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# The Bethelite Hiel and His Two Sons in 1 Kgs 16:34

## The Connection between Anthroponyms and Toponyms Considering the Concept of Deuteronomistic Geography in 1–2 Kings\*

Martina Korytiaková

### Introduction

The reading of the biblical verse 1 Kgs 16:34 in some respect resembles detective fiction. In both cases, a crime has been committed, and justice should have been done by punishing the criminal. The similarities do not end here. As the classification of its genre suggests, detective fiction aims to detect an unknown criminal and his or her motive(s) for the crime. Once it is exposed, the criminal's identity often retrospectively proves itself to be related to the nature of the crime in that the latter is in a certain way "inscribed" or "fixed" in the name of the criminal in accord with the *nomen omen* axiom. In 1 Kgs 16:34, the criminal's identity is known but its relation to the criminal act and to its motive(s) needs an explanation. Indeed, a possible link between the violation of God's prohibition (see Josh 6:26) and the personal name of the violator including those of his sons may be postulated and worthy of examination.

This type of inquiry has not yet been, however, dealt with in respect to 1 Kgs 16:34 whereas two other questions, which the actual verse raises, have already been quite satisfactorily answered: (1) Why was the account about the rebuilding of Jericho placed right before the start of the Elijah–Elisha cycle? (2) Why was the act of the restoration of the city attributed to a Bethelite? Firstly,

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\* It is a great pleasure to dedicate this study on onomastics in 1 Kings 16:34 to my colleague and friend Peter Dubovský S.J. In concert with the *omen nomen* topic of this paper, Peter's personal name and surname both prove that his personality consists in a character as solid as a rock and oak (Peter < πέτρα "rock"; Dubovský < "dub" in Slovak; English "oak"). Indeed, one may always count on Peter and lean on him whenever needed.

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Marvin A. Sweeney has shown that the episode of Jericho's "resurrection" in 1 Kgs 16:34 "was written to play a role in the Elijah–Elisha cycle", where Elisha would typologically be presented as Joshua, and "therefore functions at the head of Ahab's regnal account to express the re-Canaanisation of the land of Israel"<sup>1</sup>. Drawing on Sweeney's conclusion, Peter Dubovský and Martina Korytiaková have treated the second query. The two scholars have suggested that the geographical provenance of the restorer of Jericho relates to the role of Bethel in 1–2 Kings as taking its part in the concept of Deuteronomistic geography. Due to the establishment of an illegitimate sanctuary for an ambiguous cult in Bethel by the Israelite king Jeroboam (1 Kgs 12:28-32), the actual place became the catalyst of Israel's national disloyalty to the God of Israel and making the Northern kingdom responsible for the future loss of the land (2 Kgs 25:1-26). This responsibility is narratively indicated through an agent originating from Bethel who practically initiated the reverse conquest of the promised land (the re-Canaanisation) by rebuilding Jericho, the symbol of the start of the de-Canaanisation in Josh 6<sup>2</sup>.

If the geographical, Bethelite provenance of the criminal in 1 Kgs 16:34 may be admitted as narratively meaningful, then the remaining aspects of his identity may be supposed as having significance too. Indeed, the narrative creation of the rebuilders of Jericho and his two sons as literary characters with proper names rather than as nameless figures preliminarily indicates a narrative intention. The aim of this paper is then to examine the function of the three personal names Hiel (חִיאֵל), Abiram (אַבִּירָם) and Segub (שֶׁגֻב; קִשְׁגִּיב) in 1 Kgs 16:34<sup>3</sup> and to demonstrate their interconnection with the role of the place names, Bethel and Jericho, in the actual verse by considering the concept of Deuteronomistic geography in 1–2 Kings. Concretely, this study argues for a deliberate and elaborative creation of the anthroponyms of the three literary characters in respect to the toponym of their origin to ironically communicate conformity as well as disconformity of the etymologically motivated onomastics with both the

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<sup>1</sup> SWEENEY, Hiel's Re-Establishment of Jericho in 1 Kings 16.34, 112.

<sup>2</sup> KORYTIAKOVÁ – DUBOVSKÝ, Deuteronomistic Concept of Geography in 1–2 Kings.

<sup>3</sup> The Hebrew and Greek texts in our paper are taken from the *BHS* and *RAHLFS* – HANHART (ed.): *Septuaginta*. The English translations are given according to the *RSV*, if not stated otherwise.

nature of the act of rebuilding of Jericho and its consequences for the thematic and theological-ideological purposes of the story.

Our scrutiny of the topic will be based on the literary narrative approach complemented by the application of the theories of literary and cognitive onomastics, biblical onomastics (the *nomen omen* theory), speech act theory of naming and intertextuality.

Firstly, we will demonstrate the intentional presence of the personal names in 1 Kgs 16:34. Consequently, we will show the names' meaningfulness and function in the immediate narrative context. The role of the anthroponyms will be examined at the same time in the conceptual framework of Deuteronomistic history and its geography as the wider interpretive literary and ideological context of the names. The conclusion will summarise the outcomes of our examination.

## 1 The three personal names in 1 Kgs 16:34: The signs of an intentional existence

First Kings 16:34 concludes the introductory presentation of the wicked reign of the Israelite king Ahab (1 Kgs 16:29-34). The latter pericope, in turn, creates the narrative circumstances for the first part of the immediately following Elijah–Elisha cycle (17:1–22:54). Besides listing the impious acts of king Ahab<sup>4</sup> by which he is going to lead astray his kingdom (see עבר in 18:18), the entire passage of 16:29-34 is further replete with numerous (twenty-one in total) onomastics of various kinds<sup>5</sup>. From this perspective, its final verse 34 does not seem exceptional as attesting the same phenomenon. Concretely, the given verse contains five proper names (יהושע, יהוה, שגוב, אבירם, חיאל) together with one demonym (בית האלי) and one toponym (יריחה). The attention of the readers is, nevertheless, attracted to the onomastic issue here. Indeed, by means of the three names the informed implied reader immediately recognises that the actual verse

<sup>4</sup> A marriage with a Canaanite, Phoenician princess (1 Kgs 16:31; cf. Deut 7:1.3); the worship of Baal in Samaria (v. 31); the house and an altar built for Baal (v. 32); the erecting of Asherah in Samaria (v. 33); rebuilding of Jericho (v. 34).

