

HOW MENDELE MOKHER SFARIM GOT IT WRONG: ABRAMOWITSCH'S 1866 PHONO-SEMANTIC MATCHING OF ZOONYMS, & WHY HE NAMED THE AUKS (*ALCIDAE*) THE WAY HE DID

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How Mendele Mokher Sfarim got it wrong: Abramowitsch's 1866 phono-semantic matching of zoonyms, & why he named the Auks (*Alcidae*) the way he did

Abstract: A future famous novelist, in his *Natural History* Abramowitsch was the main moderniser of Hebrew zoonymy in the 19th century. We are concerned with his bird names from his volume on birds (1866), and in particular, with how he named the Auks (*Alcifformes*) from the northern Atlantic. In a sense, we solve a mystery: it was the extinct Great Auk that was named (rather than e.g. the Razorbill) by phono-semantic matching to a *hapax* from the Hebrew Bible, *alqum* by interpreting that term as 'no rising up'. This is because the Great Auk could not fly, and even more to the point, on the evidence of Abramowitsch relating about the named bird's then apparent extinction, because that bird would never rise again. We also discuss how Abramowitsch named the Antarctic penguin, considering that originally, in European languages, the lexical type *penguin* used to be applied to a flightless alciform species that became extinct.

Keywords: motivation of bird names (for 'Great Auk' and 'razorbill'), language modernisation, Modern Hebrew, biblical hapax, Shalom Jacob Abramowitsch (Mendele Mokher Sfarim).

1. Modern Hebrew bird names: A history of terminology

In this article (see Table 1), we are going to examine a puzzling zoonomastic item from a fundamental book in the origination of Modern Hebrew bird names, Abramowitsch (1866), by a future famous novelist whose beginnings as a writer were as a science populariser, within the Maskilic cultural project. The *maskilim* (Enlighteners), in Central and later Eastern Europe, were such Jews who were identified with the Enlightenment ethos. Interestingly, it was in the age of Romanticism, when in Germany the Enlightenment was a matter of the past, that the Jewish Enlightenment in Eastern Europe flourished, but amid a bitter struggle with those committed to tradition.

Table 1. Structure of this article

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A book by Mordechai Zalkin (2000) discusses the social aspects of the Jewish Enlightenment in the Russian Empire. Zalkin (2005) is concerned with the scientific divulgation literature produced by *maskilim*. Zalkin explains (2005: 266–267):

The encyclopaedic genre also includes the three-volume work by the maskil Joseph Schönhak of Suwalki (1812–1870), *Toledot ha-'ares* (History of the globe) (Warsaw, 1841–1859); the diverse writings by Zevi Hirsch Rabinowitz (1832–1869), especially his magnum opus *Yesodei ḥokmat ha-ṭeva' ha-kelalit* (Fundamentals of the natural sciences) (Vilna, 1867–1876); and Joshua Sirkin's *Ma'areket ha-domem* (System of mineralogy) (Leipzig, 1869). One of the key figures among these compilers of popular science was Shalom Jacob Abramowitsch, better known as Mendele Mokher Sfarim. Abramowitsch, who attached great importance to the dissemination of the maskilic ideology, was the adoption of scientific thinking as the defining trait of the contemporary maskil. Hence in the early 1860s he began publishing his comprehensive *Toledot ha-ṭeva'* (History of nature) (Leipzig, 1862–1872), a Hebrew translation of various works on natural sciences by Harlad Othmar Lenz,¹ Alfred Edmund Brehm,² Philip Jacob Beumer, and Christoph Gottfried Andres Giebel.³

The history of Modern Hebrew bird names⁴ is complex, often confusing (Fischler 1990a, 1990b, 1991). It began in the late 18th century. The turning point in the 19th century came with the Hebrew lexicon of birds by Shalom Ya'akov Abramowitsch⁵ (1866), who was to become the famous Yiddish and Hebrew novelist Mendele Mokher Sfarim.

A copy of a Hebrew zoology book from 1862 (it has been reported in recent scholarly literature) was found in the possession of the famous and much revered Rabbi Yosef Ḥayyim of Baghdad (1834–1909). This was the important Hebrew popular zoology work by Shalom Ya'akov Abramowitsch, who was to become the famous novelist Mendele Mokher Sfarim (ca. 1837–1917). An innovator in Hebrew zoonymy, he "spent more years

¹ Lenz (1842).

