

שְׁבִיל

Introduction

Grammatical Type: noun m.

Occurrences: Total 2x OT, 1x Sir, 5x Qum, 0x inscr.

Sir: 5.9.

Qum: 1QH XV(=formerly VII).15; 4Q184 1 i 9; 4Q266 2 ii 3; 4Q275 3.1; Mur 47.4.

Text doubtful:

A.1 MS A at Sir 5.9 reads שְׁבֹלַת in place of שְׁבִיל in MS C. MS A may be influenced by שְׁבַלַח in 4.26, although the whole bicolon seems to be a retroversion from the Syr. MS C, by contrast, is supported by the LXX and Vg.

B.1 At Jr 18.15 in place of שְׁבִילִי, many MSS read שְׁבֹלִי, a reading preferred by Dahood (1962:209). He reads the MS variant as שְׁבֹלִי, 'wanderers, nomads', taking it to be a qal pass part in apposition with the subject of the verb וַיִּכְשְׁלוּם, whose root sense he says is 'to twist, wander'. He compares this with the Phoenician *lpt šbl* (see Root and Comparative Material A.6), which could denote a wanderer, and suggests that other lexemes in Hebrew with a root *šbl* derive from the idea of twisting (e.g. 'a twisting path, a trail'; 'a meandering river or stream'). The text at Jr 18.15, however, is intelligible with the reading שְׁבִיל (so Holladay 1986:521) and we should not resort to unnecessary speculation. Nonetheless, the peculiar reading of the LXX σχοῖνος may indicate that the Greek translators shared Dahood's view (see Versions A.1, B.1).

B.2 Dahood (1973:233) on Ps 77.20 reads שְׁבִילֶיךָ as שְׁבִילֶיךָ 'your train', understanding it to be the plural of שְׁבִיל from Is 47.2 and related to שׁוּל 'hem' (e.g. Is 6.1). He notes that in 1QIs^a שְׁבִיל is changed to שׁוּלֶיךָ at Is 47.2. The train of the garment, therefore, explains why the 'heels' were not seen according to the next colon in Ps 77 (cf. Dt 33.3). Beeston (1979:176), by contrast, argues that שְׁבִיל in Is 47.2 designates a 'well' (see also Root and Comparative Material B.1).

B.3 There is an uncertain reading at 4Q405 20 ii-21-22 10, where the *waw* in שְׁבֹלִי appears not to be clear. Strugnell says that the *waw* is the better material choice rather than the reading שְׁבִילִי, but that the cst pl of שְׁבִילַת is only attested in the OT with the meaning 'grains' (1960:340). Here it ought to mean 'watercourses' as a parallel to the נְהַרֵי אֹר (4Q405 15 ii 2) later on in the text (cf. *1Enoch* 14.19; 71.2). Newsom does not comment on the *waw*, transcribing it as certain in her version (1985:303), but does provide further examples of the expression 'streams of fire' (1985:31516), noting especially the Aramaic to *1Enoch* 14.19 that had since come to light (שְׁבִילֵי דַן נֹר, 4QEn^c 1 vii 1) and the description of God's throne in Dn 7.10 (נְהַר דִּי-נֹר).

Qere/Ketiv: Ps 77.20 Qere וּשְׁבִילֶיךָ (m s with 2p s suf), Ketiv וּשְׁבִילֶיךָ (m pl with 2p s suf). The Qere is supported by a number of MSS, and preferred by BHS. The plural noun of the

Ketiv is also found in the LXX and Peshitta, but the Versions often translate the nouns with a different number from that represented in the MT. The singular may, however, be a later correction in the light of the singular of שָׁבִיל immediately preceding in the verse. Alternatively, the one other occurrence of שָׁבִיל in the OT is in the singular and this may have affected the MS traditions.

1. Root and Comparative Material

A.1 The etymology of שָׁבִיל is obscure. Some relate it to the Arabic *sabala* (Wehr 1971:396) in the fourth conjugation, ‘to cause to hang down, to let fall’ (e.g. BDB:987; KB²:942). It is difficult to see how this relates to the meaning ‘road’, but there is no other verbal root *šbl* in the Semitic languages (Dorsey 1991:237).

