

## “Snake,” “Life” or “Mother of All Living”? The Meaning of the Name חַוְּוָה (Eve) and Its Role in Gen 3

KRZYSZTOF NAPORA 

The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, krzysztof.napora@kul.pl

**Abstract:** In Gen 3:20, the redactor of the Book of Genesis reports for the second time the scene of naming the woman created by God from Adam’s rib (cf. Gen 2:21–23). The name אִשָּׁה (*woman*) used by Adam in Gen 2:23 obviously relates—at least phonetically—to the noun אִישׁ (*man*). In this way, the editor expresses the idea of a certain relationship between man and woman. The existence of a similar, simple connection between the name חַוְּוָה (*Eve*) and the title אִמּוֹת כָּל־חַיִּים (*the mother of all living*) is far less obvious and this conundrum has been noticed by translators and exegetes for at least 2000 years. An echo of these difficulties seems to be perceptible in the text of the Septuagint, in the writings of Philo and Josephus, in the Targums, as well as in the writings of some ancient Christian writers. This article represents one further attempt to present the panorama of modern hypotheses concerning Eve’s name and the role this naming play in Gen 3.

**Keywords:** Gen 3:20; Gen 3; Eve, naming, the mother of all living

The Hebrew name חַוְּוָה (*Eve*) appears only twice in the pages of the Hebrew Bible. While used in Gen 4:1 (“Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, ‘I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord’”) is generally not debated by scholars, its appearance in Gen 3:20 has often been the subject of much scholarly controversy. The difficulty essentially involves two issues. First, the exegetes ponder the meaning of the name חַוְּוָה and its relationship to the title “mother of all living,” which was given by Adam to his wife. Second, since the naming of Eve constitutes a clear interruption in the course of the narrative in Gen 2–3, and it seems to be a doublet to Gen 2:23, the question that arises concerns the role of חַוְּוָה naming in the context of Gen 3. This paper will present the current state of exegetical research on the calling of the first woman in Gen 3:20. To achieve that goal we will (1) examine the textual situation of Gen 3:20; (2) discuss the etymology of the Hebrew name חַוְּוָה; and (3) give some thought to its significance in the context of the entire narrative in Gen 2–3.

This article is a thoroughly revised, updated and expanded version of my study written in Polish and published as a chapter in an edited volume: Napora, “Waż,” 15–27.

## 1. Textual Observations

The Critical Apparatus of the BHS does not provide any textual comments concerning Gen 3:20. In the BHQ, the only information concerning this verse relates to the form of the verb **הָיָה**. Nonetheless, even a cursory glance at the ancient translation of Genesis allows us to make some interesting observations. In the Greek text of the LXX, Adam gives his wife the name Ζωή (i.g. “life”), on account of her role “of the mother of all living” (μήτηρ πάντων τῶν ζώντων).<sup>1</sup> This modification of the Hebrew text illuminates the translation technique. The translator of the LXX changes the name of the first woman in order to preserve the elements of Hebrew wordplay, between the proper name **חַוָּה** and the adjective **חַיָּה**.<sup>2</sup> It is worth mentioning that in other ancient Greek translations we also find a change of the name instead of a simple transcription of the Hebrew **חַוָּה**: in Symmachus it assumes the form of ζωογόνοϛ and Aquila renders it as Αὔα in addition to ζωογόνοϛ.<sup>3</sup>

Interestingly enough, the Greek name Εὔα, being a transcription of Hebrew **חַוָּה**, appears twice in the text of the LXX: in Gen 4:1 and 4:25. Although it is an accurate translation of the MT in Gen 4:1, in Gen 4:25 it appears to be an addition, not attested in the Hebrew text.

Another difference that can be noted when comparing the MT and the LXX concerns a subordinate clause in the second part of Gen 3:20. In the MT, it is a verbal clause with the verb **הָיָה**, “to be,” used in the *qal perfectum* form, whereas in the LXX we find a nominal clause, without the verb “to be”: αὕτη μήτηρ πάντων τῶν ζώντων (literally: “she mother of all living”). We may presume that the translator was attempting to avoid the difficulty provoked by the use of the perfectum form **הָיָה** in the MT. Furthermore, the usage of the plural form in the expression πάντων τῶν ζώντων also differs from the singular form of the adjective **חַיָּה** in the MT, even though it correctly conveys the meaning of the Hebrew phrase.

The Aramaic translations of the MT (Targums) are worth further noting. The variants noticed here refer especially to Eve’s title as “mother of all that lives” (**אם כל־חַי**). Targum Neofiti seems to be closest to the MT when it renders it as **אמהון דכל חייא**. The difference concerns the number of the adjective: where the MT uses the singular form: **חַיָּה**, the Aramaic text has the plural form **חייא**.<sup>4</sup> In this way, the translator of TgNeof preserves the wordplay evident in the Hebrew text between the woman’s proper name and the adjective “living” (**חַוָּה** – **חַיָּה**). Instead

1 We find a similar version in Vetus Latina. Instead of transcribing the Hebrew *hawwāh* (appearing as *Hava* in the text of Vulgate), the translator uses the noun *vita*, “life.”

