

THE MEANING OF *PA'AM* IN THE CONTEXT OF FURNITURE

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Abstract

In three instances in the Hebrew Bible, in two separate contexts, we find the word *pa'āmōtāyw* denoting parts of an item of furniture. In all three instances, the most attractive interpretation of the word is 'its feet', which would mean short projections at the bottom of the object that bear its weight. However, there has been a surprising reluctance among translators and commentators to understand the word in this sense. In this paper, the various alternative interpretations of the word will be surveyed and the reason for this reluctance will be investigated. It will be argued that this reason is invalid and that 'its feet' is the correct understanding.

Ark of the Testimony

The Priestly account of Yhwh's instructions to Moses on the establishment of the tabernacle (Exodus 25–31) includes specific commands regarding the construction of the Ark of the Testimony (25:10–22). The first half of Exod. 25:12 reads: *wēyāsaqtā lō 'arba' ṭabb'ōt zāhāb wēnātattāh 'al 'arba' pa'āmōtāyw*; 'You are to cast four gold rings for it [i.e., the ark] and put them at its four *pē'āmōt*'.

The statement is repeated in the first half of Exod. 37:3, in the parallel description of the actual construction of the ark (37:1–9), within the broader account of the implementation of Yhwh's instructions (35–40): *wayyisōq lō 'arba' ṭabb'ōt zāhāb 'al 'arba' pa'āmōtāyw*; 'He cast four gold rings for it at its four *pē'āmōt*'. In both verses the existence of four *pē'āmōt* belonging to the ark is treated as obvious, and is mentioned only incidentally in order to specify where the ark's rings should be located. The question that arises is: what are these *pē'āmōt*?

Survey of Interpretation

An early, clumsy attempt to answer this question was made in the Septuagint, which renders *pē'āmōt* in Exod. 25:12 (LXX 25:11) as κλίτη, plural of κλίτος. (In Exod. 37:3 [LXX 38:3], the entire phrase containing *pa'āmōtāyw* is not represented in the Septuagint). The word κλίτος, extremely rare in Greek, is often used in the Septuagint, especially within Exod. 25–40, as a catchall for the sense of 'side' or 'end'.¹ Most significantly, it is used to translate *šēlā'* twice in this very same verse as well as in v. 14 and twice in the parallel 37:3 (LXX 38:3),² indicating that the translator saw *pē'āmōt* as synonymous with *šēlā'ōt*.³ This translation cannot be accepted, as our verse differentiates explicitly between the two and also makes clear that the ark has *four* *pē'āmōt* but only *two* *šēlā'ōt*.

An approach that is similar but avoids internal contradiction is taken in two revisions of the Septuagint. Theodotion on Exod. 25:12 translates *pē'āmōt* as μέρος, from μέρος, a far more common word whose essential meaning is 'part', and which seems to be used by Theodotion in the sense of 'end' or 'side'.⁴ This translation also appears in several witnesses to the Septuagint on Exod. 37:3.⁵ Symmachus on 25:12 uses πλευράς, from πλευρά, 'rib/side'.⁶ The

¹ Within this section, κλίτος is used to translate *pē'āh* (of the tabernacle: Exod. 26:18; of its court: 27:9[x2], 11; 38:11, 12, 13 [LXX 37:9, 10, 11]); *qāṣeh* (of the *kapporet*: 25:18, 19[x3]; of the bronze altar's grating: 27:4; of the tabernacle: 26:28[x2]); *śad* (of the lampstand: 25:32[x2]); *kāṭēp* (of the court: 27:14, 15); and *yārek* (of the tabernacle: 40:22, 24).

² And elsewhere (of the tabernacle: Exod. 26:20, 27[x2]; of the incense altar: 30:4; cf. LXX 38:10).

³ This approach is perhaps influenced by Gen. 2:21–3, a passage that contains the only prior occurrences of *šēlā'* in the Pentateuch, and in which *pa'am* may be interpreted as its synonym (though neither the Septuagint nor any of its revisions translate *pa'am* that way in Genesis).

⁴ Theodotion uses the word to translate *pē'āh* (of the table: Exod. 37:13 [38:11]); *qāṣeh* (Judg. 7:11; Isa. 7:18); *rūaḥ* (Jer. 52:23); *min-qēṣāt* (Dan. 2:42); and *qēṣ* (Dan. 11:45).

⁵ Within our section, μέρος is used by the Septuagint to translate *pē'āh* (of the table: Exod. 25:26); *qāṣeh* (of the tabernacle cloths: 26:4, 5; of the ephod: 28:7, 39:4 [LXX 36:11]; of the breastpiece: 39:17 [LXX 36:24]; of the altar's grating: 38:5 [LXX 38:24]); *śad* (of the lampstand: 37:18 [LXX 38:14]); *yād* (of the tabernacle frames: 26:19[x2]); *šēlā'* (of the tabernacle: 26:26, 35[x2]); and *ēber* (of the tablets of testimony: 32:15).

