

WHY DOES JONAH SNORE
IN THE LXX TRANSLATION (JONAH 1:5-6)?
FROM THE THEOLOGICAL SOBRIETY
OF THE PATRISTIC EXEGESIS
TO THE FACETIOUSNESS
OF A HELLENIZING TRANSLATION¹

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ABSTRACT Ever since antiquity the Book of Jonah raised numerous problems of translation and interpretation, caused especially by its way, uncommon to the biblical books, of presenting the missionary activity of a prophet. If the ancient translations and interpretations generally reached a consensus about the sober message of the book, the LXX translation sets itself apart by seemingly reflecting a comical understanding of the original text. On the basis of other ancient translations and interpretations of the passage of Jonah 1:5-6, our study aims at explaining how the LXX translator could have understood the text and made him render it differently than the original.

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The Book of Jonah, written in Hebrew by an unknown author³, dates supposedly from a period between the 4th and the 2nd BC⁴. Included from an early

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3. In Antiquity most of the exegetes took it for granted that the book belonged to the prophet Jonah, a character identified with the ‘son of Amathi’, mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25, but, based on a linguistic analysis, the scholars reached the conclusion that the language of the book cannot date from the 8th century BC when the prophet is thought to have lived. (cf. Julius A. Bewer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jonah*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh 1951, 11).

4. It is generally supposed that the text has been written after the 4th century BC, but no earlier than the 2nd century BC, because Jonah’s prophecy about the fall of Nineveh is mentioned also in Tob 14:4, a book dating undoubtedly from the century regarded as *terminus ad quem* for the Book of Jonah.

date in the Hebrew biblical canon⁵, the book can be found in the 2nd century AD among the normative books of the Christians⁶ and it is translated by a single translator in the Greek version of LXX, together with all the other books of the Minor Prophets⁷. Except for the LXX translation, which represented the basic text for the ancient Christian interpretations, the book had also been translated into Greek (like those of Aquila, Theodotion and Symmachus), Syriac and Latin.

Unlike all the other prophetic books among which it was included, *Jonah* strikes us by the fact that it does no longer represent a sum of prophecies comprising a homogeneous vision and written by the same author, who professes himself to be a prophet, being instead a narration about a prophet, written by someone else. Despite its distinct features, the Christian interpreters attached great importance to it and, considering the texts of the Gospels, where Jesus Christ refers to ‘the sign of Jonah’,⁸ ended up by identifying Jonah with Christ and giving an allegorical understanding of the whole text. But the taste for symbols and typologies gradually faded away, particularly in the late antiquity, when a more adequate contact with the text and the subject of the book allowed more sceptical approaches, even though they remained very scarce. For example, Athanasius of Alexandria comments the reference to Jonah from the Gospel of Matthew in his *Contra arianos* III, 23 and concludes that

‘neither was Jonah as the Saviour, neither did he descend to hell, neither was the fish hell, neither did Jonah, being himself swallowed, deliver those swallowed before him by the fish, but he alone got out from the fish through God’s command. So, neither an identity nor an equality is implied by the particle «as», but something else; it shows only a slight similarity with Jonah on account of the three days.’⁹

5. As its inclusion in the list of The Books of the Twelve Minor Prophets proves (cf. Qoh 49:10).

6. Melito of Sardis (died c. 180 AD), in the letter to his brother Onesimus (cited by Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* IV, 26), includes in an indefinite Christian canon the Books of the Twelve Minor Prophets (and consequently the Book of Jonah also), which were regarded in the Hebrew canon as a single book: τῶν δώδεκα ἐν μονοβίβλῳ (PG 20, 397 A).

7. Cf. *Septuaginta V. Osea. Amos. Micheia. Ioel. Abdias. Iona. Naum. Avacum. Sophonia. Aggeu. Zaharia. Malachia*, edited by Cristian Bădiliță, Francisca Băltăceanu, Monica Broșteanu, Polirom, Iași/București, 2009, p. 289.

