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Thy Name is Deer, Animal names in Semitic onomastics and name-giving traditions : evidence from Akkadian, Northwest Semitic, and Arabic
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6 Summary and conclusions

The aim of this study was to examine the use of animal names in Semitic name-giving traditions as reflected in three language groups (i.e., Akkadian, Northwest Semitic, and Arabic) from a linguistic and sociocultural viewpoint. This objective has been dealt with by means of three chief questions: (1) the occurrence of these names in the onomasticon, (2) the reasons for their use, and (3) the impact of family traditions, social setting, and cultural changes on this use. The study consisted of four main chapters. Chapter two, an extensive survey of name-giving traditions in the language groups in question, provides the framework for our investigation, while chapters three, four, and five were devoted to animal names in Akkadian, Northwest Semitic (Amorite, Hebrew, Ugaritic, Aramaic, and Phoenician), and Arabic respectively.

In chapter two, I have dealt with the following points: the concept of the name, naming methods, name patterns, names in the family, and names in society. A comparison between name-giving traditions in the three language groups leads to the following observations:

(1) The concept of the name reflects the same background in all language groups, that is, (a) it had a numinous power (naming is the same act as creating), (b) its relation to its bearer goes beyond being merely a label; it represents the person him/herself, and (c) naming reflects the social stratum of the bearer.

(2) Naming methods: the available direct information on this topic in three languages (Amorite, Hebrew, and Arabic) shows that naming was a psychological and sociocultural expression of: (a) a special condition of the name-giver (e.g., birth-giving condition, familial condition, illness, nostalgia, etc.), or (b) the name-giver's affiliation to the religious and cultural values of the community (s)he belonged to. Importantly, two Semitic languages, Amorite and Arabic (classical and modern sources) share what we can call 'name-giving dreams', i.e., the child is given a name received directly in a dream (Amorite and Arabic) or is named after a dreamt-of object (Arabic). This particular distribution may also point to a common Semitic background.

(3) Name patterns: some differences between language groups are observed in the case of theophoric names: in terms of contents (i.e., the relationship between deities and mankind), Akkadian covers a wider scope than the other two groups, Northwest Semitic generally exhibits the same categories (mostly two-word names, verbal and nominal), while

Arabic has the smallest number of examples (two-word names in the construct state). Profane names, on the other hand, tend to cluster in the same categories in all the languages examined (characteristic names, animal names, plant names, names indicating the time or place of birth, affective names, names indicating the child's status in the family, etc.).

(4) Naming in the family: two practices have been observed in this context: (1) naming after a family member, male (papyponymy) or female (mammonymy), a practice known in Akkadian (Old Babylonian onwards), Amorite, Palmyrene, and Arabic (till our present time), and (2) harmonic naming (i.e., two family members or more bear names which are etymologically, morphologically, or categorically/semantically related), a practice which is found in Akkadian and Arabic but hardly in Palmyrene.

(5) Naming in society: secondary names and status-related names are found in most of the languages I have examined. In Akkadian as well as Arabic (classical sources), some monarchs bore secondary names that differed from those of ordinary people. Programmatic and ideological names are also well-attested in Akkadian, Amorite, and Arabic, particularly among high officials in the royal courts and military leaders. Typical slave names occur in Akkadian and Arabic.

Chapter three was devoted to animal names in Akkadian. The investigation yielded 88 onomastic elements, most of which were used in all periods for males and, less so, females. Yet the Old Babylonian period shows the highest number. Suffixes and endearment forms are well-represented in animal names. The hypocoristic suffix *-āya/iya* is the one most frequently used, and some names bearing this suffix are the shortened forms of compound names. The diminutive *-ān* is attested for both males and females, unlike the situation in the other Semitic languages, where it is confined to males. The hypocoristic *-Vt(um)/Ct(um)* is almost as frequent in Akkadian masculine names as in their Arabic counterparts. As for theophoric names containing animal terms, Akkadian has the highest number compared to the other two language groups. These names occur in two types: (1) as divine elements (nominal or verbal phrases) and epithets (DN-is-X-animal), and (2) the construct state (animal-of-DN). The former type occurred much more frequently in the older periods (Old Akkadian, Old Babylonian), which points to an early association (pre-historic?) between deities and animals. Presumably, this association is symbolic and cannot be attributed to any sort of animal worship, for, as Watanabe (2002: 155ff) has shown in her textual analysis of animal symbolism in ancient Mesopotamian mythology, there is no evidence for such a practice: animals play no significant role in the process of the creation of the world, nor in the creation of mankind. Hence the occurrence of animal terms as divine elements is likely to be related to the metaphoric use of animals in art and liter-

