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Theophoric Aramaic Personal Names as Onomastic Sequences in Diasporic and Cosmopolitan Communities

Abstract: Theophoric personal names simultaneously serve to identify an individual and make a statement about the deity invoked by each name. These personal names, this study argues, can be considered primary sources in their most essential form, reflecting one facet of a human attitude toward the divine that is otherwise free from the theological bias of an editor or redactor. Containing both onymic and semantic value, theophoric personal names can be read alongside divine epithets as they both shed light on humankind's perception of the gods. This chapter explores theophoric personal names in the Aramaic speaking world of diasporic and cosmopolitan Elephantine during the Persian period in order to seek insight into questions of how human names depict the complex and interrelated religious landscapes of multi-cultural communities. The rich theological landscape of Persian period Egypt as evidenced in Aramaic personal names demonstrates a confluence of cultures and religious traditions.

1 Introduction

This chapter explores theophoric personal names in the Aramaic speaking world, especially the diasporic and cosmopolitan context of Persian period Elephantine, in order to seek insight into questions of how human names depict the complex and interrelated religious landscapes of multicultural communities. Of especial interest in this study is the frequency of the descriptors (or non-theophoric elements) that are paired with a divine name in an onomastic sequence and their presence in contextual literary and legal texts. Where descriptors are common, uncommon, or rare in frequency indicates the influence of the named deity amongst the people whose names are listed in these everyday texts, and where native populations adopt foreign names also sheds light on this influence. Naming conventions are also reviewed. The results of this study also serve to highlight and critique current taxonomies that are used to explain naming practices.

While some cultures tend toward insular naming practices in multicultural communities, the overwhelming majority of people living in diasporic communities in the ancient Near East and Egypt adapt and assimilate to their new life situations. Individual personal names demonstrate a description of one facet of a relationship between individual and the divine, and the ever-changing nature and movement of cultural groups illustrates that the religious landscape was especially diverse and wide-ranging. When

theophoric elements are changed, the diasporic community will typically choose a name related to the local or imperial language, and it is also clear that influential divine names had an impact on native populations. When non-theophoric elements are utilized, the deities are extant in the region, representing affinity toward a new deity that is not immediately apparent in the personal names of the parents. Rigid, scholarly constructions such as pantheons deteriorate in the midst of a fluid theological landscape that emerges from the appearance of divine names, epithets, and theophoric elements in Aramaic names from ancient Egypt. In this chapter, I will argue that the fluid religious landscape of a multicultural community encourages individual and family affinity toward a multitude of deities both inside and outside their own cultural milieu; while the process of assimilation is reflected in naming practices that occur in diasporic communities, a vocabulary of popular non-theophoric elements is still present in the legal and literary texts of the local community and demonstrates even greater fluidity at points of multiculturalism.

2 Personal Names as Onomastic Sequences

In the ancient Near East, personal names are comprised of theophoric and non-theophoric elements that function as onomastic sequences; in these sequences, the non-theophoric element serves to describe one facet of the theophoric element with which it is paired.[1] West Semitic names typically contain two elements, a subject and a predicate, whereas Akkadian names contain three elements, a subject, a predicate, and an object. The subject is typically a deity, though sometimes other terms indicating relationship (*e.g.*, "father," "brother," etc.) can stand in their place. Onomastic sequences in personal names are, therefore, places where two or more constituent elements are grouped together in order to create a single meaningful expression. In the personal name, these meaningful expressions include Verbal Sentence Names (VSN), which are comprised of a divine name and a verb, and Nominal Sentence Names (NSN), which are comprised of a divine name and a noun either in the subject or predicate position. There are other name types as well, including: hypocoristica, where one element – often the divine name – is removed in order to shorten the name; One Word Names (OWN), which include single descriptive words often catego-

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1 Cf. Bonnet *et al.* 2018, 589–590, where the order and arrangement of the elements in a divine name or binomial theonym should be read "comme un énoncé théologique capable d'éclairer la représentation que les hommes se faisaient d'une entité divine et de ses relations dans un ou plusieurs ensembles." (589) In the same way, personal names can function to shed light on this relationship between human and deity.

rized as "secular" or "profane"; and Genitive Compound Names (GCN), which form a brief description.[2]

Personal names can have both onymic and semantic value. The onymic value of a personal name emerges despite the multiple constituent elements of a name. In the case of onymic value, the personal name functions to identify a specific individual in a specific context; for example, ידניה is a Hebrew name of an individual who serves as an official representative of the Jewish garrison on the Island of Elephantine at the end of the fifth century BCE.[3] Semantic value exists simultaneously to onymic value; for example, the semantic value of ידניה is expressed in the form of a verbal sentence: "may Yah hear."[4] Therefore, ידניה is both an identifiable human being and the expression "may Yah hear." Regardless of the bearing it may have had on the individual holding that name, the semantic value of a personal name in an onomastic sequence served to describe an attribute or an action of the deity present in that sequence.[5]

We can describe the actions and attributes of deities as they were understood by the ancient people by gleaning insight from theophoric NSNs and VSNs, especially where these names utilize vocabulary found in the contemporaneous corpus, which would mean the people hearing these names spoken aloud would be familiar with the individual constituent elements of each personal name.[6] For the most part, these descriptions do not align with the depictions of the deity presented in reliefs and sculptures. Instead, they reveal a deity more intimately involved in the everyday matters and interests of human life. At times, relational appellatives stand in for the deity's proper name, portraying a close relationship between human and divine worlds.

NSNs are personal names that contain a divine name as a subject and a nominal predicate. Typically, the verb "to be" is inserted between these two nouns in order to form a sentence. NSNs describe the attributes of the deity, and the single meaningful expression illustrated in a NSN might highlight a deity's function in the life of the individual. In the Aramaic personal name הדדשורי ("Hadad is my defensive wall"), for example, the divine name הדד ("Hadad") is paired with the non-theophoric element שׁור

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2 GCNs and OWNs do not offer much insight into the description of the deity, and OWNs are often a single descriptor not in an onomastic sequence.

