

מְלָכָה

BH 35 occurrences:

1K 10.1//2Ch 9.1; 1K 10.4//2Ch 9.3; 1K 10.10//2Ch 9.9; 1K 10.13//2Ch 9.12; Ct 6.8,9; Est 1.9,11,12,15,16,17 (2),18; 2.22;4.4; 5.2,3,12; 7.1,2,3,5,6,7,8; 8.1,7; 9.12,29,31.

Sir: No occurrences

Ep: No occurrences

Qumran: No occurrences.

There is also the apparent form מְלָכָה in BH, with 5 occurrences: Jer 7.18; 44.17,18,19,25.

Text doubtful:

A.1 It is generally agreed that the original reading in the passages in Jeremiah was *שְׁמַיִם לְמַלְכַּת, “to the queen of heaven”, i.e. the mother goddess, and that the Massoretes deliberately vocalised the word as if לְמַלְאכַת שְׁמַיִם*, “to the (handi)work of heaven”, avoiding the implication that the people of Judah worshipped a goddess and substituting a cult of the heavenly bodies (Gordon 1978–79:112; Holladay 1986:251; McKane 1986:170; Carroll 1986:213). The evidence for this is found in the rendering of the LXX, the Vg, Aq, Sym, Th. (see below, *Versions*).

1. Root and comparative philology

A.1 See entries מְלָךְ and מְלָכָה.

2. Syntagmatics

A.1 In apposition to a personal name, Est passim: (פְּלִנְיָה) הַמְּלָכָה Est 1.12,15; הַמְּלָכָה (פְּלִנְיָה) Est 1.9,11,16,17(2nd); 2.22; 5.2,3,12; 7.1,2,3,5,7; 8.1,7; 9.12,29,31.

A.2 Plural Ct 6.8,9.

A.3 a) In construct, governing the name of the country ruled (שְׁבָא) 1K10.1//2Ch 9.1, 1K 10.4//2Ch 9.3, 1K 10.10//2Ch 9.9, 1K 10.13//2Ch 9.12; cf. also “queen of the heavens” Jer 7.18; 44.17,18,19,25.

b) Nomen rectum of דְּבָרָה, “deed”: Est 1.17 (2nd),18.

A.4 המַלְכָּה is explicitly the subject of:

עשה Qal Est 1.9; with relative Est 5.12; with relative and negative Est 1.15; נתן Qal 1K 10.10//2Ch 9.9;

אמר Qal Est 7.3; מאן pi Est 1.12; עוה Qal Est 1.16; שמע Qal 1K 10.1//2Ch 9.1; ענה Qal Est 7.3; שאל Qal 1K 10.13//2Ch 9.12; הלל pi Ct 6.9; דבר pi 2Ch 9.1; ראה Qal 1K 10.4//2Ch 9.3; קום pi Est 9.31 (in association with Mordecai).

חול hithpalpel Est 4.4; (חן) נשא Est 5.3.

בוא Qal 1K 10.1//2Ch 9.1; בוא hi 2Ch 9.12, Est 5.12; הלך Qal 1K 10.13//2Ch 9.12; פנה Qal 1K 10.13; הפך Qal; שלח Qal Est 4.4; כתב Qal Est 9.29; עמד Est 5.2.

A.5 Object of ראה Qal Est 5.2; כבש Est 7.8; בוא hi Est 1.11,17 (2nd)

A.6 Preceded by prepositions: ל + נוד hi Est 2.22; ל + נתן Qal 1K 10.13, Est 8.1; ב + עשה Qal Est 1.15; עם + שתה Qal Est 7.1; ל + אמר Qal Est 7.5; 8.7; 9.12; מן + בקש pi Est 7.7.

3. Lexical and semantic fields

A.1 Plural is in synonymous parallelism with פִּילִגְשִׁים “concubines” Ct 6.8,9, with עַלְמוֹת “young girls” Ct 6.8, and with בָּנוֹת “daughters” Ct 6.9.

