

## official letter

נִשְׁתָּן

### 1. Statistics

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

### 2a. Literal Use

נִשְׁתָּן 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 נִשְׁתָּן 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

אִשְׁתָּרִין 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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