Common Afrasian (Afro-Asiatic) terms related to the magic, supernatural, spiritual and mythic  
Etymologies and reconstructions  

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The paper contains 38 reconstructed common Afrasian (Afro-Asiatic) terms related to the magic, supernatural, spiritual and mythic rather conditionally combined into 10 groups (Soul, essence of life; Spirits, gods, ghosts and other supernatural creatures; God, spirit as an ancestor; Wonder, miracle, fortune-telling; Evil magic; Healing magic; Sorcery as knowledge; Spell, omen, magic speech or sign; Offering, sacrifice; Mythical and fantastic animals and their origin).

Each Proto-Afrasian term is reconstructed from a set of cognate words with compatible meanings in various branches and groups of the AA superfamily based on established regular consonant correspondences. The PAA language was supposedly spoken by the human community in the Near East at the turn of the Mesolithic and Neolithic—according to my glottochronological calculations, in the last third of the 11 millennium BCE—and their original homeland, according to the author, was the southern Levant. The reconstruction can provide valuable evidence for anthropologists, archaeologists, mythologists, prehistorians.

Key words: reconstruction, proto-forms, Afrasian languages, magic, supernatural, mythic.

In memory of my beloved son Mikhail Militarev (2005-2022)

1. Introduction

On topics related to the spiritual, magic, supernatural, mythic, fantastic creatures and the like in the prehistoric and archaic cultures an ocean of literature has been published, and the author – etymologist

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and comparative linguist—can hardly say anything new except to contribute by presenting corresponding terms, trace them up to the proto-forms reconstructed as deep as the Proto-Afrasian (henceforth: PAA) level and equip with etymologies constructed on the basis of regular sound (in the case of Afrasian languages, consonant) correspondences and compatible meanings. The PAA language was supposedly spoken by the human community in the Near East at the turn of the Mesolithic and Neolithic—according to my glottochronological calculations, \(^2\) ca. 10,350 BCE—whose original homeland was the southern Levant. \(^3\) The reconstructed terms can be roughly grouped according to their proposed semantics:

1. soul, essence of life;
2. spirits, gods, ghosts and other supernatural creatures;
3. god, spirit as an ancestor;
4. wonder, miracle, fortune-telling, divination, magic;
5. evil magic;
6. healing magic;
7. sorcery as knowledge;
8. spell, omen, magic speech or sign;
9. offering, sacrifice;
10. mythical and fantastic animals.

The lexical material is organized by the families that make up the Afrasian macrofamily: Semitic, Egyptian, Berber and Chadic (the NAA branch), Cushitic and Omotic (the SAA branch), according to the author’s classification based on lexicostatistics. \(^5\)

\(^2\) Based on Sergei Starostin’s radical modification (Starostin 2000)—not yet recognized by the mainstream, but, in my experience, more than workable—of Swadesh’s method, also not recognized (which is in part justified).

\(^3\) See Militarev and Nikolaev (2020: 1 and Discussion). See also article “Afroasiatic Homeland” in Wikipedia referring to various authors (however, very outdated in what concerns my hypothesis and, especially, dating) and Militarev forthcoming.

\(^4\) The PNA is dated by the same criterion (see Starostin 2000) to ca. 9,800 BCE. For a most detailed account of my recent understanding and ongoing application of this method, its capabilities and its verification by dating established by related sciences (historical, archaeological, genetics, oral tradition/folklore studies), see Militarev (2023: 52-60 et passim. See comments to the most recent Afrasian genealogical tree in Militarev (2022) and the tree itself at Militarev forthcoming or https://disk.yandex.ru/i/C0kbpXluH17k8Q.

\(^5\) Recently transforming from “a controversial method” into the one half-accepted by the linguistic mainstream.
Almost all of our lexical data is quoted after the Afrasian Etymological Database (AADB) compiled between the end of the last century and the latter part of the first decade of our century by Olga Stolbova and myself (in the first years, within the framework of the Santa Fe Institute’s project “Evolution of Human Languages”) and later worked on by the present author alone. At present it contains over 4,000 entries in the main Afrasian etymological base (liable to strong reduction in the final version, of course) and some 15,000 entries in the subordinate bases with lexical data from all branches and main AA subbranches/groups, connected with the main one. The version dated April 2007 is available from https://starlingdb.org. According to the description by the editors of this site containing lexical and etymological bases in various world macrofamilies:

[C]ompiled by Alexander Militarev and Olga Stolbova on the basis of multiple published sources as well as constantly on-going newer work. Both the main Afroasiatic database and all of the numerous subordinate databases are in a state of near-permanent construction, containing much raw data that still has to be polished, but nevertheless, the database, even as it is, is a considerable improvement on previously available etymological dictionaries. Subordinate databases include files with Semitic, Berber, Egyptian, Cushitic, and Chadic data (the latter courtesy of O. Stolbova, most of the others supported by A. Militarev).

To this somewhat outdated description I would add the Omotic database and sporadic parallels from non-Afrasian languages. The words “in a state of near-permanent construction” explain why “the final version” is still not posted on the Internet.

Before proceeding to the lexical material, let us introduce the author's criterion for evaluating etymologies (on the example of AA languages) which allows to use the following simple five-point rating of the plausibility of cognation in each lower taxon of the AA macrofamily and on the PAA level:

- ●●●●● terms with identical or matching meaning in all (or in a representative selection) of the languages compared, with strictly regular phonetic correspondences\(^7\) between them, containing at

\(^6\) References to other sources are given when they are not mentioned in the database or sometimes when the given lexeme is of particular importance for the proposed etymology or the source is not evident.

\(^7\) This condition applies to consonants; the correspondence between vowels in the Afrasian languages is not established; the reconstructed vocalism in proto-forms of all levels is conventional in most cases. However, it is quite legitimate to consider as related lexemes with vocalism and base structure even not reducible to a single pattern, provided the same consonantal root composition and comparable meaning, unless each of these lexemes has a better alternative etymology; naturally, this implies a certain degree of hypothetical and tentative nature of the proposed etymologies, which is unavoidable until the Afrasian Database has been made into a comprehensive and well-elaborated etymological dictionary is completed with a step-by-step reconstruction at all taxonomic levels.
least three (or two including one low-frequency/rare) root consonants, fully representative of each of the branches compared or terms doubtless related regardless of the number of root consonants (like in Semitic *ʔil-, ʔilāh– ‘God’):

- • • • • terms clearly comparable semantically with regular phonetic correspondences, containing three to two “hard” root consonants, representing at least one subbranch/group of a given branch and having no alternative etymology;

- • • • terms comparable semantically and phonetically, containing only one “hard” root consonant, representing groups/subgroups of the branch and having no alternative etymology;

- • • terms presumably comparable semantically and phonetically, but under-represented in the languages compared or terms with ambiguous phonetic interpretation/origin (especially common in Egyptian where, e.g., the hieroglyph for n can stand for and continue either AA *n or *l) or terms not obviously matching semantically though fit in all other respects and having no alternative or better etymology;

- • terms suspected of borrowing or attested in a late period of the language susceptible to borrowing (late Egyptian, Coptic, postbiblical Hebrew) or having a disputable meaning, or isolated in their taxon, hypothetically commensurable, brought into comparison for the sake of “comprehensive picture.” The rating of any Proto-Afrasian or Proto-North Afrasian root is derived from the rating of at least two constituent parts (branches, groups) of the respective taxon.10

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8 In comparative and historical linguistics – while there is a high demand for strict sound correspondences (in the case of Afrasian languages—in consonantism, see the previous footnote), the criteria for semantic comparison are still mainly based on obviousness and common sense or at best on the repetition of the same semantic transition at different roots (Maizel’s “isosemantic series”—see Maizel 1983).

9 All consonants can be considered “hard” in the Afrasian languages except w, y, and ʔ (glottal stop) as any of the three may serve as an “extender” of primary, usually bi- or monosyllabic root bases and thus is secondary and unstable; there are rare cases, however, when one of these “soft” consonants persists in the same root in various daughter languages being, therefore, reconstructible as part of the proto-form (see, e.g., y- in Semitic *yWdv– ‘to know’) and hence acting as “hard.”

