

טוה

to spin, twist together

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Introduction

Grammatical type: verb

Occurrences: 2× HB (2/0/0); 0× Sir; 0× Qum; 0×Inscr. (Total: 2)

Torah: Exod 35:25, 26.

A.1 In MT Exod 35:25a, the plural form טָווּ, ‘they spun’, has a singular form as its subject (*constructio ad sententiam*): וְכָל-אִשָּׁה חַכְמַת-לֵב בְּיָדֶיהָ טָווּ, ‘and every woman wise of heart (sg.) – with her (sg.) hands they spun (pl.)’. In SP, the consonantal text of Exod 35:25a differs from MT: וְכָל אִשָּׁה חַכְמַת לֵב בִּידָהּ טוה (Tal & Florentin 2010: 303). With reference to the sg. forms יבוא in SP 35:10 and הביא in SP 35:22, William Propp (2006: 642, 662) suggested that the adaptation of the verbal form טוו to טוה was due to grammatical adjustment resulting in a more appropriate verbal form (3.f.sg.). However, since the expected feminine form would then be טוה, ‘she spun’ (cf. Joüon-Muraoka, *GBH*, § 79), it is better to interpret טוה in SP as a noun (cf. *DCH* III, 360 s.v. טוה), or the ה- as a possessive suffix (3.f.sg.) and –טו as representing a shorter noun (Tal & Florentin 2010: 687-88): ‘and every woman wise of heart – in her hand was (*her?*) spun yarn’. This interpretation is confirmed by the rendering in T^{SMR} by עולה (var.: עול; *STP* I, 372-73): באדה עולה, ‘in her hand was (*her?*) spun yarn’. Similarly, the Sam. tradition interpreted מטוה in Exod 35:25b

as a combination of the preposition מן and the form טוה: ‘and they brought – *from* (her?) spun yarn – bluish purple and reddish purple ...’; see T^{SMR} מן עזלה, ‘from (her?) spun yarn’. In Exod 35:26, however, T^{SMR} interprets טוו (SP and MT) as a verbal form and renders it as עזלו, ‘they spun’: עזלו ית עזיה ... וכל נשיה ... ‘and all the women ... spun the goat hair’. See further Tal, *DSA*, 630.

1. Root and Comparative Material

A.1 ROOT: The verb טוה has cognates in several Semitic languages, certainly in Akk. (A.3), PBHeb. (A.5) and JAram. (A.6), but probably also in Arab. and Eth. (A.7, A.8) and possibly in BAram. and Syr. (A.4).

A.2 DERIVATIVES: The noun מטוה, ‘yarn’, ‘that which has been spun’, in Exod 35:25 is a deriv. of the verb טוה (cf. BL, 491 mζ, nζ). For the deviating Sam. interpretation of the form מטוה, see [Introduction A.1](#).

A.3 AKKADIAN: The Akk. cognate *ṭamû* (sometimes *ṭawû* or *ṭemû*; also written NU.NU) means ‘to spin, twist, braid, entwine’. See *CAD* Ṭ, 45-46 (similarly *AHW* III, 1382), with quotations from several texts referring to spinning with a ^{GIS}BAL = *pilakku*, ‘spindle’ (→ פּלָךְ). The quoted phrases demonstrate that the verb *ṭamû* was not only used for spinning threads from raw fibres, but also for twisting together threads that had already been spun (*CAD* Ṭ, 46; cf. Wisti Lassen 2010: 277): *qê eṣpi taṭammîma*, ‘you spin a double-stranded thread’; *šipâte peṣâte šipâte šal[mâte] qâ eṣpa ina pilakki iṭme qâ šîra qâ rabâ qâ bitru[ma]*, ‘from white wool and black wool she spun a double-stranded thread with a spindle, a mighty thread, a great thread, a multicolored thread’.

A.4 BIBLICAL ARAMAIC AND SYRIAC: It has been suggested that the BAram. word טוה in Dan 6:19 is a cognate of BHeb. טוה (cf. GB, 274 s.v. טוה; KBL, 350 s.v. טוה, 1078-79 s.v. טוה and טוה; *HALOT*, 372 s.v. טוה; Ges¹⁸, 421 s.v. טוה). With reference to Syr. ܬܘܝ (*ṭwy*), ‘to be hungry’ (cf. Sokoloff, *SLB*, 516), BAram. טוה is interpreted as an adverb meaning ‘fasting’: וּבַת טוה, ‘he (the king) spent the night fasting’. However, it has become quite dubious whether BHeb. טוה and BAram. טוה are really cognates (see *HALOT*, 1883 s.v. *טוה).

