layered fabric, sack, sheepfold

משפתים / שפתים

1. Statistics

משפתים

Torah: 1. Nebiim: 1. Ketubim: 0. Total: 2.

שפתים

Torah: 0. Nebiim: 1. Ketubim: 1. Total: 2.

2a. Literal Use

The word מְשִׁפְּתִים occurs only twice. In Gen. 49:14-15 Issachar is compared to a strong ass (חֲמֹר בָּבְּחֵ) resting (רְבֵיץ) between הַמְשְּׁפְּתִים the direct context provides not much of a clue for a specific identification although the article suggests that the connection between מַמְשְּׁפְּתִים and an ass was not uncommon. Moreover, the dual would seem to indicate that the ass was resting between two more or less identical objects called *הְשִׁשְּׁתַי. And finally, the relation with v. 15b is not without relevance (see below). However, neither the material applied nor the shape of the מַשְׁפְּתִים is indicated.

In recent research three solutions have been suggested most frequently:

- 1) מְשְׁשְּׁחֵים as 'campfires, fire-places, ash-heaps, hearths'. This interpretation rests on a derivation from the verb שָּשׁ which in texts like 2 Kgs 4:38 and Ezek. 24:3 is thought to mean 'to put a cooking pot on the fire' (so e.g. BDB, 1046; Albright 1950; E.E. Carpenter, in: NIDOT, vol. 2, 1144). However, שְּשׁׁשׁ does not have this specific meaning and although 'fireplace' might be fitting in Judg. 5:16, it is certainly out of place in Gen. 49:14.
- 2) מְשָׁפְּתֵים as 'sheepfolds', 'pastureland' or 'pens'. So many older dictionaries which were apparently inspired by the use of the term in Judg. 5:16 (cf. Ps. 68:16) where this meaning is indeed fitting because there is also talk of listening to the flute-playing (of shepherds) with the flocks (see for adherents to this opinion De Hoop 1998, 153, n. 449). In this connection O. Eissfeldt has pointed to the prong-shaped sheepfolds in East-Jordan (Eissfeldt 1949; 1954).
- 3) The third, most plausible, rendering of מְּשֶׁפְּתֵים is 'saddle-bags, donkey-packs'. This has been defended in the past (Hogg 1927; Saarisalo 1927; Skinner 1930; see further below) and was

corroborated by new comparative linguistic evidence (De Moor 1981; 1985; 1993; 1997). The noun should be derived from \sqrt{tpd} (so still in Ugaritic) which became \sqrt{new} in Hebrew. The basic meaning of the verb is 'to put one thing on another' (see section 4). The noun is more or less an equivalent of $\rightarrow new$ the Ugaritic cognates of the two words are used in synonymous parallelism. The dual form of the noun points to the fact that a sack is made of fabric folded in two and stitched around the edges. As a donkey-pack, several such sacks were interconnected in the middle and hung down the sides of the animal (cf. Avitzur, 189-91; Dercksen 2009, 92).

This background explains the imagery of Gen. 49:14-15. When the ass lies down (רְבֹץ) with his heavy load, the bags on both sides rise up over him. This evokes Issachar's residential area: the plain of Jizreel, on both sides bordered by mountains. The ass is willing to do heavy work, provided it feels good. That this is indeed the case shows the sequel in v. 15: his resting place is good, and the land is pleasant; so he bows his shoulder (מַבֶּלְבָּן) to bear (סַבּרִל) his burden (the מַשִּׁבְּתַיִם). In other words, Issachar ('man of wages') is willing to take upon himself the unpleasant chores of a corvée worker (thus e.g. De Hoop 1999, 160-1; Macchi 1999, 152-5, both with nuances approaching the 'labouring worker' others prefer, e.g. Hamilton 1995, 668). Exactly the relationship between vv. 14 and 15 renders it plausible that the term מִשְׁבְּתַיִם refers to a real utensil, the equipment with which the pack animal hauls on his heavy load.

