3 Allegoresis and etymology

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For many centuries, especially from Late Antiquity until the seventeenth century, European scholars often chose to interpret the foundational texts of their culture – for example, the Bible and the works of Homer and Virgil – by attributing to them more or less systematic and coherent meanings strikingly at variance with those that most ordinary readers would have thought they were communicating; and the same scholars often buttressed their interpretations by claiming that some of the words used in those texts had in fact different, original meanings from the ones that ordinary speakers attached to them in everyday conversation. In so doing, these scholars were applying the procedures of allegoresis[1] to those texts and of etymology to those words. These two scholarly practices also flourished independently of one another in this period; but their complex and intense interaction is one of the features particularly characteristic of the Western classical tradition.[2] This chapter examines their nature, functions, and interrelations during classical antiquity.[3]

1. A Surprise in Macedonia

On January 15, 1962, a bulldozer was operating at a highway construction site near a mountain pass called Derveni, about ten kilometers north of Thessaloniki in Macedonia, when it uncovered an unlooted ancient grave. The work was stopped the next day when another grave was found nearby, and urgent excavations carried out in the following months under the supervision of a professional archaeologist eventually led to the discovery

[1] I use the term "allegoresis" throughout the present study to designate a specific exegetical technique that can be applied to all kinds of texts, so as to prevent confusion with "allegory," which I reserve for denoting the deliberate composition of certain works of literature intended to be interpreted by allegoresis.

[2] For a preliminary orientation, see at least Amsler 1989, Belardi 2002, Brisson 2004, Del Bello 2007, Katz 2010, Klinck 1970, Lamberton 2010, Lubac 1998–2009, Ramelli and Lucchetta 2004, Seznec 1953, Smalley 1983.

[3] For reasons of space I focus here almost entirely upon ancient Greek allegoresis and etymology and neglect their Latin counterparts.

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of six more graves, all but two of them still unlooted, containing rich funeral offerings in metalwork, jewels, bronze, and clay. On the basis of the material found in the tombs, archaeologists have dated the burials to the late fourth or early third century BCE. On the slabs covering one of the tombs were found the remains of a funeral pyre, and what looked at first sight like just another half-burned brand turned out on closer inspection to be a charred papyrus roll that was apparently burned together with the corpse of the person whose ashes were found in that grave. Years of painstaking and ingenious toil on that fortuitously discovered papyrus led to the recovery of hundreds of larger and smaller fragments that were fitted together into approximately twenty-six columns of readable text; on the basis of the writing style the most recent editors of the papyrus date the production of the roll to ca. 340–320 BCE.[4]

The bottom half of the papyrus was completely destroyed, some of the columns consist now of only a few words or letters, and even in the legible parts there are numerous lacunae and letters that are difficult to decipher. But the general nature of the text is not in doubt. Most of the portion of the book that we can read consists of a series of quotations from a cosmogonic poem attributed to Orpheus, a semidivine archaic poet considered by most Greeks to have been the founder of important mystery rites, and, intercalated between them, interpretations of these passages in terms of natural philosophy that bear striking resemblances to some of the physical doctrines ascribed to the Pre-Socratics (especially Anaxagoras, ca. 500–428 BCE), the earliest Greek thinkers to have attempted to develop systematic explanations of natural phenomena in materialistic rather than mythical terms. The author and title of the text are unknown; it is usually dated to the beginning of the fourth century or perhaps the end of the fifth BCE, and its author may have been a contemporary of Plato (who lived from ca. 429 to 347 BCE). It is certainly the most astonishing addition to our knowledge of ancient Greek religion and philosophy to have been discovered in the past century.

How does the anonymous Derveni author transform and update the mythic words of the ancient poet Orpheus so that he can turn them into recognizable versions of the philosophical doctrines of recent natural philosophy? Much about his enigmatic text is controversial, but it has long been clear to scholars that he uses above all two exegetical techniques for this purpose: allegoresis and etymology.

[4] See in general Betegh 2004, Laks 1997. The first authorized edition of the papyrus was Kouremenos, Parássoglou, and Tsantsanoglou 2006.

On the one hand he deploys allegoresis to explain that, concealed behind the gods and their actions narrated in the apparent, surface meaning of the poem, there is also another level of signification on which the poet is talking not about characters and their psychologically motivated behavior but instead about material elements and their mechanically produced interactions – and that it is in fact not the manifest superficial meaning but instead this second, hidden level that reflects the true intention of the poem as conceived by its author. For example, he asserts: "And in calling it [scil. the night] 'nurse' he [scil. Orpheus] shows in a riddling way [*ainizetai*] that everything that the sun heats and dissolves, the night reunites by cooling"[5] (col. X, lines 11–12); or "He [scil. Orpheus] says that 'she [scil. Night] proclaims the oracle out of the innermost shrine [*ex adytoio*],' his view being that 'the innermost shrine' (*adyton*) is the depth of the night; for it [i.e., the night] does not set [*ou … dynei*] as the light does, but the daylight seizes it while it remains in the same place" (XI.1–4). On this view, Orpheus (a) calls the Night a nurse and (b) has her deliver oracles from a temple not (a) because as a goddess she took care of Zeus when he was a baby or (b) because she was a prophetically inspired divinity who proclaimed oracles from the depths of a holy shrine, but instead (a) because the night is a natural condition that reunites, and hence can be said to nourish or strengthen, all that the sun has decomposed into smaller parts during the day and (b) because the night, unlike the sun, never sets but instead remains motionless, waiting until the daylight overcomes it. The goddess named "Night" becomes the natural condition called "night," and the attributes applied to her are reformulated in such a way that they can apply to it. The word *ainizetai*, used in the former passage, recurs in different forms six other times in the surviving columns of the text[6] and in later centuries goes on to become a standard technical term of Greek allegoresis: It suggests that to ordinary readers something in a text remains baffling or incomprehensible (our "enigma" is derived from this word) until its true meaning has been explained to them. The Derveni author makes this point explicitly:

… a hymn that says sound and lawful things [...] the poem is an alien one and, for human beings, riddling [*ainigmatôdês*], even if Orpheus himself intended by means

[5] Translations from Laks and Most 2016. Hereafter references are given to the papyrus in abbreviated form, with the column in roman and the lines in arabic numerals. The sign "..." in the translations indicates lacunae in the papyrus that have not yet been convincingly supplemented; "[...]" indicates that I have left out of my translation as not pertinent to my argument passages that are legible in the papyrus.