3 *TAD* A4.7:1. While the example is the name of an official and signatory of the temple letter, the personal name ידניה appears in several letters and contracts at Elephantine and can be associated with several individuals.

4 This personal name is a VSN containing a theophoric element "Yah" and the Imperfect form of a verb אדן (√dn, "to hear", cf. Porten/Lund 2002, 4).

5 In a pragmatic approach, linguist Richard Coates differentiates between onymic and semantic referential modes of meaning found in proper names. This might be a helpful distinction when it comes to understanding the multivalent meaning that can be found in ancient personal names, especially as ancient names both refer to the ancient individual being named and as they give us insight into the action performed by deity or attribute of the deity. Coates 2006, 356–382.

6 Names that appear in Biblical Hebrew, for example, are often studied alongside of the literary context of the Hebrew Bible and the epigraphic Hebrew texts. Cf. Albertz/Schmitt 2012, 21–56.

("wall") and the pronominal suffix ‎-י ("my").[7] This name portrays the deity Hadad not as the typical storm deity found in monumental reliefs, rather as a protector of the people. Compare this description of Hadad as a protector to iconography of the deity, which displays him hurling lightning bolts.[8] The question becomes this: how might the non-elite person understand the deity Hadad? If we look at evidence from Aramaic personal names, Hadad is described as *everything but* a vengeful storm deity.[9]

VSNs are personal names that contain a divine name as a subject and a verbal predicate. VSNs describe the actions of the deity. In the Aramaic personal name ביתאלזבד ("Bethel bestowed"), the divine name ביתאל ("Bethel") is paired with the verb זבד ("to bestow").[10] In this case, the name portrays the deity Bethel as the deity bestows something, though what precisely is bestowed is unclear.

Personal names can function to identify an entity and they can also identify an attribute or action of an entity, which may or may not be related the person holding that particular name. Regardless of the relationship between the semantic meaning of a personal name and its onymic meaning (*i.e.,* the individual bearing that name), the semantic meaning of the personal name reflects communal perception of the divine entity and a contemporaneous attitude toward the deity's function or capacity according to a prevailing ancient worldview. It is from the single meaningful expressions found in these onomastic sequences that theological meaning and classification can be derived.

3 Theological Meaning and Classification of Personal Names in the Ancient Near East

The theological analysis and classification of personal names in the ancient Near East has changed incrementally during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries CE. The primary methods of ancient Near Eastern onomastics derive from a focus on the study of Biblical Hebrew personal names. Martin Noth's formative work on the Hebrew personal names has shaped the study of personal names in biblical Hebrew and

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7 Six individuals from Syria share the name הדדשורי ("Hadad is my defensive wall"), which appears in both alphabetic and cuneiform. Simonson 2019, 187–188.

8 Greenfield 1993, 58–59. Likewise, the presentation of Hadad in *DDD* describes Hadad as "the ancient Near Eastern storm god . . . known among various groups in the Mesopotamian and Syrian world" and speaks about his role as a thunderer (van der Toorn *et al.* 1999, 377–382).

9 Descriptions of Hadad as a storm deity also include more supportive imagery, such as is present in the Tell Fekherye inscription, which refers to Hadad of Sikkān as "water controller of heaven and earth, who brings down prosperity, and provides pasture and watering place for all the lands" (Lipiński 1994, 48–49).

10 For a listing of names with the theophoric ביתאל, cf. Porten 2014, 230.

other ancient Near Eastern languages.[11] In this work, Noth categorizes biblical Hebrew names in terms of the relationship between human and deity.[12] The categories include: *Bekenntnisnamen* (names of confession), *Vertrauensnamen* (names of trust), *Danknamen* (names of thanksgiving), *Wunschnamen* (names of desire), and *profanen namen* (profane or secular names).[13] With some consideration of the intention behind the personal name, these categories are grouped together based on the grammatical structure of the onomastic sequence: names of confession are NSNs and rarely OWNs; names of trust are also NSNs; names of thanksgiving are VSNs and GCNs; names of desire are VSNs in the imperfect; and profane names are mostly OWNs unrelated to the divine.[14]

Noth's categories indicate an individual expression toward the divine. In his names of confession category, we find that names of confession relay a simple and plain knowledge of a particular deity and its service, and become henotheistically inclined in the post-exilic period.[15] These names include NSNs and some Genitive Construct Names, but the types of NSNs varied.[16] Names of trust are slightly different from names of confession because they reflect and strengthen humankind's trust in the deity, and that trust emerged from a particular kind of friendliness with the deity (or a gesture relayed by the deity).[17] In this sense, these names of trust were also NSNs.[18] Names of thanksgiving included VSNs and some types of construct names, with the bearer offering thanks to the deity.[19] Names of desire, then, were VSNs in the Imperfect, so they retained a sense of want or desire as if the action of the verb had not yet happened. Noth's system of classification ultimately relied on grammatical construction first and intention – which Noth intuited from the type of verb utilized – second.[20]

Like Noth, Rainer Albertz explores Hebrew names in the biblical text and epigraphic corpus. He argues that while Israelite personal names do not attest to the religion of ancient Israel, they do instead attest to the personal piety and family religion

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11 Noth 1928.

12 Noth 1928, 15–36.

13 Noth 1928, 132–213.

14 Noth 1928, 221–232.

15 Noth 1928, 147.

16 Noth 1928, 147.

17 Noth 1928, 147–148.

18 However, these NSNs differed ever so slightly, requiring some context as to the specific events of help and kindness (Noth 1928, 148). This interpretation, of course, requires some kind of additional context; in this specific case, that context can be found in the biblical material.

