

**lampstand**

מְנִרָה

**1. Statistics**

Torah: 26 (Exod.: 20). Nebiim: 5. Ketubim: 10. Total: 41.

**2a. Literal Use**

With the exception of 2 Kgs 4:10 and Zech. 4:2, 11 מְנִרָה, a derivative of the common Semitic  $\sqrt{nr}/nyr$  ( $\rightarrow$  נִר), and a nominal form with the מ- preformative added to the verbal stem, is always used as a designation of the lampstand as a piece of the sanctuary's furniture, either the Tabernacle (Exod. 25:31-35 [7x]; 26:35; 30:27; 31:8; 35:14; 37:17-20 [6x]; 39:37; 40:4, 24; Lev. 24:4; Num. 3:31; 4:9; 8:2, 3, 4) or the Temple of Solomon (1 Kgs 7:49; Jer. 52:19; 1 Chron. 28:15 [7x]; 2 Chron. 4:7, 20; 13:11). In 2 Kgs 4:10 the lampstand is mentioned along with the bed, the table and the seat as one of the articles of furniture belonging to the inventory of the houses of the well-to-do in Israel. As a piece of the sanctuary's furniture it is often mentioned together with other pieces of the sanctuary's inventory, the ark, the table and the incense altar of the Tabernacle (Exod. 30:26f.; 31:7f.; 35:12-15; 39:36-38; 40:3-5, 20-27; Num. 3:31; 4:5-11; cf. also Exod. 26:33-35), the table(s), the incense altar(s) of the Solomonic temple (1 Kgs 7:48f.; 1 Chron. 28:15-18; 2 Chron. 4:7f., 19f.).

In Zech. 4 the stand figures in a prophetic vision. Evidently a holy piece of furniture is meant. The lampstand is bearer of one or more oil lamps ( $\rightarrow$  נִר; cf. Exod. 25:37; 37:23; Zech. 4:2). Lamps and lampstand belong together and are more often mentioned together ( $\rightarrow$  נִר). So the stand can be designated as 'the lampstand, the bearer of light' (מְנִרָת הַמְּאֹרֶת [Exod. 35:14a; Num. 4:9];  $\rightarrow$  מְאֹרֶת). In his blueprint of the new temple, Ezekiel (chs. 40-48) does mention neither the lampstand(s), nor the lamp(s). That does not change the fact that the lamp is to be regarded as an essential part of the furniture of the sanctuary.

For the care of the stand and its lamps various utensils ( $\rightarrow$  כְּלֵי) were available, further particularised as 'containers of its oil' (כְּלֵי שֶׁמֶן, Num. 4:9; cf. Matt. 25:3f.), 'forceps, tongs' ( $\rightarrow$  מְלָקְחִים), 'firepans' ( $\rightarrow$  מְחַפָּה plur.), 'trimming knives, snuffers' ( $\rightarrow$  מְזַמְרֵת plur.).

The Tabernacle had one lampstand. According to 2 Kgs 7:49 the first Temple had two rows of five lampstands (cf. 2 Chron. 4:7; for the plural without number see Jer. 52:19; 1 Chron. 28:15; 2 Chron. 4:20). In 2 Chron. 13:11, in agreement with the situation described in Exod. 25; 37 and that prevailing in the second Temple, there is only one lampstand. In the OT there is no information about the material of the lampstand as a piece of the furniture of a citizen's house (2 Kgs 4:10). The Tabernacle and Temple lampstand(s) was/were made of gold (זָהָב, Jer. 52:19; 1 Chron. 28:15 [here also lampstands of silver (כֶּסֶף) are mentioned]; 2 Chron. 4:7; 13:11; cf. also Zech. 4:2), further particularised as 'of pure gold' (זָהָב טָהוֹר, Exod. 25:31, 36; 37:12, 22), 'of "closed" gold' (זָהָב סָגוּר, 1 Kgs 7:49; 2 Chron. 4:22; 'closed' means 'soldered with silver', Korpel 1991), or 'of hammered gold' (מִקְשָׁה זָהָב, Num. 8:4; cf. the use of מִקְשָׁה in Exod. 25:31, 36; 37:17, 22). Consequently the lampstand of the Tabernacle can be described as 'the bright/glittering lampstand' (הַמְנִרָה הַטְּהוֹרָה, Exod. 31:8; 39:37; Lev. 24:4). It is a disputed question whether the complete lampstand was made of gold. On the basis of an analysis of the term מִקְשָׁה, it is concluded that the Tabernacle lampstand was constructed by covering a wooden model with a layer of gold (Meyers 1976, 31-34). The traditional view is that the entire object was made of gold. Already Josephus (*Ant.*, III.144) describes it as a hollow object of cast gold. Probably the stand was to be put together in parts, placing the ornaments at the spots where the parts were joined (see the discussion in Houtman 2000, 359, 403, 405f.).

