1. Statistics

2a. Literal Use
With the exception of Prov. 31:18 the literal use is confined to passages dealing with articles of sanctuary furniture. The texts with its figurative use, however, also contribute to the understanding of the literal use.

The lamp’s function is to light, to illuminate (םֵי hiph., Num. 8:2; cf. Exod. 25:37; Ps. 18:29). It is a source of light (cf. יָם יָם, ‘the light of the lamp’, Jer. 25:10) and can be equated with ‘light’ (cf. the parallelism יָם || יָם [Ps. 119:105; Job 29:3; Prov. 6:23] and יָם || יָם [Job 18:6; Prov. 13:9]). The lamp is used in houses of man (Job 18:6; Prov. 31:18) and in the dwelling of God, in the Tabernacle (Exod. 25:37[2x]; 27:20; 30:8; 35:14; 37:23; 39:37[2x]; 40:4, 25; Lev. 24:2, 4; Num. 4:9; 8:2 [2x], 3; except Exod. 27:20; Lev. 24:2 always used in the plur.), the sanctuary of Shiloh (תֵּאָני רשא, 1 Sam. 3:3), and in the Temple of Solomon (always in plur., 1 Kgs 7:49; 1 Chr. 28:15 [3x]; 2 Chron. 4:20f.; 13:11; 29:7). Evidently also in Zech. 4:2 (plur. 2x) holy lamps are meant.

The lamp is used to dispel the opposite of light (2 Sam. 22:29; Ps. 18:29; Job 18:6; 29:3; Prov. 20:20), the darkness (תֶּשֶׁב) of the night, including the haunting demons. Apotropaic power is attributed to the light. Even in the houses of the poorest a lamp as kept burning at night (Weippert 2002, 182). The presence of lamps in the sanctuary, intended to guarantee that also at night the deity would have a pleasant and safe abode, betrays a strongly anthropomorphic notion of God. The lamp also serves to find one’s way in the darkness (Ps. 119:105; Job 29:3; Prov. 6:23) or to look for (תְּשַׁב qal or pi.) something or someone in dark or hidden places (Zeph. 1:12 [plur.]; Prov. 20:27; cf. Luke 15:8). To increase the effect of the light, the lamp is placed on a stand (מֵי). Lamps and stand belong together and are often mentioned together (Exod. 25:37; 37:23; 39:37; 40:4, 24f.; Lev. 24:4;
LAMP

Num. 8:2f.; 1 Kgs 7:49; Zech. 4:2; 1 Chron. 28:15; 2 Chron. 4:20f.; 13:11). To boost the intensity of the light more lamps are used. In Exod. 25:37; 37:23; Num. 8:2; Zech. 4:2 the number of seven lamps occurs. With exception of Zech. 4:2 (the seven lamps had seven spouts [דカメנמש]) no information is given about the lamp’s shape. Because in Exod. 25:37; 37:23 it is not explicitly stated that the lights are to be of gold (note also Exod. 25:38; 37:23), it is sometimes assumed that, like common lamps (see section 8), the Tabernacle lamps were of ceramic (e.g. Meyers 1976, 57). It has to be borne in mind, however, that metal lamps were luxury items. Because Yhwh’s house is furnished like the house of a prince, and because the lamps of the Temple of Solomon were made of gold (כּל סֶבֶן; 1 Kgs 7:49; 1 Chron. 28:15 [+ הָעַנְש, ‘silver’; 2 Chron. 4:20f.], it is natural to think of lamps of gold. So Exod. 38:17. The lamp burns oil (כּל עַלְכֹּשׁ, → כּל עַלְכֹּשׁ) by means of one or more wicks (→ דָּפַּני). For the care (דָּפַּני qal [Exod. 27:21; Lev. 24:3f.; Ps. 132:17; cf. Exod. 39:37]) of the lamp, the lighting of which is explicitly mentioned (דָּפַּני hiph. in Exod. 25:37; 27:20; 30:8; 40:4, 25; Lev. 24:2; Num. 8:2f.; בֹּטֶר pi. in 2 Chron. 4:20; 13:11), various utensils (→ כּל עַלְכֹּשׁ) were available, further particularised as ‘containers and fuels of the lampstand’s oil’ (כּל עַלְכֹּשׁ, Num. 4:9; cf. Matt. 25:3f.), ‘forceps, tongs’ (→ כּל עַלְכֹּשׁ), ‘firepans’ (→ כּל עַלְכֹּשׁ plur.), ‘trimming knives, snuffers’ (→ כּל עַלְכֹּשׁ).

