

**cleft, branch, crutch**

רַעֲיָרָה

**1. Statistics**

Torah: 0. Nebiim: 1 (6). Ketubim: 0. Total: 1 (6).

As a designation of a utensil the word is thought to occur only in 1 Kings 18:21: ‘How long will you go limping on two crutches?’ If so, it seems likely that it is identical or closely related to רַעֲיָרָה ‘1. cleft; 2. branch, bough’ (see below). The traditional translation, however, runs: ‘How long will you go limping with two different opinions?’ (e.g. σ’, υ, Luther, KJV, ASV, RSV, JPS, NIV) and this expression has become proverbial in many languages.

**2a. Literal Use**

If the word is indeed identical or closely related to רַעֲיָרָה ‘1. cleft; 2. branch, bough’ (see below), the literal use is attested 6 times in the Nebiim.

**2b. Figurative Use**

The meaning of the word in 1 Kgs 18:21 is unclear due to the problems of the context. ‘Crutches (made from branches)’ was proposed by Joüon 1908 and again by Keel 1972, as fitting the traditional meaning of the verb פָּסַח in the sense of ‘to limp’. The question would refer to a proverb which uses ‘crutches’ in a metaphorical way and denounces the attitude of making no choice, while the crutches, in this case, would point to the deities involved, i.e. YHWH and Baal. Since YHWH could indeed be designated as a supporting staff (→ מְשָׁעָן) the prophet’s criticism is directed not towards the use of supporting staffs as such, but to the fact that two *unequal* crutches are used.

De Vaux 1941, however, would see here a reference to the ritual dance performed in honour of Baal (cf. 1 Kings 19:18: ‘bending the knee to Baal’; cf. ⚡ below). Gerleman 1976, on the contrary, basing himself on a different meaning of the verb פָּסַח, namely as ‘to strike against violently, to rebound’, returned more or less to the traditional interpretation of רַעֲפִיּוֹת as an abstract noun: ‘sides, alternatives’. The prophet would reproach the Israelites to rebound against both YHWH and Baal so much so as to be repudiated by both deities.

König, *HAWAT*, 305, has a fairly elaborate paragraph on this lemma:

רַעֲפִים: f. 1 K 18<sub>21</sub> (2<sub>67</sub> [= *Hist. Komp. Lehrs.*, Bd. 2, 67], zusammenhängend mit רַעֲפִים (ar. *šá'aba*, fídit), nicht 1) “Kniekehlen” (LXX: *ἰγνύαι*; Ges.-B.), denn da würde der Dual erwartet werden. 2) Bei “Krückstöcke” (Joüon 08<sub>336</sub>: “les deux béquilles”) würde das Attribut “beide” in jener Frage fast unsinnig sein. Oder sollten sie künftig auf einem “Krückstock” hinken? Auch passt die Fortsetzung dann nicht recht. 3) Dazu stimmt aber “Spaltung: Seite” sehr gut, und “Seite” ist kein “Abstractum”, sodass das genus (Albrecht, ZATW 16<sup>75</sup>) auffallend genannt werden müsste.

If it is admissible – and it is, cf. *SLOGC*, §§ 11.4, 14.2-5, 16.5; *HAAHAT*, 894 – to compare Arab.  $\sqrt{\text{ša'aba}}$ , ‘to collect, separate, divide’, it would also be possible to point to the Arab. noun *šu'bat*, ‘space between two things, cleft, branch growing out apart’, and also: ‘a staff having at his head two forking portions or projections’ (Lane, *AEL*, vol. 4, 1556). Such staffs with forked upper ends might well have served as crutches supporting a person under the armpits (cf. Joüon and Keel). The advantage of this solution is that it is in line with the meaning of the existing Hebrew nouns רַעֲפִים, 1. cleft; 2. branch, bough’, and רַעֲפִים, ‘bough, branch’, as well as the denominative verb  $\sqrt{\text{ra'ef}}$  Pi., ‘to lop off boughs’. The gemination of the פ in רַעֲפִים is no obstacle to this explanation (cf. *GBH* § 18d-g). For further cognates see section 4 below.

### 3. Epigraphic Hebrew

Not attested.

### 4. Cognates

SEMITIC: Klein, *CEDHL*, 452, s.v. רַעֲפִים assumes the following meanings for Biblical Hebrew: 1. cleft. 2. branch, bough, but s.v. רַעֲפִים ‘division, divided opinion’ he appears to be reluctant to connect the two. From early times on scholars have compared רַעֲפִים in Job 4:13 (see also 21:2) which is supposed to mean ‘opinions, disquieting thoughts’ (see e.g. *HWAT*, 464). Subsequently it seemed admissible to regard רַעֲפִים ‘twig’ (Ezek. 31:5; cf. *HAAHAT*, 903) and רַעֲפִים ‘disquieting thoughts’ (Ps. 94:19; 139:23; Clines 1989, 111) as dissimilated forms of the same root. See also רַעֲפִים (Ps.

119:113), usually translated ‘double-minded men’.