A.5 POSTBIBLICAL HEBREW: The verb טוה does not occur in Ben Sira and the non-biblical Dead Sea Scrolls. It does occur in rabbinic Heb., where it denotes the processing of wool (עָמַר; t. Kelim Bava Batra 1:6, b. Shabbat 74b) or flax (פִּשְׁתָּן; m. Nega'im 2:4, b. Zevaḥim 79a) with a spindle (→ פּלָךְ; b. Ketubbot 72b). t. Kelim Bava Batra 1:6 includes the expression טווי שְׁעַל גְּבֵי הַפְּלָךְ, ‘spun (wool) which is on the spindle’. See further [Textual Evidence A.3](#).

A.6 JEWISH ARAMAIC: The verb טוה/טוי, ‘to spin (yarn)’, occurs occasionally in JAram. (Jastrow, *DTT*, 523; Sokoloff, *DJBA*, 496; *DJPA*, 221), where it is appar-

ently a loanword from Hebrew. The more usual JAram. verb with the meaning ‘to spin’ is עזל (Jastrow, *DTT*, 1061; Sokoloff, *DJBA*, 849-50; *DJPA*, 401; cf. Syr. ܙܠ; see [Ancient Versions](#)).

A.7 ARABIC: Many BHeb. dictionaries suggest that Arab. *ṭawā*, ‘to fold, wind’, is a cognate of BHeb. טוה (Gesenius, *TPC* I, 546-47; BDB, 376; GB, 274; KBL, 530; *HALOT*, 372; Ges¹⁸, 421). For the Arab. verb, see Lane, 1898-1900 (1900: *miṭwān*, ‘a thing upon which spun thread is wound’).

A.8 ETHIOPIC: In Eth., the verb *ṭawayya* means ‘to be twisted’ (*CDG*, 600). Many BHeb. dictionaries regard it as a cognate of Heb. טוה (BDB, 376; GB, 274; KBL, 530; *HALOT*, 372; Ges¹⁸, 421).

2. Formal Characteristics

A.1 טוה is a ל"ה verb (cf. Joüon-Muraoka, *GBH*, §79). The ה- is a *mater lectionis*, but the -ו- is retained in the pronunciation; cf. the pass. part. טווי, ‘spun’, in [Post-biblical Hebrew](#). The noun מטוה (Exod 35:25) is a *maqṭal/maqṭil* form (BL, 491 mζ, nζ).

3. Syntagmatics

A.1 In Exod 35:25, טוּו, ‘they spun’ (pl.), has כָּל־אִשָּׁה חַכְמַת־לֵב, ‘every woman wise of heart’ (sg.), as its grammatical subject (*constructio ad sententiam*). In Exod 35:26, טוּו, ‘they spun’, has כָּל־הַנְּשִׂיִם אֲשֶׁר נָשָׂא לִבָּן אֶתְנָה בְּחַכְמָה, ‘all the women whose heart stirred them up in wisdom’, as its grammatical subject.

A.2 In Exod 35:26, טוּו, ‘they spun’, has אֶת הָעִזִּים, here ‘goat hair’, as its direct object. The Sam. tradition interpreted טוּו in SP Exod 35:26 as a pi‘el form (vocalisation: *ṭuwwu*; see Ben-Ḥayyim 2000: 88, 161), also with אֶת הָעִזִּים as direct object.

A.3 In Exod 35:25 טוה is used with the preposition בְּ introducing the means or instrument: בְּיָדֶיהָ, ‘with her hands’.

A.4 For the different syntactical structure of SP Exod 35:25, see [Introduction A.1](#).

4. Ancient Versions

A.1 The verb טוה is rendered as follows in the ancient translations.

a. Septuagint (LXX)

ἐστρίψω, ‘to spin’:¹ Exod 35:25, 26.

b. Peshitta (S)

ܙܠ (‘zl), ‘to spin’:² Exod 35:25, 26.

c. Targumim

עזל, ‘to spin’:³ T^{O,PsJ,N} Exod 35:25, 26; T^{SMR} Exod 35:26. For T^{SMR} Exod 35:25, see [Introduction A.1](#).

d. Vulgate (v)

neo, ‘to spin’:⁴ Exod 35:25, where וְכָל-אִשָּׁה חַכְמַת-לֵב בְּיָדֶיהָ טָווּ וַיְבִיאוּ מִטָּוּה is translated freely as *sed et mulieres doctae dederunt quae neverant*, ‘but also the skilful women gave what they had spun’. No rendering in 35:26.

