

# Etymology as an Allegorical Technique in Philo of Alexandria

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## 1. *Some recent history of Philonic scholarship*

Let me begin this paper with some recent history of Philonic scholarship, which will be over-familiar to some of you, but less well-known to others. In the decade from 1971 to 1980 two ambitious and highly significant research projects were undertaken by North American scholars. In 1971, on the initiative of Robert Hamerton-Kelly, the Philo Institute was founded at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago. Its aim was to do co-operative research on an analysis of the sources behind the Philonic corpus and the traditions contained within it. When one of its prominent members, Burton L. Mack, moved to Claremont Graduate School in 1976, he instituted the Claremont Philo project, which had as its aim to undertake a full-scale analysis of Philonic exegetical traditions. For various reasons neither project fulfilled all its promise. Personal developments and institutional difficulties in the 1980's resulted in a hiatus in the research, which led in turn to a reformulation of goals involving less direct co-operation and less focused collaboration. This is the background of the Philo seminar at this conference and *The Studia Philonica Annual*, both of which are still flourishing.<sup>1</sup>

The relevance of this piece of history is that the single most outstanding piece of research produced by these projects is the monograph by Lester Grabbe entitled *Etymology in Early Jewish Interpretation: the Hebrew Names in Philo*.<sup>2</sup> The appearance of the book is somewhat rebarbative. It is a classic example of the early camera-ready work done in the 80's using primitive word-processing techniques. But the reader who penetrates through to its contents will find an excellent treatment of the subject of etymology in Philo, with a strong emphasis on the question of sources in Part I and containing a most valuable overview of all Philo's Hebrew etymologies in Part II.<sup>3</sup> I would like to acknowledge my debt to Grabbe's research at the outset of my paper. His book contains most of the relevant material, analysed with sound attention to methodology and reaching conclusions with which I am in strong sympathy.

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<sup>1</sup> For a history of this period of research see Hilgert (2001).

<sup>2</sup> Grabbe (1988).

<sup>3</sup> For an detailed evaluation see the extensive review by Goulet (1990).

## 2. *Aim of this paper*

The aim of my paper is to give an overview of Philo's use of etymology as an allegorical technique. My primary perspective will be on Philo himself: what place does etymology have in his writings? what is his method in using it? where does he get his material from? At the end of the paper I will also briefly touch on comparative questions: how does Philo's practice relate to the use of etymology in writers such as Cornutus, Ps.Plutarch and Heraclitus the Allegorist? what can he tell us about the controversial relation between etymology and allegory?

My aim is to give an overview and stimulate discussion. I would only claim to be an expert in part of the subject I am covering, notably Philo's exegetical method. If I am interrogated about some areas of the subject, especially the Hebrew etymologies themselves and their relation to the Rabbinic tradition, then—to use a graphic Dutch expression—I am sure to finish up standing here with a mouth full of teeth. So please have consideration for my limitations.

## 3. *The place of etymology in Philo's works*

Etymology is pervasive in Philo's exegetical commentaries. According to Grabbe's list the total number of Hebrew names for which etymologies are given are 164, located in more than 300 passages.<sup>4</sup> The distribution is uneven, however, because of the differing content of the three commentaries.<sup>5</sup>

In the *Exposition of the Law*, a systematic account of the Pentateuch from creation to the eschatological promises and threats of Deuteronomy, there is very little use of etymology, except to a limited degree in the biographies of the Patriarchs, who are regarded as living laws. This is consistent with the basic method of the work, which is literal and symbolic rather than allegorical. In the *Questions on Genesis and Exodus* Philo engages in both literal and allegorical interpretation, but the latter has the upper hand. We thus encounter numerous etymologies, some of which are hard to decipher because in most cases an Armenian translation is our only means of access to Philo's original Greek text. It is interesting to observe that etymologies are much more common in the treatment of Genesis than of Exodus. This suggests a link with the practice of genealogy, which is a fundamental feature of the first book of the Bible. But the greatest concentration of etymologies is found in Philo's *Allegorical Commentary*, that mighty and vastly complex running commentary which starts at Genesis 2 and runs through in great detail to Genesis 17, with further less detailed treatment going through to Gen. 41. Etymology is a basic and indispensable ingredient of the allegorical method which Philo employs in this work. It occurs in every single treatise to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the biblical texts that Philo is expounding and the direction of his exegesis. No reader of this work can fail to encounter it.

<sup>4</sup> A few more can be added from additional material in the Latin translation of *QG* 4.154–254 which he did not include.

<sup>5</sup> Recent Philonic scholarship has emphasized the need to take the differing nature of these three works into account; cf. Noack (2000); Runia (2001a), esp. 1–4.

4. *The method in its essentials*

For all the complexity of Philo's allegories, the basic method of etymology as an allegorical technique could not be simpler. It is beautifully illustrated in the following text, part of an allegory of the four rivers of paradise in terms of the four cardinal excellences (*Legum allegoriae* 1.68):

‘καὶ ὄνομα τῷ ποταμῷ τῷ δευτέρῳ Γηῶν· οὗτος κυκλοῖ πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν Αἰθιοπίας.’ συμβολικῶς ἐστὶν ὁ ποταμὸς οὗτος ἡ ἀνδρεία· ἐρμηνευθὲν γὰρ τὸ Γηῶν ὄνομά ἐστι στήθος ἢ κερατίζων· ἐκάτερον δὲ ἀνδρείας μνηστικόν· περὶ τε γὰρ τὰ στήθη, ὅπου καὶ ἡ καρδία, διατρίβει καὶ πρὸς ἄμυναν εὐτρέπεται· ἐπιστήμη γὰρ ἐστὶν ὑπομενετέων καὶ οὐχ ὑπομενετέων καὶ οὐδετέρων. περικυκλοῖ δὲ καὶ περικάθηται προσπολεμοῦσα τὴν Αἰθιοπίαν, ἧς ἐστὶν ἐρμηνευθὲν τοῦνομα ταπεινώσις· ταπεινὸν δὲ ἡ δειλία, ἡ δὲ ἀνδρεία ταπεινῶσει καὶ δειλία πολέμιον.

