

II Sam. 17:28 — Beds, Sofas, and Hebrew Lexicography

Simon Hopkins

Among the late Addi Wasserstein's many interests was a boundless fascination for words and idioms, their origin, their usage and the transformations they underwent at different times and in different cultures. The Hebrew Bible offers ample scope for such etymological and semantic investigation and in my contribution to this volume in his memory I should like to make a few remarks about the identity of the first two items brought to David on his arrival in Mahanaim (II Sam. 17:28). The exegetical history of מִשְׁכָּב וְסֹפָת contains several points of interest, with implications not only for the ancient vocabulary of Biblical Hebrew but also for the more recent coinages of the modern language. The following notes enlarge upon the few lines devoted to the matter by E.Y. Kutscher in 1961.¹

We must begin with a discussion of the Hebrew root *škb*. In most Hebrew dictionaries there is listed a single root *škb* with the familiar meaning 'to lie'. The Semitic cognates of this common Hebrew word are as follows:

Akkadian	Ugaritic	Syriac	Ethiopic	Arabic
<i>skp</i> (sic)	<i>škb</i>	<i>škb</i>	<i>skb</i>	ø

Arabic does not possess an exact equivalent of this word, for the formally corresponding Arabic root *skb* does not mean 'to lie' but 'to pour' and can only with difficulty be fitted into the picture. It does, however, provide etymological support for the possible existence of *škb* 'to pour' in Biblical Hebrew, a proposal which has been made from mediaeval down to modern times, but not adopted with enthusiasm by recent lexicographical tradition.

The identification of several occurrences of שכב with Arabic *skb* in the meaning 'pour' appears already in the Arabic Bible translation of Saadyah Gaon (e.g. Ex.16:13,14; Job 38:37), is stated explicitly by Judah b. Quraysh in his etymological *risāla*² and in the wake of Arabic usage seemed almost self-evident to many mediaeval Hebrew lexicographers, e.g. Menaḥem b. Saruq. If we accept

¹ E.Y. Kutscher, *Words and their History* (Jerusalem 1961) 70 [Hebrew].

² D. Becker (ed.), *The Risāla of Judah ben Quraysh* (Tel Aviv 1984) 302 no. 412. *škb* occurs in the third section of this book, the section devoted to roots shared by Hebrew and Arabic.

this suggestion, Biblical Hebrew will possess two homonymous roots, viz. the common *škb* I 'to lie' and the rarer *škb* II 'to pour'. This, however, was not the view of W. Gesenius (1786-1842), whose influence in lexical matters was decisive and upon whose work the modern lexicography of Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic is very largely based.³ In order to be more exact and to put the issue in its proper historical light, we should rather say that the belief in two separate roots *škb* I and *škb* II was ultimately not upheld by Gesenius but abandoned by him only towards the end of his career. In his early lexica the existence of two homonyms was accepted and given explicit, albeit somewhat hesitant, expression. Thus in the first edition of the *Handwörterbuch* (1815) we find two rubrics: *škb* I 'sich legen' etc. and *škb* II 'viell. nach arab. Sprachgebrauch s.v.a. *skb* ausgiessen'.⁴ Similarly again in 1823, but by the third edition (1828) Gesenius's opinion had changed and only one root *škb* appears,⁵ it meanwhile having become clear to him 'nach längerer sorgfältiger Beobachtung der Ideenverbindung der Semiten' (ibid. Vorrede xlvi) that much of what had formerly been separated in fact belongs together. This view of things reappears in the fourth edition of the *Handwörterbuch* (1834), the last produced by Gesenius himself, was embodied in the posthumously published part of his grand *Thesaurus Philologicus Criticus* (1853),⁶ and from these two sources passed into most subsequent dictionaries of Biblical Hebrew, especially those used in the Christian world. During the nineteenth century the only major lexicographer to remain immune from the influence of Gesenius in this matter was his erstwhile pupil J. Fürst, who, doubtless in deliberate continuation of Menahem b. Saruq and other mediaeval Jewish philologists, adhered to the early division of *škb* into I and II.⁷

Most of the currently used post-Gesenius Biblical dictionaries, e.g. those of Brown-Driver-Briggs, Gesenius-Buhl, König and Koehler-Baumgartner, do not recognize the existence of *škb* II. Of modern scholarly lexica only F. Zorell's *Lexicon Hebraicum et Aramaicum Veteris Testamenti* (Rome 1954) 840/1 distinguishes explicitly between two homophonous roots and arranges the

³ See E.F. Miller, *The Influence of Gesenius on Hebrew Lexicography* (New York 1927).

