

## Some considerations about Hebrew *šōṭēr* and Punic *mštr*

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[The author analyses all the Biblical texts and contexts where *šōṭēr/īm* comes out in order to determine its semantic field. In this connection some Punic inscriptions, mainly from El-Hofra, provide a significant support and are therefore close-examined with the aid of iconographical material from the same place. A much more diversified semantic picture turns up, that does not necessarily agree with the usual meaning of "second-rank official".]

The question about the real meaning of the term *šōṭēr* (pl. *šōṭērīm*) has been considered many times in scholarly works<sup>1</sup>.

M. Weinfeld, in his article where he takes into account the functions of the *šōṭērīm*, as described in the Old Testament books, the Greek and Aramaic translations, the Qumrān data, the Talmudic tradition and the Akkadian lexical parallels for this term<sup>2</sup>, reaches the conclusion, that "the *šōṭērīm* attached to the judges is a comprehensive term which includes all the subordinate personnel". In all cases which he brings from the texts, it seems to be the fact. But, it seems to us that the texts also give us some additional data.

So in Num. 11, 16 and Deut. 29,9; 31,28 we see that *šōṭērīm* appear as functionaries after the "elders" (*zqnyym*).

According to Josh. 23,2 the *šōṭērīm* appear after the "elders" (*zqnyym*) and the "heads" (*r'šym*) of the people. (Cfr. also Josh. 24,1 where the "elders", "heads" and "judges" precede the *šōṭērīm*).

In general these texts belong to the tradition of Israel's wanderings in the desert or they are retroactively projected into this period.

Very interesting is the fact by itself that there is no mention of *šōṭērīm* in the books of Samuel and Kings. On the other hand, the *šōṭēr* appears frequently in the books of Chronicles.

In 1 Chr. 23,4 David puts into office as *šōṭērīm* and judges (*šōṭērīm*) 6.000 Levites<sup>3</sup>. But the text says nothing about their numerical distribution, or about the possibility (?) that some of the Levites could have held both offices.

1. J. Van der Ploeg, "Les šōṭērīm d'Israel". *OTS* 10(1954)189-196; most recently (with previous literature) M. Weinfeld, "Judge and Officer in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East". *IOS* 7(1977)65-88, esp. 83-86. M. Weinfeld, "H'šwtr" mšm'w wtfqdyw". *BethM* 71(1977)417-420; *šwjr. EB*, VII, 1976, pp.534-535; the most recent monograph of G.W. Ahlström, *Royal Administration and National Religion in Ancient Palestine* (Leiden 1982) does not consider this question.

2. Weinfeld, *IOS* 7(1977)83-86; *BethM* 71(1977)417-420.

3. The figure is a possible exaggeration, but this does not change the basic issue, that the persons were nominated by the king.

And again 1 Chr. 27,1 states that "heads of the households (families)" (*rā šē hā'ābōt*), heads of thousands and hundreds and the *šōfērīm* served the king. Possibly this shows that the latter were inferior to the first mentioned. It seems also that the *šōfērīm* did not belong to the traditional leadership; rather they were officials, put into office by the king.

2 Chr. 19,11 treats the juridical reforms of King Jehoshaphat, and says that the *šōfērīm*, the Levites (*hall'wīyyīm*) were subordinate to Amaryahu the chief priest (*kōhēn hāroš*) and Zebadyahu, son of Yišma'el, the (*nāgīd*)-ruler of the House of Judah (i.e., the governor of the territory of the Judean tribe). Again we see the *šōfērīm* as officials, subordinate to higher dignitaries.

2 Chr. 26,11 is about King 'Uzziyahu and his army (which is very important to our topic): two persons, Ye'iel the scribe (*hassōfēr*) and Ma'ašeyahu the *šōfēr* were subordinate to Hananyahu, the *sar* (high dignitary of the king).

And lastly, in 2 Chr. 34,13 (Reform of Josiah) the Levites are said to be over the king's work-corrée (*sabbālīm*) and "some of the Levites were scribes, *šōfērīm* and gatekeepers". So, the Levites again appear as the king's nominees, who were serving in administrative positions. Contrary to the Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua, where the *šōfērīm* are connected with the representation of the tribes of Israel, here, in Chronicles, they appear only as royal officials.

Maybe monarchistic ideology as well as the late period (end of the Persian rule) when the Chronicles were written<sup>4</sup>, also influenced these explanations of the *šōfērīm*, an institution known naturally from the earlier times.

Prov. 6, 6-7: verse 6 describes the ant, which as the author of the Maxim says, has "no officer (*qāšīn*), *šōfēr* or ruler (*mōšēl*)".

And last, there is the passage of Job 38,33 where we find rhetorical questions: "Do you know the laws (*huqqōt*) of Heaven? Can you put its *mišjār* (*mišjārō*) on earth?". We see from here that the word *mišjār* has to do with laws, and that it is possibly a kind of implementing the heavenly laws on earth<sup>5</sup>.

We know from works which explain the word *šōfēr*, that the data from the early translations of the Bible, Talmud, Qumran, and the Akkadian and Aramaic lexicographic material are now almost completely exhausted.

There is also a comparatively large amount of material in the Punic inscriptions, but not in the large Carthaginian corpus, which can explain this term.

These words, derived from the root *šjr* are known from the II cent. B.C.E. from El-Hofra (Constantine)<sup>6</sup>.

1. RES 223. 1) *l'dn lb'l hmn wltnt pn b'l* 2) *ndr š ndr 'rš hmyšjr* 3) *bn kn' 'zbl' šm' ql'* 4) *brk'*,

"To the Lord Ba'al Hammon and Tinnit, face of Ba'al, 2) the vow which 'Ariš the *myšjr*, 3) son of *Kn'* the Sacrificer<sup>7</sup> wowed, (for) they heard his voice 4) (and) blessed him".

2. RES 906. *hmlk [h]myšjr bn B'šlk h[ ](?)*, "Himmilk [the] *myšjr*, son of *B'šlk* the [ ](?)

3. EH 41. 1) *ldn lb'l hmn ndr 'rš* 2) *bn hmlkt hmyšjr* 3) *mlk 'dm šm' ql'*,

"To the Lord<sup>8</sup> Ba'al hammon, the vow of 'Ariš, 2) son of *Hmlkt* the *mšjr* 3) *mlk 'dm*<sup>9</sup> (for) he heard his voice".

4. EH 79 1) *[l'dn lb'l [h]m]n š* 2) *ndr Bdmlqrt bn* 3) *'ršm hmyšjr* 4) *kšm' ql'*,

4. On the date of the Books of Chronicles: P. Welten, *Geschichte und Geschichtsdarstellung in den Chronikbüchern*. Neukirchen 1973, esp. pp.199-200.

5. *LVTL* "writing", "heavenly writing-starry sky" are in our opinion hardly acceptable. The word is a *hapax legomenon*.

6. A. Berthier-R. Charlier, *Le sanctuaire punique d'El-Hofra à Constantine*, v. I. Textes; v. II. Planches. Paris 1952-1955.

7. Or "sacrificial priest" - the person who had to make the sacrifices of the cattle or poultry designated for sacrifice. This term appears also in *CIS*. I. 132 from Malta and *CIS*. I. 86 from Kition. *zbl'* instead of *h'zbl'* is characteristic of the late Punic forms.

8. Late Punic instead of *dn*.

9. A special and not definitively clear kind of sacrifice, cf. *KAI*. II, p.103; R.S. Tomback, *A Comparative Semitic Lexicon of the Phoenician and Punic Languages*. Missoula, MT 1978, p.182. *mlk* IV.

"[To the L]ord Ba<sup>al</sup> [H]ammon, (vow) which 2) vowed Bodmelqart, son 3) of 'Arišam the *mštr* 4) (for) he heard his voice."

