

זָזָן

equipment, weaponry

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1. Statistics

Torah: 1 – Deut. 23:14.

Nebiim: 0.

Ketubim: 0.

Total: 1.

2a. Literal Use

The noun זָזָן occurs in Deut. 23:14¹ only, where it is found within a passage about purity and cleanliness of the military camp (Deut. 23:10-15). In this pericope two instructions are given. The first one (vv. 11-12) is rather vague: ‘When someone among you is unclean by reason of an accident of the night . . .’ (מְקַרְה־לַּיְלָה). Though modern Bible translations (e.g. *NEB*; *REB*) have interpreted this expression as ‘an emission of seed’, it is not the most probable solution, since ‘emission of seed’ is elsewhere characterized as שְׂכַבְת־זָרַע (Lev. 15:16). Therefore, מְקַרְה־לַּיְלָה in Deut. 23:11 should be considered a more general term: every kind of accident related to impurity that could happen at night. The second case discussed in Deut. 23:10-15 concerns a specific instruction on easing oneself (vv. 13-15). This has to be done (1) at a special place (יָד [v. 13], see [Van der Woude 1978](#), 669) outside the camp and (2) with a specific tool. One has to scrape (חָפַר qal) a hole with a tentpeg or pin (→ יָתֵד) in order to cover the excrements.

The instruction in Deut. 23:14 is rather peculiar, as ‘there is no Biblical reference

to the effect that human excrement defiles’ (Weinfeld 1972, 238). It is therefore motivated in Deut. 23:15 as having a theological, rather than a practical background: God’s presence in the camp requires purity. J. Tigay writes, ‘it may be objectionable in God’s presence simply because it is filthy and repugnant. However, Ezekiel’s objection, as a priest, to eating food cooked over human excrement as fuel may indicate that it was regarded as impure in some contexts (Ezek. 4:12-15)’ (Tigay 1996, 214). The proximity of the preceding verses, especially v. 11, argues in favour of this interpretation.

It is the apposition **עַל-נִסְ** in Deut. 23:14 that poses a problem, mainly because the noun **נִסְ** is a *hapax legomenon* in the Hebrew Bible, though it is not listed as such in either Cohen, *BHL*, or Greenspahn, *HLBH*. The preposition **עַל** can have many meanings (cf. *DCH*, vol. 6, 385–98; opting for ‘with’, 392b), but in view of the fact that the **נִסְ** came into contact with excrements it is unlikely that the meaning would be ‘among, with’ or ‘on, over’ here. The preposition could mean ‘in addition to, besides’ (*DCH*, vol. 6, 392a), implying that it should be kept apart from **נִסְ**, probably a generic term for ‘(military) equipment, weapons’.

2b. Figurative Use

Not attested.

3. Epigraphic Hebrew

Not attested.

4. Cognates

SEMITIC: A connection with \sqrt{dn} which is always connected with hearing (> Hebrew **נִסְ**, **נִסְ** hiph.) is unlikely. Probably the **ס** is a prosthetic *alef* (see below), so the best solution is to assume that the noun has to be vocalized as **נִסְ** rather than as (unattested) **נִסְ**, as it is traditionally vocalized in Hebrew lexica, with the **ס** forming an open semi-syllable (cf. Joüon & Muraoka, *GBH*, § 88a). This opinion is already attested with early Hebrew lexicographers, cf. Fürst & Ryssel, *HCHAT*, 48.

PALMYREAN ARAMAIC: Hoftijzer and Jongeling, *DNWSI* I, 26 noted a word *ʾzn* of unknown meaning, in an inscription in archaic Palmyrene script (end first century BCE),² which has the attribute *špyr*, ‘beautiful’. It appears to be related to the erection of a statue of two persons to which the expression *ʾzn špyr* fits. It might suit a piece of armour like a baldric (cf. also section 7, below), which was often beautifully decorated (but this may be too speculative).

OFFICIAL ARAMAIC: *zyn*₂ / *zn*₄, ‘weapon, armour’ in Elephantine papyrus Cowley 31:8: *znyhwm*, in the second draft of the letter to governor Bagohi of Yehud. In the first version Cowley 30:8 the first scribe had written *tlyhm* (Hoftijzer and Jongeling, *DNWSI* I, 309; Grelot, *DAE*, No 102; Porten 1996, 139–47). *tlyhm* from the Semitic \sqrt{tly} suggests a hanging weapon or piece of armour (in Gen. 27:3 most probably a quiver as part of Esau’s כְּלִים [→ כְּלִי] ‘(hunting) equipment’).

