

גִּזַּר

## Entry for Strong's #1505 - גִּזַּר

### Brown-Driver-Briggs' Definition

1. to cut, determine
  - a. (P'al) determiner (participle)
  - b. (Ithp'al) to be cut out

<http://www.studylight.org/lexicons/hebrew/hwview.cgi?n=1505>

The basic meaning of the Semitic verbal root *gwr* is “to cut”

<http://www.aulaorientalis.org/AuOr%20escaneado/AuOr%2017-18-1999-2000/53.pdf>

Gzrel - angel who revokes any evil decree against another in heaven.

[http://www.freejazzblog.org/2009\\_07\\_01\\_archive.html](http://www.freejazzblog.org/2009_07_01_archive.html)

## The Root *GZR* in Semitic

Edward Lipiński – Leuven

The basic meaning of the Semitic verbal root *gZR* is “to cut”.<sup>1</sup> We find it, for instance, in Biblical Hebrew: thus people “cut trees” (II Kings 6, 4), and Solomon orders to “cut the living child in two” (I Kings 3, 25-26). But the connotations of *gZR* are manifold and deserve a closer examination. The root is not attested in Akkadian, whereas it occurs frequently in Arabic, Aramaic, Ethiopic, and Hebrew. The richest repertory of connotations is provided in the long history of the Aramaic language, on which the present essay will be focused.

### 1. Slaughtering

Although the basic meaning of *gZR* in Aramaic is “to cut”, its use in earlier periods is related several times to slaughtering of animals. Also Arabic *ǧazara* means “to slaughter (an animal)” and *ǧazzār* is the “butcher”. The butcher killed the animal by cutting horizontally across the throat, like in the ritual Semitic method of slaughtering. The original aim of the rite was obviously providing food. The connotation “slaughter” of *gZR* in Aramaic and in Arabic corresponds to the meaning of the Hebrew verb *šāḥaṭ*, but not to the Hebrew use of *gZR*. The earliest Aramaic attestations of *gZR* used to signify slaughtering of animals occur in the Sefire treaties of the mid-8th century BC and in an Assuan ostrakon dating from the second half of the 5th century BC. The passive is used in the concerned Sefire passage, where *gZR* is sometimes translated improperly by “cut in two” or “in pieces”:<sup>2</sup> [ʾyk zy] ygzr ʿglʾ znh kn ygzr mt ʿʾl wygzrn rbwh, “[just as] this calf is slaughtered, so may Mati<sup>ʿ</sup>el be slaughtered, and may his nobles be slaughtered!” (Sefire IA, 39-40). An allusion to slaughtering of late lambs may still occur in a broken context, if ʾplʾ refers there to second-season litters: kn tgzr ʾplʾ, “so you will slaughter the late lamb crop” (Sefire IB, 43). The Assuan ostrakon is a letter, in which the usual tentative interpretations of *gZR* in the sense “to promise” or “to order”<sup>3</sup> are certainly wrong: hlw gZR ly lm ʾzl [lby]ty wyntnw lky ʿnz l,<sup>4</sup> “Behold, he has slaughtered

1. D. Cohen, *Dictionnaire des racines sémitiques ou attestées dans les langues sémitiques*, fasc. 2, La Haye 1976 (reprint, Leuven 1994), pp. 111-112. See also G. del Olmo Lete - J. Sanmartín, *Diccionario de la lengua ugarítica I*, Aula Orientalis - Supplementa 7, Sabadell (Barcelona) 1996, p. 154: *gZR*, “piece”.

2. J.A. Fitzmyer, *The Aramaic Inscriptions of Sefire*, 2nd ed., Biblica et Orientalia 19/A, Roma 1995, pp. 47 and 97; *DNWSI*, p. 220.

3. Thus P. Grelot, *Documents araméens d'Égypte*, LAPO 5, Paris 1972, p. 142; *DNWSI*, p. 220, with a question mark.

4. A. Cowley, *Two Aramaic Ostraca*, *JRAS* 1929, 107-112, see p. 108, lines 9-10. *TAD IV*, D7, 9 reads *mhr*, “tomorrow”, indicating that *hr* are partly restored. What can actually be seen on the ostrakon is *gZR*.

for me, saying: «Go to my house», and they will give you one goat”. The method of slaughtering is indicated by the metaphorical transfer of the common practice to the wisdom sphere in the Proverbs of Ahiqar 134: *mkdb gzyr qdlh*,<sup>5</sup> “a liar, his throat is cut”. There are no D-forms attested in Aramaic, but the dissimilated Tigre verb *ganzara* from the intensive \**gazzara* means “to cut meat into pieces”. It refers to slaughtering with the specific connotation of the D-stem, the preponderant function of which is denoting intensity, both of quality and particularly of quantity.

