mirror (or: stone tablet in Isa. 8:1)

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

2a. Literal Use
The word יִנְסִי occurs in the singular in Isa. 8:1 where it is construed with the adjective יִנְסִי 'large'. Isaiah has to write the text 'Belonging to Maher-šalal-ḥaš-baz' on this large object with a יִנְסִי, 'a normal stylus' (→ J) as opposed to the finer jeweller's engraving tool that was used to write similar indications of ownership in tiny letters on seals. People used such a stylus to engrave markings of ownership on household utensils, weapons and jars. The use of an engraving stylus excludes the possibility that the יִנְסִי was a single sheet of papyrus (against Galling 1933; 1971; Hyatt 1943, 74). The text had to be easily legible to all passers-by (cf. Hab. 2:2). A few verses later Maher-šalal-ḥaš-baz appears to be the name of Isaiah's son and the meaning of the name is explained as 'Soon-spoil, Quickly-loot' (cf. HAHAT, 640) because soon the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be brought before the king of Assyria (Isa. 8:3-4). In vv. 6-8 it is announced that Judah cannot hope to escape the same fate. (cf. Waschke 2007, 121). However, this explanation had to wait until the child was born and so people passing Isaiah's יִנְסִי were kept in the dark for nine months.

In past scholarship the meaning of יִנְסִי in Isa. 8:1 has been assumed to be 'board, tablet' or the like (see section 10). This still remains a possibility. However, it is difficult to understand then that the word → J 'board, plank' was not chosen, as it was in Hab. 2:2. Therefore an alternative solution is presented here.

The nominal formation of יִנְסִי is not unusual in Hebrew and parallels like יִנְסִי, יִנְסִי, יִנְסִי, יִנְסִי strongly suggest that the word should be derived from יִנְסִי 'to uncover, reveal', not from יִנְסִי 'to roll' (pace Norin 2006 whose proposal 'cylinder seal' is also objectionable on contextual grounds). The 'uncovering' of a stone or metal object was a term for polishing its surface in order to remove the layer of oxydation (cf. De Moor 1964). Sir. 12:11 which apparently rests on a different Hebrew original
than MS A describes the polishing of a mirror to remove the rust (original Hebrew probably יַרְא חָלֶנֶה רָא וּלְגִ'י, → יָרֵא וּלְגִ'י). This tallies with several ancient versions which understood יַ报酬 לְגִ'י in Isa. 3:23 as ‘mirror’ (see below). Mirrors were usually made of bronze, sometimes provided with a patina of silver or gold to enhance reflection (Derriks 2001). Inscribing names on mirrors was not uncommon (see e.g. Bird 1986). Standing rectangular mirrors were also known (see e.g. BNP s.v. ‘Mirror’). The reason why Isaiah had to write this ominous name on a reflecting surface was obviously to warn passers-by who saw their own reflection in the mirror that they themselves would soon become spoil of war.

The writing thus serves a double objective. In the first place the divine message is exposed to the general public and that is no doubt the reason why it had to be incised in an unusually large tablet or mirror. Normally writing tablets and mirrors were smaller (→ נַרְא וּלְגִ'י and רַא וּלְגִ'י). In the second place the inscription in durable stone or metal made it possible to preserve it against vandalism of angry people who understood what Isaiah meant. Moreover, the object had to prove the reliability of his announcement later on (compare Isa. 8:16.17-18). This is also the reason why Isaiah has his inscription notarised by two reliable witnesses (Isa. 8:2).

The plural יָלִין לְגִ'י is attested in Isa. 3:23. Although the following words are usually explained as garments, the immediately preceding יָלִין לְגִ'י means ‘purses’ (→ יִרְיִים וּלְגִ'י), so there is no reason why mirrors would not be mentioned as objects used predominantly by rich ladies. Mirrors have been found in graves of women since the Gemdet Nasr period (Salonen, Hausgeräte, Bd. 1, 110), were extremely popular among women in Mesopotamia (see e.g. Nemet-Nejat 1993) and Egypt (Munro 1969). Mirrors occur in dowry lists, e.g. 204 such items in the dowry of an Egyptian princess (EA 14:II.65-66, 75-79; for EA 14 as a dowry list, Kühne 1973, 70-1). There is insufficient reason to think of exotic papyrus garments (Hönig 1957, 118).

2b. Figurative Use

Not attested.
3. Epigraphic Hebrew
Not attested.