5. EH 80 1) *l'dn lb<sup>el</sup> ḥmn wlrwth tynt* 2) *p<sup>n</sup>' b<sup>el</sup> š ndr 'ršm bn 'rš ḥmyš[š]tr* 3) *tšm<sup>c</sup> ql' wbrk'*,

"To the Lord Ba<sup>al</sup> Ḥammon and to our Lady Tinnit<sup>10</sup>, 2) face<sup>11</sup> of Ba<sup>al</sup>, which vowed 'Arišam, son of 'Ariš the *myš[š]tr*<sup>12</sup>, 3) (for) they heard<sup>13</sup> his voice (and) blessed him".

6. EH 81 1) *l'dn lb<sup>el</sup> ḥmn<sup>14</sup> wltnt* 2) *pn' b<sup>el</sup> š ndr ḥmlk' ) [ḥ]myštr bn b<sup>el</sup>mlk hy[ ]<sup>15</sup> k[š]m<sup>c</sup> ql' brk'*,

"To the Lord Ba<sup>al</sup> 'Ammon and to Tinnit, 2) face of Ba<sup>al</sup>, which vowed Ḥimmilk 3) [the] *myštr*, son of Ba<sup>al</sup>imilk the *y[ ]*, for they heard his voice (and) blessed him".

7. EH 78 1) *l'dn lb<sup>el</sup> ḥmn ndr š* 2) *[ndr] 'rš ḥmyštr bn* 3) *['bd'šmn (?)] šm' ql' bk'<sup>16</sup>*,

"1) To the Lord Ba<sup>al</sup> Ḥammon, the vow, which 2) [vowed] Ariš the *myštr*, son 3) of ['bd'šmn(?)]<sup>17</sup>, (for) he heard his voice (and) blessed him".

8. EH 74 (the beginning of the text is missing) 1') *Nḥnbm š ndr Bd<sup>c</sup>štrt* 2') *rb mštrt bn Msp kšm' 3') ql' brk'*,

"...1') *Nḥnbm*<sup>18</sup>, which vowed Bod<sup>c</sup>aštrt, the 2) *rb mštrt*, son of *Msp*, for he (or "she")<sup>19</sup> heard his voice (and) blessed him".

9. EH 77 1) *l'dn lb<sup>el</sup> ḥ[mn]* 2) *š ndr M[gn bn b<sup>el</sup>]* 3) *sylg<sup>20</sup> rb m[yštrt]... 4) kšm<sup>c</sup> [ ]*,

1) "To the Lord Ba<sup>al</sup> Ḥammon] 2) which vowed M[gn, son of Ba<sup>al</sup>] 3) silleg, *rb m[yštrt]*... for he heard [his voice?]".

10. EH 75 1) *l'dn lb<sup>el</sup> ḥmn wlrbt* 2) *tnt pn b<sup>el</sup> ndr š ndr* 3) *B<sup>c</sup>štk rb ḥmyštrt bn* 4) *Wy<sup>c</sup>ln kšm<sup>c</sup> [ ]*,

1) "To the Lord Ba<sup>al</sup> Ḥammon and to the Lady 2) Tinnit, face of Ba<sup>al</sup>, the vow which vowed 3) Ba<sup>al</sup>šillek, the *rb* of the *myštrt*, son of *Wy<sup>c</sup>ln*, (for) they heard [his voice (and) blessed him]".

11. EH 76 1) *l'dn lb<sup>el</sup> ndr š ndr Mgn* 2) *rb ḥmštrt bn 'dnb<sup>el</sup>* 3) *kšm<sup>c</sup> ql' brk'*,

"1) To the Lord Ba<sup>al</sup>, the which vowed *Mgn* 2) *rb ḥmštrt*, son of 'Adoniba<sup>al</sup>, 3) for he heard his voice (and) blessed him".

These eleven inscriptions from El-Hofra (Constantine) have some common features.

First of all, there appears always the official, whose designation is derived from the root *štr* and in the last four cases even the *rb* of the *m(y)štr(t)*, i.e., the "head" or "designated chief" of the *m(y)štr(t)*<sup>21</sup>.

