

leather bag, pouch

מִשָּׁךְ

1. Statistics

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

2a. Literal Use

By means of beautiful parallelism the poet of Psalm 126:5-6 expresses the contrast as well as the gradual transition from sorrow to joy in human life. The farmer goes forth (הלך) weeping, because it pains him to throw out good grain (cf. Mk 4:1-20), but eventually, when he brings the sheaves home (בוא), he rejoices (cf. Jn 4:36). On both occasions he is carrying (נשא) something: when scattering seed from the מִשָּׁךְ־הַזֶּרַע, and at the harvest the sheaves.

In view of the poetical structure the suggestion in the critical apparatus of *BHS* that in verse 6a נשא is a vertical dittography must be rejected. Cf. Magne 1958; Dahood 1970. Moreover, 11Q Ps^a supports מ. The proposal to delete נשא and to read מִשָּׁךְ (part. Qal, cf. Amos 9:13) instead of מִשָּׁךְ that was thought to be problematic, does not merit endorsement (so e.g. Briggs & Briggs 1907; Gunkel 1968; Kraus 1989; Zenger 2008, 502).

For a long time מִשָּׁךְ was taken to mean ‘trail’, ‘drawing (up)’ or ‘throw’ of the seed. The verb מִשַּׁךְ ‘to draw, drag’ as well as some of the ancient versions (see section 5) seemed to support this idea. However, this solution proved not entirely satisfactory: ‘*Quot commentationes, tot contortiones*’ (Köhler 1937). Nevertheless it was still accepted by Klein, *CEDHL*, 391. Also the proposal to attribute the meaning ‘to grasp, seize’ to מִשַּׁךְ (Tur-Sinai 1948) and hence ‘price’ (Gordis 1978) fails to convince (Clines 2006, 903; *DCH*, vol. 5, 525).

The text of Psalm 126:5-6 itself suggests clearly that מִשָּׁךְ is a concrete utensil, a kind of bag in which the farmer could carry the seed and from which time and again he takes a handful to distribute it more or less evenly over the land (cf. Fohrer 1963; Seybold 1996). In itself it would be possible to surmise that he walked behind the seed-plough with a bag of grain in his hand (cf. *ANEP*, No. 85), but in view of the parallelism it is more likely that he is strewing out the seed directly from the bag (cf. Dalman, *AuS*, Bd. 2, 180-1, with Pl. 23 and 24).

The material of which this seed pouch was made is not indicated by the text, but the derivation from $\sqrt{\text{משך}}$ ‘to draw (off)’ and the well-attested Semitic noun **mašku* ‘hide’ (cf. section 4) allows us to think of an object made from hide or leather. Cloth is possible, but would make it difficult to dip into the pouch without looking because it could easily fold double and a broken nail might get caught in the fabric. Because the container should also be light enough to be carried effortlessly by a walking man, in order to take with him as much seed as possible, leather would seem the ideal choice of material.

2b. Figurative Use

In Job 28:15-19 the inestimable value of wisdom is described – it is not for sale, not even for gold and silver. No jewel sparkles like wisdom, it is incomparable. Verse 18b is part of this passage. It states that wisdom also exceeds the beauty and value of corals, $\text{וּמִשְׂדֵּה הַקִּמְהָ מִפְּנִינִים}$. In accordance with ט , ט' and ט (see section 5 below) many have proposed to read the *nomen regens* in $\text{מִשְׂדֵּה הַקִּמְהָ}$ as an infinitive. The ‘drawing’, ‘pulling up’ or ‘dragging’ up of wisdom is better than fishing corals from the bottom of the sea (so e.g. Kroeze 1961; De Wilde 1981), or ‘to draw’ wisdom requires a greater effort than bringing in corals (so e.g. Van Selms 1983). Others render ‘possession’, ‘acquisition’, or even ‘price, value’ (see section 2a).

Yet there is no need to take מִשְׂדֵּה in a different sense than it has in Ps. 126. In this case too a concrete object is involved – a leather pouch in which one can tuck away something. This produces a nice imagery in v. 18b. If it were possible to put wisdom in a pouch, as one puts valuables and money away, such a ‘pouch of wisdom’ (genitive of material, *IBHS*, 151) would obviously be much more valuable than any pouch filled with precious metals or gems. One is well-advised to fill his מִשְׂדֵּה with הַקִּמְהָ rather than corals, is Elihu’s message.

3. Epigraphic Hebrew

Not attested.

4. Cognates

According to Fronzaroli 1964 **mašk* should be regarded as a common Semitic word. If the Egyptian equivalent (see below) is not a Semitic loanword, this **mašk* must have been a Hamito-Semitic word (cf. *HSED*, 378).