⁶ Symmachus uses the word in one other place, to translate *śad* (of a person: Isa. 66:12). This word is used in the Septuagint on Exodus 25–40 once, to render *šēlā'* (of the bronze altar: 27:7). It is also the word the Septuagint uses to translate *šēlā'* in Gen. 2:21–2; see Note 3.

medieval Hebrew lexicographers Jonah Ibn Janah and Solomon Ibn Parhon also interpret the word here as 'sides', presumably having reached the same conclusion independently.⁷

Others translate the *pē'āmōt* of the ark as 'corners'. These include: the author of a minuscule-script correction in Codex F of the Septuagint (on Exod. 25:12) with γωνιάσματα; *Targum Onqelos* with *zwyth*, followed by Rashi, David Kimhi,⁸ Meir of Rothenburg⁹ and Gersonides; *Targum Neofiti* with *zwytyt' / zwytyt'* (25:12) and *zwytyth / zwyty* (37:3); the Peshitta with *zwyth*; the Vulgate with *angulos*, followed by Wycliffe and all the Early Modern English Bible translations; and Saadiah Gaon with *gh'th*.¹⁰

Nahmanides (on Exod. 25:12) raises a possibility, within a line of thinking that he rejects, that *pē'āmōt* here refers specifically to the lower corners of the ark. Similar views are advocated by Benno Jacob (in his studies on the Pentateuch) and Martin Noth.¹¹ However, Nahmanides' preferred explanation, adopted by Bahya b. Asher, Obadiah Sforno and, to an extent, Samson Hirsch and Benno Jacob (in his commentary on Exodus),¹² is that the word means 'footsteps' and in this case refers to the footsteps of the priests bearing the ark.

⁷ Ibn Janah in W. Bacher (ed.), *Sepher Haschoraschim* (Berlin 1896), 406: 'sides and corners' (cf. below); Ibn Parhon in S.G. Stern and S.L. Rapoport (eds), *Mahberet Ha'Arukh* (Pressburg 1844), 54c: 'sides'.

⁸ H.R. Biesenthal and F. Lebrecht (eds), *Rabbi Davidis Kimchi: Radicum Liber* (Berlin 1847), 592.

⁹ Tosafot on b. Yoma 72a, s.v. *ktyb*. The Tosafot on Tractate Yoma were edited by Meir of Rothenburg; see E.E. Urbach, *The Tosaphists: Their History, Writing and Methods*⁴ (Jerusalem 1980, Hebrew), II, 610–11.

¹⁰ For creative attempts to explain why *pē'āmōt* should mean 'corners', see Gersonides (on Exod. 25:12); P. Horowitz, *Panim Yafos on the Torah: Exodus* (Bnei Brak 1984/5, Hebrew), 227–8; M.L. Weissner (Malbim), *HaTorah VehoMitzvah* (Jerusalem 1956, Hebrew), I, 400–2; J.I. Durham, *Exodus* (WBC, Waco 1987), 356–7.

¹¹ B. Jacob, *Der Pentateuch: Exegetisch-Kritische Forschungen* (Leipzig 1905), 165; M. Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary* (OTL, trans. J.S. Bowden, Philadelphia 1962), 204.

¹² C.D. Chavel (ed.), *Rabbenu Bahya: Exegesis on the Torah* (Jerusalem 1967, Hebrew), II, 274; S.R. Hirsch, in I. Levy (ed. and trans.), *The Pentateuch: Translated and Explained by Samson Raphael Hirsch*² (London 1960), 436; B. Jacob, *The Second Book of the Bible: Exodus* (trans. W. Jacob, Hoboken 1992), 774.

Laver Stands

A third and final biblical occurrence of the word *pě'āmōt* is in the account of the establishment of Solomon's temple in Jerusalem (1 Kgs 5:15–9:9), which includes a specific description of ten bronze laver stands placed in the temple's courtyard (7:27–39a). The Masoretic Text of 1 Kgs 7:30 reads: *wě'arbā'āh ôpannēy nēḥōšet lammēkônāh hā'aḥat wēsarnēy nēḥōšet wě'arbā'āh pa'āmōtāyw kētēpōt lāhem mittahat lakkiyyōr hakētēpōt yěšūqōt mē'ēber 'iš lōyōt*. This very difficult and likely corrupt verse may be translated provisionally, after the Masoretic cantillation signs, as follows: 'Four bronze wheels on each laver stand, with bronze axles; and on its four *pě'āmōt* — shoulders; the shoulders — cast under the laver; wreaths at the side of each one.' The entire description of the laver stands, including their *pě'āmōt*, is absent from the parallel account of the establishment of the temple in Chronicles (1 Chron. 1:18–7:22).

This occurrence of the *pě'āmōt* in 1 Kgs 7:30 has received somewhat less attention than those in the tabernacle account, perhaps because it is overshadowed by the awkwardness of the text. So difficult is MT here that its two most pertinent words alone, *wě'arbā'āh pa'āmōtāyw*, contain two vexing grammatical problems. First, what is the 'it' referred to in the possessive suffix *-āyw* that possesses the *pě'āmōt*? The obvious choice would be *[h]ammēkônāh hā'aḥat*, 'each laver stand', but *[h]ammēkônāh hā'aḥat* is feminine, whereas the suffix *-āyw* is masculine. Second, why is the number of the *pě'āmōt* in the masculine — *'arbā'āh* — when the form of *pě'āmōt* itself is the feminine plural? Some have in fact suggested emending the text to *wě'arba' pa'āmōtēhā*,¹³ or at least the second word to *pa'āmōtēhā*.¹⁴ A similar proposed emendation is *wě'arba' happě'āmōt hāyū*.¹⁵ More drastic suggestions are to view the word *pa'āmōtāyw* as a scribal error, either for *pě'ōtāyw*¹⁶ or for *pinnōtāyw* (to match the word used in the similar

¹³ B. Stade, 'Die Kesselwagen des salomonischen Tempels I Kö. 7, 27–39', *ZAW* 21 (1901) 145–90 at 172; *BHK*; *BHS*; J. Gray, *I and II Kings: A Commentary* (OTL, London 1964), 192.

¹⁴ H. Weippert, 'Die Kesselwagen Salomos', in idem, *Unter Olivenbäumen: Studien zur Archäologie Syrien-Palästinas, Kulturgeschichte und Exegese des Alten Testaments* (Münster 2006), 71–114 at 75 n. 12.

¹⁵ F. Böttcher, cited by M.J. Mulder, *I Kings* (HCOT, trans. J. Vriend, Leuven 1998), 337.