The *m(y)štr* is not the scribe, at least not the ordinary one, for the El-Hofra texts mention also the scribe (*hspr*)<sup>22</sup> and even the *rb hspr*<sup>23</sup>, "the chief scribe" or the "head of the scribes".

All the forms: a) *mštr*, *myštr* and *ḥm(y)štr* and b) *rb ḥmštrt*, *rb ḥmyštrt*, are variant spellings of the same two terms.

10. The *Y* strengthens the reading - Tinnit.

11. *p<sup>n</sup>'* instead of *pn* is the late Punic spelling; possibly pronounced *pene*.

12. Reconstruction beyond any doubt.

13. *tšm'* - the ' is the late Punic spelling instead of the '(ayin); *tšm'* - possibly the presence of "Tinnit" influenced the plur. fem. form.

14. *ḥmn* instead of *ḥmm*.

15. The reconstruction of the editors *hy[š]* "conseiller" is too doubtful; but it seems that we have to deal here with the profession of the person.

16. Omission of *r*. *bk'* - instead of *brk'* is a scribal error.

17. The reconstruction of the name is by the editors. No traces of this name are visible.

18. Possibly a personal name.

19. The male or female deity.

20. Late Punic spelling instead of *B<sup>c</sup>štk*.

21. About the functions and meaning of the *rb* in the Carthaginian inscriptions - W. Huss. "Die Stellung des *rb* im Karthagischen Staat". *ZDMG* 129(1979)217-232.

22. EH. 90, 91 - Neopunic.

23. EH. 281 - Neopunic.

In no case do we see that the profession or social position was inherited by the son from the father. In one case we know even (*RES*, 223) that the father was a sacrifice priest (*'zbh*), and in another he practised another profession (*EH* 81... *hyf* 𐤆).

In four cases we have the *rb (h)m(y)štr*, i.e., the chief of the body of the men of the *mštr*, and we have to consider the word as the plural; the feminine ending has here the sense of the collective noun<sup>24</sup>.

For the better understanding of the sense of these terms we have also to consider the iconographic material of the El-Hofra stelae. Besides the stelae without any reliefs and the stelae with symbols of the goddess Tinnit and others we see some outstanding features on the *m(y)štr*, *rb mštr* stelae.

*EH* 74 (Pl. XVII A) - On the preserved lower part of the stela a collection of weapons: a sword, lance and a club, in relief.

*EH* 77 (Pl. XVIII D) - Despite the fact that the stela is broken, we can clearly recognize here a shield and possibly a sword.

*EH* 81 (Pl. XV D) - Possible traces of an incised sword.

Pl. XVIII A and B - Again we find weapons on these stelae, but only their upper parts are preserved and we do not know anything about an inscription there<sup>25</sup>.

Pl. XVIII C - We see weapons there, but also the inscription (*EH* 86) 1) *l'dn lb'el ḥmn ndr* 2) *š ndr 'rš bn lby* 3) *[š]m' ql' [brk']*, "1) To the Lord Ba'al Ḥammon the vow 2) which vowed 'Ariš, son of Lby (possibly "Libyan") 3) (for) he [he]ard his voice<sup>26</sup> (and) blessed him". Possibly the designation of the profession of this person was not mentioned here, but he belonged to the *mštr* or *rb mštr*. The same possibilities exist also concerning Pl. XVIII A and B<sup>27</sup>. And again it must be pointed out, as do Berthier and Charlier, that from the several hundred Punic and Neopunic stelae from El Hofra only these bear incisions of weapons. Therefore it does not seem to be chance coincidence, but a certain indication that the professions of the *mštr* and *rb mštr* were connected with arms, or possibly were military activities. It seems also that they were not simple warriors, but bearers of a certain rank.

We have now to turn to the question of what both our terms really meant in the texts from El-Hofra. W Huss<sup>28</sup> translates *rb mštr* "Grosser der Intendanz (?)" ("Chief (or senior) supervisor"). Ch. Jean and J. Hoftijzer<sup>29</sup> describe *mštr* as "nom d'une fonction militaire", "officier d'intendance, d'administration (?)"; i.e., they do not give an exact translation, likewise for *mštr*, "prob. intendance, administration", and *rb (h)mštr*, "chef de l'intendance (fonction militaire)".