[6] VII.5, 6, 6; IX.10; XIII.6; XVII.13.

of it to say not undeterminable riddles [*ainigmata*], but rather great things in the form of riddles [*ainigmasin*]. (VII.2–7)

Thus the author not only repeatedly applies the procedure of allegoresis; he also uses the very term for it that later becomes one of the standard ones, and he has an explicit theoretical explanation why it is appropriate to apply that procedure in the case of this text.

On the other hand, the Derveni author also repeatedly makes use of etymology in order to explain why certain gods have received the names or epithets by which Orpheus refers to them and by which they are known to all speakers of the Greek language: He claims that these names are not arbitrary or accidental but were carefully chosen on the basis of the elements of a specific doctrine, in such a way that, rightly understood, they point to that doctrine and at the same time are themselves revealed to be meaningful and motivated.[7] Thus he says that Orpheus gave the god Cronus (*Kronos*) his name because he is the mind (*Nous*) that strikes (*krounta*) beings against each other: "Therefore he says that this Cronus [*Kronon*] was born to Earth from the sun because he was the cause via the sun that they [i.e., the things] strike [*krouesthai*] against one another [...] Having called 'Cronus' Mind [*Nous*] that makes things strike [*krounta*] against each other [...]" (XIV.2–4, 7). Again, he says that Earth "is called [*kaleitai*] '*Dêiô*' too, because she was split apart [*edêiôthê*] during the mixture" (XXII.12–13). In these passages, and frequently elsewhere as well, he uses the verbs *onomazô* (I name) and *kaleô* (I call) and related words[8] to indicate a deliberate act whereby some authorized name-giver selects, for a newly born creature or for a preexisting but previously unnamed natural condition, a proper name that will identify its bearer for all speakers of Greek as a unique being, one worthy of our attention; at the same time, those particular speakers of Greek who are taught its unapparent meaning and can understand it will understand why just that name, and not some other, was selected, and they will do so in terms of a highly specific physical doctrine that it helps to elucidate (and perhaps also to fix in the student's memory). In this case, too, these are terms that in subsequent centuries will recur in many discussions of etymology. The Derveni author asserts explicitly that the etymologies he provides are justified by his supposition

[7] On etymology in the Derveni Papyrus and possible connections with Mesopotamian practices, see Myerston Santana 2013a, 2013b.

[8] *kaleô*: III.7; XVII.4; XVIII.7, 9, 10; XIX.1, 3; XXII.7, 12. *onoma*: VII.3; XVII.7; XIX.9; XXI.7; XXII.10, XXIII.12. *onomazô*: XII.7; XIV.7, 9; XVII.1, 1, 5, 7; XVIII.3, 9, 12; XXI.10, 13; XXII.1, 10.

that Orpheus assigned the names he did because of the physical properties of the material objects they referred to: "… he called him 'Cronus' from his action, and all the others according to the same principle" (XIV.9–10); "… each single thing that exists has received its name, from what dominates, all things having been called 'Zeus' according to the same principle" (XIX.1–3). So here too we find the repeated application of a procedure, the use of a specific terminology for it, and its justification by virtue of a general theoretical claim.

Now there are obviously various kinds of connections between allegoresis and etymology as they operate in the Derveni papyrus. For one thing, both procedures are directed to beings that appear in the poem as divinities or to their attributes or epithets, and they function to transform these into elements of the physical world as they have been theorized by natural philosophers. Again, both turn one meaning that is manifest, familiar, or easily recognized into another one that is hidden, strange, or surprising. They take an exoteric knowledge that is widespread and they transform it into an esoteric knowledge that is the exclusive property of a privileged elite. Finally, the Derveni author justifies both procedures as his decoding of the original act of encoding performed by Orpheus himself: It was Orpheus who chose the names for the gods and wrote a poem about their interactions with a view to his concealed theories about the natural world, and his modern interpreter is doing nothing other than reversing one by one the steps by which Orpheus partially hid his meaning, in order now to reveal it in its full clarity. So it is not hard to see, in certain regards, why the same author might have chosen to deploy both of these techniques.

Indeed, most scholars seem to have taken the combination of allegoresis and etymology found in the Derveni papyrus as being quite unremarkable, as though their combination here were only what one might expect from ancient Greek discussions of mythic texts.[9] In fact, however, several features in the particular conjunction of allegoresis and etymology in this text are quite odd and call the apparent self-evidence of this combination into question – perhaps the scholars should have been more surprised. First, as we shall see later, the Derveni papyrus is one of the very few texts in Greek literature to apply both procedures in such a systematic way, and it is probably the earliest extant text to do so. There were some allegorists, and there were many etymologists, in the centuries preceding the Derveni author, but no one before him seems ever to have brought the two operations to bear upon one another. And after him, probably at least a century must

[9] So, e.g., Betegh 2004, p. 368.

pass before we find anything else that is comparable: While there are many allegorists and etymologists in later periods, the combination of the two procedures is much rarer than has sometimes been thought, and we find many more allegorists who do not use etymology or etymologists who do not use allegoresis than we find authors who correlate the two. So we cannot take for granted their co-presence in this text, but must ask just why it is that the Derveni author has chosen to bring them together here, for what advantage, and at what cost.

And second, the two procedures in fact stand in a certain tension with regard to one another in this text and seem to be oriented in opposing directions. For on the one hand, why did Orpheus choose to disguise his philosophical message by entrusting it to a poetic allegory that was apparently only about gods? The Derveni author's answer is clear: Orpheus wanted to conceal his meaning from most of his potential recipients, whom he evidently considered unworthy of it, and to limit it to only a very few. As the Derveni author puts it, "This verse has been composed in such a way as to be misleading, and it is unclear to the many, but to those who understand correctly it is quite clear that Ocean is the air and that the air is Zeus" (XXIII.1–3); and again, "The ones [i.e., verses] that follow he puts forward [scil. as a screen], since he does not wish all men to understand" (XXV.12–13). Thus Orpheus's allegory was designed to obstruct and to limit communication by putting an obstacle between his expression and his meaning. Evidently, the Derveni author is applying to the interpretation of Orpheus's poem the conception, familiar from the ancient Greek religious mysteries (including those attributed to Orpheus), that their redemptive doctrine had to be reserved to an elite and denied to the profane – it is not accidental that the author writes near the beginning of his commentary on the poem, "he who has ordered them, 'put doors to your ears,' says that he is not legislating for the many ..." (VII.9–10). But on the other hand, when Orpheus established names for the gods and their epithets he was guided by the ordinary linguistic usages of the Greeks, choosing among common words the ones that came closest to his meaning. In the words of the Derveni author: "And he [scil. Orpheus] compares him [scil. air] to a king (for out of the names that are said, this one seemed to him to be suitable) [...]" (XIX.8–9); and again, "So he [scil. Orpheus] named all things in the same way, as best he could, knowing the nature of men, viz. that not all of them have a similar one [scil. nature] nor do all want the same things" (XXII.1–3); and once again, "But he [scil. Orpheus] indicates his thought in current and customary expressions" (XXIII.7–8). So Orpheus's name-giving was intended to facilitate communication by making use of

ordinary people's inherent dispositions and customary language in order to convey his meaning to them in an easily comprehensible expression. To be sure, not always did his name-giving turn out to be entirely successful, for not always do men nowadays understand the full meaning he assigned to the names once upon a time; but even when men do not understand these names completely, they still are not completely mistaken in them, for at least they are using the correct names even if they do not possess a complete understanding of their meaning:

