

**SEMITIC-LANGUAGE NAMES FORMED BY SEMANTIC
MOTIVATION FROM ‘LESS’, AND THEIR TRANSCULTURAL
FORTUNE: WHIG LEADERS AT BALLIOL AS DRYDEN’S “SONS
OF BELIAL”, AND SWAHILI *MBILIKIMO* FOR ‘PYGMY’**

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Abstract: The biblical compositional pattern “sons of no X” for “X-less ones” has been somewhat (just a bit) productive in Modern Hebrew, but as the Old Testament has been so influential across cultures since the Septuagint became available in the Hellenistic world, one comes across novel uses to which “son of Belial” has been put, such as in Dryden’s political allegory in *Absalom and Achitophel*, even as the etymology of *Belial* was not transparent to ones who did not know Hebrew and its word /bli/ ‘without’. Moreover, Arabic /bala/ ‘without’ also occurs in word-formation, and as the influence of Arabic along the eastern coast of Africa resulted in the Swahili language, the Swahili name for the Pygmies was formed as such an Arabic compound.

Keywords: semantic motivation, word-formation, Semitic languages, Hebrew, Arabic, ethnonyms from Swahili, Dryden’s satire.

The length of a cubit, and human stature

Cultural awareness, among some Mediterranean cultures by Hellenistic and Roman times, of Pygmies¹ is reflected in the history of that very name of theirs, in Greek Πυγμαῖοι *Pygmaioi* in the plural,² the etymological sense of whose ancient Greek

¹ See Pietro Janni’s studies (1978, 1990) on ancient to medieval ideas on Pygmies. Pygmies as a living people and culture are a research topic in in anthropology; see e.g. the volumes edited by Serge Bahuchet (1979) and Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza (1986), a book by Kairn Klieman (2003), as well as e.g. Hewlett (1996), Becker et al. (2011), and on Pygmies’ music, Grauer (2009) and Rouget (2011).

² One finds the Pygmies as early as the Iliad 3.3–6, in a claim they are constantly at war with the cranes (Muellner 1990). In Greek art, Pygmies were to ride goats. Philostratus related that the Pygmies came across the sleeping Heracles and tried to bind him down (cf. Jonathan Swift’s Gulliver bound down while asleep by the Lilliputians), but when he stood up, they fell off. Alex Scobie (1975) signalled parallels of the battle of the Pygmies and Cranes (geranomachy) in Chinese, Arab, Karaitic Jewish (in Judah Hasassi’s *Eshkol ha-Kofer* from Constantinople, 1148), and Native North American (e.g., Cherokee) sources. In the Chinese text *Shên i King*, dated to the fourth or fifth centuries C.E., one finds: “In the region of the Western Sea (*Si hai* = Mediterranean) is the land of the cranes (*hao kuo*) where men and women are only seven

form is ‘cubit-long’,³ ‘ones as long as your forearm’. By transparent etymology, Greek *πυγμαῖος* *pygmaios* (hence Latin *Pygmaeus*) means ‘[a man who is] fist-tall’, ‘no taller than a man’s fist’, but the sense of *πυγμή* *pygmē* is ‘the length of the forearm’: by ‘fist’, a unit of measure was rather intended (the cubit indeed), corresponding to the distance between the elbow and knuckles.

The very notion that the concept ‘cubit’ may form a name for a category of people has influenced in turn at least one modern language, in a context unrelated to Pygmies. Let us see how. In Modern Hebrew, *gammadim* means ‘dwarfs’.⁴ The word *gammadim* is found in the Bible, but it only was traditional exegesis that ascribed to this ethnic

inches tall [...] The only creatures they fear are cranes which come here from the sea. These cranes which in one single flight travel a thousand miles, can gobble them (sc. the pygmies) up” (Scobie 1975: 123).

It is important that the Pygmy peoples of central Africa were only named that way by European explorers in the 19th century. That reference to Greek myth has a parallel in the aftermath of the European discovery of the Americas, as Europeans sometimes matched what they saw to notions from either classical knowledge or myth, or to the Bible.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pygmy_peoples states: “In anthropology, **pygmy peoples** are ethnic groups whose average height is unusually short. The term **pygmyism** is used to describe the phenotype of endemic short stature (as opposed to disproportionate dwarfism occurring in isolated cases in a population) for populations in which adult men are on average less than 150 cm (4 ft 11 in) tall. ¶ The term is primarily associated with the African Pygmies, the hunter-gatherers of the Congo basin (comprising the Bambenga, Bambuti and Batwa). The term ‘**pygmoid**’ is a traditional morphological racial category for the Central African Pygmies, considered a subgroup of the Negroid category. The term ‘Asiatic Pygmies’ has been used of the Negrito populations of Southeast Asia and other Australoid peoples of short stature. ¶ The Taron people of Myanmar are an exceptional case of a ‘pygmy’ population of East Asian phenotype”.

³ It happens to be the case that in Japanese, the term for ‘dwarf’ is *kobitō*, which is etymologically unrelated to the English Latinate noun *cubit*, whose sense is behind the new meaning of both Hebrew *gammadim* and English *pygmy* (because of the sense of its Greek etymon). For the derivative *cubital*, corresponding to *cubitale* in Italian, consider that the latter has in Italian also the sense ‘very large’ (applied to written or typed characters): *a caratteri cubitali* ‘in very large letters’; *un titolo a caratteri cubitali* ‘a banner headline’.

⁴ Yet, children learn to associate the term with elves from fairytales. One such example are the eponymous forest-dwelling population of the television animation series *Schtroumpfs*, called in Hebrew *Dardasim*. This is the Hebrew name for both the series, and the blue-coloured elves that feature in it. (The author of the *Schtroumpfs* is Peyo, a pen-name for Pierre Culliford, from Belgium. In Italy, the *Schtroumpfs* are known by the name *Puffi*.) The term *dardás*, whose plural form is *dardasim*, had already existed in Modern Hebrew, for ‘slipper’ / ‘slippers’. It was patterned out of an Aramaic term found in the rabbinic literature, especially in the Palestinian Talmud. From the 1980s, if an Israeli child was to be asked what *dardasim* are, he or she is likely to reply that they are *gammadim*. The blurring of the lexical distinction between ‘elves’ and ‘dwarfs’ is exemplified by an episode I witnessed in the summer of 1983 at a conscription centre in Beer-Sheva, when a youngster who probably was not enlisted because of his evidently dysfunctional behaviour addressed a short, nasty officer by calling at him: *Dardás!*

European folklore distinguishes between elves and human dwarfs. For a discussion of dwarfs

name the sense ‘dwarfs’. Unlike the Caphtorites (*kaftorim*) from *Genesis*, 10:14, who in *Genesis Rabbah*, 36:8, were claimed to have been *nannasim* (i.e., ‘dwarfs’, from Greek *nanos*),⁵ *gammadim* took on the lexicalised denotation ‘dwarfs’.

The Pisa-born Israeli linguist Gad (Giorgio) Ben-Ammi Sarfatti (1916–2005) stated (Sarfatti 1975/6: 118, my trans.):

In the Bible *gammadim* is the name of a people (*Ezekiel*, 27:11). The new meaning was influenced by *gomed*, a unit of length [*(Judges*, 3:16)] which is close to the ‘*ammá* [cubit, literally: forearm], and according to [the 11th-century commentary by] Rashi *ad loc.* [i.e., in *Ezekiel*]: “There are those who interpret that these are *nannasim* (dwarfs) and that they fit inside the measure of an ‘*ammá*’. [I disagree with the following:] Perhaps the modern usage was reinforced by the English *gnome*.

Sarfatti also remarked (Part I: 260, §7.2, my trans.):

Not infrequently, the new sense in which a given term is used nowadays [in Hebrew] through folk etymology, is based on a homiletical interpretation of Scripture, or on ancient exegesis. Some would rather have me not include such terms in an article concerned with the phenomenon in Modern Hebrew. Yet, I included them, because the bottom line is that the transition from the original sense to the modern sense is a folk-etymological process, and *a priori*, it would have been in the remit of present-day speakers of Hebrew not to adopt the acceptation given by the particular homiletical text or by the given exegete. Sometimes I alluded to this intermediate stage, e.g., at the entries for the terms *gammad*, [...]

in Celtic tradition, and how this was reflected in literature, see a book by Vernon J. Harward (1958).

The late Dov Sadan (1989) has shown how folklore and literary precedents contributed to shape a depiction of “dwarfs of the night” in a Hebrew ballad, so titled (*Gammadei Láyla*), by the Volhynian-born great poet Haim Nahman Bialik. Eliezer Steinberg translated that ballad into Yiddish, under the title *Lilliputlech*. Yet, the loanword *lilliputn* only occurs at the start of the translated ballad. In Bialik’s Hebrew poem, a group of “dwarfs” (elves), wearing black hats on their small heads, are described as they come down from a hill, singing, “unconcerned like the dream of a little child”, aligned in rows by seven, and then in the forest downhill they dance, then excavate treasures from under the oaks. Their laughter is like the laughter of children. At dawn, they go back uphill and disappear. These are elves, by no means men from Jonathan Swift’s *Lilliput*. Bialik’s poem appears to reflect the conception of fairytale dwarfs from modern Western culture, rather than native ethnography, which (in its lexical reflection) is one of the two themes – along with literary treatment – of Sadan’s article.

⁵ Dwarfs in culture are a subject by itself. See, e.g., Veronique Dasen’s *Dwarfs in Ancient Egypt and Greece* (1993), cf. Dasen (1988, 1990), adopting also a medical history perspective (cf. Schrupf-Pierron 1934). In contrast to short types of human groups from physical anthropology, individual dwarfs, including ones from antiquity, are persons affected by pathological limited growth. Joan Ablon (1984) provides a sociological discussion of dwarfs (the euphemism is *little people*) in the present-day United States. There used to be a role for dwarfs as performers; see, e.g., Erika Tietze-Conrat’s *Dwarfs and Jesters in Art* (trans. Elizabeth Osborn, 1957), and see Rosemarie Garland Thomson’s edited volume *Freakery* (1996).

Perhaps the context in *Ezekiel*, a prophecy addressing the city of Tyre, militated towards such an interpretation: there is mention of Arvadites on the city walls, and Gammadites (*gammadim*) in Tyre's towers, and one may infer that from a distance, they would look small. How much so, if such men were dwarfs on top of it.

In the Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Gittin*, 14a–14b, an anecdote is told about a scholar who deemed it beneath his dignity to release a quittance (or was he just risk-averse?), and was beaten as a result by powerful men acculturated to the manners of the Sassanian aristocracy.⁶ The colleague who refused to come to his defence justified himself later, and of the attackers, he said: “Those people are like posts, and their hats as long as themselves. Their voice comes from their boots, and their names are outlandish – Arda and Arta and Pili Barish”. Literally the text states: “they are a cubit and their hats are a cubit”. This does not mean they were short, rather, by hyperbole, it is claimed that for each measure of length of their body, the same length could be measured in their hat: their hat was tall, in the fashion of the pre-Islamic Persian nobility.

Dwarf and Pygmy [sic] or pygmy as modifiers in the formation of compound zoological names

Importantly, in the formation of modern vernacular names for zoological species (as used among zoologists), ‘dwarf’ (English *dwarf*) is frequent as a component of compounds. In Hebrew, the adjective *gammadi* is used. Importantly, in English zoological and botanical terminology one comes across not just the adjective *dwarf* as a modifier, but also of the modifier *Pygmy* / *pygmy*.⁷

⁶ “R. Ahi the son of R. Josiah had a silver cup in Nehardea. He said to R. Dosethai the son of R. Jannai and to R. Jose b. Kifar [who were going there]: When you come back from there, bring it with you. They went and got it [from the people who had it]. They said to them: ‘Give us a quittance’. They said, ‘No’. ‘Then give it back’, they said. R. Dosethai the son of R. Jannai was willing, but R. Jose b. Kifar refused. They gave him a thrashing, and said to R. Dosethai: ‘See what your friend is doing’. He replied: ‘Thrash him well’. When they returned to R. Ahi, R. Jose said: ‘Look, sir, not only did he not assist me, but he said to them, “Thrash him well”’. He said to R. Dosethai: ‘Why did you do so?’ He replied: “Those people are like posts, and their hats as long as themselves. Their voice comes from their boots, and their names are outlandish – Arda and Arta and Pili Baris. If they give the order to arrest, you are arrested; to kill, you are killed. If they had killed [poor] Dosethai, who would have given Jannai my father a son like me?’ ‘Have these men’, he asked, ‘influence with the Government?’ ‘Yes’, he replied. ‘Have they a retinue [mounted on] horses and mules?’ ‘Yes’. ‘If that is so’, he said, ‘you acted rightly’”. The translation is from Epstein (1935–1948, their brackets).

⁷ <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pygmée> includes a section entitled “Animaux pygmées”, which states “L’adjectif pygmée est utilisé pour certaines espèces animales qui se caractérisent par une taille réduite par rapport à une ou des espèces sœurs” and lists:

- Hippopotame pygmée (https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hippopotame_nain);
- Manchot pygmée (https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manchot_pygm%C3%A9e);
- Chauve-souris pygmée de l’Est *Myotis leibii* (https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myotis_leibii);
- Ouistiti pygmée (https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ouistiti_pygm%C3%A9e);

A short communication by Clarence Halter (1915), entitled “Garter Snake Swallowed by Pygmy ‘Rattler’”, began by stating:

It is not generally known that the Florida Ground Rattlesnake (*Sistrurus miliarius*) is on some occasions inclined toward cannibalism. A fine specimen eighteen inches long, lately disclosed this inclination and clearly demonstrated that the snake can swallow another⁸ considerably longer than itself.