10 The meanings of the words are given in the European language of the corresponding bilingual dictionary.
2. The data

2.1. Soul, essence of life

AA *nVf- ‘breath, soul, self, life’\(^{11}\) (AADB 162): ●●●●●


Egyptian (OK) nft ‘Wedel, Fächer’, (NK) nf ‘breath, wind’, nfy ‘ausatmen, hauchen’ (EG II: 250) ●●


\[\text{Cf. EDE 1999: 126 (compared, beside Berber, C. Chadic, Beja, E. Cushitic, N. Omotic (likely loans from Ethiopian), to Semitic *ʔanp- ‘nose’); CED #591 (comp. to Egyptian, Tuareg, Beja, Saho, Somali).}\]

NAA *nafVs- ‘breath, soul, life’ (AADB 80): ●●●

Semitic *napš- ‘breath; soul; vitality, life; person; self’\(^{12}\): Akkadian napāšu ‘to breathe freely,’ napištu (napaštu, napšatu) ‘life, vigor, vitality; breath; good health; person’ (also ‘throat, neck’); Ugaritic npš ‘soul’ (also ‘throat, gullet’); Phoenician npš ‘self, desire, person’ (also ‘gravestone’), Hebrew npš (nif) ‘to breathe freely, recover,’ nāpaš ‘breath; soul; life; living being’ (also ‘throat, neck’); Aramaic: Old, Official, Nabatean, Palmyrian, Hatra npš ‘life, person’ (also ‘funerary

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\(^{11}\) It is to note that such concepts as ‘soul,’ ‘life force,’ ‘essence of a living being’ and ‘life’ itself, though commonly and “naturally” derived from such a tangible and objective notion as ‘breathe/breathing’ require a very high level of abstraction (that this derivation occurred parallelly and independently in every language, i.e. much later, is less likely or rare), while in our case, we are talking not about religious, philosophical or even mythological concepts of the ancient world but about the Neolithic or even Epipaleolithic time. It is all the more intriguing in view of a whole “network” of triconsonantal variant roots differing by the quality of one of the radicals like AA *nps (SED I Verbal Roots No. 46) ~ Semitic *mph ‘breathe’ (SED I Verbal Roots No. 45) or the presence of a third root consonant vs. the same “biconsonantal base” (like in AA *nVf- ~ *nafVs-), the fact that even raises suspicion of some conscious word creation—or play of words.

\(^{12}\) There is also Semitic verb *mps ‘to deliver, give birth’ very likely derived from the present root with a semantic development from ‘to give life’ (see SED I Verbal Roots No. 47).
monument'); Sabaic, Qatabanian nfs; soul, life, person, self'; Arabic nafs- ‘âme, principe vital; sang; personne’, nfs V ‘respirer’; Gezèt nafsa ‘to blow (wind, spirit),’ nafs ‘soul, spirit, breath, life,’ Amharic l naffūsā ‘to blow (wind),’ nafs ‘soul, spirit, life;’ Mehri nafs-ēt ‘individual, soul,’ Jibbali nefs ‘to sigh,’ nafs-ēt ‘soul,’ Soqotri nefs ‘respirer, vivre, se ranimer,’ nefs ‘selves’ (pl. of nafh ‘âme’)

Berber *ni/ufas: Ahaggar unfas ‘breath’, Ayr unfas, E. Tawllemmet infas ‘respiration; vie,’ Izayan unfas ‘breath,’ nafs ‘soul, spirit, life


(?!) Cushitic E. *nafs-: Saho nafs-e ‘breathing,’ LEC: Somali, Boni neefso, Rendille nefsó ‘breathe’ (borrowing from Arabic or Ethiopian in Saho and Somali is possible, but less so in Boni and Rendille) ●

SED I Verbal Roots No. 46.

**AA kirw- ‘soul/mind in an altered state, (shamanistic?) trance**¹³ (AADB 2700): ●●●●

Semitic *ku/irw-: Akkadian (OB, SB) kâru ‘to be in depression, in a stupor’ (CAD k 240), kâru ‘daze, depression, stupor’ (ibid. 570); Arab. kry ‘sommeiller’ [BK 2: 892]; Tigre kərri belá ‘talk nonsense,’ sôb kəyarât ‘soothsayers’ (sôb is ‘man’), Selti kərâra ‘talk much and nonsense’ (Leslau 1979: 350) ●

Egyptian (OK) k (presumably <*kur) ‘soul, vital essence’ ●

Berber: Ahaggar tâ-karaww-at, Ayr i-kerker-ân ‘épilepsie’¹⁴, E. Tawllemmet a-t-kor ‘possessed (by an evil spirit),’ Qabyle kerrer ‘faire des sorcelleries, des sortilèges’ ●●●●

Chadic W.: Hausa kōr-á ‘soul; ghost’ (Abraham 1962), ‘the soul or personality which is supposed to leave a sleeper, returning when he awakes’ (Bargery 1951), (?) Tangale korom ‘divination’, Jimi karoɔ ‘spirit (of person);’ C.: Bura kir ‘the self; the will’ ●●●●

Cushitic *a(n)-kir-: C. *ən-kir- ‘soul’: Bilin ʔankara, Qwara enkera, Aungi enk- (*ənk-[ar] in

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¹³ Hardly a random selection of lookalikes based on a frequent k + r succession of radicals, this AA root implies a sophisticated notion hard to formulate. The most interesting comparison—between Egyptian kr and Hausa kîr-wà ‘the soul or personality which is supposed to leave a sleeper, returning when he awakes’—was, if I am not mistaken, first suggested in Hodge (1966).

Appleyard (2006: 126). All the comparanda starting with Oromo shows otherwise; E.: Oromo ekeera (~*ʔVkir-) ‘ghost of dead person’ (Gragg 1982) ●●●●

2.2. Spirits, gods, ghosts and other supernatural creatures

AA *ʔil- ~ *il- ~ *la?~ ‘sky/cloud/rain’ or ‘sun’ > ‘God’?15 ●
Semitic *ʔil-, ʔilāh- ‘God’: Akkadian ʔlu (elu); Ugaritic /ʔilu/; Phoenician ʔḷ, Hebrew ʔël, ʔālēh, pl. ʔālōhīm; Aramaic Official ʔḷ, ʔlh, Syrian ʔël, ʔalāhā, Mandaic alaha (‘false god’); Sabaic ʔḷ, ʔlh; Arabic ʔilāh-, ʔilāh-; Jibbali ʔǣ, Soqotri ʔl ‘God’.16 ●●●●

a) *la?(la?)- ‘sun(shine)’ (AADB 1159): ●●
Semitic: Arabic ʔlil ‘briller (étoile, feu)’ (BK 2: 953) ●
Chadic *liʔ- ‘daybreak; sunshine’: W.: Kirfi liʔ-, līŋi ‘daybreak’, Daffo-Butura leʔ ‘anbrechen (Tag)’; E.: Bidiya laal (redupl.) ‘shine (sun)’ (cf. Stolbova 2005 #14a and 55; compared with Arabic) ●●●
Cushitic *laʔ- ~ *lalaʔ- (redupl.): E.: LEC *laʔ-t-: Konso letta, Mashile latta ‘sun’ (alternatively *lalaʔ-: AADB 2878); S. *lalaʔoo ‘sun; day; God’; Iraqw lalaʔa ‘God’ (Mous, Qorro and Kiessling 2002), lọaʔa ‘sun’, Gorowa looʔaa, lalaʔaa, leleʔaa id., Alagwa lalaʔaa ‘sun, day’, Burunge leetu, letu id. (Kiessling, Mous 2003) ●●●●

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16 Jibbali ʔǣ can continue either *ʔil- or *baʔl- ‘lord’ (cf. Mehri abel ‘God’ Johnstone 1987: 41); in Soqotri, “al ‘God’ seems to be attested in a few archaic poetic compositions recorded by our fieldwork team.” (Kogan 2015: fn. 503).
b) *lw- ~ *lil- ~ *wVl- (met.) ‘cloud, rain, sky’ (AADB 1341): ●●●

Egyptian (PT) nw.t (if <*lw-) ‘sky’ ●

Chadic W. *lw- ‘cloud’: Gwandara llùú, Sura llììu, Chip liwu, Ankwe low-in, Boghom lììyu, hwa (cf. Stolbova 2005 #50) ●●●●

Cushitic *wVl- ‘cloud’: C. *wVl- ‘cloud’: Aungi wul, Kunfal wel; E.: HEC: Burji wàall-a ‘cloud, fog’ ●●●●●

Omotic *wVl- ~ *lil- ‘cloud, rain’: N.: Gimira (Bench, She) wòl ‘rain’; S.: Ari *lil- (redupl.) ‘cloud’ ●●

AA *bariʔ- ‘god-creator’ (AADB 1689): ●●●

Semitic *bvrVʔ- ‘to create (God)’: Hebrew bārāʔ; Syrian brʔ, Mandaic bra; Arabic brʔ? ●●●●

Canarian: Palma a-bora ‘dios…que estaba en el cielo’, ‘god’, ‘Dieu, ou le régulateur des astres’
(Wölfl 1965: 432) ●


AA *raw/ʔ- ‘sky; god’ (AADB 1336): ●●●

(?) Semitic: Geʕez rāʔot ‘the name of (God) the Father (seems to be a magical name)’ (LGz.: 458)
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Egyptian (Gr.) ry.t ‘der Himmel’ (EG II: 400; if <*rVy-), (PT) rw, als vierfachen Teil des Himmels?
(EG II: 403) ●

Chadic (a) *rWv- ‘sky’: W.: Karekare rówi, Fyer rúrwê, Bokkos riʔ; C.: Hide lwa (< rwa). In CED #647, compared with Egyptian and S. Cushitic ●●●

(b) *raa (< *raH-) ‘God’: W.: Gwandara (Nim) rara (redupl.) ‘God’; E.: Mokilko ráa ‘ciel, dieu’, Bidiya raayà ‘God (used in funeral songs)’ (In CED #646, compared with Egyptian rî ‘sun, sun-god’) ●●●

Cushitic S.: Burunge raw ‘sky’ (probably also Alagwa, Burunge raw ‘above’) ●●

Omotic N. *yar- (met.)17 ‘god’: Chara yar, Kafa, Anfillo yarò, yero, Bworo ya/er, Dizi (Nao) yeri (Bender 2003) ●●●●

[] Cf. AA *ʔay/wr- ‘sunlight’ (AADB 2026) and AA *ʔar- ‘moon’ (AADB 2783)

17 Some authors suggest the origin from *ʒ/ʃar-, but *y < *ʒ or *ʃ is not confirmed (and not given in Bender’s correspondence tables) for any of the quoted languages.
NAA *ʒVḳ- ‘(night) ghost, phantom’ (AADB 2845): ●●●

Semitic *zaḳîk- ‘phantom’ (Cohen et al. 1970: 785; likely < Akk.); Akkadian (SB, NB) za/iḳîk- ‘phantom, ghost, nothingness, foolishness; haunted place; the god of dreams; soul’ (CAD z 58);

Aramaic (Hatra) zḳyḳ? ‘fantôme’ (?); Arabic zaḳ ‘avoir peur pendant la nuit’ (BK 1: 991) ●●●

Chadic C. *zVḳ- ‘spirit, shadow’ (possibly <*zVḳ-): Daba zùkò ‘fetiche, esprit’, Mofu zaḳale, zagale (-l is not etymological) ‘esprit mauvais, sacrifice’, Sukun žík ‘shadow, spirit’ (cf. Stolbova 2009 #446).

AA *ʒVr- ‘(evil) genius; sky-god; magic’ (AADB 3564): ●●●●

Semitic *zVr- ‘evil genius, magician’: Akkadian (SB, NB) zîr- ‘hatred, hate’ (as the designation of a type of magic, hate magic) (CAD z 136); Arabic zûr- ‘culte faux; idole, faux dieu’ (BK 1: 129); Tigre zar, Gurage *zar ‘spirit that possesses a person’ (Leslau 1979), Amharic zar ‘a spirit which inhabits lakes, wilderness areas or trees and which possesses people’ (Kane 1990: 1624); Jibbali zîr-én, semi-magical ritual involving fire-eating, etc., Soqotri zehér-eh ‘sorceière’, zrr ‘user de sorcellerie’ (Leslau 1938: 157) ●●●●●

Egyptian (PT) zi (if r denotes r) ‘amulet, fetish’, (NK) zw ‘preserve, guard’ ●

Chadic: W.: Hausa zarći (<*ząr-ʔ) ‘a decoction to make a man an expert hunter’; C.: Munjuk zor-o ‘devinette’ ●

Cushitic C. *ʒār-: Bilin žār ‘sky, sky god’, Khamta, Aungi zār ‘evil genius’18 ●●●●

2.3. God, spirit as an ancestor

AA *nɪ(ʔ)nay- ‘elder/adult male relative’ (> chief, lord’) > ‘god’ (AADB 52):

a) ‘elder/adult male relative’ (> chief, lord’) ●●●

Semitic: Soqotri ninhin ‘elder brother, master, lord,’ ninho ‘master, lord’ ●●

Chadic *nɪ(ʔ)an- ‘elder male relative’: W.: Mupun nāan ‘a superior person,’ nēn ‘adults, people,’


Daba nānà ‘neveu, l’oncle maternel,’ E.: Kera nəna ‘mother’s brother, uncle’ (cf. Stolbova 2005 #360) ●●●●●

18 The common tenet that the Ethiopian terms are borrowed from the Agaw languages (cf., e.g., Appleyard 2006: 76) does not seem so convincing in the light of the Akkadian, Arabic and Soqotri parallels which rather point to common Afrasian origin (or to an Ethiopism in Agaw).
Cushitic S. *naʔan-*19 ‘elder male relative:’ Iraqw naana ‘lover; elder brother,’ Gorowa naanaa ‘father,’ Burunge naanaa ‘dad’ ●●●●

Omotic N. *maynay-* ‘male relative:’ Chara nainaa ‘relative,’ Gimira (She) niania ‘nephew,’ Dizi (Nao) non, (Maji) nānē ‘brother’ ●●●●

b) Egyptian-Chadic*na(Ha)n-* ‘god’ (AADB 1585):

Egyptian (Gr.) nn ‘Urgott’ ●

Chadic W. *naʔan-* ‘God’: Sura naan, Angas nen, Mupun nāan (also ‘sky’), Montol nān, Ankwe naan, Gerka nān, Mushere naan (cf. CED #600; compared with Egyptian). ●●●●

[] Cf. Sumerian nun ‘prince; god.’

2.4. Wonder, miracle, fortune-telling, divination, magic

AA *mayh-* ‘wonder, miracle, divination’ (AADB 3642): ●●●

Semitic *ta-mayh-*, with a frozen *ta- prefix): Hebrew tānāh ‘to be astonished, amazed; to freeze with fear, be horrified;’ Aram.: Biblical tāmah ‘miracle,’ Syrian tāmayh- ‘wonder’ ●●●●

Egyptian *myh.t > Demotic myh/ḥ ‘wonder’ (EDE 2010: 154)20 ●

Berber *may- ‘wonder tal:’ Ayr, E. Tawlemmet ṣmyā ‘conte merveilleux, légende; fable (destiné à tromper qqn.),’ pl. ṣmyyy-ān ‘fantasies, hallucinations, fantasmes,’ Semlal umiy ‘conte, fable’ ●●●●

Cushitic E.: HEC: Sidamo maha ‘to do the job of a sorcerer, wizard; divine, prophesy’ ●

AA *mar-* ‘diviner, fortune-teller’21 (AADB 1475): ●●

Semitic Ethiopian: Ge’ez mārī, māray-ā ‘heathen seer, diviner, priest of idolaters, magician’ (LGz.: 362), Amharic mari ‘sorcerer who foretells the future;’ cf. probably related Hebrew mirmā ‘trick, fraud’; Aramaic: Old mrm- t (pl.) ‘treachery’ (JH 694), Syrian marmīn- ‘whisperer, calumniator, slanderer’ (according to Payne-Smith 1903: 302, root *rmā) ●●

Chadic *mar-: W.: Siri maraa-coki ‘sorcerer’ (coki ‘man, male’) (Stolbova 2009 #604); E.: Kera

19 Only *-ʔ- can account for the hiatus in the Inlaut as AA *-h- would have yielded -h- in West Rift languages. The same is true of Chadic.

20 Takács’ comment on this word “no evident cognates” looks odd as he provides it with quite convincing Aramaic, Post-Biblical Hebrew (not including the biblical Hebrew term), Tuareg and Sidamo forms, the more so since *-h- preserved in both the Egyptian (likely), Semitic and Sidamo forms is a rather rare occurrence and can hardly be haphazard.

21 Attestation in Ethiopian vs. E. Cushitic is suspicious of borrowings.
ka-краа ‘a small staff used for fortune-telling; soothsayer’ (EDE 2010: 31; included ibid. 30 into a bunch of terms presumably matching Egyptian m; ‘sehen’ and Semitic *ʔmr ‘sehen (lassen)’) ●●


NAA or Semitic only23 *cigul- ‘seal, (sealed, registered) property, treasure’ > Ethiopian ‘divination, magic’24 (AADB 441): ●●●

Semitic *sigu/il- ‘seal, (sealed, registered) property, treasure:’ Akkadian (OB on) sikiltu ‘possession, acquisition, private possessions,’ sug/kullu ‘herd (of cattle, horse, other animals),’ in personal names sikiltu-divine name(s) also in a religious sense; Ugaritic sglt ‘treasure, private property;’ Hebrew saggulā ‘Israel as the property of God; (personal) property (of the kings and the provinces);’ Hatra sgyl ‘possession’ (prob. designating temple; name of the temple of Shamash at Hatra) (HALOT: 742); Arabic s̱l ‘to register,’ IV ‘to be rich,’ s̱fíl- ‘a scroll, roll for writing on it’ (cf. also s̱fíji-l- ‘a mysterious stone’); Ge ‘to practice magic, augury, divine, take omens, have divining power’, s̱galât (pl.) ‘magical instruments’ (LGz.: 491), ‘magicians,’ Amharic s̱gal ‘witchcraft, divination,’ (?) Gurage *s̱g̱ar ‘magician, sorcerer’ (“probably to be identified with” the other Ethiopian forms; Leslau 1979: 491); MSA *sgl ‘to register’ (almost certainly from Arabic) ●●●●●

Egyptian (OK) sḏw.t (almost certainly *sVgi/ul-)25 ‘seal,’ sḏw ‘precious things, treasures’ (cf. sḏw ‘ring (?)’) (EG IV: 379). ●●

22 Compared in Sasse (1982: 149) to Oromo morom- ‘murmur, disagree, curse,’ Somali murm- ‘contradict, disagree,’ Gollango maram- ‘deny,’ etc.; with all the phonetic and structural similarity, probably too different semantically.