‘And the name for the second river is Gêôn; this river circles the entire land of Ethiopia (Gen. 2:13).’ Symbolically this river is courage. For interpreted the name Gêôn is ‘chest’ or ‘butting (with horns)’. And each of these is indicative of courage. For it both spends its time in the area of the chest, where the heart is as well, and is fitted out for defence. For it is knowledge of what should be endured and what should not be endured and of what is neither (of these). And it encircles and aggressively besieges Ethiopia, whose name interpreted is ‘lowering’. And cowardice is a low thing, whereas courage is thing that is hostile to lowering and cowardice.

I have deliberately given a rather literal translation in order to render the moves that Philo makes as clear as possible. We can distinguish five steps:

- (1) The biblical lemma is cited.
- (2) An interpretation involving a symbolic identification of the subject of the lemma is made, introduced by the term *συμβολικῶς* (symbolically).
- (3) In order to explain the symbolism, the Hebrew name is etymologized. We note the conjunction *γάρ* (for), and the technical term *ἐρμηνευθὲν* (interpreted). As Grabbe has shown, Philo almost always formally indicates that he is introducing an etymology by means of a special formula.<sup>6</sup>
- (4) Next Philo gives a justification of the symbolism based on the etymology. In this case he first explains how both etymologies (which are seen as parallel rather than separate) are related to courage and then deepens the explanation by giving a (Stoic) definition of what courage is (cf. *SVF* 3.262–266). We note how both explanations are again introduced by *γάρ* (for).
- (5) Finally the explanation is expanded by taking into account the remainder of the biblical lemma. It includes a second name Ethiopia, which is given a limited treatment showing how its etymology fits in with the interpretation of the river in terms of ‘courage’.

Extrapolating from this example we may conclude that in Philo an etymological allegorical interpretation consists of four component parts: (a) the Hebrew word (usually cited in a biblical lemma), (b) its translation into Greek, (c) the symbolism represented by the translation, and (d) a justification of that symbolism in terms of a larger interpretative scheme.

Because these component parts, from the viewpoint of the Allegorist, are interdependent, they can be presented in any order. As an example we can take the following passage which develops and illustrated the allegory of Adam the mind and Eve as sense-perception (*Leg.* 3.225):

<sup>6</sup> Grabbe (1988) 41–43.

... ἐπειδὴ μὲν ὁ τῆς ψυχῆς ἡνίοχος ἢ κυβερνήτης ὁ νοῦς ἄρχη τοῦ ζώου ὅλου καθάπερ ἡγεμὼν πόλεως, εὐθύνεται ὁ βίος, ὅταν δὲ ἡ ἄλογος αἴσθησις φέρηται τὰ πρωτεία, σύγχυσις καταλαμβάνει δεινή, οἷα δούλων δεσπότης ἐπιτεθειμένων· τότε γάρ, εἰ δεῖ τάληθές εἰπεῖν, ἐμπίπτουσι φλεγόμενος ὁ νοῦς, τῶν αἰσθήσεων τὴν φλόγα ἐγειρουσῶν τὰ αἰσθητὰ ὑποβεβλημένων. καὶ Μωυσῆς μέντοι δηλοῖ περὶ τῆς τοιαύτης ἐμπρήσεως, ἢ γίνεται διὰ τῶν αἰσθήσεων, τοῦ νοῦ, ὅταν λέγῃ· ‘καὶ αἱ γυναῖκες ἔτι προσεξέκαυσαν πῦρ ἐν Μωάβ’—ἐρμηνεύεται γὰρ ‘ἐκ πατρός’, ὅ τε πατὴρ ἡμῶν ὁ νοῦς ἐστὶ.

Whenever the mind as reinsman or pilot of the soul rules the entire living being just like a ruler ruling a city, life goes straight, but whenever irrational sensation gains the ascendancy, a terrible confusion takes hold of it. For then, if the truth be told, the mind catches fire and burns, as the senses supply the objects of sense and fan the flame. Indeed Moses clarifies such a blaze of the mind which takes place through the senses when he says, ‘and the women further kindled a fire in Moab (Num. 21:30)’. For it (Moab) is interpreted ‘from a father’, and our father is the mind.

Here Philo starts with the allegorical justification of the etymology, which of course is the part which really interests him, and then proceeds to cite the biblical lemma, give the translation of the Hebrew word and its symbolism (i.e. a sequence (d) (a) (b) (c) of the component parts identified above).

It will be noted that, in outlining Philo’s method, I have spoken of the etymology of the Hebrew word. In some cases, of course, it might be said that he is offering a translation rather than an etymology. In most cases, however, there is an element of derivation involved, in which the interpreter has to resort to some rather fancy footwork. It can be compared with the creative and even bizarre etymologies which Plato furnishes for Greek words in the *Cratylus*. The difference is that the derivation is not obvious for the Greek reader and requires scholarly reconstruction in order to become comprehensible.

##### 5. *Philonic theory on etymology*

But before we go into greater detail on how Philo uses etymology in his allegorical interpretations, it will be worthwhile briefly to examine his theoretical assumptions about etymology and the power of language. Philo, it must be said, is not a great theoretician. He usually likes to get on with the practice of allegorical interpretation rather than spend a long time reflecting on the process itself. At various points he does make pronouncement about what he is doing, but mostly these remarks have an apologetic or a polemical purpose which is limited to the context in which they are made.

