

forceps, tongs

מְלָקְחִים

1. Statistics

Torah: 3. Nebiim: 2. Ketubim: 1. Total: 6.

2a. Literal Use

With the exception of Isa. 6:6, מְלָקְחִים (transliterated by St. Jerome as *malcaim*; see Sperber 1937-8, 191, 237), a dualis describing an object consisting of two parts (cf. König 1897, § 257a), and a derivative of $\sqrt{\text{לקח}}$, is used to denote some utensils specifically intended for servicing the lamps (\rightarrow נֵר) of the sanctuary lampstand (\rightarrow מְנֹרָה), of the Tabernacle (Exod. 25:38; 37:23; Num. 4:9), as well as of the Temple of Solomon (1 Kgs 7:49 = 2 Chron. 4:21). They are made of respectively ‘pure gold’ (זָהָב טָהוֹר, Exod. 25:38; 37:23) and ‘gold’ (1 Kgs 7:49 = 2 Chron. 4:21). In Exod. 25:38; 37:23 they are mentioned together with ‘firepans’ (\rightarrow מִחְתָּה plur.), in Num. 4:9 moreover with such things as containers and funnels for the lampstand’s oil (בָּלִי־כֵלֵי שֶׁמֶנֶה), cf. also Exod. 30:27; 31:8; 35:14; 39:37).

In Isa. 6:6, where מְלָקְחִים is used for taking and holding a live coal from the incense altar of the Temple, it evidently denotes a light type of tongs or forceps. Elsewhere the term presumably stands for a tool used for servicing the wicks of the lamps, such as adjusting the wicks, holding them while trimming (\rightarrow מְנַמְרֵת), removing old wicks and putting in new ones. In translations, on the assumption that there was more than one pair of tongs, one finds the rendering ‘snuffers’ for מְלָקְחִים too. However, because in 1 Kgs 7:49f. = 2 Chron. 4:21f. מְלָקְחִים and מְנַמְרֵת are mentioned side by side it is likely that the terms refer to two different utensils. Another proposal is that lids for covering the lamps are meant so that no dirt would fall into the oil (Nachmanides; see Chavel 1973, 460-1). Finally it has been suggested that the מְלָקְחִים refer to pliers to remove the hot lamps from the stand (cf. Holzinger 1900, 126).

2b. Figurative Use

Not attested.

3. Epigraphic Hebrew

Not attested.

4. Cognates

SEMITIC: The \sqrt{lqh} is general Semitic and has the basic meaning ‘to grasp, take’, see e.g. Klein, *CEDHL*, 305; Leslau, *CDG*, 317; Del Olmo Lete & Sanmartín, *DULAT*, 501.

AKKADIAN: The word occurs in the Akkadian of Ugarit (Tawil, *ALCBH*, 215-6. See below.

UGARITIC: It has been suggested that Ugaritic *mqhm* (a dual) means ‘forceps’ or ‘pincers’ (for a survey of opinions see Watson 2002, 923). This is apparently the same word as the Hebrew מִלְקָחִים, be it that the *l* was assimilated, as is often the case with forms of \sqrt{lqh} . In KTU 4.123:21 *mqhm* occurs between various containers in the phrase *w . qpt . w . mqhm* which might be interpreted as ‘and a box with a forceps’ (\rightarrow מִלְקָחִים). KTU 4.127:4 *mqh mqhm* ‘an excellent forceps’ occurs in broken context. KTU 4.385:3 *spl . mšlt . wmqhm* might be rendered ‘a bowl, a flint-knife and a forceps’ – it has been suggested that we are dealing with a physician’s equipment here (Stieglitz 1981).

This term is also attested in syllabic Ugaritic transcription. In a list of bronze tools *PRU* VI, No. 157:13-14 mentions 1 *ma-qa-ha išāti* || 1 *ma-qa-ha me-e* ‘1 forceps for fire’ || ‘1 forceps for intestines’ (cf. Hebr. מִלְקָחִים). Especially the former tallies with the Hebrew use of the tool in Isa. 6:6. Also attested in the Akkadian of Ugarit are two *ša la-qì išāti siparri* ‘bronze forceps to pick up fire’ (*PRU* III, 186:38), mentioned just after seven torches.

PUNIC: Punic *mlqh* is a different word, possibly meaning ‘catchnet’ (Krahmalkov, *PPD*, 645; cf. Hoftijzer & Jongeling, *DNSI*, 645: uncertain).

