sack, donkey-pack

1. Statistics

2a. Literal Use
The use of גֶּלֶל is confined to three chapters (Gen. 42–44) of the Joseph narrative. In Gen. 42 and 43 it denotes, together with the terms גֶּלֶל and כַּפָּר, the sacks for the transport of victuals that are lashed to a (pack)-ass (דר). When he opens the sack (כַּפָּר) in 42:27, גֶּלֶל in 43:21) to fetch fodder (און) for his ass, one of Joseph's brothers discovers to his dismay the money (_DEN) he had paid for the grain in his גֶּלֶל (so 42:27; according to 43:21 all the brothers). Joseph had ordered to put (דָּמָה 42:25; 43:22, cf. יָמָה 43:23) the money surreptitiously back into the sacks, as he did later on with his own beaker (רָכְב; 44:2). It is stipulated explicitly that the money, or the pouch with money (דָּמָה, 42:35), is found ‘in the upper part of the sack’ (כַּפָּר 42:27, 35; 43:21; 44:1, 8, 11). According to 44:1 an גֶּלֶל was usually filled with food (דָּמָה) which in this particular case must be understood to mean ‘grain’ (cf. 42:10; 43:2, 20; 44:25; the words גֶּלֶל and כַּפָּר in Gen. 42–44 are apparently synonyms, as observed by Redford 1970, 173). The sacks are filled (דָּמָה, 42:25; 44:1) with grain or emptied (לָטֵה Hi., 42:35), they are loaded (דָּמָה, 42:26, cf. כַּפָּר, 44:13 which sheds light by adding מָשָׁפָהו, ‘sack, bag’) or unloaded (דָּמָה, 44:11). Nowhere the material of which these sacks were made has been specified.

In the scholarly literature there is discussion about the exact relation between the various terms used in Gen. 42–43. In 42:25, 35 the money is put back into (לָטֵה Hi.) a כַּפָּר. 42:27 relates how Joseph's brother finds the money in the upper part of his גֶּלֶל when he opens the כַּפָּר. In the parallel verses 43:18 and 43:21 it is stated that the money was put back (לָטֵה Hi.) into the גֶּלֶל, c.q. that the brothers find the money when their גֶּלֶל is opened. How should this variation be evaluated? Several attempts have been made to distinguish sharply between the terms גֶּלֶל, כַּפָּר and כַּפָּר in Gen. 42–43.

At a previous stage of research scholars tried to solve the
problem with the help of literary criticism by attributing רָּסִּבָּה to the Yahwist, and כֹּ֥שׁ to the Elohist (cf. TWAT, Bd. 7, 851). This necessitated taking 42:27-28 as a Yahwistic intrusion in the Elohist chapter Gen. 42 (so e.g. Schwally 1891; Gunkel 1902; Skinner 1930). This solution fails to convince, mainly because of the parallel use of the two terms in 42:27 (the circumstance that the א reads μάρσαππος twice here must be attributed to harmonisation; so Westermann 1982, 118). Rather than by invoking source criticism, the ostensible tension between 42:27, 42:35 and 43:21 can be resolved by paying attention to rhetorical strategy (see, for example, Westermann 1982, 118-9; Sternberg 1985; Alter 1981).

A totally different interpretation has been given by Jacob 2000. In his view לַּכּ in 42:25 and 43:11 specifically denotes the containers (‘Behältnisse’) in which the grain was stored, כֹּ֥שׁ in 42:25, 35 would relate exclusively to the fodder-sack (‘Futtersack’) for the donkeys, whereas רָּסִּבָּה would denote the baggage/pack of the asses in general. In this manner it would be possible to delineate the semantic content of the three terms precisely. However, this proposal flounders on the circumstance that in 42:27 (see also 43:21) כֹּ֥שׁ and רָּסִּבָּה are obviously parallel concepts, as לַּכּ and רָּסִּבָּה are in 42:25 and 44:1. Therefore it seems best to agree with Soggin 1997:

Man beachte die drei verschiedenen Wörter für ‘Sack’: כֹּ֥שׁ, wörtlich ‘Behälter [im allgemeinen]’, ṣaq, das übliche, und das seltene רָּסִּבָּה. Dies weist nicht auf verschiedene Quellen hin, wie man glaubte, sondern auf den reichen Wortschatz des Erzählers.