No measurements of the lampstand are given. In any case its height will have been in agreement with its function. It made for better light inside (cf. Matt. 5:15 par.). Placing of more than one lamp on the stand increased the intensity of the light and its spread even more (cf. Zech. 4:2, 49, burning wicks!). How the lights were placed affected how far and where their light would shine (cf. Exod. 25:37; Num. 8:2f.). The lampstand of the Tabernacle was to be placed in such a way that the light fell on the table (so explicitly the Vulgate on Num. 8:2). Consequently it must have stood at a height higher than the table which had a

height of a cubit and a half (Exod. 25:33; 37:10).

Only in Exod. 25; 37; Zech. 4 the shape of the lampstand is described. Although the description of the Tabernacle lampstand in Exod. 25:31-36; 37:17-22 is fairly detailed, the difficulty in establishing the precise meaning of the vocabulary, derived from the plant kingdom (דָּרֵךְ, 'trunk'; → קִנְיָה, 'stalk'; → גִּבְיֵעַ, 'cup'; כַּפְתֹּהוֹר, 'calyx'; פֶּתַח, 'petal'; מִשְׁקָדִים, 'in the shape of almond blossoms'), makes it impossible to obtain a complete picture (cf. Propp 2006, 398-9, 509-12).

On the basis of archeological data (the armless stand carries the lights on the saucer-like top [see section 8]), and the assumption of a tradition which maintains that there was only one lamp in the tent shrine (see Exod. 27:20; Lev. 24:2 [מְנֵרֶה sing.]), the view is defended that the central stalk (קִנְיָה [Exod. 25:31; 37:17]) of the lampstand was the lightbearer, the place where the lampstand's seven lights were situated, while the stalks (קִנְיִים) on the sides (Exod. 25:32f., 35f.; 37:18f., 21f.) were without lights (Meyers 1976, 20-2, 26, 72, 81-4). Also in Zech. 4:2 such a stand would be meant. Such an interpretation of the Tabernacle lampstand does not agree with the extant Hebrew text which supports a more traditional picture. According to another view, however, this picture is the outcome of a redactional adaptation of the basic text of Exod. 25:31-40 (P<sup>G</sup>), which would have contained the concept of the lampstand of Zech. 4, an armless stand carrying its lights on an saucer-like top (Voß 1993, 30, 32, 36, 66-8, 78f.). While accepting the view that the original stand was without arms, Görg 1981 draws a different picture based on the lotus-shaped candelabrum in the grave of Tutanchamun (see section 8). Hachlili assumes that the early cultic menorah consisted solely of a lampstand. In her view the Tabernacle Menorah of Exodus is a retrojection of the Second Temple type menorah, the seven-armed menorah which originated in the time span between the return of the Jews to Zion and the Hasmonean period (Hachlili 2001, 12-36).

In Exod. 25:32; 37:18 the קִנְיִים are described as קִנְיֵי מְנֵרֶה (lamp bearing stalks). The construct is probably intended to bring out that the branches support the main shaft as being the lampstand proper (Exod. 25:31b; 37:17b) and also themselves carry lights.

As is clear, ‘lampstand’ is used in Exod. 25:31b, 33-35; 37:17b, 19-21 in a narrow sense as term for the ‘trunk’ and the ‘stalk’ arising from it. Elsewhere ‘lampstand’ is used in a broader sense for the entire object, with stalks and all (cf. Exod. 25:31a; 37:17a; 26:35; 30:27; 31:8 etc.). Apparently the entire object is also in view in Exod. 25:37-39; 37:23, 24.