EGYPTIAN: *msk3* ‘hide, leather’, Hannig, *SP*, 107. According to Erman & Grapow, *WÁS*, Bd. 2, 150, a Semitic loanword, but not accepted as such by Hoch, *SWET*, and others.

AKKADIAN: *mašku*, ‘leather’, ‘hide’, in synecdochic use also ‘bag’ (to put away *materia medica/magica*), *CAD* M/1, 376-79.

UGARITIC: *mšk*, ‘skin, hide’, might occur in *KTU* 5.23:18, according to Caquot & Masson 1977. However, *msg* is generally thought to be the Ugaritic form of this word which in that case means ‘skin, leather’ there too, cf. *DULA*, 581-2.

IMPERIAL ARAMAIC AND PALMYRENE: *mškʿ*, ‘skin, hide’, Hoftijzer & Jongeling, *DNSI*, 700; Porten & Lund, *ADE*, 230.

JEWISH ARAMAIC: Sokoloff, *DJBA*, 714: מַשְׂכָּה ‘hide, leather, skin’; Sokoloff, *DJPA*, 334: מַשְׂךְ, det. מַשְׂכָּה ‘skin, leather’.

SAMARITAN ARAMAIC: Tal, *DSA*, 490: מַשְׂךְ ‘skin, leather’.

SYRIAC: *meškā*, ‘skin, hide ... leather’, Payne Smith (Margoliouth), *CSD*, 306; Brockelmann, *LS*, 407; Costaz, *DSF*, 193.

MANDAIC: Macuch, *MD*, 270-1: *miškā* ‘hide’ –

CLASSICAL ARABIC: Dozy, *SDA*, t. 2, 600: *mask* (in Algeria: *mašk*): ‘sac en cuir’

ETHIOPIIC: Geez *māʿas*, *māʿs* ‘skin, hide’? Cf. Dillmann, *LLAe*, 195; Amharic *mas* ‘tanned hide’? Cf. Leslau, *CAmhD*, 21.

GREEK AND OTHERS: *μεισκος* ‘sheepskin, fleece’, a rare Semitic equivalent of *κώδιον*, *LSJ*, 1106 and 1016; cf. Lewy, *SFG*, 131; Mayer 1960. Possibly it occurs also in other languages as a loanword. Robinson 1961 remarks on מַשְׂכָּה, ‘It is curious that this was not identified long ago, for every one who has spent any time in northern India must be familiar with the *mšk* (= *mšk*), the goat-skin bag in which the “bhisti” (water-carrier) bears his precious fluid.’

5. Ancient Versions

Ⓞ and other Greek versions: In Ps. 125:6 (= π 126:6) the Ⓞ and the Quinta avoid a translation. σ' has ἐλκυσμός 'attraction ... dragging'. In Job 28:18 Ⓞ and θ' render ἔλκυσσον 'drag in (wisdom)', thus apparently deriving from the verb תִּשְׁבֵּץ. This will also be the background of α' γλυκύς 'sweet' or 'sweetness'.

Ⓣ: The rabbinic Targums on Ps. 126:6 and Job 28:18 render with כְּנָנִי, 'the drawing (of wisdom)'. The Job Targum from Qumran has not been preserved at this point.

Ⓢ: In Ps. 126:6 Ⓢ paraphrases 'yna dšqyl zr' 'he who carries seed'. In Job 28:18 the very free rendering skips תִּשְׁבֵּץ altogether.

Ⓥ: *trahitur* 'drags', apparently taking the Hebrew as a verb.

6. Judaic Sources

See section 4, Jewish Aramaic.

7. Illustrations

Cf. A. Erman & H. Ranke, *Ägypten und ägyptisches Leben*, Tübingen 1923, Pl. 203.

8. Archaeological Remarks

[Will be added later on.]

9. Conclusion

In the past, scholars trying to establish the meaning of the noun תִּשְׁבֵּץ have relied too much on the testimony of the ancient versions, ignoring the fact that the translators were obviously guessing after the meaning and paraphrased the two passages Ps. 126:6 and Job 28:18 heavily in order to wrest some sense from them.

Both careful exegesis and comparative linguistics render it plausible that the rare term תִּשְׁבֵּץ designates a leather bag or pouch which, depending on its purpose, might have different shapes. In Psalm 126:6 it will have been a fairly large bag for seed, in Job 28:18 a small pouch for valuables. Since the normal Hebrew word for 'skin, hide, leather' is עֹר, one might consider the possibility that תִּשְׁבֵּץ is an Egyptian or Akkadian loanword (see section 4) which, just as the Akkadian equivalent, sometimes acquired the specific meaning of 'bag, pouch' through synecdoche.

10. Bibliography

See in addition to the literature cited above: Borowski, *AIAI*, 54: ‘bag’ – Dalman, *AuS*, Bd. 2, 180-1 – *BDB*, 604: ‘a drawing, drawing up, a trail’ – Briggs & Briggs 1907: C.A. Briggs & E.G. Briggs, *The Book of Psalms* (ICC), vol. 2, Edinburgh 1907, 457 – Caquot & Masson 1977: A. Caquot & E. Masson, ‘Tablettes Ougaritiques du Louvre’, *Semitica* 27 (1977), 18 – Klein, *CEDHL*, 391 – *CHALOT*, 219: ‘(leather) pouch, bag’ – Clines 2006: D.J.A. Clines, *Job 21–37* (WBC, 18A), Nashville 2006, 903 – Dahood 1970: M. Dahood, *Psalms III* (AB, 17A), Garden City 1970, 221 – Alonso Schökel, *DBHE*, 439: ‘Bolsa, escarcela, alforja – *DCH*, vol. 5, 525, leaves all options open – Fohrer 1963: G. Fohrer, *Das Buch Hiob* (KAT, 16), Gütersloh 1963, 391 – Fronzaroli 1964: P. Fronzaroli, ‘Studi sul lessico commune semitico II’, *AANL.M* 19 (1964), 18-55 (30) – *GB*, 469: ‘Das Ziehen, Streuen des Samens (Ps 126,6); Erwerb, Besitz (Job 28,18)’ – Gordis 1978: R. Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation, and Special Studies*, New York 1978, 309 – Gunkel 1968: H. Gunkel, *Die Psalmen* (HAT 2/2), Göttingen 1926, repr. Göttingen 1968, 553 – *HAHAT*, 753: ‘Beutel (aus Leder)’ – *HALAT*, 610: ‘Lederbeutel’ – *HAWAT*, 252: ‘1. Strich (des Samens dh. soviel man zu einem Strich [= einer Strecke] braucht) Ps. 126,6; 2. Erwerbung (Hi 28,18)’ – *HCHAT*, 797: ‘1) ... Zug, des Samens, d.h. das langhin Gesäete ... 2) ... Besitz’ – *KBL*, 575: ‘Haut, Leder > Beutel, skin, leather > bag’ – Köhler 1937: L. Köhler, ‘Hebräische Vokabeln II’, *ZAW* 55 (1937), 161-2 – Kraus 1989: H.-J. Kraus, *Psalmen* (BK, 15/2), Neukirchen ⁶1989, 1032 – Kroeze 1961: J.H. Kroeze, *Het boek Job* (COT), Kampen 1961, 310 – *LÄ*, Bd. 2, Wiesbaden 1977, 169-70 – *LHA*, 481: ‘prob. cutis, pellis, corium; ... alii explicant tractio, sparsio seminis (Ps), acquisitio sapientiae (Job)’ – Winer, *LMHC*, 584-5: ‘possessio, a tenendo dicta (Job 28, 18); alludi h.l. putat ad extractionem et expiscationem margaritarum ex fundo maris; Ps. 126, 6: tractio h. e. sparsio seminis’ – Magne 1958: J. Magne, ‘Répétitions de mots et exégèse dans quelques Psaumes et le Pater’, *Bib.* 39 (1958), 191 – Mayer 1960: M.L. Mayer, ‘Gli Imprestiti Semitici in Greco’, *RIL.L* 94 (1960), 311-51 (330) – *MHH*, 674: תָּשֵׁבֶת – *NIDOT*, vol. 2, 1129:

leaves various options open – Robinson 1961: T.H. Robinson, ‘New Light on the Text and Interpretation of the Old Testament Supplied by Recent Discoveries’, *ZAW* 73 (1961), 265-9 – Seybold 1996: K. Seybold, *Die Psalmen* (HAT, 1/15), Tübingen 1996, 486 – Gesenius & Roediger, *TPC*, 827: ‘1) tractio ... 2) possessio’ – Tur-Sinai 1948: N.H. Tur-Sinai, *הלשון והספר*, vol. 1, Jerusalem 1948, 383-97 – Van Selms 1983: A. van Selms *Job* (PredOT), Nijkerk 1983, 68 – Zenger 2008: E. Zenger, in: F.-L. Hossfeld & E. Zenger, *Psalmen 101–150* (HThKAT), Freiburg 2008, 502: ‘bezeichnet den aus (abgezogener) Haut hergestellten Lederbeutel, hier den Beutel für den auszuwerfenden Samen’.

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