However, the interpretation of מְשֶׁפְּחֵים as 'donkey packs, donkey bags' in Gen. 49:14 encounters a problem in Judg. 5:16, the only other place where the word is used. The meaning proposed does not seem to fit the context there. In the middle of the Song of Deborah (Judg. 5:1-31), which sings the praise of the vigour and fighting spirit of Israel's tribes with captivating dynamics, the tribes of Reuben, Gilead, Dan and Asher are criticised because of their inertion (vv. 15b-17). Reuben is asked why he remained sitting (שֵׁלֵי) among the מִשְׁלְּחֵים without taking part in the action. The singer gives the answer himself: because Reuben preferred 'to listen to the piping for the flocks' (בְּשֶׁבֹיְם מִּבְּרִים). The

herds are gathered by the piping of the shepherds, Reuben simply continues the daily routine of going out and comming in. Reuben hears the shepherd's flute, but not the trumpet of war. It seems likely that מַשְׁבְּחַיִם must be rendered 'sheepfolds' here, not 'donkey packs' or the like. Yet a relation between the two may be suspected in two different ways. One might assume that the poet wants to evoke the everyday scene of a mule lying down between his double burden – the very picture of peaceful rest in general. Or, one might assume that the V-shape of the sheepfold in ancient Israel resembled the shape of a donkey pack with its multiple layers of bags (thus De Moor 1993, 491, n. 33; 1997, 121, n. 80). The proposal of Crown 1967 to render 'to squat on one's haunches' failed to convince.

In view of the analogous wording and function in the context, most scholars (see section 10 below) assume that שׁבּתִים in Ps. 68:14 is a variant spelling of the term משפתים in Judg. 5:16 – without preformative מ and with geminated ת. Moreover, some of the ancient versions translate the two terms identically. Ps. 68:14 is a crux interpretum; both the position of v. 14a and the meaning of v. 14b are a riddle to many. Often it is stated that v. 14a is a stray gloss from Judg. 5:16 (e.g. Isserlin 1971; cf. Kraus 1989). Indeed the similarity between Judg. 5:16 and Ps. 68:14 is striking, but there are more parallels between Ps. 68 and the Song of Deborah. The circumstance that in Ps. 68:14 the verb שׁכב is used instead of שב (so Judg. 5:14) does change nothing in the meaning of the phrase – the lying down or sitting בין שַפַּתִים points to an undisturbed, acquiescent, passive attitude. Commentators disagree, however, on the meaning of the clause: are we dealing with a reproof, an adhortation, a promise, a wish, or an observation? An exegetical decision on this matter is possible only if the function of the 'dove' in v. 14b is clarified (for various proposals see e.g. Begg 1987; Hossfeldt 2000; De Moor 1997, 174, who believes that in Ps. 68:14 too the rendering 'sheepfolds' is appropriate).

The meaning of the technical term Didd in Ezek. 40:43 is as uncertain as it is controversial. This verse too has been a *crux interpretum* from antiquity (see section 5) to the present day. The

context is a description of a room in the neighbourhood of the north gate of the temple in Ezekiel's temple vision where sacrificial animals are slaughtered and washed (40:38-43). The vast majority of commentators agrees that the present sequence of cola in vv. 42-43 is illogical. It is thought that on the tables (מַבְּלִים) not both the slaughtering instruments (מַבְלִים) and the flesh of victims (43b) can have been laid. Moreover, the function of the מַבְּלִים in v. 43a is missing in m and v. 43a breaks off rather abruptly at מֵּלְיִהֶם It seems most natural to relate v. 43b and v. 42a, and to reverse the order so that on both sides of the building concerned (מֵבְּלִים סְבִיב סְבִים (בַּבִית סְבִיב סְבִים, Ho. part, v. 43a). They are assumed to serve for storing the slaughtering instruments (v. 42b, cf. Gese 1957; Zimmerli 1969; Block 1998). Following various ancient versions (cf. section 5), scholars render

However, no lucid explanation for the text in its present form has been given. Is it necessary to emend it so drastically as has been proposed? First of all, it should be observed that the emendation into a plural, proposed by BHS and others, does not recommend itself. Since adjectives do not have a dual, it is normal in Hebrew that מוכנים is in the plural (cf. Waltke & O'Connor 1990; Gibson 1994). Furthermore it is illuminating to study the evidence from Egypt with regard to the tools and furniture used by butchers in antiquity (cf. Ikram 1995; Curtis, AFT, 165-73), because this seems to prove that the text of Ezek. 40:42-43 is perfectly acceptable as it stands. In view of their small dimensions, the 'tables' of Ezek. 40:41-43 are rather the slaughtering blocks which in Egypt too could be of both wood and hewn stone, often used simultaneously in the same chamber. The problematic אַליהָם simply means that the stone slabs which were only one cubit high (v. 42b) were on four of the tables mentioned in v. 41 (cf. v. 41b אַלְיהַם; such a stone slab is lying on the slaughtering block in a miniature model of an ancient Egyptian butcher's shop, LA, Bd. 1, 1081-2). Since the slaughtering instruments, mostly knives and scrapers, were used on these blocks, there is no valid reason to assume that they could not be lying on these 'tables' when not in use (v. 42b). The שַׁבְּּתִים which were fastened all around in