² Alfred Edmund Brehm (1829–1884) published his bulky *Das Leben der Vögel* (650 pages in octavo, apart from the front matter and the 24 colour plates) in Glogau in 1861, and a second edition appeared there in 1867. An English translation appeared in London in 1874.

³ The multivolume work by Christoph Giebel (1820–1881), *Die drei Reiche der Natur: Erster Abtheilung Die Naturgeschichte des Thierreichs, Amphibien, Fische*, was published in Leipzig (with Otto Wigand's publishing house) in the years 1859–1864.

⁴ Birds in biblical, talmudic, or later rabbinic zoology (Amar 2004) are further important topics, with some overlap with Hebrew or Talmudic Aramaic bird terminology.

⁵ *S.J. Abramowitsch* is the spelling he used himself in the German frontispiece. The actual pronunciation of his full name would have been *Shólem Yánkev Abrámovič*.

on *Natural History* than on any of his novels” (Aberbach 1993: 79). Mendele reworked a book by Harald Othmar Lenz (1842). What really stands out in the Hebrew version is the neologised zoonyms proposed by Abramowitsch, certainly the most important modern contribution to Hebrew zoonymy earlier than the 20th century. The three Hebrew volumes (Abramowitsch 1862–1872) were about Mammals (1862), Birds (1866), and Reptiles (1872).

Shalom Jacob ben Haim Moshe Abramowitsch, also known as Sholem Yankev (Broyde) Abramovich, used from 1879 the pseudonym *Méndelev Mokhér Sfarím*, or in Yiddish *Méndelev Móykher-Sfórim*, literally ‘Mendele the (Itinerant) Bookseller’ (the usual Israeli pronunciation is *Méndelev Mokhér Sfarím*). Born c. 1835 in Kapuli (Belorussia), in 1848–58 he lived in Lithuania and in the Ukraine (Vollhynia, Podolia); in 1858–69 in Berdichev; in 1869–81 in Zhitomir; in 1881–1905 in Odessa; in 1905–8 in Geneva; and then again in 1908–17 in Odessa, where he died in 1917. On the crucial role of Mendele in the formation of Israeli Hebrew, see Patterson (1962) and Kutscher (1982: 190ff). Mendele is sometimes referred to as “the Grandfather”, i.e., the founding father of modern literary Hebrew, who used post-Biblical Hebrew as a basis.

The contrast between Abramowitsch’s *Natural History* and his novels is so striking, that it has become a paragon among such scholars who claim unity of authorship for particular books of the Hebrew Bible. Ziva Shavitsky (2012: 128) – in the steps of Joseph Gedaliah Klausner’s historical works on the Babylonian Captivity and the Jewish Second Commonwealth (1911, 1953, 1956) – uses Mendele’s authoring his three volumes of natural history as a paragon of the extent to which the output of the same writer may be diverse.

In his *Natural History*, Shalom Jacob Abramowitsch set to familiarise Jewish readers in Eastern Europe with the subject in a fresh way, whereas they had tended to acquire knowledge and lore of the animal kingdom from traditional Jewish literature. Even though his natural history was mainly a reworking of a German-language zoology book by Harald Lenz, Abramowitsch’s creativity in respect of his devising Hebrew zoonyms was brilliant, hence the enduring importance of his zoological lexicon.

2. German *Alk* ‘Razorbill’, and a biblical Hebrew *Hapax*

אלקום *alkúm* is Abramowitsch’s (1866: 363) PM coinage (i.e., merely a phonetic adaptation, without any semantic relevance) for German *Alk*, i.e., ‘razorbill, *Alca*’ (more generally, ‘auk’),⁶ a bird of the northern Atlantic, the coasts of the British Isles, the Baltic, and

⁶ The term *Razorbill* is currently the standard English vernacular word used by British zoologists but now also by North American zoologists in order to refer to birds of the genus *Alca*. (English-speaking North American zoologists in the mid–20th century still used to call the genus *Alca* by the name *Razorbilled Auk*.) The lexical type *Alk* / *auk* is the lexical cognate within Germanic languages. In zoologists’ English, *Auks* denotes any member of family *Alcidae*. That family has been traditionally considered to be part of the order *Alciformes*, but now (with the raise of resystematisation as based on DNA analysis) there is a trend to consider the family *Alcidae* as being part of the suborder *Lari* (which formerly was the order *Lariformes*, and comprises the seagulls) within the order *Charadriiformes*.

