explanation, because on the one hand he says that priests are involved, and on the other hand he says the Levites’ special role is in view.³ But what deserves full attention are Selman’s observations from the context, both regarding the Levites’ “final action”, and regarding the priests’ role in Gibeon. Boda (Cornerstone, 2010) says:

¹ The complete list of occurrences is this: Deut 17:9/18; 18:1; 24:8; 27:9; Josh 3:3; 8:33; 1Chr 9:2; 2Chr 5:5; 23:18; 30:27; Ezra 10:5; Neh 10:29/35; 11:20; Jer 33:18; Ezek 43:19; 44:15.

² That phrase with ‘and’ occurs in 1Ki 8:4, and 29 times in 1Chr–Neh, and also John 1:19.

³ Selman is not consistent with the rendering in 2Chr 23:18.

The Chronicler, however, made one change to his source in Kings in this account. He defined the priestly figures who picked up the Ark to transport it to the new site as “Levites”. This modification continues the Chronicler’s emphasis on the role of the Levites in the Temple services. ...

The *Handbook* (UBS, 2014) leaves the decision to the translator in all three places. It says:

On 5:5: The MT does not have the conjunction **and** between **the priests** and **the Levites**, although some Hebrew manuscripts as well as the ancient versions do have the conjunction. CTAT gives a {B} rating to the MT here and claims that the author did not intend to refer to two different groups. Versions that follow this understanding say “the levitical priests” (NJB, NAB, FRCL, LPD) or “The priests, who were Levites” (NIV). Some interpreters think the RSV translation is correct since the author of 1-2 Chronicles elsewhere always makes a distinction between the priests and the Levites.

On 30:27: **The priests and the Levites** is literally “the priests the Levites” (compare 2 Chr 23.18). The MT does not have the conjunction and. In addition, the accents in the MT indicate that the later scribes did not understand the text to be referring to two separate groups. Compare “the priests-Levites” (FRCL), and “The Levitical priests” (Mft; similarly NJB). ...

Discussion

This discussion and conclusion are preliminary. As we look at this peculiar expression, we should take into regard similar places, especially in Deut. Unfortunately, the Handbook on Deut. does not discuss the issue at hand (see on 18:1).

To begin with, looking at all these three verses together, it might not seem very fitting to speak of “Levitical priests” only, if this is taken to exclude other Levites who were not priests:

Re (1): The differences between the parallel texts 1Ki 8:3-4 and 2Chr 5:4-5 are strange. In the first verse, Chronicles has “the Levites” instead of “the priests”, thus apparently stressing the role of the larger group – but then, in the next verse, where Kings speaks of “the priests and the Levites”, the Chronicler says “the priests, the Levites”, which could be interpreted in two ways: either – in line with the other change – he characterizes the priests as “Levitical”, thus integrating them into the larger group, or – perhaps less likely – he does not want to talk of “the Levites” as a group by itself, thus blending the two terms.

On the whole, the Chronicler tends to underline the positive role of the Levites (although this should not be over-emphasized, see Japhet, p. 298). But one does not have to interpret this as the Chronicler’s desire to downplay the significance or rights of the priests. Rather, he might advocate that each takes his own place in the community.

Re (2): At the end of v. 23:18, “singing” is mentioned – and that is the Levites’ assignment. This makes it difficult to take the verse as speaking of priests only.

Also, we know that leadership positions were assigned not only to priests, but also to Levites. For example, in 2Chr 31:12/14 we read that “the Levites” Conaniah and Kore held positions involving great responsibilities [or were they priests, without that fact being mentioned?!].

Re (3): While we should think of the “blessing” as a priestly task (see Num 6:23-24), it is conceivable that other Levites also offered “prayers”. See Neh 8:4-7 for a comparable situation: the priest Ezra leads the meeting, but Levites are at his side, carrying out part of the teaching.

Conclusion

- The usage of the phrase in earlier books should be studied.
- The phrase is too frequent to be erroneous.
- Nobody suggests reading *hakkōh^anîm halwiyyim* as having the meaning “the priests and the Levites”, i.e. nobody explains the missing *Waw* with grammatical reasoning. Going by Joüon / Muraoka (§ 131, pp. 448-452), this is correct. **Appositions express “a relationship of identity or equation”** (§ 131 a, p. 448). I see no exception listed that would help in the present case. (It is, however, noteworthy that even early scribes had a problem with it and created variants.) It is therefore unlikely that we could read the apposition *hakkōh^anîm halwiyyim* as “the priests, in fact, the Levites at large”, or

“the priests, and with them the other Levites”.⁴ (If this could be done, this would go well with the fact that, on more than one occasion, the priests exercise a crucial task, but the Levites are somehow involved as well.)

- It seems safer, then, to stick to the understanding “the Levitical priests”, even if, looking at the three verses in 2Chr., talking of priests only seems rather restrictive.
- One function of appositions is to **name an “office, occupation, title born by a person”** (Joüon / Muraoka, § 131 k, p. 450). The priests, i.e. the sons of Aaron, would then be designated as Levites not in order to indicate their tribal belonging, but in order to **emphasize them being part of the task force at the Temple**. This would qualify the common view that the Chronicler stresses the role of the Levites: he does, but not at the cost of the priests; he rather includes them. Compare what Boda says (on 1Chr 23:6-32, p. 189; quoting Knoppers, AB, 2004, p. 826):

“... “the author does not always distinguish where Levitical duties end and Priestly duties begin” (9:10-34; 28:12-13; 2Chr 5:2-14; 7:1-10; 13:9-12; 23:1-11; 29:3-36; 31:2-12; 34:8-13; 35:1-19).”

In other words, **“Levitical priests” is a way of naming the priests as a distinct group, and at the same time conveying the idea that they are no “independent” group**, but minister together with all Levites.

Translation

Simply saying “the priests and the Levites” might be tempting, as it is clear; but it is hardly justifiable by the Hebrew grammar – unless one accepts the variant reading with *Waw*; and that would not solve the problem in places where such variants do not exist.

If we take the text as it stands, i.e. as an apposition, then how do we best resolve it?

Possibilities include:

- Literal: “the priests, the Levites”. This might leave readers wondering whether one or two groups are in view.
- Parenthesis: “the priests – all of them being Levites – ...”. This makes the sentences complicated.
- Relative clause: “the priests, who were Levites”. This could sound superfluous: that the priests were also part of the larger group of the Levites would be known by Bible readers who have gotten all the way to Chronicles.
- Complement: “the priest from the tribe of Levi”. This would be correct, but superfluous, as in the case above. It would also be misleading: probably, the Chronicler’s point was not the kinship, but the joint exercising of the office. Finally, the question could be raised whether there were other priests, not from the tribe of Levi.
- Adjectival construction: “the Levitical priests”. At least in English, this works well. Without being wordy it characterizes the priests as part of the Levites. And it does so without making a big point (or problem) out of it.

2Chr 7:8-10 par. 1Ki 8:65-66 – The sequence of events

The *Handbook* explains well how the events in these verses relate to each other chronologically. I provide this table, because it will help to visualize this – especially in regard to the parallel text in 1Kings.

A necessary piece of background information is that the feast of shelters always lasted from the 15th to the 23rd day of the 7th month (see Lev 23:34-36/39).

The text in the table below is based on NASB and adapted.

⁴ The grammars (Joüon / Muraoka, Waltke / O’Connor, van der Merwe / Naudé, Lettinga / von Siebenthal) do not list relevant references like Deut 17:9; 18:1; Josh 3:3; 2Chr 5:5 in their indices.

| Table: The same sequence of events described differently in parallel texts | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
| | 1 Kings 8 | 2 Chronicles 7 | Remarks |
| 8. – 14. of 7 th month | <i>Neither 1Ki 8 nor 2Chr 7 speak explicitly of the “dedication of the altar”, but both mention that the bronze altar was used for offerings.</i> | | <i>The fact that the dedication of the altar took a whole week is not mentioned.</i> |
| 15. – 22. of 7 th month | ⁶⁵ So Solomon observed the feast [of shelters] at that time, and all Israel with him, a great assembly from the entrance of Hamath to the brook of Egypt, before the LORD our God, | ⁸ So Solomon observed the feast [of shelters] at that time for seven <u>days</u> , and all Israel with him, a very great assembly who came from the entrance of Hamath to the brook of Egypt. | <i>Both texts begin with the report about the second week of celebrations!</i> |
| | <u>for seven days</u> <u>and seven more days,</u> <u>even fourteen days.</u> | | <i>The text of Kings [MT] mentions two weeks, but does not explain that the first week of celebrating was for the dedication of the altar.</i> |
| 23. of 7 th month | ⁶⁶ <u>On the eighth day</u> he sent the people away and they blessed the king. ... | ^{9a} <u>On the eighth day</u> they held a solemn assembly, | <i>This closing ceremony is the last day of the second week.</i> |
| [flash-back] | | ^{9b} for the dedication of the altar they [had] observed <u>seven days</u> and the feast [of shelters] <u>seven days</u> . | <i>Now the Chronicler explains in a remark, that before the feast of shelters they had celebrated the dedication of the altar.</i> |
| 23. of 7 th month | ... and they went to their tents joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that the LORD had shown to David His servant and to Israel His people. | ¹⁰ (Then / And / on that last day / on the following day, i.e.) <u>on the 23rd day of the 7th month</u> he sent the people to their tents, rejoicing and happy of heart because of the goodness that the LORD had shown to David and to Solomon and to His people Israel. | <i>Here the Chronicler picks up his report from v. 9a. The 23rd of the 7th month is either the same as “the eighth day” in v. 9a, or the following day.</i> |

Translation

- Conjunctions need to be used in such a way that each text makes sense by itself, and that both texts match each other.
- 2Chr 7:9b requires a pluperfect.
- V. 10: There is an additional difficulty: Depending on whether one counts only full days, or also half days, the 23rd is either the eighth day or the ninth day after the 15th. This is a separate question that is not discussed here. Therefore there are two ways of understanding v. 10. Either way, the transition to v. 10 should be worded in such a way that it relates well to what precedes.