## 2. Conclusion of a treaty

The conclusion of a treaty was cemented by a bloody rite, usually the slaughtering of an animal by cutting its throat. In the Amorite tradition of Mari, the notion of concluding a treaty was expressed by the phrase *hayaram qatālum*, “to slaughter an ass’ foal”, and a somewhat later text from Alalakh states explicitly that the throat of the victim was cut while the solemn oath was pronounced.<sup>6</sup> The same practice existed in ancient Greece, as shown by phrases like *λαιμούς τινος τέμνειν*<sup>7</sup> or *τέμνειν σφάγια*<sup>8</sup>, “to cut the throat of a victim”. The Aramaic technical phrase signifying the conclusion of a pact became therefore *gzyr ‘dy’*, literally “slaughter a treaty”, as in Sefire IA, 7. This formula occurs perhaps in the inscription from Tell el-Qāḏi 1’ (*wgzyr[.‘dn’]*)<sup>9</sup> and it is paralleled by Hebrew *kārat b’rit*, Greek *ὄρκια τέμνειν*, Latin *foedus ferire*. There is no trace, in Aramaic sources, of a ritual consisting in passing between the pieces of the slain animal or standing between the pieces, although *g’zar q’yyām* translates *kārat b’rit* in Targum Onqelos to Gen. 15,18.<sup>10</sup>

## 3. Circumcision

Since the circumcision was regarded as a token of a covenant (Gen. 17,11-12) and consisted in “cutting off” part or all of the foreskin which covers the glans of the penis, the Aramaic verb *gzyr* is used also in the sense of “circumcising” or “having one’s self circumcised”, like Ethiopic *gazara*,<sup>11</sup> in South Ethiopic also *gār(r)āzā* with metathesis. This use of *gzyr* thus corresponds to Hebrew *māl*.<sup>12</sup> It is found in the Testament of Levi 21, 21, which refers to the story in Gen. 34,15: *gzyrw ‘wrlt bšrkwn*<sup>13</sup>, “circumcise the foreskin of your flesh”. This acceptance of *gzyr* is widely attested in Palestinian and in Babylonian Jewish Aramaic, thus in the Targums, in the Midrash, in the Talmud,<sup>14</sup> but also in Mandaic<sup>15</sup> and in Syriac<sup>16</sup>. There are also verbal nouns, like Syriac *gzārā*, meaning “circumcision”, while Syriac *gzūrtā* means either

5. TAD III, C1.1, 134.

6. References are collected by G. F. Hasel, *ThWAT* IV, Stuttgart 1984, col. 366.

7. Aristophanes, *Birds* 1560.

8. Euripides, *Supplices* 1196.

9. A. Biran - J. Naveh, *The Tel Dan Inscription: A New Fragment*, *IEJ* 45 (1995) 1-18, see pp. 12 and 13.

10. A. Sperber, *The Bible in Aramaic* I, Leiden 1959, p. 21.

11. W. Leslau, *Comparative Dictionary of Ge‘ez*, Wiesbaden 1987, p. 211.

12. Cf. G. Mayer, *māl*, *ThWAT* IV, Stuttgart 1984, col. 734-738.

13. K. Beyer, *Die aramäischen Texte vom Toten Meer*, Göttingen 1984, p. 195.

14. M. Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* I, New York 1886 (reprint, 1950), pp. 231-232; M. Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period*, Ramat-Gan 1990, p. 126.

15. E.S. Drower - R. Macuch, *A Mandaic Dictionary*, Oxford 1963, p. 87.

16. R. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus* I, Oxford 1879, col. 699-700.

“circumcision” like in Mandaic,<sup>17</sup> or collectively “the circumcised”, and the *gāzūrā*’ is the “circumciser” besides being a “butcher”.