A.2 Accompanied by grand retinue 1K 10.2//1Ch 9.1; asks hard questions of Solomon 1K 10.1–3//2Ch 9.1–2; gives him much gold, spices, and precious stones 1K 10.10//2Ch 9.9. Possessor of country and servants in 1K 10.13//2Ch 9.12;

A.3 Maker of women’s feast in Est 1.9; of feast for king and Haman Est 5.12.

A.4 The “Queen of heaven” is the recipient of dough cakes, incense and libations from populace of Jerusalem Jr 7.18; 44.17,18,19,25, and in parallelism with “other gods” in Jr 7.18.

4. Versions

LXX:

A.1 βασίλισσα “queen” is the standard rendering for מַלְכָּה, and for מַלְכָּה in Jr 44.17,18,19,25.

B.1 στρατιά “host, army” Jr 7.18. Chastoupis (1952), cited in Holladay (1986:251), suggests that the original LXX reading was in fact τῆ στρατεία, an epithet of Aphrodite, identified here

with Astarte, and this is quite likely since the rendering belongs to the unrevised stratum of LXX Jeremiah (chs. 1–28), which would have been translated too early to reflect the later understanding as מלאכה (see Tov 1976:5). Aq., Sym, and Th. apparently rendered this occurrence with βασιλισσα, bringing it into line with the LXX renderings in ch. 44.

Targum

A.1 *malktā* “queen” Est (1st and 2nd) 1.9,12,15; 2.22, 1K 10.1,4,10,13 // 2Ch 9.1,3,9,12.

A.2 *kōkabtā* “the planet Venus; morning/evening star” (regarded as the “queen” of the heavens) Jer 7.18; 44.17,18,19,25 (Hayward 1987:71 n.8, 164–65).

B.1 *malkā* “king” (pl.) Ct 6.8 (theological paraphrase).

B.2 *malkūtā* “kingdom” (pl.) Ct 6.9 (theological paraphrase).

Peshitta

A.1 מלכה is rendered by *malktā* “queen” throughout.

A.2 מלכה is rendered by *pulḥānā* “service, worship” in Jr 7.18; 44.17,18,25, reflecting *מלאכה, but by *malktā* “queen” in Jr 44.19.

Vulgate

A.1 *regina* “queen” in every case, for both מלכה and מלכה (omitted in 2Ch 9.3).

Exegesis

A.1 The term מלכה is hardly used at all of female royalty in Israel and Judah, as noted by Solvang (2003:72–73). The only two such occurrences are in the poetic Ct 6.8,9, where the noun is in the plural and occurs in parallelism with “concubines” and “girls”. The reference is to the royal harem. The king’s chief wife or consort is never given the title מלכה, but is only known as his wife (e.g. 1K 14.2,4,5, 6,17; 21.5,7,25: אשת + PN, or אשתו), or alternatively, as in the poetic Ps 45.10 and in the foreign context of Neh 2.6, שגל, perhaps “consort”. In 2K 11.3 Athaliah reigns, מלכה, but is not referred to by the term מלכה.

A.2 However, מַלְכָּה is used of two foreign queens: the Queen of Sheba appears to have been the ruler of her land, with the freedom to visit royalty of other lands accompanied by a large retinue and sumptuous gifts. However, the Jewish Esther and Persian Vashti, successively married to the Persian king Ahasuerus, merely bear the title מַלְכָּה as his principal wife. Vashti is described as giving a feast for women in the royal palace (Est 1.9: compare Esther's more private feast for the king and Haman), so she may in addition have held sway over the women of the harem and court. However, her refusal to appear before the king's guests at Ahasuerus' request is seen not only as a crime against the king but a dangerous example to other wives throughout the kingdom who may be encouraged to mount their own challenge to male domestic authority (Est 1.16–18) She must therefore be replaced by another queen as punishment (Est 1.20). Esther herself has no power to appear before the king unsummoned, and she must first win his favour before making any request (compare the freedom of access apparently enjoyed by Bathsheba before David, even though she is not referred to as a queen). In Aram. Dan 5.10 (twice), מַלְכָּהּ appears to refer not to king Belshazzar's wife (his wives are mentioned separately, in 5.2,3,23) but to his mother, since she speaks of the days of the king's father. She is apparently not present at the banquet, but comes in to give counsel, suggesting that Daniel may be able to interpret the writing on the wall.

