bowl, hemispherical basin

1. Statistics

2a. Literal Use
In Josh. 15:19 (= Jud. 1:15) the הַלְּחָן refers to a reservoir of water (גָּבֶר), or perhaps a spring, located in the Judaean hill country.

The same noun refers to the piece on top of the pillars Boaz and Jachin (נַחֲצִית הַשָּׁלֹשֶׁת אֲשֶׁר יָלְדוּ אֲשֶׁר יָמוּת) in 1 Kgs 7:41 (ךָלֶשׁ תַּלְסֵת שָׁלֹשֶׁת יָלְדוּ אֲשֶׁר יָמוּת), in 1 Kgs 7:42; 2 Chron. 4:12-13). Both these spheres were covered with a network (ךָלֶשׁ תַּלְסֵת), each of which was embellished by two rows of pomegranates (ךָלֶשׁ תַּלְסֵת), 400 in all. The symbolical meaning of the spheres is disputed (Busink, 315-7; Fritz 1992), but if the two pillars Boaz and Jachin represented the guarding ancestors of the Davidic dynasty, as argued by De Moor 1995, esp. 16-7; 1997, 356-8; 1998, 200-1, the spheres may simply represent their heads in an aniconic way. See for an artist’s impression of the two pillars, Busink, Pl. 52, opposite p. 174. Possibly this is a later development and were the capitals originally provided with faces.

Zech. 4:2-3 הַלְּחָן describes a hemispherical bowl on top of a golden lampstand (ךָלֶשׁ תַּלְסֵת). Presumably this bowl too was made of gold and served as a reservoir for the oil of the seven lamps that were mounted round about upon it (cf. North 1970; Petersen 1984; →ךָלֶשׁ תַּלְסֵת). What these occurrences seem to have in common, is neither their function (water; building material; oil for lighting) nor their material (gold, stone, rock), but only their (hemi)spherical shape.

In view of the fact that the cognate words in Akkadian and Ugaritic denote golden and silver hemispherical drinking bowls (see section 4 below), it is unlikely that the word הַלְּחָן in Qoh. 12:6 denotes anything else (contrast e.g. Kelso, CVOT, §38; Gordis 1968). It is also overstretching the meaning of Hebrew →ךָלֶשׁ to make it ‘a silver tendril’ of a golden lampstand (Seow 1997). Precious metals could be worked into torques resembling ropes or cords in antiquity (CAD D, 66; CAD 5/2, 321; Maxwell-Hyslop 1971; Exod. 28:14, 22; 39:3: Judg. 8:26). Qoh. 12:6a therefore
depicts the end of a wealthy man: the silver chain he was wearing proudly will be removed and the golden cup from which he used to drink will be broken into pieces to be melted down again. Qoh. 12:6b compares this man’s end with that of a humble woman: her earthen jar (→ מִימָר) and the wheel (→ חָלַת) with which she had to haul up water will be broken. It was a task of girls to fetch water in their earthen jars (Gen. 24; KTU 1.16:1.50-51), just as grinding was a daily chore of women (Qoh. 12:3; cf. Exod. 11:5; Isa. 47:2; Mt. 24:41 par.; Curtis, AFT, 115). Both Qoh. 12:3 and Qoh. 12:6 depict the unexpected cruel end of men and women in the prime of life who become victims of warfare or plague. In this way the wisdom teacher brings home his message that death might come just as unexpectedly to the youth he is addressing (Qoh. 12:1) as to aged people.

2b. Figurative Use

It is possible that the designation of a pond or spring by the word לְפִי is a metaphorical use of the term (see section 9).

Some scholars have suggested that the golden לְפִי in Qoh. 12:6 should be taken as a metaphor for the beauty of life (e.g. Gesenius & Roediger, TPC, 288). As shown above, this is an unnecessary assumption.

3. Epigraphic Hebrew

Not attested.

4. Cognates

The word לְפִי derives from the √gll ‘to be round’ and basically designates a spherical vessel (Klein, CEDHL, 99; Guichard, VLRM, 178). Other derivatives of the same root designate circular objects, like wheels, disks and balls. In several Semitic languages, among them Arabic, derivatives of the √gwil have similar meanings.

AKKADIAN: In Mari the gullum, a Syrian vessel, was a large hemispherical drinking cup of gold, silver, or, more rarely, bronze, provided with one or more handles, sometimes decorated with indented hammering imitating a basket (Guichard, VLRM, 189-93, 234-5). See also Salonen, Hausgeräte, vol. 2, 96-7; Sallaberger,
**BTG, 111.**

**Ugaritic:** *gl* 'cup' (of silver and gold), Del Olmo Lete & Sanmartín, *DULAT*, vol. 1, 297.

**Phoenician, Punic:** See under Greek and Latin.

**Samaritan Aramaic:** יַם 'pond', and יָלָה, a 'jewel' (as rendering of יִנְפָּה, a roundish gold jewel, in Exod. 35:22), Tal, *DSA*, 147.

