

**scroll**

מִגְלָה

**1. Statistics**

Torah: 0. Nebiim: 19. Ketubim: 1. Total: 20.

In addition מִגְלָה occurs in Biblical Aramaic (Ezra 6:2).

**2a. Literal Use**

מִגְלָה is a derivation from  $\sqrt{\text{גלל}}$ , ‘to roll’. The etymology is clear: it denotes something that can be rolled – a scroll on which to write. In Egypt papyrus scrolls were used since the Old Kingdom (Erman & Ranke, *AALA*, 534-5). Up to 20 sheets of papyrus or leather could be joined to form a scroll (Burrows 1950, xvii; *AEMT*, 236-8; Tov 2004, 36-43). In the case of the brittle papyrus the sheets were joined with glue, in the case of leather with threads, mostly sinews. The overall length of the great Isaiah scroll from Qumran (1QIsa<sup>a</sup>), for example, is 7.34 meter, divided over 17 sheets of uneven width. In biblical scholarship it is sometimes stated that that up to the second century BCE papyrus scrolls were used. However, in Egypt parchment was used since the eighteenth dynasty (*AEMT*, 303) and it is likely that the material was introduced in Palestine already in the premonarchic period. Neither papyrus nor leather withstood the Palestinian climate with its wet winters well, so that thus far only scrolls have been preserved that were hidden in jars in the dry Judaeian Desert.

The combination מִגְלַת־סֵפֶר occurs four times (Jer. 36:2, 4; Ezek. 2:9; Ps. 40:8) indicating a written scroll by the size of a book ( $\rightarrow$  סֵפֶר). From the nineteen occurrences in the Nebiim thirteen can be found in Jeremiah 36: it is the major story about a מִגְלָה (cf. Hardmeier 2008). Even if this story should be seen as a post-textilic polemic treatise (so Knobloch 2009) its factual description is useful.

At first, Jeremiah gets the instruction to take ( $\sqrt{\text{לקח}}$ ) a מִגְלַת־סֵפֶר and to write down ( $\sqrt{\text{כתב}}$ ) all the prophecies he had received from the LORD until that day. The actual writing, however, is done by Baruch (Jer. 36:4). It is also Baruch who has to read aloud ( $\sqrt{\text{קרא}}$ ) the words on the מִגְלָה in the temple, in the hearing of all the people (vv. 6, 8, 10, 13-14). Having read the prophecies, Baruch

is requested to come to the chamber of the scribes (v. 20) and to read the words of Jeremiah again (vv. 14-19).

We note here that the word סִפֵּר can be used for the same object in alternation with הַמְגִלָּה. In verse 20 the scroll is laid away ( $\sqrt{\text{פקד}}$  Hiph.) but it is fetched ( $\sqrt{\text{לקח}}$ ) again in the following verse. King Jehoiakim wants to hear its content but every time three or four columns ( $\rightarrow$  דָּלָה), about one leaf of a scroll, have been read, he cuts ( $\sqrt{\text{קרע}}$ ) it off with a penknife or razor ( $\rightarrow$  תֵּעַר) and casts ( $\sqrt{\text{שלך}}$  Hiph.) it into the fire that was in a brazier ( $\rightarrow$  אָח). In this way, the whole מִגְלָה is consumed ( $\sqrt{\text{תמם}}$ ) by the fire (v. 23).

From the fact that king Jehoiakim burns ( $\sqrt{\text{שרף}}$ , vv. 25, 27, 28) Jeremiah's scroll in the brazier inside the room in which he is residing we can conclude that the scroll was probably made from papyrus and not from leather (Lundbom 2004, 586-7). In the end, the LORD commands Jeremiah to take ( $\sqrt{\text{לקח}}$ ) another מִגְלָה and to write ( $\sqrt{\text{כתב}}$ ) the prophecies down again (v. 28). Jeremiah complies, takes ( $\sqrt{\text{לקח}}$ ) another מִגְלָה and gives ( $\sqrt{\text{נתן}}$ ) it to Baruch, who does the actual writing again (v. 32).

In Ezek. 2:9; 3:1, 2, 3 God presents a מִגְלַת־סֵפֶר with lamentations written on the outside and the inside – an exceptional procedure – to the prophet with the command to eat ( $\sqrt{\text{אכל}}$ ) it. Its taste proved to be like sweet honey (Ezek. 3:3), but caused bitterness in the end (Ezek. 3:14). Since we are dealing with a visionary experience here, it is useless to speculate about the nature of the material of the scroll, leather or papyrus.

Also in the case of the flying scroll mentioned in Zech. 5:1-2 we cannot be sure whether it is a papyrus or leather scroll due to the fact that it occurs in a vision. But the huge dimensions (about 10x5 m) seem to suggest a leather scroll rather than one of papyrus. The 'scroll' acts as an avenger for the LORD, consuming the houses of thieves and persons who swear falsely (Zech. 5:3-4).

