(flax), wick

1. Statistics

2a. Literal Use

is a by-form of tv, 'flax, fibre' (cf. König, Syntax, § 255a, g; GK, § 122r, t). The latter occurs only in Hos. 2:7, 11 in the singular; in the rest of its occurrences always a masculine plural of composition is used (cf. GBHrev, § 136b). Flax was a highly valued crop that yielded fibre for the manufacture of linen. The fibre is obtained by soaking the stalks to the point of putrefaction (retting) and drying them again for around two years. Before the whitish fibres within the stalks can be removed, the flax has to be combed to straighten it (Wilkinson 1998, 61f.). It is possible that the 'crushed stalk' of Isa. 42:3 designates flax at the next production stage.

The second stage in the process of preparing the flax stems for spinning is the beating or bruising of the plants to separate the fibres from the wooden parts of the stem. (G. Vogelsang-Eastwood, in: AEMT, 271; cf. Dalman, AuS, Bd. 5, 27.)

So the parallelism in Isa. 42:3 might be progressive.

In Exod. 9:31 (2x) it is mentioned next to barley, wheat and emmer (Exod. 9:32) as a food stuff (cf. Forbes, SAT, vol. 4, 28; H.-P. Müller, UF 2 (1970), 230f.). According to Zohary 1982 no oil was extracted from its seeds in biblical times, but see Borowski, AIAI, 98-9.

As appears from the figurative language of Isa. 42:3; 43:17, the word can also denote the wick of a lamp (→ ṭime’, made out of twined flax fibres (see section 8 below). Placed in the spout(s) of the lamp, it sucks up the oil from the reservoir of the lamp by capillary extraction.

2b. Figurative Use

In Isa. 42:3; 43:17 the wick as a vital part denotes the burning lamp itself (metonymia, synecdoche). As a metaphor, it is used in a similar way as the lamp itself (→ ṭime’, and → ṭime'). In Isa.
43:17 the misfortune, the total destruction of the enemies is described as the extinguishing (˚d qal), snuffing out (nabh qal) of the wick. The smouldering, the dimly burning (hbk qal, derivative of hrek) wick denotes the lamp which does not burn brightly, because its oil is running out. As such it is a symbol of the weak, the people without hope (cf. 'J). Of this wick it is said, however, that it will not be snuffed out (nabh pi.), i.e., the lamp will be filled with oil, so that the wick will start burning brightly again. So the smouldering, but not extinguished wick is a metaphor for people who have perspective, thanks to the appearance of the Servant of YHWH (Isa. 42:1), the subject of Isa. 42:3 (for different interpretations see the discussion in Elliger 1978, 210-4; Koole 1997, 220-2).

3. Epigraphic Hebrew
Gezer Calendar line 3: hT;v Pi (possibly defective spelling), at that time reaped c. March. See KAI 182.

4. Cognates
Semitic: ptt / pšt(h) is apparently a North-West Semitic word which could not be realised in Aramaic because the t would have developed into a t, making it a homograph of hT;Pi ‘piece of bread’.

Ugaritic: ptt, plur. pttm ‘linen, linen fabric’ (Del Olmo Lete & Sanmartín, DULAT, 688, with earlier literature).
Phoenician, Punic: pšt ‘flax, linen’ (Hoftijzer & Jongeling, DNSI, 947; Krahmalkov, PPD, 408).
Postbiblical Hebrew: nEt, plur. nEt – ‘Lein, Flachs’ (Levy, WTM, Bd. 4, 153).

5. Ancient Versions
6. Judaic Sources
Not attested in the meaning of ‘wick’.

7. Illustrations
No suggestions.

8. Archaeological Remarks
The Egyptian hieroglyph for a lamp wick shows the basic form of the wick. It was made of short length of twisted cord of flax fibres (cf. G. Vogelsang-Eastwood, in: AEMT, 291).

9. Conclusion


10. Bibliography

C. HOUTMAN

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