

official letter

נִשְׁתָּוֹן

1. Statistics

Torah: 0. Nebiim: 0. Ketubim: 5. Total: 5 (2x Hebrew, 3x Aramaic).

2a. Literal Use

נִשְׁתָּוֹן occurs both in the Hebrew and Aramaic parts of the book of Ezra (Hebr. 4:7; 7:11; Aram. 4:18, 23; 5:5). The relatively clear context indicates that the word designates an official letter, translated into the official Aramaic language of the Persian empire (4:7), and sent to the Persian king (4:7, 18; 5:5) or by the king (4:23; 7:11).

2b. Figurative Use

Not attested.

3. Epigraphic Hebrew

Not attested.

4. Cognates

It is generally surmised that נִשְׁתָּוֹן is an Official Aramaic loanword from a (reconstructed) Old Persian word **nīštavān*, ‘decree, official document’, cf. Avestian *nī-šta*, ‘to order, command’ (Ellenbogen, *FWOT*, 116; *HALAT*, 1750; *HAHAT*, 858; Klein, *CEDHL*, 430). It remained typically confined to the period of the Persian empire and was adopted in later Hebrew and Aramaic dialects.

PERSIAN: See above.

OLD AND IMPERIAL ARAMAIC: Attested once Elephantine (Hoftijzer & Jongeling, *DNSI*, 766; Porten & Lund, *ADE*, 236).

5. Ancient Versions

Ⲅ and other Greek versions: Ezra 4:7, 18, 23; 5:5 φορολόγος, ‘tax-gatherer, tribute-collector’ (Lust *et al.*, *GELS-L*, 507), but possibly this was a neologism meaning something like ‘word-carrier, document’. In Ezra 7:11 διατάγμα, ‘ordinance, commandment’ (*GELS-L*, 110) is chosen which some hexaplaric mss also offer for 5:5. According to Muraoka, *HIS*, 101, ἐπιστολή, ‘letter’, is the

rendering in 1 Esd. 2:30.

ס: In 4:7, 18, 23 and 7:11 *ʿegartā*, ‘letter’ (Payne Smith [Margoliouth], *CSD*, 3), in 5:5 *pitgāmā*, ‘word . . . answer’ (Payne Smith [Margoliouth], *CSD*, 469).

ד: 4:7 *epistula autem accusationis*, ‘now the letter of accusation’; 4:8; 5:5 *accusatio*, ‘accusation’; 4:23 *edictum*, ‘decree’; 7:11 *epistula*.

6. Judaic Sources

Not attested.

7. Illustrations

No suggestions.

8. Archaeological Remarks

[Will be added later on.]

9. Conclusion

רְשָׁתָּן is a technical term for official letters sent by or to the Persian king. This conclusion is based on the relatively clear context, the Persian etymology and some of the ancient versions.

10. Bibliography

All dictionaries of Biblical Hebrew and Biblical Aramaic have a translation equivalent of ‘(official) letter, decree’.

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