- GNT says “and on the following day, the twenty-third day of the seventh month, ...” [cf. *Handbook*].⁵

If one takes the 23rd as identical with the 8th day from v. 9, then one should not start v. 10 with “then” – unless this relates to v. 9b. (Hebrew only has ׀ w^o.)

- 1Ki 8:65, read by itself, can be taken as speaking of 14 days of feast of shelter. Strictly speaking, it was a combination of two festivals. The Hebrew text is not entirely clear. It speaks of “the festival”. Some imprecision in translation is therefore admissible.

2Chr 8:11 – About the queen living too close to the Ark’s place

2Chr 8:11 reads:

Then Solomon brought Pharaoh's daughter up from the city of David to the house which he had built for her, for he said, “My wife shall not dwell in the house of David king of Israel, because the places are holy where the ark of the LORD has entered.”

This is a bit difficult to understand. In chapter 5, the Ark had been moved to the Temple. From the little we know we have to assume that the queen’s palace was built next to the King’s palace (1Ki 7:8), and thus situated south of the Temple. So after the queen moved, she lived again close to the Ark. It is interesting that to Solomon it was more appropriate for her to live here than in a place where the Ark had been in the past, but was not there anymore. (If she had stayed in the City of David, she would be farther away from the Temple than in her new palace). Apparently, the important difference was **not such much spatial proximity, but architectural separateness**.

1Chr 15:1 gives us this piece of information:

Now David built houses for himself in the city of David; and he prepared a place for the ark of God and pitched a tent for it. [Cf. 2Chr 1:4; 5:2.]

The royal houses and the tent for the ark must have been very close to each other. Note also 1Chr 15:29, which says that David’s wife Michal could look out of the window and see David dancing as the ark of the covenant came to the city of David. Apparently, David’s own palace and the queen’s provisional residence, and the tent where the Ark had been kept, **were all perceived as belonging together, to “one compound”** as it were. In contrast, the newly built Temple and Solomon’s own palaces were perceived as separate constructions. (Actually, both the Temple and the palaces were all situated inside the same “great court”. However, **the Temple had its own “inner court”** (1Ki 7:1-12)).

Translation

I suggest translating as follows (using the text from NRSV and from NLT):

Solomon brought Pharaoh’s daughter from David’s palace in the city of David to the house that he had built for her, for he said, “My wife shall not live in the house

⁵ GHFA 2003 had it this way:

⁹ ... Am letzten Tag feierten sie ein großes Abschlussfest. ¹⁰ Es war der 23. Tag des 7. Monats. Danach beendete Salomo das Fest, und die Israeliten zogen wieder nach Hause.

Engl.: ... On the last day they celebrated a big closing festival. It was the 23. day of the 7. month. Afterwards Solomon ended the festival, and the Israelites went back home.

GHFA 2015 changed it to:

⁹ ... Am letzten Tag feierten sie ein großes Abschlussfest. ¹⁰ Danach, am 23. Tag des 7. Monats, beendete Salomo das Fest, und die Israeliten zogen wieder nach Hause.

Engl.: ... On the last day they celebrated a big closing festival. Afterwards, on the 23. day of the 7. month, Solomon ended the festival, and the Israelites went back home.

of King David of Israel, for the Ark of the LORD has been there, and it is holy ground.”⁶

This takes care of the following things:

- Adding “David’s palace” avoids that the focus is on the City of David, as if the whole City of David had become holy through the Ark staying there. The City of David is just the bigger place in which David’s palace stood.
- Simply saying “there” (or: “in that place”) avoids the idea that the Ark was kept inside David’s own house, and at the same time it does express that the tent was part of the royal compound.
- One could also consider replacing “in the house of King David” by “on the property / plot where King David’s house stood”. Hebrew has **בְּבֵית** *b^əbêṯ* with the preposition **בְּ** *b^ə*, which does not always mean ‘in(side)’, but also ‘at / by’.

2Chr 26:15 – Uzziah’s catapult

2Chr 26:15 says:

In Jerusalem he [i.e. Uzziah] had machines designed by engineers for use on towers and battlements to discharge arrows and large stones. His fame spread far and wide, for he was so wonderfully gifted that he became very powerful.

On this verse, note the article by Lawrence in the *Yearbook on the Science of Bible Translation*.⁷ He addresses the question whether the machines in view were really catapults, since “catapults in the time of Uzziah are generally dismissed as “anachronistic”” (p. 121). That view is reflected in some versions, e.g. in NLT, which gives it a different sense (cf. also the note in the NIV Study Bible):

And he built structures on the walls of Jerusalem, designed by experts to protect those who shot arrows and hurled large stones from the towers and the corners of the wall.

Against this Lawrence quotes “two archaeological examples from before 399 BC that suggest the use of some kind of catapult before that date” (p. 121) and quotes the aphorism “Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence” (p. 123). He concludes: “Taken at face value the Chronicler’s account of Uzziah suggests that he was a catapult maker.”

2Chr 26:19 – Is the incense burned on the censer or on the altar?

2Chr 26:19 says:

The king, who had a censer in his hand ready to burn incense, was enraged; but while he was raging at the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead in the presence of the priests, there in the house of the LORD, beside the altar of incense.

When we take all Biblical evidence together, then we find out that incense was burnt in two different ways.⁸ ISBE notes (vol. 2, p. 817):

- (1) the *tāmîd* (“perpetual”) incense, burned every morning and evening upon the altar of incense (Ex 30:7f.);
- (2) the censer offering, performed by the high priest in the holy of holies once every year, on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:2/12f.).

It is not easy to find out which way applies here.

Discussion

The potential problem in 2Chr 26:19 lies in the first clause: “The king, who had a censer in his hand ready to burn incense”: A translator might need to know **whether the king**

⁶ Cf. T4T: “... because the Sacred Chest was in that palace for a while, and any place where the Sacred Chest has been is holy.”

⁷ Lawrence, Paul J. N.: Uzziah – Inventor of the Catapult? A Note on 2 Chronicles 26:15a. *Yearbook on the Science of Bible Translation*. Eberhard Werner (ed.). VTR, 2018. Pp. 119-123.

⁸ Cf. my separate compilation of references.

intended to pour the incense over the altar, or to burn it in the hand-held censer. This might influence the word choice for מִקְטֶרֶת *miqteret* ‘censer’[?], and also the rest of the wording. GNT, for instance, speaks of an “incense burner” – which implies that he would burn the incense in this vessel. NIV is more vague when it says “Uzziah, who had a censer in his hand ready to burn incense, ...” (Cf. FCL “Ozias, qui s’apprêtait à faire brûler l’encens, ...”). This could perhaps be taken as only *carrying* incense for burning it on the altar.

The six commentaries and the *Handbook* do not discuss this question. Boda’s footnote on v. 16 sounds like the incense was burnt on the altar. His note on v. 19 says the incense burner was “to carry coals”. But what is the point in carrying coals to an altar? Was that the normal procedure? Were they not already on the altar?

The *Handbook* says:

A **censer** was a small bowl or pan in which incense was burned. ... It had a handle so that a person could carry it to the incense altar.

This seems contradictory, or at least not quite clear: If the incense is burned in the censer, then why carry it “to” the altar?. As to the dictionaries, they all speak of a ‘censer / incense burner’ (BDB, Gesenius / Donner, HALOT, NIDOTTE, Semantic Dictionary of BH.).^{9, 10}

Looking at the end of the verse, burning on the altar seems to be in view. There is no need to harmonize this with other places where incense is burned in a censer. However, there is a tension with the only other place where *miqteret* is used, Ezek 8:11: it suggests the burning of incense in the censer:

Before them stood seventy of the elders of the house of Israel, with Jaazaniah son of Shaphan standing among them. Each had his censer in his hand, and the fragrant cloud of incense was ascending.

On incense burning, the Mishnah says (Tamid 6.2-3):¹¹

² The one who had won the right to do the firepan [service], made a heap of coals on the top of the [inner] altar and then spreading them out with the bottom of the firepan and bowed down and went out.

³ The one who had won the right to the incense [service] took the censer from the spoon and gave it [the censer] to his friend or his relative [of his choice]. ... He then began spreading the incense and then went out. The one who burned the incense did not do so until the appointed one said to him, “Burn the incense.” ... The people went out and he [the priest] burned the incense, he bowed down and went out.

From this later source we are to conclude, apparently, that more than one priest was involved in the whole procedure, and that indeed **a “firepan” was used to carry coals to the Altar of Incense, and two further vessels (a “censer” and a “spoon”) were used to carry the incense to the altar.** Whether or not the exact same procedure already applied in Old Testament times we do not know, but this quote gives a possible explanation for two assumptions that the text in 2Chr 26 makes:

- The Golden Altar of Incense was not an altar on which there was a constant fire fed. I.e. the coals had to be carried there before an offering could be made.
- The “censer” that Uzziah carried might only have been for carrying coals, in order to prepare the altar. It is implied that incense had to be brought as well – at the same time, or afterwards – in a separate dish.

I conclude tentatively that **the *miqteret* mentioned in 2Chr 26 served for carrying coals to the altar. Incense was brought separately. The burning of the incense – if Uzziah had gotten that far – would have taken place on the altar.** This is in line with v. 16, which says: “... entered the temple of the Lord to make offering [same verb] on the altar of incense.”

⁹ NIDOTTE, in its main entry # 7787, glosses the word ‘incense’. That must be an error. Under # 5233, the gloss “incense burner” is given. – Cf. also the *Realia Handbook*, § 4.2.4, p. 241, and § 4.4.5, p. 255, and § 4.4.7, pp. 256f.

¹⁰ A ‘censer’ is defined as “a container, usually covered, in which incense is burned, especially during religious services; thurible.” (dictionary.com).

¹¹ www.sefaria.org/Mishnah_Tamid?lang=bi (2018-11-29).

An alternative view would be that the *miqteret* served to carry the incense to the altar, and that the carrying of coals remains unmentioned. (Anyhow, I doubt that the incense was burned both in a censer and on the altar at the same occasion.)

Translation

This is an example for how, in our translations, all the words may be there, and the sentence is not “wrong”, but what is said remains foggy nevertheless, because the exegete or translator himself does not have a clear idea of the scene. One should consider the following explication:

The king, who had a censer in his hand ready to [place coals onto the altar for to] burn incense, was enraged; but while he was raging at the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead in the presence of the priests, there in the house of the LORD, beside the altar of incense.

The word for *miqteret* in the receptor language should be appropriate for a vessel or tool holding and carrying coals. It should not suggest that the incense was burnt in/on this very piece of equipment. Nine English versions (“censer” / “incense burner”) and nine German versions (“Räucherpfanne / Räuchergefäß / Räucherfaß”) are all misleading. A *miqteret* **could** be used to burn incense, as in Ezek 8:11. But the situation there is quite different: idolters bring illegitimate offerings (cf. Num 16:17/18/35). Here in 2Chr, something like “firepan” or “small coal shovel” could work (going by the illustrations in the *Realia Handbook* for מִקְטֶרֶת *maḥtâ* and for מִקְטֶרֶת *miqteret* they might have been of metal or of clay[?]) (§ 4.4.5 and § 4.4.7, pp. 255-257).

2Chr 29:3 – The first month of Hezekiah’s first year¹²

2Chr 29:3 says (NRSV):

In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he [i.e. Hezekiah] opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them.

The king’s year *versus* the calendar year

This is one of the verses in the Bible where the numbering of the months could be mistaken. Although the *year* is identified by referring to the king’s reign, we should assume that the *months* are still counted by the usual calendar year, i.e. “the first month” is here – like elsewhere – the first month of the Jewish calendar (Abib / Nisan = mid-March to mid-April), *not* the first month of Hezekiah’s rule (unless that happened to begin at New Year). One reason for this position comes from the closer context: v. 17 says that the consecration of the Temple was begun “on the first [day] of the first month”. Here, “the first month” is not qualified by “of the king’s reign”, and therefore has to be understood as in other places too: as the first month of the usual calendar year.

Further support for this position comes from two other places with the same issue:

- Esth 3:7 speaks about the lot being cast “in the first month, which is the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus”. I.e. the year is counted by the king’s reign, but the month is independent of the time in which Ahasuerus ascended the throne.
- Jer 36:9 speaks about a fast “in the fifth year of Jehoiakim . . . , in the ninth month”. Later, in v. 22 we read that “the king was sitting in the winter house in the ninth month, with a fire burning in the brazier before him”. This confirms that it was the beginning of the cold season (the ninth month is Kislev = mid-November to mid-December). Again, the year is counted by the king’s reign, but the counting of the months follows the normal calendar.

Translation

ESV is correct, but ambiguous:

in the first year of his reign, in the first month [cf. Elberfelder]

NIV, NET and NLT seem to point into the wrong direction and are not recommended:

In the (very) first month of the first year of his reign [cf. Luther]

¹² For this issue, cf. Peter Schmidt: Biblical Measures and their Translation: Notes on Translating Biblical Units of Length, Area, Capacity, Weight, Money and Time. Electronic Working Papers 2014-003. SIL International, 2014. P. 34.
<https://www.sil.org/resources/publications/entry/56085>.

GNT has solved the issue ingeniously by saying:

In the first month of the year after Hezekiah became king [cf. GECL, GHFA].

T4T does not have the same problem, because it works with modern equivalents:

During March of the first year that Hezekiah was ruling Judah ...

2Chr 31:14-20 – How the distribution of gifts was organized

These verses are full of questions. We cannot solve them all. We will concentrate on a few. The versions go all over the place, with some rather misleading wordings, and with some very helpful ideas. As Japhet points out (969), vv. 14-19 consist of nominal clauses, which is one of the reasons why the interpretation is difficult.

Key points: Especially problematic is the meaning of v. 16.

For an initial orientation, here is an overview over the responsibilities.

Table: Hierarchy and assignments in the provision for the Levites (2Chr 31:11-20)

| King Hezekiah and Highpriest Azariah (v. 13) | |
|---|--|
| ↓ | ↓ |
| Reception & Storage | Distribution |
| leader: Levite Conaniah (v. 12) | leader: Levite Kore, son of Imnah, keeper of East Gate (v. 14) |
| deputy: Shimei, Conaniah's brother (v. 12) | assistants in the towns of the priests: Eden, Miniamin, Jeshua, Shemaiah, Amariah and Shecaniah (v. 15) |
| overseers (v. 13): Jehiel, Azaziah, Nahath, Asahel, Jerimoth, Jozabad, Eliel, Ismachiah, Mahath, Benaiah | certain men designated by name in each town – looking after those living outside the towns, in the pasturelands (v. 19) |

As I understand the text, Kore is in charge of the *distribution* only, not the *receiving* of offerings. That had been dealt with in v. 12.

Although it mainly concerns v. 17, it might help if we realize one main idea of the passage right away. Japhet states it like this (972):

Thus, while the priests get their shares personally, allocated by name to each of the priests from the age of three, the Levites provide for their families through the registration of households.

Although some doubts remain, this understanding of v. 17 is supported by v. 19b, which reinforces this differentiation.

The text is quite technical. The translator should break it up in small bits. The reader needs to understand what topic is talked about in every step. The following table could help to see the structure of the passage.

| Table: The structure of 2Chr 31:14-20 and a model translation | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| Topic raised | NASB | Model translation <i>put together from several versions</i> | Remarks |
| Who was in charge? What was his task? | ¹⁴ Kore the son of Imnah the Levite, the keeper of the eastern gate, was over the freewill offerings of God, to apportion the contributions for the LORD and the most holy things. | ¹⁴ The Levite Kore , the son of Imnah, the chief guard at the East Gate, was in charge of the voluntary offerings made to God. He was to distribute the levy set aside for the LORD, and the most holy things. | <i>Probably not:</i> “in charge of receiving” (GNT, CEV). “Levy” translates the key term <i>tʿrûmâ</i> , also called “contributions” (see separate notes). |
| Who assisted? Where? Clarification: | ¹⁵ Under his authority were Eden, Miniamin, Jeshua, Shemaiah, Amariah and Shecaniah in the cities of the priests, to distribute faithfully <i>their portions</i> to their brothers by divisions, whether great or small, ¹⁶ without regard to their genealogical enrollment, to the males from thirty years old and upward – everyone who entered the house of the LORD for his daily obligations – for their work in their duties according to their divisions; | ¹⁵ in the towns of the priests he had six faithful assistants . They were Eden, Miniamin, Jeshua, Shemaiah, Amariah and Shecaniah. They distributed [the portions] to their kinsmen / fellow [Levite]s according to their divisions, to old and young alike. ¹⁶ [This happened] in addition [to the distribution] to those who were registered, males three years old or more, everyone who [went to Jerusalem and] entered the house of the LORD for [<i>or</i> : to perform] the daily duties of their various tasks, according to their responsibilities and their divisions. | Regarding the towns of the priests, see comment below. “Their brothers” are the other Levites (<i>Handbook</i>) – but probably including the priests too (Williamson). <i>Not</i> : “to their fellow priests [only]” (NET, NLT). <i>Not</i> : “except” (NRSV); <i>nor</i> : “regardless” (NLT, NASB); see discussion below. <i>Or</i> : “as the duty of each day required” (NRSV) |
| How was the register organized? | ¹⁷ as well as the priests who were enrolled genealogically according to their fathers' households, and the Levites from twenty years old and upwards, by their duties and their divisions. | ¹⁷ The registration of the priests had been done according to their clans , that of the Levites by their duties and divisions* – including all from twenty years old and upwards. | See <i>Handbook</i> . Most commentaries agree that this verse talks about different criteria applying to the priests and the Levites. * <i>Or</i> : NET: “... according to their duties as assigned to their divisions”. |

| | | | |
|--|---|---|---|
| Who else was included? ... and why? | ¹⁸ The genealogical enrollment <i>included</i> all their little children, their wives, their sons and their daughters, for the whole assembly, for they consecrated themselves faithfully in holiness. | ¹⁸ The enrollment included all their little children, their wives, their sons and their daughters, the whole company / community, for they consecrated themselves faithfully in holiness. | <i>Or</i> : ... all their dependents, i.e. ... (cf. GNT, REB). See <i>Handbook</i> . “They” might refer to the priests and Levites, or to their families. But it should <i>not</i> sound as if the infants did anything to consecrate themselves (NET?, NLT?). REB: “because in virtue of their permanent standing they had to keep themselves duly hallowed”. Cf. GNT. |
| Special case: | ¹⁹ Also for the sons of Aaron the priests <i>who were</i> in the pasture lands of their cities, or in each and every city, <i>there were</i> men who were designated by name to distribute portions to every male among the priests and to everyone genealogically enrolled among the Levites. | ¹⁹ [They distributed] also* to the sons of Aaron, the priests, who were in the pasture lands** of their towns . In each and every town, there were men who were designated by name to distribute portions to every male among the priests and to everyone registered among the [other] Levites. | The verse begins with the priests, but at the end extends to the other Levites too. * <i>Or</i> : Care was taken as well of those ... / As for the ones ... ** <i>Or</i> : NRSV: in the fields of common land belonging to their towns; NIV: who lived on the farm lands around their towns; NLT: who were living in the open villages around the towns. |
| Scope of action | ²⁰ Thus Hezekiah did throughout all Judah; ... | ²⁰ Thus Hezekiah did throughout all Judah; ... | |

V. 15 – The towns of the priests

Could they not be called “Levitical towns”? The towns for the Levites are first mentioned in Num 35:1-8. They came with pasturelands included. How much this was is debated (see the commentaries on Num 35:3-5).

