

MEDIEVAL
GRAMMAR AND
RHETORIC
LANGUAGE ARTS AND
LITERARY THEORY,
AD 300-1475

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ETYMOLOGY DOSSIER

INTRODUCTION

Etymology is a central tool for any ancient and medieval thinker or writer. From classical antiquity onwards, we encounter frequent examples of etymologies of proper names or other words in literary texts.¹ Like genealogy, etymology is a way to ground thinking or interpretation in a tradition. The goal is not to establish historical origins, but to gain a grasp on the present. Not restricted to usage in literature, etymology is a form of thought, speech, and communication. With the development of the discipline of (Greek) grammar, it becomes one of the six canonical tasks of the grammarian, as e.g. in the opening section of our first western European grammar, the *Tekhnê grammatikê* attributed to Dionysius Thrax (second century BC). This task is defined as “the invention of etymology,” which is at the same time a prefiguration of the later role of etymology in rhetoric.

In ancient grammar and lexicography, etymology is mainly used to get a better grip on the meaning of a word, because it helps one understand why the word should have that particular meaning, or, put in different words, why the thing has been given that particular name, especially in relation to other expressions in that language.² Many etymological formulas will typically feature causal language: a thing has a particular name, because x (*quod, quia*). The reason (*ratio*) or cause (*causa*) for a particular name is x. The relationship between the name or word whose etymology is in question and the explanation may take many forms—which is one of the main reasons why etymology has often come in for modern ridicule. The connection between word and etymology is primarily a semantic one, usually connected with similarity of some kind in form. Letters may be added, taken

¹ On ancient etymology, see especially Amsler, *Etymology and Grammatical Discourse in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*; Herbermann, “Antike Etymologie”; Sluiter, “The Greek Tradition.” See further the studies collected in Buridant, ed., *L'étymologie de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance*, and Nifadopoulos, ed., *Etymologia: Studies in Ancient Etymology*. A very useful work of reference is Robert Maltby, *A Lexicon of Ancient Latin Etymologies*. On etymology as a “form of thought” (“Denkform”) in the Middle Ages, see Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, 495–500.

² See Herbermann, “Antike Etymologie,” 366.

away, their order may be inverted, or they may be changed into something else entirely.³ Some syllabic etymologies compose the word in question out of parts of the words that form the explanation.⁴ The semantic relationship can be of different kinds. The relationship *a contrario* has often been received very critically: these types of etymologies are based on opposites, as in the famous *lucus a non lucendo* ("a sacred grove [*lucus*] is called that because it is not light [*lucere*] there").⁵ However, such cases can more profitably be related to the phenomenon of euphemism, where a favorable word is chosen to avert evil, as in the more common name of the Furies, the "Eumenides" ("Benevolent Ones").⁶ Avoiding words of bad omen (which does suggest a semi-magical relation between name and thing) may then lead to *a contrario* usage. In any event, etymology is a highly flexible tool, with little formalized theory.⁷

Etymology has various intellectual functions. It serves a heuristic function: for example, in the case of obscure poetical words it may be a clue to meaning and orthography.⁸ It also serves mnemonic purposes by turning words into epistemological archives.⁹ The combination of these two turns etymology into a dynamic tool of interpretation and argumentation, which in the course of history subsumes large parts of the language disciplines. In grammar, as we will see, it becomes the locus for teaching morphology and lexicon. In rhetoric, it forms part of *inventio*, and in approaching literature it becomes an interpretive tool, which helps both to find a certain interpretation, to remember it, and to persuade others of its correctness. In dialectic, it is a way to look at the relation between signs and the world.

The most important classical texts on the topic are Plato's *Cratylus* (fourth century BC), Varro's *De lingua latina* (esp. books V–VII) (first century BC), and Augustine's *De dialectica* (fourth/fifth century AD). Plato's dialogue raises the question of whether the etymologies are to be taken seriously,

³ For these four categories of change, see Usener, "Ein altes Lehrgebäude der Philologie," and Ax, "Quadrivertita ratio: Bemerkungen zur Geschichte eines aktuellen Kategoriensystems (*adiectio-detractio-transmutatio-immutatio*)." They are also at work elsewhere: for example, they shape the systematic explanation for all forms of barbarism: see section on Donatus, above, pp. 93–4. Ultimately, they derive from Aristotelian physics, in which they exhaust the possibilities for change in matter.

⁴ One of the examples from the texts below is *cadaver*, which is said to stand for *cavo data vermibus* "flesh given over to the worms."

⁵ Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 1.6.34; Augustine, *De dialectica* 6 (see below) and *De doctrina christiana* 3.29.41; Martianus Capella, *De nuptiis* 4.360. See also the section on *antiphrasis*, one of the species of "allegory" in Donatus, *Ars maior* 3:6, *GL* 4:402 (and see p. 98).

⁶ Cf. Shuiter, "The Greek Tradition," 159.

⁷ Augustine's *De dialectica* (see below) represents an unusually systematic treatment.

⁸ On these two functions, see e.g. Maltby, "The Role of Etymologies in Servius and Donatus," 103–18.

⁹ See Carruthers, "Inventional Mnemonics and the Ornaments of Style."

or whether they are meant humorously or as parody. In fact, this may be a false dilemma. Since both in its heuristic and mnemonic forms etymology is not about correct historical derivation, its ends may be equally well served by both. Humor may serve an ultimately serious purpose.¹⁰ Ancient critics of arguments from etymology include Aristotle and Galen.

In this section we present texts by Augustine (*De dialectica*), Isidore of Seville (*Etymologiae*), Petrus Helias (*Summa super Priscianum*), Osbern of Gloucester (*Derivationes*), the gloss *Promisimus*, the gloss *Tria sunt*, Hugutio of Pisa (*Magnae derivationes*), and Joannes Balbus (*Catholicon*).

Augustine's *De dialectica* circulated widely in the Middle Ages and early Renaissance. It was used in the curricula of monastic and cathedral schools as well as universities, especially in the context of logic.¹¹ The treatise opens with a discussion of simple words, combined words, and simple and combined statements (propositions). In the section dealing with speaking (*loqui*) rather than with "making propositions" (*proloqui*), Augustine distinguishes the concepts of *verbum*, *dicibile*, *dictio*, and *res* (chapter 5):¹² *verbum* is a word (-form); *dicibile* is the semantic content of a word; *dictio* is the combination of *verbum* and *dicibile*, i.e. a word considered as a meaningful expression; *res* is "whatever remains beyond the three that have been mentioned" (the referent). Chapter 6, reproduced in its entirety here, is devoted to the origin of words.¹³ It develops a double theory of etymology: names/words are either given on onomatopoeic principles, imitating and reproducing sounds; or they are based on (a) a relationship of similarity between form and content (sounds and things); (b) a relationship of similarity between things among themselves; (c) proximity; or (d) contrariety. It is widely assumed that this chapter mainly goes back to Varro, and it is sometimes listed as one of his "fragments." The last part of *De dialectica* 6 shows etymology in action, both as a constructive tool that uses the force of sounds as building blocks to get a grasp (both heuristically and mnemonically) on the meaning of words, and as an analytical tool that breaks a word into the smallest components that contribute to its meaning. To an ancient etymologist working in this

¹⁰ See below on the etymology of *fenestra* (from Petrus Helias onwards). Whereas earlier etymologies had emphasized the fact that "windows" allow light into a room, Petrus Helias' suggestion treats it as an emergency exit (probably for bored students). That makes it a memorable (as well as funny) illustration of the use of syllabic etymology.

¹¹ The ascription to Augustine has been disputed. Jackson discusses this question and concludes that the ascription is authentic; see his introduction to Augustine, *De dialectica*, ed. Pinborg, trans. Jackson, 30. On its use in the Middle Ages, see *ibid.*, 18ff.

¹² See Long, "Stoic Linguistics, Plato's *Cratylus*, and Augustine's *De dialectica*," 49–55, with discussion of the Stoic antecedents.

¹³ See Allen, "The Stoics on the Origin of Language and the Foundations of Etymology."

Stoic tradition, such a "smallest component" would again be the sound of the "letter," and the associations it carries. After the chapter on the origin of words, Augustine takes up the effect of words, obscurity and ambiguity, and equivocation. Etymology is here fully integrated in a dialectical context.

Isidore of Seville (ca. 560–636) turned "etymologies" into the organizing principle of his sprawling presentation of the encyclopedic knowledge of his day.¹⁴ In the first book of his *Etymologiae* or *Origines*, devoted to grammar, he reserved a separate chapter for "etymology" itself, in this case therefore a part of grammar. By linking etymology to the dynamic practice of *interpretatio* he not only made it a suitable instrument for any reading practice, including that of the Bible, but made it a vehicle for commenting on any aspect of a concept that catches the attention of the analyst. As a central intellectual tool, it could be used to ground all practical knowledge of the world.¹⁵

Etymology usually functions within the same language; that is, a Latin word, for example, is explained by means of a Latin etymology. At later points in its history, etymology might incorporate the procedures of translation (between languages), and derivation, where all word-forms deriving from the same base word are listed.¹⁶ The latter concept may be considered a pedagogical device related to the teaching of Latin to non-native speakers. In many medieval grammars, the section devoted to *ethimologia* became the locus for discussions of morphology.¹⁷ An excerpt from the *Summa super Priscianum* by Petrus Helias (ca. 1150) presented here shows a scholar in whose work *derivatio* comes up in connection with *ethimologia*; with the following texts in these selections the distinction between and connection of the two concepts becomes a constant and explicit issue.¹⁸ When a distinction between *ethimologia* and *derivatio* is made, *derivatio* refers to "the method of creating etymologically related families of words, in which one is the principal, the others its derivatives," while *ethimologia* remains the discipline of the interpretation of words.¹⁹

Beginning in the late eleventh century, etymology comes to be closely linked to lexicography. Important texts in this respect are the *Elementarium* of Papias (ca. 1063),

¹⁴ See introduction to section on Isidore of Seville, within, pp. 232–4.