19 Noth 1928, 169–170.

20 Though I will not cover them in this chapter, there were several other influential twentieth century CE interpreters who outlined taxonomic systems of classification based on grammatical and theological concerns, including: Fowler 1988; Hunsberger 1969; Pike 1990; Zadok 1988.

of the ancient Israelites and Judeans bearing these names.[21] In analyzing these names, Albertz modified Noth's grammatical and intentional taxonomic nomenclature, including a form-critical criterion and adding additional conceptual categories over the next few decades. The initial categories included: names of thanksgiving, names of confession, names of praise, equating names, and secular names.[22] In 2012, Albertz added a new situational criterion: names related to the process of birth.[23]

The categories "names of thanksgiving" and "names of confession" were both similar to Noth's categories. The primary difference in the initial reclassification appears in the "names of praise" category, which Albertz claims are made up of names that are found in the hymns of ancient Israel; these hymns are available to us today in the biblical book of Psalms.[24] Equating names are NSNs where the divine name is equated to the nominal predicate.[25]

While Albertz's additional form-critical criterion adds a rich dimension to Noth's grammatical and intentional system of classification, it would be difficult to impose this form-critical criterion upon onomastica outside of the Hebrew context of ancient Israel.[26] If we have anything close to a universal system of classification for the theological meaning behind ancient Near Eastern names, that system is likely more compatible with Noth's grammatical and intentional criteria, which depend on contextual materials but are not overly dependent on specific biblical genres (*e.g.*, hymns in the biblical book of Psalms). Noth's intentional and grammatical criteria are still informed by a contextual reading of literature.

A recent project, "Datenbank Althebräische Personennamen", categorizes biblical and epigraphic Hebrew NSNs and VSNs into a larger number of conceptual categories.[27] These categories are listed in appendix 3 of the User Guide for the database.[28] The lexicon and morphology volumes are especially helpful for the study of ancient personal names. For this study, we shall proceed with Noth's concise grammatical and intentional criteria behind the interpretation of theophoric personal names.

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21 Albertz/Schmitt 2012, 245; Albertz 1978, 49–77.

22 Albertz 1978, 49–77.

23 Albertz/Schmitt 2012, 252. Albertz claims that nearly one third of all epigraphic Hebrew names are related to the process of birth, and slightly more from the Hebrew Bible are related to the process of birth. (252 n. 21).

24 Albertz/Schmitt 2012, 252.

25 Albertz/Schmitt 2012, 252.

26 An application and critique of the form-critical criterion can be found, in part, in the conclusions of Simonson 2019, 634–638. To reiterate, should the personal name ברק ("lighting") reflect a quick process of birth when the context of the name gives the name to a servant of the god עתרשמין ("Attar of the Skies")? (Cf. Lipiński 2000, 608; Albertz/Schmitt 2012, 602; Simonson 2019, 635–636). The problem here is one of context.

27 *DAHPN*, https://www.dahpn.gwi.uni-muenchen.de/.

28 "User Guide", *DAHPN*, https://www.dahpn.gwi.uni-muenchen.de/wp-content/uploads/User-Guide.pdf.

4 The Theology of a Name in a Diasporic Community

In the process of determining the theological meaning of a name in a multicultural context, there are three distinct points that must be considered: first, the ethnicity of the individual bearing the name in relationship to the wider context of ethnic groups present in the multicultural community; second, the broader theological landscape of the diasporic community including the recognition of divine names and attributes in the embedded contexts; and third, the extant resources that are available to study from this community, which ultimately reflect the source data from which contemporaneous understandings of the divine can be accessed. After reviewing these three points, this section will consider specific theophoric and non-theophoric elements from the collection of Aramaic names at Elephantine, addressing how they function as onomastic sequences that make a theological claim about the deity with which they are paired. Attention will be paid to situations where cross-cultural contact has occurred. This analysis will allow us to explore how human names depict the complex and interrelated religious landscapes of multicultural communities within the specific confines of the Aramaic speaking world of Persian period Egypt.

In a cosmopolitan center such as Elephantine, personal names are just as diverse as the ethnic identities of the individuals bearing these names. Amongst the personal names in the Aramaic texts from Elephantine, it is argued that there is evidence of Arameans, Babylonians, Bactrians, Caspians, Egyptians, Greeks, Jews, Khwarezmians, Medes, and Persians among others.[29] Determining the ethnicity of the individual is a task that falls disproportionately on onomastic evidence and the presence of a nisbe or gentilic.

In multicultural and diasporic communities, personal names can have relatively little bearing on the process of identifying the ethnicity of the individual. In fact, it is often impossible to determine whether an individual was an ethnic Aramean based on personal name alone,[30] since the centuries of assimilation and intercultural interaction have broken down barriers that once allowed communities to delineate membership based on the use of common names. Some scholars even describe ethnic Arameans as purposefully choosing names that would allow them to be concealed "behind Egyptian or even Babylonian proper names."[31]

The rise of Aramaic as a lingua franca also complicates the process. F. Mario Fales argues that by the end of the Neo-Assyrian period the Aramean people were assimilated into Assyrian society and culture, so the nisbe [KUR]Aramayyu started to serve

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29 See the analysis of Kornfeld 1977, 19–35; for Egyptian names: Porten 2002, 283–327; for Persian names: Porten 2003, 165–186; for Akkadian names: Porten 2016, 1–12.

30 Botta 2002, 368.

31 Vittmann 2017, 229. Choosing locally prevailing or popular personal names was likely one way foreign populations could assimilate into local culture, but the multicultural nature of the Elephantine community demonstrates a wide range of assimilation.

both a linguistic and cultural function.[32] When applied to scribes, the nisbe indicated fluency in the Aramaic language and script rather than ethnic affiliation. In this way, the Jews of Elephantine may have been identified by the nisbe ארמי ("Aramean") because of their ability to speak Aramaic rather than their ethnic affiliation.[33] One example from Elephantine illustrates the fluid nature of the combination of names and nisbae: הדדנורי בבליא ("Hadad-nuri the Babylonian"), an Aramaic name with a nisbe affirming a Babylonian origin, located in an Egyptian text.[34]

Assimilation of ethnic Arameans into Assyrian and Babylonian cultures is clear in names that contain a deity of one linguistic or cultural origin alongside a non-theophoric element of another linguistic or cultural origin. This phenomenon is apparent in both Syro-Mesopotamian and Egyptian texts. This assimilation likely occurred prior to the arrival of the Aramean populations to Egypt and may have continued based on interaction with other, disparate Aramean groups that also relocated to Egypt.[35]

Based on an analysis of Aramaic personal names from the Aramaic papyri from ancient Egypt, Karel van der Toorn argues that there was a Bethel group and a Nabu group amongst the Aramean population at Elephantine: the former from Syria and operating the temples of Bethel and the Queen of Heaven, and the latter from Babylonia and operating the temples of Nabu and Banit.[36] A proliferation of theophoric elements evoking these Syrian and Babylonian origins reveal an Aramean presence on the Island as much as a Judean, Persian, or Egyptian presence on the Island. It is not surprising that assimilated names of multi-lingual origins feature these theophoric elements.