<sup>5</sup> Proper names (15×): עמרי (1 Kgs 16:29.30), אסא (v. 29), אחאב (vv. 29.30.33), האשרה (v. 31), אבירם (v. 31), אבירם (v. 31), אבירם (v. 31), אבירם (v. 31), אבירם (v. 31), אבירם (v. 31), אבירם (v. 31), אבירם (v. 31), אבירם (v. 31), אבירם (v. 31), אבירם (v. 31), אבירם (v. 31), אבירם (v. 31); gentile names (2×): צידנים (v. 31), בית האלי (v. 34); place names (4×): ישראל (vv. 29.33), יהודה (v. 29), שמרון (vv. 29.32), יריחה (v. 34).

narrates the fulfilment of the Lord's (יהוה) curse as pronounced by Joshua (יהושע) in respect to the rebuilding of Jericho (יריחה) in Josh 6:26. Yet, the reader also instantly notices five more names mentioned in 1 Kgs 16:34 in comparison to Josh 6:26. In fact, four personal names (נון, שגוב, אבירם, חיאל) and one gentilic name (בית האלי) have been added here as completely new elements without their precedents in Josh 6:26. The proper name נון serves to avoid any doubt about the intended intertextual reference to Josh 6:26 by specifying the identity of its protagonist Joshua as the son of Nun (בן-נון, cf. Josh 6:6)<sup>6</sup>. In turn, the four remaining names identify the originally nameless cursed man (אָרוֹר הָאִישׁ → חיאל) and his two unfortunate sons (אבירם → בכרו; שגוב → צעירו) from Josh 6:26 as well as concretising their geographical origin from Bethel (בית האלי). (See Table 1)

Table 1: The juxtaposition of 1 Kgs 16:34 and Josh 6:26

1 Kgs 16:34 MT	English version (our own translation)
<p>בְּיָמָיו בָּנָה חִיאֵל בֵּית הָאֵלִי אֶת־יְרִיחָה  בְּאַבְיָרִים בְּכָרוֹ יִסְדָּהּ וּבְשִׁגְיָב צָעִירוֹ הָעֵיב  דָּלְתֶיהָ כְּדַבַּר יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר דָּבַר בְּיַד יְהוֹשֻׁעַ  בֶּן־נוֹן</p>	<p>In his (Ahab's) days, Hiel the Bethelite built Jericho; at the cost of Abiram his firstborn, he laid her (the city) foundation and at the cost of his youngest son Segub, he set up her gates according to the word of the LORD, which he spoke by Joshua, son of Nun.</p>
Josh 6:26 MT	English version (our own translation)
<p>אָרוֹר לֵאמֹר הֲהִיא בָּעַת יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וַיִּשְׁבַּע  אֶת־וּבְנָהּ יָקוּם אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה לִפְנֵי הָאִישׁ  "יִסְדְּנָהּ בְּכָבְרוֹ אֶת־יְרִיחוֹ הַזֹּאת הָעִיר  דָּלְתֶיהָ: יַעֲיֵב וּבְצָעִירוֹ"</p>	<p>Joshua then pronounced this oath, saying, "Cursed before the LORD be the man who tries to build this city—this Jericho! At the cost of his firstborn, he shall lay her foundation, and at the cost of his youngest he shall set up her gates!"</p>

<sup>6</sup> In addition to Joshua, the son of Nun, the Old Testament texts attest several other individuals called Joshua: Joshua, the city governor (2 Kgs 23:8); Joshua, the high priest (Hag 1:1.12.14; 2:2.4; Zech 3:1.3.6.8.9; 6:9; Sir 49:12); see also ישוע in B Sir 20r:7 (= Sir 50:27c LXX). ŠTRBA, *Jozue v Knihe Exodus*, 14-17.

Just like the withholding of the three characters' names in Josh 6:26 may be considered purposeful so the attribution of both the proper names and the geographic provenance to them in 1 Kgs 16:34 may be seen as intentional too. In fact, namelessness of the characters as well as their naming are effective narrative techniques to intrigue readers and invite them to engage in the stories by exploring the reasons for the characters' names or for their lack thereof<sup>7</sup>. From this perspective, the presence of the four new names in 1 Kgs 16:34 is related to their absence in Josh 6:26 in that the latter phenomenon enabled to fill in the vacant and unpleasant position of an anonymised cursed individual by a literary character of a specific identity. Consequently, the suspense which was created by a nameless figure at the beginning of the Deuteronomistic history comes to its end by the narrative creation of the character named Hiel the Bethelite towards the close of the same redactional composition<sup>8</sup>.

Besides the phenomenon of the namelessness in Josh 6:26 as the intertextual evidence for the intentional existence of the names in 1 Kgs 16:34, other signs of the deliberate naming of the three characters in the latter verse further derive from within 1–2 Kings. Indeed, the case of the named Bethelite and his sons in 1 Kgs 16:34 evidently contrasts with two other scenes which feature *anonymous* Bethelites and/or their *anonymous* sons, such as the nameless old prophet from Bethel and his sons in 1 Kgs 13:11-32 or the anonymous male progeny of the Bethelites in 2 Kgs 2:23-24 (cf. 2:3).