In Ps. 40:8 the expression מִגְלַת־סֵפֶר seems to indicate the same heavenly book which is called  $\rightarrow$  סִפְרָה in Ps. 56:9(8) and  $\rightarrow$  סִפֵּר in Exod. 32:32-33.

## 2b. Figurative Use

The descriptions of scrolls in visions might be regarded as figur-

ative use. See section 2a.

### 3. Epigraphic Hebrew

Not attested.

### 4. Cognates

SEMITIC: According to Hurvitz 1996 the word would be a late loan from Aramaic, but in view of its attestation in Phoenician this is an unnecessary assumption.  $\sqrt{gll}$  is General Semitic (Cohen, *DRS*, fasc. 3, 125-129; *HAHAT*, 218). For the sense development Klein, *CEDHL*, 315, points to the Latin *volumen*, ‘roll, book’, from *volvere*, ‘to roll’.

AKKADIAN: *magallatu* ‘parchment scroll’ in Late Babylonian is no doubt a loanword from Aramaic (*AHw*, 574; *AEAD*, 57; *CAD* M/1, 31).

PHOENICIAN: *mglh* ‘scroll’ (Hoftijzer & Jongeling, *DNSI*, 593). This scroll contained the text of at least one incantation.

OLD AND IMPERIAL ARAMAIC: *mglh* ‘scroll’ (Porten & Lund, *ADE*, 210).

POSTBIBLICAL HEBREW: Frequent attestation.

JEWISH ARAMAIC: מגלה, מגלהא ‘leather sheet, document, Scroll of Esther’ (Sokoloff, *DJBA*, 641).

SYRIAC: *m<sup>e</sup>gallā* ‘roll, scroll, volume . . . sheet, skin, parchment’ (Payne Smith [Margoliouth], *CSD*, 250).

MANDAIC: *magalta* (Macuch, *MD*, 238).

CLASSICAL ARABIC: *mağalla* ‘book, volume, writing, written paper’ (Lane, *AEL*, 438), probably a loanword from Aramaic (*HAHAT*, 628).

### 5. Ancient Versions

Ⓞ and other Greek versions: In Jeremiah Ⓞ translates מגלה ספר as χαρτίον βιβλίου, ‘a small roll of a book’ (Jer. 43:2 = ⓓ 36:2, etc.), but מגלה alone by χαρτίον alone (43:6 = ⓓ 36:6, etc.). In Ezek. 2:9 the Greek translator renders מגלה אחרת as κεφαλὴς βιβλίου, ‘a scroll of a book’ (similarly Ps. 40[39]:8), but מגלה alone in Ezek. 3:1-3 as κεφαλὴς (similarly Ezra 6:2). The translator of Zech.

5:1-2 opted for  $\delta\rho\acute{\epsilon}\pi\alpha\nu\omicron\nu$ , ‘sickle’, which presupposes a different vocalisation ( $\rightarrow$  מִגְלָל ‘sickle’).

ט: In all cases the ט follows מ closely.

ס: Follows מ closely. In Zech. 5:1-2 the consonants *mgl*’ can be interpreted both as ‘book’ and as ‘sickle’, but the Urmia edition vocalises *m<sup>e</sup>galtā*, ‘scroll’.

ע: *volumen (libri)*.

## 6. Judaic Sources

In 4Q264a L4 (par. 4Q421 13+2+8.2) [מגלת ספר] [ל]קרא בכתבו ביום [השבת] ‘scroll of the Book to read in its writing on the day of the sabbath’. Cf. 4Q251 1-2.5 [ב]שבת [ב]ספר ולקרא ‘to study and to read in the Book on the sabbath’.

## 7. Illustrations

No suggestions.

## 8. Archaeological Remarks

[Will be added later on.]

## 9. Conclusion

The word מִגְלָה has a more narrow meaning than the word  $\rightarrow$  סֵפֶר. It designates a scroll made of papyrus or leather on which literary texts were written, e.g. prophecies or lamentations. In Rabbinic and later Hebrew, הַמִּגְלָה is the common designation of the Book of Esther. The designation ‘Megilloth’ is used for the five books Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Qohelet, Esther, which are read during the Jewish religious festivals and are therefore sometimes bundled separately.

## 10. Bibliography

All dictionaries of Biblical Hebrew have a translation equivalent of ‘roll, scroll’. Other literature cited above: Burrows 1950: M. Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls of St. Mark’s Monastery*, vol. 1: The Isaiah Manuscript and the Habakkuk Commentary, New Haven 1950 – Hardmeier 2008: Ch. Hardmeier, ‘Zur schriftgestützten Expertentätigkeit Jeremias im Milieu der Jerusalemer Führung-

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