

**nail, tip of angle-tint tool**

צַפְרָן

**1. Statistics**

Torah: 1. Nebiim: 1. Ketubim: 0. Total: 2.

**2a. Literal Use**

In Deut. 21:12 a female prisoner of war ought, among other requirements, pare (lit. ‘do’) her nails before an Israelite warrior could take her as wife. In this case the word in question refers to the nails of fingers and toes. The meaning of the act is disputed, but might signify that the woman had to shed her former life, or even her former self (Tigay 1996, 194). This was necessary because she would no longer be a slave, the normal status of a captive, but would become a free woman (Marsman 2003, 453).

**2b. Figurative Use**

According to Jer. 17:1 the sins of Judah are **בְּצַפְרָן שְׁמִיר חֲרוּשָׁה** **עַל-לִיבָם לְבָם**, ‘engraved with a **צַפְרָן** of steel on the tablet of their heart’. The word **שְׁמִיר** does not mean ‘diamond’ (so KJV, RSV, ASV, NJB and many other modern translations and Hebrew lexica, even *HALAT*, 1445-6), because diamond was unknown in biblical times (Bolman 1938, 81-5; *AEMI*, 87, 442; *AMMI*, 82). Proof to the contrary (lit. Lundbom 1999, 776) is unconvincing. Nor can it have been emery (so *KBL*, 988), because particles of this stone were mainly used as an abrasive (*AMMI*, 82; *AEMT*, 65). The rendering ‘steel’, advocated by Bolman 1938, 81-5, produces a nice climactic parallelism with the preceding **בְּרִזָּל**, ‘iron’, is supported by the ancient versions and is most likely if a special kind of burin was involved, the so-called angle-tint tool which has a slightly curved tip. With this instrument the sins of the Judaeans were engraved on the (hard) tablet of their hearts (cf. Ezek. 11:19; 36:26) and in the (hard) horns of the altar. Thus the broader context points to figurative speech.

A different solution is proposed by Tawil, *ALCBH*, 328. He assumes a secondary meaning ‘nail-mark’. On Akkadian contracts a nail-mark often substitutes for a seal impression. The parallelism with **בְּרִזָּל בְּעֵט** ‘with an iron graver’ as well as the sequel ‘on the horns of their altars’ do not favour this idea.

### 3. Epigraphic Hebrew

Not attested.

### 4. Cognates

SEMITIC: The root and several comparable derivatives are attested in many Semitic languages (Klein, *CEDHL*, 55; Leslau, *CDG*, 549; Orel & Stolbova, *HSED*, 120).

AKKADIAN: *šipirtu* B (a shape of precious stones) (*CAD* Š, 202a); *šipru*, ‘crest, spike, beak, point’ (*AHw*, 1104; *AEAD*, 105); *šupru* A, ‘nail, fingernail, claw, talon, hoof’ (*CAD* Š, 250b-253b; *AHw*, 1113). Possibly also *šabāru* B, ‘to slant’ (*CAD* Š, 4; *AHw*, 1065-6), but *not* the ghost word *šuppāru*, cited by several Hebrew dictionaries.

OLD AND IMPERIAL ARAMAIC: Egyptian Aramaic *tfr*, ‘toenail’ (Porten & Lund, *ADE*, 143).

JEWISH ARAMAIC: *tufrā*, ‘fingernail, toenail, hoof, talon, claw’ (Sokoloff, *DJBA*, 498; *DJPA*, 230); *tifrā*, ‘hoof’ (Sokoloff, *DJBA*, 514)

SAMARITAN ARAMAIC: *tfr*, ‘nail, hoof’, but also ‘chisel’ (Tal, *DSA*, 323).

SYRIAC: *tefrā*, ‘nail, hoof, claw, talon’, but also ‘a sharp instrument shaped like a finger-nail’ and ‘onyx-stone’ (Payne Smith [Margoliouth], *CSD*, 181). The latter stone is too soft for engraving purposes, so the determination may be faulty and probably arose from a misunderstanding of the Hexaplaric tradition (see below).

CLASSICAL ARABIC: *zufr*, ‘nail’, but also ‘spur’ (of a cock) (Lane, *AEL*, 1912-3). Also the verb *zaffara*, ‘to engrave, chisel’ (Dozy, *SDA*, t. 2, 83).

MODERN SOUTH ARABIC: Soqotri *tefer*, ‘nail, claw’ (Leslau, *LSoq*, 207); Mehri *zefer*, ‘nail of a finger or toe, claw’ (Johnstone, *ML*, 83).

ETHIOPIIC: *sefr*, ‘fingernail, claw’, but also an iron ‘hook’ (Dillmann, *LLAe*, 1319; Leslau, *CDG*, 549).

