griddle, (baking-)plate

1. Statistics


Attested in Lev. 2:5; 6:14; 7:9; Ezek. 4:3; 1 Chron. 23:29.

2a. Literal Use

In the first chapters of Leviticus the figures in the preparation of the מצעל (grain-offering), together with the ←דַּג (‘oven’) and the ←הלעפה (‘frying-pan’). In Lev. 7:9 the three of them are mentioned together: ‘Every cereal offering that is baked (מצעל) in the oven and all that is prepared (הלעפה) in the frying-pan and on (הלעפה) ‘the priest who offers’ ‘all these offerings shall be for the priest who offers it. This looks like a summary of the law on the מצעל in the second chapter: it shall consist of fine flour (סְלֵה, ‘wheat groats, semolina’), with oil (לְבָנָה) and frankincense (薷ן) (Lev. 2:1). When it is baked in the oven this shall result in unleavened cakes (סְלֵה) or unleavened wafers (סְלֵה בְּרוֹשָׁה), mixed (סְלֵה בְּרָשָׂה) or spread (סְלֵה בְּרָשָׁה) with oil (Lev. 2:4, cf. 7:12). Verses 5-6 describe the product obtained from a מצעל: if your offering (קרם) is a מצעל, then it shall be of unleavened fine flour mixed (סְלֵה בְּרָשָׂה, cf. v. 4) with oil (v. 5): after it has been broken into pieces (קרם בְּרָשָׂה) you shall sprinkle oil on it (v. 6). The מצעל from the frying-pan is also made of fine flour with oil (v. 7). Unlike v. 4, no word for ‘baking’ or ‘cooking’ is used in verses 5 and 7. Had this been indicated already sufficiently by the nouns used for the heating utensils themselves?

The use of the preposition לפני before מצעל in Lev. 7:9 (as against ב for the other utensils) argues in favour of a ‘baking-plate’ on which the cakes are baked as distinct from the ‘frying-pan’. The מצעל that were baked on it, could be broken into pieces (cf. 6:14).

In Ezek. 4:3 a מצעל בְּרָשָׁה, ‘an iron griddle’ is mentioned (cf. Section 2b). Probably also the ‘griddle’ in the tabernacle/temple (Lev. 6-7) was an iron plate, although griddles of clay were and are known to exist too (see below, Section 8). Obviously heavy use made iron a more practical material. Kelso, CVOT, 23, considers
copper a suitable metal too. The griddle cannot have been small because the cakes baked on it had to be broken into pieces and because several cakes were baked on it at the same time. Also the rendering of the ן points to a fairly large object (see Section 5 below). However, there is no indication of its exact shape or size in Lev. 2:5 and 7:9.

For the offering on the day of the anointing of the high priest Lev. 6:13(20) mentions a tenth of an ephah of fine flour: half of it in the morning and half in the evening. On the basis of the traditional content of an ephah (about 35 litres; cf. De Vaux, IAT, t. 1, 306-09, a.o.) just under two litres should cover the ground each morning and evening. A plate of about 40 cm (16 inches) diameter (or: length and width) would then be required. However, since it is impossible to establish the capacity of the ephah with any degree of certainty (→ יא), the real dimension of the ground remains in doubt.

In the description of Lev. 6:14, the ה is made again ‘on a griddle with oil’ (שומטך לַ_mem). The dough had to be made with oil – the meaning of the latter participle of the Hofal is disputed (Milgrom 1991, 399-400). On the basis of Lev. 7:12, where it goes together with מִית ‘mixed’, it has often been rendered ‘well-mixed’, but exactly the proximity of the two terms suggests a different meaning, possibly ‘decocted dough’, dough heated until all water has evaporated (cf. Akkadian rabaku ‘to decoct, reduce’).

1 Chron. 23 describes the subdivision of the Levites and their tasks. These included assisting the Aaronites in ‘the care for the courts and the chambers, the cleansing of all that is holy’ (v. 28, cf. 9:26), continued in v. 29 (cf. 9:29.31-32) with (the care) for the showbread (לָּטֵן לְַַַם, cf. 9:32), for the fine flour, the cereal offering, and the wafers of unleavened bread (לָּטֵן לְַַַם לְַַַם, see above, Lev. 2:4, cf. 7:12), for the baking plate (רָבּא), for the ‘decocted dough’ (לָּטֵן לְַַַם), and for ‘all measures of quantity and size’. In this series it would appear that לָּטֵן does not signify the baking-plate proper, but stands for its products, that which in 1 Chron. 9:31 is indicated with מִית (from the same stem, see Section 4 below). In this connection, it could also be a matter of debate whether ‘all measures of quantity and size’
should be understood as (watching over) ‘the required quantity of the offerings’ (thus De Vaux, IAT, t. 1, 297-298), or as (taking care of) ‘the measuring vessels’.

