

cresset, torch

לַפִּיד

1. Statistics

Torah: 2. Nebiim: 9. Ketubim: 3. Total: 14.

2a. Literal Use

The occurrences of the word can be divided into two groups: texts using just the word לַפִּיד (10x) and texts using the combination of לַפִּיד אֵשׁ (4x). The latter would seem to indicate that the object has been kindled.

The most informative text with regard to the use of לַפִּיד is Judg. 7:16 (see also Jud. 7:20). Gideon uses a ruse to surprise the Midianites. With only 300 men he goes to the outskirts of the camp of the Midianites. His men all get a trumpet in their hands, and empty jars with torches inside (לַפְדִּים בְּתוֹךְ הַכַּדִּים) in the other hand. After a signal the men have to shatter the jars, simultaneously blowing their trumpets. They hold (קִי הוֹק) the torches in the left hand and the trumpets in the right hand. Though it seems rather complicated to do three things at the same time with only one pair of hands, this is not something bothering the narrator. Perhaps they hit their neighbour's jar with their own. The לַפִּיד must have been a torch smouldering within the jar, a ploy still used by the Cairo police in the 19th century as a kind of dark lantern (see section 8).

This kind of torch was used also by Samson in Jud. 15:4-5. He turned the foxes tail to tail and put a torch between each pair of tails. Evidently he used torches the fire of which was burning at the very end of the handle to make the foxes run without burning their tails. If the description is correct the torches must have consisted of sticks with inflammable material on top. Probably in this case too the torches were kept smouldering in jars until the moment the animals could be released almost simultaneously.

In Gen. 15:17 a strange scene is depicted: Abraham is waiting for God to appear and between the pieces of meat on the ground a smoking oven (→ תַּנּוּר עֹשֵׂן) and a torch of fire pass (עֵבֶר). In this text the smoking oven and the torch of fire have to be interpreted as symbols accompanying the appearance of God, anticipating more or less the theophany on Mt. Sinai (Westermann 1981, 271).

2b. Figurative Use

Exod. 20:18 mentions the perception of thundering (הַקּוֹלִיתָ), lightning ('torches', הַלִּפְיִדִּים and the sound of the horn (קוֹל הַשּׁוֹפָר). As in other ancient oriental descriptions of the theophany, thunder and lightning accompany the theophany on Mt. Sinai. Because such theophanies were symbolically re-enacted in the cult, the torches may be a remnant of such an earlier ritual.

In a prophecy (Isa. 62:1) the vindication of Zion is said to go forth like brightness (נִגְהָה, and her salvation as a burning torch (לִפִּיד יִבְעָר). In the vision Ezek. 1:13 the appearance of heavenly creatures is accompanied by light that is described as something that looked like burning coals of fire (נִהְלִי-אֵשׁ, like torches moving (הִלְךְ). The fire was bright (וְנִגְהָה) and lightning (בָּרָק) came out of the fire. Similarly chariots are described in Nah. 2:3, they gleam like torches, they dart (יֵצֵאוּ כַּלְפִּיּוֹת) like lightning (בָּרָק).

Zech. 12:6 announces that the clans of Judah will be made like a blazing pot (כִּיּוֹר אֵשׁ, → כִּיּוֹר) in the woods and like a flaming torch (לִפִּיד אֵשׁ) among the sheaves. This means they will destroy ('devour', אָכַל) everything around them (cf. Judg. 15:4-5).

Out of the mouth of the monster described in Job 41:11 flaming torches go up, sparks of fire (כִּיּוֹרֵי אֵשׁ) leap forth. Daniel, in one of his visions (Dan. 10:6), sees a man whose face is like the appearance of lightning (בְּרָאָה בָּרָק) and whose eyes are like flaming torches (לִפִּירֵי אֵשׁ).

The difficult text Job 12:5 is not taken into consideration here. Usually לִפִּיד is analysed as the preposition לְ + the article + פִּיד 'calamity'. It is possible, however, to render, 'Contempt is a torch for the thinking of the care-free, it directs their unsteady feet'. The statement would mean then that the affluent mask their uncertainty about their unethical behaviour by treating less lucky people with contempt. Contempt is the torch lighting their way (cf. Ps. 119:105).