Once in Egypt, residents of these newly created multicultural communities also experienced additional assimilation as it is evidenced in naming practices. Günter Vittmann explores five different naming patterns in Late Period Egypt, arguing that there was some degree of cultural adaptation as demonstrated by Egyptian parents giving their children Aramaic names.[37] These include: various combinations of father and mother, one with a foreign name and the other with an Egyptian name, giving their child an Egyptian name; both parents with a foreign name giving their child an

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32 Fales 2017, 165.

33 This is also suggested in Vittmann 2017, 230 in reference to the individual named Meshullam, who is designated as both ארמי זי סון לדגל וריזת ("Aramean of Syene and the detachment of Varyazata", in *TAD* B3.3:2–3) and יהודי זי יב בירתא ("Jew of Elephantine the fortress", in *TAD* B3.1:3) among other variations (cf. Porten 2011, 186 n. 8).

34 *TAD* B2.2:19. Porten argues that the presence of this name demonstrates "that there is no consistent pattern of association between the linguistic origin of an individual's name and his cultural background or identification" (Porten 2016, 6).

35 The Aramean tribal groups were vastly diverse and spread throughout the Fertile Crescent from Syria to Babylonia. Cf. Lipiński 2000; Younger 2016.

36 van der Toorn 2019, 53.

37 Vittmann 2017, 264; also cf. Vittmann 2003, 239–241.

Egyptian name; all members with names of the same origin; and, finally, a father with an Egyptian name and a son with a foreign name.[38] The final model, Vittmann argues, is very common in the Aramaic texts from ancient Egypt and does not fit the model of typical cultural assimilation that would be expected in Late Period Egypt.[39]

How, then, might one interpret a name like ביתאלשזב ("Bethel has saved") that was given by his father *wȝḥ-ỉb-rʿ* ("the heart of Re endures") at Elephantine as this does not appear to represent cultural assimilation?[40] Greater spheres of cultural and theological influence must be addressed in order to acknowledge the fluid religious landscape of the multicultural community. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate evidence of a much broader theological landscape at Elephantine.

The broader theological landscape of Aramaic-speaking ancient Egypt is primarily illustrated by both the theophoric elements present in personal names and in the divine names and epithets that appear in these texts. In the Aramaic documents from ancient Egypt, divine names and epithets included a wide range of deities that represent many diverse cultures. Gods and goddesses in the Aramaic material include the Persian Ahuramazda; Egyptian Amon, Atumnebʾon, Isis, Khnum, Min, Nemmaʿati, Osiris, Osiris-Ḥapi, Ptaḥ, and Sati; Semitic deities Anatbetʾel, Anatyahu, Bʿel, Bʿelšemayin, Banit, Bel, Bethel, El, Ešembethel, Ḥerem, Ḥerembetʾel, Malkatšemayin, Nabu, Nergal, Šamaš, Sin, and Yahu; and North Arabian Hanʾilat.[41]

In the Aramaic text corpus from ancient Egypt, a limited number of divine names appear alongside terse descriptors in divine epithets. These epithets are meant to convey basic information about the deities that they describe, but they also function to legitimize the divine status of the deity. This is typical of the Imperial Aramaic text corpus across Egypt, the Levant, and Syro-Mesopotamia.[42]

At Elephantine, epithets affirm the divine nature of the gods that they describe. The most popular epithets in the Imperial Aramaic text corpus are simply variations of "[Divine Name] the God", "[Divine Name] the God who is in Elephantine the Fortress", and "[Divine Name] the God/Master/Queen/Lord of Heaven".[43] Epithets like these, while relatively terse, are functional. They establish a solid basis for – and acceptance of – the divine in a community with many deities.

Bi-lingual texts often portray the disparities between epithets in Egyptian and Imperial Aramaic. In a funerary inscription from Khastemeḥi, for example, the deity Osi-

38 Vittmann 2017, 264.

39 Vittmann 2017, 266.

40 *TAD* D9.10:7; cf. Porten 2002, 89.

41 Porten/Lund 2002, 425–427.

42 Cf. Imperial Aramaic sources in *DB MAP*: https://base-map-polytheisms.huma-num.fr/.

43 Epithets containing "[Divine Name] the God" appear 38 times, "[Divine Name] the God who is in Elephantine the Fortress" appears 14 times (eleven of which with the deity יהו and three with Khum), and variations of "[Divine Name] the God/Master/Queen/Lord of Heaven" appear 13 times.

ris is invoked.[44] The Egyptian inscription reads: *wsỉr ḫnty-ỉmntyw nṯr ꜥȝ nb ȝbḏw* ("Osiris, lord of the westerners, great god, lord of Abydos"), documenting in detail a royal offering to the deity.[45] The Imperial Aramaic translation is terse, and renders the epithet: אוסרי אלהא ("Osiris the god").[46]

Though the Imperial Aramaic epithet provides a minimum amount of context necessary to identify Osiris as a god, it still recognizes the divinity of Osiris and the role that the deity plays in the funerary inscription. In this way, those who could not read or understand spoken Egyptian might still understand the divine nature of the god. Divine names and epithets, therefore, serve to legitimize the names and identities of gods to a wider audience beyond that of singular ethnic communities.

Many of the theophoric and non-theophoric elements that appear in Aramaic personal names are represented in some way in the extant text corpus. While the corpus includes the letters, contracts, and other documents from ancient Egypt, they also include a number of literary texts.[47] In short, the vocabulary of the theophoric and non-theophoric elements will help us understand how humans perceived the divine.