⁴ W. Gesenius, *Neues hebräisch-deutsches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament* (Leipzig 1815) 646/7.

⁵ W. Gesenius, *Hebräisches und chaldäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament* (Leipzig 1828) 837.

⁶ W. Gesenius, *Thesaurus Philologicus Criticus Linguae Hebraeae et Chaldaeae Veteris Testamenti* III, ed. Aemilius Roediger (Leipzig 1853) 1402/3. This work is far more informative on the issue than any other Hebrew dictionary published before or since.

⁷ J. Fürst, *Hebräisches und chaldäisches Schul-Wörterbuch* (Leipzig 1842) 585/6 and again in his larger *Hebräisches und chaldäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament* II (Leipzig 1861, and later editions) 441.

material under separate rubrics: *škb* I '(de)cubuit' (impf. *yīškab*), *škb* II 'effudit' (impf. **yīškob*). Zorell may have been influenced in his treatment by H.M. Orlinsky, who in *JBL* 63 (1944) 19-44 had published a study of *škb* in Biblical Hebrew and apparently decided (pp. 37/8), like some of the mediaeval Hebrew philologists to whom he refers, upon the existence of two homonymous roots as the best means to solve some of the semantic problems involved.⁸

One of the Biblical words in which some of the mediaeval Jewish philologists discovered the use of *škb* II is the מִשְׁכָּב which occurs at the head of the list of objects brought to David upon his reaching Mahanaim. In II Sam. 17:28 we read מִשְׁכָּב וְסִפּוֹת וְכָלִי יוֹצֵר. While all seem to agree regarding כָּלִי יוֹצֵר, the proposed identities of מִשְׁכָּב וְסִפּוֹת are somewhat variable. The conventional understanding, e.g. Targum Jonathan, Midrash Tehillim⁹ and Rashi, is along the lines of 'bettweg, becken, jrden gefes' (Luther), 'beds, and basins, and earthen vessels' (AV). But this collocation of heterogeneous domestic objects is not immediately satisfactory; what are the 'beds' (sic, apparently in an unusual collective meaning) doing here together with the basins and earthen vessels, followed by the agricultural produce 'and wheat, and barley, and flour, and parched corn, and beans, and lentiles, and parched pulse'? One method of harmonizing the list is to remove the 'beds' by seeking in מִשְׁכָּב the root *škb* II, thus understanding a kind of vessel used for pouring. This would give us an entirely logical inventory of three different types of kitchen utensils to be used in the preparation of the following foodstuffs. Such an interpretation is given by Judah b. Quraysh (loc. cit.),¹⁰ by the Karaite David b. Abraham al-Fāsi,¹¹ and appears very plainly in D. Kimḥi, whose dictionary mentions no other exegetical possibility: וְהוּא כָּלִי שֶׁשּׁוֹפֵכִין בוֹ מִיָּם לַיָּדַיִם 'and it is a vessel with which one pours water on to the hands'.¹² There is thus a substantial body of mediaeval

⁸ The homophones *škb* I and II and their relationship to *špk* 'to pour' require to be treated anew; here the matter is stated in the briefest fashion only. It is worth noting that in certain varieties of mediaeval Karaite Hebrew *škb* II 'to pour' is a living reality, not a mere exegetical postulate.

⁹ Ed. S. Buber (Vilna 1891) 18a (35).

¹⁰ Quoted negatively by Gesenius, *Thesaurus* III 1403a (*quo loco Juda ben K. male vasis genus interpretatur, gutturnium*) and hence ignored by most subsequent dictionaries of Biblical Hebrew.

¹¹ S.L. Skoss (ed.), *The Hebrew-Arabic Dictionary of the Bible known as Kitāb Jāmi' al-alfāz (Agrōn) of David ben Abraham al-Fāsi the Karaite (Tenth Cent.)* II (New Haven 1945) 667.

