

**Was the lad a lad?
On the interpretation of I Sam. 1: 24**

Serge Frolov, Vladimir Orel

Taken at its face value, the end of v. 24 in I Sam. 1 has no logical connection with the preceding narrative describing Hannah's return to Shiloh with her infant, cattle, flour and wine. The text informs us that the child was brought to the house of Yhwh, and then, unexpectedly, adds: *w^ehanna^c ar nā^c ar*.

Two major approaches to this mysterious statement were developed: one founded on the presumption of the integrity ascribed to the Massoretic text, the other, more recent, based on emendations following from Septuagint.

For Driver¹, the literal meaning of the sentence, "And the lad was a lad", i. e. "the lad was what he was - there is no occasion to say more about him", does not seem credible enough, and his solution is a conjecture of *w^ehanna^c ar ^cimmām* or, better, of *w^ehanna^c ar ^cimmā* instead.²

Another approach, represented by modern commentaries³, treats "the unintelligible expression" as a "remnant of a long haplography due to *homoiooteleuton*" and looks for the original Hebrew text in the reconstruction based on Septuagint and a corresponding (but heavily damaged) passage of 4QSam^a.⁴ It is not surprising, however, that McCarter does not show the way in which this original text was presumably truncated since no such text may be restored from Septuagint or the Qumran fragments. The best possible reduction of Septuagint translated back into Hebrew by McCarter would be *wbn^c r hn^c r* which is a totally different thing. Moreover, the detailed Greek version sounds suspiciously rationalized and may turn out to be a midrash rather than a faithful translation of the lost Hebrew original.

¹ See DRIVER S.R., *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel*, Oxford 1913, 21.

² Naturally, these conjectures are, to a certain extent, based on a much more lengthy passage from Septuagint.

³ See MCCARTER P.K., *1 Samuel*, New York 1980, 56-57. His view is generally shared by KLEIN R.W., *1 Samuel*, Waco 1983, 3.

⁴ MCCARTER, *loc. cit.*

Thus, we remain without any consistent explanation as far as the text of Septuagint is derived from the dark passage of the Massoretic text. It seems, however, that not all internal resources of our phrase have been used in order to understand its meaning.

In Driver's interpretation, we find one baseless presumption: that the first *hanna^car* is etymologically identical with the second *nā^car* in its predicative usage. Meanwhile, other cases of *nā^car* "to be a lad" functioning as a verb are not attested in the Bible, even though theoretically such usage is fairly possible. In the other hand, there are at least two other homonyms of *nā^car* that occur in the biblical text and must be taken into account. If one of them fits our context semantically, it is this verb and not *nā^car* "to be a lad" that we should consider a part of the mysterious passage.

One of these verbs may be rejected at once. It is attested, for example, in Is. 33: 15: *no^cer kapāw mit^cmok baššoḥad* "shakes his hands from holding bribes"; and in Neh. 5: 13: *gam-hāš^cni nā^carti* "also I shook out my lap". This transitive *nā^car* "to shake" would lead us to an even poorer reading than we have already. Another verb seems to be a much more attractive option. It is usually believed to be attested only once⁵ in Jer. 51: 38: *yahdāw kak^cpirim yiš^cāgu nā^caru k^cgurē^c rāyōt* "They shall roar together like lions: they shall growl like lions' whelps". Obviously, in this context we meet another verb *nā^car* denoting a sound emitted by young lions. Quite plausibly, at least one more context in the Bible contains this verb, erroneously connected with *nā^car* "to shake" by lexicographers⁶. This occurrence is found in Jud. 16: 20: *wayyiqāṣ miš^cnnātō wayyo^cmer ʿeš^c k^cpa^cam b^cpa^cam w^cinnā^cēr*. This sentence describing Samson when warned about the approaching Philistines is usually understood in an unexpected sense of his going out and "shaking himself", i.e. waking up. But Samson has succeeded to wake up in the beginning of this very verse. An alternative (and more literal) interpretation according to which he was shaking, is even less sensible as he had nothing to shake off⁷. Apparently, those who vocalized this verse did not identify its predicate with the rare word for growling and, in order to escape the confusion of an active form without object, turned the original **en^car* "I shall growl" into *innā^cēr* "I shall shake (myself)".

If we accept the interpretation of *n^cr* in Jud. 16: 20 as identical with *n^cr* of Jer. 51: 38, we get a more consistent view of Samson's behavior⁸. Moreover, we confront a situation in which two occurrences of *n^cr* "to growl" out of three are connected with Nazirites⁹. Both

⁵ EVEN-SHOSHAN A., *Qonqordansiyā ḥ^a dāsā l^c-Tōrā, N^c bī^cim u-K^c tubim*, Jerusalem 1988, 766.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Cf. COHEN A., *Joshua. Judges*, London 1950, 283.

⁸ Taking into account the following verse ("And he knew not that Yhwh was departed from him") we may assume that Samson's growl either was endowed with supernatural power of stopping enemies or that it could be used in order to draw the attention of God, or that it was a sign of Yhwh's spirit coming down upon him.

⁹ On Samuel as a Nazirite see MCCARTER, *op. cit.*, 56; FROLOV S., OREL V., *Men of God and Men of War*, Jerusalem 1994 (manuscript).

Samuel and Samson were dedicated to God before birth and according to one and the same ritual as proved by the striking intertextual coincidence in the descriptions of their dedication:

Jud. 16: 17 *mōrā lo³-^cālā^c al-ro³šī kī-n^ezīr³ ³lobīm ³nī mibbeten ³immī*

“There has not come a razor upon my head; for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother’s womb“.

I Sam. 1: 11 *w^enātattā la³māt^ekā zera^c ³nāšim un^etattāw la-Yhwh kol-y^emē ḥayyāw umōrā lo³-ya^cle^c al ro³šō*

“But wilt give to thy handmaid a man child, then I will give him to Yhwh all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head“.

Their growling similar to that of lions’ whelps must have been a divine sign given to them in their early childhood. In this light, Samson growling and not knowing that he has been left alone represents the last tragic step of a Nazirite on a road which the growling lad of I Sam. 1: 24 is only entering.