

**luminary, lightbearer**

מָאוֹר

**1. Statistics**

Torah: 15. Nebiim: 1. Ketubim: 3. Total: 19.

**2a. Literal Use**

מָאוֹר is a derivative of  $\sqrt{\text{אור}}$ , a nominal form with the preformative מ added to the verbal stem. Its literal use is confined to the description of the Tabernacle and its furniture. With the exception of Exod. 35:14a and Num. 4:9 it is always used in combination with שֶׁמֶן, '(olive)oil'. Two combinations can be discerned: (1) שֶׁמֶן לְמָאוֹר (Exod. 25:6; 35:8; cf. הַשֶּׁמֶן לְמָאוֹר in Exod. 35:28), further particularised as שֶׁמֶן זַיִת וְדָבָר כְּתוּב לְמָאוֹר, 'pure beaten olive oil for the מָאוֹר' (Exod. 27:20; Lev. 24:2); (2) שֶׁמֶן הַמָּאוֹר (Exod. 35:14b; 39:37; Num. 4:16). According to Exod. 27:20; Lev. 24:2 the oil is intended for the permanent maintenance of the lamp ( $\rightarrow$  נֵר). As such the oil is mentioned together with the implements ( $\rightarrow$  כְּלֵי) and lamps ( $\rightarrow$  נֵר plur.) of the lampstand ( $\rightarrow$  מְנִרְתָּה) in Exod. 35:14; 39:37, to which are added other utensils in Num. 4:9. It figures among the valuable substances in use for the service of the Tabernacle (Num. 4:16).

From Exod. 27:20; Lev. 24:2 the conclusion can be drawn that מָאוֹר is not to be equated with נֵר. As appears from the explicative construct chain מְנִרְתָּה הַמָּאוֹר in Exod. 35:14a; Num. 4:9, מָאוֹר may be most adequately circumscribed as 'source of light, bearer of light'. This interpretation is confirmed by the use of מָאוֹר in Gen. 1:14-16, a passages which as the other texts in the Torah is ascribed to the priestly author(s) (P). מָאוֹר seems to be a somewhat vague term for the luminary, the means by which illumination, lighting is brought about. In the description of the Tabernacle and its utensils it evidently denotes the lampstand with its lamps (along with the redundant הַמָּאוֹר הַמְנִרְתָּה [tautology] of Exod. 35:14 in the parallel Exod. 39:37 הַמְנִרְתָּה הַטְּהוֹרָה 'the pure lampstand' is used). As is the case with נֵר, the means also can denote the means in use, i.e. the burning light.

**2b. Figurative Use**

In Gen. 1:14-16 מָאוֹר plur. (although masculine [see Gen. 1:16])

three times the feminine form מְאֹרָה is used [see on the contrary מְאֹרִי in Ezek. 32:8]) is used to denote the heavenly bodies, the luminaries. In Gen. 1:16 they are particularised as the ‘two great lights’, sun and moon, further particularised as ‘the greater light’ (הַמְאֹר הַגָּדֹל) and ‘the lesser light’ (הַמְאֹר הַקָּטָן), and the stars (= ‘the other lights’). With a somewhat pleonastic wording the heavenly bodies figure as מְאֹרֵי אֹר, ‘the shining lights’, in Ezek. 32:8. In Ps. 74:16 מְאֹר is used along with the sun (שֶׁמֶשׁ). In view of the chiasmic parallellism of the verse (day-night-light-sun) the moon must be meant (cf. MSS 6:  $\sigma\epsilon\lambda\gamma\eta\eta\eta\nu$  and  $\tau^K$ ). In short, in the above texts מְאֹר figures as a metaphorical, poetical term for a heavenly source of light (cf. the use of נֶר as a designation for the moon in Sir. 43:7 [6:  $\varphi\omega\sigma\tau\eta\rho$ ]), and of *nūru* and *nyr/nr(t)* in respectively Akkadian and Ugaritic divine epitheta; → נֶר, section 4). In this way the *function* of the heavenly bodies is strongly emphasised. Their being is reduced to a mere functional existence. No conclusion can be drawn with regard to concrete background of the metaphorical language, whether the picture of a lamp or another source of light (e.g. a torch, lantern or firepan) is evoked.

