Introduction

Grammatical Type: adjective.

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

Text doubtful: 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 from II “strip” (form to II).

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

B.1 A possible cognate is Arb “a stranger (among people)” (Snaith 1977:98; Lane 1956:1.1990c).

B.2 may be a cognate of Akk vb erū V, arū VII; G “mittellos sein”; D “entblößen”; adj erium “nackt, leer, mittellos” (AHw 242, 247-48; CAD 4:320-21). If 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 is accounting for the doubling of the reš. 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]ecim ated; 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 . 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 עירירי. 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 עירירי is far from certain. He claims that עירירי 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 עירירי based on its relationship to עירר or עירר “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 עירירי favours עירירי carrying the sense of “the lack of a principle heir” in Gn 15.2.

2. Formal Characteristics

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

3. Syntagmatics

A.1 Three times עירירי 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 הלך “go” (Gn 15.2), used euphemistically for “dying”.

4. Versions

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

b. Peshitta: la’ bnin (3x), makrzā’ dlā’ bnin (Jr 22.30).
c. Targum: 

The rendering of עריות with a brief sentence meaning “one who lacks children” indicates that Arm lacked a lexeme that was equivalent to עריות.

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

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

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

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

5. Lexical/Semantic Fields

A.1 Occurring primarily with males, עuries 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 אשת ערה ת[ראה ערה] “a childless woman”, it attests an occurrence of this adj in the feminine, being followed by עקרה in line 7. In this text עuries functions as a metaphor for those sorrowing at Jerusalem's decimation. It stands in a series of synonyms for grieving women: עותבה “a woman forsaken by her husband”, עותבה “a grieved woman”, אשת מרדים “an infertile woman”, מוכחת “a woman shut up”, אשת מרדים “an embittered woman”, אשת מרדים “women in mourning”, and מוכחת מוכחת “bereaved women”.

A.3 עuries belongs to the category of punishments classified as “bearing (the guilt of) one's sin” (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) is explicated both by the phrase לא אֵלֶּה בָּכִיתוֹ “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 עַרְעָר occurs in Ps 102.18 and in Jr 17.6. Its meaning in the Ps is uncertain. Tg renders it מְשָׁפִיָּין “those who are disconsolate”, LXX ταμεινοί “lowly, humbled”, Vg vacui “empty, worthless”, and Pesh meskenē’ “poor, wretched”. In the wider context it is parallel to עֵסֵרי “prisoners” (a collective) and תְמוּתָה “captives sentenced to or anticipating death” (v 21). עַרְעָר is possibly related to the pilpel and hitpalpel of עָרֵר “to lay bare, decimate” (Jr 51.58; Gk κατασκάπτω “demolish”, Vg evello “tear down”). In JArm attests עַרְעָר 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 נר “strip, make naked” used literally (Fitzmyer 1995:97-98). In Ps 102.18 many Eng translators follow the versions and gloss עַרְעָר 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 עַרְעָר means one who is penitent, i.e., one who has stripped off his clothes and put on sackcloth. Gunkel (1968:440), however, understood עַרְעָר in the light of עָרֵיר. If עַרְעָר comes from the root עָרֵר, it may be related to עָרֵר. This view, however, has not found wide support.

6. Exegesis

A.1 When Abram complained bitterly to God that he was going to die עָרֵר, he had an heir in Eliezer and possibly בְּיָשׂוֹאֵל שַׂמֵּר Keturah (Gn 25.1-2). Therefore, he was using עָרֵר 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 עָרֵר 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 נָעַר “impurity”. An obstacle to taking עָרֵר 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 "ערידי" (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 "ערידי" is often rendered “childless,” e.g., the Pesh reads makrza’ dla’ 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 "ערידי" 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 "ערידי" to have a meaning similar to the “cut off” penalty (כרת; Lv 20.17; cf. 7.20), glosses it with “ontluisterd” (“tarnished”) in Jr 22.30. In Jr 22.30. REB translates "ערידי" “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 "ערידי" 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 עריי 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 עריי 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 עריי 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, עריי 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.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


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