#### 4. Cutting off

The use of *gZR* in the sense of “circumcising” is a reflex of the meaning “to cut off”. This connotation is attested likewise in the Sefire treaties, where it refers to the possibility of repealing part of the clauses: *wlygr[zn m]lh mlky ʾ[rpd] mnhm*, “and the kings of A[rpad] will not cu[t a w]ord off from them” (Sefire IB, 41). It occurs elsewhere with reflexive-passive forms of the verb as in the oldest known attestation of *gZR* with a *t*-infix in the inscription from Tell Fekherye 23:<sup>18</sup> *wmwtn šbt zy nyrgl ʾl ygtzr mn mth*, “and may pestilence, the rod of Nergal, not be cut off from his land”. In later periods, the stem with *t*-prefix replaces the older form with the infix, as in Dan. 2,34 and 2,45: “a stone was cut off without the aid of any hand”. A metaphorical use of the connotation “to cut off” occurs with reference to the time in 11QTgJob 21,21: *[mny]n yrhwly gzyryn*,<sup>19</sup> “[the numb]er of his months is cut off”.

A metaphoric connotation of the meaning “cut off” occurs also in Biblical Hebrew, in the intransitive use of the basic stem and in the *nif*’al form. The basic stem is encountered in Hab. 3, 17: “The flock is cut off from the fold”. The *nif*’al is attested several times. Thus, the Lord’s servant “was cut off from the world of living men” (Is. 53, 8), king Uzziah “was cut off from the house of the Lord” because of leprosy (II Chron. 26, 21), dead people “are cut off from the (protecting) hand” of the Lord (Ps. 88, 6), and the author of Ps. 31, 23 says to the Lord: “I am cut off from your sight”, using *nigratzti* with a metathesis comparable to South Ethiopic *gār(r)āzā*.<sup>20</sup>

The Syriac noun *gāzartā*’, “island”, is a derivative of *gZR* used likewise in the sense “cut off”. In fact, it designates a place which is “cut off”. The Arabic word *ġazīra(tun)* has the same meaning and it was most likely borrowed from an earlier Aramaic dialect, since *ġazara* does not occur usually in Arabic with the connotation “cut off”. The noun seems to represent an older form \**gazīrat* of the Aramaic noun, in which the additional syllable of the emphatic state occasioned vocalic changes, especially the shortening of *i* in a closed syllable, thus \**gazirtā*’. A further change *i* > *a* in the stressed syllable, closed by *r*, led to the form *gāzartā*’.<sup>21</sup> This phenomenon exactly parallels the change observed in the words *birtā*’, “stronghold”, *qiryat*, “town”, *spīrā*’, “learned”, or in the name *Miryām*. In fact, *birtā*’ is attested at Dura Europos also as *Bartha*,<sup>22</sup> the surname *ισκαριωθ* or *ισκαριωτης* “townsman”, shows the shift *qiryat* > *qāryōt* in the Aramaic dialect reflected in the Gospels, and *Miryām* is transcribed *Μαριαμ* in the Septuagint, in inscriptions and papyri,<sup>23</sup> *Μαρια* in the Gospels and in papyri. Finally, Syriac *sāpar*, “scribe”, results from the change *spīrā*’ > *spīr* (*se-pir*) > *sāpar*. The pattern *qatīl* of *ġazīra* clearly indicates that this is a substantivized verbal adjective with a passive meaning, thus “(place) cut off”.

17. Drower - Macuch, *A Mandaic Dictionary*, p. 86.

18. E. Lipiński, *Studies in Aramaic Inscriptions and Onomastics II*, OLA 57, Leuven 1994, pp. 71-72 and 80.

19. Beyer, *Die aramäischen Texte*, p. 286.

20. The meaning of Ez. 37, 12 is not clear.

21. Compare P. Joüon, *Grammaire de l’hébreu biblique*, Rome 1923 (reprint, 1965), § 21b, p. 61, and § 23b, p. 64; P. Joüon - T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, Subsidia biblica 14/I, Roma 1996, § 21b, p. 87, and § 23b, pp. 90-91.

22. C.B. Welles - R.O. Fink - J.F. Gilliam, *The Excavations at Dura-Europos. Final Report V, Part I. The Parchments and Papyri*, New Haven 1959, No. 100, XV, 9 and XXIV, 12, pp. 317 and 323. J.T. Milik, *Notes d’épigraphie orientale, Syria 37* (1960) 94-98 (see p. 94, n. 2), explains the vocalic change by the shift of the stress.

23. For instance in M. Schwabe - B. Lifshitz, *Beth She’arim II. The Greek Inscriptions*, Jerusalem 1974, No. 219: 2-3, p. 199; D. Foraboschi, *Onomasticon alterum papyrologicum*, Milano-Varese 1971, p. 188a.

