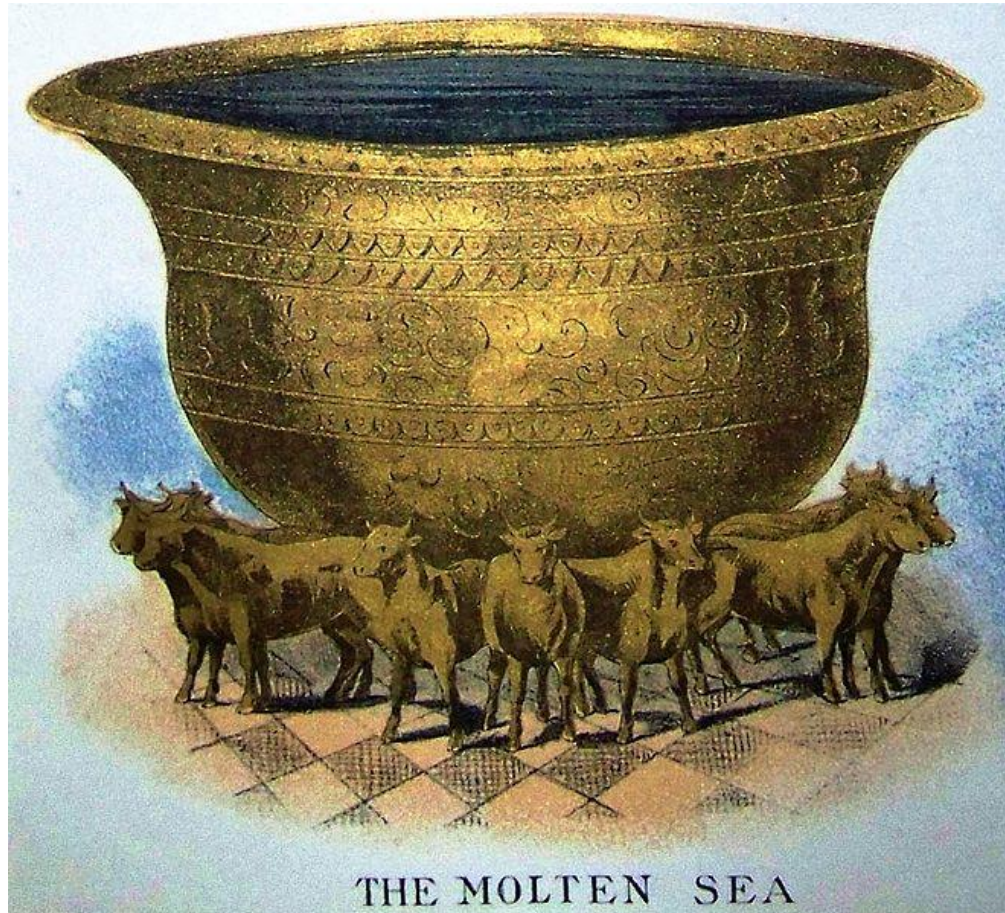


The Cast Sea

Avner Ramu

Although the structure of Solomon's temple and many of its sacred utensils resembled those of Moses' tabernacle, the Cast Sea of the temple was not among them.



Source: 1890 Holman Bible

In the Book of Kings the work of the artisan Hiram is described as follows:

ויעש את-הים מוצק: עשר באמה משפתו עד-שפתו עגל סביב, וחמש באמה קומתו, וקוה
(וקו) שלשים באמה יסב אתו סביב.
ופקעים מתחת לשפתו סביב, סבבים אתו-עשר באמה, מקפים את-הים סביב; שני טורים
הפקעים יצקים ביצקתו.
עמד על-שני עשר בקר, שלשה פנים צפונה ושלשה פנים ימה ושלשה פנים נגבה ושלשה
פנים מזרחה, והים עליהם מלמעלה; וכל-אחריהם ביתה.
ועביו טפה, ושפתו כמעשה שפת-כוס פרח שושן; אלפים בת יכיל.

“And he made the cast sea (of) ten cubits from brim to brim, round in compass, and the height thereof was five cubits; and a line of thirty cubits did compass it round about. And under the brim of it round about there were knobs which did compass it, (for) ten in a cubit, compassing the sea round about; the knobs were in two rows, cast when it was cast. It stood upon twelve oxen, three looking toward the north, and three looking toward the west, and three looking toward the south, and three looking toward the east; and the sea was set upon them above, and all their hinder parts were inward. And it was a hand-breadth thick; and the brim thereof was wrought like the brim of a cup, like the flower of a lily; it held two thousand baths” (1 Ki 7:23-26).

This description contains one case of a letter deletion error, and several superfluous words (marked by an underline) which muddle the description. After their omission we would read:

ויעש את-הים מוצק: עשר אמה משפתו עד-שפתו עגל סביב, וחמש אמה קומתו, וקוה (וקו) שלשים אמה יסב אתו סביב.

