

burin, stylus

חֶרֶט

1. Statistics

Torah: 1. Nebiim: 1. Ketubim: 0. Total: 2.

2a. Literal Use

The meaning of חֶרֶט in Exod. 32:4 is disputed. Houtman 2000 enumerates no less than six different interpretations and finally prefers to render אֶהוּ בְחֶרֶט as '(Aaron) tied the (gold) in a cloth' (similarly *HCHAT*, Bd. 1, 438; Loewenstamm 1967; 1975; Gevirtz 1984, and others) because he believes that a rendering like 'he shaped it with a חֶרֶט' requires a repointing of the Hebrew. However, this is an unnecessary assumption if one accepts the existence of a צוּר III 'to draw, design, shape, form' that is also attested in several other Semitic languages (cf. Childs 1974; Schroer 1987; *HALAT*, 952; *DCH*, vol. 7, 107) and is supported by the ancient versions (see section 5 below). The hypothesis that חֶרֶט should be regarded as a cloth bag or purse (identical to or repointed as חֶרֶיט, for which 2 Kgs 5:23 is invoked) leaves unexplained how the gold became an image of cast metal (בְּמִכָּה). The assumption of a miracle has no basis in the text.

It is highly unlikely that the chief priest Aaron himself would have engaged in the specialist's work of casting a molten image of a bull-calf (on the techniques required see e.g. Forbes, *SAT*, vol. 8, 105-95; M. Weippert, in: *BRL*², 219-24; Moorey, *AMMI*, 216-40; J. Ogden in: *AEMT*, 161-6; Notebaart, *MMHB*, 231-235). Small images of cast metal bulls and bull-calves have been found in many places in Israel and the neighbouring countries, but Exod. 32:2-3 and 32:19-20 create the impression that it was a big image which would have complicated the smith's task considerably. Therefore it is more likely that it was the writer's intention to indicate that it was Aaron who commissioned and outlined the shape of the calf with a חֶרֶט, whereas others did the actual casting, probably in the form of gold sheets which were subsequently hammered into shape over a wooden base (cf. Exod. 31:1-11; 35:30-36:1 and Notebaart, *textitMMHB*, 234). If this was the case, the עָשָׂה, 'he made it', of Exod. 32:4, 35 must be understood as 'he had it made', as was the oriental way of giving

the employer all the credit for building or making things (see the building inscriptions of many kings, Baal's boast to have built his palace in KTU 1.4:VI.35-37 whereas actually it was built by the technician among the gods Kotharu, and for the OT, e.g. 1 Kgs 10:12, 16, 18; 12:28, 31-32; 16:33 and especially 2 Kgs 16:10-11). So חֲרָט in Exod. 32:4 is most likely a burin or stylus with which one could draw a sketch of an object on a writing tablet (for a similar interpretation, cf. Propp 2006, 549-50).

According to Isa. 8:1 the prophet has to write characters on a large bronze mirror (or a stone tablet) with a חֲרָט אָנֹשׁ 'a man's (normal, as distinct from the finer jeweller's tool) חֲרָט. Such a tool was commonly used for making notes on a wax or clay tablet, or to mark jars (after firing), weapons and tools with indications of ownership. Since the lettering on Isaiah's mirror (or tablet) had to be clearly readable to all passers-by (→ גְּלִיּוֹן) it may be assumed that a חֲרָט was a rather thick engraving tool, a burin or stylus. If it was a mirror of bronze on which Isaiah wrote, as has been suggested, the stylus must have been harder than that metal and therefore it may have had a point of iron or sapphire (cf. Jer. 17:1). There is certainly no basis for Van der Toorn's guess that a חֲרָט אָנֹשׁ would have been a 'brush' (Van der Toorn 2007, 180, 336).

2b. Figurative Use

Not attested.

3. Epigraphic Hebrew

Not attested.

4. Cognates

√חרט is considered a variant form of √חריץ, 'to incise, engrave' (*HAHAT*, 396, 401; Leslau, *CDG*, 264). An original connection with √חרה 'to plough' (Syr. √חרת also 'hollow out'), Hebr. √חַרַשׁ 1 'to plough', and √חרת 'to incise, engrave' is not excluded.