¹⁵ Cf. Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies*, 55.

¹⁶ Hunt, "The 'Lost' Preface to the *Liber derivationum* of Osbern of Gloucester," 270. In all such cases, there are (late) ancient examples (e.g. Jerome's attention to Hebrew and Greek), but this approach is now systematized. Priscian himself also sometimes collects words with the same stem, and in that sense may have served as a source of inspiration for the practice.

¹⁷ Law, "Linguistics in the Earlier Middle Ages," 191.

¹⁸ Teeuwen, *The Vocabulary of Intellectual Life in the Middle Ages*, 266–7 credits Petrus Helias with the first explicit distinction between *derivatio* and etymology, referring to R. Klinck, *Die lateinische Etymologie des Mittelalters* (1970), 17ff. and Olga Weijers, *Lexicography in the Middle Ages* (1989), 147–8.

¹⁹ Teeuwen, *The Vocabulary of Intellectual Life in the Middle Ages*, 266–7.

Osbern's *Derivationes* (third quarter of the twelfth century), the *Magnae derivationes* by Hugutio (Hugh) of Pisa (end of the twelfth century),²⁰ and the *Catholicon* by Joannes Balbus of Genoa (end of the thirteenth century). Strikingly, Osbern and Hugh adduce words from the vernacular to explain the Latin lemmata.²¹

Osbern's work comes between the commentary of Petrus Helias on Priscian's *Institutiones* and later glosses on Priscian. In this period there is a growing "vogue for *derivationes*," of which Osbern's work is a result.²² Language is presented as a stream from which rivers and rivulets branch off. The metaphor of streaming and flowing, both for thought processes and for products of language, is prominent in Osbern's work as well as in that of Joannes Balbus (see below).

The gloss on Priscian known as the "*Promisimus* gloss" (last quarter of the twelfth century; so-called from its opening word) presents two views of etymology. In one *ethimologia*, *interpretatio*, *derivatio*, and *compositio* are distinguished, with increased prominence for *derivatio* and *compositio*. The alternative view presented by this glossator is that *ethimologia* and *derivatio* are the same.²³ The *Tria sunt* gloss on Priscian (similarly named for its *incipit*), which was composed slightly later, is also concerned with the relationship between etymology, translation, and derivation.

Hugutio of Pisa (ca. 1190) was bishop of Ferrara and a famous teacher of canonical law. In his *Magnae derivationes*, he deals with a Latin characterized by its bold use of neologisms, which Hugutio connects and groups in fanciful ways in order to make them qualify as *derivationes*. This is a way to turn what Hugutio calls the "natural poverty" of Latin into the flexibility of a modern language.²⁴ His enthusiastic use of Greek betrays a virtually complete lack of knowledge of that language.²⁵ Hugutio uses the grammatical and rhetorical tradition (Cicero, Priscian, Martianus Capella), as well as other classical authors (Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Plautus, Terence, Juvenal, Persius, Statius, Lucan, and the church fathers). He probably used Osbern of Gloucester directly.²⁶ He was very influential: for example, some of Dante's Italian words must be explained with the help of his lexicon.²⁷

²⁰ Or *Thesaurus novus latinitatis*, cf. Marigo in Hugutio of Pisa, *Magnae derivationes*, ed. Marigo.

²¹ Marigo, 99 n. 5, gives examples involving Italian, French, and German.

²² Hunt, "The 'Lost' Preface," 273. On the alternative title *Panormia*, see Hunt, 269. Osbern himself refers to his work as "Derivations."

²³ See Hunt, "The 'Lost' Preface," 271f. See Joannes Balbus below.

²⁴ For the origins of the idea that Latin is naturally less rich than Greek, see Fögen, *Patrii sermonis egestas*. We have encountered this idea in Terentianus Maurus (Part 1, p. 79).

²⁵ Cf. Marigo in Hugutio of Pisa, *Magnae derivationes*, ed. Marigo, 100, 106f.; notice however the two etymologies of his own name at the end of the prologue (8).

²⁶ Hunt, "The 'Lost' Preface," 267, 1 and n. 1.

²⁷ Marigo, 107.

The *Catholicon* of Joannes Balbus (John of Genoa) dates from 1280. Any biographical information we have for Balbus comes from his own work (e.g. provenance from Genoa in the lemma with etymology of *ianua*). Balbus is mostly dependent on Papias and Hugutio, whom he cites regularly;²⁸ he also uses Eberhard of Béthune.²⁹ His grammatical sources include Priscian and Donatus, but also Isidore and the church fathers. The *Catholicon* is divided into five parts. The first four follow the division into four parts that replaced the structure of Donatus' *Ars maior* in the Middle Ages: *ortographia*, *prosodia*, *ethimologia*, *diasintastica* ("syntax"). However, the parts as listed in the "list of contents" do not quite correspond to these four. Rather, the first part deals with orthography and letters; the second with matters such as accidents and the syllable; the third part treats *de ethimologia* and the question *an translacio faciat derivacionem*, and goes on to list different kinds of nouns (e.g. adjectives, relatives, collectives, complexives, patronymica, etc.) followed by a section on the verb and the other parts of speech, and further sections on construction and regimen. Here *ethimologia* has become the heading for traditional grammatical teaching on the parts of speech. Part four is dedicated to barbarism, solecism, and figures. The fifth part returns to etymology with a lexicographical turn by adding an alphabetical word list (not just alphabetized according to first letters, but throughout), which gives etymologies for every entry. Joannes Balbus provides a good example of the way glossaries and grammatical works merge: the grammatical part deals in explanations of words, and the lexicon contains grammatical (morphological) rules.³⁰

