VULGATA IN DIALOGUE • 10 (2026) 153–164

# *Canes Domini sumus*

## The Work of the Exegete in a Text of Rupert of Deutz

**Lucas Brum Teixeira**

University of Würzburg

lucas.brum@uni-wuerzburg.de GND 119604595X https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2834-0456

**ABSTRACT** • This study examines a hunting metaphor in Rupert of Deutz's commentary on Micah 2:4–5 and asks how it defines the work of the Christian exegete. Rupert compares interpreters to the Lord's hunting dogs, the true sense of Scripture to prey, and Scripture itself to a dense forest. The article situates this imagery within Rupert's Benedictine setting, the difficulty of the Micah passage, and the medieval practice of reading through patristic authorities, especially Jerome. Source-critical discussion relates the pursuit of truth to Clement of Alexandria and Xenophon, while the positive symbolism of dogs is traced through Cassiodorus and Gregory the Great. Rupert's distinctive contribution is the synthesis of two inherited motifs: hunting as the strenuous search for truth and the dog as an image of the preacher who protects and edifies the Church. The metaphor, therefore, presents exegesis as persistent, demanding, and pastoral work. The successful interpreter follows the elusive sense through textual difficulties, rejoices before the Lord on grasping it, and returns with an interpretation that nourishes and delights the reader.

**KEYWORDS** • Rupert of Deutz – medieval exegesis – Micah – metaphor – hunting dogs – patristic tradition – Jerome – Cassiodorus

**ZUSAMMENFASSUNG** • Der Beitrag untersucht eine Jagdmetapher in Ruperts von Deutz Kommentar zu Mi 2,4–5 und fragt, wie sie die Arbeit des christlichen Exegeten bestimmt. Rupert vergleicht die Ausleger mit Jagdhunden des Herrn, den wahren Sinn der Schrift mit der Beute und die Schrift selbst mit einem dichten Wald. Die Untersuchung ordnet diese Bildsprache in Ruperts benediktinischen Kontext, die Schwierigkeit der Micha-Stelle und die mittelalterliche Auslegung anhand patristischer Autoritäten, besonders des Hieronymus, ein. Quellenkritisch wird die Wahrheitssuche mit Clemens von Alexandrien und Xenophon verbunden; die positive Symbolik des Hundes wird über Cassiodor und Gregor den Großen erschlossen. Ruperts eigenständiger Beitrag liegt in der Verbindung zweier überlieferter Motive: der Jagd als mühevoller Suche nach Wahrheit und des Hundes als Bild des Predigers, der die Kirche schützt und erbaut. Die Metapher beschreibt Exegese daher als beharrliche, anspruchsvolle und pastorale Arbeit. Der erfolgreiche Ausleger verfolgt den schwer fassbaren Sinn durch die Schwierigkeiten des Textes, freut sich vor dem Herrn, wenn er ihn erfasst, und bringt eine Deutung zurück, die den Leser nährt und erfreut.

**SCHLAGWORTE** • Rupert von Deutz – mittelalterliche Exegese – Micha – Metapher – Jagdhunde – patristische Tradition – Hieronymus – Cassiodor

© 2026 The Author(s)
This article is licensed under CC BY 4.0

https://doi.org/10.25788/vidbor.v10i1.1617

## Introduction

In his commentary on the book of Micah, the medieval Benedictine abbot Rupert of Deutz (1070–1129) describes the work of the exegete using a compelling metaphor: that of "hunting dogs." As will be discussed here, Rupert's metaphor is original in its synthetic character; it represents well the main features of medieval exegetical tradition; and it revives and highlights the rhetorical force of a trope[1] "that we live by," to paraphrase the title of a famous study on metaphor.[2]

## 1 Rupert: The Author, His Time and Work

Perhaps it may be useful to begin with some essential information about Rupert, his time and his work. The *Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften* offers in a few lines a helpful summary of Rupert's life and time, which is worth quoting in full[3]:

> Rupert was born around 1076 in the vicinity of Liège (Lüttich/Luik, Belgium). As a boy, he was sent to the monastery of Saint Lawrence, where later he took the monastic vows. In the wake of the Investiture Controversy, he went into exile with Saint Lawrence's abbot, Berengar, until he was admitted by abbot Cuno of the monastery of Siegburg (diocese of Cologne, North Rhein-Westphalia).[4] In 1121, when he had already gained some fame as commentator of the Holy Scriptures, he was appointed to the Abbot's seat of Saint Mary and Saint Heribert in Deutz (also diocese of Cologne). He died on March 4th, 1129.

From this outline, three pieces of information are especially noteworthy. First, that Rupert from an early age was entrusted to the care of the Benedictines from whom he received his education and whom he later joined, following the path of religious life. By the time of Rupert, the Benedictine order, founded in the first half of the sixth century, had already made a name for itself in biblical exegesis. The Benedictines are credited with copying and transmitting the biblical text in the West; notable figures in biblical exegesis in the first millennium were Benedictines, such as Pope Gregory the Great[5] and

---

1 "Tropos est verbi vel sermonis a propria significatione in aliam cum virtute mutatio." Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, VIII.6.1. Quintilian's definition of a trope is an apt introduction to the theme of the power of metaphors in conveying meaning, which lies at the heart of the present study.

