

scriber, scratch awl

שָׁרָד

1. Statistics

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

2a. Literal Use

The Old Testament preserves but one occurrence of the word שָׁרָד, viz. Isaiah 44:13. Here four utensils are mentioned which a carpenter used to shape a wooden image of a god (→ קו; שָׁרָד; מְחַוֵּנָה; מְקַצֵּעָה). With the exception of קו, ‘measuring line’, the precise meaning of these technical terms is difficult to establish. The imperfect יִתְאַרְרוּ, ‘he traces it, outlines it’, is used with both שָׁרָד and מְחַוֵּנָה which suggests that the enumeration does not intend to describe successive stages in the carpenter’s work and that both tools were used in drawing lines.

2b. Figurative Use

Not attested.

3. Epigraphic Hebrew

Not attested.

4. Cognates

SEMITIC: The etymology is uncertain according to Klein, *CEDHL*, 681. For an overview of previous proposals see *HAHAT*, 1299. Since the interchange between *d* and *t* occurs more often (cf. Guillaume, *HAL*, Part 1, 27; Lipiński, *SLOCG*, § 12.2), a connection with שָׁרַט, ‘to make incisions’, שָׁרַט, ‘incision’, and its cognates (*HAHAT*, 1299-1300) might be considered.

AKKADIAN: A connection with *sirdû*, ‘pole of a chariot’ (*CAD* (S), 312) [*not*: ‘awl’ which is *marṣā’u* in Assyrian → מְרַצֵּעַ], is unlikely both because of its meaning and the contracted end-vowel.

However, Old Assyrian *sarādum*, ‘to harness, load’ and *masradum*, ‘pack-saddle’ (Veenhof 1972, 9-11) might be related if perforated leather straps were used.

UGARITIC: A connection with *srdnn*, according to Del Olmo Lete & Sanmartín, *DULAT*, 770, ‘a type of projectile or missile’, seems unlikely, both because of the different sibilant and because of the

entirely different context.

SYRIAC: If the connection with $\sqrt{sr\dot{t}}$ proposed above is tenable, comparison with Syriac *s^erat* ‘to scratch, make a line or stroke . . . to draw or write a line’, *serṭā* ‘scratch, gash, line, character’, *masrāṭā* ‘scalpel’ (Payne Smith (Margoliouth), *CSD*, 286, 391; Brockelmann, *LS*, 498-9) is certainly enlightening.

CLASSICAL ARABIC: Several authors have proposed a connection with *sarada* in the meaning of ‘to perforate’ (Lane, *AEL*, 1346-7), *sarād*, *sirrād*, ‘awl’ (Kazimirski, 1080). The correspondence between Hebr. *s* and Arab. *s* is problematic, but not decisive (cf. König, *HAWAT*, 470-1; Thomas 1971, 325; Lipiński, *SLOCG*, 123-5). See also below, section 9.

MODERN ARABIC: Syro-Palestinian Arabic *masrad*, ‘awl’ (Denizeau, *DPASyr*, 243).

GREEK: Lewy, *SFG*, 57-8, considered the possibility that *σάρδιον*, ‘the Sardinian stone’ or ‘sard’, also attested in Rev. 4:3, would be a Semitic loanword. König, *HAWAT*, 471, calls this difficult, without giving his reasons. Lewy misunderstood the quotation from Pliny he gave. The sard was used as a stone for seals because it was relatively soft and therefore easy to engrave (Bolman 1938, 93-95). For this reason it is unlikely that it was used in a tool for engraving gems or in shaping a wooden image.