In the same periodical, *Copeia*, Herbert Pack (1918) published a brief communication entitled “Some Habits of the Pygmy Horned Lizard”, i.e., *Phrynosoma douglassii douglassii*. The specimens he studied were from Salt Lake City, Utah.

The pygmy sunfish (*Elassoma zonatum*), a spiny-rayed fish, is useful for mosquito control in the delta region of the Mississippi (Barney and Anson 1920, but they spelled “Pygmy”). It is found from southern Illinois to Texas, and in Louisiana and Alabama.

A paper in botany by Angus Woodbury (1947) is entitled “Distribution of Pygmy Conifers in Utah and Northeastern Arizona” (note the spelling *Pygmy*). It began as follows: “The forest cover type of pinyon-juniper woodland locally known as Pygmy forest or Pygmy conifers consists of a mixture of scrub or Pygmy trees belonging to the genera *Juniperus* and *Pinus*”.

Also note, the Pygmy Owl (*Glaucidium gnoma*), from North America (Grinnell 1913). In the British Isles, there is the species *Sorex minutus*, i.e., “The Lesser or Pygmy Shrew”,⁹ to say it with the title of Moffat (1926), which began:

The small mouse-like animals known as Shrews, of which three species are found in Great Britain, are represented in Ireland by only one, the smallest of the three – which has the further distinction of being the smallest of all British mammals, as its size and weight are only about three-fifths of those of the celebrated Harvest Mouse, which was thought entitled to that honour by Gilbert White.

Have a look at <https://avibase.bsc-eoc.org/species.jsp?avibaseid=20DB761BC5C08898>. *Avibase* is a Canadian ornithological database of 10,000 bird species which is a trove for comparative zoonymy. Let us consider some of the various names, in many languages, listed at that webpage, of a species of pygmy-tyrant, *Myiornis auricularis*, known in English as the *eared pygmy-tyrant* or *eared pygmy tyrant*. Some languages

– Tarsier pygmée (https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tarsier_pygm%C3%A9e).

⁸ The snake that was swallowed was a garter snake (*Eutaenia sirtalis*).

⁹ Also in Ireland, David Cabot (1962) reversed the order, as the title of that paragraph-long communication began with “The Pygmy or Lesser Shrew”. Both versions of the name were used in the first sentence: “While I was on Tory Island on July 4th, 1961, I found a Pygmy or lesser shrew, *Sorex minutus* at the west end of the island by the lighthouse”. Later (in the last sentence of the paper) we find the name *Pygmy shrew* alone: “The Pygmy shrew appears to be commonly found on Irish islands and has been reported from Rathlin, Achill, Aran, Olare and Great Saltee”. Still in Ireland, Jeremy Searle (1989) only used “the Pygmy shrew”.

resort to a diminutive in order to express the smaller size *vis-à-vis* prototypical members of the bird family *Tyrannidae*. For example, Polish uses *tyraneczek*. Czech uses *tyránek*. Sloval uses *moskytárik*, based upon Spanish *mosqueta*. French uses *tyranneau*, but also *microtyran*. Other languages resort to the lexical type *pygmy*: Catalan has *tirà pigmeu*, Italian has *tiranno pigmeo*, Swedish has *pygmétyrann*, Danish has *Pygmætyran*. But German has *Zwergtyrann*, thus modifying *Tyrann* with the name for ‘dwarf’. Likewise, Dutch has *dwergtiran*. Turkish resorts to the adjective for ‘small’, thus forming *küçük tiran*. Names in European languages tend to be bookish, as these are birds from South America. In contrast, South American Spanish and Portuguese display much variation for these birds, and the names are not necessarily identical to the respective name from the Iberian Peninsula. Portuguese resorts to both the modifier based upon ‘pygmy’, and a diminutive, in *tiraninho-pigmeu*.

- Catalan: *tirà pigmeu orellut*
 Czech: *tyránek černouchý, Tyránek ušatý*
 Danish: *Sortøret Pygmætyran*
 German: *Ohrfleck-Zergtyrann, Ohrfleck-Zwergtyrann*
 English: *Eared Pygmy Tyrant, Eared Pygmy-Tyrant*
 English, HBW: *Eared Pygmy-tyrant*
 English (IOC): *Eared Pygmy Tyrant*
 English (United States): *Eared Pygmy-Tyrant*
 Spanish: *Mosqueta enana, Pico Chato Pigmeo Orejudo*
 Spanish (Argentine): *Mosqueta enana*
 Spanish (Bolivia): *Mosqueta enana*
 Spanish (Spain): *Mosqueta Enana*
 Spanish (Paraguay): *Mosqueta enana*
 Finnish: *Täpläkorpvatypäkkö*
 French: *Microtyran oreillard, Tyranneau à oreillons noirs, Tyranneau oreillard*
 Guarani: *Tai'i, Tai'i*
 Croatian: *cimetastolica elenija*
 Italian: *Tiranno pigmeo orecchiuto*
 Japanese (romaji): *mimigurokobitotairanchou*
 Japanese: ミミグロコビトタイランチョウ
 Scientific: *Euscarthmus minutus, Myiornis auricularis, Myiornis auricularis auricularis, Platyrhynchus auricularis*
 Lithuanian: *Ausuotasis miornis*
 Dutch: *Oorvlekdwergtiran, Oorvlek-dwergtiran*
 Norwegian Nynorsk: *Gulbukknøtтыrann*
 Norwegian: *Gulbukknøtтыrann*
 Polish: *tyraneczek uszaty*
 Portuguese: *cigarra, Maria-cigarra, miudinho, sebinho, sebinho-de-orelhas, úri*
 Portuguese (Brazil): *cigarra, maria-cigarra, miudinho, sebinho, sebinho-de-orelhas, úri*
 Portuguese (Portugal): *Miúdinho, tiraninho-pigmeu-d'orelhas*
 Russian: *Ушастая аруна*
 Slovak: *moskytárik čiernosluchý*
 Swedish: *Öronpygmétyrann*

Turkish: *Kulaklı küçük tiran*

Ukrainian: Аруна східна

Chinese: 角侏霸鶲

Chinese (Traditional): 耳斑侏霸鶲

Having said that, note that not all species of pygmy-tyrant belong to the genus *Myiornis*. The scale-crested pygmy tyrant is the species *Lophotriccus pileatus*. It has five subspecies. It is interesting to consider the names listed for this species at the *Avibase* database. As the genus is different, German does not resort to the compound we have considered earlier. Also Turkish refrains from using again the compound *küçük tiran*. Anmd here, Polish refrains from using *tyraneczek*. Likewise Slovak, but not Czech. Note the Colombian Spanish diminutive *tiranuelo*, the Costa Rican Spanish diminutive *mosquerito*, and the Equadorean Spanish diminutive *cimerillo*.

