

**book**

סִפְרָה

**1. Statistics**

Torah: 0. Nebiim: 0. Ketubim: 1. Total: 1.

**2a. Literal Use**

This word occurs only once, in Ps. 56:9(8), הֲלֹא בְּסִפְרָתְךָ, ‘Are they not in your book?’. The subject refers to the tears of the pious that God keeps with him in a waterskin. Word-play may be observed with סִפְרָתְךָ, ‘you have counted’, earlier in the verse. Sometimes the phrase הֲלֹא בְּסִפְרָתְךָ is seen as a gloss, but the grounds for this hypothesis are insufficient (Zenger 2000, 108). Tur-Sinai 1957, 382-3, proposed to take סִפְרָה as the equivalent of שִׁפְרָה, ‘bag, net’ in Job 26:13, but Clines 2006, 624, rightly remarks ‘It is not wise to follow Tur-Sinai’.

There is no explanation as to why the biblical author did not use the common masculine form → סִפֵּר here, but preferred the uncommon feminine. Perhaps he wanted to indicate that the ‘book’ was no real object but an abstract concept (*GBHrev*, § 134q-r). Some of the ancient versions also point in that direction (cf. section 5). In this particular context סִפְרָה refers to the סִפְרָה זְכוֹרֹן, ‘Gedenkbuch’ (Book of Remembrance) in which the LORD records the names and deeds of pious sufferers (Mal. 3:16; cf. Kraus 1960, 409; Hill 1998, 339-40). This book is probably the same as the סִפְרָה חַיִּים, ‘Book of Life’, mentioned in Ps. 69:29(28). See also Exod. 32:32; Ps. 40:8(7). According to apocalyptic literature it will be opened at the Final Judgment (Dan. 7:10; 12:4; TLevi 1:18; Asen. 15:4; Rev. 20:12, etc.). The concept of a heavenly book has very ancient roots (see e.g. Widengren 1950; Paul 1973).

**2b. Figurative Use**

It is unclear whether the use in Ps. 56:9(8) should be regarded as figurative or not.

**3. Epigraphic Hebrew**

Not attested.

**4. Cognates**

→ סִפֵּר.

### 5. Ancient Versions

Ⲫ and other Greek versions: Renders הַפְּרָסָה אֲלֶיךָ by ὡς καὶ ἐν τῇ ἐπαγγελίᾳ σου, ‘as also by your promise’, probably taking הַפְּרָסָה as the ‘Book of Life’ (Ps. 69:28 and cf. 2 Tim. 1:1 κατ’ ἐπαγγελίαν ζωῆς, ‘according to the promise of life’). Ⲫ paraphrases μὴ οὐχὶ ὅταν ἐξαριθμηῖς, ‘not even when you count?’.

Ⲯ: אַחַשְׁבַּנָּה ‘accounting’.

Ⲥ: *sefrā*, ‘book’.

Ⲯ: *promissio*, ‘promise’, as in Ⲫ.

### 6. Judaic Sources

The word occurs once in Sirach 44:4 where חֲכָמֵי שִׁיחַ בְּסִפְרָתָם ‘sages of discourse with their literacy’ are praised, meaning Solomon and Job. A variant reading has בְּמִסְפָּרָתָם, ‘by means of their counting’.

### 7. Illustrations

No suggestions.

### 8. Archaeological Remarks

[Will be added later on.]

### 9. Conclusion

הַפְּרָסָה denotes a special kind of book, to wit: the book in which God takes notes of all the evil and suffering the faithful righteous encounter in their lives. It occurs only once in the Hebrew Bible.

### 10. Bibliography

Clines 2006: D.J.A. Clines. *Job 21–37* (WBC, 18A), Nashville 2006 – *DCH*, vol. 6, 193-4, 841: ‘document, scroll, learning’, but various other proposals are discussed – *HAHAT*, 901: ‘1. Buch . . . 2. Schriftkenntnis, -gelehrsamkeit’ – *HALAT*, 725: Buch, himmlisches Merkbuch – Hill 1988: A.E. Hill, *Malachi: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AncB,25D), New Haven 1998 – *KBL*, 666: Schrift, Buchrolle, writing, scroll – Kraus 1960: H.-J. Kraus, *Psalmen* (BK.AT, 15/1), Neukirchen-Vluy 1960 – Paul 1973: S.M. Paul, ‘Heavenly Tablets and the Book of Life’,

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K.A.D. SMELIK

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