

## BIBLICAL NAMES FOR MILITARY WEAPONS IN MODERN HEBREW

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**Abstract:** The military weapons of Israeli army includes a wide array arms, armored vehicles, tanks, artillery, planes, helicopters, missiles, and warships. Many of their names are from ancient origin, especially from Biblical Hebrew. During the process of the Hebrew language revival at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, the restorers of the language were aware of the inadequacy of its vocabulary as existing in classical texts. They looked upon their work as a means of closing the gap between Ancient Hebrew vocabulary and contemporary needs. In field of military vocabulary as in other fields of basic vocabulary were adapted Biblical or Mishnaic words, which no longer functioned in their original meaning in the generation of revival or were unknown before the revival. In this paper will be described some modern military weapons in their Biblical context and the process of their adaptation to the modern use. The following nouns will be described: gun (*rove*), revolver (*ekdah*), cannon (*totah*), mortar (*margema*), mine (*mokesh*), shell, cannonball (*pagaz*), bombe (*petzatza*). Can it be said that at the time of establishment of the State of Israel and of IDF in 1948, Hebrew speech was already a complete fact, and the revival process was no longer a process of creation, but a process of expansion. The fact is that the military terminology, as other fields, were not fulfilled until the sixties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and even later. For example, the term for "flight of airplanes" (*matas*) was created only in 1964.

**Keywords:** Hebrew, IDF, Biblical Weapons, Bible, Revival of Hebrew

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The process of revival of the Hebrew language began at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and did not end until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This revival of the Hebrew language is generally considered to be one of the outstanding sociolinguistic phenomena of modern times. Several serious scholars have even referred to it in terms of the miraculous (Tur Sinai, 1960:23). Hebrew had been an everyday spoken language of the Israelite, used for reading, writing as well, for over 1600 years from the 13<sup>th</sup> century BCE to the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE. About the year 200 CE, as one of the consequences of the failed Jewish revolts against Rome, the Hebrew language died as a spoken language and was replaced by the two international lingua francas of the time, Aramaic and Greek. From then until its reintroduction as a spoken language in Palestine in the 1880's, however, Hebrew was in no sense stagnant, for the Biblical and Rabbinical styles served both singularly and together in various combinations, in various times and places, as norms for further creative writing (Fellman, 1973).

The restorers of the language were aware of the designative inadequacy of its vocabulary as existing in the above classical texts. Even such words as newspaper, watch, kitchen, now part of

basic Hebrew, were unknown before the revival. For this reason they paid great attention to the problem "how to fill the gap," as they put it, and their efforts were directed towards planned innovation (Tene, 1969). They are seven major methods used in lexical codification in the Hebrew revival. The third method is "Drawing words from old sources and assigning them new meanings, as *Hashmal* 'electricity', *meHona* 'machine', *totaH* 'cannon' from Biblical Hebrew; *'itzumim* 'sanctions', *teges* 'ceremony' from Mishnaic Hebrew". This presentation systematically examines some of the terms for Modern Hebrew weapons, which derive from Biblical Hebrew. It examines the etymology of each term and their instances in the whole corpus of the Hebrew Language during the ages. Semantic changes have occurred only concerning the nature of Modern war comparing to the Ancient warfare.

### 2. EQDAH 'REVOLVER'<sup>1</sup>

The word *eqdaH* does go back to Bible, but it appears only one time in the book of Isaiah 55:12 "And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy

<sup>1</sup> The transcription in this paper is from Lexilogos, advised by IPA, <http://www.lexilogos.com/clavier/ivrit.htm>

gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones."<sup>2</sup> The meaning of this word is obscure. In Targum Jonathan<sup>3</sup> is translated 'coal.' BDB (1906: 869) determines "perhaps fiery glow, sparkle." Is based on Jewish ancient interpretation: "Your gates will look in the burning light." In Hebrew, the full expression is *avney eqdaH*, meaning 'stones of *eqdaH*' This interpretation refers to the meaning of the root of the word QDH. The meaning of this root in Biblical Hebrew is 'be kindled, kindle.' For example, "A fire is kindled in mine anger" (Deuteronomy 32:22). The Biblical word *qadaHat* 'fever', in Modern Hebrew 'malaria,' is from same root. This root exists in other Semitic languages, as Aramaic *qedah* 'bore, kindle', and Arabic *qadaHa* 'strike fire'. The same root in Mishnaic Hebrew means 'to bore, perforate, and penetrate.' We find the verb for example in Mishna<sup>4</sup>, tractate Shabbat 12:1, "he who bores a hole ever so small." The grammatical formation here is a verb in the Qal derivation, but we find the root as well in *Hiphil* derivation *hiqdiah* for two primary meanings: (1) to cut out, make an opening; and (2) to cause burning, to spoil a dish, a dye (Jastrow, 1903: 1314). This second sense of 'to cause burning' is derivate of course from the Biblical meaning of 'be kindled'. It is a very famous passage in Mishna, tractate Gittin ('divorce') 9:10: "If she spoiled a dish for him, he may divorce her." Of course, all is about not a meal, but a bad behavior. Another known phrase is in Talmud Bavli<sup>5</sup>, Tractate Berachot ('blessings') 17: b "that we may not have a son or a pupil that disgraces his education in public." The root of the word *eqdaH* in the Bible maybe has shifted in two meanings: always appears in Biblical Hebrew "be kindled", and in Mishnaic Hebrew means "to bore." The problem is that the second meaning does not exist in the Bible at all. In KJV above, the translation is 'carbuncles', based on Vulgata and Septuaginta translations. 'Carbuncles' is in sense of the Hebrew word translated as 'agates'.

