

## GREEK BROTHELS IN JERUSALEM? – VULGATE READINGS OF THE SECOND BOOK OF THE MACCABEES<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT** The paper presents peculiarities of the Vulgate version of the Second Book of the Maccabees (2 Mcc). The Vulgate text is contrasted with the original Greek (Septuagint), as well as other Latin translations (Vetus Latina). Topics dealt with include: style, narrative focus, names and numbers, cultural background, ‘misanthropy’, and theological peculiarities. The paper is intended as a general overview, rather than an exhaustive treatment.

**KEYWORDS** Septuagint, Vulgate, 2 Mcc

### *Introduction*

The Second Book of the Maccabees describes the culture clash between Greeks and Jews as it took place in and around Jerusalem in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. Among the book’s main topics are: the Hellenisation of Jerusalem (with the establishment of Greek institutions, like the *ephebeion* and *gymnasion*), the robbing of the Jewish Temple by Greek kings and officials, various battle scenes, and – most prominently – detailed depictions of Jewish martyrs ready to die bravely for their faith – the latter topic assuring the book a widespread popularity in Christian communities from late antiquity to this very day,<sup>3</sup> with (at least) one peak of interest in the Middle Ages, where we find, for example, in Cologne the establishment of a monastery in honor of the *Sancti Maccabaei*<sup>4</sup> – holding, allegedly, the bones of the seven martyr brothers whose fate is impressively

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3. For Christian interest in 2 Mcc cf.: Schwartz, Daniel R.: *2 Maccabees* (Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature), de Gruyter, Berlin 2008, 88-90. Cf. further the chapter “Theologische Bedeutung” in: Bévenot, Hugo: *Die beiden Makkabäerbücher*, Hanstein, Bonn 1931, esp. p. 41.

4. The associated cult was quite popular among the locals – cf.: Schreiner, Klaus: *Märtyrer, Schlachtenhelfer, Friedensstifter. Krieg und Frieden im Spiegel mittelalterlicher und frühneuzeitlicher Heiligenverehrung*, Leske und Budrich, Opladen 2000, 41-49.

described in chap. 7 of our Book. In medieval Europe, these stories were read and transmitted not in the original Greek, but in translated Latin from: as the text to be found in the Vulgate. It is this text that we will examine more closely in the following pages – thereby asking ourselves, for example:

- Did God create the world ‘out of nothing’? (2 Mcc 7,28)
- What do brothels have in common with sunhats? (2 Mcc 4,12)
- What to do with wine and water? (2 Mcc 15,40)

### *Vulgate peculiarities of 2 Mcc*

#### 0) General notes and problems

The Second Book of the Maccabees was – due to its doubtful canonical status – not translated by Jerome during his 4<sup>th</sup> century Bible revision and translation project.<sup>5</sup> However, before and besides Jerome, a lot of Latin translators and redactors had also worked on the Holy Scriptures, creating what is nowadays collectively called the ‘Vetus Latina’. For the Second Book of the Maccabees (2 Mcc), six of these Vetus Latina versions are still known today – the Vulgate being one of them.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, the historical background of this Vulgate version is most obscure to us, and a lot of questions have to remain unanswered:

- 1) Who was the translator? When did he work?
- 2) Which Greek text was used by him? Was it very different from the Septuagint text known to us today?<sup>7</sup>
- 3) To which extent was the Latin text altered over time? How many revisions had there been?<sup>8</sup> How many corruptions and scribal errors influenced the Vulgate text as it is known to us today?<sup>9</sup>

5. Cf.: Schwartz, *2 Mcc*, 59. Siegert, Folkert: *Einleitung in die hellenistisch-jüdische Literatur. Apokrypha, Pseudepigrapha und Fragmente verlorener Autorenwerke*, de Gruyter, Berlin/Boston 2016.

6. A very useful collocation of the Vulgate and Vetus Latina versions of 1/2 Mcc can be found in: de Bruyne, Donatien: *Les anciennes traductions Latines des Machabées* (Anecdota Maredsolana 4), Maredsous 1932.

7. This seems most likely. Cf.: de Bruyne, *Les anciennes traductions*, VI-XII.

8. de Bruyne suggests that our Vulgate text might be a Vetus Latina version revised in close connection to the Greek text – de Bruyne, *Les anciennes traductions*, XXIX.

9. For a list of textual corruptions cf. note 19.

The reader should keep these issues in mind – I will not touch upon them too often in the following pages. Instead, I will refer to ‘the Vulgate’<sup>10</sup> and ‘the Septuagint’<sup>11</sup> as if these were concepts most undebated and undebatable – a simplification I thought necessary for argument’s sake, as well as to achieve greater readability.

### 1) Style

The Second Book of the Maccabees was originally written in Greek, by an author who was well trained in rhetorics and who liked to ‘show off’ his capabilities: the book is full of rhetorical devices, like metaphor, simile, parallelism, and exhibits a great variety of vocabulary, ranging from hellenistic κοινή to epic/poetic or even the invention of new words.<sup>12</sup> Considering this, 2 Mcc is a text that offers great challenges to any translator, and, accordingly, it might not surprise us to find the Latin version of 2 Mcc to be much less sophisticated than its Greek original. The Vulgate rather seems concerned with giving an unambiguous text, an ‘easy read’ so to say, than with mimicking all and every delicacy of style. This phenomenon can be seen in numerous places – most striking perhaps in the following example (2 Mcc 10,14):<sup>13</sup>

Γοργίας δὲ γενόμενος στρατηγὸς τῶν τόπων ἐξενοτρόφει καὶ παρ’ ἕκαστα πρὸς τοὺς Ἰουδαίους ἐπολεμοτρόφει.