The webpage <https://avibase.bsc-eoc.org/species.jsp?avibaseid=ACC831CF30663DB5> gives the following names:

Catalan: *tirà emplomallat dels Andes*

Czech: *tyránek rezavochocholatý, Tyránek žlutavobrichý*

Danish: *Skæltoppet Pygmætyrann*

German: *Rot-Schuppenkopftyrann, Schuppenkopftyrann, Schuppenkopf-Tyrann*

English: *Scale crested Pygmy Tyrant, Scale-crested Pygmy Tyrant, Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant, Scaled Helmeted-Flycatcher*

English, HBW: *Scale-crested Pygmy-tyrant*

English (IOC): *Scale-crested Pygmy Tyrant*

English (United States): *Scale-crested Pygmy-Tyrant*

Spanish: *Cimerillo Andino, Cimerillo crestiescamado, Mosquerito de yelmo, Pico Chato de Penacho, Tiranuelo Crestibarrado*

Spanish (Colombia): *Tiranuelo Crestibarrado*

Spanish (Costa Rica): *Mosquerito de yelmo*

Spanish (Ecuador): *Cimerillo crestiescamado*

Spanish (Spain): *Cimerillo Andino*

Spanish (Panama): *Tirano-Enano Crestiescamado*

Spanish (Peru): *Tirano-Pigmeo de Cresta Escamosa*

Spanish (Venezuela): *Pico Chato de Penacho*

Finnish: *Ruskotöyhtötöypäkkö*

French: *Microtyran chevelu, Todirostre chevelu, Tyranneau chevelu*

Croatian: *ridokruna elenija*

Hungarian: *kontyos törpetirannusz*

Italian: *Tiranno pigmeo crestascagliosa, Tiranno pigmeo crestasquamata*

Japanese (romaji): *kammurihaetori, kanmurihaetori*

Japanese: カンムリハエトリ

Scientific: *E[uscarthmus] pileatus, Euscarthmus pileatus, Lophotriccus pileatus, Lophotriccus pileatus pileatus*

Lithuanian: *Paprastasis žvynuotagalvis tironas*

Dutch: *Schubkuifdwergtiran, Schubkuif-dwergtiran*

Norwegian Nynorsk: *Fjellalvetyrann*

Norwegian: *Fjellalvetyrann*

Polish: *luskoczubek rdzawopióry, luskoczubek rdzawopióry*

Portuguese: *maria-cabeluda*

Portuguese (Portugal): *tiraninho-pigmeu-de-escamas*

Russian: Рыжехотлая чубатка, Чешухотлый тиранчик-гренадер, Чешухотлый тиранчик-гренадер

Slovak: *muhárčik červenohrivý*

Swedish: *Rosttofsad dvärgtyrann, rosttofsad pygmétyrann*

Turkish: *And taçlı tiran*

Ukrainian: Тиранчик-чубань західний

Chinese: 鳞冠侏霸鹟

Chinese (Traditional): 鳞冠侏霸鹟

The Swahili name for the Pygmies, *Mbilikimo*

This section is concerned with the etymology that the Swahili noun *Mbilikimo* is given, s.v., in the classic A Standard Swahili English Dictionary (Johnson 1939). An asterisk following the headword in that entry conveys the information that this is considered to be a loanword. The definition given there for *Mbilikimo* is: “a name by which the Pygmy races of Central African forest regions are known on the coast, a dwarf”. The entry for *Mbilikimo* in an online Swahili–English dictionary¹⁰ states: “[*Kar*] *nm* (*wa*) [*a/wa*] pygmy, dwarf”.

The etymology proposed in Johnson (1939) is as an Arabic compound of *bála* ‘without’, and *qíma*, which is rendered as ‘stature’. Actually it is *qáma* which means ‘stature’ in Arabic, whereas *qíma* denotes ‘worth’, ‘price’. In some dialects of Arabic, in some contexts [a] is replaced with [i]. It may be that ‘stature-less’ is perceived depreciatively, as though it was ‘worthless’.¹¹

(Dialectally, in Arabic, *qíma* may also denote something different. In Baghdadi Judaeo-Arabic, *qími* denotes ‘worth’ or ‘price’, whereas *qíma* denotes ‘dish of minced meat’, even though ‘minced meat’ is usually called *láḥam maḥḥún*. Cf. in Indian cuisine, *keema* as spelled in England; e.g., *keema rice*, or, for a kind of bread, *nan*, the compound *keema nan*.¹² The impact of terminology of Indian origin on Iraqi Arabic and especially,

¹⁰ <http://www.swahili.it/glossword/index.php?a=term&t=ae5bafa4aca3a8a8585e>

¹¹ Note that there is a pattern such that co-territorial farmers who are not Pygmies seek for marriage Pygmy women, as they are cheaper to buy from their family (traditionally, bush-dwelling foragers), and because they are reputed to be fertile.

Much worse, unfortunately (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pygmy_peoples), discrimination, enslavement and massacres affecting Pygmy peoples continue to be reported; “Historically, the pygmy have always been viewed as inferior by both colonial authorities and the village-dwelling Bantu tribes”.

¹² Flat breads (*naan* in India) are grounded in the prehistory and history of bread-making, and in a study of flat bread, Antonella Pasqualone (2018) has shown in a map the spread of flat breads from the Near East to South and Central Asia, to parts of the Mediterranean (including

on the Jewish vernacular, is quite considerable; moreover, in both Urdu and Hindi, there is no dearth of Arabic and Persian terms.)

Biblical or Modern Hebrew compounds displaying the pattern

The Arabic compound *bála qáma* for denoting a group of people is an instance of a pattern of compounding also found in both Biblical and Modern Hebrew. The pattern is found in Hebrew, and indirectly one finds an instance of its occurrence in European languages through the Bible, in the proper name *Belial*, from the Hebrew *beliyyá'al* (< *belí* + *yá'al*, literally: 'worthless'). Nevertheless, Hebrew prefixates such compounds with *běné* for 'sons of'.

Thus, 'sons of *beliyyá'al*' (*Deuteronomy*, 13:14; *Judges*, 19:22; 20:13; *1 Samuel*, 2:12; 10:27; *1 Kings*, 21:10; 21:13; *2 Chronicles*, 13:7); 'son of *beliyyá'al*' (*1 Samuel*, 25:17); 'daughter of *beliyyá'al*' (*1 Samuel*, 1:16); 'man of *beliyyá'al*' (with *ish* for 'man':¹³ *2 Samuel*, 20:1; *Proverbs*, 16:27; *1 Samuel*, 25:25; *2 Samuel*, 16:7; with *'adám* for 'man': *Proverbs*, 6:12).

One also finds *bené vli-shém* (*Job*, 30:8) 'people without name/renown', literally: 'sons of without name'.

In Modern Hebrew, a neutral name for 'people who declare no religion' (e.g., in world demography) is *bené vli-dát*, 'people who have no religion', literally: 'sons of without religion'.