2 See George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*. University of Chicago Press, 1980 (new revised edition 2003). See also Umberto Eco. "3. La metafora nel Medioevo Latino". *Doctor Virtualis*, fasc. 3, luglio 2008. https://doi.org/10.13130/2035–7362/51 (Italian and English).

3 As will be the case elsewhere in this paper, the translation is ours unless otherwise stated.

4 The original German text runs as follows: "Geboren um 1076 in der Gegend von Lüttich (Liège/Luik, Belgique). Er wurde als Knabe dem Kloster St. Laurentius in Lüttich übergeben, wo er später die Mönchsgelübde ablegte. Im Zuge des Investiturstreits ging er mit Abt Berengar von St. Laurentius 1092–1095 ins Exil, bis er unter Abt Kuno im Kloster Siegburg (O.S.B., Nordrhein-Westfalen, dioec. Köln) Aufnahme fand. 1121, als er bereits einigen Ruhm als Kommentator der Heiligen Schrift erlangt hatte, wurde er auf den Abtsstuhl von St. Marien und St. Heribert in Deutz (O.S.B., Nordrhein-Westfalen, dioec. Köln) berufen. † 1129 März 4." See https://geschichtsquellen.de/autor/4652. See also "Rupert von Deutz" in *DBE*, 8:470; *LThK*, 8:1366–1377.

5 On the significance of Gregory for the western exegetical tradition see Kessler, "Gregory the Great," *HBOT* 1/2, 135–147.

the Venerable Bede.[6] The latter's monastery in today's north England was responsible for producing Codex Amiatinus, the primary surviving manuscript of the Vulgate text (currently housed in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana in Florence, Italy). Second, Rupert spent most of his life in the context of the Investiture Controversy—the conflict between Church and State regarding the election and appointment of bishops, abbots, and even the Pope.[7] His experience of exile with Abbot Berengar, which "he laments in his *Carmina de sancto Laurentio*,"[8] must have also shaped his life and views. Regarding the issue of the investitures, it may be noticed that Frederick I (ca. 1075–1131), archbishop of Cologne from 1100 until his death, who appointed Rupert as abbot of Deutz in 1120, was appointed archbishop by the Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV (1050–1106). Additionally, it appears that Frederick either commissioned Rupert to write the commentary on the twelve Minor Prophets or was involved in the project. Rupert in fact mentions him in the very first paragraph of his commentary.[9] Third and last, at the time Rupert composed his commentary on the Minor Prophets, although the exact date remains uncertain (in any case, sometime in his late years), he had already acquired fame as a Bible commentator. This fame is best understood considering that Rupert's opus magnum, *De sancta trinitate et operibus eius* (1112–1117),[10] is a commentary on almost the entire Old Testament from Genesis to Daniel. In addition to this work and his commentary on the corpus of the twelve Minor Prophets, Rupert's surviving works also include a commentary on Job (PL 168: 961–1196C), the Song of Songs (PL 168:837–961), Ecclesiastes (PL 168:1195–1306D), the Gospel of Matthew (PL 168:1307–1634C), the Gospel of John (PL 169:201–0826A), and on the book of Revelation (PL 169:825–1214C). In the words of Engelbert, "Rupert ist einer der bedeutendsten und originellsten Vertreter der ‚monastischen Theologie'."[11]

---

[6] On Bede see for instance Holder, "Bede," *HBR* 3:733–735; Leonardi, "Old Testament Interpretation in the Church," *HBOT* 1/2, 185–188.

[7] See in this regard, for example, Claudia Zey, "Der Investiturstreit – Neuere Perspektiven der Forschung," in *Konflikt und Wandel um 1100: Europa im Zeitalter von Feudalgesellschaft und Investiturstreit*, ed. Thomas Kohl, EM 36 (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 13–31. The author has also published in 2017 a monograph on the theme: Claudia Zey, *Der Investiturstreit* (Munich: C.H.Beck Wissen, 2017).

[8] Heinrich Holzer, "Rupert of Deutz," in *Religion Past and Present Online*, Brill, 2011. https://doi.org/10.1163/1877–5888_rpp_SIM_025107

[9] "Spiritui sancto, et omnibus, quorum per os ipse locutus est, sanctis prophetis, vir illustrissime Coloniensium archipraesul Friderice, jucundum esse nostrum eloquium non vane speramus, dum Christi Filii Dei sacramenta praedicantes, ipsorum testimoniis opportune et convenienter utimur" ("To the Holy Spirit, and to all the holy prophets through whose mouths he himself spoke, most illustrious archbishop of Cologne, Frederick, we do not hope in vain that our speech will be pleasing, as we, preaching the sacraments of Christ the Son of God, make use of their testimonies in a timely and fitting manner"). *Comm. in duodecim prophetas minores*, prologus (PL 167:9A).

[10] See PL 167:197–1828.

[11] See Engelbert, "Rupert von Deutz," *LThK* 8:1367. On the general theme of monastic exegesis as a particular form of exegesis, see Dahan, "Genres, Forms and Various Methods in Christian Exegesis in the Middle Ages," 200–215.

## 2 Rupert's Metaphor in Context

The metaphor with which this paper is concerned is part of a digression in Rupert's commentary to Mic 2:4–5, in his *Commentarium in duodecim prophetas minores*.[12] Rupert's digression reads as follows:

> Sensum Scripturarum sensum verum quaerere et indagare cupientes, silvaticarum venationum recordamur, quarum in usu quinam canes veraciter venatici sint, comprobantur. Nam qui ejus naturae vel sagacitatis non sunt, ut venationis infatigabili dilectione trahantur, mox ut spinetis, aut paludibus, aut scopulis vel rupibus offensi fuerint, fugientem capream aut hinnulum cervorum segnes obliviscuntur, et ad domestica cubicula vacui revertuntur. Qui autem canes ingenui vel naturaliter sunt venatici, nullius difficultatis offensione superantur; sed eunt perniciter per aspera, per invia, quo semel aspectae venationis delectabili odore trahantur, quasi morituri nisi capiant, miserabiliter gemebundi nisi apprehendant. Si canes Domini sumus, sensus veritatis in sanctarum Scripturarum silva densissima venatio nobis est. Currimus ut comprehendamus; et tunc laeti sumus, tunc coram illo laetari gestimus, si inter omnes litterae difficultates perseveranter intenti, sensum bonum et utilem, qui lectorem aedificet et velut convivam oblectet, reportamus.[13]
>
> *Desiring to seek and investigate the true meaning of the Scriptures, we recall the wild hunts, in the use of which it is proved which dogs are truly hunters. For those who are not of that nature or sagacity, so as to be drawn by the tireless love of hunting, as soon as they have been offended by thorns, or by marshes, or by rocks or cliffs, they forget the fleeing roe or the fawn of the deer, and return empty-handed to their domestic chambers. But those dogs who are noble-bred or naturally hunters are overcome by the hindrance of no difficulty; but they go perilously through rough, impassable places, where once they are drawn by the delightful scent of hunting, as if about to die unless they catch, groaning miserably unless they apprehend. If we are the Lord's dogs, the sense of truth is for us a hunt in the very dense forest of the Holy Scriptures. We run to grasp it; and then we are happy, then we rejoice before him, if, among all the difficulties of the letter, perseveringly attentive, we bring back a good and useful sense that edifies the reader and delights him like a guest.*

Before focusing on Rupert's metaphor(s), some remarks on the digression itself and the context in which it appears seem due. The context makes clear that Rupert's digression originates from the difficulty posed by the passage of Mic 2:4–5. It serves as a first premise to his disquisition on these verses,[14] the second being a lengthy quotation from Jerome's *Commentarius in Micheam Prophetam*. Jerome's text, which also constitutes a digression in his commentary, concludes his considerations on Mic 2:4–5.[15] In his digression, Jerome expresses the difficulty posed by those verses in his characteristic self-promoting style, in the form of a quasi-defence.[16] The Jerome-quotation also seems to

---

[12] The Latin text of Mic 2:4–5 which Rupert is commenting on runs as follows: "2:4 In die illa sumetur super vos parabola, et cantabitur canticum cum suavitate, dicentium: Depopulatione vastati sumus; pars populi mei commutata est: quomodo recedet a me, cum revertatur, qui regiones nostras dividat? 2:5 Propter hoc non erit tibi mittens funiculum sortis in cœtu Domini." Douay-Rheims translation: "2:4 In that day a parable shall be taken up upon you, and a song shall be sung with melody by them that say: We are laid waste and spoiled: the portion of my people is changed: how shall he depart from me, whereas he is returning that will divide our land? 2:5 Therefore thou shalt have none that shall cast the cord of a lot in the assembly of the Lord." Hebrew (MT):

ביום ההוא ישא עליכם משל ונהה נהי נהיה אמר שדוד נשדנו
חלק עמי ימיר איך ימיש לי לשובב שדינו יחלק:
לכן לא־יהיה לך משליך חבל בגורל בקהל יהוה:

[13] See PL 168:455D.

[14] In the PL 168, Rupert's commentary on Mic 2:4–5 runs from column 454 to column 457.

[15] PL 25:1151–1230C.

serve to promote Rupert's image (and authority?) as a Bible commentator.[17] Rupert explicitly affirms already in the prologue to his commentary the difficulty posed by the book of Micah in general.[18] The difficulty of Micah in general and of chapter 2 in particular continues to be highlighted by modern commentators.[19]

## 3 Exegesis as "Hunting," and Scripture as a "Dense Forest:" Rhetorical and Source Critical Considerations

As Holzer writes, Rupert "treated theological subjects with rich imagery."[20] Although the distinction between a simile and a metaphor remains to some extent a matter of debate,[21] and although in my section's title I insert the comparator "as," I treat Rupert's image(s) here, following the classical distinction, as metaphors.[22] The main reason for this decision lies precisely in the absence from Rupert's text of the comparative particle or comparator, such as "like, as" (Latin: *ut*, *velut*, *sicut*) or even "than" (which sometimes also occur to designate similes). An exception occurs in the very last sentence of Rupert's

---

16 Jerome's digression, which Rupert quotes in full, reads as follows: "Si quis autem in lege Domini die ac nocte meditatus, majus habuit studium, majus ingenium, otium gratiamque et potest de praesenti capitulo probabilius aliquid dicere, non sperno, non invideo, quin potius cupio ab eo discere quod ignoro, et libenter me discipulum profitebor dummodo doceat, et non detrahat. Nihil enim tam facile quam otiosum et dormientem de aliorum labore et vigiliis disputare." See PL 25:1168.

17 To introduce his citation from Jerome, Rupert refers to him as "et studiosus sensuum tractator, et fidelis litterae interpres" ("both a diligent handler of the senses and a faithful interpreter of the letter"). Moreover, Jerome's text, which is also a digression in his commentary, mentions those who "meditate day and night in the law of the Lord" who could come with a better explanation of the difficult Micah text and from whom Jerome himself would be open to learn from. Rupert's explanation of Mic 2:4–5 is clearly based on Jerome's but also has some original additions ("Dicimus itaque quia …").

18 See PL 168, 192. Rupert's prologue has many points of contact with Jerome's in his *Commentarius*, making clear that Rupert builds upon Jerome's ideas in his explanation on Micah.

19 Macchi, "Micah (Book and Person)," *EBR* 18:1097: "The Hebrew text of Micah (particularly chs. 1–2) is full of textual corruptions. That is why the text of Micah is often seen as badly preserved." Specifically regarding Micah ch. 2, Kessler writes, "Auch wenn man die zum Teil abweichenden Wiedergaben der antiken Übersetzungen nicht berücksichtigt, enthält der Text etliche sprachliche Schwierigkeiten" (Kessler, *Micha*, 119). Wolff, *Micah*, 39–40 points out in detail the text-critical problems of Micah 2:4–5. See also Zapff, *Micha*, 66, 73–77, 102.

20 Holzer, "Rupert of Deutz."

21 See in this regard, for example, Catrinel Tromp, "A Tale of Two Tropes: How Metaphor and Simile Differ," *Metaphor and Symbol* 28 (2013): 254–274; Emma Krane Mathisen, Nicholas Allott and Camilo R. Ronderos, "Cognitive Mechanisms in Simile and Metaphor Comprehension," *Language and Cognition* 17.e89 (2025): 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1017/langcog.2025.10038; Ghsoon Reda, "Like-simile and Metaphor in Cooperation: From Expressing Similarities to Expressing Contrasts," *Lang. Semiot. Stud.* 10.4 (2024): 504–544. https://doi.org/10.1515/lass-2024–0036; Sergey S. Zharikov and Dedre Gentner, "Why Do Metaphors Seem Deeper Than Similes?," in Wayne D. Gray and Christian D. Schunn (eds.), *Proceedings of the Twenty-Fourth Annual Conference of the Cognitive Science Society*, George Mason University, 2002, 976–981.

22 Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, VIII.6.8–9: "In totum autem metaphora brevior est similitudo, eoque distat quod illa comparatur rei quam volumus exprimere, haec pro ipsa re dicitur. Comparatio est cum dico fecisse quid hominem 'ut leonem,' tralatio cum dico de homine 'leo est.'" See in this regard Anna Novokhatko, "The Linguistic Treatment of Metaphor in Quintilian", *Pallas* [Online] 103 (2017): 311–318. https://journals.openedition.org/pallas/4420

digression, in which he compares the reader to a "guest." In this case, the comparator *velut* appears and therefore one may speak of a simile instead (see discussion below).

Rupert begins his digression speaking of the "desire to seek and investigate the true meaning of Scripture." Presumably, for him, such a "desire" represents and synthesizes the motivation and purpose of the work of the exegete. In its content, Rupert's statement is reminiscent of Eccl 1:13,[23] a key text in which the wise Jerusalemite sage states the aim and method of his intellectual endeavour. For Rupert, the search for the "true meaning" (*sensum verum*) of Scripture brings to mind the theme of "wild hunts" (*silvaticarum venationum*). In both phrases, the modifier is especially significant. In the first case, the adjective "true" (*verum*) exemplifies the major concern of medieval exegetes—and that of every exegete—in dealing with the biblical text.[24] In the second, the adjective "wild" (*silvaticarum*) serves as an intensifier of the metaphor of hunting. Through these adjectives, Rupert vividly emphasizes the strenuousness that the pursuit of the "truth" of Scripture entails. Not only this, but formally considered, the *sensum verum* takes the place of the "prey" in the hunting metaphor which has been introduced. In his initial phrase, therefore, Rupert is affirming that the exegete's pursuit of the true meaning of Scripture can be compared to the chase of prey in wild hunts. By comparing or describing the pursuit of scriptural truth with the metaphor of hunting, the adventurous, often dangerous, but also amusing aspects of this primeval human activity are also evoked. By this means, Rupert implicitly describes exegesis as an intellectual activity that, *servatis servandis*, comprises similar characteristics.

From a source-critical point of view, we may notice that in using the predatory image[25] to describe the pursuit of truth—in his case, of Scripture—Rupert is not original. Likewise, the image of hunting dogs is not wholly original to Rupert. As the Jerome citation in his commentary makes clear, Rupert, as other medieval commentators, draws heavily on the patristic tradition both as source and as "authority" for the sense of Scripture. This fact exemplifies a second central principle of medieval exegesis and reveals the main source(s) from which Rupert is drawing. Specifically regarding the hunting themes, we find in the *Stromata* ("Miscellanies") of Clement of Alexandria (ca.150 – ca.215 CE)[26] an interesting text and potential source.[27] In speaking of the pursuit of truth, Clement uses hunting as a metaphor, regarding which hunting dogs are mentioned, although *en*

[23] Vg Qo 1:13a: *et proposui in animo meo* quaerere et investigare *sapienter de omnibus quae fiunt sub sole*.