¹⁶ B. Stade and A. Klostermann, cited in Stade, 'Kesselwagen', 171.

v. 34),¹⁷ or to dismiss *wē'arbā'āh pa'āmōtāyw* altogether as a careless gloss.¹⁸

If the word *pa'āmōtāyw* is not deleted or replaced, however, then the passage in 1 Kings is akin to the verses in Exodus in that it does not state specially that the laver stands had *pē'āmōt*; it rather assumes the existence of the *pē'āmōt* as obvious, and only mentions them in the course of divulging that they had 'shoulders' (*kētēpōt*).

Survey of Interpretation

The Septuagint to 1 Kgs 7:30 (LXX 7:17) translates *pē'āmōt* as μέρη, on which see above.¹⁹ The issue of the Septuagint's understanding of the word here is somewhat complicated by the fact that its equivalent for the entire phrase *wē'arbā'āh pa'āmōtāyw kētēpōt lāhem* is καὶ τέσσαρα μέρη αὐτῶν, ὠμῖαι ..., 'and their four sides, shoulder pieces ...'; this reflects a variant consonantal reading of the Hebrew text, presumably **w'rb' hp'mt lhm, ktpt* or even **w'rb' p'mtyhm, ktpt*. But whatever the case, the translator's use of the genitive αὐτῶν shows that he understood the text such that the existence of the μέρη was self-evident. The Vulgate departs more radically from its translation of the word in Exodus as 'corners' and renders it here as *partes*, meaning 'parts' or 'sides', similarly to the Greek translations in both books. It is followed, naturally, by the translations of Wycliffe ('partis') and Douay-Rheims ('sides').

The Aramaic translations, like those cited on Exodus, all render the word here as 'corners'. *Targum Jonathan*, followed by Rashi, Joseph Kara and Gersonides, has *zwytyh*. The Peshitta similarly has *zwyt'*, but its equivalent to the entire phrase is *w'rb' zwyt' mdbqn lhyn wktpt' 'yt lhyn ...* presumably reflecting another variant reading, such as **w'rb' hp'mt dbqt lhm, wktpt lhm*. The MT-based Early Modern English translations of the Bible have 'corners' here as well. Simon DeVries and Ernst Würthwein similarly understand the word as meaning 'cornerposts'.²⁰

¹⁷ A. Kamphausen and R. Kittel, cited in Stade, *ibid.*; *BDB*, 821–2.

¹⁸ M. Noth, *Könige* (BKAT, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1968), 142, 144.

¹⁹ The word is used in the Septuagint on Samuel-Kings to render *qāšeh* (of Samuel's town: 1 Sam. 9:27; of the cherubim's wings: 1 Kgs 6:24[x2]; of the Aramaian camp: 2 Kgs 7:5, 8); *šad* (of the ark: 1 Sam. 6:8; of a hill: 1 Sam. 23:26, 2 Sam. 13:34); and *'ēber* (figuratively, of the people: 1 Kgs 12:31, 13:33; of Solomon: 1 Kgs 5:4).

²⁰ S.J. DeVries, *1 Kings* (WBC, Waco 1985), 105; E. Würthwein, *Das erste Buch der Könige: Kapitel 1–16* (Göttingen 1985), 79 ('Eckpfosten').

pē'āmōt as 'Feet'

All of the opinions cited above notwithstanding, the most plausible understanding of *pē'āmōt* in these three instances is 'feet', meaning short projections at the bottom of the object that bear its weight. A first indication of this is that the feminine noun *pa'am*, despite usually taking the *-īm* plural or (where appropriate) the *-ayim* dual, takes the *-ōt* plural here; this is normal when a word denoting a body part is used figuratively as a part of an object.²¹

Indeed, there can be no doubt that 'foot' is a basic meaning of *pa'am*: In Isa. 26:6, *pa'am* is formally parallel to *regel*, which ordinarily means 'leg' or 'foot'. In this context it is noteworthy that the two words are equivalent (both carrying the meaning 'time' in the numerical sense) in phrases with clearly identical meanings: in festival legislation we find that pilgrimages must take place 'three *pē'āmīm* a year' (Exod. 23:17, 34:23, 24; Deut. 16:16; cf. 1 Kgs 9:25, 2 Chron. 8:13) or 'three *rēgālīm* ... a year' (Exod. 23:14). And in the Balaam story, characters recall thrice-repeated actions as occurring 'three *pē'āmīm* now' (Num. 24:10; cf. Judg. 16:15) or 'three *rēgālīm* now' (Num. 22:28, 32, 33).

In Isa. 26:6 one could perhaps understand *pa'am* in the sense of 'step' or 'tread' and the like without running afoul of the parallelism with *regel*, but the concrete meaning of 'foot' is seen unambiguously in the following instances: 2 Kgs 19:24b = Isa. 37:25b: 'and with the soles of my *pē'amay[im]* I dried up all the rivers of Egypt'; feet have soles, steps do not. Ps. 58:11b: 'he will bathe his *pē'amay[im]* in the blood of the wicked'; feet can be bathed, steps cannot.²² The

²¹ U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (trans. I. Abrahams, Jerusalem 1967), 329; D. Michel, *Grundlegung einer hebräischen Syntax* (Neukirchen-Vluyn 1977), 56, 70. It was suggested in the sixteenth century by Elijah b. Abraham Mizrahi (on Exod. 25:12), and later so presented in the Even-Shoshan biblical concordance, that the noun here is actually **pa'āmāh*; see M. Phillip (ed.), *Humash HaRe'em: Shemot* (Petah Tikva 1992/3, Hebrew), 407; A. Even-Shoshan, *A New Concordance of the Bible* (Jerusalem 1988, Hebrew), 955. But this would be an otherwise unattested word, so there are no grounds to hypothesize its existence here. See also M. Sæbø, 'p'm', in *TDOT*, XII, 44–9 at 45–6.