Belial and Balliol in Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*

Consider 'sons of *beliyyá'al*' again. Whereas in Hebrew the formation of this compound is transparent, it must not have been so for English speakers when confronted with its English form, *Belial*. It has been suggested that John Dryden, in *Absalom and Achitophel, Part One*, v. 598, proposed an association for this name – of all things, with *Balliol*, the name of the well-known college in Oxford: "*sons of Belial*: implies rebellion rather than immorality (Deut. xiii.13); there may be a pun on Balliol, where the Whig leaders were lodged at the time of the Oxford Parliament" (Sharrock 1968: 137).

In Dryden's political allegory¹⁴ in *Absalom and Achitophel*, the Jews stand for the

Italy), and to parts of Africa. Cf. Nissan and Pasqualone (2019), Nissan (2018), Nissan and Alinei (2013), Alinei and Nissan (2007).

¹³ Hebrew *'adám* 'person' vs. *ish* 'man', like in Latin *homo* 'person' vs. *vir* 'man'.

¹⁴ Rebecca Price Parkin remarked (1969: 345): "In spite of [...] exceptions, it remains generally true that Dryden was not at his happiest in the adaptation of honorific biblical and theological references to the praise of secular subjects. He was more felicitous when the poetic mode was either mock-heroic, as in *Mac Flecknoe*, or largely satiric, as in *Absalom and Achitophel*". Moreover (ibid.: 347): "In *Absalom and Achitophel* Dryden demonstrates the feasibility of Christian epic machinery on a scale which *Mac Flecknoe* barely foreshadows. As a principal thematic stratagem *Absalom and Achitophel* presents an epic pre-battle confrontation of heroes. The Sons of Light, loyal to the king, are on one side; the Sons of Darkness on the other. God and his angels are clearly abetting the side of Light; Lucifer and his minions the side of Darkness.

English, whereas the Jebusites stand for the Roman Catholics. (Dryden had lesser imitators,¹⁵ in such allegories. But he had a predecessor in John Caryl.)¹⁶ The passage concerned deals with a character bearing the biblical name¹⁷ *Shimei* (in the Bible, he insults David while the latter is fleeing from Absalom). Dryden's *Shimei* stands for 'Slingby Bethel, Whig sheriff of London, and notorious for a stinginess not usual in that office' (Sharrock 1968: 137). See on him a study, "Dryden's History: The Case of Slingsby Bethel", by Robert McHenry (1984a). Quoted below are the relevant lines of verse by Dryden (emphasis added):

Thus heaping wealth, by the most ready way

Yet Dryden does not show the archangel Raphael whispering in the ear of King Charles, or the archangel Michael going before Charles's armies. Dryden's ways of bringing in the Christian supernatural, however unmistakable, are more indirect. Chiefly these ways are: first, the long-recognized allusions to Milton's Christian epic; second, the pervasive parallel with Hebrew history, especially the history of the epic age of David, which as related in the Bible constantly involves supernatural concern; third, exploitation of the concept of divine right in the direction of showing heaven's concern in the events; and finally, in association with these, personifications and quasi-personifications of moral and spiritual forces conceived under their natural aspect".

Absalom rebelled against King David; likewise, Monmouth rebelled against his father, Charles II. "The original anguished inner battle which the biblical David fought between royal duty and loving concern for his misled and disloyal favorite son parallels not only the historical situation between Charles II and Monmouth but also the typical love versus honor conflict in Dryden's stage dramas" (ibid.: 349).

"A curiously inverse yet powerful inclusion of the Christian supernatural inheres in the line following, spoken by Achitophel when encouraging Monmouth to sacrifice his father to the 'good' of the people: 'Better one Suffer, than a Nation grieve' (l. 415). Logical though this line may seem, not only does it deal with a person as though he were a thing; it echoes the sorry wisdom of Caiaphas prior to the crucifixion. Charles II, alias King David, becomes the Son of David, the Messiah about to be crucified. It is, of course, richly ironic that a line which so enhances the supernatural content of the poem, turning the king into the Messiah, should be put into the mouth of the devil surrogate" (ibid.: 348).

¹⁵ Alan Roper writes (2002: 293): "Dryden's example also challenged imitators to find a decisive historical moment in the past to convey the decisiveness of the present, and during the Stuart century decisive moments typically concerned the succession to the throne. Most could not. Pordage could not even find a past moment and had to invent one, like the author of *A Dialogue between Nathan and Absalome*" [sic].

¹⁶ In a paper concerned with Caryl's work, Michael Suarez (2004) began by stating: "*Naboth Vineyard: Or, the Innocent Traytor* [sic] (1679) is the first sustained mock-biblical verse satire in English. Written by John Caryl, a recusant [i.e., Catholic] nobleman imprisoned in the Tower during the Popish Plot trials, the poem is routinely adduced as an important antecedent to *Absalom and Achitophel*, the most famous instance of the mock biblical – a rhetorical strategy in which scriptural narratives, quotations, typologies, or tropes are used for satirical ends"

¹⁷ "In *Absalom and Achitophel* one of the main sources of compression is the biblical parallel. When Monmouth is called Absalom, or the French king Pharaoh, much is said in small compass" (Parkin 1969: 351).

Among the Jews, which was to cheat and pray,¹⁸
 The city, to reward his pious hate
 Against his master, chose him magistrate.
 His hand a vare of justice did uphold;
 His neck was loaded with a chain of gold.
 During his office, treason was no crime;
 The **sons of Belial** had a glorious time;¹⁹
 For Shimei, tho' not prodigal of pelf,
 Yet lov'd his wicked neighbour as himself.

Gordon Leff points out (1968: 113): Merton is “commonly accepted as the earliest Oxford college. In the words of Rashdall [(1936, vol. 3: 193)], ‘Balliol existed before it, we may say *de facto*, but not *de iure*, and University [college] *de iure* but not *de facto*. Merton alone existed both *de iure* and *de facto* in 1264”. It is again Leff who states (infra: 114): “Of the other early colleges, Balliol was first founded in 1266 but did not receive a legal charter until 1282 through John de Balliol’s widow, Dervorguilla”.

With reference to the same lines by Dryden, Parkin remarked (1969: 348–349):

The “Sons of Belial”²⁰ are here viewed both as wicked human beings (perhaps even in the well-known pun as “sons” of Balliol College, a Whig stronghold) and as demons. Further on in the portrait of Shimei, the actual person Slingsby Bethel becomes, in a parody of Matthew 18:20 and the Book of Common Prayer, an anti-Christ:²¹

When two or three were gather’d to declaim
 Against the Monarch of Jerusalem,
Shimei was always in the midst of them.

(ll. 601–603)

¹⁸ “A kind of humor arises too from the paralleling of Britons with Old Testament Jews. Since so much of the satiric thrust of the poem is directed against the British people en masse, the London mob, vulgar ‘heads without names’, and all this under the sobriquet ‘Jews’, a purely literary variety of anti-Semitism result” (Parkin 1969: 352).