8. Mt 12:39; Lk 11:29-30.

9. PG 26, 369 C.

A somewhat reserved attitude can be found in Eusebius' *Eclogae propheticae* III, 16:

‘About Christ we found out nothing literally from what is presented there (in the Book of Jonah). But, because the Saviour, when He was asked to give a sign, He gave none, excepting the sign of Jonah, adding [also]: «For as Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights», so do we, of necessity, count this book among those that prophesied about Christ.’¹⁰

Such reservations, timidly expressed, do not necessarily reflect a misunderstanding of the Book of Jonah or a kind of intimidation caused by its fantastic nature, but more the impossibility of accepting the analogy between Christ and a character quintessentially anti-heroic, made to act in situations which seem today to verge on the comic genre¹¹.

The narration is built around a direct or indirect dialogue between God and Jonah, during which the collective characters act as reflectors of an adequate behaviour. What remains puzzling when trying to interpret this book is the fact that the narration is atypical for the biblical writings, by depicting situations opposite to those expected by a reader accustomed to the text of the Scriptures, by using an ambivalent language and, last but not least, by including in its key points many texts taken almost literally from other biblical books. Over time, these features made it difficult for this writing to be classified in a literary genre; it was regarded successively as an allegory, a *midrash*, a prophetic parable, a satire, a prose poem, a didactic narrative and so on.

There are many researchers who, not lacking arguments in my opinion, admitting that the Book of Jonah cannot be properly called a parody, have nonetheless considered it a book containing many parodic elements, supporting their claims on the subtle irony by which the author generally relates to the texts borrowed from other biblical books. For example, the scene of Jonah asking for his death and then sitting outside the city under the pumpkin stalk is certainly a reference to 1 Kings 19:4, where the prophet Elijah, sitting under a juniper tree

10. PG 22, 1140 D.

11. For a literary analysis of the comical elements of the book there are many modern studies that can be consulted. I mention only two of them: John R. Miles, ‘Laughing at the Bible: Jonah as Parody’, in Yehuda T. Radday; Athalya Brenner (eds.), *On Humor and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible*, The Almond Press, Scheffield 1990, 203-215 and Judson Mather, ‘The Comic Art of the Book of Jonah’, *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 65 (1982/3) 280-291.

(ὕπὸ ραθμ) ask for his death by an almost identical phrase¹². However, if the prophet Elijah has real reasons for making his request, being threatened by queen Jezebel, Jonah's reasons refer to his regret that God refuses to destroy the city of Nineveh, putting him in the embarrassing situation of having uttered a false prophecy. Consequently, the parody would spring from the minimization of the meaning that the borrowed passages had in their original context.

There are some who contend against the parodical understanding of the borrowed texts, arguing that their moral and religious meaning is distorted by the hermeneutical fantasy of the moderns¹³. Their arguments claim that a parody should firstly have an author who, by quoting and rephrasing other texts, has intentionally given his own text a parodical meaning and, secondly, an audience capable of understanding it in such a way. If the author would have intended to write a parody, he would have emphasized more some special narrative features, and ancient exegetes would have easily grasped the ironies of the text¹⁴.

By joining these arguments, I have sought to find out how the few exaggerations of the text have been translated and interpreted within the Christian tradition and in this paper I have dwelt upon two biblical verses which prove that in antiquity, the issues in question were not so clearly cut as they might seem at first sight, especially if we take into consideration that for the ancient writers the biblical text is a product of Revelation and the LXX translation is a divinely inspired one.

A first issue of interpretation emerges from a strange, to put it mildly, translating option of the LXX translator when he describes Jonah's sleep during the sea storm in Jonah 1:5:

καὶ ἐφοβήθησαν οἱ ναυτικοὶ καὶ ἀνεβόων ἕκαστος πρὸς τὸν θεὸν αὐτῶν καὶ ἐκβολὴν ἐποιήσαντο τῶν σκευῶν τῶν ἐν τῷ πλοίῳ εἰς τὴν θάλασσαν τοῦ κουφισθῆναι ἀπ' αὐτῶν· Ἴωνας δὲ κατέβη εἰς τὴν κοίλην τοῦ πλοίου καὶ ἐκάθευδεν καὶ ἔρρηγγεν¹⁵.