**Classical Arabic:** Lane, *AEL*, 437: ُغَلَةَتْ 'a large receptacle . . . for dates'; 489, غَلَةَتْ 'wall surrounding a well'.

**Ethiopic:** የግል ያለalta 'metal ornament surmounted by a cross placed atop a church' (Leslau, *CDG*, 191); געﻝำት, 'clay pot put on the top of an Ethiopian house, cupola, dome' (Leslau, *CAmhD*, 204).

**Sanskrit, Greek and Latin:** Probably Sanskrit گُلās, 'a waterpot', Greek γαῦλος 'milk-pail, water-bucket, machine for raising water, any round vessel', γαῦλος 'round-built Phoenician ship' (*LSJ*, 339, Suppl. 33) and Latin gaulus, 'pail, round vessel' (*LD*, 803) are all loans from Semitic languages (cf. Lewy *SFG*, 150-1; Brown 1995).

### 5. **Ancient Versions**

Ø and other Greek versions: Ø uses different equivalents for each passage: Γόλαθμαν (Josh. 15:19, 3x, with many orthographic variants, apparently taking it as a placename, *µον ρέα*), like λύτρωσις ὑδάτως 'ransom of water' (Jud. 1:15, 3x, representing *µον ρέα*, *GELS-L*, 286), σπερτόν (braided) 'moulding, capital (of a pillar)' (1 Kgs 7:27-28 [= 7:41-42], *GELS-L*, 442), λαμπάδιον, 'bowl (of a lamp), small lamp' (Zech. 4:2-3, *GELS-L*, 276; *GELS-M*, 144, both with lit.), κνῆθμον 'flower' (Qoh. 12:6, *GELS-L*, 36) and γόλαθ 'ball, small globe' (2 Chron. 4:12-13, *GELS-L*, 94).

In Qoh. 12:6 α’ has λύτρωσις, probably representing יַם; σ’ περιφέρης, 'round shape'; θ’ χελώνη 'tortoise-shell'. See also Muraoka, *GHTIS*, 175.

Τ offers the equivalents Ναξ ἐν δίπλα 'irrigation place' (Josh. 15:19; Judg. 1:15); ὕδατα 'basin, kettle, vessel' (1 Kgs 7:41-42); γάλαξ 'bowl' (Zech. 4:2-3) The paraphrasis of Qoh. 12:6 in Τ apparently equates
with ‘skull’.

Josh. 15:19 hefrā hānā, ‘this pit, pond’; Jud. 1:15 bēt šeqqā ‘irrigated field’; 1 Kgs 7:41-42 ‘agnā ‘large bowl, wine vessel, waterpot; crater of volcano; capital of pillar; base of a vessel; Zech. 4:2-3 keftā ‘hollowed place, arch or vault’ (Payne Smith (Margoliouth), CSD, 222; Sokoloff, SLB, 647 gives ‘dish, pan’ as the first meaning).


6. Judaic Sources

In LevR 32.8 the occurrence of הָלֶכֶת in the meaning of ‘cup, bowl’ is a quotation from Zech. 4:2.

7. Illustrations

For possible examples of lampstands with multiple spouts around a circular basin in the middle see North 1970. The meaning ‘pool, natural water-basin’ is suggested by the fact that swirling water from a natural water outlet tends to hollow out a roundish basin in the rock. See e.g. PLBL, vol. 2, Benjamin, Gibeon pool (72-30tb.jpg); vol. 4, En Gedi, Nahal Arugat pool (dl 022702.jpg).

8. Archaeological Remarks

[Will be added later on.] See North 1970; BRL², 200.

9. Conclusion

It is likely that a hemispherical cup or bowl stands at the basis of all meanings, including larger convex vessels, the spheres crowning the pillars Boaz and Jachin, the bowl-shaped form on top of lampstands (though not in stone) and (metaphorically) a bowl-shaped natural basin filled by a natural water outlet. The English word ‘bowl’ has the same broad semantic spectrum. While both contents and construction material may vary, in most instances the bowl or basin contains a liquid. Originally it seems to have been a fairly large hemispherical drinking vessel, provided with handles, often made of precious metals like gold and silver. This
meaning is still likely in Qoh. 12:6.

10. Bibliography

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clesiastes: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (AncB, 18C), New York 1997, 381 – Loewenstamm & Blau, TLB, vol. 2, 228: ‘1. Basin on top of chandelier, apparently round vessel containing oil (Zech. 4,2); so also perhaps ... in Eccl. 12,6; but according to another view, the word there means the chandelier itself. 2. Part of capitals of the pillars Yachin and Boaz (1 K. 7,451), possibly a kind of circular basin round the top of a pillar’ – Gesenius & Roediger, TPC, 288: ‘lampas aurea’ – Guichard, VLRM, 189-93, 234-5.

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