AUGUSTINE, *DE DIALECTICA*³¹

Chapter VI. *The Origin of Words*

Any word [*verbum*] whatsoever though not its sound [*sonus*—since its sound belongs to the exercise of dialectic to dispute well about but does not belong to the science of dialectic, just as the speeches of Cicero belong to the exercise of rhetoric but rhetoric itself is not taught by means of those speeches—every word, I say, apart from its sound,

²⁸ Marigo, 100.

²⁹ On Joannes Balbus, see also Della Casa, "Les glossaires et les traités de grammaire du moyen âge," and on Joannes' sources, 43f. (with n. 43).

³⁰ Della Casa, "Les glossaires et les traités de grammaire du moyen âge," on Joannes Balbus especially 41ff.

³¹ Translation reprinted (with minor adaptations) from Augustine, *De dialectica*, ed. Pinborg, trans. Jackson, by permission.

necessarily raises questions about four things: its origin [*originem suam*], force [*vim*], declension [*declinationem*], and arrangement [*ordinationem*].³²

We ask about the origin of a word when we ask why it is called such and such; but in my opinion this is more a matter of curiosity than necessity. And I do not feel that I am bound to say this because it is the opinion of Cicero.³³ For who needs authority in such a clear matter? Even though it is a great help to explicate the origin of a word, it is useless to start on a task whose prosecution would go on indefinitely. For who is able to discover why anything is called what it is called? Discerning the origin of words is like the interpretation of dreams; it is a matter of each man's ingenuity. Let us take as an example *verbum* itself. One man thinks that *verba* are so called because, as it were, they *verberent* ["strike or reverberate on"] the ear; another man says no, they reverberate on the air. But what difference does this make to us? Their dispute is not great, for in either case the word is derived from *verberare*.³⁴ But a third man introduces a dispute. He says that we ought to speak what is true [*verum . . . loqui*]³⁵ and that the judgment of nature finds a lie hateful; therefore *verbum* is named from *verum* ["true"]. And there is a fourth piece of cleverness, for there are those who agree that a *verbum* is named from *verum*, but think that attention should not be directed to the first syllable to the neglect of the second. For when we say *verbum*, they surmise, the first syllable signifies what is true, the second sound. And this latter they decide is *bum*. Thus Ennius calls the sound of hooves *bombum pedum*; and in Greek "to shout" is *βοῆσαι* [*boēsai*]. And Virgil says *reboant silvae* ["the woods resound"].³⁶ Therefore, *verbum* is derived, as it were, from *verum boare*, that is, from a sounding of what is true. If this be so, this word *verbum* certainly forbids us to lie when we produce a word. But I am afraid that those who say this are lying. Consequently it is up to you to judge whether you think *verbum* comes from *verberare* or from *verum* alone or from *verum*

³² Augustine uses *declinatio* for "changes in both the inflection and the function of words" (*De dialectica*, 127 n. 2 [Jackson]). Three of these topics (*origo*, *declinatio*, and *ordinatio*) are the organizing principles of Varro's *De lingua latina*. In Varro, *declinatio* is grammatical inflection and other forms of word change. *Ordinatio* (the actual term used in Varro is *coniunctio*) is syntax. See Jackson's note 2, cited above, which also refers to Barwick, *Probleme der Stoischen Sprachlehre und Rhetorik*.

³³ Cicero, *De natura deorum* 3.24.61–3.

³⁴ Jackson prefers to render constructions like *a verberando* as "from *verberans*"; we have substituted the infinitive throughout. For the etymology from *verberare*, see e.g. Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 1.6.34; Priscian, *Institutiones* 8.1, *GL* 2:369.6; Isidore, *Etymologiae* 1.9.1 and *saepius*. Cf. Maltby, *Lexicon*, s.v. *verbum*.

³⁵ Note that this also seems to allude to the etymology of *etymologia* as *veri-loquium*. For the derivation of *verbum* from *veritas*, cf. Varro *apud* Donatus, commentary on Terence, *Andria* 952: *verbum dixit veram sententiam, nam verba a veritate dicta esse testis est Varro*.

³⁶ Virgil, *Georgics* 3.223. Cf. also the etymology of *vox*, where there is recourse to Greek *βοᾶ*: see Priscian, *Institutiones* 1.1, *GL* 2:6.4–5.

boare or whether its origin is a matter of indifference so long as we understand what it signifies.

Nevertheless I do wish for you to consider for a little while this topic which we have indicated briefly, namely, the origin of words, so that we might not seem to neglect any part of the work we have begun. The Stoics, whom Cicero ridicules in this matter, as only Cicero can, think that there is no word whose definite origin cannot be explained. Because it would be easy to refute them by saying that this would be an infinite process, for by whichever words you interpret the origin of any one word, the origin of these words would in turn have to be sought, they assert that you must search until you arrive at some similarity of the sound of the word to the thing, as when we say "the clang of bronze," "the whinnying of horses," "the bleating of sheep," "the blare of trumpets," "the rattle of chains."³⁷ For you clearly see that these words sound like the things themselves which are signified by these words. But since there are things which do not make sounds, in these touch is the basis for similarity. If the things touch the sense smoothly or roughly, the smoothness or roughness of the letters will produce names for those things in accordance with how smoothly or roughly the letters touch the hearing. For example, *lene* ["smoothly"] itself has a smooth sound. Likewise, who does not by the name itself judge *asperitas* ["roughness"] to be rough? It is gentle to the ears when we say *voluptas* ["pleasure"]; it is harsh when we say *crux* ["cross"]. Thus the words are perceived in the way the things themselves affect us. Just as honey itself affects the taste pleasantly, so its name, *mel*, affects the hearing smoothly. *Acre* ["bitter"] is harsh in both ways. Just as the words *lana* ["wool"] and *vepres* ["brambles"] are heard, so the things themselves are felt. The Stoics believed that these cases where the impression made on the senses by the things is in harmony with the impression made on the senses by the sounds are, as it were, the cradle of words [*cunabula verborum*]. From this point they believed that the license for naming had proceeded to the similarity of things themselves to each other. For example, take the words *crux* ["cross"] and *crura* ["legs"].³⁸ A *crux* is so called because the harshness of the word itself agrees with the harshness of the pain which the cross produces. On the other hand, *crura* ["legs"] are so called not on account of the harshness of pain but because their length and hardness as compared with other members is more similar to the wood of the cross. Next we come to the transferred use [*abusionem*] of words, when a name is borrowed not from a similar thing but, as it were, from a nearby thing. For what similarity is there between the signification of *parvum* ["small"] and the signification of *minutum*

³⁷ I.e., analysis should go on until an onomatopoeic principle is found. This principle is then extended from sound to qualities that affect the other senses.

³⁸ Jackson (*De dialectica*, 128) notes that the similarity is particularly obvious in the singular: *crux* (cross) and *crus* (leg).

["diminished"], since something can be small which is not only in no way diminished, but has even grown somewhat.³⁹ Nevertheless we say *minutum* for *parvum* according to a certain proximity of signification. But this transferred use [*abusio*] of a name is within the discretion of the speaker, for he has the word *parvum* and need not use *minutum*. This bears more on what I now wish to show, namely, that when *piscina* ["fish-pond," "swimming pool"] is applied to baths, in which there are no fish and nothing like fish, the baths are, nevertheless, named from *pisces* ["fish"] because they contain water, in which fish live.⁴⁰ Thus the term is not applied by any similarity but is borrowed because of a certain proximity. But if someone should think that men are like fish because they swim and that the term *piscina* comes from this, it is foolish to oppose his theory, since neither explanation is incongruous with the thing and each is obscure.⁴¹ It is fortunate that we can see by means of this one example the difference between the origin of a word drawn from proximity and the origin of a word derived from similarity. We can thus move on to contrariety. It is thought that a *lucus* ["sacred grove"] is so called because *minime luceat* ["it has little light"];⁴² and *bellum* ["war"] because it is not *bella* ["pretty"]; and a *foedus* ["alliance"] has that name because the thing is not *foeda* ["dishonorable"].⁴³ But if, as many think, *foedus* is named from *foeditas porci* ["the filthiness of the pig"] then its origin is based on the proximity we were talking about, since that which is made is named from that by which it is made.⁴⁴ Proximity is a broad notion which can be divided into many aspects: (1) from influence, as in the present instance in which an alliance is made through the filthiness of the pig; (2) from effects, as *puteus* ["a well"] is named, it is believed, from its effect, *potatio* ["drinking"]; (3) from that which contains, as *urbs* ["city"] is named from the *orbis* ["circle"] which was by ancient custom plowed around the area after taking auspices at the place (Virgil mentions where "Aeneas laid out the city by plowing");⁴⁵ (4) from that which is contained, as it is affirmed that by changing a letter *horreum* ["granary"]

³⁹ Translation slightly adapted.

⁴⁰ For the relationship between *piscina* and *pisces*, cf. Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* 3.29.40 and Donatus, *Ars maior* 3.6, *GL* 4:400, on tropes, where it is an example of *abusio* or *catachresis*: a word is not used in a "literal" or "proper" sense, but on the other hand there simply is no more proper term to designate the thing (the word for "swimming pool" is always *piscina*).