It is indeed possible that  $\sqrt{s^c p}$ , dissimilated  $\sqrt{sr^c p}$  //  $\sqrt{s^c p}$ , dissimilated  $\sqrt{sr^c p}$ , and Arab.  $\sqrt{s^c b}$  (see section 2 above) are all variants of the same original  $\sqrt{s^c b/p}$  (cf. *SLOGC*, §§ 16.1-6, 20) with the meaning ‘to branch off, divide into two directions’.

SYRIAC: *sar^ef* ‘to branch out’, *sarefītā* ‘branches, a branching out, fork; layers, suckers’ (Payne Smith (Margoliouth), *CSD*, 392); *sūr^āfā* ‘a branch, subdivision, ramification’ (Margoliouth), *CSD*, 371).

OLD ARABIC: Perhaps Sabaeen  $\sqrt{s^c b}$ , ‘tribal group, community’ (Beeston, *SD*, 130-1; Biella, *DOSA*, 520). See also the modern South Arabic cognates cited by Leslau, *ESAC*, 37; *HAHAT*, 903.

CLASSICAL ARABIC: *ša^b* ‘collection, separation, division, branch, crack, tribe’ (Lane, *AEL*, vol. 4, 1556); *šu^bat* ‘space between two things, cleft, branch growing out apart’, and also: ‘a staff having at his head two forking portions or projections’ (Lane, *AEL*, vol. 4, 1556), discussed above. Less likely *sa^af* ‘palm-branches’ (Lane, *AEL*, vol. 4, 1365). See also Palestinian Arabic *ša^be* ‘Gabelhölzer’ (Dalman, *AuS*, Bd. 3, 241).

## 5. Ancient Versions

⊖ and other Greek versions: The versions mirror the exegetical impasse of modern times. ⊖ translates with a word for a body part: ἰγνύα ‘the part behind the thigh and knee, ham’ (*GELS-L*, 211). This results in the translation: ‘to halt on both feet’. σ has ἀμφιβόλος, ‘doubt, uncertainty of mind’.

⊗: פִּלְגוּתָא ‘half, division’.

⊘: *pelgūtā* ‘half, part’ or *pālgūtā* ‘part, division, duplicity’ (Payne Smith (Margoliouth), *CSD*, 447).

⊙: Like ⊗ en ⊘ has interpreted the term as an abstract noun: *Usquequo claudicatis in duas partes?*

## 6. Judaic Sources

Not attested in Jesus Sirach, Dead Sea Scrolls, rabbinic sources.

## 7. Illustrations

No suggestions.

## 8. Archaeological Remarks

[Will be added later on.]

## 9. Conclusion

On the somewhat uncertain basis of etymological comparison the meaning ‘crutch’ seems acceptable. Other proposals that have found some support from the ancient versions are ‘part’, ‘side’ and ‘uncertainty, divided opinion’, but all these alternatives seem to have been inspired by the same root ‘to branch off, divide in two parts’.

## 10. Bibliography

See in addition to the literature cited with → מִצָּה:

*BDB*, 704: ‘divided opinion’ – *DCH*, vol. 6, 175: various options – De Vaux 1941: R. de Vaux, ‘Les prophètes de Baal sur le Mont Carmel’, *BMB* 5 (1941), 1-20 – *GB*, 548: ‘Teilungen, Krücken’ – Gerleman: 1976: G. Gerleman, ‘Was heißt פִּסָּח?’, *ZAW* 88 (1976), 409-413, esp. 411f. – Gese 1997: H. Gese, in: J. Ådna et al (eds), *Evangelium, Schriftauslegung, Kirche: Festschrift für Peter Stuhlmacher*, Göttingen 1997, 133-4, n. 22 – Gray 1970: J. Gray, *I & II Kings: A Commentary* (OTL), London <sup>2</sup>1970, 396, after discussing several options: ‘crutches’ – *HAHAT*, 894-5: s.v. רַעֲיָ: ‘1. Felsspalt, Felsenkluft ... 2. Zweig, Ast’, but s.v. רַעֲפִים the authors merely mention some previous proposals – *HALAT*, 719: ‘Krücken’ – *HAWAT*, 305: ‘Spaltung: Seite’ (see above, section 2) – *HCHAT*, Bd. 2, 89-90: ‘Seite’, but preferably ‘Kniekehle’ – *HWAT*, 464: ‘gewöhnl. geteilte Meinungen übersetzt, vgl. רַעֲפִים’ (thoughts) – Joüon 1908: P. Joüon, ‘Notes de lexicographie hébraïque’, *MUSJ* 3 (1908), 336 – *KBL*, 663: ‘Krücken’ – Keel 1972: O. Keel, ‘Erwägungen zum Sitz im Leben des vor-mosaïschen Pascha und zur Etymologie von פִּסָּח’, *ZAW* 84 (1972) 414-34, esp. 428 – *LHA*, 558: ‘ramificationes, opiniones divisae’ – *MHH*, 760: מַחֲשָׁבָה חֲלוּקָה: מִפְּרָשִׁים: ברירה, מחשבה חלוקה – Thiel 2002: W. Thiel, *Könige* (BK 9/2/2), Neukirchen 2002, 143-8, after discussing a large number of options: ‘Krücken’ – Gesenius, Roediger, *TPC*,

963: 'partes, opiniones divisae'.

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