mar'ah (vision, appearance), mirror
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1. Statistics

2a. Literal Use
The normal meaning of הָרָּמָּם is ‘vision’ and it is difficult to make a clear distinction between the feminine form and the masculine הָרָּמָה, ‘appearance’, but also ‘vision’ (see esp. Ezek. 43:3). However, the meaning ‘vision’ does not fit Exod. 38:8 where the bronze laver (→ רָוָי) and its base have to be made from the חָרָמָּם 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 → יָדוּר. A comparable semantic development may be observed in Akkadian nāmaru, ‘mirror’, from amāru, ‘to see’. Syriac borrowed this Akkadian noun in the form of nāwrā, ‘mirror’.

Postbiblical Hebrew: הָרָּמָּם, ‘mirror’ (Levy, WTM, Bd. 3, 235-6).

Classical Arabic: mir‘ah, ‘mirror’ (Lane, AEL,1002).

Modern Arabic: Mehri mīrōt/mār, ‘mirror’ (Johnstone, ML. 268); Soq. ‘imrehor, mére, ‘mirror’ (Leslau, LSoq, 251); Palestinian Arabic mrēye (plur. -āt), ‘mirror’, √mry, ‘to make someone look in a mirror’ (Barthélemy, 265, 785).

5. Ancient Versions
θ and other Greek versions: θ Exod. 38:26(8) κατοπτρον, ‘mirror’ (GELS-L, 251; LSJ, 929). Var. κατοπτρον, also ‘mirror’ (GELS-L, 251).

\( ^{\wedge} \)T: Exod. 38:8, ‘with the apparition of the powers that are strong (in) the gate of the Tent of Meeting’, possibly paraphrasis on the basis of Aramaic מַרְאָה, ‘be powerful’.

\( \varepsilon \): 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). \( ^{\varepsilon} \)O, ‘with the mirrors of the women who came to pray in the gate of the Tent of Meeting’; \( ^{\varepsilon} \)N, ‘with the mirrors of the righteous women who were praying in the gate of the Tent of Meeting’; \( ^{\varepsilon} \)440etc. מַרְאָה, ‘with the mirrors of the chaste women who were being chaste in the gate of Tent of Meeting’; \( ^{\varepsilon} \)utivo, מַרְאָה, ‘from bronze mirrors of chaste women. When they came to pray in the gate of the Tent of Meeting, at that time they were standing with their heave-offering praising and thanking and upon returning to their husbands bore righteous sons when they had been purified from the impurity of their menses’.

\( \varsigma \): byt mhzy’ dns’ d’ tyn lmslyw btr’ dmśkn ‘zbn’ ‘in the house of mirrors (or: apparitions?) of the women who came to pray in the gate of the Tent of the Sojourn’ reflects the same concerns as the Targumim.

\( \upsilon \): speculum, ‘(metal) mirror’.

6. Judaic Sources

In 1QM V.5 bronze shields are said to be polished like a face-mirror (벼דיא פָּנִי) and in V.11 javelins of purified iron are said to be whitened like such a face-mirror. Comparable is the expression na-ma-ar pānī ša siparri, ‘bronze face-mirrors’, in EA 14:ii.75-76.
7. Illustrations

→ מִזְרָחִים.

8. Archaeological Remarks

→ מִזְרָחִים.

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 מִזְרָחִים 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 (→ מִזְרָחִים 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. מִזְרָחִים and מַעַי). 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.

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