fiery missile

1. Statistics

First of all there is the problem of establishing the correct lemma for this word. In it occurs only twice as ṭwqyz in Isa. 50:11. So it is actually a hapax legomenon in the Hebrew Bible (not recognised as such by Cohen, BHL and Greenspahn HLH). The most natural choice is to regard it as a plural of *ṭwq (so TLB, vol. 3, 30; DCH, vol. 3, 102). However, since many Hebrew nouns exist both in a masculine and a feminine form (cf. e.g. Sperber 1959) and feminine plurals are fairly common with masculine singulars (e.g. GKC §87m-p), a singular *ṭwq is an acceptable alternative (so HCHAT, 361; BDB, 278). Other dictionaries refuse to choose between these two options (e.g. GB, 197, 204; LHA, 207; KBL, 254; HALAT, 257; DBHE, 169; HAHAT, 299). The circumstance that the masculine plural form µyqyz is well-attested in Postbiblical Hebrew (see sections 4 and 6 below) argues in favour of those who opt for the masculine form of the lemma.

The next question is whether the lemma also occurs in the form of ṭ in Prov. 26:18. Apparently this has the same meaning as ṭ in Isa. 50:11. Some scholars regard ṭwqyz as a secondary form which developed from an original ṭyz, plural of *ṭ which in that case would be the more original form of the lemma (cf. Gesenius & Roediger, TPC, 424; GKC §20n). Whether this ṭ in turn is same word as the ṭ which is thought to mean ‘fetter, chain’ in Isa. 45:14; Nah. 3:10; Ps. 149:8; Job 36:8 depends on the etymology and basic meaning of all three words concerned (see section 4). To avoid confusion the statistics above are based only on the three passages where the word is thought to mean ‘flaming missile’ or ‘torch’.

2a. Literal Use
In Isa. 50:11 people kindling a fire (ḥqd Qal ซู) are addressed. In the parallel colon they are called people ‘girding’ (ḥqd Pi.) ṭwqyz. In the next verse-line they are invited to walk into the blaze of their own fire ʿl zR parallel into the ṭyz that they themselves burn (ḥqd Pi.). The use of the verb ʿl Pi. often caused translation
problems. Duhm and others solved this by emendation (אָשָׁר יַעֲבֹר יְדֵיכֶם, ‘those who light torches’). Nowadays most commentators suggest יָשָׁר Pi. has to be taken metaphorically, meaning that the people addressed surround themselves with torches, thus protecting themselves by their light. As a consequence, renderings like ‘walk by the light of your fire’ (RSV) came into existence. However, it is questionable whether יָשָׁר can mean ‘light’ (cf. Isa. 2:5; Ps. 56:14: יָשָׁר יָשָׁר). Moreover, the verb יָשָׁר Pi. occurs 6 times in the Hebrew Bible and in all other 5 cases it is a direct object that is girded. The verb is never used reflexively. Thus, it would be more appropriate to surmise that the people ‘gird’ or ‘wrap’ the torches (cf. Watts 1987, 194, who renders ‘tying up torches’). Because it stands in parallelism with ‘to kindle a fire’, it is more likely that the expression describes the preparation of torches by wrapping wooden sticks in wool or pieces of cloth, and drenching them in oil, wax or bitumen (see below, section 8). This preparatory work nicely matches the kindling of fire.

Isa. 50:11 mockingly exhorts those who hope to illuminate the darkness surrounding them by man-made light instead of trusting in the LORD (cf. 51:10). They kindle their torches – possibly to participate in Babylonian nightly processions (cf. RLA, Bd. 3, 2) – but these torches will become a pyre on which they will burn (one should not emend יָשָׁר into יָשָׁר, cf. Korpel & De Moor 1998, 449, n. 7, 486). They seem to forget that it is God himself who commands both the darkness of judgment (Isa. 50:3; 51:6; cf. 47:5, 14) and the light of salvation (51:4, cf. 42:16; 45:7; 49:6).

In Prov. 26:18 the plural יָשָׁר is used, which presupposes a singular יָשָׁר (also known from Jewish Aramaic, see below). It occurs in the expression יָשָׁר יָשָׁר יָשָׁר יָשָׁר יָשָׁר יָשָׁר יָשָׁר יָשָׁר, literally ‘one who continuously shoots יָשָׁר, arrows and death’. He who deceives his neighbour is like a madman wildly shooting off יָשָׁר, arrows (יָשָׁר) and death (יָשָׁר). Apparently the writer saw the יָשָׁר as potentially deadly weapons which one should not handle carelessly. If it is admissible to view the sequel, Prov. 26:19-20, as an elaboration of the imagery, the missiles are fiery here too. Both biblical texts suggest a kind of torch or fiery missile.