Their distribution is reported in Josh 21. From there we learn that the *priests* were given towns that originally belonged to Judah, Simeon and Benjamin (Josh 21:4/10-19; some of this material is taken up in 1Chr 6:39-50 [Engl.54-65]). The other Kohathites, and the Gershonites and the Merarites received towns from other tribes. This might be one reason why here in 2Chr 35, both in v. 15 and in v. 19, the towns are primarily associated with the priests, and only secondarily with the Levites: The Southern kingdom Judah comprised the

earlier territory of Judah, Simeon and Benjamin. Thus, the *Levitical* towns in this part of Israel were, at least in the beginning, indeed *priestly* towns. Other Levites lived in other parts of the country. Later in history, some Levites moved from the Northern kingdom Israel into the Southern kingdom Judah (2Chr 11:13f.). Some of them might have taken residence in towns that were only for priests in the beginning[?].

Translation: Arguably, then, it is better to keep the literal “towns of the *priests*” in the translation, and speak of “other Levites” where needed. Saying “Levitical towns”, however, would not be wrong. The advantage of this rendering is that it spares the reader the question why they are called “towns of the priests”, and then there are Levites as well who receive donations in those places (v. 19).

V. 15 – Towns of the priests: a textual problem?

Japhet (970) sees a textual problem and solves it following the LXX (see BHS). The phrase “in the towns of the priests” would then become “under the hand of the priests”. But her arguments regarding the problem are not fully convincing, nor is the proposed solution. One difficulty with it is that v. 14 said that the assistants worked under the authority of Kore, a Levite; thus to continue with “under the priests” would not be elegant. Anyhow, Keil, NCBC, WBC, TOTC, Cornerstone, and the *Handbook* all do not even pick up this question at all, and of nine English versions none goes that way.

V. 16 – מְלִבָּד *mill^pbad*

A crux in this passage is the expression מְלִבָּד *mill^pbad* in v. 16. The word is based on the root *bdd*, which has to do with separation or solitude. The form *mill^pbad* (with <bad> in the status absolutus) only occurs in 1Ki 10:13; 12:33; 1Chr 3:9; 2Chr 9:12; 17:19; 31:16; Dan 11:4 (but see Gen 26:1 and many more cases for the same with <bad> in the status constructus). – 1Ki 10:13 par. 2Chr 9:12 are difficult themselves. 1Ki 12:33 has a textual issue. The other three references are clear:

1Chr 3:9 All these were David’s sons, besides the sons of the concubines; and Tamar was their sister.

2Chr 17:19 These were in the service of the king, besides those whom the king had placed in the fortified cities throughout all Judah.

Dan 11:4 ...; for his kingdom shall be uprooted and go to others besides these [i.e. his posterity].

In each of these cases, one group is contrasted with another group of people who do not count among the first. *mill^pbad* means “**apart from / besides / in addition to**”.

In the present passage, *mill^pbad* is rendered in three different ways, here represented by NRSV, NLT, and NIV:

NRSV: except those enrolled by genealogy, males from three years old and upwards

NLT: They distributed the gifts to all males three years old or older, regardless of their place in the genealogical records.

NIV: In addition, they distributed to the males three years old or more whose names were in the genealogical records

Going by the examples quoted above, NRSV’s translation can be ruled out. It is true that **what precedes *mill^pbad* is a special group or case** (cf. Num 29:6ff. for further good examples). **This group or case is mentioned separately and treated differently.**

However, it is not excluded or exempted. HALOT (“except”) and Gesenius / Donner (“außer / ausgenommen”) are misleading here.

NLT’s rendering seems too specific. Further, it does not go together with v. 17, where the recording of the priests does matter. NIV seems closest to how *mill^pbad* is used elsewhere.

However, the syntactical connection to what follows *mill^pbad* is unclear in Hebrew, and whether NIV got it right needs checking. In the three references quoted above (1Chr 3:9, 2Chr 17:19, Dan 11:4), *mill^pbad* is followed by a noun phrase, or a relative clause, or a pronoun, **all referring to people**. Here in 2Chr 31:16 it is followed by the inf. cs. of the hitp. of שָׁחַץ *yāḥaś*, and then followed by a phrase with לְּ . How are we to understand “apart from + inf. cs.”? We need to take a closer look at the verb.

V. 16 – שׁוּׁר יָהֻס *yāḥas*

שׁוּׁר *yḥs* usually refers to **genealogical** enrollment (BDB, HALOT). Two clear examples are these:

Ezr 2:62: These looked for their entries in the genealogical records, but they were not found there, and so they were excluded from the priesthood as unclean;¹³

1Chr 5:1: ..., so that he [Reuben] is not enrolled in the genealogy according to the birthright;¹⁴

However, NIDOTTE's gloss "to have o.s. registered" – without mentioning "by genealogy" – is justified, because the genealogy is not always in focus:

- In 1Chr 4:24-33; 5:11-17, the places of residence are equally important.
- In 1Chr 7:1-5ff., while descent, family and leadership are all mentioned, what matters in the end is the number of soldiers.
- In Neh 7:5 we read:

Then my God put it into my mind to assemble the nobles and the officials and the people to be enrolled by genealogy. And I found the book of the genealogy of those who were the first to come back, and I found the following written in it:

What follows is *not* a list of who descended from who – a typical genealogy – , but just a list of family heads together the the *number* of people who belonged to them, including some groups mentioned by task (vv. 43ff.).

- Finally, in 1Chr 9:22 (cf. also v. 25) we read:

All these, who were chosen as gatekeepers at the thresholds, were two hundred twelve. They were enrolled by genealogies in their villages. David and the seer Samuel established them in their office of trust.

We see how family relationships *and* their place of residence *and* their number *and* their task are all intertwined.

That is to say that **“enrollment” might, by default, have been carried out by listing people according to family relation, but the purposes included interest in (a) who lived where, (b) who did what, and (c) how many people were available for these tasks. It was not solely the point and purpose to establish the descent.**

These observations are completely in line with what TWAT says (s.v. שׁוּׁר *yāḥas*, col. 612):

Obwohl also *jḥs* fast immer die Vorstellung der genealogischen Zusammengehörigkeit bei sich hat, ist die mit *jḥs* gemeinte Zuschreibung bzw. Eintragung nicht diachronisch, sondern immer synchronisch interessiert.

Engl.: Thus, while *yḥs* almost always includes the idea of a genealogical belonging, the attribution or enlisting that is expressed by *yḥs* happens not with a diachronic interest, but always with a synchronic interest.¹⁵

TWAT continues to make a point that is relevant for translators (col. 612f.):

Der substantivierte Inf. hitp hitjaḥs bezeichnet meist nicht mehr den Vorgang der Registrierung, sondern metonymisch das Ergebnis dieses Vorgangs. ... Nicht „ihre Registrierung“ noch „ihr Geschlechtsregister“, sondern „ihre Eingetragenen“ sind so und so viele (1Chr 7:5/7/9/40).

Engl.: The nominalized inf. hitp hityaḥs most of the time denotes not the process of registering anymore, but – metonymically – the result of this process. ... Neither “their registering”, nor “their genealogy”, but “their registered ones” are such and such a number (1Chr 7:5/7/9/40).

TWAT explicitly recommends the translation **“die Eingetragenen” (“the registered ones”)** also for the present passage. This is a helpful comment, because it allows us to rule out the meaning ‘enrolling / recording’ (as an activity). We are thus justified in translating the word that follows *mill^pbad* as referring to people – just like in the other three places.

¹³ Note v. 59 “...they could not prove their families *bēt^abôtām* or their descent *zar^aām*, whether they belonged to Israel”.

¹⁴ Note v. 7 “And his kindred by their families *ḥmšp^aḥōtāyw*, when the genealogy of their generations *ḥtōl^adōtām* was reckoned: ...”.

¹⁵ Own translation; the English translation of TWAT – TDOT – ist not available to me.

One more point for the sake of clarity: *yḥś* (vv. 16/17/18/19) is used in connection with both priests (17) and Levites (19). It is thus not a term that is particular to either of these groups.

Results

- What this means for 2Chr 31 is that *yḥś* has to do with ‘registration’, but we should be careful not to assume that genealogy is an important *criterion*, contrasting with other criteria, in each occurrence. *yḥś* occurs in vv. 16-19, and each case is different: in v. 16 it has to do with age and task, in v. 17 with descent for the priest, and with age and task for the Levites, in v. 18 with family members, and in v. 19 it is not specified.
- In some verses in 2Chr 31, the inf. cs. of *yḥś* is best translated as “the registered ones”.

The way I understand v. 16 agrees with what Williamson writes:

Regardless of the precise translation, the purpose of the phrase is to stress the inclusive nature of the distribution. ... it would seem that when a priestly family went to Jerusalem from one of the priestly cities to fulfil their term of service, their family went with them and drew support from the distribution in the temple.