PERSIAN: Probably 𐤆𐤊/(𐤆𐤊) was derived from Avestian *zaēna*, Old Persian **zaina*, Pehlevi *zēn*, ‘weaponry’ (cf. *HAHAT*, 30; Sokoloff, *SLB*, 378).

POSTBIBLICAL HEBREW: 𐤆, Levy, *WTM*, Bd. 1, 528: ‘Waffe, eig. wohl Schmuck, s.w.u. Kriegsrüstung’, with reference to Arab. *zayn* ‘ornamentum’.

JEWISH ARAMAIC: 𐤆𐤊, Sokoloff, *DJPA*, 175; *DJBA*, 410: ‘weapon’. In T^J to Jer. 5:16 and Isa. 49:2 𐤆𐤊𐤆 is a rendering of Hebrew אֶשְׁפָּה ‘quiver’, whereas in Isa. 22:6 the same word is equated with Aramaic 𐤆𐤊 ‘weapon, weaponry’ (cf. Levy, *CWT*, Bd. 1, 18).

SAMARITAN ARAMAIC: 𐤆𐤊, 𐤆𐤊, 𐤆𐤊, Tal, *DSA*, 276: ‘gear’.

SYRIAC: *zaynā*, Payne Smith (Margoliouth), *CSD*, 115: ‘arms, armour, weapons’; Brockelmann, *LS*, 195: ‘arma’; Costaz, *DSF*, 87: *zaynā* ‘armure, armour’; Sokoloff, *SLB*, 378: *zaynā* ‘shield, armor, implements’.

CLASSICAL ARABIC: *zayn*, Lane, *AEL*, 1279-80: ‘ornament, finery’.

HURRIAN: If a word of non-Semitic origin and, perhaps, a loan of Indo-European provenance, also Hur. *ziyani* should be taken in consideration. It is attested as a determined noun or ablative: *ziyan(i)=ni/e* in the first tablet of the Hurrian-Hittite bilingue *para tarnumar* ‘Epic of Release’ (KBo 32,67 IV, 8’; Neu 1996, 527; Dijkstra 2013, 135–36). It is also attested in the Ugaritic trilingual vocabulary S^a 46.1 H₁AL = *ḥallu* = *ziyani* = *kurza’u* ‘thigh, shank(-bone)’. Also a related or variant noun may be *ziyari* ‘side (of body, house)’ (see Richter 2012, 367, 371). It is known that in Hurrian many words relating to horse-breeding and warfare have been adopted from ancient Indo-European stock. If so, it implies that the word (’*a*)*zaynu** may have entered the West-Semitic world at a much earlier stage than the Persian period.

5. Ancient Versions ³

LXX and other Greek versions: LXX Deut. 23:14 (13) renders ἐπὶ τῆς ζώνης σου ‘on your belt’ (*GELS-L*, 195: ‘girdle, belt’; *GELS-M*, 316: ‘girdle’). LXX’s rendering suggests that the Hebrew text has been read (or interpreted) as 𐤆𐤊𐤆 (𐤆𐤊 ‘girdle’). However, this interpretation might be a mere guess, since it is unlikely that a soiled tentpin would have been worn on the belt.

T^{Smr}: See: Samaritan Aramaic under ‘Cognates’.

TARGUM: Some manuscripts of T^O read אֶזֶן, but the best text has זִינְךָ (Sperber, *BiA*, vol. 1, 329). T^N Deut. 23:14 has מֵאֶזֶן זִינְךָ. This would seem a conflated reading which attempts to reconcile the Aramaic with MT. Probably T^{Ps-J} has the better reading here: מֵאֶזֶן זִינְךָ ‘your war equipment’ (Díez Macho, *Neophyti*, vol. 5, 193: ‘vuestros equipos de armas’; Le Déaut 1980, 188: ‘vos équipements d’armes’). The Targumists further explain their intention by אֶתֶר דְּתִיסְדֹן סִיפִיכֹן ‘the place where you fasten your swords’ (Le Déaut 1980, 189: ‘l’endroit où vous attachez vos glaives’). So the Targumim are connecting אָזֶן with Aramaic זִינְךָ, apparently regarding the א as prosthetic.

PESHITTA: As often, S seems to follow the Targumic tradition in translating עַל-אֶזְנֶךָ as *l zynk*, ‘on your equipment’ (Payne Smith [Margoliouth], *CSD*, 87: ‘armour’; Brockelmann, *LS*, 195: ‘arma’; Costaz, *DSF*, 87: ‘armure, armour’; Sokoloff, *SLB*, 378: *zaynā* ‘shield, armor, implements’). It is interesting that the important manuscript family of 9a1 has the variant reading *m* ‘with (your equipment)’.

VULGATE: Deut. 23:13 *balteum* ‘girdle, belt’, apparently following LXX.

6. Judaic Sources

Deut. 23:14 is quoted in b. Yoma 75b where it is explained that the tool was only needed to cover up excrements produced by food that was bought from foreign merchants because the manna the Israelites ate normally was digested entirely. In b. Ket. 5a it is proposed to read בְּאֶזְנֶךָ ‘in your ear’ which is then interpreted figuratively.

7. Illustrations

If אָזֶן was a general term for weaponry and armour, it is difficult if not futile to search for relevant examples in the vast iconographic resources of the art of warfare in the ancient Near East. If, however, it may be assumed that as a *hapax legomenon* the word designated a rare piece of equipment, or was a rare term for a specific piece of armour such as a kind of baldric hanging from the girdle or a shoulder-belt, it is rather easy to provide examples of them from ancient Near Eastern iconography. We display one example of each. First, the often beautifully decorated Persian ‘akinakes’ or short sword from the southern ‘Treasury Relief’ at Persepolis (Figure 1, next page). The decorated leather scabbard is here hanging from the girdle connected to it by a single metal device (see also *ANEP*, 11, 463).



FIGURE 1: Short Persian sword or akinakes from Persepolis with leather scabbard attached to the girdle (Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago)



FIGURE 2: Assyrian relief: Ashurbanipal⁴ hunting lions (© Trustees of the British Museum).

Baldricks or shoulder-belts made from leather straps hanging over the right shoulder slanting to the left, are known since the Late Bronze Age. They also appear frequently in the Neo-Assyrian-Babylonian and Persian period. Compare, for instance the two reliefs which show king Ashurbanipal (668-ca 627 v.Chr.) and king Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 v.Chr.) hunting lions (Figure 2, previous page; Figure 3, below).⁵

[M. Dijkstra]



FIGURE 3: Gypsum Assyrian relief: Ashurnasirpal II hunting lions
(© Trustees of the British Museum).

8. Archaeological Remarks

A large number of different types of Assyrian and Persian swords, usually made from bronze alloys, have been found in excavations all over the ancient Near East including Palestine and are nowadays on display in museum collections.⁶ Also often the remains of the golden and silver adornments of the ornamented hilts and scabbards have been unearthed.⁷ These material remains complete nicely the iconographic records cited above. Unfortunately, the leather parts of the scabbards and straps of the belts and baldrics perished except for an occasionally preserved bronze ring, buckle or some small floral ornaments adorning these parts of the weaponry. As early as about 1500 BCE in shaft-grave V at Mycenae (Greece) the golden adornments of a bronze swords scabbards and baldrics were found, which are examples of how a beautiful and a precious baldric could look like in the ancient Near East (Figure 4, next page). Near a long bronze sword, a golden shoulder-belt was found. The strip gold was about 130 cm (4 ft.) long and about 3 cm (1 3/4 in.) broad. In the extremity of the shoulder-belt are two perforations; at the other end there has probably been a clasp, because no perforations are present. Near this shoulder-belt a gold decorated disk similar to the ones covering the sword's scabbard was also found. Many of such round golden and silver floral plates have been found all

over the ancient world. These golden belts were the covering decorative element of leather baldrics used for the sword's scabbard suspension.⁸ [M. Dijkstra]



FIGURE 4A: Golden strap from baldrick found in Mycenae (ca 1500).
(Courtesy of the National Archaeological Museum Athens)



FIGURE 4B: Golden straps from baldricks found in Mycenae (ca 1500).
(© unknown; picture in Salimbeti s.a.)

9. Conclusion

The word is a *hapax legomenon*, perhaps borrowed from an Indo-European language. If a relationship be accepted with Hurrian *ziyani* and *ziyari*, it may have entered

the West-Semitic languages in the Bronze Age. According to the Septuagint and the Vulgate the apposition **עַל-אַזְנוֹתָי** in Deut. 23:14 refers to a specific spot ('on your girdle') or a special piece of equipment to attach the scabbard for sword or dagger to a girdle or a shoulder-belt (baldrick, the Roman *balteus*). The same kind of equipment is also supposed to carry the special → **יָתֵד** 'tentpin' used when leaving the camp towards the special place to ease oneself.