Spreading of darkness as a result of the lamp’s extinguishing (דָּפַּני qal [Job 18:5f.; 21:17; Prov. 13:9; 20:20; 24:20]; כּל qal [1 Sam. 3:3; Prov. 31:18] and pi. [2 Sam. 21:17; 2 Chron. 29:7]) has to be prevented by good care. According to Exod. 30:7f.; Lev. 24:3 (cf. also Num. 8:2f.), the care for the lights in the Tabernacle was entrusted to Aaron, the highpriest. In Exod. 27:21 that task is also assigned to his sons, the priests (cf. 2 Chron. 13:10f.).

With regard to the time of burning of the lamps in the Tabernacle the information is diverse. In Exod. 27:20 and Lev. 24:2 mention is made of permanent light (דָּפַּני, for the conspicuous sing. [to be regarded as a collective, cf. Lev. 24:4, or as the incorporation of an ancient tradition according to which originally there stood just one lamp in the sanctuary, cf. 1 Sam. 3:3] see the discussion in Houtman 2000, 462f.). However, Exod. 27:21;
Lev. 24:3 give the impression that the light burned only at night, from evening till morning (cf. 1 Sam. 3:3; 2 Chr. 3:11). It has been proposed that continuous burning was necessary because light from the outside could not reach the inner sanctuary. It is further contended that in ancient Israel there was the custom to have a lamp burning in the house day and night. If that were the case, the existence of an analogous practice in the sanctuary would be quite plausible. It is doubtful if such a custom of letting a lamp burn continually really existed (see Galling 1923, 33-37). What is possible is that people liked to have a lamp burning all night. Particularly the well-to-do could afford that (Prov. 31:18). For the sanctuary it was an ordinance to have the lamp burning through the whole night. The true meaning of Exod. 27:20 seems to be that there must always be enough oil, so that without interruption, each night anew, the light can burn again. Negligence brings on the wrath of YHWH (cf. 2 Chron. 29:7). It must be assumed that, as with regular homes, the sanctuary was naturally light enough by day (cf. also 1 Kgs 8:12).

2b. Figurative Use

The lamp, i.e. the burning lamp, is used as a metaphor for the Torah of YHWH (Ps. 119:105), and for the instruction of the Wisdom teacher (Prov. 6:23). It is a symbol of the social (Jer. 25:10; cf. 4 Ezra 10:22; Rev. 18:23) as well as of the individual happiness and prosperity (Ps. 18:29; Prov. 13:19a) which have to be attributed to YHWH’s ‘lamp’, God’s benevolent and salutary presence (2 Sam. 22:29; Job 29:3; cf. the characterisation of YHWH as בֶּן יִשְׂרָאֵל in Isa. 10:17, and as בֶּן יִשְׂרָאֵל in Ps. 27:1). Cf. also Prov. 31:18, where the lamp has a literal as well as a figurative sense (permanent wellbeing). Generally the text of Prov. 20:27 with the lamp of YHWH (יִשְׂרָאֵל רָע) as a metaphor for ‘the human spirit’ (בֹּשֶׁם, רָע), is considered corrupt (תַּחַם ‘he who heeds’ instead of רָע is proposed; cf. Job 7:20; Prov. 24:12). The lamp also is a symbol of the king as the source of blessing for his people, of whom the nation’s wellbeing depends (מֹשֶׁה רָע, of David in 2 Sam. 21:17, → beginRšn; cf. the characterisation of the king as בֹּשֶׁם, ‘the breath of our nostrils’ in Lam. 4:20), and a designation for the royal descendant on the throne who keeps the
dynastic light burning (Ps. 132:17; cf. the use of יַעָש). Similarly Babylonian and Assyrian deities and kings could be designated as the nûrû ‘light, lamp’ of world (CAD (N), 347-351). The Old Aramaic light-goddess Aya is called Nr (KAI, Bd. 1, 245).

The lamps of Zeph. 1:12 may be regarded as a designation of the eyes of YHWH (cf. Zech. 3:9; 4:10). The extinguished lamp is a symbol of the misfortune and the end of the wicked (Job 18:6; 21:17; Prov. 13:9b; 20:20: 24:20), who have no descendants and no future (cf. also Rev. 2:5). In the sanctuary the radiant light of the lamps offers a fitting environment to him who is all brightness and glory (cf. Isa. 60:1-3; Hab. 3:4, 11; Ps. 50:2; 104:1f. and e.g. 1 Tim. 6:16; 1 John 1:5). It is assumed that יַעָש as a personal name (1 Sam. 14:50f.; 1 Chron. 8:33, etc.) and as an element of a personal name, יַעֵש (1 Sam. 14:50) or יַעֵש, Abner (‘the father is a lamp’ or ‘Ner is the father’, 1 Sam. 14:50f. etc.), and יַעֲש or יַעֵש, Neriah (‘my lamp is YH, Jer. 32:12, 16; 36:14, 32 etc.), is also a metaphor of happiness and prosperity (Noth 1928, 167f.; Fowler 1988, 81).

3. Epigraphic Hebrew

The name Neriah is attested on ostraca, for example from Lachish (1,5) and Arad (31,4). See the evidence in D. Kellermann, TWAT, Bd. 5, 621; Ahituv 2008, 56, 135, 177.

4. Cognates

SEMITIC: יַעָש is a derivative of the common Semitic root nwr/nyr ‘to give light’ (Leslau, CDG, 401, 410; Klein, CEDHL, 410, 427; HAHAT, 797).

5. Ancient Versions

In all instances בֵּיתָן – Tal, DSA, 86: ‘candle, lamp’.


In all instances ꧇ renders יֹרֶג – Payne Smith (Margoliouth), CSD, 597: ‘lamp’. Part of 1 Chron. 28:15 and 2 Chron. 4:20-21 are lacking. According to the Leiden edition, ꧇ has a singular in Zeph. 1:12 and Zech. 4:2b where ꧇ has a plural.

Lamp – Lewis & Short, LD, 1079: ‘lamp, oil-lamp, light’.

6. Judaic Sources

Cf. Krauss, TA, Bd. 1, 68-71. The cultic lamps are dealt with in Judaic sources, but their data do not contribute to the elucidation of their form and meaning in the Hebrew Bible. According to later tradition, also during the day a light was burning in the sanctuary. Josephus, Ant., III.199, relates that three of the seven lamps remained lit. Rabbinic tradition mentions only one lamp that was kept burning and used to light the other lamps at night (m.Tamid, III, 10[9]; VI, 1). Complete quenching of the lamp was regarded as ominous (b.Joma, 39b). It would seem that the later practice was influenced by the tradition about the tent shrine. The existence of a permanently burning light in the second temple is explicitly mentioned by Pseudo-Hecateus (in Josephus, Apion, I, 199). Also the synagogue had one or two permanent lamps. In 11Q19 (= 11QTemple,a) ꧇ plur. occurs in col. IX.12 and XXII.1
(see also 11Q20b V.22).

7. Illustrations
→ וּלְפָמ and Avitzur, 104; EM, 921-2, and see further section 8.

8. Archaeological Remarks
The lamp was invented in prehistoric times (Salonen, Hausgeräte, vol. 1, 131-3). It was a shallow bowl (for the oil), sometimes with the rims bent inward and with one or more (cf. Zech. 4:2) notches – the rim pinched outward, creating a spout – for one or more wicks (of flax) (→ וּלְפָמ). It is known that from the end of the 7th century in Palestine there was in use a closed lamp with two openings, a spout for the wick and a shallow cavity with a circular hole for pouring in the oil. Sometimes the lamps had a small base and normally were of pottery, but lamps made of stone and metal were in use as well. For descriptions and illustrations see Dalman, AuS, Bd. 4, 269-73; Bd. 7, 230-2; BRL², 198-201; Barrois 1939, 451-453; Smith 1961; 1964; 1966; Kennedy 1963; Israeli & Avi da 1988; Weippert 1988, 335f., 410-2, 640-5; Adler 2004; Sussman 2007.

9. Conclusion
The lamp was a shallow bowl containing olive- or castor oil, sometimes with the rims bent inward and with one or more notches for one or more wicks. Usually it was of ceramic, but as luxury items also metal lamps were in use. Often the lamp denotes the burning lamp. In that case יָלָ֙ם can acquire the meaning ‘light’.

10. Bibliography

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