[24] It is interesting to consider what the 'true meaning" of Scripture meant to them. The phrase certainly implies the quadriga—the four senses of Scripture—and, above all, the search for its Christological meaning.

[25] See on this theme the interesting study of Francesca Gardner, "On the Hunt: Predatory Metaphor and the Early Modern Essay," *The Cambridge Quarterly* 54.3 (2025): 203–222.

[26] See Joona Salminen, "Clement of Alexandria." In *Brill Encyclopedia of Early Christianity Online* (Brill, 2018), doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/2589–7993_EECO_SIM_00002450.

[27] Clement's use of this motif exemplifies his Hellenistic education in Alexandria. At least from the time of Aristotle, the use of terms from the semantic field of "chasing, pursuing" for the philosophical quest for truth is well documented. Still other Greek Fathers make use of this motif in their writings (as Origen, for example). In this sense, it can be said that the predatory image as a metaphor for truth seeking is a typical Hellenistic *topos*.

*passant*: "The lover of the chase catches his prey by a process of hunting, searching, tracking, and using the speed of hounds. Similarly, truth is clearly a desirable object of a hunt, secured by hard work."[28] The English translator John Ferguson translates the Greek κυνοδρομήσας in Clement's text with "using the speed of hounds." In LSJ, the verb κυνοδρομέω is defined as "to run or chase with dogs."[29] For this definition, LSJ gives as a main reference *Cyn.* 6.1 from Xenophon's influential text on hunting and hunting dogs, *Kynegetikos*.[30] The main descriptive elements of Rupert's text have notable points of contact with the content of chapter 3 and 4 of the *Kynegetikos*, which makes it another potential source for Rupert's ideas.

Contrary to how these themes might make us feel as modern readers, given our sensibilities regarding them individually and in relation to one another, hunting was highly esteemed and praised as an indispensable educational means in antiquity. In this regard, some of Xenophon's statements are worth quoting:

> Thanks to the careful heed they[31] paid to dogs and things pertaining to the chase, thanks also to the other training of their boyhood, all these greatly excelled, and on the score of virtue were admired…[32] For my part, then, my advice to the young is, do not despise hunting or the other training of your boyhood, if you desire to grow up to be good men, good not only in war but in all else…[33] The first efforts of a youth emerging from boyhood should be directed to the institution of chase…[34]

---

[28] Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, 1.21.1: καθάπερ οὖν ὁ τῆς ἄγρας ἐρωτικὸς ζητήσας, ἐρευνήσας, ἀνιχνεύσας, κυνοδρομήσας αἱρεῖ τὸ θηρίον, οὕτω καὶ τἀληθὲς γλυκύ τι φαίνεται ζητηθὲν καὶ πόνῳ πορισθέν. The Greek text is from SC 30, 59. The English translation is from John Ferguson, *Clement of Alexandria*: *Stromateis*. *Books One to Three.* The Fathers of the Church. A New Translation (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 37.

[29] See LSJ, 1010.

[30] For this work, see the recent Greek/German edition: Xenophon / Arrianos, *Jagd und Jagdhunde*: *Griechisch-deutsch*, ed. and trans., Kai Brodersen, Sammlung Tusculum (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018). This volume also includes two other texts on the theme: Lucius Flacius Arrianos' *Kynegetikos* and Julius Polydeukes' *Onomastikon* 5. Both works were clearly influenced by and based on Xenophon's work. Biographical information on all three authors is found in the above-mentioned volume, on pp. 10–19 (Xenophon: 10–14; Arrianos: 14–15; Polydeukes: 15–19).

[31] This pronoun encompasses the preceding and following extensive list of Greek figures, mostly mythical, that Xenophon mentions in the opening chapter of his *Kynegetikos*.

[32] Xexnophon, *Cyn.* 1.5: ἐκ δὲ τῆς ἐπιμελείας τῆς κυνηγεσίων καὶ ἐκ τῆς ἄλλης παιδείας πολὺ διενεγκόντες τὰ κατὰ τὴν ἀρετὴν ἐθαυμάσθησαν.

[33] Xenophon, *Cyn.* 1.18: ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν παραινῶ τοῖς νέοις μὴ καταφρονεῖν κυνηγεσίων μηδὲ τῆς ἄλλης παιδείας· ἐκ τούτων γὰρ γίγνονται τὰ εἰς τὸν πόλεμον ἀγαθοὶ καὶ εἰς τὰ ἄλλα ἐξ ὧν ἀνάγκη καλῶς νοεῖν καὶ λέγειν καὶ πράττειν.

[34] Xenophon, *Cyn.* 2.1: πρῶτον μὲν οὖν χρὴ ἐλθεῖν ἐπὶ τὸ ἐπιτήδευμα τὸ τῶν κυνηγεσίων τὸν ἤδη ἐκ παιδὸς ἀλλάττοντα τὴν ἡλικίαν.