A.2 Much of the debate surrounding the root of שָׁבִיל is whether or not it is cognate with שֶׁבֶלֶת, and if so, in what way. שֶׁבֶלֶת denotes an ‘ear of grain’ in at least 15 of its 19 occurrences in the OT (e.g. Gn 41.5) and elsewhere denotes, probably as a homonym, a ‘watercourse, torrent’ (e.g. Ps 69.3, 16). In deriving these lexemes from the same root *šbl* some scholars have proposed an etymology for שָׁבִיל, as recorded in A.3 and A.4 below. An alternative comparative semantic suggestion has been made by Beeston (see B.1 below). The debate is complicated by the account in Jdg 12.6 of the Ephraimite inability to pronounce שֶׁבֶלֶת, replying instead with the sound סֶבֶלֶת. It is, first, uncertain whether the lexeme they are asked to utter is the one with the meaning ‘ear of grain’ or with the meaning ‘watercourse, torrent’. Second, this account raises phonetic questions regarding the root of the lexeme, whichever of the two homonyms is the one used in Jdg 12.6. A summary of this debate, as far as it bears on the meaning of שָׁבִיל, is given in B.2 below, although it is probably an unresolvable question (Beeston 1988:261; Speiser 1967:150). It does, however, appear that we should distinguish between two roots (Faber 1992:48; Hendel 1996:69–70): a Proto-Semitic denoting **šblt* ‘ear of grain’ (attested in many languages) and a root **šbl* denoting ‘watercourse, path’ (attested in Heb, Syr, Arb, and [from Arb] Tge). This implies that caution should be exercised in connecting שָׁבִיל with the meaning ‘ear of grain’, but that it may well be cognate with שֶׁבֶלֶת ‘a flowing stream’ and the *hapax* שָׁבֵל (Is 47.2).

A.3 Nouns in BH commonly associated with שָׁבִיל are שָׁבֵל (Is 47.2), possibly referring to the hanging folds of a robe, שֶׁבֶלֶת ‘an ear of corn’ (e.g. Gn 41.5), and שֶׁבֶלֶת ‘a flowing stream’ (e.g. Ps 69.16; cf. BDB:987; KB²:942). See on these B.1 below. Jastrow includes in this group the noun שֶׁבֶלֶל, a ‘snail’ (Ps 58.9; 1903:1515). Jastrow in turn (1903:1514, 1557) connects these words with the Shaphel of יָבַל, ‘to bring, carry’, a verb appearing only in the causative stem in Heb, but in the causative and Peal (in Egyptian Aram; see Muraoka & Porten 1998:121, and n. 561) in Arm, and in the causative and G-stem in Akk. The derivatives from *lby* are similar in meaning to those from the stem *šbl*: יָבַל, ‘watercourse, stream’; יָבֹל, ‘produce’; יוֹבֵל, ‘ram’s horn’; אוֹבֵל, ‘stream’.

A.4 Dorsey (1991:237) notes that what is common to Heb nouns with the stem *šbl* and to those from *ybl* is that each appears to be an object that grows out or extends from something else. It may be produced from the earth (יָבֹל, בּוֹל), be an ear of grain (שֶׁבֶלֶת), a ram’s horn (יוֹבֵל), a snail (extending) out of its shell (שֶׁבֶלֶל) or the folds of a robe dropping down from the upper part of the garment (שָׁבֵל). A שֶׁבֶלֶת ‘a flowing stream’ could be so called because a stream flows from or extends from a particular source (so

also יָבֵל and אֹבֵל). Dorsey, therefore, suggests that a שְׁבִיל was so called because it was a road *extending* from a main road (i.e. a branch road), although he admits that this is speculative. The doubtful connection between all these lexemes renders his suggestion all the more speculative (see A.2, B.1). Others have identified the root as denoting something that flows (BDB:987), and hence Carroll glosses שְׁבִיל as a ‘flowing course of life’ (1986:376). This is possible if there is a root *šbl behind certain of the lexemes, but uncertainty remains over the origins of the lexemes.