> This breath, therefore, Orpheus named it 'Moira'; but all other men, according to common usage, say, 'Moira has spun for them' and 'these things will be whatever Moira has spun' – speaking correctly, but not knowing either what 'Moira' is or what 'spinning' is. For it is wisdom that Orpheus called 'Moira': for this seemed to him to be the most suitable out of the names that all men have given. (XVIII.2–9)

Thus even though both the allegoresis and the etymology used by the Derveni author are designed to bring Orpheus's originally intended meanings back, after a long period during which they were forgotten or misunderstood, to the full consciousness of present readers, the two techniques operate in different directions: The commentator's etymologies help Orpheus fulfill his original communicative intention (to increase people's understanding), but to a certain extent, at least, his allegoresis must work against his intention (to limit their understanding). Another way to put this is that the words whose etymology the Derveni author explains are themselves already true in the sense that they have a correct denotation, so that what he supplies for them are merely further dimensions of signification, whereas the poem whose allegoresis he performs is unacceptable on its apparent level and becomes fully true only when its mythological elements are transposed into a very different kind of philosophical doctrine. Thus the Derveni author uses allegoresis to put into question the surface meaning of the poem and to substitute for it a different one, while he uses etymology to corroborate the denotations of its names and to enrich them by further meanings.

Evidently, as philological techniques allegoresis and etymology are much more complicated than they might at first seem. They deserve careful (and ultimately comparative) consideration.[10]

[10] See Del Bello 2007, who however emphasizes the similarities and mutual reinforcement of allegoresis and etymology. I prefer instead, like, e.g., Long 1997, to stress the differences and tensions between them.

2. Allegoresis and etymology in Greece and Rome

In Greco-Latin antiquity, allegoresis and etymology were two widespread kinds of procedures for transcoding meanings from one discursive system to another. Both techniques presupposed the intelligibility of the apparent significance of some unit of discourse, but they then transformed that first significance into a second one, belonging to a different unit of discourse; in fact this second significance was produced later, on the basis of the first one, by this very procedure, but instead it was posited as being primary or original – indeed, as being the cause of the first one and its hidden truth. In so doing, these procedures increased the quantity of information supplied by the discursive unit upon which they operated: For that unit continued to signify precisely as it had always had (even if many forms of allegoresis tended to reject as defective the first or superficial level of signification), but now its traditional meaning was enriched by the addition of new and unexpected ones. Thus both procedures operated by defamiliarizing some linguistic object that Greek readers and speakers had thought they already understood and showing them that it also had other meanings than they had supposed. Allegoresis took a narrative unit that adhered in its plot and characters to certain criteria of plausibility but not to others and that therefore seemed understandable in certain terms but not in others, and then it translated those narrative elements into (usually) conceptual ones that, it proposed, were in some way what originally had been meant by that narrative. Etymology took a lexical unit that already had a well-defined denotation but then translated it, usually (though not always) by various techniques of decomposition and recomposition, into its alleged sources, sources that revealed an unexpected set of meanings that could be claimed to have been its original one.

Despite the formal similarities that united them in antiquity, there were significant differences between allegoresis and etymology as well. The most obvious is that between the extents and kinds of discursive units to which they were directed: Allegoresis operated on single or bundled mythemes, elementary mythic narratives either as these were presupposed by the canonical archaic poetic texts that first transmitted them or as they were explicitly contained within them; while etymology operated on lexemes, individual words, most often proper names, especially those of the gods. But beyond this there was also a fundamental difference in their scope and purpose: Allegoresis was usually recuperative, inasmuch as it most often presupposed that the evident meaning of these mythic narratives was

radically deficient in some important respect (theological, philosophical, moral, etc.) and that hence a different and more acceptable meaning had to be ascribed to them if they were to maintain their canonical status; while etymology was generally corroborative, since it did not question the denotation of the word in question but strengthened it by proposing that the word as a whole or in its components (individual sounds or syllables) was not associated with the denoted object by a purely arbitrary relation but instead was bound to it by significant and even natural connections. Thus both procedures were ultimately justificatory, but allegoresis usually began by questioning the acceptability of the mythemes that it finally redeemed by transcoding them, while etymology enriched the significance of lexemes whose denotation it never put into doubt. This difference was reflected in a further one: Allegoresis transposed the mythic narrative into a radically different discursive system (for example, into philosophical physics or psychology) and thereby secured its (relative) justification; while etymology remained within the same linguistic system (for example, the Greek language) but simply analyzed the word in question into allegedly more fundamental units that already existed within the same system.

If, then, an etymology may be considered to be, at least to a certain extent, an allegoresis of a word – an allegoresis that, especially in ancient times, often unfolds that word's meaning in the form of a sentence (indeed, one that sometimes can even imply a whole narrative) – the question arises of what exactly, if any, the relations have been between these two kinds of procedures in various cultural contexts.

It is not easy for us to understand immediately how closely they could sometimes be correlated with one another in antiquity. For nowadays, at least within the galaxy of humanistic studies in the West, allegoresis and etymology seem to inhabit completely different and noncommunicating planets.

Allegoresis is absent as an analytical tool from modern linguistics; and in contemporary textual philology the term "allegorical interpretation" has until recently all but vanished from the repertory of reputable scholarship, serving instead, if at all, only as a term of abuse. Especially since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the millennial tradition of allegorical interpretation seems largely to have been eclipsed in European culture, partly in connection with the decline of biblical allegoresis, on the one hand, and with the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, on the other, and more broadly as part of a larger development in which nascent historicism and ethnographic relativism have replaced the earlier search for timeless truths hidden in ancient poetic raiments with the hunt for direct

expressions of historically and spatially local data.[11] Until sometime that we may very roughly locate somewhere in the eighteeenth century, people tended to seek truth in literature; since then they tend to seek meaning in it – and the consequences for allegoresis have been disastrous. To be sure, certain modes of Western literary interpretation have continued, in their own way, to produce modern versions of ancient allegoresis by transforming literary plots and characters into instantiations of putatively scientific doctrines – for example, Freudian psychoanalysis – but their proponents have not realized, and would doubtless dispute, that they are closet allegorists. And historically minded literary scholars have often applied to older poets like Chaucer or Spenser forms of allegoresis that seem authorized by the cultural contexts of those authors. There have also been a few recent attempts by radical literary critics and philosophers to reconceive allegory completely and thereby to relegitimize some version of it;[12] but it seems unlikely that they will end up having any effects other than, at most, terminological ones.