12. Jonah 4:3: καὶ νῦν, δέσποτα κύριε, λαβὲ τὴν ψυχὴν μου ἀπ' ἐμοῦ, ὅτι καλὸν τὸ ἀποθανεῖν με ἢ ζῆναι με; 1 Kings 19:4: Ἰκανούσθω νῦν, λαβὲ δὴ τὴν ψυχὴν μου ἀπ' ἐμοῦ, κύριε, ὅτι οὐ κρείσσων ἐγὼ εἰμι ὑπὲρ τοῦ πατέρος μου (ed. Rahlfs-Hanhart).

13. In a 1990 article Arnold J. Band writes: 'The Book of Jonah has inspired this interpretive activity not only because of its theme, flight from commitment to a divine injunction, but because it is itself a conscious interpretation of many literary texts. [...] The intertextual density of the book suggests that the book was originally published as a parody, i.e., as a composition imitating and distorting another, usually serious, piece of work.' ('Swallowing Jonah: The Eclipse of Parody', *Prooftexts* 10 (1990/2/2) 179).

14. Band, 'Swallowing Jonah', 185.

In his rendering of the Hebrew term *radham*, which means ‘to fall into heavy sleep’, ‘to sleep profoundly’,¹⁶ the translator chose the Greek verb ῥέγγειν, a term peculiar rather to the comedies of Aristophanes¹⁷ than to the biblical language. Having few occurrences in the sacred texts, the Hebrew verb never assumes a comical connotation suggesting, on the contrary, the idea of loss of consciousness¹⁸ and of being stunned or petrified.¹⁹ Unfortunately, the translating choices of the other Greek versions are no longer extant. When he translates the Book of Jonah into Latin, Jerome compares the Greek text with the Hebrew version and translates the two verbs describing Jonah’s sleep by a single verb and a complement: *dormiebat sopore gravi* (‘he was sleeping a heavy sleep’, ‘he fell into a deep sleep’). His translating choice can be explained by the fact that the lexical root **rdm* appears in Gen 2:21 (lat. *immisit ergo Dominus Deus soporem in Adam*; gr. ἐπέβαλεν ὁ θεὸς ἔκστασιν ἐπὶ τὸν Ἀδὰμ) and he interprets Jonah’s sleep as being the heavy sleep Adam was put to when God created Eve. How are we supposed to understand the translation option present in the LXX, given the fact that the possible meanings of the verb would more likely be conducive to mystical interpretations? The choice of the verb ῥέγγειν to the detriment of any other Greek verb translating a state of heavy sleep seems to suggest a different understanding of the text by the translator.

Generally, the sleep of Jonah posed quite a lot of problems to the ancient exegetes, especially to those that did not choose to understand it allegorically. The main difficulty arises when trying to understand the reasons behind Jonah’s sleep in the middle of a sea storm, in correlation with the prophet’s refusal to fulfill God’s commencement of prophesying the destruction of Nineveh. Since for that period it was inconceivable that a prophet should refuse the fulfillment of a divinely appointed mission, the majority of interpretations of the late antiquity argued for a psychologisation of the character. Theodoret of Cyr, which had in front of him a similar version of the LXX translation, interprets Jonah’s

15. Jonah 1:5: ‘And the mariners were afraid and cried out, each to their god. And they heaved the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to be lighted from them. But Jonas went down into the hold of the ship and was sleeping and snoring.’ (*A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, A. Pietersma, B. G. Wright (eds.), Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007; English translation by George E. Howard).

16. Cf. *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, Clarendon Press, 1907 s.v. רָדַם.

17. Aristophanes, *Nubes*, vv. 5-11; *Equites*, v. 115.

18. Judg 4:21.

19. Ps 75 (76):6.

sleep as an unnatural one, caused by his pangs of conscience, but avoids explaining in any way the verb ῥέγγειν:

‘For he, being conscience-stricken, fallen to despair and unable to endure the stings of reason, found relief in sleep. And when the ship met with a big storm, outside waves crushing down from all sides, inside confusion seizing the crew, Jonah didn’t sleep in an usual and moderate manner, but he fell in a heavy sleep and snored, as he himself explained when he wrote the book.’²⁰

For Theodoret the heavy sleep has its origins in the guilt of having sinned, and one of the distinctive signs of this unusual sleep is the noise. A similar approach can be found in Jerome, who follows in his commentary of this verse the LXX text, whose interpretation he amplifies by the meanings of the Hebrew text and by analogies with Adam’s ‘sleep’:

‘[...] he was aware of his flight and of his sin of disregarding the Lord’s commandments and he realized, though the others remained ignorant of it, that the tempest burst forth against him. That’s why he descends to the interior of the ship and, saddened, hides so that he will not see like God’s avengers the waves swelling up against him. Thus his sleeping shows not the lack of cares, but his grief. For we read that even the apostles, during Lord’s passions, were taken by sleep, on account of their deep sadness. If however we gave it a typological interpretation, the sleep and the heavy torpor of the prophet signify the man overpowered with the torpor of sin. For such a man it was not enough that he fled from the face of God, but he also ignored the wrath of God, his mind being seized by a frantic state, and, as if safe and secure from harm, he slept a sleep so heavy that his nostrils resounded.’²¹

It is interesting to note that in his interpretation, Jerome continues to go further in his analogy between Jonah and Adam, which explains the shame for the

20. Theodoret of Cyr, *Commentaria in duodecim prophetas minores. In Jonam* I, 7: Ὑπὸ γὰρ τοῦ συνειδότος κεντούμενος, καὶ τῆ ἀθυμίας βαλλόμενος, καὶ τῶν λογισμῶν τὰς ἀκίδας οὐ φέρων, ἐμηχανήσαντο τὴν ὑπὸ τοῦ ὕπνου παραψυχὴν. Καὶ τοσοῦτου κατὰ τοῦ σκάφους γιγνομένου θορύβου τῶν κυμάτων ἔξωθεν προσρηγνυμένων, καὶ τῶν ναυτῶν ἔνδοθεν ταραπτομένων, αὐτὸς οὐχ ἀπλῶς οὐδὲ μετρίως ἐκάθευδεν, ἀλλὰ βαθεῖ κατεχόμενος ὕπνῳ καὶ ἔρεγγεν, ὡς αὐτὸς συγγράψας ἐδίδαξεν (PG 81, 1725 D).

21. Jerome, *Commentaria in Ionam* I, 5: *Consciens erat fugae et peccati, quo Domini praecepta neglexerat: et tempestatem, ignorantibus caeteris, contra se saevire cernebat: ideo descendit ad interiora navis, et tristis absconditur, ne quasi Dei vindices fluctus adversum se videret intumescere. Quod autem dormit, non securitatis est, sed moeroris. Nam et Apostolos legimus in Domini passione prae tristitiae magnitudine somno fuisse depressos. Sin autem interpretamur in typo, somnus prophetae et gravissimus sopor hominem significat erroris sopore torpentem, cui non suffecerat fugisse a facie Dei, nisi et quadam vecordia mens illius obruta, ignoraret iracundiam Dei, et quasi securus dormiret et profundissimum somnum rauca nare resonaret* (PL 25, 1125 B-1125 C).

sin. This can account for the presence of the expression *tristis absconditur*, which is missing from the text of Jonah and which brings to mind Adam's disobedience. As for the imperfect ἔρρεγγεν (lat. *stertebat*), Jerome makes sure that this verb is not understood as implying a certain indifference, carelessness (*securitas*), but as referring primarily to sadness (*moeror*). The same concern for not understanding Jonah's lack of reaction in terms of carelessness, can also be found in Cyril of Alexandria, who, in his *Commentarium in Jonam prophetam*, underlines the fact that Jonah's sleep takes place before the storm, stressing that a prophet would never fall asleep in such a dangerous situation, without trying to mitigate the Creator of the Universe (τὸν τῶν ὅλων ἐκμειλίσσεσθαι Θεόν): 'So in fact the prophet slumbers, not neglecting what is proper, but, as I have already said, before the outbreak of the storm.'²² Although he omits to mention the reasons which led Jonah to sleep during a sea storm, Cyril probably avoids citing the verb ῥέγγειν, which he reads as ἀπονυστάζειν ('to slumber', 'to feel sleepy'), by which he indicates sleepiness rather than usual sleep. The fact that the biblical text could suggest the idea of indolence on the part of Jonah, of carelessness in front of the storm sent by God is also proved by this detail in the chronology of the events, which Theodore of Mopsuestia also refers to:

'It couldn't be that, descending to the hull of the ship, he fell asleep after the outbreak <of the storm>. For it would be ridiculous if, amid such uproar, when everyone is in dire peril about his own safety, he would allow himself to fall asleep. For he did it immediately after he embarked in the ship. And the Scripture, narrating the events which took place during the storm, returns afterwards to what happened in the meantime with the prophet. So the first mate, because going to see the prophet he saw him sleeping amid such an uproar, woke him up and was amazed that in the midst of such a disaster he did not have any apprehension about the dangers that befell them and was instead sleeping and snoring as in complete safety.'²³

22. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentarius in Jonam prophetam* I, 5: Ἀπονυστάζει δὴ οὖν ὁ προφήτης, οὐκ ἀφειδήσας τοῦ πρέποντος, ἀλλ', ὡς ἔφην ἤδη, πρὸ τῆς τῶν χειμῶνων ἐκβολῆς (PG 71, 609 A).

23. Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Commentarius in Jonam* 1, 5: Οὐχ ὅτι μετὰ τὸ ἐκεῖνα γενέσθαι εἰς τὸ πλοῖον κατελθὼν ἐκάθευδεν. γελοῖον γὰρ εἰ ταραχῆς τοσαύτης γενομένης καὶ πάντων περὶ τῆς σωτηρίας κινδυνευόντων τῆς οικείας, εἰς ὕπνον ἑαυτὸν ἐκεῖνος ἐδίδου. ἀλλὰ γὰρ τοῦτο μὲν εὐθύς ἐπιβάς πεποίηκε τοῦ πλοίου. ἡ δὲ Γραφή τὰ κατὰ τὸν κλύδωνα διηγησαμένη, ὕστερον ἐπήγαγε τὰ παρὰ τοῦ προφήτου κατ' ἐκεῖνον γινόμενα τὸν καιρὸν. ὅτι τε ὁ πρωρεὺς ὡς ἐν ταραχῇ τοσαύτη καθεύδοντα τὸν προφήτην ἰδεῖν ἀπεληλυθῶς, διήγειρέ τε αὐτὸν, καὶ ἐθαύμαζεν ὅτι τοσοῦτου γινομένου κακοῦ, μηδεμίαν αἴσθησιν ἔχοι τῶν κατεχόντων αὐτοῦς κακῶν, ἀλλ' ὡς ἀδεία πολλῆ καθεύδει τε καὶ ῥέγγει (PG 66, 332 D – 333 A).

What these ancient commentaries have all in common is the idea that the Greek text of Jonah could have also been understood in a comical note (γελοῖον), implied by both the translation of the troublesome verb and a linear reading which rules out the narrative *analepsis*.

A short analysis of the verse points out the fact that establishing an exact chronology of the events is impossible, because of the narrative tenses used, aorist and imperfect, which leaves room for nothing but speculations²⁴. The real issue here is the verb which the LXX translator uses, though, if he had understood the original text in the same way as the Christian exegetes had, he would have had at his disposal either the passive form of the verb καταφέρειν ('to be overcome by sleep', 'to sleep soundly') or the verb καροῦν ('to fall into a torpor', 'to fell into a sleep numbness')²⁵. Our hypothesis is that the LXX translator understood the text in a comical note and he construed the sleep of the prophet as carelessness in front of the divine wrath. There are some arguments which might sustain this hypothesis, some suggested by the text and some external.

