



## ADAM'S NAMING OF THE ANIMALS: NAMING OR CREATION?

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The aim of this article is to examine the relationship between naming and creation, focusing particularly on Adam's naming of the animals. After presenting the biblical background and a couple of examples from Ancient Jewish thought, we shall proceed to consider some interesting texts in the Armenian tradition

### I. *The Creative Word in Genesis*

Jewish thought has assigned a major role in creation to speech and language. This notion finds its scriptural underpinning in Genesis 1–2. There are numerous statements in later Jewish thought about how God creates through speech,<sup>1</sup> and equally, since the Torah is divine speech, about how and why he created with the particular words and letters actually used in Genesis 1.<sup>2</sup> Such statements issue from consideration of the first two chapters of Genesis so the history and development of this consideration are of great interest. In Jewish literature of the Second Temple period, the idea occurs of the active divine word that is fulfilled in being uttered.<sup>3</sup> Things come into being because they are spoken by God and it is divine speech that created the world. Here, however, we shall strive to narrow our focus from speech in general or the *αχτιε* word to the idea of the name and naming.

### II. *Creation by God's Name: Biblical Underpinnings*

In language that evokes ancient Canaanite creation myths, Prayer of Manasseh 1.3 says, following an invocation that partly recalls the opening of the *Amida* prayer:

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<sup>1</sup> Stone 1990, 183–4 and Index, s.v.

<sup>2</sup> Theodor and Albeck 1965 §1.1 and 1.10.

<sup>3</sup> Is. 11.4, Wisd. 12.9, 18.15–16, 1 *Enoch* 62.2, 2 Thes. 2.8 and *Odes of Solomon* 29.9–10: cf. Ps. 46.6. See further Stone 1990, 273 and 385–7.

O Lord Almighty,  
 God of our ancestors,  
 of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob  
 and of their righteous offspring;  
 who shackled the sea by your word of command,  
 who confined the deep and sealed it with your terrible and glorious  
 name.

The actions described after the initial doxology refer to creation. The Deity shackles the sea, just as in the Ugaritic myth Baal shackles or kills Yamm.<sup>4</sup> He does this by his word of command. In the parallel and, consequently, conceptually identical statement, he shackled the Abyss, the Tehom, sealing it in with his terrible and glorious name.<sup>5</sup> The door of the sea's prison cannot be opened, because of the Name's power.<sup>6</sup> This description of the act of creation draws on mythological sources, yet it also shows how the name speculation that became so central in later Jewish mystical thought might have developed.<sup>7</sup> God's word imprisons Chaos; his name is set on the prison door. This is not just a statement about the active word, but that the imprinting of the Name creates cosmic order. We will trace the rich heritage of this formulation in a more modest context and a later period.

To this end, we have chosen to look carefully at the way Adam's naming of the animals was understood, particularly by the Armenian tradition. We believe that such an examination will cast light on the ideas of word-action and of the effective divine name.

### III. *Adam Naming the Animals: The Biblical Basis*

Adam was created in the image of God ("And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" Gen. 1:2) and so, Adam's act of naming reflects, or perhaps exemplifies, God's way of naming or creating, too.

<sup>4</sup> Van der Toorn, et al. 1995, 255–63 and further references there; an English translation of the main text, with interesting notes and commentary, is to be found in Gaster 1961, 114–29 and 153–71.

<sup>5</sup> ὁ πεδήσα τὴν θάλασαν τῷ λόγῳ τοῦ προστάγματός σου, ὁ κλείσα τὴν ἄβυσσον καὶ σφραγισάμενός τῳ φοβεῖς καὶ ἐνδόξῳ ὀνόματί σου.

<sup>6</sup> Adam's tomb is sealed with a triangular seal (suggesting the Trinity), see *Life of Adam and Eve* 42 (48):1. Compare Mt. 27.66 and *Gospel of Peter* 28–34 where there are seven seals on Christ's tomb.

<sup>7</sup> Scholem 1954, 56; Schäfer 1992, 20–4, 56–8 and see further his Index, s.v.

It all began in Genesis: where else? Before the “documentary hypothesis”, of course, Genesis chapters 1 and 2 were seen as parts of a single composition.<sup>8</sup> In chapter 2 there is an interesting sequence of events. There was dry earth and no man to work the soil (Gen. 2.5). God was moved to create man after the ground was watered (i.e., so that vegetation would grow—Gen. 2.6). Then, God formed (the Greek says e[plasen “modelled”) man from dust of the earth and blew the breath of life into his nostrils, so vivifying him (Gen. 2.7). Next, the Edenic Garden was planted and God put man there (Gen. 2.8). God made vegetation grow, especially fruit trees (we leave aside the tree of life and of knowledge of good and evil Gen. 2.9) and took care of irrigation with the four rivers on which there is a little excursus (Gen. 2.9–15). So far, it will be observed, there are no animals. Adam is put into the Garden to work it and keep it (note verse 5 above) and he is given the commandment about the fruit (Gen. 2.15–17). Then comes the relevant citation: Gen. 2.18 is God’s statement that it is not good for man to be alone, he needs a partner. So God creates all the animals and the birds and brings them to Adam to see what he will call them and “whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name” (Gen. 2.19). Adam named all the birds and beasts, but no partner was found for him.

As will readily be observed, this sequence of events differs in many ways from Gen. 1–2.4a. In Genesis 2, after the creation of Adam there ensues God’s statement that there was no partner found for him. Only then does the text narrate the creation of the other living creatures (Gen. 2.19) and it can readily be inferred that those creatures were created in order to find a partner for Adam. By naming, Adam checks them out for this purpose, and that naming is effective. He cannot recognize his partner without naming her; he names the animals that have been created and does not find his partner.

#### IV. *Armenian Understanding of this Sequence*

The chief move of Armenian exegesis of this passage, and not just of Armenian exegesis, is to connect this story with Genesis 1.26–30.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The apparent “differences” or “contradictions” between the two creation stories were handled in various ways by traditional Jewish and Christian exegesis. For some examples, see Alexandre 1988, 43–5.

<sup>9</sup> Alexandre 1988, 43.

26 And God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth.”

27 And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

28 God blessed them and God said to them, “Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.”

29 God said, “See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food.

30 And to all the animals on land, to all the birds of the sky, and to everything that creeps on earth, in which there is the breath of life, I give all the green plants for food.” And it was so. (JPS)

This passage introduces the ideas of the creation of Adam in the image and likeness of God, the creation of mankind both male and female, and the giving of dominion over all the creatures to mankind. This is the last act of the scenario of creation, on the sixth day. How did the ancient exegete fit the two passages, Genesis 1–2.4a and Genesis 2, together, despite the *prima facie* tensions between them?

The oldest theological treatise in Armenian is entitled *Teaching of St. Gregory*, and it is embedded in a history of the conversion of Armenia attributed to Agathangelos.<sup>10</sup> There seems no doubt that the work, which we shall call just “Agathangelos”, was written about the middle of the fifth century, within half a century of the invention of the Armenian alphabet.<sup>11</sup> In the *Teaching of St. Gregory* §264, the “image of God” from Genesis 1.27 is understood to be the breath breathed into Adam according to Genesis 2.7. Thus Adam received the image with the following results. First, he had “discernment, rationality, intelligence, spiritual breath”; second, he had recognition of God; and finally, he had authority and prescient knowledge.

Focusing on the last phrase first, Agathangelos says that his knowledge is prescient because he *recognized* each creature and knew its name.<sup>12</sup> The “authority” that Adam had derived from the prototype of which he was the image, i.e., God, and was expressed in his authority

<sup>10</sup> Thomson 2001 translates this text with introduction and annotation.

<sup>11</sup> Thomson 1976, “Introduction”. For further bibliography, see Thomson 1995, 90–5.

<sup>12</sup> On a similar basis, *Teaching* §275 speaks of Adam’s recognition of Eve (Gen. 2.23–24, cf. Mt. 19.56 and Mk. 10.78).

over vegetation and animals. God made the animals obedient to man, and man, by his discernment, recognized the essential character of each beast and so gave its name. Thus, in Adam's naming and in the qualities that make that naming possible, Adam is the image of God.

#### V. *Adam Names God*

In his next move Agathangelos moves back to the second fruit of the spirit that was breathed into Adam, that is recognition of God. He argues that, because Adam could name the animals, he must first have known and named—and so proclaimed—the Creator. Thus, and only thus, could he have known the names of the animals. For this reason, Scripture says that “God (i.e. the Creator) led all creatures of his creation to Adam to see what he would call them” (Gen. 2.19). Adam, it follows, “first named the Creator, because from whose face he received life, Him he saw before all others; for the creatures were established to make known to him the Creator” (§273).<sup>13</sup> Because God led the animals to him, he must have recognized God before he recognized and named the animals. That recognition of God is naming. In other words, as it is put in §264: “For the Lord introduced knowledge and through his knowledge recognizing His creatures, he was called similar to Him.”<sup>14</sup> So, the second of the gifts of the spirit also reflects Adam's being in the image of God.

Here two most interesting notions are introduced. First, that the divine breath or spirit breathed into Adam gave him discernment, rationality and knowledge and in this respect he was the image of God. It is this discernment that enabled him to recognize the animals—not just to make up their names, but to name them according to their essential being. This point was stressed repeatedly during the following centuries. David of Ganjak (1060?–1131), also known as David son of Alavik, says that “Adam gave names conformable to the nature of each animal and those were found to be their unchangeable names.”<sup>15</sup> The name is an

<sup>13</sup> Thomson 2001, 70.

<sup>14</sup> Thomson 2001, 66.

<sup>15</sup> Abrahamyan 1952, 52. Similarly Gregory of Narek (945?–1003), David's predecessor, in his *Commentary on Song of Songs*, stresses this point: “Even after eating the fruit, he did not totally lose the spirit”. This is shown, Gregory maintains, by the fact that “he arranged names for each of them (the animals) according to its disposition and

expression of the essence or true being of that named, an idea found widely in human societies.<sup>16</sup> Adam recognized and knew that name because he was created in the image and inspired by the spirit that God breathed into his nostrils.

A commentary on Genesis is attributed to the fifth-century author Elišē. It is likely, but not completely certain, that he was the actual author. In it, we find an additional confrontation of Genesis 1 and 2. Genesis 1.30 gives an inclusive list of creatures: “every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life”. In the naming pericope, in Genesis 2.19, only the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven are mentioned, the creeping things are passed over. Elišē asks:

And why did he add the additional ones (i.e., those added in Genesis 1 to the list in Genesis 2)? Because they were going to receive names and those who are without names are reckoned with the uncreated, as though the created come from the uncreated through that (i.e., through receiving names). “And he brought them to Adam to see what he would call them, and whatever Adam named every living thing, that was its name.”<sup>17</sup>

Here the creative dimension of naming is made very explicit. Adam can name true names, which is an act of creation, only because he bore the image of God.

The second intriguing idea present in the *Teaching* is that God could be visible to humans and audible to humans only if he took on “a visible likeness and a power of expression”. Otherwise they could not endure the sight of Him and the sound of His voice. Adam named Him because he saw His face before he saw any other creatures, “for the creatures indeed were established to make the Creator known to him” (*Teaching* §272). In the background of these statements is, of course, the idea of the Incarnation: in Creation man was made in the image of God; in the Incarnation God took on the form of a man.

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nature” (Grigor Narekac’i, 1840, 276–7). All translations of Armenian sources are our own, unless otherwise specified. Compare John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 8:352–3. “I nam’d them, as they pass’d, and understood Thir Nature, with such knowledge God endu’d”.

<sup>16</sup> On the importance of naming, see Abba 1962, 500–3, Denny, 1987, 300–1.

<sup>17</sup> Gen. 2.19. Xaç’ikyan 1992, 241.

VI. *God's Etymology*

At first glance, the assertion that Adam named God is strange. Of course, we may recall Exodus 3:13–16 and 6:1–5 where God makes his name known to Moses, and tells him to use His name in addressing the people of Israel. But this is not the same, though the idea of God's proper name is present. In his *Reflection on the Holy Liturgy*, Nersēs of Lambron (1153–1198) remarks on the phrase from the Mass “Lord God of hosts and Creator of all beings”,<sup>18</sup>

First (is) God's name which people found, (with which) it names him . . . Because having learned that He alone is Creator of beings, on account of this we called the Creator of the structures of things God (Armenian: *Astuac*) that is “he who brings here (*աստ ածող* [ast acoł]), the non-existent things to existence and being, (both) the heavenly and earthly.<sup>19</sup>

So Nersēs too says that humans gave God His name.

Now, in fact, the etymology of the Armenian word *Astuac* (**Աստուած**) “God” is not completely certain (one plausible view would take it from Phrygian Σαβάζιος, etc). Nonetheless, the popular etymology (“He who brought here”, i.e., “Creator”) referred to by Agathangelos and Nersēs of Lambron was extremely ancient and widespread. So much so that it is given as the meaning of *Astuac* in the great nineteenth-century thesaurus of Classical Armenian.<sup>20</sup>

Agathangelos connects this popular etymology with the idea that when God brought Adam the animals to name, Adam recognized, i.e., named, Him as the Creator. Therefore the name of God used by Adam means “he who brings hither”, and thus “Creator”. An interesting footnote is that the Armenian translation of the Bible renders Exodus 3.16, **אֲנִי אֲשֶׁר אֲהִיָּה**, “I am who I am”, as «**ես եմ Աստուած, որ էն**», I am *Astuac* (The Creator) who IS”, though the Septuagint reads for this

<sup>18</sup> The phrase is from the Liturgy, from the prayer before the Kiss of Peace: see Nersisyan, 1984, 68.

<sup>19</sup> **զոչ էսն յետմին և ի գոյութիւն և զերկրաւորս**: Nersēs' remarks on this name “I do not mean the name of his nature which is glorious and incomprehensible but of his glory and action.” See Nersēs Lambronac'i 1842, 81 for both quotations.

<sup>20</sup> In NBH 1837, s.v. it is glossed thus: **իբր հաստատիչ, կամ աստ' և յաստիս ածող, այսինքն քոյացուցիչ, արարիչ, ստեղծի**, “like founder, or bringer here or hither, that is to say, bringer into being, maker, creator.” Ačařyan, in his etymological dictionary, in a long, detailed article gives an excellent overview of proposed etymologies of the word supports the Phrygian etymology given above (1971, 1.279–282).

phrase:  $\epsilon\gamma\omega\ \epsilon\dot{\iota}\mu\iota\ \acute{\omicron}\ \acute{\omega}\nu$ . The word *Astuac* is introduced into the Armenian form of the verse where it is not found in the Hebrew or Greek. This witnesses the antiquity and dissemination of this idea.

The same concept was very much to the fore in the thirteenth century for, in his *Book of Questions*, Nersēs' later contemporary, Vanakan *vardapet* (1181–1251), has the following.

QUESTION: How did he (Adam) give the name?

ANSWER: When He (God) breathed into his face, the eyes of his mind being opened, he saw God and the fiery hosts round about, and he said, "God!" (*Astuac*, i.e., bringer forth hither). Then He (God) brought the animals forward. He (Adam) gave the name. The animal, wondering, looked at him.<sup>21</sup>

Vanakan *vardapet* clearly states the relationship between Adam's naming God and God, by or in accordance with the meaning of His name, bringing forth the animals so that Adam could give them, to their astonishment, their "true" names.

Knowledge or recognition of names, therefore, is a creative act and the name of God that is known to humans is "Creator". This name comes from Adam's discernment that he is the image of God and the ability to discern this derives from the inbreathing of the spirit.

## VII. *The Late Medieval Ages*

In the material we have discussed there, we have ranged from the inception of Armenian literature to its *floruit* in the High Middle Ages. It may, therefore, be appropriate to conclude with two passages from great figures of the late Armenian Middle Ages. Grigor Tat'ewac'i (1344?-1409), Armenia's most eminent systematic theological writer, asks in his *Book of Questions* (part 53): "Why did Adam give names to all cattle and other (animals)?" He enumerates a number of answers to this question and we take up the discussion in the middle:

Answer. . . . Third, because God had given Adam natural wisdom; He commands (him) to give names in order to demonstrate the best offspring of the Word (i.e., mankind). Fourth, in order to show man to be autonomous; wherefore he commands him to give whatever names he wishes. Fifth, he gave these animals as help to man, as servants to the(ir) lord; he had to

<sup>21</sup> R. Ervine, personal correspondence.

know them by name. Sixth, the beneficent God made Adam *companion of His creation* by giving names. Seventh, since he had breathed into him the breath of grace of various gifts, now he manifested the grace of priesthood in him. For it is the duty of a priest to give names after the birth in the font. Eighth, now he manifested in Adam the grace of prudence and speech and voice and lordship.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, Grigor Tat'ewac'i stresses a series of Adam's aspects which relate to his role or status. The issue of Adam's autonomy is an old one and his free will is related to his sin as early as *The Teaching of Gregory*.<sup>23</sup> Lordship is also present, but so is the theme of creation. Adam gave names, which means he created and because he created, he was a companion or partner of God in creation. Consequently he was lord of the creatures he named and had authority over them. Moreover, Adam gave names just as a priest gives names in the baptismal font. Baptism is rebirth so here, again, the theme of creation and recreation recurs.

In the *Adam Book* of Arak'el of Siwnik' (ca. mid-fourteenth century to ca. 1421) we read:

16 Why did he create Adam later?  
And not before everything,  
For, if he was image and likeness,  
He should have made him first, with Himself.  
17 Because, if he had not created the beings first,  
Where would the first man have lived?  
He formed the earth as a table for him,  
And then He summoned and honoured the First one.  
18 Then He brought, He set before him,  
A thousand sorts of living beings,  
So that if he were pleased with them,  
He might take a companion, whom he wished.  
19 He took no companion from the irrational beasts,  
For they were not like him.  
But he gave names to the cattle,  
Those whom he saw turning (or: again) with him.  
20 When he gave them a name,  
The fitting one according to each,  
Lowering their heads to the ground to him.  
They passed by obediently. (Recension 1, Chapter 1).<sup>24</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Grigor Tat'ewac'i 1993, 219–20.

<sup>23</sup> *Teaching* §§277, 279.

<sup>24</sup> The text may be found in Madoyan 1989, 15.

Aṙak'el of Siwnik' wrote a long epic poem on Adam and Eve from which the preceding is an extract. He was both nephew and student of the great theologian, Grigor Tat'ewac'i and his uncle's ideas about naming influenced him. What this passage from Aṙak'el's Adam Book omits is as intriguing as what it presents. Ideas about naming and creation, prominent and developing from Agathangelos to Nersēs Lambronac'i, are completely absent. Elišē's idea that naming is required for existence, which has many resonances in other writings, is not taken up. From the beginning, in Agathangelos, Adam's image had included an aspect of authority and mastership (so already Genesis 1:28–30). It is this which Aṙak'el of Siwnik' discusses almost exclusively. He passes over notions such as Adam's naming as the image of God's creation, Adam's naming the animals as the continuation of his naming of God, naming as bringing into being, and so forth. Instead, he stresses the issue of obedience: a lord or master names and so naming demands obedience. This is not a new idea, of course, and Agathangelos' words about it bring to mind Isaiah's doxological cry:

Lift up your eyes on high and see:  
 Who created these?  
 He who brings out their host and numbers them,  
 calling them all by name;  
 because he is great in strength,  
 mighty in power,  
 not one is missing. (Is. 40:26)

The biblical sources, however, are submerged in the background in Aṙak'el's poem as he highlights one characteristic of Adam as the image: his lordly authority. In the search narrative in the apocryphal *Penitence of Adam* (especially 37(10):1–38(12):3) the beasts' obedience is the operative theme. Eve lost it when she sinned, but Seth retained it, because he was created in Adam's image and likeness (Gen. 5.3) and so he could overcome the beast.<sup>25</sup> The *Penitence of Adam*, the Armenian translation of the primary Adam book, is quite old, and might be of the sixth or seventh century.<sup>26</sup>

A final remark touches on Adam's naming as a sacerdotal function. In the seventh reason cited by Grigor Tat'ewc'i above, he related Adam's

<sup>25</sup> Being in Adam's image, Seth possessed a measure of the image of God.

<sup>26</sup> Anderson and Stone 1997 provide a synoptic edition and translation of the relevant texts.

naming to his priestly role. This point was made earlier by Vanakan *vardapet*:

Question: What did he give to Adam?

Answer: Priesthood in the putting of names, for priests seal the believer at the font, by calling his name.

Priesthood relates on the one hand to the idea of the primordial high priesthood, passed on by Adam to the subsequent generations. On the other hand, it takes up themes related to Christ as priest and sacrifice that are already developed in the New Testament.<sup>27</sup> Similar ideas are expressed by Grigor Tat'ewac'i who says that before sinning Adam had "three gifts: priesthood, royalty and prophecy." The priesthood, Grigor says, was expressed by his naming the animals.<sup>28</sup>

The theme of naming is a rich one, both from the aspect of history of thought and from that of the investigation of social categories. More data could be assembled and further avenues of investigation could be broached. Yet, what has been said here suffices to indicate certain main lines of development.

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<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Hebrews 2.17–18, 5.1–10.

<sup>28</sup> Sermon for the Saturday before the Fast, chap. 60 in Grigor Tat'ewac'i 1998, 275. The same exact formulation is found in Yovhannēs Erznkac'i Corcorec'i 1825, 316. Compare Vanakan vardapet cited in Ervine 2000, 435 n. 15.

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