On the other hand, however, the three given passages from 1–2 Kings (1 Kgs 13:11-32; 16:34; 2 Kgs 2:23-24) are mutually connected by Bethel as the geographic provenance of the literary characters and by the theme of disloyalty to the God of Israel which is associated with Bethel's role of an illegitimate cultic place representing the apostatised Northern Israel. In this line, the identification of Hiel by the demonym "the Bethelite" in 1 Kgs 16:34 has already been interpreted as deliberate and meaningful to ascribe the loss of the land to the Northern kingdom of Israel by the act of the reverse de-Canaanisation which the rebuilding of Jericho, the city once destroyed by Joshua, symbolises. Since the gentilic name *בֵּית הַאֱלִי* is an identity marker common to both the father and his

<sup>7</sup> See BLUMENTAL, *Biblical Onomastics*, 125. On the bibliography survey of the Old Testament biblical naming, see, e.g. I-MORPHÉ, *Name and Person in Biblical Antiquity*, 44, nn. 15, 16.

<sup>8</sup> Our approach is here primarily based on a synchronic reading of the biblical text. We have no intention to enter the redactional critical discussion about whether 1 Kgs 16:34 presupposes the existence of Josh 6:26 or *vice versa*.

sons in 1 Kgs 16:34, a thematic interrelatedness may be supposed between the role of the toponym Bethel and the function of the proper names of Hiel, Abiram and Segub in the Deuteronomistic composition. A successful way to find it out is the examination of the meaning of the individual personal names in their context<sup>9</sup>. Indeed, if the attribution of the names to the originally anonymous characters in 1 Kgs 16:34 is the result of the narrator's intention, then the names as such cannot be regarded as "arbitrary labels"<sup>10</sup> or meaningless linguistic units. Rather, a conscious act of naming of the characters, i.e. a meaningful literary creation of the names can be assumed<sup>11</sup>.

## **2 The etymological ambiguity in the meaningfulness of the anthroponyms in 1 Kgs 16:34**

In both real life and literature, names play a significant role granting importance to their name-bearers. In literature, a name may transpire something of the identity of the literary character and inform us about his or her ethnic, cultural or religious background. Although the primary source of information about literary characters is their actions and words, their names are no less important narrative informants too as they often relate to the character's agency

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<sup>9</sup> The connection among the form, function and context of literary names is the prime interest of literary onomastics. See FABIAN, *Eigennamen als raumkonstituierende Elemente*, 439: "Das primäre Interesse der literarischen Onomastik liegt dabei in der Erkenntnis des Wesens und der Rolle von Namen in einem literarischen Werk sowie der Art und Weise, wie sie zu dessen Literarizität beitragen. Dabei sind zum einen die formale und die inhaltliche Seite von literarischen Namen von Bedeutung, aber auch ihr funktionaler Umfang innerhalb literarischer Texte." For the importance of the context in cognitive onomastic, see ABBASBEYLI, *On Cognitive Onomastics* [Accessed 30-01-2025], 6041: "The context plays a leading role in the adequate interpretation of proper name activity because only in the context can it be determined what the name serves in a particular situation – profile or base."

<sup>10</sup> YOST, *The Speech Act of Naming*, 29.

<sup>11</sup> "Historically, people named what they wanted to distinguish... People never name something unthinkingly. Each given name is filtered through the filter of their thinking, and then the concepts are named. Each given name has a direct connection with the human psyche. ... All linguistic units are considered meaningful symbolic forms, thanks to which cognitive onomastics realize the view of onymes as symbolic forms whose semantic component is collected as a result of the activity of the subject or object of reality in the real world." (ABBASBEYLI, *On Cognitive Onomastics*, 6039.)

and thereby also to the plot<sup>12</sup>. In general, literary names are “integrale Bestandteile von literarischen Texten und sollten auch nicht isoliert, sondern stets im Zusammenhang mit anderen Namen im Text sowie dem Text als Ganze betrachtet werden”<sup>13</sup>. In respect to biblical names, their interpretation should in addition be provided in the way in which they “correspond to the spirit of the Bible as a whole”<sup>14</sup>, i.e. to the overriding theological or ideological objectives of the Old Testament which need to be communicated<sup>15</sup>. This method is particularly suitable for the instances when the implied meaning of the names has been left to the reader to explore. Accordingly, the three unexplained personal names in 1 Kgs 16:34 are going to be studied here in their connection to the remaining names in the actual verse, mainly in their relation to the toponyms Bethel and Jericho, as well as being examined in their literary context within the conceptual framework of Deuteronomistic geography.

### ***2.1 Hiel: The ironic relation between a name and the name-bearer’s agency***

Each of the three personal names under investigation can be etymologically analysed as meaningful. The first name **הִיאֵל** means “El lives”<sup>16</sup>. As a theophoric name, it is a statement not only about the deity in question (El) but also about Hiel’s relationship to this deity as his worshiper. Accordingly, one logically expects that Hiel’s existence (*omen*) should be a practical manifestation of the meaning of his name (*nomen*) to confirm that the deity, which is referred to by the El-element, truly lives, i.e. exists. We do not know much about Hiel from 1 Kgs 16:34 because this literary character does not feature elsewhere in 1–2 Kings. Nevertheless, the actual verse provides us with sufficient information to figure out whether Hiel’s way of life accords with the message of his personal name or not. In this regard, Hiel’s agency is the only and most important source of data as no speech of Hiel is recorded here.

In 1 Kgs 16:34, Hiel is the agent of the building activity of Jericho (**בְּנָהּ הִיאֵל** אֶת-יְרִיחוֹ ...). More concretely, Hiel brings a Canaanite city back to its existence

<sup>12</sup> See SKA, “*I nostril padri ci hanno raccontato*”, 138.

<sup>13</sup> FABIAN, *Eigennamen*, 440.

<sup>14</sup> BLUMENTAL, *Biblical Onomastics*, 124.

<sup>15</sup> See BLUMENTAL, *Biblical Onomastics*, 128.

<sup>16</sup> *BDB*, 313. Cf. LXX:  $\text{Αχιλ} < * \text{הִיאֵל}$  “brother of God”, *HALOT* I, 309.

after it had been destroyed in the past and its restoration had been put under God's curse as pronounced by Joshua (Josh 6:26). The entire building activity of the city is narrated in two steps with the laying of city foundations (הַסִּדָּה) representing the start of the architectural process and with the installation of the city doors (הַצִּיב דְלִתֶיהָ) standing for its end. Just like the initial and conclusive architectural act “brackets so to speak, all the building processes”<sup>17</sup>, so the death<sup>18</sup> of the oldest and youngest son of the city rebuilder embraces the destruction of his entire offspring, i.e. the whole family. The narration of the city re-construction is, therefore, at the same time a narration of the family de-construction.