Etymology, by contrast, does have some place in contemporary literary criticism and other forms of textual philology,[13] but in historical linguistics it is a well-established, indeed indispensable, instrument: Although it is sometimes difficult or impossible to discover the etymological origin and development of a particular word, and although scholars can sometimes disagree strongly about which of several proposed etymological accounts they should accept, nonetheless there seems to be a widespread consensus among professional linguists about just what an etymology is, about its crucial place in the scientific study of languages, and about the criteria a suggested etymology would have to satisfy in order to be accepted.[14]

But matters were not always this way. In Greco-Roman antiquity, allegoresis was a procedure limited for the most part to intellectuals, and applied and theorized above all by philosophers and rhetoricians, whereas

[11] Already in the Renaissance, traditional allegoresis and nascent historicism coexist and sometimes compete with one another; the explicit and dramatic opposition between them seems to begin in the seventeenth century. See on this general development Most 2004, 2013; and esp. Norman 2011. On the heritage of ancient allegoresis through the Renaissance, see at least Seznec 1953.

[12] So, most notably, de Man 1979.

[13] Etymological considerations can sometimes help the editor, especially of medieval texts, to choose among transmitted variant readings, and they play a role in some fields of literary criticism, for example in the detailed interpretation of Roman, English, and other poetry. For a striking example of etymology in the service of medieval philology, see Bloch 1983.

[14] For the conception of etymology among modern linguists, see Durkin 2009, Malkiel 1993, Thurneysen 1905.

etymology was a very widespread cultural activity, ranging in its aspirations from the popular to the scholarly. The practice of textual allegoresis grew out of the interpretation of dreams and oracles and other forms of divination, and although such activities could also be practiced informally under certain circumstances by most people, they tended to be regarded as the particular specialty of a class of professionals;[15] whereas the practice of etymology derived from the ways in which ordinary Greeks used and thought about their own language, and while it eventually also became a favorite activity of grammarians and philologists, it never lost this foundation in everyday usage. We might say that, in sociological terms, allegoresis was a top-down phenomenon, etymology a bottom-up one. As we saw earlier, the connection between allegorical interpretation and etymology in the Derveni papyrus seems not to have caused much surprise; and in larger terms a number of modern scholars have suggested that a very frequent and close link between the two was standard practice.[16] But in fact the two activities arose from very different sources and needs, and they were only on occasion performed in close association with one another and then always for very specific and contingent argumentative purposes or doctrinal reasons.

Allegoresis differs from other kinds of discursive operations in that it both exaggerates and restricts the polysemy inherent in all natural languages. For on the one hand it drastically increases the discrepancy between the apparent meaning and the putatively intended one by a number of techniques: for example, on the level of the apparent meaning, by personifications of simple named concepts and allegations of glaring discrepancies, contradictions, and implausibilities, all violating verisimilitude; and on the level of the putatively intended meaning, by claims for doctrinal simplicity, familiarity, coherence, and transparence. The result is that it strongly encourages the reader to seek the desired additional meaning beyond the apparent one, for the literal level is variously problematic while the allegorical one beckons alluringly. But on the other hand allegoresis tends to discipline severely the capricious spirit typical of literary polysemy by analyzing complex textual wholes into little bits that can then each be assigned a single, unambiguous doctrinal meaning; its goal is that of producing a single coherent conceptual level to which all the individual elements make

[15] On divination in ancient Greece and China, see Chemla, Harper, and Kalinowski 1999, Raphals 2013, Vernant 1974.

[16] E.g., Baxter 1992, pp. 93, 115–16, 118–19; Buffière 1973, pp. 61–65, 105; Ramelli and Lucchetta 2004.

the same kind of contribution – this is why ancient rhetorical theory discusses allegory as an extended chain of metaphorical transpositions linked with one another in sequence.[17]

An example of the procedure will make this clearer. At one point during Odysseus' wanderings in the *Odyssey*, Homer has the Phaeacian bard Demodocus tell an apparently light-spirited and entertaining story of how the adulterous lovers Ares (the god of war) and Aphrodite (the goddess of sexual desire) enjoyed trysts at the home of her husband, Hephaestus (the craftsman god) – until the all-seeing Sun noticed and told Hephaestus, who set a trap for the two lovers from which it was only with the help of the sea-god Poseidon that they eventually escaped (*Odyssey* 8.266–369). The gods who come to see the trapped couple laugh, and the human audience who hear the story are delighted; but for the high-minded allegorist Heraclitus[18] (*Homeric Problems* 69) this is not a ribald tale of doubtful morality, nor the inevitable mythographical result of the peculiar combination of ugly Hephaestus' marriage to lovely Aphrodite with the virility of Ares and the all-seeing eye of the Sun – nor even an implicit warning to Odysseus, subtle but potentially quite effective within this specific narrative context in the *Odyssey*, about the very uncomic dangers that would await him at his home in Ithaca if his own wife should turn out to have betrayed him. Instead, Heraclitus interprets this episode as a poetic version of Pre-Socratic Empedocles' philosophical doctrine of the concord of the fundamental principles of Love and Strife – or, additionally (not alternatively), as a veiled account of the activity of the bronze-worker, who softens the iron of Ares in the fire of the sun and unites it with the loveliness of Aphrodite before plunging the molten metal in the water of Poseidon. Heraclitus' allegoresis takes every element of the story as linked by an individual metaphorical relationship to another signification belonging to a different dimension and collocates them in a sequence in such a way that it transforms a diachronic narrative development into a (usually) synchronic conceptual structure derived from philosophy or from craftsmanship (without giving any sign that the allegorical meaning intended should be one or the other but not both). His interpretation, so far from banishing altogether the playfulness of the original narrative, permits it graciously to return, in the witty

[17] Cicero, *Orator* 27.94, *De Oratore* 3.41.166; Quintilian 8.6.44–53.

[18] The date, identity, and even the name of this author are controversial. Most scholars now assign him to the second half of the first century CE and accept that his name really was Heraclitus (though of course he is not identical with the Pre-Socratic philosopher of the same name). See on this text Russell and Konstan 2005.

capriciousness of the allegorist's own surprising and creative interpretative moves.