⁴¹ I.e., the truth of neither can be demonstrated.

⁴² Cf. introductory note to this section.

⁴³ Translation slightly adapted to bring out the opposition between *nomen* and *res*.

⁴⁴ The explanation of the origin of *foedus* is deemed obscure by Jackson, *De dialectica*, trans., 128. However, the idea is clearly that through the *foeditas porci* (i.e. by means of a filthy pig), treaties are concluded: reference is to the customary sacrifice. Cf. Varro, *De re rustica* 2.4.9, where the Greek word for pig, *ὑς*, is derived from *θύειν*, "to sacrifice." Varro claims pigs were the oldest sacrificial animals. A trace of this is to be found in the fact *quod iniitius Pacis f<o>edus cum feritur, porcus occiditur* "that at the beginning of Peace, when a treaty is concluded, a pig is sacrificed." Cf. Livy, *Ab urbe condita*, 1.24.7-9 for such a sacrifice.

⁴⁵ Virgil, *Aeneid* 5.755.

is named after *hordeum* ["barley"]; (5) or by transference [*abusionem*], as when we say *horreum* and yet it is *triticum* ["wheat"] that is preserved there;⁴⁶ (6) or the whole from a part, as when we call a *gladium* ["sword"] by the name *mucri* ["point" > "sword"], which is the terminating part of the sword;⁴⁷ (7) or the part from the whole, as when a *capillus* ["hair"] is named from *capitis pilus* ["hair of the head"]. Why continue?⁴⁸ Whatever else is added you will see that the origin of a word is contained either in the similarity of things and sounds, in the similarity of things themselves, in their proximity, or in their contrariety.⁴⁹

We cannot pursue the origin of a word beyond a similarity of sound, and at times we are unable to do even this. For there are innumerable words for which there either is no origin that one could give an account of,⁵⁰ as I believe, or for which it is hidden, as the Stoics maintain.

But now consider for a moment the way in which the Stoics think they arrive at that cradle or root [*stirpem*] of words, or more precisely the seed [*sementum*] of words, beyond which they deny that the origin can be sought or that anything can be found even if someone wishes to search. No one denies that syllables in which the letter V functions as a consonant produce a dense and powerful kind of sound, for example, in the first syllable of the words *vafer* ["clever"], *velum* ["sail"], *vinum* ["wine"], *vomis* ["plough"], *vulnus* ["wound"].⁵¹ Thus ordinary usage approves our removing this sound from certain words lest they oppress the ear. For this reason we say *amasti* ["you loved"] more readily than *amavisti* ["you loved"] and *abiit* ["he went away"], not *abivit* ["he went away"]. There are innumerable examples of this. Therefore when we say *vis* ["force"], the sound of the word is, as I said, in a way powerful, congruous with the thing signified. We can see that chains are called *vincula* from a proximity with that which they do,⁵² that is, because they are *violenta* ["forcible"] and that a *vimen* ["withe"] is so called because by it something *vinciatur* ["is bound"]. Then, *vites* ["vines"] are so named because they seize the stakes which they press upon by entwining. On account of this Terence called a bent old man *vietum* ["withered"] by similarity.⁵³ Further, the ground which is winding and worn by the feet of travelers is called *via* ["road"]. If it is thought to be called *via* more because it is worn by the *vis* ["force"] of feet, then the origin of the word returns to the realm of

⁴⁶ Where the name of the storage facility seems to indicate a different kind of grain than is actually being stored there.

⁴⁷ The topic of the "origins" of words extends beyond what we would consider "etymological" in a stricter sense to encompass a notion of "part and whole" here.

⁴⁸ Translation adapted. ⁴⁹ Translation slightly adapted. ⁵⁰ Translation slightly adapted.

⁵¹ In this section, Augustine first explains the development of several words on the basis of the properties of the sound V and the procedures of similarity and proximity. He then imagines a dialogue with someone who pursues the way back from the most complex word to the letter V. Translation slightly adapted to reflect this dialectical process.

⁵² I.e., the first category distinguished above.

⁵³ Terence, *Eunuchus* IV 4.21.

proximity. But let us derive it from a likeness to a vine or a withe, that is, from its winding. So someone asks me: "why is a road called *via*?" I answer, from winding, because the ancients called what is wound or bent *vietus* ["withered"]. For this reason they called the woods of wheels which are encircled by iron *vieti*. The questioner pursues: "Why is something bent called *vietus*?" And to this I answer, from the similarity to *vites* ["vines"]. He insists and wants to know why a *vitis* has this name. I say that it is because it *vincit* ["binds"] that which it lays hold of. He inquires why *vincire* itself is called that. We say, from *vis*. He will ask "why is it called *vis*?" He will be told the reason is that the word, with its robust and powerful sound, is congruent with the thing that is signified. That ends his questions. It is useless to inquire about the number of ways in which the origin of words is varied by the alteration of utterances, for such an inquiry is long and it is not as crucial as these matters of which we have spoken.

