sceptre

1. Statistics

2a. Literal Use
It is only attested in the sense of a golden royal sceptre in the book of Esther (Est. 4:11; 5:2 [twice]; 8:4). The lemma is a late (Aramaic) development next to → םשׁ ‘stick, staff, tribe’.

2b. Figurative Use
Not attested.

3. Epigraphic Hebrew
Not attested.

4. Cognates
König, HAWAT, 527, remarks: ‘mit Übergangs-r (2473 [= Hist. Komp. Lehrgeb., Bd. 2, 473]) wie es auch im Aram. gesprochen wird (cf. מִשְׁפַּרְפָּא).’ Apparently König means Jewish and Samaritan Aramaic, see below. See also Fürst & Ryssel, HCHAT, Bd. 2, 497. Probably all are loans from Bab. šabbītu ‘staff, sceptre’, with typically Aramaic dissimilation of the geminated consonant (Wagner, LGA, 116, No. 317; Mankowski, ALBH, 147-9). The etymology proposed by Sasson 1972 must be rejected (Mankowski, ibid.).

COPTIC: šarbōt ‘sceptre’ (Crum, CD, 554).
AKKADIAN: šabbītu ‘staff’ (CAD Š/1, 10).
JEWISH ARAMAIC: אַффָרָבְר ‘staff, branch’ (Sokoloff, DJPA, 566).
SAMARITAN ARAMAIC: Tal, DSA, 930: אַффָרָבְר ‘1. staff . . . 2. blow, plague’.

5. Ancient Versions
§ and other Greek versions: LXX translated with χρυσή σταυροῦ.
]]= The First Targum to Esther translates with אֲבֵדְבַּבָּר אֲבֵדְבַּבָּר ‘golden sceptre’ (Levy, CWT, Bd. 2, 528), the same word as is used in the Targum to Ps. 23:4.
6. Judaic Sources

The term occurs once, in the plural, in Jesus Sirach Hebrew (Sir. 37:17), in ms D, while ms B seems to read נֶבֶשָּׁת (nebah), which must have been the Vorlage of שְׁבֵּרַ בֵּי (shabrībē; cf. Beentjes 1997, 102, 155). Apparently the meaning is ‘branches’ here. The term is not attested in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Rabbinic sources maintain the meaning of a royal sceptre, which decides upon chastisement (m. Sanh. II,5; b. Arakh. 19 a; Cant. Rabba II, 16. 2). At the same time, the term is used in the sense of a ‘shoot’ or ‘twig’ (Tosephta, Kil. I,10; Uqtsin I,5). This may be due to the fact that several times נֶבֶשָׁת which can mean ‘branch’, is translated as אִשָּׁר בֵּי in the Palestinian Targums to Exod. 21:20 and Lev. 27:32 (→ נֶבֶשָׁת, section 6).

7. Illustrations

8. Archaeological Remarks

[Will be added later on.]

9. Conclusion

אִשָּׁר בֵּי is nothing but a late loanword from Babylonian שָּׁבֶיתוּ, in which the double consonant is dissimilated into r+consonant, a process that took apparently place under the influence of Aramaic. The virtual hapax legomenon is exclusively attested in the book of Esther, in the meaning of ‘scepter’.

10. Bibliography


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