First of all, the moral lesson presented at the end of the book gives a hint that the global meaning of the book tackles with the philosophical issue of the theodicy, of God's freedom of showing his mercy, even though this could seem injustice to mankind. If we carefully read the reason given by Jonah for his initial refusal of preaching in the city of Nineveh (Jonah 4, 2: διὰ τοῦτο προέφθασα τοῦ φυγεῖν εἰς Θαρσις, διότι ἔγνων ὅτι σὺ ἐλεήμων καὶ οἰκτίρμων, μακρόθυμος καὶ πολυέλεος καὶ μετανοῶν ἐπὶ ταῖς κακίαις²⁶), we will observe that he expresses himself by means of a quotation taken almost *verbatim* from Exod 34:6-7, describing God's attributes:

καὶ παρῆλθεν κύριος πρὸ προσώπου αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκάλεσεν Κύριος ὁ θεὸς οἰκτίρμων καὶ ἐλεήμων, μακρόθυμος καὶ πολυέλεος καὶ ἀληθινὸς καὶ δικαιοσύνην διατηρῶν καὶ ποιῶν

24. The ambiguity surrounding the moment when Jonah sleeps is maintained because, especially in the earlier ancient writers, the distinction between the two verbal tenses is neglected throughout the narration, and the authors seem to use them indiscriminately (cf. William W. Goodwin, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses of the Greek Verb*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2009, 25).

25. Although other Greek translations have been lost, the translation option of Aquila and Symmachus can be presumptively reconstituted by following Jerome's suggestion and choosing the solutions they give from the translations of the nouns present in Genesis 2:21 (Fr. Field, *Origenis Hexaplorum quae supersunt sive veterum interpretum Graecorum in totum Vetus Testamentum fragmenta*, vol. I, Oxonii e Typographeo Clarendoniano 1875, 15).

26. Jonah 4:2: 'That is why I had the foresight to flee to Tharsis, for I knew that you are merciful and compassionate, long-suffering and one who repents at calamities' (NETS).

ἔλεος εἰς χιλιάδας, ἀφαιρῶν ἀνομίας καὶ ἀδικίας καὶ ἁμαρτίας, καὶ οὐ καθαρῶν τὸν ἔνοχον ἐπάγων ἀνομίας πατέρων ἐπὶ τέκνα [...].²⁷

The author of the Book of Jonah must have noticed the paradox latent within this phrase of Exodus, which in the first part speaks of forgiveness and in the second about revenge, leaving an ambiguity about the nature of the divine intervention. Thus can be explained why God can, obviously in an ironic manner, change his mind²⁸. Applying this to the theme of the book, we understand that the prophet Jonah refuses to fulfil the divine commandment precisely because of this possibility, which would make the prophecy become useless. Up to this point nothing seems to be comical, except the fact that we cannot help noticing that, according to the citation from Exodus, Jonah falls in the same category of those who could be forgiven for the so-called ἀνομία, meaning not keeping God's commandments, but God does not show his mercy towards him too.

Secondly, even after he obeys the command and the city is forgiven, the prophet asks for his death. This can be cleared up if we read the text of Deut 18:18-22, where we are told that the false prophet must be put to death. The forgiving of the city of Nineveh, which God knows beforehand He will forgive, puts Jonah in the situation of giving a false prophecy and, consequently, of appearing ludicrous. Of the two issues that explain the flight of Jonah, it can more likely be understood that the prophet's attitude is that of someone rebelling against something that seems unjust to him. Even after he fulfils the commandment, Jonah remains discontented with the idea that God forgives the city of Nineveh and he continues to wait for its destruction. Jonah's actions seem to be those of a rebellious prophet rather than those of a prophet seized by remorse and consumed by guilt.

The irony emerges also from the next verse, where the first mate does not ask Jonah why he sleeps in the middle of the storm, but why he snores: Καὶ προσῆλθεν πρὸς αὐτὸν ὁ πρωρεὺς καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ Τί σὺ ῥέγγεις; ἀνάστα καὶ ἐπικαλοῦ τὸν θεὸν σου [...].²⁹ Normally, in the ancient interpretations this pas-

27. Exod 34:6-7: 'And the Lord passed by before his face, and he called «[The Lord,] the Lord God [is] compassionate and merciful and truthful and preserving righteousness and doing mercy for thousand, taking away acts of lawlessness and of injustice and sins, and he will non acquit the guilty person, bringing lawless acts of fathers upon children [...].»' (NETS).