ISIDORE OF SEVILLE, *ETYMOLOGIAE* (FROM BOOK I, ON GRAMMAR)⁵⁴

xxix. *Etymology*⁵⁵

1. Etymology is the origin of words, when the meaning of a word or a name is established through interpretation.⁵⁶ Aristotle called this *symbolon*, Cicero *annotatio*

⁵⁴ Translated from *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive originum libri xx*, ed. Lindsay, by permission. For further information on Isidore's grammar, see the introduction to the section on Isidore, within, pp. 232–4.

⁵⁵ On this chapter, see Amsler, *Etymology and Grammatical Discourse*, 133–72; Fontaine, "Aux sources de la lexicographie médiévale," and "Cohérence et originalité de l'étymologie isidorienne"; Schweickard, "'*Etymologia est origo vocabularum*'"; Codoñer Merino "'Origines' o 'Etymologiae?'" ; Valastro Canale, "Isidoro di Siviglia: la vis verbi come riflesso dell'omnipotenza divina," 149ff. The sources for this chapter are (ultimately) Aristotle and Cicero (*Topica* 35), Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 1.6.28, and Boethius' commentary on Cicero's *Topics*. Disciplinary influence comes from grammar (technical), rhetoric (use in argument), philosophy (epistemological connection of etymology), folk-linguistics, biblical exegesis, and pedagogy (in that etymology serves the purposes of clarification and memory).

⁵⁶ *Vis verbi vel nominis*: this could, of course, also be rendered: the meaning of a verb or a noun (cf. just below in the same section). For the more general translation, cf. Amsler, *Etymology and Grammatical Discourse*, 139f. *Interpretatio* is the dynamic moment which establishes the static *origo* in a process of *inventio*, Schweickard, "'*Etymologia est origo vocabularum*,'" 3; Valastro Canale, "Isidoro di Siviglia," 160. Schweickard's proposal to change *origo* into *originatio* in order to make both halves of the definition dynamic is unnecessary. The opening of *Etymologies*, book 10 seems to protect the traditional reading (cf. Magallon, review of Barney et al., *Etymologies*, *TMR* 07.05.30, 2007). Fontaine, "Aux sources de la lexicographie médiévale," 100–1 emphasizes the importance of the etymological *process* rather than the *results*.

["annotation"],⁵⁷ because it makes names and words for things *nota* "known" by giving an example. E.g. *flumen* ["river"] is called that from the word *fluere* ["to flow"] because it increases *fluendo* ["by flowing"].⁵⁸

2. Knowledge of this fact often has a necessary use in interpreting. For once you have seen what the origin of a word is, you understand its meaning more quickly. The examination of anything is clearer once its etymology is known.⁵⁹ It is not the case however that all names have been imposed by the ancients according to nature; some have also been given arbitrarily, just as we too sometimes give names to our slaves and possessions just as we please.⁶⁰

3. This explains why an etymology cannot be found for every name, since some things have acquired names not according to their quality, how they are by nature, but on account of a decision of the human will. The etymologies of names are either given on the basis of their cause, e.g. *reges* ["kings"] from *recte agere* ["acting correctly"], or on the basis of their origin, e.g. *homo* ["man"] because he is *ex humo* ["made of dirt"], or on the basis of the contrary, e.g. *lutum* ["mud"] from *lavare* ["to wash"], whereas mud is not clean, and *lucus* ["grove"] because it is darkened by shadows and hardly *luceat* ["shines"].⁶¹

4. Some are made by derivation of nouns, e.g. *prudens* "prudent" from *prudentia* "prudence"; some also because of the sounds [*ex vocibus*], such as "chattering" [*garrulus*]

⁵⁷ Cf. Cicero, *Topica* 8.35 (where the term used is *notatio*, not *annotatio*, from this passage the reference to Aristotle's *symbolon* is also taken): *Multa enim ex notatione sumuntur. Ea est autem, cum ex vi nominis argumentum elicitur; quam Graeci etymologian appellant, id est verbum ex verbo veriloquium; nos autem novitatem verbi non satis apti fugientes genus hoc notationem appellamus quia sunt verba rerum notae. Itaque hoc idem Aristoteles symbolon appellat, quod Latine est nota.* "Many things are taken from the etymology (*notatio*). Etymology is, when an argument is derived from the meaning of a word. The Greeks call it *etymologia*, the literal equivalent of which is *veriloquium* 'true speech.' However, we prefer to avoid the unusualness of a word which is not quite fitting, and call this kind *notatio* 'signing,' because words are the signs of things. That is why Aristotle calls this *symbolon* [cf. Aristotle, *De interpretatione* 16a; rendered very freely], which in Latin is *nota*." Isidore derives this passage from Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 1.6.28. The change of Ciceronian *notatio* into *annotatio* turns etymology into the central intellectual activity. Whereas *notatio* refers to the designating (or connoting) power of words, *annotatio* is a "commenting" procedure that allows any kind of observation to be subsumed under the practice of etymology (so Fontaine, "Aux sources de la lexicographie médiévale," 101; and Fontaine, *Isidore de Séville: genèse et originalité*, 186–7).