A.2 The ancient versions appear to be unanimous in translating טוה by a common word meaning ‘to spin’.

5. Lexical/Semantic Fields

A.1 In BHeb., the semantic field of spinning includes the verb טוה, ‘to spin’ (Exod 35:25-26), and its derivative מִטָּוּה, ‘spun yarn’ (Exod 35:25), as well as the noun → פְּלֶךְ, which denotes the spindle, the instrument with which the spinning was performed. The verb → שׂוּר, ‘to twist’ (see מְשׂוּר in Exod 26:1, etc.), denotes an activity that was probably also covered by the verb טוה and that seems to have been performed also with a פְּלֶךְ. If in Prov 31:19 the noun → כִּישׂוּר designates a distaff or another instrument used for spinning, it belongs to the same semantic field.

6. Exegesis

6.1 Textual Evidence

A.1 Not only the ancient versions but also the dictionaries of BHeb. agree that the verb טוה means ‘to spin’ (Gesenius, *TPC* I, 546; BDB, 376; GB, 274; KBL, 530; *DCH* III, 360; *HALOT*, 372; Ges¹⁸, 421). Exod 35:25-26 recounts that women spun different materials that had been collected previously (Exod 25:4; 35:6, 23):

- תְּכֵלֶת, ‘bluish purple’
- אַרְגָּמָן, ‘reddish purple’
- תּוֹלַעַת (ה)שָׁנִי, ‘scarlet’, ‘bright red’
- שֵׁשׁ, ‘fine linen’
- עֲזִים, ‘goat hair’

The three designations תְּכֵלֶת, אַרְגָּמָן and תּוֹלַעַת (ה)שָׁנִי apparently denote sheep wool that had been coloured with these costly dyes before it was spun. Linen usually remained undyed, since its cellulose fibres do not easily absorb dyes (Andersson Strand 2015: 55; Spinazzi-Lucchese 2018: 16-17, 20; but cf. Ezek 27:7). Whenever תְּכֵלֶת, אַרְגָּמָן and תּוֹלַעַת (ה)שָׁנִי occur together, they are mentioned in this order. They form a distinctive group, with שֵׁשׁ, ‘fine linen’, mentioned either before them (Exod 26:1; 36:8; 39:29), or after them (Exod 25:4; 26:31, 36; 27:16; 28:5, 6, 8, 15; 35:6, 23, 25, 35; 36:35, 37; 38:18, 23; 39:2, 3, 5, 8), or without references to שֵׁשׁ in the same context (Exod 28:33; 39:1, 24).

Exod 35:26 refers separately to the spinning of the coarse עֲזִים, ‘goat hair’ (also in Num 31:20; 1 Sam 19:13, 16), which was apparently left undyed and was used

to produce the protective curtains (יְרִיעֹת) of the tent (אֹהֶל) covering the sanctuary (26:7; 36:14).

Although Exod 35:25 says that the women spun with their hands (בְּיָדֵיהֶן), this certainly does not exclude that they made use of a → פְּלֵדָה, ‘spindle’, the common instrument with which spinning went much faster and easier and which was driven with the hand. In order to perform the spinning properly, the female spinners needed to be ‘wise of heart’ (חֲכַמְת־לֵב, 35:25; cf. בְּחֲכָמָה, 35:26). After the women had spun the yarn (מְטוּה), it was brought away, apparently by others (וַיָּבִיאוּ, 3.m.pl., 35:25; cf. Propp 2006: 662), to be processed further. Among the craftsmen who made use of the spun yarn were producers of multicoloured cloth (רִקְמָה, 26:36; 27:16; 35:35; 36:37; 38:18, 23; 39:29) and weavers (אָרְגָה, 28:32; 35:35; 39:22, 27). The spun תְּבִלָּת (אָרְגָמֹן, תְּבִלָּת (ה)שָׁנִי, and תּוֹלַעַת (ה)שָׁנִי were used together to produce luxury curtains enclosing the sanctuary (26:1; 36:8: יְרִיעֹת), the curtain separating the Holy of Holies from the rest of the tent (26:31; 36:35: פְּרָכֶת), and the curtains (מָסָךְ) shutting off the entrance to the tent (26:36; 36:37) and the entrance of the court (27:16; 38:18). The same kinds of spun yarn were processed together for the clothes of Aaron and other priests ministering in the sanctuary (28:5-6, 8, 15, 33; 39:1-3, 5, 8, 24, 29). Other objects were made only of spun תְּבִלָּת (26:4; 28:28, 31, 37; 36:11; 39:21, 22) or only of spun שֵׁשׁ, ‘fine linen’ (27:9, 18; 28:39; 38:9, 16; 39:27-28).

