

Miszellen

The Etymology of Biblical Hebrew ^ʿayin "appearance" in Light of Akkadian *šiknu*¹

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On nearly twenty occasions in the Hebrew Bible, the vocable ^ʿayin occurs with the meaning "appearance" or "color" (Ex 10: 5, 15; Lev 13: 5 [!], 37 [!], 55; Num. 11: 7, 22: 5, 11; Ezek 1: 4, 7, 16, 22, 27, 8: 2, 10: 9; Prov 23: 31; Dan 10: 6)². Concordances and dictionaries unanimously connect this word with the common Semitic primary noun ^ʿayin meaning "eye", assuming that ^ʿayin meaning "appearance" or "color" indicates metaphorically "that which is perceived by or is visible to the eye"³. This semantic development seems to make sense, but in fact no conclusive proof or

¹ I am grateful to Professor Jonas Greenfield for his helpful remarks.

² The list presented here is "maximalist", and there is admittedly no full agreement among exegetes in which passages ^ʿayin has the special meaning of "appearance". Already the ancient versions disagree about the meaning of ^ʿen hā^ʾāreš in Exodus 10: 5, 15 and Numbers 22: 5, 11. Onqelos consistently renders this expression with an enigmatic ^ʿen šimšā de^ʾar^ʿā^ʾ. Peshitta on Exodus 10: 5 and 15 simply repeats the Hebrew ^ʿenāh d^ʿar^ʿa^ʾ. In both cases, ^ʿen could mean "eye" or it could mean "appearance" as it does in Late Hebrew. Vulgate on all four passages and Peshitta on the verses in Numbers give, respectively *superficiū terra* and *appe^ʾ d^ʿar^ʿa^ʾ*, both meaning "surface of the earth". On the other hand, LXX translates ὄψιν τῆς γῆς and the later Targum ascribed to Yonatan ben Uzziel renders *hezweh de^ʾar^ʿa^ʾ*, both meaning "appearance of the land". A. Brenner, *Colour Terms in the Old Testament*, JSOT Suppl. Ser. 21, Sheffield 1983, p. 142 adds to the list Psalms 73: 7 where she reads *yīšāh mēhālāb* ^ʿenēmō and translates "their appearance (= complexion) is more dazzling than milk". For Leviticus 13: 5 and 37 see below, note 8. E. Dhorme, *L'emploi métaphorique des noms des parties du corps en hébreu et en akkadien*, Paris 1963, p. 79 equates Proverbs 23: 31 *al tēre^ʾ yayin kī yit^ʾaddām kī yittēn bakkōs* ^ʿenō, with *i-nu ša KAŠ* found in Nabnitu I 185, assuming the later means "oeil de la boisson fermentée". This equation may still be valid unto itself but the Akkadian is now taken to mean "bubbles of beer" (cf. CAD I/J, p. 157, s.v. *īnu* 2c) and if the expressions are in fact related the Hebrew should be translated accordingly "don't look at wine when it reddens, as it bubbles in the goblet". Obviously, relating the Hebrew and Akkadian expressions would remove this passage from the list. M. Greenberg, Ezekiel, 1-20 (AB 22), Garden City 1983, p. 43, notes the appearance of ^ʿayin meaning "dye" in Mishnah Shabbat 1: 6 as being derived from the use of ^ʿayin as "color" in the biblical passages. For the derived expressions *k^ʿen* und *mē^ʿen* found in post-biblical sources with the meaning "similar, like" see M. Jastrow, *DictTalm* p. 1071b.

³ See, for example, the concordances of S. Mandelkern and A. Even-Shoshan, and the dictionaries of Ibn-Janah, E. Ben-Yehudah, BDB, KBL^{1,3} and ThWAT. For explanation of the development see first Ibn-Ezra on Leviticus 13: 5 and more recently E. Dhorme, *ibid.*, p. 78.

parallels have ever been offered⁴, and whether it reveals the proper etymology of the word is yet open to question. Cognates of ^ʿayin do not develop the meaning of "appearance" in Akkadian or Ugaritic, while in Late Hebrew, Aramaic and Syriac derivatives of this particular usage may be attributed to the influence of the biblical idiom. Furthermore, words such as ^ʿozen (ear), *peh* (mouth), *šāfāh* (lip) and *lāšōn* (tongue) do not develop meanings of "sound" or "taste", so there seems to be no analogy to the proposed semantic development for the name of the sensory organ coming to designate the stimulus which it perceives. If the commonly held etymology is indeed the proper one, it will certainly be a remarkable one.

In fact, a comparative investigation of the word indicates that an alternative explanation may be at hand. In numerous Akkadian texts the word *šiknu* occurs with the meaning of "appearance"⁵, and the use of this term is strikingly similar to that of ^ʿayin = "appearance" in biblical Hebrew. We find, for instance, the expression *šikin muršim* meaning "the appearance of, or visible symptoms of a disease". So in a neo-Assyrian letter from the physician Urad-Nana to King Esarhaddon the king is quoted as having asked *atū šikin muršija anniu la tammar bulṭēšu la teppaš*. "Why don't you diagnose (lit. see) the symptom (lit. appearance) of my disease and bring about its healing?"⁶ In *Ludlul bēl nēmeqi* the suffering suppliant complains *ul ušāpi āši pu šikin muršija*, "The exorcist has not diagnosed the appearance of my disease"⁷ In an extispicy report on behalf of Assurbanipal, the diviner prays *šikin muršišu īši u ma²du ilūtka rabīti īdū*, "Your divine majesty

⁴ Dhorme, *ibid.*, sees the link between the meaning "eye" and "appearance" in I Samuel 16: 7 *kī hā^cādām yir²eh la^cēnayim wa-YHWH yir²eh lallēbāb*, "for a man sees *la^cēnayim*, while the Lord sees into the heart", where, according to him, *la^cēnayim* means "I'aspect". However, this passage has been and remains difficult. H.P. Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel* (ICC), Edinburgh: 1899, rules out a connection with ^ʿayin, "appearance" and notes: "It must be contrasted with *lallēbāb*; as the latter must mean (Yahweh looks) *at the inner man*... we need an expression meaning *at the outer man*". He goes on to point out that the Septuagint reading *eis prosopon* may be only an attempt to render the Hebrew text, but invites the substitution *lappānīm*, although there is no analogy. S.R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and Topography of the Book of Samuel*, Oxford 1913, p. 133, also rejects association of *ēnayim* here with ^ʿayin = "appearance" and prefers to follow Klostermann and Budde who saw *la^cēnayim* as a corruption or ellipsis for *l^cpī^cēnayim* or *l^cmar²ēh^cēnayim*. A possible Akkadian analogy is found in S. Langdon, *Die neubabylonischen Königsinschriften* (VAB 4), Leipzig 1911, p. 67, Nabopolassar Nr. 4, l. 35 *Marduk bēlī i-ḥa-ṭu pī-i-im ibarri libbi*, "Marduk, my lord, inspects the 'mouth', investigates the heart". This passage is found near the end of a text which told about how Nabopolassar was selected in his youth, when he was small and unnoticed among men. It parallels a previous passage (p. 66, l. 8-10)

Marduk mūdū libbi ilāni ša šamē u eršetim ša tākalat nišī(m) ibarrū kajjānim jāši šaḥrim ša ina nišī(m) la uttū ša libbija ibrema

which is to be translated (contra CAD S, p. 183a, s.v. *šihru* 2a): "Marduk, who knows the hearts of the gods of heaven and earth, who constantly inspects the insides of men- as for me, the insignificant one, who was unnoticed among men, he inspected my heart". It does not imply that Marduk discerns hypocrites (who's mouth don't speak what is in their hearts) but that he judges people externally as well as internally. The reference to the "mouth" here means "external appearance".

⁵ For Akkadian references see W. von Soden, AHW p. 1235a, s.v. *šiknu* B 4-9.

⁶ See S. Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian Scribes to the kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal, Part I: Texts*, (AOAT 5/1), Neukirchen Vluyn 1970, no. 246, l. 9.

⁷ See W.G. Lambert, *BWL* 44,1. 110.

knows the appearance of his disease, small and great⁸. These passages may be compared with Lev 13: 55 *w^crā²āh hakkōhēn ṽaharē hukkabbēs ṽet hannega^c w^chinnēh lō² hāfak hannega^c ṽet ṽēnō...*, "and the priest will see after the garment has been laundered that the blight has not changed its appearance", as well as with vss. 5 and 37 in the same chapter where *ṽēnāw* is to be emended to *ṽēnō* and to be taken as designating the appearance of the blemishes rather than the eyes of the priest⁹.

Similarly, *šiknu* is used frequently in connection with the appearance of stones and plants in expressions such as *abnu šikinšu kīma...*, "the appearance of the stone is like..." or *šammu šikinšu kīma...* "the appearance of the plant is like..."¹⁰. It is also to be found in comparisons of the appearance of stones with plants. So, for example, in an inscription of Sennacherib we read *ašnan ša kīma zēr qiššē šikinšu nussuqu*, "Ashnan stone, whose appearance is as splendid as cucumber seeds"¹¹ or *ašnan ša kīma še ṽim šahhari šikinšu nussuqu*, "Ashnan stone whose appearance is as splendid as mottled barley"¹². Descriptions of stones with the word *šiknu* are to be compared with the passages in Ezekiel and Daniel which describe parts of visions as being *k^cṽēn haḥašmal*, *k^cṽēn n^cḥōšet qālāl*, *k^cṽēn taršiš* and *k^cṽēn haqqueraḥ hannōrā²*. The comparison of stones and plants has a close parallel in Numbers 11: 7 where the Manna is described *w^chammān kizra^c gad hū² w^cṽēnō k^cṽēn habb^cdōlah*, "The Manna was like coriander seed and its appearance (color) was like the appearance (color) of Bdelium stone"¹³.

The above examples demonstrate clear semantic and functional parallels between Hebrew *ṽayin* meaning "appearance" and Akkadian *šiknu* meaning the same thing. These parallels raise the possibility of parallel etymologies as well, and that just as *šiknu* is derived from *šakānu*, "to dwell", the Hebrew term is also to be related to a verbal stem meaning "to dwell". There is in fact just such a root in Hebrew – *WN*. This root is found in the common noun *mā^cōn* meaning "dwelling" and synonymous with *miškan*. It also appears in at least one passage in a verbal form. In Isaiah 13: 22 we read *w^cṽānāh ṽiyyim b^cṽar(!)m^cnōtāw w^ctannīm b^cḥēk^clē ṽōneg*, "And jackals shall abide in its castles, and dragons in the palace of pleasure"¹⁴. The final *heh* in *W^cNH* is a feminine plural ending as is found in the *K^ctīb* to Dt. 21: 7, *yādēnū lō² ṽāf^ckū (K^ctīb ŠPKH)*, Ps. 73: 2 *k^cṽayin šupp^ckū (ŠPKH)* ^{2a}*šurāy* and

⁸ See E.G. Klauber, *Politisch-Religiöse Texte aus der Sargonidenzeit*, Leipzig 1913, p. 107,1. 19.

⁹ The emendation is accepted by most modern critical commentaries. Note that Rashi, without emending the text, already interpreted *be ṽēnāw* in Lev. 13: 5 *bemar ṽēhū ubšī ṽrō hāri ṽōn*, "in its appearance and original size". Ibn-Ezra interpreted the verse in the same way, adding the Targumic basis for the explanation.

¹⁰ For references to the lexical series *abnu šikinšu* see B. Landsberger, JCS 21, 1967, p. 151, n. 64 and CAD A I, p. 55b-56a.

¹¹ See D.D. Lukenbill, *The Annals of Sennacherib*, (OIP II), Chicago 1924, p. 132,1. 72.

¹² *ibid.* p. 127 d, 3.

¹³ C. Cohen and D. Sivan, *The Ugaritic Hippocratic Texts: A Critical Edition* (American Oriental Series Essays 9), New Haven 1983, p. 38 compare the first part of this description with Ugaritic and Akkadian texts using the words *tmīl* and *tamšil* in functions corresponding to the Hebrew comparative *kap*. They make no comment on the word *ṽayin*.

¹⁴ Similar translations given by New English Bible and Tanakh, *A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text*, Philadelphia 1985.