ature. The second type of theophoric names, animal-of-DN, is found in different periods with several elements: *kalbu* “dog”, *būru* “calf”, *imмерu* “sheep”, *enzu* “goat”, and *mūru* “foal”. Names of this type seem to reflect a special connection between the deity and the name-giver and could be understood as: (1) thanksgiving names (i.e., metaphorically, the child is like an animal granted by the deity), or (2) relationship/trust names (i.e., the child belongs to a certain deity).

Regarding the reasons for using animal names, I have dealt with five theories/practices in this chapter: (1) the nickname theory, (2) the omen theory, (3) the astral theory, (4) naming and royal ideology, and (5) naming as a family tradition. Neither the few examples of individuals bearing two names, one of them is formed with an animal name, nor the affective aspect of using animal names can support a nickname origin of all the one-word names we have encountered. Such an interpretation would be clearly based on generalization. Thus, I have considered these names from another angle, that is, in relation to omens. The survey shows that the people of ancient Mesopotamia mostly avoided names of venomous animals and predators, which all seem to have borne negative connotations in omens. Concerning the astral theory, i.e., animal names designated astral bodies instead of real animals, the evidence does not support this explanation, for all astral names not based on animal names are absent from the onomasticon. The fourth theory, naming and royal ideology, suggests that the large attestation of cattle terms and the like can be explained as a kind of onomastic response of the people of ancient Mesopotamia to their representation in royal ideology as obedient flock/cattle. Regarding naming and family traditions, the investigation shows that the above-mentioned preferences of certain families also applied to animal names. Several people were named after their ancestors, while others were given names that reflect a kind of ‘figurative’ harmony with their patronyms. Lastly, in their distribution in society, animal names were: (1) more common among people from the lower social class, (2) not among typical slave names, and (3) not affected by religious prohibition, as they occur among people with cultic positions or related, in a way or another, to temples.

In chapter four, I have dealt with animal names in Northwest Semitic, that is, Amorite, Biblical and epigraphic Hebrew, and epigraphic Northwest Semitic (Aramaic, Ugaritic, and Phoenician). The section on Amorite yielded ca. 38 (North)West Semitic elements (based on etymology and linguistic features). Twelve of these elements/variants are new: ‘*anz-*’/‘*inz-*’ “goat” (to be distinguished from the previously discussed ‘*azz-*’), *bulbul-* “nightingale”, *gaḥś-* “donkey foal; young gazelle”, *gūr-* “whelp”, *ḥagal-* “partridge”, *ḥargal-* “locust”, *labu’-* “lion” (to be distinguished from the previously discussed form *labb-*), *pa’rūr-*

/parūr- “mouse”, qurd- “tick”, qūz-/qawz- “weasel”, šuršūr- or zurzūr- “cricket”/“starling”, and ta’lab- “fox”. Suffixes common to Amorite names are -ān (masculine names), -at (masculine names), -ay/iya, and -a (modtly feminine names). Generally, animal names occur less frequently in Amorite theophoric names than in their Akkadian counterparts. Two theories have been examined in this section regarding the reasons for using animal names: the totemistic theory and the metaphor theory. The totemistic theory that animal names originated as tribal names or as a method of binding the child to the tribal totem is unconvincing in view of one dubious ‘tribal’ name, *Ditāna*. However, the metaphoric theory that animal names were given as metaphors, either in a descriptive sense or as a wish that the bearer would be like the animal mentioned, provides a more solid explanation, especially in view of the expressions/proverbs found in Mari texts as well as the animal connotations in the literatures of the other Northwest Semitic languages. In their distribution in society, animal names are attested for individuals from different social backgrounds, some of them, like in Akkadian, having cultic positions.