“Razorbills nest along coastal cliffs in enclosed or slightly exposed crevices. [...] The world

Bretagne (nowhere close to places where Mendele ever lived, let alone biblical lands. Even its wintering is as south as the northern coasts of the western Mediterranean, leaving out anywhere east of the Tyrrhenian Sea).⁷

Biblical Hebrew אֶלְקוּם /ʔalqum/ is a *hapax legomenon*, appearing in *Proverbs* 30:31; its meaning is opaque, perhaps 'no rising up' (<אֵל 'no' + קוּם 'rising up').⁸ That literal meaning is counterintuitive, if reapplied to any of the Auks (*Alcidae*), because (Peterson et al. 1993, facing Plate 62): "Most auks have an erect posture when on their nesting ledges by the sea" (not as erect as the unrelated penguins of Antarctica, but like these, the auks are black and white. But when they swim, the position of the body of auks looks rather like that of such waterfowl when swimming as the ducks).

Thus, Biblical Hebrew מֶלֶךְ אֶלְקוּם עִמּוֹ *mélekh alqúm 'immó* (*Proverbs* 30:31) is translated as 'a king, against whom there is no rising up' (*The Holy Bible – King James Version*)⁹ or as 'a king striding before his people' (*The Holy Bible – New Revised Standard Version*).¹⁰ Comparison to Arabic *al-qawm*, colloquial Arabic *al-gôm* 'the people', 'the nation', would rather suggest "a king with his people [in arms] with him".

This is an example of using a semantically unclear, and in a sense empty signifier from the textual legacy of Hebrew (empty in the sense that it is not in use other than in its original biblical *locus*) in order to render a European ornithonym: the signifier being "empty" was, to Mendele, the same as the name being for the take. He recycled it, without there being any semantic connection. It is a **phonetic matching (PM)**, not a **phono-semantic matching (PSM)**. Cf. Zuckermann (2000, 2003) concerning those concepts, and their role in the formation of terminology in several modern languages.

There would be more semantic motivation if we were to playfully "explain" the English zoonym *clam* by the Latin adverb *clam* 'clandestinely', 'in a hidden manner', 'stealthily', as clams hide their inside by means of their shell and when alive would not themselves be open, or then because clams are themselves hidden because they are covered by water (or are found to have been covered once water no longer covers them).

population of Razorbills is estimated at about 500,000 to 700,000 breeding pairs. [...] Approximately 60 to 70 percent of the entire razorbill population breeds in Iceland" (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Razorbill>). "The Razorbill has white underparts and a black head, neck, back and feet during breeding season. A thin white line also extends from the eyes to the end of the bill. [...] During the nonbreeding season, the throat and face behind the eye become white, and the white line on the face becomes less prominent. The thick black bill has a blunt end." (*ibid.*).

⁷ See Map 182 in Peterson et al. (1993).

⁸ As the razorbill is a marine bird, there is the possibility that Mendele felt it easier to reapply to the razorbill (as being the new signified) the opaque extant signifier, the Biblical Hebrew אֶלְקוּם /ʔalqum/, whatever it originally denoted, because a marine creature, the coral, was already denoted by a similarly sounding Hebrew term, אֶלְגִּימִים *algumim* (*2 Chronicles* 2:7, 9:10–11), in the plural, an exotic staple brought from afar. It was identified as denoting either 'sandalwood' or 'corals'. As opposed to *2 Chronicles*, the parallel account in *2 Kings* 10:11–12 has a form that differs by metathesis: אֶלְמִגִּים *almuggim*, which in Israeli Hebrew is standard for 'corals'.

⁹ KJV (1987).

¹⁰ NRSV (1995).

