leather bag, pouch

1. Statistics

2a. Literal Use
By means of beautiful parallelism the poet of Psalm 126:5-6 expresses the contrast as well as the gradual transition from sorrow to joy in human life. The farmer goes forth (˚lh) weeping, because it pains him to throw out good grain (cf. Mk 4:1-20), but eventually, when he brings the sheaves home (awb), he rejoices (cf. Jn 4:36). On both occasions he is carrying (acn) something: when scattering seed from the [r“Z:h‘] and, at the harvest the sheaves.

In view of the poetical structure the suggestion in the critical apparatus of BHS that in verse 6a acn is a vertical dittography must be rejected. Cf. Magne 1958; Dahood 1970. Moreover, 11Q Ps supports ˚vm. The proposal to delete acn and to read ´Evmo (part. Qal, cf. Amos 9:13) instead of ˚vm that was thought to be problematic, does not merit endorsement (so e.g. Briggs & Briggs 1907; Gunkel 1968; Kraus 1989; Zenger 2008, 502).

For a long time ˚vm was taken to mean ‘trail’, ‘drawing (up)’ or ‘throw’ of the seed. The verb ˚vm ‘to draw, drag’ as well as some of the ancient versions (see section 5) seemed to support this idea. However, this solution proved not entirely satisfactory: ‘Quot commentationes, tot contortiones’ (Köhler 1937). Nevertheless it was still accepted by Klein, CEDHL, 391. Also the proposal to attribute the meaning ‘to grasp, seize’ to ˚vm (Tur-Sinai 1948) and hence ‘price’ (Gordis 1978) fails to convince (Clines 2006, 903; DCH, vol. 5, 525).

The text of Psalm 126:5-6 itself suggests clearly that ˚vm is a concrete utensil, a kind of bag in which the farmer could carry the seed and from which time and again he takes a handful to distribute it more or less evenly over the land (cf. Fohrer 1963; Seybold 1996). In itself it would be possible to surmise that he walked behind the seed-plough with a bag of grain in his hand (cf. ANEP, No. 85), but in view of the parallelism it is more likely that he is strewing out the seed directly from the bag (cf. Dalman, AuS, Bd. 2, 180-1, with Pl. 23 and 24).
The material of which this seed pouch was made is not indicated by the text, but the derivation from חָצָק ‘to draw (off)’ and the well-attested Semitic noun *mašku ‘hide’ (cf. section 4) allows us to think of an object made from hide or leather. Cloth is possible, but would make it difficult to dip into the pouch without looking because it could easily fold double and a broken nail might get caught in the fabric. Because the container should also be light enough to be carried effortless by a walking man, in order to take with him as much seed as possible, leather would seem the ideal choice of material.

2b. Figurative Use

In Job 28:15-19 the inestimable value of wisdom is described – it is not for sale, not even for gold and silver. No jewel sparkles like wisdom, it is incomparable. Verse 18b is part of this passage. It states that wisdom also exceeds the beauty and value of corals. according to \( \text{كمب} \) and \( \text{كمب} \) (see section 5 below) many have proposed to read the nomen regens in \( \text{كمب} \) as an infinitive. The ‘drawing’, ‘pulling up’ or ‘dragging’ up of wisdom is better than fishing corals from the bottom of the sea (so e.g. Kroeze 1961; De Wilde 1981), or ‘to draw’ wisdom requires a greater effort than bringing in corals (so e.g. Van Selms 1983). Others render ‘possession’, ‘acquisition’, or even ‘price, value’ (see section 2a).

Yet there is no need to take חָצָק in a different sense than it has in Ps. 126. In this case too a concrete object is involved – a leather pouch in which one can tuck away something. This produces a nice imagery in v. 18b. If it were possible to put wisdom in a pouch, as one puts valuables and money away, such a ‘pouch of wisdom’ (genitive of material, IBHS, 151) would obviously be much more valuable than any pouch filled with precious metals or gems. One is well-advised to fill his חָצָק with קֶמֶּב rather than corals, is Elihu’s message.