This is in contrast to Keil’s understanding. He says:

The meaning of the verse is: From those dwelling in the priests’ cities were excluded those who had come to perform service in the temple; and, indeed, not merely those performing the service, but also their male children, who were catalogued along with them if they were three years old and upward.

Translation of v. 16ff.

For the meaning that should be translated, see the model translation in the table further above; the style would need improving.

מִלְּבָד מִלְּבָד *millʔbad*: Translations like NASB (“without regard to their genealogical enrollment”) and REB (“irrespective of their registration”) probably miss the point of what *millʔbad* means. TEV (“not by clans”) has the same problem, and also lacks the idea of registering.

GECL is far removed from the Hebrew syntax, but expresses eloquently much of what the brief Hebrew wording contains: the registering, the service groups, the rota etc. However, what is missing is *millʔbad*, and so the connection to the rest of the passage is lost.

The *Handbook* quotes and recommends TOB (see at v. 19).

According to another interpretation, followed by TOB, this verse states that the priests received their portions regardless of whether they were on duty at the Temple or off duty in their homes, unlike the Levites who received their portion only during the times that they were on duty at the Temple.

The reasoning for why priests and Levites should be treated differently in the times when they did not serve at the Temple is not clear. However, the translation looks quite good:

16 moreover, the men already enrolled, from the age of three and up, all those who came to the House of the LORD received each day something for their function in their groups according to their classes.

שְׂדֵדָה *yāḥas*: NRSV (“those enrolled by genealogy”) puts a focus on descent that is not present in *yāḥas*. Therefore, my model translation in the table further above does not include the words “genealogical / genealogy”, but speaks of “registered ones / registration / enrollment”.

Two groups: NLT says:

¹⁵ ... They distributed the gifts among the families of priests in their towns by their divisions, dividing the gifts fairly among old and young alike. ¹⁶ They distributed the gifts to all males three years old or older, regardless of their place in the genealogical records. The distribution went to all who would come to the LORD’s Temple to perform their daily duties according to their divisions.

Here it is not clear whether those “who would come to the LORD’s Temple” are a sub-group of the “priests in their towns”, or how else these groups relate to each other. NIV is better:

¹⁵ ..., distributing to their fellow priests according to their divisions, old and young alike. ¹⁶ In addition, they distributed to the males three years old or more whose names were in the genealogical records—all who would enter the temple of the

Lord to perform the daily duties of their various tasks, according to their responsibilities and their divisions.

Cf. GHFA 2003 [the verse was changed in GHFA 2015]:

Wer mit seiner Dienstgruppe die täglichen Arbeiten im Tempel des Herrn versah erhielt seinen Anteil direkt in Jerusalem.

Engl.: Whoever performed the daily duties in the Temple of the Lord with his service group, received his share on-site in Jerusalem.

V. 17 – Priestly families *versus* Levitical divisions

One should not overemphasize or misinterpret **the contrast between families (“fathers’ houses”) for the priests, and work groups (“divisions”) for the Levites**. Part of the background to this is found in 1Chronicles. The Levites were divided up according to their *tasks*, but division into *family units* also played a role (see e.g. 1Chr 23:6/11; 26:21-22; cf. also 2Chr 35:5, where the phrase “father’s house” is used of Levites.). Naturally, every Levite belongs to a clan, and it is these clans which had been assigned certain duties. So the emphasis is different, but both priests and Levites belonged to clans, and both priests and Levites had divisions that came on duty at certain times. (The word מַחְלֹקֶת *mah^alōqet* ‘division’ can be used of both priests (see 1Chr 24:1) and of Levites (as here in 2Chr 31:17).¹⁶

Verses 18-20 are less problematic.

2Chr 32:31 – Continuation or contrast?

There is a difficult connective at the beginning of 2Chr 32:31:

NRSV: ³⁰ ... Hezekiah prospered in all his works. ³¹ So also in the matter of the envoys of the officials of Babylon, who had been sent to him to inquire about the sign that had been done in the land, God left him to himself, in order to test him and to know all that was in his heart.

The *Handbook* says about וְכֵן *w^okēn* at the beginning of v. 31:

And so translates the common conjunction and an adverb in Hebrew. These words been interpreted in different ways in this context. **And so** suggests a continuation of the thought that Hezekiah prospered in all that he did. GNT is similar with “and even.” Other translations include “Nevertheless” (NAB) and “although” (NJB), which introduce a contrast with the preceding statement.

Is the interpretation as a contrast maintainable? *kēn* normally means “thus / in the same manner” etc. Keil stated that “וְכֵן ... never has an adversative meaning.” 150 years later that is still so. *kēn* occurs over 600 times, which was too much to check; but I did check all 27 cases in 1Chr–Neh, and all 35 cases where it occurs as וְכֵן *w^okēn*, and in none of these cases is it used for a contrast. Neither HALOT nor Gesenius / Donner suggest a translation for the present difficult case. Anyhow, neither list an adversative meaning for *kēn*. Nor do Waltke / O’Connor (§ 39.3.4 e, pp. 665–667) or van der Merwe / Naudé (§ 40.30, p. 437) mention a contrastive usage. – Therefore, translating with “but” (NIV) or “however” (NLT) or “als aber” (Luther) is daring.

But if we reject a contrastive meaning, what is the verse supposed to say? “And so” (ESV) does not seem to make sense, because Hezekiah fails the test. Keil thinks:

Bertheau rightly translates, “and accordingly,” with the further remark, that by וְכֵן the account of Hezekiah’s treatment of the Babylonian ambassadors, which could not be reckoned among his fortunate deeds, is brought into harmony with the remark that he prospered in all his undertakings.

From his further comment, it seems, **he looks at Hezekiah’s action as something negative, but takes his being-humbled as something positive**. Japhet describes the “And so” as

¹⁶ One reason why priests were organized by clans, and Levites by tasks, might simply be that the tasks of the Levites were more diverse – no single Levite could be involved in all of them –, whereas the tasks of the priests were somewhat more limited and so there might have been less specialization.

“non-specific”, and thinks it is an “artificial link between the passages”. But, based on the parallel text in Kings (2Ki 20:12-21, esp. v. 19), she would say that Hezekiah “passed the test”. Thus she also takes the whole story as positive, in the end. Selman, on the other hand, sees a contrast. He points out: “*God left him* implies divine judgment, as is normal when God is the subject of the Hebrew verb **עָזַב** ‘zb.’” Anyhow, for Selman, too, God’s goal is a positive one: “... , to provide an opportunity for people to show heartfelt repentance.”

A different way of looking at the verse is this: one could **relate the word “prosper” to the fact “that the wrath of the Lord did not come upon them in the days of Hezekiah”** (2Chr 32:26, NRSV).

Translation

NRSV (“So also”) and NET (“So”) are correct (cf. Zürcher Bibel “So auch als ...”). It could be though that the reader does not get the connection to what precedes.

If one agrees with Keil’s interpretation, one may follow GNT (“and even when the Babylonian ambassadors came to inquire about the unusual event that had happened in the land, God let Hezekiah go his own way only in order to test his character.”) – Similar Elberfelder. hhh

If one sees the “prospering” in the fact that judgment did not come in Hezekiah’s lifetime, one may adapt GECL (“So nahm es auch noch ein gutes Ende, als die Fürsten von Babylon eine Gesandtschaft zu ihm schickten, ...” – *Engl.*: Thus it came to a good end, when the princes of Babylon had sent envoys to him ...)

A last resort is to express no logical connection to the preceding verse at all, like GHFA (“Eines Tages kamen Gesandte ...” – *Engl.*: One day envoys came ...).

2Chr 34:9 – Who gave the money to who?

In NASB, 2Chr 34:9 reads like this:

They came to Hilkiyah the high priest and delivered [וַיִּזְכֹּר] the money that was brought into the house of God, ...

This translation is open to the misunderstanding that “they”, i.e. the king’s representatives, brought the money *to Hilkiyah*. Many English versions even say that explicitly, e.g. NIV: “and gave him the money”. This is not a reasonable interpretation. The Hebrew only says “and gave”, not “and gave him”. The story is about the king wanting to make the money available to the “workmen” (v. 10). It is Hilkiyah who is keeping the money at the Temple! Part of the background is a related story found in 2Ki 12, here vv. 9-11 (cf. 2Chr 24:10-14):

⁹ But Jehoiada the priest took a chest and bored a hole in its lid and put it beside the altar, on the right side as one comes into the house of the LORD; and the priests who guarded the threshold put in it all the money which was brought into the house of the LORD. ¹⁰ When they saw that there was much money in the chest, the king's scribe and the high priest came up and tied it in bags and counted the money which was found in the house of the LORD. ¹¹ They gave the money which was weighed out into the hands of those who did the work, ...

Thus, it is true that the king’s scribe was involved, but he did not take the money to the palace.

The parallel verses to 2Chr 34:9-10 are 2Ki 22:4-5:

⁴ “Go up to Hilkiyah the high priest that he may count [*or*: total] the money brought in to the house of the LORD which the doorkeepers have gathered from the people. ⁵ Let them deliver it into the hand of the workmen who have the oversight of the house of the LORD, and let them give it to the workmen ...

Hilkiyah is supposed to hand out the money. The meaning is not different in 2Chr. **When the representatives of the king come to see Hilkiyah, they are charged to make him pay out the money.** The verb “and gave” must either be understood as a causative (“made him give”), or it is implied that they demanded the money from him, and afterwards they themselves “gave” it to the workmen. This is what v. 10 states explicitly (“Then they gave it into the hands of the workmen ...”).

The interpretation that the money had been at the Temple all along is also in line with v14:

When they were bringing out the money which had been brought into the house of the LORD, Hilkiah the priest found the book of the law ...