The same derivative occurs in the Hebrew place name *ʿereṣ gʿzērāh* (Lev. 16, 22) and in its Arabic counterpart *al-Ġazīra*, which is the usual name of Northern Mesopotamia. This name neither describes this region as an "island" nor suggests that this is a "land from which water is cut off and which is without herbage".<sup>24</sup> The Septuagint translation of *gʿzērāh* by ἄβατος, "inaccessible", and the Targumic rendering *dʿlā yātbāʿ*, "without dwelling",<sup>25</sup> refer to "waste lands", which are "cut off" from inhabitable and cultivated areas.

A positive connotation is involved instead by old place names like Gezer or Baʿal Gazara,<sup>26</sup> where the derivative of *gʿzr* designates a separated place, most likely "cut off" by a rampart from the surrounding area. A similar connotation is attested by the Hebrew feminine noun *gizrāh* in Ez. 41, 12-15; 42, 1.10.13. A closely related connotation is provided by *gizrāʿ* or *gzārāʿ*, "fold" or "sheep in folds", hence "flock". The first meaning of this noun was certainly "enclosure", as for sheep, and not a reference to sheep gathered in order to be slaughtered.

### 5. Sinking

The Arabic intransitive use of *ġazara*, when referring to water, means "to sink" or "to ebb", and the noun *ġazr* then refers to the ebb of the sea.<sup>27</sup> Since the reflux of the tidewater to the sea often leaves algae and molluscs on the shore, it is quite possible that a related word appears already in Ugaritic, in the Poem of the Gracious Gods: "and fish from the sea and eel,<sup>28</sup> ebb by ebb, were put, or right or left, into their mouth", *wdg bym.wnnd. gʿzr. l<g>zr. yʿdb. ʿu ymn ʿu šmʿal. bphm.*<sup>29</sup> However, a similar passage occurs in Is. 9, 19, where the verb *gʿzr* simply means "to cut off": "and he cuts off on the right, but yet is hungry, and he eats on the left, but is not satisfied". Therefore, *gʿzr lgʿzr* in the Ugaritic poem may also be translated "piece by piece". A surname of the Gracious Gods seems to derive from the same root *gʿzr* and to allude to the cutting of the umbilical cord: "offspring of the sea, children of the sea", *ʿagʿzr ym bn ym.*<sup>30</sup> The noun *ʿagʿzr* is rather a derivative with a preformative *ʿa*<sup>31</sup> than a fossilized "broken" plural of the *ʿafʿāl* pattern, like *Ahlāmu* = *ʿaglām*.<sup>32</sup> In fact, its feminine *ʿagʿzrt* appears in the Hymn to Anath,<sup>33</sup> in an obscure context.

The Arabic intransitive connotation of the verb raises the problem of the original meaning of Ps. 136, 13 and of Lam. 3, 54b.<sup>34</sup> According to the traditional reading of Ps. 136, 13, already attested by the Septuagint and by 11QPs,<sup>35</sup> the clause means "to him who divided (*lʿgōzēr*) the Sea of Reeds into parts". However, the infinitive *ligʿzor*, with *yam-sūp* as grammatical subject, would provide a better sense: "so that the Sea of Reeds would flow back as ebb-tides, ... and he made Israel pass through it". Instead, the nifʿal is used in Lam. 3, 54b, where *nigzarti* does not mean "I was cut off", but "I am swept away", as

24. *KBL*<sup>2</sup>, p. 179.

25. Sperber, *The Bible in Aramaic I*, p. 194.

26. A. Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II. aus Khorsabad*, Göttingen 1994, p. 277, Epigraphs V, 15: <sup>un</sup>Ba-il Ga-za-ra.

27. Muḥammad ibn Mukarram ibn Manzūr al-Ifriqī, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, Beirut 1955-56, s.v. *ġzr*.

28. Tentative translation of *ndd*, based on the fish name *ni-du-ud* <sup>É</sup>a (*MSL VIII/2*, pp. 175: 261 and 107: 77) and on the meaning "to slip away" of the Semitic root *ndd*, suggesting a snake-like fish.

29. KTU 1.23:63-64.

30. KTU 1.23:[23],58-59.61.

31. This is the explanation proposed by G. del Olmo Lete, *Mitos y leyendas de Canaan*, Madrid 1981, p. 510, who nevertheless offers a different interpretation and translation of the passage.

32. Cf. *AHw*, p. 21a.

33. KTU 1.13:29.

34. The latter is one of the passages where L. Delekat, *Zum hebräischen Wörterbuch*, VT 14 (1964) 11-13, proposed to change *gʿzr* into *grz*. This attempt is baseless.

