

עֲרִירִי

Introduction

Grammatical Type: adjective.

Occurrences: Total 4x OT (Gn 15.2; Lv 20.20,21; Jr 22.30), 2x Sir, 1x Qum, 0x inscr.
עַרְיָה is read by Strugnell (1969-71:251f.) in 4Q179 2.6.

Text doubtful: עֲרִירִי in Sir. 16.4 (A, B) is the result of an error of dittography from v. 3.

Qere/Ketiv: none.

1. Root and Comparative Material

A.1 BDB (792b) takes עֲרִירִי from עָרַר II “strip” (// form to עָרָה and עוֹר II).

A.2 עֲרִירִי is found in RH in a discussion of Lv 20.20-21 (GnRab 44; pSnh 7.24c).

B.1 A possible cognate is Arb *‘arīr* “a stranger (among people)” (Snaith 1977:98; Lane 1956:I.1990c).

B.2 עֲרִירִי may be a cognate of Akk vb *erû* V, *arû* VII; G “mittellos sein”; D “entblößen”; adj *erium* “nackt, leer, mittellos” (*AHW* 242, 247-48; *CAD* 4:320-21). If עֲרִירִי is related to this Akk root, BH extended the nuance of “destitute” to include situations in which a person was deposed or failed to have his children succeed him. An obstacle to these Akk words being cognate to עֲרִירִי is accounting for the doubling of the *rēš*. This fact also stands as an obstacle to the following two possibilities.

B.3 A text from Ug offers a possible parallel. *KTU* 1.14 6b-8 (= Gordon *Krt* 6b-8) reads *‘um...[krt] ‘rwt.bt[m]lk.itdb*: “the clan [of Keret is d]ecimated; the house of the [k]ing is destroyed”. The lines following recount Keret’s loss of children and the departure of his wife. Badre (1976:96-97) explains *‘rwt* as from the root *‘rw* “to strip bare, decimate”; *DLU* (90) renders it “estar consumido”. *‘rw* offers a good parallel to *itdb* (generally emended to *itdb* from the root *‘bd* “to perish”). If the root *‘rw* “decimate” is present in Ug, as Badre proposes, it is a possible cognate for עֲרִירִי. In place of the reading *‘rwt*, others (Gibson 1977:82) propose *rp’at*.

In either case, Keret's twofold loss, the death of his children and the hope of having children, is another case of a leader beset by childlessness. While Keret was mourning this fate, El appeared to him in a dream instructing him on the acquisition of a noble wife who would bear him several sons and daughters.

B.4 In treating Gn 15.2, Cazelles (1962:329) rejects the meaning of “childless” for ערירי. He bases this position on a different interpretation of הלך, taking it with a military significance of “going to battle” (Gn32.7, Dt 1.30), not going to die and the fact that the etymology of ערירי is far from certain. He claims that ערירי has been assigned the meaning “childless” or “lack of a legitimate heir” because of its other occurrences and because vv 3-4, a gloss, interpret the subject to be concerning a slave born in Abraham's household becoming his heir. Cazelles proposes another meaning for ערירי based on its relationship to ערה or ערר “raise up, stir up” (both Hb and Ug), roots that also have a military nuance (cf. Is 41.2), coinciding with the military interpretation of הלך. On this basis Abraham was saying that he was going to battle as one raised up by Yahweh. However, the dominant theme in the Abraham story, the lack of a principal heir, along with the other occurrences of ערירי favours ערירי carrying the sense of “the lack of a principle heir” in Gn 15.2.

2. Formal Characteristics

A.1 The pattern is *qatīl* (BL 501x) with a gentilic morpheme attached.

3. Syntagmatics

A.1 Three times ערירי occurs as an adj with a vb, describing an attending condition (GKC §118n; JM §126a). It occurs with the vb מות “to die” (Lv 20.20 and Jr 22.30) and the ptc הולך “go” (Gn 15.2), used euphemistically for “dying”.

4. Versions

a. LXX: ἄτεκνος (3x), ἐκκήρυκτος (Jr 22.30); Aq ἄγονος (Gn 15.2, Jr 22.30); Sym κένος (Jr 22.30).

b. Peshitta: *lā' bnin* (3x), *makrza' dlā' bnin* (Jr 22.30).

c. Targum: דְּלֵא וְלֵד TgO TgJ; דְּלֵא בְּנִין TgNeo and TgPsJ (Gn 15.2), בְּלֵא בְּנִין TgNeo (Gn 15.2). The rendering of ערירי with a brief sentence meaning “one who lacks children” indicates that Arm lacked a lexeme that was equivalent to ערירי.

d. Vulgate: *absque libris* (3x), *sterilis* (Jr 22.30).

A.1 Aware that Jehoiachin had several children, LXX renders Jr 22.30 ἐκαήρυστος “deposed”; Lust *et al* (2003:182a) gives “banished, cast away”.

A.2 1QapGn 22.33 renders Gn 15.2 בְּנִין לֹא בְּנִין אֵהְיֶה עִרְיָהּ “I, when I die, shall depart naked, being without sons”. ערטלי “stripped, naked” is a figurative translation of ערירי as the following phrase בְּנִין לֹא בְּנִין demonstrates.

A.3 Sym choice of κενός at Jr 22:30 is in accord with LXX's rendering ערה pi four times with ἐκαενοῦν.

5. Lexical/Semantic Fields

A.1 Occurring primarily with males, ערירי emphasizes a man's lack of an heir to carry on the family name and/or maintain his position in Israel. By contrast עקרה is used in BH for a wife who has not been able to provide her husband with a child.

A.2 If 4Q179 2.6 reads אשה ער [י]ריה “a childless woman”, it attests an occurrence of this adj in the feminine, being followed by עקרה in line 7. In this text ערירי functions as a metaphor for those sorrowing at Jerusalem's decimation. It stands in a series of synonyms for grieving women: עזובה and [אישה] עזובת “a woman forsaken by her husband”, עצובה “a grieved woman”, עקרה “an infertile woman”, מסככה “a woman shut up”, אשת מרורים “an embittered woman”, אבלות “women in mourning”, and משכלות “bereaved women”.

A.3 ערירי belongs to the category of punishments classified as “bearing (the guilt of) one's sin” נָשָׂא חַטָּא (Lv 20.20). As a penalty it is applied to both genders in Lv 20.19-20.

A.4 In a curse against Jehoiachin (Jr 22.30) ערירי is explicated both by the phrase לֹא יֵצֵא בְיָמָיו “he will not succeed in his days” and by the statement that none of his descendants would sit on the Davidic throne. Thus Jehoiachin would die virtually childless.

B.1 The adj עֲרֵעֵר occurs in Ps 102.18 and in Jr 17.6. Its meaning in the Ps is uncertain. Tg renders it מְצֻטְדִּיָּאן “those who are disconsolate”, LXX ταπεινοί “lowly, humbled”, Vg *vacui* “empty, worthless”, and Pesh *meskenē* “poor, wretched”. In the wider context it is parallel to אֲסִיר “prisoners” (a collective) and בְּנֵי תְמוּתָה “captives sentenced to or anticipating death” (v 21). עֲרֵעֵר is possibly related to the pilpel and hitpalpel of עָרַר “to lay bare, decimate” (Jr 51.58; Gk κατασκάπτω “demolish”, Vg *evello* “tear down”). In JArm attests עֲרֵעֵר vb “strip” (Sokoloff 420ab; Jastrow 1121b-22a). In the partly reconstructed lines of Sf I A 40-41 (*KAI* 222.A) there are two occurrences of *ʿr* “strip, make naked” used literally (Fitzmyer 21995:97-98). In Ps 102.18 many Eng translators follow the versions and gloss עֲרֵעֵר either by “destitute” or “humbled”. Ridderbos (1958:474) employs “berooide” (“poor, indigent”), a description of weary captives who have lost all. Seybold (1973:139n9) proposes that עֲרֵעֵר means one who is penitent, i.e., one who has stripped off his clothes and put on sackcloth. Gunkel (1968:440), however, understood עֲרֵעֵר in the light of ערירי. If עֲרֵעֵר comes from the root עָרַר, it may be related to ערירי. This view, however, has not found wide support.

6. Exegesis

A.1 When Abram complained bitterly to God that he was going to die ערירי, he had an heir in Eliezer and possibly בִּי שֶׁהִלְדֵרְגָן Keturah (Gn 25.1-2). Therefore, he was using ערירי in a very restricted sense, namely that he had no son by Sarai who would be his principal heir and the carrier of God's special promises to him (Gn 12.1-3).