2 See Barr, *Comparative Philology*, 47; Wevers, Notes, 47.

3 See Field, *Origenis Hexaplorum*, I, 17.

4 In the TgNeof the noun “mother” appears with suffix of third person masculine plural. In this case, it does not seem to be an addition or a change of the MT, but the Aramaic way of expressing the genitive relationship by the use of so-called *proleptic pronominal suffix*. See Rosenthal, *A Grammar*, § 48.

of the general adjective חַי, “alive,” “living,” TgOnq and TgPsJ use the expression בְּנֵי־אָנָשָׁא (or בְּנֵי־נִשְׂאָא in the case of the TPs-J), literally “sons of man.” Therefore, the authors of these Targums solve the problem of the ambiguity of the Hebrew text, since the adjective חַי can be used for both human beings and animals.<sup>5</sup> According to the TgOnq and TgPsJ, Eve became “the mother of all humans,” and not “the mother of all living.”<sup>6</sup> This part of our analysis can be summed up with Jan Heller’s statement: while from the perspective of textual criticism the sentence in Gen 3:20 is clear, its content and meaning are certainly not.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. The Etymology of the Name חַוְוָה

The first problem that we need to face in the exegesis of Gen 3:20 is the etymology of Eve’s name. The identification of its root seems to be rather simple, since in Biblical Hebrew we find the verb חוּוה. In *pi’el*, this verb means “to make known,” “to declare” (e.g. Ps 19:3; Job 32:6.10.17; Sir 16:25; 42:19), “to inform someone” (e.g. Job 15:17; 36:2).<sup>8</sup> In the Hebrew Bible, it appears exclusively in poetic books, that is, in texts considered to be late.<sup>9</sup> Hence the verb is sometimes identified as an example of an Aramaism in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, it seems that the possibility of easily explaining the name of the first woman by referring to the Hebrew root חוּוה becomes problematic.

Solving the enigma of the etymology of the name חַוְוָה evidently seems un-complicated due to the fact that the redactor of Genesis explains the meaning of the name that Adam gives his wife. In his view, “the man called his wife’s name Eve (חַוְוָה, ḥawwā<sup>h</sup>), because (כִּי)<sup>11</sup> she was the mother of all living (חַיָּתָהּ אִם כָּל־חַי) (ḥāytāh ʾēm kol-ḥāy)” (Gen 3:20). The basis for this explanation, then, is supposed to

<sup>5</sup> As Jan Heller (“Der Name Eva,” 85) notes, the expression כָּל־חַי “bedeutet nämlich gewöhnlich das Tierleben oder mindestens auch das Tierleben,” e.g. Gen 6:19; 8,21; Ps 145:16; Job 12:10; 28:21; 30:23. It seems that only in Ps 143:2 this expression is used with reference to humans solely.

<sup>6</sup> See Maher, *Genesis*, 29, n. 42.

<sup>7</sup> See Heller, “Der Name Eva,” 85.

<sup>8</sup> See BDB, 296; KBL, 295.

<sup>9</sup> To this list we should probably also add Ps 52:11 as well as Hab 3:2, where the verb חוּוה is proposed as a possible correction of the MT. Furthermore, in the Hebrew Bible we also find the noun related to the verb חוּוה, namely אִתְּחַוָּה, “declaration” or “exposition” (see Job 13:17). It is worth mentioning that the verb הִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּה and its derivatives are considered to be the *hištap’el* form of the root חוּוה (it used to be considered a *hitpalel* form of the root חוּוה). See Lambdin, *Wprowadzenie*, 424.

<sup>10</sup> See KBL, *sub loco*.

<sup>11</sup> The nature of this explanation depends on how we understand the ambiguous conjunction כִּי in Gen 3:20. Although the causative meaning (“because”) is the one that most often appears in the commentaries, perhaps we should not rule out the possibility that the conjunct may have *concessive meaning* (“even though”) or *exclamative meaning* (“how!”).

be a wordplay between the name  $\text{חַוְּוָה}$ , “Eve” and the adjective  $\text{חַי}$ , meaning: “living” or “alive.” Thus, the name  $\text{חַוְּוָה}$  would refer directly to the noun  $\text{חַיִּית}$ , meaning “life.” An echo of this understanding of Eve’s name can be found in ancient translations of the biblical narrative into Greek, Aramaic, and or Latin, as we saw above. The issue that needs to be faced in such explanations consists in the necessity of explaining the difference between the middle consonants of the nouns  $\text{חַוְּוָה}$  and  $\text{חַיִּית}$ . The problem of finding a convincing solution to this difficulty led Frank Zimmermann, who published his article in 1965, to the conclusion that modern studies for the most part reject this biblical etymology linking *havvah* with *hay*.<sup>12</sup>

The problematic nature of the simple relationship between the nouns  $\text{חַוְּוָה}$  and  $\text{חַיִּית}$  can hardly be considered an original idea of twentieth-century scholarship. Already ancient Jewish exegetes as well as early Christian writers made attempts to explain this liaison more precisely or develop alternative solutions to the riddle of the first woman’s name. In his *Antiquitates iudaicae*, Flavius Josephus (ca. 37 – ca. 100) mentions the name “Eve” already at the moment of creation of the first woman: “Adam knew her when she was brought to him, and acknowledged that she was made out of himself. Now a woman is called in the Hebrew tongue Issa; but the name of this woman was Eve, which signifies ‘the mother of all living’” (*Ant.* 1,36). In this way, Josephus recalls the biblical etymology of Eve’s name, underlining a maternal dimension of it: Eve = mother of all living. And before Josephus, Philo of Alexandria (ca. 25 B.C. – ca. A.D. 50) repeatedly refers to the etymology mentioned in the LXX, according to which the name Eve means “life” ( $\text{Ζωή}$ ).<sup>13</sup> At the same time, Philo is wrestling with the question: “why did he who was born of the earth called his wife Life?” Answering it he states, that first, she was called Life, inasmuch as she was destined to be the fountain of all the generations which should ever arise upon the earth after their time” (*QG* 1,52). Then, she deserves this name, “because she did not derive the existence of her substance out of the earth, but out of living creature, namely, out of one part of the man” (*QG* 1,52). Finally, Philo attempts to solve the secret of Eve’s name by resorting to allegorical interpretation of the Scripture. According to this interpretation Eve become a symbol of sensory perception. As Philo states, it is sensory perception that distinguishes living beings from non-living beings; it is from it that ideas and impulses are born. As he states: “in real truth the outward sense is the mother of all living creatures, for as there could be no generation without a mother, so also there could be no living creature without sense” (*QG* 1,52).<sup>14</sup> There is also another interesting motif in Philo’s writing that connects the figure of the first woman with the figure of the serpent. In his work *De agricultura*, Philo writes about