A.2 In the verses referring to the collection of linen before it was spun (Exod 25:4; 35:6, 23, 25), the noun שֵׁשׁ, ‘fine linen’, is never modified by a following מְשֻׁזָּר, ‘twisted’ (part. hoph. → שֹׁזֵר). Linen ready to be used for the production of fabrics is usually designated as שֵׁשׁ מְשֻׁזָּר, ‘twisted fine linen’ (→ שֹׁזֵר), and as שֵׁשׁ – without מְשֻׁזָּר – only in 28:5, 39; 39:3, 27-28. The texts do not clearly indicate whether the twisting of the linen was performed by the spinning women, as part of the work designated by טוה, or by the craftsmen who took care of the further processing of the materials (see שֵׁשׁ without מְשֻׁזָּר in 35:35 and 38:23). However, since the twisting of the linen threads was usually performed with a → פְּלֵדָה, ‘spindle’ and the → פְּלֵדָה was regarded as a women’s instrument, the twisting was probably also done by the women. See also the *Akk. verb tamû*, which denotes the spinning as well as the twisting of threads.

A.3 The interpretation of טוה as relating to forming yarn is confirmed by rabbinic texts, which mention the → פְּלֵדָה, ‘spindle’, as the instrument with which the spinning was performed (see *Postbiblical Hebrew*). t. Berakhot 6:2 describes a specific order in which the processing of the raw materials took place when it says with regard to Adam: ולא לבש חלוק אחד עד שגזז וליבן וניפץ/ס וצבע וטווה וארג ותפר ואחר כך לבש, ‘he did not wear a single shirt until he had cut/shorn and washed and beaten and dyed and spun and woven and sewed; and after that he wore it.’ Other texts refer to exactly the same sequence of actions before the fibres were spun (טוה): גזז, ‘to cut/shear’; לבן pi., ‘to wash’; נפץ/ס pi., ‘to beat’; צבע, ‘to dye’ (y. Berakhot 9, 13c; m. Shabbat 7:2;

cf. 13:4). These texts indicate that, after the spinning, the spun yarn (designated as חוט, ‘thread’, in m. Shabbat 7:2; 13:1, 4) was used for weaving (ארג). Exod 35:25-26 also presupposes that the wool had been dyed before it was spun. b. Berakhot 58a refers to the same sequence of actions as the other rabbinic texts, but omits the reference to dyeing.

6.2 Pictorial Material and Archaeology

A.1 In the Cave of the Letters (cave 5-6) in Nahal Hever, three wooden and two stone spindle whorls were found, together with a bundle of dyed, unspun wool and balls of woollen and linen threads, all with 135 CE as the *terminus ad quem* (Yadin 1963: 35-36, 130-32, 169-88, 252, 256, plates 36, 59, 88). See further → פְּלִידָה, ‘spindle’.

7. Conclusion

A.1 In Biblical Hebrew, the verb טוה means ‘to spin’. It designates the production of threads from fibres, especially wool and flax, but apparently also the plying together of two or more thin threads to form a stronger yarn (see Akkadian *tamû* and Biblical Hebrew שֵׁשׁ מְשֻׁזָּר). These activities were usually carried out with a → פְּלִידָה, ‘spindle’.

Notes

- 1 ↑ LSJ, 1173; *GELS*, 474.
- 2 ↑ Payne Smith, *CSD*, 409 (‘to spin, twist, twine’); Sokoloff, *SLB*, 1090 (‘to spin, weave’).
- 3 ↑ Jastrow, *DTT*, 1061; Sokoloff, *DJBA*, 849-50; *DJPA*, 401; Tal, *DSA*, 630.
- 4 ↑ Lewis & Short, *LD*, 1200; *OLD*, 1170.

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For the abbreviations applied → [List of Abbreviations](#)

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