

**staff, support**

מִשְׁעָן / מִשְׁעָנָה / מִשְׁעָנָה / מִשְׁעָן

**1. Statistics**

	Torah	Nebiim	Ketubim	Total
Total	2	13	2	17
1. Staff	2	8	1	11
2. Support	0	5	1	6

Since the words מִשְׁעָנָה / מִשְׁעָן occur only once, moreover as word pair and parallel with מִשְׁעָן, this survey takes them as intentional artificial deformations of the latter (Isa. 3:1). The masculine and the feminine form of the same noun can serve to express entirety (*GKC*, § 122v).

**2a. Literal Use**

מִשְׁעָנָה serving the literal sense of the stem, refers to a staff which offers support on a walk or journey, always with an accompanying purpose such as help for an infirm (Exod. 21:19) or elderly person (Zech. 8:4), a symbol of authority (Num. 21:18), herding the flock (Ps. 23:4) or an instrument for performing miracles (Judg. 6,21; 2 Kgs 4:29, 31). The travelling background keeps a low profile where the theological meaning of relying on YHWH rather than on men is involved (2 Kings 18:21 / Isa. 36:6; Ezek. 29:6).

**2b. Figurative Use**

The second series of noun forms (מִשְׁעָן and מִשְׁעָנָה / מִשְׁעָן) occurs only in the figurative sense of ‘support, stay’.

The first noun form (מִשְׁעָן) refers to the basic needs of ‘bread/water’, the supply of which the leaders have to guarantee the people. This noun form occurs once more with reference to YHWH (2 Sam. 22:19 / Ps. 18:19). As such the noun serves the biblical theme which is mainly expressed by the corresponding verb (שָׁעַן Niph. + עָל) that people should depend on God rather than on anything else (Isa. 10:20; 30:12; 31:1; 36:6; 50:10; Ezek. 29:7; Mic. 3:11; Job 8:15; 24:23; Prov. 3:5; 2 Chr. 16:7).

The couple of the masculine and feminine noun forms in Isa. 3:1 (מִשְׁעָנָה / מִשְׁעָן) refers to the subsequent list of professional groups (vv. 2-4). Usually the following מִשְׁעָן־לָחֶם וְכֹל מִשְׁעָן־מַיִם is seen as an explanatory gloss (Duhm 1892, 44) but it might well be the writer’s intention to indicate that the basic supplies of

bread and water will be lacking when the leadership is removed (cf. vv. 6-7).

### 3. Epigraphic Hebrew

Not attested.

### 4. Cognates

Etymologies thus far proposed for  $\sqrt{\text{שען}}$  are unconvincing (cf. *HCHAT*, Bd. 2, 483; *HALAT*, 1488; *CEDHL*, 672). Metathesis of  $\sqrt{\text{שנ}}$  ‘to be strong’ (attested in Aramaic, and rarely in Sabaic and Akkadian) might be taken into consideration. Cf. Arab. ‘*uššānat* ‘trunk, stem’ (Kazimirski, *DAF*, t. 2, 264). Cf. the rendering of  $\text{ש}$  in Ps. 17:19, of  $\text{ט}^{\circ}$  in Exod. 21:19, of  $\text{ש}$  in Isa. 3:1, and the association with strength in 1 QS XI 4-5 (see below).

### 5. Ancient Versions

$\text{ש}$  and other Greek versions:  $\text{ש}$  translates  $\text{משענת}$  by  $\rho\acute{\alpha}\beta\delta\omicron\varsigma$  (6 times), only in 2 Kgs 4:29, 31 and Ps. 23:4 by  $\beta\alpha\kappa\tau\eta\rho\acute{\iota}\alpha$ . Both Greek nouns mean ‘staff, rod’. Apparently the translators regarded it as a synonym of  $\rightarrow \text{מִטָּה}$  and  $\text{מִקֵּל}$ . In Num. 21:18  $\text{ש}$  substitutes the noun by the infinitive  $\kappa\upsilon\rho\iota\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\alpha\iota$ , effacing in this way the concrete meaning of ‘staff’ in favour of its function of exercising authority. The abstract noun  $\text{משען}$  is translated, likewise, by abstract nouns:  $\acute{\epsilon}\pi\iota\sigma\tau\acute{\eta}\rho\iota\gamma\mu\alpha$  in 2 Sam. 22:19 /  $\acute{\alpha}\nu\tau\iota\sigma\tau\acute{\eta}\rho\iota\gamma\mu\alpha$  in Ps. 17:19 (both ‘support’),  $\iota\sigma\chi\acute{\upsilon}\varsigma$ , ‘strength’, in Isa. 3:1. In the latter text, the word pair  $\text{משען ומשענת}$  is rendered by participles which maintain the difference of gender:  $\iota\sigma\chi\acute{\upsilon}\omicron\nu\tau\alpha$  και  $\iota\sigma\chi\acute{\upsilon}\omicron\sigma\alpha\nu$ .

$\text{ש}^{\text{T}}$ : Exod. 21:19  $\text{משענה}$ , ‘(supporting) staff’ (*DSA*, 320); Num. 21:19  $\text{הסמכה}$ , ‘support’ (*DSA*, 597).

$\text{ט}$ : In Exod. 21:19, Fragn. A; Num. 21:18  $\text{ט}^{\circ}$  and the Palestinian Targumim; 2 Kgs 4:29, 31  $\text{חוטרא}$  ‘staff, rod’. In Exod. 21:19  $\text{ט}^{\circ}$  has  $\text{בוריא}$  ‘strength’ (*WTM*, Bd. 1, 115).  $\text{סמכה}$  ‘support’, is preferred in 2 Kgs 18:4; Isa. 3:1 (next to  $\text{סעדא}$  ‘support’); Ezek. 29:6. In Judg. 6:21 we find an isolated  $\text{שוטיהא}$  ‘staff’. And in Zech. 8:4 the  $\text{ט}$  opts for paraphrastic  $\text{עוברדא}$  ‘work’.

$\text{ש}$ :  $\text{משענת}$  is always rendered by *hwtr* ‘staff, rod, sceptre’, except

in 2 Kgs 18:21 || Isa. 36:6 where *smk* ‘pillar, support’ has been preferred. מִשְׁעָן is paraphrased by the participle Pa‘el of *sw* ‘to uphold, support’ (Payne Smith [Margoliouth], *CSD*, 369) in 2 Sam. 22:19, but by *prwq* ‘saviour’, in the parallel verse Ps. 18:18. In Isa. 3:1 it is freely translated with *smk* Pe‘al ‘to sustain, uphold, support’. The other related words in Isa. 3:1 are rendered *smwk*’ and *smwkt*’ ‘stay, support’.

v: This version translates מִשְׁעָנָה by *baculus*, only in Judg. 6:21 by *virga*, maybe because here the person holding the staff is the ‘messenger of YHWH’, who does not need a staff to support him. The abstract noun מִשְׁעָן is rendered as *firmamentum* ‘support’, in 2 Sam. 22:19 / Ps. 17 (18):19, as *robur* ‘strength, vigor’, in Isa. 3:1. In the latter text, the word pair מִשְׁעָנָה / מִשְׁעָן is translated by terms which do not maintain the gender difference of מ, ט and ש: *validem et fortem* ‘the valiant and the strong’.

## 6. Judaic Sources

In Sirach Hebrew, מִשְׁעָן occurs only in its abstract meaning. In Sirach ט it is equally rendered by abstract nouns (3:31: *στήριγμα* ‘support, staff’ [cf. 2 Sam. 22:19 / Ps. 17(18):19: *ἀντιστήριγμα*]; 36:29: *ἀναπαύσις* ‘rest’; 40:26: *βοήθεια* ‘help, aid’ [with regard to this verse, the Hebrew term is only attested in ms Masada; cf. Beentjes 1997, 160]).

The Dead Sea Scrolls are familiar with both noun forms. מִשְׁעָנָה is used, as in the Hebrew Bible, in literal sense in: ‘a delightful plantation ... its sprouts with support (מִשְׁעָנָה עַל) (up to) the height of heaven’ (4Q433a, frag. 2, 5), but the figurative sense is also found in the expressions: ‘God’s support’ (מִשְׁעָנָה אֵל; 1QM IV 13) and ‘their (i.e. of wicked people) support is without ...’ (מִשְׁעָנָהם בְּלֹא); 1QM XVII 4). The other noun form, מִשְׁעָן, occurs, as in the Hebrew Bible, only in figurative sense: ‘What always is, is support for my right hand’ (וְהוּיָא עוֹלָם מִשְׁעָן יְמִינִי); 1QS XI 4, see also XI 5). The circumstance that מִשְׁעָן יְמִינִי is used here in parallelism with ‘a rock of strength’ (סֹלֶעַ עוֹן, 1QS XI 4) and ‘his might’ (גְּבוּרָתוֹ, 1QS XI 5) suggests that מִשְׁעָן was associated with strength. The very fact that in 1QHa XVIII the two nouns occur in the same figurative sense in close distance to each other makes

clear that in these later period the functional difference of literal and figurative use between them no longer applied; cf.: ‘You have not placed my support in robbery’ (22-23: *ולא נתתה משעני על בצע*) with: ‘My support is in the refuge from up high’ (32: *ומשענתי במעוז מרום*).

In rabbinical sources, *משענת* in its literal meaning of a ‘staff’ or rather ‘crutch’ is attested in b. Gittin, 72b-73a : *דהלך על משענתו* : ‘when he goes about on his crutch’ (with reference to a convalescent person).

## 7. Illustrations

→ *הטמ*.

## 8. Archaeological Remarks

[Will be added later on.]

## 9. Conclusion

*משענת* and its variant forms denote a strong staff providing the convalescent and elderly with a reliable support (*שען*, ‘to lean on’), or serving the mighty as a symbol of authority. The circumstance that it is never used to strike might indicate that it was a sturdy, fairly heavy type of staff. Metaphorically it designated the unwavering support one expected from the deity. In the bible the noun forms (*משען* and *משענה* / *משען*) occur in the figurative sense of ‘support, stay’ only, but in Qumran also *משענת* occurs in this metaphorical sense. So there is insufficient reason to suppose a formal differentiation between the literal and the metaphorical use of the nouns.

## 10. Bibliography

See in addition to the literature cited with → *מטה*:

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1892, 44 – *GB*, 472: ‘Stab, Stütze’ – *HAHAT*, 759: ‘Stab, Stock, Stütze’ – *HALAT*, 615: ‘Stütze, Stab’ (*HALOT*: ‘staff, support’) – *HAWAT*, 254: ‘Stütze, Stab’ – *HCHAT*, Bd. 2, 801: ‘Stütze, Stab’ – *HWAT*, 389: ‘Stütze... Lebensunterhalt, Nahrung ... Stab ... Zepter’ – *KBL*, 579: ‘Stütze, Stab’ – *LHA*, 484: ‘fulcrum, baculus’ – *MHH*, 678: עזרה, סעד, עזרה; 679: מְשָׁעֵנָה, מקל – *NIDOT*, vol. 4, 202-4 – Gesenius, Roediger, *TPC*, 1458: ‘fulcrum, adminiculum, baculus’ – *TWAT*, Bd. 8, 351-5.

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