23 The meaning ‘seal’ looks too early for proto-Afrasian. It is more likely a Semitism in Egyptian considering a whole network of Semitic derivatives and the proto-form reconstructed on a proto-North Semitic level which I date glottochronologically between 4,500 (separation of proto-MSA or proto-South Semitic) and 3,700 (separation of proto-Akkadian) BCE. Interestingly, the two other Egyptian (OK) terms for ‘seal’ (ḥtn and, probably, ḏḇt) are also connected with Semitic ‘seal’ (*ḥ̱tm- and *tšušt-). For more on Egyptian-Semitic terms meaning “seal,” see Militarev (2023: 50 and footnotes 76, 110, 111).

24 Though the semantic change from ‘seal’ to Ethiopian ‘divination, magic’ (having no alternative etymology) is not so obvious, the identic triconsonantal roots are hardly unrelated.

25 Suggestive comparison with Semitic ‘seal’ is strangely omitted in EDE 1999: 253 where the Egyptian term is instead compared with Semitic *sgr (‘to close, shut’) and two C. Chadic words hardly fitting phonetically.
2.5. Evil magic

AA *bî'ay- ‘hex, evil spells causing antisocial behavior’

Semitic: Arab bîw ‘commit crime, un pêché; envoûter; se rendre coupable d’une trahison; atteindre qqn et lui nuire de son mauvais œil; susciter à qqn un malheur’, ba’w- ‘crime’ (BK 1: 144); cf. Tigre bâbîa, Amharic bâba (redupl.) ‘é. consterné, angoissé’ (Cohen et al. 1970: 73) ●●●

Berber: Ahaggar buy-et ‘n’être aimé de personne (déplaire à tout le monde) ●●●

Chadic*bVHVy- ‘to be bad, evil (spirit)’: W.: Hausa má-bîyya ‘the spirits which are supposed to cause the various forms of hysteria’, Pero bò ‘devil’, Kupto mbîyya ‘witchcraft’; C.: Gabin bîbà, Gaa’anda bîbà (redupl.) ‘evil’, Gude bîyî ‘bad, evil,’ Logone mbâwëe, mbâwe ‘to be bad,’ etc.; E.: Bidiya beyô ‘méchanceté,’ Mokilko bêyyé ‘bad spirit’ (Stolbova 2021 #73; compared to Arabic) ●●●

Cushitic S. *bî- ‘antisocial behaviour;’ Iraqw bî-iri ‘greed,’ Alagwa bîa ‘adultery,’ Burunge bîa ‘madness, lunacy’ (Kiessling, Mous 2003: 73), Qwadza be?-et- ‘to scorn’ (EDE 2001: 169) ●●●

AA *bî'Vt- ‘evil spirit or magic’: 26 (AADB 2615) ●●●

Semitic *bî'Vt- ‘terror of God, evil spirit;’ Hebrew bî呋 ‘terrors (of God),’ bît (pi.) ‘to terrify so. (evil spirit);’ Aramaic Judaic bâšît- ‘terror,’ Syrian bît (af.) ‘to frighten’ (HALOT: 147) ●●●

Cushitic E. *bit-: Afar but-a ‘evil eye,’ HEC: Sidamo bit-a ‘work of a sorcerer’ ●●●●

Omotic N. *bit- ‘to bewitch:’ Wolaita bit-a ‘to bewitch; witchcraft,’ Gamo bit- ‘to bewitch,’ bit-a ‘sorcery27 ●

AA *bawd- ‘sorcerer, witch-doctor, one with evil eye:’ 28 (AADB 65) ●●●●

Semitic *ba/ud- ‘evil priest, sorcerer:’ Hebrew bâd ‘oracle priest’ (HALOT: 109); Arabic ʔabdâd- , pl. bidad-at- ‘temple des idolâtres’ (BK 1: 93), 29 Yemeni Arabic bûtâ/bidâh ‘elle peut transformer un homme en animal (âne, cheval),’ bid-eh ‘witch, sorceress, monster;’ Ge’ez budâ, Tigrinya, 26 Probably derived from *bî'ay- with the fossilized *-t suffix.

27 Borrowing from Sidamo in N. Omotic is possible. This direction of borrowing, not vice versa, is supposed based on many similar cases of borrowing pointing to HEC as the source.

28 Cf. AA *(ʔ)bîd ‘go mad, be insane’ (AADB 3769) ●●●●●● probably related: Semitic: Arabic ʔâd ‘become wild (cattle);’ Ge’ez ʔāda ‘be insane, mad, out of one’s mind, become a fool,’ Amharic ʔabbâd ‘be insane, go mad’ ●●●●●. Berber *bîd- ‘be mad!’ Nefusa beddiw ‘fou,’ Mzab bidda ‘perdre la raison, rendre fou,’ Warгла abeddîw ‘faible d’esprit, idiot, niais, et aussi fou’ (Naït-Zerrad 1998). ●●●

29 Cf. also bîd ‘causer du dommage à qn.’ (BK 1: 92).
Amharic, Harari buda ‘ironsmith, magician, man who causes harm by means of the evil eye,’
Gurage *buda ‘tanner, man who has the power of casting the evil eye’ (Leslau 1979: 132)  
Chadic *(7V)-bVd-: W.: Karekare badda-kà ‘blacksmith,’ Ngizim baddà-nà⁴³ ‘sorcerer,’ C.: Lame,
Zime-Dari bidà ‘blacksmith,’ ⁴¹ E.: Mobu bábádé, Kwang bùbbùde ‘to curse’  
Cushitic C. *bawd-: Bilin bawd-a ‘witch-doctor; werewolf,’ bōd-a ‘potter,’ Khamir bud-a ‘witch-doctor; werewolf,’ Kemant bud-a ‘witch-doctor,’ E. *bawd-: Saho, Afar bud-á ‘witch-doctor; potter,’ LEC: 
Somali bid-a ‘witch-doctor,’ Oromo bawd-a, bud-a ‘man with evil eye,’ bud-a ‘potter,’ Bayso bud-a ‘evil eye,’ HEC (< Oromo?): Sidamo bud-akko, Darasa, Burji bud-a ‘who has evil eye,’ Kambatta būd-a ‘potter’  (low score if borrowed or a Wanderwort)
Omotic *bud-: Dache bud-a ‘evil eye,’ Kafa bud-o ‘witch-doctor, potter,’ Bworo bud-o ‘witch-doctor’
(cf. also Ongota buda ‘to spit’ Kusia, Siebert 1994)  
⁴⁴ A widely spread East African term usually treated as a Wanderwort. While some of the terms are possibly loans in Cushitic and Omotic from Ethiopian (Amharic?) or in Ethiopian from Agaw or East Cushitic (so in EDE 2001: 151-152), the Proto-Afrasian origin is secured by the Hebrew-Arabic (with compatible but different meanings) and Chadic cognates (and, perhaps, Somali bid-a with its root vowel -i- preventing explanation as borrowing. Cf. NS: Bari, Shilluk bōdo, Bongo bōdo ‘smith.’

NAA *bary- ‘possession by an evil spirit, spell’ (AADB #2673): ³²  
Semitic *bary-: Akkadian (OB) bārû ‘diviner,’ barīri-tu, ‘a female demon; Mandaic baraia
‘exorciser,’ Neo-Aramaic būrā ‘fou, insensé; Ge’ez bāryā ‘one who is in the service of a demon;
epilepsy, a spirit that brings an epilepsy’  
Berber: Ahaggar būri ‘attaque de nerfs,’ E. Tawlehemmet bor-t-an (pl.) ‘génies, esprits’  
Chadic *bury- ‘possession by a bad spirit:’ W.: Hausa bōrīi ‘a form of supposed devil possession’
Tangalle būra ‘name of a bad spirit (cf. also Bokkos mburū, Daffo-Butura mburú ‘medicine’);

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⁴³ *Ra is a suffix? Cf. Ngizim gaZbor ‘tall, long’ < AA *gVz̓堵– ‘long.’
⁴⁴ In view of a well-known association ‘smith – sorcerer,’ here probably also belongs Chadic *(u)bVd- > *vāf- ‘to forge:’ W.: 
Warji vaaf ‘fabricate,’ C.: Ouldém -vāf ‘fabriciser, forger,’ Chuvok méovāf ‘forger, couvrir le toit de la case,’ Mada avāf ‘forger,’
Muyong avāf ‘to roof, to forge,’ Mafa vāf ‘forger, fabriquer; faire un toit en paille’ (in Stolbova 2021 #36 glossed ‘to fabricate’).
³² It is tempting to unite *bari- ‘god-creator’ (above) and *bary- ‘possession by an evil spirit, spell’ into one root implying an 
arguable evolution from an epileptic fit/possession by spirits (a shaman’s trance?)  →  the one who deals with spirits  →  (evil) 
spirit → god. Cf. a somewhat similar semantic development in AA *kVrw-. 

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C.: Mbara mbré ‘sorcerer;’ E.: Mokilko bírre ‘se promener (mauvais esprit) pour manger les âmes des gens’ (Stolbova 2021 #272; comp. to Akkadian and Gețez) ●●●●●

NAA *čVn(?)- ‘(evil) sorcery’ (AADB 54): ●●●
Semitic *šVnʔ- ‘to hate, be enemy;’ Ugaritic šnʔ ‘to hate;’ Phoenician šnʔ-t ‘hate, enmity,;
Hebrew šnʔ ‘to hate,’ šônē ‘enemy;’ Palmyrean ṛwh šny ‘evil spirits (?)’; Sabaic š2nʔ ‘enemy, ill-wisher;’ Arabic šnʔ ‘to hate’ ●●●●●

Egyptian (Medical texts) šny (unless < šly) ‘zaubern,’ (NE) šn.w ‘der Zauberer’ ●●
Chadic *šVn- ‘magic, spirit worshiping;’ W.: Bolewa šín-kau ‘spirit,’ Tangale šen ‘to worship (idol);’ C.: Logone šana ‘Fetisch;’ E.: Kwang šɔ̀nɛ ‘fetish,’ Sokoro sune ‘magic, medicine,’ Bidiya čōŋŋa ‘sorcer thaumaturge’ (in CED #858 compared to Egyptian, Sabaic and Mehri šny ‘to see, to consider’ > ‘to show, to be a medicine-man,’ semantically arguable) ●●●●●

2.6. Healing magic

NAA *bVl(bVL)– ‘(healing) magic, sorcery’ (AADB 1154, 1616): ●●
Semitic *bVL- *bVLbVL- (redupl.) ‘be delivered from an evil spirit;’ (?) Arabic bll ‘guérir, être guéri; recouvrer la santé,’ bill- ‘remède,’ balal- ‘salut, sécurité’ (BK 1: 155-156); Gețez balbala ‘predict through omens’ (LGz.: 95), Tigre (ʔa)bälbala ‘to talk like one possessed; be delivered from an evil spirit’ (Littmann, Höffner1956: 271) ●●

2.7. Sorcery as knowledge

AA *(y)Vdəf- ‘to know’ > S. Cushitic ‘sorcery’ (AADB 3472): ●●●●●
a. ‘to know:’ ●●●●●
Semitic *(y)VdVL- ‘to know;’ Akkadian idû, wadû; Ugaritic; Phoenician , Hebrew ; Aramaic *(y)dɨ ‘to know;’ Sabaic dsw (met.) ‘to know,’ ydɨ ‘to find out;’ Arabic ʔaydaša IV ‘to inform;’ Gețez ʔaydaša (caus.) ‘to make know, inform, declare, report, etc.,’ Harari ʔda; Mehri wēda, Harsusi yōda, Jibbali ʔedaʃ, Soqotri edaḥ ‘to know’ ●●●●●

Egyptian (NE) idī ‘clever’ (probably < Hebrew) ●
Chadic *\textipa{{d}\textipa{{i}}}?: ‘know, learn, teach’ C.: Mandara diya, Masa \textipa{{d}\textipa{{i}}}i ‘to know,’ Bachama dyë gûnò, Kola dyò \textipa{{gw}}\textipa{{y}} ‘learn’ (Jungraithmayr, Ibrizsimow 1994: 319); E.: Mokilko dôôyè ‘to teach’

Cushitic E. *(ya)\textipa{{d}}\textipa{{a}}?: ‘know, think’ Saho, Afar \textipa{{d}}\textipa{{a}} ‘be able, know,’ LEC: Somali \textipa{{d}}\textipa{{a}} ‘understand,’ Oromo yaada ‘think; worry,’ Konso yaat- (-t < *d) ‘think’

b. ‘sorcery:’

Cushitic S. *\textipa{{d}}\textipa{{a}}?: Iraqw, Gorowa \textipa{{d}}\textipa{{a}}-ti, \textipa{{d}}\textipa{{a}}-ri ‘withchcraft, sorcery, magic,’ Alagwa danda-: ‘to treat injury, wound,’ Asa *\textipa{{d}}\textipa{{a}}-aruk ‘doctor-diviner’

AA *\textipa{kayn}– ‘know’ > NAA ‘magic’ (AADB 912):

a. ‘know, learn, master’:  
Semitic: Ethiopian *\textipa{kayn}– ‘skill, art:’ Ge\textipa{{f}}ez \textipa{{k}}\textipa{{i}}n ‘craft, skill, plan, trick, etc.,’ Tigrinya k\textipa{{a}}yn\textipa{\textipa{t}} ‘art,’ (?) Tigre \textipa{{k}}\textipa{{i}}n ‘intention, will’

Egyptian (MK) \textipa{t}\textipa{n}y (unless <*kly) ‘to learn’

Chadic: W.: Kirfi \textipa{ki}nn– ‘to know,’ Maaka \textipa{{k}}\textipa{o}nò ‘it is known;’ C.: Bachama kaná ‘truth,’ Buduma káni ‘true;’ E.: Mokilko kónyà ‘knowledge’ (cf. CED #436; comp. to Ethiopian and Cushitic)

Cushitic *\textipa{kayn}– ‘know’: N.: Beja -\textipa{kan} ‘know;’ C.: Bilin \textipa{{k}}\textipa{{a}}n-\textipa{t}-, Khamir, Qwara \textipa{{k}}\textipa{\textipa{a}}n-\textipa{t}– ‘learn;’ E.: LEC: Hadiya k\\textipa{\textipa{n}} ‘know’

b. ‘(evil) wizard, magician, priest’ (NAA):

Semitic *\textipa{ka\textipa{h}}\textipa{n}– ‘priest; cheat:’ Ugaritic \textipa{{k}}\textipa{n}, Phoenician \textipa{{k}}\textipa{n}, Hebrew k\textipa{{\textipa{\textipa{h}}}\textipa{n}%; Aramaic: Egyptian \textipa{{k}}\textipa{n}, Syrian k\textipa{{\textipa{\textipa{h}}}n\\textipa{\textipa{a}}}, Mandaic k\textipa{\textipa{h}}na ‘priest;’ Arabic \textipa{{k}}\textipa{n} ‘ê. devin, prêtre; predire l’avenir à qqn.,’ \textipa{ka\textipa{h}}\textipa{n}– ‘fortune-teller, diviner; (pre-Islamic) priest’ (the latter meaning may be < Aram.); Ge\textipa{{f}}ez k\textipa{\textipa{h}}\textipa{\textipa{a}}n ‘priest, clergyman’ (considered an Aramaic loan), Tigrinya, Amharic k\textipa{\textipa{h}}\textipa{\textipa{a}}n ‘priest’ (< Ge\textipa{{f}}ez ?); Mehri k\textipa{\textipa{h}}\textipa{\textipa{a}}n ‘cunning; cheat,’ \textipa{ka\textipa{h}}\textipa{\textipa{a}}n ‘to pretend to st. in order to attain one’s object,’ Harsusi k\textipa{\textipa{h}}\textipa{\textipa{\textipa{a}}}n, Jibbali k\\textipa{\textipa{h}}\textipa{\textipa{\textipa{a}}\textipa{n} ‘adult, clever’

Chadic *\textipa{kVn}– ‘k. of magic; evil spirit’ (CED #438; compared to Ugaritic, Hebrew and Arabic): W.:  

\footnote{In view of this AA etymology, more semantically plausible, the idea of this root derived from *\textipa{d}\textipa{a}: ‘burn’ (Kiessling and Mous 2003: 78) looks much less likely.}

\footnote{On a secondary -h- in Afrasian see Militarev (2005: 18-20).}
Montol kung ‘evil spirit,’ Kupto kònm ‘spirits,’ kònnôm ‘object of religious worshipping; ritual,’
Bokkos kuná ‘sorcerer’; C.: Gude kikiinà ‘type of evil spirit,’ Sukun kyikun ‘divination,’ Makeri kunus ‘magic, God, fetish,’ Munjuk kiniwi ‘empisonner par magic’

2.8. Spell, omen, magical speech or sign

NAA *ʔayat- ~ *tay(t)- ‘sign, miraculous sign, omen’ (AADB 199):
Semitic *ʔayat- ‘sign, miraculous sign, omen’: Akkadian (Oakk.) ittu ‘mark, sign, omen, ominous sign,’ etc. (CAD i 304); Hebrew ʔôt ‘sign, miraculous sign, omen, foretelling the future,’ etc. (HALOT: 26); Aram.: Bib., Syrian ʔātā ‘signum, miraculum,’ etc. (Brockelmann 1928: 53-54); Arabic ʔāyat- ‘signe, miracle, pierre sépulcrale, signe céleste,’ etc. (BK 1: 72; cf. tiwā- ‘marque en forme de croix imprimée sur les cuisses ou sur le cou d'une bête' (BK 1: 211)

Egyptian (OK) ty.t ‘image, form, shape, figure, sign’ (EG V: 239-40)

(?) Berber: Ayr, E. Tawllemmet tua 'drapeau' (Alojali: 187)

AA *fa(V)l-35 ‘to curse’ (AADB 842):
Semitic *pVʔl- ‘to wish ill, curse’: Sabaic fîl ‘to wish ill to so.;’ Jibbali effél ‘to bring bad luck by cursing’

Egyptian (PT) fꜢw36 ‘Bedrohung o. a.’ (EG I: 575)

Berber: Ayr, E. Tawllemmet fàll-ân ‘é. possédé par le diable; s’irriter, s’énerver’ (Naït-Zerrad III: 568)

Chadic *ful- ‘to curse:’ W.: Montol ful-ní, Karekare fùulu, Bolewa full- ‘abuse, curse’37


55 *f- in the reconstructed form is based not so much on the arguable Egyptian form or the Chadic ones not clearly distinguishing the reflexes of AA *f- and *p- (see AA *palaʔ- ‘magic speech or object’ below) as on the unequivocal evidence of f- in Iraqw clearly distinguishing between f and p. The choice of Sabaic and Jibbali in favor of AA *fâlVl- vs. *palaʔ- relies on the meaning alone.

36 ꢢm more likely renders -l- in view of the very plausible AA parallels.

37 And several verbs of the *fulp- type meaning ‘to abuse’ – see Stolbova 2021 #362 *ful-p (pl.)
AA *pala? - ‘magic speech or object’*38 (AADB 842):

Semitic: Hebrew pālā‘ *something unusual, miracle* (HALOT: 928); Syrian pēlēṯā ‘simile, proverbium; symbolum; aenigma’ (Brock.: 569); Arabic fašl- (met.?) ‘augure, présage, pronostique, sortout bon’ (BK 2: 530); cf. Mehrī fayūl ‘to be saved, safe’ (JM:111), Jibbali fyl ‘to be saved, save, survive’ (Johnstone 1981: 67) ●●●

Berber *fal- ‘magic speech or practice:’ Ayr, E. Tawlemmet ta-nā-falāl-t (Alojali 1980: 141), Ahaggar ta-na-fāl-it ‘paroles magiques ayant pour but de retrouver un objet égaré’ (cf. also Ayr affāl ‘immunité (contre une maladie)’ (Alojali 1980: 38), Qabyle a-s-fal ‘pratique magique qui consiste à faire tourner une offrande au-dessus du malade, puis à l’égorger’ (Dallet: 204; unless <$ fāl ‘passer par dessus’ (Dallet 1982: 203) ●●●

Chadic C.: Mada fla ‘génie, esprit lié à un objet magique, souvent maléfique,’ Azum flei-na ‘idol, oracle’*39 ●●

Cushitic S.: Dahalo pōlaʔi ‘amulet’ ●●●

AA *ḥabar- ‘cursing or charming someone openly, out loud’ (AADB 4081):

Semitic *ḥabar- ‘cursing or charming someone out loud:*40 Akkadian ḥābāru ‘to be noisy, make noise (of people)’ (context meanings);41; Phoenician ḫbr ‘conjurer, charmer, exorcist,’ Hebrew ḥābār ‘spell,’ Post-Biblical Hebrew ḥabbār ‘charmer of snakes, magus, Parsee priest’ (likely <$ Aramaic); Aramaic Judaic ḥabbār, Syrian ḥabbār ‘charmer of snakes, magus;’ Ge’ez ḫabr ‘encantation, enchantment, witchcraft,’ Tigre ḫābrā ‘to profess,’ ḫābre ‘wonder’ ●●●

Cushitic E. *habăr-: Saho abaar, Afar abaar ‘curse’, abaaro ‘evil, curse, a devilish act’, LEC: Somali,

38 Differing from the somewhat semblable *fala(ʔ)l-.* ‘to curse’ not only semantically, but also phonetically: *p- is guaranteed by Dahalo pōlaʔi as AA *f- and *p yield different reflexes in Dahalo (Takács 2011: 115).

39 As the reflexes of *p- and *f- do not clearly differ in the corresponding languages (CED: 29), semantically these two terms seem to suit here better than in Stolbova 2021 #361, where they are united under the heading ‘wind’ > ‘ghost’ with W.: Boletwa pēlī ‘wind’, pe-mpēlī ‘wind, spirit, ghost’, Karekare  fullWidth ‘wind’, Kupto  fullWidth ‘wind, air, spirit, devil’; C.: Hide  fullWidth ‘wind’, Dzeapaw fur, Gizey fūl ‘esprit’, Marba, Musey ful-na, Ham fūl ‘esprit-génie’, Masa, Lew fūl ‘génie de la brousse’ derived, in its turn, from *f∅l- ‘to blow (away).’

40 There are a few words in Arabic and MSA (probably, Arabisms) either homonymous or (more likely) related with a semantic change from ‘cursing or charming’ to ‘be wizard, magician’ to ‘know, test:’ Arabic ḫbr ‘know, learn, test;’ ḥabar- ‘news, rumor;’ Mehrī ḥabūr ‘try, test (so’s character),’ Jibbali ḫbr ‘to examine so.,’ Soqotri ḥabur ‘to plumb, measure; give news of a death.’

41 Most likely related is a much-discussed Akkadian ḥābīru (rather than ḥāpīru which has no feasible cognates; often confused with Egyptian ḫpr.w ‘foreign/Asiatic workers’ having a different etymology but perhaps contaminated due to a partial phonetic coincidence) ‘outlaws, rebels, etc.’ originally probably denoting a band of wandering fortune-tellers and magicians.
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Boni habaar, Oromo, Rendille abaar– ‘curse’

2.9. Offering, sacrifice

AA *sa/uk- ‘slaughter an animal, make a sacrifice’ (AADB 1956). Semitic: Arabic skk 'to cut ears'

Chadic W.: Hausa siika 'slaughtering a camel'

Cushitic C. *suk-: Bilin suuk- 'slaughter cattle (after funeral)' (see Reinisch 1887: 300); S.: Iraqw saanka (with a secondary -n-) 'chyme, stomach contents of a slaughtered animal (sheep or cow)... used as an offering to the dead' (Mous, Qorro and Kiessling 2002)

NAA *zi(H)b- ‘(food-)offering, sacrifice’ (AADB 1708):

Semitic: Akkadian (from OB on) zib-u 'food-offering' (CAD z 105)

Chadic *zib- ‘make a sacrifice’: C.: Podoko gičika žibe 'hut for sacrifices' (gičika 'hut'); Muyang čiibi 'give dowry for a woman, give by stages', Sakun zav (< *zVb-) 'sacrifice, make offering to'; E.: Bidiya ziib 'make a sacrifice before eating the new corn' (CED #800; compared with Akkadian).

NAA *ẓVbVh- ‘make a sacrifice, offering’ (AADB 1707):

Semitic *dVbVh- ‘slaughter, make a sacrifice’: Akkadian (NB) zebu 'slaughter, make a sacrifice,'

Ugaritic dbh; Phoenician zbḥ, Hebrew zbh 'to slaughter;' zābah 'communal sacrifice, sacrifice of slaughtering sheep, goat or cattle' (HALOT: 262); Aramaic: Biblical dbh, Syrian debḥā 'sacrifice;' Sabaic ḏbh 'to slay, sacrifice, slaughter; sacrificial victim;' Arabic ḏbh; Ge’ez zabḥa ‘to slaughter, sacrifice,’ Tigré zabha ‘to skin an animal’

Egyptian (MK) dbḥ ‘(food) offering’

42 Semitic *ḥ (< AA *ḥ) yields *ḥ in Saho-Afar and LEC which often appears as h or disappears completely in all the languages, see (Sasse 1979: 35-41). Though borrowing in E. Cushitic from Ethiopian is possible phonetically, there is no term in the latter fitting semantically (Harari ḥabar 'curse' is obviously a loan from E. Cushitic as ḥ in Harari is attested only in borrowed words; instead, it confirms the fallen ḥ- in the earlier state of E. Cushitic).

43 In spite of scarce evidence, a semantically interesting item worth recording and further search.

44 The Iraqw dictionary (Mous, Qorro and Kiessling 2002) gives a more detailed meaning of the noun clearly pointing to an offering, while the W. Rift reconstruction (Kießling and Mous 2003) retains only *saanka 'chyme.'

45 Though AA *ʒ regularly yields Egyptian z, not d, there are several notable exceptions, e.g. AA *ʒi/uʒn- 'ear' (> Semitic *luḍm-) > Egyptian lh.
(?) Cushitic E.: LEC: Somali dabaah- ‘slaughter’

2.10. Mythical and fantastic animals and their origin

AA *ʔaχayl- ‘(big) reptile’ > Semitic ‘dragon’ (AADB 2606):
Semitic *ʔaṭhaly- (met.) ‘a mythical reptile, dragon’: Aramaic: Syrian ḥatalāy ‘draco; stella, quae solem tegens eclipsim efficit;’ Tigre ḥashal-āt ‘dragon,’ Tigrinya ḥasāl-āt, ḥashal-āt ‘animale favoloso, di misurata grandezza e della specie del coccodrilla’

Berber *Haššayl- ’sp. of snake:’ Ghat ašil, Ahaggar aššel ‘serpent,’ Ayr aššel, E. Tawllemmet aššol ‘coulevre, gros serpent,’ Mzab t-ṭšel-t ‘vipère’

Cushitic S.: Dahalo ṫalala (met.) ‘puff-adder’

Omotic *ʔaylaš- (met.) ‘crocodile:’ N. *ʔaylaš-: Wolaita ayłaaš-uwa, Zala aylaš-uwa, Dawro allašo; S. *haylaš-: Ari hayleša

[] Militarev, Nikolaev 2021 #9.1. Cf. SED II No. 20.

NAA *ʔalw- ‘elephant’ > Akkadian ‘mythical giant bull’ (AADB 2511):
Semitic *(y-a-)ʔalw- ~ *ʔVwal: Akkadian (Bogh, SB, Akkadogr. in Hitt.) alû (elû) ‘mythical giant bull’ (CAD a, 377), ‘The Bull (of Heaven);’ Syrian yašlā ‘unicornus, rhinoceros’ (Brockelmann 1928: 305); Tigre ʔawal ‘young of the elephant’ (Littmann, Höflner1956: 477)

Berber *ʔalw ‘elephant’: Ghat alu, Ahaggar ēlu, pl. ēlw-ān, Ayr ilaw, E. Tawllemmet elaw, Zenaga ažih (≡*ʔlīw)


AA *bač- ‘snake, reptile’ > Akkadian, Ugaritic ‘dragon’ (AADB 2625):
Semitic *baṭ-am/n-: Akkadian bašm-u ‘a horned serpent; the constellation Hydra, mythical aquatic
reptile; Ebla baša-na-um 'sp. of snake;' Ugaritic bṯn, bṯn-t 'serpent, dragon;' Arabic baṯan- 'coulèvre, serpent,' buṯn- 'genre de reptile'

Cushitic E.: LEC *(ʔa-)hVč-: Somali abes-o, Arbore ebés-a 'kind of serpent,' Oromo bōf-a 'snake'

Omotic N. *biʔas- (met. < *ʔi-bas-?): Dizi (Sheko) biasu 'crocodile'

[] Cf. SED II #63.

AA *garyam- ~ *gumaray- ‘hippopotamus’ > (ʔ) Ugaritic ‘a mythical beast’ (AADB 2526):
Semitic *g(ʷ)imar(r)ay- ‘hippopotamus:’ Ugaritic gmr ‘a kind of animal capable of fighting ferociously’ (‘hippopotamus’?);
Geṯė gomāri, gʷamārī, Tigrinya gumare, Amharic gumarre,
Muher gʷāmarre, etc. ‘hippopotamus’ ●
Chadic C. *garyam- ‘hippopotamus:’ Vulum, Mbara gāriyām, Męsę geryam, Masa gāryam, Banana garyamba; E.: Tumak ērīm, Mębi ērīmtī ●●●●●

Omotic N.: Kullo gomāra ‘hippopotamus’ 49 ●


AA *har- ‘crocodile’ > ‘water monster,’ ‘mythological giant snake’ (AADB 4072): ●●●●●

Egyptian (PT) hjw (if < hrw; if < *hyw, related to Sem. *hVwVr- ‘sp. of worm, snake’) ‘Schlange (best. Art)’ (EG II: 483), also ‘Monster, (zischende) Schlange?’ ●

Chadic *har-um- ‘crocodile:’ W. *haram-: Dirī hurin, Sha hār-ām ‘some water monster (crocodile, hippo),’ Bokkos hārām, Daffo-Butura hārām, Kulere hārāq, etc.; C. *hurum-: Gisiga hurom, Męsę hūrām, Masa hūrām-nā, etc.; E. *(H)ur-m-: Lele ērm-ō, Kabalai orrm-ō ●●●●●

Cushitic *har(ar)- ‘large reptile:’ E.: Dullay: Gollango háar-o ‘crocodile;’ S. *harar- ‘mythological giant snake:’ Iraqw hārār-ō, Gorowa haraari-yodā 50 ●●●●●

[] CED #332 (comp. to Gollango and W. Rift) 51

48 The main argument for this meaning is Ethiopian parallels which are, naturally, suspicious of borrowing from Cushitic. If the Ugaritic term really means ‘hippopotamus’ (and not so interpreted from Eth.), it tips the scale in favor of Ethiopism in Cushitic. If not, an African Wanderwort, of course, is also a possibility.

49 Blažek (1994: 202) also quotes Yamma gumau, Bworo goma, gomia, Kafa gomānā. If not for these terms, the Kullo form may be considered an isolated Omotic example and suspected a loan from HEC or Ethiopian.


51 Ongota ʰahr-o ‘crocodile’ compared ibid., if recorded correctly, does not fit here because ʰ- does not continue AA ʰh.
NAA *harnag- ~ *hirguan- ~ *gurhan- ‘sp. of carnivore’ (dog, jackal, hyena) > Canarian demon in the form of a dog (AADB 352):

Semitic *harnag-: Syrian harnāgā ‘golden jackal;’ cf. also Arabic žārihat- ~ *gariḥ- ‘bête ou oiseau de chasse (chien, guépard, faucon)’

Canarian *hir(g)wan-: Palma hirguan ‘...demonio in figura d’uomo lanuto,’ irvene ‘el demonio en figura de perro lanudo,’ irvene ‘apparitions,’ yrvene ‘el Diablo’ (Wölfel 1965: 484, entry “Der Hund”)

Chadic: C. *gurh-an- ~ *hir-: Hildi garhay ‘jackal,’ Musgu hérge, Munjuk hire ‘dog,’ Musgoy guñrni, guñrni, Masa ĵurnaita, Banana ģonira; E. *gurnay-: Kera ġornòy, Kwang ģôrñey, Kabalai gwòrrnày ‘hyena’ (Jungraithmayr, Ibriszimow 1994: 107, 205; cf. CED #224a.)

AA *kal(ul) ‘sp. of large fish’ > Akkadian fabulous creature (AADB 2674):

Semitic *kalul-: Akkadian (SB) kulīl-, kulull- ‘a fabulous creature, part man and part fish’ (CAD k 526); Mehri kell, jibbali kāl ‘whale’

Chadic *kVl-: W. *kul-m-: Hausa kulma ‘the name of a large fish;’ C. *kalik- (partial redupl.): Bura kalik-o, kilakil-a ‘a sp. of fish’

Cushitic E. *kallu-m- ‘fish:’ Afar kull(u)m, LEC: Somali kallúun, pl. kalluum-o, Bayso kunnum-i (assim.)

NAA *kusay- ‘sp. of (large) reptile’ > Semitic mythical (aquatic) reptile, dragon’ (AADB 3727):

Semitic *kuš(a)y- ~ *kayš- ‘(mythical) serpent:’ Akkadian (NB) kušā ‘an aquatic (mythical) animal, a crab? a shark?’ (šinni kuši ‘a dragon’s tooth’ in CAD); Ge’ez kaysi, Tigre kayas ‘serpent, dragon,’ Tigrinya, Amharic käysi ‘snake, serpent’


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52 Hardly a Sumerian loan in view of the Semitic and AA cognates.
53 Dolgopolskiy (2008 #1030) apud Thomas (1937).
54 In view of Eth. and Chadic cognates, borrowed in Sumerian kušū, not vice versa.
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[] Cf. SED II No. 120; Stolbova 2011 #125, 127 (comp. to Akkadian).

AA *laḥ-am* – ‘large aquatic animal’ ••••• > Akkadian ‘a mythical being’ ••••• (AADB 2516):
- Semitic *laḥm* – ‘shark;’ Akkadian (OAkk.) laḥmu (laḥamu) ‘a monster, a mythical being;’ Arabic
  
  laḥm – ‘kind of sea-fish,’ Dat_ina laḥam, Yemenite ḥaṃ, laḥam ‘shark;’ Harsusi ḥem, Jibbali

  ḥuṃ, Soqtri ḥem ‘shark’55 •••••
- Egyptian (NK) ḥrm(w) (<*ḥlVm-, met.?) ‘crocodile’?56 ●
- Chadic *lVḥV ‘hippo’ (Stolbova 2005 #151): W.: Dera lōhyo; C.: Chibak laḥa, Bura lāha, Gude lōh

  •••••
- Cushitic N.: Beja lehúmbo ‘die graugrüne Meerkatze’ (Blažek 2003: 263) ●
[] Cf. SED II No. 145.

NAA *tVn* – ‘snake’ (?) ● or Semitic only ••••••• (AADB 3805):
- Semitic *tannin* – ‘(mythical) snake, dragon;’ Ugaritic tnn ‘dragon,’ Hebrew tannîn ‘sea-monster, sea-
  
  dragon; serpent; crocodile;’ Aramaic: Official tyn ‘dragon,’ Judaic tannînā ‘sea-monster, crocodile;
  
  large snake,’ Samaritan tyn ‘serpent,’ Syrian tannînā ‘belua marina; draco, aspis;’

  Mandaic tanina ‘dragon;’ Arabic tinnīn ‘serpent of enormous size; dragon’ (< Aramaic?) •••••

  (?) Egyptian (Gr.) wrj tn.t ‘Schlange (best. Art)’ (EG I 146) ●
- Chadic E.: Kera ǯungw ‘Flusspferd’ ●
[] Cf. SED II No. 227.

AA *(ʔa-)ǯag(ʷ)-* – ‘sp. of largest herbivore’ •••• > Egyptian ‘a mythical animal’ ••••• (AADB 2521)
- Egyp. (MK) zg.t ‘ein Fabeltier’ •••••
- Chadic W. *(n-)ǯungw* – (met. < *ǯagʷ-n-): Diri, Pa’a ǯungw-a, Siri ǯiw-a ‘hippopotamus,’ Dwot
  
  ndzugh-u ‘elephant’ •••••
- Cushitic E. *zag-am*: Yaaku sogóm-ći ‘elephant’ (s in Yaaku may reflect *z < *ʒ/ʒ) ●
- Omotic N. *ʔa-azăγ-ay ‘hippopotamus;’ Kačama aẓăgê, Koyra azzāgê, azzagi, Ganjule azaγē •••••●

55 Inter-borrowing between the living Arabic idioms and MSA suggests itself, but its direction is not clear.
56 “…reconstructed after the sign ‘crocodile’ determining the homonymous place name” (Bla 2003: 264).
3. Conclusions

The fact that our ancestors believed in spirits and the supernatural and practiced different kinds of magic from a much earlier time than the Neolithic is well known, but the reconstruction of the proto-language terms at such a deep chronological level reflecting perceptions, beliefs and practices of the Near Eastern man and society has been carried out for the first time in scholarship and can provide valuable evidence for anthropologists, mythologists, prehistorians, archaeologists. Evidence obtained not indirectly—through the interpretation of archaeological artifacts, rock carvings, much later written monuments or still later modern archaic cultures, but directly—through objective and impartial testimony of language.

4. Discussion

The reconstructed proto-language terms related to the proposed theme do not name objects, actions or qualities in the way many other reconstructed terms with quite concrete and clear meanings (such as ‘goat,’ ‘sun,’ ‘big’ or ‘eat’) do, but rather reflect the etymologist’s view of the common notion that unites the given group of cognate words. This approach, with the inevitable element of “semantic subjectivity,” however, creates a framework and paves the way for further research that could cover a significantly larger number of lexical sources, including new ones, for individual languages—to overcome another weakness in part of the etymologies, namely, incompleteness, if not scarcity, of data compared, rather than claims high degree of semantic precision in reconstructed proto-forms or completeness of lexical material. As they say, not perfect but workable…

Alphabetic list of 38 reconstructed proto-forms:

*ʔaχayl- ‘(big) reptile’ > Semitic ‘dragon’
*ʔil- ~ *lil- ~ *laʔ- ‘sky/cloud/rain’ or ‘sun’ > ‘God’?
*ʔayat- ~ *tay(t)- ‘sign, miraculous sign, omen’
*ʔalw- ‘elephant’ > Akkadian ‘mythical giant bull’
*biʔay- ‘hex, evil spells causing antisocial behavior’
*biʔVt- ‘evil spirit or magic’
*bač- ‘snake, reptile’ > Akk., Ugaritic ‘dragon’
*bawd- ‘sorcerer, witch-doctor’
*bVl(bVl)- ‘(healing) magic, sorcery’
*bariʔ- ‘spirit or god-creator’
*bary- ‘possession by an evil spirit, spell’
*cigul- ‘seal, (sealed, registered) property, treasure’ > Eth. ‘divination, magic’
*ĉvN(?)- ‘(evil) sorcery’
*(y)daʕ- ‘to know’ > ‘sorcery’
*faʔVl- ‘to curse’
*garyam- ~ *gumaray- ‘hippopotamus’ > (?) Ugaritic a mythical beast
*har- ‘crocodile’ > ‘water monster’, ‘mythological giant snake’
*harnag- ~ *hirguan- ~ *gurhan- ‘sp. of carnivore’ (dog, jackal, hyena) > Canarian demon in the form of a dog
*habar- ‘cursing or charming someone openly, out loud’
*kal(ul) ‘sp. of large fish’ > Akkadian ‘fabulous creature’
*kayn- ‘know’ > ‘magic’
*kirw- ‘soul, ghost’
*kusay- ‘sp. of (large) reptile’ > Semitic mythical (aquatic) reptile, dragon’
*lah-am- ‘large aquatic animal’ > Akkadian ‘a mythical being’
*mVh- ‘wonder, miracle, prophesy’
*mar- ‘diviner, fortune-teller’
*ni(H)nay- ‘elder/adult male relative’ (> chief, lord’) > ‘god’
*nVf- ‘breath, soul, self, life’
*nafVs- ‘breath, soul, life’
*palaʔ - ‘magical speech or object’
*raw/?- ‘sky; god’
*sa/uk- ‘slaughter an animal, make a sacrifice’
*tVnnVn- ‘(mythical) snake, dragon’ (Semitic)
*zi(H)b- ‘(food-)offering, sacrifice’
*ʒǐVbVh- ‘make a sacrifice, offering’
*(ʔa-)ʒag(ː) - ‘sp. of largest herbivore’ > Egyptian a mythical animal
*ʒVk- ‘(night) ghost, phantome’
*ʒVr- ‘magic; (evil) genius; sky-god’

Some transcription signs and conventions

b — emphatic voiced bilabial stop
t — interdental voiceless spirant
ḏ — interdental voiced spirant
ᵗ — dental voiceless emphatic stop
ḑ — dental voiced emphatic stop
c — alveolar voiceless affricate [ts]
ʒ — alveolar voiced affricate [dz]
č— palato-alveolar voiceless affricate [tʃ]
š — palato-alveolar voiced affricate [dʒ]
š — hissing emphatic voiceless spirant
cy — alveolar emphatic voiceless affricate
c — palato-alveolar emphatic affricate
š — lateral voiceless spirant
c — lateral voiceless affricate
c — lateral emphatic affricate
k (or q) — emphatic velar stop
ḥ — uvular voiceless spirant
ḥ — pharyngeal voiceless fricative
ʕ — pharyngeal voiced fricative
h — laryngeal voiceless fricative
ʔ — glottal stop
ā, ī, ū, ē, ō — long vowels
ā, etc. — short vowels
ə — neutral vowel (shwa)

in the reconstructed proto-forms:

\( V \) indicates a non-specified (in other words, any) vowel, e.g. \( *bVr \) should be read ‘either *bar-, *bir-, or *bur-’

\( H \) indicates a non-specified laryngeal or pharyngeal consonant

\( S \) indicates a non-specified sibilant

/ between two symbols means ‘or’, e.g., \( *gaw/y \) is to be read ‘*gaw- or *gay-’

( ) a symbol in round brackets means ‘with or without this symbol’, e.g., \( *ba(w)r \) should be read ‘*bawr- or *bar-’

~ means ‘and’ pointing to two or more co-existing proto-forms, e.g. \( *ɪad-at- \sim *ɪ(dd) \) indicates two reconstructed variant proto-forms
[] precedes references and comments to the whole entry

Abbreviations

AA – Afrasian
E. – East
LEC – Lowland East Cushitic
MK – Middle Kingdom
MSA – Modern South Arabian
N. – North
NAA – North Afrasian (Semitic, Egyptian, Berber, Chadic)
NB – Neo-Babylonian
NE – New Egyptian
NK – New Kingdom
OAkk – Old Akkadian
OB – Old Babylonian
OK – Old Kingdom
PAA – Proto-Afrasian
PNA – Proto-North Afrasian
PT – Pyramid Texts
S. – South
SAA – South Afrasian (Cushitic and Omotic)
SB – Standard Babylonian
W. – West.

Abbreviations of sources


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