

**stylus, graver**

עט

**1. Statistics**

Torah: 0. Nebiim: 2. Ketubim: 2. Total: 4.

**2a. Literal Use**

In Jeremiah 8:8 the word refers to the untruthful writing instrument of scribes (עט שקר ספרים), the result of which is a law that is not in accordance with the Law of God. Thus, because of the addition of the adjective untruthful (שקר) to עט, one cannot exclude the possibility that עט itself too has a figurative meaning here. In any case the text does not state clearly on which material these scribes were supposed to be writing. Was it a → ספר? Or a public proclamation on a → לוח 'tablet', like the Mosaic 'tablets of stone'?

In Jeremiah 17:1 the word refers to an 'iron graver' with which the sins of Judaeans had been written on the tablet (לוח) of their hearts and on the horns of their altars. On the one hand this passage is to be taken as a witness for the literal use of the word, on the other hand one cannot neglect that the whole verse has a figurative meaning. Since the horns of an altar were of natural stone or metal, the iron עט can only be a stylus or graver here. The use of a term for an engraving tool suggests that their sinful hearts were like stone (cf. Ezek. 11:19; 36:26). Because it is used in parallelism with → צפרן, another type of graver, the stylus may have had a hardened tip.

A clear case of the literal use of עט is Job 19:24. In this case it means the iron stylus or graver with which a scribe (or Job himself) carves Job's words as characters in the hard and solid surface of a rock (בצור יקצבון). The meaning of ועפרת 'and lead' in this verse is unclear. Some scholars suppose that it refers to incising characters into a plaque of lead, others think of lead or lead oxide used to fill in the incised characters (cf. Clines 1989, 456-7).

Thus in all three cases the עט may be understood as an instrument with which scribes incised text into metal or stone. It seems improbable that a reed-pen or the like was meant.

**2b. Figurative Use**

In some of the afore-mentioned instances ט ע is used in an ambiguous way and it is a matter of debate whether it is used in a figurative way. In Psalm 45:2 (1), however, the figurative use of ט ע seems beyond doubt, because in this case the tongue clearly functions as a ‘stylus’. In this case too the writing material is not specified, but a king’s heroic deeds were usually recorded on non-perishable stone or metal surfaces, because they had to be remembered ‘for ever and ever’ (cf. Ps. 45:17). The circumstance that the owner is described as a סופר קהיר is not an argument in favour of a reed-pen, because this expression merely designates ‘a skilled scribe’ (cf. Ezra 7:6).

### 3. Epigraphic Hebrew

Not attested.

### 4. Cognates

SEMITIC: Klein, *CEDHL*, 469, remarks, ‘Of uncertain origin.’ A connection with Hebr. ט ע, a bird of prey, proposed by some (Fürst & Ryssel, *HCHAT*, Bd. 2, 120), is unlikely if the basic root of the latter was  $\sqrt{gyz}$  (*HAHAT*, 953).

AKKADIAN: According to some authorities the Akkadian *ḥattu*, ‘staff, scepter’ might be a cognate noun (cf. *GB*, 579; *HAHAT*, 950), but the *ḥ* is attested in other Semitic languages as well (Klein, *CEDHL*, 213).

UGARITIC: Whether or not Ugar.  $\text{‘}t$  – a fish, mollusc or bird – is a cognate cannot be established as long as the precise meaning of this term is unknown (Del Olmo Lete & Sanmartín, *DULAT*, 192; Watson 2006, 453).

JEWISH ARAMAIC: The cognate ט ע listed in some dictionaries is simply the untranslated word in the Targum on Jer. 17:1 (see below).

CLASSICAL ARABIC: Most likely cognates are *ḡāṭa* ( $\sqrt{ḡwṭ}$  ‘to dig, hollow out’; *ḡāṭ* ‘hollow, cavity, pit’ (Lane, *AEL*, 2309); see also Syr. Arab. *ḡawīṭ* ‘deep’ (Barthélemy, 587) and some related verbs in Chadic dialects (Orel & Stolbova, *HSED*, 230, 294).