In Ps. 90:8 and Prov. 15:30 מְאֹר is used as *nomen regens* in construct chains with respectively פְּנִים, ‘face’, (of God) and עֵינַיִם, ‘eyes’ (of man). Face and eyes are closely related and sometimes appear to be interchangeable. This is the case also in Ps. 90:8 and Prov. 15:30 where the source of light is a metaphor for the look reflecting the mood, the judgement and the feelings of a person. In the case of Ps. 90:8 the (brightly burning) light is a metaphor for the penetrating look of YHWH, for whom nothing is concealed. In the case of Prov. 15:30a, an exhortation to kindness, the (brightly burning) light is a metaphor for the favourable look of the highly-placed, who is the bringer of good news (cf. Prov. 15:30b). As for its meaning, there is no difference between the use of מְאֹר in Ps. 90:8 and Prov. 15:30 and the use of אֹר as *nomen regens* in construct chain with פְּנִים in Ps. 4:7; 44:4; 89:16; Job 29:24; Prov. 16:15.

### 3. Epigraphic Hebrew

Not attested.

#### 4. Cognates

SEMITIC:  $\sqrt{wr}$  seems to be Hamito-Semitic (Cohen *et al.*, *DRS*, 13; Orel & Stolbova, *HSED*, 35), but only in the North-West Semitic languages it is fully developed. The *maqtal*-formation occurs exclusively in Biblical Hebrew and later Jewish sources (cf. *HAHAT*, 620).

#### 5. Ancient Versions

Ⓞ and other Greek versions: Gen. 1:14, 16 φωστήρ plur., ‘luminary ... light, splendour’ (*GELS-L*, 511). Gen. 1:15 (added in Gen. 1:14); MSS Ps. 74:16 (Ⓞ 73:16) φαῦσις ‘light ... illumination’ (*GELS-L*, 500), but MSS σελήνη ‘moon’ (*GELS-L*, 423; cf. Ⓞ<sup>K</sup>). Exod. 27:20; 35:14 (Ⓞ 35:16); 39:17 (Ⓞ 39:37); Lev. 24:2; Num. 4:16 φῶς ‘light ... day-light ... illumination’ (*GELS-L*, 511). Num. 4:9 φωτίζω ‘to shine, to give light ... to enlighten’ (*GELS-L*, 511). Ezek. 32:8 φαίνω ‘to give light, shine’ (*GELS-L*, 499). Ps. 90:8 (Ⓞ 89:8) φωτίσμος ‘light’ (*GELS-L*, 511). Prov. 15:30 (Ⓞ 16:2) θεωρέω ‘to look at, to behold, to see’ [‘the eye which sees beautiful things’]), but *GELS-L*, 205: ‘seeing, causing to see’ (= מַרְאֵה?). The hexaplaric witnesses try to harmonise these different translations, as in Ps. 74:16 where α’ and σ’ have φωστήρ, θ’ φῶς and Prov. 15:30 where α’ has φωστήρ and σ’ φωτίσμος.

Ⓞ<sup>T</sup>: אֶהָרֹא ‘lighting’; נְהַיֵּר ‘luminary’; נְהָרָא ‘light’; נְהָרוּ ‘light’ (Tal, *DSA*, 506-7).

