

pole, carrying frame, yoke

מוֹטָה, מוֹט

1. Statistics

מוֹט:

Torah: 3. Nebiim: 1. Ketubim: 0. Total: 4.

מוֹטָה:

Torah: 1. Nebiim: 10. Ketubim: 1. Total: 12.

2a. Literal Use

The spies who were sent out by Moses to reconnoitre the land of Canaan cut off וְמוֹרְהָ וְאֶשְׁכּוֹל עֲנָבִים אֶחָד, ‘one branch with a cluster of grapes’ in the Valley of Eshcol which was so heavy that they had to carry it on or in (ב) a מוֹט between two men (Num. 13:23). Usually this is interpreted as a pole from which the cluster hang, but the preposition ב renders this unlikely. Therefore many exegetes opt for a carrying frame, bier or stretcher which was called after its poles (metonymy). This is also the meaning of מוֹט in Num. 4:10, 12 where the covered lampstand (→ מְנֹרָה) with its utensils and the service vessels are put on (עַל) the מוֹט.

Summoned by David, the Levites brought up the ark בְּכַתְּפָם, ‘on their shoulders’, further explained as בַּמֹּטוֹת עָלֵיהֶם, ‘with the poles on them’, ‘as Moses had commanded’ (1 Chron. 15:15; cf. Num. 7:9; 2 Chron. 35:3); thus מוֹטָה can be seen as an equivalent of → בָּד here (cf. Exod. 25:10,12 etc.).

Symbolising the inescapable subjection to Babel, Jeremiah had to make straps (מוֹסְרוֹת, → מוֹסְרָה) and מוֹטוֹת (Jer. 27:2), parts of a yoke which may represent the yoke as a whole (cf. Jer. 27:8, 11, 12; 28:2, 4, 11, 14). In a more restricted sense two מוֹטוֹת are the wooden pegs which are put into holes through the yoke beam on both sides of the neck of the animal and joined together with straps. This contraption served to attach the draught animal to the yoke-beam and kept the beam in place on its neck (Schumacher 1889; Turkowski 1969; Zwickel 1991; Deist, *MCB*, 191; Borowski, *AIAI*, 51-2; Viberg 2007, 128-44). With a pair of draught animals it also served to keep the beasts apart to allow the draw-bar to pass between them. Because considerable force was applied to the yoke the beam had to be heavy.

In Jeremiah’s case it may have been a light imitation of such

a yoke or מוֹטָה עֵץ in Jer. 28:13 designates the wooden pegs around his neck, because Hananiah was able to break them with ease (Jer. 28:10-13) which he would not have accomplished if they had been forged of iron (בְּרִזָּה, Jer. 28:13).

2b. Figurative Use

Jeremiah's symbolic act hints at the figurative sense of the terms for yoke: they symbolise subjection, oppression and bondage (cf. Ruwe & Weise 2002). Deliverance from Egypt can be described with the same imagery: YHWH has broken the מוֹטָה of Israel's yoke. The people is no longer bound and bent down like a draught animal, but can walk erect (Lev.26:13; cf. Ezek. 30:18; 34:27).

The singular מוֹטָה in Isaiah 58:6 and 9 is further removed from its literal meaning, though the imagery can be recognised easily: The fast for YHWH is meant to undo the thongs (→ אֲגָדָה) of the מוֹטָה of oppression they have laid on the shoulders of others and break it, thus setting free the oppressed.

In Nah. 1:13 מוֹטָהוּ, 'his yoke bar' (|| מוֹסְרֵתֶיךָ, 'your straps') is a designation of Nineve's yoke of oppression which lady Zion had to bear and which YHWH will break off her neck now (מַעֲלֵיךָ counsels against the emendation מוֹטָהוּ, 'his rod', which has been defended by several scholars, e.g. Spronk 1997, 72-3).

3. Epigraphic Hebrew

Not attested.

4. Cognates

SEMITIC: The root is no doubt *mw/yt* which is attested in several Semitic languages (cf. Klein, *CEDHL*, 324; Leslau, *CDG*, 377; *HAHAT*, 641). It is certainly not related to → מוֹטָה (*contra* D.M. Fouts, *NIDOT*, vol. 2, 866). Since the Hebrew √מוֹט means 'to totter', it has been assumed that the name of the yoke bar מוֹטָה/מוֹט was derived from its back-and-forth, up-and-down motion on the necks of the draught animals. In view of Geez *myt* / *meta*, 'to turn away, divert, repel' and Arabic *myt*, 'to remove, put at a distance, repel' one might also think of a bar designed to keep the horned heads of the draught oxen apart.

EGYPTIAN: Possibly as a Semitic loanword in Late Egyptian *m'wḏ*

(Helck, *BÄV*, 513, No. 86; Hassan 1979).

OLD AND IMPERIAL ARAMAIC: In the Balaam inscription i.9 *mith* occurs in a damaged context, but usually this is connected to *mith* ‘rod’ (cf. Hoftijzer & Jongeling, *DNSI*, 617).

POSTBIBLICAL HEBREW: In mBeş. 3:3 and derived passages מוֹט is supposed to be a long carrying bar, מוֹטָה a short one. Cf. Levy, *WTM*, Bd. 3, 44-5; Dalman, *ANHT*, 227. Actually the passage states nothing about size and ם may have meant in a disjunctive sense, cf. *DCH*, vol. 2, 596.

