

Reviews

A Dictionary of Muslim Names. By Salahuddin Ahmed. New York Univ. Press. 838 Broadway, 3rd Floor, New York, NY 10003-4812. 1999. Pp. 352. \$45.00 cloth. \$13.95 paper.

The names used by a society are inextricably interwoven with its deepest cultural roots and religious beliefs. Naming in the present-day English-speaking world, with its crop of given names taken from the worlds of pop music, sport, film, popular fiction, soap operas, and the like, only serves to emphasize this fact and remind us how rootless our society has become.

In more stable, traditional societies, one of the duties of a priest is not only to cure souls, but also to control naming and ensure that the associations of a name are understood and respected. Giving a name is the first important duty that a society performs for its new members. Russians are named for saints and martyrs venerated in the Eastern Church, and Roman Catholics for the saints of the Western Church. When Puritans and Dissenters broke with what they saw as the corrupt opulence of the old Church, they symbolized the break by choosing names for their children taken from the Old Testament, not the New (*Ezekiel, Jedediah, Jabez, Abigail, Beulah, Zillah*) or based on abstract nouns denoting the virtues they cherished: *Patience, Prudence, Hope, Humility, Fortitude, Endeavor, Wrestling*.

An extreme contrast to conservative naming practices is found in the exuberant creativity of modern American Black culture, where the value of the individual is asserted by the invention of names, especially names for girls, which seem almost to vie with one another for originality. Given the treatment of Blacks in America over the past three centuries, it is hardly surprising that Black parents should express their rejection of traditional American society's values in the names they choose for their children, even as those children can look forward to greater opportunities for a life integrated with the rest of American society. A further paradox is that this very rejection builds itself into a new tradition, a tradition in which certain phonological elements become favored, for example the prefixes *La-*, *Sha-*, and *Ta-* for female names.

On the evidence of Salahuddin Ahmed's *Dictionary of Muslim Names*, Muslim society, despite its vast geographical spread from Morocco and Mali in the west to Malaysia and Indonesia in the east, is

74 Names 50.1 (March 2002)

remarkably conservative and faithful to its traditions. Muslims speak a great variety of languages: among them Turkish, Persian, Pashto, Urdu, Bengali, Malay, Turkmen, and Kyrgyz, as well as Arabic, but their names tend to be homogeneous. Muslim names, with overwhelming predominance, are of classical Arabic origin, and their meaning is generally transparent to Arabic speakers. Comprehensive coverage is a feature of this dictionary, as attested by a spot check against telephone directories. Almost all Muslim names with any substantial international frequency are entered and explained in *A Dictionary of Muslim Names*.

After Arabic, the most important source language for Muslim names is Persian. Persian names are used not only in Iran, but also in the Indian subcontinent and elsewhere. About 80% of the names in this dictionary are of Arabic origin, while about 17% are Persian, and a handful are Turkish. Altogether, the book contains over 2,000 male names and around 1,200 female names. Many of the traditional Arabic female names are derivatives of male names, with a final *-a*. It is a curious fact that in many cultures (Christian as well as Muslim) the number of traditional male names greatly outnumbers the traditional female ones.

Traditional Arabic names consist of four main elements, with an optional fifth. The four main elements are:

Ism: the given name proper, generally from an Arabic word denoting a desirable quality or state, e.g., *Mumtaz* 'distinguished', *Wasim* 'handsome', *Firdaus* 'heaven', *Naqiya* 'pure'.

Nasab: patronymic or lineage name, e.g., *Ibn Saud* 'son of Saud', *Bint Sadiq* 'daughter of Sadiq'.

Nisba: a locative or tribal name, e.g., *al-Haashimi* 'the Hashemite', a member of the tribe to which Muhammad himself belonged.

Laqab: an honorific, e.g., *Al-Siddiq* 'the truthful', *Khalil Allah* 'friend of Allah'.

An optional fifth element of Arabic personal name, the *kunya*, is somewhat surprising to English readers unacquainted with Muslim nomenclature. It is a teknonym, a nickname based on the *ism* or personal name of the bearer's child, actual or hypothetical. Thus, the Prophet Muhammad was known as *Abu-l Qasem* 'father of Qasem', while his wife, Ayesha, was known as *Umm Abdullah* 'mother of

Abdullah', even though she was in fact childless. Sometimes a newborn baby may be given a kunya, while in the Indian subcontinent only figurative kunya are found, e.g., *Abu Fazl*, literally 'father of bounty'. One of the most famous of all kunya is *Abu Bakr*, literally 'father of a young camel', i.e., 'father of *Bakr*', an ism meaning 'young camel'. The historic Abu Bakr al-Siddiq (573-634) was Mohammad's successor as leader of Islam, the first of the so-called "rightly guided" khalifs. Many prominent Muslims in the past 14 centuries have been named for him.

Indeed, many of the names in this dictionary, adopted by Muslims, are bestowed today in honor of influential religious and military leaders of the past. It is a merit of the book that many of the great figures of Islam are mentioned. It thus serves not only as an etymological work, but also as an index to some of the personalities who helped to frame Muslim culture, such as:

Ali ibn Abu Talib 'sublime, son of the father of the seeker', the fourth and last of the 'rightly guided' khalifs and the first imam of the Shiites.

The brothers *Hasan* 'good-looking' and *Husayn* (a diminutive of *Hasan*), sons of Ali, whose tragic fate is mourned by Shiites to this day.

Abdul Mu'min 'servant of the All-Faithful', the great 12th-century Almohad ruler in North Africa and Spain.

Khalid ibn al-Walid 'immortal, son of the newborn', a companion of Muhammad and the military leader responsible for the early victories of Islam, to whom the Prophet awarded the title "Sword of Allah."

Salah-ud-Din 'rectitude of the faith': the 12th-century sultan of Egypt who beat the Crusaders in battle, and who was renowned for his military prowess and his knightly courtesy to his enemies.

Shah Jahan 'king of the world' (Persian): Mughal emperor in India, who built the Taj Mahal.

Aisha 'prosperous', Muhammad's wife.

Fatima, daughter of Muhammad and wife of the khalif Ali.

The isms in *A Dictionary of Muslim Names* often denote qualities that are universally regarded as admirable or desirable. Occasionally, though, one is reminded of a desert culture: the male ism *Tamir* means 'rich in dates', while the female ism *Dima* means 'unceasing rain'.

76 Names 50.1 (March 2002)

It is a common misapprehension in the West that *Abdul* is a Muslim personal name. In fact, it is only part of a name, meaning 'servant of the'; for completion, it must be followed by a term denoting one of the attributes of Allah, e.g., *Abdul Aziz* 'servant of the Almighty', *Abdul Hakeem* 'servant of the All-Wise', *Abdur Rahman* 'servant of the Most Gracious', *Abdus Salam* 'servant of the All-Peaceable'.

Christian and Jewish readers will recognize Arabic forms of biblical names: *Ibrahim* (Abraham), *Sulayman* (Solomon), *Yaqub* (Jacob), *Sausan* (Susannah), *Maryam* (Miriam, Mary). Islam recognizes the Hebrew prophets as prophets and messengers from Allah, and the same status is accorded to *Yahya* (John the Baptist) and '*Isa* (Jesus).

This is a timely publication for several reasons. In the English-speaking world there are now increasing numbers of Muslims whose Arabic is not as fluent as they would like it to be. Such readers will particularly value the carefully chosen quotations from the Qur'an.

Users able to read Arabic will be delighted that the names are given not only in transliterated English form, but also in the original language (Arabic, Persian, or Turkish) in Arabic script. For many Arabic names, the three root letters are also given, so that a reader can consult a standard Arabic dictionary and learn more about the word from which the name is derived, or find other names originating from the same root, e.g., from *h-m-d* 'praise' are derived not only *Muhammad* but also *Ahmed*, *Hamid*, and *Mahmud*.

For non-Muslims, this work will prove a useful guide to the meaning and history of Muslim names, an introduction to important aspects of Muslim culture, and a delightful book for browsing.

Before Salahuddin Ahmed's work, the only widely available guides in English to the names of Islam were Mona Baker's supplement in the *Dictionary of First Names* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1990), Annemarie Schimmel's *Islamic Names* (Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1996), and the recently published but limited *Arabic First Names* (Hippocrene, 1999). Now, we are fortunate in having a more comprehensive work, which is both readable and scholarly. There are extensive footnotes, and an excellent and relevant short bibliography.

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Names and Social Structure: Examples from Southeast Europe. Ed. Paul H. Stahl. Trans. Carvel de Bussy. East European Monographs No. 506. Distributed by Columbia Univ. Press. 1998. Pp. 214. \$31.50.

Names and naming in southeastern Europe have not received a great deal of attention. For this reason, among others, the present volume is a welcome addition to the meager literature currently available. Paul Stahl has brought together seven doctoral theses from L'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris that investigate naming practices in small, rural villages in Albania, Greece, Romania, and Yugoslavia that have tended to maintain traditional cultures. In addition, Stahl contributes one chapter and a general conclusion. The essays consider names from a sociological perspective, showing how naming patterns are part of the social structure of a community and how they are used, especially as means of social control.

The first chapter, by Simion Dănilă, describes four types of names found in the Romanian village of Belinț: family names; names attached to houses and places of origin; baptismal names and quasi-surnames called "pociumb" names. A pociumb is somewhere between a personal name and a place name and acts somewhat like a group nickname. There are two naming systems operating in the village, the official one, based up a family name and the baptismal name and the popular one, which includes a baptismal name (usually in hypocoristic form), and the pociumb. Dănilă gives rules for the application of the pociumb name in marriage and divorce along with several examples.

The next chapter, by Niki Didika, reports on family names among the Maniates, who live on a peninsula in the southern Peloponnesus. Didika describes how names are conferred and how collective names serve to identify people by their group membership. A particular type of reference name, the "syndrophia," is drawn from the names of social groups and class strata.

Dejan Dimitrijević-Rufu contributes a chapter on Melnica, a village of Romanians in northeast Serbia composed of Romanians who are bilingual in Romanian and Serbian. Here individuals have identities through their baptismal names, their lineal names, and their village names. Dimitrijević-Rufu gives the example of Velisică Bîsiau Meniseanu

78 Names 50.1 (March 2002)

(Velisică Bîsîau of Melnica). In addition to Romanian identification names, there are Serbian identification names, household identification names, and patronymics.

The chapter by Sokol Kondi describes naming customs in a rural Catholic region of northern Albania, where traditional names are composed of a baptismal name, the father's name, and the grandfather's name, such as Vuksan Lek Nika. Another type of name is that of the village. Two types of names deserve special mention: names with proscribed associations, such as *gjarpër* 'serpent', and names of the newly-deceased; these must be announced by shouting to members of the group.

Olga Sapkidis reports on names on the Greek island of Syros, which has large Catholic and Orthodox populations. While patronymics are used on Syros, they are generally not known, except for those of prominent people. Baptismal names are conferred 40 days after birth. Terms of address mark boundaries in social life and between age groups. There are different types of nicknames: village or family nicknames; nicknames for the heads of family groups (passed from generation to generation along the male line); city nicknames; and religious nickname. The usage is different for the Orthodox.

Henri Stahl, in his 1934 work in Drăgus, in Transylvania, observed that there one name is used for legal purposes and another for daily life. The legal name consists of a baptismal name and a surname. The name used in daily life includes three of what are functionally "surnames": a "policre," a name identifying one's lineage; a "de heiu," or place name, which identifies an estate or habitat; and a humorous surname, a "policră de batjocură". Several examples are given; also included is a description of how women are identified and situations where a man marries into a family and takes its name.

Paul Stahl, the editor of the volume under review, contrasts the names of the princes of Wallachia and Moldavia with those of peasants and residents of cities from the 12th to the 17th centuries. The three most popular names among male peasants and city dwellers were Ion, Constantin, and Gheorghe whereas those of princes were Alexandru, Radu, and Ștefan. Stahl provides a general discussion of the formation of names in Romania, as well, incorporating a great deal of information

from name studies in southeastern Europe, Italy, and France. Included are descriptions of grandparents and the stock of family names; the use of names of deceased relatives; names which bring good fortune; the role of social position and names; and changes of names, such as by royalty, through baptism, to gain a Christian (or Muslim) name; and for religious reasons.

Irini Toundassakis conducted onomastic research in Vourkoti, a small village on the island of Andros, the island farthest north in the Cyclades off the southeast coast of Greece. Arvanites are descendants of people who originated in Albania. Toundassakis' analysis of records from three time periods (1853, 1873, and 1954) shows that male names are drawn from a limited stock and are largely religious (Orthodox), while female names show much greater freedom and are often given to express wishes, desires, virtues, and relationships to nature. Here, the first names of deceased relatives are not given to children for the fear of bringing them bad luck. There are two types of nicknames, personal and family; family nicknames are often inherited.

Eleni Tsenoglou investigated naming on the Greek island of Kastellorizo, which is just off the southwest coast of Turkey. The population of this small village in 1981 was 215. An important function of naming on Kastellorizo is the transmission of the grandfather's name to the eldest son since it shows the paternal line of descent. Second-born children receive the first names of the maternal grandfather and grandmother. Names of other children alternate between paternal and maternal sides of the family. Personal nicknames include some which become hereditary surnames. Examples given by Tsenoglou include *tou haidaru* 'of the donkey, *e kotsinu* 'the redhead', and *parjano* (< *paros* 'a modest woman'.

Finally, there is the contribution of Cornelia Zarkias who studied naming on the island of Skyros, which is located in the Aegean Sea northeast of Athens. On Skyros, there are three primary social strata: landowners, shepherds, and farm workers. Each group lives in its own section of town and wears distinguishing dress. Individuals have three names: personal (providing a link to an ancestor and following precise rules), family (showing line of descent), and nickname (the most reliable means of identification). Several types of name forms are described.

80 Names 50.1 (March 2002)

One is the “anastasi,” a first name which originally recalled an ancestor. However, in Skyros, contrary to the practice in some other societies, an anastasi has an honorific aspect and a parent can be resurrected several times in a family. In Skyros, there are two customs for the transmission of first names: the firstborn child, regardless of sex, receives the first name of one of the paternal grandparents; and the eldest daughter receives the first name of her maternal grandmother and the eldest son receives the first name of his paternal grandfather.

In the concluding chapter, Paul Stahl draws on a large number of onomastic investigations in a range of cultures (Albanian, Andorran, Basque, French, Greek, Romanian, and others) to show the interconnections between individuals, their names and their identities within families and within social groups. Identities assume great importance in such matters as land ownership, enrollment for taxes, petitions for justice, vendettas, and rituals.

This volume is especially welcome because it focuses on names and naming in communities and societies that have previously been under-investigated. I doubt that few of the sources cited by the authors are familiar to English-language researchers. The wealth of material offered here opens to a wider audience a greater understanding of onomastics in southeastern Europe.

The book is not without its flaws, however. While I appreciate the content of these articles, I also note that the editorial staff should have taken greater care with such matters as style, spelling, and general consistency of presentation. A map is also needed to help readers unfamiliar with the region.

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