POSTBIBLICAL HEBREW: See section 6 below.

5. Ancient Versions

Θ and other Greek versions: Exod. 25:38(37) ἐπαρυστήρ sing. according to *LSJ*, 611: ‘vessel for pouring oil into a lamp’; similarly *GELS-L*, 165: ‘vessel for pouring oil (into a lamp), funnel’. 1 Kgs. 7:49 (Θ 7:35) ἐπαρυστρὶς plur., a neologism with the same mean-

ing. This rendering is also used for \rightarrow מְחַתֵּה in Exod. 37:23 [ט 38:17]; Num. 4:9, and for \rightarrow מוֹצֵקֶה in Zech. 4:2. In Exod. 37:23 (ט 38:17); Num. 4:9; Isa. 6:6; 2 Chron. 4:21 the ט opts for λαβίς (sing. in Isa. 6:6; elsewhere plur.), according to *LSJ*, 1021: ‘handle’, ‘holder’, ‘forceps’, ‘clamps’, ‘tongs, snuffers to trim lamps’. The latter renderings are also given by *GELS-L*, 275.

ט^T: מְלֻקְחָה which Tal, *DSA*, 445, describes as a ‘receptacle’ but which on the analogy of ט and ס should probably be understood as ‘forceps, tongs’.

ט: ט^O on Exod. 25:38; 37:23; Num. 4:9 צִיבְהָא plur. (Levy, *CWT*, Bd. 2, 314: ‘Zange, Lichtschneuze’; Jastrow, *DTT*, 1260: ‘tongs’). ט^N, ט^{PsJ}, Fragment Targum MS Vatican Ebr. 440 (on Num. 4:9) מְלֻקְחָא plur. (Levy, *CWT*, Bd. 2, 43: ‘Zangen’, ‘Lichtschneuzen’; Jastrow, *DTT*, 793: ‘snuffers’; Sokoloff, *DJPA*, 311: ‘tong, snuffer’). ט 1 Kgs 7:49; 2 Chron. 4:21 צִיבְהָא plur. like ט^O. In Isa. 6:6 ט offers a free paraphrasis.

ס: The normal rendering is *malq^etā*, ‘tweezers, snuffers’ according to Payne Smith (Margoliouth), *CSD*, 278. The verb *lqh* means ‘to pick, glean’. Only in Isa. 6:6 *kalb^etā* is chosen for which Payne Smith (Margoliouth), *CSD*, 215 offers the renderings ‘tongs, pincers, tweezers’. 2 Chron. 4:21 is lacking in ס.

ט: Exod. 25:38; 37:23 *emunctorium* plur., ‘snuffers’ (in Num. 4:9 \rightarrow מְחַתֵּה plur. is translated with *emunctoria*). Num. 4:9; 1 Kgs. 7:49; Isa. 6:6; 2 Chron. 4:21 *forceps* (sing. in Isa. 6:6; elsewhere plur.), ‘(pair of) tongs, pincers, forceps’ (*LD*, 767).

6. Judaic Sources

In the Temple Scroll from Cave 11 in the Judean Desert (11Q19: IX.10-11) מְלֻקְחִים כּוֹלֵה כּוֹלֵה וּמְלֻקְחִים כּוֹלֵה כּוֹלֵה ‘its [trimming knives] and its מְלֻקְחִים, two talents in total’ occurs, suggesting fairly heavy tools. However, this may rest on interpretation of the biblical occurrences.

The rabbinic testimony is based on the biblical testimony and has no independent value. There are no indications supporting the hypothesis that the מְלֻקְחִים were attached to the lamp (against Krauss, *TA*, Bd. 1, 71, 403, n. 217).

7. Illustrations

In Tell el-Amarna, Egypt, forceps designed like human hands have been found that may have been used to pull up lampwicks (*ISBE*, vol. 4, 558).

8. Archaeological Remarks

[Will be added later on.]

9. Conclusion

The מְלַקְחִים denote a pair of tongs or forceps. They were used in the cult to pick up hot coals from the altar (fire was difficult to make) or were used for servicing the wicks of the lamps, such as adjusting them, holding them while trimming (→ מְזַמְרֵת), removing old wicks and putting in new ones. Most ancient versions support this interpretation. A related word in Ugaritic suggests that such forceps were also used for other purposes requiring a delicate instrument to pick up small objects.

10. Bibliography

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