²² Other than the three instances constituting the topic of this study, the word *pa'am* is attested 115 times in the Hebrew Bible; 'foot' is the probable meaning in 13 of them (Judg. 5:28; 2 Kgs 19:24 = Isa. 37:25; Isa. 26:6; Pss 17:5, 57:7, 58:11, 74:3, 85:14, 119:133, 140:5; Prov. 29:5; Song 7:2). In almost all the others, the word carries the aforementioned meaning of 'time' in the numerical sense. 'Foot' is in fact the only meaning of the word as a tangible thing, with the possible exception of Isa. 41:7, where it may mean 'anvil'. In some instances, the word might have a

meaning 'foot' is carried by the word *p'm* in Phoenician and Punic writings as well.²³ Ugaritic features the word *p'n* with this meaning,²⁴ and Akkadian has *pēmu*, 'thigh'.²⁵

There have always been some who correctly recognized this as the meaning of *pa'am* in the verses under discussion. In Exodus, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* renders the word as *'yztwury* (25:12) and *'stwury* (37:3); both are forms of *ystw*('), 'foot or leg of a piece of furniture'.²⁶ Regarding the *pē'āmōt* of the ark as well, Abraham Ibn Ezra (long commentary on Exod. 25:12; *Yesod Mora* 9.3²⁷) rejects the 'corners' translation of *Targum Onqelos* and Rashi, arguing that he is unable to find such a meaning for the word anywhere in the Hebrew Bible, and grudgingly posits that the ark had feet. He is followed by Chaim Paltiel,²⁸ Hezekiah b. Manoah and Isaac Abravanel.²⁹ In modern scholarship this has become the prevailing view, advocated by many commentators on Exodus, including Carl Keil and Franz Delitzsch, August Dillmann, Samuel Driver, Umberto Cassuto, Cornelis Houtman and William Propp;³⁰ by commentators on Kings, including Keil, J. Lumby, James Montgomery and Henry Gehman, John Gray,

non-tangible intermediate meaning between 'foot' and 'time': in Judg. 5:28 it may mean 'footfall/hoof-beat'; in 1 Sam. 6:28 and the already cited Isa. 41:7 it may mean 'blow/strike' (in the nominal sense). Compare also the Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic verb *p'm* (Gen. 41:8; Judg. 13:25; Ps. 77:5; Dan. 2:1, 3), which, based on its contexts, means something like 'buffet/stir'. The development history of the various meanings is not relevant here.

²³ *DNWSI*, II, 928–9.

²⁴ *DULAT*, II, 660.

²⁵ *CAD*, XII, 321–3. For discussions of the cognates see also *BDB*, 821–2; *HALOT*, III, 952; Sæbø, 'p'm', 44.

²⁶ *CAL*, "ystwr, 'ystwr" (n.p., online: <http://cal1.cn.huc.edu/>, cited 7 January 2013); *DJBA*, 123.

²⁷ J. Cohen and U. Simon (eds), *Yesod Mora Ve-Sod Torah: The Foundation of Piety and the Secret of the Torah* (Ramat-Gan 2002, Hebrew), 162–3.

²⁸ I.S. Lange (ed.), *Chaim Paltiel's Commentaries on the Torah* (Jerusalem 1980/1, Hebrew), 309.

²⁹ Y. Shaviv (ed.), *The Commentary of Abravanel on the Torah: Exodus* (Jerusalem 2007/8, Hebrew), 438.

³⁰ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch* (Edinburgh 1864), II, 167; A. Dillmann, *Die Bücher Exodus und Leviticus* (KEHAT³, Leipzig 1897), 311; S.R. Driver, *The Book of Exodus* (CBSC, Cambridge 1911), 269; Cassuto, *Exodus*, 329; C. Houtman *Exodus III* (HCOT, Kampen 2000), 377; W.H.C. Propp *Exodus 19–40* (AB, New York 2006), 381.

and Martin Mulder;³¹ and in major dictionaries of Biblical Hebrew, including *BDB*, *HALOT*, *DCH*, and *TDOT*.³²

Problem with *pē'āmōt* as 'Feet'

Why, then, have so many translators and commentators, particularly early ones, been reluctant to interpret the word in this sense?³³ The reason seems to be the casual manner in which the text brings it up; for an ark to have feet is not quite so self-evident. Indeed, if the text wanted to convey that the ark was to have feet, one would expect an explicit command to make them and an explicit account of the command being carried out — just as we find in the cases of the ark's rings, poles, *kappōret* and *zēr*.³⁴ The same problem exists in the case of the laver stands in Kings. One would expect the description of

³¹ K.F. Keil, *Commentary on the Books of Kings* (trans. J. Murphy, Edinburgh 1857), 130–2; idem, *Commentary on the Old Testament: The Books of the Kings* (trans. J. Martin; Edinburgh 1883), 107; J.R. Lumby, *The First Book of the Kings* (CBSC, Cambridge 1890), 76; J.A. Montgomery and H.S. Gehman, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings* (ICC, Edinburgh 1951), 176; Gray, *Kings*, 195; Mulder, *1 Kings*, 337. Mordechai Cogan renders the word here as 'legs', while Marvin Sweeney deliberates between 'steps, feet' and 'brackets': M. Cogan, *1 Kings* (AB, New York 2001), 260; M.A. Sweeney, *1 & 2 Kings: A Commentary* (OTL, Louisville 2007), 119, 123.

³² *BDB*, 822; *HALOT*, 952; *DCH*, VI, 731; Sæbø, *TDOT*, 47.

