

CATEGORIES OF MODERN OCCURRENCES OF THE PERSONAL NAME TYPE SAMSON

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Categories of modern occurrences of the personal name type *Samson*

Abstract: The biblical personal name *Shimshōn* is quite transparently a derivative of *shēmēsh* 'sun'. And indeed, the Herculean character so named has solar features. He has, among the other things, flaws in his character, and perhaps this was a deterrent when it came to bestowing his name on a Jewish baby. It is not frequent at present in the Jewish onomasticon, but it has not been absent, either, historically.

For example, in medieval France, one of the leading rabbinic authorities was Samson (Shimshon) of Sens, born c. 1150, according to Urbach (1955: 228). Samson of Sens moved to the Holy Land in 1211, along with other rabbis (Urbach 1955: 230). He was born perhaps in Falaise, where his grandfather, Rabbi Samson of Falaise, had lived (Urbach 1955: 227). The grandson bore his grandfather's name. In a family of medieval rabbis, the biblical Samson having had a flawed character did not prevent the adoption of his name. I suggest that perhaps the presence of the personal name *Samson* among the Christian population was an incentive among French Jews not to shun the name of that ancient Hebrew character.

The present article traces some modern occurrences of the name type *Samson*, and identifies categories of occurrence. The name even occurs among bird names, in French. Moreover, one finds it among names for Walt Disney's anthropomorphic ducks, in translation – in Spanish in particular: as the name for Grandma Duck's tall and fat lazy farm hand Gus; "muscular" is sometimes used ironically for somebody who is fat, and after all, it is the job of Gus to carry out heavy duties on the farm, even though he would rather shirk such works and fall asleep.

Bear in mind that the personal name type *Samson* also resulted (directly or indirectly) in names for inanimate material. Samsonite is a strong, resistant material of which suitcases are often made. The Italian name is *sansonite* (< *Sansone*). But *sansonite* (spelled *samsonite* also in Italian: Devoto and Oli 1968, s.v.) is a term used by mineralogists, for a monoclinic mineral being a sulphur of silver, manganese and antimony. It is steel black, with metallic brightness. The mineral was so named after a mine called *Samson*, at St. Andreasberg, in the German region of Harz.

Keywords: Samson (biblical and cinematic character), personal name and biographical context, cinematic and Walt Disney characters' onomastics, name type *Samson* in anthroponomastics, name type *Samson* in bird names.

1. Introduction

The biblical personal name *Shimshōn* is quite transparently a derivative of *shémesh* ‘sun’. And indeed, the Herculean character so named has solar features. He has, among the other things, flaws in his character, and perhaps this was a deterrent when it came to bestowing his name on a Jewish baby. It is not frequent at present in the Jewish onomasticon, but it has not been absent, either, historically.

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2. The biblical Samson in homiletics

In the midrashic (i.e., traditional Jewish homiletic) interpretation of Jacob's deathbed blessing for his sons, what he says about the future of the tribe to be descended from Gad (*Genesis*, 49:19) was taken to refer to Elijah,¹ just as what he says about the tribe of Dan was taken to refer to Samson,² who according to the biblical account, was from the territory of Dan, a Danite indeed.³

In the middle of his discourse, Jacob invokes the Lord's deliverance,⁴ and whereas this may refer to his physical weakness while performing a solemn ceremony notwithstanding his illness, that brief invocation has been variously interpreted, homiletically (e.g., he wanted to foretell the Latter Day, but at that his foreknowledge was taken away from him).⁵ In the passage I am discussing, Jacob is made to believe that Samson would be the Messiah, but then he is disappointed, he sees him defeated and undergoing the final episode in which Samson dies; notwithstanding Samson's prodigious physical force, and his early successes against the Philistines, Samson comes to a bad end, and on his own deathbed, Jacob is disappointed at coming to realise this outcome as his vision of future events unfolds, yet Jacob is comforted once he becomes aware of there going to be Elijah, further down in sacred history.

3. Samson's end, and the end of another Samson: onomastics and a person's conceptualisation in autobiographical narratives

We mentioned the homiletical tradition about Jacob's foreseeing Samson and then Jacob's disappointment on foreseeing Samson's end. Contrast this to the following autobiographical narrative discussed by Ilana Rosen in her book (1999) *There Once Was... : The Oral Tradition of the Jews of Carpatho-Russia*.

Between the two World Wars, Carpatho-Russia (or Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia) used to be the easternmost region of Czechoslovakia. One of the persons who tell their story, Deborah Gross, relates that she studied at a Hebrew school stressing Bible reading, instead of traditional talmudic culture (Rosen 1999: 68–70). In one narrative, she relates (*ibid.*: 71) about a traditional Jew, bearded and with sidelocks, tall and handsome, her family's shoemaker, whose name was Samson. As a child, she used to create for herself occasions for her to listen to stories he would tell her, and she used to fantasise that he was one of the Thirty-Six Hidden Righteous Ones; moreover she also used to identify him with the biblical Samson (arguably the former identification shows her background in traditional culture,

¹ *Genesis Rabbah*, 99:12. (The tribe of Gad is dealt with also *ibid.*: 99:21.)

² *Genesis Rabbah*, 99:18–19. In the latter, a series of comparison is drawn between Samson and the serpent, which based on Jacob's blessing is the emblem of the tribe of Dan (*Genesis*, 49:16–17). Gad and Samson in relation to the serpent are briefly mentioned also in *Genesis Rabbah*, 99:12, right before the reference to Gad and to Malachi's prophecy concerning Elijah.

³ The midrashic literature also attempts to nevertheless give Samson a Judahite ancestry, in that his father's mother is claimed to have been from the tribe of Judah, and, more conspicuously so, in that Samson's mother (whose name is not stated, in the biblical account of her) is identified with *Hatslelponi*, a woman from the tribe of Judah.

⁴ "In Thy deliverance I hope, o Lord" (*Genesis*, 49:18).

⁵ That is the interpretation adopted in Rashi's commentary to *Genesis*, 49:19.

whereas the latter identification shows her schooling in the new national approach). Then during the Holocaust, as this community from Capatho-Russia was being transferred, the final destination being Auschwitz, a Hungarian policeman shouted at that man – Samson the shoemaker – that he would no longer be the tallest of them all, and killed him. Gross comments:

For me it was an utter disaster. Of him, I always used to think he was one of the Thirty-Six Hidden Ones. I heard so many tales about carpenters, shoemakers, and tailors, and I had been sure he was Samson the Hero. And all of a sudden everything disappeared, if it was possible for him to be killed.

4. Maciste, Atlas, and Samson in cinematography

The usual perception of Samson in those cultures to which the Bible is a sacred text, is as a character with exceptional physical stamina, capable of Herculean feats, yet eventually defeated, owing to his flawed personality. There exist contexts in which the identity of that powerful character is interchangeable with that of other physically extremely strong characters. Arnaldo Arnaldi was an Italian actor. He was active as early as the 1930s. One of his films was *Maciste alla corte dello zar*, of 1964, distributed in the U.S. under the title *Atlas Against the Czar* and *Samson vs. the Giant King*, and in Britain under the title *Giant of the Lost Tomb*.

This shows that Maciste, the protagonist of several Italian films, could be introduced instead as Atlas, or then as Samson. The availability, in the cultural repertoire, of physically extremely strong characters, clearly subserved peplum films (in which narratives are woven by exploiting extant mythology), but it could also facilitate character naming in other kinds of fantasy films.

5. The name type *Samson* in European anthroponastics

As Samson's name occurs in European cultures also other than by reference to the biblical character or than by using him as a metaphor, in the given languages of those respective cultures that names also has associations different from that of exceptional physical force. For example, in France the family name *Sanson* was borne by the members of a dynasty of executioners. Charles Sanson (1740–1806) guillotined Louis XVI, and subsequently related the event. His son Henri Sanson (1767–1840) executed Queen Marie Antoinette and others.

In Britain, the spread of the anthroponym type *Samson* in the forms *Sampson* and *Simpson* (these are rather frequent family names) was apparently facilitated by the ending *son* lending itself to homologation of the name along with patronyms ending in *son* for 'son'.

In Italy, *Sansoni* (the plural form of *Sansone*) is the name of a particular publishing house. To Italian mineralogists, however, that family name is rather associated with Francesco Sansoni. He was professor of Mineralogy at the University of Pavia, and died in 1895 at the age of 40. He established the *Giornale di Mineralogia* and was its editor in 1890–1894. After earning his Laurea at the University of Bologna, he worked for two years at Groth's laboratory in Strasbourg, and his handbook of crystallography published with the publisher Ulrico Hoepli in Milan was a popularisation of Groth's approach to the discipline.

It is not only the national context and general or disciplinary specialistic context that are relevant for the likeliest associations of the name. Regional geography also matters, as the family name *Sansoni* is not infrequent in Tuscany. Guido Biagi, in a guide (1909) to Val di Nievole, mentions a mineralogist, Sansoni, as a native of Vellano, a town from an area known as *Svizzera Pesciatina* (the Switzerland of Pescia), which is how it was named by Genevan economist and historian Jean-Charles-Léonard Simonde de Sismondi, in the past also known in Italy by the name Sismondo Sismondi or Sismondo de Sismondi (1773–1842), who owned a farm in that territory, a valley, hills and then mountains on the river Pescia upstream of the town of Pescia.

The coinage of the toponym may have been facilitated by extant toponyms: *la Suisse Normande*, for the southernmost and most elevated part of the “Bocage normand” (western Normandie), and *la Suisse Saxonne*, for a region on both banks of the River Elba, now in the Czech Republic and Saxony (in the former East Germany).

6. The name type *Samson* in French ornithonymy

The personal name of the biblical character gave rise to a bird-name in French. The starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) is called both *étourneau* and *sansonnet*, and the *Petit Larousse Illustré* gives the latter as a synonym of *étourneau* and derives it from the personal name *Sansonnet*, itself derived from *Samson*. Yet, to French ornithologists *étourneau* is more general, and they use the compound *étourneau sansonnet* in order to denote the species *Sturnus vulgaris*. The other European species of starling, the Spotless Starling (*Sturnus unicolor*), is called *étourneau unicolore* in French. See §§518–519 on p. 89 in Harriet I. Jorgensen’s (1958) *Nomina Avium Europæarum*.

In a given literary work, namely, my own *Liber Animalium*, a Hebrew-language, midrash-like literary bestiary, *Sefer-haḤayyót* (ספר החיות), the entry for *zarzír* (Starling) concocts a narrative aetiology for the association of this bird with Samson (*Shimshón*), on the evidence of French *sansonnet* (adapted into the Hebrew neologism *shimshonít*). This is woven by extrapolating extant midrashic narratives about Samson’s biography, and combining this with a symbolism of the spotted feathers of the starling, and newly devised convenient mock-etymologies of the Hebrew name of this bird. The mock-explanatory devices are so applied, as to result in overdetermination because of the coexistence of alternative pseudo-causal links. In part of these, Samson is the active character, and the starling’s function is as a symbol (in more than one way), whereas in another passage the starling, witnessing events from Samson’s life, is an active, anthropomorphised character.

7. The name type *Samson* in the translated onomastics of Walt Disney characters

Birds are not only those of scholarly ornithology, of folk-zoology, and of literary symbolic bestiaries. Anthropomorphised animals, including ducks, are well known from twentieth-century cartoons and animated films. In present-day Spanish, the connotations of the name *Samsón* are not only those of the biblical character, but also – *lehavdil* as one would say in Hebrew, or *si licet comparare*, in Latin – those of Disney’s character Gus Goose, Grandma Duck’s fat, lazy, sleepy farm hand (who nevertheless sweats abundantly when he

carries out farm work, which he does when he has to, for all of his being disinclined to do so, and who moreover is taller than Donald Duck).

Whereas in French, the name *Gus* was retained (or occasionally expanded into *Gustave*), in Italian the name *Ciccio* was adopted (or *Ciccio Papero* when both first name and family name are required), resorting to the hypocoristic name from the Italian onomasticon which, while derived by clipping and modification from a longer name, is so modified that is interpreted as referring to the child or man so named because of his being plump (the feminine *ciccia* is used by some as an equivalent of *darling*).

In German, Gus Goose is called *Franz Gans*. His Greek name is *Paschalis* (Πασχάλις Χήνος). But in Spanish it is *Sansón*. Tables of the names of Disney's characters in several languages are found in the Inducks database.⁶ Note that *Gus* is also the name one of the mice in the Disney film *Cinderella*. Because of the two characters living in different story universes, there is no conflict between Gus Goose and Gus the mouse as resulting from their being namesakes.

8. Other names for Disney's ducks in translation

Gus Goose having become *Paschalis* [*Goose / Gander*] in Greek conflicts with how another character connected to the Ducks has been called in yet another language. The child prodigy Newton, the nephew of the inventor Gyro Gearloose, was called *Newton* after the English scientist Isaac Newton (1642–1727), but in French the same character is called *Pascal Newtron*, which – while replacing a French early modern scientist (Blaise Pascal, 1623–1662) for the English early modern scientist Isaac Newton – maintains a soundalike of the latter's name in the physical term made into a family name, *Neutron*.

In Portuguese, Gyro is called *Prof. Pardal* (notwithstanding his not being an academic; cf. Gyro's Slovenian name: *Profesor Umnik*. In Slovenia, *Umnik* exists as a family name, and is rather frequent. Incidentally, in informal Israeli Hebrew the noun *úmnik*, written אֲמִנִיק and whose plural is אֲמִנִיקִים *úmnikim*, denotes a 'soldier of the United Nations', being derived by suffixation from the acronym אֲמִ Um – equivalently to 'UN' or 'UNO' in English – for [*Irgún*] *ha-'Ummót ha-mme'uḥadót*, 'United Nations [Organisation]'. Note that since the 1990s, the acronym for the UN Mission in Kosovo is *UNMIK*, but the form *UMNIK* also occurs, for 'the UN administration of the Serbian province of Kosovo and Metohija'.

Gyro's name in Slovene, *Profesor Umnik*, happens to rhyme with *šumnik*, a Slovenian derivative of the noun *šum* 'noise'; *šumnik* literally means 'noise maker'. According to a 'Slovene-English Waterfall Dictionary' of the Voda–Water project,⁷ the term *šumnik* denotes a 'stream where there are very noisy waterfalls', whereas *šum* 'noise maker' denotes a 'very noisy waterfall (but not necessarily)' (*sic*). This is not an inappropriate association with Gyro Gearloose's stream of inventiveness and noisy activity, but proposing such a metaphor, which bears no relation to how his name was devised in Slovene, is rather a creative exercise and little else.

⁶ Accessible on the Web at: <http://www.inducks.org/character.php> and at: <http://coa.inducks.org/legend-character.php>

⁷ <http://www.burgen.si/dictionary.htm>

As to Gyro's nephew, Newton, he is called *Pascoal* in Portuguese (arguably, after the French, but by renouncing the association with Blaise Pascal; the names of the type *Paschal* not being uncommon in Romance Christian cultures: I recall how, in my school days in Milan, a janitor at the school I attended, a southerner, had decided he would call me *Pasquale* [paʃkwaːle], with a rising, then descending tone and a very long second /a/, when it wasn't the hypocoristic [paʃkwa'liːno]).

As Gyro and Newton are eagles, rather than ducks, and as the Disney onomastica in Greek and Portuguese or French do not infiltrate each other, there is no real inconsistency in Gus Goose having been Hellenised as *Paschal Gander*.

Curiously, and apparently with no relation to this onomastic coincidence, the two characters, Gyro and Gus, were in some relation between them when they were invented by Carl Barks. The looks of the eagle-like, lanky, blond Gyro were initially intended for the farm hand of Grandma Duck, before this character, Gus Goose, was made into a fat glutton.

In Danish, the child prodigy Newton was given the name Edison, evidently after Thomas Alva Edison (arguably, the model for the prolific inventor Gyro Gearloose; but in Italian, *Edi*, pronounced like the first two syllables of *Edison*, from which it is backclipped as being a hypocoristic, is the name given to the tiny, lightbulb-headed robot who is Gyro's laboratory assistant).

In Dutch, the child Newton was given various names at various times, both *Archimedes* and *Newton* being among these. Yet, in Italian it is Gyro who is called *Archimede*, or in full *Archimede Pitagorico*. The audience is assumed to know something about there having existed a scientist called Archimedes, and whereas Pythagoras and (all the more so) the Pythagoreans are not necessarily known, the *tavola pitagorica* (i.e., 'multiplication table') is known from primary school.

That name-giving in Italy was relatively cultured can also be seen from how Scrooge McDuck's relative, a very pedantic scholar with an incomparably broad scope of erudition, was named in Italian: *Pico de Paperis*. This Disney character is called *Ludwig Von Drake* in English (presumably because of the popular perception of the many men of culture who came to the United States), and *Primus von Quack* in German. Yet this Disney character, in being an encyclopaedic erudite, is a man of the Renaissance, and therefore his bearing the name *Pico* is befitting.

The average Italian, let alone a child, is likelier than not to be unaware of the specifics of the thought and titles of the treatises of the Renaissance humanist Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494), yet Pico della Mirandola's vulgate persona, as having been an intellectual with a wondrous memory for detail (so much so as to having gambled quite literally his head he would make no error in declaiming a long text in reverse order) is extremely popular in Italy.

One need bear in mind that Italy is the main centre in Europe where Disney stories are authored; the Scandinavian school is second to Italy in that respect. This distinction is important, e.g., for how the behaviour and social life of Donald Duck's rather loony relative, Fethry Duck, or, in Italian, Paperoga (from *papero* 'duck' and rhyming with *yoga*, which was his absorbing interest in early Italian stories) – unshevelled, with long, thin hair (but short hair, as drawn in the United States) and always wearing a red roll-neck sweater and a long red hat (or rather a nightcap) – was modified by the Scandinavian Disney school (Fethry

Duck is called *Klodrik* in Norway) with respect to the American original and the Italian version, whereas in the Brazilian Disney school that character (called by it *Peninha*) acquired a special prominence, though with a refashioning far removed from the peculiar traits of the European Fethry Duck. (The lore about this particular character is derived from the respective entry, unsigned, in the Italian-language online Wikipedia.) This example should be enough to clarify geographic differences in how Disney characters have been managed and developed. Even American authors have been sometimes inconsistent among themselves, e.g., about the circumstances of the life of Grandma Duck.

Without delving in that complex matter, let the following suffice. Whereas in the United States, a complex genealogy was devised for the Ducks by Don Rosa, in Italian stories it was much simplified. This way, in these, Grandma Duck became Scrooge McDuck's sister, whereas their relation is much more complex in Don Rosa's grand plan for the family genealogy.

According to Don Rosa's grand plan, Ludwig Von Drake married one of Scrooge's sisters. Actually the character, which was invented by Milt Kahl and Ward Kimball, first appeared in an animated cartoon that was first broadcast on 24 September 1961. As introduced in the first few stories, his relation to the American Ducks was left vague: he was a European relative, was welcomed by a crowd of characters, and initially lodged at Donald Duck's house.

The cultural context originally referred to, namely, Central European intellectuals ended up in the United States, disappeared in the Italian stories. So did the onomastic connotations of *Ludwig Von Drake*, as *Pico de Paperis* is a name whose cultural roots are in Italian culture. It was Italian authors who developed, for this character, the main feature of his being a scholar with an extremely broad scope of reference, as opposed to the mainly awkward and caricatural character as in the original American stories featuring him. It has been claimed that the translator who introduced the reference to the humanist Pico della Mirandola, probably was Guido Martina. The character first appeared in Italy in 1962, and eventually was exploited and developed in Italy more extensively than it was in the United States.

In Italian-language Disney stories, the duck Pico bears the family name *de Paperis* in Italian, being patterned after *papero* ('young duck', but in Disney's Italian terminology, just 'any of the Ducks'), which is also the case of Scrooge McDuck's name, *Paperon de' Paperoni* (a name which, as Oreste Del Buono pointed out once, based on a signalation by a member of the public, was actually borne during the Middle Ages by an abbot – in the form *Paperone delli Paperoni* – a fact that was unknown when the Disney character was given his Italian name). Yet, whereas in one story the character was ephemerously introduced, of another of Scrooge McDuck's relatives, called in Italian Gedeone de' Paperoni – this being the bossy, ever-lecturing, quick-tempered, effectiveness-minded editor of a newspaper; invented in Italy by Romano Scarpa, where he first appeared in a story published in 1956, and so drawn as to resemble Mario Gentilini, at the time the editor of *Topolino* (the main Disney periodical in Italy) – and the family name of Scrooge McDuck, *de' Paperoni*, was retained, for Pico de Paperis the family name is formed by applying a Latinate pattern not infrequent in the Italian onomasticon of family names. The connotation is rather bookish, as befitting the duck Pico. (Don Rosa, the American genealogist of Disney characters, did

not include Gideon McDuck in his official genealogy, but suggested to consider him a half-brother of Scrooge McDuck.)

In Italian, *Gedeone* is the name of the biblical Gideon. Within the Italian population it is a name one does not almost expect to meet, as borne by a living person, so rare it is, if it is given at all to one's child nowadays. Yet, in the Italian onomasticon of Disney characters, *Gedeone* is the name of Grandma Duck's old horse. That animal-animal character's appearance (with his name being mentioned) is rare, yet it has been a viable character, unlike his namesake the humanoid duck Gedeone de' Paperoni, whose coming commanded a presence in a few original stories, yet did not result in this character staying for long. Just as Grandma Duck's horse bears the name of a biblical character, so does Donald Duck's cat, called *Tabby* in English-language stories, but that in Italy, bears the name of the prophet Malachi (in Italian, *Malachia*), and that, in the Scandinavian developments of the character of Fethry Duck, dislikes the latter intensely.

France was less courteous than Italy to Ludwig Von Drake, as whereas the Italian name *Pico De Paperis* is so formed as to command respect, in French he was named *Donald Dingué*, and whereas in this compound, *Donald* hints at his association with the Ducks (including *Donald*, i.e., Donald Duck), the insulting *Dingué* was certainly motivated by both alliteration, and the funny yet unsympathetic popular notion of the distract professor (ever noticed that suspense movies in which a professor dies, still have a happy end? If the scientist holds a secret with world-changing potential, then the non-intellectual or even anti-intellectual audience can be counted upon to feel safer without surviving memory of the content of that secret, and not to feel too sorry about the professor).

As to Gyro Gearloose, in Greek *Gyro* was modified into *Kύρος* (*Cyrus*); cf. his name in Spanish-language Disney stories from Mexico: *Ciro Peraloca*. Whereas Canadian French kept Gyro Gearloose's English name, in Belgian French it is *Gyro Gyroscope*, which exhibits completion into the name for a scientific instrument from the French (and international) lexicon.

A biblical name, *Daniel* (perhaps without motivation from the biblical Daniel having been a wiseman in Babylonia) is given to Gyro Gearloose in German: *Daniel Düsentrieb*, which in turn appears to have been the model for the Hungarian name of the same character, *Szaki Dani*.

Walt Disney's ducks, a class within his anthropomorphised, half-human, half-animal characters. For one thing, those ducks have no wings, possessing instead human arms, and hands with four fingers (only four, so as to avoid "crowding" of details in as small a detail as a hand is in most drawn panels). These ducks speak – only quacking when angry – and even have cultural and thinly disguised national and ethnic or racial identities, as White Anglo-Saxon Americans.

Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart authored an influential book (1971) in literary studies about the ideological thread of Disney's Ducks narratives set in exotic lands. Naomi Lindstrom (1995), writing on literary studies in Latin America, describes the impact of dependency theory from economics (about peripheral national economies being persistently and inherently disadvantaged in their trade relations with economically hegemonic partner countries) first on communication studies, and then on literary studies. "The Chilean writer and literary critic Ariel Dorfman was probably the single individual who

most successfully spread dependency theory to literary studies”, especially through his “content analyses of Donald Duck cartoons” (Lindstrom 1995: 216).

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