2b. Figurative Use

In Ezekiel 4-5 Yhwh instructs the prophet to perform a number of symbolic acts (cf. Viberg 2007, 182-207). In Ezek. 4:1-2 he engraves in the still soft clay of a brick a plan of the city of Jerusalem and surrounds it with the whole armoury of the siegeworks of his days: a siege wall, a mound, camps of the besiegers, and battering rams all around. In v. 3 he has to take a household utensil which would be close at hand (Cooke 1936, 51, cf. Zimmerli 1969, 114: ‘Aus den Haushaltsgeräten herausgegriffen’). The prophet has to put it as a wall of iron between himself and the city. From behind this wall he shall fasten his eyes (literally: his face) on her, bringing her in a state of siege and hemming her in. This will be a sign for the house of Israel. Again, nothing is said about the shape of the iron plate, but in this case a rectangular shape seems obvious. Because Ezekiel must represent the attackers, the iron plate between him and the city could be understood as the iron armour-plating protecting the warriors operating the battering rams (µyr, v. 2) from the arrows of the defenders (see Fig. 1 on next page).

So the iron baking plate seems to convey the message that God will protect the enemies instead of sinful Jerusalem. In addition to the symbolic act of vv. 1-2, the severity and irrevocability of Yhwh’s intention are emphasized by the iron plate and by the relentless gaze of the prophet: ‘Härte, Undurchdringlichkeit und Unzerbrechbarkeit der Platte verbildlichen die entsprechenden Züge an Jahwes Tun’ (Zimmerli 1969, 114).

3. Epigraphic Hebrew

Not attested.
4. Cognates

SEMITIC: The hapax legomenon מְיִבַּיָּה in 1 Chron. 9:31 which evidently refers to the priestly cakes baked on the griddle, (baking-)plate seemingly points to a root ה/הָבַת. Because this root is rare in all Semitic languages, it was suggested early on that it might be connected with the well-known root ה/הָבַז which in many Semitic languages means ‘to bake’, cf. Arabic, هُبَّز ‘flat bread’ (so e.g. Gesenius & Roediger, TPC, 443; Fürst & Ryssel, HCHAT, Bd. 1, 374; GB, 412; Klein, CEDHL, 207). However, Leslau, CDG, 257 rightly deems this proposal ‘unlikely’.

From an etymological point of view a connection with the root הָבַת or the root הָבָש ‘to beat’ (suggested by Lewy, WTM,Bd. 2, 13) is somewhat less unlikely (cf. English ‘batter’), but it is not a mixing bowl we are looking for.

If the root is ה/הָבַת indeed, not all problems are resolved, however, because the grammatically correct form should have been
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Of course it is possible to surmise that this in turn was contracted to הַבָּתָן (thus already Gesenius & Roediger, TPC, 444a), but this is obviously a makeshift solution.

A possibility which hitherto does not seem to have been explored is that the root הָבָּת is a denominative from a noun *הַבָּתָן 'grains, semolina' which itself would have been derived from a root הָבָּב (see below under Arabic).

CLASSICAL ARABIC: Perhaps *הָבָּב, הָבָּת 'grains, bread'; הָבָּבָּב 'merchant of corn'; muḥabbāb 'full of grains' (Lane, AEL, 496-7; Kazimirski, DAF, 363-4; Dozy, SDA, 239-242).

MODERN EGYPTIAN ARABIC: Perhaps *הָבָּב 'a dish prepared from wheat that has been soaked in water for two or three days, and is then cooked with sugar' (Kazimirski, DAF, 364).

MODERN PALESTINIAN ARABIC: Perhaps *הָבָּב, הָבָּת 'grains' (Barthélemy, DAF), 141).