וְהָיָה in v. 9 needs to be taken together with the same word in v. 10 – as Keil stated it long ago: “In וְהָיָה, v. 10, the verb of v. 9 is again taken up: ...”.

Literature: Williamson (NCBC, 1982) sees a contradiction between v9 and v10 and, following Rudolph, suggests an emendation, which is unnecessary. Dillard (WBC, 1987) translates “and gave him the money”, and also sees a tension : “in v. 9 Hilkiah receives them [i.e. the funds], whereas in v. 10 they are paid directly to the workmen. He suggests “that there is simply an ellipsis here: Hilkiah and his subordinates administered the funds and distributed them to the workmen.” – But this all starts with inserting “him” and assuming Hilkiah as the recipient. Japhet (OTL, 1993) discusses the differences to the text in Kings, but, for the verb under discussion, sticks to the translation “delivered” (implying, apparently, Hilkiah as the recipient). Selman (TOTC, 1994) does not explicitly address the present question, nor does the *Handbook*. Boda (Cornerstone, 2010) sees the Chronicler giving Hilkiah “sole control over the funds”. (NLT translates the verb at the beginning of v. 10 with “He entrusted ...”.)

Translation

Firstly, it should be made clear that Hilkiah has to pay out the money. Out of eleven English versions, none reflects the above understanding that takes into consideration the parallel text in Kings. The second challenge lies in combining verses 9 and 10. V. 9 tells us about the preparations, v. 10 about how the money is given to the workmen. I think GECL got it right:

⁹ Sie gingen zum Obersten Priester Hilkija; dort wurde ihnen das Geld ausgehändigt, das für den Tempel gespendet worden war. ... ¹⁰ Sie übergaben das Geld den Meistern, die mit den Ausbesserungsarbeiten am Tempel beauftragt worden waren.

Engl.: ⁹ They went to the high priest Hilkiah; there, the money was handed over to them that had been donated for the Temple. ... ¹⁰ They passed on the money to the masters / foremen who had been charged with the repair works at the Temple.

In v. 10, one could also use an impersonal construction, as GNT does: “This money was then handed over to ...”.

2Chr 35:1-19 – Several issues

The section 2Chr 35:1-19 is a difficult one.

The section divides up as follows:

Verses Topics

- 1 General introduction
- 2 King’s command to the priests (brief)
- 3-6 King’s command to the Levites (with speech)
- 7-9 The King and other leaders donate animals to the people
- 10-16 Execution of king’s command / Passah ritual
- 17-19 Closing statement about the exceptional character of this Passover celebration

The paragraph vv. 10-16 is framed by the almost identical statement “So the service was prepared, ...” in vv. 10 & 16. The paragraph focuses on the Levites’ service to everybody else.

The participants are:

- King Josiah
- various leaders
- the priests
- the Levites, including the singers and the gatekeepers
- the sons of the people (*literally*), i.e. the ordinary Israelites (vv. 5/7/12/13)

The word “brothers” refers to: literal brothers in v. 9, the ordinary Israelites in v. 5/6, fellow Levites with different tasks in v. 15.

Key points discussed below are these:

- V. 3: The Levites should leave the Ark where it is – in the Temple, and not carry it around anymore, but devote themselves to tasks that are in demand today.
- The various words for ‘division’ in vv. 4/5/10/12 are synonyms and do not necessarily have to be distinguished. For the sake of clarity, it might be better to *not* use different words for them.
- What is said in v. 5 means that each Levitical group served a number of Israelite families.
- The “holy place” in v. 5 is the court of the Temple.
- The cattle in vv. 7-9 are for peace offerings.
- *’ōlâ* (usually “burnt offering”) in vv. 12-16 refers to the parts of the paschal lambs that were burned on the altar.

2Chr 35:3 – What should the Levites do with the Ark?

2Chr 35:3 says:

He also said to the Levites who taught all Israel and who were holy to the LORD, “Put [נָתַן] *nātan* the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David king of Israel built; it will be a burden on your shoulders no longer. Now serve the LORD your God and His people Israel.

The *Handbook* says:

According to 2 Chr 5, the Covenant Box had already been placed in the Temple at the time of King Solomon. Interpreters are unsure of the meaning of the Hebrew here. How can the Levites put the Covenant Box in the Temple if it has already been put there? For this reason some interpreters suggest that the sense here must be “Since the sacred ark ... was placed inside the temple built by Solomon ...” (Mft; similarly Osty). Peregrino says “Leave the holy ark in the temple that Solomon ... built.”

The commentators entertain various ideas as to why the Ark might have to be “put” into the Temple. One is that during Manasseh’s reign it might have been removed. But the sentence “it will be a burden on your shoulders no longer” does not suggest this background. Or could the Ark have been taken to war, as in the earlier days of the Judges? The commentaries do not mention this, probably because the Bible itself does not. What we do know is that the Temple is seen as a “house of rest for the Ark” (1Chr 28:2). It is unlikely that it was removed from there ever again (cf. Japhet).

The problematic word נָתַן *nātan* is the normal qal plural imperative of נָתַן *ntn* ‘to give’ etc. This verb can also take the meaning ‘to put’ (cf. HALAT s.v., 12.), and this is where HALAT lists the present reference. However, *ntn* can also mean ‘to give up’ (HALOT, 2. [HALAT: “überlassen”]), as in 1Ki 18:26; Ezk 45:8, or ‘to hand over’ (HALOT, 9. [HALAT: “preisgeben”]), as in Judg 11:9. Such references suggest that the idea of **‘leaving something to somebody / somewhere’** is not totally outside the scope of *ntn*, even if neither HALOT nor DCH list it explicitly. It would be fitting here: **“Leave the ark where it is”**, as it were, “Do not concern yourself with it anymore.”

Keil thinks “not of material placing, but of mental”, and comments:

“Set the ark into the house” is equivalent to, “Overlook, leave it in the temple; you have not any longer, since Solomon built a house for it, to bear it upon your shoulders;” *i.e.*, Think not on that which formerly ... belonged to your service, but serve the Lord and His people now in the manner described in ver. 4 ff.

The last point is seen similarly by Williamson (NCBC, 1982), who writes: “Here, he seems to be broadening the idea to include other aspects of cultic service, and this is amplified in the sequel.”

Thompson (NAC, 1994) says:

In many of the pagan rituals of the ancient Near East the image of a deity was carried in procession on special occasions [with footnote referring to Clendenen]. Perhaps Manasseh had begun such a practice with the ark of the Lord contrary to the law. If so, it is possible to translate the verb *nātan* (“put”) as “leave.”

I quote this not because I think it is likely that the Ark had been carried around, but because Thompson, too, endorses the possibility of translating *ntn* with “to leave”.

Translation

Peregrino’s translation “Leave the holy ark in the temple, ...” seems to fit the text and the circumstances best. While most English versions say “Put / Place ...”, the Contemporary Russian Version has “Оставьте“ (*Engl.*: “Leave! / Keep!”), and GECL renders freely: “sie hat ihren festen Platz in dem Tempel gefunden” (*Engl.*: “It [i.e. the Ark] has found its constant place in the Temple”) – a thought that is found similarly in CEV.

One further note on the background of the phrase “**a burden on your shoulders**”: Num 4 describes how the priests, the sons of Aaron, had to first cover the Ark (vv. 5-6); then the other Kohathites – normal Levites, not priests – should come and carry it (v. 15).

2Chr 35:4ff. – The divisions of the Levites

The words for ‘division’

The four different words for ‘division’ in vv. 4-12 might be confusing. The relevant verses are these:

4 Prepare yourself by your fathers' households in your divisions [מַחֲלָקוֹת], according to the writing of David ...

5 Moreover, stand in the holy place according to the sections [פְּלִיָּה] of the fathers' households of your brethren the lay people, and according to the Levites [*in Hebrew this phrase comes at the end*], by division [חֲלִיקוֹת] of a father's household.

10 So the service was prepared, and the priests stood at their stations and the Levites by their divisions [מַחֲלָקוֹת] according to the king's command.

12 Then they removed the burnt offerings that they might give them to the sections [מִפְּלִיָּה] of the fathers' households of the lay people to present to the LORD, as it is written in the book of Moses. ...

Japhet explains helpfully:

The two words *p³luggâ* and *h^aluqqâ* are unique. The former derives from the quite rare root *plg* denoting ‘divide’, while the latter comes from its common synonym *hlq*, the ordinary word for ‘division’ being *mah^alōqet*, also found in this chapter (vv. 4, 10). The meaning of these terms is clarified by their synonyms, attested in v. 12 for the one and v. 10 for the other. The unique *p³luggâ* / *miplaggâ* refer to the ‘father’s house’ of the lay Israelites, while *h^aluqqâ* / *mah^alōqet* refer to the Levites.

Thus, a meaning-based translation may use the same word for מַחֲלָקוֹת in vv. 4/10 and חֲלִיקוֹת in v. 5. – Also, both פְּלִיָּה in v. 5 and מִפְּלִיָּה in v. 12 refer to the same thing. – Anyhow, what is meant are ‘divisions / groups’, and even if all four Hebrew words were translated with the same word, it seems nothing essential would be lost.

The arrangement by groups

V. 4: How should we translate the verb כִּוְּן *kwn*? NASB and several others say “Prepare yourselves” (by families and divisions). This might be unclear. The next imperative is found in v. 5 and comes from עָמַד ‘*md*: “Stand ...”. V. 4 anticipates this and says “get organized”. Forming the groups *is* the “preparing”. However, translators should not use a verb that gives the impression that the Levites had to *make up* these groups from scratch. As the verse says, the Levites had been divided into groups a long time ago by David (see 1Chr 23ff.) Even if Josiah had to revive the system, the divisions were already established. Therefore, I suggest “Arrange yourselves ...”.

What does “by your fathers' households in your divisions” (v. 4) mean? Is it not an “either-or-choice”: by families, or by divisions? No, it is both. The Levites were divided up according to their *tasks*, but division into *family units* also played a role (see. e.g. 1Chr 23:6/11). **Naturally, every Levite belongs to a clan, and it is these clans which had been assigned certain duties.** GNT is a good model here:

Take your places in the Temple by clans, according to the responsibilities assigned to you by King David and his son King Solomon,

The syntax of v. 5 is difficult, and the commentaries do not explain it. Most English versions seem to have the meaning overall alright, but lack some clarity. NIV provides a reasonable, albeit not ideal, model:

Stand in the holy place with a group of Levites for each subdivision of the families of your fellow countrymen, the lay people.

Japhet explains how this is meant. Referring to late Second Temple literature she says:

“By analogy to the priests and Levites, the lay people of Israel were divided into twenty-four divisions, each represented in its turn at the daily sacrifice in the Temple, and this division was also maintained during the pilgrimages, ...

Thus, each Levitical clan served a group of the people’s clans.¹⁷ The figure below shows this in a simplified way.

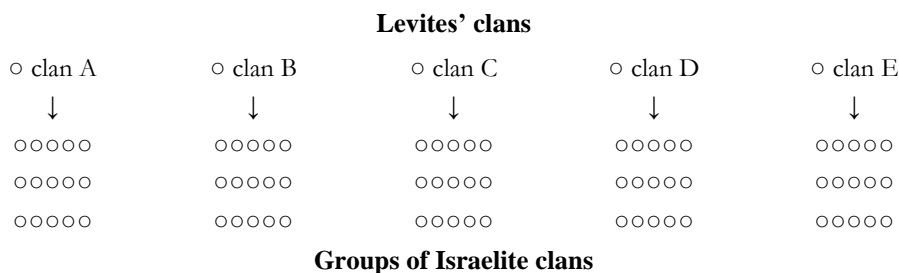


Figure 1: Divisions of Levites serving the divisions of the ordinary people

GECL (2000) expresses it this way:

Jede eurer Dienstgruppen soll für eine Anzahl von Familien aus dem Volk im Heiligtum bereitstehen.

Engl.: Each of your service groups shall stand ready in the holy place [to serve] a number of families from the people.

“Father’s house” – singular versus plural

Father’s house: In vv. 4/5/12, the plural in “house of fathers” must be read as “houses of fathers”, i.e. families / clans. (This is due to a grammatical exception in this phrase.)¹⁸ The second occurrence of “house of father” in v. 5 is, significantly, a singular. This supports the meaning rendered above: *one* Levitical clan was responsible for a *group* of Israelite clans.

Further remarks

“Stand in the **holy place**” (v. 5): This cannot be the “Holy Place” (so REB), the front part of the sanctuary itself. It has nothing to do with handling sacrifices, and the ordinary people would not have access. The Hebrew word **קֹדֶשׁ** *qōdeš* is less specific. “Holy place” here refers to the courtyard(s) of the Temple – as is often the case with the expression “house of the LORD” as well. NLT and NET say “Stand in the sanctuary”, CEV “arrange yourselves throughout the temple”. Clearer would be “Stand in the holy Temple(’s) court”.

Some versions (NET, REB) speak of the Levites “representing” the people. I am not sure it is useful to introduce this idea of representation here, because the passage is about the Levites serving the ordinary people. One might include the word “assigned (clans of the people)”, but we do not know how the ordinary people were organized.

A model that expresses all elements of the verse in a clear way would be this:

Take your places in the court of the Sanctuary according to your work groups – in such a way that each of your [Levite] clans can serve a number of clans of (your brothers,) the ordinary people.

¹⁷ For some kind of matching between priestly and Levitical groups on the one side and the people’s clans on the other, cf. also Neh 10:35 [Engl.34], where lots are cast “among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for the wood offering, to bring it into the house of our God, by ancestral houses, at appointed times, ...”.

¹⁸ See Joüon/Muraoka (A *Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 2006) (§136m-n). Peter Schmidt: Short Note: *bêt āb* ‘Father’s House’ in Numbers. *Journal of Translation*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2017, pp. 26-28. 2017. (P. 27). <https://www.sil.org/resources/publications/entry/72283>.

2Chr 35:7-9 – Who gives to who?

A table might help to get the overview.

| Giver | Recipient | Number of animals | |
|---|------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| | | Lambs & young goats for Passover | Cattle for peace offering |
| King Josiah | ordinary people | 30,000 | 3,000 |
| King Josiah's officers | people, priests, and Levites | | |
| the officials of the house of God: Hilkiah, Zechariah, Jehiel | (other) priests | 2,600 | 300 |
| the officers of the Levites Conaniah, Shemaiah, Nethanel (brothers); Hashabiah, Jeiel, Jozabad | (other) Levites | 5,000 | 500 |

2Chr 35:7-9 – What kind of sacrifices are the cattle?

The question is for which of the following three purposes the cattle was used: (1) as Passover sacrifices, as an alternative for lambs or kids; (2) as burnt offerings (mentioned in v. 12/14/16); or (3) as peace offerings (not mentioned here by this term, but implied in the whole festival procedures, cf. 2Chr 30:22/24). The last option is the most likely one. Keil says:

Nothing is said as to the purpose of these [oxen], but from ver. 13 we learn that the flesh of them was cooked in pots and caldrons, and consequently that they were intended for the sacrificial meals during the seven days of the Mazzoth-feast [i.e. the Feast of Unleavened Bread]; see on vers. 12 and 13.

The *Handbook* agrees. It says (on v. 13):

And they boiled the holy offerings in pots, in caldrons, and in pans: The holy offerings refers to the bulls that were offered (see verse 7).

The comment on v. 7 says:

According to Exo 12.3-11, the Passover offering must consist of sheep or goats, and the meat must be roasted, not boiled in water. However, according to Deut 16.2-8, cattle as well as sheep and goats could be offered, and the meat must be boiled in water. These two different traditions are combined in 2 Chronicles, with the result that the Passover offering consisted of sheep and goats, and the cattle were considered as a separate additional offering. Verse 13 calls the offering of cattle “the holy offerings.” The Hebrew text here in verse 7 indicates that the passover offerings consisted only of the lambs and kids. The bulls were not a part of the passover offerings but were additional offerings. By restructuring the wording of this verse, GNT does not maintain this distinction.

Japhet is also sceptical that cattle could serve as Passover animals. In contrast to Keil and Rudolph she does not connect them with the peace offerings of the feast of unleavened bread either. She says (1050):

These sacrifices, then, may belong to the category defined in rabbinical terminology as ‘*Shalmei Hagigah*’, that is, peace-offering sacrifices offered during the festivals. These were offered at the eve of Passover together with the Passover lamb (Mishnah, Hagigah, ch. 1); they thus belong to the Passover, but were not ‘the’ Passover sacrifice.

Translation

For “cattle”, Hebrew uses the general word בָּקָר *bāqār*. Since these cattle are intended for peace offerings, their sex does not matter (see Lev 3:1). If, however, they were intended for burnt offerings, they would have to be male ones (see Lev 1:3). This would influence the word choice in some languages.

Taking v. 7 as an example, most English versions reflect the Hebrew syntax by adding “and also three thousand cattle” (or similar) after “Passover offerings”. This keeps the ambiguity whether they are Passover offerings or not. The German NLT resolves this by explicitly including the cattle among the Passover offerings. This is probably wrong. GHFA does it the other way round: It specifies that the cattle were “für andere Opfer” (= for other offerings). I see no English, German or French version **explicating that they were “for peace offerings”**. But this is what at least part of the commentaries suggest. It also seems to fit v. 13 best, where the Passover proper and the other sacrifices are dealt with in different ways.

In v. 13, speaking of “the holy / sacred offerings” (so NIV, NET, NLT, GNT) makes it difficult for the reader to make the connection. **An exlication could be this: “... and boiled the meat of the cows, the holy offerings ...”**. GHFA is not quite that explicit, but it makes the connection to the sacrificial meal: “..., während das übrige Fleisch für die Opfermahlzeiten ... gekocht wurde. ...” (= ... while the other meat for the sacrificial meals was boiled ...). CEV (“boiled the meat for the other offerings”) is unhelpful.

2Chr 35:10-16 – The Passover ritual

There are two kinds of sacrifices: lambs for the Passover proper, and bulls as additional peace offerings (or: fellowship offerings). This is what happens – in simple statements:

- The priests and the other Levites stand in the foreseen places.
- The Levites slaughter the Passover lambs.
- The priests sprinkle their blood at the altar.
- The Levites proceed to skin the lambs.
- The Levites put aside the fat parts of the Passover lambs (here called “burnt offerings”) and give them to the people.
- The people take them to the altar, where the priests burn them.
- The same happens with the fat parts of the bulls.
- The Levites roast the meat of the Passover lambs over the fire.
- They boil the meat of the bulls.
- They take the roasted meat and the boiled meat to the people.
- The Levites do the same with the lambs (Passover) and the bulls (peace offering) for the priests and for themselves.
- The priests burn up the fat parts of the Passover lambs and of the bulls on the altar.
- The [Levitical] singers sing, the gatekeepers are on guard.
- Everybody eats the Passover and the peace offering.