But Gorgias, upon becoming commander of the region, collected mercenaries [‘nourished mercenaries’] and at every occasion waged war [‘nourished war’] against the Jews.<sup>14</sup>

*Gorgias autem cum esset dux locorum adsumptis advenis frequenter Iudaeos debellabat.*

But Gorgias, while being governor of the region, collected the strangers and often fought against the Jews.<sup>15</sup>

10. Thereby meaning *de facto*: *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*, ed. by Robert Weber / Roger Gryson, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart 2007.

11. Thereby meaning *de facto*: *Septuaginta, id est Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes*, ed. by Alfred Rahlfs, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart 1979.

12. More than 20 *hapaxlegomena* have been noted by: Richnow, *Untersuchungen zu Sprache und Stil des Zweiten Buchs der Makkabäer*, Göttingen 1966, 48. Cf. also: Schwartz, 2 Mcc, 68.

13. More examples: 2 Mcc 4,26 (ὑπονοθεύσας ὑπονοθευθεῖς) – 5,6 (εὐημερία/δυσημερία) – 6,18 (τὴν πρόσωπιν τοῦ προσώπου κάλλιστος) – 12,21 (δυσπολιόρκητον καὶ δυσπρόσιτον). Contrast these with the rhetorically more styled Latin version in: 2 Mcc 10,26.

14. Throughout the present paper, English translations of the Greek text of 2 Mcc will be based on (but not always literally taken from): Schwartz, 2 Mcc.

The Greek word play ‘to nourish mercenaries’ / ‘to nourish war’ – ξενοτροφέω / πολεμο-τροφέω (the latter probably being an invention of the Greek author<sup>16</sup>) – gets completely lost in the Vulgate, which in contrast renders the passage with the non-impressive, but very lucid phrasing *advenos adsumere / debellare*. According to this tendency, the Vulgate at times can even be understood much more easily than the original Greek,<sup>17</sup> due to – for example – added words or simplified sentences.<sup>18</sup> However, this tendency towards clarity is also thoroughly counterbalanced by the many scribal errors that can be found in our medieval Latin manuscripts. They constitute, for us, a Vulgate text that is far more obscure, at times even nonsensical, than it possibly could have been intended by the original Latin translator.<sup>19</sup>

## 2) Narrative Focus

The overall narrative of 2 Mcc is of course the same in Greek as in Latin. However, in the Vulgate version one can note slight shifts of focus especially in the last third of the book, where the wars of Judas Maccabaeus are related. Here, a typical war scene might start with words like: οἱ δὲ περὶ τὸν Ἰουδαν (‘But those around Judas...’), which in the Vulgate simply reads *Iudas autem*.<sup>20</sup> These shifts in focus might simply have taken place for stylistic reasons<sup>21</sup> (*ii autem qui cum Iuda erant* probably seems rather awkward if used for the fourth time in a row),

15. English translations of the Vulgate will be based on (but not always literally taken from): *The Vulgate Bible: Douay-Rheims translation*, ed. by Angela M. Kinney, Dumbarton Oaks medieval library 17, vol. V (The Minor Prophetic Books), Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Massachusetts) / London 2012.

16. πολεμοτροφέω is a *hapaxlegomenon*, according to: Richnow, *Untersuchungen*, 48.

17. This, at times, might have been caused by scribal errors in our Greek manuscripts. Hanhart, in contrast, supposes an influence of the ‘Lucianic recension’ on the Latin text – Lucian allegedly liked to ‘polish’ the texts revised by him (*lukianische Glättung*). Cf.: Hanhart, Robert: “Zum Text des Zweiten Makkabäerbuchs. Probleme der Überlieferung, der Auslegung und der Ausgabe”, in: *Nachrichten der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Philologisch-Historische Klasse* (1961/13) 5-65, here 18 and esp. 21ff.

18. E.g. in: 12,26 (*Iudas autem*) or 12,44-46.

19. I noticed textual corruptions in: 1,35 – 3,1 (*habentes* should read *habens*) – 3,35 (*promisit* should read *promissis*) – 6,23 (confused genitives/accusatives) – 9,26 (*oro* should read *orate*) – 10,15 (*Judaei* should read *Idumei*) – 10,24 (*exercitu* should read *equitatu*) – 12,9 (*pareret* should read *appareret*) – 12,18 (*non* missing; cf. 12,20!) – 11,19 (*honorum* should read *bonorum*). There are probably more.

20. Cf.: 2 Mcc 12,15f. – 13,1 – 13,23 – 14,1 – 15,1 – 15,6. And with reference to Nehemias: 2 Mcc 1,36.

but they also influence the contents of the story to a certain degree: in the Vulgate version, Judas stands out as the heroic leader, doing things ‘all by himself’. In contrast, the Greek version puts an emphasize on the community that backed up Judas’ deeds – a ‘collectivist’ focus that might have been of more importance for the original Jewish author and his audience, than for later (Latin and Christian) readers and translators.

### 3) Names and numbers

Being an *epitome*, a shortened version of a larger historical work,<sup>22</sup> 2 Mcc is full of names and numbers. Already the Greek manuscripts show a great variety here, especially regarding proper names,<sup>23</sup> so it is not surprising to find similar differences in the Vulgate text as well. For example, in chap. 7, the mother of the seven martyr brothers gives an exhorting speech to one of her sons, addressing him in the following manner (2 Mcc 7,27):

Υιέ, ἐλέησόν με τὴν ἐν γαστρὶ περιενέγκασάν σε μῆνας ἐννέα...  
Son, pity me, who carried you about in my womb for nine months...

*fili mi miserere mei quae te in utero decem<sup>24</sup> menses portavi...*  
My son, have pity upon me, who bore you ten months in my womb...

There seem to have been different notions of how long a woman’s pregnancy usually will last, and they seem to have been irritating enough for the translator/redactor so as to change the original text according to his own understanding.

Regarding proper names, the Vulgate regularly translates them if they bear some meaning in themselves.<sup>25</sup> This rule gets also applied in 2 Mcc: *Antiochus Epiphanes*, for example, is rendered as *Antiochus nobilis*<sup>26</sup> – which, allegedly, might not have been the most appropriate translation. The Greek term *epihanes*

21. And, as always, it is difficult to decide where these alterations had taken place: within the Vulgate or already in the Greek manuscript tradition on which the Vulgate translation was based?

22. Cf.: 2 Mcc 2,24.

23. Hanhart, *Zum Text des Zweiten Makkabäerbuchs*, 47-52.

24. Vulgate ms. Z (*Harleianus*) and *Clementina–novem*. Vetus Latina mss. L and P – *decem*. Vetus Latina mss. X, B, and M – *novem*. (Cf.: de Bruyne, *Les anciennes traductions*.) There are no variants attested in the Greek manuscript tradition.

25. Cf. Beriger, Andreas: “Et verborum ordo mysterium est”, in: *Vulgata-Studies* Vol. I, ed. by Andreas Beriger et al., Lang, Bern et al. 2015, 121-131.

26. E.g. in: 2 Mcc 2,20 – 4,7 – 10,13.

is derived from *epiphaneia* – the ‘appearing’/‘manifestation’ of a deity – and strongly connects Antiochus with the ‘spheres divine’ and the Seleucid ruler cult.<sup>27</sup> This connection is missing in the Vulgate, whose rendering *nobilis*, instead, seems to add a certain irony to 2 Mcc, since throughout the narrative, the ‘noble’ Antiochus acts rather like a brute and madman.<sup>28</sup> Another example: in 2 Mcc 5,24, we find the Greek military commander *Mysarchos* translated as *odiosus princeps* – ‘hateful leader’. The Greek term, though, could be understood just as well as a proper name or a military function (‘leader of the Mysoi’<sup>29</sup>). A similar ambiguity can be found in the name of the Greek god *Zeus Xenios* mentioned in 2 Mcc 6,2: is he a ‘foreign’<sup>30</sup> or a ‘hospitable’<sup>31</sup> god? The Vulgate decided for the latter and rendered the name as: *Iovis Hospitalis*. Here, again, we see a certain interpretation applied by the Latin translator, which resulted consequently in a less ambiguous Latin text.

### 3) Cultural background

The culture clash between Greeks and Jews is one of the central themes of the Second Book of the Maccabees.<sup>32</sup> Accordingly, there is an abundance of references to Greek and Jewish identity, including the coinage of new terms like ‘Ιουδαισμός vs. ‘Ελληνισμός.<sup>33</sup> Such cultural references are rendered faithfully throughout the Latin translations — with only one exception: the Vulgate, which at times translates ‘Ελληνικός (‘greek’) not as *graecus*, but in a more general way as *gentilis* (‘pagan’).<sup>34</sup> For example we read in 2 Mcc 4,13:

27. Cf.: Mehl, Andreas (Halle/Sale): „Epiphanes“, *Brill’s New Pauly*, Antiquity volumes edited by: Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider, consulted online on 06 May 2017. On Antiochus IV cf. further: Appian, *Syriake* 45.

28. Schwartz notes a similar word play in the Greek text, where the name *Epiphanes* is contrasted with Antiochus’ *hyperephania* (‘arrogance’). Schwartz, *2 Mcc*, 81.

29. This is the rendition of the *Septuaginta Deutsch* („Befehlshaber der Myser“).

30. That is how Luther understood it: “vnd den Tempel zu Garizim / des Jouis Xenij Kirchen / dieweil frembde Leute da selbs woneten“ – in: *Biblia, das ist, die gantze Heilige Schrift Deudsch*, 1545.

31. That is how, for example, Schwartz understood it – cf.: Schwartz, *2 Mcc*, 537.

32. This ‘obsession’ with cultural identity is a peculiarity of 2 Mcc. In 1 Mcc we find the term ‘Greeks’ applied only four times and in a mere political sense: 1 Mcc 1,1 – 1,10 – 8,9 – 8,18.

33. ‘Ιουδαισμός occurs in: 2 Mcc 2,21 – 8,1 – 14,38. ‘Ελληνισμός occurs in 2 Mcc 4,13. Cf. further: Honigman, Sylvie: *Tales of Highpriests and Taxes. The Books of the Maccabees and the Judean Rebellion against Antiochus IV*, University of California Press, Oakland 2014, 201.

ἦν δ' οὕτως ἀκμή τις Ἑλληνισμοῦ καὶ πρόσβασις ἀλλοφυλισμοῦ...  
And there was such an apogee of Hellenism and inroad of foreignism...