Concerning the morphological pattern of the word, the addition of the consonant *Aleph* to the

root of QDH is due to that in Biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew, the addition of the consonant /a/ is as the result that in Hebrew a word starts always with a consonant and not a vowel (except the *vav* 'and' in certain circumstances). This letter is a form of a prosthetic letter. To avoid harshness in pronunciation a helping sound, *Aleph* prosthetic with its vowel, is prefixed to some words, e.g., *ezroa* 'arm' from *zroa*, *etzb'a* 'a finger' (French *esprit* from *spiritus*, Arabic *usfur* "bird" from stem *safara*) (Gesenius, 1910:70, 235). In Hebrew, they are more prosthetic vowels and *Aleph* can be one of them (Shafrir, 2014: 250).

The *eqdaH* word was unused for almost 3000 years, until Eliezer Ben Yehuda (1858-1922), the famous reviver of Spoken Hebrew, suggested in 1896 to use it for 'gun.' It was another expression used in this period based on another Biblical word (next chapter). He started to use it in his newspapers "*hatZevi*" and "*hashqafa*" for both 'gun' and 'revolver'. The spreading of the word started ten years later, first in newspapers, and later in the speech. The sense of 'revolver' became the sole meaning due to a very famous poem written by Itamar Ben Avi, Ben Yehuda's son, named "*haEqdaH*" 'The Revolver' in the end of the first decade of the 20th century. After years of love poems edited in "*haOr*" newspaper, he lost heart and published a poem in which he menaced to commit suicide.

### 3. ROVE 'GUN'

This word appears in a sole verse in Genesis 21:20 "And God was with the lad, and he grew. And he dwelt in the wilderness, and became, as he grew up, an archer." The ordinary compound for 'archer' in Biblical Hebrew is *dorcheq qeshet*, meaning 'bow benders', and the signification of *dorcheq* is 'tread' and *qeshet* is 'bow.' In this verse, the compound is *rove qashshat*, meaning 'one shooting the bow.' BDB (1906: 1916) derived it from *rove qeshet* and proposed to read *rome qeshet*. The root RMH one of the common roots for 'shoot, throw' in Biblical Hebrew (see 'mortar' below). On the other hand, the root RVH for 'shoot' does not exist in Biblical Hebrew and this is the unique item. The form of *rove* is a verb in active participle, being in Biblical Hebrew a noun. The problem is the second part of the compound *qashshat*. This compound is a phrase meaning '(he) shoots a bow.' The noun for 'bow' is *qeshet*, containing the same root of QSHT as *qashshat*, but being on a different base (Swarzwald, 1998: 268). They belong to two different ground-forms

<sup>2</sup> The English Biblical verses are from King James Version, unless indicated different.

<sup>3</sup> It is the classical translation of the Bible to Aramaic called Targum Onkelus for the Tora portion and Targum Jonatan for Prophets and Writings portions.

<sup>4</sup> Is the first major written redaction of the Jewish oral law tradition known as the "Oral Torah." It contains 6 orders and 63 tractates.

<sup>5</sup> The Babylonian Talmud is one of the two Talmuds produced the Rabbinic Judaism and contains 37 tractates.

(patterns). The first is a dissyllabic with penultima accent, and is related to the *Segolates* ground-form *getel*, taking two similar short vowels of /e/ (*segol*) (Gesenius, 1910: 228). The second is a noun with the middle consonant sharpened and belongs to the ground-form *qattal* with two long vowels of /a/ in both syllables. (Gesenius, 1910:233). This group denotes usually a professional, an artisan, e.g. *gannav* 'a thief', *dayyan* 'a judge', *tabbah* 'a cook'. Therefore, the meaning of the compound cannot be as BDB translated "one shooting the bow", rather "an archer is shooting".