³³ The Talmudic Sages presumably did not understand *pē'āmōt* as feet either. An anonymous maxim brought up in the Talmud in the context of the ark is that 'all burdens carried by means of poles were one-third above and two-thirds below' (b. Shab 92a). As pointed out by the thirteenth/fourteenth-century Talmudist Asher b. Jehiel (cited by his son Jacob b. Asher, *The Complete Commentary of the Tur on the Torah* [Jerusalem 1997/8, Hebrew], 470), anyone accepting this maxim would imagine the rings and poles of the ark attached about two-thirds up its vertical faces, nowhere near its feet, if it had any. However, contrary to Asher's claim, Rashi's view is not consistent with this Talmudic maxim, as Rashi states (on Exod. 25:12) that the ark's rings were placed on its 'upper corners, adjacent to the lid', meaning at or near its very top, not two-thirds up. Another attempt to ground Rashi's view in the Talmud is made by the sixteenth century rabbi Judah Loew of Prague (Y.D. Hartman [ed.], *The Complete Gur Aryeh Chumash* [Jerusalem 1991/2], IV, 273–5): he adduces the Talmudic statement that the ark's poles juttred into the curtain at the entrance to the Holy of Holies, appearing 'like a woman's two breasts' (b. Yoma 54a), and argues that this image would not work if the poles were laid on the ground. However, the image does not preclude an understanding of *pē'āmōt* as feet, because the height of the feet themselves could still afford the poles some distance from the ground.

³⁴ Benno Jacob (*Exodus*, 774) articulates this argument explicitly in rejecting the 'feet' interpretation.

their form to include explicit mention of the feet, just like the wheels, frames, axles and shoulders, as well as the decorations of lions, oxen, cherubim, wreaths and palm trees.

The ancient translators were thus forced to translate the *pē'āmōt* as elements that the ark or the laver stands would self-evidently possess four of, which can only be sides or corners. In choosing the precise word, they may have glanced at similar verses. In Kings, *Targum Jonathan* and the Peshitta apparently identified the laver stands' *pē'āmōt* with the *pinnōt* of v. 34, which both of them, as well as the Septuagint and Vulgate, quite reasonably understood as 'corners'. The identification between v. 30 and v. 34 is made explicitly by Rashi and Joseph Kara (on v. 34).

In Exodus, the similar verses are those that describe the placement of rings on other tabernacle objects: the table, whose rings are at the four *pē'ōt* of its four legs (Exod. 25:26 = 37:13); the bronze altar, whose rings are at the four *qēšāwōt* of its grating (27:4 = 38:5); and the golden altar, whose (two) rings are at its two *šēlā'ōt* or *šidd[īm]* (30:4 = 37:27). The Septuagint's name for the ring locations of the ark, κλίτη, is the word it uses for the *šēlā'ōt* of the golden altar (30:4)³⁵ and one of the words it uses for the *qēšāwōt* of the bronze altar (27:4).³⁶ The Vulgate's *angulos* is employed for the *pē'ōt* of the table (25:26 = 37:13) and once for the *qēšāwōt* of the bronze altar (27:4).³⁷ And the various forms of 'corner' used by *Onqelos*, *Neofiti* and the Peshitta are used by them consistently for the *pē'ōt* of the table (25:26 = 37:13) and for the *šēlā'ōt* of the golden altar, and inconsistently for the *qēšāwōt* of the bronze altar (all in 38:5; only *Neofiti* in 27:4).³⁸

Solution

With regard to the tabernacle ark, August Dillmann addressed the problem by arguing that it is, in fact, self-evident that the ark would have feet, because objects like it were usually provided with them. 'Die Füße werden bloss erwähnt, nicht besonders befohlen, weil es wohl gewöhnlich war, einen solchen אָרֹן mit (wohl nur kurzen)

³⁵ The parallel verse (37:27) is entirely missing in the Septuagint.



³⁶ In 38:5, the Septuagint renders *qēšāwōt* as μερῶν; see Note 5.

³⁷ In 38:5, the Vulgate renders *qēšāwōt* as *summitates*, 'ends'.

³⁸ In 27:4, *Onqelos* and the Peshitta render *qēšāwōt* as *šrwhy*, 'sides'.

Füssen zu versehen'.³⁹ However, as he did not present any evidence for this assertion, his theory, while plausible, remains in the realm of speculation. Can evidence be found to support Dillmann's suggestion?

It has recently been argued that the ark is properly understood as a portable wooden chest made in typical Egyptian style. It has been maintained that extant chests from the ancient Near East, particularly Egypt, reveal parallels to almost every detail of the ark as described in priestly and other biblical texts.⁴⁰ If this is correct, we should examine Egyptian chests to see whether they typically had feet.

A survey of the ancient Egyptian items of furniture described by Geoffrey Killen shows that almost all of the boxes and chests in his study do indeed have four feet.⁴¹ Moreover, the Egyptian classifiers for 'box, chest',  (Gardiner Q5), and for 'coffin',  (Gardiner Q6), both depict objects with feet, demonstrating that Egyptian writers visualized chests in this way.

It will be recalled that the *pě'amōt* of the ark are mentioned in order to specify that its rings are placed by them. The purpose of the rings is to hold the ark's carrying poles (Exod. 25:14 = 37:5). Turning to the Egyptian furniture discovered thus far, there is one extant Egyptian chest that is equipped with rings holding carrying poles: a gable-lidded chest found in the tomb of the fourteenth-century Pharaoh Tutankhamun (Figure 1).⁴² A British Museum catalogue entry on the chest in question displays a photograph of its poles (Figures 2a, 2b) and includes a description of the object.⁴³ The photograph and description express several other details in which the rings and poles of the Tutankhamun chest are similar to those of the ark as described in Exodus: the rings are made of metal (cf. 25:12 = 37:3); the poles are made of wood (cf. 25:13 = 37:4) and are aligned along the chest's long sides (cf. *šal'ōt* in 25:14 = 37:5); and they are fashioned and positioned in a way that would make it difficult to slide them out of the rings and remove them entirely from the chest (cf. 25:15). It is

³⁹ Dillmann, *Exodus*, 311. Followed by Houtman, *Exodus*, 377; Propp, *Exodus*, 381.