Allegoresis went on to become a fundamental constituent of the classical tradition after Greco-Latin antiquity, and its procedures have been much studied in modern scholarship.[19] And yet within antiquity itself it in fact remained confined in its diffusion to a few philosophical schools and to rhetorical handbooks. The only Pre-Platonic thinkers who can be claimed with some degree of certainty to have practiced the allegorical interpretation of mythic poems are Theagenes of Rhegium in the sixth century BCE, Stesimbrotus of Thasus and Metrodorus of Lampsacus in the fifth on Homer, and then, perhaps slightly earlier than Plato or contemporary with him, the Derveni author in the fourth on Orpheus.[20] Plato contemptuously dismissed the allegoresis of traditional myths as practiced in his time.[21] Aristotle appears by and large simply to have ignored it, as not being worthy of his attention.[22] Epicurus seems to have had little patience with traditional poetry and even less with attempts to allegorize it.[23] It was above all the Stoics[24] and, later, the Neoplatonists who, despite Plato's skeptical strictures and the crossfire from philosophical (especially Epicurean)[25] rivals, applied sophisticated allegorical techniques to the ancient poems, transmitted myths, and established cults in order to demonstrate that these were communicating the very same physical and moral doctrines they themselves held.[26] As for rhetoric, allegoresis did indeed enter into its vast repertory of

[19] See especially Boys-Stones 2003; Brisson 2004; Buffière 1956; Copeland and Struck 2010; Dawson 1992; Lamberton 1986; Pépin 1976; Ramelli and Lucchetta 2004; Reinhardt 1910; Struck 2004; Tate 1927, 1934; Whitman 1987, 2000.

[20] Anaxagoras is also said to have been the first to have claimed that Homer's poetry was about virtue and justice (Diogenes Laertius 2.11), though it is quite uncertain what this is supposed to mean; and Heraclitus interprets features of certain Greek cults in terms similar to allegoresis (e.g., 22 B51 Diels-Kranz ed.).

[21] *Republic* 2.378d–e; and yet Plato composed a number of extended mythic narratives that seem to call for allegorical interpretation. See Tate 1930.

[22] Yet he does suggest that some myths can be considered remnants of an ancient wisdom from a time before a natural catastrophe (*Metaphysics* Lambda 8.1074a38–b14, *On the Heavens* 284a2–13, Frag. 13 Rose[3]).

[23] And yet Epicurus's fervent disciple Lucretius does not hesitate to engage in allegoresis of myths and cults himself.

[24] See Goulet 2005b, Meijer 2007, Steinmetz 1986. Long 2006 has denied that the Stoics engaged in allegoresis; but this is to limit the application of the term to literary criticism and textual allegoresis narrowly understood. The Stoics were more interested in ancient myths than in ancient poems, but the only sources available for most ancient myths were ancient poems. See on Stoic attitudes to poetry Blank 2011.

[25] E.g., Cicero, *De Natura Deorum* 1.36, 41, 2.63–72, 3.62; Philodemus, *SVF* 2.1078.

[26] For discussion and examples of the use of these techniques in ancient commentaries, see, for example, Most 2010b.

the instruments of discursive analysis, and hence is to be found discussed (or at least listed) in the standard ancient manuals;[27] but in fact it was of little use for legal and political speeches and had a (modest) place only in epideictic oratory, and the true function of such discussions may have been to justify older pupils' continuing to study the ancient poets, with whom schoolchildren were initiated in the established educational sequence.

If allegoresis seems to us to have been far more pervasive in ancient culture than it really was, this is in part because of an optical illusion whereby the real dominance of the Stoic and Neoplatonist schools in the pagan culture of the Roman Empire subliminally influences our simplified perception of the whole of Greco-Roman antiquity,[28] in part because certain scholars like the Jewish thinker Philo (ca. 20 BCE–ca. 50 CE) and the Christian one Origen (ca. 185–255) exploited these modes of philosophical exegesis in order to interpret the Hebrew and Christian Bibles and thereby created a hermeneutical legacy that profoundly shaped ways of reading in Late Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and beyond.[29]

Etymology, in contrast to allegoresis, has been both a widespread scholarly practice and also a popular nonprofessional activity, and not only in ancient times but also in modern ones.[30] Yet despite the persistence of the term employed, the spirit of the procedures in these two periods has in fact had quite different tendencies.[31] The etymology of the term itself (from *etymo-* [true] + *logia* [word, discourse]) suggests an investigation of the truth of words: But ancient and modern etymologists have had very different conceptions of the nature of that truth and the procedures for arriving at it. Modern etymology always claims to be looking diachronically for the real attested or postulated historical source of a given word; whereas ancient etymology tends more to search for one word's possible synchronic connections with other words in the language as it is currently used, privileging semantic relations between coexisting lexical units rather than any laws of phonetic change governing the gradual succession of forms over time. The ancient etymologist presupposes language not as a dynamic

[27] Hermogenes lists allegory as one of the sources of solemnity in style but warns against its dangers: Wooten 1987, p. 21.

[28] See for example Colish 1990, Lamberton 1986.

[29] Rollinson 1981, van den Hoek 2004.

[30] On the Latin medieval heritage of ancient etymologizing see Amsler 1989, Bloch 1983, Klinck 1970; for the Greek etymologica see Alpers 1969, Reitzenstein 1897.

[31] For the differences between ancient and modern etymology, see Baldinger 1990, Benedetti 2003, Herbermann 1981, Tsitsibakou-Vasalos (1997–98). For the developments in modern linguistics that led to these changes, see Morpurgo Davies 1998. Chambon and Lüdi 1991 provide a very interesting and helpful collection of articles on particular aspects.

process of continuous historical development but instead as a stable and coherent system of intelligible and interconnected conceptual meanings; and when he does invoke the past, he usually seems to think of it not as a continuous series of discrete phases passing gradually through the many stages of a coherent evolution but rather as a single radical contrast between some postulated primeval moment and the manifest current state of affairs. Furthermore, modern etymology aims to derive from the examination of real evidence of linguistic usage attested in different historical periods as economical and as broadly applicable as possible a set of mechanisms for explaining language change; and while ancient etymology does tend to respect certain elementary transformative rules like addition, subtraction, and inversion of elements, it derives these rules not from the inspection of linguistic evidence but from general principles of logic, grammar, and rhetoric, applies them haphazardly, and only rarely, if ever, subjects them to analysis and justification by any kind of serious meta-theory. Moreover, ancient Greek etymology tends almost always to search for connections within the confines of the ancient Greek language (Latin etymology, by contrast, is aware that there are at least two languages in the world and often searches for Greek roots for Latin words); whereas modern etymology is oriented no less toward inter-lingual than toward intra-lingual research. Finally, ancient etymology often seeks to establish as many relationships as possible between one word and others, as though it were following the principle of the more relations the better, and does not, like its modern counterpart, attempt to discover the one hypothetical etymology that must be the correct one and that automatically disallows all other proposed ones. In short, ancient *etymo-logy* attempts, as the name rightly suggests, to demonstrate the truthfulness, in the sense of the appropriateness, of a given term, as it happens by relating it to other coexisting ones; whereas modern etymology (despite its own etymology) aims not at all at the truthfulness of any particular word but exclusively at its true historical origin.