R.S. Tombaek<sup>30</sup> compares *mštr* with the Hebrew *mšār*, "rule, authority", etc. *hmštr* is translated by him as "officer" and in both cases he is far from being exact,

M.J. Fuentes Estañol<sup>31</sup> interprets *m(y)štr* "oficial de intendencia (o: de administración)", *mštr* as "a substantive of uncertain meaning, some type of military official", *mštr*, probably "administración, intendencia", *rb mštr*, "jefe de la administración (intendencia)". These translations are also very approximate.

In our opinion, there were some military functions connected with the *m(y)štr* and *rb (h)m(y)štr*. The *m(y)štr* was an individual, a member of the *mštr* and its head was the *rb (h)m(y)štr*. The arms on the stelae show the military connections of these functionaries. Knowing that in Punic cities a developed system of local self-government existed, we propose to understand the term *m(y)štr* as designating a person (appointed or elected) who was in charge of conscription of the militia of the city. *Mštr* could be the body

24. Cf. also *DISO*, p.170.

25. *EH* 76. The photograph is not given, but the description of the stelae does not mention weapons.

26. Written *ql'* with an *'ayin*.

27. For discussion of the weapons cf. *EH* pp.193-194.

28. "Die Stellung...", p.221, note 18.

29. *DISO*, p.170.

30. *A Comparative Semitic Lexicon...*, p.201.

31. M.J. Fuentes Estañol, *Vocabulario Fenicio*. Barcelona 1980, pp.156 and 169.

in charge of the military functions of the city and the *rb mšṣrt* would then be the head of this administrative body inside the city, but not the army-commander. We know that the Phoenician designation for "army" was *mḥnt*.

Therefore it seems to us that the biblical passage Prov. 6 6-7, where the *qāšm*, *šōṭēr* and *mōšēl* are mentioned, is the closest in meaning to the El-Hofra inscriptions. The passages Josh 1, 10 and 3,2 which relate that the *šōṭērīm* have to pass the camp and deliver to the people the military order to cross the river Jordan also seems to coincide with the functions of the El-Hofra *mšṣr* or *rb mšṣrt*.

But in addition to the El-Hofra text there is an inscription from Volubilis in Morocco (Ancient Mauretania)<sup>32</sup>. This is inscription No. 5 from the Volubilis Museum, from the end of the II cent. B.C.E. or the beginning of the I cent. B.C.E., published by J. Fevrier<sup>33</sup>.

1) *ṣ wytnkn ḥšṣt ḥšṣr m.l. ...*

2) *bn ymll bn mlwytmb (or n(?)) ḥšṣt bn ṣ ...[bn]*

3) *'rš ḥšṣt bn ymštn bn mkl ...*

4) *... bn šnt š[šm] wšb<sup>c</sup> lm yshb...*

"1) [Stela] of<sup>34</sup> *Wytnkn*<sup>35</sup>, the suffet (and) the *šṣr* (= *šṣr*)<sup>36</sup> m.l. ... 2) son of *ymll*, son of *Mlwyt-nb* (or *n*(?))<sup>37</sup>, the suffet, son of *R* ,, [son] 3) of 'Ariš, the suffet, son of *ymštn*, the suff[et], son of *Mkl* ... 4) ..., of the age<sup>38</sup> si[xy] seven, when it (the stela) was erected ...".

