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Ancient Hebrew מַלַצֶּד and עצד in the Gezer Calendar

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Introduction

The Hebrew Bible contains dozens of terms for tools which must have been common words for speakers of ancient Hebrew, but which present particular challenges for lexicographers of this dead language. Since the biblical texts do not include agricultural manuals or craftsmen's catalogs, some words make their only appearances in highly allusive contexts, where there is little to indicate what object the word actually referred to. For example, Isaiah mentions (10:15) the garzen in a rhetorical question: “Shall the garzen be glorified more than the one who hews with it?” The lexical information which can be gleaned from this verse is quite sparse. Fortunately, in this case, we have the use of the garzen in the Siloam Inscription as well, which also talks about “hewing” (חצב) with a garzen, and that text is so embedded in its physical context that it is possible to infer what tool the text is referring to.1

1 The mentions of the garzen in Deuteronomy 19 and 20 must be kept separate, since there the term refers to a wood-cutting tool, and apparently a small one; in Isaiah 10:15, the Siloam Inscription, and 1 Kings 6:7, it is a masonry tool. For detailed discussion, see my The Semantic Field of Cutting Tools in Biblical Hebrew: The Interface of Philological, Semantic, and Archaeological Evidence, Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 49 (Washington, D.C., 2012), 27–34, 129–40, and 160–61.

The purpose of the present note is three-fold. First, it argues that the correct meaning of Hebrew מַלַצֶּד is “adze.” Second, it pleads for systematic but judicious use of Mishnaic Hebrew in the lexicography of Biblical Hebrew. Third, it investigates the use of the root עצד in the Gezer calendar and concludes, based on considerations of agricultural practices in antiquity, that Gezer’s עצד is better connected with Aramaic חֶצֶד than with the Hebrew מַלַצֶּד; in light of this, it raises once more the long-debated question of the dialect of the Gezer calendar.

* A very early form of some of these ideas was subjected to the critical eye of Richard C. Steiner. A rough draft of the paper was read and thoroughly (and appropriately) criticized by Elitzur Avraham Bar-Asher, to whom I owe a large debt of gratitude, and a later, but still undeveloped, draft was much improved by the comments and advice of Shawn Zelig Aster. At a later stage, Gary Rendsburg attentively read the paper and provided me with valuable feedback and critical comments. Further criticisms and suggestions came from Seth Sanders, who forced me to clarify certain statements and lines of the argument, and finally, an anonymous reviewer for JNES challenged some of the basic points in ways which led me to re-formulate and sharpen the arguments in what are hopefully more convincing ways. Flaws that remain are likely due to my failure to take the advice of these scholars on some point or another.

1 The mentions of the garzen in Deuteronomy 19 and 20 must be kept separate, since there the term refers to a wood-cutting tool, and apparently a small one; in Isaiah 10:15, the Siloam Inscription, and 1 Kings 6:7, it is a masonry tool. For detailed discussion, see my The Semantic Field of Cutting Tools in Biblical Hebrew: The Interface of Philological, Semantic, and Archaeological Evidence, Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 49 (Washington, D.C., 2012), 27–34, 129–40, and 160–61.
The biblical lexeme כְּרָתו
craftsman

After listing cognates in Mishnaic Hebrew, Ugaritic, Arabic, and Ge’ez, HALOT defines כְּרָתו as “blacksmith's tool.” BDDB defines the word as “an axe,” though the first evidence cited (from Arabic and Ge’ez) indicates that the root כְּרָתָה is associated with agricultural work. The contexts of the two biblical attestations of the lexeme, however, show that it was actually the tool of a carpenter. The two uses are in the related passages Jeremiah 10:3 and Isaiah 44:12, both of which belong to the long tradition of mocking idols and their makers by describing the mundane processes by which the idols were made.²

The first attestation is in Jeremiah 10:3: כְּרָתו מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵי-חָרָשׁ בַּמַּעֲצָד “For the idol of the nations is worthless: he cut a tree from the forest; it is merely the work of a craftsman with an adze.”³ The passage describes an idol (בעגגט האר-תمتازין) made of wood, which originated as a tree in the forest. After stating that the idol is “worthless” (בּבֶּבֶל), the process by which the idol was constructed is reviewed, to emphasize the absurdity of worshipping the idol thus produced. The last nominal phrase of Jeremiah 10:3 contains a compound genitive construction (בַּמַּעֲצָד יְדֵי-חָרָשׁ בַּמַּעֲצָד) modified by a prepositional phrase (בַּמַּעֲצָד יְדֵי-חָרָשׁ בַּמַּעֲצָד). What exactly בַּמַּעֲצָד modifies is ambiguous, but on all readings, the בַּמַּעֲצָד is being used to work on wood.⁴

Further specificity may be gained from the semantics of the word הָעַמִּים. This is a generic word for a “craftsman,” one who might work in any medium. Ibn Janah pointed this out, comparing the similarly multi-purpose Arabic term اسْكَاف.⁵ Despite this versatility, the הָעַמִּים is not a woodsman; neither the הָעַמִּים nor the 'uskāf chops down trees in the forest.⁶ The יְדֵי-חָרָשׁ, therefore, is not the tool used to chop down a tree, but to work on the wood later, in the shop.⁷ It is a carpenter’s tool.⁸

The second case is found in Isaiah 44:12: כְּרָתו מַעֲשֵׂה יְדֵי-חָרָשׁ בַּמַּעֲצָד “he makes iron into an adze, working with coal; with mallets he forms it, and works it with the strength of his


⁴ Thus reading (3) in n. 4 above can be ruled out.
arm.” According to some, the word maʿāṣād is not supposed to appear in this passage: since at least the time of Bishop Robert Lowth, suggestions have been made to rid the text of the word. The basic problem sensed by many is, as Winton Thomas explained, “if [the phrase הָעִצִּים הָהֵן קִרְבּ לְעַל-מְעָצַד] is to be clothed with meaning, [it] requires a verb, which seems to have fallen out, either before or after הָעִצִּים.”

This problem results from the fact that the phrase הָעִצִּים הָהֵן קִרְבּ לְעַל-מְעָצַד is usually taken to be a noun phrase, consisting of הָעִצִּים “craftsman” in the construct, and “iron,” thus, “an iron craftsman,” or “a craftsman who works in iron.” To fulfill the requirement of the verb, therefore, Winton Thomas cited numerous previous suggestions for emending the text and added one of his own.

10 Robert Lowth, Isaiah: A New Translation, with a Preliminary Dissertation and Notes, Critical, Philological and Explanatory, 12th ed. (London, 1837 [1779]), 329, suggests מָעַצד, and C. C. Torrey, The Second Isaiah: A New Interpretation (New York, 1928), 349, emends to מָעָצָד, both allegedly with the meaning “cuts.” Deidre Dempsey, “The Verb Syntax of the Idol Passage of Isaiah 44:9–20,” in Imagination and Imagination in Biblical Literature: Essays in Honor of Aloysius Fitzgerald, ed. Lawrence Boadt and Mark S. Smith, CBQMS 32 (Washington, D.C., 2001), 147 n. 5, also claims that מָעָצָד [sic] seems impossible here, since the idol under discussion is metal, so this cutting tool would be ineffectual. As will soon become clear, however, the idol being described is almost certainly not made of metal.

11 D. Winton Thomas, “Isaiah XIV:9–20: A Translation and Commentary,” Hommages à André Dupont-Sommer (Paris, 1971), 324; and E. J. Kissane, The Book of Isaiah (Dublin, 1943), 2.63, 65, 68. The idea of the missing verb is echoed by many commentators, ad loc. Sa’ada demurs from this claim, taking it to be a non-verbal phrase, which nevertheless stands alone since it is specifying one of the craftsmen mentioned in the previous verse; cf. Yehuda Ratzaby, Tafsir Yeshaya le-Rav Saadia (Kitāb al-Istiṣlāḥ al-Kabīr) (Jerusalem: Academy of the Ancient Hebrew Language, 2012], 222 [Judeo-Arabic] and 223 [Hebrew translation]). According to this analysis, which is shared by other Medieval exegetes, the phrase and the word תַּשִּׁבּ is as an enclitic belonging to the verb followed by the noun מָעַצַד, more references in Michael B. Dick, “Prophetic Parodies of Making the Cult Image,” in Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East, ed. Michael B. Dick (Winona Lake, IN, 1999), 27 n. n. Of the more recent suggestions, that of Karl Elliger, Deuteronomio (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1978), 407–10, has gained some currency: he suggests that the text originally read מָעַצַד תַּשִּׁבּ, “‘He handwerker in Eisen schmiedet die Urim aus,’” and the מָעַצַד of the original was omitted by haplography, wrongly leaving mention of the תַּשִּׁבּ. See, for example, John D. W. Watts, Isaiah 34–66, WBC 25 (Waco, TX, 1987), 141. For a good summary, see John N. Oswalt, The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI, 1998), 177–78, and for further discussion of the verse, including numerous interesting observations, see Knut Holter, Second Isaiah’s Idol-Fabrication Passages, Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese und Theologie 28 (Frankfurt, 1995), 150–56.

12 An ancient scribe corrected 1QIsaa in this manner: the text reads גַהַל תֵּרָה מְעָצָד יִפְעַל פָּחֵם, but originally read according to Donald W. Parry and Elisha Qimron, The Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsaa): A New Edition, STDJ 32 (Leiden, 1999), 75–76, and cf. John Goldenay and David Payne, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40–55, ICC (London, 2006), 1.351. Dick, “Prophetic Parodies,” 27 n. f prefers this as the “least radical emendation”; also Levtow, Images of Others, 60 n. 46. Shadal did not emend the text, but comments, “The iron craftsman makes the maʿāṣād for the wood craftsman!” (Persu Shadal al Sefer Yešayahu [Tel Aviv, 1970], 324). Michael Rosenbaum, Word-Order Variation in Isaiah 40–55: A Functional Perspective, Study Semitica Neerlandica (Assen, 1997), 38 with nn. 27–28 and 180 with n. 50 deletes מָעַצַד as a gloss, changes תַּשִּׁבּ to תִּשְׁפָּל, and argues that the direct object is מַלְסָל, “gapped from the surrounding context.”

suggestion does have the advantage of enhancing the parallelism between Isaiah 44:12 and 44:13.16

Even more convincing is the proposal which finds the missing verb in the text itself: some commentators take חרש not as a noun in the construct (“a craftsman of”), but a verb in the perfect (“he crafted”). This possibility is attested in medieval texts,17 but according to one modern scholar, it “found little support,”18 then or now. It seems to have been revived, however, by the Dictionary of Classical Hebrew (DCH), which offers the translation, “he has fashioned the iron of an axe or iron into an axe.”19 The analysis of חרש as a verb is shared by the New Revised Standard Version, as well. Adopting the second possibility given by the DCH, we have again an “object of result,” but this time the syntax is similar to that found in sentences such as עשה את האבנים מברה ירא (verb + material + result): “he crafted the iron into a blade.”

One other possibility, suggested already in medieval times, is to assume that the prophet at this point goes back in time to describe not the construction of the idol itself, but the construction of the tools used to make the idol. Radaq (fl. ca. A.D. 1200) restored the verb to the clause by positing an ellipsis in the first clause of Isaiah 44:12, and rendered חרש ברזל מעצד as “the iron-craftsman [makes] a

divine about the construction of the resulting artifact.

According to all these readings, there is no evidence of the maʿăṣād being used in metal work, as is often claimed.23 Instead, the blacksmith is said to make the maʿăṣād, but not use it, and only in the next verse does the wood-craftsmen enter the narrative, and begin to create the idol. It is the “wood craftsman” (ḥārāt ʾezīn) who actually uses the maʿăṣād, and so the testimony of this text, sparse though it is, agrees with that of Jeremiah 10:3. In both biblical texts, the maʿăṣād is a tool used for woodworking. This conclusion is worth emphasizing: although the data are minimal, they are sufficient to determine that the maʿăṣād was a tool utilized by the carpenter, not by the blacksmith or the farmer.

20 Radaq himself then explained, “he works with coals (to heat the iron),” ירא ויִמְּסָכָה “(and he makes) the hammer with which the other craftsman will make the idol.”

21 Jan L. Koole, Isaiah 3/1: 40–48 (Kampen, 1997), 388, objects to this type of analysis.

22 See Dick, “Prophetic Parodies of Making the Cult Image,” 40; the relevancy of this for the understanding of Isaiah 44:12 arose as the result of a conversation with Barry Eichler.

The Mishnaic Hebrew data

Confirmation that the maʿăṣād was a carpenters’ tool, and further details of its morphology and function are provided by rabbinic literature. In both legal and midrashic texts within this corpus, the maʿăṣād is a tool regularly used by the carpenter for carving wood. Mishnah ‘Arakhin 6:3 rules:

Although they said that we seize the property of those liable for evaluations, we give them thirty days’ worth of food and twelve months’ worth of clothes, a made bed, his shoes and his tefillin. . . . But if he was a craftsman, we give him two of each of his tools of trade: we give a carpenter two maʿăṣād and two saws. . . .