ופקעים מתחת לשפתו -עשר באמה, מקפים את-הים סביב; שני טורים פקעים יצקים ביצקתו.

עמד על-שנים עשר בקר, שלשה פנים צפונה ושלשה פנים ימה ושלשה פנים נגבה ושלשה פנים מזרחה; ואחריהם ביתה.

ועביו טפח, ושפתו כמעשה שפת-כוס פרח שושן; אלפים בת יכיל

“And he made the cast sea ten cubits from brim to brim, round in compass, and the height thereof was five cubits; and a line of thirty cubits did compass it round about.

And under the brim of it were knobs ten in a cubit, compassing the sea round about; the knobs were in two rows, cast when it was cast.

It stood upon twelve oxen, three looking toward the north, and three looking toward the west, and three looking toward the south, and three looking toward the east; and their hinder parts were inward.

And it was a hand-breadth thick; and the brim thereof was wrought like the brim of a cup, like the flower of a lily; it held two thousand baths.”

It is not clear how the English translator determined that the rare word: פקעים (*peqai'm*) mean “knops.” The Greek translation of these verses apparently had no clue what פקעים (*peqai'm*) were and he omitted them from his translation. This word also appears in verse 1 Ki 6:18 and here the Greek translator omitted the whole verse. We will soon see then even earlier, the Chronicler struggled with this word.

A similar description of the making of the Cast Sea by the artisan (now named) Hiram is found in the Book of Chronicles

את-הים אחד; ואת-הבקר שנים-עשר תחתיו.

“One sea, and the twelve oxen under it” (2 Ch 4:15).

Yet thirteen verses earlier there is a fuller description of this work:

ויעש את-הים, מוצק: עשר באמה משפתו אל-שפתו עגול סביב, וחמש באמה קומתו, וקו שלשים באמה יסב אתו סביב.

ודמות בקרים תחת לו סביב סביב, סובבים אתו עשר באמה, מקיפים את-הים סביב: שנים טורים הבקר, יצוקים במצקתו.

עומד על-שנים עשר בקר, שלשה פנים צפונה ושלושה פנים ימה ושלושה פנים נגבה ושלושה פנים מזרחה, והים עליהם מלמעלה; וכל-אחריהם ביתה. ועביו טפח-ושפתו כמעשה שפת-כוס, פרח שושנה; מחזיק בתים שלשת אלפים יכיל.

“And he made the molten sea of ten cubits from brim to brim, round in compass, and the height thereof was five cubits; and a line of thirty cubits did compass it round about. And under it was the similitude of oxen, which did compass it round about, for ten cubits, compassing the sea round about. The oxen were in two rows, cast when it was cast. It stood upon twelve oxen, three looking toward the north, and three looking toward the west, and three looking toward the south and three looking toward the east; and the sea was set upon them above, and all their hinder parts were inward. And it was a handbreadth thick; and the brim thereof was wrought like the brim of a cup, like the flower of a lily: it received (and) held three thousand baths” (2 Ch 4:2-5).

The comparison between these paragraphs suggests that:

ודמות בקרים תחת לו סביב סביב, סובבים אתו עשר באמה, מקיפים את-הים סביב: שנים טורים הבקר, יצוקים במצקתו.

And under it was the similitude of oxen, which did compass it round about, for ten cubits, compassing the sea round about. The oxen were in two rows, cast when it was cast” (2 Ch 4:3), is the Chronicler version of:

ופקעים מתחת לשפתו סביב, סבבים אתו-עשר באמה, מקפים את-הים סביב; שני טורים הפקעים יצקים ביצקתו.

“And under the brim of it round about there were knops which did compass it, (for) ten in a cubit, compassing the sea round about; the knops were in two rows, cast when it was cast” (1 Ki 7:24).

It appears that the Chronicler believed that פקעים (*peqai'm*) is a ר (r) - ע (a') letter-substitution and a ב (b) - פ (p) bilabial exchange error of בקרים (*beqarim*) - “oxen.”

This understanding of the Chronicler, lead him to believe that the oxen were formed in the same casting process of the making of the Sea. This would have turned the casting process to extremely complicated and hardly feasible process. Furthermore, such a view is not supported by the reading of the account in the Book of Kings (1 Ki 7:23-26). We also read that later, King Ahaz: “took down the sea from off the brazen oxen that were under it, and put it upon a pavement of stone” (2 Ki 16:17). Practically this could not have been accomplished if the oxen and the Sea were casted in one mold.

Although the production of the Cast Sea was a major (and expensive) project, the Bible does not actually indicate what function the Cast Sea fulfilled in God’s temple.

It should also be noted that in Ezekiel’s detailed description of the future building of God’s house, the Cast Sea is not mentioned.