The restoration process and its tragic consequences are reproduced in 1 Kgs 16:34 in an identical manner to Josh 6:26 in order to underscore the exactness of the curse's fulfilment (see Table 1) and thus to prove the words of the God of Israel as true<sup>19</sup> and “still (at a later stage) effective”<sup>20</sup> whereby indirectly proclaiming the God of Israel as the only divine authority over the actual territory. From this perspective, Hiel's act then confirms the opposite of what its original purpose was and of what his personal name primarily intended to communicate. In other words, Hiel's name only ironically conforms to his agency just like the name of his geographical origin does as well.

### 2.1.1 (Dis)conformity of the name with the name-bearer's agency

Indeed, Hiel the Bethelite is a resident of the Northern Kingdom of Israel which makes him a worshiper of the Canaanite deity Baal. The Canaanite religious cult was inaugurated in the sanctuary at Bethel by Jeroboam, the first king of Israel to work as a substitution for the cult of the God of Israel in

<sup>17</sup> BLAKE, Jericho, 89.

<sup>18</sup> The Hebrew preposition ב in וּבְשָׂגִיב ... בְּאֶבְיָרָם (1 Kgs 16:34) and in וּבְצָעִירוֹ ... בְּבָכְרוֹ (Josh 6:26) is usually interpreted with the meaning of “at the cost of” (see ב *pretii* in HALOT I, 105). We understand the sons' death from the thematic perspective of the curse which brings along the infant mortality in Jericho (see 2 Kgs 2:19-22). See also note 26 below.

<sup>19</sup> According to KORYTIAKOVÁ – DUBOVSKÝ, Deuteronomistic Concept of Geography in 1–2 Kings, the double use of דָּבַר in 1 Kgs 16:34 (בְּדָבַר יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר דָּבַר בְּיַד יְהוֹשֻׁעַ) may be a sort of the narrative preparation for the *anagnorisis*. The latter narrative phenomenon would happen in the end of the next chapter 17 (וַיְדַעְתִּי, 1 Kgs 17:24) where the God of Israel will be acknowledged as true in His words (וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה בְּפִי אֱלִיָּהּ, v. 24) by means of Elijah just as it had earlier happened through Joshua (Josh 6:26 // 1 Kgs 16:34).

<sup>20</sup> BLAKE, Jericho, 88.

Jerusalem (1 Kgs 12:29.32). The rebuilding of Jericho by Hiel happens during the reign of king Ahab (see בְּיָמָיו, 16:34) as the consequence of the continuous and even culminating apostasy of the rulers of the Northern kingdom of Israel from the God of Israel. In fact, Jericho seems not to have been restored on Hiel's own initiative but rather Hiel most probably acted as the realiser of the command of king Ahab the reign of whom is evaluated as the worst from among those which were in Israel thus far (16:33)<sup>21</sup>. The founding of new cities was not the business of the subjects, but rather both the duty and exclusive right of a king. Accordingly, king Ahab is elsewhere presented as a builder not only of his royal palace, “the ivory house” in Samaria (וּבֵית הַשֵּׁן אֲשֶׁר בְּנָה) but also of various cities (וּכְלֵהָעָרִים אֲשֶׁר בְּנָה, 22:39). Furthermore, since king Ahab's rule is evaluated as the peak of the religious decadence of the monarchic institution in the Northern kingdom, the restoration of Jericho by Hiel upon royal decision fittingly expresses the climax of the ongoing religious apostasy. Hiel's action practically signifies the inauguration of the Re-Canaanisation of the land the purpose of which is to proclaim that it is the Canaanite divinity Baal which is to be worshiped in the land in place of the God of Israel.

Consequently, Hiel's proper name as well as the name of his geographic provenance (Bethel) both conform with the name-bearer's agency in so far as the rebuilding of Jericho is seen as an act of the worshiper of Baal or of the apostate from the God of Israel respectively. Simultaneously, however, Hiel's personal name and the name of his geographic origin contradicts his action when the latter is considered from the non-pagan perspective of the worshipers of the Lord, God of Israel.

The double interpretation of Hiel's agency relates to the two possible referents in the two theophoric names according to the two different perspectives which are at play here. The El-elements in the anthroponym הֵיאל “El lives” and in the demonym בֵּית הָאֱלֹהִים (< בֵּית אֱלֹהִים) “the one coming from/related to the house of El” refer to the Canaanite god Baal (the northern Israelite perspective of Hiel) as well as to the God of Israel (the southern Judahite perspective of the narrator and his implied readers). Analogically, Hiel's agency then aims to proclaim that Bethel *is* the house of Baal (= El) and *not* the house of the God of

<sup>21</sup> “Ahab did more to provoke the anger of the LORD, the God of Israel, than had all the kings of Israel who were before him.” (1 Kgs 16:33)

Israel (= El) anymore<sup>22</sup>. Simultaneously, Hiel's agency tends to communicate that it *is* Baal (= El) who should be worshiped as the god of life (Baal was the rain/storm god) in the Northern Israel but *not* the God of Israel whereby implying that the latter is to be associated with death. From the Judahite perspective of the narrator and his implied readers, however, the communication of Hiel's names in respect to his agency may be perceived the other way round. The ambiguity of the theophoric anthroponym "Hi-El" and of the theophoric toponym "Beth-El" seems deliberate in that it might have reflected the fact that the Israelite kings and their subjects in Northern Israel worship the Canaanite god Baal (אֱלֹהֵי־בַּל, 1 Kgs 12:28) with the pretension of worshiping the Lord God of Israel (יְהוָה = הָאֱלֹהִים, 18:21). Hiel's action, however, is a far cry from manifesting loyalty to the God of Israel. It is a demonstration of ignorance of God's will instead. Elijah's critique of the so-called Northerners for their dual or schizophrenic religious mind-set (18:21) supports this interpretation:

עַד־מַתִּי אֲתֵם פֹּסְחִים עַל־שְׁתֵּי הַסַּעֲפִים	“How long will you go limping <i>with two different opinions?</i> ”
אִם־יְהוָה הָאֱלֹהִים לָכֵן אַחֲרָיו וְאִם־הַבַּעַל (הָאֱלֹהִים) לָכֵן אַחֲרָיו	If the LORD (יְהוָה) is God (הָאֱלֹהִים), follow him; but if Baal (הַבַּעַל) [is god (הָאֱלֹהִים)], then follow him.”