Ⓞ: Ⓞ<sup>O</sup>, Ⓞ<sup>PsJ</sup>, Ⓞ<sup>N</sup> in Gen. 1:14-16 נְהָרָא sing. and plur. (cf. → נָר, section 5) ‘light’ (Levy, *CWT*, vol. 2, 96; Jastrow, *DTT*, 881; Sokoloff, *DJPA*, 342). Exod., Lev., Num. אֶהָרֹא, אֶנְהָרוּתָא, אֶנְהָרוּרִי, verbal nouns of  $\sqrt{nr}$ , ‘to illuminate, shine, give light’ (Levy, *CWT*, vol. 2, 95; Jastrow, *DTT*, 882; Sokoloff, *DJPA*, 343) resulting in nominal renderings like ‘lighting, illumination’ (Levy, *CWT*, vol. 1, 40; Jastrow, *DTT*, 82; Sokoloff, *DJPA*, 65). Ⓞ<sup>J</sup> Ezek. 32:8 מְנַהָרִי (נְהָרָא), participium of  $\sqrt{nr}$  Pael ‘to give light, shine; to illumine, brighten, make shine’ (Levy, *CWT*, vol. 2, 95; Jastrow, *DTT*, 882; Sokoloff, *DJPA*, 343). Ⓞ<sup>K</sup> Ps. 74:16 סִיְהָרָא ‘moon’ (Levy, *CWT*, vol. 2, 149; Jastrow, *DTT*, 960; Sokoloff, *DJPA*, 369); Ps. 90:8 and Prov. 15:30 נְהָרָא ‘light’ (see above).



## 7. Illustrations

→ מְנִרָה.

## 8. Archaeological Remarks

→ נֵר, section 8.

## 9. Conclusion

מְאוֹר is a rather vague term, denoting the means by which illumination, lighting is brought about. It is used for the Tabernacle lampstand with its lamps, and for the heavenly bodies with special attention to their *function*. The translators of the ancient versions appear to have realised this. It is unlikely that a concrete concept of heavenly lamps forms the background of this use of the word. Most of its attestations can be attributed to P or later sources which had only a vague recollection about the concrete, tangible objects in the Tabernacle. Moreover, the word is exclusively attested in Jewish sources. Therefore it seems most likely that it was coined deliberately to avoid any all too realistic representations of either the tabernacle furniture or the astral bodies worshipped by Israel's neighbours. With regard to the latter we may compare 'the white one' (הַלְבָנָה, the moon) and 'the hot one' (הַחֲמָה, the sun) in Isa. 24:23. Many of the modern dictionaries of Biblical Hebrew assume far too concrete meanings (see below, section 10).

## 10. Bibliography

*BDB*, 22: 'luminary' etc. – Alonso Schökel, *DBHE*, 374: 'a) Lumbrera. astro ... b) Lámpara, candelabro' – *DCH*, vol. 5, 116-7: '1. luminary... 2. light' – *GB*, 393: 'Licht, Lichtkörper' etc. – *HAHAT*, 620: '1. Beleuchtungskörper, Lampe ... 2. Licht, Glanz' – *HALAT*, 512: '1) Lichtort ... 2) Lichtkörper' etc. – *HAWAT*, 203: '1) Lichtträger, Leuchter ... (2) meton. Licht (Ps. 90:8) ... , metaph: Huld uä (Prov. 15:30) – *HCHAT*, Bd. 1, 688: 'eig. Lichtort od. Lichtkörper, dah. Leuchte, Licht, als Element, v. Sonne u. Mond ... Licht, als Erscheinung, Erhellendes ... der Leuchter ... bildl. Lichtglanz' – *KBL*, 489: '1) Lichtort place of light ... 2) Leuchte, Lichtkörper luminary', etc. – *LHA*, 404: '1) illuminati ... 2) res lucens, sidus' – *MHH*, 573: 1. בהירות, אור ...

2. פעולה ההארה ... 3. גוף שמימי הפיץ אור – *NIDOT*, vol. 1, 328 – *THAT*, Bd. 1, 84-90 – Gesenius & Roediger, *TPC*, 56: ‘1) lumen ... 2) candelabrum’ – *TWAT*, Bd. 1, 160-82.

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