All indications are that the maʿăṣād was the adze, which was certainly the standard operating tool of a carpenter.24 Sifre Deuteronomy §308 relates this parable:25

Moses said to the Israelites, “You are crooked! You are perverters! You are going nowhere but to split!” To what is this comparable? To one who builds – how much must he build? One who builds at all, or carves stones at all, or who bores at all. This is the rule: anyone who does constructive work which is permanent on the Sabbath is liable.

According to this text, the maʿăṣād was a tool used for carving up wood.27 The adze was used for carving up wood, and served as the primary tool for this purpose until the plane was introduced by the Romans.28

More details of the tool’s use arise from the discussion in the Mishnah and Tosefta Baba Qamma, regarding the rights to ownership of waste products created in the context of a carpenter’s work. The Mishnah elsewhere (Baba Qamma 10:10) ruled:

What a craftsman produces [as waste] with the adze (maʿăṣād) is his, but [that which he produces] with the ax (kaššīl) belongs to the owner; if he was doing [the work] in the house of the owner, even the sawdust belongs to the owner.

The ruling was based on the fact that the maʿăṣād “adze” produced finer cuttings than the ax (kaššīl). If noted that with a lathe a carpenter turns the piece round and round, trimming until it is smooth.

27 The verb used is pîl in the P’el, which normally means “to carve” (denominative from לָכַּר. Shmuel Yeivin, “Keli Melakā,” Encyclopaedia Misra’i, 4.1018, suggests reading this as לָכַר פָּש”ל, and he ignores the fact that the craftsman is not correcting the staff—that was tried already—but rather about to use it as fuel in a fire; Yeivin’s basic suggestion that here is a biform of מִסָּר לָכַר פָּש”ל “to split” is attractive, although the word is attested far more often in the Hiph’îl than the P’el (compare the P’al in Tosefta Menahot 11:4 with the Hoph’îl in the parallel Mishnah Menahot 11:6). Binyamin Goldstein suggested that the text may be talking about a metal staff, rather than a wooden one. In MH, however, לָכַר פָּש”ל seems to always indicate a wooden staff, as can be seen especially in Mishnah Kelim, where לָכַר פָּש”ל is assumed to be a “wooden implement that does not ‘hold’ anything” (משתנה, פָּש”ל ולכ”ר פָּש”ל), and therefore not susceptible to impurity. In some texts this is explicitly contrasted with similar metal implements, which are susceptible to impurity; see, for example, Mishnah Kelim 11:6, 14:2, 17:16, and 20:3. The proofext cited from Ezekiel may have been chosen to identify the people utilizing the maʿăṣād “adze” as the craftsmen (בִּרְחוּם), but given the longer passage, this identification is uncertain; my thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out the complications here.

a man brought a block of wood to the carpenter to be carved into something, the waste produced by the maʿăṣād was ruled to be fine enough that it need not be returned to the owner of the wood; the ax, on the other hand, severed pieces that were worth saving, and so that waste was to be returned to the wood-owner.29 Certainly the adze was used at later stages of the work than the ax, and produced finer waste. Thus the rabbinic evidence confirms what is evident from the biblical data alone—that the maʿăṣād was a tool of carpentry—and augments it, allowing us to conclude with confidence that ancient Hebrew maʿăṣād referred to the adze. Although lexicographers should combine data from different eras with caution, in this case the data are in agreement, supporting the claim that the meaning of the word did not change between the late Iron Age and the Roman period, and that the Mishnaic texts are relevant for the lexicography of the biblical word.

Cognates elsewhere in Semitic

Given this relative plethora of evidence, one may rightly wonder why lexicographers have not consistently defined the maʿăṣād as an adze. The explanation for this is that cognates in other Semitic languages do not share this meaning. Verbs and nouns derived from the root רָדַךְ elsewhere seem to mean “to cut” and “a cutting tool,” but are not otherwise related to carpentry. Instead, the evidence in other languages points to different types of activities, especially agriculture, and this has misled Hebraists into importing an agricultural meaning into definitions of the Hebrew word as well.

Ugaritic

Consonantal mʿṣd appears in a few lists of implements. For example, KTU 6.632, a record of silver and tools owned by various individuals, mentions that a certain AĞDṬB owned hmsū. sr[t] / ksp, w nit w mʿṣd / w lhrmtt, “15 silvers, and a nit and a mʾṣd and a lhrmtt.”30 The same mʾṣd tool appears in syllabic texts, as well. PRU 6 157, a list of implements, includes “1 ma-ṣa-du” (l. 15); another list, PRU 6 142, includes [x] mʾṣd w ma-ṣa-du-ma′mūs (l. 3). Although the “ayin is not written in either attestation, the ending -ima makes it clear that the word is Ugaritic, and not Akkadian, and that it should be equated with consonantal mʾṣd.31

The meaning of the term within Ugaritic is debated. John Healey writes that “[t]he cognates suggest mʾṣd is a cutting-tool used on trees or plants”,32 Jonas Greenfield argues that Ugaritic mʾṣd is an axe or an adze, and adds, “This is based on the use of mʾṣd in Bib. Heb.”33 Based on the presence of the undoubtedly agricultural lhrmtt (cognate with Hebrew חרמש, “sickle”), the entire list has sometimes been taken to be agricultural in nature; Gregorio del Olmo Lete and Joaquín Sammartín’s Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language offers “agricultural cutting tool, ‘sickle(?)’.”34 This text therefore suggests that the Ugaritic mʾṣd was an agricultural implement, although even this is not certain. Certainly no semantic information about the Hebrew word is to be gleaned from the Ugaritic,35 and utilizing the Ugaritic word for help in defining the Hebrew word would be an example of what the Talmud called “making the known be dependent on the unknown.”36

Arabic

A similarly close cognate to Hebrew maʿăṣād is Arabic مصعد (miḏad),37 defined by E. W. Lane as:

29 The Tosefta (B.Q. 11:15), however, flatly contradicts this ruling, stating that מֵשׁ אֲסָד מִצְעַד תְּנוּאָב וּמֵסָד פִּינָקָל וְאֵוָה לְשׁוֹנָל סִלָּעַב וּמֵסָד פּוּוָת רְכִבָּה מֵסָד מִצְעַד הָאֵוָה יֶחֶזֶק. “What the carpenter produces with the adze, and what is cut off with the saw (= sawdust), these are his.” But the Tosefta agrees with the basic legal principle, to wit, there are some waste products that are significant, and others that are not, based on size, and that larger waste products must be handed over to the owner of the wood while smaller waste products could be kept by the artisan. The only difference is where to draw the line: the Mishnah draws it between the כפש and the מֵסָד, whereas the Tosefta draws it between the וּמֵסָד and מךְיָד.
an instrument with which trees are cut, or lopped. . . anything with which this is done; described by an Arab of the desert as a heavy iron instrument in the form of a reaping-hook, with which trees are cut, or lopped . . . also . . . signifies an iron instrument like a reaping hook without teeth, having its handle bound to a staff or cane, with which the pastor draws down the branches of trees to his camels or his sheep or goats and a sword which is commonly, or usually, employed for cutting, or lopping, trees.\(^{38}\)

What the tools mentioned and described have in common, to the extent specified, is their shape: they all are, or contain, a hook. Beyond that, there is variety among these tools regarding their purposes (cutting, pulling) and morphologies (with or without teeth, or the presence or absence [or mere insignificance?] of a handle). But Lane offered no pictures in connection with this lexeme,\(^{39}\) and the various tools he mentions seem to vary widely in their forms and functions, so further specificity is not possible.\(^{40}\)

This word is plausibly related semantically to Hebrew maʿāṣād, since the adze, after all, does have a shape somewhat like a hook. It may well be that the variety preserved in the diverse Arabic evidence reflects an early stage of the word’s referential range, which became narrowed in Hebrew until it referred only to the adze, or, alternatively, that an originally narrowly-defined word had its reference broadened to include all tools with a hooked shape. But these possibilities are irrelevant to the meaning of the word within Hebrew. Regarding lexicography (as opposed to lexical history), the Arabic data is useful only to the extent that it confirms what is known already from the Hebrew sources; nothing further can be said about Hebrew maʿāṣād based on Arabic maʿādād alone. It is likely, however, that lexicographers of Hebrew have illegitimately imported the semantics of the Arabic lexeme into their definitions of the Hebrew cognate.\(^{41}\)

Conclusions on cognates

In sum, the cognates of Hebrew maʿāṣād in Ugaritic, Arabic, and Ge’ez\(^ {43}\) all refer to cutting tools. The Ge’ez word and possibly the Ugaritic word refer specifically to agricultural tools; the Arabic word is defined by a form rather than by a function. Among the various cognates, then, only the Hebrew term refers to a carpenter’s tool, and none of the others are semantically close to the Hebrew.

The Gezer calendar

Relevant to this discussion is l. 3 of the tenth-century B.C. text known as the Gezer calendar. Most interpreters agree that the tablet identifies the agricultural activities of all twelve months, although Seth Sanders has pointed out that intended are “loose, colloquial Hebrew Lexicography,” CBQ Monograph Series 28 (Washington, D.C., 1996), 88–92.

\(^{42}\) Both definitions are from Wolf Leslau, Comparative Dictionary of Ge’ez (Classical Ethiopic): Ge’ez-English, English-Ge’ez (Wiesbaden, 1987), 58.

\(^{43}\) Other cognates have sometimes been invoked. Some have compared Aramaic תַּנִּין and Akkadian ēṭēdu (on which see below). An even less credible claim has been made in the new edition of Gesenius, which cites the South Arabian name for the harvest month, dmḥzdzm, as a cognate for תַּנִּין (Wilhelm Gesenius, Hebräisches und aramäisches Handworterbuch über das Alte Testament, 18th edition, directed by Udo Rüterswörden, edited by Rudolf Meyer and Herbert Donner [Berlin, 1987–], s.v. dmḥzdzm; for the South Arabian name itself, cf. G. Ryckman, Leo Nomo Proprio Sud-Semiticus [Lou- vain, 1934], 1.379). The consonant ḫ makes this impossible (Arthur Jeffery, The Foreign Vocabulary of the Quran [originally Baroda, 1938, repr. Lahore, 1977], 109). A connection of the South Arabian name with Aramaic תַּנִּין “to harvest” (see below) is also problematic, for two reasons: ESA /z/ should correspond to Aramaic ס (or ס in Old Aramaic), and Aramaic תַּנִּין is etymologically related to ēṭēdu (again, see below), so the ס was most likely a pharyngeal /h/ rather than a uvular /ḥ/.

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Ge’ez ʿaḍada (below) is compelling evidence that these are, in fact, cognate. The Arabic cognate was noted already by König, “Isaiah xliii. 12, 13,” 563.

38 Lane, Lexicon, 2073.
39 For part of the history of illustrations in dictionaries, see Anne McDermott, “Johnson’s Definitions of Technical Terms and the Absence of Illustrations,” IJL 18 (2005): 173–87. Illustrations were included in a monolingual dictionary already in 1538.
40 None of the dictionaries of post-classical or colloquial Arabic that I checked had any relevant data.
41 For this methodological problem in the lexicography of Biblical Hebrew, see John Kaltner, The Use of Arabic in Biblical He-

Ge’ez

Ge’ez has a verb ʿaḍada, defined by Leslau as “reap, mow,” and a derived noun also exists, in the forms maʿăṣād and maʿăṣād (plural maʿăṣād), with the meanings “sickle, scythe, pruning hook.”\(^ {42}\) Ge’ez /d/ is the reflex of Proto-Semitic /ṣ/, which merged with /s/ in Hebrew, so *ʿṣ́ d would be יָעַע in Hebrew and ʿaḍada in Ge’ez; thus the cognate status of these words seems assured. As with the Arabic data, however, it would be illegitimate to utilize the semantics of the Ge’ez word to interpret the Hebrew word.