A.5 In RH the substantive appears most often in the prepositional expression בְּשִׁבִיל ‘for the sake of’ (Jastrow:1514). This use is also found in Mur 47.4, whose date and the context are unclear owing to the damaged state of the manuscript (Milik 1961:167). שְׁבִיל appears ten times in the Mishnah as an independent substantive and designates a ‘path’ in contrast to דֶּרֶךְ, which is used of roads in general (Dorsey 1991:23738). A שְׁבִיל, for example, may be traversable only in the summer months (m.Peah 2.1) or may designate a path that leads only to a well, cistern, pit, cave or winepress (m.Toharot 6.6), all denoting its small size. According to m.Toharot 5.1, 2, 3, 5 a שְׁבִיל is one of many paths on which a man walks, so numerous that he could easily forget on which one he had walked. Indeed in m.Peah 2.1 a שְׁבִיל is actually differentiated from a דֶּרֶךְ as being the smaller of the two. In the Talmud and Midrashim שְׁבִיל continues to be used of a ‘path’ (e.g. b.BQ 81a).

A.6 The only occurrence of a possible cognate with the same meaning in North-West Semitic (apart from in Aramaic/Syriac) is the hapax legomenon šbl in Phoen (DNWSI:1101; KAI I:2), but its context is too unclear to permit any definite conclusion (Albright 1947:156, n. 27). It probably is a substantive (sing abs), perhaps indicating some type of erasing instrument (e.g. Gibson 1982:16) or, as some have suggested (e.g. Albright 1947:156, n. 27), a ‘road, way’. These are, however, only some of many suggestions for the reading of the lexeme in this text and for its interpretation. Torrey even sees it as a verb and not a substantive, and proposes that it is the Shafel of *bll* ‘to besmear’ (1925:274). A complete list of alternative suggestions and bibliographical details is provided in DNWSI:1101.

Ug preserves a form šblt, which means ‘ear of corn’, but no cognate lexeme with the meaning ‘path’.

A.7 In Aramaic the noun שְׁבִילָא denotes both a ‘path’ (e.g. Tg Jr 18.15) and a ‘way’ (LevR 17; Jastrow:1514), whilst שׁוּבְלָתָא is the noun denoting ‘ear of grain’. Faber (1992:5) even suggests that on the basis of the initial cluster šv- in שְׁבִיל the Hebrew lexeme is probably an Aramaism. In Syriac šbilā’ appears to denote a ‘path’ (via Brockelmann:752) and the more common lexeme ‘urḥā’ is used for both a ‘road’ and a ‘way’ (Brockelmann:47). Also in Syriac one can find the lexeme šebeltā’ ‘flow of a river’ and the homonym šebeltā’ ‘ear of grain’.

A.8 In Mandaic the noun šbilā is attested with similar meanings to its Syriac counterpart (Drower and Macuch 1963:447b). There is also the Christian Palestinian šwblj ‘*semita, via*’ (Schulthess 1903:200).

A.9 The Tge *sabil*, a ‘religious war’ is derived from the Arabic sense of a religious path or the right path of the Lord (Leslau 1958:53). In Eth there does not exist a cognate lexeme

with the meaning ‘path’, but the form *sabel* and many variants on this denoting ‘ear of grain’, ‘*spica*’ (Dillmann:35556) appear.

A.10 There does not appear to be in Soqotri a cognate noun denoting ‘path’, but the root may exist in the noun *sebōleh* (dual: *seboliti*) ‘ear of grain’ (Leslau 1938:280).

A.11 In Arabic the noun *sabīl* designates both a ‘road’ and a ‘path’ (Wehr 1971:396), and there exists the noun *sabal* ‘rain, flowing rain’.

A.12 The Egyptian *šabaruti* ‘Weg’ is sometimes cited as a cognate (e.g. Ges.:802; HAL:1295).