In the chapters under consideration we are dealing with a variation of idiom to describe the same objects: the sacks of grain or fodder which were attached to the pack animals (so already Keil 1866 and Dalman, Aus, Bd 3, 198; Bd. 7, 246). The medieval Jewish exegete Nahmanides describes the רָּסִּבָּה as ‘a big sack (לַּכּ כֹּ֥שׁ) having two sides (טִּיוֹתָב) which in the language of the Talmud is called אֲנִי תַּחַט’. The latter is a Greek loan word (μετρητής) which in this instance designates ‘a double sack’ (cf. Cohen 1999; Sokolof, DJBA, 661).
2b. Figurative Use
Not attested in Biblical Hebrew.

3. Epigraphic Hebrew
Not attested.

4. Cognates
It is questionable whether etymological research helps us to understand the term סַכָּק much better. Because the word occurs exclusively in the Joseph narrative, one might suppose that it is an Egyptian loan word. However, no Egyptian etymology has been proposed thus far. A derivation from the Hebrew preposition סַכָּק ('das Wort bez. ein Gefäss, welches oft zum Reiten benützt wird, so dass es unter dem Reiter sich befindet', so Bacher 1885) failed to get any support. Greenfield 1965 connected סַכָּק with an Assyrian verb *matâhu, 'to bear, carry, lift up' (cf. CAD M/1, 403-4). Consequently the word סַכָּק would not mean 'sack', but 'load, burden, pack' (this was taken over by HAHA'T, 79: 'Sack, besser Ladung, Last'). This might also explain the rendering of the word by סַכָּק in Ê and Í (see section 5 below).

More promising is the long-standing derivation from the Hebrew verb סַכָּק, 'to stretch, spread out' which occurs once in Isa. 40:22 in parallelism with סַכָּק. In Mishnaic Hebrew it is used frequently (see below). For the prosthetic ס, cf. BL, 487; Klein, CEDHL, 37. The following cognates may be mentioned here:

AKKADIAN: *matâhu, 'to carry, transport ... to pickup, lift', CAD M/1, 403-5.

UGARITIC: Del Olmo Lete, Sanmartín, DULAT, vol. 2, 599: 'a measure of length (?)'. However, De Moor 1981 and 1985 proposed to connect Ugaritic *mtpdm and *mthm with Hebrew סַכָּק respectively in the sense of ‘donkey-packs’. In Ugaritic these words are used metaphorically in the sense of layered ‘stretches’ of geological formations. See also De Hoop 1999.
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Samaritan Aramaic: Tal, DSA, 492: nop ‘spreading out’.

Syriac: Payne Smith (Margoliouth), CSD, 314: mētah Peal ‘to stretch out, extend, prolong’, mēṭāhā ‘stretching out’, etc.

Classical Arabic: mataha ‘to draw, extend’ (Lane, AEL, 2688; Dozy, SDA, t. 2, 575).

Ethiopic: Geez matha ‘to be thin’ (Leslau, CDG, 371).

5. Ancient Versions


ו: טב ‘carrying bag’, Tal, DSA, 320. The suggestion put forward by Z. Ben Hayyim apud Greenfield 1965, 90, n.2, is better discarded.

כ: פמע, ‘load, burden’ in all Targumim in all instances.

ס: ta‘nak ‘load, burden, package’ (Payne Smith (Margoliouth), STS, 181) in all instances.


6. Judaic Sources

Not attested.

7. Illustrations

A good drawing of the type of sack described above is found in Wilson, PPSE, vol. 2, 24, lower right corner:
See also the photographs Avitzur, 189-91 and Bolen, *PLBL*, tb060503203.

8. Archaeological Remarks
In Egypt grain was distributed in sacks (Kemp 1994). [Further text will be added later on.]

9. Conclusion
The נְפָּרָן seems to be a sack for storing grain which was extended (נְפָרָן) like a piece of cloth and folded over the back of an ass by way of pack-saddle, hanging down both sides of the animal. Such saddles are also attested in Mesopotamian sources (Derck-
At the ends the sack was tied shut (cf. Elliger 1978; see also Bacher 1891: יָדָןָא, der Sack, der nur so gefüllt oder geleert werden kann, indem man ihn zieht, ausdehnt). This explanation is supported by the context in which it balances בָּלָה ‘container’, and פֶּשׁ ‘sack’, and also by the etymological cognates of the word, by several renderings in the ancient versions and by the interpretation offered by the medieval exegete Nahmanides. Although its material is not specified in the Bible, there is reason to suppose it was woven from black goat’s hair (Dalman, AuS, Bd. 3, 198). Exactly such a double sack made of goat’s hair was used for the transport of grain on donkeys in Mesopotamia. It was called a патну or zurzu there (cf. Salonen, Hausgeräte, Bd. 1, 188-90; Veenhof 1972, 8). Probably the ידָןָא did not differ greatly from the → µיֶתִי and פֶּשׁ.

10. Bibliography

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H.G.L. Peels

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