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month[s],” rather than formal months,44 by which he means that they need not be precise periods of 29 or 30 days, and need not begin or end at any set time; “months” here are, rather, a means of approximating the units comprising the annual agricultural cycle. Within this text, the line of interest to us reads יָכַּס פֶּשֶׁת תֶּפֶסֶת, the graphemes פֶּשֶׁת have often been seen as a verbal noun derived from the same root that produced the noun פִּשְׁתָּ, with a meaning such as “the cutting.” On the further assumption that the following string, פֶּשֶׁת, is the direct object of the verbal noun פֶּשֶׁת and a form of the Hebrew word for “flax,”45 it is concluded that פֶּשֶׁת means “harvest” or something similar.46


45 In which case, the vocalization can be debated: it may be pointed פִּשָּׁת, and understood to be the feminine form attested in the Bible, written here defectively; or it may be a masculine form פֶּשֶׁת or the like (cf. Ahituv, *Echoes from the Past*, 256, and Amikam Gai, “ linea וָשִׁיט לְתָהוֹת רַדִּי הַמָּתָנָה," *Tarbiz* 65 [1996]: 532, arguing for the latter and pointing to Hosea 2:7,11 in support). For the form פִּשָּׁת, see further Richard C. Steiner, “On the Monophthonization of *ay* to *i* in Phoenician and Northern Hebrew and the Preservation of Archaic/Dialectal Forms in the Masoretic Vocalization,” *Orientalia* 76 (2007): 81–83, and below.


49 See, e.g., H. R. Carter, *Flax: Its Cultivation & Preparation for Market* (London, 1918): 13. Albright, “Gezer Calendar”: 22 n. 35, gives a different explanation: to maximize the length of the stem removed. Botanists report that this is not a serious consideration, however, since the fiber contained in the roots is minimal.

50 Ahmed M. Moussa and Friedrich Junge, *Two Tombs of Craftsmen, Archäologische Veröffentlichungen 9* (Mainz am Rhein, 1975), Plate 9, second register.

51 See the comments in Ibid. 38, as well.

52 Ibid., Plate 4b, bottom register; see also the descriptions on p. 21.

53 More pictures of the process can be seen in Norman de Garis Davies, *The Rock Tombs of Der el-Ghārāwi: Part I—Tombs of Abu and Smaller Tombs of the Southern Group* (London, 1902), plate XII and the comments on p. 18; cf. the more general discussion in Mary Anne Murray, “Cereal Production and Processing,” in *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Technology*, ed. Paul T. Nicholson and Ian Shaw (Cambridge, 2000), 522. For the situation in medieval Egypt, see...
known from as early as the Old Kingdom, such as the one from the tomb of Zau (Fig. 1):

On the philological side, we may note that in a number of Near Eastern languages the word used to refer to harvesting flax is different from that used to harvest grain. In Sumerian this different method of harvesting used for flax is lexicalized: “Bu-(r) is used especially for those plants that have bulbs such as onions...or those pulled out along with their roots such as flax.”

Gustaf Dalman writes, “Auf dem Felde wird des ausgereifte Flachs nicht geschnitten, sondern ausgerissen (tālaš),” and he refers to passages in rabbinic literature (e.g., Mishnah Baba Batra 5:7 [see n. 59 below]), in which the verb used for harvesting flax is תלש.

56 Gustaf Dalman, Arbeit und Sitte in Palästina (Hildesheim, 1964 [originally 1928-1939]), 5.26
Also used for the process, in Mishnaic Hebrew and many of the Middle and Late Aramaic dialects, is the root פשתת (to "uproot"; the Bavli mentions, for example, למסקת יבנה, "to uproot flax" (Bavli Moed Qatan 12b)). 57 Hebrew descriptions of flax harvesting in rabbinic sources also speak of קונה "uprooting" the flax, and the tool used for this job is קורדה. For example, Mishnah Pe'ah 4:4 rules, "Pe'ah (the corner of the field set aside for the poor): [the poor] may not harvest it with sickles or uproot it with mattocks (גורדומ), so that people do not strike each other." 58 Other sources, such as Mishnah Baba Batra 5:7, use פשתת "to pick," as noted by Dalman; 59 no source talks about harvesting flax with a tool, or cutting the flax, and there is no evidence that Hebrew פשתת or any of its cognates can mean "to uproot." 60

Indeed, partly based on this, some have argued that the Gezer Calendar does not refer to flax at all, 61 and that flax may never have been cultivated in Iron Age Israel. 62 But after weighing the various possibilities, Frederick Dobbs-Allsopp et al. write that the understanding of פשתת as a word for "flax" is the "most natural," although they agree that even the "more natural" solution is "far from ideal." 63

It is my contention that the Gezer Calendar does in fact refer to flax, and that it was the word פשתת that was preventing a proper understanding of this line. The problem, in other words, is not with taking פשתת to refer to flax, but that flax is not "cut." The root קורדה may have meant "to cut" but there is nothing to suggest that פשתת can refer to "uprooting" flax, and therefore פשתת is problematic.

A different possibility regarding פשתת in the Gezer calendar may therefore be considered: rather than connecting Gezer's פשתת with Hebrew פשתת, we may perhaps connect it with Aramaic פשתת. This root is attested in Aramaic as early as the Tell Fakhariya inscription. 64 In ll. 18–19, that text offers the curse, "פשתת יתן י הדברו פשתת. "May he sow, but not reap." 65 The root appears in participial form often in seventh-century Aramaic texts, as part of the "harvester clause" (a clause found in contemporary contracts in Akkadian as well). 66 For example, one contract reads, "מש חמשה עלולה plated. פשתת יתן י הדברו פשתת. 2. We will accrue interest at 50%; 2 harvesters. It will be returned to the threshing floor." 67 A noun פשתת apparently meaning "harvest" appears in the Tell Šiouch Fawqani inscription: ... פשתת יתן י הדברו פשתת. . . . whoever gives a sickle at the harvest will...? 68

57 This was pointed out by Jehuda Feliks, Agriculture in the Land of Israel in the Days of the Mishnah and the Talmud, 2nd ed. (Jerusalem, 1990), 202 (Hebrew), and Aḥituv, Echoes from the Past, 255. For a Hebrew dictionary of "flax" in JBA, see Michael Sokoloff, A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods (Ramat Gan, 2002), 579.

58 Cf. Saul Lieberman, Toefsha ki-Fsdinh (New York, 1955–1988), 1:140. The rationale given for the show lists clearly that the tools were singled out simply as the ones normally used for the tasks at hand.

59 Gustav Dalman, Arbeite und Sitze in Palästina (Hildesheim, 1964 [1928]), 26. The mishna in Baba Batra reads: הלך משנתו ארבעים. המ部位י. אם הוא לקובע כי בקשו מה שלח לך השוח. או שיר והרבה לרקע. "one who purchases flax from his fellow, does not acquire it until he has lifted it from one place to another; if it was still attached to the ground, as soon as he plucked (חלש) any of it, he has acquired [all of it]."