Generally the lampstand of Zech. 4:2, 11 is regarded as an armless stand carrying its seven lights (גְּרוֹת) with their seven spouts (בְּזִצְקוֹת) on a saucer-like top, a bowl (→ גִּלְתָּה) (e.g. Voß 1993, 55f., 65f.; M. Haran in *EM* vol. 5, 20; Hachlili 2001, 18-22). Sometimes the olive trees (זֵיתִים) of Zech. 4:3, 11f. are interpreted as decorations on the bowl. No information is given on the shape of the lampstands of the temple of Solomon. Only one disputable element is mentioned: הַפֶּרֶחַ (1 Kgs 7:49; 2 Chron. 4:20). It is interpreted as ornamental floral work or equated with the גִּלְתָּה of Zech. 4:2 (Möhlenbrink 1929, 281f.). Often the view is maintained that the lampstands in Solomon’s temple were stands without arms, shaped like the menorah in Zechariah’s vision (so e.g. Busink, 293-9 [cf. Plate 72]; Voß 1993, 47 and Plates 22-24]; Hachlili 2001, 16-8 and Pl. I.1-4). The following history of the cultic lampstand is assumed: the lampstands of Solomon’s temple were shaped like the stand of Zech. 4; the second Temple had a stand with seven branches (cf. Exod. 25; 37); it was replaced in 165 BC (cf. 1 Macc. 1:21; 4:49f.) by the lampstand shown on the Arch of Titus (Voß 1993, 68f., 78f.; for a different view see Meyers 1976, [section 2b]). In any case, it is certain that the description of the lampstand in Exod. 25; 37 has more in common with the מְנֵרֶה on later depictions than with the reconstructed picture based on Zech. 4:2.

Usually the Tabernacle lampstand is pictured as follows: the stalks, branches curving upward, protrude from both sides of the main stem; all end at the same height, that of the trunk (stalk in the center), so that the seven lights are on the same horizontal level (cf. e.g. the reconstruction in Voß 1993, 79). Such a picture is based on the illustration of the מְנֵרֶה on the Arch of Titus and many later illustrations (see section 7 below). In view of the terminology for the מְנֵרֶה, it seems, however, more likely that the envisioned shape of the stand was that of a stylised tree

which makes one wonder whether a stand resembling a pine tree was intended (cf. Zwarts 1935, 35, 75): from the stem, on either side, protrude straight stalks, which two by two end at *different* heights; the center stalk sticks out above and forms the top. Cf. the illustration of the מְנִרָה from the synagogue of Dura Europos and see depictions of the tree of life on seals from Mesopotamia (see below, sections 2b and 7). Probably יָרֵךְ (Exod. 25:31; 37:17) is a designation of the lampstand's base, as it stands for the 'lower end', the part of the stand that is broad and heavy ('the stem', 'the trunk') which provides stability to the whole object (see further discussion in Houtman 2000, 403-7).

## 2b. Figurative Use

In view of the form of the Tabernacle lampstand the question arises whether, in addition to its function as a bearer of lights, it may also have had a symbolic meaning. Was the stand with the lights more than just a source of light?

Important to note is that the standard of Exod. 25; 37 is described with terms derived from the plant kingdom. The picture evoked is that of a stylised tree (see section 2a; this interpretation is contested by Hachlili 2001, 38-9). The stylised tree, sometimes with seven branches and of the 'spruce type', occurs frequently on iconographic material from the ancient Near East (see the illustrations in Bergema 1938, Plates 30-57; Meyers 1976, Pl. 42-54.; *ANEP*, Pl. 858-859), and is regarded as a depiction of the tree of life, a symbol of fertility and life, associated with many deities (cf. Widengren 1951, 62-7). It is argued that as to its shape, the lampstand was based on the iconographically attested tree of life, and that as to its function it was primarily a 'tree' and secondarily a light holder, symbol of YHWH's approachability and powerful presence in the aniconic sanctuary. Based on philological, archeological and art-historical analysis of the מְנִרָה of the Tabernacle, the conclusion is drawn that the lampstand dates from the end of the Late Bronze era or shortly after, so that it fits inside the Mosaic period (Meyers 1976, 133-9, 165-93). This interpretation is not convincing. In the Tabernacle the presence of YHWH is closely linked with 'the place of atonement' (see Exod. 25:22; Lev. 16:2; Num. 7:89). It is more likely that the lampstand, also

by its shape, had to make it attractive to YHWH to reside in the sanctuary. Its beautiful form must make him favourably inclined toward his people. The shape of the tree might have been picked because the presence of the tree of life turns the sanctuary into a kind of paradise and also conveys the idea that the resident is the owner of the tree of life (Gen. 2:9; 3:24). More weight, however, might be attached to the fact that the tree was a specific place where theophanies happened (Gen. 12:6f.; 18:1; Judg. 6:11, 19, and see also 2 Sam. 5:24). That suggests the possibility that the form of a tree was chosen as an invitation to YHWH to manifest himself right there, in the sanctuary (cf. Gen. 21:33). Besides, the symbolism associated with the tree makes it fitting that the lampstand, the primary function of which is to spread light, should be in the form of a tree. After all, the life it symbolises owes its existence to light. The oil is its sap and the lights are its flowers and fruits. Light and life (vegetation) are closely related and can appear in one figure, that of the tree of light (see Zwarts 1935, 8f., and in particular Bergema 1938, 261, 265, 269f., 272, 280 etc. [index s.v.]). An eventual special significance of the almond blossom on the lampstand (see section 2a) is hard to trace. Possibly it was more than a mere ornament. Noticeably, another object in the sanctuary, the staff of Aaron, had the same ornaments (Num. 17:22-26; Heb. 9:4).