In the modern era, the word *rove* was in use by the writers of *haskalah*, the Jewish Enlightenment movement<sup>6</sup>, in the form of *qne rove* 'a barrel of a shooter'. This is an example of the clumsy and unwieldy phrases to which the novelist was compelled to resort time and time again in order to express their ideas via an adequate linguistic medium (Patterson, 1962:318). A simple example is *more shaot* 'to show the hours'; it is used to designate a 'watch' or 'clock'; the term for "newspaper" is *michtav iti* 'a timely letter'.

Eliezer Ben-Yehuda rejected those compound nouns being foreign to Hebrew and influenced by German on Hebrew. The first Modern Hebrew word for which Ben Yehuda could claim authorship was *millon* 'dictionary'. He suggested it in 1 January 1880 in a letter to "Maggid Mishne," a Hebrew journal published in Germany. In this letter, he rejected the current term *sefer millim*, a clumsy literal translation of the German *Wörterbuch*. He was fearful of the influence of German on Hebrew – compound words, he insisted, were foreign to Hebrew. In this specific case he suggested use of a suffix *on*, expressing the concept of a place or "a thing comprising the concept rendered in the noun." Thus from *milla* 'word' plus *on*, he created the common *millon* 'dictionary,' which immediately gained currency. The transformation of two- or three-word expressions into single words became an important feature in the development of Modern Hebrew (Sivan, 1969: 38-39). Thus, at least more than fifty two-word expressions have given way to one-word expressions. Only a few of the one-word expressions are old words, which underwent semantic changes (Sivan, 1980: 33, 35). Such is the one-word *rove* from the two-word expression *qne rove*. Ben Yehuda published on 11 December 1896 in his newspaper "*hatZevi*," a long article rejecting the use of the two-word *qne rove*. He

suggested a few suggestions, but rejected David Yellin's (1864- 1941)<sup>7</sup> suggestion to use only *rove*. A year later, he suggested *eqdaH* for a 'gun.' It was only a few years later that the word *rove* was used only for 'gun,' and *eqdaH* only for 'revolver.'

#### 4. *TOTAH* 'CANNON'

The word *totaH* appears in the Bible once in the book of Job 41:29: "Darts are counted as stubble: he laugheth at the shaking of a spear"; In ASV<sup>8</sup> the translation is "Clubs are counted as stubble: He laugheth at the rushing of the javelin." In the original Hebrew version of the Old Testament, the verse is 21 and not 29. The KJV translated *totaH* to 'dart,' and ASV version of the Old Testament translated it to 'club.' BDB translation is "name of a weapon, perhaps club, mace (or dart, javelin)" (BDB, 1906: 450). The Jewish classical interpretation is "a sort of weapon." One of the most famous interpreters, RaLBaG<sup>9</sup>, explained in his Biblical interpretation as "a weapon that fired stones."

The origin of this word is a bit mysterious. Outside of the word *totaH*, the root YTH does not exist in Hebrew. This root is found in Arabic WTH, meaning "beat with a club, chastise." From this root derives in Arabic the word *mittaHa* 'club.' In this case the ground-form is *taqtal*, a very unusual noun pattern in Hebrew. Another option is that the root is TTH, and the Hebrew word is a loan word from the Assyrian *tartaHu* 'club, javelin' (BDB, 1906:450). In this case, the ground-form is *qotal*, more usual than the precedent.

The word was not used in Mishnaic Hebrew. Only centuries later, the *payyanim*<sup>10</sup> liked it and insert it in their poems. In a *piyyut* from Spain around the year 1000 CE "sliHot leta'anit" 'a penitential song for fast-days' we find the verse "in front of me a *totaH* shoots arrows of a bow." In the modern era, the word entered into common lexicon for 'cannon' in the middle of the nineteenth century, in Hebrew newspapers and by *haskala* writers. The form was again a compound two-word noun *kley totaH* 'tool of cannon.' The first to skip *kley* and to use one-word expression *totaH* was the

<sup>7</sup> One of the foremost pedagogues and cultural leaders of Palestine, and one of the most eminent revivers of Hebrew.

<sup>8</sup> The American Standard Version of the Holy Bible.

<sup>9</sup> Gersonides (Levi ben Gershon, acronym RaLBaG, 1288-1344) was a philosopher, Talmudist, mathematician and astronomer in France.

<sup>10</sup> The authors of the Jewish liturgical poems known as a *piyyut*.