61 Ibid., 178–79, and Oded Borowski, Agriculture in Iron Age Israel, 34–35, derive פשתת from פשתת "to spread."


64 This Aramaic root has been invoked by others to explain פשתת in the Gezer text; cf., for example, Aḥituv, Echoes from the Past, 255.

65 Of the studies of this text, the most useful regarding the curse-traditions are Stephen A. Kaufman, “Reflections on the Assyrian-Aramaic Bilingual from Tell Fakhariyeh,” Maaseh 3 (1982): 169; Jonas C. Greenfield and Aaron Shaffer, “Notes on the Akkadian-Aramaic Bilingual Statue from Tell Fekherye,” Iraq 45 (1983): 115; J. Greenfield and A. Shaffer, “Notes on the curse Formulae of the Tell Fekherye Inscription,” RB 92 (1985): 53. As noted by Greenfield and Shaffer, the idea of the curse is paralleled in Micah 6:15; they point, too, to Hag 1:16 and Deut. 28:38, as well as Bavli Mo'ed Qatan 9b.


67 André Lemaire, Nouvelles Tablettes Araméennes, Hautes Études Orientales 34 (Geneva, 2001), 94–97. See also texts 7:3; 8:5; 10:5; 11:v6, r4; 12:5; 13*:7, 21*:9 in that collection.

The verb is found later in Middle Aramaic dialects, and the noun דר מזמור*—harvest* is found borrowed into post-biblical Hebrew. The contract Naḥal Hever 46 reads, in part:

שתיקך vượtי את התורן האיטיל בשמה והעפשת חלב ומקלקך תח_to ה Caleb שיחוֹדך עזני הב התייט אמך חם

These I have leased from you: the date palms and the rest of the trees in them, the “white dust” and the good palm and the harvest (חצד) that is in the village—everything that was in the possession of Hananiah b. Hayyäta until this point.

The verb was apparently borrowed into Arabic, as well.

The suggestion is, then, to translate Gezer’s לזרע ואל יחצד as “harvesting flax,” taking יחצד to be related not to Hebrew וּכָל, “adze,” but to Aramaic דר מזמור* “to harvest.” Since flax was not harvested by cutting it with a sickle or other tool, but pulled up by hand, this text would show that יחצד could refer also to harvesting done that way.

69 For a contrary view—that the Aramaic word actually represents a variant spelling of older Hebrew דר מזמור*—cf. Yechezkel Kutscher, Words and their Histories (Jerusalem, 1965), 81 (Hebrew), as well as Feliks, Agriculture in the Land of Israel, 201.


71 Arabic حصد “to reap” is found, e.g., in the Qurʾān (12:47), where يُعِيد سبع سنين دابة وهي تحاصر فروة , that is, seven years as you usually do, and the harvest that you reap, leave in the ear, except a little, of which you shall eat.” For this being a loanword from Aramaic, see Siegmund Fraenkel, Die Aramäischen Fremdwörter im Arabischen (Hildesheim, 1962 [orig. Leiden, 1886]), 132–33, who argues that the noun حصد is borrowed, and the verb حصد is actually a denominative within Arabic; also Jeffery, Foreign Vocabulary of the Quran, 109. Jeffery claims that the proper Arabic cognate of Aramaic יחצד is حصد “to cut,” which is semantically attractive but phonologically problematic: an Aramaic cognate of that Arabic root should have been written יחצד in Old Aramaic and יחצד in later Aramaic, not יחצד, which in Aramaic can only derive from *h/yNd.

Related to Aramaic יחצד—but not, etymologically, to Hebrew יחצד—is Akkadian eṣēdu. Although a priori derivable from a root *ḥṣd or a root *ḥṣy,72 Healey pointed out that the meaning is precisely that of Aramaic יחצד, and that there is no reason to doubt that equation from an etymological or semantic perspective.73 It is worth noting, too, that the Akkadian text of the Tell Faḥariya inscription has livest lū lā ʾessēde where the Aramaic has יזרע אל יהزة.74 This semantic correspondence says nothing directly about the etymological question, but this Akkadian cognate is important because it establishes that the ה in יחצד is the pharyngeal /ḥ/, not the uvular /x/.

It may be suggested that the scribe of the Gezer calendar may have written יחצד for etymological reasons, and thus יחצד for etymological reasons. The yiqtol and the het share a place and manner of articulation—they are both pharyngeal fricatives—and differ only in the voicing. Is it possible that the scribe simply wrote יחצד because that is what the word sounded like to him?

If it could be established that the writer of the Gezer calendar was not a professional scribe, or that he spoke a dialect in which /ḥ/ and /x/ had merged—or both—this suggestion would be plausible. Both options are, in fact, possible. Even to the untrained eye, the scribe of the text does not seem to have been professional: note, for instance, that the place of the het א_vars widely throughout the inscription, and the

72 At various times, Albright compared the Akkadian root to both יחצד and יחצד. First he held (“Gezer Calendar”: 22 n. 33): “[יחצד] is not found in the Bible. . . . The cognate Accadian word (eṣēdu) means ‘to reap,’ whereas in Arabic the verb (’aṣād) means ‘to cut, prune, etc.’” However, later he stated (apud Louis Finkelstein, “A Talmudic Note,” BASOR 94 [1944]: 28 n. 2): “After studying the data again, I think that it is preferable to return to the etymology of Delitzsch and his successors, namely that Accad. eṣēdu is Aram. bāṣād and Arab. bāṣāda, both of which have the same meaning, ‘to reap (grain),’ whereas the basic meaning of ’aṣād and Arab. ’ādāda is ‘tolop off,’ or the like.”

73 Healey, “Swords and Ploughshares,” 52. Healey notes that it is possible that eṣēdu conceals both roots, which would have merged into a single lexeme within Akkadian, but concludes that there is no hint of this.