5. Ancient Versions

⊕ and other Greek versions: The Greek Version of Isaiah 44:13 raises a text-critical problem. It does not run in accordance with Ⓜ. In fact, Ⓜ and ⊕ present a different picture of the making of cult objects or idols. In its description of the activities of the carpenter Ⓜ contains four technical terms (\rightarrow קו \rightarrow שֵׁרֵט \rightarrow מְצַקֵּם and \rightarrow מְחַבֵּם) in four cola. The ⊕ does not provide an exact correspondence of this. The main manuscripts inexplicably connect ἐκλεξάμενος, ‘having chosen’, with v. 12. Moreover, קו הַמֶּדָּה is rendered inaccurately by ἔστησεν αὐτὸ ἐν μέτρῳ, ‘he sets it up with a measure’. The next two cola are skipped and מְחַבֵּם הַמְּחַבֵּם is translated καὶ ἐν κόλλῃ ἐρρύθμισεν, ‘and he composed it with glue’. Possibly ἐν κόλλῃ is an early error for ἐν κύκλῳ ‘with a circle’ (\rightarrow מְחַבֵּם).

It seems therefore that the Θ does not help much in establishing the meaning of שָׁרָד. However, in v. 12 $\alpha\lambda\iota \ \acute{\epsilon}\nu \ \tau\epsilon\rho\acute{\epsilon}\tau\rho\omega \ \acute{\epsilon}\tau\rho\eta\sigma\epsilon\nu \ \alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{o}$, ‘and he bored it with an awl’, is Θ ’s strange rendering of וּבַמִּקְבֹּת יִצְרֶהוּ, ‘and with hammers he shapes it’. Because the translators of Θ knew the correct rendering of מִקְבֹּת well (Muraoka, *HIS*, 87), it is possible that originally ‘and he bored it with an awl’ was the rendering of יִתְאַרְהוּ בְשָׁרָד, but that somehow the difficult text of vv. 12-13 got into disorder.

α' renders $\alpha\lambda\iota \ \acute{\epsilon}\mu\acute{o}\rho\rho\omega\sigma\epsilon\nu \ \alpha\upsilon\tau\acute{o} \ \acute{\epsilon}\nu \ \pi\alpha\rho\alpha\gamma\rho\alpha\phi\acute{\iota}\delta\iota$, ‘he shapes it with a writing instrument’ (cf. *LSJ*, 1306). In the Syro-Hexapla this is interpreted as *bmsrgdn*, ‘with a ruler’.

Σ : מִשְׁקֹלֵתָא, ‘plummet’, apparently a guess based on the parallelism in the Hebrew text with קוּ.

ς : Probably influenced by Θ , renders *wbtt' dbqh*, ‘he fastens it with glue’, but adds *wglph*, ‘and engraves it’ which looks like the remnant of an earlier rendering.

ν : *runcina*, a ‘plane’.

6. Judaic Sources

Only in the Middle Ages rabbinical interpretations of שָׁרָד crop up which explain the word as a red-dyed cord. As Blau 1995 has demonstrated convincingly, this interpretation goes back to an erroneous understanding of the Arabic translation of Saadya Gaon by the famous Hebrew lexicographer Ibn Janaḥ who was responsible for the theory that שָׁרָד would be a red-dyed cord or red marking tool. This theory was perpetuated up to modern times (see below, section 10), but should definitely be discarded.

As noted by Blau 1995, 691, the correct interpretation is found in the Hebrew-Arabic dictionary of David ben Abraham: ‘a carpenter’s tool having a sharp point’.

7. Illustrations

No suggestions.

8. Archaeological Remarks

[Will be added later on.]

9. Conclusion

Both the embracing parallelism between קָן and מְחֻנְנָה, and the vertical verse-line parallelism between יִתְאַרְהוּ, ‘he traces it, outlines it’, in vv. 13aB and 13bB suggest that שֵׁרֵד and מְחֻנְנָה were measuring tools. The etymological cognates, especially the Syriac and Arabic ones, suggest a sharp-pointed tool used to incise a line in the wood, what we would call a ‘scriber’, or ‘scratch awl’. This is supported by Aquila’s rendering and by the medieval Hebrew-Arabic lexicographer David ben Abraham. Joshua Blau has demonstrated that other Jewish renderings from the Middle Ages, though repeated up till modern times, rested on an erroneous interpretation of the Arabic translation of Saadya Gaon. It is possible that the original rendering of the Old Greek was ‘awl’ but that the text got into disorder as a result of which the phrase landed in v. 12. Also the Peshiṭta seems to reflect an earlier translation which involved an engraving tool.