Moving forward, I will now turn to a select number of theophoric and non-theophoric elements in personal names in order to determine how they represent the relationship between humankind and the divine. The presence of theophoric elements serves to confirm the religious landscape of the ancient community, signaling the presence of particular cults. Non-theophoric elements illustrate unique understandings of the divine names that appear with them. The selection of these theophoric and non-theophoric elements will include Nabu and Bethel, the two most common deities from Aramean communities, and the non-theophoric elements will include unique descriptors and common descriptors from both Elephantine and wider Egypt. Altogether, these names will represent one facet of the fluid theological landscape that was Persian Egypt.

4.1 Theophoric Elements

The theophoric elements extant in personal names from the Elephantine corpus are wide-ranging. Extant texts from ancient Egypt that explicitly mention the name of these deities outside of the context of personal names are relatively reduced in number. Included here are theophoric elements in personal names that are also present as separate divine names and epithets in the extant material. These divine names will include Nabu and Bethel. Nabu and Bethel were chosen because they represent the

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44 *TAD* D20.3 = *DB MAP* S#6521.

45 *TAD* D20.3:1′. Cf. Porten/Yardeni 1999, 254.

46 *TAD* D20.3:2 = *DB MAP* T#8425.

47 Additionally, other works of literature are extant, including a corpus of material relevant to the religious communities from Syria-Mesopotamia and the Levant in P. Amherst 63 (van der Toorn 2018).

traditions of two different Aramean communities in diaspora, and they appear alongside non-theophoric elements that might be best explained by extant legal and literary material later in this section. In this way, Nabu and Bethel names can best represent the complex religious landscape of multicultural communities in Persian Egypt.

A presence of the cult of Nabu near Elephantine is established in the Aramaic materials as early as the sixth century BCE. Reference to the "Temple of Nabu" appears in *TAD* A2.3:1 in the greeting formula of a letter.[48] The letter dates to the fifth century BCE, and was sent to a woman רעיה ("friend") in Syene by her brother מכבנת ("Who is like Banit?") in Hermopolis. Both children have Aramaic names, unlike their father פסמי (hypocoristicon of פסמשך, "man of mixed wine"), who has an Egyptian name.[49] His father, however, is identified as נבונתן ("Nabu gave"). In this case we find a man with an Aramaic name giving his son an Egyptian name, who in turn gives his children Aramaic names. Also indicative of a cult of Nabu, an inscription on a ceramic coffin in Syene dating to the end of the fifth century BCE marks the final resting place of "Sheil the priest of Nabu."[50]

The epithet "Nabu the God" appears twice in the Aramaic documents from Ancient Egypt. In *TAD* B8.4:7, a court record from Saqqara, the divine name appears in the title of person whose name is lacunose: עבד נבו אלהא [. . .] ("[PN] servant of Nabu the God").[51] In *TAD* D23.6:7, the Sheikh Fadl Cave inscription, the divine name appears on an otherwise illegible relief: נבו אלהא ("Nabu the God").[52] These epithets serve to legitimize and recognize the status of Nabu as a god to readers otherwise unfamiliar with the divine status of the being. The presence of a Temple to Nabu in Upper Egypt can also attest to the impact that the Nabu cult had on its environs.

Outside of the Egyptian material, epithets of Nabu are attested in the Temple of Nabu at Palmyra: לנבו אלהא טבא ושכרא ("for Nabu, the good and rewarding god"),[53] which speaks to a characteristic of the divine. Though it is not paired with Nabu, non-theophoric element טב is relatively common in Aramaic personal names in the documents from ancient Egypt.[54] One of which, אחוטב ("the brother is good"), appears in five different ostraca.[55]

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48 *TAD* A2.3:1.

49 The name פסמשך is the same as the name of Pharaoh Psammetichus, who was called Nabu-šēzibanni (md MUATI-še-zib-an-ni) in the royal inscriptions of Aššurbanipal from the seventh century BCE (*Ashurbanipal 011*, http://oracc.org/rinap/Q003710/).

50 *TAD* D18.1; for the dating see Porten/Yardeni 1999, 239.

51 *TAD* B8.4 = *DB MAP* S#6450.

52 *TAD* D23.1 = *DB MAP* S#6527; the name of the god Nabu also appears on panel 16a.

53 *DB MAP* S#3153.

54 Aramaic names attested are אבטב ("[the] father is good", *TAD* D23.1a:1), אביטב ("my father is good", *TAD* D21.1:2), אחוטב ("the brother is good," *TAD* D7.2:1; D7.3:1; D7.4:1; D7.5:1; D7.10:4), אחטב ("[the] brother is good", *TAD* D7.6:4; D7.7:9; D7.8:12), and שמטב ("[the] name is good", *TAD* D23.1a:2).

55 *TAD* D7.2:1; D7.3:1; D7.4:1; D7.5:1; D7.10:4.

At Elephantine, Aramaic names with the theophoric element נבו include:

נבוברך ("Nabu blessed," VSN, Thanksgiving),[56] נבודלה ("Nabu drew up," VSN, Thanks-giving),[57] נבודלני ("Nabu drew me up," VSN, Thanksgiving),[58] נבויהב ("Nabu gave," VSN, Thanksgiving),[59] נבונרי ("Nabu is my flame," NSN, Confession),[60] נבונתן ("Nabu gave," VSN, Thanksgiving),[61] נבועקב ("Nabu rescued," VSN, Thanksgiving),[62] נבורעי ("Nabu is my friend" NSN, Trust),[63] נבושזב ("Nabu rescued," VSN, Thanksgiving),[64] נבושלו ("Nabu is tranquil," NSN, Confession),[65] and נבושלם ("Nabu requited," VSN, Thanksgiving).[66] The overwhelming majority of Nabu names at Elephantine are VSNs that can be interpreted as Names of Thanksgiving, though two Names of Confession and one name of trust also appear. Many of the non-theophoric elements paired with the theophoric element נבו are common, but there is one unique non-theophoric element: יהב ("to give"). From these names, three will receive greater scrutiny in the next part of this section: יהב ("to give"), שזב ("to rescue"), and נור ("flame").

