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Ammonite and Edomite Personal Names in the Light of Assyro-Babylonian Sources

Abstract

Correct identification and understanding of personal names may be facilitated by a comparison of anthroponyms written in an alphabetic script without vowels with their equivalent in cuneiform script, where the consonants can sometimes be interpreted in two or three different ways. Difficulties and misinterpretations arise when all the factors are not taken into consideration. As examples, the article proposes a few Ammonite and Edomite names of the 8\textsuperscript{th}–6\textsuperscript{th} centuries B.C., attested in West-Semitic epigraphic texts, mainly seal legends, and on clay tablets or stone inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian periods.

Keywords: Personal names Śanīpu, Ḫaṭṭaš/Ḫaṭṭuš/Ḫaṭṭiš, Ba-yad-'Il, Padō-'Il, Hamī-wāsā, 'Ilī-rām, Qaus-gabr, 'Aḥ-'immeh, 'Aḥ-'abū, Lēt-'ahuwa, Balbal/Bulbul.

The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire having been achieved in 2011\textsuperscript{1}, there is an opportunity to examine some West-Semitic personal names in the light of Assyro-Babylonian cuneiform sources and to pay attention to problems arising from this mixed research field for students not dealing with it usually. The identification of West-Semitic names with names attested in Mesopotamian cuneiform script is not a mechanical operation. It requires an adequate knowledge of the values of cuneiform signs in the period and the region concerned, and an acquaintance with the principles regulating the transcription of West-Semitic syllables in cuneiform script. An approximate approach

\footnote{1}{K. Radner, H.D. Baker (eds.), The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, Helsinki 1998–2011.}
to these problems related to Semitic phonology can lead to erroneous conclusions. The writer chose Ammonite and Edomite names rather than Aramaic, Hebrew or Phoenician ones, because they are not so often dealt with.

The well-known Ammonite statuette in the Amman Archaeological Museum (inv. J. 1656) bears a name read šnb by Fawzi Zayadine, who correctly equated the personage in question with the Ammonite king, whose name appears as mSa-ni-bu or mSa-ni-pu in the Annals of Tiglath-Pileser III, to whom he paid tribute in 734 B.C. The name was already read “Sanipu” in the English transcription of the Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament. Commenting this identification in his Corpus of Ammonite Inscriptions Walter E. Aufricht wrote: “This posits a common [b] / [p] vocalic interchange”. These words demonstrate an unawareness of the peculiarities of cuneiform script and a lack of acquaintance with linguistic phraseology in general. In fact, an eventual [b] / [p] interchange is not “vocalic”, but consonantic or simply phonetic. Besides, the cuneiform sign used in the Annals of Tiglath-Pileser III to designate the Ammonite king can be read indifferently bu or pu, thus Sa-ni-bu or Sa-ni-pu. Moreover, the cuneiform name is erroneously transcribed Šanipu, without the expected distinction between the cuneiform signs ša and sa. A problem apparently arises here in view of the use of two distinct sibilants in the sources: sin in Neo-Assyrian, šin in Ammonite. In reality, however, this problem is easily solved when one knows that phonetic changes in the pronunciation of the Neo-Assyrian dialect led the Neo-Assyrian scribes to use cuneiform signs with “s” to transcribe West-Semitic words and names pronounced with [š].

Zayadine’s reading šnb has been corrected in šnp by É. Puech in the inscription of the Amman statuette, while Ulrich Hübner rightly noticed that a letter was still following šnp and he proposed reading šnp’. Instead, the present writer saw there an unmistakable y, that he regards as the Ammonite genitive ending. In fact, as shown by br, “son of”,

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7 É. Puech, L’inscription de la statue d’Amman et la paléographie ammonite, “Revue Biblique” 92 (1985), pp. 5–24 (see p. 8). Although this reading was not accepted by F. Zayadine in: La Voie Royale (n. 2), p. 106, it appears as epigraphically correct.
the inscription is written in Aramaic, which usually indicates the final vowels. Also the writing is of the Aramaic type. In the Annals of Tiglath-Pileser III one should thus read Sa-ni-pu. In consequence, the consonantal equation šnp = Sa-ni-pu is perfect. Besides, the reading šnp(y) is confirmed by North-Arabian names. In fact, a name Šanīpu or, if one prefers, Šanti, is well attested in Nabataean and Ṣafaitic onomastics, with two attestations of šnyp in Nabataean and at least twenty-one published attestations of s²nf in Ṣafaitic. The same name might also occur in earlier cuneiform texts as Sa-ni-bu/pu-um or Za-ni-bu/pu-um, but the alternative spelling with SA/ZA requires an explanation, which is not obvious. It is also unclear whether Sanabbu or Sanappu in a Neo-Assyrian text from Ashur is etymologically related to Šanīpu.

The meaning of Šanīpu is unknown according to The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. In fact, no root šnp suitable for a personal name seems to be attested in Northwest Semitic and in Arabic. However, such a verb appears in Ethio-Semitic. In South-Ethiopic sänäf generally means “lazy”, but sänäfä is used in Tigrinya in the sense “to be inactive” and sänfa means in Tigré “to be weak”. A connotation “peaceful” or “frail” is thus quite possible in another language. The name appears as a good Semitic qatīl-type form, used in adjectives, and the root seems to appear also in Sabaic and in Ugaritic, but its meaning is not clear.

A name ḫṭš appears on two Ammonite seals from the 7th century B.C. The same name is attested most likely in contemporaneous Neo-Assyrian texts as Ḥa-an-tu-šú and in Neo-Babylonian texts as Ḥa-an-ta-šú or Ḥa-an-tu-(u/uš)-šú. The
difference in the sibilant is due again to the fact that there was a shift in the pronunciation of Neo-Assyrian, while the n indicates the dissimilation of a geminated t.

The vocalization reveals the existence of two variant forms of the name, viz. Ḫaṭṭāš and Ḫaṭṭūš, unless the cuneiform signs in “u” express an ō resulting from the well-known vocalic change ā > ō. However, the biblical form Ḫaṭṭūš of the same name favours a qattūl-pattern. The name is frequently attested in Ṣafaitic as ḥṭs\(^{20}\) and once as ḥṭs\(^{21}\). The latter form obviously represents the same name, but it is written in this particular case with an Aramaized spelling that does not distinguish ḥ and ḥ. The name occurs once in Nabataean under the form ḡtyšw\(^{22}\) with the final -w, typical of Nabataean proper names. This later spelling implies a pronunciation Ḫaṭṭiš or rather Ḫaṭṭēš, as suggested by the Greek transcription Χαττεσος\(^{23}\) which confirms the gemination of t. In the Hebrew Bible, the name is vocalized Ḫaṭṭūš \(^{24}\), and its Greek transliteration is Χαττους or Αττους. Both confirm the existence of a variant of the qattūl-type, to which we should relate the cuneiform spelling Ha-an-ṭu-(ū/uš)-ṣū. The root in question is certainly ḥṭš.

Despite its numerous attestations in West-Semitic onomastics, the meaning of the name Ḫaṭṭāš / Ḫaṭṭūš / Ḫaṭṭēš is unknown according to The Prosopography (p. 456) and to other publications. However, like in the case of śanīpu, a reference should be made to Tigre ḥaṭṭāša, “to sneeze”, and to Harari ḥaṭṭiš bāya, “to say ḥaṭṭiš”, i.e. “to sneeze”. This expression shows the onomatopoeic origin of the root and explains its vocalic variations. Although the Ge’ez root is ‘atāsā, like Arabic ‘aṭasa, “to sneeze”, an old relation to Tigre ḥaṭṭiša is possible. In this case, the personal name would mean “Sneezer”, like Arabic ‘āṭis, a frequent anthroponym in Ṣafaitic (‘ṭs’), attested also in Ţamūdic\(^{25}\) and in Nabataean (‘tšw)\(^{26}\).