Xenophon concludes his work by stressing that hunting fosters good and pious people, acceptable to both humans and the gods.[35] Hunting was a privileged educational means for the political leadership of Cyrus the Great.[36]

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that when introducing the hunting metaphor in his digression, Rupert immediately connects it to the motif of hunting dogs. Interestingly, he continues his text by abandoning the theme of hunting per se to focus on that of hunting dogs. This makes it clear that the latter is the central theme of the considerations that follow. Rupert in fact goes on to say that wild hunts determine which dogs are true hunting dogs. For this point, he begins by describing the main features of dogs or dog breeds that do not possess an authentic hunting instinct, which he specifies as "tireless love of hunting" (*venationis infatigabili dilectione*), and how this is revealed in their behavior. Those dogs who do not possess a love of hunting, before the difficulties of the path (thorns, marshes, rocks, and cliffs), forget the desirable, yet fleeing prey (a roe or a fawn, for example) and return peacefully to their "domestic chambers" (*domestica cubicula*). Even though empty-handed, they apparently manifest no sense of guilt or shame. By contrast, those dogs who have a natural, distinguishing hunting instinct, which makes them hunters "by nature," are overcome "by the hindrance of no difficulty" (*nullius difficultatis offensione superantur*). Instead, drawn by the irresistible scent of the most appetizing prey, they brave rough and impassable terrain. They would rather die than return home empty-handed. Their deeply moving groans during such a tireless chase (*miserabiliter gemebundi nisi apprehendant*) vividly manifest the strength of their natural gift — their true hunting instinct.

At this point, we reach the climax of Rupert's considerations: his metaphorical description of the exegete as a "hunting dog." Given that this is the core of Rupert's text and of the present study, we move on to consider it in the next section.

## 4 "Si canes Domini sumus…": The Exegete as a "Hunting Dog"

The metaphor of the hunting dog for the exegete and his/her work in the interpretation of Scripture is without a doubt the climax of Rupert's text, but it also constitutes its originality. Although beginning with the theme of hunting, Rupert's digression in effect focuses on the theme of hunting dogs; everything that he says from the beginning of his text is in effect geared towards this central statement: *si canes Domini sumus*. The originality of this climax consists in the fact that Rupert's statement synthesizes previous

[35] Xenophon, *Cyn.* 14.17–18: "In fact, an ancient story has it that the gods delight in this business, both as followers and spectators of the chase. Therefore, reflecting on these things, the young who do what I exhort them to do will put themselves in the way of being dear to the gods and pious men, conscious that one or other of the gods is watching their deeds. These will be good to parents, good to the whole city, to every one of their friends and fellow-citizens. For all men who have loved hunting have been good: and not men only, but those women also to whom the goddess has given this blessing, Atalanta and Procris and others like them."

[36] See, for instance, Xenophon, *Cyr.* 1.2 and 1.6 and the comments by Ivan Jordović, "Hunting in Xenophon's Political and Ethical Thought," *Museum Helveticum* 81/2 (2024) 198–219.

tradition in a new, original *totum*. Given its importance, we may recall Rupert's text again here, both in Latin and in its English translation:

> Si canes Domini sumus, sensus veritatis in sanctarum Scripturarum silva densissima venatio nobis est. Currimus ut comprehendamus; et tunc laeti sumus, tunc coram illo laetari gestimus, si inter omnes litterae difficultates perseveranter intenti, sensum bonum et utilem, qui lectorem aedificet et velut convivam oblectet, reportamus.
>
> *If we are the Lord's dogs, the sense of truth is for us a hunt in the very dense forest of the Holy Scriptures. We run to grasp it; and then we are happy, then we rejoice before Him, if, among all the difficulties of the letter, perseveringly attentive, we bring back a good and useful sense that edifies the reader and delights him like a guest*.

The first significant element in Rupert's statement is the introductory conditional phrase. Given that in Latin, the conjunction *si* ("if") with the indicative mood is used when the speaker assumes that the condition is true, possible, or factual, Rupert's text seems to mean in English something like "assuming that, given that, by the fact that." In addition, Rupert mentions "we," among which he includes himself. This personal pronoun seems not merely to encompass those who occupy themselves with interpreting Scripture (i.e. exegetes) but specifically the Christian exegete, especially monks and/or clerks. These, while commenting on the Bible, not only or not primarily do so as an academic endeavour but as a ministerial tool (i.e., for the purpose of preaching). This element reveals where Rupert's motif of the dog derives and for what purpose it is included. The source, again, seems to be the patristic tradition. The Latin and Greek church fathers in fact know of both positive and negative as well as of various symbolic meanings of dogs in Scripture.[37] Cassiodorus voices this clearly in his commentary on the Psalms: "Canes non in malo tantum, sed etiam in bono poni frequentia exempla testantur,"[38] and "Canes et in malo ponuntur … et in bono."[39]

Most significantly, while commenting on Ps 58:15 (MT 59:15),[40] which mentions dogs, Cassiodorus uses an expression that seems especially significant for our discussion at this point. First, while commenting on the phrase "et famem patientur ut canes" (OL Ps

---

[37] The negative meaning of dogs is mentioned, for example, in Eusebius, *Comm. in Ps.* LVIII (PG 23,540C–541A); Cassiodorus, *Expos. in P*s. XXI, 17 (CChL 97:198); Chromatius of Aquileia, *Tract. In Math.* XXXIII.3 (CChL 9A:359); Didymus of Alexandria, *Comm. in Ps.* 38, 13–20 (PTA 7, 154). For positive meanings, see, for example, Augustine, *Enarr. in Ps.* LXVII, 32 (CChL 39:892–93); Cyril of Alexandria, *Comm. Is.* V.3 (PG 70:1252CD). The source of these references is Maria Pia Ciccarelli, *Animali simbolici* I.XII: Cane 239–261. Her edition includes the texts in the original language with an Italian translation. The footnotes to these texts include many other references.

[38] See Cassiodorus, *Expos. in Ps. XXI*, 21 (CChL 97:202).

[39] See Cassiodorus, *Expos. in Ps. LXVII*, 24 (CChL 97:597).

[40] Cassiodorus is clearly commenting on the Old Latin (OL) text, which reads: "Et convertentur ad vesperam, et famem patientur ut canes, et circuibunt civitatem." The Vulgate *Psalterium iuxta Hebraeos* reads: "Et convertantur ad vesperam et latrent ut canis et circumeant civitatem"

(MT: וישובו לערב יהמו ככלב ויסובבו עיר;
LXX: ἐπιστρέψουσιν εἰς ἑσπέραν καὶ λιμώξουσιν ὡς κύων καὶ κυκλώσουσιν πόλιν).

See Hieronymus, *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*. *Lateinisch-deutsch*. vol. 3, *Psalmi – Proverbia – Ecclesiastes – Canticum canticorum – Sapientia – Iesus Sirach*, ed. Andreas Beriger, Widu-Wolfgang Ehlers, and Michael Fieger (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 301–302.

58:15b), Cassiodorus expands upon the dog simile in these terms: "Next comes: *And shall suffer hunger like dogs*. The dog is a most greedy and insistent beast, and usually defends with barking at houses where it knows its hunger is satisfied by obtaining bread."[41] Next, he brings in the apostle Paul and his "conversion," remarking that, "Though he previously persecuted the Christian name, through divine kindness he was subsequently joined to the apostles."[42] But what does Paul have to do with dogs? Cassiodorus' answer is ingenious. Just as a dog barks to protect its owner's house, preaching the Word defends God's flock, the Church. Cassiodorus clearly states this while commenting on the phrase, "And they shall go round about the city" (OL Ps 58:15c): "The city denotes Jerusalem, which is known to be universally spread throughout the world. That Paul went round this city is attested by his epistles which brought salvation to the human race, and which thundered through all the nations like sacred signals from heaven."[43] He goes on to exclaim: "What a blessed dog was he! He pursues the unfaithful, drives off thieves, and guards the holy sheepfolds; his barking has thundered through the whole world like a mighty trumpet."[44] The dog as an image of the defending preacher is also found in Gregory the Great's *Moralia in Iob*.[45] This image seems to become a *topos* in the Christian tradition thereon[46] and Rupert seems to use this *topos* in his text. In this light, by referring to the exegete as the "dog of the Lord," Rupert emphasizes the inherently pastoral nature that the work of Christian exegetes, including himself and his contemporaries, is supposed to comprise.

However, in Rupert's text, the metaphor of the exegete as a dog is clarified by its connection to hunting dogs. Therefore, if regarding its content, Rupert's text is deeply rooted

---

41 "Sequitur et famem patientur ut canes. Canis, uoracissimum animal atque importunum, consueuit illas domos latratibus defendere in quibus edacitatem suam nouit accepto pane satiari."

42 "…ut qui ante fuit persecutor Christiani nominis, postea diuino munere iungeretur apostolis." Before this statement, Cassiodorus speaks of the "loud preaching" from the Church of God which brings about conversion.

43 "Addidit et circuibunt ciuitatem. Ciuitatem significat Ierusalem, quae uniuersaliter per mundum noscitur esse diffusa. Hanc ergo circuisse Paulum, salutares generi humano testantur epistolae, quae per uniuersas gentes uelut sacra divina tonuerunt."

44 Cassiodorus, *Expos. in Ps. LVIII*, 15 (CChL 97, 527): "O canem istum beatum! Qui populos persequitor infideles, fures abigit et ouilia sancta custodit; cuius latratus per totum mundum quasi grandiosa tuba concrepuit." English translation: *Cassiodorus: Explanation of the Psalms*, ed. Walter J. Burghardt and Thomas Comerford Lawler, trans. Patrick Gerard Walsh, ACW 51/2 (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 60.

45 Gregory the Great, *Mor. in Iob* XX,6.15 (CChL 143A, 1014): "Who is the 'flock' of Holy Church saving the multitude of the faithful? Or who else are called 'the dogs' of this flock, but the holy Teachers, who became the guardians of those believers? Which same whilst in behalf of their Lord they cried aloud, given up to daily and nightly watchings, uttered, so to say, loud barks of preaching. Concerning whom it is said to that Church by the Psalmist, The tongue of Thy dogs from the enemies by the same [Ps. 68:23]. Since there are some that being recalled from the worshipping of idols are made the preachers of God. So 'the tongue of the dogs' of the Church goeth forth from enemies, because the Gentiles that are converted the Lord makes even preachers." The English translation is from Charles Marriot, ed., *Morals on the Book of Job by St. Gregory the Great* (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1844).

46 See, for instance, Bede, *In Tob.* (PL 91:928A). It is particularly interesting that both authors belonged to Benedictine monasticism.

in tradition, his image of the exegete as a hunting dog is original in its synthetic nature. Rupert in fact conjoins the image of the dog for the defending preacher with that of the pursuit of the truth as hunting; the two terms are synthesized in an original manner in the figure of the hunting dog. This is what the reader is supposed to grasp in his introductory statement (*Si canes Domini sumus*). The two additional metaphors that Rupert uses next reinforce this interpretive dynamic. The first is that of Scripture as a "dense forest" (*silva densissima*). With the first metaphor, Rupert describes in a vivid manner the difficulty, toil, and even risks that the interpretation of Scripture poses to the exegete. This he explicitly states while introducing his citation from Jerome: "The present chapter [i.e. Micah ch. 2] is difficult according to the already mentioned analogy of the forests."[47] It is worth noting that, in using the metaphor of the "forest" for Scripture and its interpretive difficulties, Rupert is using another *topos*. This appears early as in Origen.[48] However, Rupert seems original in his use of this metaphor in connection with that of hunting and hunting dogs. In effect, Rupert explicitly speaks of the work of the exegete as a "hunt in the very dense forest of the Holy Scriptures." The "sense of truth," i.e., the discernment of the true meaning of the Scriptures as the primary task of the exegete, is not merely again stated with the metaphor of hunting but in effect with that of the hunting dogs. As they run to apprehend their scented prey, the exegete "runs" (i.e., "fatigues") to understand their prey (i.e., the true sense of Scripture); as the hunting dog, having caught his prey, rejoices before his master, so the exegete rejoices before "him," i.e., the Lord. The reason for this joy consists in the fact that, persevering through the difficulties of the letter, the exegete is able to "bring back" (*reportamus*; notice the predatory language in the verb choice) a "good and useful sense that edifies the reader." In this regard, he adds a second metaphor. The "good and useful sense that edifies the reader" is "served" to him/her as the good cooking of a caught prey, i.e., as a "fine meal" of a successful hunt. Moreover, what is "served" to the reader—meaning "a good and useful sense that edifies"—seems to further specify what Rupert means by the "true sense" of Scripture in the beginning of his digression and to stress the pastoral dimension of the work of the exegete.

Lastly, Rupert uses once more the dog hunting metaphor after quoting Jerome, this time, however, with a twist: it is the reader that is compared to a hunting dog. After presenting Jerome's interpretation of Mic 2:4–5, he adds this annotation: "Therefore, when he says these things, and with many similar ones in different places, he turns the listener into a gaping and barking dog [i.e., alert and operative], so that, as in most cases, so in the present place too, feeling himself still being left behind, he does not cease to pursue the fleeing

[47] "Capitulum praesens secundum saltuum jam dictam similitudinem difficile est adeo ut propter difficultatem ejus dicat B. Hieronymus …" ("The present chapter, according to the already mentioned simile of the forests, is so difficult, that because of its difficulty Blessed Jerome says …"). See Rupert of Deutz, *Comm. in Mich*. 1.455B.

[48] Origen also seems to have referred to exegetical work with the metaphor of hunting, as did his contemporary Clement of Alexandria. See Marc M. Epstein, *Dreams of Subversion in Medieval Jewish Art and Literature*. The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997, xiii-xiv. See also Marguerite Harl, "Origène et les interprétations patristiques grecques de l'"obscurité' biblique," *Vig. Chr.* 36.4 (1982): 334–371.

deer or fawn, no matter how much it flees."[49] The difficulty of the text, like a fleeing "deer or fawn," keeps the hunting dog (in this case, the reader) operative in his chase (i.e., in his search for sense). Jerome said in his digression that another reader who meditates on God's "Law" (i.e., the Scriptures) day and night (Ps 1:2) could find a better explanation for the difficult Micah text than his, from whom even Jerome was willing to learn. In the context, this reader is Rupert himself, who goes on to give his interpretation of the difficult Micah passage. His next statement, in fact, is *dicimus itaque* ("therefore we say").

## Synthesis and Conclusions

The canine predatory metaphor used by Rupert in his digression vividly and in an original manner describes the work of the Christian exegete when examining Scripture, capturing the dimensions of delight, toil, challenge, and risk, as well as service. It also describes the primary characteristics of medieval Christian exegesis, which is defined by an unwavering pursuit of the "true meaning" of Scripture, firmly rooted in tradition. The vividness of Rupert's description lies in the power of metaphor to convey meaning, and the originality of Rupert's text lies in his synthesis of traditional motifs into a new, engaging whole. In this way, the exegete, primarily focused on discovering the "true meaning of Scripture," taking the place of the prey in the hunting metaphor, is referred to as a "hunting dog." This metaphor combines the hunting motif to describe the pursuit of truth with the dog motif, which symbolises the preacher in their work of edifying and protecting. As with a hunting dog, the pursuit of scented prey often becomes fierce due to the difficulties of the terrain ("a very dense forest") and the agility of the game; similarly for the exegete. A true "hunting dog" does not give up when the situation becomes more difficult; it intensifies the chase. In doing so, the dog demonstrates the strength of its hunting instinct. Similarly, the true exegete does not give up when faced with difficulties posed by the scriptural text. On the contrary: he continues "running" to grasp it and so to rejoice before the "hunter." The motive of jubilation lies not only in the success of the hunt (i.e., the "prey caught") but also in the fact that, like a "fine meal," it can be presented to the reader as a "guest," for their enjoyment, i.e., for their benefit and edification.

[49] Rupert of Deutz, *Comm. in Mich.* 1.455: "Haec ergo cum dicit, et cum plura similia diversis in locis, hiantem atque latrantem canem auditorem reddit, ut sicut in plerisque sic et in praesenti loco seipsum adhuc subesse sentiens quantumvis fugientem velut capream aut cervorum hinnulum non cesset insequi."