the building (v. 43) can only be the sacks in which the butchers used to suspend joints of meat for drying (Darby et al. 1977, 153, Fig. 3.41; Ikram 1994: 77, Fig. 16; 82-83, with Fig. 17; 85, Fig. 18; Curtis, textitAFT, 170-2). Apparently the fabric served to keep away flies. The circumstance that they were only one handbreadth (קַהָּה הַצָּה) wide in the case of Ezekiel's temple (v. 43a) can be explained on the basis of the Egyptian practice to hang out long, narrow strips of meat for drying, somewhat resembling the South African 'biltong' (cf. Ikram 1995). The sacks sometimes had a tapering shape to accommodate the shape of the cut, not unlike the European custom to sell hams in a tapering sack or net.

2b. Figurative Use

Not attested.

3. Epigraphic Hebrew

Not attested.

4. Cognates

On the basis of Ugaritic and Arabic the Semitic root can be determined as tpd 'to put one thing on another'. This root may have developed into אַשְּׁפַּאָרָוֹת in biblical Hebrew under the influence of nouns like אַשְּׁפַּאָרָוֹת (Lam. 4:5) and אַשְּׁפַּאָרָוֹת (Ezek. 40:43; Ps. 68:13) which suggest the development *'ašpadtu > *'ašpatt > *'ašpat and *šapadtu > *šapatt > *šapatt > *šapat (cf. SLOCG, § 27.3; Joüon & Muraoka, GBH, §§ 100b and 18l).

Klein, *CEDHL*, 394, 677, hesitates between 'dual ash heaps', 'sheepfolds', and 'hook-shaped pegs', but accepts the derivation from השט.

UGARITIC: The word occurs as mtpdm, a metaphor for 'folded layers' of rock (Del Olmo Lete & Sanmartín, DLU, 605-6). Also the verb $\underline{t}pd$ G 'to place one thing on another' is attested (cf. Del Olmo Lete & Sanmartín, DLU, 925).

Postbiblical Hebrew: As the context betrays, שַּבְּתֵּים 'border-mounds' (?) and שׁפּת 'to place, pile' (Jastrow, *DTT*, 1620) have apparently been borrowed from Biblical Hebrew.

Classical Arabic: Kazimirski, DAF, t. 1, 226: taffada ...

'Doubler, garnir en dedans une cuirasse de drap'; $\underline{t}af\bar{a}f\bar{\iota}d$ '1. Nuages blancs qui s'amoncèlent et chevauchent les uns sur les autres.

2. Doublure, pièces de drap dont on garnit en dedans. 3. Choses cachées sous d'autres'; $ma\underline{t}\bar{a}f\bar{\iota}du\ Voy.\ le\ précéd.\ 2$.' Similarly Freytag, LAL, t. 1, 220. So the basic meaning in Arabic seems to be 'to fold one side over the other, make double, provide with a lining', from which developed 'to pile, pack (said of cumulus)', 'to hide one thing under another'.

5. Ancient Versions

of and other Greek versions:

:משפתים

Gen. 49:14 σ and α': ἀνὰ μέσον τῶν κλήρων, 'in the middle of the inheritances' (GELS-L, 258). ἀλλος: λιβάδων, 'streams, pools' (LSJ, 1047); σ' ἀνὰ μέσον τῶν γειτόνιων, 'in the middle of the neighbours' (LSJ, 341). Graeco-Venetus: ἀνὰ τὰ ἡμιφόρτια 'to the half-packs'.

Judg. 5:16 \mathfrak{G}^A simply transcribes the Hebrew: μοσφαθαιμ. \mathfrak{G}^B has ἀνὰ μέσον τῆς διγομίας, 'in the middle of the double burden' (GELS-L, 258; LSJ, 960). α΄ ἀνὰ μέσον τῶν κλήρων. σ΄ ἀνὰ μέσον τῶν μεταιχμίων, 'in the middle of the frontiers'. ἀλλος: ἐν μέσω χειλέων, 'in the middle of 'lips' (rims)' (GELS-L, 1982).