B.1 Beeston (1979:177) has proposed that there is a semantic association between ‘way’ and ‘watering’ in the Hebrew *šbl* root, accounting for the existence of שָׁבִיל, a ‘way’, and שְׁבִלָּת, a ‘watercourse’. שְׁבִלָּת meaning an ‘ear of grain’ should, he suggests, be considered to derive from a different root. The modern South Arabian languages uniformly show an initial *s* in the word for ‘ear of corn’ (e.g. Soqotri: *sebōleh* [given by Beeston as *seblit*]), and this implies that an initial *s* was the original form of the word, portrayed in the Bible as an Ephraimite peculiarity (Jdg 12.6; although see B.2). In BH, confusion with the word for ‘watercourse’, Beeston (1979:175) surmises, led to the creation of a homonym. Although Blau (1977:109) argues that in Ephraimite Hebrew the Proto-Semitic letters *s *ś *š had all merged into *s* (as in Eth), all that may be concluded from the Biblical account, if Beeston’s hypothesis is not correct, is that the Ephraimites had lost the phoneme *š*, but not necessarily *ś*. Beeston notes that in medieval and modern Arabic *sabīl* is a word both for ‘way’ and for a ‘public fountain’. The connection with BH must, however, remain tenuous since in early Arabic the meaning of *sabīl* as a ‘public fountain’ is not attested (Beeston 1979:176). Furthermore, Dozy (³ 1967) gives a different account of the semantic development that led to *sabīl* meaning ‘public fountain’. Nevertheless, Beeston still finds Dozy’s explanation requiring a ‘semantic jump’ and feels that the development was facilitated by an association between ‘way’ and ‘watering’, as exists in the Arabic root *šrʿ*, giving both *šāriʿ* ‘street’ and *šarīʿah* ‘watering place’ (1979:177). In response, Faber indicates how, given that the lexeme denoting path only appears in Hebrew and Arabic, it is unlikely to have provided the analogical source for a change of **s* to *š* in other languages (1992:5). She further suggests that on the basis of the initial cluster *šv-* in שָׁבִיל the lexeme is probably an Aramaism.

B.2 Swiggers (1981:205206; cf. Marquart 1888) has argued that in folk-tales the test-word used (as in Jdg 12.6) is related to the context, and in the case of the Gileadites a word ‘stream’ is relevant in the light of the banks of the river that they are occupying. Emerton has, however, questioned whether it is always the case that the test-word is relevant to the context (1985:153). Hence, even if שְׁבִלָּת at Jdg 12.6 is found to be from a different root than שָׁבִיל, it need not necessarily be the lexeme denoting ‘watercourse’. There is at present little agreement as to what the *Shin Samekh* interchange in the account of Jdg 12.6 tells us about the etymology of שְׁבִלָּת there. Many have argued for an historical **t* as the first consonant, and that this sound has been preserved by the Gileadites in Jdg (Speiser 1967; Swiggers 1981; Lemaire 1985; Rendsburg 1988a, 1988b). The cognate evidence, however, does not seem to support this (except for Arm תִּבְלָא: see B.3), and it has been doubted by Emerton (1985) and Faber (1992). Emerton (1985) argues that there has been no change from the root, but that the story represents two different pronunciations of the phoneme *š*, an argument supported by Hendel’s graphemic evidence (1996; cf.

Tropper 1997). Blau posits an initial letter *š* that became an *s* in Ephraimite (1977), whilst Faber (1992) and Beeston (1979) prefer an initial letter *s*. Emerton's and Faber's suggestions appear to be the most likely, but there is as yet a lack of consensus.

B.3 The Arm form תּוֹבְלָא, which is used to translate שְׁבִלָה in TgPsJ Gn 41.5, 6, 7 etc. (not FT as recorded in Emerton 1985:149) and brought as evidence by Speiser for the root of שְׁבִלָה in Jdg 12.6 (1967:145 47), is most likely a hyper-correction in Aramaic, as argued by Kutscher (1967:17374) and affirmed by others (Emerton 1985:150; Blau 1977:109; Faber 1992:4, n. 3; Marcus 1992:98, n. 13; Hendel 1996:73, n. 6). The form with *taw* is lacking in TgNeo, probably one of the oldest Targumic texts (Kutscher 1967:174), although the observation that it is also lacking in FT (Marcus 1992:98, n. 13) is not helpful, since none of the FT records the relevant verses. Emerton (1985:151) observes that Fraenkel (1905:252) had already argued, before Speiser's proposal, that תּוֹבְלָא was a learned back-formation in the Aramaic (see also Marcus 1942:39). Emerton (1985:151, n. 2) also notes that Speiser does not argue for a Proto-Semitic root beginning with *t* (as Driver 1950:60 thinks), but that there were two Proto-Semitic roots, one beginning with *š* and one with *t*. In that case שְׁבִיל may be cognate with a Proto-Semitic *šblt* without being cognate to the doublet *tblt*.