2b. Figurative Use
Not attested in biblical Hebrew.

3. Epigraphic Hebrew
Not attested.

4. Cognates
Klein, CEDHL, 197, does not indicate which root he prefers for בִּזְנִי I, בִּזְנִי and בַּזְנִי II, but he derives בַּזְנִי I ‘chain, fetter’ from the √בַּזְנִי. Gesenius & Roediger, TPC, 424 and König, HAWAT, 89, 93, assume that both words have been derived from √בַּזְנִי. This is a less exotic proposal than it may seem at first sight. It is indeed noteworthy that both בַּזְנִי in Prov. 26:18 and בַּזְנִי in Jer. 40:1, 4 have a double ב. בַּזְנִי is easily explained as a normal development: *

Akkadian: The noun is related to Neo-Asyrian ziqtu ‘torch’, and ziqu II, ‘torch’, cf. CAD (Z), 133; AHw, 1532; Salonen, Hausgeräte, 138-145; Tawil, ALCBH, 90.

Postbiblical Hebrew: See below, section 6. For some (rare) rabbinic references, Levy, WTM, Bd. 1, 531: ‘Feuerkugel, Brandpfeil ... ein Komet’: Jastrow, DTT, 395: ‘sparks, burning arrows ... meteors, shooting stars.

Jewish Aramaic: In the Aramaic Henoch נָשְׁנָה ‘meteor’ occurs several times (4Q201:IV.3; 4Q204:VI.20, 24, 30, next to thunder and lightning). In other apocalyptic works these ‘meteors’ are mentioned too (4Q246:II.1; 4Q558:Fr. 1, II.5). For Rabbinic Aramaic see Jastrow, DTT, 395: בַּזְנִי, ‘sparks, burning arrows; meteors, shooting stars [or comet]; Idem, 396: נָשְׁנָה I, ‘1. shooting star, or comet; 2. blast, wind, draught (spirit)’. The Job Targum from...
Qumran renders the Hebrew הָרְדֵּס ‘torches’ of Job 41:11 as בְּרַדְס ‘flame’ (11Q10:XXXVI.6). With regard to rabbinic Aramaic, cf. אֶלֱעַר 2, according to Sokoloff, DJPA, 176: ‘flash of fire, comet, demon’; בְּרַדְס ‘spark’ (see also Sokoloff, DJBA, 411).

Syriac: Payne Smith (Margoliouth), CSD, 115: ẓiqā and ẓiqṭā, ‘a. violent rain with wind; rain falling in great drops; boisterous wind; b. a shooting star, metaph. racyancy’. Idem, 115: ṣnaq ‘to shoot an arrow, to hurl, sling’.

Classical Arabic: zanaqa ‘to tighten, constrict’ (Wehr, DMWA, 383). Lane, AEL, 1259: zanaq ‘thin part of an arrow-head’. See the introductory part of section 4 above.

5. Ancient Versions

θ and other Greek versions: Isa. 50:11 φλόξ – GELS-L (1992-1996), 505 and GELS-L (rev. ed. 2003), 650: ‘flame; light, shine; blade (of a flashing sword)’. Interesting is the fact that θ translates ‘to gird the torches’ as ‘to strengthen/to feed the torches’ (κατασχέω φλόγα), which also might refer to the binding of pine splinters with cloth or wool into a bundle, and made inflammable with oil, resin or bitumen. Prov. 26:18 ἄπαξλογον – GELS-L (1992-1996), 418 and GELS-L (rev. ed. 2003), 544: ‘club (weapon)’. It is paralleled by sword (μάχαιρα) and arrow (τοξομον).

ε: Isa. 50:11 μάχαιρα ῥῆχα ‘(all you) who grasp a sword’.

ς: Isa. 50:11 σαλθεῖτα – Payne Smith (Margoliouth), CSD, 518: ‘flame, blaze’; the paraphrasis of ς in Prov. 26:18 does not allow a definite identification of its rendering of ἄπαξλογον: ‘Like the behaviour of boys throwing things (or: words), so are the sharp arrows of death’.