### 2.1.2 (Dis)conformity of the name with the consequences of the name-bearer's agency

Hiel's name sounds ambiguous not only in respect to Hiel's agency but also to its consequences. With an anticipatory or proleptical function<sup>23</sup> in the story, the anthroponym חִיאֵל both accords and disaccords with the effects of

<sup>22</sup> Note that, in the era of the patriarchs, Bethel (בֵּית אֱלֹהִים, Gen 28:17; בְּיַת־אֵל, v. 19) was known for God's presence (יֵשׁ יְהוָה בְּמִקְוֹם הַזֶּה, Gen 28:16-17). In the Deuteronomistic history, Bethel firstly features as the place of the presence and worship of the God of Israel (Judg 20:18.26; 21:2) but later it would be turned into a place of an idolatrous shrine with an altar to a golden calf by king Jeroboam (1 Kgs 12:29.32).

<sup>23</sup> SKA, “*I nostri padri ci hanno raccontato*”, 138: “Va da sé che i nomi occupano un posto particolare in molti racconti biblici. Hanno spesso una funzione *proleptica* (di anticipazione) nelle storie in cui compaiono...” (The emphasis in the original text.)

Hiel's act. Indeed, the results of Hiel's behaviour confirm the message about the aspect of life, which is inherent in his name (-חַי < חַיָּה), as true but not in relation to Baal as אֵל (הַבְּעַל הָאֱלֹהִים) but ironically to the God of Israel as to its counterpart which is inferred by אֵל as well (הָאֱלֹהִים, 1 Kgs 18:21).

Hiel's rebuilding of Jericho activates the fulfilment of God's curse against the city restorer in terms of the death of his progeny. The death is thus the result of disloyalty to the God of Israel by worshiping the Canaanite deity Baal instead. In this way, Baal is *not* the deity which is to be associated with life as Hiel's name and his action originally wanted to indicate. On the contrary, the cult of Baal brings death to its worshippers. Paradoxically, the death caused by the cult of Baal is intended to prove later in the story that life in the land of Israel is linked only to the worship of the God of Israel. This acknowledgement will be part and parcel of the de-Canaanisation mission of Elijah and Elisha. In fact, life is a recurrent motif in the Elijah–Elisha cycle appearing in the oath formulae as the invocation חַי in respect to the God of Israel meaning “as God lives [forever]” to proclaim the truth of God's existence:<sup>24</sup> חַי־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (17:1); חַי־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ (17:12); חַי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ (18:10); חַי יְהוָה (18:15). At the same time, a theme of God as the giver of life is further found in Elijah's and Elisha's miracles. As the servants of God, the prophets raised people from the dead (חַי, 17:23) and saved them from death by thirst, famine and illness (וּמָתָנּוּ, 17:12) ironically in the territory where Baal, the deity of rain was worshiped as the god of life.

Consequently, the theophoric anthroponym Hiel and the theophoric toponym Bethel ironically communicate the truth in respect to the outcomes of Hiel's action in that they foretell that Bethel, and thus the all of Israel<sup>25</sup>, houses the God of Israel (Beth-El) instead of the Canaanite deity Baal. God's living existence in the land will be demonstrated by the substitution of death for life which happened by means of God's prophets Elijah and Elisha and experienced by those who acknowledge the authority of the God of Israel as their only god. Paradoxically, among the witnesses of the experience of this kind will also be the inhabitants of Jericho. The curse which brought the death of the progeny as

<sup>24</sup> ZIEGLER, *Promises to Keep*, 87-92.

<sup>25</sup> King Josiah re-sanctificated Bethel at the end of his religious reform as the ultimate act of the re-sanctification of the entire promised land (2 Kgs 23:14-19). In this way, not only Bethel but also the entire land is the place of God.

a consequence of Hiel's rebuilding of Jericho<sup>26</sup> would in the end be turned into a blessing by healing the waters to give life (2 Kgs 2:19-22)<sup>27</sup>. Indeed, the mission of Elijah and Elisha tends to reveal the God of Israel as the God of life through the element of water/rain vis-à-vis Baal which, ironically, despite being the pagan rain/storm god, will be shown as the god of death/drought because he is unable to provide water and guarantee the life of his worshipers. It is not by chance then that both Elijah and Elisha bear theophoric names consisting of an El-component too just like the name Hiel. The unambiguous meaning of the El-element in the personal names of the two prophets (אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל = "Eli/my God of Israel is Yah"; אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יְשׁוּעָה = "Eli/My God of Israel is Salvation") seems to be narratively linked with the ambiguous nature of the El-element in Hiel's theophoric name (El = Baal or the God of Israel). Indeed, Hiel's episode (1 Kgs 16:34) serves as a prologue to the following Elijah–Elisha cycle the goal of which is to reveal the God of Israel as the only deity El in the land.

## ***2.2 Abiram and Segub: The ironic relation between the names and the fate of the name-receivers***

Just like Hiel's personal name, so the proper names of Hiel's two sons are meaningful and ambiguous. The meaning of their names cannot, however, be investigated in relation to the agency of the sons as the name-bearers but in relation to their fate as the name-receivers which is inextricably linked to the agency of their father as the name-giver inspired by his faith. Indeed, the naming of children "often shows the faith of the parents or their perspective of the circumstances"<sup>28</sup> at the time of the child's birth. Therefore, the son's names relate to their father's name in terms of his narrated agency which indirectly reveals his devotion. Consequently, the referents of the meaning of the sons' names are their father as the agent and the father's deity (El) as the theological motivation of the builder's agency. Since the El-element in Hiel's name is intentionally ambiguous

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<sup>26</sup> The curse had negative consequences not only for Hiel in terms of the death of his progeny but also on the inhabitants of Jericho in terms of death and the lack of their offspring (תְּשׁוּבָה וְיָמָּה וְיָמָּה «neither death nor miscarriage», 2 Kgs 2:19; cf. LXX ἔτι ἐκέϊθεν θάνατος καὶ ἀτεκνουμένη).

<sup>27</sup> See BURNET, "Going down" to Bethel, 296.

<sup>28</sup> YOST, The Speech Act of Naming in Context, 29.

in nature because it alludes to Baal as well as the God of Israel, the theological connotations in the names of Hiel's sons need to be interpreted from the same dual perspective.

### 2.2.1. Proper names in the framework of the construction of narrative space

Etymologically, the proper name אֲבִירָם “Abiram” signifies “Father is high, exalted”<sup>29</sup> or “The Exalted one is (my) Father”<sup>30</sup> (אב “father” + רום “to be high/pride”). The first element אב may refer to the biological father as well as to the divine father, i.e. to the deity whom the parents of the child worship and the faith in whom the parents proclaim by giving such a name to their offspring. The second component of the name deriving from the verbal stem רום has physical, spatial as well as figurative connotations. The Hebrew verb רום is used in the Old Testament for an erecting building activity oriented upwards. The same verb also covers a metaphoric sense which may be read positively in respect to the God of Israel (“to be exalted”)<sup>31</sup> or negatively in respect to humans (“to be arrogant, haughty”)<sup>32</sup>.

The personal name שְׁגֻב (K שְׁגִיב) “Segub” can be explained as “exalted”<sup>33</sup> (< שגב “to be high, exalted”)<sup>34</sup>. The referent of the exaltation may here be the biological father Hiel and/or his divine father. The motive of exaltation is most probably intended to be linked with the concept of protection. In fact, the Hebrew verb שגב also renders a protective meaning in the Old Testament<sup>35</sup>. Further evidence of the given semantics is provided by the female name on a seal in the verbal form of piel: אֵל־שָׁגַב “El has shown himself exalted” or “El has protected (her, i.e. the seal)”<sup>36</sup>. Analogically, the masculine name שְׁגֻב (K שְׁגִיב) may be read as a shortened version of the name “El is high/exalted for he protects.”

<sup>29</sup> HALOT I, 6.

<sup>30</sup> BDB 4.

<sup>31</sup> HALOT II, 1202

<sup>32</sup> HALOT II, 1203, 1205.

<sup>33</sup> BDB 960.

<sup>34</sup> HALOT II, 1305. See also RINGGREN, שְׁגֻב, 34-36; FIRMAGE – MILGROM – DAHMEN, רום, 402-412.

<sup>35</sup> HALOT II, 1306.

<sup>36</sup> HALOT II, 1306.

By the inscribed aspects of height and protection, the names of the two sons are tied with the narrative event of the rebuilding of Jericho<sup>37</sup> by his biological father on both a physical and symbolic level. In fact, the city restoration is to be imagined as an architectural act of raising *up* the material protective walls of a fortified city on a vertical scale. Although it is not narrated, the erection of the walls may be implied by the act of laying the city foundations on the ground (הִסְדִּיחַ) as the next architectural step of the building process<sup>38</sup>. Likewise, the narrated act of the installation of the city doors supports the construction of the walls and further strengthens the impression of the vertical dimension of the entire building activity. In fact, the city doors (דְּלֵת) may be “placed *up*” (הִצִּיב), i.e. put on the door hinges, only if the walls (and gates<sup>39</sup>) were already finished. By the installation of the city doors, the rebuilding of the city and her fortification are completed. Once the entrance into the walled city is secured by the doors, the city becomes impregnable and protected. By its connotations of height (רוֹם), the name of Abiram then echoes the vertical aspect which is inferred by the laying of the city foundations on which the walls would be raised up. Likewise, by its allusion to protection (שָׁגַב) the name of Segub is etymologically and semantically related to the installation of the city doors as the final protective element of the entire fortification.

The newly created city seems a great achievement of its builder to manifest the greatness and the protective quality of his pagan deity Baal. In other words, a well-fortified and protective Jericho might have been intended as the reason for the exaltation of Hiel’s deity through Hiel’s agency. From this pagan angle of Hiel and those whom this narrative character represents (the apostatised kings of

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<sup>37</sup> The restoration of Jericho represents the re-creation of a narrative urban space in the narrative world map of Deuteronomistic geography.

<sup>38</sup> If the restoration of Jericho in 1 Kgs 16:34 has been intended as the reverse of the city destruction in Josh 6:20, then the city walls which in the past fell down themselves, i.e. collapsed to their foundations (וַתִּפֹּל הַחֹמָה תַּחֲתֶיהָ), are now raised from the ground up inferring thus the opposite spatial, architectural vertical effect (downwards vs upwards).

<sup>39</sup> The word שַׁעַר “gate(s)” is not applied here probably due to the intention to reproduce the original curse as faithfully as possible (בְּצַעֲרֵירוֹ יִצִּיב דְּלֵתֶיהָ, Josh 6:26 // וּבְשַׁעֲרֵיהָ יִצִּיב דְּלֵתֶיהָ, 1 Kgs 16:34). Moreover, a city gate is an architectural construction on its own, a part of the fortification just like the implied walls, whereas the city doors are an architectural item complementing the already constructed city gates.

the Northern Israel)<sup>40</sup>, the meaning of the anthroponyms אֲבִירָם (“Father is high/exalted”) and שְׁגִיב (“[El is] high/exalted [for he protects]”) fits into the picture of the supposed intention of Hiel as both the names-giver and city-builder devoted to the Canaanite god Baal.

### 2.2.2 (Dis)conformity of the names with the consequences of the name-giver’s agency

Yet from the Judahite perspective of the narrator and his readers, the meaning of the sons’ names may be perceived differently. The newly created fortified city communicates that its builder puts his trust in the material things made by human hands as misled by his faith in a wrong divine protector. Put in other words, instead of venerating the God of Israel as their only stronghold<sup>41</sup>, the people of the Northern Kingdom worship Baal as their new protector as the restoration of the Canaanite stronghold of Jericho shows<sup>42</sup>. The aspect of height in the building process of the city the restoration of which was put under God’s curse then alludes to *human pride* testifying to the negligence of or even to disrespect for the God of Israel and his words delivered through the prophets.

And yet, the positive meaning of the verticality of the restored city and its symbolic protective function work well in respect to the God of Israel in contrast to Baal. Indeed, ironically the names of Hiel’s sons disprove the theological intention of the father’s act to exalt Baal as a divine and protective father but paradoxically confirming the theological purpose of the father’s agency in respect to the God of Israel. The sons’ father Hiel *cannot be exalted* for the impressive rebuilding of Jericho because he caused the death of his sons by his negligence of God’s words. Analogically, Baal *cannot be invoked as a protecting divine father* because his worship brings along death to his worshipers instead of life. In contrast, it is the God of Israel who *should be exalted* as a true divine Father. Firstly, his words came to be true in terms of the fulfilled curse (Josh 6:26 // 1 Kgs 16:34). Secondly, the God of Israel will later be manifested as a genuine Father who is worthy to be exalted for protecting<sup>43</sup> his children, i.e. worshipers

<sup>40</sup> Hiel is the realiser of the command of his king who represents the entire nation.

<sup>41</sup> See, e.g. Deut 28:52; 2 Kgs 18:30; Isa 31:1; Jer 5:17; 17:5.7; Ps 20:8; 33:16-21.

<sup>42</sup> See WRIGHT, *How Was the Curse on Jericho Fulfilled?*, 264.

<sup>43</sup> The Hebrew verb שָׁגַב “be high” is used in the Old Testament for the high walls of a fortified city symbolising protection, security, refuge. Therefore, the same verb is often applied to God to exalt Him, see, e.g. Isa 2:11.17; 12:4; 33:5; Ps 148:13.

for turning the deadly consequences of the curse activated by Hiel into the blessing of life. In fact, in the following chapter 1 Kgs 17 the God of Israel will be shown as the caring Father who saves his children from death in contrast to the father Hiel and his divine father Baal who caused the death of his sons. Within 1 Kgs 17, the thematic switch from the death of a son to his life proves the case: לְהַמִּית אֶת־בְּנֵי (v. 18) → [מָטְתוּ, v. 20; תָּשֵׁב נָא נַפְשׁ, v. 21; תָּשֵׁב נַפְשׁ, v. 22] → חַי בְּנֵי (v. 23). Additional evidence is the numerous proclamations חַי־יְהוָה throughout the Elijah-Elisha cycle which we have already mentioned above.

The aspect of exaltation (רוּם, שָׁגַב) related to the fatherhood (אָב) and protection (שָׁגַב) and comprised in Hiel sons' names sounds, then, satirically in respect to Hiel and his god Baal as the father(s) who contrariwise caused the death of their own children. By the same aspects, the sons' names (just like the case of Hiel's name), however, tell the absolute truth as far as they refer to the God of Israel who should be exalted as a protective Father granting life to his children.

## Conclusion

This paper has aimed to show that the proper names שָׁגוּב, אַבְיָרִם, חַיָּאל in 1 Kgs 16:34 have been created with deliberation and well worked out. The three anthroponyms are the meaningful proper names which etymologically relate to the narrative event of the rebuilding of Jericho by a Bethelite and to the theological meaning of the city restoration including its consequences. The personal names of the three literary characters complement their identification and characterisation which is linked with the toponyms Bethel and Jericho to serve the thematic and theological purposes of the narrative.

The common Bethelite origin of the three family members creates an interrelatedness between the cultic associations of the toponym Bethel and the ambiguous etymology of the three anthroponyms. By their dual meaning, the proper names transpire both normality and deviation to represent the contrast between the two realities. Originally, the Bethelites, who as *pars pro toto* represent the Northern Israel in 1 Kgs 16:34, were the adherents to the one legitimate cult by worshipping only the God of Israel. After the division of the united monarchy, the people of Northern Israel were led astray by their kings and turned to the syncretistic cult symptomatic of a schizophrenic or dichotomous

faith in that the God of Israel was worshipped as the Canaanite Baal starting in Bethel and Dan (1 Kgs 12:28-32). The dichotomous aspect of Hiel's religious identity, which is inferred by his geographic provenance from Bethel, is reflected in the dual perspective from which Hiel's agency and its intention may be perceived in the story and which is, in turn, inscribed in the personal names of Hiel and his sons in the form of their ambiguous or double meaning.

The author exploits the dichotomy of Hiel's action and the double etymology of his name and the names of his sons for the ends of the story. As ambiguous, the names on the one hand negate their own etymology in respect to Baal but on the other hand they confirm it in respect to the God of Israel. Concretely, the names affirm the opposite of what Hiel wanted to achieve by his agency, and of what was the original reference of the etymological meaning of his name and the names which he gave to his sons. Instead of Baal, it is the God of Israel whom the names in reality exalt as the El and Father despite Hiel's regrettable agency. The tragic consequences of Hiel's action motivated by his erroneous faith in Baal, on the one hand, prove the efficacy of God's words (the fulfilled curse) and thus confirm the authenticity of His divine existence as the El in the land of Canaan. Yet, on the other hand, the death of the two sons caused by their father will paradoxically become the chance to show the God of Israel as the Father who, through his prophets Elijah and Elisha, will in the unfolding story turn Jericho from the place cursed by death into the city blessed by life and will restore his children to life whereby deserving a justified exaltation. The etymological wordplay, which is inherent in the names under investigation, aims to illustrate that the God of Israel is the only true El notwithstanding to opposite intention of Hiel's action influenced by his erroneous cult to exalt Baal as the El.

In a specific way, Hiel's name and the names of his sons then illustrate the *nomen (est) omen/nomina (sunt) omina* theory according to which one's destiny or fate is fixed in his/her name<sup>44</sup>. The action of the name-bearer (Hiel) and the destiny of the name receivers (Abiram, Segub) confirm the names' etymology yet not in respect to the originally intended referents from the non-Judahite perspective (i.e. Baal as the El and Father and Hiel as the biological father) but conversely and paradoxically in respect to the only referent from the Judahite viewpoint (the God of Israel as both the El and Father). In other words, in Hiel's episode (1 Kgs 16:34) the onomastic predestination is both approved and not

<sup>44</sup> "By ... representing the *name* as the vehicle of an *omen*, the fate or destiny—indeed, the meaning—of the *person* was judged to be 'locked' within *nature* or *history*." (I-MORPHÉ, Name and Person, 81; the emphasis in the original text.)

approved depending on the identity of the divine referent(s) of the name(s) according to two different and opposing perspectives in play. The names contradict one's destiny or fate in respect to Baal from Hiel's pagan perspective while fixing one's destiny in respect to the God of Israel from the narrator's/readers' Judahite viewpoint. The ambiguity which makes Hiel's name and the names of his sons direct and at the same time ironic<sup>45</sup> regarding Hiel's action serves to ridicule the apostasy of the kingdom of Northern Israel which Hiel the Bethelite embodies as the realiser of king's Ahab command. This way of ridicule takes part in the Deuteronomistic critique oriented against (not only) the kings of Northern Israel whom the narrator aligns with the guilt for the re-Canaanisation and exile through the Bethelite identity of Hiel who, against God's prohibition, restored Jericho where the de-Canaanisation once started.

By their ambiguous etymology, the three anthroponyms in 1 Kgs 16:34, therefore, serve the purposes of the Deuteronomistic ideology and theology just as the toponyms Bethel and Jericho do. In fact, the narrative role of Bethel as the place of negative topologic connotations which were created in the contradistinction to the positive image of Jericho within the concept of Deuteronomistic geography in 1–2 Kings has been an effective grid through which the possible meaning and narrative function of the proper names of Hiel and of his two sons, Abiram and Segub could have been uncovered.

The results of our paper then confirm – and therefore can be summed up by – the words by Morshe Garsiel who, in respect to the role of the personal names in 1 Kings 1–2, has contended that “punning upon names in this biblical story (as well as in many others) functions as a significant literary device to enrich and intensify the plot through a correspondence between names and themes.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> For the direct and ironic characterizing function of the etymologically motivated names (German: “redenden Namen”), see BIRUS, *Vorschlag zu einer Typologie literarischer Namen*, 47.

<sup>46</sup> GARSIEL, *Puns*, 386.

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### Summary


The verse 1 Kgs 16:34 represents an intriguing part of Deuteronomistic History for several reasons. It narrates the re-building of Jericho despite God’s prohibition and curse announced by Joshua upon the city’s destruction in Josh 6:26. Moreover, while recounting the effectiveness of the curse in respect to the re-builder of Jericho the passage identifies not only his geographical provenance (Bethel) but also his personal identity (Hiel) along with those of his two sons (Abiram, Segub). Scholars have already dealt with the questions about why Jericho was brought to life by a Bethelite and why this event immediately precedes the Elijah–Elisha cycle. Yet, the reasons the re-builder of Jericho was concretised by name have not been treated yet. To complement the existing investigations, this paper examines interconnections between the personal names of Hiel and his sons, and the place names of Bethel and Jericho within the Deuteronomistic concept of geography. This study argues for the intentional choice of the anthroponyms of the three literary characters and of the toponym of their origin to communicate both an ironic conformity of the names’ semantic significance with the act of rebuilding and its consequences.

*Key words:* 1 Kgs 16:34, Hiel, toponyms, Deuteronomistic geography, space.

*Zhrnutie*

Verš 1Kr 16,34 tvorí fascinujúcu časť Deuteronomistickej histórie a to z viacerých dôvodov. Daná stať rozpráva o znovu vybudovaní mesta Jericha aj napriek Božiemu zákazu a kľatbe oznámenej skrze Jozueho voči tomu mužovi, ktorý by chcel mesto v budúcnosti opäť vystavať (Joz 6,26). Navyac pasáž v 1Kr 16,34 nielen že dosvedčuje účinnosť uvedenej kľatby vo vzťahu k novému budovateľovi Jericha, ale aj identifikuje jeho geografický pôvod (Betel) a osobnú identitu (Hiel) spolu s identitou jeho dvoch synov (Abiram, Segub). Odborníci sa už v minulosti zaoberali otázkami o tom, prečo bolo Jericho „vzkriesené“ k životu práve obyvateľom z Betela a prečo táto udalosť bezprostredne predchádza naratívneho cyklu Eliáša a Elizea. Avšak nikto sa doposiaľ nevenoval dôvodom, pre ktoré bol Betelčan, ktorý znovu vybudoval Jericho, v 1Kr 16,34 konkretizovaný vlastným menom. S cieľom doplniť existujúci výskum táto štúdia preto skúma vzájomné súvislosti medzi vlastnými menami Hiel a jeho synov a názvami miest Betel a Jericho v rámci deuteronomistického konceptu geografie. V štúdiu sa zastáva názor, že antroponymá troch literárnych postáv a toponymum ich pôvodu boli zámerne zvolené tak, aby ironicky komunikovali konformitu sémantického významu mien s aktom znovu vystavania mesta Jericha a jeho následkami.

*Kľúčové slová:* 1Kr 16,34, Hiel, toponymá, deuteronomistická geografia, priestor.

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