¹⁹ McHenry remarks (1984a: 272, note 59): “This book, popular enough to require a second edition in 1681, may have led Dryden to select Bethel for his satire; the phrase ‘Sons of Belial’ (l. 598) in the portrait of Shimei may be meant partly to allude to Bethel’s use of the biblical phrase in this book (37)”. The reference is to a book by Bethel: “Bethel did produce numerous writings on trade during the 1670s, and in 1680 he collected them all together, added new chapters on the trade of thirteen European countries, and published his magnum opus, *The Interest of Princes and States*, a book of three hundred and fifty-seven pages. It is a work that strongly defines both his political and religious principles. Invoking the example of Holland, he advocates free trade and religious toleration to all – except the Papists” (McHenry 1984a: 265).

²⁰ Cf. McHenry’s paper (1984b) “‘The Sons of Belial’ in Absalom and Achitophel”.

²¹ But French claims (1968: 407): “The play on the New Testament phrases is expert and very funny, but is perhaps too funny for us to be able to feel Shimei as evoking anything so serious as an ‘anti-Christ’ (see Hoffman [1962]: 85). He does not seem dangerous enough, nor can he suggest anything beyond himself”.

In short, Shimei combines an actual personality with supernatural personhood – as, indeed, do all the main characters in the poem. David, by virtue of his divine right, represents the Almighty – sometimes as the first and sometimes as the second person of the Trinity. Achitophel, of course, represents Lucifer;²² and all who side with him, including Monmouth,²³ are Luciferians. They are part of the infernal machinery, just as all who side with David are part of the heavenly machinery. Messiah-ship is bandied about rather freely in this poem. It is applied seriously to the king, ironically to Shimei, and, as a master card in Achitophel's temptation speeches, dramatically to Monmouth.²⁴

Reuse of *Achitophel* in 1753, in the uproar over the Jew Bill

Unsurprisingly, the personal name *Achitophel* does not belong in the Jewish onomasticon as actually used for naming babies, and it only refers to the negative biblical character by that name. Not so in perceptions of which the Jews were the object in 18th-century England. In May 1753, under a Whig government, the Jew Bill was approved; it was intended to allow the naturalisation of rich foreign-born Jewish residents of Britain.²⁵ Throughout the summer, the political nation was gripped by a vociferous polemic, which resulted in the Jew Bill being repealed – on the initiative of the Whig government, in the face of the Tory-inspired public outcry – in November by Parliament, with the royal assent being given in December of that year, five months before the elections.

One of the defenders of the Bill, Philip Carteret Webb – who did paid work as a solicitor on behalf of the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation, both related and unrelated to the Jew Bill (Katz 1994: 252, fn. 39) “was not spared the indignity of public criticism, and it was reported that he had himself circumcised and converted to Judaism, changing his name to Rabbi Achitophel Kor in order to please his clients” (ibid.: 247). That spurious claim about Webb was made in the *London Evening Post* in August 1753. Why *Kor*? Did some Hebraist provide a mock-translation of the family

²² Chambers stated (1959: 593): “Dryden damns Shaftesbury as wily politician by revealing his identity with wisely mad Achitophel, and Achitophel damns himself still further by becoming a self-created Satan. Like the Satan of [Milton's] *Paradise Lost*, he even condemns his own argument at times, as when he speaks of David's title ‘drawn from the mouldy rolls of Noah's ark’ (A. A., 302)”. Cf. Morris Freedman's paper “Satan and Shaftesbury” (1959).

²³ Reuben Brower remarked (1952: 40): “The ‘huddled notions’ of Dryden's satiric mode lay in readiness when the Monmouth ‘conspiracy’ offered the occasion his genius had been waiting for. He could now compose heroic narrative and dialogue while talking to his familiar audience. What is remarkable is that in scoring a journalistic and political success he produced poetry of a high order”.

²⁴ De Beer explained (1941: 298): “The personal allusions in *Absalom and Achitophel* aroused curiosity from the start. While a few of them were probably obvious to all readers some of them must have been unintelligible to almost all”.

²⁵ This would have been in the rivalry between London and Amsterdam.

name *Webb* as *qur* <qwr>, the Hebrew name for the thread of a spider web? Katz thinks so, on the evidence of his concise remark on p. 247, fn. 22: “‘Kor’ is ‘web’ in Hebrew”.²⁶

It is interesting that unlike Absalom’s associate Achitophel’s, Prince Absalom’s own unfortunate circumstances as a negative biblical character did not prevent the presence of the name *Avshalóm* in the Israeli Hebrew onomasticon.²⁷ The anecdote about the would-be Achitophel Kor sheds a curious light on the present-day actual existence, in Israel, of Dr. Avshalom Kor, a broadcaster whose specialty is linguistic popularisation.

***Dal-yá’ al* in a lampoon on current affairs, in London in 2005**

During the regurgitations of animosity against Israel and against Jews *tout court* in Britain which reached their acme in the period 2002–2003 (an antecedent to the situation in 2016–2019), in 2003 the Father of the House of Commons (i.e., the then longest serving Member of Parliament), Tam Dalyell (who retired afterwards in 2005, but was never asked to resign because of the given incident) voiced concern about the British government as well as the U.S. federal administration being (according to him) unduly influenced by a “cabal of Jewish advisers”: a conspiracy of persons to whom he referred as being of Jewish ancestry in the circles governing the United States and the United Kingdom²⁸ – Dalyell was much interested in genetics also in his capacity as a long-serving columnist for *The New Scientist*²⁹ – and even went as far as referring

²⁶ In Hebrew, *qor* denotes ‘coldness’ or ‘cold weather’, the latter being the sense of the only occurrence of this derivational form in the Hebrew Bible, which is in *Genesis* 8:22. In contrast, it is *qur* that suites the intentions of Webb’s critic. In the Hebrew Bible, both occurrences of inflected forms of the terms occur within the span of two verses in Book of Isaiah: “they weave *qurei* (i.e., <qur>s of) a spider (i.e., spider webs)” (*Isaiah* 59:5); “their <qur>s (*qureihém*) will not be a dress” (*ibid.*: 59:6). Spider webs are also spider threads, and in fact the interpretation of the singular form *qur* – as well as the sense of the noun as in the singular in Modern Hebrew – is ‘thread’. Perhaps in *Kor*, the vowel, as uttered by Webb’s critic, would have been more like [u] than like [o].

²⁷ *Avshalom* can be interpreted literally interpreted as “father of peace”.