¹² Jo.H.R. Biesenthal & F. Lebrecht (eds.), *Rabbi Davidis Kimchi Radicum Liber* (Berlin 1847) 384a. In his commentary to the verse, however, Kimḥi conceded the alternative possibility, adding: 'and there are those who interpret 'bed', so called because one lies (*škb*) on it'.

opinion,¹³ both Rabbanite and Karaite, which would see in משכב וספוח a homogeneous pair of kitchen utensils.¹⁴

But, on the other hand, משכב seems far too transparent and obvious a word to be understood in anything but its usual sense. Indeed, in at least one source this very occurrence is the only(!) example of משכב 'couch, bed' adduced,¹⁵ and one would certainly not declare the appearance of 'beds' here to be impossible. Others have therefore looked to ספוח with a view to gaining a smoother sense. The unique vocalization (according to the best sources¹⁶) in our verse of ספוח with *pataḥ* doubtless encouraged the belief that the intention might be to something other than ספוח ~ ספוח 'basins' with *hiriq*. Instead of a homogeneous pair of cooking utensils, perhaps it is possible to match the 'basins' with the preceding 'beds', and transfer the two items from the kitchen to the sleeping quarters or lounge? The great majority of Hebrew lexica do not adopt such an approach, but understand this ספוח as the plural of סף (or, with e.g. Ben-Yehuda [see below], ספה) 'vessel, cup'. But 'cup' is not the only meaning which has been assigned to the word. There exist various attempts, both ancient and modern, to interpret ספוח in the light of the preceding משכב 'bed', finding in the word reference to some sort of bedding material, rug, couch etc. The rendering of the LXX is not only somewhat problematical in itself, but implies a Vorlage different from the MT: ἤνεγκαν δέκα κοίτας καὶ ἀμφιτάπους καὶ λέβητας δέκα καὶ σκεύη κεράμου 'they brought ten beds and carpets and basins ten and pottery vessels'. Here four classes of offerings seem to be mentioned, but it should be noted that some witnesses lack the first καὶ and the Alexandrinus omits καὶ σκεύη κεράμου. Whether ספוח is reflected in ἀμφιτάπους 'carpets, blankets',¹⁷ in λέβητας 'basins',¹⁸ or possibly in both, may be open to debate. More straightforward is the Vulgate's *obtulerunt ei stratoria et tapetia et vasa fictilia* and the Peshitta's *qarreb[u] 'arsātā w-tešwyātā w-māne d-paḥḥārā* 'they offered

¹³ Among the moderns a virtually lone voice is that of the independent Amos Ḥakham, who in his Hebrew commentary to Job (Jerusalem 1970) 299 ad Job 38:37 explicitly states that משכב II Sam. 17:28 means 'drinking vessel' not 'bed'.

¹⁴ Against this it should be observed that the early Gesenius, Fürst, Zorell, and Orlinsky (art. cit. pp. 41/2), all of whom accepted the existence of *škb* II 'pour', nevertheless referred משכב in our verse to *škb* I 'lie'.

¹⁵ B. Davidson, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon* (London n.d. [1848]) dccxiii.

¹⁶ In many works printed before the middle of the last century the vocalization with *pataḥ* is not found.

¹⁷ E.g. O. Thenius, *Die Bücher Samuels* (Leipzig 1842) 209: 'ספוח, ist nach LXX hier ... nicht ... von Schalen, sondern von Teppichen zu verstehen'; A.M. Honeyman, *JTS* 37 (1936) 58.

¹⁸ E.g. J. Wellhausen, *Der Text der Bücher Samuelis* (Göttingen 1871) 201; E. Hatch & H.A. Redpath, *A Concordance to the Septuagint II* (Oxford 1897) 863b.

couches and beds and potter's vessels', where the equation of ספות with *tapetia* 'covers, blankets' and *tešwyātā* 'beds' seems obvious. We thus see that ספות has been interpreted both as (i) 'basins, cups' in accordance with the following unequivocal יוצר כלי, and as (ii) 'rugs, couches' in accordance with the preceding משכב (i.e. *škb* I):

	משכב	ספות	כלי יוצר
(i)	beds	basins	↔ earthen vessels
(ii)	beds	↔ rugs, couches	earthen vessels