5. Ancient Versions

Θ and other Greek versions: Θ has τῇγναυ in all instances, also for דְּרוֹב in 1 Chron. 9:31. The Greek word is usually rendered ‘frying-pan’ or the like in modern dictionaries (see e.g. GELS-L, 474b; GELS-M, 678a). The same word describes a fairly large instrument of torture by heat in 2 Macc. 7:3, cf. the derivative verb in 2 Macc. 7:5. In 2 Sam. 13:9 τῇγναυ is the rendering of → דְּרוֹב, a baking-pan.

Є: In all places the Targumim have מַסְרְג or מַסְרַג, apparently derived from the Hebrew term in 2 Sam. 13:9. Jastrow, DTT, 812a: ‘a mould for frying a batter’, in gen. ‘pan’; Dalman, ANHT, 244b: ‘Pfanne’.

ß: Follows Θ closely by choosing the Greek loanword τῇγναυ in all instances, except 1 Chron. 23:29, where it is left untranslated. Brockelmann, LS, 268: ‘sartago’; Payne Smith, TS, 1431: ‘sartago’; Payne Smith (Margoliouth), CSD, 167b: <Gr> τῇγναυ, ‘a grid iron, an instrument of torture’.

ם: sartago ‘frying-pan, baking pan’ (Lewis & Short, LD, 1632)’, but 2 Sam. 13:9 ‘quod coxerat’, 1 Chron. 9:31 ‘[quae] in sartagine [frigebantur]’. 
6. Judaic Sources

The word is not attested in Qumran. In Mishnah and Talmud תבנית is discussed several times, cf. Dalman, *AuS*, Bd. 4, 42: ‘Das jüdische Recht (Men. V.8) unterscheidet *mahabat* als deckellos oder flach von der mit Deckel versehenen oder tiefen *marhésat*: Platte und Pfanne oder Tiegel wären also wohl die richtigen Übersetzungen’ (see also *AuS*, Bd. 7, 211; Forbes, *SAT*, vol. 6, 63). The תבנית should be prepared in a special room in the temple (Men. XI.3; Mid. I.4, cf. Tam. I.3 – *AuS*, Bd. 4, 42, cf. 66), but תבנית and → תבנית also formed part of the private household (Men. V.8, Sifra, 11a, cf. Ezek. 4:3! – *AuS*, Bd. 4, 42).

7. Illustrations

Cf. Dalman, *AuS*, Bd. 4, Abb. 9-12; Galling, *BRL*², 30, Fig. 1; Avitzur, 107-8 (both rectangular and circular griddles); *LBI*, 145, Fig. 70b.

8. Archaeological Remarks

Galling, *BRL*², 29-30 (art. ‘Backen und Backofen’ [M. Kellerman]). Baking plates of clay have been unearthed in Megiddo and Taanakh. [More will be added later on].

9. Conclusion

All evidence points to the meaning ‘griddle, baking-plate’ (Backplatte) for תבנית, as distinct from the → רשת (oven) and the → תבנית, (frying-pan, cf. Lev. 7:9, discussed in Section 2a).

In scholarly works one often finds references to the Arabic *sāq*, a circular, convex iron plate to bake very thin bread on (e.g. Dalman, *AuS*, Bd. 1.D, 39-73). It could help us to form our idea of the תבנית of TeNaKh. However, griddles come in different shapes, also rectangular and flat. The plate is placed on some stones and is heated by a charcoal fire.

At least in the case of Ezek. 4:3 (where it is of iron, see Section 2b.) it seems to have had a rectangular shape, not unlike modern flat griddles, though the heating will have been far less sophisticated in Antiquity.
There is archaeological evidence for ceramic baking-plates, but Ezek. 4:3 proves that also iron griddles were in use. ‘It may be of iron in every instance, as in Ezek. iv.3, but the purpose would earlier be served by convex discs of pottery’ (Honeyman 1939, 11). ‘A ceramic disc would be the griddle of the common man of all periods’, etc. (Kelso, CVOT, 51).

The סָמָך-offering of Lev. 2 could be home-made, but those prepared by the priests (Lev. 6 and 7, cf. 1 Chron. 9 and 23) were made in the temple. According to later tradition there was a special room in the temple for baking the סָמָך (see Section 6.). Because of the heavy use the סָמָך in the temple surely would have been made of iron.

In 1 Chron. 23:29 סָמָך rather indicates the product of the baking plate, like its cognate סָמָך in 1 Chron. 9:31. This product
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consisted of a thin, hard-baked cake, made from fine grain mixed with oil, that should be broken into pieces (Lev. 2:6, 6:14).

10. Bibliography


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