

wagon-box (?)

אָרֶגֶן

1. Statistics

Torah: 0. Nebiim: 3. Ketubim: 0. Total: 3.

2a. Literal Use

אָרֶגֶן 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 (כְּלֵי הַזָּהָב in 6:8, כְּלֵי־זָהָב in 6:15), according to 6:4, 11, golden mice and images of their tumors, as a guilt offering on a new wagon (עֲגֹלָה, 6:7), next to the ark (בְּצִדּוֹ, v. 8 [cf. Deut. 31:26]; אָרוֹ, v. 15). In 6:8 אָרֶגֶן 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 אָרֶגֶן is placed (שֵׁם Hi., 6:8) on the wagon and is taken down on arrival in Beth-Shemesh (יֵרֵד Hi., 6:15).

The immediate context gives little hold to a positive identification of אָרֶגֶן. No mention is made of the material the אָרֶגֶן 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 רָגַן, and possibly meaning "that which sways".' However, nothing but etymologising suggests that an אָרֶגֶן would be a swaying object. Equally fancy is the etymology proposed by

HCHAT, Bd. 1, 135 ('von אָרַן 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 (*hrš* (cf. *DUL*, 103).

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

SYRIAC: Payne Smith (Margoliouth), *CSD*, 528: *rgāztā*, *rgūztā*, *ʾargūztā*, *rgāstā* '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

Ⲫ and other Greek versions: At 1 Sam. 6:8 Ⲫ renders באָרַן with ἐν θέρματι βερσεχθάν; θέρμα meaning 'coffer', βερσεχθάν is seen as a representation of Hebrew באָרַן. At 1 Sam. 6:11, 15 Ⲫ translates אָרַן אָרַן with τὸ θέρμα εργαβ – εργαβ is taken as a representation of Hebrew באָרַן. 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; burrial-place; case etc.'

α' and σ' render λαρνὰξ 'coffer, box, chest' (*LSJ*, 1030).

Ⲅ: Translates תִּיבָהָא 'box, chest' in all instances. Possibly this rests on nothing but etymologising, cf. Latin *arca* 'box, coffer, pouch, coffin, ark'.

ⲥ: In all instances the ⲥ simply transcribes the Hebrew: *ʾarguztā*. See section 4.

v: *capsella*, ‘(little) box’, in all instances. Note that *capsella* is a diminutive form of *capsus*, ‘wagon-body’.

6. Judaic Sources

The rare references to קָרָבֵן 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 קָרָבֵן 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 קָרָבֵן with Arabic *riġāzat*, according to him a kind of ‘pouch, bag’ in which heavy stones were put as a counterweight to the tent. So the קָרָבֵן 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 קָרַב ‘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 → קָרַב. 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 Peshiṭta 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 אָרַגָּז 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

BDB, 919: ‘box, chest, or like receptable’, but also reference to Arab. *riḡāzat* ... ‘a garment containing stones, etc., as balance, makeweight’, etc. – Klein, *CEDHL*, 53: ‘box, chest’ – *CHALOT*, 26: ‘saddlebag’ – Alonso Schökel, *DBHE, DCH*, vol. 1, 370: ‘box, or other kind of receptacle, perh. saddlebag’ – *FHAWAT*, 22: ‘Behälter’ – *GB*, 63: ‘Behälter, Sack od. dgl.’ – *HAHAT*, 95: ‘Behälter, Sack od. dgl.’ – *HALAT*, 81: ‘Satteltasche’ – *HAWAT*, 26: ‘Wagenkasten’ – *HCHAT*, Bd. 1, 135: ‘Kiste, Kasten’ – *KBL*, 83: ‘Satteltasche, saddle-bag’ – *LHA*, 78: ‘repositorium pendulum, capsula in latere currus’ – *MHH*, 67: כְּלִי קִיבוּל בְּלִתֵּי יָדוּעַ – Morgenstern 1942-43: J. Morgenstern, ‘The Ark, the Ephod, and the “Tent of Meeting”’, *HUCA* 17 (1942-43), 251-5 – *NIDOT*, vol. 1, 498: ‘saddlebag; chest(?)’ – Riehm 1884: E.A.C. Riehm, *Handwörterbuch des biblischen Altertums*, Bd. 1, Bielefeld 1884, 811 – Salonen, *Landfahrzeuge*, 28 – Sapir 1936: E. Sapir, ‘Hebrew *’argaz*, a Philistine Word’, *JAOS* 56 (1936), 272-81 – Smith 1899: H.P. Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel*, Edinburgh 1899 (many reprints), 45 – Staubli 1991:

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.’ With reference to Arabic *riḡāzat* – Van Zyl 1988: A.H. van Zyl, *1 Samuel* (PredOT), Nijkerk 1988, 91 –

Last update: 09-05-2011

H.G.L. PEELS