The understanding of ספות in the light of משכב 'bed' is quite often met with in Jewish exegesis of the late Haskala period onwards; for example, S.L. Gordon (1867-1933), an influential commentator whose works still enjoy a fairly wide readership, explains that ספות in II Sam. 17:28 are מוֹתוֹת לִשְׁבֹּת וּלְשֹׁכֵב עֲלֵיהֶן 'couches to sit and lie on', without even offering any alternative.¹⁹ In the Jewish Biblical lexica from the middle of the last century onwards the singular that is offered for the Biblical ספות as an item of furniture or piece of bedding equipment is invariably סִפָּה, never, as far as I see, סֶף. Thus we find as early as 1861 in the dictionary of J. Fürst the entry: 'סִפָּה . . . *Teppich* 2 S. 17,28 (LXX, Vulg., Syr., Ar.), neben משכב (Lagerpolster)'²⁰ and similarly K. Pollák (1881),²¹ D. Cassel (1889)²² and Y. Steinberg (1896): מִטָּה לִשְׁבֹּת, עֶרֶשׂ עִם מַסְעָד לִשְׁבֹּת: 'a bed for sitting, a couch with a support for sitting',²³ each specifically citing the verse וּסְפֹת וּמִשְׁכָּב II Sam. 17:28 in support. The same approach was adopted by A.M. Honeyman, *JTS* 37 (1936) 57/8, 59: סִפָּה 'coverlet, bedding'. A similar semantic result, though by a quite different means, was achieved in an ingenious manner by F. Perles, *AfO* 4 (1927) 220, who proposed the interpretation

¹⁹ S.L. Gordon, נביאים ראשונים (repr. Tel Aviv 1953/4), 80 ד. ספר שמואל ב',

²⁰ Fürst, *Handwörterbuch* II (1861) 91a. Note that in Fürst's earlier *Librorum Sacrorum Veteris Testamenti Concordantiae Hebraice atque Chaldaice* = אצר (Leipzig 1840) 773c and *Schul-Wörterbuch* (1842) 389a our word is given as the pl. of סֶף in its usual meaning 'basin'; neither the form סִפָּה nor the meaning '*Teppich*' is there yet mentioned. The interpretation of משכב as 'Lagerpolster' is given despite Fürst's acceptance of *škb* II from 1842 onwards (above nn. 7, 14).

²¹ Kaim Pollák, *Héber-Magyar teljes Szótár* (Budapest 1881) 257a (szőnyeg).

²² D. Cassel, *Hebräisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch* (Breslau 1889) 232b. The earlier editions of this work (Breslau 1871 = Ober-Glogau n.d.) recorded only סֶף '(1) Becken; (2) Eingangsort'.

²³ Y. Steinberg, משפט האורים (Vilna 1896) 586a.

'Decken' in the belief that the word was loaned from Akkadian *šipātu* 'wool' and should accordingly be repointed סִפָּה.

The appearance of the singular סִפָּה in the meaning 'bed(ding)' naturally raises the question of the etymology of the modern Hebrew *sapá*, a word which today is well entrenched in the meaning 'sofa', but which does not occur at all in older Hebrew sources. According to the data available so far, it looks very much as if the modern סִפָּה 'sofa' is a creation of the Hebrew maskilim of the mid 19th century, derived by back-formation from the Biblical מִשְׁכַּב וסִפָּה of II Sam. 17:28. In form סִפָּה will have been influenced by the similar-sounding European *sofa*,²⁴ for which the emerging secular modern Hebrew required an equivalent, and in meaning by the adjacent מִשְׁכַּב understood as 'bed'.

This back-formation soon became popular, and is not uncommon in Hebrew dictionaries and in Hebrew belles lettres from the latter decades of the last century onwards, particularly in Eastern Europe. At about the same time the word must also have taken root in the revived spoken Hebrew of Zionist Palestine. After the mention in 1861 of our word in the dictionary of Fürst (1805-1873) as 'rug' (the earliest case I have so far encountered), סִפָּה = 'sofa' is recorded in several lexica of (ancient and) modern Hebrew published before and after the turn of the century, and in some of these the connection with the Biblical מִשְׁכַּב וסִפָּה of II Sam. 17:28 is explicitly made. סִפָּה is either itself the headword,²⁵ or given as the recommended Hebrew equivalent of European *sofa*.²⁶

The chronology and distribution of סִפָּה = 'sofa' in Hebrew literature is rather similar. The earliest free use known to me of the word in Hebrew writing is in the work of S.J. Abramowitsch = Mendele Mokher Sefarim (1835-1917), who was already using it in 1862 in the meaning 'blanket, eiderdown'.²⁷ Mendele's

²⁴ Thus A. Even-Shoshan, המלון החדש IV (Jerusalem 1967) 1827a. According to G.B. Sarfatti, *Lěšonénu* 40 (1976) 127/8 the equivalence *sapá* = *sofa* is a case of popular etymology. The association of the two words would have been especially facilitated, as Prof. Z. Ben-Hayyim suggests to me, by the fact that in Russian the unstressed *o* of the first syllable and the *pataḥ* of סִפָּה do not sound so very different, if different at all. As far as factual etymology is concerned, the European *sofa* has, of course, nothing at all to do with the Biblical word, being derived from the Arabic *suffa*.