⁴⁰ R. Eichler, 'The Biblical Ark in Context' (forthcoming).

⁴¹ G. Killen, *Ancient Egyptian Furniture II: Boxes, Chests and Footstools* (Warminster 1994), *passim*.

⁴² Object no. 32 in Howard Carter's system. See J. Malek (dir.), *Tutankhamun: Anatomy of an Excavation* (n.p., online: <http://www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/gri/carter/032.html>, cited 13 May 2012).

⁴³ Trustees of the British Museum (pub.), *Treasures of Tutankhamun* (no credited author or editor, London 1972), Exhibit 14 (n.p.).

therefore particularly noteworthy that this chest has four feet, and that its rings are located alongside of them.

Earlier depictions of chests equipped with carrying poles exist from Old Kingdom Egypt. Some of these have sufficient detail to show the poles slid through rings like those of the Tutankhamun chest (Figure 3). In these cases too, the rings are located by the feet of the chests.⁴⁴

All of this evidence suggests that the author of the priestly tabernacle pericopes could in fact have taken the ark's feet for granted, just as he took its sides (*šālā'ōt*: Exod. 25:12, 14 = 37: 3, 5) for granted, only mentioning them incidentally because their very existence goes without saying. The same is the case with the *raglay[im]* of the table in the tabernacle (25:26 = 37:13), which are also mentioned only in the course of describing the position of the table's rings: it goes without saying that a table would have legs.⁴⁵

There is also evidence that the feet on the bronze laver stands in the temple mentioned in 1 Kings would have been 'virtually self-evident', as Martin Mulder phrased it.⁴⁶ Three wheeled bronze stands from Cyprus that are considered the closest parallels to the Solomonic laver stands all have four lower, supporting projections. On two of these stands, which are unprovenanced, the projections are fairly short (Figures 4a, 4b). The projections on another one from Larnaka are long enough to be more aptly called 'legs' (Figure 5), but the difference is not critical. Four short, supporting projections are also seen on wheelless bronze stands from Megiddo (Figure 6), from Enkomi (Figure 7), and from an unknown origin (Figure 8).⁴⁷

mṭbh

A possible fourth occurrence of *pa'am* in Northwest Semitic as denoting part of an artificial object, or perhaps an edifice, occurs in a Punic inscription housed in the British Museum (CIS I.175 = KAI 80). The inscription includes the following phrase: *ḥdš wp'l 'yt hmṭbh z dl p'mm 'srt ḥšm š 'l hmqdšm ...* These words would appear to refer to

⁴⁴ Killen, *Boxes*, 20, fig. 40; H.G. Fischer, 'Möbel', *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, IV, 180–9 at 182.

⁴⁵ The word *regel* does not denote a part of an object anywhere else in the Hebrew Bible. In at least some cases (most clearly Deut. 28:57, 1 Sam. 17:6, Isa. 7:20, Ezek. 1:7) *raglayim* are specifically 'legs' as opposed to feet.

⁴⁶ Mulder, *1 Kings*, 337.

⁴⁷ These objects are discussed at length in Weippert, 'Kesselwagen'.

a *mṭbh* that has *p'mm*. Whether *mṭbh* means 'slaughtering table', 'altar' or 'slaughterhouse',⁴⁸ it is not given a detailed description; thus the problem that arose with regard to understanding *pē'āmōt* as 'feet' of the aforementioned objects would not arise with regard to the *p'mm* of the *mṭbh* in the Punic text, even if the reference to them were merely incidental. And indeed, many scholars have understood these *p'mm* as 'feet/legs'. In this view, the phrase *dl p'mm* may mean 'in disrepair at its feet/legs',⁴⁹ 'not including its feet/legs',⁵⁰ or simply 'with feet/legs'.⁵¹ Some scholars have disagreed, suggesting various other translations.⁵² The present study, while it can contribute but little to the understanding of this inscription, provides some confirmation for 'feet' as a plausible translation for *p'mm*.

This study has attempted to demonstrate how the discontinuation in use of objects that were part of the real-life setting of ancient Israel has led to a widespread error in the interpretation of biblical texts of a technical nature, and how this erroneous interpretation can confidently be rectified through the re-examination of objects discovered by archaeological research.

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⁴⁸ The word occurs in Isa. 14:21, but its meaning there is also unclear.

⁴⁹ M. Lidzbarski, *Kanaanäische Inschriften* (Giessen 1907), 53.

⁵⁰ N. Slouschz, *Collection of Phoenician Inscriptions* (Tel Aviv 1941/2, Hebrew), 162.

⁵¹ KAI, II, 98; DNWSI, II, 928–9; cf. DISO, 232.

⁵² An old suggestion is 'stairs'; see CIS, I, 1, 269–70 (no. 1.175); G.A. Cooke, *A Text-book of North-Semitic Inscriptions* (Oxford 1903), 130; Z.S. Harris, *A Grammar of the Phoenician Language* (Philadelphia 1936), 138. G. Hoffmann proposed 'twice' (*dl p'mm* = 'twice in disrepair'); cited in M. Lidzbarski, *Ephemeris für Semitische Epigraphik* (3 vols, Giessen 1900–2), I, 22, n. 1, and in idem, *Inschriften*, 53. Yet another possibility is 'yards' (*dl p'mm 'srt* = 'of ten yards'); see M.J. Mulder, 'Pa'am as a Measure of Length in 1 Kings 7.4 and KAI 80.1', in W. Claassen (ed.), *Text and Context: Old Testament and Semitic Studies for F. C. Fensham* (Sheffield 1988), 177–81 at 180.