Let us now take a closer look at the text. Some clarifications are made in the margin:

| NASB | Explanation |
|--|--|
| <p>10 <u>So the service was prepared</u>, and the priests stood at their stations and the Levites by their divisions according to the king's command.</p> <p>11 <u>They</u> slaughtered the Passover animals, and while the priests <u>sprinkled the blood</u> received from their hand, the Levites skinned them.</p> <p>12 Then they <u>removed the burnt offerings</u> that they might give them to the sections of</p> | <p>This clause, together with the similar one in v. 16, forms an inclusio for the paragraph.</p> <p>“They”: i.e. the Levites (so Keil, Japhet).</p> <p>“sprinkled”: probably at the altar; this is an adaptation of the original Passover ritual, where the blood was smeared on the doorframes.</p> <p>“removed”: Alternatively: “put aside / took off” [Hebrew: וַיִּסְרְוּ]. “Burnt offerings”</p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| <p>the fathers' households of the lay people to present to the LORD, as it is written in the book of Moses.</p> <p><u>They did this also with the bulls.</u></p> <p>13 So they <u>roasted the Passover animals on the fire</u> according to the ordinance, and they boiled <u>the holy things</u> in pots, in kettles, in pans, and carried them speedily to all the lay people.</p> | <p>here means the fatty parts of the Passover sacrifices (see discussion below).</p> <p>The same procedure applies. The rest of the bulls' meat would then be used as the 'peace-offerings of the festival' (Japhet). (Thus the bulls are not the burnt offerings from above (Keil, <i>Handbook</i>.)</p> <p>"roasted": as at the original Passover.</p> <p>"the holy things": i.e. the meat of the peace offerings, namely the cows (this point is not debated much; cf. 29:33).</p> |
| <p>14 <u>Afterwards</u> they <u>prepared</u> for themselves and for the priests, because the priests, the sons of Aaron, were offering <u>the burnt offerings and the fat</u> until night; therefore the Levites <u>prepared</u> for themselves and for the priests, the sons of Aaron.</p> <p>15 The singers, the sons of Asaph, were also at their stations according to the command of David, Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun the king's seer; and the gatekeepers at each gate did not have to depart from their service, because the Levites their brethren <u>prepared</u> for them.</p> | <p>"Preparing" (3x in these two verses) includes all previously mentioned steps: slaughtering etc.</p> <p>On "the burnt offerings and the fat", see the discussion below.</p> |
| <p>16 <u>So all the service of the LORD was prepared</u> on that day to celebrate the Passover, and to offer burnt offerings on the altar of the LORD according to the command of King Josiah.</p> | <p>This clause, together with the similar one in v. 10, forms an inclusio for the paragraph.</p> |

2Chr 35:12/14/16 – What are the “burnt offerings”?

The “burnt offerings” **cannot be the Passover lambs** themselves, because burnt offerings were burnt up on the altar, whereas the Passover lambs were eaten. Also, the Passover lambs were already slaughtered in v. 11. If “burnt offerings” was referring to them, there would be no point in “setting them aside” anymore, to be offered. They were eaten. (Keil also points out that v. 13 says the Levites distributed the meat. Therefore they cannot have distributed the animals already in v. 12.)

The “burnt offerings” **can also not be the cattle** that was donated (vv. 7-9), because v. 12 first says (NRSV) “They set aside the burnt offerings ...”, and afterwards says “And they did the same with the bulls.” So, in the beginning something *other* than the bulls must have been talked about (or else the words “and thus for the cattle” refer only to part of the preceding sentence). What, then, is meant with “burnt offerings”? Keil, Rudolph, Williamson and Japhet all agree that, at least in v. 12, – in Williamson’s words – :

... in the context this must refer to the parts of the sacrifice which were burnt on the altar (v. 14), not a completely different set of offerings.

There is a linguistic argument for this view. V. 12 uses the verb סור *sur*, which is a technical term in Leviticus. Japhet explains (1052):

..., the verb ‘remove’ (*hāsīr*) being the common term for the treatment of the fat parts of the sacrifices (Lev 3:4/10/15 etc.). ... The fat parts removed from the lambs are offered on behalf of the lay people as ‘burnt offering’, ...

Williamson adds:

..., there is a marked assimilation of the Passover to the ‘sacrifice of peace offering’ of Lev 3 in particular. ... This will then justify what would otherwise be an inaccurate comment: **as it is written in the Book of Moses.**

Now Deut 16:2 sounds as if cattle could be used for the Passover.

You shall sacrifice the Passover to the LORD your God from the flock and the herd, ...

McConville (Deuteronomy, AOTC, 2002) comments on Deut 16:2:

Deuteronomy uses less prescriptive terms, allowing larger cattle to be used either for the Passover sacrifice itself or for the feast more generally. ... The terms used may also be suggested by a consideration of other sacrifices that would accompany the Passover proper (cf. the sacrifices in Num 28:19; 2Chr 30:15,24!).

Whether Deuteronomy allows for cattle to be used as Passover sacrifices proper cannot be solved here conclusively. What is clear is that **Num 28:19/23-24 prescribes burnt offerings at the occasion of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread**. These were in addition to the regular morning- and evening sacrifices. **Could they be in view when 2Chr 35 speaks of burnt offerings? Hardly.** Num 28–29 contain the festival calendar and talk about the offerings that the priests are to present on behalf of the whole nation at the Temple. However, in the present verses it says “that they might give them to ... the lay people to present to the LORD” (2Chr 35:12).

In conclusion, I follow Keil’s explanation on v. 12 (p. 500):

We must consequently refer לְהַתְּחִילָהּ to the immediately preceding noun, הַחֲלֵב: to give the parts separated from the paschal lambs to be burnt upon the altar to the divisions of the people, that they might offer them to the Lord. This can only mean that each division of the fathers’-houses of the people approached the altar in turn to give the portions set apart for the עֹלָהּ to the priests, who then offered them on the fire of the altar to the Lord.

What is slightly unsatisfying about this explanation is that עֹלָהּ ‘olâ is not used in this sense anywhere else. The explanation has the advantage, though, of not introducing a third kind of sacrificial animal besides the Passover lambs and the cattle for the peace offering in the text.¹⁹

Related text: 2Chr 30:15 also speaks of “Passover [lambs]”, and “burnt offerings”, and then in v. 24 of more bulls and sheep being given to the people by Hezekiah and his officials. That these animals were meant for peace offerings seems clear from the fact that v. 23 reports the continuation of the festival for another seven days; presumably, the obligatory Passover and burnt offerings had already been offered.

Translation

If possible, the hiphil of the verb סִוַּר *sur* should be rendered in the same way as in Lev 3. Thus, probably closer to “to remove” than to “to set aside”.

A literal translation of עֹלָהּ ‘olâ as “burnt offering” (e.g. NIV, NET, NLT, GNT) will confuse or misguide the reader. REB has it right:

¹⁹ The *Handbook* explains the text differently. It says about v. 12:

And they set aside the burnt offerings: The pronoun **they** refers to the Levites, which CEV makes explicit. A literal translation of this clause may incorrectly suggest that the burnt offerings had already been made. Rather, as GNT makes clear, the animals that had been killed and prepared to be burnt offerings were set aside. For **burnt offerings**, see the comments on 1 Chr 16.1 and 2 Chr 1.6. These offerings differed from the Passover sacrifices mentioned in the previous verse. ...

And so they did with the bulls: Since this information was already included in what is said about “the animals for burnt offerings” earlier in this verse, GNT does not repeat it here. But it is quite possible that **the burnt offerings** refers only to the smaller animals and that **the bulls** (literally “the bull”) are intentionally mentioned separately. This second interpretation is reflected in the NJPSV rendering “they did the same for the cattle.”

¹² Then they removed the fat flesh, which they allocated to the people by groups of families for them to offer to the LORD, as prescribed in the book of Moses; and so with the bulls. [*Footnote: fat flesh: or whole-offering.*]

One might want to explicate: “Then they removed the fat flesh of the Passover animals, ...”. CEV expresses the same idea, but less precisely. – Menge translated “Sie legten aber die Stücke beiseite, welche verbrannt werden sollten, ...” (*Engl.: And they put aside the pieces that were to be burned up.*) The advantage of this solution is that a reader who compares versions can make the connection between this interpretation and the word “burnt offering” in other versions. All combined, I suggest: “**They removed the fat flesh, which was to be burned up, from the Passover animals, ...**”.

In vv. 14/16, it is probably best to keep the same translation for *’ōlā* as in v. 12, although, theoretically, in vv. 14/16 the normal meaning “burnt offering” is less problematic than in v. 12; it could possibly refer to the prescribed burnt offerings (see above on Num 28–29).

2Chr 35:14 – What does the fat belong to?

This verse speaks of the priests, who were offering “the burnt offerings and the fat [חֵלֶב] ...”.

If we keep in line with the argumentation further above, “burnt offering” should here, too, be translated “**the fat flesh of the Passover animals**”.

This leaves us with the second part “and the fat”: this, then, must be **the fat of the peace offerings**. Leviticus 3, beginning with v. 3 and throughout the chapter, refers to the fatty parts of the peace offerings as to those parts that have to be burnt (whereas the rest is eaten by the worshippers).

The *Handbook* takes the same view, and this seems the simplest reading of the text to me. However, Japhet (1052) sees “the burnt offerings and the fat” as the regular burnt offerings (as prescribed in Num 28) and the fat from all the other sacrifices, and Keil prefers that the two phrases should be taken to mean “the burnt-offering, viz. the fat [of both Passover and cattle?] which was offered as a burnt-offering”.

Related texts: Compare 2Chr 7:7; 29:35, which also show the combination of “burnt offerings” and “fat” – with the fat explicitly belonging to the “peace offerings”.

After these technical details in 2Chr 35:1-19 have been sorted out, one should be able to produce a translation that reflects the vivid activities of that outstanding Passover celebration.