2. Formal Characteristics

A.1 The form *qtīl* may be the result of a reduction of the *a* vowel in *qatīl* (BL:470 n), as in Aramaic, or a reduction of *qitil* (BL:471 s).

B.1 [nil].

3. Syntagmatics

A.1 שְׁבִיל is in apposition to דְּרָךְ, which is in an adverbial phrase modifying כִּשְׁלֵי hif (Jr 18.15).

A.2 The שְׁבִיל is the subject of a predicative בְּמַיִם רַבִּים 'through mighty waters' (Ps 77.20).

A.3 שְׁבִיל is governed by the verb לְהִלְךְ + ל (Sir 5.9 [MS C]).

A.4 שְׁבִיל in the plural is the nomen regens of עוֹלָם 'eternity' (Jr 18.15) כְּבוֹד 'glory' (1QH XV.15), חַטָּאת 'sin' (4Q184 1 i 9), חַטְּאִים 'sinners' (4Q266 2 ii 3).

B.1 The syntax of 4Q266 2 ii 3 is disputed. The phrase containing חַטְּאִים שְׁבִילֵי does not appear in the parallel text CD ii 3, where there is a small *vacat*. In 4Q266 the reading published by Baumgarten on the basis of Milik's transcriptions has the expression וּמְכוּל before שְׁבִילֵי (1996:36), which requires the restoration of a verb. Baumgarten accordingly supplies אֲזִיר אֶתְכֶם 'I will keep you apart'. If, however, a *beth* is read in place of the *mem* (וּבְכוּל), a confusion caused by the misreading of an ancient scribe or the possible reading of the unclear letter in the MS (so Hempel 1997:299 301), there is no need for the addition of a verb, but the phrase would be in parallelism with בְּדַרְכֵי רַשְׁעִים earlier in the sentence and be an adverbial phrase of אֲגַלֶּה אֶזְנוֹכְךָ ('I will uncover your ears ... concerning the paths of sinners').

4. Versions

a. LXX:

τρίβος (Ps 77.20 [pl as Ketiv]; Aquila on Jr 18.15);

σχοῖνος (Jr 18.15);

ἀτραπός (Sir 5.9);

b. Peshitta:

šbīlā' (Ps 77.20 [pl as Ketiv], Jr 18.15, Sir 5.9);

c. Targum:

כְּבִשָּׁא (Ps 77.20 [s as Qere]);

שְׁבִילָא (Jr 18.15);

d. Vulgate:

semita (Ps 77.20 [pl as Ketiv]; Jr 18.15);

via (Sir 5.9).

A.1 In Ps 77.20 שְׁבִיל is translated by τρίβος, a word chosen for the translation of other lexemes in the semantic field, including דָּרַךְ (Is 3.12, Pr 2.20, 30.19ba). Tidwell suggests that at Jr 18.15 we have the curious translation σχοῖνος since in the following colon τρίβος is used to render נְתִיבָה (1980:6566). This does not, however, clarify the meaning of σχοῖνος (see B.1). Perhaps σχοῖνος denotes a translation of the Hebrew הֶבֶל (often rendered in the LXX by σχοινίον, e.g. 2Sm 8:2), arising from a misreading of שְׁבִיל (so BH). The choice of the lexeme ἀτραπός by the Greek translator of Sir 5.9 is apposite, since in Greek it denotes both a '(small) path' and a metaphorical 'way of life' (LSJ:272).

A.2 On the two occasions that דָּרַךְ is paired with שְׁבִיל, שְׁבִיל is translated by ὁδός (Tidwell 1980:66).

A.3 The Targum to Jr 18.15 qualifies its rendering of שְׁבִיל as שְׁבִילֵין תְּקִנִין 'straight paths'.

