

perfume boiler

מְרַקְחָה

1. Statistics

Torah: 0. Nebiim: 1. Ketubim: 1. Total: 2.

2a. Literal Use

The מְרַקְחָה is the main working vessel of the רוֹקֵחַ, the artisan making cosmetic unguents and incense from fragrant herbs, spices and resins (*AEMI*, 99-119; *SAT*, vol. 3, 1-50). The vessel occurs only twice in the bible, and in similes only.

2b. Figurative Use

In Job 41:23 the word occurs parallel to → סִיר in the verse יִרְחִיחַ כְּסִיר מְרַקְחָה יָם יְשִׁים כְּמְרַקְחָה ‘He makes the depths seethe like a cauldron; He makes the sea like a perfume boiler’ (*JPS*). The comparison suggests a fairly large and wide (the sea!) cooking vessel of either clay or metal. Kelso, *CVOT*, 25, No. 57, suggested that such a delicate art as making perfume ‘requires exact temperatures and only copper is suitable for such purposes. Furthermore a copper kettle would not absorb the expensive perfume as would a ceramic piece.’ However, this argument is not conclusive since it has been established that the hot steeping of aromatic flowers and resins in oil or fat (the so-called maceration process) took place not directly over the fire, but in or over a vessel containing boiling water (*AEMT*, 461; supported by the findings of Ebeling 1948). So, in principle the seething vessel might also be a pot of clay.

However, if we may assume that the same word occurs in Ezek. 24:10, the next verse strongly suggests that it was a vessel of bronze. Although the meaning of הַמְרַקְחָה in Ezek. 24:10 is uncertain, there is no convincing reason to emend הַמְרַקְחָה into either הַרְחֵק הַמְרַק or הַרְק הַמְרַק, because both of these emendations destroy the verse’s increasing climax. The noun is closely related to מְרַקְחָה ‘compound of spices’ (Exod. 30:25, 2 Chron. 16:14, 1 Chron. 9:30) and to the verb רַקַּח, ‘blend spices’, and so it is likely related to the production of incenses and perfumes. As it was made of bronze and could be left standing on the fire (Ezek. 24:11), it may refer to a boiler vessel used in the process of

maceration. In this connection the use of the hiphil מְרַקֵּה, never explained to satisfaction, may refer to the steeping process, possibly of the double-boiler method, in or on this vessel ('let the perfume boiler do its blending'). While the materials were not boiled to maximum capacity in this way, since the jar containing an oil base and spices was indirectly heated in or over the vat with boiling water, the aromatic ingredients would be completely absorbed into the oil base. This metaphor may therefore refer to the complete absorption of all flesh. Such a complete annihilation is referred to when the pot is left standing empty on the fire, after the liquid has evaporated. Even so, the comparison has an ironic intention. Instead of fragrance the process will produce a bad odour.

3. Epigraphic Hebrew

Not attested.

4. Cognates

The root *rqh* is attested in several North-West Semitic languages as well as in Akkadian (*DULAT*, 746; *HALAT*, 1202-3).

AKKADIAN: *ruqqû* 'to prepare perfume' (*CAD* (R), 420); *mur-aqqû*/*murraqqîtu*, 'perfume maker' (*CAD* M/2, 218); *narqîtu* 'perfume' (*CAD* (N) 1, 362; Tawil, *ALCBH*, 225)

5. Ancient Versions

Ⓞ and other Greek versions: No equivalent in Ezek. 24:10; Job 41:23 τό ἐξάλειπτρον, 'unguent-box' (*GELS-L*, 157; *LSJ*, 583). For Ezek. 24:10, ἀΨησις 'boiling' (*LSJ*, 751); ἡ σκευασία, 'preparation (of food and pharmaceutical recipes)' (*LSJ*, 1607). For Job 41:23 ἀΨηστήριον, 'ointment-pot' (*JSJ*, 1153); ὡς ἀναβρασσομένην ῥτυσιν, 'like the boiling of seasoning' (*LSJ*, 100, 250). So the ancient Greek witnesses have preserved a vague notion of what is meant.

Ⓢ: Interprets Ezek. 24:10 as a sustained metaphor for battle preparations, and the phrase under consideration has accordingly been translated as עבְרֵי קַרְבָּא וּזְמִין עֲלֶיהָ 'and prepare warriors against her'; Job 41:23 מַתְכֵּלָא – Levy, *CWT*, II, 81: 'Hohlgefäß', Jastrow, 862: 'apothecary's pot'. A widespread variant reading (in

part transmitted under the heading א"ל) reads מבסמא 'ointment pot (?)'.

ס: Ezek. 24.10 *ʿartaḥ reṯā*, 'let the broth boil'; Job 41:23 is missing in ס.