*Erat autem hoc non initium sed incrementum quoddam et profectus gentilis et alienigenae conversationis...*

But this was not the beginning, but an increase and progress of heathenish and foreign manners...

Contrast the Vulgate version with the more faithful and (as I would say) also more creative rendering of Ἑλληνισμός in the Vetus Latina manuscript P:

*Erat autem tale quoddam graecisationis robur <et> profectus alienigenarum moris...*

It seems, the translator/redactor of the Vulgate was not overly concerned with problems of cultural identity, and instead of giving the most faithful rendering, he simply gave a term he (and his Christian audience) was more used to: *gentilis*. But whatever the reason behind this rendition, the rather free Vulgate translation might very well have also helped later readers to apply the text to their own times and their own wars against the ‘gentiles’. In the Middle Ages, for example, the Maccabean warriors were invoked as helping figures for the crusade.<sup>35</sup> The 12<sup>th</sup> century *Gumbertusbibel* illustrates the deeds described in the First Book of the Maccabees with a miniature of Judas saying in rhyme: *contra gentiles sub me duce state viriles*.<sup>36</sup> Readings of the Second Book of the Maccabees might have aimed in the same direction, thereby altering the intention of the original author (to show the conflicts between Greeks and Jews) to a broader, more contemporary understanding – this ‘modernisation’ of the Book, one could argue, was maybe helped along by the Vulgate rendering of *gentilis* for Ἑλληνικός. It is interesting, however, to note that the Jewish ‘side of the coin’ was not altered in such a way: Ἰουδαῖοι is usually translated as *Iudaei*, and the

34. The Vulgate rendering *gentilis* for *hellenikos* can be found in: 2 Mcc 4,10 – 4,13 – 6,8 – 6,9 – 11,2. In contrast, *graecus* can be found in: 4,15 – 4,36 – 11,24. There is only one instance where the Vetus Latina (and just one manuscript: P) gives the version *paganorum* instead of *graecorum* – 2 Mcc 11,2.

35. Cf.: Schreiner, *Märtyrer, Schlachtenhelfer*, 32-37.

36. Fol. 297v. A digital copy of the *Gumbertusbibel* can be viewed online (*Digitale Sammlungen der Universitätsbibliothek Erlangen Nürnberg*): [http://digital.bib-bvb.de/view/bvb-mets/viewer.0.6.1.jsp?folder\\_id=0&dvs=1494106186005~230&pid=3672120&locale=de&usePid1=true&usePid2=true](http://digital.bib-bvb.de/view/bvb-mets/viewer.0.6.1.jsp?folder_id=0&dvs=1494106186005~230&pid=3672120&locale=de&usePid1=true&usePid2=true).

numerous references to ‘us’ (= the Jews) are given just in the same vein (as *nos/nostril*) throughout the Vulgate text.<sup>37</sup>

Besides such questions of identity, the Vulgate at times also seems to have struggled with the plain cultural background of 2 Mcc. For example, at the end of our book the Greek author compares his work with water and wine: both are enjoyable only when mixed together (συγκερασθεις), not when drunk as such (κατὰ μόνας). The Vulgate translation sort of misses the point in stating (2 Mcc 15,40):

*sicut enim vinum semper bibere aut semper aquam contrarium est alternis autem uti delectabile...*

For as it is hurtful to drink always wine or always water, but pleasant to use sometimes the one and sometimes the other...

The practice of mixing wine with water was so common in antiquity, that one cannot help but wonder how the author/redactor of the Vulgate could have been unacquainted with it. One could even speculate whether this might not give some hint about the date and location of the Vulgate translation/redaction of 2 Mcc. But I do not want to pursue such questions of ‘historical oenology’ any further here, and instead will give a last example of cultural misunderstandings in the Vulgate – one of the most striking and (at least to me) most inexplicable examples to be found. In chapter 4, our Book describes the ‘hellenising programme’ of the high priest Jason (2 Mcc 4,12):

ἀσμένως γὰρ ὑπ’ αὐτὴν τὴν ἀκρόπολιν γυμνάσιον καθίδρυσεν καὶ τοὺς κρατίστους τῶν ἐφήβων ὑποτάσσων ὑπὸ πέτασον ἤγαγεν.

With relish he laid the foundations for a gymnasium directly beneath the acropolis and led the strongest of the young men under the sunhat.<sup>38</sup>

To this very day, scholars remain uncertain about the meaning of the Greek metaphor ‘to lead somebody under the sunhat’.<sup>39</sup> The same must have been true for the ancient Latin translators. Some of the *Vetus Latina* manuscripts just give

37. With only one exception in 2 Mcc 14,34.

38. This is my rendition. Schwartz, *2 Mcc*: “making the strongest of the epebes submit to (wearing) sunhats”.

39. Suggestions have ranged from an educational program that somehow is connected with the *petasos* (Goldstein, Jonathan A.: *Second Maccabees. A new translation with introduction and commentary*, Garden City, New York 1983, 229), to questions of social or even military ordering (Honigman, *Tales of Highpriests*, 209; Schwartz, *2 Mcc*, 223).



the Greek term (*petasus*<sup>40</sup>) without further explanation, others give the nonsensical reading *sub apertum* or *palam*.<sup>41</sup> The Vulgate, in contrast, shows a translation that is very clear, though probably not very close to the Greek original:

*Etenim ausus est sub ipsa arce gymnasium constituere et optimos quosque ephoeborum in lupanaribus ponere*

For he had the boldness to set up under the very castle a *gymnasium* and to put all the choicest of the young men in brothel houses

It is obscure to me how the Vulgate arrived at this understanding of the text. At any rate, one has to admit that it fits well into the general context of this passage, which is full of the ‘corrupted’ morals introduced by the Hellenising high priest Jason. However, it seems the Vulgate even overstates his misdeeds, giving an even darker picture than it might have been intended by the original author.<sup>42</sup> Such ‘misanthropy’ occurs more than once in our Vulgate text: I want take a closer look at it in the following section.

