# LATE PUNIC WORDS FOR TEXTILES AND THEIR PRODUCTION

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An inscription cut in eleven columns of Neo-Punic script on lintel blocks became incorporated into a basilica at ancient Maktar in Tunisia, but probably originally adorned the city's temple. Discovered and published nearly half a century ago (Février and Fantar 1963-64, text B), the inscription has received limited attention from scholars[1]. The text, labeled Hr. Maktar N 76, is now available in excellent critical editions by Jongeling and Kerr (2005: 36-38) and Jongeling (*HNPI*). I recently produced a new translation and interpretation of the inscription (Schmitz forthcoming), reaching somewhat different conclusions about its character than previous investigators[2]. The prose narrative[3] of Hr. Maktar N 76 does not concern the repair of a dilapidated building, as has generally been thought. According to my interpretation, the background theme of the text is expressed in the phrase *y'tn šb't* (lines 2, 4), which I understand to be the distribution of spoils or captives by members of a group labeled *mzr'* (line 7)[4].

A foreground theme of the document, unrecognized in earlier studies, concerns the making, decoration, and display of cloth ensigns, banners, or pennants in connection with the background theme. Six words in the text have to do with types of cloth, weaving, embroidery, and the circumstances of textile production and decoration. The purpose of the present study is to bring this vocabulary to the attention of specialists and to add these words to the ongoing discussion about Northwest Semitic words for textiles and textile production in antiquity (Ribichini and Xella 1985; Sanmartín 1992; Van Soldt 1990; Vattioni 1990; Vogelsang-Eastwood 1992; Watson 1990; 2003; 2004; 2006).

Paolo Xella's recent study of Phoenician textile vocabulary treats two of the six words discussed below: *bṣ* "byssus" (Xella 2010: 419-20), and *rqm* "to weave" (*ibid.*, 418). The words *hykr*, *ḥtbt*, *mšlt*, and *ns*, introduced in the following paragraphs, are new additions to the Phoenician-Punic textile lexicon.

The textile theme begins in line 2 of the inscription and continues through line 6. Line 2 is complete and legible:

> *tyl' hykrt r'qym by'tn šb't*
>
> "They hung up varicolored ensigns for the distribution of spoil".

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1    Février and Fantar 1963-1964; Krahmalkov 1975; van den Branden 1977; Teixidor (1986: 17-18); Garbini (1987: 50-52); Jongeling and Kerr (2005: 36-38); *HNPI* 126-128.

2    I wish to acknowledge valuable correspondence with R. Kerr concerning Neo-Punic texts from Althiburus and Maktar (not including this text). Although my conclusions differ from the published views of Jongeling and Kerr at some points, I remain nonetheless mindful of the fundamental advances they have made.

3    Krahmalkov (1975) interpreted the text as a verse composition.

4    Compare MHeb *šibyā* 'captivity, captives' (Jastrow 1985: 1513-14).

The word *hykrt* had been interpreted as an aberrant *hip'îl* causative stem of *k-r-t* (Février and Fantar 1963-64: 50; Krahmalkov 1975: 180-181; 2000: 243-244 s.v. *krt* I), although the most recent treatments express caution about this analysis (Jongeling and Kerr 2005: 37: "highly speculative"; Jongeling, *HNPI* 127: "highly uncertain"). Late Punic *hykr* (see table 1) is properly a member of the class of nouns – rare in Northwest Semitic – formed with an initial *h-*[5]. Its Hebrew cognate *hêkēr* (see table 1) is masculine but forms the plural with the suffix *-ôt*[6]. This morphological feature secures the analysis of *hykrt* as plural[7]. The meaning "sign", in the material sense of an ensign, suits the context aptly.

The word *r'qym* /raqim/ (see table 1) derives from *r-q-m*, a root attested in Punic (Vattioni 1990; Xella 2010: 418)[8]. The professional designation *rqm* "weaver" (*CIS* I 4912.3) implies working with thread of different colors (Sznycer 1995: 19; Ferjaoui 1991).

Line 3 of the inscription introduces another variety of decorative elaboration:

[*wḥ*]*ṭbt 'l wmyst mšlt š' bṣ ql'rnt*

"[and em]broidered (ones), according to the manner of the stitchers of byssus of the storage cellars".

The Punic word *ḥṭbt* (see table 1) is cognate with Biblical Hebrew *ḥăṭūbôt* "multicolored cloth" (Prov 7:16 [*HALOT* 306]). In this instance, color in the design is a result of hand stitching rather than weaving. The word *mšlt* (< *š-l-ḥ* "stitch, baste"; see table 3) designates female specialists in the handicraft of needlework. The phrase *mšlt š' bṣ* "stitchers of byssus" designates a craft specialization[9].

The fine white cloth called *bṣ* (see table 1) may in this late period have been silk rather than linen, but the high quality of the cloth is primary in the designation. Xella (2010: 419-420) sets the Phoenician uses of the word in a larger comparative context of Semitic and Indo-European languages, so I will not repeat the discussion here[10].

Line 4 offers a summary statement concerning the working conditions of the textile workers:

*np'l bkw l bm ns'm by'tn šb't*

"Standards for the distribution of spoil were made by them in its windows"[11].