B.1 A problematic reading in the LXX is the translation of שְׁבִיל 'path' at Jr 18.15 by the Gr σχοῖνος (Aquila here renders the noun by τρίβος). A σχοῖνος is a 'rush' or 'reed' and it is not easy to see how it came to be used of שְׁבִיל. σχοῖνος is also a land measure used in Egypt (e.g. Hdt II 6), a meaning that is possible, if stilted, in the context. Lust et al. glosses it as 'measure (of length)' (*Lexicon*:466) for its occurrence here. In Root and Comparative Material A.4, it was noted that Dorsey saw that the common meaning underlying words from the root šbl was the idea of sprouting. It may be that the LXX translator's rendering σχοῖνος, a 'reed' was a recognition of this association between lexemes apparently from that root. One may compare the cognates of Eth *sabel*, Arm שׁוּבְלֵתָא, Syr šēbletā', all

meaning 'ear of grain', and the Heb שְׁבִילֹת. σχοῖνος may also be used of something that is twisted (such as a rope), a meaning that could underlie the root סָלַל in מְסָלָה and מְסָלוּל. The idea of twisting has also been proposed by Dahood for שְׁבִיל 'a twisting path, trail' (1962:209), for its possible cognates שְׁבִילֹת 'a meandering river or stream' and שְׁבִיל 'a garment that wraps around the body (Wickelkleid)' (see Introduction, Text Doubtful B.1).

B.2 Wutz (1933:493) suggests that the LXX translation σχοῖνος at Jr 18.15 implies the reading שְׁכוּלִי and that דְּרָךְ should be read as דָּרַב.

5. Lexical/Semantic Field(s)

A.1 [See דְּרָךְ].

A.2 שְׁבִיל is paired in the MT only with דְּרָךְ among the road words (Tidwell 1980:56), דְּרָךְ taking the position of the A-word of the pair in both cases (ibid.:57).

B.1 Koch says that שְׁבִיל stands in parallelism with נְתִיבָה at Jr 18.15 (1977:299), but it is in fact with דְּרָךְ.

6. Exegesis

A.1 The main disputes concerning the meaning of שְׁבִיל are whether it denotes a metaphorical or a physical path (or both) and whether it is of a particular size or importance. HAL (1295) merely glosses it as 'Pfad', which suggests that it may be of a smaller size than other lexemes in the field that are rendered by 'Weg' (e.g. אֶרֶץ, דְּרָךְ), but that is dependent on whether it is considered to be a physical path or not. BDB (987) glosses it as 'way, path', but indicates that in Jr 18.15 it denotes a 'course of life'. It is not clear from this whether BDB takes Ps 77.20, therefore, as physical. Zorell indicates the variety of its meanings with the glosses '*semita, callis, iter*' (816), and Alonso Schökel (721) gives the two meanings 'senda' (for Jr 18.15) and 'vado' (Ps 77.20).

A.2 שְׁבִיל in ancient Hebrew (including Qum and Sir) probably only denotes a 'course' (Ps 77.20, Sir 5.9) or a 'way [of life]' (1QH XV.15, 4Q184 1 i 9, 4Q266 2 ii 3), and it does not denote a physical path (except possibly at Jr 18.15; see B.2 below), a meaning for שְׁבִיל that is, however, attested in RH. Whether this sense existed in ancient Hebrew but is not attested or whether in RH it is a derivative from the ancient uses we cannot be sure, but it seems more likely that it already existed and is simply not attested in our sources. There is no ancient indication of its size or importance, but if the evidence of RH is to be taken as an indicator of its use earlier, it would seem to have been a path or other small route. In m.Peah 2.1 a שְׁבִיל is actually differentiated from a דְּרָךְ as being the smaller of the two (cf. m.Toharot 5.1; see Root and Comparative Material A.5). In its metaphorical uses (i.e. 'way [of life]'), however, there would be no distinction in size.

A.3 Holladay (1986:521) interprets the שְׁבִילֵי עוֹלָם in Jr 18.15 as the ways walked in infidelity to the Lord, rather than the ways prescribed by the Lord. He understands verse 15 as part of the description of the terrible state of the land facing the unfaithful, the 'endless tracks' (שְׁבִילֵי עוֹלָם) being paralleled by the 'endless hissing' in verse 16. Part of the hissing may be implied in the assonance of שְׁבִילֵי and סִלּוּהָ (Dahood 1986:525). McKane likewise takes the paths to be the apostasy followed by Israel, and the stumbling

to be caused by the influence of idols on their way (1986:433). Bright (1965:124), on the other hand, thinks that the שְׁבִילֵי עוֹלָם in Jr 18.15 are the paths prescribed by the Lord and translates the expression as ‘tracks of old’. He sees the diction of Jr 6.16, נְתִיבוֹת עוֹלָם (‘paths of old’), which refer to the paths laid out by the Lord for covenantal obedience, as the background for Jr 18.15. Holladay considers the immediate context of Jr 18 first and argues that 6.16 may only be relevant as an ironic contrast (1986:525). However, most commentators agree with Bright and take שְׁבִיל here to be the path prescribed by God for the ordering of the nation’s life (e.g. Nicholson 1973:157; Carroll 1986:376).