#### 4) ‘Misanthropy’

The Latin translation of 2 Mcc seems to have followed a rule of: “If in doubt, go for the worse”. We have already seen the ‘hateful leader’ (*odiosus princeps*) in 5,24<sup>43</sup> as well as the Vulgate rendering *in lupanaribus ponere* for the probably rather innocent Greek idiom ‘to lead under the sunhat’ (2 Mcc 4,12). In a similar way, we find in 2 Mcc 3,4:

Σιμων δέ τις [...] διηνέχθη τῷ ἀρχιερεῖ περὶ τῆς κατὰ τὴν πόλιν ἀγορανομίας  
But one Simon [...] had his differences with the high priest concerning market supervision in the city.

*Simon autem [...] contendebat obsistente sibi principe sacerdotum iniquum aliquid in civitate moliri*

But Simon [...] strove in opposition to the high priest to bring about some unjust thing in the city.

40. Mss. B and P, according to: de Bruyne, *Les anciennes traductions*.

41. Ms. L: *sub apertum*. Ms. X: *sub aperto*. Ms. M: *palam*. Cf.: de Bruyne, *Les anciennes traductions*.

42. Of course one could also speculate if it is not the Vulgate that ‘got the point’ – though it would be strange that none of the modern commentaries sees a sexual connotation in 2 Mcc 4, 12, and neither did any of the *Vetus Latina* translators.

43. Cf. the section above on ‘Names and numbers’.

At first glance, it might seem like the Vulgate did not understand the Greek term *agoronomia* and just replaced it with a vaguely fitting paraphrase – *iniquum aliquid moliri*. However, in this particular instance, the Vulgate rendering is probably already based on a Greek textual variant: in one Septuagint manuscript<sup>44</sup> we find *paranomia* – ‘unlawful things’ – instead of *agoronomia* – ‘market supervision’. It seems likely that this former variant was the basis for our Latin translator. However, there are more occurrences of ‘misanthropy’ in the Vulgate that cannot always be explained that easily:

— In 2 Mcc 4,19, the highpriest Jason sends out an envoy (θεωρούς) to the city of Tyre – in the Vulgate, he sends out ‘sinful men’ (*viros peccatores*).

— In 6,21, the scribe Eleazar refuses to eat the unlawful meat from a sacrifice for king Antiochus. His friends try to convince him to use a trick: he shall let himself bring lawful meat and eat this instead, just pretending to participate in the king’s sacrifice, but in fact not eating anything unlawful. This advice gets rather bad credit in the Vulgate – Eleazar’s friends are said to be ‘moved by unjust pity’ (*iniqua miseratione commoti*).

— In 6,4, the profanation of the temple in Jerusalem is described: ‘For the Temple was filled with licentiousness and reveling by the Gentiles, who amused themselves with whores and were intimate with women in the sacred courts, also bringing in things which are not appropriate.’<sup>45</sup> The Vulgate version gives the female prostitutes an extra share in the sin: *sacratissime aedibus mulieres se ultro ingerebant intro ferentes ea quae non licebat*. – ‘And the women thrust themselves of their own accord into the holy places and brought in things which were forbidden by the laws.’

— In chap. 7, there are a couple of speeches, held by each of the seven martyr brothers just before he dies. After there is only one brother left, his mother gives an impressive speech as well, exhorting him not to fear his tormentor, but to die bravely like his brothers did – but her son just cuts her short, at least in the Vulgate: *cum haec illa adhuc diceret ait adulescens ...* – “While she was yet speaking these words, the young man said ...”<sup>46</sup>

44. L<sup>c</sup> 311, according to Hanhart’s critical edition, p. 55.

45. τὸ μὲν γὰρ ἱερὸν ἀσωτίας καὶ κόμων ὑπὸ τῶν ἔθνῶν ἐπεπληροῦτο ῥαθυμούντων μεθ’ ἑταιρῶν καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἱεροῖς περιβόλοις γυναιξὶ πλησιαζόντων, ἔτι δὲ τὰ μὴ καθήκοντα ἔνδον εἰσφερόντων.

46. The Greek version lets her finish her speech: Ἄρτι δὲ ταύτης καταληγούσης ὁ νεανίας εἶπεν – “As soon as she concluded that, the youth said”. Note, however, that there are a number of textual problems connected to this passage, some of which could possibly explain our Vulgate rendering as well. Cf. Kappler, *De memoria alterius libri Macchabaeorum*, 64.

In summary, one can find quite a lot of ‘misanthropy’ in the Vulgate, although it is not always clear how and where it originated. It might well be that the renditions mentioned above rather reflect the Greek text used for translation than the ‘personal attitude’ of our Vulgate translator/redactor.