28. This is an idea which the author of the Book of Jonah takes from Joel 2:13, a text which also refers to the same quotation from the book of Exodus.

29. Jonah 1:6: 'And the first mate came to him and said to him: Why are you snoring? Get up, invoke your God [...].'

sage is not interpreted literally, because it is obviously difficult to explain. The only reference is that of Pseudo-Philo, an obscure author of presumably the 1st and the 2nd century AD, who, in his commentary to Jonah (*De Jona*, 9), tries to clarify how could the first mate have heard Jonah snoring amidst all the uproar of the storm and he tells that Jonah was snoring like a resounding trumpet, because his snoring was not a natural one, but one caused by his guilty conscience³⁰.

The LXX translator probably understood the text with humour and, what is more important, in a manner profoundly Hellenistic, with all the literary culture that Hellenism implies. Otherwise it will be difficult to explain why in the same episode of the sea storm the translator thinks of Homer, as the epic vocabulary proves it³¹. There are in the text two usual and unimportant terms, which are rendered differently from the source text; I am talking about the Hebrew words *mallah* ('oarsmen') and *rab* ('captain'). In a precise Greek translation these terms should have been translated by οἱ κωπηλάται³² ἢ ὁ κυβερνήτης³³. The LXX translator would have probably never rendered them by οἱ ναυτικοί ('seamen') and ὁ πρωρέυς ('first mate'), if he would not have read the passage from the *Odyssey* VIII, 557-559, where the king Alcinous describes to Ulysses what differentiates a Phaeacian ship from the others: 'For the Phaeacians have no pilots, nor steering-oars such as other ships have, but their ships themselves understand the thoughts and minds of men'³⁴. There is no doubt that the translator

30. Folker Siegert, *Drei hellenistisch-judische Predigten. I. Ps.-Philon, De Jona*, WUNT I 61 (1992) 13.

31. The expression τὴν κοίλην τοῦ πλοίου (literally 'the cavity / the hollow part of a ship', 'the belly of a ship') represents probably the Hellenistic form of a homeric expression that associated the noun 'ship' with the qualitative adjective κοῖλος as in *Iliad* I, 26: μή σε γέρον κοίλησιν ἐγὼ παρὰ νηυσὶ κιχέω ('Let me not find you, old man, by the hollow ships' – Homer, *The Iliad*, translation by A. T. Murray, <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0133%3Abook%3D1%3Acard%3D1>>). Likewise, the lexis specific to the epic, used in the episode of the seastorm, seems to have a lot in common with the scene of the shipwreck from the 5th book of *Odyssey*. For example, the text of *Jonah* 1:4 (καὶ ἐγένετο κλύδων μέγας ἐν τῇ θαλάσῃ) would correspond to the scene from *Odyssey* V, 296 (μέγα κῦμα κυλίνδων); the term used for the sea monster (κῆτος) is mentioned also in *Odyssey* V, 421-422, where the shipwrecked Ulysses fears that a malevolent god would bring in his path a sea monster raised and nourished by Amphitrite, the wife of Poseidon.

32. Cf. Ezek 27:9.

33. Thus translated the term Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion (Field, *Origenis Hexaplorum* II, 984).

34. Homer, *Odyssey* VIII, 557-559: οὐ γὰρ Φαιίκεσσι κυβερνητῆρες ἔασιν, / οὐδέ τι πηδάλι' ἔστι, τά τ' ἄλλαι νῆες ἔχουσιν: / ἄλλ' αὐταὶ ἴσασι νοήματα καὶ φρένας ἀνδρῶν [...] (Homer, *The*