### 5. Ancient Versions

Ⓞ and other Greek versions: In both cases the Ⓞ does not correspond to the Hebrew. In Deut. 21:12 it replaced the Hebrew combination of the substantive צַפְרֵן and the verb-form וְעָשָׂהּ by the single verb-form περιονυχίσει, ‘pare her nails’, whereas Jer. 17:1 is wanting entirely. The hexaplaric tradition of the latter verse has ἐν ὄνυχι ἀδαμαντίνῳ, ‘with a steel claw (nail)’.

Ⓣ: The Targumim use טַפְרָא, ‘fingernail’, ‘claw’ or ‘hoof’ in both cases.

Ⓢ: In Deut. 21:12 Ⓢ has *trp̄yḥ*, ‘her nails’. Like the Ⓣ, Ⓢ chooses the same word in Jer. 17:1, but one cannot exclude the possibility that it intended one of the derived meanings cited under section 4 (Cognates).

Ⓟ: Like Ⓣ and Ⓢ, Ⓟ has the same word in both cases. Deut. 21:12 *et circumcidet unguis*, ‘she shall pare her nails’, Jer. 17:1 *in ungue adamantino*, ‘with an iron nail’. However, in this case too, *unguis* might have a meaning like ‘hook’ (*LD*, 1932).

## 6. Judaic Sources

Not attested as a tool.

## 7. Illustrations

No suggestions.

## 8. Archaeological Remarks

[Will be added later on.]

## 9. Conclusion

The literal meaning of צַפְרֵן occurs in Deut. 21:12 where it is a ‘finger- and/or toe-nail’. In Jer. 17:1 the context points to a figurative use of this term to describe the tip of a type of burin with a steel tip. On the basis of the cognates it may be assumed that the instrument had a slightly curved tip resembling a toenail of a bird. Some of the ancient versions support this interpretation. Nowadays such a graver’s instrument is called an angle-tint tool.

On the basis of the etymology one would expect the development \**zupr*, ‘nail’ > \**zuprān*, ‘little nail’ > Hebrew צַפְרֵן\* (*BL*, 499-500). The Masoretic vocalisation צַפְרֵן may well represent folk-

etymologising on the basis of צַפּוֹר, ‘bird’. Even though this is mistaken (צַפְרָן must be derived from a different root,  $\sqrt{spr}$ , ‘to twitter, sing (birds)’), it betrays awareness of the meaning ‘bird’s claw’.

צַפְרָן belongs to the small category of technical terms ( $\rightarrow$  קָרַט,  $\rightarrow$  עֵט,  $\rightarrow$  קָסַת,  $\rightarrow$  שָׁרַד,  $\rightarrow$  מְחוּנָה), the basic function of which is either the essential shaping of artefacts or the writing of characters.

## 10. Bibliography

Tawil, *ALCBH*, 328: ‘1. nail; 2. nail-mark’ – *BDB*, 862: ‘fingernail, point of diamond’ – Bolman 1938: J. Bolman, *De edelsteenen uit den Bijbel*, Amsterdam 1938 – Alonso Schökel, *DBHE*, 619: ‘uña ... punta’ – *DCH*, vol. 7, 153: ‘1. nail; 2. stylus point’ – *EB*, vol. 3, 3645-6: ‘pen, stylus’ – *FHAWAT*, 239: ‘Nagel, (Finger, Zehe); Griffelspitze’ – *GB*, 693: ‘Nagel am Finger ... die (diamantene) Spitze des Griffels’ – *HAHAT*, 1135: ‘1. Finger- u. Zehennagel 2. ([?] diamantene) Spitze eines Griffels’ – *HALAT*, 983: ‘1. Nagel (Finger, Zehe) ... 2. ‘diamantene (?) Spitze ... (an einem Griffel od. Meissel aus Eisen)’ – *HAWAT*, ‘1) Fingernagel ... 2) metaph. Spitze’ – *HCHAT*, Bd. 2, 287: ‘Nagel ... übertr. Spitze eines Griffels, Diamantstift, zum Eingraben’ – *HWAT*, 635: ‘der Nagel (der Finger u. Zehen) ... die Spitze (des Griffels)’ – *KBL*, 814: ‘1. Nagel (finger, Zehe) ... 2. Diamantnagel, = -stift (z. Schreiben)’ – *LHA*, 701: ‘1) unguis digitorum ... 2) cuspis acuta stili scriptorii’ – Lundbom 1999: J.R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20* (AncB, 21A), New York 1999, 776 – Marsman 2003: H.J. Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel: Their Social and Religious Position in the Context of the Ancient Near East* (OTS, 49), Leiden 2003 – *MHH*, 923: 1. החלק הקרני בקצה האצבע ... 2, חוד (בהשאלה) – Tigay 1996: J.H. Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy*, Philadelphia 1996 – Gesenius & Roediger, *TPC*, 1184: ‘1) unguis digiti ... 2) cuspis stili adamantina, qua stilus munitus est, ut digitus ungue’

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