35. This is indicated by the spelling *gwzr*, certainly the participle.

understood properly by the Septuagint where *nigzarti* is translated by ἀπῶσμαι: "The waters rose high above my head, and I said, «I am swept away»".

### 6. Divination

Slaughtering of animals was linked also to divination that encompassed hepatoscopy and, in general, reading entrails. The expert practitioner slaughtering a victim to peer into the world of future was therefore not only a "butcher", in Arabic *ǧazzār*, but also a "diviner". He appears in Dan. 2,27; 4,4; 5,7.11, where the plural *ǧāzʿrīn* or *ǧāzʿrayyāʿ* is used, in fact the plural of the active participle, but the Septuagint transliteration γαζαρηνοί, probably *gazzārīn*, gives a much older pronunciation which is based not on the participle *qātil* but on the professional name of the pattern *qattāl*. The word appears also in the Prayer of Nabonidus who says: *wh̄tʿy šbq lh gZR*, "and a diviner remitted my sins" (4QOrNab 1,4).<sup>36</sup> The passive construction *šbq lh*, borrowed by Aramaic from Old Persian,<sup>37</sup> is used here without the internal *mater lectionis* which one would expect in *šbyq*. This might point to a relatively old spelling and testify to the Aram. use of *gZR*, "diviner", in the 5th century BC.

### 7. Enactment

It is hard to decide a priori whether the use of *gZR* in the sense "to decree" and the derived noun *gʿzīrāh*, "verdict", go back to the diviner's activity and to his oracles, or simply reflect the large semantic field of the verb "to cut" which, like Akkadian *parāsu*, "to separate", also means "to decide" in court. True, the alternative thus expressed has only a relative value since *parāsu* can mean "to decide" also in reference to the diviner's art, for instance *bārū ina bīri arkat ul iprus*, "the diviner with (his) inspection has not determined the cause".<sup>38</sup> However, Akkadian *dīna parāsu* means "to bring in a verdict"<sup>39</sup> and this Akkadian phrase is paralleled in Aramaic *ʿlyk dyn qštʿ gZR*, "he has brought in a just verdict against you" (4QTob 6,13).<sup>40</sup> A juridical background seems therefore to offer the best explanation for this use of *gZR*, also of the noun *gʿzīrāh*, since it appears in phrases like *bgzyrn [ʿly]kwn*, "by verdicts against you" (4QEn<sup>c</sup> 14,4),<sup>41</sup> *bgzrt ʿyryn*, "by the verdict of the Watchers" (Dan. 4,14), and *gzrt ʿlyʿ hyʿ*, "it is a verdict of the Most High" (Dan. 4,21). The Scroll of Fasting 4 mentions a "Book of Verdicts", *spr gzrtʿ*,<sup>42</sup> which is believed to have been a Sadduceean code being in use prior to the Mishnah. The forensic connotation of the verb *gZR* and of the noun *gʿzīrtāʿ* is attested also in later Jewish Aramaic,<sup>43</sup> in Mandaic,<sup>44</sup> and in Syriac.<sup>45</sup> Instead, this connotation appears only in two Hebrew passages of the Bible, viz. Job 22, 28 and Esth. 2, 1, but it occurs often in Rabbinic texts, influenced by the Aramaic use.

36. Beyer, *Die aramäischen Texte*, p. 223.

37. E.Y. Kutscher, *Two 'Passive' Constructions in Aramaic in the Light of Persian*, in *Proceedings of the International Conference on Semitic Studies*, Jerusalem 1969, pp. 132-151.

38. W.G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, Oxford 1960, pp. 38/39, line 6.

39. *AHw*, pp. 172a and 831b.

40. Beyer, *Die aramäischen Texte*, p. 300.

41. J.T. Milik, *The Books of Enoch*, Oxford 1976, Pl. XII.

42. Beyer, *Die aramäischen Texte*, p. 356.

43. Sokoloff, *A Dictionary*, p. 126.

44. Drower - Macuch, *A Mandaic Dictionary*, p. 87.

45. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus* 1, col. 700-701.

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# Strong's Concordance

**gezar:** to cut, determine

**Original Word:** גָּזַר

**Part of Speech:** Verb

**Transliteration:** gezar

**Phonetic Spelling:** (ghez-ar')

**Short Definition:** diviners

<http://biblehub.com/hebrew/1505.htm>