

## THE PHOENICIAN NAME KPR: "YOUNG LION" OR "HE FORGIVES"? A REJOINDER

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In a recent note, T. K. Sanders proposes that the Phoenician personal name *kpr*, attested on two Phoenician seals, may best be analyzed as a *D*-stem verbal hypocoristicon /*kippir*/, meaning "He forgives."<sup>1</sup> Until now, scholars have concurred in interpreting the Phoenician *kpr* as "young lion."<sup>2</sup> Sanders' study provides an opportunity to review the methodology employed for determining the meaning of personal names in general and to reconsider the meaning of Phoenician *kpr* in particular.

The basic difficulty in the interpretation of personal and geographical names is that, as proper nouns, these are linguistic isolates whose meaning cannot be divined from their surrounding contexts.<sup>3</sup> With personal names, this difficulty is palliated to the extent that often the most common and transparent lexical items are used in their construction. For example, among the Northwest Semitic languages, a personal name such as \**ntn'l* can only be interpreted as "God/El has given." Theophoric personal names, no doubt constituting the largest class, generally expressed sentiments,

<sup>1</sup>T. K. Sanders, "Young Lion" or "He Forgives"?: A Note on the Name KPR," *AUSS* 29 (1991):71-72.

<sup>2</sup>W. E. Aufrecht, *A Corpus of Ammonite Inscriptions*, Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Studies, vol. 4 (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1989), 272; F. L. Benz, *Personal Names in the Phoenician and Punic Inscriptions*, Studia Pohl 8 (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1972), 334; Pierre Bordreuil, *Catalogue des sceaux ouest-sémitiques inscrits* (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1986), 35; R. Hestrin and Michal Dayagi-Mendels, *Inscribed Seals: First Temple Period* (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1979), 126.

<sup>3</sup>In general, see my *Archaic Features of Canaanite Personal Names in the Hebrew Bible*, Harvard Semitic Monographs, no. 47 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 22-25; note also the remarks by J. Huehnergard, *Ugaritic Vocabulary in Syllabic Transcription*, Harvard Semitic Studies, no. 32 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 8; idem, "Northwest Semitic Vocabulary in Akkadian Texts," *JAOS* 107 (1987): 714.

wishes, or gratitudes that were intelligible to ancient man. The modern scholar's success at recovering these meanings depends on several methodological considerations, such as observation of grammatical structure, knowledge of the language in which the name is cast (or of relevant cognate languages), and careful comparison of Northwest Semitic names with one another.

From the perspective of structure, Phoenician *kpr* may be either a one-word name, or perhaps a shortened<sup>4</sup> name, in which the deity name is unexpressed. To restate the question in these terms, is Phoenician *kpr* a profane ("nontheophoric") name, meaning "young lion," or a shortened name, meaning "He (i.e., the deity) forgives"? From the perspective of structure, either meaning is possible. The recognition that the personal name *kpr* is Phoenician is relevant but not decisive for determining the exact meaning of the name and thus deciding between these two interpretations. With the exception of the personal name *kpr*, neither the root \**kpr*, "to cover over," nor the homonym "lion" are listed in the standard Phoenician lexica.<sup>5</sup> The only alternative, therefore, is to turn to cognate languages in search of the meaning of this name. Sanders has compared Phoenician *kpr* to the personal names *kfr'l* and *smkfr*, which occur in Taymanite inscriptions.<sup>6</sup> This comparison is unacceptable for two reasons. First, the meaning of these names is too uncertain to serve as a basis for interpreting Phoenician *kpr*.<sup>7</sup> The state of our knowledge of the North Arabian dialect(s?) spoken in ancient Teman is at best primitive. To be sure, the North and South Arabian languages and onomastica are important fields of study, and significant progress has been made and will continue as trained specialists devote their attention to these inscriptional remains. In the meantime, however, casual

<sup>4</sup>I prefer this term to Sanders' hypocoristicon, but the argument remains unaffected by this preference.

<sup>5</sup> Richard S. Tomback, *A Comparative Lexicon of the Phoenician and Punic Languages*, SBLDS 32 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978); Maria-José Fuentes Estañol, *Vocabulario Fenicio* (Barcelona: Biblioteca Fenicia, 1980).

<sup>6</sup>Sanders, 72. G. Lankester Harding, *An Index and Concordance of Pre-Islamic Arabian Names and Inscriptions*, Near and Middle Eastern Studies, no. 8 (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1971), 376, 501, who does not classify names by regional dialects, subsumes these names under Thamudic.

<sup>7</sup>Note, e.g., that Harding, 501, interprets the *kfr* element in personal names by Arabic *kafir* "lofty."

comparisons between Northwest Semitic personal names and poorly understood Arabian personal names should be avoided.

Second, the comparison of Phoenician *kpr* with personal names found in Taymanite inscriptions is methodologically flawed. Lexical (or in this case, onomastic) comparisons should always proceed from the nearest to the more distantly related languages, and only to the latter when comparisons with the former have been exhausted without conclusive results.<sup>8</sup> In the development of Ugaritic studies, the heavy reliance upon Arabic to explain the Ugaritic lexicon has long since been abandoned and replaced by more careful lexical comparisons between Ugaritic and other ancient Northwest Semitic languages. Likewise, the proposal to rely solely on South Arabian personal names to interpret Amorite names—ignoring the vast differences in space and time between these two onomastica—has been critically evaluated and found wanting.<sup>9</sup>

The closest and best known cognate language to Phoenician, which could serve as a point of comparison, is Hebrew. Though a biblical or epigraphic<sup>10</sup> Hebrew personal name formed with a root *\*kpr* is not attested, biblical Hebrew does possess a common noun *kēpîr*, "young lion," as well as a root *\*kpr* I, "to cover over." At first glance, it may seem that another stalemate has been reached, but additional considerations tip the balance of evidence in favor of comparing Phoenician *kpr* with biblical Hebrew *kēpîr*. To interpret Phoenician *kpr* as meaning "young lion" is to place this name in an already well-established category of one-word names—animal names. Examples of animal names functioning as personal names are found in many ancient cultures,<sup>11</sup> Phoenician being no

<sup>8</sup>See esp. W. Röllig, "The Phoenician Language: Remarks on the Present State of Research," *Atti del I Congresso Internazionale di Studi Fenici e Punici, Roma, 5-10 Novembre 1979*, 3 vols. (Rome: Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche, 1983), 2.376, n. 9; for the application of this methodological principle in the interpretation of the biblical name *miryam*, see Baruch A. Levine, "Assyriology and Hebrew Philology: A Methodological Re-examination," in *Mesopotamien und seine Nachbarn: Politische und kulturelle Wechselbeziehungen im Alten Vorderasien vom 4. bis 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.*, eds. Hans-Jörg Nissen and Johannes Renger (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1982), 521-530.

<sup>9</sup>See *Archaic Features*, 78-87.

<sup>10</sup>Here I refer to the numerous Hebrew personal names attested in Iron Age inscriptions (on seals, bullae, ostraca, vessels, etc.).

<sup>11</sup>See T. Nöldeke, "Names. B. Meaning of Names," *Encyclopaedia Biblica*, 1902, 3:3298-3299; idem, "Einige Gruppen semitischer Personennamen," *Beiträge zur*

exception.<sup>12</sup> Interpreted in this manner, the Phoenician *kpr*, "young lion," finds a semantic cognate in the Hebrew personal name *layiš*, "lion," the patronym of Palti (ʿel) (1 Sam 25:44; 2 Sam 3:15).<sup>13</sup> Among animal names, "lion" names are fairly common in the ancient Near East.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, the derivation of Phoenician *kpr* from the root meaning "to cover over" finds no certain parallel in Semitic onomastica.<sup>15</sup> Though "the concept of atonement is not unimaginable as an element in Semitic personal names,"<sup>16</sup> imagination is not a reliable criterion for determining the meaning of a personal name. The concept of a deity atoning is not at issue here; what is at issue is whether this particular concept finds expression in personal names. What is needed are actual names that are lexically or semantically parallel; these we do not have at present. Until unambiguous evidence establishes the use of the root \**kpr*, "to cover over," in personal names, it is preferable to classify the Phoenician personal name *kpr* as an animal name and to translate "young lion."

*semitischen Sprachwissenschaft* (Strassburg: Karl J. Trübner, 1904), 73-90; M. Noth, *Die israelitischen Personennamen im Rahmen der gemeinsemitischen Namengebung*, BWANT III/10 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1928); 229-230; B. Schaffer, "Tiernamen als Frauennamen im Altsüdarabischen und Frühnordarabischen," in *Al-Hudhud: Festschrift Maria Höfner zum 80. Geburtstag*, ed. R. G. Stiegner (Graz: Karl-Franzens-Universität, 1981), 295-304; and for a summary list, R. Zadok, *The Pre-Hellenistic Israelite Anthroponymy and Prosopography*, OLA 28 (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1988), 382.

<sup>12</sup>Benz, 239.

<sup>13</sup>For a possible use of Hebrew ʿ<sup>a</sup>rl "lion" in personal names, compare ʿ<sup>a</sup>rlēl (Ezra 8:16) and Greek ʿAri < ʿ<sup>a</sup>rl? (Abraham Schalit, *Namenwörterbuch zu Flavius Josephus* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968], 16).

<sup>14</sup>In general, see Nöldeke, "Einige Gruppen semitischer Personennamen," 77-78; on \**lb*ʿ, "lion," in West Semitic personal names, see R. S. Hess, "Amarna Proper Names" (Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion [Cincinnati], 1984), 170-171; on \**lb*ʿ(ʿ) in South Semitic personal names, see Schaffer, 361.

<sup>15</sup>In this statement, I include Northwest Semitic and Akkadian personal names.

<sup>16</sup>Sanders, 72.