AKKADIAN: *harāṣu* 'to cut down, to cut off, to incise' (*CAD* (H), 92). *māhrūṣu* 'graver, chisel, burin' (*AEAD*, 58).

UGARITIC: *ḥrṣ* 'to cut, bite' (?) (Del Olmo Lete & Sanmartín, *DULAT*, 369). However, also Ugar. *ḥrzn*, a PN of uncertain de-

rivation, might be related.

PHOENICIAN, PUNIC: *hr̄tyt* ‘sculpture’ (cult image in a temple, Krahmalkov, *PPD*, 196), but doubted by Hoftijzer & Jongeling, *DNSI*, vol. 1, 404. See also *hr̄ṣ* ‘moat, canal’ and ‘carving, chiselling, carved work’ (Hoftijzer & Jongeling, *DNSI*, vol. 1, 406-7).

POSTBIBLICAL HEBREW: חֲרַט ‘to chisel, model’ (Dalman, *ANHT*, 160; Jastrow, 501); חָרַט ‘to incise’; חֲרָץ ‘incision, groove’ (Levy, *WTM*, Bd. 2, 115; Jastrow, *DTT*, 505).

JEWISH ARAMAIC: חֲרַיִץ ‘incision, groove’; חֲרַט ‘to cut into, dig’ (Levy, *WTM*, Bd. 2, 115; Sokoloff, *DJBA*, 484).

SAMARITAN ARAMAIC: חֲרַץ ‘to mutilate’; עֲרַק ‘opening’ (in the ark) (Tal, *DSA*, 296).

SYRIAC: *hūrātā* ‘cutting, laceration’; *h^erat* ‘to scrape, scratch, make incisions’; *hartā* ‘gash, scratch’ (Payne Smith [Margoliouth], *CSD*, 134, 157; Brockelmann, *LS*, 256).

CLASSICAL ARABIC: *haraṣa* ‘to rend, cleave’ (Lane, *AEL*, 547), less likely *haraṭa* ‘to peel, rub off’ (Lane, *AEL*, 723), though this is also attested as ‘to cut off’ (Dozy, *SDA*, t. 1, 362).

GREEK: *χάραγμα* ‘any mark engraved, character’; *χαρακτήρ* ‘graving tool, mark engraved, character’; *χάρασσω* ‘to whet, cut into, engrave’ (*LSJ*, 1976-70) may ultimately go back on Semitic *hr̄ṣ* because the Greeks learned how to write from the Semitic world.

5. Ancient Versions

⊖ and other Greek versions: For Exodus 32:4 the corresponding passage in ⊖ clearly expresses the idea of giving the essential shape (πλάσσω) to the idol with the help of a stylus or chisel (γχαφίς, cf. *GELS-L*, 93). Also in Isa. 8:1 ⊖ renders חֲרַט by γχαφίς.

⊖^T: מֲרַכִּי ‘trough, mould’ (Tal, *DSA*, 835).

⊖: ט^O renders וַצַּר יְהוָה בּוֹיָפֶא, ‘and he shaped it with pitch’ in Exod. 32:4, apparently interpreting the verb as a form of צַוַּר ‘to shape’ (Dalman, *ANHT*, 361) and assuming that the cast was hollow because in antiquity pitch was used to achieve a hollow shape (see the literature cited under section 2a).

ט^N has ורמא יתה בטופסא ‘and he cast it in a mould’. ט^J has a double rendering, וצר יתיה בשושיפא ורמא יתיה בטופסא ‘and he shaped it in a cloth and cast it in a mould’.

In Isa. 8:1 the Targumist avoids the difficult חֲרֵט by rendering וכתוב עלוהי כתב מפרש ‘and write on it in clearly readable script’.

ס: In Exod. 32:4 ס presents a connection between the verb *šwr* ‘to form, shape’ (Payne Smith [Margoliouth], *CSD*, 476) and the Greek LW *tūpsā*, ‘type’, ‘model’ or ‘mould’. It appears that ס has understood חֲרֵט as a mould, possibly under the influence of the Palestinian Targum (see above) and perhaps ט^T.

In Isa. 8:1 ס renders *bktb’ d’nš’*, ‘in human script’. The two passages together render it likely that the Syriac translator did not know what to do with the Hebrew word חֲרֵט, but was acquainted with the Palestinian exegetical traditions about its meaning.