A.2 The condition described by ערירי was so abhorrent that it served as the penalty for incest with either one's aunt or one's brother's wife (Lv 20.20-21). The latter offence is also labelled נְדָה “impurity”. An obstacle to taking ערירי as “childless” in these incest laws is that

they do not presuppose that the offenders were childless at the time of the offence. It is possible, though, to interpret the penalty to mean that all of the children would predecease the offenders by an act of God. BYeb 55a explains the juxtaposition of the two statements of the penalty in this way: “If he has children, he will bury them; if he has no children, he will be childless”. In addition to the possible meanings “stripped of posterity, proscribed”, Snaith (1977:98) prefers “struck off the list”. REB translates ערירי “proscribed” in Lv 20:20,21.

A.3 Jeremiah pronounces several curses against King Jehoiachin (22.28-30). According to one curse, it is to be written in the official record that Jehoiachin was ערירי (v. 30). The sequel establishes that this curse means that neither Jehoiachin nor any of his children would sit on the Davidic throne as his successor. While ערירי is often rendered “childless,” e.g., the Pesh reads *makrza’ dlā’ bnin* “proscribed as to being without children”, no doubt in the light of Jehoiachin's having seven sons (1 Ch 3.17-18; his having at least five sons is confirmed by a ration text from Babylon [Thomas 1958:84-6]). In a thorough discussion of this verse McKane holds that ערירי means “stripped of rank, deposed”, i.e., banished into exile (1986:551). Similarly G.R. Driver (1938:115) proposes the meaning “stripped of all rights/honour or disgraced”. Maarsingh (1974:181), understanding ערירי to have a meaning similar to the “cut off” penalty (כרת; Lv 20.17; cf. 7.20), glosses it with “ontlusterd” (“tarnished”) in Jr 22.30. In Jr 22.30. REB translates ערירי “to be stripped of all honour” and NJPS “without succession”.

A.4 According to Sir 16.3(A, B), it is better to die childless than to have ungodly children. Thus Ben Sira did not view the situation of a childless couple as being under a curse; in fact, for him a childless couple has a better lot than those who have godless children.

A.5 A critical issue in regard to a man who died without a son is the distribution of his inheritance. Two texts address a particular case involving a man who died without a son, though the term ערירי does not occur in either of them. When Zelophehad died without sons, his daughters won from Moses the right to become the heirs of their father's possession (Nu 27.1-11). Attached to this case is the establishment of the line of successive heirs for a man who dies without children (27.8-11). Amongst the Sh. Moussaïeff ostraca collection there is a letter--written in palaeo-Hebrew and dated to the end of 7th century BCE--from a childless widow to the officer charged with probating the estate. She makes a plea for consideration in the matter of her husband's inheritance. Her plea is apparently supported by the fact that her husband gave

specific directions to this officer prior to his death. The officer confirms her as usufruct, but goes on to assign the wheat field that belonged to her husband in Na‘amah to the brother of the deceased (Bordreuil 1996:74f). In the matter of the wheat field, the officer was probably following case law. This letter attests how a husband who died childless circumvented custom and provided his childless wife an income after his death.

7. Conclusion

A 1 ערירי is a strong word, depicting a family condition that was considered reprehensible in ancient Israel; e.g., it describes a patriarch either as lacking an heir from his primary wife or not having one who would carry on his social position. Such a condition was viewed as either a penalty or a curse. Tradition, represented by the versions, takes this term to mean “childless”. *HAL* (837a) advocates this meaning; and it is supported by its usage in Sir 16.3. However, in the laws in Lv, in which ערירי serves as a penalty, this lexeme does not necessarily exclude the possibility that the parties involved did not already have children. Although Jehoiachin was placed under the ערירי curse, he had several children. Consequently, in addition to meaning “childless”, this term carries the technical meaning of “proscribed” or “stripped of honourable standing”. That is, ערירי depicts a situation in which a man's son, particularly his oldest son by his primary wife, would not become the principal heir of his possessions nor the successor to his position or legacy in the community. So “stripped of honour, banished, deposed” are among its meanings.

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