<sup>6</sup> Was among the European Jews in the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

eminent writer *Mendele Mocher Sefarim*<sup>11</sup> in 1862. The two-word expression continues to be used until the second decade of the twentieth century.

### 5. MARGEMA 'MORTAR'

The word *margema* appears once in the Old Testament in the book of Proverbs 26:8 "As he that bindeth a stone in a sling, so [is] he that giveth honour to a fool." KJV and ASV both translated *margema* to 'sling.' The same definition is given by BDB (1906: 920), which adds the Hebrew original version is *tzror even* 'stone-heap,' and not 'stone'. The early mortars fired stone shots very high seeing used in siege warfare. This weapon was perhaps a big slingshot, which fired a stone-heap in one shoot. This verse refers to pagan custom of throwing stones on some idols, and compares the shooter to a foul. The Rabbinical interpretation refers it to the Roman *Mercurius* and the Hellenic *Hermes*, in English 'Mercury', idol-worship. He was reported as becoming extremely popular among the nations the Roman Empire conquered, inclusive Judaea. The Jews used to throw stones at *Mercurius* statues over the ways, to owe their loathe to this cult. The Mishna says that even to throw a stone in this sense is a symbol of paganism.

The root RGM in the sense of 'stone, kill by stoning' exists in many Semitic languages, e.g., Arabic *rag'ama* 'throw stones at, revile, curse,' Aramaic *regam* 'stone,' Ethiopian 'curse'. The Biblical synonym root is SQL (BDB, 1906: 920).

The fossilized term *margema* entered the Modern Hebrew in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, after an absence of 2500 years. In 1866 was used by the famous writer *Mendele Mocher Sefarim* in a translation from German of a bioscience book "The History of the Nature", referring to the ancient sense "they used a *margema* to throw stones." The term entered the public consciousness during the Second World War. In 1942 entered the press and appeared in the newspaper "*haTZofe*" in a list of German army weapons.

### 5. PETZATZA 'BOMBE'

We can affirm that there is a substratum unity. This word is a new one, but his root is Biblical Hebrew. Is used only as a verb in a few occasions, "[Is] not my word like as a fire? saith the lord; and

like a hammer [that] breaketh the rock in pieces?" (Jeremiah 23:29). The verb in Hebrew version is *yefotzetz* which is a *po'el* pattern Imperfect singular masculine, meaning 'hammer which shatters rock' (BDB, 1906:828). A second item is in book of Habakkuk 3:6 "He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting." Here the verb translated by KJV 'scattered' is Hebrew *vayitpotzetz*, a *hitpo'el* pattern Imperfect plural masculine, meaning of course 'scatter.'

The root PTZTZ 'break' is found in other Semitic languages as Arabic *fad'da* 'break, break asunder,' Nabatean same sense, Syriac 'crush.'

The root was unused in Mishnaic Hebrew, and a noun is first recorded in the late Middle Age, in a *piyyut* from the 9<sup>th</sup> century in the form of *petzetz*, a masculine noun, in the sense of 'fragment, splinter.' This is a masculine noun and its plural form is *petzatzim*. Ben Yehuda coined the word *petzatza*, a feminine noun, in Aube of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and published it in 1904 the distinguished writer and journalist Nahum Sokolov in his newspaper "*haTzefira*". The word is modeled after the pattern *qetala*. In his dictionary, he gave two meanings: 'bomb' and 'mine.' During a few decades, both words have been used to designate both meanings, despite the word for 'mine' exists in the Bible *mogesh* and was already in use in this period.

### 6. MOQESH 'MINE'

This word *mogesh* has a rather straightforward etymology. Isaiah 8:14 is a good example for it "And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem." In the Hebrew text they are two synonyms *paH* and *mogesh*, translated in KJV 'gin' and 'snare.' In Biblical Hebrew, they are many synonyms for 'trap, snare, and gin.' The definition of BDB (1906: 430) is "a bait or lure in a fowler's net, fig. snare," according to verse as Proverbs 12:13 "The wicked is snared by the transgression of [his] lips; but the just shall come out of trouble."

The root is YQSH in the sense of "lay bait or lure, lay snares"; two similar roots with the same meaning are in Biblical Hebrew NQSH and QUSH. The root YQSH is found in the form of verbs in different conjugations, as *yaqoshti*, Qal perfect, in Jeremiah 50:24 "I have laid a snare for thee, and thou art also taken, O Babylon."

<sup>11</sup> Shalom Abramovich, known as Mendele Mocher Sefarim (1836-1917), was a Russian Jewish author, one of the founders of modern Hebrew literature and one of the most important revivers of the Modern Hebrew Language.

