

שורף – צורף

אבנר רמו

The expression: **באש ישרף** - “**be burnt with fire**”, and its variants, appear in the Bible multiple times: (Ex 12:10; 29:14, 34; Lev 6:23; 7:17, 19; 8:17, 32; 9:11; 13:52, 55, 57; 16:27; 19:6; 20:14; 21:9; Num 17:4; 31:10; Deu 12:31; 13:17; Jos 6:24; 7:15, 25; 11:6, 9, 11; Jud 9:52; 12:1; 14:15; 15:6; 18:27; 1 Sam 30:1, 3, 14; 2 Sam 23:7; 1 Ki 9:16; 16:18; 2 Ki 17:31; 23:11; 25:9; Is 1:7; 9:4; 33:12; 44:16, 19; 47:14; 64:10; Jer 7:31; 19:5; 21:10; 32:29; 34:3, 22; 36:32; 37:8, 10; 38:17, 18; 39:8; 43:12, 13; 51:32; Eze 5:4; 16:41; 23:47; Mic 1:7; Ps 46:10; 80:17; Pro 6:27; 1 Ch 14:12; 2 Ch 36:19).



The Worship of the Golden Calf by Filippino Lippi (1457-1504)

However, in the Book of Exodus we hear Aaron telling Moses:

וַאֲמַר לְהֵם לְמִי זֶהב, הַתְּפַרְקוּ וַיִּתְּנוּ-לִי; וְאִשְׁלַכְתֶּם בָּאֵשׁ, וַיֵּצֵא הָעֵגֶל הַזֶּה.

“And I said to them: Whosoever has any gold, let them break it off; so they gave it me; and I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf” (Ex 32:24).

Now we read about Moses: **וַיִּקַּח אֶת-הָעֵגֶל אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ, וַיִּשְׂרֹף בָּאֵשׁ** - “And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it with fire” (Ex 32:20; see also: Deu 9:21).

However, as heating a gold object in hot fire could result in its melting (but not “burning”), we have to assume that both Aaron and Moses smelted gold objects merely to change their shape.

Similarly, we read in the Book of Deuteronomy:

פסילי אלהיהם תשרפון באש ; לא-תחמד כסף וזהב עליהם, ולקחת לך

“The graven images of their gods shall you burn with fire; you shall not covet the silver or the gold that is on them, nor take it to you” (Deu 7:25; see also: Deu 7:5).

The Greek translator wrote here: “from them” which suggests that he believed that the graven images were made of silver and/or gold and therefore the fire melted (but not burnt) them.

In the Book of Judges we read:

ותקח אמו מאתים כסף ותתנהו לצורף, ויעשהו פסל ומסכה,

“And his mother took two hundred pieces of silver, and gave them to the founder, who made thereof a graven image and a molten image” (Jud 17:4).

Obviously, the founder had to melt the pieces of silver in hot fire, so that he could give it a new shape.

In the Book of Malachi we read about the impending messenger of God:

כי-הוא כאש מצרף, וכברית מכבסים.

וישב מצרף ומטהר כסף, וטהר את-בני-לוי וזקק אתם, כזהב וככסף;

“For he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap;

And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver” (Mal 3:2-3; see also: Jer 6:29; Zec 13:9).

The Hebrew word here: **צורף** (*tsoreph*), that was translated to English as a “founder” was translated to Greek as a “silversmith” or “smelter.” In addition, we should notice that the word: **צורף** (*tsoreph*) could be viewed as a **ש** (s) - **צ** (ts) variant of **שורף** (*soreph*) - “(one who uses) burning.” Furthermore, in the Akkadian language the word *sarapu* means: “to smelt.”



Foreparts of a lion and ox. Lydian silver stater, from the reign of Croesus (560-546 BC).