

**(vision, appearance), mirror**

מִרְאָה

**1. Statistics**

Torah: 1. Nebiim: 0. Ketubim: 0. Total: 1.

**2a. Literal Use**

The normal meaning of מִרְאָה is ‘vision’ and it is difficult to make a clear distinction between the feminine form and the masculine מִרְאָה, ‘appearance’, but also ‘vision’ (see esp. Ezek. 43:3). However, the meaning ‘vision’ does not fit Exod. 38:8 where the bronze laver (→ כִּיּוֹר) and its base have to be made from the מִרְאָה of the women ministering at the door of the Tent of Meeting. This instruction is lacking in the parallel text Exod. 30:18 and was probably added to explain where the bronze came from.

**2b. Figurative Use**

Not attested.

**3. Epigraphic Hebrew**

Not attested.

**4. Cognates**

SEMITIC: The root occurs in several Semitic languages (Leslau, *CDG*, 458-9; Klein, *CEDHL*, 600; Beeston, *SD*, 113; Biella, *DOSA*, 474). Below only some derivatives meaning ‘mirror’ have been listed. See also → מִרְאָה. A comparable semantic development may be observed in Akkadian *nāmaru*, ‘mirror’, from *amāru*, ‘to see’. Syriac borrowed this Akkadian noun in the form of *nāwrā*, ‘mirror’.

POSTBIBLICAL HEBREW: מִרְאָה, ‘mirror’ (Levy, *WTM*, Bd. 3, 235-6).

CLASSICAL ARABIC: *mirʿah*, ‘mirror’ (Lane, *AEL*, 1002).

MODERN ARABIC: Mehri *mārōt/mōʿr*, ‘mirror’ (Johnstone, *ML*, 268); Soq. *ʿimrehor*, *mére*, ‘mirror’ (Leslau, *LSoq*, 251); Palestinian Arabic *mrēye* (plur. *-āt*), ‘mirror’,  $\sqrt{mry}$ , ‘to make someone look in a mirror’ (Barthélemy, 265, 785).

**5. Ancient Versions**

Ⓞ and other Greek versions: Ⓞ Exod. 38:26(8) *ἀτόπτρον*, ‘mirror’ (*GELS-L*, 251; *LSJ*, 929). Var. *ἀτόπτρον*, also ‘mirror’ (*GELS-L*, 251).

Ⓜ<sup>T</sup>: Exod. 38:8 באַתחזות חיליה דאתעילי תרַח משכן זימנונה ‘with the apparition of the powers that are strong (in) the gate of the Tent of Meeting’, possibly paraphrasis on the basis of Aramaic מרא ‘be powerful’.

Ⓣ: The Targumim on Exod. 38:8 reflect various stages of elimination of the potentially offensive nature of this verse (cf. 1 Sam. 1:22; Isa. 3:23). Ⓣ<sup>O</sup> במחזית נשיא דאתין לצלאה בתרע משכן זמנא ‘with the mirrors of the women who came to pray in the gate of the Tent of Meeting’; Ⓣ<sup>N</sup> במחזיין דנשייא צדיקתא דהוון מצליין בתרע משכן זימנא ‘with the mirrors of the righteous women who were praying in the gate of the Tent of Meeting’; Ⓣ<sup>440etc.</sup> בחזיין נשיא צניעתא דהוון ‘with the mirrors of the chaste women who were being chaste in the gate of Tent of Meeting’; Ⓣ<sup>J</sup> מן אספקלירי דנחשא נדן נשיא צניעתא ובעידן דאתיין לצלאה בתרע משכוןימנא הואן קיימן על קרבן ארמותהון ומשבחן ומודן ותייבן לגובריהון וילדן בנין צדיקין בזמן דמדיכן מן סואבות דימהון ‘from bronze mirrors of chaste women. When they came to pray in the gate of the Tent of Meeting, at that time they were standing with their heave-offering praising and thanking and upon returning to their husbands bore righteous sons when they had been purified from the impurity of their menses’.

Ⓢ: *byt mħzy<sup>3</sup> dnš<sup>3</sup> d<sup>3</sup>tyñ lmšlyw btr<sup>c3</sup> dmškn<sup>3</sup> zbn<sup>3</sup>* ‘in the house of mirrors (or: apparitions?) of the women who came to pray in the gate of the Tent of the Sojourn’ reflects the same concerns as the Targumim.

Ⓟ: *speculum*, ‘(metal) mirror’.

## 6. Judaic Sources

In 1QM V.5 bronze shields are said to be polished like a face-mirror (מראה פנים) and in V.11 javelins of purified iron are said to be whitened like such a face-mirror. Comparable is the expression *na-ma-ar pāni ša siparri*, ‘bronze face-mirrors’, in EA 14:ii.75-76.

## 7. Illustrations

→ גְּלִיּוֹן.

## 8. Archaeological Remarks

→ גְּלִיּוֹן.

## 9. Conclusion

On the basis of the use in Qumran, the versions, several cognates, and the circumstance that women appear to be in possession of the מִרְאָה mentioned in Exod. 38:8, the meaning ‘mirrors’ has been firmly established.

Why these women were supposed to have possessed mirrors and were instructed to part with them is a matter of conjecture (Houtman 2000, 569-72) but possibly the author of this note felt that coquetry at the entrance of the sanctuary had to be eliminated (cf. 1 Sam. 1:22; Isa. 3:23). Mirrors were typical attributes of women (→ גְּלִיּוֹן and Everhart 2004). Whether earlier these women had been servants of a goddess (Winter 1983; Görg 1984) cannot be established with certainty. Perhaps the mirrors had fulfilled a function in the pre-exilic ancestor cult (cf. De Moor 1997, 350-2 and cf.  $\omega^T$  and  $\varsigma$ ). In any case it is remarkable that in contrast to later prescriptions the women fulfilled some kind of temple service with their mirrors (Busink, 1077-8; Marsman 2003, 565-6).

## 10. Bibliography

All dictionaries of Biblical Hebrew recognise the meaning ‘mirror’ in Exod. 38:8 – Furthermore: Busink, 1077-8 – De Moor 1997: J.C. de Moor, *The Rise of Yahwism: The Roots of Israelite Monotheism* (BETHL, 91A), Leuven 1997 – Everhart 2004: J.S. Everhart, ‘Serving Women and Their Mirrors: A Feminist Reading of Exodus 38:8b’, *CBQ* 66 (2004), 44-54 – Görg 1984: M. Görg, ‘Der Spiegeldienst der Frauen (Ex 38, 8)’, *BN* 23 (1984), 9-13 (repr. in: M. Görg, *Aegyptiaca – Biblica: Notizen und Beiträge zu den Beziehungen zwischen Ägypten und Israel* ((ÄAT, 11), Wiesbaden 1991, 143-7) – Marsman 2003: H.J. Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel: Their Social and Religious Position in the Context of the Ancient Near East* (OTS, 49), 2003, 565-6 – Winter 1983: U. Winter, *Frau und Göttin: exegetische und ikonograph-*

*ische Studien zum weiblichen Gottesbild im alten Israel und in dessen Umwelt* (OBO, 53), Freiburg 1983, 58-64.

Last update: 01-11-2011

A.L.H.M. VAN WIERINGEN

This article should be cited as:

A.L.H.M. van Wieringen, 'מִרְאָה mirror',

PDF downloaded from: <http://www.otw-site.eu/KLY/kly.php>