Some considerations argue in favour of a more general, collective meaning of the word. This more general meaning 'equipment, weaponry' has been preserved in Official Aramaic, Persian, Postbiblical Hebrew, Targumic Aramaic, and Syriac. Though the context does not provide conclusive evidence to decide which of these two options is correct, a specialized meaning such as a 'baldrick' seems to be preferable because of the fact that it is a *hapax legomenon* in the Old Testament Hebrew, i.e. a rarely used term. Another possible solution is to translate 'in addition to your equipment' which would imply that it should be kept apart from the other gear because of its hygienic use. Though not defiling in the strict religious sense, and obviously cleaned when used and carried around for sanitary purpose attached to a belt like the other weaponry, it was still regarded repugnant in the presence of God.

Notes

- 1 There is a difference between the numbering of verses in MT (Deut. 23:10-15) and V (23:9-14), whereas the latter is followed in a number of older translations, like e.g. KJV, NRSV, NEB, StV, NBG; newer translations are according to the numbering in MT: JPS, NBV.
- 2 [Cantineau 1933](#), 190–91.
- 3 Generally, the sigla for the *Versiones* are according to *BHQ*.
- 4 Note that the shoulder strap from which the sword is hanging, here also is secured inside his girdle!
- 5 Both reliefs are displayed in the British Museum, see [Reade 1983](#), Figs. 33; 80, 81; further: Figs. 79, 96; *ANEP*, Nos 184, 441, 185, 235; see also *AOB*, No 380; *ANEP*, No 651, and *BRL*², 61 the winged deity; another Persian example *ANEP*, No 11; other examples from Zincirli *ANEP*, No 49 and Neo Hittite Kargemish *ANEP*, No 461.
- 6 See also [Stern 2001](#), 531.
- 7 Usually subsumed under jewellery. Perforations and small ringlets on the edges show however that they were ornaments sewn on clothes, or attached on leather and cloth belts and other objects.
- 8 [Salimbeti s.a.](#) For examples of archaeological remains of such equipment from Palestine, see *BRL*², 61.

10. Bibliography

For the abbreviations applied: → [List of Abbreviations](#)

Alonso Schökel, *DBHE*, 32:

‘Ajuar, equipo’.

BDB, 24:

‘implements, tools’.

BHL

H.R. Cohen, *Biblical Hapax Legomena in the Light of Akkadian and Ugaritic* (SBL.DS, 37), Missoula 1978. [↑ Text](#)

Cantineau 1933

J. Cantineau, ‘Tadmorea,’ *Syria* 14 (1933) 169–202. [↑ Text](#)

DCH, vol. 1, 171:

‘perh. collective, tool(s) or weapons’.

Déaut 1980

R. le Déaut, *Targum du Pentateuque, t. 4: Deutéronome* (Sources Chrétiennes, 271), Paris 1980. [↑ Text](#)

Díez Macho, *Neophyti*

A. Díez Macho, *Neophyti I: Targum Palestinense MS de la Biblioteca Vaticana*, vol. 5: Deuteronomio, Madrid 1978. [↑ Text](#)

Dijkstra 2013

M. Dijkstra, ‘The First Tablet of the Hurritic Bilingual Song of Release in the Light of Hurritic Mythological Tradition,’ *UF* 44 (2013) 121–42. [↑ Text](#)

GB, 21:

‘unsicheres Wort: Waffen’.

HAHAT, 30:

‘Etymologie unsicher: Geräte’.

HALAT, 27:

‘Ausrüstung (?)’.

HAWAT, 10:

‘Gerät’.

HCHAT, 48:

a very elaborate treatment, resulting in the translation ‘Geräth, Werkzeug’.

HLBH, F.E. Greenspahn, *Hapax Legomena in Biblical Hebrew* (SBL.DS, 74), Chico 1984.

[↑ Text](#)

HWAT, 21:

‘Werkzeug’.

KBL, 25:

‘Gerät, tools’.

LHA, 28:

‘arma’ (Zorell renders: ‘praeter arma tua’).

MHH, 22:

סְתוּם (unclear).

Neu 1996

E. Neu, *Das hurritische Epos der Freilassung I: Untersuchungen zu einem hurritisch-hethitischen Textensemble aus Ḫattuša*, (SBoT 32) Wiesbaden 1996. [↑ Text](#)

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Tigay 1996

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TLB, vol. 1, 61:

Meaning uncertain.

TPC, 60:

'supellex' (utensils, stuff).

Van der Woude 1978

A.S. van der Woude, '𐤓, *yād*, Hand,' *THAT*, Bd. I, 667-674. [↑ Text](#)

Weinfeld 1972

M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School*, Oxford 1972, 238. [↑ Text](#)

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