

Introduction

Naming is one of the ways in which societies classify the contents of their worlds, but it is done differently in different places and times. Diodorus Siculus (20.58.4) tells us of a region of Libya where monkeys are revered as gods and where “parents mostly give children their names from monkeys as we do from gods” – so pithekophoric names. If you hear me cry out “Jesus” in the streets of Oxford, you will think I am a vulgar person using a blasphemous exclamation, but if I do it in Spain, with Spanish pronunciation and stress, you will think I am calling to a friend: in Spanish it is an accepted personal name. In England there are, to my knowledge, no laws governing naming, but that was not the case in Athens: there, you could not call a slave Harmodios or Aristogeiton; the two supposed founders of Athenian freedom could not be associated with servility. Those have been differences in place but there are also obviously differences in time. In English the kind of name you would give to your dog or cat was traditionally different from what you would give your son or daughter, but the distinction between animal names and human names is much blurred nowadays: it is not difficult to meet a dog called Charlie these days, even though that name is based on the name of our present king. (That movement has, however, so far been one way, from human to dog; I do not yet know of typical dog names given to humans, I have never met a Towser who could speak.)

1 Greek Names

The topic in this section is partly that of barriers or absence of barriers in naming. It is well known that until the first c. CE Greeks could bear names based on god’s names but not identical with them: they could be called Dionysios or Demetrios, but not Dionysos or Demeter. This principle broke down around the 2nd century CE but still only for a limited number of names: a human could be Hermeias, but still not Zeus or Aphrodite. Until very recently there was a single apparent exception to this sharp division between human and divine names: a woman on a stone of the third century BCE from Tenos was apparently called Here, so Hera in an Ionic form. But Julien Faguer has now brilliantly re-interpreted the stone, recognising in *HPHΞ* the beginning of a month name Eresion.¹

Our section treats various aspects of the separation and partial coming together of human and divine names and naming. Anna Heller discusses to what extent gods and mortals share epithets. “The aim of this paper”, she says, “is to study these over-

1 Faguer 2020, 164–170.

laps in order to reflect on the interactions and cross-references between two apparently separated systems: the naming of gods and the honouring of humans.”² So, the premise is that in the main honouring a human is one thing, honouring a god another, and different vocabularies are appropriate in the two cases. But there are exceptions: some of these are odd isolated cases, but *ktistes* and *soter* are quite regularly applied to both gods and men. And the feminine form of the latter raises an interesting point. In contrast to the many epithets shared between goddesses and women, Heller points out that goddesses can be “saviours” (*soteirai*) but women cannot. Her example is a neat confirmation of what Loraux argued in a famous paper in 1992: goddesses ultimately aren’t women, goddesses’ powers are greater, however much they resemble women from the outside. Mortal men can save but mortal women cannot.

Thus far, the issue has been that of how far men and gods were distinguished through distinct sets of epithets. For Christians, the issue was quite different. For them, the crucial separation was not between men and gods but between Christians and pagans. Christians were faced with a name stock a substantial proportion of which consisted of so-called theophoric names, names such as Demetrios based on and honouring though not identical with those of pagan gods; other pagans just took names that ran in their family but still expressed no Christian allegiance. John Chrysostom in the late 4th century CE famously urged his hearers “Let no one desire to name his children by the names of his forebears, of his father, mother, grandfather, great-grandfather, but by those of the righteous – martyrs, bishops, apostles.”³ Christian naming is the theme of the joint paper of Urciuoli and Gordon. They ask “How did early Christian writers who adopted theophoric names for themselves or employed them for others navigate the line between misuse and honor, religious scruple and religious tribute?”⁴ (En passant they introduce what is apparently a new but useful word, “onomaturgy”: will it end up in the *Oxford English Dictionary*?) Some names were of course indeterminate between paganism and Christianity: so for instance Luke, in addressing both his Gospel and Acts to ‘excellent Theophilus’, was revealing nothing about his addressee’s religious allegiance though hinting that he may already have been within the Christian fold. The name of the Diognetos addressed in an anonymous tract, by contrast, suggests Zeus: Urciuoli and Gordon see the choice of name as indicating him as a target for conversion. Their main case study is that of a Christian bearer of a pagan name who adopted an extra name or nickname: Ignatius of Antioch, who at a certain point took on the nickname (not used by pagans) Theophóros, with that stress, “god-bearer”, like Christophóros, “Christ-bearer”, not of course theóphoros “possessed by god”.