It is to be agreed with David Winston that Philo’s various pronouncements about the role of language point to a consistently held general theory of language.<sup>7</sup> It draws on Greek philosophical speculation, but is adapted to biblical themes such as the imposition of names by Adam in Gen. 2:19. Names are not natural, as held by the Stoics, but conventional in the sense that they are imposed by a wise man who has insight into the nature of things. This person is sometimes identified with Adam, the first human being (cf. *Opif.* 148–149), but in other texts (e.g. *Opif.* 127) Philo is vaguer and just refers to anonymous wise men. Moses as the wise man *par excellence* possesses insight into the meaning and use of names in supreme measure. In introducing his exegesis of Gen. 9:20, ‘And Noah became a

<sup>7</sup> See Winston (1991) 117.

farmer of the earth', Philo affirms (*Agr.* 2):

Μωσῆς δὲ κατὰ πολλὴν περιουσίαν τῆς ἐν τοῖς πράγμασιν ἐπιστήμης ὀνόμασιν εὐθυβολωτάτοις καὶ ἐμφαντικωτάτοις εἴωθε χρῆσθαι. πολλαχοῦ μὲν οὖν τῆς νομοθεσίας τὴν ὑπόσχεσιν ἐπαληθεύουσαν εὐρήσομεν, οὐχ ἥκιστα δὲ κἀν τῷ προτεθέντι κεφαλαίῳ, καθ' ὃ γεωργὸς ὁ δίκαιος Νῶε εἰσάγεται.

Moses with the great abundance of his knowledge of the nature of things was in the habit of using words that were right to the point and highly expressive. Everywhere in his legislation we shall find this claim made true, and not least in the present chapter, where Noah the righteous man is introduced as a 'farmer'.

In the example given here the word accurately used is a generic noun, i.e. farmer. As far as I know, however, Philo nowhere gives a theoretical explanation of the nature of the Hebrew proper names used in the LXX and how they might relate to any original Adamic language or to the language used by Moses the great prophet and author of scripture.<sup>8</sup>

In this context a text which has long fascinated me is found at the beginning of Philo's long discussion of the changing of names in the treatise with the same name, *De mutacione nominum*. Having quoted Gen. 17:4, in which God changes Abram's name to Abraham, Philo first polemicizes against those who scoff at this kind of text and ask what the difference of an alpha can make.<sup>9</sup> He then continues (*Mut.* 62–65):

δικαίως δ' ἂν ἡμεῖς ... τὰς ὑπονοίας ἐκκόψαιμεν, φυσιολογοῦντες καὶ ἀποδεικνύντες τὰ λεγόμενα ταῦτα πάσης ἐπάξια σπουδῆς. οὐ (γάρ) γράμματα ἄφωνα ἢ φωνήεντα ἢ συνόλων ῥήματα καὶ ὀνόματα χαρίζεται ὁ θεός, ὅποτε καὶ γεννήσας φυτὰ τε αὐτὸ καὶ ζῶα ἐκάλεσεν ὡς πρὸς ἡγεμόνα τὸν ἄνθρωπον, ὃν ἐκ πάντων δι' ἐπιστήμην ἐχώρισεν, ἵν' ἐκάστοις τὰ οἰκεία ὀνόματα θῆται· 'πάνω γάρ φησιν ὡδ' ἂν ἐκάλεσεν ὁ Ἀδάμ, τοῦτο ὄνομα τοῦ κληθέντος ἦν'. εἶθ' ὅπου οὐδὲ τὰς ὀλοκλήρους θέσεις τῶν ὀνομάτων ὁ θεὸς ἠξίωσεν ἐπιφημίζειν, ἐπιτρέψας ἀνδρὶ σοφῷ ... τὸ ἔργον, ὑπονοεῖν ἄξιον, ὅτι μέρη τῶν ὀνομάτων ἢ συλλαβὰς ἢ γράμματα, οὐ φωνήεντα μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἄφωνα, αὐτὸς προσετίθει καὶ μετήμοζε, καὶ ταῦτ' ἐπὶ προφάσει δωρεᾶς καὶ ὑπερβαλλούσης εὐεργεσίας; οὐκ ἔστιν εἰπεῖν. ἀλλὰ τὰ τοιαῦτα χαρακτηρῆς δυνάμεων εἰσι, βραχεῖς μεγάλων, αἰσθητοὶ νοητῶν, φανεροὶ ἀδήλων· αἱ δὲ δυνάμεις ἐν δόγμασιν ἀρίστοις, ἐν ἀψευδέσι καὶ καθαραῖς ὑπολήψεσιν, ἐν ψυχῆς βελτιώσεσιν ἐξετάζονται.

Quite rightly we should eradicate such insinuations by explaining the truths of nature and demonstrating that these words are worthy of most serious consideration. Letters, whether consonants or vowels, or in general verbs and nouns are not bestowed (directly) by God, since when he created the plants and living beings, he summoned them to the human being as to a ruler, whom he set apart from all the others on account of his knowledge, so that he could impose the appropriate names on each of them. For he says, 'everything which Adam called them, this was the name by which they were called' (cf. Gen. 2:19). If God did not think fit to affirm the whole-scale imposition of names, but entrusted the task to a wise man, is it right to suppose that he himself added and altered parts of names or syllable or letters, not only vowels, but also consonants, and this on the pretext of a gift or an outstanding act of beneficence? This cannot be maintained. Rather, such things are the markings of (spiritual) powers, the former small, visible, overt, the latter large, intelligible, hidden. Such powers are examined in excellent doctrines, in unerring and pure conceptions, in improvements of the soul.

This text is intriguing because it actually contrasts the nature and significance of Hebrew names in scripture to the names given by the first human being in the Genesis account. Admittedly the prime purpose of the passage is rhetorical. Philo wants to show that not the literal meaning here is important but the allegorical

<sup>8</sup> Certainly *Cher.* 53–56 cannot be used for this, since Philo is not talking about the names Cain and Seth, but rather the way in which the children of Adam and Eve are introduced.

<sup>9</sup> Very similar comments are made in *QG* 3.43, 3.53.

intent of the text. In fact he almost goes so far as to deny the literal meaning, which is fairly unusual for him.<sup>10</sup> The implication is nevertheless that the allegorical exploitation of Hebrew names involving etymologies is quite separate from question of how those names arose in the first place. There are many questions we might wish to ask Philo.<sup>11</sup> How did it happen that Moses was able to select just those names that have a suitable allegorical application? Why did the translators of the Septuagint leave the names for the most part untranslated? Was it to preserve the allegories involved? Philo, to judge by this passage, would wave the questions away. He just wants to get on with what is important. Contrary to most interpreters I do not think it is very profitable to speculate on Philo's views about the origin of the names in Scripture. They are inspired, meaningful, and he wants to work with them.

A second theoretical question of interest is the possibility of multiple meaning. Well versed in philosophical grammar, Philo is quite aware of the complexities of synonymy, homonymy and polyonymy.<sup>12</sup> But what is the relevance for his allegorical use of etymologies? Here too, because of a lack of theoretical pronouncements, we mainly have to look at how he operates in practice. There are in fact two separate questions here.

(1) For the overwhelming majority of Hebrew names Philo basically gives a single translation. For some seven names he gives alternative etymologies.<sup>13</sup> For five of these—Barad,<sup>14</sup> Geon, Esau, Naphtali, Sur—there appear to be two separate etymologies in the background. For the other two—Dinah and Charan he gives alternative Greek renderings for the same root. In all cases the two meanings are joined by the word 'or' (ἢ). It may be surmised that he found the alternative on his list of etymologies.<sup>15</sup> Philo may not have been aware of the different backgrounds, depending on whether we think he had any knowledge of Hebrew or not. In the case of Haran at *Somn.* 1.41 he writes:

ἔστι τοίνυν, ὡς ἔμοιγε φαίνεται, Χαρρὰν μητρόπολις τις αἰσθήσεων. ἐρμηνεύεται γὰρ τοτὲ μὲν ὀρυκτῆ, τοτὲ δὲ τρωγλαί, δι' ἀμφοτέρων τῶν ὀνομάτων ἑνὸς δηλουμένου πράγματος.

Haran then, it seems to me, is a kind of mother-city of the senses. For it is interpreted sometimes as 'dug' and sometimes as 'holes', one single thing being signified by both names.

The text seems to imply two separate etymologies, but in actual fact there is only one. I have not included the case of Noah, who is interpreted as 'rest or righteous' at *Leg.* 3.77, because the second alternative is not strictly an etymology but is derived directly from Gen. 6:8. It may be noted also the name of the prophet Moses itself is given two etymologies in *Mut.* 126: λῆμμα (receipt) and ψηλάφημα (touch).<sup>16</sup> This is not the reason, however, why Philo says at §125 that the arch-prophet is πολυώνομος (having many names). This has to do with the fact that he is

<sup>10</sup> See the discussion of such passages in Pépin (1967) 146–150.

<sup>11</sup> Compare the questions posed by Long (1997) 210.

<sup>12</sup> Elucidate.

<sup>13</sup> For the texts see the list of Grabbe (1988), Part II.

<sup>14</sup> As reconstituted by Jacobson (2003).

<sup>15</sup> We find examples of this practice on the list in P.Oxy. 2745, which can be conveniently consulted at Grabbe (1988) 240.

<sup>16</sup> As shown by Nikiprowetzky (1984) 133, arguing against Colson's note at LCL edition 6.206.

also give other designations in the Pentateuch such as ‘man of God’ and ‘god to Pharaoh’. These are not proper names. It is in fact rather confusing that Philo introduces this polyonymy at the end of a long discussion on the change of (proper) names that allegorized personages have in scripture (*Mut.* 57–129).

(2) The situation is similar for the symbolism that Philo derives from the names. In the vast majority of cases the name is taken to represent a single symbol. In a handful of cases the symbolism is multiple, or at least bivalent. Those cases in which the same name can represent both a positive and a negative symbol will be discussed below. The cases in which a single name represents two separate symbols are in fact exceedingly rare. One example is Benjamin, whose name ‘son of days’ can symbolize both time and vainglory. It is difficult to see what the connecting ‘common denominator’ of the two could be.<sup>17</sup> Similarly Midian is given two symbolisms at *Mut.* 106 and 110, but this is the result of the etymology being taken in two different ways, as ἐκκρίσεως and as ἐκ κρίσεως. Given Philo’s penchant for multiple exegesis, it is really quite remarkable and significant how rarely Philo gives more than a single symbol for a biblical name.<sup>18</sup>

#### 6. Philo’s Greek etymologies

At this point a word should briefly be said about Philo’s Greek etymologies of Hebrew names. These are at least nine of these:<sup>19</sup>

Pheison*	from φείδεσθαι, to spare ( <i>Leg.</i> 1.66)
Evilat*	from εὖ and ἴλεως, well merciful ( <i>Leg.</i> 1.66)
Tigris	from τίγρις, tiger ( <i>Leg.</i> 1.69)
Euphrates*	from εὐφραίνειν, to enjoy ( <i>Leg.</i> 1.72)
Leah*	from λεία (κίνησις), smooth movement ( <i>Leg.</i> 2.67, <i>Congr.</i> 25)
Aithiopissa	from αἶθω, burning ( <i>Leg.</i> 2.67) <sup>20</sup>
Pascha	from πάσχειν, to undergo ( <i>Her.</i> 192)
Peitho	from πείθειν, to persuade ( <i>Somn.</i> 1.77)
Cush	from χούς, dust ( <i>QG</i> 2.81).

In the case of four of these Hebrew etymologies are given as well, which means that Philo is dealing with a double derivation. How could this coincidence of two etymologies be explained? Grabbe makes the important observation that in the case of none of these does Philo make use of his usual etymological interpretative formulae.<sup>21</sup> This is an indication that Philo does not regard these etymologies as being on the same level as the Hebrew ones. It is to be agreed with David Winston that Philo is being fanciful or playful in these texts, superimposing examples of *paronomasia* (or punning) on top of his usual etymologies from the

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Somn.* 2.36, *Mut.* 92. A link could be hypothesized between being ‘swept along by empty opinion’ and the sweeping movement of time, but Philo does not make the connection.

<sup>18</sup> If the list at Grabbe (1988) 40 is examined, it will emerge that most of his examples are either bivalent (e.g. Lamech, Shechem) or have a common denominator (e.g. Eden, Israel). In addition to the two examples given, Gerar and Joseph seems to be genuinely multiple.

<sup>19</sup> The lists at Grabbe (1988) 237 and Winston (1991) 119 n. 29 are incomplete. Grabbe in the same appendix also usefully lists Philo’s many other etymologies of Greek words that are not names.

<sup>20</sup> As observed by Goulet (1990) 192.

<sup>21</sup> Grabbe (1988) 44.

Hebrew.<sup>22</sup> Plutarch does the same with Egyptian names in *De Iside et Osiride*.<sup>23</sup> The procedure is typical of Philo's allegorical method, which opportunistically exploits a great diversity of techniques in order to reinforce its interpretation.

### 7. Some observations on Philo's usage

We turn now to some observations on how Philo actually makes use of etymologies in his allegorical exegesis. These will necessarily have to be brief and impressionistic. To my knowledge no study has been ever devoted to a detailed analysis of the role of etymology in Philo's allegorical method. All the emphasis has been on the nature of the etymologies themselves and their sources. A study of this kind is a real desideratum. It would have to take into account the various kinds of exegesis practised by Philo in his three commentaries, for, as we have seen, etymologies are used in all three. The present remarks, however, will concentrate on Philo's chief allegorical work, the Allegorical Commentary.

Reduced to its essentials this work gives a running commentary of the first 17 chapters of Genesis (excepting the creation account in Gen. 1), in which a large array of biblical names make their appearance. In order to explain the main biblical lemma being commented on, Philo habitually introduces secondary biblical lemmata which shed additional light on the main text. It is the interaction between these layers of text which is mainly responsible for the labyrinthine nature of Philo's allegorical treatises (this process does not occur in the *Quaestiones*, where only a literal and a figurative explanation of a single text is given). The following general observations can be made.

(a) Philo generally introduces the etymology of a name the first time it occurs in the main biblical lemma being expounded, but he does it in such a way that it fits in with the general plan of his allegorical exegesis. Gen. 4:1–2, which mentions Cain and Abel for the first time, is first cited at *De Cherubim* 40, but he first explains another aspects of the verse and in fact does not concentrate on the two etymologies until *De sacrificiis* 2, where the etymologies are formally introduced. They return at *Quod deterius* 32, because Philo feels he needs to remind his readers of what these biblical figures stand for before he can proceed further. Cain, meaning κτήσις, i.e. acquisition, symbolizes a self-loving creed, whereas Abel, meaning ἀναφέρων εἰς θεόν, i.e. one who refers (all things) to God, symbolizes a God-loving creed. The etymology is thus an integral part of the interpretative equipment that Philo has at his disposal when allegorizing a biblical text. This is not to say that the etymology is always introduced. For example when Gen. 3:24 is cited at *Cher.* 1, Philo makes no attempt to explain the name of the Cherubim at §21, but launches straight into cosmological and theological explanations (§21–30). It is only when explaining the Ark of the Covenant that the name is explained as ἐπίγνωσις καὶ ἐπιστήμη πολλή (understanding and full knowledge). This falls outside the Allegorical Commentary on Genesis (cf. *De vita Moysis* 2.97, *QE* 2.62).

(b) Generally speaking the etymology is mentioned near the outset because it is used to *found* a particular interpretation. This makes sense because from the

<sup>22</sup> Winston (1991) 120.

<sup>23</sup> Cited by Winston *ibid.* See further below §9.

Philonic perspective the etymology can be taken as an objective given, which through its associated symbolism furnishes a basis for the allegory which can be further elaborated.

(c) Similarly when secondary biblical lemmata are cited in order to deepen the exegesis of the main text, Philo regularly takes the trouble to explain the names in the text as a foundation for his further exegesis.

(d) But in the case of quite a number of biblical characters the etymology of their name virtually becomes part of their identity, so that they are often cited with both their Hebrew name and either the etymology or its symbolism. This seems to occur especially when the etymology is rather transparent, e.g. Rebecca as 'patience', Isaac as 'laughter' or 'joy', Jacob as 'supplanter' etc.<sup>24</sup> Clearly both etymology and symbol are part of an allegorical system which is prior to the actual interpretative 'performance' given in the treatises and presupposed by it.<sup>25</sup>

Usually, therefore, the etymologies of biblical names contribute to the exegesis and help to give it a solid foundation. In two cases, however, they move more to centre stage. The first of these are the *genealogies* that are so prominent in Genesis. Especially the treatise *De posteritate Caini*, which gives exegesis of Gen. 4:16–25 focuses on these. The biblical account, as Philo reads it, introduces two genealogies, one for the descendants of Cain, the other for the descendants of Seth, who is the replacement for the slain Abel (cf. Gen. 4:25). The two genealogies represent the life of vice and the life of virtue respectively, an absolute antithesis as taught in Stoic ethics. Philo thus has the challenge of explaining how some of the figures in the two genealogies, such as Enoch, Lamech and Methuselah, possess the same name, i.e. they are homonymous figures (*Post.* 40). It is important to recognize, he argues, that each of the names can be interpreted in a double sense (§41), i.e. as a symbol *in malam partem* or a symbol *in bonam partem*. For example the name of Lamech, which means ταπείνωσις (lowering), is equivocal (ἀμφίβολος), for it can signify the fall caused by the passions or the humility which avoids self-conceit (§46). Another example given is the name of the city Hebron. It is highly philosophical (φυσικώτατον), Philo states, 'to distinguish homonymous words by their kinds'.<sup>26</sup> Hebron means συζυγή (coupling), but in the case of the soul this can be of two kinds, coupling with the body (bad) or coupling with virtue (good). The distinction thus neatly relates to the absolute ethical antithesis represented by the two genealogies.<sup>27</sup>

The second main interpretative theme that focuses on names directly is the changing of names. This theme of course has biblical origins, but Philo is able to integrate it beautifully within the larger framework of his allegorical system. The main treatment of this theme is found in *Mut.* 60–129, the beginning of which was discussed earlier in the paper (§5). The purpose of the name-change, when interpreted allegorically, is to indicate alteration or improvement of character (cf. §70). The name Abram as μετέωρος πατήρ (father on high) is changed to Abraham

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Fug.* 194, *Leg.* 3.43, *Leg.* 3.15 etc.

<sup>25</sup> On Philo's treatises as allegorical performances see Runia (1987); (2001b) 103.

<sup>26</sup> Comment on translation and mistake Whitaker.

<sup>27</sup> For further commentary on the genealogies of Gen. 4–5 and their interpretation in *Post.* see Grabbe (1988) 29–33.

as πατήρ ἐκλεκτὸς ἡχοῦς (chosen father of sound), symbolizing the change from the mind focused on astrology and the cosmos to the mind focused on virtue and God. It is not too fanciful to see here a link with the Stoic ethical theme of progress, in which perfection is attained through aptitude, training and hard work. Towards the end of *De posteritate* Philo joins up the genealogy of Seth with later genealogies that link up with Noah and Abraham and culminate in the supreme sage Moses (§173–174). The genealogy symbolizes the quest for ethical perfection and knowledge of God. The two allegorical themes that focus more directly on names thus link together and encompass a large part of Philo's ethical and spiritual allegory.

As for the etymologies themselves and the symbols that are linked to them, it is not possible to go into any detail. Some examples have been given already. Scholarship would be well served by a list which gave a complete account of all the names, their etymologies, the associated symbols and the texts where they are referred to. Here is a sample of a dozen names that is given *exempli gratia*:<sup>28</sup>

name	etymology	symbol	texts
Ἄαρών / Aaron	mountainous	reason with its lofty thoughts	<i>Ebr.</i> 128
Ἄγαρ / Hagar	sojourning	involved in preparatory studies	<i>Congr.</i> 20
Ἄννα / Hannah	her grace	gift of God's wisdom	<i>Deus</i> 5
Βαθουήλ / Bethuel	daughter of God	wisdom as reason's offspring	<i>Fug.</i> 50
Θάμαρ / Tamar	palm tree	obtains victory of virtue	<i>Leg.</i> 3.74
Ἰούδας / Judah	praise to the Lord	mind who blesses and thanks God	<i>Plant.</i> 135
Ἰσραήλ / Israel	seeing God	mind contemplating God & cosmos	<i>Congr.</i> 51, <i>Somn.</i> 2.173
Μελχά / Milkah	queen	astronomy, queen of the sciences	<i>Congr.</i> 45
Σαττίμ / Shittim	thorns	passions tormenting the soul	<i>Somn.</i> 1.89
Σήθ / Seth	watering	soul fostered by stream of wisdom	<i>Post.</i> 125
Συχέμ / Shechem	shoulder	toil for or against virtue	<i>Det.</i> 9, <i>Mut.</i> 193
Φανουήλ / Penuel	turning from God	vice diverting mind from God	<i>Conf.</i> 129

At least two observations spring to mind even on the basis of this partial list. Firstly in many cases there appears to be quite a distance between the etymology and the symbol that the name represents. Symbols cannot be derived directly from the etymology, but are the result of interpretation in terms of a larger allegorical scheme. It would seem that the chicken precedes the egg. Secondly the kind of allegorical scheme presupposed is somewhat mixed. To be sure, there is no physical or cosmological allegory involved. All the examples focus on the life of the soul. But some of the examples clearly belong primarily to ethical allegory, focusing on the soul struggling against the passions to attain virtue, whereas others have a more spiritual focus (e.g. Hannah, Judah, Penuel).

<sup>28</sup> The lists given by Goulet (1987) 58–61 and Grabbe (1988) 225–231, though both very useful, do not measure up to what is required. Goulet's is selective and incomplete; Grabbe only tries to reconstruct the etymological list which Philo might have had before his eyes.

8. *The sources of Philo's etymologies*

Philo's knowledge of Hebrew has long been a contentious topic in Philonic studies? Can we really imagine that a man who both a polymath and devotee of scripture and moreover paid visits to Jerusalem,<sup>29</sup> could be ignorant of the original language of the Torah? It is improbable, yet it seems true. An exhaustive study of Prof. Valentin Nikiprowetzky seems to have effectively closed the discussion.<sup>30</sup> Philo did not know any Hebrew, so he cannot himself have been responsible for the etymologies, some of which are crude but others quite refined,<sup>31</sup> in his allegorical writings? Where, then, did he find them?

In a brief but elegant article originally published in Hebrew,<sup>32</sup> Y. Amir pointed out that in the case of the figure of Jethro, Philo formally introduces the etymology with the *koinê* Greek form *περισσός*, but as soon as he explains the symbolism in his own terms he reverts to the Attic form *περιττός* which he customarily uses. This strongly suggests that Philo had received the etymology in a form which he did not feel he could unilaterally alter. Amir's discovery supports the view that in the allegorical process etymologies were a given that was by no means arbitrary, but rather provided a foundation that the exegete could build on. Amir did not wish to pronounce on whether the name was found in a bare list of biblical names and their etymologies, or whether he derived them from literary material that contained such explanations.

There is a single text in Philo which unambiguously affirms that he derived etymological material from exegetical predecessors. It is found in one of the infrequent passages in the Exposition of the Law in which he gives allegorical exegesis (*Abr.* 99):<sup>33</sup>

ἦκουσα μέντοι καὶ φυσικῶν ἀνδρῶν οὐκ ἀπὸ σκοποῦ τὰ περὶ τὸν τόπον ἀλληγορούντων, οἱ τὸν μὲν ἄνδρα συμβολικῶς ἔφασκον σπουδαῖον εἶναι νοῦν ἐκ τῆς περὶ τοῦνομα ἐρμηνευθείσης δυνάμεως τεκμαιρόμενοι τρόπον ἀστέιον ἐν ψυχῇ, τὴν δὲ τούτου γυναῖκα ἀρετὴν, ἧς τοῦνομά ἐστι Χαλδαῖστὶ μὲν Σάρρα, Ἑλληνιστὶ δὲ ἄρχουσα, διὰ τὸ μηδὲν ἀρετῆς ἀρχικώτερον εἶναι καὶ ἡγεμονικώτερον.

I have also heard students of nature who not without good reason allegorized the contents of the passage. They stated that the husband was symbolically the good mind, testifying from the interpretation of the meaning of his name that it represented a noble character in his soul, while his wife was virtue. Her name in Chaldean is Sarah, but in Greek it is 'sovereign lady', on account of the fact that nothing is more sovereign and hegemonic than virtue.

The fact that such a central etymology in Philo's system comes from earlier traditions strongly suggests that the practice of etymologizing and the basic features of his allegorical scheme did not originate with Philo himself.

<sup>29</sup> As we know from *Prov.* 2.109.

<sup>30</sup> Nikiprowetzky (1977) 50–96. Through the kind help of my friend David Satran (Jerusalem) I have been able to consult the English summary of the Hebrew dissertation of C. Schur (1991) on the Etymologies of Hebrew names in Philo. The author is quite adamant that Philo is intimately acquainted with both the Hebrew and the Greek versions of the Pentateuch and tries to prove this on the basis of the etymologies he produces. The English summary does not refer to any scholarship on the question of Philo's knowledge of Hebrew.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *ibid.* 76.

<sup>32</sup> Amir (1961), conveniently translated by Grabbe as an Appendix to his monograph, (1988) 233–235.

<sup>33</sup> Note that the formula ἦκουσα + genitive can mean also mean 'read'; cf. Schenkeveld (1992).

Grabbe in an instructive and well-argued chapter on Philo's sources argues that the best hypothesis is that he made use of an extensive list of Hebrew names and their etymology, similar to the two papyrus fragments (Heidelberg and Oxyrhynchus 2745) that have been found and Jerome's *Liber interpretationis hebraicorum nominum*.<sup>34</sup> His main argument is that Philo's exegesis presupposes a long and complete list of names which moreover appears to have been tailor-made for the purposes of allegorical exegesis. If he had gathered together his etymologies from a diverse group of anterior exegetical writings, his etymologies could never have obtained the uniformity and consistency that they possess. The same argument applies to the possibility that he had an informant with knowledge of Hebrew. Strikingly the Oxyrhynchus papyrus actually contains the etymology of Jethro as περισσόζ, confirming the deduction made by Y. Amir.

The Canadian-French scholar Richard Goulet is not satisfied with Grabbe's hypothesis. In a massive study published one year before Grabbe's monograph he put forward a radical hypothesis. Detailed examination of Philo's allegories reveals that he has adapted (and distorted) a pre-Philonic commentary which gave a consistently philosophical allegorical exegesis of the Pentateuch in terms of soul, mind, reason, senses, passions, vice and virtue.<sup>35</sup> It is to this commentary that Philo's statement at *Abr.* 99 cited above refers. A pillar of his argument is that examination of Philo's etymologies reveals a fundamental division between philosophical and religious symbolism.<sup>36</sup> So in the brief list we gave above (§7) the secular etymologies of Israel and Penuel are quite different from the religious etymologies of Judah and Hannah. Philo has superimposed his own ideology on a tradition with an entirely different perspective. In his review of Grabbe's book, Goulet argues that the manifest coherence and originality of the thought presupposed by the bulk of Philo's etymologies invites the conclusion that he must have been dependent on much more than a simple list.<sup>37</sup>

Goulet's radical hypothesis about a pre-Philonic commentary has not been accepted by scholars in its full scope. The two rigorous distinctions that he advocates, between philosophical and religious allegory and between coherent tradition and muddled Philonic adaptation, cannot be sustained. But with regard to Philo's etymological source both scholars score an important point. There can be little doubt that Philo had a list. Grabbe's observation that it contains almost no multiple symbolism is particularly significant in the light of the large amount of multiple exegesis elsewhere in Philo. But Goulet is right in emphasizing that this list cannot have been developed independent of a coherent allegorical tradition. A possible solution may be that Philo did not accept an already existent list but developed his own, which he stuck to when writing his commentaries. The material was traditional and based on knowledge of Hebrew which he himself did not

<sup>34</sup> In Jerome's Preface he informs us of a 'statement by Origen' that Philo published a book of Hebrew names which he (Origen) used, but the Church father must have been mistaken in this; cf. Runia (1993) 181f. On the Oxyrhynchus papyri first published about 35 years ago, see Rokeah (1968).

<sup>35</sup> See Goulet (1987).

<sup>36</sup> This develops an earlier hypothesis put forward by Stein (1929).

<sup>37</sup> Goulet (1990).

possess. He appropriated it and used it to build his own remarkable edifice of allegorical exegesis.

9. *Some comments on Philo's relation to Greek allegorical etymologizing*

My main task has been to explain how Philo uses the etymology of names in his allegorical exegesis. The main features of Philo's practice should now be clear. But before I finish I would still like to make a few comments on how Philo's practice relates to what we find in Greek sources, many of which the members of this seminar have been studying (and therefore know a lot better than I do).

First we should note the obvious fact that the question of the source of Philo's Hebrew etymologies is quite different from the question of the source of his method in using etymologies for the purpose of allegory. It is to be agreed that the inspiration for Philo's allegorical practice was ultimately Hellenic, even if he in the first instance took over methods that had been developed in Alexandrian Judaism. The Septuagint contains a certain amount of etymologizing, but its aetiological method is quite different to that of Philo. Rabbinic allegory, as Grabbe has shown,<sup>38</sup> is later than Philo and not relevant to our inquiry. The best parallels are to be found in the world of Greek literature and philosophy.

Before we look at these, however, we should recapitulate the chief features of Philo's etymological allegorizing. These can be summarized under three headings:

- (a) it is very **extensive**, consisting of about 170 names, which cover virtually every Pentateuchal personage or place cited in Philo's commentaries;
- (b) it is **systematically applied**, using a consistent and rigorous method of linking name, etymology, symbolism and reason for the identification;
- (c) it shows **coherence** on a grand scale, being linked to highly complex and extensive system of ethical and spiritual allegory.

These features must be taken into account when we hunt for parallel material.

The best parallels, as far as I can see, are found in four different areas. Once again I am indebted to Grabbe for highlighting much of this material.<sup>39</sup>

- (1) For the translation of foreign names we can compare Plutarch's practice in his treatise *De Iside et Osiride*. In the course of his exposition he mentions about ten Egyptian gods and heroes, whose names are given etymologies, sometimes with reference to similar Greek words, but on other occasions using genuine Egyptian explanations.<sup>40</sup> For the latter he must have drawn on a source which knew the Egyptian language. A few allegories impinge on the life of the soul in terms reminiscent of Philo, e.g. Typhon as the element of the soul which is παθητικὸν καὶ ἄλογον (subject to passion and without reason), who is also called Seth, meaning καταδυναστεῦον (overpowering), and Bebon, meaning κώλυσις (hindrance).<sup>41</sup> But unlike Philo, Plutarch is allegorizing a myth rather than a continuous text.
- (2) Similarly a large number of names of gods and goddesses are etymologized by the Stoic philosopher Cornutus in his handbook *Theologiae Graecae compendium*. The

<sup>38</sup> Grabbe (1988) 73–77.

<sup>39</sup> Grabbe (1988) 78–85.

<sup>40</sup> See chapters 9, 10, 20, 24, 29, 37, 41, 49, 56, 60–62, 66.

<sup>41</sup> I am paraphrasing and simplifying a more complex text at §50, 371B–C.

allegory involved is mainly physical and cosmological and operates at a fairly unsophisticated level. Unlike in Philo, Cornutus habitually gives multiple etymologies, e.g. Zeus' father Kronos is explained by the etymologies χρόνος (time), διάκρισις / σύγκρισις (separation/contraction), and κρᾶναι (accomplish) (§3).

(3) For the allegorization of an authoritative text with extensive use of etymologies the best example is Pseudo-Heraclitus, *Quaestiones homericae*. The main aim is apologetic, coming to the defence of Homer's arcane wisdom (cf. esp. *Quaest. Hom.* 3), which of course reminds us of Philo's frequent praise of Moses. The author's allegories are a mixed bag, combining physical and moral allegory with historical exegesis (but without any spiritual allegory).<sup>42</sup> Some of the use of etymological explanation of names found in the moralizing allegories of the wandering of Odysseus remind us quite strongly of Philo's treatment of the Pentateuch:

	name	etymology	explanation
§70	Cyclops	λογισμοὺς ὑποκλωπῶν	unloosening reason
§71	Aeolus	ποικίλος	variety of year's cycle
§72	Hermes	ἑρμηνεύς	reason warns Odysseus against Circe
	Hermes as	Ἄργειφόντης	words makes thought clear
§73	Hermes as	χρυσόρραπις	words stitching together facts
	'molu' drink	μόνος οἱ μόλις	wisdom only in humans or with difficulty
§74	river Cocytos	Κωκυτός	symbol of human suffering
	Puriphlegethon	πῦρ	fire consuming human flesh
	Acheron	ἄχη (and ῥέω)	afflictions
	Styx	στυγνότης	darkness of death

In some cases, however, we are closer to word-play than the fully-fledged etymologies that we find in Philo. For example in the story of Circe, which symbolizes the fight of φρόνησις (practical wisdom) against pleasure, no attempt is made to give an etymology of the name of the goddess herself. Moreover the coherence of the overall allegory is very limited.

(4) In looking for a coherent ethical allegory that can be compared to Philo, the best example I have found is the *Tabula of Cebes*, translated many years ago by two members of the Seminar.<sup>43</sup> The explanation of the tableau in terms of a human life progressing from pleasure through repentance to education, virtue and felicity is both systematic and coherent. Strictly speaking the literary *ecphrasis* is not allegory, but it comes close. The only trouble for our purposes is that it contains not a single etymology!

## 10. Conclusion

In a fine and thought-provoking article the distinguished connoisseur of Hellenistic philosophy, A. A. Long, pleaded for a distinction between allegory in

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Buffière's remarks on the layers of exegesis at (1962) xxi-xxvi.

<sup>43</sup> Fitzgerald and White (1983).

Philo and etymology in Stoicism.<sup>44</sup> There is a crucial difference, he argued, between strong allegory, when the interpreter attempts to divine the intentions of the author's deeper meaning, and weak allegory, when a text or a myth is subjected to an allegorical reading regardless of what its author meant to do with it. What we find attributed to Stoics such as Zeno and Chrysippus and what we find in the manual of the Stoic philosopher Cornutus must be placed in the second category. There is no evidence that the Stoics gave an interpretation of Hesiod and Homer attributing to them a crypto-Stoic view of the world or of the place of the human being within it.

Long's view is both plausible and paradoxical. As we have seen, the Hellenic parallels for what Philo is doing with the etymology of Hebrew names in his *Allegorical Commentary* are not strong. What is missing is the extent, the systematic nature and the coherence of Philo's achievement. Yet much of the ethical allegory that Philo reads into his names is strongly influenced by Stoic moral philosophy (overlaid with a thick layer of Platonism). Systematic coherence is the hallmark of Stoic philosophy, including its ethics.<sup>45</sup> So we are faced with a stark choice. Jewish exegetes, including Philo, may have developed an ethical and spiritual allegorical system, including extensive use of etymology, which was without parallel in its time (which I take to be from about 150 bce to 50 ce). If they achieved this of their own accord, it must have been a remarkable, even astonishing, achievement. An alternative is that they followed Stoic models which have been almost wholly removed from our gaze. We would then have to disagree with Long, but there is most definitely a problem of evidence. Is there a third way? It is just possible that Pythagorean or Platonist interpreters may have already started to develop their exegeses of Homer, which could have served as a model for Philo and his predecessors.<sup>46</sup> But here too we have little evidence for the kind of ambitious coherence that Philo achieved. Which of the three will it be? Whichever of the three we choose, there is no denying the impressive nature of Philo's achievement.

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<sup>44</sup> Long (1997), building on his earlier article, (1992).

<sup>45</sup> Cf. the examples given Long (1974) 119–120, Long and Sedley (1987) 345.

<sup>46</sup> As argued by Boyancé (1963) 67–79 in an important article. But he does not touch on the question of etymologies.

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