6. Judaic Sources

In Sir. 43:13 (17) – according to manuscripts M and B – God’s יִרְשָׁה תַּהוֹן ‘fiery missiles of judgment’ light up in the sky, accompanying his hail (ברד). Both the Hebrew and Aramaic texts of Qumran mention the אֶלֱעַר בְּרַדְס. Here too the expression יִרְשָׁה תַּהוֹן ‘fiery missiles of judgment’ occurs (1QH⁴16.37). According
to 1QM 6.2-3 ‘fiery missiles of blood’ (רֵדֶךְ דֵּבֵר) shall be written on darts (שְׁלֵדָּה). CD-A 5:13 clearly alludes to Isa. 50:11, when it describes followers of Belial as קֶרֶדֶךְ אֶלֶךְ אָבֶּנֶךְ רֵדֶךְ, ‘kindlers of fire and igniters of fiery missiles’. 1QHא 9:12 pairs מִשְׁCLLocationאוֹרַבְרוֹר ‘fiery missiles and lightnings’. Apparently these missiles have acquired a celestial, apocalyptic status.

7. Illustrations

On the well-known relief depicting Sennacherib’s siege of Lachish an Assyrian soldier who is almost entirely hidden behind the archer in the foreground is igniting tightly wrapped missiles with a torch (לַשּׁאד),

Unfortunately it is unclear how the Assyrians hurled these projectiles into the city, but the association with arrows and fire matches the biblical data.

On the Baal-stele from Ugarit the lightning spear the god holds in his left hand is a kind of burning arrow. For the imagery,
see e.g. Cornelius 1994. Probably, the idea was that lightning was created by the god Ba‘al throwing his flaming arrows from heaven.

8. Archaeological Remarks
The material used to make \(\text{qyz I}\) cannot have been very different from that of torches. According to Salonen, *Hausgeräte*, 138-145, esp. 138, torches were made of wood and wool, seldom bronze was used for the haft. The ideogram for the word ‘torch’ is \(\text{iži} ‘\text{burning torch, fire}’\). The wick or burner was made of wool or a piece of woolen cloth. In Sumerian several words were used for the torch, mostly constructed with \(\text{gi ‘reed-stem}‘\) and \(\text{iži ‘fire}‘\). The Neo-Assyrian word \(\text{ziqtu (see above) is marked as combustible material by the determinative giˇ ‘wood (Von Soden, AHW, vol. 3, 1532). In one text the making of the torch is described, ‘you insert cedar, cypress and aromatic reed into two torches, wrap white and red wool around them, set fire (to them) by means of sulphur and throw them on the pyre’ (Salonen, *Hausgeräte*, 143). Often resinous wood like pine was used to make a torch from a bundle of kindle-wood splinters bound around a stick (Salonen, *Hausgeräte*, 144-5; Forbes, *SAT*, vol. 6, 129, 131). Torches not only were used for lightning but also as a kind of telegraphy. Staves of pine wood were used to which reeds and branches of olive trees were attached by a cord (Forbes, *SAT*, vol. 9, 174).

In ancient Greece too bundles of splinters were used as torches. They were made of resinous wood, and bound together with rushes, papyrus, or vine tendrils, and drenched into resin, pitch or wax (Forbes, *SAT*, vol. 9, 131). Torches were used predominantly when going out by night. The Romans too used *malleoli*, ‘fire-darts’ and *fasces sarmentorum*, ‘bundles of twigs’, to start a fire in the cities they besieged (cf. Lewis & Short *LD*, 1104).

9. Conclusion
The evidence assembled warrants the conclusion that \(\text{qyz} \) and \(\text{qz} \) are the same word which designated a missile made of tightly wrapped rushes or kindle-wood, impregnated with combustible fluids. As such it could also be used as a dreaded type of weapon that could be used to kindle a besieged city. Only later on it
became a designation of comets or heavenly demons, although it is possible that this was derived from existing popular belief. See also → דַּרְשָׁר.

The root from which the word was derived is most likely the Semitic √نزq ‘to wrap tightly’. There is insufficient reason to assume the existence of a feminine form יְצִירָה.

10. Bibliography


Last update: 28-10-2011

This article should be cited as:
Marjo Korpel, ‘iedades / yedias fiery missile’,