nail, tip of angle-tint tool

1. Statistics

2a. Literal Use
In Deut. 21:12 a female prisoner of war ought, among other requirements, pare (lit. ‘do’) her nails before an Israelite warrior could take her as wife. In this case the word in question refers to the nails of fingers and toes. The meaning of the act is disputed, but might signify that the woman had to shed her former life, or even her former self (Tigay 1996, 194). This was necessary because she would no longer be a slave, the normal status of a captive, but would become a free woman (Marsman 2003, 453).

2b. Figurative Use
According to Jer. 17:1 the sins of Judah are כַּֽעַ֛דְּרָ֨ו הָֽעַרְבִּ֖ית הָֽרְשַׁ֑וֹת ‘engraved with a nail of steel on the tablet of their heart’. The word כַּעַֽדְּרָ֨ו does not mean ‘diamond’ (so KJV, RSV, ASV, NJB and many other modern translations and Hebrew lexica, even HALAT, 1445-6), because diamond was unknown in biblical times (Bolman 1938, 81-5; AEMI, 87, 442; AMMI, 82). Proof to the contrary (lit. Lundbom 1999, 776) is unconvincing. Nor can it have been emery (so KBL, 988), because particles of this stone were mainly used as an abrasive (AMMI, 82; AEMT, 65). The rendering ‘steel’, advocated by Bolman 1938, 81-5, produces a nice climactic parallelism with the preceding זהר ‘iron’, is supported by the ancient versions and is most likely if a special kind of burin was involved, the so-called angle-tint tool which has a slightly curved tip. With this instrument the sins of the Judaeans were engraved on the (hard) tablet of their hearts (cf. Ezek. 11:19; 36:26) and in the (hard) horns of the altar. Thus the broader context points to figurative speech.

A different solution is proposed by Tawil, ALCBH, 328. He assumes a secondary meaning ‘nail-mark’. On Akkadian contracts a nail-mark often substitutes for a seal impression. The parallelism with כַּעַדְּדָ֨ו כְּפַרְרָ֖ל ‘with an iron graver’ as well as the sequel ‘on the horns of their altars’ do not favour this idea.
3. Epigraphic Hebrew
Not attested.

4. Cognates

**Semitic:** The root and several comparable derivatives are attested in many Semitic languages (Klein, *CEDHL*, 55; Leslau, *CDG*, 549; Orel & Stolbova, *HSED*, 120).

**Akkadian:** šipirtu B (a shape of precious stones) (*CAD* _SEGMENT 202a); šipru, ‘crest, spike, beak, point’ (*AHw*, 1104; *AEAD*, 105); šupru A, ‘nail, fingernail, claw, talon, hoof’ (*CAD* _SEGMENT 250b-253b; *AHw*, 1113). Possibly also šabarə B, ‘to slant’ (*CAD* _SEGMENT 4; *AHw*, 1065-6), but not the ghost word šappāru, cited by several Hebrew dictionaries.

**Old and Imperial Aramaic:** Egyptian Aramaic tfr, ‘toenail’ (Porten & Lund, *ADE*, 143).

**Jewish Aramaic:** ťufra, ‘fingernail, toenail, hoof, talon, claw’ (Sokoloff, *DJBA*, 498; *DJPA*, 230); ťifrə, ‘hoof’ (Sokoloff, *DJBA*, 514)

**Samaritan Aramaic:** tfr, ‘nail, hoof’, but also ‘chisel’ (Tal, *DSA*, 323).

**Syriac:** ťefra, ‘nail, hoof, claw, talon’, but also ‘a sharp instrument shaped like a finger-nail’ and ‘onyx-stone’ (Payne Smith [Margoliouth], *CSD*, 181). The latter stone is too soft for engraving purposes, so the determination may be faulty and probably arose from a misunderstanding of the Hexaplaric tradition (see below).

**Classical Arabic:** zufr, ‘nail’, but also ‘spur’ (of a cock) (Lane, *AEL*, 1912-3). Also the verb zaффara, ‘to engrave, chisel’ (Dozy, *SDA*, t. 2, 83).

**Modern South Arabic:** Soqotri ţefer, ‘nail, claw’ (Leslau, *LSoq*, 207); Mehri ţefer, ‘nail of a finger or toe, claw’ (Johnstone, *ML*, 83).

**Ethiopic:** şeфр, ‘fingernail, claw’, but also an iron ‘hook’ (Dillmann, *LLAc*, 1319; Leslau, *CDG*, 549).

5. Ancient Versions
and other Greek versions: In both cases the θ does not correspond to the Hebrew. In Deut. 21:12 it replaced the Hebrew combination of the substantive פּוֹסֵי and the verb-form פָּרַע by the single verb-form περιονυχίες, ‘pare her nails’, whereas Jer. 17:1 is wanting entirely. The hexaplaric tradition of the latter verse has ἐν δύναι, ἀδάμαντινο, ‘with a steel claw (nail)’.

ε: The Targumim use הָרָכָה, ‘fingernail’, ‘claw’ or ‘hoof’ in both cases.

ζ: In Deut. 21:12 ζ has τρύγη, ‘her nails’. Like the ε, ζ chooses the same word in Jer. 17:1, but one cannot exclude the possibility that it intended one of the derived meanings cited under section 4 (Cognates).

η: Like ε and ζ, η has the same word in both cases. Deut. 21:12 et circumcidet ungues, ‘she shall pare her nails’, Jer. 17:1 in ungue adamantino, ‘with an iron nail’. However, in this case too, unguis might have a meaning like ‘hook’ (LD, 1932).

6. Judaic Sources

Not attested as a tool.

7. Illustrations

No suggestions.

8. Archaeological Remarks

[Will be added later on.]

9. Conclusion

The literal meaning of פּוֹסֵי occurs in Deut. 21:12 where it is a ‘finger- and/or toe-nail’. In Jer. 17:1 the context points to a figurative use of this term to describe the tip of a type of burin with a steel tip. On the basis of the cognates it may be assumed that the instrument had a slightly curved tip resembling a toenail of a bird. Some of the ancient versions support this interpretation. Nowadays such a graver’s instrument is called an angle-tint tool.

On the basis of the etymology one would expect the development *צֶּפֶר, ‘nail’ > *צֶּפֶרָן, ‘little nail’ > Hebrew צֶּפֶר (BL, 499-500). The Masoretic vocalisation צֶּפֶר may well represent folk-
etymologising on the basis of תַּרְפּוֹן, ‘bird’. Even though this is mistaken (תַּרְפּוֹן must be derived from a different root, spr, ‘to twitter, sing (birds)’), it betrays awareness of the meaning ‘bird’s claw’.

נֶפֶשׁ belongs to the small category of technical terms (→ fr<j, → f[e, → s,q<, → dr<c, → hg:WjM]), the basic function of which is either the essential shaping of artefacts or the writing of characters.

10. Bibliography


Last update: 09-05-2011

This article should be cited as:
K.D. Jenner, ‘נֶפֶשׁ – nail, tip of angle-tint tool’, PDF downloaded
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