## BIBLICAL NAMES FOR MILITARY WEAPONS IN MODERN HEBREW

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The word was used during all the periods in his Biblical sense, as well in the Modern Era, starting from the *haskala* authors in Middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The word *moqesh* is first recorded as a weapon in newspapers in 1892. The term was used in both senses of 'mine' and 'bomb.'

### 7. PAGAZ 'CANNONBALL'

The word *pagaz* comes to us not from the Bible, but from the classical translation of the Bible to Aramaic, the Targum. The word appears in a very difficult verse in Ezekiel 26:9 "And he shall set engines of war against the walls, and with his axes he shall break down the towers." The "engines of war" in the KJV is in the original Hebrew version written in two unusual words *umHi qavolo*, meaning 'a hit in front of him.' The Jewish interpretation is usually "an engine to throw stones." The translation of Targum Jonatan is *umHat pegozohi* and in some versions of the translation is *umHat pegoshohi*, meaning 'a hit of some kind of weapon.' Jastrow (1903: 1132) defines the word *pagoz* "battering projectile." Kohut (1889: 290) defines it 'a big stone to be stoned' and he is adding in German 'grosser Wurfstein.' The word *pagosh* and his variant *pagoz* exist in Mishnaic Hebrew in Mishna, tractate Kelim (tools) 16:8 in the compound *bet haPagošot* and a variant of *bet haPagozot*, in the sense of 'quiver for arrows.' Therefore, in Mishnaic Hebrew the meaning is 'arrow.' In Semitic Languages can be a phonological alternation between the sibilant consonants /s/, /ʃ/, and /z/, and as a result both forms exist *pagosh* and *pagoz*. The meaning of the word is 'arrow' and 'stone,' in Hebrew and Aramaic. In Ben Yehuda Dictionary (1952: 4810-4811) we find the Syriac word *pagasha* in the sense of 'stone,' and the translation of *pagoz* into 'slingstone.'

The word was not in use since the Mishnaic period in the second century CE until the 11<sup>th</sup> century when it appears in some *piyyutim*. In one of them from the south of France appears *pagoz* in the sense of 'stone', "your stones will shatter the town as a broken clay pottery." The modern pattern *pagaz* was coined by Alexander Kohut in his dictionary (Kohut, 1889: 290) for 'stones.'

Only in 1939, we find the modern military use of 'shell,' in a brochure edited by *hahagana*<sup>12</sup>

military organization "Infantry Section Leading." In the Hebrew translation, they are footnotes with new coined Hebrew terms. On page 34, the second note is "*pagaz* – shell (in English) – a big bomb to shoot from a cannon or a mortar." The word entered the press in 1940. The full use was completed during the Independence War in 1948.

### 8. CONCLUSION

All the weapons, which were coined from Biblical weapons, are long-range weapons, not short-range, not protective armor, and not chariots. All those weapons remained in their original ancient meaning. In antiquity, long-range weapons were intended to inflict casualties on the enemy from afar by means of stones or arrows (Gonen, 1975: 41). In Modern era, they do not use any more for munitions. Therefore, those missile weapons are not current anymore and they were free to be coined as modern artillery weapons. This process transformed the ancient 'dart' into a modern 'cannon,' the ancient 'sling' into a modern 'mortar,' the ancient 'trap' into a modern 'mine.' Generally, most of the modern military terminology in IDF is from Biblical and Mishnaic non-military origin, e.g., *matos* 'aircraft,' *masoq* 'helicopter,' *matzneah* 'parachute,' *leyyaret* 'to intercept missiles or rockets,' *qatzin* 'officer,' *tiron* 'recruit,' *tzo'er* 'cadet,' *milu'im* 'reserve force,' *taHmoshet* 'munition.' Most of ranges, units, and most verbs for warfare operations are from Biblical and Mishnaic origin.

On the other hand, one of the main problems of the revival of Hebrew was how to adapt it to the expression of the needs of a modern society (Tene, 1969:8). In the decade of 1880, Hebrew, daily papers began to appear. These journals introduced into the language many lexical and syntactic means of expressing contemporary political ideas and trends of thought, and altogether shaped a Hebrew style, which was less aesthetically oriented and more direct and forceful. In this process, Hebrew was prepared for the role of a State language in Israel (Rabin, 1969: 34). One of the most important institutions of a State is the army. From the first Jewish Palestinian forces in the British army during the First World War, the target was to use in those units the Hebrew Language only. The IDF fulfilled this target with a big success after his establishment in 1948.

<sup>12</sup> "Hahagana" organization was the main defense force of the Jewish community in Palestine during the time of time of the British Mandate until 1948.

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