4. Cognates
SEMITIC: The √glw/y is attested in almost all Semitic languages (Cohen et al., DRS, fasc. 3, 120-2; Leslau, CDG, 192-3). Below only some specific meanings that are relevant to the discussion are mentioned.

POSTBIBLICAL HEBREW: *Terminus technicus* for the blank margin of a manuscript (Levy, WTM, Bd. 1, 334; Jastrow, DTT, vol. 1, 249). See section 6 below.

SYRIAC: See below, the Versions.

CLASSICAL ARABIC: One of the meanings of the verb *glw* is ‘to polish’ (a sword or a mirror), cf. Lane, AEL, 447.

MODERN SOUTH ARABIC: √gly, ‘to polish’ (Johnstone, ML, 119).

5. Ancient Versions
θ and other Greek versions: Usually τὰ διαφανὴ λακωνικά, ‘the translucent Laconian dresses’, in θ Isa. 3:22 are seen as the rendering of מ 3:23 יִלָּה (e.g. Camilo dos Santos, EHIH, 36; Muraoka, HIS, 34). However, the θ’s rendering of these verses is very confused and the equation is by no means certain. In Isa. 8:1 the θ paraphrases τόμον καίνον μεγάλον, ‘a scroll of a new great (book)’ (or if καίνον μεγάλον is a corruption of καίνον μεγάλον, ‘a new large scroll’). In 1 Esd. 6:22 τόμος seems to be the rendering of מִנָּה, ‘scroll’ (cf. Ezra 6:2). Probably all Greek translators derived מ 3:23 from √לע, because also θ opts for κεφαλίς, here probably ‘roll’ (GELS-L, 254), σ’ for τσκόνος, also ‘roll’ (LSJ, 1784). θ’s διαφέρωμα, ‘hide’, is an attempt to explain that it was an unrolled parchment scroll.

ε: Isa. 3:23 καταβάς (var. καταβας, ‘mirrors’). Isa. 8:1 בְּרָחַל, ‘a large tablet (or plank)’ (cf. Sokoloff, DJPA, 279; DJBA, 619), possibly harmonising with Hab. 2:2.

ς: In Isa. 3:23 ς guesses unhtym, ‘their long mantles’. In Isa. 8:1 ς simply transposes the Hebrew into Syriac: *glywn*’. The Syriac dictionaries (e.g. Payne Smith (Margoliouth), CSD, 71; Brockel-
mann, *LS*, 116; Costaz, *DSF*, 48) fill in the presumed meaning of the Hebrew word and for that reason are not really helpful.


6. Judaic Sources

The attestations of ḳwyọŁGI in the rabbinic sources seem to be derived from Isa. 8:1 but acquired the specific meaning of ‘blank margin of a manuscript’ (m. Yad. III.4; b. Shab., 116a [twice], 116b [twice]). There is insufficient reason to assume a satirical allusion to the Christian εὐγγέλιον in these passages (G. Friedrich, *ThWNT*, Bd. 2, 723-4). In b. Abod. Zar., 18b ḳwyọŁGI designates the unwritten parchment of a scroll since it is contrasted to the lettering that got away unharmed. Gen. R. XIX.6 seems to understand ḳwyọŁGI in Isa. 3:23 as some kind of garment for women, possibly under the influence of φ.

7. Illustrations


8. Archaeological Remarks

[Will be added later on.] Mirrors are attested as early as the 20th century BCE in the Egyptian Tale of Sinuhe (*CoS*, vol. 1, 82). For Mesopotamia, see Pappi 2011.

9. Conclusion

The common interpretation of ḳwyọŁGI as ‘tablet, writing board’ in Isa. 8:1 rests on a precarious basis. Only one of the ancient versions supports it (κ) and it is unclear why the usual designation of such an object (→ ṣה) would have been avoided here. Nevertheless this rendering should be considered a viable option.

An alternative solution is to accept the meaning ‘mirror’ which is attested in early interpretations of Isa. 3:23. As soon as it is realised that according to Isa. 8:1 Isaiah wrote on a mirror in order to warn passers-by who saw their reflection in it that they would become the target of the message of doom he had to inscribe
in it, any tension between this text and Isa. 3:23 disappears. In both instances the rendering ‘mirror’ that is attested in several ancient versions and is supported etymologically by some Semitic cognates appears to be satisfactory.

10. Bibliography

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