

# AYYALA: A ZOONOMASTICALLY MOTIVATED HEBREW FEMALE PERSONAL NAME, AND HOW SEMANTIC REINTERPRETATION AND OTHER FACTORS AFFECT THE CURRENT FIRST NAME

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## *Ayyala*: A zoonomastically motivated Hebrew female personal name, and how semantic reinterpretation and other factors affect the current first name

**Abstract:** This study examines the background of the female names *Ayyala* in Modern Hebrew and Pre-Islamic Jewish Aramaic *Yalta* (literally, 'doe'), and Biblical and Modern Hebrew *Tsivya* ('she-gazelle', but in Eastern Europe 'roe doe') – cf. New Testament *Tabitha* (Aramaic for 'she-gazelle') – in their historical and comparative contexts (e.g., in relation to Modern Arabic *Ghazala*, and to Hellenistic and Roman-age Greek *Dorcas*). The background is complex. The denotation of Hebrew names for 'doe', 'gazelle', and 'roedeer' varied historically and geographically. Does and gazelles are evocative across cultures, in Hebrew a perceived red doe running in the sky motivated a metaphor for the break of dawn, and in Jewish homiletics e.g. Moses' mother was metaphorised as a gazelle. **Keywords:** first names motivated by animal names, Hebrew *Ayyala* (Aramaic *Yalta*) and *Tsivya*, Arabic *Ghazala*, Greek *Dorcas*, Doe vs. Gazelle.

## 1. A first name with a complex background

The present study (see Table 1) is concerned with אַיְלָה *Ayyala*, an Israeli Hebrew female first name. Its informal pronunciation is *Ayála*, as often with first names in Israel (an emotional factor is involved in the position of the tonic stress, an affective paroxytone like in גְּלִידָה *glída* instead of \**glidá* 'ice-cream'). The formal pronunciation of the personal name is *Ayyalá*, like אַיְלָה *ayyalá* 'doe', 'hind'. The Hebrew masculine noun אַיִל *ayyál* denotes 'deer', 'stag'. Like אַיִל *áyil* 'ram', its etymological semantics is from the field of 'strength' (Both *ayyál* and *áyil* entered as loanwords ancient Egyptian, and persisted in Coptic: see Hoch 1994: 17, no. 1, and 1994: 29, no. 18.). The Hebrew male first name *Ayyál* was neologised in Israel, by semantic shift from the zoonym.

**Table 1. Structure of this article**

1. A first name with a complex background
  2. The gazelle standing for Jochebed, Moses and Aaron
  3. Feminine *ayyalá* or *ayyélet*: Evidence for unmarkedness
  4. The gazelle in Hebrew versus Old French literature
  5. Occurrences (Hellenistic to early Islamic eras)
- References

In the Babylonian Talmud, in its tractates *Gittin* 67b, *Berakhot* 51b, and *Shabbat* 54b, one finds the Aramaic female first name יַלְתָּא *Yálta* (<\**ayálta* יַלְתָּא ‘doe’), borne by the wife of Rav Nachman; she was the daughter of an Exilarch, i.e., the prince heading Mesopotamian Jewry in pre-Islamic Iraq under Iranic rule (first Arsacid, and then Sasanian). For example, at *Shabbat* 54b there is a discussion of some actions for the protection of ewes so they would not catch cold after shearing, or then when lambing: upon hearing about compresses made for a lambing ewe, Rav Nachman retorted to Rav Papa ben Samuel: “If so, you would treat here like Yalta!” – i.e., Rav Nachman’s own wife. In Aramaic, there is a pun, as both the ewe and a doe are animals, so this could be understood as though Rav Papa mistook the one for the other, but of course the actual point is the contrast between the expected treatment of a beast (whether ewe or *deer*) and of a *dear* person, such as Yalta for her husband.

Historically, geographical location affected how Jewish communities interpreted the masculine noun צְבִי *sěbi* (now [tʃvi]), which as per the original sense in the Hebrew Bible, as well as among the Jews of Western Asia or North Africa, denotes ‘gazelle’. In Europe, the absence of gazelles caused a semantic shift of *tʃvi* to ‘roedeer’, and of the feminine צְבִיָּה *tʃviyya* or צְבִיָּה *tʃviya* to ‘roedoe’. The latter, feminine form exists as a female first name among Ashkenazi Jews (for example, Tʃviya Lubatkin was a famous partisan in the Resistance against the Nazis), and is already found (*Šibyā*) in the Hebrew Bible as being the name of Sibiah of Beersheba, the mother of Joash, King of Judah (2 *Kings* 12:2; 1 *Chronicles* 24:1). The literal sense of her name was ‘she-gazelle’. Also in present-day Arabic, there exists the female first name *Ghazāla*, which literally means ‘gazelle’. In Baghdad, a particular Jewish family in recent generations had the surname *Ghazāla*, pronounced *Ghzála* [ˈɣzaːla] ‘gazelle’. I recently published, in an Australian journal, an article (Nissan and Amar 2012)<sup>1</sup> about the historical confusion between the senses ‘gazelle’ and ‘deer’ of Hebrew *sěbi* (now [tʃvi]). On 23 January 2013, the editor of that journal, Dr. Myer Samra, himself an Australian Jewish anthropologist of Iraqi background, sent me an email in which he provided interesting onomastic data which in turn inspired me to write the present paper: “I thought you might be interested in hearing that I met a lady a couple of days ago, an Israeli born woman, whose father was Syrian born, and she speaks Arabic fairly well. She said her name in Arabic is Ghazala, and in Hebrew Ayala! It seems the European confusion has encroached into the Middle East!”

In my reply to Dr. Samra, I agreed concerning the interestingness of such data, and suggested one further, likely factor in the selection of *Ayála* or *Ayyála* as being the Israeli name replacing *Ghazāla*, in the case of that woman. As personal names, *Ghazāla* and *Ayála* are rhyming, have the same number of syllables, the same place of the tonic stress, and the same vowels (approximately, as the first /a/ in *gházālā* is short, rather [æ] or, in some pronunciations, reduced to zero: *Ghzála*). Yet another factor in that woman’s father’s deference<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> We had previously published, also about gazelles in Jewish culture, the paper Amar and Nissan (2009). Cf. Amar (2008, 2009), Amar et al. (2010).

<sup>2</sup> Because of social positioning at the time that a huge influx of Jewish refugees arrived in the newborn State of Israel between 1948 and the early 1950s (with a massive immigration from Morocco following in the 1960s), their culture was not locally held to be prestigious, and the

to the Ashkenazi tradition of mixing up the senses ‘deer/doe’ and ‘gazelle’, when he(?)<sup>3</sup> named his daughter is that when he learnt Israeli Hebrew, in all likelihood the relevant zoological terminology he acquired was not precise. I ascertained in conversation with two educated Baghdadi-born Jewish men now in their eighties, that they groped for the equivalent of Hebrew אַיָּלָה *ayyalá* ‘doe’, ‘hind’ or אַיָּל *ayyál* denotes ‘deer’, ‘stag’, and consulted each other as to whether to translate with Arabic *ghazāla*, ‘gazelle’, or rather Judaeo-Arabic *ghzāla*. (As children in the 1930s, a gazelle, later released, sought refuge and was caged for a while in the garden of their country house outside Baghdad.) Two siblings of theirs also only came up with *ghzāla* (while also recollecting, with an effort, literary Arabic ظبي *ẓabī* i.e. ‘fawn’, ‘antelope’, ‘deer’; the lexical cognate of Hebrew צִבִּי *sēbi* ‘gazelle’: Klein 1986, s.v.; Kopf 1976). They did not ignore that the gazelle and the cervids are different, but their vernacular generalised the sense of *ghzāla*, also including ‘deer’ (unlike zoologists’ Standard Modern Arabic). Of course, one comes across individual variation in cognitive maps. At any rate, this anecdote is illuminating in that it underscores that the gazelle (the thing and the name) was conceptually more available than cervids in their milieu, whereas in Europe one would rather think first of cervids or, in some places, steinbocks or chamois.

Arab zoologists now use (Wik. Ar. s.v.) the names *ǰayæl* أَيْل ‘deer’ (m. sing.), *ǰæl-ǰayæl* الأَيْل ‘the deer’ (m. sing., written with vowel diacritic marks), *ǰæl-ǰayā’al* الأَيْانِل ‘the deer’ (m. pl.). Once told about it, my informants recognised this term right away.

## 2. The gazelle standing for Jochebed, Moses and Aaron

In his important dictionary of early rabbinic Hebrew, Jastrow (1903: 1253, s.v. *sēbi* [tsvi]) did not distinguish between “deer” and “gazelle”; also, he considered the two acceptations ‘desirable thing, beauty’ and ‘deer, gazelle’ as part of the same lexeme:

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culture of the political elite was of course held to be prestigious. This was compounded by the fact that at the time, official rhetoric stressed secularisation and a mild form of socialism: the need was claimed sometimes, rather selectively, to proletarianise immigrants, and to employ them in agriculture or in industry, something not difficult to accomplish as even though new arrivals usually were from the urban bourgeoisie or small bourgeoisie, as well as urban proletarians, at any rate they usually had to leave their possessions behind in their countries of origin. Of course, this produced social subordination. The father of that woman was from Syria, and the situation of Jews in Syria had been extremely vicious, until the almost total eradication and disappearance of Syria’s Jewish community around 1990.

<sup>3</sup> Or was the name chosen by his wife? Social culture in Israel in the 1950s was that neighbours used to be close – individualism only became the norm later on – and neighbours were not unknown to suggest a first name. The hypocoristic by which my own mother calls me was suggested by the lady neighbour in front. Incidentally, the name of Obed, King David’s paternal grandfather, was chosen by lady neighbours, according to *Ruth* 4:17.



*shel Yisra'el*. i.e., “And why was Jochebed likened to a (she-)gazelle? Because she raised the beauties / (she!) gazelles of Israel”, these being Moses and Aaron, who correspond to two breasts for which Scripture has the metaphor *kishnéi ofarim te'oméi tsviyá* “like two fawns, the twins of a gazelle”, explicated thus: “Just as the breast, neither is larger than the other one, neither is Moses greater than Aaron, nor is Aaron greater than Moses” (*ibid.*). This is quite awkward for modern sensibilities, but it is a way of thinking that was considered a delight in the Middle Ages across denominational borders. One could hardly come across a more blatant example than this one. (Christian exegesis indulges in allegory much more than Jewish homiletics does, or perhaps one should rather say, Christian homiletics as based on the Old Testament used to consider allegory to be more focal, but clearly Jewish homiletics also considered allegory highly, and it solely resorts to allegory when interpreting *Song of Songs*. Cf. Kamin and Saltman 1989, Kamin 1980, Gelles 1981, Weiss Halivni 1998.)

As for a feminine metaphor standing for two men, consider that the mother of two saints, and therefore the theme of maternity, is involved anyway. I am only aware of one other instance, this one from Hebrew hymnography, of a feminine metaphor applied to a famous man.<sup>5</sup>

### 3. Feminine *ayyalá* or *ayyélet*: Evidence for unmarkedness

Hebrew nouns have two declension cases: the absolute state, and the constructed state. The latter means ‘X of’ (this kind of construction is alternative to the use of a genitive, which Hebrew does not have, but for example ancient Akkadian, a Semitic language, did possess).

The constructed state of the feminine noun אַיָּלָה *ayyalá* is אַיָּלֶת *ayyélet*. Both forms exist at present in Israel as first names borne by women; and as first names, they are not interchangeable: a woman is called either *ayyalá* or *ayyélet*.

I recall that in the 1980s, I had a student who proudly announced her name as *Ayyélet*. There exists a kibbutz whose name is אַיָּלֶת-הַשְּׁחָר *Ayelet-Hashachar*, which

<sup>5</sup> During the morning prayers of the Feast of Tabernacles (except on Saturday), in a few portions of the liturgy men stand and hold a wreath of four vegetal species. The Four Species are the citrus fruit (*etróg*), and the festive wreath of three species which as a whole is named after the longest and most conspicuous one: the *luláv*, i.e., a young, not yet spread out branch of the date palm tree. In the same wreath, three myrtle branches are required (*Mishnah*, tractate *Sukkah*, 3:4), with three leaves on top for this to be valid. The fourth species is the willow: two willow boughs must be included. In the precept as stated in *Leviticus* 23:40, the myrtle is not named explicitly, and “a branch of a thick [i.e., leafy] tree” is stated instead. In contrast, “riverine willows” are named there explicitly. There are symbolical interpretations of the Four Species, and out of these, a mystical tradition is reflected in a particular Hebrew hymn (well-known among Levantine Jewish communities), entitled *Sukká ve-Luláv* (‘A Booth and a Palm-Branch’, authored by a Moses, according to the acrostic of that poem). According to the sixth (and penultimate) stanza, “The myrtle alludes to the three Patriarchs” (i.e., Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), as there are three myrtle branches; “Moses and Aaron are [the two] boughs of willow. / David for the *etróg* is a beautiful bride” (this awkward, idiosyncratic metaphor, *kalla kelula*, stands for ‘a perfect match’ in the allegory). This in turn is related to the tradition about the Seven Guests (*ushpizin*), who are biblical characters, and are one for each of the seven evening banquets in the booth.

is the biblical as well as the current name for dawn: literally, that compound means ‘the doe of blackness’, because the first red rays of the sun, rapidly expanding in the sky at dawn, were apparently likened to a doe running in the sky; darkness disappears, and the sun then appears. Of course, wild ruminants as associates of the sun are widespread in international folklore; e.g., Skrynnikova (2002) traces this motif in the Shamanism of Inner Asia. Cf. Nissan (2011) discussed textual or visual depictions of bull-riding (even Joshua’s) as a Sun motif.

Normatively in Judaism, in the period up to 70 CE when sacrifices were still permitted, the meat of gazelles and deer could be permissibly eaten in a lay context, but these animals were not eligible for sacrifice. This confinement to lay contexts of meat consumption is stated in *Deuteronomy* 12:15, 12:22, 15:22. Apart from ritual, there is a factually irreducible difference with respect to domestic ruminants: gazelles and deer can be tamed but not domesticated.<sup>6</sup> In deer species accessible to the ancient Hebrews, antlers were/are grown by males, not females, and it is precisely based on this absence of antlers in female deer that in the early and then medieval rabbinic literature there is a realisation that *ayyala*, though a feminine name, is an unmarked noun, i.e., it denotes the species, both males and females, and therefore may be mentioned on occasion as possessing “horns” (i.e., antlers).<sup>7</sup>

In the context of Jewish law, Amar (2008) is to make the distinction of the *tsvi* (gazelle) from the *ayyal* (deer) independent from considerations of lexical philology, and grounded in animal morphology, i.e., in anatomy. He remarks that not only did the early rabbinical authorities point at the shape of the horns (with branching out in the *ayyal*, but without diramations in the *tsvi*) a distinctive trait (*Hullin* 59b); they also made much of the diramations of the horns of the *ayyal* in homiletics. We find indeed, again in the Babylonian Talmud (tractate *Yoma*, 29a): “«To the conductor [of the chorus], on the ‘doe of dawn (*sháḥar*)’» (Psalms 21:1): Just as this *ayyala* (deer) has horns branching out to this side and to this side, likewise this dawn [the red aurora] breaks (*maḥsía*: lit. wounds, bleeds) to this side and to this side [...]. Just as this *ayyala* (deer), as long as its horns grow, they keep diramating, likewise the righteous ones, as long as they keep adding prayer to prayer, their prayer is heard [High Above]”. Lifelong horn growth in cervids was noticed. Rashi is Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac (Troyes, Champagne, 1040 – Worms, 1105). His gloss *ad loc.* understood *ayyala* is used here for ‘deer’ as being semantically unmarked, and that the feminine here does not refer to the female: “«This *ayyala*»: it employs [the feminine] not necessarily [to denote the female], as [in point of fact], the female has no horns”.

<sup>6</sup> A likely criterion of domesticity as a rationale for eligibility for sacrifice is not unparalleled in the ancient Eastern Mediterranean. Jan Bremmer claims (2005: 3682): “Basically, then, the Greeks selected only domesticated cattle for their sacrifice, and the origin of sacrifice does indeed not seem to go back before the time when cattle became domesticated in the ancient Near East. Yet in Artemis’s sanctuary in Kalapodi, excavators have found bones of boars and deer; the latter have also come to light in the Theban Kabirion and the Samian Heraion. In ancient Israel, too, excavations have demonstrated incidental sacrifices of fallow deer. Evidently, there were sometimes fuzzy edges at the boundaries of the accepted sacrificial victims in order to include the most popular game.”

<sup>7</sup> In Greek mythology however, Herakles “caught the Cerynthian hind, a female deer with golden antlers that was living in Arcadia” (Graf 2005: 3916).

#### 4. The gazelle in Hebrew versus Old French literature

From a book by Raymond Scheindlin (1991), one can see that the doe and the gazelle were roughly interchangeable in Hebrew medieval poetic metaphor. Even in translations from modern Hebrew literature, sometimes ‘doe’ is made to render *tsviyya*, even when the setting is in Israel, and an animal in the wild is being referred to. This is the case of Yitzhak Orpaz’s *Hunting of the Gazelle* (“Tseid Ha-Tsviyya”, 1966, in Orpaz 1973), a work analysed by Giulia Miller (2008); an earlier draft had the title translated as *Hunting of the Doe* instead.

Incidentally, note that Donà (2007) discussed the appearance of a deer or doe in medieval Christian hagiography. The gazelle instead was exotic, for Western Christianity. Discussing how Old French epics represented antiquity, Guy Raynaud de Lage remarked that in some famous romances, respectively about Troy and Alexandre the Great, exotic details appear or are even prominent: “Dans le *Roman de Troie*, mais plus encore dans the *Roman d’Alexandre*, d’Alexandre de Bernai, l’exotisme se fait jour ou s’étale” (Raynaud de Lage [1961] 1976: 139), e.g., when it comes to chariots or mounts. In the *Roman d’Alexandre*, III, 637–640, chariots have sickles rotating with their wheels, a sight unknown to the romance’s original audience.

In the *Roman de Troie*, v. 7905, the Chariot of King Fion is drawn by two camels. Or then, “un prince Africain étrangement monté” (Raynaud de Lage [1961] 1976: 139), in the *Roman d’Alexandre*, III, 733:

Moab, uns rois d’Aufrique, sist sor une gazele  
[Moab, a king from Africa, is mounted on a gazelle]

#### 5. Occurrences (Hellenistic to early Islamic eras)

Tal Ilan published (2002–2012) a *Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity*. Its *Part I* (2002) deals with names borne by Jews in Palestine in the period 330 BCE – 200 CE. *Part II* (2012), in the period 200–650 in the same country. *Part III* (2008), *The Western Diaspora, 330 BCE – 650 CE*, is concerned with countries as disparate as Egypt, Rome, and Greece. *Part IV* (2011), *The Eastern Diaspora, 330 BCE – 650 CE*, is concerned with such places as Mesopotamia, Syria, Persia, and Arabia.

For example, in Sec. 1 above I mentioned the Aramaic name, יַלְתָּא *Yálta* (<\**ayálta* אַיִלְתָּא ‘doe’), of the wife of a well-known rabbi from the Babylonian Talmud, Rav Nachman (Naḥman) or Nachmani (Naḥmani). Ilan (Vol. 4: 417) notes that he died in 320 CE (cf. *ibid.*: 41, Sec. 8.2.3), according to “a short, [...] Gaonic composition known as *Seder Tannaim ve-Amoraim*” (*ibid.*). It is from the Caliphal period: Iraq’s Jewish Gaonate, the then world leadership in religious matters to which Jewish communities worldwide used to turn with queries, flourished in the heyday of the Abbasid Caliphate of Baghdad.

Ilan (Vol. 4: 417) – cited from Harding (1971: 682) a form *YLṬ* recorded for Arabs, in Arabic pre-Islamic inscriptions – did not elaborate about the etymology (she is not an etymologist), nor did she mention the derivation יַלְתָּא *Yálta* (<\**ayálta* אַיִלְתָּא ‘doe’), which is given by Jastrow (1903, s.v. יַלְתָּא). Jastrow’s etymologies are often questionable (Kutscher 1972), because of his penchant to try hard and detect a Semitic etymon

where the etymon is more likely non-Semitic, but in this particular case he supplied the correct etymology.

The Greek female personal name Δορκάς *Dorcās* literally means ‘gazelle’. It occurs on the tombs of two apparently Jewish women: Arimmas’ daughter (see below), Δορκ[άς], in an epitaph from Cyrenaica from around 67/8 CE (according to the date on a tomb nearby); and Joseph’s daughter, Δόρκα, who is tentatively considered to have been Jewish because of her father’s name, and who died aged 33 (λγ in Greek numerals), according to an epitaph from Ptolemais (in Cyrenaica), earlier than 117 CE (Ilan, Vol. 3: 413).

Moreover, Ilan (Vol. 1: 316) signals a woman from Palestine, Δορκάς, Yohanan’s mother, mentioned by Josephus in his *Bellum Judaicum*, 4:145 (thus, the period was the 60s CE). צביא (*Sebia*) occurs, as being the name of a parent of Yohanan, on an ossuary from Mt Scopus in Jerusalem, from before 70 CE. Ilan (Vol. 1: 208), who considers this צביא (*Sebia*) to have been the father (not the mother) of this particular Yohanan, rejects an identification previously made in the literature with the Yohanan son of Dorcas referred to by Josephus.

Ilan (Vol. 1: 316) also enumerates in the prosopography from Palestine of women bearing the name Δορκάς one whose second name it was, namely, Tabitha (Aramaic טביתא for ‘gazelle’, Δορκάς is a Greek literal translation), who according to *Acts* 9:36 was resurrected by Peter. Moreover, Ilan (Vol. 3: 691, s.v. *Arimmas*) has a subentry for Marcus Arimmas, the father of Dorcas and Zeaina, mentioned in funerary inscriptions from Cyrenaica; Ilan (*ibid.*) remarks that *Arimmas* appears to be a typical name from Cyrenaica (cf. above).

Ilan (Vol. 1: 420) has an entry for the female name טביתא *Thabita*, as documented in Palestine. That entry lists the character from *Acts* 9:36, another woman from the Syriac *Assumption of the Virgin* 2, and yet another woman who was a maidservant of Rabban Gamaliel (and earlier than the Hadrianic war of 135 CE: so this was Gamaliel II, i.e., Gamaliel of Yavneh), according to the Palestinian Talmud, at *Nedarim* 2:1, 49d (thus, in text written several generations later on). Ilan (Vol. 3: 683–684) signals Tabitha, Philippus’ wife, in an epitaph from the island of Chios, dated to the first or second century CE.

Ἀϊαλάς – which Benoit et al. (1961: 226) interpreted as a Greek transliteration of the name אילא – is Hagai’s father, according to a document (Ilan, Vol. 1: 361). There also is a man called Ἀϊαλά in an inscription in Elijah’s cave (a pilgrimage site located on the slopes of Mt Carmel, in what is now the city of Haifa), earlier than the eighth century (Ilan, Vol. 2: 328, 557. On the latter, the wall inscription containing the name AIAAA is reproduced).

May the personal name אילא have had a zoonymic motivation? Ilan (Vol. 1: 361; Vol. 2: 328) does not raise that possibility. She rather signals unlikely etymological senses. Also note that Ilan (Vol. 2: 65, no. 24 and Vol. 2: 67, note 56) mentions אילא as being one of the variant spellings (a scribal correction by a copyist uncertain about what the precise name was) of the name of a particular rabbi, Eleazar, Barachiah’s son, according to the Babylonian Talmud, *Ta’anit* 10b. Copyists had, in place of *Eleazar*, אילא or other available similarly sounding names.

As for טבִּיָּא *távya*, the Aramaic masculine noun for ‘gazelle’, its usual spelling without diacritic marks, טביא, is polysemous, because sometimes טביא is a form of the



etymologically unrelated personal name **טוביה** *Tobiah*, *Tuuya* ‘Tobias’ (whose etymological sense is ‘G-d is good’). **טביא** as being a form of **טוביה** is dealt with by Ilan (Vol. 1: 110; Vol. 2: 422).

The Latin diminutive female personal name *Ursula* (lit., ‘little she-bear’) has nothing to do with the Aramaic masculine zoonym **אורזלא** *úržēla* or **אורזילא** *urzila*, which is arguably related to Arabic *ghazāla* ‘gazelle’ (pace Jastrow 1903: 33, s.v.): whatever the phonetic value written as **ר** <r> in the Aramaic word (one would normally expect that phonetic value to have been a voiced dental trill [r], as in a Mediterranean *r*), if there was a transition through a voiced velar fricative (like in German or French *r*), then it approximates the voiced velar fricative of Arabic *gh* as in *ghazāla*.

Curiously, **אורזלא** *úržēla* or **אורזילא** *urzila* was used, in Aramaic in the early rabbinic literature, for the young of an **איילא** *ayyala* (Aramaic for ‘deer’) in translation, in *Targum Song of Songs* 2:9 (whereas *Song of Songs* has **עֶפְרָא** ‘ófer ‘fawn’).

*Pesiqta Rabbati* 15 mentions an *urzila* of an **איילתא** *ayyalta*, thus ‘the young of a doe’. Thus, the semantic shift from ‘gazelle’ to ‘fawn’ (if this was a loanword from Arabic, rather than a lexical cognate: in this case, as *faux amis*, with differentiated senses) must have been complete, if *urzila* could appear in an Aramaic compound which makes it into the young of a cervid.

Furthermore, the Babylonian Talmud in tractate *Zevachim* 113b mentions a one-day-old *urzila* of a **רִמָּא** *rema*, i.e., the biblical **רָאֵם** *rě’ém*, which was reinterpreted as a huge ox. For folklorists, “The Great Ox” is international tale type 1960A. The *rě’ém* is discussed by Slifkin (2007: 50–55). The particular mention in *Zevachim* 113b is part of fabulous conjectures about how Noah could fit the *rě’ém* in the Ark,<sup>8</sup> and there is “testimony” from Rabbah bar Bar Hanah, famous for his tall tales about his travels. The passage is translated as follows in the so-called Soncino translation of the Babylonian Talmud (Epstein 1935–1948):<sup>9</sup> “Said R. Jannai: They took the young [of the *rě’ém*] into the Ark. But surely Rabbah b. Bar Hanah said: I saw a sea *rě’ém*, one day old, which was as big as Mount Tabor. And how big is Mount Tabor? Forty parasangs. Its neck, stretched out, was three parasangs; the place where its head rested was a parasang and a half. It cast a ball of excrements and blocked the Jordan! – Said R. Johanan: They took its head [only] into the Ark. But a master said: The place where its head rested was three parasangs? – Rather, they took the tip of its nose into the Ark. { ... } Said Resh Lakish: They tied its horns to the Ark.”

In the Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Bava Batra* 74b mentions creatures called *arzilei deyamma*, “sea gazelles”. This fits in a pattern of compounding that also includes the “sea goat” (which according to *Bava Batra* 74a, is horned), the “sea ox”, and the “sea donkey”.

<sup>8</sup> According to another passage about how Noah saved the *rě’ém*, in *Genesis Rabbah* 31, the *rě’ém* swam behind the Ark and (to say it with the translation in Jastrow 1903: 1672, col. 1, s.v. *talam*) “left furrows in the water as far as from Tiberias to Susitha” (i.e., Hippos, east of the Sea of Galilee, whereas Tiberias is on the western shore). We have here the earliest documented conceptualisation of how an overboard engine works in a boat, propelling it from behind...

<sup>9</sup> My {} braces; their square brackets. A note of theirs explains that a parasang is “nearly four English miles”.

In a paper in a series of his about fish names, Paul Barbier, fils (1910), discussed in Sec. 89 Latin *asellus*, *asinus* (which are primarily names for ‘donkey’). By semantic calque from the Greek equivalent (the fish name *onos*), one also finds the “sea donkey” (the genus *Gadus*?) in the Aramaic of the Babylonian Talmud: *ḥamra de-yamma* <ḥmr’ dym’> stated to be kosher (Babylonian Talmud, at *Avodah Zarah* 39a; cf. Dor 1997: 174), whereas contiguously the *tora de-yamma* <twr’ dym’> (Aramaic for “sea bull”) is stated to be non kosher (*Avodah Zarah* 39a; Dor 1997: 180). As a mnemonic device, the talmudic text pointed out a paradox: “Abbaye said: the ‘sea donkey’ is kosher, the ‘sea bull’ is non kosher. The signs for you [to remember] are: the one unclean [i.e., the kind of beast living on earth] is clean [i.e., the fish so named in the sea], and the one clean [the kind of beast on earth] is unclean [i.e., the fish].”

Lewysohn (1858), followed by Dor (1997: 180), identifies the *tora de-yamma* with the ray (*Raja*), a cartilaginous fish. Dor also has an entry for the *ḥamra de-yamma*, which he identifies with the genus *Gadus*, i.e., the cod, a sea-fish called *šibbūt* in Israeli Hebrew, in contradiction with the talmudic tradition and the Iraqi Jewish tradition up to the present, for which that name denotes a particular, much appreciated kind of riverine fish. Dor (1997: 174), s.v. <šybwṭ>, proposed that perhaps the talmudic fish called <šybwṭ> was *Gadus*, referring to the statement (*Ḥullin* 109b) that “the pig [tastes like] the brain of <šibbūt>”. Dor remarked that Lewysohn’s identification of the rabbis’ “sea donkey” <ḥmr’ dym’> with the cod was based on names in Aristotle and Pliny, and proposed that the analogy is correct: “One is right to assume that a fish called *Onos* in Greek and *asellus* in Latin – the ass of the sea – was called likewise in Aramaic. In the Talmud, usually the Greek names for fish appear in loan-translation.” Such semantic calques are also found in Syriac: <’rnb’ dyma> (literally “sea hare” is found in Syriac, with a cognate in Arabic, and is a calque after the Greek *λαγώς θαλάσσιος* (Löw 1969: 21, §84).

The *‘izza de-yamma* <‘yz’ dym’>, literally “sea-goat”, mentioned as a fish with horns in the Babylonian Talmud (*Bava Batra* 74a), was taken to be some fabulous animal by Jastrow (1903), and if so, this would correspond to the Graeco-Roman imaginary about a sea-creature half-fish, half-capricorn. Also consider Green’s (1986) discussion of part fish, part human or part goat characters in Assyrian iconography. Dor however, a zoologist rather than a philologist or an archaeologist, tentatively identified the *‘izza de-yamma* (Dor 1997: 177) with the fish *Naso brevirostris*, whose English name is *spotted unicorn*. It has a horn on its forefront. (Its Israeli Hebrew name is *qarnappōn érekh-qéren*, literally “long-horned little rhinoceros [little horn-nosed]”).

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