3. A mystery solved: It was the extinct Great Auk that was named, by phono-semantic matching to *alqum* ‘no rising up’

In order to get a better understanding of why Mendele found אלקום *alqum* to be an apt name for the razorbill or any of the auks, refer to Nissan and Zuckermann (2013, Sec. 6), concerning how he dealt with the extinct dodo. On p. 8, after mentioning the extinct dodo and other birds that were extinct or facing extinction, Abramowitsch (1866) mentions fears about the impending or presumably already consummated extinction of

the wingless[!!!]¹¹ *alqum* bird, which dwells in the far north, whether it shall be counted now in the land of the living; as since sailors carried out the last time destruction and extermination among those birds,¹² which walk with difficulty (literally: ‘heavily’), they have been unheard of.

This clarifies the matter altogether. Abramowitsch was badly mistaken about the identity of the bird he named *alqum*, אלקום /ʔalqum/, literally ‘no rising up’ (<אֵל ‘no’ + קום ‘rising up’). To Abramowitsch, that bird would presumably never raise again indeed, as it was as dead as the dodo, quite literally so. Moreover, Abramowitsch conflated all auks with the extinct Great Auk (*Alca impennis* or *Pinguinus impennis*). See Figures 1, 2.

The Great Auk (*Pinguinus impennis*) was a large, flightless bird of the alcid family that became extinct in the mid-19th century. It was the only modern species in the genus *Pinguinus*, a group of birds that formerly included one other species of flightless giant auk from the Atlantic Ocean region. It bred on rocky, isolated islands with easy access to the ocean and a plentiful food supply, a rarity in nature that provided only a few breeding sites for the auks. When not breeding, the auks spent their time foraging in the waters of the North Atlantic, ranging as far south as northern Spain through Canada, Greenland, Iceland, the Faroe Islands, Norway, Ireland, and Great Britain.¹³

¹¹ Abramowitsch’s German source must have described the bird as flightless, but Abramowitsch rendered this by Hebrew wording that states that this bird had no wings.

¹² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Auk relates the following about the destruction of the last colony of Great Auks:

The last colony of Great Auks lived on Geirfuglasker (the “Great Auk Rock”) off Iceland. This islet was a volcanic rock surrounded by cliffs which made it inaccessible to humans, but in 1830 the islet submerged after a volcanic eruption, and the birds moved to the nearby island of Eldey, which was accessible from a single side. When the colony was initially discovered in 1835, nearly fifty birds were present. Museums, desiring the skins of the auk for preservation and display, quickly began collecting birds from the colony. The last pair, found incubating an egg, was killed there on 3 July 1844, on request from a merchant who wanted specimens, with Jón Brandsson and Sigurður Ísleifsson strangling the adults and Ketill Ketilsson smashing the egg with his boot.

The latter person, Ketill Ketilsson (whose name is an iterative name), is quite aptly named when Semitic languages are considered (Arabic, Aramaic, and Hebrew), because the lexical root \sqrt{qtl} in Arabic and \sqrt{qtl} in Aramaic and Hebrew (<Aramaic) is associated with ‘to kill’. Iterative personal names are the subject of Nissan (2013c, 2013d). Apt personal names, as well as paradoxical person names, are the subject of Nissan (in press, I).

¹³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Auk



Figure 1. A razorbill in flight. Photographed by D.L. Jameson on 6 July 2009 at Gannet Island, Labrador, Canada. Image in the public domain.¹⁴

The Razorbills,¹⁵ which are the Great Auk's closest relative,¹⁶ do fly, unlike the Great Auk, which was flightless¹⁷ (and thus, more vulnerable;¹⁸ a motive for hunting the Great

¹⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Razorbill_in_flight.jpg Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.

¹⁵ I.e., the species *Alca torda*, as opposed to the extinct Great Auk (*Alca impennis* or *Pinguinus impennis*). “While the Razorbill is the only living species, the genus *Alca* had a much higher diversity in the Pliocene. Some ornithologists also feel it is appropriate to retain the Great Auk in the genus *Alca*, instead of *Pinguinus*” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Razorbill>). “While the Razorbill is the only living species, the genus *Alca* had a much higher diversity in the Pliocene. Some ornithologists also feel it is appropriate to retain the Great Auk in the genus *Alca*, instead of *Pinguinus*.” (*ibid.*).