Ps. 68 [67]:14 σ ἀνὰ μέσον τῶν κλήρων, as in Gen. 49:14. Ezek. 40:43 σ γεῖσος 'cornice , coping' (*GELS-L*, 87; *LSJ*, 341. α' ἐπιστάσεις 'stoppers (?)'.

 $\mathfrak{m}^{\mathrm{T}}$: The basic text J has בין כרניה 'among the nations' (Tal, DSA, 411). Some other manuscripts have לשוניה or לשונאיה, apparently etymologizing with Hebrew שָּׁפָּה 'tongue', also 'language'. Manuscript A has בספיואתה, probably with the same meaning (Tal, DSA, 445, 693).

כ: משפתים:

Gen: 49:14: \mathfrak{C}^O has a double translation: אחסנתיה בין החומיא 'his inheritance between the borders'. \mathfrak{C}^N ביני הרין החומיא 'between two borders' (so also some other Palestinian targums). \mathfrak{C}^{PsJ} ביני 'between the borders of his brothers'.

Judg. 5:16 בין תחומיא 'between the borders'. A variant reading has

אורחא בפרשת 'at a cross-road', cf. Smelik 1995.

: שפתים

Ezek. 40:43 עונקלין, a Greek loanword (ὅγκινος or ἀγκάλη), not 'eine mit Widerhaken versehene Stange' (so Levy, CWT, Bd. 2, 230), but rather 'hook, rack' (Jastrow, DTT, 30). No doubt this was based on the iron 'hooks' of m. Midd. 3:5, a passage, however, which bears a hypothetical character itself.

Ps. 68:14 ביני קילקלתא 'between dunghills' (Jastrow, *DTT*, 1368; Dalman, *ANHT*, 377).

s: משפתים:

Gen. 49:14 $b\hat{e}t \ \check{s}b\bar{\imath}l\hat{e}$ 'between roads'.

Judg. 5:16 baynat šbīlayyā 'between the roads'.

: שפתים

Ezek. 40:43 $s\hat{e}\ddot{p}w\bar{a}th\bar{o}n$ 'and their rims, ledges', cf. Payne Smith (Margoliouth), CSD, 385.

Ps. 68:14 $b\hat{e}t$ $\check{s}p\bar{a}y\hat{e}$ 'between the clearings', cf. Payne Smith (Margoliouth), CSD, 590; Brockelmann, LS, 794 'offensa'; Costaz, DSF, 376 'pierre d'achoppement, stumbling-block'.

משפתים: מ

Gen. 49:14; Judg. 5:16 terminus 'border, boundary' (LD, 1859). שׁרָּבּוּט:

Ezek. 40:43 et labia earum 'and their rims'.

Ps. 68:14 in medios cleros, after 6.

6. Judaic Sources

The words do not occur in Qumran, Ben Sira or rabbinic sources (see section 4 on the rare occurrence in Postbiblical Hebrew). Apparently these words became obsolete in later Hebrew.

7. Illustrations

A good drawing of the type of sack described above is found in Wilson, PPSE, vol. 2, 24, lower right corner (\rightarrow המתחת). See also the photographs Avitzur, 189-91 and Bolen, PLBL, tb060503203.

8. Archaeological Remarks

[Will be added later on.]

9. Conclusion

The ancient versions are clearly at a loss how to interpret משפתים and שַּׁבְּתִים, words that apparently had become obsolete by the time the translators started their work. On the basis of context, etymology and iconography it may be assumed that משפתים and שַּׁפְּתִּים designated objects made of fabric folded in two and stitched together at the edges to form a sack (\rightarrow אמתחת.). As such it could designate a sack to dry freshly slaughtered and washed meat (Ezek. 40:43). Two or more such folded sacks could be connected and hung over the back of a donkey as a 'donkey-pack' (Gen. 49:14). Very few versions seem to have preserved a vague notion of this meaning, viz. $\mathfrak{G}^{\mathrm{B}}$, which translates 'in the middle of the double burden' in Judg. 5:16, and the Graeco-Venetus rendering 'to the half-packs' in Gen. 49:14. In a metaphorical sense both words could designate a sheep-fold (Judg. 5:16; Ps. 68:14) whereas the equivalent in Ugaritic $(m\underline{t}pdm)$ became a metaphor for multiple layers of rock and the Arabic cognate could designate cloud-packs, cumulus.

