

Biblical Translations and Cross-cultural Communication

A focus on the Animal Imagery*

INTRODUCTION

Ancient translations of the Hebrew Bible constitute an interesting field for exploring cross-cultural encounters, since the translation process inevitably involves a significant variation of nouns, concepts and contents, that create a kind of open ‘borderland’ between cultures, where elements of continuity and discontinuity can be more clearly observed. These transformations are particularly evident in the study of fauna (and flora) nomenclature. Zoological (and botanic) jargon reflects specific semantic fields and cultural paradigms that underpin every language.¹ Moreover, the animal imagery is a symbolic referent for operations of identification and separation, and thus constitutes a privileged subject matter for each cultural encyclopedia, holding an extraordinary semiotic productivity.² In the present study, I provide a selection of examples that demonstrates how the translation process fostered cross-cultural interactions in antiquity. I analyze different translation strategies underpinning some onomastic choices made by the Septuagint (LXX) translators that involve the animal lexicon specifically. In particular, I focus on some unexpected correspondences between the source and the target text, where anomalous or fantastic animals, monstrous beings and exceptional creatures appear or, by contrast, disappear in the Greek translation.

I will focus on the Septuagint of *Job* as an initial test case, given its significance in the study of animal onomastic in the Hebrew Bible more broadly. The author of *Job* draws on animal metaphors throughout the book, most notably in the specific section that focuses on Yhwh’s unique activity as a creator (38-41): this long passage contains many references to the biblical fauna. Moreover, the unique character of the Septuagint of *Job*, which has long been recognized not only as a “free”, but

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¹ In this regard, a pilot study concerning Septuagint translation techniques for flora nomenclature is B. LEMMELIJN, “Flora in Cantico Canticorum. