

Review of: A. Zucker and C. Le Feuvre (eds.), *Ancient and Medieval Greek Etymology: Theory and Practice I* (Trends in Classics, Supplementary Volume 111), Berlin/Boston 2021.

Searching for, and trying to uncover, both the origins of words and the connections between words is an activity that tends to fascinate even people who are not otherwise interested in linguistic research. If such endeavours are not guided by the methods of modern historical-comparative linguistics, their results will not always convince the specialists, and hence be dismissed by them as ‘folk-etymologies’, but that does not mean that they should be considered irrelevant: for the reasons why such insights are looked for and the ways in which they are reached can tell us a lot about the cultures that give rise to such ‘etymological’ efforts.

The ancient term ‘etymology’ itself reveals one important notion that informs the study of word origins as pioneered in ancient Greece: by dissecting a word, one may somehow discover an otherwise hidden ‘truth’ (ἔτυμον) behind it. In some ways, even modern etymological research operates within such a framework when it seeks to account for unexpected semantic developments or the like; but for some ancient philosophical schools the ‘truth’ to be found could be a much more fundamental one: if one subscribes to the idea that words are not, in origin, arbitrary signs but intrinsically related to the essence or inner nature of the things and concepts denoted by them, the etymological analysis of words promises a deeper understanding of the world that may not be reachable through, for example, medical, biological, astronomical, philosophical, or theological enquiry alone. However, notwithstanding the fact that some particularly early – and long-lived – strands of pre-modern etymologizing were certainly rooted in such beliefs, it would be wrong to assume that the aims and methods of ancient etymology were always the same, and always based on such a common philosophical denominator. It is one of the merits of the volume under review that its diverse contributions demonstrate how nothing could be further from the truth and how ancient etymology was, on the contrary, an extremely versatile discipline.

Following an introduction by the editors, the volume is divided into four main sections, each of which contains two or three papers. Just like the title of the volume itself, which has virtually nothing to offer on medieval as opposed to ancient Greek etymology (if one discounts two pages on Byzantine riddles that are not really of an etymological kind, as well as the occasional reference to restatements of earlier etymologies in Byzantine sources such as Eustathius), the section titles do not always accurately reflect the scope of the contributions placed under them. For instance, the paper by A. Filoni on the use of etymology in Apollodorus’ *Περὶ θεῶν* and in Porphyry does not deal with “*Poetical* practices of etymology”, and in the section on “Etymology and word-plays” the paper by V. Decloquement on etymology in Ptolemy Chennus’ *Καὶνὴ ἱστορία* is concerned with etymology rather than word-play while the paper by S. Beta on word-play in Greek epigrams is not really about etymology (unless one classifies as ‘etymological’ *any* kind of pun or word-play). None of this is a major issue, of course, but it is still regrettable because the arrangement thereby risks obscuring other, and sometimes more suggestive, connections between individual papers. Thus, V. Decloquement makes such a good point of Ptolemy Chennus playfully mocking the use of etymology among ancient philologists and literary scholars that it represents a neat mirror image to N. Rousseau’s equally convincing disquisition of Galen’s almost contemporary (but more seriously framed) reservations against the use of etymology as an argument in scientific medicine; and given the strong philological focus of Apollodorus’ etymologies, which are undercut by his reader Porphyry’s more ideological (philosophical/theological) goals, as highlighted by A. Filoni, it would also have made sense to place this paper either in the section on “Etymological practices and philosophical issues” or alongside the one by C. Le Feuvre which deals with the ancient

Homeric commentators' explicit *or* implicit etymological analyses that surface in the Homeric scholia.

Having said that, the task to impose some order onto a collection of papers originally written for a conference with a rather broad theme is always a difficult one, and the editors A. Zucker and C. Le Feuvre do provide some preliminary orientation in their introductory essay. As is natural and appropriate, they stress the fact that Greek etymologists “did not pursue the same goals, nor did they apply the same methodologies as those used in modern [etymology]” (p. 1), and also that “although not much in ancient Greek etymology is correct from our modern point of view, its principles are far from fanciful” but “rest on a correct observation of linguistic facts” (p. 17), such as the semantic as well as phonetic proximity of certain words but not others (cf. p. 10). However, in their wish to emphasize the gap between ancient and modern etymologizing, the editors hardly do justice to the modern “etymological approach” when they find that it considers “semantic proximity illusory and useless for determining the etymology of a given word” (p. 4); after all, the discovery of the existence of regular sound laws never meant that etymology stopped being a “semantic and cultural investigation”, as if the latter aspect were incompatible with a “regulated study of the evolution of phonemes and words” (p. 3; note, incidentally, that there was not “no notion of historical phonetics” in antiquity, as stated on p. 15, but merely no notion of rule-based sound change).

At the same time, the introduction shows a tendency to over-simplify even when it comes to the characterization of ancient etymology itself. It is true that there were *some* ancient practitioners of etymology who accepted that a word could have more than a single ‘etymon’ and for whom, therefore, a “large number of etymons constitutes confirmation of the accuracy of [their] research and not a weakness thereof: the more explanations there are, the more reasons the ancients had for naming this or that as they did” (pp. 10-11). But it is wrong to claim, without further qualification, that “for Greek philosophers and scholars, [two etyma] Y and Z were not exclusive of each other and both etymologies could be correct”, and that this is reflected by statements in the writings of “philosophers or grammarians that word X ‘may come from Y, or from Z’” (p. 13). In fact, various quotations that are discussed in the volume itself demonstrate the inaccuracy of such a generalization. If, for example, the philosopher Porphyry observed that the early Greeks “gave Apollo the surname *nomios*, not from his service as a shepherd [...] but because the sun provides sustenance for all the things the earth generates”, and thereby corrected something he probably read in Apollodorus (*Macr. Sat.* 1.17.43, cited on p. 251), or if the learned Apollodorus himself found that his “predecessors did not understand what the epithet of Aphrodite [i.e. *kypris*] means” since “[t]hey, misled by Hesiod, held that *kypris* means, just as Hesiod said, *kyprogeneia* because she is born ‘in Cyprus surrounded by the sea’” (Apollodorus *FGrH* 244 F 353, cited on p. 266), there can be no more question of happily accepting a multiplicity of etyma than when Homeric commentators quibble about the etymon of the word *δολιχόσκιος* as applied to a spear, with “some” (οἱ μὲν) deriving it from *κίειν* ‘to go’ and “others” (οἱ δέ) defending the natural connection with *σκιά* ‘shadow’ (cf. pp. 59-65). In other words, the reader of the introductory essay risks being seriously misled about one very central aspect of the volume’s topic, namely the *diversity* that characterizes both the theory and the practice of ancient etymologizing. At no point is the reader instead told that one ‘kind’ of etymologizing is characteristic of, say, Stoic theology, while Alexandrian scholars typically proceed in a very different manner; nor is he/she ever given a succinct overview of such differences of approach (and be it only by reference to the clear statements to that effect in Varro, *LL* 5.7-8). For very similar reasons, it also must not be said without further ado that “ancient Greek etymology is [sc. only] about synchronic relationships” (p. 3), that “in εὐχή ‘prayer’ the Greeks did hear εὖ ‘well’” (p. 2, italics added), or that “it is absolutely impossible to understand ancient intellectual practices if one makes the mistake of considering play and seriousness as contradictory” (p. 9). If, for example, V. Decloquement is indeed right about

Ptolemy Chennus' aims (cf. above), Ptolemy's etymologies *are* meant to mock, and thus debunk, the claims of 'serious' etymologists; and the same is already true much earlier when Aristophanes makes his stage Socrates point out to Strepsiades that the words for 'thunder' (βροντή) and 'fart' (πορδή) are similar because farts can be as loud as thunder (Ar. *Nub.* 394). *Not* to differentiate between seriousness and play would mean to misconstrue ancient intellectual practice in such cases, not the contrary.

Finally, one further problematic aspect of the introduction is the fact that the short summaries of the subsequent contributions do not always correctly reflect what the contributors have to say. Thus, Ptolemy Chennus' *Καὶνὴ ἱστορία* does not provide "a kind of alphabet of heronyms", nor does V. Decloquement's typology of the etymological techniques used (or parodied) in the work contain a category of "reversal of common sense" (p. 8); D. Petit does not argue that "[e]nantiosemy [i.e., the etymological type *lucus a non lucendo*] probably has its roots in antiphrasis and euphemism, familiar rhetorical tropes extended to etymological derivation" (p. 16) – an assumption which is in fact contrary to Petit's plausible hypothesis that the "usage must go back to the Stoics" (p. 93), i.e. a school of philosophers who were notably disinterested in the study and pursuit of rhetoric, and which seems to arise from a misunderstanding of Petit's observation that the *term* ἀντίφρασις, which is sometimes found in connection with such paradoxical etymologies, was rooted in, or borrowed from, rhetorical terminology; and N. Rousseau does not find that "Galen himself uses etymology in a restricted sense, namely for derivation" (p. 8), but frankly (and for good reasons) states that "the question of whether derivation, from Galen's point of view, is included within etymology remains open" (p. 173). Turning to the contributions themselves, many are of a high quality and definitely worth reading. For example, the aforementioned study by D. Petit, under the title "On enantiosemy in antiquity and its modern outcomes" (pp. 83-124), offers a wide-ranging historical sketch of a particularly (in)famous and fascinating type of ancient (as well as medieval and early modern) etymology, which not only explores the use of the *lucus a non lucendo* type among scholars and grammarians but also asks to what extent it may be reflected in literature; it turns out that even in the Latin world, where it seems to have a slightly stronger foothold in scholarly circles (though not in Varro!), it is still fairly rare overall, no doubt because the Stoic tradition, which appears to have given rise to it, was not influential enough to be able to establish such an oddity within 'mainstream' etymologizing. Given this Stoic connection, more thought could indeed be given to what theoretical justifications may lie behind the procedure within this particular philosophical tradition with its all-encompassing λόγος; and since this Stoic idea of the λόγος certainly owes much to Heraclitus' conception of the λόγος as an intertwined unity of opposites, reference could also have been made to Heraclitus fr. 48 D.-K. whose wording τῷ τόξῳ ὄνομα μὲν βιός, ἔργον δὲ θάνατος (*vel sim.*) seems to encapsulate what may well be the very first *lucus a non lucendo*-type etymology in history ('βιός from/despite being opposed to βίος'). Substantial, too, is the article by C. Le Feuvre, on "Implicit elements in scholiasts' etymological analyses" (pp. 55-82). By means of a few selected examples, Le Feuvre aptly illustrates how etymologies offered in the scholia can often be puzzling because the reasoning behind them is not, or no longer, presented explicitly, but how a careful analysis of parallel sources may aid in piecing together again what has been lost. In doing so, she argues among other things that one should differentiate between a type of scholastic etymology which operates "in the way we moderns understand [things], connecting a base and its derivatives on formal criteria", and another type which "gives a motivation to unmotivated words and restores a 'deep' meaning which is not immediately accessible", thereby displaying a "cratylean conception" of etymology (p. 57). As neat as such a dichotomy may look at first sight, however, it is probably too schematic. One example adduced for the latter, allegedly 'Cratylean', type is a connection of the word κόμη in a D-scholion on *Il.* 1.197 with the word κόσμος because 'hair is the adornment of the body'. What perhaps *feels* 'Cratylean' about this is the wild semantic

association game going on, but there is nothing to indicate that whoever came up with this etymological link actually subscribed to a Cratylean concept of the world: connecting κόμη and κόσμος is not in and of itself more Cratylean than connecting, say, ἔδος and ἔζω (as in an A-scholion on *Il.* 1.534, cited as an example of the former type of etymology). In reality, what separates the two ‘types’ may simply be the greater boldness (or ‘originality’, depending on one’s point of view) that is needed to defend the former etymology. In fact, as Le Feuvre herself observes elsewhere, the “general tendency already present in Plato’s *Cratylus* [...] to consider all long words as compounds which have to be reduced to simple elements” is also “systematic in the work of Hellenistic grammarians” (p. 69), but of course that will not turn the latter into adherents of Cratylean language philosophy; and so, if e.g. Herodian (p. III/1.325 Lentz) mentions approvingly the κόμη/κόσμος etymology, this equally tells us nothing about any philosophical convictions behind it. This reservation should not, however, detract from the validity of Le Feuvre’s philological case studies as such, nor from that of her further point that scholarly etymologies can sometimes be shown to interact with each other below the surface in unexpected ways (as when, for instance, similar etymologies are offered for ἀγανός and αἰγανέη: cf. pp. 76-80).

Further highlights of the volume include the contributions by N. Rousseau (“Ὅτι ἀλαζών ἐστι μάρτυς ἢ ἐτυμολογία: Galen on etymology, theory and practice”, pp. 125-176), by A. Filoni (“The use of etymology in Apollodorus’ *Περὶ θεῶν* and in its reader Porphyry: scientific or ideological?”, pp. 229-277), and by V. Decloquement (“Fallacious etymology and puns: Ptolemy Chennus’ sham *Homeric Questions*”, pp. 281-304), some of the main points of which have already been mentioned. The first of these stresses that the linguistic pragmatist Galen does not disapprove of etymology *per se*, only of its “inappropriate use [...] as a premise (λήμμα) within scientific research” (p. 171), the second successfully combines careful *Quellenforschung* with an exploration of the relevant texts’ purpose and intellectual context, and the third seeks to correct earlier disqualifications of Ptolemy Chennus’ work as misguided pedantry by bringing out a parodic dimension that directly foreshadows what we find, slightly later, in Lucian’s satirical oeuvre.

The two papers with a predominantly literary focus, meanwhile, both suffer from an inclination to strain the primary material. A. Vergados (“Etymological explanations of fish-names in Oppian’s *Halieutica*: between poetry, philology, and scholarship”, pp. 179-212) presents well how individual fish-names are discussed in Oppian, and how this situates the poet in “the didactic tradition begun by Hesiod and reinvented by the Hellenistic poets” (p. 181), but the attempt to frame such fairly banal ‘etymological’ passages as challenges to the reader or to assign them epistemological relevance is not entirely convincing; for example, it is hardly the case that in *Hal.* 1.212-243 “[t]he etymologically correct name renders an incredible story credible” (p. 199; cf. again p. 208) since the alleged ability of the ἐχενήϊς fish to stop and hold a storm-tossed ship merely accounts for the ichthyonym, but the latter has no corroborative value as such. Similarly, C. Cusset (“Etymology as a poetic resource among the poets of Alexandria”, pp. 213-228) is obviously right that “[the Alexandrian poets] are interested in proper nouns [sic] (both toponyms and anthroponyms)” and that etymological ‘digressions’ are often more than just digressions (p. 228), but formulations such as “In inverting the eponym process through the archaeological and etiologial analysis in which the poet indulges, because it is a question of passing from the effect of this linguistic product stated at the beginning, rather than transforming a given fact (which may be historical, or ethnographic, or of some other nature) into a linguistic witness of this event, the poet desacralizes onomastic phenomena in that they become assignable to a precise cause” (pp. 219-220) do not, in my view, clarify anything; and again, the case-studies themselves, like the one on the name Asteria for the island of Delos in Call. *Del.* 36-38 (pp. 218-219), often read too much into what the primary texts actually say (in the case at hand, not only is the reader never told which Pindaric intertext the

author had in mind when writing that “Callimachus adopts a motif that he finds in Pindar”, but if he/she nevertheless manages to figure out that Pind. fr. 33c must be meant, he/she will also discover that it is simply not the case that “[f]or Pindar Delos’ fixity is essential”, whereas “Callimachus [...] wants to underline the island’s mobility” – for Pindar, too, the fixity only follows Asteria’s arrival: see Pind. fr. 33d, and cf. Pind. *Pae.* 7b.49).

Lastly, in the section on philosophical issues, M. Romani Mistretta (“Naming the art, or the art of naming: the etymology of τέχνη (*technē*) in Plato’s *Cratylus*”, pp. 21-35) briefly looks into one specific ‘Cratylean’ etymology presented in the eponymous dialogue, arguing that for Plato “[e]tymology itself, in fact, does not satisfy the requirements for being a τέχνη” because it cannot “claim to νοῦν ἔχειν with respect to its ultimate goal” (p. 32); yet, this ‘paradox’ would be more noteworthy if it were clearer than it actually is that etymology would naturally have been thought of as a τέχνη. And while M. Chriti (“Etymological proximities and *onomastics*: from Aristotle to Ammonius of Hermeias”, pp. 37-51) interestingly asks, in the wake of Ammonius, what principles Aristotle intended to follow when creating new terminology, her insistence on the notion of ‘familiarity’ seems exaggerated and based on a doubtful interpretation of the adverb οἰκείως in Arist. *Cat.* 7a5-7 and *Met.* 347a10-12: in both cases, ‘specificity’ rather than ‘familiarity’ is more likely intended.

All in all, then, this volume leaves a mixed impression. On the one hand, it contains several enlightening and substantial contributions, the length of which is such that they would not easily have found space in a journal. On the other hand, it is a collection the final shape and usefulness of which would have benefitted from more editorial selectivity, guidance, and unification. Readers who are already familiar with the major ideas, uses, and trends of ancient etymologizing will no doubt discover various new facets here, but those who are new to the subject may not find enough orientation or inspiration to make them wish to explore things further. Moreover, both groups may legitimately ask why a publisher who (apparently) insists that a series contain only contributions in English, even when not a single contributor is a native speaker of that language, does not then at least feel morally obliged to provide the copy-editing assistance that would be needed in order to maintain a linguistic standard that is commensurate with the academic quality of what is accepted for publication.

Andreas Willi
University of Oxford
Worcester College
Walton Street
GB-Oxford OX1 2HB
andreas.willi@worc.ox.ac.uk