Whether the מְנֵרֶה may be regarded as a relic of an earlier symbolic representation of Asherah in the form of a tree (cf. Taylor 1995) whereas the stone tablets in or before the ark would be relics of the stelae of ancestor worship remains wholly uncertain. Such stones and trees are often associated in Canaanite inscriptions and are represented together on Tyrian coins (Mettinger 1995, 96, Plates 5.5-5.7), but any direct connection with the מְנֵרֶה is lacking thus far.

Indisputably the lampstand of Zech. 4 has a symbolic meaning. Opinions, however, differ with regard to this meaning (cf. Tigchelaar 1996, 16-46). Some think it is a symbol of the community, others consider it to be a symbol of (the Temple mountain with) the new Temple (cf. Zech. 4:7-9). Many regard the lampstand with the lights as a symbol of YHWH (cf. Zech. 4:10b, 14).

See esp. Keel 1977, 306-20 (for criticism on his argumentation see Weippert 1978, with Keel's reply [Keel 1978]).

### 3. Epigraphic Hebrew

Not attested.

### 4. Cognates

SEMITIC: The  $\sqrt{nrw/nyr}$  for light and fire is general Semitic (Leslau, *CDG*, 401; Klein, *CEDHL*, 356, 410; *HAHAT*, 797). Comparable nominal formations are attested in many other Semitic languages (cf. *HAHAT*, 697).

### 5. Ancient Versions

Ⓞ and other Greek versions: 33x  $\lambda\upsilon\chi\gamma\acute{\iota}\alpha$  (excluding Sir. 26:17; 1 Macc. 1:21; 4:49f.; 9x Exod. 25 [Ⓜ 7x]; 1x Exod. 37 [Ⓜ 7x] = Ⓞ 38:13; 1x 1 Chron. 28:15 [Ⓜ 7x]), *LSJ*, 1068: 'lamp stand'; Exod. 37:19 = Ⓞ 38:16 (cf. the use of  $\lambda\alpha\mu\pi\acute{\alpha}\delta\iota\alpha$  in the same verse)  $\lambda\alpha\mu\pi\acute{\alpha}\delta\iota\omicron\nu$  *LSJ*, 1027: 'bowl of a lamp'. On the Ⓞ's version of the lampstand's construction see Wade 2003, 217-22.

Ⓜ<sup>T</sup>: מְנֵרֶה 'lampstand' (Tal, *DSA*, 506).

Ⓣ: In the targums מְנֵרֶה is not translated, but aramaicised: מְנֵרֶהָ (Levy, *CWT*, Bd. 2, 49: 'Leuchter'; Jastrow, *DTT*, 802: 'lamp').

Ⓢ: Follows Ⓣ in transcribing *mnrt*'.

Ⓟ: *candelabrum*. This translation is the source of the translation 'candlestick' in later versions (e.g. the King James Version), an inadequate rendering, because the Latin word can also designate 'a chandelier, candelabrum, or also a lamp-stand, light-stand' (*LD*, 277).

### 6. Judaic Sources

The cultic lampstand is dealt with in Judaic sources, but their data do not contribute to the elucidation of its form and meaning in the Hebrew Bible. The Tabernacle lampstand is described in Josephus, *Ant.*, III, 145f., and in b.Men. 28b. In agreement with the stipulation of Exod. 25, the lampstand belonged to the sacred objects of the post-exilic temple (1 Macc. 1:21; 4:49; cf.

2 Macc. 10:3 and Josephus, *Ant.*, XII.250, 318). Jesus Sirach alludes to it (26:17) and Pseudo-Hecataeus mentions it explicitly (in Josephus, *Apion*, I.199). According to Eupolemus (Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, IX.34, 7f.), the ten lampstands of the temple of Solomon were made after the model which Moses had placed in the Tabernacle, with each having seven lamps. According to rabbinic exegesis, also the menorah of the tent shrine was placed in that temple (b.Men. 98b) and it was among the sacred objects which, at the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar, was hid by God himself, destined for a place in the new sanctuary to be built by God (see e.g. Ginzberg 1911, 161; Ginzberg 1913 321). The menorah, captured by Titus, is described in Josephus, *Bell.*, VII.148f.; cf. also *BJ*, I.152; V.216; VI.388; for the tradition on what else happened to it see H. Strauss, in: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, XI, 1367). Various symbolic interpretations have been presented (see the overview in Houtman 2000, 409f.). In 11QTemple<sup>a</sup> the term מְנֵרָה occurs (col. III.13); in the damaged description of the lampstand in col. IX the word itself is lacking but apparently it was assumed to carry several lamps (נְאִירָיו כִּיל) 'they shall light all its lamps'.