### 5. Ancient Versions

⚡ and other Greek versions: εἰς μάτην ἐγενήθη σχοῖνος ψευδῆς γραμματεῦσιν, ‘a false pen has become of no use to scribes’, in ⚡ Jeremiah 8:8 does not literally correspond to the Hebrew קַטְוֹת לְפִי הַחַיִּים הַזֵּה עַל הַשֵּׁפֶט. Possibly the translator read חַיִּים instead of הַחַיִּים. Apparently σχοῖνος is taken as a reed-pen here (*LSJ*, 1747; *GELS-L*, 466). The same interpretation underlies α': γραφεῖον, ‘stylus, pencil’. The ⚡ of Jeremiah 17:1 is missing, but some hexaplaric manuscripts have γραφεῖον. Also in Job 19:24 the ⚡ has γραφεῖον, though the whole relevant passage is put between the hexaplaric symbols. The rendering in Ps. 45 (44):2 is κάλαμος, ‘reed-pen’.

⚡: The Targum presents חַיִּים, a Greek loanword corresponding to κάλαμος, as a rendering in Jer. 8:8. In Jer. 17:1 the Targumist simply took over טע from ח, even though he normally opted for a consistent rendering within the same book. Possibly he deemed an iron reed-pen an unlikely combination. Job 19:24 is not preserved in 11Q10 (11QTgJob). The rabbinic Targum of Job offers חַיִּים (var. טע), again the Greek loanword κάλαμος.

⚡: In all four cases ⚡ has *qanyā*, which might mean ‘reed(-pen)’, but according to Payne Smith, *TS*, 3654, also ‘stilus’ (Job 19:24). If so, an iron writing tool was apparently acceptable to these translators.

⚡: Always *stilus* or *stylus*, according to Lewis & Short, *LD*, 1759, ‘A *style* used by the Romans for writing on waxen tablets (pointed and usually made of iron)’.

## 6. Judaic Sources

In 4Q171, f3, IV.26-27 Ps. 45:2 is quoted and applied to the Teacher of Righteousness.

## 7. Illustrations

No suggestions.

## 8. Archaeological Remarks

[Will be added later on.]

## 9. Conclusion

The context, the Arabic cognates and some of the ancient ver-

sions point in the direction of an iron tool (graver, stylus) with which characters were incised into a hard surface (rock, metal). The ancient versions which understood the word as a reed-pen interpreted it after the most common scribal tool of their own times. However, none of the four passages in which עט occurs suggests the use of ink and a reed-pen. At least once the word is clearly attested in a figurative use (Ps. 45:2 [1]).

עט belongs to the small category of technical terms (→ עֲרֵט, → צַפֵּרֶן, → קִסְטָה, → שֵׁרֶד, → מְחַוֵּגָה), the basic function of which is either the essential shaping of artefacts or the writing of characters.

## 10. Bibliography

*AncBD*, vol. 6, 99-1008 – *BDB*, 741: ‘1. stylus ... 2. prob. = reed-pen’ – *BRL*<sup>2</sup>, 289-92 – Clines 1989: D.J.A.Clines, *Job 1–20* (WBC, 17), Dallas 1989, 456-7 – Alonso Schökel, *DBHE*, 531: ‘*Punzón de escribir, estilo; pluma, cálamo*’ – *GB*, 579: ‘v. eisernen Griffel ... wahrsch. auch v. *calamus* Jer 8 8. Ps 45 2’ – *HAHAT*, 950: ‘Griffel, aus Eisen ... Schreibrohr’ – *HALAT*, 769: ‘Griffel ... u. ? Schreibrohr’) – *HAWAT*, ‘Griffel zum Einritzen ... oder Schreiben übhpt.’ – *HCHAT*, Bd. 2, 133: ‘eig. das Eingrabende, der (eiserne) Griffel, stilus’ – *HWAT*, 502: ‘der Griffel ... v. Schreibrohr: ... Ps 45,2 ... Jer 8,8’ – *KBL*, 697: ‘Griffel stylus’ – Zorell, *LHA*, 588: ‘stylus ferreus, quo litterae metallo vel lapidi inciduntur ... calamus (iunceus) scribae Jr 8 8’ – Kaddari, *MHH*, 791: חרט עשוי ברזל – *NIDOT*, vol. 4, 1291: ‘pen, stylus’ – Gesenius & Roediger, *TPC*, 1001: ‘stilus’; their proposal to derive the word from a non-existent  $\sqrt{\text{עטה}} = \sqrt{\text{עצה}}$  ‘to be hard, rigid’ is unacceptable. – Watson 2006: W.G.E. Watson, ‘Names for Animals in the Ugaritic Texts’, in: G. del Olmo Lete *et al.* (eds), *Šapal tibnim mû illakû: Studies Presented to Joaquín Sanmartín* (AuOr.S, 22), Sabadell-Barcelona: AUSA, 2006, 445-58.

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