Figure 1. Red chest from the tomb of Tutankhamun, equipped with carrying poles, shown with poles extended. Burton photograph 1557. From Malek, *Tutankhamun*. Reproduced by permission of the Griffith Institute, University of Oxford.

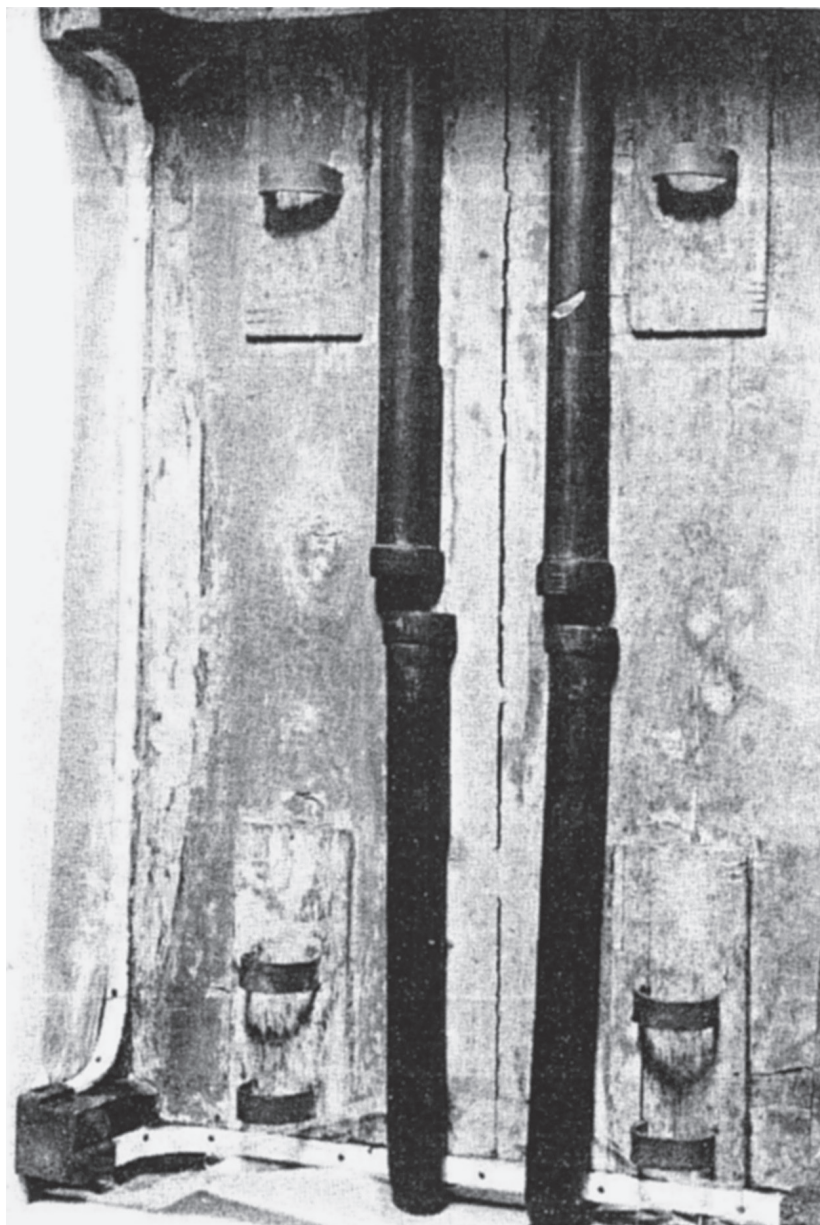
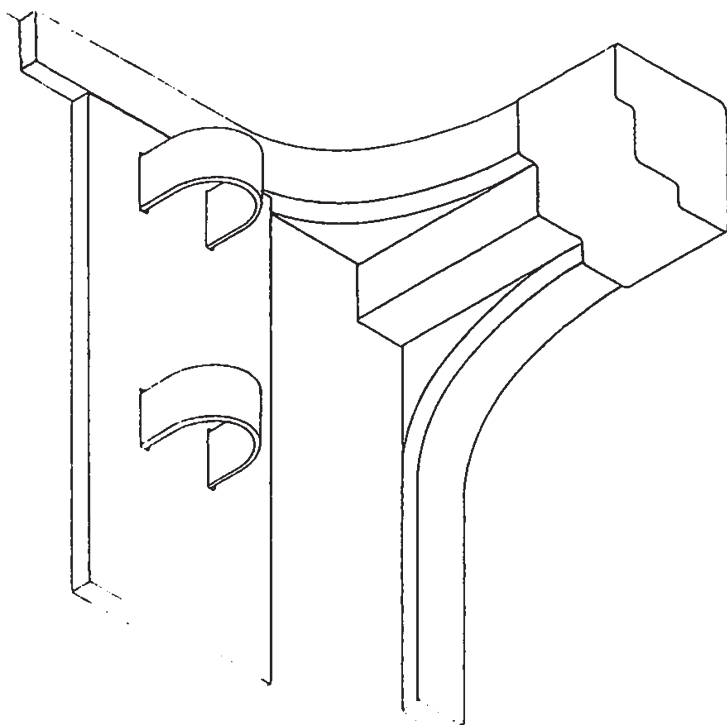


Figure 2a. Underside of same chest, showing rings and (removed) carrying poles. Image based on photograph in British Museum, *Treasures*, Exhibit 14, credited to the Cairo Museum.



2b. Sketch of one corner of chest's underside, from Killen *Boxes*, 52 fig. 61.
Reproduced by permission of Geoffrey Killen.