The second section of this chapter dealt with animal names in Biblical and epigraphic Hebrew. The examination yielded 76 elements, 10 not occurring in the Bible. The suffixes -ōn, -ay, and -ī/ē are confined to masculine names. The fact that animal names in Hebrew are never used as divine names can be attributed to the impact of Yahwistic traditions on name-giving (i.e., the absence of theophoric names honoring deities other than Yahweh).³²² On the other hand, the few examples of names of animal-of-DN type agree with what we find in epigraphic Northwest Semitic (see the next paragraph). In this section, I have also considered animal names from the viewpoint of totemism and the metaphor theory. Given the epigraphic evidence as well as the data of the other Northwest Semitic languages, the totemistic argument that animal names emerged as tribal names was not found to be a sound explanation, for these names are clearly individual (both male and female). The metaphor theory, however, agrees more with the literary evidence, namely the frequent use of animal terms as designations. In line with the metaphoric explanation, some of these names were probably used to protect the child from demons, the evil eye, and illness (i.e., apotropaic), a naming practice that lives on in the Middle East to this day. Yet other names denote geographic localities named after animals. As for their distribution in society, the epigraphic evidence shows that animal names are also attested for wealthy people.

³²² Sufficient information on Yahwistic names is available in Beaulieu 2011.

The third section of this chapter treated animal names in epigraphic Northwest Semitic. The number of names varies from one language to another: Ugaritic has 68 elements (tentative ones not included), Aramaic has ca. 60 elements (including the Arabian-like ones), and Phoenician exhibits the least number of examples, that is, 12 elements. Suffixes common to epigraphic Northwest Semitic are *-ān(V)* (in Ugaritic and, less frequently, in Aramaic) and *-iy(V)/a/āy(V)* (Ugaritic, Aramaic, and, in very few cases, in Phoenician). Some names ending in these two suffixes can represent the shortened forms of compound names. As in Akkadian, animal names in epigraphic Northwest Semitic occur in two types of theophoric names: (a) as divine elements and epithets (In Ugaritic and the Aramaic languages/dialects of the Hellenistic and Roman periods), and, less, (2) in the construct state animal-of-DN. Given that there is no evidence of an animal cult, the former type should be attributed to the symbolic association between deities and animals. The latter type reflects the belonging to the deity with a special nuance of tenderness. In this section, three theories have been dealt with regarding the use of animal names, that is, the totemistic theory, the astral theory, and the metaphor theory. The totemistic theory, which is based on the tentative name *Aram*, does not offer a solid explanation for the other examples, which are all attested as individual names. The astral theory that animal names in Nabataean designate astral bodies lacks sufficient evidence. The metaphor theory, on the other hand, is more probable in view of the richness of animal connotations in literature.

Chapter five was devoted to animal names in Arabic (the classical, modern, and contemporary onomasticon). Remarkably, Arabic exhibits the highest number compared to the above-mentioned languages, that is, 257 elements, including by-forms. 115 of these are found in the Ancient Arabian onomasticon, especially in Safaitic, which, on the one hand, obviously reflects a continuity in name-giving traditions in the Arabian Peninsula and the Syro-Jordanian steppe, and, on the other hand, supports, to a certain extent, the reliability of the narrative sources (at least as far as name-giving is concerned). Suffixes common to animal names in Arabic are the adjectival *-ān* (masculine names), *-a(t)* as a hypocoristic-diminutive in masculine names (only in the classical onomasticon), and the nisba (or hypocoristic) ending *-ī* (more attested in masculine names). As in Hebrew, animal names in Arabic are never used as divine elements. The element *al-asad* in the pre-Islamic name ‘*Abd al-asad*’ is likely to be an eponymous name. *Asad-DN* and *Kalb-DN* types are the only examples in the construct state. The former emerged as an honorific title and has survived as a personal name until our present time, while the latter is confined to the modern onomasticon (particularly among the Shiites of Iraq).