ט: In Exod. 32:4 ט has *formavit opere fusorio* ‘he shaped it with foundry-work’. In Isa. 8:1 Hieronymus translates *et scribe in eo stilo hominis* ‘and write in it with a human stylus’.

6. Judaic Sources

1QM XII.3 וברית שלומכה חרתה למו בחרט חיים ‘and the covenant of your peace you engraved for them with the stylus of life’ definitely favours the interpretation as an engraving tool.

7. Illustrations

No suggestions.

8. Archaeological Remarks

[Will be added later on.]

9. Conclusion

Because the Old Testament provides the scholar with but two instances, the meaning of the word חֲרֵט depends mainly on its context. Though in this case the two instances are very different, ‘stylus’ may be taken as the basic meaning of the word under discussion. Several ancient versions, an important passage in a Qumran text, as well as the most likely etymology support this choice which makes good sense in each of the passages quoted.

The word belongs to the small category of technical terms (→ טַט, → צַפְרָן, → קִסְתָּ, → שְׂרָד, → מְחַנְנָה), the basic function of which is either the essential shaping of artefacts or the writing of characters.

10. Bibliography

BDB, 354-5: ‘graving-tool, stylus’ – Klein, *CEDHL*, 232: ‘graving tool, stylus’ – Childs 1974: B.S. Childs, *Exodus: A Commentary* (OTL), London 1974, 553-6 – Alonso Schökel, *DBHE*, 255: Exod. 32:4 ‘Cincel, estilo’; Isa. 8:1 ‘Por metonimia, lo escrito o grabado’ – *DCH*, vol. 3, 316: ‘stylus’ – *GB*, 259: Isa. 8:1 ‘Griffel z. Eingraben’; Exod. 32:4 ‘Meissel ... unwahrsch.’ – Gevirtz 1984: S. Gevirtz, ‘בִּרְטַן in the Manufacture of the Golden Calf’, *Bib.* 65 (1984), 377-81 – *HAHAT*, 396: Isa. 8:1 ‘Griffel, übertr. Schrift’; Exod. 32:4 ‘griffel od. Meißel’ (?) – *HALAT.*, 339: Isa. 8:1 ‘Griffel’, Exod. 32:4 cj – *HAWAT*, 125: Exod. 32:4 ‘Schabewerkzeug’ 2. ‘synekd. speziell: Griffel zum Einritzen’ – *HCHAT*, Bd. 1, 438: Isa. 8:1 ‘Griffel ... Menschengriffel, d.h. mit vulgären, gewöhnlichen Schriftzügen’; Exod. 32:4 ‘Meisel’ oder besser ‘Beutel’ – Houtman 2000: C. Houtman, *Exodus* (HCOT), vol. 3, 608, 636-8 – *HWAT*, 223: ‘1. Griffel; 2. Meißel’ – *LHA*, 268: ‘scalprum’ – Loewenstamm 1967: S.E. Loewenstamm, ‘The Making and Destruction of the Golden Calf’, *Bib.* 48 (1967), 481-90 (reprinted in: S.E. Loewenstamm, *Comparative Studies in Biblical and Ancient Oriental Literatures* (AOAT, 204), Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1980, 236-245) – Loewenstamm 1975: S.E. Loewenstamm, ‘The Making and Destruction of the Golden Calf – A Rejoinder’, *Bib.* 56 (1975), 330-43 (reprinted in: S.E. Loewenstamm, *Comparative Studies in Biblical and Ancient Oriental Literatures* (AOAT, 204), Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1980, 503-16) – *MHH*, 351: אֹמֵל, מַפְסֵלָה – Propp 2006: W.H.C. Propp, *Exodus 19–40* (AncB, 2A), New York 2006, Schroer 1987: S. Schroer, *In Israel gab es Bilder: Nachrichten von darstellender Kunst im Alten Testament* (OBO, 74), Freiburg 1987, 86 – Loewenstamm & Blau, *TLB*, vol. 3, 248: ‘chisel, graving-tool’ – Gesenius & Roediger, *TPC*, 520: ‘stylus, scalprum’ (?) – Van der Toorn 2007: K. van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible*, Cambridge: HUP, 2007.

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