<sup>12</sup> Zimmermann, “Folk Etymology,” 317.

<sup>13</sup> See Philo, *QG* 1,52 (*Les Oeuvres de Philon d’Alexandrie* 34A, 118–119); Philo, *Her.* 1,53 (*Les Oeuvres de Philon d’Alexandrie* 15, 190–191).

<sup>14</sup> “Et revera sensus est mater viventium omnium: sicut enim sine matre nulla fuit generatio, sic et sine sensu vivens (animal)” (*Les Oeuvres de Philon d’Alexandrie* 34A, 120).

the serpent of Eve being the symbol of pleasure (ἡδονῆς ὢν σύμβολον) (*Agr.* 1:108).<sup>15</sup> It seems that in this case, Philo’s exegesis is again based on allegory rather than on any philological method.<sup>16</sup>

The motif of the serpent in the interpretation of the first woman’s name also appears clearly in rabbinic exegesis. In the *Midrash Rabbah*, we read that the woman was given to the man as an advisor, yet “she played the eavesdropper like the serpent” (*Gen. Rab.* XX, 11). As Freedman comments, this play on her name  $\text{חַוָּה}$  is connected here with both the verb  $\text{חָוָה}$ , “to show forth,” i.e., “state (an opinion)” and the Aramaic noun  $\text{חַוָּה}$ ,<sup>17</sup> “serpent.”<sup>18</sup> In the same *Midrash Rabbah*, we find a famous phrase by Rabbi Akiva ben Yosef: “The serpent was thy [Eve’s] serpent [i.e. seducer], and thou art Adam’s serpent.”<sup>19</sup>

In searching for the sources of the idea present in rabbinic exegesis, regarding the name of the first woman and its connection with the serpent, it should first be noted that this exegesis is built upon certain intuitions of a philological nature ( $\text{חַוָּה} \rightarrow \text{חָוָה}$ ). As A.J. Williams states, however, when studying midrash, one gets the impression that the rabbis examined the biblical material “less on the ground of philological exactitude but more on an attitude of speculation on an already fixed tradition in an attempt to answer some of the puzzling questions concerning it.”<sup>20</sup>

Interestingly enough, the connection between Eve’s name and the serpent can also be found in the Christian literature of the first centuries. In his *Exhortation to Greeks*, Clement of Alexandria in such way describes “the absurdity and impiety of pagan mysteries and myths”: “[Bacchants] wreathed with snakes, they perform the distribution of portions of their victims, shouting the name of Eve, that Eve through whom error entered into the world; and a consecrated snake is the emblem of the Bacchic orgies”<sup>21</sup>.

Clement pays attention to the similarity between the first woman’s name and the Hebrew (or Aramaic rather) term for serpent: “according to the correct Hebrew speech, the word ‘hevia’ with an aspirate means the female snake.”<sup>22</sup> Apart from this phonetical observation. Clement does not develop the issue of the relationship between Eve and serpent. In his other writings, he follows

<sup>15</sup> See *Les Oeuvres de Philon d’Alexandrie* 9, 68–69; see also Philo, *Leg.* (*Les Oeuvres de Philon d’Alexandrie* 2, 146–147).

<sup>16</sup> Williams, “The Relationship,” 361.

<sup>17</sup> Marcus Jastrow (*Dictionary*, 452) also lists the forms:  $\text{חַוָּה}$ ,  $\text{חַוָּה}$  and  $\text{חַוָּה}$ .

<sup>18</sup> See Freedman, *Midrash Rabbah*, 170, n. 1.

<sup>19</sup> *Gen. Rab.* XX, 11. See also Skinner, *Genesis*, 85 note to verse 20. It should also be mentioned that in the Midrashic literature, the serpent does not appear with an explicitly negative connotation. It seems that this ambiguity should also be taken into account in the context of the study of rabbinic exegesis of *Gen* 3:20.

<sup>20</sup> See Williams, “The Relationship,” 359.

<sup>21</sup> Clemens Alexandrinus, *Protr.* 2,11 (LCL 92, 30).

<sup>22</sup> Clemens Alexandrinus, *Protr.* 2,12 (LCL 92, 31).

the interpretation of the LXX in pointing out the connection between the name of the first woman and life.<sup>23</sup>

Certain attempts at an alternative interpretation of the name Eve are made by Jerome. In his *Onomasticon*, we come across translations of this Hebrew name into Greek as ὄφις or θηλεῖα, or into Latin, as *calamitas*, *vae* or *vita*.<sup>24</sup> The Latin nouns *calamitas*, “misfortune” and *vae*, “woe” seem to indicate that Jerome connects the name עֵוָה with the noun עֵוָה (the slight difference regards only the first consonant of the root!), meaning “abyss,” “ruin,” “destruction.”<sup>25</sup> Interestingly, Zimmermann comes to similar conclusions in the twentieth century when he tries to explain the riddle of Eve’s name through its similarity to the Arabic root *ḥavvah*, which conveys the idea of “emptiness,” “lack,” “hunger,” and “ruin.”<sup>26</sup>

The development of biblical philology and archaeological discoveries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have provided biblical scholars with a vast amount of comparative material from the ancient Near East. This has resulted in many new theories regarding the etymology of the name of the first woman.<sup>27</sup>

In the search for this etymology, attempts have been made to look for its origins in ancient Mesopotamia. Scholars have pointed out a possible relationship between the Hebrew *ḥawwāh*, Sumerian *ama*, and Akkadian *awa*, meaning “mother.”<sup>28</sup> William R. Smith claims that the name עֵוָה can be considered just a phonetic variant of the word עֵוָה with a feminine form ending. As he notes, in Arabic the word *ḥyy* meant a group of female relatives. Presented in Gen 3:20 as *the mother of all/of each ḥyy*, Eve becomes “the Great Mother,” and “the universal eponym” from which all relationships are derived. She becomes a personification of family ties—particularly of the female line (just as Adam is a symbol of the male line).<sup>29</sup>

Likewise, Hans Bauer refers to the analogy from Arabic culture. He links the name of the first woman with the noun [עֵוָה], “tent,” “settlement, tent village,” that appears in the Hebrew Bible only in the plural form עֵוָה (Num 32:41; Deut 3:14; Josh 13:30; Judg 10:4; 1 Kgs 4:13; 1 Chr 2:23). Since in Arabic the noun “tent” (*ahl*)

23 Williams, “The Relationship,” 361–362. The same phonetic similarity is pointed also out by Eusebius of Caesarea (*Praep. ev.* 2,3,7) and Epiphanius of Salamis (*Exp. Fid.* 10,7). About a similar observation in the writing of Theophilus of Antioch, see Zeegers-Vander Vorst, “Satan, Ève,” 152–169.

24 See Lagarde, *Onomastica sacra*, 5,16–17; 164,65.

25 The same idea is taken up by Isidore of Seville, who emphasizes the complementarity of the different variants of the translation of Eve’s name Eve. As he writes: “Eva interpretatur vita sive calamitas sive vae. Vita, quia origo fuit nascendi: calamitas et vae, quia praevaricatione causa extitit moriendi. A cadendo enim nomen sumpsit calamitas” (Isidorus, *Etymologiae*, VII, 6, 5).

26 See Zimmermann, “Folk Etymology,” 318.

27 The reader will find extensive summaries of existing theories in: Vriezen, *Onderzoek*, 192–193. Zimmermann, “Folk Etymology,” 317; Heller, “Der Name Eva,” 84–102.

28 See Heller, “Der Name Eva,” 88.

29 See Smith – Cook – Goldziher, *Kinship and Marriage*, 208.

can mean “family” or “wife,” Bauer hypothesizes that in the case of Gen 3:20 הַחַיָּה understood as a “tent” can similarly refer to the term “wife.”<sup>30</sup>

Johannes Meinhold believes that the original vocalization of the name הַחַיָּה was הַחַיָּה. That *hiwwāh*, in Meinhold’s view, refers to “the mother of the tribe,” which is known in the Bible as Hivites (see Gen 10:7; Exod 3:8.17; Deut 2:23).<sup>31</sup>

On the basis of his study of Phoenician inscriptions, Mark Lidzbarski suggests that the Hebrew הַחַיָּה may be related to the Phoenician goddess חַיָּה, considered a serpent-goddess and/or deity of the underworld.<sup>32</sup> In view of this theory, the biblical הַחַיָּה would be “a ‘depotentiated’ deity, whose prototype was a Phoenician goddess of the Under-world, worshipped in the form of a serpent, and bearing the title of ‘Mother of all living.’”<sup>33</sup> This idea is also taken up by Israel Eitan who links Eve’s name with the Arabic *hawā*, “to beget,” “to bring forth.” In his view, the purpose of this verse was not “to specify the root or word from which הַחַיָּה was derived.” The redactor of Genesis intended above all to convey “etymological meaning” of this name as “mother of all humans.” As he writes, “הַחַיָּה indeed, seems to represent an archaic Hebrew equivalent of the [...] Latin *genetrix*, ‘one who brings forth, or bears, a mother,’ or figuratively ‘one who produce.’”<sup>34</sup> This equivalence relies on the relationship between הַחַיָּה and the Arabic *hawā*, “to bring forth.”<sup>35</sup>

A similar hypothesis was suggested by Heller in the conclusion of his detailed analysis of the name Eve. In his view, the title אִמַּתְּ כָל־חַיִּים may have been an honorific name or title for a particular female figure. Heller believes that the name may have had its distant roots in the worship of the Great Mother or Mother of the Gods.<sup>36</sup> In his article, however, Heller did not point to texts that might provide evidence to support or verify his hypothesis. This absence is rectified by Isaac M. Kikawada, who suggests that an expression similar to the title used in Gen 3:20 can be found in the narrative of Atra-ḥasis. In this tale, the goddess Mami is given the honorific title *bēlet-kala-ilī*,

<sup>30</sup> See Bauer, “Kanaanäische Miszellen,” 413.

<sup>31</sup> See Meinhold, “Die Erzählungen,” 128.

<sup>32</sup> See Lidzbarski, *Ephemeris*, 30. He refers to the works by Julius Wellhausen (*Reste arabischen Heidentums*) and Theodor Nöldeke (“Beiträge zur semitischen Religionsgeschichte,” 487). See also Gressmann, “Mythische Reste,” 345–367.

<sup>33</sup> Skinner, *Genesis*, 85–86, note to verse 20.

<sup>34</sup> Eitan, “Two Onomatological Studies,” 31. Halévy (“Annexe,” 523) even hypothesizes that the name הַחַיָּה is equivalent to the verb חַיָּה, with the difference that, by changing ך into ך the idea of “giving birth,” “bringing forth new life” is emphasized. חַיָּה becomes synonymous with the Hebrew form חַיָּה. The expression “mother of all [living]” also appears in Sir 40:1: “Much labor was created for every man, and a heavy yoke is upon the sons of Adam, from the day they come forth from their mother’s womb till the day they return to the mother of all (εις μητέρα πάντων).” It is also worth mentioning that in Hebrew apocalyptic literature, the name of Eve is clearly interpreted in terms of motherhood: “And I put sleep into him and he fell asleep. And I took from him a rib, and created him a wife, that death should come to him by his wife, and I took his last word and called her name mother, that is to say, Eva” (2 En. 30:16).

<sup>35</sup> Israel Eitan (“Two Onomatological Studies,” 31) also mentions two other related Arabic words: *hawiya* “to be delivered” and *hawīn* “empty bellied.”

<sup>36</sup> See Heller, “Der Name Eva,” 102.

i.e., “Lady of all the Gods” (I:247). Herbert B. Huffmon and Wolfram von Soden also point to the presence of analogous formulas used as proper names in the languages of the ancient Near East. Huffmon mentions the name *Būnu-kala-ilī*, “the Noble-one of all Gods,” confirmed in Amorite onomastics.<sup>37</sup> Von Soden provides some examples from the Akkadian language area (e.g. *Bin-kali-šarri*).<sup>38</sup> To the same group we can also add the Akkadian *Šar-kali-šarri*, “king of all the kings.” As Kikawada states, in all of these cases, we are dealing with a name consisting of three elements, where in the middle there is word *kala* or *kali*—an equivalent of the Hebrew כָּל, “everything,” “the whole.”<sup>39</sup> The title אִם כָּל־חַי, “mother of all living,” that Eve receives in Gen 3:20 is exactly of the same nature.

According to Kikawada, it is noteworthy that the moment of naming the goddess Mami in the sequence of the Atra-ḥasis narrative corresponds exactly with the moment at which Eve receives her name in the Genesis account. This moment occurs at the end of the episode, which talks about the creation, just prior to episode about the first birth. All these observations lead Kikawada to conclude that behind the figure of Eve in the biblical narrative we can identify the figure of the creator or mother goddess Mami, and that the name חַוָּה used by the biblical redactor is an onomastic form rooted in the title אִם כָּל־חַי.<sup>40</sup>

Kikawada also quotes the conclusions of Jonas Greenfield, who states that the form *ḥawwāh* “may represent a sort of *qattāl* form based on *ḥwy*.” Since in Ugaritic and Phoenician *ḥwy* is the factitive of *hyy*, it can be assumed that *ḥawwāh* denotes “the one who gives life.”<sup>41</sup>

The opinions of the exegetes mentioned above reveal to us a rich network of possible connections and interrelationships between the various traditions of the ancient Near East. Nonetheless, it is difficult to resist the impression that as a result, they lead to conclusions that are apparent even to a reader who has only a rudimentary knowledge of biblical Hebrew and is not armed with the weapons of modern comparative philology. The association of Eve’s name with life, or mother, i.e. “the one who gives life,” comes from a simple reading of the biblical text. This association seems to be planned and intended by the biblical editor. It appears to be a part of the so-called *folk etymology*.<sup>42</sup> This is occasionally rejected by some exegetes due to its unscientific nature. However, perhaps the decision to discard folk etymology is made too hastily.

<sup>37</sup> See Huffmon, *Amorite*, 127.

<sup>38</sup> See von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*, 127a.

<sup>39</sup> See Kikawada, “Two Notes,” 34.

<sup>40</sup> See Kikawada, “Two Notes,” 34. The author also notices a contrast between the Akkadian Mami and the Biblical Eve. As he points out, the biblical material contains significant corrections to the Akkadian epic. Whereas Mami in the Atra-ḥasis story is the creatress, the woman who receives the honorific title in Gen 3:20 is the creature. The Hebrew Bible explicitly demythologizes the figure of the “mother of all that lives.” See *ibidem*, 35.

<sup>41</sup> Kikawada, “Two Notes,” 34, n. 9. See also Layton, “Remarks,” 31.

<sup>42</sup> The term comes from German term *Volksetymologie*, coined by Ernst Förstemann in 1852.

The biblical redactor does not seem to aim at producing an etymological treatise of a scientific nature in the modern sense of the word. A lack of relevant scientific competence seems to be only one of the reasons in this regard—and not the most important one. If we would like to describe in scholarly language what the biblical redactor is doing in Gen 3:20, we could define it as a paronomastic game, a so-called pseudoe-tymological figure. It occurs in the case, when the similarity in sound between adjacent words in a sentence creates the appearance of their etymological bond. In our view, it is exactly the phonetical similarity between  $\text{הַיָּהוּבָה}$  i  $\text{יָבִי}$  lub  $\text{הַיָּהוּבָה}$  (and not exact etymology!) that was intended as sufficient for the listener or reader of the biblical narrative to grasp the significance of the naming the first woman “Eve” in the context of Gen 3. We will attempt to explore this significance in the third part of our article.