The description of a Palestinian carpenter’s work in Avitzur, 166, renders it likely that שֵׁרֵד was more or less a synonym of → חֶרֶט. Thin-blade awls have been found in ancient Egypt (Nicholson & Shaw, *AEMT*, 356).

The broader context of the polemic in Isa. 44:9-20 does not aim at providing the student with either an exact knowledge of the making of cult objects or a complete survey of the tools of the craftsmen. Its distinctive purpose is the denunciation of idolatry and the proclamation that YHWH’s power is indisputable against the vain boasting of the Mesopotamian deities and their physical representations. The description wants to bring home the message that making an idol is an utterly human, very clumsy process. It is not impossible that in choosing the term שֵׁרֵד the author wanted to make a contrasting pun on → יָרַח, ‘span’, the term he used in his magisterial description of God’s creation of the heavens (Isa. 40:12).

10. Bibliography

Only primary choices are quoted. Authors marked by * mention alternative solutions: Nicholson & Shaw, *AEMT*, 356 – Avitzur, 162: מִין מְרֻצֵעַ (a kind of awl) – *BDB*, 975: ‘from context, a marking-

tool' (following Gesenius & Roediger, *TPC*, 1337-8) – Bolman 1938: J. Bolman, *De edelsteenen uit den Bijbel gezien in het licht der hedendaagsche Edelsteenkunde*, Amsterdam 1938 – Klein, *CEDHL*, 681: 'stylus, marking tool . . . usually translated from the context' – Alonso Schökel, *DBHE*, 714: 'lápiz, estilo, punzón' – Delitzsch 1889: Fr. Delitzsch, *Commentar über das Buch Jesaja* (BCAT, 3/1), Leipzig ⁴1889, 'Reiß- oder Zeichenstift' – **EB*, vol. 3, 3646: 'the instrument with which the wood-carver made his first rough sketch of the image he was to produce. . . . Haupt, however, would render "שֶׁרֶד compasses,"' and connect Ass. *sirdu* 'yoke' – *Elliger 1978: K. Elliger, *Deuterocesaja, 1. Teilband: Jesaja 40,1-45,7* (BK, 11/1), Neukirchen-Vluyn 1978, 427: 'Reißstift' – **EM*, vol. 8, 388-9 פסל עץ העושה פסל – *GB*, 792: 'wahrsch.: Stift, n. Kimchi: Rötél, Rotstift' – *Gradwohl 1963: R. Gradwohl, *Die Farben im Alten Testament* (BZAW, 83), Berlin 1963, 85-86: 'Die richtige Bedeutung des Wortes bleibt offen' – **HAHAT*, 1299: 'ein Werkzeug des "Meisters i. Holz"' – **HALAT*, 1262: 'die Bedtg. des sbst. ist ungewiss' . . . 'Ahle, Pfriem . . . Reisstift' . . . wohl vorzuziehen' – *HAWAT*, 470-1: supports Gesenius & Roediger, *TPC*, 1337-8, and renders 'Stift' – **HCHAT*, Bd. 2, 498: 'Griffel, Stift, zum Zeichnen' – **HWAT*, 762: 'Werkzeug des Bildschnitzers' – *KBL*, 930: 'nach d. Zusammenhang Rötél, according to context red chalk (Fe₂O₃)' – *LHA*, 807: 'instrumentum artificis ad opificium praedesignandum: frt. graphis, stilus' – *MHH*, 1143: חרט לעיבוד עץ בעשיית הפסילים – Thomas 1971: D.W. Thomas, 'Isaiah XLIV.9-20: A Translation and Commentary', Winton Thomas, in: *Hommages à M. André Dupont-Sommer*, Paris 1971, 319-330 – *Gesenius & Roediger, *TPC*, 1337-8: 'stilus' – Veenhof 1972: K.R. Veenhof, *Aspects of Old Assyrian Trade and its Terminology*, Leiden 1972.

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