

## גְּבִירָה and גְּבִירָה

גְּבִירָה and גְּבִירָה are treated separately in BDB 150, but as a single lexeme in DCH 308 and Even-Shoshan 219.

Total number of occurrences in BH: 15 (6 גְּבִירָה, 9 גְּבִירָה): 1K 11.19; 15.13 // 2Ch 15.16; 2K 10.13; Jr 13.18; 29.2; גְּבִירָה Gn 16.4,8,9; 2K 5.3; Isa 24.2; 47.5,7; Ps 123.2; Pr 30.23.

Sir 1 occurrence of גְּבִירָה: 41.18B.

Ep: No occurrences.

Qumran: No occurrences.

### *Doubtful readings/textual variants:*

**A.1** 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> 47.5,7 גְּבוּרָה < גְּבוּרָה “heroine” DCH 305, 308.

**A.2** In Isa 24.2 the anomalous combination בְּגִבְרָתָהּ maintains the assonance with the other eleven words beginning in the same way (GK 127i, Gray 1912:410, Williamson 1995:2 and n.5).

**A.3** Prv 30.23: it has been suggested that because the context requires a meaning such as “supplant, disinherit”, which the Qal of ירש does not appear to have, we should read גְּרִשׁ\* (cf. LXX ἐκβάλη) or the hi of ירש (cf. Aq., Sym, Th. ἀληρονομήση). Such emendations are discussed in McKane (1970:659–60) and Scott (1965:181), but it is felt that the Qal could possibly carry the required meaning and that therefore no change to the text is necessary.

**A.4** Isa 47.7 גְּבִירָה עַד *mistress of eternity* could be emended to גְּבִירָה עַד\* *mistress, so that* (DCH 308 and BHS) or to גְּבִירָה עַל\*, as in some Hebrew MSS. For details of both emendations, see Hermisson (1991:150). However, it is not certain that גְּבִירָה can be an absolute form: see *Formal Characteristics*.

**A.5** 1K 11.19 read הַגְּבִירָה\* with LXX (μείζω). However, Gray (1970:282 h) thinks that the Greek translator understood הַגְּבִירָה as a title “principal lady”, and translated accordingly.

### *Formal characteristics*

**A.1** HAL I:166 (= ET I:173) understands גְּבִירָה as the construct form of גְּבִירָה, which is possible, since the former only occurs in a construct relationship or with suffixes, and the latter only in the absolute form. There is no clear example for the absolute use of גְּבִירָה in BH except for the

occurrence in Isa 47.7, read with one of the possible emendations given in *Doubtful readings* A.4. Sir 41.18 (מֵאֲדוֹן וְגִבְרַת עַל שְׂקָר) has what appears to be the absolute form, but since a construct can sometimes be followed by a preposition (JM§129 m-o), as here, the evidence is still ambiguous.

A.2 Jerome transcribes the word גְּבִירָה as *gebira*.

### 1. Root and comparative philology

A.1 The root *g-b-r* is found in several Sem. languages and tends to be connected with the idea of power, e.g. BH גָּבַר “be strong, mighty; prevail”, with Pi meaning “make strong”, Hi “confirm”, Hith “show self as mighty” (BDB 149), cf. Akk *gab/pāru* “overpower, compete”, OArm (DNSI I:210 *gbr*<sub>1</sub>) “be mighty, strong”; *gbr*<sub>2</sub>, and גִּבְר “man”, cf. Aram, Syr. *gab̄rā* with the same meaning, but much more widely used; גִּבּוֹר “strong man, champion” cf. Aram *gibbārā*, Syr. *gabbārā* with a similar meaning; גְּבוּרָה “strength, might” and similar forms in Phoen, Aram, Mand and Syr. Arb has the root in the forms *jabara* “compel, force”, *jabrun* “constraint”, *jabariyyah* “overbearing behaviour”, and Eth *g-b-r* in various dialects and meanings (Leslau 1987).

A.2 The BH word גָּבִיר is the equivalent masculine form to the feminine noun גְּבִירָה. This masculine form is only found in the poetic passage Gn 27.29,37, and may have the meaning of “lord, ruler” or in a more domestic capacity “head of the family”. In a similar way the form גְּבִירָת as used in Gen 16 of Sarah and in 2K 5.3 of Naaman’s wife reflects their position as female head of the household and mistress of handmaidens (cf. Isa 24.2, Ps 123.2, Pr 30.23) (Kosmala 1973:373). On the other hand, the word גִּבְרַת in the Mesha inscription line 16, parallel with גְּבָרִין “men”, appears to mean simply “women”, just as Syr *gab̄rā* has no special significance, being the term used most commonly of a male person, comparable to Heb אִישׁ.

### 2. Syntagmatics

I: גְּבִירָה

A.1 Rarely the subject or object of a verb, with the exception of Jr 29.2 (יֵצֵא Qal inf. cons.).

A.2 Usually occurs as a title or rank: in 1K 11.19 it occurs in apposition to the name תְּחַפְּנִים and was apparently the title of Pharaoh’s wife.

1K 15.13 // 2Ch 15.16 title of king Asa's mother Ma'acah: she was demoted (Hi. סור + מן) by him from the position for making a cultic object for Asherah.

**A.3** Nomen rectum of בָּנִים 2K 10.13: like the king, the גְּבִירָה has sons whom the relatives of Ahaziah come to greet (however, Hobbs 1985:128) believes these are military officers, not physical offspring).

II: גְּבִירָה

**A.1** Usually with a suffix, describing the relationship of the servant (שִׁפְחָה) to her mistress, but in construct Isa 47.5,7, the first having as nomen rectum מַמְלָכוֹת , “kingdoms”, hence “empress”?

**A.2** Subject of קָלֵל Qal “be lightly esteemed” Gen 16.4; הָיָה Qal Isa 47.7.

**A.3** Object of יָרַשׁ Qal “be heir to” or possibly “dispossess”.

**A.4** Nomen rectum of יָד “hand”, Ps 123.2 (cf. Gn 16.9 for meaning of authority, power).

**A.5** In apposition to the name שָׂרִי at Gn 16.8; אָדוֹן Sir 41.18.

### 3. Lexical and semantic fields.

I: גְּבִירָה

**A.1** The title occurs in synonymous parallelism with מֶלֶךְ in 2K 10.13, Jr 13.18; 29.2, and in a list with סְרִיסִים, יְהוּדָה, שָׂרֵי יְהוּדָה, חֶרֶשׁ, מְסֻגָּר in Jr 29.2.

**A.2** There is an allusion to a “glorious crown” (עֲטֹרַת הַמְּאֹדָהֶם) worn by the king and גְּבִירָה (Jr 13.18).

II: גְּבִירָה

**A.1** In parallelism with אָדוֹן Ps 123.2

**A.2** In a long series of paired relationships of opposites in Isa 24.2, to express the totality of social relationships, where one of the terms is in a position of power or authority over the second:

people–priest // servant–master // maid–mistress // buyer–seller // lender–borrower // creditor–debtor.

#### 4. Versions

I: 𐤀𐤒𐤁𐤓

LXX:

**A.1** δυναστευούση “powerful one (f.)” 2K 10.13. Cf. 1K 15.13 (τοῦ μὴ εἶναι) ἡγουμένην “from being leader”.

**A.2** βασίλισσα “queen” LXX Jr 29.2 (Aq.’s reading of the same occurrence is reconstructed as τὴν οὖσαν βασίλισσαν).

**A.3** *lhāy dšallīṭā* = \*τῆ κυριευούση “the mistress” Aq. in the Syrohexapla of Jr 13.18 (Jerome renders the Greek as *dominatricem*).

**A.4** *lmārṭā* = \*τῆ κυρία “Mistress, Lady” Sym. in the Syrohexapla of Jr 13.18 (Jerome renders the Greek as *dominam*).

**A.5** δέσποινα “mistress” Sym. Isa 47.5.

**B.1** οἱ δυναστεύοντες “the powerful ones (m. pl.)” Jr 13.18. Jerome comments that this would seem to render Heb GEBUROTH, i.e. *potentes*.

**B.2** μείζω 1K 11.19 (in the sense of “the elder sister” of “Thekemina” (= Tahpenes)).

**B.3** 2Ch 15.16 (τοῦ μὴ εἶναι τῆ Ἀστάρτη) λειτουργοῦσαν “from being a worshipper of Astarte”.

Targum:

**A.1** *malḳṭā* “queen” 1K 11.19, 2K 10.13, Jr 13.18; 29.2, 2Ch 15.16.

**A.2** *malḳuṭā* “royal office” 1K 15.13 (some MSS with suffix “from her royal office”, some without, possibly “from the kingdom”).

Vulgate:

**A.1** *regina* “queen” 1K 11.19, 2K 10.13.

**A.2** *dominatrix* “ruler (f.)” Jr 13.18.

**A.3** *domina* “mistress” Jr 29.2.

**B.1** Jerome gives interesting paraphrastic renderings for the parallel passages 1K 15.13 and 2 Ch 15.16: *amovit ne esset princeps in sacris Priapi et in luco eius quem consecraverat* “he removed her from being leader in the rites of Priapus and in his grove that she had consecrated” (1K

15.13), and *ex augusto deposuit imperio eo quod fecisset in luco simulacrum Priapi* “he deposed her from that honourable office because she had made an image of Priapus in a grove” (2Ch 15.16).

*Peshitta:*

**A.1** *rabtā* “the great one (f.)” 1K 11.19; *rabbūtā* “greatness” (“from her greatness, important position”), 1K15.13; *rawrbānē* “great ones, nobles, princes” Jr 13.18.

**A.2** *malktā* “queen” 2K 10.13, Jr 29.2; *malikutā* “kingdom, royal position” 2Ch 15.16.

II: גְּבִירָה

*LXX:*

**A.1** κυρία “mistress” Gn 16.4,8,9, 2K 5.3, Isa 24.2, Ps 123.2, Pr 30.23.

**A.2** ἄρχουσα “ruler (f.)” Isa 47.7.

Sir 41.18

**B.1** ἰσχύς “power” Isa 47.5.

*Targum*

**A.1** *ribbontā* “great lady, mistress” Gn 16.4,8,9, Isa 24.2, Ps 123.2, Pr 30.23.

**A.2** *mārtā* “mistress” 2K 5.3.

**A.3** *tqēfā* (or read *taqqifā* with Sperber?) “mighty one (f.)” Isa 47.5,7.

*Vulgate*

**A.1** All occurrences are rendered by *domina*, “mistress”.

*Peshitta:*

**A.1** *mārtā* “mistress”, Gn 16.4,8,9 (O, N, PJ); 2K 5.3, Ps 123.2, Pr 30.23, Isa 24.2.

**A.2** *gabbārtā* “great lady” Isa 47.5,7.

5. *Exegesis*

It is clear that there is a semantic differentiation in MT between *גְּבִירָה* and *גְּבֵרָה* even if they are basically variations of the same lexeme. *גְּבִירָה* is some kind of royal title, whereas *גְּבֵרָה* is a position and function, usually within the household. Donner (1959:106) argues that there was a common semantic base for the two words, with *גְּבֵרָה* being reinterpreted later and used in a broader sense. This is reflected, he thinks, in Gen 16, where Sarah, whose name means “princess”, is described as *גְּבֵרָה*.

## II: *גְּבִירָה*

**A.1 Identity:** *גְּבִירָה* is usually rendered “queen mother”, but it cannot be ascertained from the handful of biblical uses that this is the most accurate definition of the term in every case. It is very common for scholars to assume that since *גְּבִירָה* often refers to the mother of a reigning king, the mothers of (Judaean) kings automatically bore the title *גְּבִירָה* or had it conferred upon them at their sons’ accession (Pedersen 1953: 71–72, de Vaux 1958: I:180–82/ET 117–19, Donner 1959:105–106, Ahlström 1963:57–88, Gray 1970:106 [but cf. 285], Ishida 1977:156–57, Andreasen 1983:179–94, Ackerman 1993:385–401, Ben-Barak 1994:170–85; see now the survey of recent views in Solvang 2003: 73–78). However, there is insufficient evidence to justify such an assumption. Though the mothers of kings of Judah are almost always named in the opening regnal formulae, *גְּבִירָה* is never used in that context. Even in 1K 15.13, where *גְּבִירָה* is explicitly the title of Ma’acah, there is a possibility that she was not Asa’s mother but his grandmother, according to 1K 15.2 (see discussion in Montgomery and Gehman 1951:274; according to DeVries [1985:188–91] 2Ch 13.2 fabricates the name of Abijah’s mother in order to harmonise the discrepancy).

The reference to *הַגְּבִירָה* in 2K 10.13 may be to Jezebel, in her role as queen mother, or possibly to her role as dowager of Ahab (see Smith 1998:146, Ahlström 1963:75, for the idea that the *גְּבִירָה*’s power may have been initially as consort rather than mother, and Donner 1959 107–108 for the opposite view). The *גְּבִירָה* in Jr 13.18 and 29.2 may have been respectively Zedekiah’s mother Hamutal and Jeconiah’s mother Nehushta, but we cannot be sure (Smith 1998:144). Certainly in 1K 11.19, if we accept the reading (see *Text Doubtful*), the *גְּבִירָה* is defined explicitly as Pharaoh’s wife (Montgomery and Gehman 1951:240).

**B.1** On the basis of what he sees as an Ug parallel, Gordon (1988:127–32) takes a quite different line. The chief consort of the king (and El) at Ugarit was known not as a queen, *mlkt*,

but as the *rbt*, *rabîtu*, or Great Lady, She was the one consort in the king's harem entitled to bear the heir, and after her husband's death she became the revered queen mother, and the term queen (*mlkt*) is then applied to her by the king. Gordon believes that the situation in Israel and Judah was the same: ambitious members of the harem schemed to become the *גְּבִירָה*, i.e. the mother of the crown prince, so that they could become queen mother when their son became king. In other words, Gordon sees the status of *גְּבִירָה* as a *preliminary* to becoming queen mother, not the consequence. As for the use of the term *גְּבִירָה* in 1K 11.19 for Pharaoh's wife, Gordon argues that it is the obvious choice in Hebrew to represent the Eg *ḥm.t wr.t*, "great wife". The problem with Gordon's thesis is that it is based on the supposition that the court situation in Israel and Judah mirrored that of Ugarit several hundred years previously, and is not well supported by internal, BH, evidence for the use of *גְּבִירָה*, for the mother of the crown prince is not at all strong.

**A.2 Role:** As noted above, most scholars assume that the queen mother and the *גְּבִירָה* were one and the same, and this colours the various definitions of the precise role of the *גְּבִירָה*. That the rank of *גְּבִירָה* was not an automatic and inalienable right of the king's mother is confirmed by 1K 15.13, where Asa removes Ma'acah from the position because of her active promotion of the cult of Asherah (Donner 1959:106–108). Taking her lead from this passage, and following Ahlström's rehearsal of the ancient Near Eastern evidence (1963:61–85), Ackerman (1993:385–401) has suggested that in Judah the queen mother, whom she equates with the *גְּבִירָה*, usually played a vital role in the state cult of the heavenly couple, Yahweh and Asherah. The king acted as Yahweh's adopted son while his mother represented the goddess Asherah, whose worship, it is argued, was a normal part of the Judaeen royal cult within the Temple in Jerusalem. Thus the queen mother would have played a vital part in the state cult, and her role as representative of the goddess would have given her the right to determine the succession, as she would testify to her son's divine adoption (1993:401). Ackerman believes that the *גְּבִירָה* with an involvement in the cult of Asherah include at least Ma'acah, Jezebel, Athaliah and Nehushta. To some extent, then, Ackerman's position is in harmony with that of Kittel (1900:18) and Molin (1954:173–74), who saw the title as a relic of a supposed matriarchal period in Palestine, and with those scholars who point to the existence of a strong cultic role for the queen mother in neighbouring kingdoms, such as the Hittite *tawananna* (Molin 1954:161–75, Donner 1959). However, her position differs from that of Ahlström (1963:57–61)

in that the latter saw the cult of Asherah as a foreign import introduced by Ma'acah, daughter of Talmai of Geshur, mother of Absalom and grandmother of the Ma'acah of 1K 15.13.

It is hard to substantiate Ackerman's thesis partly because of the lack of evidence that the term *גְּבִירָה* was ever used of Athaliah or Nehushta (Ackerman assumes it was used of 17 Judaeen queen mothers [1993:399]), but also because, if the queen mother played such an essential role in the state cult on which depended the prosperity of the nation, it is unclear what would happen if the queen mother predeceased her son: she would have been at least 15 years his senior, and one has to reckon with the possibility of her death through childbirth or illness long before he came to power. Presumably another female relative could have filled the role, if it existed, but Ackerman does not address this possibility.

Other scholars regard the role of the *גְּבִירָה* as a *political* one: most recently, Andreasen (1983:179–94) has suggested that the queen mother was in fact the king's chief counsellor (perhaps providing some continuity with the reign of his father?). This reading is based on the prominence of Bathsheba in 1K 1-2 and the deference paid to her by the king, and also by the ascription of Pr 31.1–9 to "King Lemuel's" mother. Seitz (1989: 51–54) considers Andreasen's view that the queen mother acted as a counsellor a plausible one, but rejects the idea that a formal office of *גְּבִירָה* was conferred ceremonially on the queen mother at her son's accession, and doubts that the term had any institutional overtones.

Most would agree that the title and role were confined to *Judah only*, in that *גְּבִירָה* is generally used only of Judaeen queen mothers, and that the extension of the title to Pharaoh's wife and to the Israelite queen Jezebel reflect Judean perceptions of senior royal women: e.g. Donner (1959:106–107), de Vaux (1962:117), Ben-Barak (1994:170–85). Donner believes that the reason the title is not found for northern queen mothers is due to the different nature of kingship there, but Ishida considers that the office existed in the North, as the apparent application of the title to Jezebel might suggest (1977:156–57).

Brenner (1985:32) states that the title *גְּבִירָה*, "Lady", was limited to a few instances where it was conferred on the queen mother acting as *regent* after the death of her husband or son, or during the minority of her son. She suggests that the title may have been suppressed in the otherwise anomalous case of Athaliah, in order to discredit the legitimacy of her reign (cf. Ishida 1977:155–60).

In a case study of Ma'acah, Spanier (1994:186–95) takes the interesting line that the queen mother's influence lay not in her position as queen dowager or mother of the king, but



in her own ancestry and the terms of her marriage contract. The chief wife was the one whose family associations gave the Judean king the greatest political and territorial advantages, and it would be her son who therefore became heir-apparent, even if he was not the first-born of his father. When her son became king on his father's death, she would become queen mother with special privileges for the duration of her son's reign. However, Spanier distinguishes the automatic maternal status of queen mother and the role of *גְּבִירָה*, an official court position, and although she does not elaborate on the precise responsibilities of the latter, she implies that these were cultic.

In contrast to the views expressed above, Ben-Barak (1994:170–85) believes that in fact the *גְּבִירָה*/queen mother had *no official political* status normally, and the allusions to the influence wielded by the mothers of kings such as Bathsheba, Ma'acah, Athaliah, and to a lesser extent Nehushta and Hamutal, reflect strong individual personalities or unusual political circumstances, for instance where the succession was in question (cf. Donner 1959:128, Ishida 1977:155). Similarly, Smith (1998:144–45) believes the title *גְּבִירָה* was granted to a powerful woman in recognition of that power, and that it was not limited to the mother of the king nor even to a member of the court. The scanty use of the term in Biblical sources may reflect either chance, fashion or intention.

**A.3** Relationship to *גְּבִירָה*: the basic identity of the two words is assumed in de Vaux (1958:I:180 = ET 117), Donner (1959:106), Andreasen (1983:179–80), Ben-Barak (1994:170–85).

### *Conclusion*

Gray (1970:285) defines *גְּבִירָה* as the “senior lady of the royal harem, queen mother, or mother of the heir-apparent”. However, it is clear that the burden of proof is on those who believe that every queen mother was ipso facto a *גְּבִירָה*. The office of *גְּבִירָה* undoubtedly entailed a function, but not every mother of a king was accorded the title (she may not have lived to be granted the title in any case). Separating the title from the person of the queen mother makes it easier to see how the Egyptian royal consort could be termed *גְּבִירָה*: presumably the Egyptian queen had considerably greater powers than the chief consort of an Israelite king, and this is why she is referred to by a Hebrew title that suggests female royal power. For these reasons a rendering of the title as “Great Lady” is preferable, since it does not assume the identity of the roles of queen mother and of the *גְּבִירָה* and is compatible with the use of the

term as the title of Pharaoh's wife. An exact definition of the role was probably dependent on circumstances and individual personality, The position of Smith and Brenner seems the most sensible on the basis of the thin evidence for an established institutional role for the גְּבִירָה.

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