Ancient etymology has received much less attention from scholars[32] than ancient allegoresis has, perhaps in part because allegoresis lacks a well-entrenched modern counterpart inclined to demonstrate its own proclaimed scientific seriousness partly by neglecting, partly by disdaining, its ancestor. This is a shame, because etymology was a very widespread practice in all sectors of ancient culture, not just philosophy and rhetorical

[32] Steinthal 1890 and Muller 1910 are outdated but still fundamental. See also Buridant 1998; Lallot 1991a, 1991b; Nifadopoulos 2003; Peraki-Kyriakidou 2002; and now above all Sluiter 2015.

theory – indeed, it was much more widespread than allegory ever became – and studying it casts light on fundamental aspects of ancient thought.

Above all, it is proper names, especially the names of the gods, that are particularly favored subjects for ancient etymology. The cultural background for this is a notable difference in ancient Greek between the typical names for humans and those for gods. Most of the proper names that ancient Greek human parents gave to their children are semantically transparent (unlike those in many modern European languages) in the sense that, whether they come from a single root or are combined from two roots, they most often yield a clear meaning to ordinary speakers of the language on the basis of its standard lexical items and according to its morphological rules.[33] But this was not the case for most of the important Greek gods, even though all Greek gods were born and almost all of them had parents (who might be supposed to have assigned them their names). In fact, only the very fewest of the gods' names make sense in terms of the Greek language, presumably because their identities and cults were already found in ancient Greece by the people we know as the Greeks or because they were imported into it from abroad in very early times.[34] Of the Olympian pantheon, only Zeus has a name that perhaps might be Indo-European in origin (most modern scholars used to believe, and some still do, that he was a Greek version of an Indo-European sky-god, corresponding as *Zeu pater* to the Vedic *Dyaus pitar* and Roman *Iuppiter*) – and even his name seemed thoroughly enigmatic to most speakers of ancient Greek. Only rarely did divine names coincide, more or less, with ordinary Greek words – and when that did happen, as for example with Pan (cf. *pan* [all]), the similarity that the ancients perceived was in fact deceptive and any correlation they postulated was fallacious.

Why should humans like the brothers Eteocles (*Eteo-klês* [true fame]) and Polynices (*Poly-neikês* [much strife]) bear names that every Greek could understand, while gods like the divine brother and sister Apollo and Artemis did not? This was a problem that exercised the minds of many Greeks and paved the way to a very widespread attention, if not necessarily to language in general, then certainly to names and naming, and to a fascination with apparent etymologies. Various forms of etymological wordplay, especially involving explanations of personal names but then broadening out to include other kinds of words as well, are a fundamental feature of all of Greek literature, from lyric and drama (especially comedy) to oratory

[33] Solmsen 1922. For a complete survey, see Fraser and Matthews 1987–2013

[34] See in general Burkert 2011.

and novels, and presumably they filled no less important a role in everyday life as well.[35]

The earliest poets already use a variety of etymological procedures.[36] Hesiod provides a celebrated example with his account of the birth of Aphrodite out of the genitals of Ouranos, which his son Kronos had cut off and cast into the sea (*Theogony* 188–210): Hesiod derives Aphrodite's linguistically obscure name from the seminal foam (*aphros*) arising from the castrated phallus and her traditional bynames *Cythereia* and *Cyprogenea* from the islands of Cythera and Cyprus near which she was born and where she first landed, and he implies that her epithet *philomeides* (smile-loving) came about by distortion from what had originally been *philomêdes* (genital-loving). First he tells the story, then he gives the names: The bare narrative seems at first bizarre, but it is then justified retroactively when the words that it is meant to explain are introduced; and the words too are illuminated unexpectedly by the light the mythic story sheds upon them. The etymologies are used conclusively and climactically, to rhetorical effect.[37]

Many extant texts demonstrate that starting in the archaic period and continuing through the end of antiquity, poets and other kinds of writers continued to furnish etymological explanations, especially for terms regarding the gods.[38] The philosophers, in contrast, seem to have joined the fashion for etymologizing much later, and perhaps rather more reluctantly. Among the Pre-Platonic thinkers, Heraclitus does suggest some etymologies of words connected with Greek religious rituals;[39] and then, as we have seen, the anonymous author of the Derveni papyrus etymologizes the proper names and other terms connected with the gods that he finds in his Orphic theogony. But the first philosopher who seems to have taken etymologies seriously as a philosophical issue was Plato, who devoted a whole dialogue, the *Cratylus*, to Socrates' examination, together with the Heraclitean Cratylus, of the question of the correctness of words; almost

[35] So, perhaps most creatively but surely not unrepresentatively, in Aristophanes: See Kanavou 2011. This technique is frequently discussed in ancient rhetorical handbooks under the heading of paronomasia: See Lausberg 1973, vol. I, pp. 322–25, sections 637–39.

[36] O'Hara 1996, Rank 1951, Risch 1981, Tsitsibakou-Vasalos 2007, Woodhead 1928.

[37] So too in other etymologies asserted or implied by Hesiod, e.g., *Theogony* 207–10 (Titans < *titainontas* [strainers]), *Works and Days* 1–4 (*Dia*, the accusative of Zeus < *dia* [through]). See on Hesiod's etymologies Arrighetti 1987, pp. 13–36.

[38] Euripides, *Bacchae* 286–97, provides an interesting early example of a complicated etymological explanation (not for a god this time but for an important element in a mythic narrative about the birth of a god) in which the considerable linguistic difference between the term explained and the term explaining it is justified by reference to the length of time and the ignorance of humans. See also lines 275–76.