## 7. Illustrations

In attempts to reconstruct the shape of the lampstand of Exod. 25; 37 and to describe its symbolic significance, the depictions of the tree of life on seals from Mesopotamia play an important role (see section 2b). It is likely that early pictures of the menorah, such as the one on a coin bearing the name of Mattathias Antigonus (40-37 BCE) (picture in Goodenough 1953, Pl. 674; *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 11, 1357; *EM*, vol. 5, 19), on the Arch of Titus (see e.g., Busink, vol. 2, Pl. XXVI; → בֵּד), and in the synagogue of Dura Europos (3th century BCE; see e.g., Goodenough 1953, Pl. 603; Busink, vol. 1, 295), as well as the depictions of the seven-branched candelabrum which after the destruction of the second temple, from the beginning of the second century onwards, are frequently found in synagogues, on sarcophaguses, on amulets etc. (many depictions in Goodenough 1953; see further especially Hachlili 2001, 5\*-92\* and e.g., Voß 1993, 25-43; *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 11, 1355-66), all rest on interpretation of



the postexilic biblical texts. The double, octagonal base of the menorah on the Arch of Titus has received a lot of attention, because it differs from the base on (later) depictions of the menorah and because the visible panels contain images of animals, eagles and (sea)monsters – loathsome images (cf. Ezek. 8:10) – such as one would not expect to find in the temple. It is supposed that the picture on the triumphal arch is not a faithful reproduction (Eltester 1960, 74-6; cf. Goodenough 1954, 72; for other views see Hachlili 2001, 46-50; H. Strauss, in: *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 11, 1365f.). Also a matter of dispute is whether the menorah originally belonged to the furniture of the synagogue, and whether the synagogal menorah or the menorah of the second temple is the ‘Urbild’ of the depictions. Some contend that, despite a rabbinic prohibition to make a seven-branched lampstand (e.g. in b.Men. 28b) – the lampstand of the Hanukkah feast has eight arms – originally the furniture of the synagogue, and possibly that of the homes as well, included a seven-branched menorah, and that such a menorah, not the one of the temple and depicted on the triumphal Arch of Titus, provided the inspiration for the images (Eltester 1960, 64-6; Goodenough 1954, 74-7). Others disagree (e.g. Goldberg 1967, 237-40; Hachlili 2001, 41-169).

For a seven-spouted bowl from Dothan and an artist rendition of the lampstand of Zech. 4, see *ZIBBC*, vol. 5, 214.

## 8. Archaeological Remarks

Excavations have provided examples of what lampstands in the ancient Near East may have looked like. They were made of wood, clay, stone or metal. Not always it is clear what their function was. For holding a censer, offerings, or one or more lamps? That at least some of them were used to hold lamps is certain, however. Stands came in a great variety: there were stands on legs; stands with a wide, round shaft, thicker at the bottom than at the top; stands with a small, downward thickening shaft that turns into a base; stands with a shaft gradually widening toward the bottom (for illustrations see e.g. *ANEP*, Pl. 519-20, 624-8, 657-8; *BRL*<sup>2</sup>, 189f.; Meyers 1976, 1-41). In all instances it concerns stands without arms, leaving it uncertain whether they can be used for purposes of comparison. Attention has been drawn to an

alabaster lamp (27cm high) from the tomb of Tutankhamen. The lamp is made from one block of stone, out of which extend a head and two side branches, each bearing a cup in the shape of a lotus flower (Görg 1981).

## 9. Conclusion

The lampstand is an article of furniture which was used as a bearer of lamps both in the houses of the well-to-do and in the sanctuary. It could be fashioned from various materials, metal, wood and ceramic. Its height is in agreement with its function: servicing for better light inside a room. So it could rise higher than a normal human's height. As appears from Exod. 25:37 a lampstand could have the shape of a stylised tree and this, supported by iconography from the ancient Near East, has given rise to a lot of hypotheses about its symbolic meaning.

## 10. Bibliography

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