¹⁶ “Analysis of mtDNA sequences has confirmed morphological and biogeographical studies suggesting that the Razorbill is the Great Auk's closest living relative”, according to http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Auk which cites Mowm et al. (2002).

¹⁷ The murre (the genus *Uria*) also belongs to the family *Alcidae*. The thick-billed murre (*Uria lomvia*, a species from Canada) is quite inefficient when flying: “the bird used almost three times as much energy as the bar-headed goose, previously considered the least efficient flying bird”, *New Scientist* magazine reports in an unsigned item (“These wings were made for diving”, p. 16 in the issue of 25 May 2013, vol. 218, no. 2918). A researcher was quoted as saying “You can't have a wing that's both good for propulsion in water and in air”. An extreme case is that of the penguins being unable to fly, as they only use their wings as flippers.

¹⁸ Also the razorbills were threatened, at a time: “In the early 20th century, Razorbills were harvested for eggs, meat and feathers. This greatly decreased the global population. In 1917, they were finally protected by the “Migratory Bird Treaty Act” which reduced hunting” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Razorbill>).

Auk was demand for its down, and later on, the bird's very rarity also fostered demand).¹⁹ The Great Auk and its disappearance are the subject of books by Jeremy Gaskell (2000), Emily Crofford (1989), and Errol Fuller (1999).

The specific name, *impennis*, in the scientific name *Alca impennis* or *Pinguinus impennis* refers to the lack of flight feathers (this are called *pennae* in Latin, but in Latin the sense may be broader, denoting any feathers).

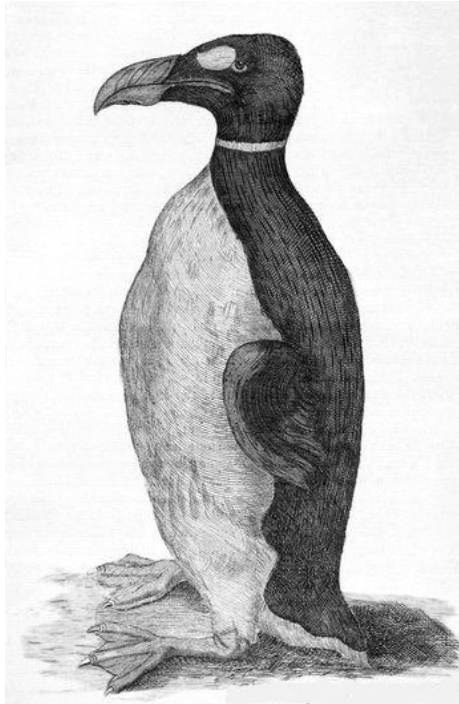


Figure 2. A Great Auk as drawn by Olaus Wormius (Ole Worm), and published in his book *Museum Wormianum* (1655).²⁰

¹⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Auk explains: “Early European explorers to the Americas used the auk as a convenient food source or as fishing bait, reducing its numbers. The bird’s down was in high demand in Europe, a factor which largely eliminated the European populations by the mid-16th century. Scientists soon began to realize that the Great Auk was disappearing and it became the beneficiary of many early environmental laws, but this proved not to be enough. Its growing rarity increased interest from European museums and private collectors in obtaining skins and eggs of the bird. On 3 July 1844, the last two confirmed specimens were killed on Eldey, off the coast of Iceland, which also eliminated the last known breeding attempt. There are unconfirmed later reports of roaming individuals being seen or caught. A record of a bird in 1852 is considered by some to be the last sighting of the species. The Great Auk is mentioned in a number of novels and the scientific journal of the American Ornithologists’ Union is named *The Auk* in honour of this bird.” Naming a periodical catering to ornithologists after some bird is a widespread pattern.

²⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Wormius%27_Great_Auk.jpg “Only known illustration of a Great Auk drawn from life, Ole Worm’s pet received from the Faroe Islands, which was figured in his book *Museum Wormianum*” (*ibid.*). Cf. Worm (1655), Schepelern (1971).

The Great Auk was flightless. Nevertheless, Abramowitsch was not correct, when stating that that bird was wingless. It did possess wings, but these were too short for enabling flight:²¹

The Great Auk was 75 to 85 centimetres (30 to 33 in) tall and weighed around 5 kilograms (11 lb), making it the largest member of the alcid family. It had a black back and a white belly. The black beak was heavy and hooked with grooves on its surface. During summer, the Great Auk had a white patch over each eye. During winter, the auk lost these patches, instead developing a white band stretching between the eyes. The wings were only 15 centimetres (5.9 in) long, rendering the bird flightless.

