

trimming knife, snuffer (?)

מְזַמְרֵת

1. Statistics

Torah: 0. Nebiim: 4. Ketubim: 1. Total: 5.

2a. Literal Use

מְזַמְרֵת, in form a feminine participium of the pi'el of the verb זָמַר, 'to trim, prune', occurs only in the plural absolute and, with the exception of 2 Kgs 12:14, always with the article (1 Kgs 7:50 = 2 Chr. 4:22; 2 Kgs 25:14 = Jer. 52:18). The מְזַמְרוֹת are mentioned among the utensils of the Temple of Solomon in partly stereotype enumerations. As such they are preceded by → כֶּפֶר plur. in 1 Kgs 7:50 (lacking in the parallel 2 Chr. 4:22); 2 Kgs 12:14, by → סִיר plur. and → יָע plur. in 2 Kgs 25:14 = Jer. 25:18, and followed by → מְזַמְרֵק plur. (2 Kgs 12:14 + הַצִּצְרָה plur., 'clarions, trumpets') as well as כֶּפֶר plur. (1 Kgs 7:50 = 2 Chr. 4:22 [+ → מְחֻזָּה plur]; Jer. 52:18 [מְזַמְרֵק plur. is lacking in the parallel 2 Kgs 25:14]). According to 1 Kgs 7:50 = 2 Chr. 4:22 the מְזַמְרוֹת were made of "closed" gold' (זָהָב סָגוּר, 'closed' meaning that the gold plating was soldered with silver, Korpel 1991; cf. 2 Kgs 12:14, of gold or silver [כֶּסֶף]), according to 2 Kgs 25:14 = Jer. 52:18 they were of bronze (נְחֹשֶׁת); cf. 1 Kgs 7:45). The $\sqrt{\text{זמר}}$ (see section 4 below) points to some sort of cutting instrument, a kind of knife or a pair of scissors (cf. → מְזַמְרֵה). Often the מְזַמְרֵת are identified as snuffers (e.g. Dalman, *AuS*, Bd. 7, 232: 'Dochtmesser') for trimming the wicks (→ פְּשֻׁתָּה) of the lamps (→ נֵר) of the lampstand (→ מְנֹרָה). The meaning 'snuffers' is also attributed to another term, מְלָקְחִים, but these are rather forceps or tongs (→ מְלָקְחִים).

In view of the context of their occurrence knives with a more general cultic or another specific cultic use might have been intended. It has been suggested that they might be identified with pincers ('Zwicker') which look like pruning knives, and were used in treating the sacrificial meat to remove the fat and to press out the blood ('den Winzerscheeren ähnliche *Zwicker* bei Behandlung des Opferfleisches [Fettablösen, Blutausdrücken]'), see Böttcher 1864, 64).

For practical reasons a pair of scissors is the most unlikely option. There is no evidence for the use of scissors in ancient

Egypt (*AEMI*, 282). In Greece scissors were used since the fifth century BCE (Hurschmann 2009). It is unlikely that they were invented earlier in Israel.

The closest cognates are Arabic *mizbar*, a small sickle (Dozy, *SDA*, t. 1, 579), and Palestinian Arabic *zâbûra*, also a sickle (Dalman, *AuS*, Bd. 3, 23-4, Pl. 16; Bd. 4, 312). For the equivalence of *m* and *b*, see Lipiński, *SLOGG*, § 11.6. The reason why a small, very sharp sickle-knife may have been used for trimming the wicks is that, as with a sickle cutting a cornstalk, the curved blade provided sufficient counter-pressure to cut off a piece of wick. Perhaps the מְלִקְחִים ‘forceps’ held the wick during this operation. For the use of such small sickles as pruning-knives on vines see Dalman, *AuS*, Bd. 4, 312 and Avishur, Plates 90-1.

2b. Figurative Use

Not attested.

3. Epigraphic Hebrew

Not attested.

4. Cognates

SEMITIC: $\sqrt{zmr/zbr/dmr}$ is attested in both South-Semitic and Northwest-Semitic dialects. In most cases it describes a careful mode of cutting, such as pruning a vine. Cf. *DRS*, 677-9; *CDG*, 631; *HAHAT*, 304; *DULAT*, 999; *DOSA*, 96-7. The root should not be confused with $\sqrt{dmr/zmr/\check{s}mr}$ ‘to guard, protect’ and $\sqrt{dmr/zmr}$ ‘to play music’.

UGARITIC: The verb *zbr* is used for the pruning of a vine. Cf. *DULAT*, 999.

JEWISH ARAMAIC: Usually אִזְמִילָא or אִזְמִילָא ‘scalpel, very sharp small knife’ is seen as a Greek loanword (so e.g. Levy, *CWT*, vol. 1, 170), but see below under Greek.

SYRIAC: Usually $z^e melyā$ or $z^e malyā$ ‘scalpel, very sharp small knife’ is seen as a Greek loanword (so e.g. Brockelmann, *LS*, 199), but see below under Greek.

ARABIC: See above, section 2a.

GREEK: Because in many languages, including Semitic dialects

and Greek, interchanges between *l* and *r* are frequent (cf. Lipiński, *SLOCG*, § 17.5) there is a remote possibility that Greek $\sigma\mu\tilde{\lambda}\eta$, a ‘scalpel’, but also ‘a vinedresser’s pruning-knife’ (*LSJ*, 1619), is an early Semitic loanword.