Actually the English 'fold' underwent a similar semantic development. The verb denotes bending a thing over itself, or 'double'. Then also 'to undergo bending or curvature', said of rock strata, and 'to enclose, envelop'. As a noun, it may denote 'a part doubled or laid over another part', but also curved or undulating layers of rock (Merrian-Webster), and of course also the '(sheep)fold' has survived, the enclosure in which sheep are driven from the grazing land via its wide V-shaped entrance.

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de'; 524: שֶׁבְּתִים 'Doppelgestelle, Hürden (Ps. 68, 14); Hürdenartige Pflockreihen (um Tische), Hes. 40,43 HCHAT, Bd. 1, 802: 'Hürde, d.h. offener Sommerstall'; Bd. 2, 492: 'Haken, in den Wänden, um geschlachtete Thiere daran zu hängen Ez. 40,43 ... Hürde Ps. 68,14' – Heck 1986: J.D. Heck, 'Issachar: Slave or Freeman?', JETS 29 (1986), 390-1 – Hogg 1927: J.E. Hogg, 'The Meaning of המשפתים in Gen 49,14 and Judg 5,16', AJSL 43 (1926-27), 299-301 – Hossfeldt 2000: F.-L. Hossfeldt & E. Zenger, Psalmen 51–100 (HThK.AT), Freiburg i.B. 2000, 253 – Ikram 1994: S. Ikram, Choice Cuts: Meat Production in Ancient Egypt (OLA, 69), Leuven 1994, 41-108 – Ikram 1995: S. Ikram, 'Did the Ancient Egyptians Eat Biltong?', Cambridge Archaeological Journal 5 (1995), 283-9 – ISBE, vol. 2, 326 - Isserlin 1971: B.S.J. Isserlin, 'Psalm 68, Verse 14: An Archaeological Gloss', PEQ 103 (1971), 5-8 - KBL, 580: מְשָׁפַתֵּיִם 'die beiden Sattelkörbe ...both saddle-bags'; 1006: 'Abstellplatten (aus Stein? slabs? places where to set down things Hs. 40,43; Packsättel, pack-saddles Ps. 68,14' – Kraus 1989: H.-J. Kraus, Psalmen (BK, 15/1). Neukirchen ⁶1989, 627 – LHA, 486: מַשַּפְתֵים 'saeptum duplex, i.e. locus (caulae, castra, urbs) duplici saepto cinctus ideoque tutus, quietus'; 877: שַּׁפַּתִּים Winer, LMHC, 1019: השפתים 'stabula vel crates, caulae, quibus pecus noctu includitur'; שׁבְּחֵיִם: 'vulgo canales, stabula' – Macchi 1999: J.-D. Macchi, *Israël* et ses tribus selon Genèse 49 (OBO, 171), Fribourg 1999 – MHH, 680: מכלאות צאן, 1137: מכלאות הבוערת – NIDOT, vol. 2, 1144– Pehlke 1985: H. Pehlke, An Exegetical and Theological Study of Genesis 49:1-28, Ann Arbor 1985, 191-6 - Saarisalo 1927: A. Saarisalo, The Boundary between Issachar and Naphtali: An Archeaological and Literary Study of Israel's Settlement in Canaan, Helsinki 1927, 92 – Skinner 1930: J. Skinner, Genesis (ICC), Edinburgh 1930, 526 - Smelik 1995: W.F. Smelik, The Targum of Judges (OTS, 36), Leiden 1995, 459 – Gesenius & Roediger, TPC, 1472: מְשַׁפְּתִים: 'caulae pecorum palis septae'; שַׁפְּתִים 'paxillus bifidus' (Ezek. 40:43); caulae pecorum palis (et cratibus) constructae (Ps. 68:14) – Vlaardingerbroek 1973: J. Vlaardingerbroek, Psalm 68, Amsterdam 1973, 59-67 – Waltke & O'Connor 1990: B.K. Waltke & M. O'Connor, Biblical Hebrew Syntax, Winona Lake 1990, \S 14.2b – Zimmerli 1969: W. Zimmerli, *Ezechiel* (BK, 13/2), Neukirchen 1969, 1022 – Zobel 1965: H.J. Zobel, *Stammess-pruch und Geschichte* (BZAW, 95), Berlin 1965, 16.

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