(vision, appearance), mirror

1. Statistics

2a. Literal Use
The normal meaning of יָרַם is ‘vision’ and it is difficult to make a clear distinction between the feminine form and the masculine יָרָה, ‘appearance’, but also ‘vision’ (see esp. Ezek. 43:3). However, the meaning ‘vision’ does not fit Exod. 38:8 where the bronze laver (→ רָהַנִיתוֹ) and its base have to be made from the יָרַם of the women ministering at the door of the Tent of Meeting. This instruction is lacking in the parallel text Exod. 30:18 and was probably added to explain where the bronze came from.

2b. Figurative Use
Not attested.

3. Epigraphic Hebrew
Not attested.

4. Cognates
SEMITIC: The root occurs in several Semitic languages (Leslau, CDG, 458-9; Klein, CEDHL, 600; Beeston, SD, 113; Biella, DOSA, 474). Below only some derivatives meaning ‘mirror’ have been listed. See also → יָשָׁר. A comparable semantic development may be observed in Akkadian nāmaru, ‘mirror’, from amāru, ‘to see’. Syriac borrowed this Akkadian noun in the form of nāwrrā, ‘mirror’.

POSTBIBLICAL HEBREW: יָרַם, ‘mirror’ (Levy, WTM, Bd. 3, 235-6).
CLASSICAL ARABIC: mir'ah, ‘mirror’ (Lane, AEL, 1002).
MODERN ARABIC: Mehri mīrōt/mēf, ‘mirror’ (Johnstone, ML. 268); Soq. ‘imrehor, mēre, ‘mirror’ (Leslau, LSoq, 251); Palestinian Arabic mūyēye (plur. -āt), ‘mirror’, √mry, ‘to make someone look in a mirror’ (Barthélemy, 265, 785).

5. Ancient Versions

Exod. 38:8: ἐν τῷ θαύματι ἱλαστηρίου, τῆς μετάνωσις τῆς ίματος, ‘with the apparition of the powers that are strong (in) the gate of the Tent of Meeting’, possibly paraphrase on the basis of Aramaic מָרָא, ‘be powerful’.

The Targumim on Exod. 38:8 reflect various stages of elimination of the potentially offensive nature of this verse (cf. 1 Sam. 1:22; Isa. 3:23). Exod. 38:8 in the Targumim reflect various stages of elimination of the potentially offensive nature of this verse (cf. 1 Sam. 1:22; Isa. 3:23). Exod. 38:8 in the Targumim reflect various stages of elimination of the potentially offensive nature of this verse (cf. 1 Sam. 1:22; Isa. 3:23).

6. Judaic Sources

In 1QM V.5 bronze shields are said to be polished like a face-mirror (בַּדָּשַׁם אָפֶן) and in V.11 javelins of purified iron are said to be whitened like such a face-mirror. Comparable is the expression נָא-מָא-אָרְפָּיָה שְׁאְסִירְרִי, ‘bronze face-mirrors’, in EA 14:ii.75-76.
7. Illustrations

→ ὑλή.

8. Archaeological Remarks

→ ὑλή.

9. Conclusion

On the basis of the use in Qumran, the versions, several cognates, and the circumstance that women appear to be in possession of the ἀρχή mentioned in Exod. 38:8, the meaning ‘mirrors’ has been firmly established.

Why these women were supposed to have possessed mirrors and were instructed to part with them is a matter of conjecture (Houtman 2000, 569-72) but possibly the author of this note felt that coquetry at the entrance of the sanctuary had to be eliminated (cf. 1 Sam. 1:22; Isa. 3:23). Mirrors were typical attributes of women (→ ἀρχή and Everhart 2004). Whether earlier these women had been servants of a goddess (Winter 1983; Görg 1984) cannot be established with certainty. Perhaps the mirrors had fulfilled a function in the pre-exilic ancestor cult (cf. De Moor 1997, 350-2 and cf. ἑ and ζ). In any case it is remarkable that in contrast to later prescriptions the women fulfilled some kind of temple service with their mirrors (Busink, 1077-8; Marsman 2003, 565-6).

10. Bibliography

ische Studien zum weiblichen Gottesbild im alten Israel und in dessen Umwelt (OBO, 53), Freiburg 1983, 58-64.

Last update: 01-11-2011       A.L.H.M. VAN WIERINGEN

This article should be cited as:
A.L.H.M. van Wieringen, ‘םידעלג סנורא mirror’,