3. Epigraphic Hebrew

Not attested.

4. Cognates
According to Fronzaroli 1964 \(*mašk\) should be regarded as a common Semitic word. If the Egyptian equivalent (see below) is not a Semitic loanword, this \(*mašk\) must have been a Hamito-Semitic word (cf. \textit{HSED}, 378).

**Egyption:** \textit{msk3} ‘hide, leather’, Hannig, \textit{SP}, 107. According to Erman & Grapow, \textit{WĀS}, Bd. 2, 150, a Semitic loanword, but not accepted as such by Hoch, \textit{SWET}, and others.

**Akkadian:** \textit{mašku}, ‘leather’, ‘hide’, in synecdochic use also ‘bag’ (to put away \textit{materia medica/magica}), \textit{CAD} M/1, 376-79.

**Ugaritic:** \textit{mšk}, ‘skin, hide’, might occur in \textit{KTU} 5.23:18, according to Caquot & Masson 1977. However, \textit{msg} is generally thought to be the Ugaritic form of this word which in that case means ‘skin, leather’ there too, cf. \textit{DULA}, 581-2.


**Samaritan Aramaic:** Tal, \textit{DSA}, 490: ְנַשֶּׁה ‘skin, leather’.


**Mandaic:** Macuch, \textit{MD}, 270-1: \textit{miškā} ‘hide’ –

**Classical Arabic:** Dozy, \textit{SDA}, t. 2, 600: \textit{mask} (in Algeria: \textit{mašk}); ‘sac en cuir’


**Greek and Others:** \textit{μετσκος} ‘sheepskin, fleece’, a rare Semitic equivalent of \textit{κωδίνου}, \textit{LSJ}, 1106 and 1016; cf. Lewy, \textit{SFG}, 131; Mayer 1960. Possibly it occurs also in other languages as a loanword. Robinson 1961 remarks on \textit{$get\ }, ‘It is curious that this was not identified long ago, for every one who has spent any time in northern India must be familiar with the \textit{mšk} (= \textit{mšk}), the goat-skin bag in which the “bhisti” (water-carrier) bears his precious fluid.’

5. Ancient Versions
Ø and other Greek versions: In Ps. 125:6 (= 126:6) the Ø and the Quinta avoid a translation. σ' has ἐλκυσμός ‘attraction . . . dragging’. In Job 28:18 Ø and σ' render ἐλκυσμόν ‘drag in (wisdom)’, thus apparently deriving from the verb γλυκός. This will also be the background of α' γλυκός ‘sweet’ or ‘sweetness’.

Ξ: The rabbinic Targums on Ps. 126:6 and Job 28:18 render with אָּכַּכְס, ‘the drawing (of wisdom)’. The Job Targum from Qumran has not been preserved at this point.

Σ: In Ps. 126:6 Σ paraphrases יָנָה דְּקִיַל זִרְבָּכָה ‘he who carries seed’. In Job 28:18 the very free rendering skips גָּלַקְו altogether.

ヴ: trahitur ‘drags’, apparently taking the Hebrew as a verb.

6. Judaic Sources
See section 4, Jewish Aramaic.

7. Illustrations

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

9. Conclusion
In the past, scholars trying to establish the meaning of the noun גָּלַקְו have relied too much on the testimony of the ancient versions, ignoring the fact that the translators were obviously guessing after the meaning and paraphrased the two passages Ps. 126:6 and Job 28:18 heavily in order to wrest some sense from them.

Both careful exegesis and comparative linguistics render it plausible that the rare term גָּלַקְו designates a leather bag or pouch which, depending on its purpose, might have different shapes. In Psalm 126:6 it will have been a fairly large bag for seed, in Job 28:18 a small pouch for valuables. Since the normal Hebrew word for ‘skin, hide, leather’ is רֶשֶׁת, one might consider the possibility that גָּלַקְו is an Egyptian or Akkadian loanword (see section 4) which, just as the Akkadian equivalent, sometimes acquired the specific meaning of ‘bag, pouch’ through synecdoche.
10. Bibliography


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