²⁸ In an article in the *Daily Mail* on 31 January 2005, Melanie Phillips wrote: “All this from a party which wears its ‘anti-racism’ on its sleeve. But it is by no means alone. The most vicious prejudices, redolent of ancient anti-Jewish tropes, are regularly surfacing in the mainstream media and in polite society. ¶ One can hardly open a broadsheet newspaper without reading the preposterous claim that an international Jewish conspiracy linking Jews in the Bush administration to Israel has subverted American foreign policy and placed the world in danger – a modernised version of the classic conspiracy theory perpetrated by the 19th century tsarist forgery, The Protocols of the Elders of Zion. ¶ When the veteran Labour backbencher Tam Dalyell claimed there was a sinister ‘cabal’ of Jews influencing Tony Blair and George W Bush, he was merely indulged as an eccentric. Far from condemning such bigotry, BBC TV’s *Newsnight* investigated the claim with all due seriousness and concluded there was indeed just such a network of Jews in America, illustrated by a spidergram to show their influence accompanied by scary music”.

²⁹ Dalyell was never suspended for that incident by his party, nor ceased then to be a

to Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, who supposedly had a Jewish ancestor. This had a (minor) literary sequel which is quite relevant to our present mention of Dryden, as well as to the discussion of compounds formed with *yá'al*.

In an interview, the late Robert Wistrich (2008), the British-bred scholar on anti-Semitism, remarked:

Another favorite topic of the British media is the power of the Jewish lobby. One well-publicized example occurred when the veteran Labour MP Tom Dalyell said in a 2003 interview in *Vanity Fair* that Tony Blair was surrounded by a 'cabal' of Jewish advisers. Of the three people he mentioned, only one was Jewish, Lord Levy. A second exemplar, Peter Mandelson, did have a Jewish ancestor but never claimed to be a Jew; while the third was Foreign Minister Jack Straw, whom many Jews consider anti-Israeli. Straw, it turned out, did have a Jewish grandfather but had never advertised the fact. Dalyell claimed these people were linked up with the neocons in Washington in a pro-Israeli Jewish world conspiracy. Many others on the British Left have held virulently anti-Israeli views, including former minister Claire Short who, at one point, blamed the Jewish state for global warming!

A Hebrew-language lampoon (scribbled privately by myself at the time), prompted by the Dalyell incident, restyled that politician as one called **תַּמְּ דַל-יָא'ל** *Tam Dal-yá'al*. That name transparently lends itself to a literal analysis in Hebrew as 'Simple-minded Of-little-use'. The formation of *Dal-yá'al*, patterned as it is after the extant compound *beliyyá'al*, by replacing for the word for 'without' the word for 'scarce of', is an instance of misantonymy, a concept I introduced, exemplified, and analysed in Nissan (1999), and further discussed in Nissan (2013).

Arguably a contributing factor to papering over the mismatch between the last vowel in *Dalyell* and the vowels in *Dal-yá'al* (**דַּל-יָע'ל** <*dl-y'l*>) is that in Yiddish spelling using the Hebrew script, the letter 'áyin (**צ**) is employed in order to convey the vowel *e*. The use of the letter 'áyin in order to transcribe /e/coloured vowels was discussed by Beider (2015: 178–302).

Nevertheless, the Yiddish spelling for *Dalyell* would be **דאַלייעלל** <*d'lyy'll*>, as opposed to **דאַלייל** <*d'lyyl*>, or **דלייל** <*dlyyl*>, or (with vowel diacritical marks) **דְּלִיִּל** in Hebrew transliteration.

Playful modification of anthroponyms was discussed in e.g. Nissan (2014a, 2019). For the same in the context of political polemic, see Nissan (2017). Cf. Nissan (2014b).

A prominent exponent of the Great Peasants' Revolt of 1381

We mentioned the then Labour minister Jack Straw, among ones attracting Dalyell's bile because of their ancestry. Jack Straw is neither Jewish, nor suspect for favouring 'Jewish' interests (he may even have been tacitly pushed by Dalyell's allegations to make himself even less reproachable in that respect, if one can construe that collaborator of *New Scientist* who had a special interest in genetics, but he retired, for his own unrelated reasons, from both the Commons and the magazine in 2005.

way episodes such as, over one year later on, his carefulness not to be seen as responding in any positive way to a complaint of the Board of Deputies of British Jews about pronunciations ascribed to the ambassador in Rome; later on he alluded to the Jews as ones with “deep pockets”). He happens to bear the name of the medieval Jack Straw (to many, e.g. his parents, this was a revolutionary hero).

Jack Straw was one of the leaders of the Peasants’ Revolt of June 1381,³⁰ and he led a massacre of Flemish people in London, in a sense he lends himself to being identified with that episode itself, famously recalled by Geoffrey Chaucer in his *Canterbury Tales*. One would thus metonymically if not necessarily accurately perceive the historical Jack Straw as having been the ultimate, “worst” xenophobe from medieval English history, and the name one that modern parents with mainstream sensitivities would rather avoid, but then one’s villain is another’s working class hero.

While London was in the hands of the rebels, there was an initial massacre of members of the Flemish minority by a mob of rebels; five Flemish prostitutes and thirty-five other Flemish people were killed.³¹ This was followed by another massacre in the same neighbourhood.

³⁰ At the time, England was “ruled by the boy-king Richard II, with Archbishop Sudbury as his chancellor and prime minister” (Oman 1906: 6).

³¹ Just in case one repeats the pretext that they were affluent, consider that the first to be killed were ethnic Flemish sex workers in London, typically not affluent women. Still, there was a perception of undue effluence, as described by Oman (1906: 17): “The foreign resident in those days was not the destitute alien who now fills the slums of the East End, but a merchant or less frequently a manufacturer. The grievance against him was that he was supposed to be sucking the wealth out of the country, and especially to be exporting secretly all the gold and silver, for which he gave in return only useless luxuries. Hence there was no cash left in the realm, and so, in the ideas of the labouring classes, money was hard to come at, and wages were low. This was the guilt of the merchant: that of the manufacturer, nearly always the woollen manufacturer from Flanders, was that he was an unfair competitor, who ruined the native artisan by using cheap labour, often that of aliens, women, and children. The Government owed an appreciable part of its unpopularity to the fact that ever since Edward III first tempted the Flemings and Zeelanders to Norfolk, it had encouraged immigration of skilled artisans from abroad. Every journeyman or casually employed labourer in the wide branches of the wool trade who chanced to be out of work, put the blame of his privations on the outlander, whose competition had straitened the demand for native hands. Hence come the sudden fury displayed against the Flemings. It was, no doubt, partly inspired by unreasoning dislike for all strangers, but mainly rested on the economic fallacies that are always rife in an uneducated class living on the edge of starvation”.