A.4 In the light of Holladay’s interpretation, לֹא סְלוּלָה should be understood as pejorative (1986:525), suggesting that the roads are overgrown. This need not mean that a שְׁבִיל is always something of a lesser status or quality.

A.5 In Ps 77.20 God’s שְׁבִיל is said to be בְּמַיִם רַבִּים ‘through mighty waters’, and, as דָּרָךְ in that verse, probably designates a course of travel across the sea. This is also suggested by the statement later in the verse that his עֵקְבוֹת (‘footprints’) are not known (Dorsey 1991:236), implying that it is not a physical road.

A.6 At Qum שְׁבִיל always appears in the construct plural (1QH 7.15, 4Q184 1 i 9, 4Q266; cf. Jr 18.15). The nouns following all denote that it is to be taken in a metaphorical sense. In 4Q184 1 i 9 it is part of a list of lexemes each denoting the ways of ‘Lady Folly’.

A.7 In Sir 5.9 (MS C) שְׁבִיל is found in the singular, but is preceded by כָּל, denoting ‘all’ or ‘every’. There too it does not denote a physical road, but a course of travel. It is in parallelism with רוּחַ ‘wind’, and although it appears to denote a physical course of direction, it is used in a simile for proper behaviour.

A.8 The adverbial usage of בְּשִׁבְלֵי ‘for the sake of’, known from RH (see Root and Comparative Material A.5) is already found in Mur 47.4, but the date and the context are unclear owing to the damaged state of the manuscript (Milik 1961:167).

B.1 Koch correctly notes that in the OT (he inaccurately says in Hebrew) שְׁבִיל never denotes a physical (he speaks of the foreground sense) stretch of road (1977:299), but only a course of travel or way of life. He adds that if one were to infer such a meaning then it would denote a prepared and well-known road, and not a path, in view of its contrast to נְתִיבָה in Jr 18.15. This seems unlikely for several reasons. In the first place he states that it never has the foreground sense in Hebrew, which indicates that he is thinking only of Biblical Hebrew, since such a sense occurs in RH, and in particular it seems to mean there a ‘path’. Second, he understands נְתִיבָה to denote a ‘path’ and not anything larger such as a ‘road’, an error found in many lexica (see נְתִיבָה/נְתִיב). Third, he infers in Jr 18.15 that the שְׁבִיל and the נְתִיבָה are contrasted, although the contrast seems to be between עוֹלָם and לֹא סְלוּלָה.

B.2 Dorsey takes the various roads mentioned in Jr 18.15 to be physical, and from this infers that a שְׁבִיל was a ‘road or beaten track’ (1991:236). He adds that עוֹלָם probably indicates that the road was ancient, ‘and therefore well established’. Although the verse does speak of stumbling and walking in roads, it is an allusion to their choosing the wrong metaphorical paths, and hence it is unclear to what extent designations such as עוֹלָם and לֹא סְלוּלָה should be taken literally. Craigie et al. say that סְלוּלָה is a ‘highway’ and

that there is a contrast drawn in the verse between a pathway and a built-up highway (1991:249). They seem to be influenced by the translation of the RSV (cf. LXX) in rendering the adjective as a noun, and place great emphasis on the verb קָלַל as denoting the preparation of a main road. The meaning of קָלַל and precisely what it denotes when applied to roads is a matter of dispute (see מְסָלָה Root and Comparative Material).

7. Conclusion

In ancient Hebrew שָׁבִיל is only attested in poetry and probably only denotes a way of life. Its use in RH for a physical path of a small size may attest to a meaning that has not survived in our ancient sources, but was known in ancient Hebrew. The root of שָׁבִיל cannot be decided with any certainty.

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