### 3. The Meaning of the Name $\text{הַיָּהוּבָה}$ in the Context of Gen 2–3

Gen 3:20 is sometimes considered an editorial insertion<sup>43</sup> and the proponents of this thesis present at least three arguments in support of it. First, the naming of Eve appears to be a duplicate of Gen 2:23, where the woman’s name is first mentioned. Furthermore, the positive tone of this verse seems to be in sharp contrast with the material both preceding and following it. The naming of  $\text{הַיָּהוּבָה}$  occurs in the context of punishment and cursing, which are the consequences of the first parents’ fall (see Gen 3:14–19). Then, almost immediately after the naming (separated only by the mysterious scene of Adam and Eve being dressed in clothes made of animal skins, Gen 3:21), the motif of exile from Paradise follows (Gen 3:22–24). Lastly, we must mention a grammatical problem. In the context of Gen 3:20, the expression “she became ( $\text{הַיָּהוּבָה}$ ) the mother of all that lives” seems a bit premature: here, it would be much more natural to use the phrase “she will become  $\text{הַיָּהוּבָה}$  the mother of all that lives.”<sup>44</sup>

Starting with the latter of stated arguments, the problem in Gen 3:20 is the verb  $\text{הָיָה}$ , used in the *perfectum* form. According to Hermann Gunkel’s opinion, shared by Gerhard von Rad as well, the use of the *perfectum* form suggests that Eve had indeed already given birth to offspring.<sup>45</sup> The sentence seems to fit better after Gen 4:1, where we find mention of Eve actually becoming a mother: “Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, ‘I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.’” As reported by Victor P. Hamilton, this difficulty can be solved in two

<sup>43</sup> See Zob. Cassuto, *Genesis*, 170; Vriezen, *Onderzoek*, 191; Westermann, *Genesis*, 268.

<sup>44</sup> It should be noticed that this maternal role of the first woman has already been signaled in Gen 3:16.

<sup>45</sup> See Gunkel, *Genesis*, 19; von Rad, *Genesis*, 96.

ways.<sup>46</sup> First, this form can be understood as *perfectum propheticum*,<sup>47</sup> that is, as a form of *perfectum*, which is an announcement of what will happen in the future. The biblical editor, speaking from the position of an omniscient narrator, reveals a glimpse of the mystery concerning the future. The use of the form *perfectum*, according to researchers, emphasizes the certainty and inevitability of the announced future. Second, the form  $\text{חַיָּה}$  can be understood as the so-called *precativa (optative) perfect*; in this case it could be understood as a kind of wish or request (prayer?) that his spouse become a mother: “the mother of all that lives.”

The alleged doublet of Gen 3:20 in relation to Gen 2:23 does not seem to present a serious difficulty. These verses are clearly different. Whereas  $\text{חַיָּה}$  in Gen 2 is rather a name or generic name,  $\text{חַיָּה}$  in Gen 3 is a personal name. This name defines the specific vocation of the first woman: she is to become the mother of the living.<sup>48</sup> To specify the name of this pre-mother while describing the beginnings of the human family tree seems fully understandable. It is worth noting that the naming of the woman follows immediately after the words addressed by God to the first man, where his relationship to the earth is emphasized (Gen 3:17–19). This is a natural allusion and a kind of etiology linked to the name  $\text{חַיָּה}$ . Gen 3:20 contains a similar explanation in relation to the first woman. Finally, as the naming of Eve by Adam is framed with the consequences of the first parents’ fall, formulated by God, it may signify one element of the man’s domination over woman.<sup>49</sup> In this sense, Gen 3:20 seems to be an integral part of the narrative unfolding in Gen 3.

Exegetes’ opinions about the meaning of Gen 3:20 in the context of punishment and expulsion from Paradise vary depending on how the name  $\text{חַיָּה}$  is interpreted. Zimmermann explains this scene as Adam’s bitter statement, who holds his wife responsible for the fall described in Gen 3. It is because of her that the transition from  $\text{עֵדֶן}$  (Eden) to  $\text{חַיָּה}$  happens, which, according to Zimmermann, conceals the idea of “emptiness,” “lack,” “hunger” and “ruin.”<sup>50</sup> It seems that the proponents of the “snake” interpretation of the name  $\text{חַיָּה}$  also follow a similar direction.

An alternative solution perceives in Gen 3:20 a kind of irony. Tribble thinks that Adam ironically defines the woman with a name referring to “life,” but at the same time, in a sense, “robs” her of this life and reduces her to the level of animals by

<sup>46</sup> See Hamilton, *Genesis*, 205.

<sup>47</sup> This form is also sometimes described as *perfect of certitude*, *rhetorical future*, *accidental perfective*, or *perfect of confidence*. More on this issue see GKC, § 106–107; Van der Merwe – Naudé – Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew*, § 19.2.5(ii) and page 364; Arnold – Choi, *A Guide*, § 3.2.1d; Walke – O’Connor, *Hebrew Syntax*, § 30.5.1e; Joüon – Muraoka, *A Grammar*, §112 h; Rogland, *Non-Past Uses*, 53–114.

<sup>48</sup> Richard S. Hess (*Studies*, 111–112) points out that despite the controversy over both, the meaning of the name and the role of Gen 3:20 in the present context, the name Eve is the first personal name to appear in Scripture. It defines Eve as someone distinct from the first man (though “bone of bones and flesh of flesh” at the same time; cf. Gen 2:23) and identifies her as “the mother of all life.”

