wagon-box (?)

1. Statistics

2a. Literal Use

わが occurs only thrice, in one and the same pericope (1 Sam. 6), so it is practically a hapax legomenon, although neither Cohen, BHL, nor Greenspahn, HLBH, recognised it as such. Priests and diviners (6:2) advise the disheartened Philistines to put golden objects (כֶּלֶם in 6:8, קָצֹלֵם in 6:15), according to 6:4, 11, golden mice and images of their tumors, as a guilt offering on a new wagon (םִירָן, 6:7), next to the ark (םִירָן, v. 8 [cf. Deut. 31:26]; יִרְאֶה, v. 15). In 6:8 わが is provided with the article and for this reason some scholars have surmised that it must have been an object belonging to the cart (‘wagon-chest’, so BDB, 919; HAWAT, 26; Van Zyl 1988; cf. Smith 1899). It is questionable, however, if the use of the article justifies this conclusion, cf. GKC, §126 q-s; GBH, §137 f-i; IBHS, §13.5.1. The わが is placed (םִירָן Hi., 6:8) on the wagon and is taken down on arrival in Beth-Shemesh (יִרְאֶה Hi., 6:15).

The immediate context gives little hold to a positive identification of わが. No mention is made of the material the わが is made of, or which shape it had. As usual in such cases, scholars have had recourse to the ancient versions and to comparative linguistics in the hope to get a clearer picture of what is meant.

2b. Figurative Use
Not attested.

3. Epigraphic Hebrew
Not attested.

4. Cognates
Klein, CEDHL, 53, renders ‘box, chest’, compares the cognates mentioned further on in this article, and notes: ‘Prob. derived from base わ, and possibly meaning “that which sways”.’ However, nothing but etymologising suggests that an わが would be a swaying object. Equally fancy is the etymology proposed by
HCHAT, Bd. 1, 135 (‘von גָּרַ' zusschliessen’).

AKKADIAN: Hitherto the possibility that Akkadian araziqqu (part of a wagon, CAD, vol. A/2, 239; Salonen, Landfahrzeuge, 28), apparently a learned foreign term, is a corruption (metathesis) of a comparable word has not been considered.

UGARITIC: A relation with Ugaritic ʾarkd (KTU 4.277:9) cannot be excluded. The meaning of this word is unknown, but it is a product of a craftsman (ḥrš (cf. DUL, 103)).

POSTBIBLICAL HEBREW: גָּרַ' ‘box, chest’ (Jastrow, DTT, 115), apparently based on 1 Sam. 6 itself, and therefore not really helpful.

SYRIAC: Payne Smith (Margoliouth), CSD, 528: rgāztā, ryūztā, ʾargūztā, ryāstā ‘a wallet of hair cloth or wool, a fodder-bag, nosebag; a plaited basket’. However, all these renderings rest on guesses derived from 1 Sam. 6. See sections 5 and 9.

CLASSICAL ARABIC: See section 9.

5. Ancient Versions

Ø and other Greek versions: At 1 Sam. 6:8 Ø renders גָּרַ' with ἐν θέματι βερσεγθάν; θέμα meaning ‘coffer’, βερσεγθάν is seen as a representation of Hebrew גָּרַ. At 1 Sam. 6:11, 15 Ø translates גָּרַ with τό θέμα εργάθ — εργάθ is taken as a representation of Hebrew גָּרַ. So in all cases a double translation has to be assumed, testifying to the difficulty already the early Greek translators experienced with the word. The erroneous transliteration was taken over in the Ethiopic version (cf. Leslau, CDG, 37).

GELS-L, 203: ‘treasure; pile; coffer [1 Sam. 6:8]’; LSJ, 788: ‘that what is placed or laid down; treasure; pile; position; burial-place; case etc.’.

α’ and σ’ render λαξφάζ ‘coffer, box, chest’ (LSJ, 1030).

Σ: Translates κολπός ‘box, chest’ in all instances. Possibly this rests on nothing but etymologising, cf. Latin arca ‘box, coffer, pouch, coffin, ark’.

Ξ: In all instances the Ξ simply transcribes the Hebrew: ʾargūztā. See section 4.
צ[ג]רה: *capsella*, ‘(little) box’, in all instances. Note that *capsella* is a diminutive form of *capsus*, ‘wagon-body’.

6. Judaic Sources

The rare references to צ[ג]רה in the rabbinical literature have apparently been based on the supposition that it means ‘box, chest’ in 1 Sam. 6 (cf. Jastrow, *DTT*, 115).

7. Illustrations

No suggestions.

8. Archaeological Remarks

[Will be added later on.]

9. Conclusion

The available data is too scant to permit a confident determination of the kind of object an צ[ג]רה was. All attempts at identification rest either on etymologising or on renderings in the ancient versions which, however, are evidently guesses themselves.

Much approval was won by a suggestion of Morgenstern 1942-43 who draws a parallel between pre-islamic transportable tent-shrines and the Israelite tabernacle. He associates the Hebrew צ[ג]רה with Arabic *riğāzat*, according to him a kind of ‘pouch, bag’ in which heavy stones were put as a counterweight to the tent. So the צ[ג]רה would have been a permanent device necessary for the transport of the tabernacle. The rocking motion of the pouches might explain the derivation of the word from the root צ*גר* ‘to quiver, quake’. As a matter of fact the same solution had been proposed much earlier by others (see section 10).

However, the meaning of the Arabic cognate is modified by those who adduce it. Morgenstern selects only one meaning of the word. The primary meaning is ‘palanquin’, a small type of camel litter for women, sometimes provided with a dome-like top. The saddle on which the women sat was called → רז. For descriptions and illustrations of this type of domed litter, see Riehm 1884; Staubli 1991. Others take the Arabic word to mean ‘saddlebag’ (cf. *KBL*, 83; McCarter 1980; *HALAT*, 81) which it is definitely not, not even if it sometimes metonymically may designate a spe-
cial covering that was filled on one side with stones to balance the camel litter if it started to slant (Lane, *AEL*, 1036, 2885, also 649). In any case this is something completely different from the wagons drawn by oxen in 1 Sam. 6. Moreover, it may be asked whether it is likely that precious golden objects would have been put into bags containing heavy stones as counterweights.

As a provisional rendering ‘box, chest’ might be retained because it is supported by ancient tradition which, however, rests ultimately on what was obviously a guess of the early Greek translators who expressed their uncertainty by also transcribing the unfamiliar term. The translator of the Peshitta does not know the word either and simply transcribes it. Rabbinic sources may have been etymologising on the basis of Latin *arca* ‘box, chest, ark’. No convincing Semitic etymology has been proposed. The root †rgz ‘to shake, sway, be angry’ renders a useful solution only if one surmises that †rzrk was a swaying object. Therefore Sapir’s hypothesis that we are dealing with an unknown Philistine (Anatolian) loanword may still be valid (Sapir 1936).

10. Bibliography

T. Staubli, *Das Image der Nomaden im alten Israel und in der Ikonographie seiner sesshaften Nachbarn* (OBO, 107), Freiburg 1991, 126-33, esp. 129, Fig. 5 and Abb. 113-117 – Loewenstamm, Blau, *TLB*, vol. 1, 265: ‘Recepticle of an unknown type’ – Gesenius, Roediger, *TPC*, 1261: ‘arca, cista e vehiculi lateribus dependens, ita dicta quod commoveatur et agitetur 1 Sam. VI, 8. 11. 15.’


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H.G.L. Peels

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