In this chapter, I have dealt with several theories and practices concerning the use of animal names: the totemistic theory, the classical Arabic theory, apotropaic names, affective names, alternative names, and naming after famous people. The totemistic theory is unlikely in view of the Ancient Arabian evidence, i.e., animal names are obviously individual, also in the plural form (which is still in use in our time). The classical Arabic theory that animal names were given: (1) to frighten foes, (2) after animals used in augury, or (3) after the first encountered animal is supported by evidence from classical sources, modern name-giving practices among nomads, and comparative anthropological data. The practice of using animal names as apotropaic names (i.e., against the evil eye and jinn as the main agents causing miscarriage) is recorded in classical and modern sources. In short, this practice involved using: (1) names of animals having negative connotations (unattractive to the evil eye and angels of death), and (2) names of powerful animals (viewed as able to counter the jinn and prevent them from entering the womb of the mother). As for affective names, their use is obvious in the classical and modern sources, especially for females (names of gazelles and doves). Animal names also occur largely as alternative names (*kunya*, nicknames, honorific titles, *nasab*, matronyms, and *nisba*). The last practice, naming after famous figures, is well-observed in modern Arabic, for both males and females. In addition to these theories and practices, family traditions have also played a significant role in the survival of this type of names until our present time. Many individuals bore animal names of their ancestors (all periods), some of which were compound forms (modern Arabic). Harmonic names are also found in all periods. Lastly, as for naming in society, my investigation suggests that it took three centuries at least for Hadith instructions to influence name-giving. While this influence is well-attested among urban and more religious milieus, it has not played any significant role among nomads until recently, which can be attributed to conservative aspects of their name-giving practices. In contemporary practices, namely among urban milieus, several animal names disappeared as given names (except for the ones referring to honorific and elegant animals) but have survived as nicknames. The fact that this survival also applies to the classical onomasticon allows us to conclude that Islamic instructions failed to establish control on naming in society at large but did succeed in the family circle. In other words, while given names are immune due to family values, nicknames tend to be affected by the authority of community.

To sum the conclusions of the three language-specific chapters in comparative remarks:

- Animal names occur in all Semitic languages, but their number varies from one language to another, depending on the richness of the onomasticon: Arabic (257), Akkadian (88), Hebrew (78), Ugaritic (ca. 68), Aramaic (ca. 60), Amorite (ca. 38), and Phoenician (12).
- Animal names point to an originally 'Proto-Semitic' onomastic background imbued with metaphoric, affective, and apotropaic aspects. There is, however, no evidence for totemism.
- Whereas names of herbivorous animals (wild and domestic) are common to all the corpora examined, names of venomous animals, predators, and raptors are much more attested in West Semitic, especially Arabic, than in Akkadian, and this is apparently related to the symbolic nature of names within the social ideology of a society.
- As divine elements, animal names crop up much more frequently in Akkadian than in Amorite, Aramaic, and Ugaritic, and their presence can be explained by the symbolic role animals played in art and literature. The other type of theophoric names, animal-of-DN, occurs in most of the languages investigated, and it could reflect a notion of tenderness or belonging to a certain deity (i.e., dog/calf/sheep/lamb/goat-of-DN) or honour (i.e., lion-of-DN).
- The survival of animal names in modern Arabic practices, especially among nomads, points to an adherence to 'pre-Islamic' naming methods vis-à-vis normative Islamic views.

With these conclusions, the present study, thanks to its interdisciplinary outlook, furnishes new avenues for future comparative onomastic research. A specialized study of personal names referring to other natural phenomena, particularly plants, would yield interesting findings, especially if it takes into consideration the distribution of theophoric/non-theophoric names. The question of naming and ancestor cult in ancient Semitic traditions, which has been briefly dealt with in our present study, is of high importance, too, especially in view of relevant archeological and textual evidence from different areas in the ancient Near East.