5. Ancient Versions

⊖ and other Greek versions: In Lev. 26:13 מוֹטָה עֲלֵיכֶם is rendered τὸν δεσμὸν τοῦ ζυγοῦ ὑμῶν, so the plural is understood as a singular ‘band, bond’ (Lust *et al.*, *GELS-L*, 99).

In Num. 4:10,12; 13:23: 1 Chr. 15:15 ⊖ renders ἀναφορέυς, ‘bearer, carrying-pole, stave’ (*GELS-L*, 33-4).

In Isa. 58:6 ⊖ understands כָּל-מוֹטָה in a metaphorical sense: πᾶσαν συγγραφήν ἄδικον, ‘and every unjust contract’ (*GELS-L*, 444; see below on the ⊕) whereas only a few verses further on (Isa. 58:9) מוֹטָה is rendered more or less literally: σύνδεσμον, ‘band, fetter’ (*GELS-L*, 455).

In Jer. 28:13; Ezek. 34:27 ⊖ opts for κλοῖος, ‘chain, bond’, but also ‘yoke’ (*GELS-L*, 259). In Ezek. 30:18 ⊖ may have read מוֹטָה, ‘rods’ and in Nah. 1:13 מוֹטָהוּ, ‘his rod’.

⊕: ⊕^O has אַרְיָה in Num. 4:10, 12; 13:23, apparently equating מוֹט with → בַּד. In Num. 4:10, 12; 13:23 ⊕^N has קוֹפֵה, ‘basket’, but ⊕^J has אַסְלָא, ‘pole’ in Num. 4:10 and 13:23. The latter rendering is also chosen in the Targum of 1 Chron. 15:15. In Jer. 27:2; 28:10, 12, 13 ⊕ renders מוֹטָה by נִירָא, ‘yoke’. Surprisingly, the same rendering is chosen in Ezek. 34:27 where one would expect the Targumist to explain the metaphor.

In Lev. 26:13 ⊕^O interprets מוֹטָה עֲלֵיכֶם as נִיר עַמְמֵיָא מִינְכוֹן, ‘the yoke of the nations from you’. The Palestinian targums have understood the metaphor in a similar way here. In Isa. 58:6 the Targum paraphrases מוֹטָה twice as דִּין מוֹסָטִי ‘perverted judgment’ and in 58:9 as דִּין אִסְטִיּוֹת ‘perversion of judgment’. In Ezek. 30:18 the metaphor is recognised and rendered by תְּקוּפָא, ‘strength’.

ס: In Num. 4:10, 12; 13:23 *qwp*’, according to the Syriac dictionaries ‘carrying staves, poles’, but cf. ט. In Lev. 26:13, Ezek. 34:27 and Nah. 1:13 the literal *nyr*’ is chosen, in Isa. 58 :6 ‘*wl*’. Both words mean ‘yoke’. In Isa. 58:10, however, מוֹטָה is rendered *nkl*’, ‘deceit, perfidity’ (cf. ט). In Jer. 27:2 ס translates by *hnq*’, ‘the collar (or strings) of a yoke’ (Payne Smith [Margoliouth], *CSD*, 150), but this may be a simple transposition of מוֹטָרוֹת which is rendered *nyr*’, ‘yoke’. The word מוֹטָה becomes *dgl’ hnq*’, ‘falsehood-strings’, in Jer. 28:10, 12, 13. In Ezek. 30:18 ס follows ט with *hwtr*’, ‘rod’. In 1 Chron. 15:15 the word is skipped.

ט: Num. 4:10,12; 13:23; 1 Chron. 15:15 etc.: *catena*, according to *LD*, 301: ‘wooden bracket ... chain’; 1 Chron. 15:15 and Nah. 1:13: *vectis* ‘carrying-pole’; Isa. 58:6: *fasciculus* ‘bundle’; Ezek. 30:18 *sceptrum* ‘rod’; Nah. 1:13 *virga* ‘branch, twig’.

6. Judaic Sources

In 4Q437 fragm 2, II.13 [מ]טוֹתֵיהֶם ‘their [y]okes’ occurs in broken context. See further section 4, Postbiblical Hebrew.

7. Illustrations

For photographs and drawings of comparable yokes see E. Schiller (ed.), *The Holy Land in Old Engravings and Illustrations*, Jerusalem 1977, 64a (W. Rae Wilson 1819); 242, 247 (Ch.W. Wilson 1880); 285 (P. Lortet 1884); Ch. W. Wilson, *Picturesque Palestine, Sinai and Egypt*, vol. 1, London 1880, No. 72; vol. 2, No. 17, 128; Dalman, *AuS*, Bd. 2, Plates 18, 21b, 25, 29, 33, 41; Salonen, *Agricultura*, Taf. VI,2; XII.1; XIV.2; Stager, *LBI*, 90. For a modern reconstruction at the Ekron Museum, see Bolen, *PLBL*, disk 1, 2 (Samaria): Cultural Pictures, 71-27tb.jpg and tb n031500.jpg.

8. Archaeological Remarks

[Will be added later on.]

9. Conclusion

A מוֹט is used as a carrying pole or frame to transport heavy objects. Generally the מוֹטָה designates a heavy yoke bar, or the pegs used to fasten a yoke with straps on the neck of a draught animal.

As such it became the image of oppression of humans. To break the yoke (bars) means liberation of the oppressed. Jeremiah wore (a light imitation of?) such a yoke as a symbolic representation of the oppression he had to announce.

10. Bibliography

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