

מִפְרָקָת

(For fuller discussion of the lexical field as a whole see the ‘Overview of SAHD entries for “Deliverance” words’ on this site)

Introduction

Grammatical Type: noun

Occurrences: (Total: 1) 1x OT, 0x Qum, 0x Sir, 0x inscr.

Text doubtful: none

1. Root and Comparative Material

A.1 In addition to possible cognate nouns noted in **1. A.5-6** under מִפְרָקָת, the lexica s.v. mention the following forms: מִפְרָקָת in post-biblical Heb. (Jastrow 1971: 822, ‘neck, nape’; he also cites there one occurrence of מִפְרָק, ‘joint’), Ar. *farq*, ‘Scheitel [crown of the head]’ (*HAL*: 585); in *Ges18*: 719 Ar. *mafraq*, *mafriq*, ‘Kreuzung, Knotenpunkt’, *mafriq aš-ša’r*, ‘Scheitel’, Soq *fiqeriroh*, ‘Hals’, JAram (Tgg.) פִּרְקָתָא, ‘Genick’ (‘back of the neck’: for this Jastrow 1971: 1228, refers to פִּרְקָתָא, [p. 1172], ‘joint’, always with a specifying genitive to mean ‘neck’: occurrences of the spellings cited in *Ges18* are noted as variants). [See also the entries for פִּרְקָתָא and פִּרְקָתָא. In Ancient Hebrew the occurrence of פִּרְקָתָא in 4QpsEzek is particularly relevant.]

2. Formal Characteristics

A.1 Noun: segholate fem. form of type *maqṭāl* (Bauer and Leander 1922: §77d, cf. §61eη, fη; so *HAL*, but *Ges18* considers *maqṭal* also possible [ibid.: §61aζ]). While such forms might be expected to refer to the subject of the related verb, in fact they frequently refer to its object (e.g. מֵאֵל, מֵאֵלָה, מֵאֵלֶיךָ), so that ‘something divided or separated’, like the bones of the neck, is an entirely possible sense for this word.

3. Syntagmatics

A.1 מִפְרָקָתָא is the subject of שִׁבַּר Ni., ‘be broken’ (1Sm 4.18).

A.2 In the immediate context this syntagm is preceded by וַיִּפֹּל מֵעַל-הַכֶּסֶּא אַחֲרֵינִי and followed by וַיִּמָּח, indicating cause and effect of the breaking.

4. Versions

a. LXX:

νῶτος (1Sm 4.18)

Jewish revisers:

Aquila: τένων (1Sm 4.18)

Symmachus: σπόνδυλος (1Sm 4.18)

b. Peshitta

prqt (1Sm 4.18)

c. Targum:

פיקות(א) (1Sm 4.18)

d. Vulgate:

cervix (pl.) (1Sm 4.18)

A.1 The renderings of Symmachus (specifically the vertebrae), Vulg, TgJ and Pesh all understand מפרקת as ‘neck’. The use of the pl. form in Vulg conforms to a classical idiom (Lewis and Short 1879: p. 322).

B.1 LXX’s *νότος* means ‘back’, not ‘neck’ (LSJ: 1187): the translator probably made a guess from the context, not knowing the exact meaning of this *hapax legomenon*, which would have been accurately rendered by either *ἀντήν* or *τράχηλος*. [It is more surprising that LXX used *νότος* several times for the better known synonym *ἐνθά* (2Kms 22.41 = Ps 18.40; 4Kms 17.14; Jr 2.27; 32.33; 48.39), but in those contexts ‘turning the back’ may have seemed the more natural Greek expression. *ἐνθά* (like *צואר*) is quite frequently translated by *ἀντήν* or *τράχηλος* (including 3x in Jer.), so that there seems to have been no ignorance of its real meaning.] Aquila’s *τένων* is a general word for ‘sinew, tendon’ (LSJ:1775), most often of the foot or ankle, but Hom. *Od.* 3.449 used it of the neck tendons (of a sacrificial animal): cf. also Aquila at Ex 13.13; 34.20.

5. Lexical/Semantic Fields

A.1 The more common words for ‘neck’ are *עָרַף* (33x BH, 1x Sir, 18x Qumran acc. *DCH*, 6: 565) and *צַנְאָר* (41x BH, 1x Sir, 4x Qumran acc. *DCH*, 7: 91). Both these words are used of animals’ necks as well as humans’, whereas *מפרקת* refers to a human. Both of them are also used figuratively, again unlike *מפרקת*. (But not much can be made of a single occurrence.) Neither of them seems to be used specifically of the bones of the neck or as the object of *שבר*, though Pr 29.1 (*עָרַף*) comes close to this and the verb *עָרַף* is used of breaking the neck of an animal (so most authorities: but see Zipor 2001: 369 for an alternative interpretation). Despite the last-mentioned evidence, the general usage of the other words may support the idea (for which there is etymological support: see 1. Root and Comparative Material) that *מפרקת* meant the neck-bones specifically and that this was the reason for its selection in 1Sm 4.18.

6. Exegesis

A.1 The commentaries and reference works are in no doubt about the meaning of this word, and generally have little if anything to say about it. But Gesenius 1835-58: 1131 gave the meaning as ‘*vertebrae cervicis vel dorsi a frangendo dicta*’ (cf. Robinson 1855:603: ‘pr. [properly] the joints or vertebrae of the neck’). This is preferable to the more recent explanation cited below in B.1.

B.1 Smith (1904: 36: ‘It means the neck as dividing [פָּרַק] the head and trunk’) and BDB: 830 (‘[dividing head from body]’) explain the meaning from the presumed active sense of פָּרַק. But comparison with words of a similar form (see 2. Formal Characteristics) and the existence of cognates meaning ‘joint’ (in the sense of a small bone) at Qumran as well as in later Heb. and Aram. makes it at least as possible, and perhaps more likely, that the meaning is ‘that which is divided (or broken)’, which also fits the physical reality well (i.e. the vertebrae that make up the ‘neck-bone’) [so Gesenius: see above].

7. Conclusion

Although this noun occurs only once in BH, the combined evidence of later Heb. usage and the majority of the Versions makes the meaning ‘neck’, which fits the context well, virtually certain. A combination of etymological parallels and the structure of the lexical field supports a specific reference to the (human?) neck-bone(s).

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