2a. Literal Use

In Jeremiah 8:8 the word refers to the untruthful writing instrument of scribes (םירש שכר), 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 (רש) to שכר, one cannot exclude the possibility that שכר 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 הסכ? 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 (לו) 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 שכר 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 האסף, another type of graver, the stylus may have had a hardened tip.

A clear case of the literal use of שכר 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 (סנא הנקרא). The meaning of הנה ‘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 שכר 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 "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 " 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 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. נֶּעַר, a bird of prey, proposed by some (Fürst & Ryssel, *HCHAT*, Bd. 2, 120), is unlikely if the basic root of the latter was *g̱yw* (HAHAT, 953).

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

UGARITIC: Whether or not Ugar. 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 פָּשַׁי listed in some dictionaries is simply the untranslated word in the Targum on Jer. 17:1 (see below).

CLASSICAL ARABIC: Most likely cognates are gāṭa (gwt ‘to dig, hollow out’; gāṭ ‘hollow, cavity, pit’ (Lane, *AEL*, 2309); see also Syr. Arab. gawīt ‘deep’ (Barthélemy, 587) and some related verbs in Chadic dialects (Orel & Stolbova, *HSED*, 230, 294).

5. Ancient Versions
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 מִשְׁלָשׁ 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]).

מִשְׁלָשׁ belongs to the small category of technical terms (→ לְרֵד, → הַמַּחֲצֵה, → מְמוּשָׁה, → מְסָרְר), the basic function of which is either the essential shaping of artefacts or the writing of characters.

10. Bibliography


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