5. Ancient Versions

Ⓞ and other Greek versions: 1 Kgs 7:50; 2 Kgs 12:14(13) ἦλος plur. (hearing error or guesswork, cf. ἦλοις as rendering of מְזַמְרֵת [Jer. 10:4]; ἦλων for מְזַמְרֵת [2 Chr. 3:9]), ‘nails’ (*LSJ*, 769; *GELS-L*, 198); Jer. 52:18 κρεάγρα, a neologism meaning ‘flesh-hook, fork for meat’ (*GELS-L*, 267), elsewhere used as a rendering for → מְזַלֵּג. Not translated in Ⓞ 2 Kgs 25:14; 2 Chr. 4:22(21). The traditions about the renderings of α' and σ' and θ' in Jer. 52:18 are too uncertain to be trusted.

Ⓢ: It is unclear whether Ⓢ מְזַמְרֵת is an aramaicised transliteration meaning ‘musical instruments’ (so Levy, *CWT*, Bd. 2, 21) or a true Jewish-Aramaic equivalent (so Jastrow, *DTT*, 756: ‘snuffers’ and Dalman, *ANHT*, 230: ‘Lichtputze’, which was followed by most modern specialists in Targumic studies).

Ⓢ: 1 Kgs 7:50 par. *naftirā* ‘lamp, lantern’; 2 Kgs 12:14 *šelḥā* ‘hide, skin’; 2 Kgs 25:14 *qardālā* ‘basket’; 2 Chr. 4:22 is lacking.

Ⓢ: 1 Kgs 7:50; 2 Kgs 12:14(13) *fuscinae* ‘small three-pronged forks’; 2 Kgs 25:14 *tridentes* ‘tridents’; Jer. 52:18 *psalteria* ‘psalteries’ (a kind of lute); 2 Chr. 4:22 *thymiateria* ‘censers’.

6. Judaic Sources

Not attested as a utensil.

7. Illustrations

See section 2a above.

8. Archaeological Remarks

[Will be added later on.]

9. Conclusion

Already the ancient versions were guessing about the nature of this cultic implement that was apparently used in connection with

the lamps of the temple. Modern scholars waver between ‘snuffer’ and ‘scissors’, but the latter are unlikely in the pre-exilic period. A third possibility, though also rather remote, is a special type of butcher’s knife used to remove fat and blood from the sacrificial meat. Finally some Arabic cognates point in the direction of a very sharp trimming knife in the shape of a small sickle. This would seem the best option.

10. Bibliography

See in addition to the literature cited above: *AncBD*, vol. 6, 75: (instrument) ‘for trimming lampwicks. In this case, a kind of scissors, rather than a snuffer, would be a more accurate rendering’ – Dalman, *AuS*, Bd. 7, 232 – *BDB*, 275: ‘snuffers’ – Böttcher 1864 – F. Böttcher, *Neue exegetisch-kritische Aehrenlese zum Alten Testamente*, Zweite Abtheilung, Leipzig 1864, 64 – *BRL*², 218 – *CEDHL*, 330: ‘snuffers, forceps’ – Alonso Schökel, *DBHE*, 390: ‘Cuchillos’ – *DCH*, vol. 5, 210: ‘snuffer, or perh. knife to trim wick, as utensil in temple’ – *EB*, vol. 4, 4664: ‘snuffers’ – *GB*, 411: ‘Messer zum Lichtputzen, als Geräte des Armleuchters’ – *HAHAT*, 654: ‘Messer, i.d. Funktion einer Lichtputzscherer f. die goldenen Leuchter i. Tempel z. Jerusalem’ – *HALAT*, 536: ‘Messer als Lichtputzscherer’ – *HAWAT*, 216: ‘Lichtputzscheere’ – *HCHAT*, Bd. 1, 718: ‘Messer für die Lichter’ – Hurschmann 2009: R. Hurschmann, ‘Scherer’, in: *BNP* online – *HWAT*, 335: ‘Lichtputzen’ – *IDB*, vol. 4, 394: ‘some sort of scissors or similar cutting instrument used for trimming the wicks of the lamps’ – *ISBE*, vol. 4, ‘a kind of scissors for trimming the wicks of lamps’ or ‘snuffer’, like מְזַמְרֵת, the latter ‘perhaps having been added through the influence of the tabernacle account’ – *KBL*, 510: ‘Lichtscheere, snuffers’ – Korpel 1991: M.C.A. Korpel, ‘Soldering in Isaiah 40:19-20 and 1 Kings 6:21’, *UF* 23 (1991), 219-222 – *LHA*, 424: ‘cultellus’ – *MHH*, 596-7: עשוי זהב כלי מכלי בית המקדש, Mulder 1998: M.J. Mulder, *1 Kings*, vol. 1 (HCOT), Leuven 1998, 370: ‘It is possible that these knives were also used as “snuffers”, though a somewhat more general cultic use seems more likely’ – *NIDOT*, vol. 1, 1118: ‘golden snuffers that were part of the temple utensils and were used for trimming the wicks of the lamps’ – Gesenius & Roediger, *TPC*, 421: ‘forfices’ (scissors).

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