The cult of Bethel is also established in Elephantine, primarily through the personal names present in the text corpus, but also with the presence of the divine name. Only one tangentially related epithet appears; it is related to the deity Ḥerembethel. The epi-thet reads: חרמביתאל אלהא ("Ḥerembethel the god").[67] Reference to a Temple of Bethel appears in the letter *TAD* A2.1, which is addressed to city of Syene.[68]

Names with the theophoric element ביתאל appear abundantly at Elephantine and Syene: ביתאלזבד ("Bethel bestowed," VSN, Thanksgiving),[69] ביתאלנדר (likely read "Bethel illuminated," VSN, Thanksgiving),[70] ביתאלנורי ("Bethel is my flame," NSN, Confession),[71] ביתאלנתן ("Bethel gave," VSN, Thanksgiving),[72] ביתאלרעי ("Bethel is my friend," NSN,

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56 *TAD* D11.9:2.

57 *TAD* A3.4:3; D9.9:5.

58 *TAD* A6.9:1.

59 *TAD* C4.9:2.

60 *TAD* C4.8:8.

61 *TAD* A2.3:14; A3.1:3, 4,6; B2.8: 11, 12; D9.9:4; D22.30:1.

62 *TAD* A6.2:23, 28; C3.13:54; C3.15:20.

63 *TAD* B2.8:12, 13.

64 *TAD* A2.1:15.

65 *TAD* B4.3:9; B4.4:8.

66 *TAD* B3.9:11; C3.14:2.

67 *TAD* B7.2:7–8 = *DB MAP* T#8318.

68 *TAD* A2.1:1 mentions the Temple of Bethel and the Temple of the Queen of Heaven. The letter is written by נבושזב (from √šzb "Nabu rescued") to his sister נניחם ("Nanay ḥm"). The patronymic of Nabu-šezib, פתחנם ("the one Khnum gave"), appears on the envelope.

69 *TAD* B3.9:11.

70 *TAD* A3.2:1.

71 *TAD* C3.15:6.

72 *TAD* A2.1:3, 9; B6.4:9, 10; D7.35:2; D9.9:2.

Confession),[73] ביתאלשזב ("Bethel rescued," VSN, Thanksgiving),[74] ביתאלתדן ("Bethel, may you judge," VSN, Desire),[75] and ביתאלתקם ("Bethel may you rise," VSN, Desire).[76] Names of Thanksgiving are, once again, the most abundant classification, followed by two names of desire and two names of confession. From these names the non-theophoric terms שזב and נור will be covered.

4.2 Non-Theophoric Elements

A variety of non-theophoric elements are present in Nabu and Bethel names, both of which have established cults and temples at Elephantine. These non-theophoric elements are also present in extant literary and legal material, which will yield insight into how the ancient people understood these terms. In this section I will explore the semantic range of the verbs יהב ("to give") and שזב ("to save") and the noun נור ("flame"). The semantic ranges of these non-theophoric elements serve to describe an individual's understanding of the deity with which they are paired, highlighting the relationship between human and divine worlds.

The non-theophoric element יהב is a very common verb in the Aramaic material from ancient Egypt, but it is only attested as a theophoric element in one name.[77] It appears alongside the theophoric element Nabu in Egypt in the name נבויהב ("Nabu gave").[78] While this descriptor is unique in Egyptian Aramaic, the term נתן ("to give") appears to be a preferred non-theophoric with this meaning as it is extant in many names at Elephantine. In the material from Syro-Mesopotamia, יהב is a relatively uncommon non-theophoric element appearing in the names אליהב ("El gave"), דדיהבי ("Dadi gave"), הדיהב ("Hadad has given"), and שמשיהב ("Šamaš has given").[79] All attestations of the verb as a non-theophoric element appear in Syria (ranging from Harran in the west to Dur-Katlimmu and Nineveh in the east), though the term also appears in Akkadian names. It is likely that this name is a remnant from an earlier, Syro-Mesopotamian context.

Particularly striking in the context of נבויהב are his descendants. *TAD* C4.9 is a fragmentary list of Egyptian names. The relevant line reads: פסמשך בר פנית בר נבויהב ("Psamshek son of Paneith son of Nabuyahab").[80] Here, we find an individual with an Aramean name giving his son an Egyptian name פנית ("He of Neith"), who gave his son the Egyptian name פסמשך ("the man of mixed wine"). This is an example of assimilation typical

73 *TAD* B3.9:11.
74 *TAD* A2.5:6; D9.9:7.
75 *TAD* A3.8:8.
76 *TAD* B4.4:6, 10.
77 Porten/Lund 2002, 144–146.
78 *TAD* C4.9:2.
79 Simonson 2019, 214, 292, 307, 581.
80 *TAD* C4.9:2.

of a multicultural community: an Aramean population moved into the area, and gave local Egyptian names to subsequent generations. It is likely that the יהב non-theophoric, common in Syro-Mesopotamia, was a name given to נבויהב prior to his arrival in Egypt.

The non-theophoric element שזב ("to save") is attested as a verb throughout the Aramaic documents in ancient Egypt.[81] In *TAD* A4.3, the verb appears in a narrative about the letter-writer being held in captivity by the Persian commander Vidranga under suspicion of stealing stone, only to be rescued by the servants of Anani, who intervened on behalf of the author.[82]

In the extant copy of Aḥiqar, the verb שזב appears in Aḥiqar's appeal to his executioner: "I am Aḥiqar who formerly rescued you from an innocent killing . . ."[83] The act of rescuing here happens at the height of risk to Aḥiqar: as he is about to be executed, he recounts the tale of his once rescuing his executioner. The executioner understands what Aḥiqar has done and spares him his sentence. In two other fragmentary letters, it is clear that a god is credited with the rescue: אלהא שזבך הילי, "the god rescued you, my troop"[84] and ואלהא שזבן, "and the god rescued us."[85] Unfortunately the letters are too fragmentary to understand any additional context, but it is clear that one activity of the divine is the ability to rescue.

Of the names listed above, the verb שזב appears in נבושזב and ביתאלשזב. Both names offer contrast to what we find with נבויהב: with these names, we find an Egyptian father giving an Aramaic name to his children. In *TAD* A2.1, נבושזב בר פטחנם ("Nabushezib son of Petekhnum") writes to his sister נניחם ("Nanay ḥm").[86] The Patronymic פתחנם is derived from the Egyptian *pꜣ-dj-ḫnm* ("the one Khnum gave"). Little is known about the patriarch's context and the children's mother is only known by the lallative ממה ("Mama").[87] Additionally, ביתאלשזב is given an Aramaic name by his father וחפרע, derived from the Egyptian *wꜣḥ-ı͗b-rꜥ* ("the heart of Re endures") as it appears on a list of names.[88] In both cases, the influence of Nabu and Bethel temple cults were a significant draw to assimilate. The story of נבושזב is told in several letters, many of which contain wide ranging onomastica, with the letter-writer inquiring of many individuals with both Aramaic and Egyptian names, and both Aramaic and Egyptian theophoric elements.[89]

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81 שזב itself is an Akkadian loanword, but common to Aramaic. *Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon*, https://cal.huc.edu.

82 *TAD* A4.3:3–4.

83 *TAD* C1.1:46.

84 *TAD* D1.24.

85 *TAD* D1.30.

86 *TAD* A2.1:15.

87 *TAD* A2.1:14.

88 *TAD* D9.10:7.

89 *TAD* A2.1; A2.2; A2.3; A2.4; A2.5.

The non-theophoric element נור ("flame", though also translated "light")[90] is frequently attested in Aramaic names in Syro-Mesopotamia,[91] and is likewise found at Elephantine: אחנורי ("[the] brother is my flame"),[92] ביתאלנורי ("Bethel is my flame"),[93] הדדנורי ("Hadad is my flame"),[94] נורשמש ("[the] flame is Šamaš"),[95] and שמשנורי (Šamaš is my flame").[96] The defective spelling נר is also extant twice in the Elephantine material: אחנרי ("[the] brother is my flame"),[97] and נבונרי ("Nabu is my flame").[98]

The Elephantine papyri do not preserve the word נור. However, the term appears in multiple places in P. Amherst 63, especially in relation to these divine names. In the so-called "Magnificat for the Lady of the Sanctuary" column I,[99] we find a dialogue between the Herald of Gaddi-El and the deity Nabu. The Herald of Gaddi-El requests Nabu to:

hw$_2$y + q'r$_2$['n' | k'] + r$_2$š'p |
h[w$_2$y] + ⌜m'ʾy'd'r⌝|⌐ kw$_2$⌐[kbn|]
[k x x x x](n)' + dy | y'ḫ$_2$⌐[nb x x x x x] |
'l.C ny{|}r2[']⌐k'⌝ | n'r2[ḥ'ṣ |]
[b'šmyn] | rm' | nw[r2'k' |]

Be shin[ing like] Resheph!
Gi[ve sp]lendor to the sta[rs]
[Like gold (?)] that shi[nes.]
In your light we will tr[ust].
[In heaven your] light is exalted.[100]

Here the deity Nabu is called upon to magnify and crown mrty.C dy$_2$y[k'] "the Lady of the Sanctuary", an epithet given to the attested divine name מרתי ("Lady"). Nabu is called mry.G "O Lord", but throughout the passage Nabu is defined by his ability to hw$_2$y + q'r$_2$['n'] "be shining".[101] Two characteristics of Nabu are prevalent: that in Nabu's

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90 For more on the semantic range of נור, see Gzella (ed.) 2018, 466–468; Litke 2013, 149–150; *Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon:* http://cal.huc.edu.

91 Simonson 2019, 138 and 683.

92 Porten/Lund 2002, 322.

93 Kornfeld 1978, 43; Porten/Lund 2002, 332; Porten 2014, 223–236.

94 Kornfeld 1978, 47; Porten/Lund 2002, 339.

95 Kornfeld 1978, 62; Porten/Lund 2002, 380. Both Kornfeld and Porten/Lund read this name as נורשוש, though Kornfeld interprets the name as נורשמש (cf. discussion in Kornfeld 1978, 62).

96 Kornfeld 1978, 75; Porten/Lund 2002, 416.

97 Porten/Lund 2002, 322.

98 Likewise, the defective spelling נר appears in Syro-Mesopotamian texts with the name אדנרי (Simonson 2019, 171), (297) דדנרי and the hypocoristicon (442–443) נרי.

99 Quotations and translation of P. Amherst 63 are from van der Toorn 2018. In these cases, van der Toorn uses "light" to translate נור.

100 van der Toorn 2018, 44.

101 van der Toorn 2018, 44 i 5.

light (ny{|}r2[ʾ]ˈkˀˀ) the people will trust and in heaven Nabu's light (rmʾ | nw[r2ˀk) is exalted.[102]

Though the text is primarily concerning the magnification of the Lady of the Sanctuary, the reader learns about the attributes of Nabu and his relationship to the light, characteristics that are represented in personal names from Elephantine, especially נבונרי ("Nabu is my flame").[103] The name נבונרי appears as a patronymic on a list: אשמרם בר נבונרי, "Eshemram son of Nabunuri".[104] Here, the father appears to hail from the Babylonian Aramean population and the son was given a fully Aramaic name: אשמרם ("Eshem is exalted").[105] Other names using נור might also evoke such poetry as is found in column I of P. Amherst 63, which describe the god Nabu as both divine and celestial. Nabu's light might just give way to the confession in the NSN נבונרי.

Nabu is not the only deity described by the word נור in P. Amherst 63. In column IV, line 23, which is partially reconstructed, the "planets and constellations" speak to the goddess Nanay, the Queen of Heaven, identifying her as the Lady of the Sanctuary. The text reads:

mʾzʾ {|} lʾty$_2$ + ybʾ[r$_2$k]
ˈkˀˀdˀ<n> | nˈrn.Cˀ [dy lylʾ]
mn^{n}zˀlˈ[n +]ˈmnˀzˀlyn [x x x]
šʾ | bʾnʾ | [nwrˀky] | mrty.C yʾbˈr$_2$[kw$_3$.C]

Let the Constellations speak a bles[sing]
Just so the lights [of the night,]
The planets and the constellations:
Elevate between us [your light (?)]!" They bless the Lady . . .[106]

If we read van der Toorn's reconstruction nwrʾky, the goddess is also described as capable of radiating light. In this way, the goddess is comparable to all of the celestial bodies mentioned in the text.