So it is a funerary inscription of a person whose forefathers were suffets in this town. This shows us his high social position and lineage. The persons bear Libyan (Berber) names, and, as is pointed out by Fevrier<sup>39</sup>, they belonged to the Mauretanian Kingdom. But the inscription is written in Punic and we see here also Punic cultural and political influence. The best evidence for it is that there existed the *suffetat*, i.e., that a suffet (*šṣt*) was a high magistrate of the city. As we see from the inscription, *Wytnkn* (but none of his forefathers) was at the same time also the *šṣr* (*šṣr*). What is the real meaning of it? Jean-Hoftijzer<sup>40</sup> limit themselves to the designation of the word as "Qal. Part. act. m.s. cstr. - (contexte endomm. = damaged context)". Fuentes<sup>41</sup> did not take into account this inscription in her dictionary. In our opinion the possible reading has to be \*šāṭēr<sup>42</sup>. It is clear that the high magistrate of Volubilis was at the same time also the *šṣr*, who is possibly identical to the *myšṣr* or *rb mšṣrt* from El-Hofra. This shows that the functions of the suffet and *šṣr* could be united and the same person could have at his disposal both positions. In view of inscription No. 5 from Volubilis the biblical expression *šōṭērīm wšōṭērīm* is not unique. Naturally we cannot confirm that the position and function of the *šṣr*, *myšṣr*, *rb mšṣrt* in the late Punic texts and of the *šōṭērīm* in the Old Testament books were identical. But although the Books of Chronicles put the *šōṭērīm* in a context of events of the X-VII cent. B.C.E., they were written relatively late (not earlier than the IV cent. B.C.E.) and could also include in this field later concepts.

By all means it is clear that the *šōṭēr* was not always a second-rank official, that he was connected with conscription and military activities, and as there was in El-Hofra the *m(y)šṣr* and the *rb mšṣrt*, we can suppose

32. On the history and position of Volubilis, as also the Punic influence on this Mauretanian city, cf. M. Euzennat, "Volubilis", *RE*, IX, A. 1, 1961, pp.864-873.

33. J. Fevrier, "Les textes puniques du musée de Volubilis", *BAC* 1958, pp.30-33, esp. 32-33.

34. ṣ - appears often in Punic inscriptions with the same meaning as š - "of, from, which".

35. Cf. *Benz*, p.188 - a Libyan or Berber name.

36. It seems that in this case the *šaym* is written to designate a long vowel - \*šāṭēr, cf. also Fuentes, *Vocabulario*, p.241, where we see that the latin names *Satur* = *Šṣr*; *Saturius* = *Šṣry*; *Saturninus* = *Šṣrynu* are written with *šaym*; the *šaym* stood for *a*.

37. All Libyan names - *Benz*, pp.189-196.

38. Literally "son of sixty seven years" - on Punic and Neopunic funeral monuments the age of the deceased was often written.

39. *BAC*, 1958, pp.32-33.

40. *DISO*, p.295.

41. *Vocabulario*, p.241.

42. Cf. note 36.

that also in the Old Testament, and especially in the passages from Chronicles not all the *šōp'rīm* were of equal rank and certain differences between them existed.

It must be noted that it is definitely clear that in investigating the social position and functions of the *šōp'rīm* in the Old Testament we have also to turn to Punic material.

#### LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- BAC* - *Bulletin archéologique du comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques.*  
*Benz* - F.L. Benz, *Personal Names in the Phoenician and Punic Inscriptions.* Rome 1972.  
*Beth M* - *Beth Miqra'.*  
*CIS* - *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum.*  
*DISO* - Ch. Jean - J. Hoftijzer, *Dictionnaire des inscriptions sémitiques de l'ouest.* Leiden 1965.  
*EB* - *Encyclopedia Biblica.* Jerusalem 1952-1982 (Hebrew).  
*EH* - A. Berthier, R. Charlier, *Le sanctuaire punique d'El-Hofra à Constantine,* v. I-II. Paris 1952-1955.  
*IOS* - *Israel Oriental Studies.*  
*KAI* - H. Donner, W. Röllig, *Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften,* Bd. I-III. Wiesbaden, 1964.  
*LVTL* - L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros.* Leiden 1958.  
*OTS* - *Oudtestamentische Studien.*  
*RE* - Pauly - Wissowa - Kroll - Mittelhaus, *Real-Encyclopädie der Klassischen Altertumswissenschaft.* Stuttgart 1894ff.  
*RES* - *Repertoire d'Epigraphie Sémitique.*  
*ZDMG* - *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft.*