(palm, sole), handbowl, incense-ladle

1. Statistics
In other meanings (hand, palm, sole) the noun occurs ca. 180 times.

2a. Literal Use
The primary meaning of this word is ‘palm’ or ‘sole’, to which many additional meanings can be added: socket (of hip); hollow (of slinger); ladle or saucer; handle; receptacle; and with a plausible emendation ‘castanets’ in Hab. 2:11 (Pinker 2002). The meaning under consideration here occurs when the object is a Temple utensil (→ יִלּוֹת) said to be filled with incense (חֲלֵטָה, Num. 4:7). It had to be put on the table (→ יָשָׁב), together with bowls (→ נַשְׁבָּה), jugs (→ מַסְמָה), and jars (→ חַשְׁגָּה; Exod. 37:16). On the occasion of the anointing of the altar the ṭבָּר, together with silver bowls and basins (→ נֶחוֹם, → מַרְכָּב) were dedicated (Num.7:84). They are also listed among fire pans (→ כַּמָּה), lampstands (→ מַשְׁתְּתָה), pails (→ סְכָם), scrapers (→ יִשְׁכֶּב), snuffers (→ עָמַר), and sprinkling bowls (→ נַשְׁפָּה; 2 Kgs 25:14; Jer. 52:18; 2 Chron. 4:22; 24:14), and were made of bronze, silver or gold; no other material is mentioned in the Bible (see further Exod. 25:29; Num. 7:14, 86; 1 Kgs 7:50; Jer. 52:19), but archaeologically specimens made of clay and stone are known (Nielsen 1986).

2b. Figurative Use
As a name of a utensil, יִלִּיט is a metaphor. The figurative use of יִלִּיט is related to the meaning ‘palm’, and then denotes ‘power’ or ‘grip’.

3. Epigraphic Hebrew
Not attested.

4. Cognates
According to Watson 1978 the word kp/kappu in the meaning of ‘shallow dish’ that is attested in several Semitic languages would have nothing to do with the homonym meaning ‘open hand’. This is unlikely, however, because the archaeological and iconographic
evidence clearly favours the identity of the two words. Mostly the noun is seen as a derivative of √πk ‘to bend’ (so e.g. Gesenius & Roediger, TPC, 705; König, HAWAT, 183; Zorell, LHA, 370; Klein, CEDHL, 283). This in turn might have developed by assimilation out of √knp which gave rise to nouns denoting ‘wings’ (cf. Orel & Stolbova, HSED, 312).

5. Ancient Versions


wT: Exod. 25:29, 37:16; Num. 7:20, θυσικη, a Greek/Latin LW, ‘cup, pot’ (Tal, DSA, 680).


ς: In all instances kaffa ‘ladle, bowl’.


6. Judaic Sources

In Mishnah Tamid 4.3 the word בקבא occurs in the sense of a vessel (בכפיות, יפה וקרישה על בּריה מתקל, ‘he who won the incense did take the spoon’; m. Tam. 4.3; 5.4.). Cf. m. Men. 11.5. Both the close relationship between the בקבא and incense, and the fact that [another] word is used to describe the related vessel, indicate that the meaning of בקבא was understood to be ‘incense spoon’.

7. Illustrations

Photographs are found in e.g. EM, vol. 7, 115-7; Avitzur, 183;
8. Archaeological Remarks

Ladles in the form of an open hand, holding a bowl, have been found all over the Levant. They are usually related to incense and ointments. [More will be added later on.]

9. Conclusion

The clearest literary indication for the use of this utensil, is its filling with incense. All other occurrences merely list the object among temple utensils. Archaeological exhibits confirm the use of a hand-shaped ladle for incense; for that reason, the meaning ‘incense ladle’ is reasonably certain.

10. Bibliography


Last update: 18-05-2011

W.F. Smelik

This article should be cited as: