

**A philological and zoological description of the bird names
given by Yāqūt Al Ḥamawī and Zakariā' Al-Qazwīnī in
their description of the island of Tinnīs**

Part 2.

Philippe Provençal

Zoologisk Museum – Statens Naturhistoriske Museum,
Universitetsparken 15, 2200 København Ø.

This is the following up of my previous article in Arabic Biology and Medicine: A Philological description of the bird names given by Yāqūt AL-Ḥamāwī and Zakariā' AL-Qazwīnī in their description of the island of Tinnīs¹. This series of article is treating philologically and biologically the list of 134/135 bird names included in the descriptions of the island of Tinnīs in Lake Manzalah in the Delta of the Nile which are given by Yāqūt ibn 'abdullāh al-Ḥamāwī (1179-1229)² in his *Mu'ğam al-Buldān* and by Zakariā' b. Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd al-Qazwīnī (1203-1283)³ in his Cosmography, *Kitāb 'Ağā'ib al-Maḥlūqāt wa ġarā'ib al-Mawġūdāt*. As the amount of material involved in this study is extensive, the treating will take place using several articles.

¹ Provençal, P. A Philological description of the bird names given by Yāqūt Al-Ḥamāwī and Zakariā' Al-Qazwīnī in their Description of the island of Tinnīs, *Arabic Biology and Medicine*, May 2015, No. 3. vol. 1 p. 1-45.

² al-Qazwīnī, Zakariā' b. Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd; *Kitāb 'Ağā'ib al-maḥlūqāt wa ġarā'ib al-mawġūdāt - El Cazwini's Kosmographie*. Ed. F. Wüstenfeld. Genehmigter Neudruck des Ausgabe von 1848-49 des Verlages der Dieterichschen Buchhandlung. Martin Sändig 1967: Wiesbaden.

³ Yāqūt al-ḥamāwī, *Jacuts Geographischer Wörterbuch*, herausgeben von Ferdinand, Wüstenfeld, Leipzig 1866-70. Reprint by Asādi Library, Teheran.

In the treating of these bird names I continue with the names, for which the identity is clear or easy to work out. As in the previous article, the treated species will taxonomically be spread out in order to provide a better overview of the knowledge found in the Arabic texts on zoology. As explained in my previous article, some bird names are still in use and the species in questions are well described in the classical literature. In order to avoid making the text of this article too long, we will only treat twelve species here. The remaining being treated in subsequent articles. For a general treating of list of bird names and an overview of the sources used see my previous article⁴.

THE BIRD NAMES:

الفاختة/Al-fāḥitah (No. 11)⁵ /Collared
Dove/*Streptopelia decaocto* / **African Collared Dove**/
Streptopelia roseogrisea

Philological comments

Malouf writes that the name *fāḥitah* is the name for the collared dove⁶. This is confirmed by Goodman et al.⁷, where

⁴. Provençal, A PHILOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION.

⁵. The numbers refer to the number of the item in the list of bird names as noted by Yāqūt Al-ḥamawī, see Provençal, ibid. p. 14-16.

⁶. Malouf, A.,1932, *An Arabic zoological dictionary* al-Muktataf Press, Cairo, p. 87.

the name *fāḥitah* is used both for the Collared Dove and the African Collared Dove, and by F. Viré⁸.

The plural of *fāḥitah* is *fawāḥit* فَوَاحِتْ.

Al Ġāḥiẓ writes that the *fāḥitah* is a pigeon or dove⁹.
Lisān al-‘Arab writes under the entry *fāḥitah*:

فاختة و الواحد الفواخت: هي ضرب من الحمام المطوق. قال ابن بري: ذكر ابن الحوالي أن الفاختة مشتقة الفخت الذي ظل القمر

"*Fāḥitah* is the singular of *fawāḥit*: It is a kind of collared pigeon. Ibn Barī has told (that) Ibn al-Ḥawālīqī mentioned that the (name) *Fāḥitah* is derived from the *Faḥt* which is the shadow of the moon."¹⁰ This last remark might allude to the collar of the dove which in fact has the form of a crescent placed horizontally across the nape¹¹.

Al-Damīrī writes:

الفاختة: واحدة الفواخت من ذوات الاطواق (...) قاله في الكفاية و يقال

⁷ Goodman, S. M. and P. L. Meininger, S. M. Baha el Din, J. J. Hobbs, W. C. Mullié 1989: *The Birds of Egypt*. Oxford University Press. Oxford, New York, p. 311-312.

⁸ Viré, F. in Etchécopar, R.D., F. Hūe. 1964. *Les Oiseaux du Nord de l'Afrique de la Mer rouge aux Canaries*. Paris, N. Boubée et Cie, p. 109.

⁹ Al Ġāḥiẓ, *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, established and annotated by Abdessalām Mohammed Hâroun; ed. Dār-el-Ġīl, 8 vols, (Beyrouth, 1996), vol. 3, p. 201.

¹⁰ *Lisān al-‘Arab*, (ed. 1955) compiled by: Ibn Manẓūr al-Ifriqī al-Miṣrī, Abū-l-Faḍl Jamāl ad-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Mukarram. Ed. Dār Ṣādir - Dār Bayrūt, Bayrūt.

¹¹ Personal observations on collared doves, cf. too Peterson, R., G. Mountfort, P. A. D: Hollom 1989. *Europas Fugle*. Translated to Danish by D. Boertmann and J. Fjeldsâ. Copenhagen, C.E.G. Gads Forlag, plate 51.

للفاختة الصُّلُّل ايضاً (...) وهي عراقية و ليست بحجازية (...) و صوتها يشبه المثلث و في طبعها الانس بالناس و تعيش في الدور

"(The *Fāḥitah*) is the singular of the *fawāḥit* among the collared (birds)... The writer of the *Kifāyah* wrote: "The *Fāḥitah* is also called the *Ṣulṣul*.... They are Iraqi birds and not from the *Ḥiḡāz*...Their voice is like a triplet. In the natural disposition of the *Fāḥitah* is (the trait) that it likes people and lives in built-up places".¹²

This description gives the main characteristics of the Collared Dove. The voice of the Collared Dove does indeed pronounce a tri-syllabic coo as anyone who has heard these birds may confirm. The Collared Dove is furthermore a very urbanised species¹³. The remark on the distribution of the species seems also to be entirely correct. An-Nuwayrī writes too that the *Fāḥitah* is from Iraq and not from the *Ḥiḡāz*¹⁴ while al-Qalqašandī writes that the *Fāḥitah* is a collared bird from the *Ḥiḡāz* having the size of a Domestic Pigeon (*Ḥamām*)¹⁵. This last remark may indicate a confusion with the African collared dove, which at the present time is living on the southern half of

¹². Al-Damīrī, Kamāl ad-Dīn (1861) *Kitāb ḥayāt al-ḥayawān al-Kubrā*, ed. Muḥammad Shāhīn and ed. Dār al-Fikr, Bayrūt, Lebanon.

¹³. Personal observations on wild specimens, Cf. Nowak, E. 1963. *Die Türkentaube*. Franckh'sche Verlagshandlung Stuttgart, Kosmos-Verlag p. 42, cf. also Goodwin, D. 1967. *Pigeons and Doves of the World*. Trustees of the British Museum (Natural History), London, p. 128.

¹⁴. An-Nuwayrī (ed.1923-55): *Nihāyat al-Arab fī Funūn al-Adab*. Photomechanical reprint of the ed. of Dār al-Kutub al Miṣriyyah. Ministry of Culture and National Guidance, Egypt. Book 9 pp. 224-383 and book 10 pp. 1-354.

¹⁵. Al-Qalqašandī, Abū l-'Abbās Aḥmad, *Kitāb Ṣubḥ al-A 'šā*, vol. 2 ed. Dār al-Kutub al-ḥidīwiyyah. Cairo: 1913-1922, art. *Fāḥitah*.

the Red Sea coast of the Arabian peninsula¹⁶. As there are very small differences in outwards appearance between the Collared Dove and the African Collared Dove, so small in fact that the two doves sometimes have been counted as conspecific although their voices are very different, this confusion is very likely to occur.

Biological comments

The Collared Dove is an eastern species which has only very recently begun to expand its range to the west, that is from about the beginning of the 20th century¹⁷.

The Collared Dove is locally a common breeding resident in Egypt at the present time¹⁸, but it entered the country in the mid 1970ies and the colonisation process still continues¹⁹.

According to Goodman et al.²⁰ the African Collared Dove is not found at the present time in Egypt proper but is a breeding resident near Gebel Elba which is an igneous mountain standing single in the extreme south-east corner of

¹⁶. Hollom, P. A. D., R. F. Porter, S. Christensen, I. Willis, 1988, *Birds of the Middle East and North Africa*. T & D Poyser: Calton, p. 123.

¹⁷. Cf. Nowak, *Die Türkentaube*.

¹⁸. Goodman, *The Birds* p. 312.

¹⁹. Meininger, P.L. & Atta G.A.M. (eds). 1994. *Ornithological Studies in Egyptian Wetlands 1989/90*. FORE-report 94-O1, Wivo-report 40, Vlissingen/Zeist, p. 334.

²⁰. Goodman, *The Birds*.

Egypt²¹. Nevertheless, this species seems to immigrate in the Lake Nāṣir area, and two specimens have probably been observed as far north as Aswan²².

The only other place in the Middle East where the African Collared Dove does breed is on the south western coastal regions of the Arabian peninsula i.e. from Jiddah to the most western part of the Gulf of Aden.

الزَّرَيْقُ / Az-zurrayq (No. 13) / **Jay** / *Garrulus glandarius*

Philological comments

The Jay is called *Abū Zurayq* أَبُو زُرَيْقُ in Syrian Arabic²³. The name *Zurayq* for the Jay alludes to its bright blue mirror on its wings. These appear as a very bright blue patch on the front edge of the wing²⁴.

In classical Arabic the Jay was also called *Qīq* قَيْق An-

²¹. Goodman, *ibid.* p. 311.

²². Meininger & Atta, *Ornithological Studies*, p. 334.

²³. Malouf, *An Arabic Zoological*, p. 135 and Dalman, G. 1913. *Arabischen Vogelnamen von Palästina und Syrien*. Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästinavereins nr. 36 pp. 165-179, No. 60.

²⁴. Peterson et al. *Europas Fugle.*, p. 215 and plate 69 and personal observations on live birds in the field, cf. also Fischer, W., 1965, *Farb- und Formbezeichnungen in der Sprache der Altarabischen Dichtung*, Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden for the primitive meaning of the root 'zrq.

Nuwayrī writes:

- و القيق : طائر في قدرة الحمام اللطيف ، و أهل الشام يُسمونه أبا زُرَيْقٍ .
و في طبعه الإلف بالناس ، وقبول التعليم ، و سرعة الإدراك لما يلقن من الكلام
مبيناً حتى لا يشك سامعه اذا لم يره أنه أناسٌ ، وربما زاد على الببغاء . وله
حكاياتٌ و أخبارٌ في الذكاء والفتنة يطول شرحها ، وهو طائر مشهور بذلك

"The *Qīq* is a bird the size of a slender pigeon. People in the Syrian region call it *Abū Zurayq*. This bird is by nature easy to accustom to people. It is able to learn and acquires quickly the speech which it is taught. (This it utters) clearly so that a listener, if he has not seen the bird (in question) never doubts that it is a human being (speaking). It often excels over the parrot in these things. There are tales and reports about this bird (relating) about its intelligence and cleverness whose commentating is lengthy. This bird is well known in this respect."

This is a very fine description of the jay, as it is a bird, which is well known for its ability to imitate other sounds with considerable or perfect accuracy²⁵. Corvids are known as being quick-witted birds and much of their behaviour whether innate or learned may be interpreted in this way by a layman²⁶.

In present day Egypt the name *zurayqah* is used for small warblers (cf. No. 29 of the present list). The reason for suggesting to identify this name with the Jay here is that the

²⁵. Goodwin, D. 1986. *Crows of the World*. Trustees of the British Museum (Natural History): London, p. 53.

²⁶. Goodwin, *ibid.* p. 23-62.

birds in this part of the list are characterised by being of dove size like the Jay²⁷; i.e. the turtle dove (No. 10) the collared dove (No. 11) the "wailing dove" (no. 12), which according to the sources should belong to the *Streptopelia* genus, and the Crow (No. 15) the latter being a Corvid like the Jay.

Biological comments

In recent time the Jay is not a member of the Egyptian fauna. The Jay is a breeding resident in Asia Minor and the adjacent mountainous parts of Iraq and Iran, in Coastal Syria, in Lebanon, Palestine and north-west Africa, where it occurs in wooded lands²⁸ (Hollom et al. 1988). As there were some wooded areas around the southern shores of Lake Manzalah in medieval times (pers. inf. from dr. ‘Abbās aš-šānāwī) the Jay may have occurred in this place.

The Jay is, in its different forms, widely distributed in Europe and Central- and East Asia²⁹.

الجرادي/Al-Ġarādī (No. 18) / **Kestrel** / *Falco tinnunculus* ; **Lesser kestrel** / *Falco naumanni* ; **Merlin** / *Falco columbarius*

²⁷. Cf. Peterson, *Europas fagle*, plate 69

²⁸. Hollom, *Birds of the Middle East*, p. 225.

²⁹. Goodwin, *Crows*, p. 197.

Philological comments

François Viré writes in his *Essai de détermination des oiseaux de vol dans les principaux manuscrits arabes médiévaux sur la fauconnerie* (1977) that the names *ḡarādī*, *ḡjarādiyyah*, *abū ḡarādah*, *ḡaradānī* and *ṣaqr al-ḡarād* جَرَادِي ، جَرَادِيَّة ، أَبُو جَرَادَة ، جَرَدَانِي ، صَقْر الجراد are common Arabic names in the manuscripts on falconry for the Kestrel³⁰. Malouf (1932) and Goodman et al. (1989)³¹ write that the Kestrel and the Lesser Kestrel are called *ṣaqr al-ḡarād* in Egypt, however the same authors write that the name of the Merlin in Egypt is *Ḥarādiyyah* to which Malouf adds *ṣaqr al-ḡarād*³².

The name pertaining to grasshoppers (coll. *Ḥarād*) is due to the fact that larger insects constitute a great part of the food of the Kestrel³³. In the Mediterranean countries, larger insects do constitute a greater part of the food of the Kestrel³⁴. However the Lesser Kestrel is specialised in eating larger insects, having beetles and grasshoppers as main food items³⁵. The Merlin being a northern species hunts first and foremost

³⁰ Viré, F. 1977. *Essai de détermination des oiseaux-de-vol mentionnés dans les principaux manuscrits arabes médiévaux sur la fauconnerie. Arabica*, tome XXIV.

³¹ Goodman, *The Birds*.

³² Malouf, *An Arabic Zoological*.

³³ Viré, *Essai de détermination*.

³⁴ Génsbøl, B. 1987. *Rovfuglene i Europa, Nordafrika og Mellemøsten*, Gad. Copenhagen, p. 274.

³⁵ Génsbøl, *ibid.* p. 280 and ill. pp. 280-281.

small birds³⁶. However it is highly probable that in its southern winter quarters insects do play a larger part as food items, but it is equally probable that the name *Ĝarādiyyah* was given by simple analogy, the three species all being small falcons resembling more or less each other³⁷.

In Ancient Egypt the Kestrel was apparently the most frequently mummified falcon³⁸. It is also noteworthy, that the female Kestrel or female Lesser Kestrel was the zoological model for the representation of the divine "Horus Falcon" in the Ramesside period (last third of the second millennium and beginning of the first millennium B.C.). In the other periods the Horus Falcon was depicted as a kind of great Falcon but without discriminating species characteristics. Several species thus seemed to have influenced the model of the Horus Falcon. Kestrels are found with certainty only on tombs and funeral papyri of the Dynasties XIX and XX (1307-1196 and 1196-1070 B.C.). The Kestrels from this period are always pictured in mythological scenes in which the goddesses Isis and Nephtys appeared in the form of falcons. The Kestrels thus depicted were (often) female birds³⁹.

Biological comments

³⁶. Génsbøl, *ibid.* p. 266.

³⁷. Génsbøl, *ibid.* p. 264- 281 and pp. 374-379.

³⁸. Houlihan, P. F. 1986, *The Birds of Ancient Egypt*. Aris and Phillips. Warminster: England, p. 46.

³⁹. Houlihan, *ibid.*

The Kestrel is a fairly common breeding resident in Egypt, whereas the Lesser Kestrel is a casual migrant breeder in northern Egypt, a scarce autumn migrant and a much commoner spring migrant, and the Merlin is a rare winter visitor in Egypt⁴⁰. A total of 243 Kestrels were counted between December 1989 and July 1990 in different parts of Egypt by the group behind the Ornithological Observations in Egyptian Wetlands. A total of 33 Lesser kestrels were observed by the group in the same period. A total of 17 Merlins, all observed in the Northern parts of Egypt, were seen by the group in the same period. One of the observations, a male on 12. March 1990, was on Lake Manzalah⁴¹. At my visit on the island of Tinnīs on the 8 April 1993 Gamīl ‘Aṭṭā’ and I observed a Kestrel presumably hunting over the island.

Concerning the Arab world the Kestrel is breeding in many and large parts of the Middle East. The lesser Kestrel is mainly breeding in Asia Minor, whereas the Merlin is a decidedly northern species visiting the Middle East and North Africa only in winter⁴².

الأبلاق / Al-Ablaq (No. 19) / Wheatears *Oenanthe spp.*

Philological comments.

⁴⁰. Goodman, *The Birds*, p. 199-201 and p. 203.

⁴¹. Meininger & Atta, *Ornithological Studies*, p. 313-314.

⁴². Hollom, *Birds of the Middle East*, p. 67-68.

The name *Ablaq* is a generic name in Arabic for the Wheatears⁴³. The name meaning pied, black and white⁴⁴ alludes to the colour of several species of Wheatears in the Middle East and North Africa. In all 17 species of the genus *Oenanthe* inhabits the Middle East and North Africa. Of these three species, i.e. the Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*, the Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina* and the Red-breasted Wheatear *Oenanthe bottae* do not have a pied, black and white plumage, while all the other species are endowed with this colour pattern⁴⁵.

Biological comments.

Several species of Wheatears occur in Egypt at the present time, either as breeding birds or as passage migrants and/or winter visitors⁴⁶. During my visit to the island of Tinnīs on the 8 April 1993 I observed the following three species around the site of the old city of Tinnīs. Common Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*, Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina* and Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica* - the black-throated morph.

⁴³. Malouf, *An Arabic Zoological*, p. 174-175, Goodman, *The Birds*, p. 389 - 399.

⁴⁴. Fischer, *Farb- und Formbezeichnungen*, p. 83 - 85.

⁴⁵. Hollom, *Birds of the Middle East*, plates 28 and 29.

⁴⁶. Goodman, *The Birds*, p. 398-391.

الخضير/Al-ḥudīr (No. 30) / **Little Green Bee-eater** /
Merops orientalis; Blue-Cheeked Bee-eater /*Merops*
superciliosus

Philological comments

ḥudīr is the official name given by Goodman et al. (1989) for the Little Green Bee-eater, and both Goodman et al. (1989) and (Malouf 1932) state that this name is a generic name for the Bee-eaters⁴⁷. The Bee-eaters have other generic names derived from the root 'ḥdr in the Arab world⁴⁸. Another generic name for the Bee-eaters in Arabic is *warwār* وَرْوَار. Nevertheless as this name does occur in the present list as No. 57, and because of the general meaning of the adjective *aḥḍar*⁴⁹, the Green Bee-eaters occurring in the Middle East and North Africa, i.e. the Little Green Bee-eater and the Blue-Cheeked Bee-eater⁵⁰ are suggested as identifications for the present name.

Al-Qalqaṣandī writes in his chapter about the swallows:

و عدّوا من أنواعه أيضا الذي يسميه أهل مصر الخُضَيْرِي ، وهو طائر
 أخضر دون البيغاء في المقدار لا يزال طائرا وهو يصبح ، يقتات الفَرَّاشَ والذباب

⁴⁷. Malouf, *An Arabic Zoological*, p. 32-33, Goodman, *The Birds*, p. 342-345.

⁴⁸. Malouf, *An Arabic Zoological*, p. 32.

⁴⁹. Cf. Provençal, A PHILOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION , p. 24-25. The root 'ḥdr stands for the colour green in Arabic.

⁵⁰. Hollom, *Birds of the Middle East*, p. 143 and plate 21.

"... and among the kinds (of swallows) is counted (this bird) which the people of Egypt call the Little Green Bee-eater (al-ḥudayrī). It is a green bird, smaller than a parrot in size. It always flies about voicing. It feeds on flying insects and flies". This is a very precise description of the green coloured Bee-eaters. Their long pointed wings and their graceful and agile flight during which they hunt their prey consisting exclusively of flying insects give them a resemblance to swallows and martins⁵¹.

Biological comments.

The Little Green Bee-eater is a breeding resident in Egypt. It is a common breeder in the whole of the Nile valley down to Aswan, and it has extended its breeding range northward in the course of the 20th century to include the lower Nile valley and the delta, where it nevertheless still seems to be absent as a breeding bird in the central and northern parts of the delta. It nevertheless breeds in the areas around Alexandria and Ismailia⁵². Three observations at Suez were made in the spring and summer 1990⁵³. The Little Green Bee-eater is a breeding resident in southern Palestine, and in oases and on the shores of the Arabian peninsula with the exception of the Gulf region. It

⁵¹. Delin, H., L. Svensson 1990. *Photographic guide to the birds of Britain and Europe*. Hamlyn Publishing Group Limited, London, p. 172-173 and Jonsson, L. 1994. *Fugle i Europa med Nordafrika og Mellemøsten*, Gyldendal, Copenhagen, p. 336-337.

⁵². Goodman, *The Birds*, p. 343-344.

⁵³. Meininger & Atta, *Ornithological Studies*, p. 341.

is also breeding on the gulf shores of Iran⁵⁴.

The Blue-cheeked Bee-eater is, at the present time, a rather common summer breeding bird in the northern parts of Egypt i.e. the Nile delta, the lower Nile valley, and it is a passage migrant through the whole country. On 7 May 1983 a colony of more than 700 nesting burrows were found on a stretch of a few kilometres of dike near Gridi on Lake Manzalah⁵⁵. During the spring 1990 it was commonly observed around Lake Manzalah⁵⁶.

Concerning the Arab world the Blue-cheeked Bee Eater is a breeding bird in north-west Africa, especially in Morocco, in Palestine and in many areas in the Middle-East⁵⁷.

أبو الحنّاء / Abū-l-ḥinnā' (No. 31) / **Robin** / *Erithacus rubecula*

Philological comments

The Robin is generally known by this name in Arabic⁵⁸. Amin Malouf writes:

⁵⁴. Hollom, *Birds of the Middle East*, p. 143.

⁵⁵. Goodman, *The Birds*, p. 344-345.

⁵⁶. Meininger & Atta, *Ornithological Studies*, p. 341.

⁵⁷. Hollom, *Birds of the Middle East*, p. 143.

⁵⁸. Cf. entry *Robin* in: Saad, K. M. 1926. *Centennial English-Arabic Dictionary*, The American Press: Beyrouth; and the entry *ḥinnā'* in Wehr, H., 1976, *Arabic -English Lexicon*. J. Milton Cowan, New York.

طائر صغير احمر الصدر يعرف في الشام بابي الحن و ابو الحنة سمي
بذلك لونه ذكره ياقوت والقزويني في وصف جزيرة تنيس و سميها ابالحنّاء

"A little bird with a red breast. It is known in the region around Damascus as *abū-l-ḥinn* and *abū-l-ḥinnah*. It is so called because of its colour. Yāqūt and al-Qazwīnī mentioned it in [their] description of the island of Tinnīs and they called it *abū-l-ḥinnā*' (...)"⁵⁹. Goodman et al. write that this name *abū-l-ḥinnā*' is the "official" name of the bird in Egypt⁶⁰. The name using the red colouring plant *ḥinnā*' is derived from the red colour on the throat and chest of the bird.

Biological comments.

Concerning the Arab world Robins are, at the present time, breeding in north-west Africa and furthermore on the northern shores of Anatolia and on the Caspian parts of Iran, and it is a winter visitor in most parts of the Middle-East and North-Africa, however being scarcer on the Arabic peninsula⁶¹. In Northern Egypt it is a fairly common winter visitor, but it does not breed in Egypt⁶².

الدوري / ad-dūrī (No. 38) / **House Sparrow** / *Passer*

domesticus

⁵⁹. Malouf, *An Arabic Zoological*, p. 207.

⁶⁰. Goodman, *The Birds*, p. 383.

⁶¹. Hollom, *Birds of the Middle East*, p. 175.

⁶². Goodman, *The Birds*, p. 383.

Philological comments

The House Sparrow is generally known in Arabic by the names 'Uṣfūr Dūrī and 'Uṣfūr Buyūtī⁶³. An-Nuwayrī writes :

فَأَمَّا الْعَصْفُورُ الْبُيُوتِيُّ - ففِي طَبَاعِهِ اخْتِلَافٌ : ففِيهِ مِنْ طَبَاعِ سِبَاعِ الطَّيْرِ أَنَّهُ يُلْقِمُ فِرَاحَهُ وَلَا يَزُقُّهَا ، وَيَصِيدُ أَجْنَاساً مِنَ الْحَيَوَانِ كَالنَّمْلِ إِذَا طَارَ وَالْجِرَادِ وَ يَأْكُلُ اللَّحْمَ . وَالَّذِي فِيهِ مِنْ طَبَاعِ بَهَائِمِ الطَّيْرِ أَنَّهُ لَيْسَ بِذِي مَخْلَبٍ وَلَا مَنْسَرٍ ؛ وَهُوَ إِذَا سَقَطَ عَلَى عَوْدِ قَدَمِ أَصَابِعِهِ الثَّلَاثِ وَأَخَّرَ الدَّابِرَةَ ؛ وَ سِبَاعُ الطَّيْرِ تُقَدِّمُ إِصْبِعَيْهِ وَتُؤَخِّرُ إِصْبِعَيْهِ ؛ وَيَأْكُلُ الْحَبَّ وَالْبَقُولَ . وَ يَتَمَيَّزُ الذَّكَرُ مِنْهَا مِنَ الْأُنثَى بِلِحْيَةٍ سَوْدَاءَ . وَهُوَ لَا يَعْرِفُ الْمَشْيَ وَإِنَّمَا يَرْفَعُ رِجْلَيْهِ وَيَتَّبُ . وَهُوَ كَثِيرُ السَّفَادِ ، وَرَبِمَا سَفَدَ فِي السَّاعَةِ خَمْسِينَ مَرَّةً ، وَلِذَلِكَ عَمْرُهُ قَصِيرٌ فَإِنَّهُ لَا يُعَمَّرُ غَالِباً أَكْثَرَ مِنْ سَنَةٍ ؛ وَإِنَّا نَهَا تَعَمَّرَ أَكْثَرَ مِنْ ذَكَورِهَا

"And concerning the House Sparrow -: Its natural disposition is differentiated, as it contains [elements] of the nature of the Raptor birds as it feeds its young bit by bit and does not regurgitate in their beak and as it hunts kinds of animals like flying ants and grasshoppers and eats meat; but it has also what belongs to the nature of the corn-eating birds, as it is not endowed with the toes and beak of Raptors; and when it alights on a twig it sets forward three of its toes and it sets behind the back toe while the Raptors set forward two toes and set behind (the other) two toes and as the (House Sparrow) feeds on grains and greenery. The male in this kind of bird differs from the female by (having) a black beard. This bird does not walk, but only lifts its feet and jumps. (The House Sparrow) mates abundantly and it may perhaps mate 50 times in one hour. It therefore has a short life and for the most does

⁶³. Dalman, *Arabischen Vogelnamen*, No 48; Malouf, *An Arabic Zoological*, p. 232; Goodman, *The Birds*, p. 457.

not live more than one year. The females, however, live longer than the males of these birds.(...)"⁶⁴.

This is a very fine description of a House Sparrow, where the author observes the distinguishing characters i.e. the movements, the black bib of the male and the feeding and mating habits⁶⁵.

Biological comments

The House Sparrow is a bird species whose historical relation to man begins in the Middle East. In fact the oldest known fossil remains of House Sparrow like birds have been found in a cave near Bethlehem in Palestine. These remains were excavated from 12.000 years old layers. In 400.000 years old layers two parts of beaks were excavated and these were identified as belonging to an ancestral form of the House Sparrow. The typical House Sparrow evolved together and in close interaction with the evolution of corn-based agriculture in the Middle-East⁶⁶. This means that the House Sparrow may be counted as a natural product of the civilisations and cultures of the Middle East.

⁶⁴ An-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyah*, book 10. p. 249-500. For a survey of the discussion found in the *Kitāb al-ḥayawān* of al-Ġāhiz regarding a similar classification among birds according to their natures, see: Meyssa Ben Saad, Mehrnaz Katouzian Safadi, Philippe Provençal, Quelques réflexions sur les critères de classification des animaux chez les savant Al-Djāhiz (776-868), *Al-Mukhatabat*, No. 7, July 2013.

⁶⁵ Cf. Hansen, P. 1985. *Gråspurven*. Natur og Museum nr. 3. Naturhistorisk Museum, Aarhus.

⁶⁶ Hansen, *ibid.* p. 23.

The House Sparrow is a widespread species everywhere in The Middle East and North Africa where it lives in close association with human settlements, as in the rest of the world where this bird is found. It colonies rapidly new settlements. A fact I witnessed personally in 1994 in the new tourist settlements in Na‘āmah Bay on the Sinai coast of the gulf of ‘Aqabah where House Sparrows were readily seen.

شِقْرَاق /siqirrāq (No. 41) / **Roller** *Coracias garullus*

Philological comments

Malouf writes that the names of this species are: شِقْرَاق , šaqirrāq, šiqirrāq, šiqrāq, šaraqrāq and širiqrāq . That the Roller is designated by the names given above is beyond doubt by the examples gathered by Malouf (1932) in al-Damīrī, Dāwud al-Antakī, Fīruzbādī and Lisān al-‘Arab and by the research of Malouf in the modern colloquial dialects of the Middle East⁶⁷. These names are confirmed by Goodman et al. (1989) who write that the generic names for Roller in present day Egypt are: šiqirāq and širqūq⁶⁸ i.e. شِقْرَاق , شِرْقُوق . F. Viré writes that one of the present day names of the genus *Coracias* in

⁶⁷. Malouf, *An Arabic Zoological*, p. 210-212.

⁶⁸. Goodman, *The Birds*, p. 346.

north-west Africa are *širāqrāq* شَرَقْرَاق and in Egypt it is *širqrāq* and *šiqirrāq* i.e. شَقْرَاق (F. Viré does not vocalise his Arabic names). Finally a Moroccan student of biology informed me personally that in his country, i.e. the region of Marrākuš, the name of the Roller was *šarraqrā* شَرَقْرَاء. This name was actually written down by him with full vocalisation. His information came upon the request by the author of this article to identify the bird according to the photographic picture of the Roller in H. Delin and L. Svensson's photographic guide⁶⁹.

The name which appears as different versions of a reduplication of a *raq* syllable prefixed by a (perhaps factitive) *šin* is an onomatopoeic of the voice of the bird⁷⁰.

There are many other names for the Roller in the colloquial Arabic dialects. For Egypt the main alternative appellation is *Ġurāb Zaytūnī* غراب زيتوني⁷¹. Nevertheless, to al-Qalqašandī the *Ġurāb Zaytūnī* is another name for the Chough, *Pyrrocorax pyrracorax* (cf. No. 15 of the present list).

The Roller was rarely painted in Egypt in Dynastic time, but an unmistakable bird of this species was painted in the tomb of Baket III from Dynasty XI (2040 - 1991B.C.) at Beni Ḥasan. This bird is depicted together with a Golden Oriole in

⁶⁹ Delin, *Photographic guide*, p. 172.

⁷⁰ Delin, *ibid.*

⁷¹ Malouf, *An Arabic Zoological*, p. 210; Viré, *Les Oiseaux*, p. 586; Goodman, *The Birds*, p. 346.

what seems to be a scene depicting the trapping of birds considered to be fruit pests⁷².

Biological comments

At the present time the Roller is a scarce passage migrant in Egypt, but this may have been different 60 years ago, where Meinertzhagen in 1930 wrote that the Roller was common in autumn migration⁷³. In all 15 Rollers were observed by the international group making ornithological studies in Egyptian wetlands in 1989-90 of which one was observed on the island of Tinnīs in April 18⁷⁴.

Concerning the Arab world the Roller is now breeding in northern Syria, Northern Iraq.

It is furthermore breeding in the Syro-Palestinian region and in much of north-west Africa. It furthermore breeds in Turkey and most of Iran. In this whole range it is a summer visitor⁷⁵.

الوروار / Warwār (No. 57) /Bee-eater/ *Merops apiaster*

Philological comments

⁷². Houlihan, *The Birds*, p. 111 - 113 and p. 187.

⁷³. Goodman, *The Birds*, p. 347.

⁷⁴. Meininger & Atta, *Ornithological Studies*, p. 342.

⁷⁵. Hollom, *Birds of the Middle East*, p. 144.

As already stated during the commentaries attributed to the Green Bee-eaters (No. 30 of this list), the name warwār وروار is a well known generic name for the Bee-eaters in Arabic. The name is an onomatopoeic⁷⁶. As the other Arabic name for the Bee-eaters namely *ḥuddār* has already been mentioned in this list as No. 30, and as the Bee-eater is the only one of the Bee-eaters in the Middle East which does not have an overall green colour⁷⁷ and as furthermore this name is an onomatopoeic of the voice of the bird, the Bee-eater having the most far carrying cries of the Middle-eastern Bee-eaters, all these features are taken too as clues for suggesting the identification of the *warwār* in this place with the Bee-eater.

Biological comments

At the present time the Bee-eater is breeding in the Syro-palestinian region and in many parts of the Middle East and north-west Africa. It is a common in Egypt on passage during spring and autumn migrations⁷⁸.

السقسق / Al-saqsq (No. 62)/ **Spur-winged Plover**

/Hoplopterus spinosus

⁷⁶. Malouf, *An Arabic Zoological*, p. 32.

⁷⁷. Personal observations on specimens of *Merops apiaster* belonging to the collections of the Natural History Museum, Aarhus, Denmark and on live specimens in Egypt in May 2011 ; cf. too Hollom, *Birds of the Middle East*, plate 21 and Delin, *Photographic guide*, p. 172-173,

⁷⁸. Goodman, *The Birds*, p. 345.

Philological comments

The name Zaqzāq زقزاق is given as the "official" name in Egypt for the Spur-winged Plover both by Malouf⁷⁹ and by Goodman et al.⁸⁰ (1989).

The name is an onomatopoeic of the cry of this bird. This is in accordance with my personal observation on Lake Manzalah 7 April 1993 where a single bird flew over my head while uttering a distinct cry, which may be rendered as zaq-zaq, zaq-zaq, zaq-zaq or saq-saq, saq-saq, saq-saq. That the name is onomatopoeic is further confirmed by the pronunciation of other common names given to this species, i.e. Saqsāq, Qatqāt, ṭaqṭāq سقساق ، قطقاط ، قططاق where the last name was told personally to me by dr. ‘Abbās aš-šanāwī - the General Director of the Historical Museum in Port Said.

Biological comments

The Spur-winged Plover is a characteristic bird of the Nile delta. I saw it personally on many different kinds of environment on Lake Manzalah around small stretches of water teaming with waders and flying above reed thickets on the island of Tinnīs. The Spur-winged plover is a breeding resident in Egypt and the population "comprises many thousands of

⁷⁹. Malouf, *An Arabic Zoological*, p. 192.

⁸⁰. Goodman, *The Birds*, p. 251.

pairs"⁸¹.

السكسكة / *Al-suksukah* (No. 65) / **Chiffchaff** /
Phylloscopus collybita

Philological comments

Suksukah سكسكة is the "official" name given by Goodman et al.⁸² for the Chiffchaff. Like the English name the Arabic name seems with all certainty to be an onomatopoeic one, as the Chiffchaff has a rather monotonous song sounding as a repeated two syllabic voicing rendered in English as chiffchaff and in Arabic as suk-suk⁸³.

Biological comments

The Chiffchaff is a common passage migrant and winter visitor to most parts of Egypt⁸⁴. It is not an especially shy bird⁸⁵.

⁸¹. Goodman, *ibid.*

⁸². Goodman, *ibid.* p. 430.

⁸³. Personal observations from singing chiffchaffs in the field.

⁸⁴. Goodman, *The Birds*, p. 430.

⁸⁵. Personal observations on Chiffchaffs in woodlands and gardens.

البشروش / al-bašarūš (No. 98)/ **Greater Flamingo** /
Phoenicopterus ruber

Philological comments

The name *bašarūš* is the common Egyptian name for the flamingo⁸⁶. The name *bašarūš* is not readily found in Classical Arabic texts and it seems to be peculiar to the dialects of Egypt⁸⁷. Perhaps the first letter ب of its name is derived from the Coptic definite article in masculine p.

Biological comments

The Greater Flamingo is a winter visitor to Lake Manzalah, where it is fairly common. Formerly the Greater Flamingo bred in several Nile Delta lakes including Lake Manzalah, but this breeding seems to have ceased around the beginning of 20th century⁸⁸.

⁸⁶. Malouf, *An Arabic Zoological*, p. 107; Viré, *Les Oiseaux*, p. 598; Goodman, *The Birds*, p. 151.

⁸⁷. Malouf, *An Arabic Zoological*, p. 107-108.

⁸⁸. Goodman, *The Birds*, p. 151-152.

أبو منجل / Abū miṅḡal (No. 102) / **Glossy Ibis** / *Plegadis falcinellus*; / **Bald ibis** / *Geronticus eremita*; / **Sacred Ibis** / *Threskiornis aethiopicus*; **Yellow-billed Stork (Wood Stork)** / *Mycteria ibis*

Philological comments

The name *abū miṅḡal* is a generic Arabic name for the Ibises⁸⁹. The name *abū miṅḡal* refers to the sickle-shaped form of the beak of these birds.

F. Viré writes that *Abū Miṅḡal* أبو منجل is an Egyptian name for the Yellow-billed Stork, also called the Wood Stork. This bird is zoologically not an Ibis, but it looks like one⁹⁰. Cf. too the scientific name *Mycteria ibis* which was earlier *Ibis ibis*. This bird is still found occasionally in Egypt⁹¹.

Historically the Sacred Ibis was (together with

⁸⁹. Dalman, *Arabischen Vogelnamen*, No 127; Malouf, *An Arabic Zoological*, p. 132-133; Viré, *Les Oiseaux*, p. 592; Goodman, *The Birds*, p. 132.

⁹⁰. Hollom, *Birds of the Middle East*, p. 3 and plate 4.

⁹¹. Goodman, *The Birds*, p. 143.

the baboon) the symbol of the lunar deity *Thoth* which also was the god of writing, science, calculation and wisdom. At a late period in Ancient Egypt, i.e. the Late Dynastic and Greco-Roman period, large numbers of Sacred Ibises were bred in captivity for religious reasons and later mummified⁹².

Biological comments

It seems that the Sacred Ibis was a common in Egypt until the early 19th century. One of its last strongholds in Egypt seems to have been Lake Manzalah⁹³. The Bald Ibis was rather commonly depicted in Ancient Egypt especially as a hieroglyph⁹⁴, and there is every reason to believe that this species was at least regularly seen in more recent times until the beginning of its heavy decline, which in Europe began in the 17th century. At the present time the Bald Ibis is a very endangered species indeed, having its last strongholds in Morocco, and perhaps the Yemen⁹⁵. The Glossy Ibis is still a passage visitor in Egypt, especially in spring⁹⁶.

⁹². Houlihan, *The Birds*, p. 30.

⁹³. Goodman, *The Birds*, p. 149.

⁹⁴. Houlihan, *The Birds*, p. 31.

⁹⁵. Jonsson, *Fugle*, p. 72.

⁹⁶. Goodman, *The Birds*, p. 147.