pole, branch, bolt (?)

1. Statistics


There is some uncertainty about the number of occurrences since some scholars emend dubious passages or reckon certain instances with homonyms of בּ to which they attribute a different meaning (cf. HAHAT, 124). The statistics above are based on the occurrences where an implement seems to have been meant.

2a. Literal Use

In nearly all the cases of occurrence בּ are poles of acacia wood (ץ) overlaid (לפיי) with gold (כ) or bronze (ברונז), Exod. 25:28; 30:5; 37:4, 15, 28) or bronze (ברונז), Exod. 27:6; 38:6). The wood of the Acacia raddiana Savi which is the only species that can have been meant is extremely hard (Feliks 1968, 96-8; Zohary 1982, 116) and therefore suitable for poles used to carry heavy objects. Such objects are the ark (ark), carried by putting the poles through the four rings (ברונז) of gold that were fastened two by two on the four feet of its sides (Exod. 25:12f., 15; 35:12; cf. 39:35; 40:20). According to 1 Kgs 8:7-8 (cf. 2 Chron. 5:8-9) when the ark had been brought to its place in the temple, the wings of the cherubim made a covering above the ark and its בּ which were so long that their ends could be seen from the holy place in front of the inner sanctuary.

In the wilderness the Kohathites, a clan of the Levites (Num. 4:2f.) are cast as actors for the task to handle the בּ when the camp is set out (Num. 4:6, 8, 11, 14; cf. 1 Chr. 15:15 where Levites
carry the ark with poles [עַל, מָשָׂא; מְשָׂא] in stead of וּרְדִי בּוּ דְבַר).

In view of the uncertainty of the shape of the ark and the possibility that other ‘arks’ may have existed it is impossible to be sure about the length and weight of the poles. According to Exod. 25:10 (P) the dimensions of the ark were modest (1.25 x 0.75 x 0.75 m). Two men were able to carry it (1 Sam. 4:4; 2 Sam. 15:24, 29), according to the Chronicler on their shoulders (1 Chr. 15:15; 2 Chr. 35:3).

In Hos. 11:6 and Job 17:16 וּרְדִי בּוּ דְבַר may designate the bars of city gates. If so, this must be seen as an extended use of דָּבָר ‘(carrying) pole’. The bars of gatedoors were heavy poles indeed (cf. Salonen, Türen, 74-90). However, in both cases other solutions have been proposed (see e.g. Macintosh 1997, 453; Clines 1989, 375).

2b. Figurative Use

דב is an old word that originally meant ‘in the hand’, which, as a noun became ‘handle’ (see section 4 below). Therefore, when דב is used for a branch or twig of a vine (Ezek. 17:6; 19:14) this must be regarded as a metaphorical use of the term. According to some commentators וּרְדִי בּוּ דְבַר in Hos. 11:6 should be understood as ‘branches’ in the metaphorical sense of ‘villages’ subservient to a major city (Macintosh 1997).

The possibility that וּרְדִי בּוּ דְבַר in Isaiah 16:6, Jeremiah 48:30 and 50:36 does not mean ‘prattle’ or ‘prattlers, soothsayers’, but ‘power’, i.e. the ‘carrying force’ of a people, or a crocodile (Job 41:4), cannot to be excluded.

3. Epigraphic Hebrew

Not attested.

4. Cognates

SEMITIC: Usually דב is derived from סֹס דָּב, ‘to separate, put apart’ (e.g. HAHAT, 124; Cohen et al., DRS, 43-45; NIDOT, vol. 1, 500-501), but for the carrying-pole a derivation from דָּב ‘in the hand’ would seem more likely (see below on Ugaritic and Phoenician as well as some ancient renderings under section 5).

UGARITIC: The Ugaritic cognate bd is evidently a shortened form of byd, ‘in the hand’ (Del Olmo Lete & Sammartín, DULAT, 214-
6).

**Phoenician, Punic:** Also in Phoenician bd means ‘by/in/from (the hand of)’ (Krahmalkov, *PPD*, 97-8).


**Samaritan Aramaic:** Tal, *DSA*, 80: תב ‘branch’.

**Syriac:** baddā ‘beam of an oil- or wine-press’ (Payne Smith [Margoliouth], *CSD*, 35; see also Payne Smith, *TS*, vol. 1, 450; Brockelmann, *LS*, 59, both revealing uncertainty as to the exact meaning).

**Palestinian Arabic:** badd ‘beam of an olive-press’ (Dozy, *SDA*, t. 1, 56; Denizeau, *DPASyr*, 20-1), but according to Dalman, *AuS*, Bd. 4, 220 Palestinian Arabic badd would be a designation of the ‘Olivenmühle’ (pars pro toto?) whereas rabbinic sources seem to use תב for the receptacle of the oil (Levy, *WTM*, Bd. 1, 191; Jastrow, *DTT*, 138). For illustrations and descriptions of this type of lever press, see Dalman, *AuS*, Bd. 4, 212-6, Fig. 50-62; *BRL* 2, 239; Frankel, *WOP*, 86-121; Bolen, *PLBL*, disk 1, 1 Galilee and the North: Cultural Pictures: tb041103.jpg; 2 Samaria and the Center, Cultural Pictures: 69-14tb.jpg.

5. **Ancient Versions**

(with many different spellings, as usual), ‘pole’ (Tal, DSA, 61).

According to Levy, CWT, Bd. 1, 62: ‘Lattic, viereckige Stange’, according to Sokoloff, DJPA, 74: ‘bar, pole’. In Hos. 11:6 ζ paraphrases נָשְׂר, ‘his heroes’. 11Q10 (11QtgJob) is missing at this point. The rabbinic ζ Job 17:16 has רַסִי, ‘rocks’, but this might be a scribal error for רַסִי, ‘tyrants’.

Mostly qwp, ‘carrying staves, poles, bars’ (Payne Smith [Margoliouth], CSD, 497). ζ’s rendering of Hos. 11:6 seems to be inspired by θ: mn ידיהוּן, ‘from their hands’. In Job 17:16 the translator exploits the metaphorical meaning of ‘hand’: btwqp, ‘in strength, while being strong’.

6. Judaic Sources

All Judaic references to the carrying-poles of the ark and other objects belonging to the tabernacle are derived from the Bible and for that reason do not offer useful additional information.
7. Illustrations
On the Arch of Titus the poles on which the Menorah was carried are clearly visible. They are round, not square, and were carried on the shoulders of the bearers (cf. Bolen, PLBL, Disk 2, 10. Rome, tb q112002.jpg and tb q112002.jpg). For the door-bar, see Salonen, Türen, 74-90.

8. Archaeological Remarks
[Will be added later on.]

9. Conclusion
The word בּ in the sense of ‘carrying-pole’ was probably derived from a contraction of ב + ב ‘in the hand’, hence ‘handle’. It was a round pole of extremely hard wood overlaid with a coating of gold or bronze. Two such poles were used to carry various heavy cultic objects. Remaining in the rings of the furniture of the tabernacle and later the temple they reminded the cultic personnel continuously of the original movability of the sanctuary.

10. Bibliography
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