²⁵ See s.v. סִפָּה in e.g. S.Y. Fuenn's (1818-1890 [or -91?]) posthumous האוצר III, ed. S.P. Rabinowitz (repr. Warsaw 1912) 347a/b; A. Robinsohn and O. Wilf, *Neues hebräisches Wörterbuch, verfasst von hervorragenden und besten Schriftstellern* (Lemberg 1912) col. 603.

²⁶ See s.v. *sofa* in e.g. O.N. Shteynberg (= Y. Steinberg), *Polniy Russko-Evreyskiy Slovar* II (Vilna 1881) col. 1263; M. Margel, *Deutsch-hebräisches Wörterbuch* (Požega 1906) 470b s.v. *Sofa*.

²⁷ For this and other information on the occurrence of the word in early modern Hebrew literature I thank the Historical Dictionary Project of the Academy of the Hebrew Language, Jerusalem.

examples occur in his *Toldot Hateba* = תולדות הטבע, I: Säugetiere (Leipzig 1862), II: Vögel (Schitomir 1866), being a translation of the third edition of H.O. Lenz, *Gemeinnützige Naturgeschichte* (Gotha 1851), and clearly reflect the impact of the Biblical verse from which the usage was derived. The three examples are worth quoting here (the vocalization is as given in the printed text), together with the German which they render:

I 66: והנוגע אל משכבו בלילות, הנה בדאגו כי יחם לו ולא תעיק תחתיו, נגב מן המלכים ספות < 'In Betreff seiner nächtlichen Bequemlichkeit hatte er es zu einem hohen Grade von Kultur gebracht, indem er für ein weiches Ruhelager so sehr besorgt war, daß er den Matrosen einige Decken entwandte, um sie für sich zu benutzen' (I 68).

I 262/3: ויזהרו גם כן לבלתי הניח לחתול לשכב אצל פירים ואח מבוערת, מדאגה מדבר, < 'Auch in der Nähe eines Feuerheerdes dürfen sie nicht geduldet werden weil ihnen eine glühende Kohle in den Pelz fliegen und an einem feuergefährlichen Orte abgeschüttelt werden kann' (I 348).

II 35: ובשר רב העופות הגדולים, גם ביצייהם הם מזון טוב ומבריא להאדם. מנוצתם יעשו ספות < 'das Fleisch und die Eier der meisten größeren Vögel geben dem Menschen eine wohlschmeckende und nahrhafte Speise; die Federn geben Betten und Schreibwerkzeug' (II 15).

Even-Shoshan, loc. cit. and Y. Cnaani²⁸ cite later examples from D. Yellin (1864-1941) and U.N. Gnessin (1881-1913), by which time the meaning is clearly 'sofa'. Y.H. Brenner (1881-1921) also uses the word. Its modern origin is noted in an interesting observation of D. Yellin quoted by Honeyman, art. cit. 57 n. 2: קביעת המלה ספה ל- sofa היא ענין חדש, מלפני שלשים שנה בערך ואעני זוכר מי: 'The use of the word ספה for 'sofa' is something new, about thirty years old, and I do not recall who first used it'. Although Yellin himself was among those who used it in his writing, it is noteworthy (Honeyman, ibid.) that he had little confidence in applying this interpretation to II Sam. 17:28 and was quite willing to understand there as 'drinking cups'. Yellin surmised that ספה became popular during the early years of the 20th century, but we have seen that, at least in the meaning 'rug, blanket' (Fürst, Mendele), the innovation was some fifty years older than that.

Today this neologism is in daily use and it is difficult to think of Israeli Hebrew without it. It did not, however, meet with universal approval. The entry ספה in Ben-Yehuda, *Thesaurus* VIII, ed. M.Z. Segal (Jerusalem – Berlin 1929-30) 4146b is something of a compromise which bears clear witness to the great lexicographer's discomfort concerning the Hebraic chasteness of the meaning 'sofa, couch'. Ben-Yehuda is indeed willing to admit a word ספה, but only in the meaning 'basin', for which II Sam. 17:28 is adduced in support. The meaning

²⁸ Y. Cnaani, *אוצר הלשון העברית*, XII (Jerusalem – Ramat Gan 1972) 4111a.