### 5) Theological peculiarities

On the surface, 2 Mcc may seem like a mere historical text, but a closer look reveals a lot of theological assumptions interwoven into the narrative – culminating, arguably, in the story of the seven martyr brothers in chap. 7. It is also in this chapter that we can note subtle differences between the Vulgate on the one hand, and the Vetus Latina and Greek versions on the other hand – differences that might be due to theological interpretations or at least to certain (Christian?) ways of expression. Take the following example, already mentioned above: the mother of the seven Jewish martyrs, after witnessing the torture and death of six of her sons, gives a short speech to the last of them, addressing him in the following manner (2 Mcc 7,28):

ἄξιῶ σε, τέκνον, ἀναβλέψαντα εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς πάντα ἰδόντα γνῶναι ὅτι οὐκ ἐξ ὄντων ἐποίησεν αὐτὰ ὁ θεός...

I ask you, child, to raise up your eyes and, seeing the heaven and the earth and all that is in them, know that God did not make them out of existing things...

In the Vulgate, the mother says:

*peto nate aspicias in caelum et terram et ad omnia quae in eis sunt et intellegas quia ex nihilo fecit illa Deus...*

I beseech you, my son, look upon heaven and earth and all that is in them, and consider that God made them out of nothing...

The Vulgate rendering seems to be very faithful to the original Greek, with the exception, however, of the rather free translation *ex nihilo* for οὐκ ἐξ ὄντων. Do both phrases mean the same? Is it the same to say ‘out of nothing’ and ‘out of (things) that had not been’? To tell the truth, such questions seem too complex to me to be answered in passing in a paper like this: so, instead of giving an in depth discussion, I will confine myself to just briefly stating the more obvious facts:

- 1) The Greek passage can and has been understood in different ways, including readings that did not see any connection with the *creatio ex nihilo* thesis.<sup>47</sup>
- 2) The Vulgate version is neither the most obvious nor the most neutral translation possible. Compare for example the two versions of the Vetus Latina: *non ex his quae erant*<sup>48</sup> resp. *ex his quae non erant*.<sup>49</sup>
- 3) The phrasing *ex nihilo* or *de nihilo* can be found dozens of times in – for example – the writings of St. Augustine,<sup>50</sup> when he is refuting ideas of emanation (i.e. that God had created the world ‘out of himself’, rather than ‘out of nothing’). To corroborate his stance, Augustine even cites 2 Mcc 7,28 as proof by scripture.<sup>51</sup> It seems likely, therefore, that the Vulgate translation of this passage has been influenced by such theological disputes.

Without doubt it would be worthwhile to explore these questions more in depth – but for the present paper it may suffice, and I will conclude with a last example of Vulgate peculiarities: in the martyr scene discussed above we already saw the mother exhorting her sons. But the martyr brothers themselves are also encouraging one another in the following manner (2 Mcc 7,6):

‘Ο κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἐφορᾷ καὶ ταῖς ἀληθείαις ἐφ’ ἡμῖν παρακαλεῖται, καθάπερ διὰ τῆς κατὰ πρόσωπον ἀντιμαρτυροῦσης ᾠδῆς διεσάφησεν Μωυσεῖς λέγων Καὶ ἐπὶ τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ παρακληθήσεται.

The Lord God watches over us and is in truth becoming reconciled with us, as Moses stated clearly in the song which face to face bears witness against us, saying, ‘And He will reconcile Himself with His servants.’

47. Cf. esp.: Gerhard May, *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts: d. Entstehung d. Lehre von d. creatio ex nihilo*, de Gruyter, Berlin/New York 1976, 6f. Cf. further: Barbara Schmitz, „Geschaffen aus dem nichts? Die Funktion der Rede von der Schöpfung im Zweiten Makkabäerbuch“, in: *Theologies of Creation in Early Judaism and Ancient Christianity*, T. Niklas / K. Zamfir (edd.), De Gruyter, Berlin 2010, 61-80.

48. Manuscript B and P.

49. Manuscript M. The changed word order (ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων vs. οὐκ ἐξ ὄντων) can already be found in the Greek mss. (according to Habicht, 2. *Makkabäerbuch*, 237, as well as Hanharts critical edition of 2 Mcc; the change of word order is not noted in the Septuagint published by Rahlfs).

50. The search engine on [www.augustinus.it](http://www.augustinus.it) enlists 40 results for *ex nihilo*, 44 for *de nihilo*.

51. In yet another version than those known to us through the Vulgate and Vetus Latina manuscripts: *Oro te, fili, respice ad caelum, et terram, et omnia quae in eis sunt. Vide et scito quia non erant ex quibus nos fecit Dominus Deus.* – Augustine, *De natura boni* 26.

The idea of reconciliation (as expressed in the verb παρακαλέω) is central to this passage as well as to the whole Book itself.<sup>52</sup> The Jews – runs the idea – have loaded sin upon them in taking over the Greek customs; God, consequently, withdrew his protection from them; but he will now favor them again (‘reconcile himself with them’) thanks to the brave martyrs who are ready to die for the covenant with God and for the benefit of their people. This is an interpretation that at least partly seems to have missed the notion of the Vulgate translator, who renders the text as follows:

*Dominus Deus aspiciat veritatem et consolabitur in nobis quemadmodum protestationem cantici declaravit Moses et in servis suis consolabitur.*

The Lord God may look upon the truth and will be consoled by us,<sup>53</sup> as Moses declared in the profession of his song: ‘And by his servants he will be consoled.’