3. Epigraphic Hebrew

Not attested.

4. Cognates

AKKADIAN: Zimmern 1914 and Segert 1962 suggested that Akka-

dian *dipāru*, ‘torch’, might be at the origin of Hebrew *lappīd*. This was adapted by Salonen (*Hausgeräte*, 139). However, this derivation is phonetically improbable. According to the examples Salonen mentions the *dipāru* was used ‘to light up the darkness’, and it could glow ‘to shine out high in the sky’. It could also be used for fire signals (Salonen, 140). All texts Salonen discusses clearly point to a torch made of wood and wool (→ קִי ‘fiery missile’).

HITTITE: Rabin 1963 suggested that the origin of the word has to be sought in Hittite *lappiya-* ‘glowing thing, torch’, Luwian *lappi(ya)-*. For this word Friedrich, *HW*, 127, gives ‘Glut’; 1. Erg., 12: ‘Kienspan (?)’.

UGARITIC: The word itself is not attested in Ugaritic, but Salonen (*Hausgeräte*, 140) mentions RS 16.146 + 161 (*PRU* III, 186:38 where the word *dipāru* is used, ‘seven bronze torches, with a weight of 170 Shekel each’. The ‘bronze’ probably refers to the firepot on top of a wooden shaft. See section 9.

PHOENICIAN, PUNIC: Hoftijzer & Jongeling, *DNSI*, 580 and Krahmalkov, *PPD*, 261, mention a vessel *lp*. For possible identifications see Hoftijzer & Jongeling. Perhaps < λαμπάς might be added.

POSTBIBLICAL HEBREW: Jastrow, *DTT*, 715: ‘a pot in which light is carried; torch; lightning; flash’. JEWISH ARAMAIC: לַפִּיד, Jastrow, *DTT*, 715: ‘a pot in which light is carried; torch; lightning; flash.’ Also as לַמְּפִיד, ‘lamp’, a direct loan from Greek λαμπάς, cf. Sokoloff, *DJPA*, 284.

SAMARITAN ARAMAIC: לַפִּיד, Tal, *DSA*, 442: ‘torch’.

SYRIAC: Payne Smith (Margoliouth), *CSD*, 243: *lampī(°)d*, rarely *lampīs*, a) ‘a lamp, torch, candlestick’ . . . b) a flash, meteor’, obviously a loan from λαμπάς, but influenced by לַפִּיד, cf. Brockelmann, *LS*, 368.

CLASSICAL ARABIC: The proposal to connect it with the Arab. *√nafata* (Guillaume 1959) does not merit serious consideration.

ETHIOPIC: Leslau, *ESAC*, 316: *lampā*, ‘lamp’; *lanpās* ‘lamp, torch, flame’.

GREEK: From antiquity on people have connected לַפִּיד with Greek

λαμπάς ‘torch’ (*LSJ*, 1027). More recently e.g. Gordon 1955; Segert 1962; Brown 1995-2001. This is possible from a very early time on (cf. Hittite), but it can also have been a more recent loan directly from Greek.

5. Ancient Versions

Ⓞ and other Greek versions: Always λαμπάς – *GELS-L*, 276 and *GELS-L* (rev.ed. 2003), 366: ‘torch; lamp; flash; lightning’.

Ⓢ: The Job Targum of Qumran (11Q10, 36:4) renders Job 41:11 fairly literally, מן פמה לפידין יפקון, ‘from its mouth torches emerge’. Gen. 15:17 Ⓢ^O בעור דאשא, ‘a fiery torch’; Ⓢ^N and some other Palestinian targums, שביבין די נור שלהבין דאשא, ‘fiery sparks and flames of fire’; Ⓢ^{PsJon} גומרין דאשא ומבעיר שביבין דנור, ‘coals of fire and burning of fiery sparks’.

Exod. 20:18 Ⓢ^O אמיטתא דהמן, ‘the darkness that was there’; Ⓢ^N למפדייה, ‘torches’; Ⓢ^{PsJon} בעוריא ‘torches’.

Targum Jonathan on the Prophets translates בעורא, ‘torch’, in all instances. So does the late Ⓢ Job in 41:11.

Ⓢ: Gen. 15:17; Exod. 20:18, etc., *lampīdā* ‘torch’.

Ⓢ: *lampas*, ‘torch’, in Gen. 15:17; Exod. 20:18; Judg. 7:16 par.; Isa. 62:1; Nah. 2:4; Job 12:5; 41:10 (Ⓢ 11); *fax*, also ‘torch’, in Jud. 15:4; Zech. 12:6.

6. Judaic Sources

Jud.10:22 mentions that Holofernes came out of his tent with silver torches (λαμπάδες ἀργυραῖ) carried before him. This suggests torches in a (silver) pot or container, that can be held in the hand, or even torches with a silver handle. 1 Macc. 6:39, when the sun is shining on bronze and golden shields, the mountains also reflect this light, and gleam like torches of fire (λαμπάδες πυρός). Sir. 48:1 states that the prophet Elijah arose like a fire, and his word flares like a torch (λαμπάς). The Hebrew text has תנור ‘oven’ here.

According to the War Scroll of Qumran God will ignite the stricken of spirit ‘like a blazing torch in straw’ (כלפיד אש בעמיר) (1 QM 11:10).

According to rabbinic sources the לַפִּיד always had a shaft on which a cup of clay or metal containing an impregnated wick was mounted (Krauss, *TA*, Bd. 1, 68, 401; Brand, *KHBH*, 261-2).

7. Illustrations

On Sennacherib's well-known well-known relief depicting the siege of Lachish an Assyrian soldier is kindling a tightly wrapped missile with a torch (→ קִי / קִי).

8. Archaeological Remarks

Cf. (→ קִי / קִי).

9. Conclusion

In all texts where לַפִּיד is attested, it is accompanied by words denoting fire and heat. In comparisons the word is paralleled by an oven (Gen. 15:7), a blazing pot (Zech. 12:6), burning coals (Ezek. 1:13; Job 41:11-13), fire and lightning (Exod. 20:18; Dan. 10:6). The לַפִּיד can burn and give light (Isa. 62:1), and is narrow enough to be put into a jar (Judg. 7:16, 20). It also can burn down sheaves, grain and olive orchards (Judg. 15:5; Zech. 12:6). In that case it is used as a kind of weapon, the kindling potential of which is more important than its light. The literal use in Judg. 7:16,20 and 15:4-5 clearly points to a lightpot or lamp-post, just as young people nowadays sometimes make torches of an empty tin and a stick.

According to Dalman (*AuS*, Bd. 6, 58) the לַפִּיד consists of a torch in an earthen pot. Beduins called it the *maš'al*, an iron firepot for burning wood, on long sticks (*AuS*, Bd. 6, 58; Bd. 8, 22). This description is somewhat misleading (see below on the Arabic word). The torches mentioned in Matt. 25:1ff. and John 18:3 might also be compared with this kind of lightpot on a stick (*AuS*, Bd. 4, 271).

Lane 1860, 120, provides an interesting parallel from modern Egypt,

‘The Zābiṭ, or Ághà of the police, used frequently to go about the metropolis at night, often accompanied by the executioner and the “sheḷegee,” or bearer of a kind of torch called “sheḷeh,”

which is still in use. This torch burns, soon after it is lighted, without a flame, except when it is waved through the air, when it suddenly blazes forth: it therefore answers the same purpose as our dark lantern. The burning end is sometimes concealed in a small pot or jar, or covered with something else, when not required to give light.'

Lane, *AEL*, 1564, offers a more detailed description of this type of torch called *maš'alah* or *ša'lah* (Lane 1860, 178) in Arabic, 'A particular sort of large support for a light: (KL:) [i.e. a sort of cresset, consisting of a staff with a cylindrical frame of iron at the top which is filled with flaming pine-wood or the like or tarred rags ... it is borne before travellers and others at night' ...].

Whereas the → לִפְיֵד consisted of a bundle of tightly wrapped rushes or kindle-wood, the לִפְיֵד always had a shaft and a cup of clay or metal on top containing an impregnated cloth serving as a wick. It may be assumed that this type of torch with a cup on a handle developed out of the more primitive Egyptian torch with only a conical lump of fat at the top of a stick (H.G. Fischer, *LÄ*, Bd. 2, 79-81).

10. Bibliography

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