<sup>49</sup> Zob. Cassuto, *Genesis*, 170.

<sup>50</sup> See Zimmermann, “Folk Etymology,” 318.

the fact of giving her a name.<sup>51</sup> Williams locates the ironic aspect slightly differently. He believes that it lies in the fact of “condemning” a woman to the role of the mother of all that lives. What is supposed to be an element of punishment for the fall becomes at the same time a blessing, thanks to which Adam and Eve not only survive outside the garden: they also constitute the beginning of the human race.<sup>52</sup>

It seems, however, that Gen 3:21 can be understood without having to resort to irony or to somewhat sophisticated hypotheses about the possible etymology of this name. The emphasis on the connection of the woman’s name with the idea of life and the title “mother of all that lives” become a sign that, despite humanity’s fall, God does not take away the gift of life. In a dramatic situation of disobedience, which should inevitably bring death to people, a new chapter in the life of humankind begins. Although it is Adam and not God who gives the woman the name “life” or “she who gives life,” there is no doubt as to who is ultimately the Author and the Giver of life. It is to Him that the final word belongs. The same God, who punishes disobedience and expels from Eden, is also the one who upholds His blessing of life (Gen 3:20) and clothes people in order to let them to survive beyond Paradise (Gen 3:21).

## Conclusion

Although it is mentioned only twice in the pages of the Hebrew Bible, the name of the first woman is one of the best known, not only among biblical scholars, theologians, or people of higher religious culture, but also among those who do not read or know the Bible. This almost universal familiarity with the name “Eve” is not matched by a general awareness regarding the richness of possible associations and connections of the Hebrew name חַוָּה, with the wider cultural context of the ancient Near East.

As we have seen, the tension between the form חַוָּה and the explanation of it presented in Gen 3:20, “the mother of all that lives,” has resulted in the multiplicity of forms of the first woman’s name that we find in ancient translations and the writings of ancient authors. This tension also became the impulse for researchers to carry out etymological searches among other languages belonging to the same cultural circle as Hebrew. These studies have made it possible for us to appreciate the multidimensionality of the name Eve, while pointing to possible sources of the inspiration of the biblical redactor. Without questioning the results of these studies, and while acknowledging the need for still more analysis of the question, we suggest that in the explanation of the name Eve in Gen 3:20 we are dealing with a pseudoetymological figure to

<sup>51</sup> See Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric*, 133. Cf. Ramsey, “Is Name-Giving,” 24–35.

<sup>52</sup> See Williams, “The Relationship,” 373–374.

wit an element of folk etymology. Its use, we propose, allowed the listeners and readers of the biblical text to discover an unbreakable connection between the figure of the first woman and the life that continues and develops despite the crisis described in Gen 3.

This richness of the Hebrew name  $\text{חַוְּוָה}$ , laboriously discovered over the centuries and concisely presented in this paper, has most often been available only to a narrow group of specialists and enthusiasts of the biblical text. We now hope that this modest study will contribute, at least to some extent, to its further dissemination. However, should these hopes prove to be misplaced, the results obtained in this study allow us to believe that the message of the biblical text is not reserved exclusively for philologists and exegetes. They make it possible to believe that the biblical redactor is leading the reader towards the recognition of the deepest truth about a God who is a lover of life, about a blessing that lasts, about a life that is stronger than death.

## Bibliography

- Arnold, B.T. – Choi, J.H., *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003).
- Barr, J., *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns 1987).
- Bauer, H., “Kanaanäische Miszellen,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 71 (1917) 410–313.
- Baumgartner, W. et al., *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill 1994–2000) I–IV (= KBL).
- Brown, F. – Driver, S.R. – Briggs, C.A., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson 2003) (= BDB).
- Cassuto, U., *Commentary on the Book of Genesis. I. From Adam to Noah. Genesis I – VI.8* (Jerusalem: Magnes 1961).
- Clemens Alexandrinus, *Protrepticus*, in: Clement of Alexandria, *The Exhortation to the Greeks. The Rich Man’s Salvation. To the Newly Baptized* (trans. G.W. Butterworth; Loeb Classical Library 92; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press – London: Heinemann 1960).
- Eitan, I., “Two Onomatological Studies: The Name Eve – The Name Abraham,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 49 (1929) 30–33.
- Field, F. (ed.), *Origenis Hexaplorum quae supersunt, sive veterum interpretum Graecorum in totum Vetus Testamentum fragmenta* (Oxford: Clarendon 1875) I–II.
- Freedman, H. (trans.), *Midrash Rabbah. Genesis* (ed. 3; London – New York: Soncino 1983) I.
- Gressmann, H., “Mythische Reste in der Paradieserzählung,” *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 10 (1907) 345–367.
- Gunkel, H., *Genesis* (Handkommentar zum Alten Testament 1; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1901).

- Halévy, J., “Annexe au procès-verbal de la séance du 13 novembre 1903: 1. Le nom d’Eve. 2. Nabuchodonosor. 3. Juges, VI, 37. 4. Psaumes, XVII, 13, 14,” *Journal asiatique* 10 (1903) 522–528.
- Hamilton, V.P., *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17* (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1990).
- Heller, J., “Der Name Eva,” *An der Quelle des Lebens. Aufsätze zum Alten Testament* (eds. J. Heller – W. H. Schmidt; Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentum 10; Frankfurt am Main et al.: Lang 1988) 83–103.
- Hess, R.S., *Studies in the Personal Names of Genesis 1–11* (Alter Orient und Altes Testament 234; Kevelaer – Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag 1993).
- Huffman, H.B., *Amorite Personal Names in the Mari Texts. A Structural and Lexical Study* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP 1965).
- Isidorus, *Etymologiae*, in: *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive originum Libri XX* (Scriptorum Classicorum Bibliotheca Oxoniensis; Oxonii: e Typographeo Clarendoniano 1911).
- Jastrow, M., *Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York: Judaica Treasury 2004).
- Joüon, P.M., – Muraoka, T., *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Subsidia biblica 27; Roma: PIB 2006).
- Kautzsch, E. (ed.), *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar* (trans. A.E. Cowley; ed. 2; Oxford: Clarendon 1910).
- Kikawada, I.M., “Two Notes on Eve,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91 (1972) 33–37.
- Lagarde, P.D., *Onomastica sacra* (Hildesheim: Olms 1966).
- Lambdin, T.O., *Wprowadzenie do hebrajskiego biblijnego* (Materiały Pomocnicze do Wykładów z Bibliistyki 11; Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL 2011).
- Layton, S.C., “Remarks on the Canaanite Origin of Eve,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 59/1 (1997) 22–32.
- Lidzbarski, M., *Ephemeris für semitische Epigraphik. I. 1900–1902* (Giessen: Ricker 1902).
- Maher, M., *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan. Genesis* (The Aramaic Bible 1B; Collegeville, MI: Liturgical Press 1992).
- Meinhold, J., “Die Erzählungen vom Paradies und Sündenfall,” *Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft. Karl Budde zum Siebzigsten Geburtstag am 13. April 1920 überreicht von Freunden und Schülern und in ihrem Namen* (ed. K. Marti; Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 34; Giessen: Töpelmann 1920).
- Napora, K., “«Wąż», «Życie» czy «Matka wszystkiego, co żyje»? Znaczenie imienia אֵוָה (Ewa) i jego funkcja w Rdz 3,” “Niewiastę dzielną kto znajdzie?” (*Prz 31,10*). *Rola kobiet w biblijnej historii zbawienia* (eds. A. Kubiś – K. Napora; Analecta Biblica Lublinsensia 14; Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL 2016) 15–27.
- Nöldeke, T., “Beiträge zur semitischen Religionsgeschichte. Der Gott Israel’s und die Götter der Heiden by Friedr. Baethgen,” *Zeitschrift Der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 42/3 (1888) 470–487.
- Philo D’Alexandrie, *De agricultura* (ed. J. Pouilloux; Les Oeuvres de Philon d’Alexandrie 9; Paris: Cerf 1961).
- Philo D’Alexandrie, *Legum allegoriae I–III* (ed. C. Mondésert; Les Oeuvres de Philon d’Alexandrie 2; Paris: Cerf 1962).

- Philo D'Alexandrie, *Quaestiones et solutiones in Genesim I et II e versione armeniaca* (ed. C. Mercier; Les Oeuvres de Philon d'Alexandrie 34A; Paris: Cerf 1979).
- Philo D'Alexandrie, *Quis rerum divinarum heres sit* (ed. M. Harl; Les Oeuvres de Philon d'Alexandrie 15; Paris: Cerf 1966).
- von Rad, G., *Genesis. A Commentary* (The Old Testament Library; Philadelphia, PA: Westminster 1973).
- Ramsey, G.W., "Is Name-Giving an Act of Domination in Genesis 2:23 and Elsewhere?," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50 (1988) 24–35.
- Rogland, M., *Alleged Non-Past Uses of Qatal in Classical Hebrew* (Studia Semitica Neerlandica 44; Assen: Royal Van Gorcum 2003).
- Rosenthal, F., *A Grammar of Biblical Aramaic* (ed. 6; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 1995).
- Skinner, J., *Genesis* (International Critical Commentary 1; Edinburgh: Clark 1910).
- Smith, W.R. – Cook, S.A. – Goldziher, I., *Kinship and Marriage in Early Arabia* (London: Black 1903).
- von Soden, W., *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 1965) I–III.
- Trible, P., *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Overtures to Biblical Theology 2; Philadelphia: Fortress 1978).
- Van der Merwe, C.H.J. – Naudé, J.A. – Kroeze, J.H., *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar* (Biblical Languages: Hebrew 3; London: Sheffield Academic Press 1999).
- Vriezen, T.C., *Onderzoek naar de Paradijsvoorstelling bij de oude semietische Volken* (Wageningen: Veenman & Zonen 1937).
- Waltke, B.K. – O'Connor, M., *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns 1990).
- Wellhausen, J., *Reste arabischen Heidentums* (Berlin: Reimer 1897).
- Westermann, C., *Genesis 1–11* (A Continental Commentary; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press 1994).
- Wevers, J.W., *Notes on the Greek Text of Genesis* (Septuagint and Cognate Studies Series 35; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press 1993).
- Williams, A.J., "The Relationship of Genesis 3.20 to the Serpent," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 89 (1977) 357–374.
- Zeegers-Vander Vorst, N., „Satan, Éve et le serpent chez Théophile d'Antioche,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 35 (1981) 152–169.
- Zimmermann, F., "Folk Etymology of Biblical Names," *Volume du Congrès – Genève 1965* (eds. G.W. Anderson – P.H. De Boer – G.R. Castellino; Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 15; Leiden: Brill 1966) 311–326.