The Vulgate seems to assume that God is sad, rather than angry, and that he needs to be ‘cheered up’ by the martyrs. The promise to the Jewish people that their suffering will have an end because God is reconciled with them is completely missing in the Latin version – it is all about God, not about men.<sup>54</sup> At least, that is how one could understand the Vulgate rendering *consolabitur*: it is quite interesting in this context to take a look at the ‘song of Mose’ (which had been cited by the martyr brothers – *quemadmodum declaravit Moses*) in its original place (Dtn 32,36):

κρινεῖ κύριος τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐπὶ τοῖς δούλοις αὐτοῦ παρακληθήσεται.

*iudicabit Dominus populum suum et in servis suis miserebitur.*

The Lord will judge his people, and he will take pity on his servants.

The Greek verb in both passages (Dtn 32,36 / 2 Mcc 7,6) is the same: παρακαλέω. The Vulgate rendering, however, is not: *miserebitur* / *consolabitur*. This mismatch has already been noted by at least one reader before me. In 1686, Ambrosius Schönhardt<sup>55</sup> published a compilation of sermons, in which he, *inter*

52. Cf. Schwartz’ commentary on this passage (2 Mcc 7,6), as well as Schwartz, *2 Mcc*, 21-22.

53. *consolabitur* could also be understood as an active verb: „And he will console [sc.: the Jewish people] through us.”

54. *nos* seems to refer to the martyrs, whereas the Greek ἡμεῖς rather points to the Jewish people as a whole (as in 2 Mcc 7,33).

55. Brother of the Dominican Order (*Ordo Praedicatorum*) in Breslau (today: Wrocław/Poland) – according to the title page of his *Geistliche Vorrathskammer* (1686).

*alia*, also commented upon the different versions of *consolabitur* and *miserebitur* in 2 Mcc vs. Dtn:

Mit den sieben Brüdern verfuhr *Antiochus* aufs grausamste, fand aber eine diamantische Beständigkeit an ihnen, hörte auch ihre unterschiedlichen Reden, und unter denselben: *Dominus Deus aspiciet veritatem & consolabitur in nobis, quemadmodum in protestatione Cantici declaravit Moyses: Et in servis suis consolabitur*. Gott der Herr wird die Wahrheit ansehen, und an uns getröstet werden, wie Moses in dem Gesange erklärt, das er zum Zeugnis gemacht hat: und er wird an seinen Knechten getröstet werden. Weil man sich auf das Gesang Moses in *Deuteronomio* beruft, so schlage mit mir das Buch auf, lies das Lied, welches anfängt: *Audite caeli, quae loquor &c*. In diesem *cantico* klingt der 36. Vers: *Iudicabit Dominus populum suum. & in servis suis miserebitur*. Der Herr wird sein Volk richten, und wird sich über seine Knechte erbarmen. Wie ich mich verwundere, daß diese tapferen Jünglinge sagen, Gott werde an ihnen getröstet werden, also stehe ich an, daß sie sich auf *Mosen* berufen, sein *Canticum* vor sich zitieren. Kann denn Gott getröstet werden? Nichts kann in Gott geraten, das eines Trostes benötigt, wie kann ihm derohalben ein Trost zukommen? Nochmals, Moses sagt in dem angezogenen Ort von keinem Trost, seine Worte lauten nicht, wie sie werden zitieret, sondern es heißt: *In servis suis miserebitur*: Er wird sich über seine Knechte erbarmen. Wo ist da *consolabitur*, er wird getröstet werden? Trost nehmen und Erbarmen stimmen weit voneinander ab: Wie wird denn eines statt anderns zitieret? Vielleicht aus Größe der Peinen ist ihnen der rechte Text entfallen, das Gedächtnis schwach worden. Nein, sie fehlen nicht, ob sie gleich sagen, es heiße bei Mose *consolabitur*, Er wird getröstet werden, und heißt doch *miserebitur*, Er wird sich erbarmen. Eben da Moses sagt, er wird sich erbarmen, so sagt er zugleich, er wird an ihnen getröstet werden; *Consolatione quasi & gaudeo Deus afficitur, dum miserendo benefacit & benefaciendo miseretur, ipsomet per Jeremiam dicente: Laetabor super eis, cum eis benefecero*, sagt ein vornehmer *Asceta* darüber. Bei Gott ist sich erbarmen und getröstet werden beisammen, eines folget aus dem andern, denn wenn Gott den Menschen eine Barmherzigkeit und Wohltat erweist, hat er seinen Trost und seine Freude daran, wie er selbst beim *Jeremia* sagt: Ich werde mich über ihnen erfreuen, wenn ich ihnen werde wohlthun.<sup>56</sup>

Cruelly did Antiochus act with the seven brothers, but found them to be hard as a diamond, also listening to their various speeches, among which: *Dominus Deus aspiciet veritatem & consolabitur in nobis, quemadmodum in protestatione Cantici declaravit Moyses: Et in servis suis consolabitur*. God, the Lord, will see the truth and will be consoled by us, as Moses professed in his song: and he will be consoled by his servants. Since they refer to the song of Moses in *deuteronomio*, let us open the book, and read the song which begins: *Audite caeli, quae loquor &c*. In this song, the 36<sup>th</sup> verse sounds like this: *Iudicabit Dominus populum suum. & in servis suis miserebitur*. The Lord will judge his people, and he will take pity on his servants. I cannot help but wonder

56. Ambrosius Schönhardt: *Geistlicher, in sieben Abtheilungen bestehender Vorraths-Kammer über alle Sonntage des Jahrs*. Mainz 1686, 375-6. [German spelling has been slightly changed according to modern conventions.]