74 Chaim Cohen and Yaakov Klein, “Heremēl and maggāl in the Bible and their Parallels—Ugaritic ḫrmtt and Akkadian niggallu,” in Tuburah li-Shmuel: Studies in the World of the Bible, ed. Zipora Talshir, Shamir Yonah, and Daniel Sivan (Beer-Sheva, 2001), 245 n. 1 (in Hebrew), cite this semantic equivalency and write, “Here is the unambiguous proof that Aramaic יחצד = Akkadian eṣēdu both semantically and etymologically.” (Note that they conflate semantic and etymological relationships also in their discussion of מגל and niggallu.)
bet in l. 5 is actually sideways; the yods, too, are notably heterogeneous. Albright already pointed out that “in favor of the exercise-tablet interpretation is the scribe’s hand, which is slow and extremely awkward.”75 Indeed, in Macalister’s original publication of the text, he described it as “rudely scratched.”76 Although a trained scribe might simply have lousy handwriting, this particular palaeography may suggest that the writer was not a professional scribe. This text is not a type we would expect a professional scribe to have written at all: it seems, on the contrary, to reflect the emergence of scribal practices outside of the professional bureaucracy.77

As for the origin of the text, there are good reasons to associate the text with the Phoenician rather than Hebrew.78 It is well-known that in northern Israel of

75 Albright, “Gezer Calendar”: 21. G. R. Driver, “Brief Notes. II. Notes on Old Inscriptions. I. Hebrew,” PEQ 74 (1945): 5–9, concurred with Albright’s assessment; see further references in George, Israel’s Tabernacle as Social Space, 96 n. 23.


77 Sanders, “Writing and Early Iron Age Israel,” 101.

78 This is now argued most fully by Dennis Pardee, “A Brief Case for the Language of the ‘Gezer Calendar’ as Phoenician,” in Linguistic Studies in Phoenician Grammar, ed. Robert Holmstedt and Aaron Schade (Winona Lake, IN, 2013); my thanks to Prof. Pardee for sharing a draft of the paper with me. Epigraphers have often associated the text with the Phoenician script rather than with Hebrew.

79 Although a trained scribe might simply have lousy handwriting, this particular palaeography may suggest that the writer was not a professional scribe. This text is not a type we would expect a professional scribe to have written at all: it seems, on the contrary, to reflect the emergence of scribal practices outside of the professional bureaucracy.

In order to be relevant for the Gezer Calendar, of course, it would have to be shown that מ and ט had merged much earlier than it is usually said to have

p. 89. (Note that Rollston’s position is self-contradictory: if there was no separate Hebrew script, the use of the Phoenician script has nothing to do with “prestige.”) Cf. Amihai Mazar, “Three 10th–9th Century B.C.E. Inscriptions from Tel Rehov,” in Saxa Loquentur: Studien zur Archäologie Palästinas/Israel: Festschrift für Volkmar Fritz zum 65. Geburtstag, ed. Cornelis G. den Hertog, Ulrich Hübner and Stefan Münger, AOAT 302 (Münster, 2003), 182, on the difficulties of distinguishing Hebrew from Phoenician in Iron IIA inscriptions.

80 In one case, interestingly, it even appears that Hebrew was written מ: Louis Finkelstein, “A Talmudic Note,” 28–29, pointed to a passage in the Sifra (Qedosim §1.1), which (in the text cited by R. Samson of Sens) reads, "אלא ידע המקרא: השם休み, מ"ן, מ"ן: אשתו של חברון, whence one who plucks (משיח ורים, ורים) as well? It teaches it by saying ‘to harvest’ (}" once). Whence one who reaps (משיח ורים) It teaches it by saying ‘your harvest’ (}" once). However, testifying to this reading is a single, not particularly reliable, witness. Far more and better witnesses testify to the reading מ: this is the reading in Codex Assemani 66 of the Sifra and the Leiden manuscript of the Yerushalmi Peah 1:4, where this passage is quoted, and this is the reading adopted in the databases of the Historical Dictionary of the Hebrew Language project (Ma’agarim), as well. Rather than positing מ as the ur-form from which the various readings descended, it would appear to be simpler to posit an original מ, "reaps," which was mistakenly written as מ. This would then simply testify to the tendency to interchange מ and ט. See also Jonas C. Greenfield’s review of Gibson’s TSSI 1 in JAOS 94 (1974): 510.

81 See the discussion in Yechezkel Kutscher, הלשון והרקע הלשוני של מגילת ישעיהו השלמה ממגילות ים המלח (Jerusalem, 1959), 42–44. In Hellenistic and Roman times, the phenomenon is not restricted to northern dialects—the dialects of Hebrew found at Qumran and in the Mishnah also show examples; for discussion, see especially E. Y. Kutscher, Studies in Galilean Aramaic, tr. Michael Sokoloff (Ramat Gan, 1976), 70–78; for references to examples from Qumran Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew and the secondary literature regarding them, see Lawrence H. Schiffman, The Halakhah at Qumran, SJLA 16 (Leiden, 1975), 32–33 n. 73. The interchanges of ט and מ were earlier discussed by Nahmanides in his commentary on Deut. 2:23 (regarding the word מ). Although this merger is sometimes seen as the result of Greek influence (for example, Gary Rendsburg, “Ancient Hebrew Phonology,” in Phonologies of Asia and Africa, ed. Alan S. Kaye [Winona Lake, IN, 1997], 74), it is suggested here that this is in fact a much older phenomenon.
done. Indeed, there is evidence for the interchange of נ and כ in Late Bronze Age Semitic already, which has for the most part gone unremarked in the Semitic literature. To be specific, there is evidence from Late Egyptian transcriptions of Semitic words that in some cases, etymological /ḥ/ was realized with voicing, as an /ʕ/. For example, the word כותב was written ‘אדי נא(א) in three Late Egyptian texts, and כומת (known from Arabic بحر "sea") was written ב-כ-ר(א). The word כֻּרין "beetle, grasshopper," was written כ-ר-י-א-ר (and with other comparable spellings).

The Egyptian transcriptions of Semitic words have proven to be invaluable to Semitists for the reconstruction of the phonology of Northwest Semitic dialects in the Late Bronze Age. Although long available, these transcriptions became eminently more useful after they were systematically collected and judiciously analyzed by James Hoch, as emphasized by Hoch himself as well as some of the reviewers of his book and more recent scholars.

The examples just seen suggest that sometimes Semitic /ḥ/ was voiced, and heard as an /ʕ/ by the Egyptian scribes. Locating this phonetic development is less simple. As Hoch points out, כותב (כומת) is attested only in South Semitic (Syrian Arabic, Ethiopic, and Arabic), but the other two are plausibly Aramaic: כֻּרין seems to be a native Aramaic word, and the plural ending -ינ in the word for "wheat" suggests that it, too, is Aramaic or Arabic in its origins. No single locale suggests itself as the origin for all of these words, but the northern part of the Levant is a strong candidate for at least two of them.

It should be emphasized, of course, that this evidence does not stand alone. The partial merger of נ with כ is well-known from a millennium or so later. The value of the Egyptian transcriptions is to enable us to move back the date of the beginning of that process to the Late Bronze Age, rather than seeing it as a new phenomenon in Hellenistic or Roman times. It is the combination of the early and late evidence that makes this suggestion worth entertaining.