² Heller, in this volume, 553.

³ *Sur la vaine gloire et l'éducation des enfants*, c. 47, ed. A.M. Malingrey (Paris, 1972), 146. 648–651.

⁴ Urciuoli/Gordon, in this volume, 570.

Following on this line of thought, the paper of Andrade addresses the issue of the transformation of onomastics at the time of christianization. Not limiting himself to Greek or Semitic names, because both categories were in use for pagans and for Christians in the late antique Near East, he shows how in continuity with traditional practice Christians bore ambiguously or implicitly theophoric names: *e.g.* Symeon was derived from the Semitic root *šm'* “to listen,” without specifying which god was listening. Conversely, one can note a change of pattern: “people increasingly bore the names of saints, martyrs, and ascetics that had become popular,” which might explain why pagan theophoric names were still in use, despite being easily recognizable as such.

2 In-Betweens

Reflecting on Luwic onomastics, Réveilhac draws our attention to the way personal names were formed with divine epithets or designations, implicitly referring to a deity. The divine name was thus hidden. Likewise, a toponym like Aleppo included in a personal name had to be understood as a reference to the Storm-God, because the city of Aleppo was a major place of worship for this deity: the name *Ḫalpa-wiya* “Aleppo sent” had to be understood as “(The Storm-God of) Aleppo sent (her)”. As is clear from the examples adduced by Réveilhac, there was ample space for ambiguity, because of the relation with an implied divine name. As in the case of Christian and pagan names in late antiquity (Andrade), ambiguously or implicitly theophoric names were very numerous. They reveal too a wealth of vocabulary pertaining to religious life and divine designations, particularly important in a corpus of a very fragmentary nature.

3 Semitic Names

Semitic names in antiquity were not substantially different from Greek names in the huge proportion of theophorics as well as in the separation between mortal and human names: no human was called “Baal”, but “Gift of Baal”, or “Baal has done so-and-so”.

Surprisingly to the modern eye, the meaning of Semitic names is often transparent (as it is for most Greek names) and this has often been used as a way to understand ancient societies. Reflection on the vast number of theophoric names in the languages of antiquity has often been used to describe pantheons and, whatever the dangers, to go back in time. However, as has often been underlined, it is not always possible to ascertain if the meaning was really considered when the name was given: the name of a child was frequently taken from his grandfather or one of his ancestors. Fashion and local habits are another source of uncertainty on this point. In the three

studies which deal with Semitic onomastics in this section on human and divine names, these caveats are taken into consideration.

The first two (Minunno and Simonson; for Andrade see above) are good examples as well of the classic method for the study of Semitic personal names, following in the steps of such great names as Martin Noth or Jürgen Stark.⁵ They represent variations on this time-proven methodology, which includes both a classification of the formation of names (“personal names comprise theophoric and non-theophoric elements that function as onomastic sequences”) and a lexicon for the meaning of these names, shedding light on the pantheons and divine constellations of particular groups of population, namely here Punic Carthage (Minunno), and Iron Age Elephantine (Simonson), or, to adopt the words of one of the contributors, the “study of the relationship between ancient humans and their deities”.

Interestingly, they underline the discrepancy between the known pantheon and the use of divine names in human onomastics: usefully highlighted by Minunno is the example of the Punic goddess Tanit, rather rare among theophoric human names at Carthage. Besides, attributes well represented in the cult of a particular deity (such as the word *qadish*, “saint”) are not necessarily represented in the personal names formed from the same divine name. Conversely, “the lack of an attribute from the onomastic record concerning a deity does not imply the irrelevance of that attribute for the same deity.” One similar phenomenon, well attested in Semitic onomastics, is the frequency of abbreviated, so-called hypocoristic names, which consequently hide the divine name present in the compound, introducing an ambiguity as to the identity of the latter.

Both authors manage to avoid numerous pitfalls, for instance that of assigning ethnicity to an individual according to his personal name; in regard to that pitfall, Simonson draws our attention to the context, in the case of Elephantine that of a very complex and multi-ethnic society. The very important issue of chronology is also addressed in the presentation of Simonson, who again proposes to look at the context of use of the non-theophoric elements of the names, because as Robert Parker effectively puts it⁶ there is a strong possibility of “names outliving the religious context in which they were first bestowed”, hence the importance of defining precisely this context, keeping in mind too that a name is bestowed by the parents and does not say anything about the individual himself.

⁵ Noth 1928; Stark 1971.

⁶ Parker 2000, 64.

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