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5    The remaining Biblical Hebrew h- preformative nouns are *hakkārâ* (< n-k-r), *hanāpâ* (< n-w-p), and *haṣṣālâ* (< n-ṣ-l) (GKC §85.45).

6    On this class of masculine nouns, see GKC 224 §93, remark 1E, and Joüon and Muraoka (1993: 1:271 §90d).

7    Note additionally that *r'qym*, a masculine form, is in agrrenment with *hykrt*.

8    In the orthography of Late Punic, {'} and {y} are vowel letters, not consonants. Vowel length cannot be determined from the orthography (Kerr 2010: 39 n54).

9    Other examples are Phoenician *sprm š lḥ* 'tablet-scribes' (*CIS* I 86 A 14 = *KAI* 37 A 14), Late Punic *bnm š 'bnm* 'builders of stones' (*KAI* 100.4), designating stonemasons, and *ḥršm š yr* 'woodworkers' (*KAI* 100.6). On the syntax, see Schmitz (2009 [2010]).

10   Apparently byssus was stored in a *ql'rnt* (Heb. *qîllārîn* 'receptacle for food, pantry; provisions' [Jastrow 1985: 1361 s.v.]). See n.11 for further comments.

11   The word *kw*, cognate to Aramaic *kawā*(ʾ) 'window' (pl. *kawwê*), may refer to the windows of the *ql'rnt* (cognate to Middle Hebrew *qîllārîn* < Gk. κελλάριον = Lat. *cellarium* [Jastrow 1985: 1361 s.v.]), where the stitchers had sufficient light for close work.

All previous interpreters derive the word *ns'm* from *n-š-'ₗ* "rise, raise" (Février and Fantar 1963-1964: 51-52: "élevés"; Krahmalkov 1975: 183; *DNWSI* 761 s.v.: "part pass pl. m."; Jongeling and Kerr 2005: 37; *HNPI* 127). I argue that the word *ns* is cognate to Hebrew and Aramaic *nēs* "standard, ensign, flag, pennant" (*HALOT* 701-702; *DNWSI* 760). I translate *ns'm* as "standards"[12].

Line 5 refers to the making of standards as *p'lt m'ṣrt* "work under pressure" (cf. Isa 53:8; Ps 108:39). The phrase illustrates the always difficult working situation of piece-workers. Lines 6 and 7 of the text concern the satisfaction experienced by the local population viewing the finished ensigns and standards waving over nearby towns.

It is not surprising that the obscure and fairly technical vocabulary of Hr. Maktar N 76 has made this Late Punic text one of the most difficult in the Maktar series. Once recognized, these lexical items provide limited access to at least five categories of information about textiles and their production in Late Roman-period Maktar:

Fine cloth: *bṣ*
Varicolored woven cloth: *r'qym*
Colorful embroidered cloth: *ḥtbt*
Cloth semaphores: *hykr, ns*
Stitchers: *mšlt*

The prominence of textiles, textile workers, and textile production in the narrative of the inscription may also be an indication of its sponsorship. Although no statement in the extant text indicates this, one or more professional associations of textile workers might have provided funds to produce the inscription.

### Table 1: Textile Terms in Hr. Maktar N 76

| Form | Line | Root | Definition | Comments |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *bṣ* | 3 | *būṣ* | byssus | "byssus", a fine white cloth: *KAI* 24.12-13; 76 A 6 (*DNWSI* 185). |
| *hykr* | 2,5 | *n-k-r* | sign | n.m. /êkēr/[13] cf. MHeb. hêkēr n.m. "recognition, sign, indication"; JArm hêkērā(') also "signal" (Jastrow 1985: 345-346); "recognizable distinction" (*DJBA* 383b). |
| [*ḥ*]*ṭbt* | 3 | *ḥ-ṭ-b* | embroider | BH *ḥəṭūḇôṭ* "multicolored cloth" (Pr 7:16; *HALOT* 306); cf. MHeb *ḥôṭəḇā*(') n.m. "embroidery, design" (Jastrow 1985: 431 s.v.). |
| *mšlt* | 3 | *š-l-l₂* | seamstress, stitcher | n.f.pl. /məšallūt/ "seamstresses, stitchers"; cf. BH *šûl* 'seam' (*HALOT* 1442); MHeb *š-l-l₂* "chain stitch, loose stitch, baste" (Jastrow 1985: 1585 s.v.); JArm *š-l-l* G "to sew or chain together" (*CAL*). |
| *ns* | 4 | *nas* | sign | *ns'm* (< *n-s-s*) n.m. pl. "pennants" (*HALOT* 701-702). |
| *r'qym* | 5 | *r-q-m* | varicolored | n. m. s. /raq(q)im/ "varicolored"; note Punic *rqm* (*CIS* I 4912.3); cf. BH *riqmâ* "colorful weaving" (*HALOT* 1291); MHeb *reqem* "embroidery" (Jastrow 1985: 1497). |

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[12] The phrase *ḥmzrḥ wnsm* 'the *mzrḥ* and their standard' (*KAI* 159.4-5) in the large Neo-Punic inscription from Althiburus appears to associate the *ns* 'standard' with the *mzrḥ*.

[13] Kerr (2010: 64) discusses evidence for the loss of word-initial /h/.

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