knew very well both Hebrew and Greek (this can be easily inferred from the fact that his translation is an accurate and exact one), but I believe that this was his way of showing that the seamen were not Jewish. Is it possible that the translator identified the Phaeacians with the Phoenicians? Very likely, especially if we take into account that in Antiquity they were counted as Phoenicians. He had, also, other reasons for which he could have seen the text as a mythological story. The episode of the swallowing of Jonah by the sea monster (κῆτος) would actually represent a reworking of an old myth, probably of Phoenician origin, which passed into the Greek mythology. This myth was included in the trojan epic cycle and took the form of the myth of Hesione, king Laomedon's daughter, exposed on a rock as a sacrifice to a sea monster and saved by Heracles. There are many versions of this myth, fragments of which are preserved in the works of Greek and Latin mythographers, each of them giving it a specific form or simply alluding to it. In some versions the main character is Perseus, who kills the sea monster in the port of Joppa³⁵, from which Jonah also begins his journey. According to other versions, Heracles is swallowed by the monster and remains three days³⁶ inside its belly before he manages to kill it. If Cyril of Alexandria and Jerome strived to explain theologically the practice of casting lots of Jonah 1:7, however this practice, uncommon to the Bible³⁷, can be more accurately understood from the reading of the myth (a myth that the two exegetes know³⁸ in its different versions, but that they refuse to accept as an exegetical solution for the sacred texts), where the young maids are chosen to be sacrificed to the monster sent by Poseidon by casting lots³⁹. There are of course more sim-

Odyssey, translation by A. T. Murray, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.01.0135>).

35. Pausanias, *Graecae descriptio* IV, 35, 9; Plinius Maior, *Naturalis Historia* V, 25; Nonnus of Panopolis, *Dionysiaca* XVIII, 298; Strabon, *Geographica* XVI, 2, 28; Josephus Flavius, *De bello Judaico* III, 419-422.

36. Lycophron, *Alexandra*, vv. 33-34; cf. Cyril of Alexandria, *Comm. in Jonam.*, II, 11 (PG 71, 616 D).

37. Cyril of Alexandria, *Comm. in Jonam*, I, 6 (PG 71, 609 C); Jerome, *Commentaria in Ionam* I, 7 (PL 25, 1126 B).

38. Cyril of Alexandria knew the myth of Hesione in its version which has Heracles as hero (PG 71, 616 C – 616 D). Jerome doesn't give any details, but from his incentive to reading Ovid's *Metamorphoses* addressed to those sceptical about the existence of wonders (PL 25, 1132 B), we can presume that he knew the version of the myth of Andromeda, told by the Latin poet (*Metamorphoseon libri* IV, 669 sq.), where Perseus is the hero, and also the myth of Hesione (*Metamorphoseon libri* XI, 207 sq.).

39. Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica* IV, 42, 3; Pseudo-Hyginus, *Fabulae* LXXXIX.

ilarities with the Greek myth, but it is certain that the Book of Jonah retells the myth from a biblical perspective, hiding meanings which can be properly grasped only when related to other biblical books. Despite this, the translator seems to see the text as a Hellenistic parody which he translates accordingly.

On the basis of these internal and external arguments, I can conclude that the bilingual translator understood the text in a comical note, being well acquainted with the Greek literature which he uses in his translation. Jonah is a book which aims at an intentional differentiation between the comical story and its religious meaning. The comicality does not exclude the religious message of the book. Unlike other biblical books, the good characters of this work are the supporting ones (the seamen and the Ninevites), while the main protagonist is a negative example. As for the LXX translator, if we take into account some facts from the comedy *Nubes*, where the son rebels at the end against the father and, careless about the debts he passed down to his father, snores recklessly at the beginning of the play, maybe the use of ῥέγγειν⁴⁰ would stop seeming to us so uncommon a rendering for expressing carelessness⁴⁰, but in no way we could construe it as expressing guilt for a sin committed.

40. The insertion of a term from the lexis of Aristophanes into the translation of the Book of Jonah may seem unjustified. Nevertheless, if we take into account the fact that the Greek poet often parodies the tragedies of Euripides, one of which is *Andromeda*, a play from which only fragments survived and which treats the homonymous myth, we cannot entirely rule out the possibility that the translator had known the parodical allusions. The comedy *Nubes* (v. 556) also contains a parodical allusion to the myth of *Andromeda*.