David Bain

A List of Bird-Names (*P. Amst.* 1.13)

aus: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik 128 (1999) 76–78

© Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, Bonn
A LIST OF BIRD- NAMES (P. AMST. 1.13)*

In 1977 the late and greatly lamented P. J. Sijpesteijn published a papyrus of unknown provenance containing a list of bird-names. This text, which Sijpesteijn dated to the fifth century A.D., subsequently reappeared as P. Amst. 1.13. The list is notable for the presence in it of several extremely obscure names and also a large number of diminutive forms. It repays further examination.

The list, almost certainly a school exercise, is set out in two columns, the second of which is extremely defective, and contains 34 items of which 4 are totally unproblematical since no letters which are legible or legible with certainty (viz. 19, 24, 25, 33) are to be found in them. Nothing needs to be said about κίττα (9), κορόνη (13), ορνύξ (18), or about the diminutive forms of common bird-names, τρυγώνιν (4: from τρυγών: the first known occurrence of the diminutive form) and χνόνιν (16: from χήν). Some items are preserved with only their initial letter intact or semi-intact (21, 22, 23, 28, 32, 34). The remaining nineteen items require and in some cases defy comment. Items in the latter category I mention ‘pour encourager les autres’.

1) περικτέριν: i.e. the late diminutive form ending in -in, equivalent to what in earlier Greek would have been περικτέριον.6 περικτέριον is attested as early as Old Comedy: see Pherecrates, fr. 143 Kassel–Austin where it is clearly an affectionate diminutive.

2) αετάριον [sic l. αετάριον]: Sijpesteijn associates this with the obscure αειάλον/αείσάρων, but it is quite obvious that the reference is to the eagle; MG αέτος < αετός.7 This is rightly observed in the revised supplement to LSJ which, however, glosses αετάριον as ‘little eagle’. It is extremely unlikely in a text of this date that such a meaning was intended. Sijpesteijn notes the preponderance of diminutive forms in this list and refers to Zilliacus ‘for the well known fact that in later Greek -ιον need not have diminutive force’.8 There is no more likelihood in this collection of αετάριον having the special meaning ‘little eagle’ than there is of περικτέριν (1) meaning ‘little dove’, τρυγώνιν (4) meaning little ‘turtle-dove’ or χνόνιν (17) meaning ‘little goose’ or elsewhere, for example, βουρδνάριον in P. Ryl. 238.11 (A.D. 262) meaning ‘little mule’. For the extremely productive -αριον suffix see L. R. Palmer, A Grammar of the post-Ptolemaic Papyri 1.1, London, 1946, 83f.

* In writing this note I have greatly benefited from the advice of Professor W. G. Arnott. It is not to be assumed that he is in agreement with all the suggestions made herein.

1 A List of Birds, Mnemosyne 2 30 (1977), 69–72.
2 Die Amsterdamse Papyri I ed. R. P. Salomons et al., Zutphen, 1980. I shall for the most part refer to the English language version. References to D’Arcy Thompson are to D’Arcy W. Thompson, Greek Birds, London, 1936. In P. Amst. 1.13 the year reference to the editio princeps should be corrected to 1977 and the page reference to D’Arcy Thompson in the note on item 30 should be to p. 190.
3 See below on αετάριον. The only really comparable text, M. E. Crum – H. E. Evelyn White, The Monastery of Epiphanius of Thebes II (New York, 1928), nr. 621 is very different in these respects, containing only one unusual bird name (χοίμα l. 6) and no diminutives. (It consists of Greek bird names written in Coptic.)
4 See the references in Sijpesteijn, P. Amst. 30 n. 2 to which can now be added R. Cribiore, Writing, Teachers, and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt (American Studies in Papyrology 36), Atlanta, 1996, 39.
5 v.l. There are not that many Greek bird names beginning with ν and I suppose that the smart money would here be placed on any one of νιττά/νιττάριον, νικάνη/νικάριον.
7 See G. P. Shipp, Modern Greek Evidence for the Ancient Greek Vocabulary, Sydney, 1979, 44 for an explanation of why Attic αετός has ousted koine αετός.
3) ἀκρεοπαόνι: clearly some sort of peacock. Read ἀγριοπαόνι? It must be noted, however, that while ἀγριο- is regularly found as the first part of a compound in which a vegetable or plant is denoted, as far as I know no such compounds are to be found denoting fauna.9

5) στρωθίν (sic): since the full form is στρωθίον the word should be accented στρωθίν. On the reference here see footnote 16.

6) μελαγκόλωψ: clearly as Sijpesteijn says an alternative spelling of μελαγκόρωψ, but he does not account for the neuter form. Should we not read rather μελαγκολόφ(τ)ον, adding a further diminutive form to the list?10

7) σαλακκονήδα: a most mysterious word. It is a curious feature of the Greek vocabulary that so many Greek words which have a sexual denotation begin with σα-,11 and one therefore is tempted to speculate that this is a reference to a bird of lewd habits or suggestive sexual movement. The word σαλάκχον (cognate with σαλεύτεν) is well attested as a term of disparagement connoting arrogant swaggering.12 If it is to be detected in this bird-name, it would probably indicate that we are confronted with an alternative name for the γυγξ. Compare εεισομηντίς used as an alternative name for the γυγξ in the Cyranides (Cyr. 3.41.1, 2).13 The last three letters of σαλακκονήδα are, however, morphologically inexplicable, which would imply that we are confronted by a non-Greek word.

8) πρύγαλος: ‘read πύργαλος . . . this undoubtedly is the same bird as the one called πύργαλος at πυργαλίτης [no authority is cited for the latter form]’, Sijpestein, 70 n. 8. πυργαλίτης would be a by-form of πυργίτης (the LSJ revised supplement glosses with this word) formed from the diminutive πυργαλός: but how does one account for the -σ declension ending of πυργαλος if it is a by-form of πυργαλίτης? A more promising approach would be to treat the form as the outcome of a series of dissimilations, combined with metathesis in the first syllable, culminating from an original misspelling of the more familiar πύργαρχος.14

10) κεάρι: Sijpesteijn states that Hesychius gives κέαρος as an equivalent of ὀρτυξ, but this is not the form found in Latte where the relevant lemma is κέαριον: Latte refers to S. Kraus, BZ 2 (1907), 525. If the word is related to κεάζειν, the bird in question might be either a woodpecker or a pelican. Compare πελεκάς (woodpecker) and πελεκάν (pelican), both in all probability being formed from πέλεκος (axe). κέαριον is given in LSJ as ‘carpenter’s axe’. Perhaps we should read κεάριον.

11) βοιςίτς: unknown and totally inexplicable.

12) ὀκτίς: the most obvious Greek bird name of similar shape is ὀκτί, but in the papyrus the two first letters are absolutely clear and, since this is certainly the master’s rather than the pupil’s hand, it is scarcely conceivable that we are dealing with a scribal error.

---

9 This is not the case, however, with medieval Greek. Sophocles’ lexicon gives ἀγριόβους as early as Cosmas Indicopleustes and I note from the Lexikon der byzantinischen Græzität ἄγριον, ἄγριοπτενάλον, ἄγριοπτετεν, ἄγριοπτεινον, ἄγριοπτινον, ἄγριοπτινον, ἄγριοπτινον, ἄγριοπτινον, ἄγριοπτινον and from the lexicon of Kriaras (LΕΞΙΚΟ ΜΕΣΑΙΩΝΙ-ΚΗΣ ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗΣ ΔΗΜΟΣΙΑΣ ΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΕΙΑΣ, Athens, 1968–), ἄγριοπτινον, ἄγριοπτινον, ἄγριοπτινον. Professor questions the existence of wild peacocks in Egypt.


11 See Felix Solmsen, IF 30 (1912), 36ff. who connects them all, not altogether plausibly, with the α- element in κάθη.


13 See D’Arcy Thompson, 257–58.


14) ἄκρεγιατον: unknown.
15) ἄκρυνας: Sijpesteijn suggests a connection with ἀκυλάς.
17) ὁρνίθιν: Sijpesteijn was excessively cautious in his first edition of the text when he said that the meaning is ‘probably . . . chicken’. In a text of this date and character there can be little doubt. The third book of the Κυρανίδες which deals exclusively with birds and creatures of the air, a text not all that earlier than this papyrus, eschews any form of ὁρνις as the generic term, using in its place either ἄρνηθινον,16 πτηνὸν, or ὁρνευν.

20) γ.ε.: there are no known Greek bird names which begin with a γ and have as their third letter ε.
26) τι.: the only bird whose name begins thus listed in D’Arcy Thompson is τιτᾶς.
27) τα.: ταῦτα? Sijpesteijn. Unless we are faced by something very recherché, presumably he is right in assuming that the item contains a reference to the peacock. ταῦτα is not the only available supplement. In later Greek ταῦτα is an alternative form and, in view of what is so commonly found elsewhere in this text, one must also entertain the possibility that the peacock was referred to by a hitherto unattested diminutive form (?τα[ωνάριον).

28) τετρ.: Sijpesteijn notes that there are five bird-names in D’Arcy Thompson which begin τετρ-.
30) λαε[ῶς (?): Sijpesteijn plausibly sees this as by-form of λαῖός.
31) τακηνάριν: Sijpesteijn is obviously correct to see here a phonetic spelling of τακηνάριων, which is in turn an alternative form of ἀτταγήν, ἀτταγᾶς. The revised supplement to LSJ which takes account of seven of the words found in this list does not mention this one: this is the first attestation of the word outside the lexicographical tradition.

University of Manchester  
David Bain

---

16 In view of this, one might entertain the possibility that τρουθίν (item 5) does not mean ‘sparrow’, but rather represents the generic word for bird current at the time of writing, but I would not wish to press this notion.