other similar passages¹⁵. Note that in the previous verse we find $w^{\text{c}}\text{šāk}^{\text{c}}\text{nū šām } b^{\text{c}}\text{nōt } ya^{\text{c}}\text{nāh} \dots$ One further significant example occurs in Moses' parting blessing (Dt 33: 28) which should be read contrary to the Massoretic punctuation $wayyiškōn yišrā'ēl beṭaḥ / bādād \text{ēn } ya^{\text{c}}\text{qōb}$ "Israel dwells securely, Jacob abides alone". In this passage ēn may be emended to ān giving thus another verbal attestation of the root¹⁶, or it may be left as is and thus designate simply "dwelling" in a noun sentence to be translated "Solitary is Jacob's abode". In either case, the meaning of the root is "to abide", "dwell", "reside", or the like¹⁷. Interestingly, LXX to Lev. 13: 37 and Peshitta to 13: 5 and 37 translate $\text{āmad } b^{\text{c}}\text{ēnāw}$ as "remained in its place" ($qam\ b^{\text{c}}\text{dukteh}$), perhaps indicating their recognition of this root as still alive in the language, or their ability to analyse words containing it on the basis of other occurrences in the Hebrew text before them. It should be noted that there are other examples of *media wāw* roots forming nouns *media yōd* (e.g. šWD "to hunt" forming nouns $māšōd$, "snare" and šayid , "prey"; DWŠ "to thresh" appearing both in verbal forms and in the noun dayiš , "threshing"¹⁸) so that the formation of ayin from WN is not problematic morphologically.

In conclusion, it is proposed that just as $mā^{\text{c}}\text{ōn}$ is synonymous with $miškān$ and ān is equivalent to šākan , so ayin is the equivalent of šiknu . Moreover, just as šiknu is a noun derived from the verb šakānu , so ayin should be derived from the verbal stem WN rather than from the noun meaning "eye". Both šiknu and ayin have meanings of "that which is present" from which the applications to "appearance" or "color" are derived.

There is a possible semantic or exegetical offshoot of the correspondance between ayin , "appearance", and šiknu . It is likely that only in the passages in Leviticus, Numbers 11, Ezekiel and Daniel which have functional parallels with Akkadian in describing diseases, plants and stones is ayin to be rendered "appearance" and derived from WN . The expression $\text{ēn } hā'āreš$, which has no parallel in Akkadian¹⁹ should be taken to mean "surface of the earth"²⁰ (cf. Vulgate *superficies terrae*, Peshitta $\text{ḥ}^{\text{c}}\text{ar}^{\text{c}}\text{ar}^{\text{c}}\text{a}^{\text{c}}$), with ayin , derived from ayin = eye being used secondarily in an expression parallel to $p^{\text{c}}\text{nē } hā'āreš$, face of the earth.

¹⁵ See Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar as Edited and Enlarged by the Late E. Kautzsch, Second English Edition revised by A.E. Cowley, Oxford 1910, § 44m for various explanations of this affirmative.

¹⁶ See. U. Cassuto, "Il cap. 33 del Deuteronomio e la festa del Capò d'anno nell'antico Israele", RSO 11, 1928, pp. 233-253 ad loc., and I.L. Seeligman, "A Psalm from Pre-Regal Times", VT 14, 1964, pp. 72-92 ad loc.

¹⁷ So KBL³ p. 736, s.v. III WN , but cf. Schreiner, ThWAT VI 1/2, 1987, p. 55a, who rejects the emendation and interpretation, preferring to relate ayin here with ayin meaning "well". Interestingly, Rashi has already equated ayin in this verse with that in Numbers 11: 7, remarking, "Like $w^{\text{c}}\text{ēnō } k^{\text{c}}\text{ēn } habb^{\text{c}}\text{dōlah}$, the type of blessing with which Jacob blessed them".

¹⁸ According to KBL³ hayiṣ is derived from HWŠ and the stem WL forms the noun ayil . In addition, the root of the noun kēl/kayil found in the Gezer calendar is taken to be KWL .

¹⁹ The element in(a)-mātim , "eye of the land", found in personal names (cf. CAD I/J, p. 156, s.v. īnu 1 d) is certainly unrelated to the biblical expression $\text{ēn } hā'āreš$.

²⁰ See above, note 1. This correspondance would also eliminate Proverbs 23: 31 and strengthen the interpretation proposed in note 1. It would also call into question the emendation proposed to Psalms 73: 7.

Abstract:

Biblical Hebrew ʿayin with the meaning "appearance" or "colour" is usually explained as a secondary use of ʿayin = "eye, indicating "that which is perceived by the eye". Convincing parallels supporting such an etymology have never been adduced. It is suggested here that ʿayin = appearance is in fact derived from the stem ʿwn meaning "dwell". The semantic development proposed is paralleled in Akkadian where *šiknu*, the functional equivalent of ʿayin is derived from *šakānu*, the functional equivalent of ʿwn .

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