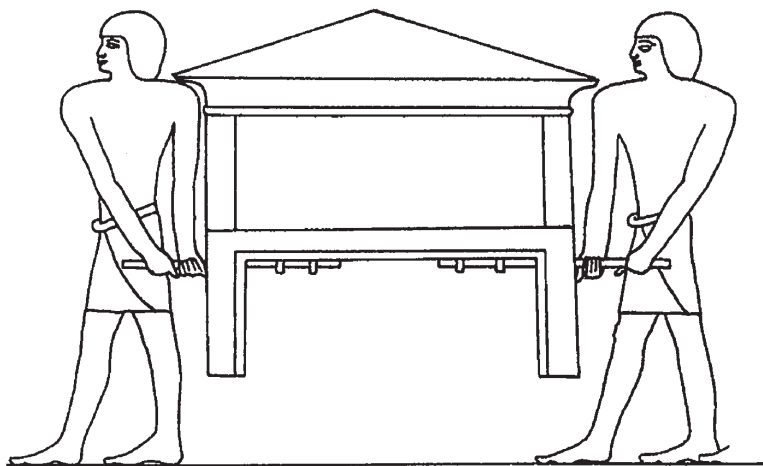


Figure 3. Sixth Dynasty depiction of a chest with carrying poles.
From Killen, *Boxes*, 21 fig. 40. Reproduced by permission of Geoffrey Killen.

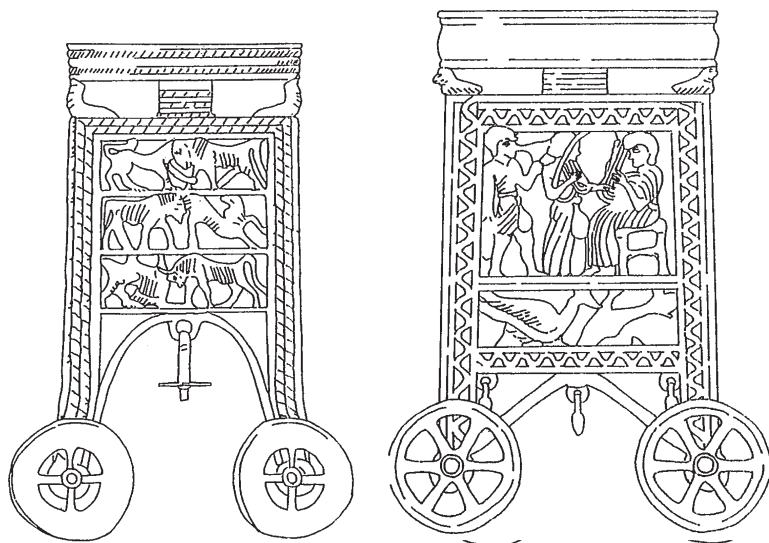


Figure 4a–b. Cypriot wheeled, bronze stands; unknown provenance,
possibly the region of Enkomi. From Weippert, 'Kesselwagen', 91 Abb. 10–11.
Reproduced by permission of Ugarit-Verlag.



Figure 5. Wheeled bronze stand from Larnaka. From idem, 84 Abb.
Reproduced by permission of Ugarit-Verlag.

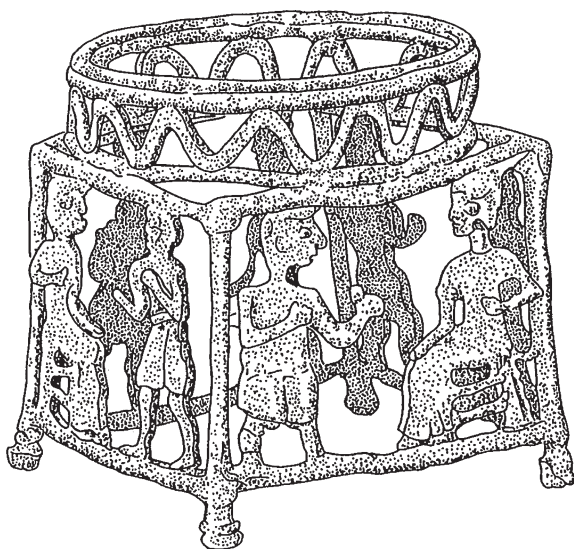


Figure 6. Bronze stand from Megiddo. From ibid., 86 Abb. 8.
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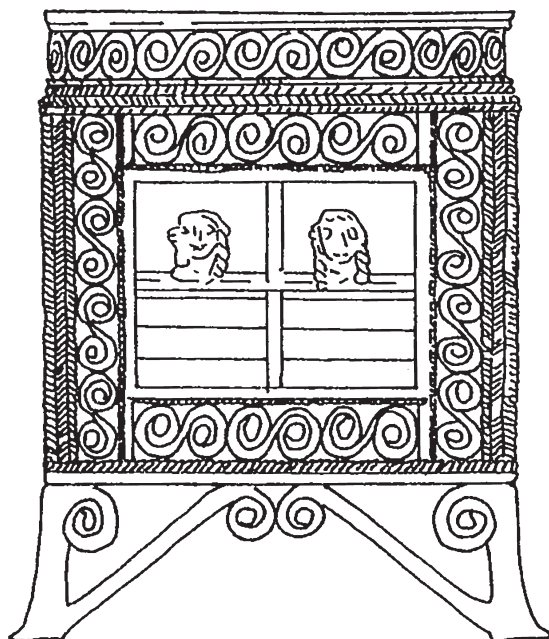


Figure 7. Bronze stand from Enkomi. From *ibid.*, 84 Abb. 6.
Reproduced by permission of Ugarit-Verlag.



Figure 8. Unprovenanced bronze stand. From *ibid.*, 84 Abb. 7.
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