'sofa', although described as *נהוג בדבור ובספרות* 'usual in speech and writing', is denied the separate rubric of its own which on semantic grounds it should plainly have, and as a vulgarism is not considered worthy of exemplification from Hebrew literature.²⁹ Similar uneasiness doubtless explains why in the works of Gnessin we find hesitation between the quasi-Hebrew *ספה* and the plainly European loanword *סופה*, and why Agnon in revising some of his writings not infrequently altered *ספה* to *דרגש*.

The preceding discussion suggests that *ספה* began life in the middle of the last century as a learned exegetical proposal in the meaning 'rug' (Fürst) in the wake of those ancient versions which had offered something similar as a rendering of *ספות* in II Sam. 17:28. Almost simultaneously the same form and similar meaning appear in Hebrew literature (Mendele). Shortly thereafter the acoustic similarity of *ספה* to European (especially Russian) *sofa* led to a change of meaning; the word came to denote the item of furniture which it denotes today and the meaning 'rug, blanket' disappeared. It is clear that a condition of the creation of *ספה* = 'sofa' is the occurrence of the word *משכב* adjacent to it in the Biblical verse from which it was derived; were it not for the propinquity of 'bed' it is hardly conceivable that anyone would have felt the need to interpret *ספות* as an item of lounge or bedroom furniture and not as a kitchen utensil. The *משכב* which prompted the understanding of *ספות* as 'sofas' rather than 'basins' is, of course, derived from the familiar *škb* I 'to lie'. If, on the other hand, we adopt the suggestion first proposed by Judah b. Quraysh and others a thousand years ago that this very example of *משכב* belongs to *škb* II 'to pour' and denotes a vessel for pouring liquid, then the logic and legitimacy of the modern Hebrew *ספה* 'sofa' will appear in a very different light. In that case the scriptural authority for this interpretation³⁰ would be seriously undermined and the alleged Biblical *ספה* 'sofa' revealed as a ghost-word.³¹

The case of *ספות* and *משכב* is an interesting one, with implications both for the hermeneutics of the Biblical text itself and, in turn, for the manner of word-creation in modern Hebrew. The Biblical lexicon may have lost a lawful 'pouring vessel' while providing the modern language with a rather spurious 'sofa'. In their original context the meaning of neither word is immediately clear

²⁹ The word is absent from Ben-Yehuda's Hebrew – Yiddish – Russian pocket dictionary *מלון עברי, מדרגים אשכנזיים ומדברת בין היהודים ורוסים* (Vilna 1903), but nevertheless appears s.v. *sofa* in E. Ben-Yehuda and Y. Gruzovsky (= Gur), *Polniy Russko-Evрейsko-Nemeckiy Slovar* (Warsaw 1912) col. 1960.

³⁰ Taken for granted by Y. Klausner, 'שפה עבר – שפה חיה', *Magazin für Hebräische Literatur u. Wissenschaft, Poesie und Belletristik*, ed. E. Gräber, vol. 5 (Cracow 1896), second pagination 21/2 = idem *הלשון העברית – לשון חיה* (Jerusalem 1949) 31.

³¹ Cf. the brief verdict of E.Y. Kutscher, *A History of the Hebrew Language* (Jerusalem – Leiden 1982) 188.

and interpretation of both rests upon a number of assumptions. One of these assumptions is that the מִשְׁכָּב of II Sam. 17:28 has nothing to do with a quite possible (but admittedly uncertain) root *škb* II 'to pour' but, as usual, simply means 'bed'. Another assumption is that the following סְפוֹת is to be understood as a similar item of furniture, not as a kitchen receptacle. This latter assumption has been adopted by Jewish lexicography of the 19th and 20th centuries and, by back-formation, has produced the singular סִפָּה, a convenient equivalent of the European *sofa*, for which Hebrew had hitherto lacked suitable expression. We have seen, however, that neither of these two assumptions is necessarily correct, for according to some authorities מִשְׁכָּב in this verse does not mean 'bed' at all, and the סְפוֹת brought to David in Mahanaim are in any event unlikely to have been 'sofas'.

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem