

(door), column

דָּלָת

1. Statistics

Torah: 0. Nebiim: 1. Ketubim: 0. Total: 1.

The word דָּלָת occurs 77 times in the Hebrew Bible. Normally it means ‘door’. In 2 Kgs 12:10(9) the meaning is ‘lid’ (‘door’ of a chest), in Ezek. 41:24 ‘leaf (hinged section) of a folding door’. In one instance it occurs in the context of writing (Jer. 36:23) and some scholars have proposed to see it as a leaf from a scroll there.

2a. Literal Use

See under metaphorical use.

2b. Figurative Use

According to some scholars it occurs as writing equipment only once, in the meaning of ‘hinged leaf of a scroll’ (Jer. 36:26; Fürst & Ryssel, *HCHAT*, Bd. 1, 300; Hicks, 1983, esp. 61; Ahituv, *EFP*, 71; as an option: Loewenstamm & Blau, *TLB*, vol.2, 306; R.S. Hess, *NIDOT*, vol. 1, 963). If so, this was initially no doubt a metaphorical use of ‘hinged door’. A comparable semantic development can be observed with rabbinical Hebrew דָּלָת, ‘board, tablet’, but also ‘column’ (Levy, *WTM*, Bd. 1, 416-7). In several North-West Semitic languages *dlt* was used for wooden hinged tablets provided with a layer of wax which enabled administrators to jot down fast notes, such as lists of deliveries (Galling 1971; Stol 1978; 1998). This usage is attested for Ugaritic, Phoenician and epigraphical Hebrew and wandered as a loanword even to Greece (see below). But obviously this meaning is unacceptable in Jer. 36:26.

Cutting skins with a penknife (דָּעַר הַסֶּפֶר, → דָּעַר) is difficult which suggested to Hicks that the king would have cut the threads binding the leaves of parchment together (see for example the great Isaiah scroll from Qumran, Parry & Qimron 1999). However, the numbers three or four in the text do not agree well with this interpretation and with the king’s angry mood. Moreover, the roll might have been made of papyrus (Lundbom 2004). So the traditional rendering ‘column’ which is supported by the ancient

versions is preferable.

According to Eshel 2000, 185-7, דָּלַת would also mean ‘column’ in Prov. 8:34. The parallelism with v. 3 renders this proposal less attractive.

3. Epigraphic Hebrew

The meaning ‘hinged wax tablet’ is possible in Lachish Ostrakon 4:Obv. 3. Renz & Röllig, *HAE*, Bd. 1, 421 render ‘Kolumne’ (also preferred by Aḥituv, *EFP*, 71), but since it is unlikely that a military man who usually wrote on ostraca would have written a neat column on a clay tablet, parchment or papyrus for this special occasion, a temporary list on wax is more likely. However, since we do not know what his superior had written it is also possible that the text was a public announcement which due to the circumstances had to be written on the door of the barrack (note the use of the article: *hdlt*).

4. Cognates

SEMITIC: In the meaning ‘door’ the word is attested in several North-West Semitic languages and in Akkadian (Marrassini 1971, 27-30; Cohen *et al.*, *DRS*, fasc. 4, 260; Klein, *CEDHL*, 126).

EGYPTIAN: With the meaning ‘door(-leaf)’ attested as a Semitic loanword (Hoch, *SWET*, Nos. 528 and 533).

AKKADIAN: According to Stol 1998 *daltu* ‘door’ is also attested in the meaning of ‘Holztafelblatt’.

UGARITIC: According to Gordon 1965; Stol 1994; 1998, and others, Ugaritic *dlt* is attested in the meaning of ‘wooden writing board’ in KTU 5.7:5. This tablet is a scribal exercise of disjuncted words. Nothing can be said about the meaning and Gordon’s interpretation is not accepted by Del Olmo Lete & Sanmartín, *DULAT*.

PHOENICIAN, PUNIC: Next to the normal meaning ‘door’, the meanings ‘(bronze) plaque’, ‘writing tablet or book’, and ‘column’ are attested (Krahmalkov, *PPD*, 149; for other opinions see Hoft-ijzer & Jongeling, *DNSI*, 250).

GREEK: A loanword δάλτος / δέλτος, ‘writing tablet’, *LSJ*, 368, 377; Lewy, *SFG*, 171; Brown 1995, 52-3. It is used in this meaning

in 6 1 Macc. 8:22; 14:18, 26, 48.

5. Ancient Versions

6 and other Greek versions: In Jer. 43(36):23 6 has *σελίς*, ‘column of writing (of a papyrus-roll)’ (*GELS-L*, 423; *LSJ*, 1590).

7: In Jer. 36:26 *פַּצִּי/פַּצִּיָּם*, according to Levy, *CWT*, Bd. 2, 283; Jastrow, *DTT*, 1205 and Dalman, *ANHT*, 343 s.v. *פַּצִּיָּם*: ‘column’. Possibly in this case too the original meaning was ‘board, plank, doorpost’ (Sokoloff, *DJPA*, 442; *DJBA*, 923).

8: *ps*’, ‘column, page’ (Payne Smith (Margoliouth), *STS*. 454).

9: *pagella*, ‘little page’ (var. *plagella*) < *plagula*, in post-Augustinian Latin ‘sheet’ (*LD*, 1291, 1383).

6. Judaic Sources

Not attested as writing equipment.

7. Illustrations

Tov 2004, 82-104, and the Plates.

8. Archaeological Remarks

[Will be added later on.]

9. Conclusion

The word דָּלָה, normally ‘door’, is used metaphorically for columns of writing in a scroll, probably a papyrus roll. Although in other Semitic languages the word could denote a wooden writing board provided with a layer of wax on which scribes made hasty temporary notes, this meaning is not attested in Biblical Hebrew. Both context and most ancient versions argue in favour of ‘column’.

10. Bibliography

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