A.3 Most commentators have identified the "Queen of Heaven" worshipped in pre-exilic Jerusalem (Jr 7.18; 44.17,18,19,25) with the Ancient Near Eastern mother goddess in one of her local manifestations: Ishtar, Astarte, Isis, Anat, or the Venus star (see Rudolph ²1958:51; Bright 1965:56; Thiel 1973:119–21; McKane 1986:170; Carroll 1986:213; Holladay 1986:254–45; Ackerman 1992:8–10 and notes). An Aram. text from Hermopolis mentions a temple of the queen of heaven, בֵּית מַלְכַּת שָׁמַיִן, without identifying the goddess further (Herm 4:1). The cakes, כִּבְּנִים, offered to the deity in Jr 7.18; 44.19 may have been star-shaped (cf. Akk *kayyamānu*: McKane 1986:170, Rudolph 1958:55), or they may have borne the image of the goddess or been fashioned in her shape (Carroll 1986:213; Holladay 1986:254–55). The very word used for the cake-offerings, Heb כִּבְּן, may help in identifying the goddess, in that it is etymologically related to NeoBab *kamānu* (intervocalic *m* was pronounced as *w* in NeoBab). This was a sweet cake used in the cult of Ishtar and Tammuz, though it is also possible that the goddess could be Nanai, who was considered the consort of Nabû at this time (Holladay 1986:254; Lipinski 1988:66).

The most recent study of the identity of the Queen of Heaven is that of Ackerman (1992:5–35). She believes that the most likely candidates for the title in Jer 7 and 44 are the West Semitic Astarte and the Mesopotamian Ishtar, both of whom are fertility goddesses identified with Venus, the morning and evening star. Both were offered cakes as part of their cult, though it is only Ishtar in whose image cakes were baked and whose cult held a particular appeal for women. Ishtar was known as the queen or lady of heaven, *šarrat/bēlet šamē*. Ackerman concludes that the Queen of Heaven in Jeremiah is therefore a syncretistic deity, combining aspects of Astarte and Ishtar.

B.1 Rowe (1930:32–33) and Vincent (1937:635, 649–51) suggest that the Queen of Heaven worshipped by Jeremiah’s contemporaries may be the Canaanite goddess Anat, who seems to have been popular in the Jewish and Aramaic colonies of Elephantine in Egypt. She was called *nbt pt* “Lady of Heaven” in Egyptian New Kingdom texts, and *b’lt šmm rmm* “mistress of high heaven” in Ugarit. However, the evidence supporting Anat’s identification with the Queen of Heaven is from the second millennium BCE and may not be relevant to the sixth century of the era. Though her name occurs as a theophoric element in personal names, it does not occur alone at Elephantine or Hermopolis. Anat has no connection with the heavenly bodies, nor was she offered cakes as part of her cult (Ackerman 1992:13–20).

B.2 Dahood (1960:166–68) identifies the Queen of Heaven with Shapash/Shapshu, the sun-goddess, but his is very much a minority opinion. Ackerman (1992:11-13) notes that this deity is only called *rabbat* “lady” in Ug, never “queen”, and that her cult is not described as having been particularly attractive to women, against the evidence of the book of Jeremiah.

Conclusion

A.1 The term מְלִכָּה is not used in royal narratives of Israel and Judah, only in the poetry of Song of Songs to denote the king’s wives. It is used of one foreign, female ruler, and of the principal wife of the Persian king. It does appear to have been used of the goddess worshipped in popular Judaeon religion of the seventh to sixth centuries BCE, however. It is just possible that the biblical writers’ disapproval of her cult may be related to the lack of

evidence for Israelite queenship: did the latter exist, as in other near Eastern societies, but was deliberately unrecorded, or did the cult of Yahwistic monotheism tend to exclude the institution of queenship? There is insufficient evidence either way.

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