And indeed, the smallness of that bird's wing provided the semantic motivation for naming the bird among the Inuit (Eskimo people): "The Inuit name for the Great Auk was isarukit-sok, which meant 'little wing'."²²

4. The [Antarctic] Penguin, and the northern "Penguin" of old

What Abramowitsch did, then, was to confuse the auks with the Great Auk. Consider in addition another source of confusion: the Great Auk is the old northern "penguin",²³ the bird that used to be called *penguin* before it disappeared and its name was taken over by the birds from Antarctica and surrounding seas we now call *penguin*. Dor's Hebrew lexicon of Vertebrates (1965) has an entry on p. 260 for the species *Pinguinus impennis*, his Hebrew corresponding headword being the compound פִּינְגְּוִין קַדְמוֹן *pingvin kadmón* (literally, 'ancient penguin'). He states (our translation):

A large waterfowl from Order *Alciformes* [אַלְקַאיִם *alka'im*]. It became extinct in the 19th century. It had the size of a goose. It was flightless. It used its wings as flippers. It had to climb upon rocks in order to nest. Its habitat was on the coasts of Iceland. It was exterminated by humans. The name *penguin* originally applied to it (it means in Celtic 'white head'). Once this bird was destroyed, its name was transferred to southern birds which resemble it (see *pingvina'im* [*Sphenisciformes*]).

²¹ The quotation is from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Auk

²² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Auk citing Cokinos (2000: 314). The same Wikipedia entry claims: "The Great Auk was an important part of many Native American cultures which coexisted with the bird, both as a food source and as a symbolic item. Many Maritime Archaic people were buried with Great Auk bones, and one was buried covered in over 200 auk beaks, which are assumed to have been part of a cloak made of their skins."

²³ "The Great Auk was one of the 4400 animal species originally described by Carolus Linnaeus in his 18th-century work, *Systema Naturae*, in which it was named *Alca impennis*. The name *Alca* is a Latin derivative of the Scandinavian word for Razorbills and their relatives. The species was not placed in its own genus, *Pinguinus*, until 1791. The generic name is derived from the Spanish and Portuguese name for the species, and the specific name *impennis* is from Latin and refers to the lack of flight feathers or penna." This quotation is from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Auk That same webpage also claims: "The word 'Penguin' first appears in the 16th century as a synonym for 'Great Auk.' It may be derived from the Welsh *pen gwyn* 'white head', although the etymology is debated. When European explorers discovered what are today known as penguins in the Southern Hemisphere, they noticed their similar appearance to the Great Auk and named them after this bird, although they are not related." Note however that Latin *pinguis* 'fat' (adj.) > diminutive: *pinguinus*.

Abramowitsch (1866) refers to Antarctica's penguins by a clumsy semantic calque, literally 'fat goose' (אָנז פֿאַט גאָס אַנז *avváz šamén*), which broadly speaking was from the international name, itself based upon the scientific name of the extinct flightless auk (*Pinguinus* is semantically motivated by fatness). One can see why, from the caption of a penguin image in no. 54 in Plate 9 from the end of Abramowitsch (1866): the Hebrew semantic calque was directly from a German name, *Fettgans*, which appears in that caption along with the Hebrew neologised compound אָנז פֿאַט גאָס.

In contrast, in no. 53 in Plate 8, the image captioned in Hebrew as אֱלָקוּם גָּדוֹל *alkum gadol* (literally, 'great auk') and in German as *Grosser Alk* (of which clearly the formation of the Hebrew compound was by semantic calquing) was drawn standing erect, the way we are used to see the penguin stand. However, when in the respective text Abramowitsch (1866) had proposed his Hebrew neologism for the auk, he gave the scientific name as *Alca arra*, and rendered the German name he transcribed in two words דּוּמְמַע לּוּמְמַע *Dummelumme* (now not standard in German, but *Lumme* is the genus *Uria*, i.e., in English, the *guillemot*) – literally 'stupid guillemot' – with אֱלָקוּם אוֹיְלִי *alkum evili*, 'stupid auk'. Schönhak (1841) had called in Hebrew הַטּוֹבֵל הָאוֹיְלִי *hatovel ha'evili* ('the stupid diver') the bird whose German name he gave as דּוּמְמַעֵר לּוּמְמַעֵר (*Dummerlummer*); cf. Fischler (1991: 22, no. 4).

The Italian actress Monica Vitti first played dramatic roles in four films directed by Michelangelo Antonioni, but then she successfully turned to comedy, starting with the fourth episode, *La lepre e la tartaruga* (*Le lièvre et la tortue*), directed by Alessandro Blasetti, in the 1962 film *Le Quattro verità*, whose four episodes were inspired by fables by Jean de La Fontaine. The other three episodes of *Les quatre vérités* were directed by Luis García Berlanga, René Clair, and Hervé Bromberger. The original languages of the film were French and Spanish.

In Vitti's cinematic filmography within the comedy genre, in the 1970 film *Amore mio aiutami* [*My Love Help Me*], directed by Alberto Sordi (who in the film, plays the character of Giovanni Machiavelli, Vitti's husband),²⁴ there is a scene in which two couples meet around the same table at the restaurant.

The husband of the character played by Vitti relates that they had taken part in a cruise to the northern seas. Vitti blurts out that she saw the penguins. The other woman coldly responds that that cannot be. Vitti insists, and, while still sitting, mimics the movements of penguins walking. The other woman coldly explains that she is a biology teacher, and that there are no penguins in that area. Vitti's face becomes tragic, and she spells out: "TO HO VISTO I PINGUINI!" ("I saw penguins!").

Vitti's character is all the more humbled because the other woman humbles here in the presence of the man, Valerio (sitting on the side of that woman) whom Vitti's character is trying hard to impress (to her own husband's chagrin: it is a bitter-sweet comedy). The scene was filmed on board of the famous cruise ship Raffaello.

It apparently occurred to nobody involved in making that film that Vitti's character may partly save face by claiming there must be a misnomer, and how do you call those

²⁴ Nissan is grateful to Ezio Albrile, a Turin-based Iranologist who also publishes about films, for finding an expert who identified the film based on a description of the penguins scene played by Monica Vitti.

birds she saw? If it did occur to whomever wrote the script of that episode, that perhaps the movements she was mimicking could be those of auks (because of their feet being quite back in the body), then that realisation may have been suppressed because then the comical effect would have evaporated.

What is somewhat embarrassing about Abramowitsch's blunder concerning his naming the auks by a name that intimates that for them, there is 'no rising up', is that whereas that sad detail befits the extinct *Pinguinus impennis*, it by no way befits the several extant alciform taxa.

One can nevertheless excuse Abramowitsch's mistaking the part for the whole, the auk of auks for all auks, once one considers the various European names for *Pinguinus impennis* (Jørgensen 1958: 50, §285): English *Great Auk*, standard German *Riesenalk*, Dutch *Reuzenalk*, and Spanish *Alca gigante*.

Other names include Hungarian *Óriás alka*, Czech *Alka velká*, Finnish *Siivetön ruokki* (where *Ruokki* is the Finnish name of the Razorbill, *Alca torda*), and in the Scandinavian languages one finds Icelandic and Norwegian *Geirfugl*, Danish *Gejrfugl*, and Swedish *Garfågel*.

French *Grand pingouin* shares 'grand' with English *Great Auk*, and shares the noun within the compound with the scientific name, as well as with the Modern Greek name (which is a semantic calque of the scientific name): Πτυκούϊνος ὁ ἄπτερος, where the reference to this "penguin" being flightless does not distinguish it from Antarctica's penguins, but the rationale instead is that the Modern Greek name renders literally *Pinguinus impennis*. Cf. Italian *Alca impegne*.

Russian instead has different names (not merely different compounds) for the various alciform taxa, and the only Russian compound name that shares the noun with the extinct *Great Auk* (Бескрылый чистик) is the Black Guillemot, whose scientific name is *Cerpphus grille*, and whose Russian name is Обыкновенный чистик (Jørgensen 1958: 51, §289). The shared noun is чистик.

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