Both columns X and XI of P. Amherst 63 include the word נור. In column X, the cloud of the מרי "Lord" occludes the light (wʾnˈr$_2$) from reaching the land of Rash, and the petitioner asks for the cloud to be removed and the Lady awoken.[107] Once awoken, the luminescence (here q$_2$ˈr{|}nˈt "rays" rather than nwr) of the מרתי might be seen again.[108] In column XI, "shining" is a quality of the Lord of Rash (mry.C ˈmn + rˀšˀ

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102 Two Akkadian names from the Neo-Assyrian text corpus describe Nabu in similar light: Nabû-nūrka-lāmur ("O Nabû, let me see your light!") and Nabû-nūru-nammir ("O Nabû, make the light shine!") (Baker 2001, 858).

103 Kornfeld 1978, 61.

104 *TAD* C4.8:8. Porten suggests either "Nabunur" or "Nabunad[in]" here.

105 *Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon* 2022: http://cal.huc.edu; Simonson 2019, 700.

106 van der Toorn 2018, 108, iv 21–23. Line 20 also contains nr, but it is unclear whether this light is describing the deity or the sun.

107 van der Toorn 2018, 141, x 2–3.

108 van der Toorn 2018, 142, x 7.

ʾH), and by shining and speaking, the Lord of Rash burns the lands "like columns of fire".[109]

The word נור is a non-theophoric element explicitly present in the descriptions of deities in both P. Amherst 63 and within the personal names of the Elephantine papyri.[110] Likewise, the non-theophoric element is also paired with another divine name in the name ביתאלנורי ("Bethel is my flame"): the name in this text is a patronymic that appears next to an individual who is giving silver to YHW the god, הושע בר ביתאלנורי ("Hosea son of Bethelnuri").[111] In this text it is clear that the son Hosea is tithing to the deity YHW and is therefore part of the Jewish garrison of the Island of Elephantine. This is likely a case of assimilation, though not to a dominant culture, where the father with the Aramean name Bethelnuri gave his son the name Hosea once joining the Jewish community on the Island.

Each personal name is capable of evoking a description of a deity that can be corroborated by the descriptions and characteristics present in extant texts from this time period. The individual נבונרי ("Nabu is my flame") lived at the end of the 5th century BCE, around the same time as Shiel the priest of the Nabu temple. Collected literature at the time, including P. Amherst 63, illuminates what a name like נבונרי might mean to a person bearing that name. In the end, the semantic range of the vocabulary of these non-theophoric elements helped us delineate the descriptive function that these names may have held, ultimately highlighting one additional facet of the relationship between human and divine worlds.

5 Conclusion: Mapping the Relationship Between Human and Divine

Regardless of whether or not a personal name was selected due to reasons of fashion as opposed to personal piety or a family's system of belief, that personal name functioned as an onomastic sequence that served to describe the divine name with which it was paired. This chapter has demonstrated that theophoric and non-theophoric elements belonging to individuals of a diasporic community could be located in the extant corpora, meaning that the people who used these names would likely understand their meaning. Because the deities and descriptors that were chosen would have been understood, personal names had both onymic value and semantic value.

No matter their mode of selection, the personal names themselves still had meaning as onomastic sequences. The multicultural nature of the communities living in Egyptian diaspora means that cultural material – and, indeed, the number of influential

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109 van der Toorn 2018, 152, xi 5–6.

110 While scholars suggest that P. Amherst 63 was composed in the Levant and later copied in Egypt, its presence in Egypt suggests contemporaneous usage of the vocabulary within.

111 *TAD* C3.15:6.

deities – from which individuals might draw is expansive. Assimilation, it was demonstrated, happens in many directions in a multicultural and cosmopolitan community.

Several conclusions arise from this study. In the ancient Near East, the personal name functioned as an onomastic sequence that served to describe the deity with which it was paired. These names had semantic meaning: both theophoric and non-theophoric elements alike are extant in the text corpus and would have been understood by the bearer in this multicultural context. As onomastic sequences, personal names therefore offer a look into the relationship between human and divine worlds. The descriptions of deities revealed by onomastics offer much different depictions of deities than what appears in epigraphic, literary, or iconographic evidence. Most importantly, it was revealed that mapping people according to onomastic evidence is problematic: to assign ethnicity based solely on the appearance of a "national god" in a personal name precludes the possibility that names were adopted in order to assimilate. While this point is clear in diasporic communities, interpreters should also be careful to avoid ascribing an ethnicity to an individual based on onomastic evidence in non-diasporic communities as well.

What, then, can the descriptors say about the deities that also appeared in these names? The most vivid example of a descriptor came from an exploration of the non-theophoric element נור. To be named נבונרי ("Nabu is my flame") is to proclaim that your deity is your source of light. Nabu, above all other deities, is your flame; he is a flame that could give splendor to the stars, and a flame in which one could trust. A name with the non-theophoric element נור connects the human on Earth with a god above. Likewise, with a non-theophoric like שזב we might find a god who can rescue from a difficult situation, a support in a time of need. As onomastic sequences, personal names therefore offer a look into the relationship between human and divine worlds.

Alongside epithets, ancient personal names can serve as onomastic sequences that inform our understanding of the gods and goddesses of the ancient world. Personal names are themselves theological statements capable of describing humankind's perception of divine interaction in the world. When populations live alongside many vibrant cultic and temple communities, the already complex religious landscape of the ancient Near East becomes even more fluid in these multicultural communities.

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Abbreviations

GCN = Genitive Compound Name
NSN = Nominal Sentence Name
OWN = One Word Name
VSN = Verbal Sentence Name
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