If the proposed explanation of the names Śanīpu and Ḫaṭṭīš (with variants) is correct, this hides unknown historical events that should have taken place around 1000 B.C.\(^{27}\), bringing some Tigre people from Eritrea to Transjordan. In that period, the eastern Tigrean plateau was partly included in the cultural Afro-Arabian complex\(^{28}\).
The sense of the anthroponyms in question is explained by the name Ḫaṭṭušu-al-di-i, where aldi stands for the suffixed Northwest-Semitic word ḥld, “lasting life”, in Arabic ḥld. The name thus means “Sneezing for my lasting life” and shows that the proper name “Sneezer” expresses the venerable and widespread belief surviving in the custom of saying “God bless you!” or “Good health!”, when a person sneezes. It is a “good luck!” wish, applied to the newborn child. The same wish is expressed by the names Ḥaldū, Ḥldw, Ḥldy, Αλδη, Χαλδη, Ḥld’, Ḥld, Ḫālid in Old Arabian and in Arabic: “Lasting life!”.

On several Ammonite seals appears the name byd’l or bd’l, “In the hand” or “By the hand of God”. This West-Semitic name occurs frequently in Neo-Assyrian and in Neo-Babylonian texts where it is spelt Ba-a-a-di-DINGIR or Ba-a-di-DINGIR, but also Ba-di-DINGIR and Ba-a-du-DINGIR. The logogram DINGIR stands for the word “God” and can be transcribed ēl or il. The variant Ba-a-a-dī-DINGIR shows that the first part of the name is Ba-yad-, which exactly corresponds to Byd’l. It can be shortened to Bād-, which corresponds in turn to Bd’l.

Besides, the name of an Ammonite king is often transcribed Bu-du-DINGIR. However, this royal figure has nothing to do with Bd’l, despite older opinions in the contrary. One should read his name Pu-du-DINGIR and identify the king in question with pd’l, “God has redeemed”. The same Ammonite name is also transcribed Pa-du-ū-DINGIR in a Neo-Assyrian text mentioning two small golden rings presented to the Ammonite king on the occasion of his visit at the Assyrian court in Nineveh. The other members of the Ammonite delegation received each a silver ring. Both spellings Pu-du- and Pa-du-ū- indicate that the vowel a in the second syllable of the verbal form changed into ō or ū, thus. Padō-’Il or Padū-’Il. The spelling Pu-du-DINGIR does not

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30 W.E. Aufrecht, A Corpus of Ammonite Inscriptions (n. 5), Nos. 13, 26, 47, 99, 100, 103, 135. Excellent photographs of Nos. 13 and 135 were published in La Voie Royale (n. 2), Nos. 173 and 185. See also N. Avigad, B. Sass, Corpus of West-Semitic Stamp Seals (n. 16), Nos. 908 and 921.
34 R.P. Dougherty, Records from Erech (n. 19), No. 30, 2. Instead, there is no variant Ba-ia-a-di-DINGIR, as reported by R. Zadok, On West Semites in Babylonia during the Chaldean and Achaemenian Periods. An Onomastic Study, 2nd ed., Jerusalem 1978, p. 110. The name should be read ḫa-a-di-DINGIR; cf. Th. Kwasman, S. Parpola, Legal Transactions (n. 18), No. 175, 1; H.D. Baker, Iadī’il, in: The Prosopography (n. 1), pp. 486–487.
36 W.E. Aufrecht, A Corpus of Ammonite Inscriptions (n. 5), Nos. 13 and 33. The first seal is reproduced in La Voie Royale (n. 2), No. 173. See also N. Avigad, B. Sass, Corpus of West-Semitic Stamp Seals (n. 16), Nos. 857 and 965.
38 Ibid., lines 7’–10’.
represent a real Ammonite pronunciation of the name: it reflects the usual Assyrian vowel harmony. In fact, there is a typically Assyrian trend to harmonize the quality of the vowels, in this particular case under the influence of the long and probably stressed vowel ो / ū.

On a seal found at Tell el-Mazār appears the interesting feminine name ḫmyws, the first element of which is the West-Semitic and Arabic noun ḫam, “father-in-law”, while the predicate ws can be related to Arabic wāsā, “to help, to be generous”. The name should thus mean “My father-in-law was generous”, possibly a mother’s allusion to the marriage and to the following good life conditions. This interpretation of the name excludes any relation between the element ḫmy and the Neo-Assyrian feminine name Ḥammāia with geminated m, since ḫam, “father-in-law”, derives from the root ḫamā (hwnd/y), “to protect”. The seal was found in a tomb dating apparently from the 5th century B.C., but this lower date is not recommended for the seal either by palaeography or by the use of the internal yōd, because the final semivowel of ḫmw/y belongs to the root.

The second element of the name cannot be related to the Old Arabian personal name Yw’t, which appears in official Neo-Assyrian documents as Ia-ú-ta-. In fact, the usual Assyrian and Babylonian transcription of the Arabian interdental ţ is t, and we know at present that its West-Semitic transcription may be s, which is the normal rendering of etymological ţ in the Aramaic inscription of Tell Fekherye. This scribal practice is also attested by the Hebrew transcription b’lys of the name of the Ammonite king b’lyš’ (/Ba’alya’ta’/), with an omission of the final ‘ayin. However, on the seal from Tell el-Mazār, the ‘ayin cannot be replaced by an ‘alif.

The name ’lrm, “My god is exalted”, appears on a seal of unknown provenance, dating from about 700 B.C. and belonging to ‘bd’ n’r ’lrm, a servant of high position, as shown by his title n’r. The ’lrm in question was probably a manager of the Edomite

39 W.E. Aufrecht, A Corpus of Ammonite Inscriptions (n. 5), No. 117; N. Avigad, B. Sass, Corpus of West-Semitic Stamp Seals (n. 16), No. 872.
46 W.E. Aufrecht, A Corpus of Ammonite Inscriptions (n. 5), No. 55; N. Avigad, B. Sass, Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals (n. 16), No. 864.
royal court since the title n’r appears in connection with royal names, as in II Sam. 9:9 and in seal impressions of ’lyqm n’r ywkn, an abridged spelling of king Jehoiachin’s name (597 B.C.). In fact, the mêm of the seal inscription seems to be Edomite, instead of being Ammonite, as proposed by W.E. Aufrecht and some other authors. The assumed king in question is likely to be mentioned in the Annals of Sennacherib, where his name should be read m”DINGIR-a-a-ram-mu, i.e. ’Ilāya-rām, “My god is exalted”, with the Aramaic/Arabic theophorous element ’ilā(h). It can by no means be interpreted “Ea is exalted”, as done in The Prosopography of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, with a Mesopotamian divine name.

During the excavations of Crystal Bennett at Umm el-Biyara, the impression of a seal of a king of Edom was discovered and correctly read qwsg[br] above a sphinx advancing to the right, and mlk ’[dm] under the sphinx. The left part of the seal was not completely impressed on the document, that was lost, but the king’s name could easily be restored thanks to Neo-Assyrian mentions of an Edomite king Qa-uš-gab-ri in inscriptions of Esarhaddon and of Ashurbanipal. The theophorous element is transliterated Qa-uš, which perfectly corresponds to the Edomite form Qaws. The predicate is vocalized gabr, because the final vowel of the name should be viewed at that time either as a purely graphic feature or as a short vowel. This word corresponds to Hebrew geber, that usually means “man”, but one should check here the meaning of geber in the Book of Job, which was probably composed in a language different from Classical Hebrew, most likely in a Transjordanian idiom. Now, in Job 38, 3 and 40, 7 geber clearly means “hero”. Thus, the name Qaus-gabr probably signifies “Qaus is a hero”.

In an Edomite ostracon found in 1983 at Ḥorvat ʿUzza, some 8 km. southwest of the modern city of Arad, appears a personal name ’h’mh. The same name is spelt ŠEŠ-im-me-e in Neo-Babylonian texts and it occurs in several Neo-Assyrian texts from the 7th century B.C. under the forms PAP-im-me-e, PAP-im-me or PAP-me-e. Both logograms PAP and ŠEŠ stand for aḫu, “brother”, and they are interchangeable.

51 C.-M. Bennett, Fouilles d’Umm el-Biyara, “Revue Biblique” 73 (1966), pp. 372–403 and pls. XIV–XXV (see pp. 399–401 and pl. XXIIb). See also N. Avigad, B. Sass, Corpus of West-Semitic Stamp Seals (n. 16), Nos. 1048 and 1049.
53 I. Beit-Arieh, B. Cresson, An Edomite Ostracon from Horvat ʿUza, “Tel Aviv” 12 (1985), pp. 96–101 and pl. 12, 2. See also N. Avigad, B. Sass, Corpus of West-Semitic Stamp Seals (n. 16), Nos. 54 and 618, both apparently Hebrew.
From the comparison of these names it is evident that they do not mean “The brother is with him”, but “The brother of his mother”, ‘Aḫ-’immeh. The noun “mother” is vocalized ‘imm in the above mentioned Assyro-Babylonian texts, but ’umm is attested in ŚEŠ-um-me-e\textsuperscript{56}. It is a secondary form resulting from the labialization of the vowel i under the influence of the nasal labial m. Therefore, we cannot decide whether the Edomite noun “mother” was ‘imm or ’umm. Perhaps both dialectal forms coexisted. The h of the suffix cannot be expressed as such in cuneiform script, but it results from the spellings -me-e and -me-’ that the end of the name was -eh, exactly as in Aramaic and probably in Edomite. The interpretation of the name is confirmed by the Babylonian name A-ḫi-um-mi-šu, “The brother of his mother”, i.e. “His uncle”\textsuperscript{57}.

The shorter form PAP-me-e of the name in question is attested also in West-Semitic epigraphy by an Aramaic seal bearing the name ’hmh\textsuperscript{58}. The ‘alif is dropped here and the name was pronounced ’Aḥimmeh or ’Aḥummeh without the internal glottal stop.

What does such a name mean? It means that the newborn child takes the place of his deceased maternal uncle in the family. He is “the brother of his mother”. This does not imply a belief in the reincarnation, which is not attested among the Semites, but it reveals a strong feeling of the continuation of the family, of the permanence of the “Name”.

One should relate this kind of proper names to a similar onomastic group in which the second element of the name is “father”, ’bw, probably pronounced ’abuwa(a), a dialectal form derived from ’abūha or ’abūh(i), “her father”, “his father”, as suggested by the analogy with the Hebrew dialectal tradition in which ’abīhu becomes ’abīw.

This interpretation is confirmed by Assyro-Babylonian names like ’A-ḫat-abi-šu / ’Aḥat-abi-šā\textsuperscript{59} “The sister of her father”, i.e. “Her aunt”.

Now, a West-Semitic name ŚEŠ-a-bu -ū\textsuperscript{60}, ŚEŠ-bu -ū\textsuperscript{61} or PAP-a-bu-u\textsuperscript{62}, PAP-bu-u\textsuperscript{63} occurs frequently in Assyro-Babylonian texts. Its shorter form is by no means a scribal error: it is a phonetic spelling reflecting the pronunciation ’Aḥabuw with the loss of the initial ’alif of ’abū. It is attested also in Aramaic script as ’ḥbw, in the 7\textsuperscript{th} century B.C.\textsuperscript{64}

\textsuperscript{56} K.L. Tallqvist, Assyrian Personal Names (n. 17), p. 18a.
\textsuperscript{57} J.J. Stamm, Die akkadische Namengebung, Leipzig 1939, p. 302.
\textsuperscript{58} P. Bordreuil, A. Lemaire, Nouveaux sceaux hébreux, araméens et ammonites, “Semitica” 26 (1976), pp. 45–63 (see p. 48); N. Avigad, B. Sass, Corpus of West-Semitic Stamp Seals (n. 16), No. 1104.
\textsuperscript{62} Th. Kwasman, S. Parpola, Legal Transactions (n. 18), No. 134, r. 7”; K. Fabritius, Aḥ-ābū, in: The Propopography (n. 1), pp. 57–58. See also id., Aḥ-abi and Aḥu-ābu’a, in: ibid., pp. 57 and 69.
\textsuperscript{63} Ma’lānā/Ma’allanate tablets O. 3659, line 23; O.3685, lines 37 and 38.
Another name of this group occurs in Minaic inscriptions from Hellenistic period, that mention two women from Gaza called ṣlmbw. The identical name appears at Dura-Europos in a Greek inscription from 36/37 A.D., where the woman is called Σαλαμβουα, best known from G. Flaubert’s novel, but it means “Image of her father”. Another name of this group occurring at Dura-Europos is 'I[μ]αβουα, which is attested at Palmyra as '[']mbw. It means “The mother of her father”, i.e. “Her grandmother”.

There is another feminine name at Dura-Europos that seems to be related to this group, namely Ληθαχουας, which could be interpreted as *lēt-‘aḫuwa, “The strength of her brother”, possibly an allusion to the weakness of an elder brother who will need the help of his sister. This name has a partial parallel in cuneiform texts, namely PAP-li-’-ti/te or ŠEŠ-li-ti-’/ia, “The brother is my strength”. L’yt is a noun derived from the old Semitic root l’y, “to be strong”.

All the Greek transcriptions of these names seem to imply a pronunciation ’abuwa/’aḫuwa, and the cuneiform spelling with final -u/¬ú may be interpreted in the same way. In fact, the additional vowel sign -u/¬ú could be read -wa at the end of a name. This appears, for instance, from the occasional spelling Ni-nu-u of the city-name Nineveh, instead of the usual Ni-nu-a and of the older Ni-nu-wa. The Aramaic spelling ’ḥbw in the 7th century B.C. or ’ḥtbw in 482 B.C. does not contradict this interpretation, because the short vowels were generally not indicated at that time, not even at the end of a word. A possible parallel is found at the end of the 12th century B.C., when the final vowels were still correctly written in cuneiform script. We find there a name DUMU-ŠEŠ-at-tu-ú-a, apparently “The son of my sisters”, Bar/Mār-‘aḫattū’a, to be compared with later Bar-ahātt, “My sister’s son”. Some speculation is required here to explain this name, implying perhaps that the mother died and that the father’s sisters should take care of the child.

To finish with an easier case, one may refer to the ostracon from Ḥorvat ‘Uzza mentioning ’ḥ’mh. One can also read there the name blbl, which is already attested in

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67 Ibid., p. 412, No. 57, and pl. CXIII, 5.
69 F. Cumont, Fouilles de Doura-Europos (n. 66), p. 421, No. 72, and pl. CXV, 1.
71 J.C.L. Gibson, Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions II. Aramaic Inscriptions, Oxford 1975, No. 23A.
the Old Babylonian period as *Ba-al-ba-lum*\(^{74}\), with the mimation characteristic of that period. It is perhaps the “nightingale”, in Arabic *bulbul*, but in plural *balābil*. The different vowel cannot be considered here as a difficulty when we observe that the coq’s chant is called *cocorico* in French, *chichirichi* in Italian, and *kukuryku* in Polish.

The purpose of this paper was to present some new solutions and to show the relevance of a comparative study of Semitic names attested in alphabetic and in cuneiform scripts for their interpretation and understanding. Onomastics is, in fact, an important aspect of epigraphic studies, particularly in the field of West-Semitic and North-Arabian.