[39] 22 B5, B14, B15 Diels-Kranz ed.

two-thirds of the text is devoted to a lengthy and detailed analysis of the names of a large number of Greek gods, and although the dialogue concludes that using words in order to know about things cannot be a satisfactory procedure because we can only know if the words are the right ones if we already know the truth concerning the things to which they refer, nonetheless it provides the most substantial extant ancient philosophical treatment of etymology.[40] Aristotle, by contrast, seems scarcely to have concerned himself with etymologizing,[41] and Epicurus hardly if at all.[42] Even in the Middle Academy and Neoplatonism, etymologies appear all in all to have played a surprisingly small role.[43]

The only ancient philosophical school that demonstrated sustained and acute interest in etymologization was the Stoa; but the Stoics certainly made up in the intensity of their own engagement with the theory and practice of etymologies for the relative indifference of philosophers from the other schools.[44] Although there is no doubt that many of the Stoics were influenced in their etymologizing by Plato's *Cratylus* (and a number of the specific etymologies they offer are already to be found in Plato), the extent and timing of Plato's influence upon them is uncertain.[45] Cleanthes (331–232 BCE), who led the second generation of the Stoic school, is attested to have etymologized the names and epithets of some traditional gods such as Apollo, Dionysus, and Persephone.[46] Then Chrysippus (ca. 280–207 BCE), the great systematizer of Stoicism, went on to extend and refine this practice: He is known to have written a number of lost works on the subject, such as *On Etymologies to Diocles* in seven books, *Etymologies to Diocles* in four books (perhaps the same work in a shorter version?), *On the Nature of the Gods*, and *On the Ancient Natural Philosophers*; and numerous surviving fragments and reports provide evidence for the etymologies he offered for the names of gods transmitted by the ancient poets.[47] Two authors whose

[40] See Barney 2001, Baxter 1992, and esp. Sedley 2003, who vindicates the philosophical seriousness of Plato's etymologies.

[41] But he does, for example, derive the word *aithêr* (ether) from *aei thein* (always running): *On the Heavens* 270b22–24 and elsewhere.

[42] Yet Epicurus's disciple Lucretius is fascinated by the ways in which words can contain other words within themselves just as objects contain atoms.

[43] Alcinous mentions the *Cratylus* in his *Handbook of Platonism* but ignores its specific etymologies. But the Neoplatonist Proclus does devote an extensive commentary to Plato's *Cratylus* in which he examines and validates many of Plato's etymologies, especially of divine names: See Van den Berg 2008.

[44] See Allen 2005; Barwick 1957, pp. 70–79; Boys-Stones 2003, pp. 189–216; Broggiato 2001; M. Frede 1987, pp. 333–37; Lloyd 1996; Long 2005; Mette 1952, pp. 2–48.

[45] See Long 2005.

[46] *SVF* 1.540–42, 546–47.

[47] E.g., SVF 2.1062–63, 1071–74, 1077, 1084–85, 1089–90, 1090–95, 1098–99.

works are still extant give a good idea of how Stoic etymology could work in practice: Philo, who uses the techniques of Stoicism to provide etymological and allegorical exegesis of the Hebrew Bible (but who in other regards is also influenced by other Greek philosophical traditions);[48] and the rhetorician and philosopher Cornutus (first century CE), whose handbook of Greek theology provides for most of the more important Greek gods a systematic exposition of their names, epithets, attributes, cult worship, visual representations, myths, poetic citations, parallels from other religions, and connections with other divinities.[49] In addition, Augustine provides a very important Latin version of what seems most likely to have been a Greek Stoic summary indicating the rules by which etymologies could be formed and offering a number of examples.[50] It was doubtless from Stoic sources that many if not all of the quasi-philosophical etymologies found in ancient exegetical literature ultimately derived.

The resulting picture that we get regarding the diffusion of allegoresis and etymology in Greco-Roman antiquity is rather surprising. Allegoresis is largely absent among most of the Pre-Socratics, Plato, Aristotle, and Epicurus and is found prominently only in the Stoa and in Neoplatonism; etymology is lacking for the most part among the Pre-Socratics, Aristotle, Epicurus, and Neoplatonism and is attested above all only in Plato and the Stoa. There is allegoresis without etymology among the Neoplatonists (and in such eclectic works as Heraclitus's *Homeric Problems*, mentioned earlier in this essay), etymology without allegoresis in Plato (and of course among ancient linguists, grammarians, and other kinds of philologists). It turns out that despite the manifest affinities between the two procedures, they do not seem to be correlated systematically with one another anywhere in antiquity except in the Derveni papyrus and among the Stoics. It is probably because many modern scholars have taken the Stoic correlation of allegoresis and etymology as the norm for all of antiquity, rather than a peculiarity of that school, that they have not sufficiently problematized that correlation in general.[51]

[48] See N. Cohen 2007, Goulet 2005a, Grabbe 1988.

[49] See Most 1989, Tate 1929.

[50] See Long 2005, Pinborg 1962.

[51] One can understand why some scholars have even been tempted to propose that the Derveni papyrus should be dated much later than has usually been thought, suggesting that it has been influenced by Stoicism. But most specialists think that the archaeological evidence precludes this hypothesis; and while the issue is not quite closed, it seems all in all most likely that the Derveni author is an eccentric forerunner of Stoicism rather than a doctrinaire adherent of it: Betegh 2007.

This suggests the following concluding reflections. The similarities, in certain regards, between allegoresis and etymology do not suffice by themselves to explain the copresence of both techniques among certain authors in classical antiquity, for if they did then we would expect to find correlations far more frequently than is the case: Such similarities may well be necessary causes for such correlations, but they are certainly not sufficient ones. Instead, we must invoke other explanatory factors as well. I would suggest (though I am aware that this is only a hint of a possible direction rather than a fully articulated theory) that the most important one is the attribution, by certain authors, of a divine status to the texts that transmit archaic divine narratives such that even their most specific linguistic features can be regarded as being filled with a sacred and redemptive meaning. This is certainly the case for the Derveni author, who claims explicitly about Orpheus, "Indeed, he is making a holy discourse [*hierologeitai*], and from the very first word continuously until his last one [...]" (VII.7–8), and "Because he speaks in a riddling way about real things during the whole poem, it is necessary to speak about each word in turn" (XIII.5–6). So, too, Philo was convinced that the author of the whole of the Pentateuch was, ultimately or by the mediation of Moses, God himself, so that every word, every letter, and every accent was divinely inspired. But other Stoics also developed theories about the pervasiveness of the rational *Logos*, throughout human history and the whole of the cosmos, such that the mythic narratives contained in early poetic texts and implied by cult objects and practices were legitimated as the expressions of the divine principle that permeates, in some form and to some degree, all of mankind and all of nature (however much they may have been misunderstood and distorted by the earlier poets and theologians themselves). Perhaps only the conviction that the actual linguistic text of the allegorized narratives was itself sacred could justify so intense a degree of attention to the hidden meanings not only of the bizarre stories, but also of the odd names and other words to be found in them, that the ancient exegete could feel encouraged, indeed obliged, to provide explanations, both allegorical and etymological, of their hidden meanings at every level, in order to confirm their divine status and to deflect any possible criticism from them. Viewed in this light, the general rarity of the correlation between allegoresis and etymology during Greco-Roman antiquity is probably to be interpreted as one consequence of the general absence of sacred scriptures that is one of the most striking features of Greek and Roman pagan polytheism in contrast with Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and other religions.

When etymology and allegoresis do appear in conjunction with one another, this is likely to be not just because they can collaborate with each other in interrelating the transmitted texts, names, language, and facts of traditional religion and literature and thereby apparently justifying them in terms of the systematic rationality of established philosophy and daily experience. For the differences in the orientation, scope, methods, and social context of these two procedures mean that there will always be some degree of tension between them. Modern scholars who examine their conjunction might do well to consider not only their doctrinal outcomes but also their rhetorical effects. For both techniques operate by informing readers – but also by surprising them: The more unexpected the connection established, the better. Very often, etymology seems to function to provide a kind of supplementary proof for allegoresis, by nailing down, to the apparently hard evidence of single words in a language that all members of the same culture have always used and revered, the sometimes questionably nebulous general claims furnished by allegoresis on the basis of texts, myths, and practices that skeptics can still question. It was only when, in the early modern period, ancient Greek became just one more dead language, and skepticism about the authority of ancient texts became widespread, that ancient allegoresis could decline in favor of other kinds of textual philology, and ancient etymology could be replaced by its modern counterpart.

3. Allegoresis and etymology in other traditions

So much, briefly, for allegoresis and etymology in the Greco-Roman traditions. How do matters stand comparatively with these techniques in some other classical traditions? There is much to be explored by experts here, including the fundamental question whether, and if so to what extent, even asking whether such traditions know of something much like them means projecting Western concepts onto non-Western cultures.

In general, etymology of various premodern sorts seems to be a characteristic of the occupation with language and with texts in all philological traditions. In some it is regulated and theorized more systematically; in others it flourishes with less attempt to control it; in few if any is it entirely absent.

With allegoresis, on the other hand, matters are less clear. Jewish interpretative traditions have theorized and applied in various periods modes of exegesis manifestly similar to Greek allegoresis, as is especially the case of

such eclectic and syncretic figures as Philo[52] (who, however, seems to have been largely ignored within the Jewish tradition itself);[53] it remains controversial to what extent this reflects Jewish familiarity with Greek practice and to what extent it grows out of indigenous habits or reflects contacts with other cultures.[54] So too, in the Islamic tradition, some of those philosophers who were most influenced by Greek authors, like Ibn Sînâ (early eleventh century) and Ibn Rushd (twelfth century),[55] have articulated complex conceptions of allegoresis, doubtless under Greek influence, at least to a certain extent; but there is also a less philosophical tradition of allegorical interpretation applied to the Qur'ān and other, literary texts whose affiliation is less clear.[56] There does not seem to be a category corresponding closely to allegory in Arabic classifications of *madjâz* (tropes), but the evidence for its theorization in Persian literature is stronger.[57] As we move further from the Greco-Roman world, the question of the possible presence of allegoresis becomes vaguer and more problematic. In Sanskrit, there seems to be little or nothing in the early period that corresponds precisely with the Western practice, despite the multiplicity of permitted modes of exegesis for the Vedas;[58] but in the second millennium CE such hermeneutic techniques do seem to develop for commentary on epics.[59] And in China, despite the prevalence of various kinds of philosophical interpretation of literature, it has long been disputed by Western scholars whether any established Chinese exegetical technique exactly corresponds to Western allegoresis. Earlier European scholars used the term "allegory" quite freely, especially when they discussed the history of the interpretation of the *Book of Odes* (*Shijing*); but more recent ones have tended instead to draw attention to the differences between the Chinese practices and Western ones and to warn against conscious or unconscious attempts to colonize Chinese culture by the use of Western concepts.[60] And yet the most recent publications,

[52] See, e.g., Alexander 2004, Niehoff 2011, Ramelli 2008, Runia 2004, and for the mediaeval period Heinemann 1950–51 and the essays in McAuliffe et al. 2003.

[53] But the destruction of Hellenistic Judaism means that no evidence is available to let us know how many Jewish readers Philo had.

[54] On allegoresis in the midrash see Stern 1991, 1996; on the concept of literal meaning, Milikowsky 2005.

[55] P. Heath 1992, Ivry 1996.

[56] McAuliffe et al. 2003, Reisner 2004.

[57] Reinert and de Bruijn 1986.

[58] See Gonda 1975, vol. I, p. 45.

[59] Bronner 2011.

[60] For various discordant conceptions regarding the *Shijing* see, e.g., Chen 2005; Henderson 1991; Kern 2007; Mittag 2004; Slingerland 2011; Van Zoeren 1991; Wang 1988; Yu 1983, 1987.

especially an important book by Zhang Longxi, have returned to a more cautious renewal of claims for the fundamental similarity of spirit between the techniques found in the Chinese and the Western exegetical traditions.[61] A single example may suffice to demonstrate the complexity of the issues involved. When the ancient commentators on the *Shijing* interpret the odes as meaning something very different from what an ordinary reader would expect – for example, what seems to be a passionate love poem is said to really be about the relation between some specific historically attested ruler and his subjects – they rarely if ever are translating a narrative of actions into an abstract structure of concepts, so a Western scholar might hesitate to qualify their practice as allegorical. And yet precisely the same kind of exegesis, which clarifies an ambiguous lyric fragment in terms of an imagined dramatic situation for which it can be explained as a disguised but plausible utterance, is also attested in ancient Greece as an allegoresis: Heraclitus (5.2) cites a fragment of Alcaeus (Frag. 208 V.) that seems to be speaking about the dangers faced by a ship at sea, and he claims that the poet is using the ship to "allegorize" (*allêgorounta*) political dangers faced by his city. So caution, circumspection, and above all intense and sustained interdisciplinary and international discussion and collaboration are certainly called for.

I do not know of detailed and wide-ranging studies of the relations between allegoresis and etymology in traditions other than the Greco-Latin ones. Much, fortunately, remains to be done.

A related issue is whether, and if so to what degree, various classical Chinese novels were composed intentionally as allegories (see Bantly 1989; Xiaolian Liu 1991; Plaks 1976, 1977) and whether allegory was used in other political (Hartman 1989) and literary (Idema 1995, Xie Liu 1983) contexts.

[61] Zhang 2005; see also esp. Saussy 1993.