ט: Ezek. 24:10 *concoquetur universa compositio*; Job 41:23 *unguenta*.

6. Judaic Sources

Interpreting Ezek. 24:10, the phrase הַמְרִקָּה הַמְרִקָּה is taken to refer to desirable spices used at a banquet (אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא חייכם שאני) עושה ממונכם חביב עליו כמו בשמים הללו שהן עולין בסעודה, 'The Holy One blessed be He, replied: "By your lives, I will make your wealth as desirable to him as the spices which are used at a banquet" '; QohR proem 5). The anger and grief felt by the Israelites at their exile is compared to the cognate noun in Aramaic (מרקתא), referring to boiling ingredients, in an interpretation of the next phrase in Ezek. 24:10: והעצמות יתרו את מוצא בשעה שגלו ישראל היה, 'And let the bones be charred', you find that at the time when the Israelites were exiled their bodies boiled like an ointment vat'. Steaming refers to boiling water of 100 degrees Celsius, and may therefore imply the double-boiler method discussed above.

In b. Shab. 77b משכילתא, the equivalent for מְרִקָּה in Targ. Job 41:23, is defined as a small washing pitcher.

7. Illustrations

Cf. Singer *et al.* 1956, 292, fig. 190; Manniche 1989, esp. 50, 56-57.

8. Archaeological Remarks

[Will be added later on.]

9. Conclusion

Almost all references and translations refer to a vessel used in the production of incense and perfume, for the blending of spices. The vessel was heated to the point of boiling, the intensity of which triggered comparisons to stormy seas and steaming bodies. For its

purpose, however, direct heating would not have been adequate, so that the word מִרְקָהּ may refer to a wide vessel containing boiling water, in which or on which maceration of herbs and spices took place for a prolonged period.

10. Bibliography

Lucas & Harris, *AEMI*, 99-119 – Nicholson & Shaw, *AEMT*, 461 – *AncBD*, vol. 5, 226-228 – Dalman, *AuS*, Bd. 4, 259-68; 5, 266-7, 274, 339 – *BDB*, 955: ‘ointment-pot’ or ‘spice-seasoning’ – Klein, *CEDHL*, 387: ‘1. ointment 2. ointment pot’ – Kelso, *CVOT*, , 25, No. 57: ‘metal ware, a perfume kettle’ (see further above) – Alonso Schökel, *DBHE*, 435: ‘Pebetero’ – *DCH*, vol. 5, 493: ‘pot of ointment, spice’ (while referring to a suggestion for emending Ezek. 24:10) – Ebeling 1948: E. Ebeling. ‘Mittelassyrische Rezepte zur Herstellung von wohlriechenden Salben’, *Or* 17 (1948), 129-45 – *GB*, 463: ‘Salbe, Salbentopf’ – *HAHAT*, ‘Salbentopf’ (Job 41:23; Ezek. 24:10 emendation) – *HALAT*, 1202-3 Harrison 1966: R.H. Harrison, *Healing Herbs of the Bible*, Leiden 1966, 49-54 – *HAWAT*. 248: ‘Gemisch, Sauce’ – *HCHAT*, Bd. 1, 790: ‘1. Gebräu, d.h. die durch Kochen u. Brauen verbundenen Substanzen Ez. 24,10. – 2) Gefäss, Kessel, zu einem Gebräu Hi. 41:23’ – *HWAT*, 382: Salbenbüchse, Hi 41, 23; in Ez 24,10 streitig’ – *IDB*, vol. 3, 730 – *ISBE*, 766-7 – Joannès 1993: F. Joannès, ‘La culture matérielle à Mari (V): les parfums’, *M.A.R.I.* 7 (1993), 251-270 – *KBL*, 603: ‘Salbentopf’ (with a suggestion to emend Ezek. 24:10) – Stager, *LBI*, 280-1 – *LHA*, 475: ‘1) mixtio ac concoctio aromatum; sensu latiore plurium rerum super focum concoctarum mixtura Ez 24 10. . . . 2) olla unguentarii (vel coqui) super ignam bulliens’ – 2) Manniche 1989: L. Manniche, *An Ancient Egyptian Herbal*, Austin 1989, 48-58 – *MHH*, 668: (של בשמים) משחה – *RLA*, Bd. 11, 572-5 – Forbes, *SAT*, vol. 3, 1-50 – Singer *et al.* 1956: Ch. Singer, E.J. Holmyard, A.R. Hall, *A History of Technology*, vol. 1, Oxford 1956, p. 292, fig. 190 – Gesenius & Roediger, *TPC*, 1309: ‘1. conditura, id quo conditur Ez. XXIV, 10. – 2) unguentarium sc. vas vel ahenum, in quo unguentum coquitur Iob. XLI, 23’

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