that these brave youths are saying: God will be consoled by them, for I see they are citing Moses. How can God be consoled? Nothing can touch him that would cause him to need consolation, so how can he get consoled? Again, Moses says nothing of consolation, his words are not the words cited, but he says: *In servis suis miserebitur*, He will take pity on his servants. Where do you find here *consolabitur*, He will be consoled? To be consoled and to take pity are two completely different things: how can it be that one gets confused with the other? Maybe they have forgotten the right text, due to the magnitude of their pains, maybe their memory failed them? No, they are not wrong, even in saying that Moses said *consolabitur*, He will be consoled, whereas in truth he said *miserebitur*, He will take pity. In saying that he will take pity, Moses also says that he will be consoled; *Consolatione quasi & gaudeo Deus afficitur, dum miserendo benefacit & benefaciendo miserebitur, ipsomet per Jeremiam dicente: Laetabor super eis, cum eis benefecero*, says a noble *Asceta*. For in God these belong together, to take pity and to be consoled, one follows from the other, because if God shows mercy or acts as a benefactor for men, he has his consolation and joy in this act, as he himself says in *Jeremia*: I will rejoice over them, when I will do good to them.

Schönhardt obviously took the Vulgate at its word, and he also took quite an effort to ‘reconcile’ the diverging translations of 2 Mcc and Dtn. From a modern point of view, it is quite astonishing to see him so fixed on the Latin text: not for a second does he seem to consider the possibility that his two Vulgate versions might simply be due to an erroneous translation process that initially involved three to four different languages.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, Schönhardt even seems to assume that the martyrs spoke Latin and knew the Bible in Latin, when he asks rhetorically: “Maybe they have forgotten the right text, due to the magnitude of their pains?” – or, at the very least, he assumed that the Vulgate is indeed a faithful translation of the Greek and Hebrew original. That this last assumption, from a modern perspective, often cannot hold true, has been shown in the present paper.

### *Summary*

The Vulgate version of the Second Book of the Maccabees contains a couple of noteworthy peculiarities – only a selection of which could be presented in this paper. We noted, firstly, that style and language of the Latin Book are less sophisticated than in the original Greek, and that the Vulgate text rather aims at being intelligible, than at being rhetorically elaborate. From a narratological point of view, the Vulgate often highlights Judas Maccabeus as the ‘lonely hero’ of the story, whereas the Greek rendering more often gives collective credit to

57. Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and the *patria vox* of the martyrs (mentioned in 2 Mcc 7,8).

‘those around Judas’. Names and numbers often do not agree in the Greek and Latin versions: for example, a woman in the Vulgate stays pregnant for ten months, whereas in the Septuagint she is credited only with nine months. Proper names and epithets that bear some meaning usually get translated in the Vulgate: We have met the ‘noble Antiochus’, the ‘hateful leader’, and the ‘hospitable Zeus’. The cultural background of 2 Mcc, it seems, was not always clear to the Vulgate translator – or at times he maybe just did not care, as when he rendered the word for ‘Greek’ (*hellenikos*) with the Latin word for ‘pagan’ (*gentilis*). This occurred in numerous places throughout the Vulgate, but in none of the other Latin translations known to us. Another cultural misunderstanding included the mixing of water and wine, as it is described in the Greek text and as it was common in antiquity – a Vulgate reader, in contrast, would not mix these, but rather drink water and wine at turns, using ‘sometimes the one and sometimes the other’ (as it is translated in the Vulgate). One of the most curious translations, however, can certainly be seen in the Vulgate rendering ‘to put sb. into brothels’ for the Greek idiom ‘to lead under the sunhat’ – a translation that, again, distinguishes the Vulgate among all the other Latin versions. In the next section of this paper, we noted even more cases of such ‘misanthropy’, i.e. of Latin renditions that bore some negative meaning not to be found in the Greek text – for example: the planning of ‘some unjust thing’, an envoy of ‘sinful men’, friends who were ‘moved by unjust pity’, female prostitutes pushing themselves ‘of their own accord into the holy places’, and a son who rudely interrupts his mother. At times these negative renderings could be explained by scribal errors in the Greek and Latin manuscripts, but the origin of most of the ‘Vulgate misanthropy’ remains obscure to us. Finally, we have taken a look at theological interpretations in 2 Mcc. These are the most subtle, but arguably also the most interesting of the Vulgate peculiarities. Here, we have encountered the problem of *creatio ex nihilo*: did God create the world ‘out of nothing’ (*ex nihilo*), as the Vulgate states? Or ‘out of something that had not been’, as the Greek text states? Do both phrases mean the same? We have touched upon these questions only in brief, without giving a definite answer (if there is any), and moved on to our last example: the seven martyr brothers claiming that God ‘will be consoled by his servants’ – a passage that they were allegedly citing from Moses. However, Moses himself in the original passage says (at least in the Vulgate) quite something else: God ‘will take pity on his servants’. Is it the same to be consoled and to take pity? In God it is the same – says the 17<sup>th</sup> century author and priest Ambrosius Schönhardt, who based his own theological interpretation on the diverging Vulgate translations: thereby reminding us that for



many generations the Vulgate was ‘the word of God’, and that any peculiarities a modern observer might find in this book were to these older generations just as sacred a part of the bible as the rest – challenging, maybe, to our human understanding, but divinely inspired none the less.

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