⁵⁸ Maltby, *Lexicon* s.v. offers parallels from Varro, *De lingua latina* 5.27 and Priscian, *Institutiones* 4.16, *GL* 2:126.7.

⁵⁹ In fact, this is the hermeneutic principle on which the *Etymologiae* was composed.

⁶⁰ The philosopher Diodorus Cronus tried to prove that even *sundesmoi* ("conjunctions," particles, and some adverbs) could have (lexical) meaning. He therefore gave his slaves the names of conjunctions. This is also an example of the arbitrary imposition of names. Cf. e.g. Ammonius on Aristotle, *De interpretatione*, ed. A. Busse, *CAG* IV.5:38,17–20; Simplicius on Aristotle, *Categories*, ed. K. Kalbfleisch, *CAG* VIII:27,18–21; Stephanus Alexandrinus on Aristotle, *De interpretatione*, ed. M. Hayduck, *CAG* XVIII.3:9,21–4.

⁶¹ See the introductory note above, p. 340 for such etymologies *a contrario*.

from "loquacity" [*garrulitate*];⁶² some originate from a Greek etymology and are made into Latin forms, e.g. *silva* ["wood"], *domus* ["house"].⁶³

5. Other things have acquired their names from the names for places, cities, or rivers. Many are called whatever the language of different peoples calls them.⁶⁴ That means their origin can hardly be seen. For a great many names are foreign (*barbara*) and unknown to Latins and Greeks.

PETRUS HELIAS, *SUMMA SUPER PRISCIANUM* I 2⁶⁵

Now, since it remains to give the etymology [*etymologiam*] of this word *vox*, we will first briefly deal with the matter of what *etymologia* is. *Etymologia*, then, is the expounding of a word through either one or more other words which are better known,⁶⁶ in accordance with the characteristics of the thing designated [*secundum rei proprietatem*] and the similarity of the letters, e.g. *lapis* ["stone"] as if it were *ledens pedem* ["hurting the foot"],⁶⁷ *fenestra* ["window"] as if it were *ferens nos extra* ["taking us outside"].⁶⁸ For in

⁶² The sentence is very imprecise, but reference here is to onomatopoeic formation, with both *garrulus* and *garrulitas* somehow being related to *graculus* "jackdaw," whose name is related to the noise it produces, as is clear from Isidore, *Etymologiae*, 10.114 and 12.7.45. In that latter passage, the etymology of *graculus* from "gregarious flight" is rejected (it was defended by Varro, *De lingua latina* 5.76): "*graculus* ['jackdaw'] . . . not, as some claim, because they fly in formation [*gregatim volent*]; for it is manifest that they get their name from their sound [*ex voce*]." Cf. also Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 1.6.37.

⁶³ Varro, *De lingua latina* 5.160, *domus Graecum*: "*domus* ['house'] is a Greek word"; Priscian, *Partitiones*, *GL* 3:505.32; Isidore, *Etymologiae* 9.4.3; 15.3.1 "the word *domus* ['house'] comes from a Greek name; for the Greeks call houses *dōmata*"; for *silva*, see Sextus Pompeius Festus, *De verborum significatu quae supersunt cum Pauli epitome*, ed. Lindsay, 290 (*hulas*); Isidore, 17.6.5 where it is derived not from Greek *hulē* "material, wood," but from Greek *xulon* "wood."

⁶⁴ A reference to loan words.

⁶⁵ Translated from *Summa super Priscianum*, ed. Reilly, 1:70.86–71.103, by permission; Cf. Thurot, *Notices et extraits*, 146f. (XXII 2); text in Hunt, "The 'Lost' Preface," 271, from Paris, Bibl. de l' Arsenal 711, fol. 2^{rb}.

⁶⁶ Petrus Helias' view of etymology demonstrates both how the technique functions as part of *inventio* and as a pedagogical tool. He sees it as a clarificatory procedure, reminiscent of the technique of substituting something more familiar to explain something obscure. In the Greek rhetorical tradition, starting with Aristotle's *Topics* (e.g. 111a8), this technique was known as *metalepsis*, and it was adopted by the grammarians (notably Apollonius Dyscolus) in order to ascertain the meaning of a word. Aristotle explicitly warns against using something less familiar (*Topics* 149a5ff.). The commentator Alexander of Aphrodisias (2nd cent. AD) subsumed the etymological procedure under this technique of substitution (*in Aristotelis Topica*, ed. M. Wallies, *CAG* II.2: 175.18). "Substitution" could also take the form of a definition. See on this topic Sluiter, *Ancient Grammar in Context*, 111–13, with n. 274.

⁶⁷ Cf. Isidore, *Etymologiae* 16.3.1 *lapis* . . . *dictus quod laedat pedem*, an example of syllabic etymology.

⁶⁸ This etymology has no ancient pedigree, and given the unorthodox use of a window, it looks like an effective use of schoolboy humor for mnemonic purposes.