It may also be worth considering the suggestion, then, that the form 좌 in the Gezer text represents כותב rather than כומת. It has long been noted that the Gezer text reflects northern Hebrew (or Phoenician); the clearest evidence for this is the contracted diphthongs in the words כלח "measuring" (SBH כלח) and כִּי "summer" (SBH כִּי). On the lexical level, the use of כלח rather than כolest also provides an isogloss between this text and Phoenician (and Proto-Hebrew) against standard Biblical Hebrew. (This is a result of an inner-Hebrew development, in which the term for "new moon," כִּי ירח, spread to mean "month" through abridgement and synecdoche.) The form כִּי for flax is also a marker of the northern Hebrew

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81 For these examples, see James E. Hoch, Semitic Words in Egyptian Texts of the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period (Princeton, 1994), 85 (no. 104) and 92–93 (no. 114). I am indebted to Gary Rendsburg for reminding me to check Hoch for relevant data.

82 Hoch, Semitic Words in Egyptian Texts, 66–67 (no. 72), with a discussion of the many phonological problems this word raises within Semitic. See also Hoch’s summary statements of the כ for נ interchanges on p. 413.


84 Despite the restriction of the lexeme to South Semitic in what is known to us, the second-millennium Egyptian evidence suggests that it was known in the Levant at that time. My thanks to Prof. Aaron Demsky for his comments in this regard.
dial ect: it is paralleled in Phoenician and Ugaritic, as well as in Hosea 2:7, 11.

Now perhaps we can add that the scribe pronounced the ב in the root ḫmr with voicing, thus yielding a sound equivalent to that of the י. This, too, was not a feature of the dialect of the south which became Classical Biblical Hebrew, but of certain dialects to the north and east, as seen in the Egyptian transcriptions of the words bahy, ḫittin and ḥippisit discussed above. This voicing may also have been a feature of the dialect in Gezer (or wherever the writer of the text came from).

Some linguists have suggested on the basis of other data (such as the use of the anticipatory pronoun inならない that the text is Phoenician. Regarding the issues at hand, however (the contractions of the diphthongs and the lexical form תנש), the Northern dialect of Hebrew shared these isoglosses with Phoenician; therefore, distinguishing between those two options is not possible on the basis of either of these features, and indeed, Dennis Pardee indicated that it may be “early Samarian Hebrew.” Some have argued for the Israelite identity of the scribe on the basis of his name, which is often reconstructed as יֵאלִיב on the bottom left corner of the text, but it is obviously hazardous to put too much weight on a conjectural restoration, and, indeed, no restoration may be necessary, as the name יֵאל is by itself is actually found on an Iron Age papyrus. The phonetic realization of /ḥ/h/ as /ʿ/ is known from loanwords, possibly from Aramaic, in the Late Bronze Age, and then from Galilean Hebrew and Aramaic a millennium later, but not in Phoenician. In my view, then, aligning the Gezer text with Northern Hebrew best accounts for all the data. Indeed, it seems intuitive to expect a text found at Gezer to be in northern Hebrew than to be in Phoenician.

Conclusions
Within the Gezer Calendar, it seems likely that the scribe transcribed the word ḥaṣid “harvest” as ḥ新闻中心. This reflected the phonetics of the word as he pronounced it and heard it. Perhaps because he not a classically trained scribe, he did not learn to compensate for his own pronunciation by writing the “proper” form.

The papyrus, published by J. T. Milik in Les grottes de Murabbaʿat, DJD 2 (Oxford, 1961), 97, is apparently just a list of names.

This adds to Gary Rendsburg’s argument that “northern Hebrew” is attested just to the north of Jerusalem itself. Recently, Rendsburg has made the case that in the late eighth and seventh centuries, the Benjaminites’ dialect of Hebrew shared certain features with northern Hebrew and Phoenician. See Rendsburg and William M. Schniedewind, “The Siloam Tunnel Inscription: Historical and Linguistic Perspectives,” IEJ 60 (2011): 188–203, and the dissertation written by Rendsburg’s student Colin Smith, “With an Iron Pen and a Diamond Tip: Linguistic Peculiarities in the Book of Jeremiah” (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 2003). Ideally, dialectal conclusions should not be based on a single text alone; numerous scenarios could be imagined to account for one tablet found at Gezer composed in a northern dialect. But it is possible that the Gezer dialect really was different from the Jerusalem-based dialect known as “standard biblical Hebrew,” and it may indeed be that it is Jerusalemite Hebrew that is the enigma, differing as it does from all its neighbors in basic phonological features such as the non-contraction of diphthongs. See the striking map provided by Garr in Dialect Geography, 40.

The vocalization, which is obviously speculative, is based on the assumption that the noun is the qāṭīl type common for agricultural activities, a possibility suggested to me by Gary Rendsburg. For the data, see John Huchnergard, “Qāṭīl and Qāṭīl Nouns in Biblical Hebrew,” in Sharihav Lashon: Studies in Hebrew, Aramaic and Jewish Languages Presented to Mohe Bar-Asher, ed. A. Maman, S. E. Fassberg, and Y. Breuer (Jerusalem, 2007), 1. 43–45. Huchnergard notes that the qāṭīl pattern “came to be associated with . . . agricultural terms and other terms for various plants” (45).

For this critical skill learned by scribes, see the examples and discussion in Richard C. Steiner, “Papyrus Amherst 63: A New Source for the Language, Literature, Religion, and History of
To summarize, therefore, it has been seen that the Hebrew noun מָכַד refers to the “adze” throughout the history of ancient Hebrew: it is found twice in the Hebrew Bible, in relatively unrevealing contexts, and often in rabbinic literature, in contexts that make the identification clear. Hebrew is unique among the Semitic languages in having a noun from the root עֶצֶד which refers to a carpentry tool; in other languages, cognates refer to agricultural tools and other cutting tools, but not to the tools of the carpenter.

Although the literary corpus of Hebrew (Biblical through Mishnaic) does not contain any attestations of the verbal root עֶצֶד, this root is attested in the Gezer calendar. Since flax (פֶּסֶח) is “uprooted” rather than “cut,” however, the use of עֶצֶד in the Gezer calendar does not match the data regarding the semantics of the root within Hebrew. Instead, I have suggested the connection of Gezer’s עֶצֶד with Aramaic חַצֶּד, and posit that in the dialect of the scribe, the ע and the ח were indistinguishable, at least in some contexts.