It is traditionally related that during the massacre, suspect Flemings were tested, about their ethnic identity, by having them utter the English words ‘bread’ and ‘cheese’, and were killed if they pronounced them in the Flemish way. In case the vowel they uttered in the word *bread* was /o/ rather than /e/ they were killed (this being the shibboleth by which they were identified, like the Ephraimites in *Judges* 12:6, who mispronounced the Hebrew phoneme /š/ as [s]). Charles Oman stated (1906: 49): “Popular tradition records that every man suspected of Flemish birth was seized, and asked to pronounce the shibboleth ‘bread and cheese’; if he answered ‘brod and case’ he lost his head. The Lombards also suffered, and their houses yielded much valuable plunder. But the

I quote from Charles Oman's translation of the Anglo-French *Anonimal* [sic] *Chronicle of St. Mary's, York*³² (Oman 1906, Appendix V: 164–165):³³

And at this time the King made the commons draw themselves out in two lines, and proclaimed to them that he would confirm and grant it that they should be free, and generally should have their will, and that they may go through all the realm of England and catch all traitors and bring them to him in safety, and then he would deal with them as the law demanded.

Under colour of this grant Wat Tighler and [some of] the commons took their way to the Tower, to seize the Archbishop, while the rest remained at Mile End. [...] and when he was at the words "Omnes sancti orate pro nobis", the commons burst in, and dragged him out of the chapel of the Tower, and struck and rustled him rudely, as they did also the others who were with him, and dragged them to Tower Hill. There they cut off the heads of Master Simon Sudbury, Archbishop of Canterbury [...]. And at the same time the commons made proclamation that whoever could catch any Fleming or other alien of any nation,³⁴ might cut off his head, and so they did after this. Then they took the heads of the Archbishop and of the others and put them on wooden poles, and carried them before them in procession, as far as the shrine of Westminster Abbey [...]. Then they returned to London bridge and set the head of the Archbishop above the gate, with eight other heads of those they had murdered, so that all could see them who passed over the bridge. This done, they went to the Church of St. Martin's in the Vintry, and found therein thirty-five Flemings, whom they dragged out and beheaded in the street. On that day there were beheaded in all some 140 or 160 persons. Then they took their way to the houses of Lombards and other aliens, and broke into their dwellings, and robbed them of all their goods that they could lay hands on. This went on for all day and the night following, with hideous cries and horrid tumult.

The rebel Jack Straw owes his fame to his being mentioned (as Jakke Straw) by Geoffrey Chaucer (see e.g. Astell 1993). Ann Astell explains (1993: 56):

aliens were not the only sufferers: all manner of unpopular Londoners met their death". For the shibboleth episode, Oman, note 104, cites the *London Chronicle*, ed. Kingsford, p. 15.

The attack on the Flemish is treated by Hilton (1973: 195–198). Not just in London, but in other towns, too, Flemish people had been killed, and this before the Essex and Kent bands moved off towards London. Oman (1906: 35) points out: "Colchester, the county town of Essex, fell into the hands of the insurgents without making resistance. Its capture was celebrated by the massacre of several Flemings, which we may suspect to have been the work of the urban mob rather than of the peasantry. We also hear of the murder of a Fleming at Manningtree". The income from the customs had decreased, as Flanders, where there was an incipient civil war, had not bought the quantity of wool it did before (Oman 1906: 20–21).

³² Originally discovered and transcribed by G.M. Trevelyan and published in the *English Historical Review*, 51, in 1898.

³³ The brackets are Oman's. Double brackets are my own omissions.

³⁴ Concerning "any Fleming or other alien of any nation", recall that there were no Jews in England at the time, as they had been expelled almost a century earlier.

Chauntecleer's³⁵ violent abduction by the fox bestirs a general hubbub that recalls the havoc and outcry at the Fall of Troy: [...]. Now Chaucer's mock-heroic rendition compares the tumult in the barnyard to the confusion at the burning of Troy, Carthage, and Rome. The swarming, cackling, squeaking, bellowing, barking, and honking, of the bees, hens, hogs, dogs, cow, calf, ducks, and geese, combined with the running and "shoutyng of the men and wommen eeke" (VII.3387), resembles the yelling of "feendes ... in helle" (VII.3389) and the shrill "shoutes" of "Jakke Straw³⁶ and his meynee" (VII.3394–95) as they attacked and killed the Flemish merchants.³⁷

Thus far, Ann Astell.³⁸ Charles Oman (1906) makes no mention of Jack Straw, except once in quotes, citing his extorted confession before his execution. Oman uses the name John Wraw for one of the rebel leaders from other counties.

Envoi

Cubit-tall humans (Pygmies of Greek myth, their names now recycled by anthropologists) led us to a discussion of the Swahili ethnic name *Mbilikimo*, whose Arabic etymology led us into a discussion of a pattern of compounding also found in Hebrew, e.g. in the word that in translation of the Bible became *Belial*. This in turn led us into a number of topics in British literature and history.

³⁵ Chaucer's Chauntecleer is a cock.

³⁶ In Jacqueline de Weever's Chaucer Name Dictionary (1996), s.v. *Jakke*² (now at <http://www.columbia.edu/dlc/garland/deweever/JK/jakke2.htm>), one can read: "The noise of the people and animals as they chase the fox is like that of Jack Straw and his company as they attacked the Flemish quarter, *NPT* [i.e., *Nun's Priest's Tale*] 3394–3397".

³⁷ On 13 July 1381, Jack Straw's band attacked more Flemings in the Vintry, after King Richard's address at Tower Hill, at which he offered a pardon which the rebels scorned. During that night, London was in flames. On the 15th, during a meeting with the King, rebel leader Wat Tyler was mortally wounded, and the King, whose age was just 14, had the presence of spirit to lead the rebels out of town. He would eventually not keep his promises. Chaucer, by the way, sold his family home in London to lessor Henry Herbury on July the 19th.

³⁸ Ann Astell (1993) draws a systematic comparison, concerning the treatment of the 1381 uprising, between John Gower's Anglo-Latin *Vox clamantis*, Book 1, and Geoffrey's Chaucer's *Nun's Priest's Tale* in his *Canterbury Tales*. "Geoffrey Chaucer and John Gower both responded to the tumultuous, end-threatening events of the 1381 Peasants' Revolt in the linked forms of beast-fable and dream-vision' (ibid.: 53). Astell explains (ibid.: 54): 'While it may seem, in Fisher's words, 'downright wrongheaded' to compare the *Nun's Priest's Tale* with *Vox clamantis*, the obvious differences between Chaucer's 'murie tale of Chauntecleer' (VII.3449) and Gower's lamentatious book become significant when we perceive the similarities between them. The Prologue to Book 1 of *Vox clamantis* announces the intent of the author 'to describe how the lowly peasants violently revolted against the freemen and nobles of the realm (p. 49) and to do so by reporting the 'true dreams' (p. 50) he had in which 'he saw different throngs of the rabble transformed into different kinds of domestic animals' (p. 49), all of which then assumed the ferocity of wild beasts. Gowers' plan thus anticipates, admittedly in very general terms, Chaucer's use of a barnyard beast-fable, which includes a true dream of a predator, to refer explicitly to the murderous uprising in London led by 'Jakke Straw and his meynee' (VII.3394)".

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³⁹ *Copeia* is published periodically by the American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists (ASIH).

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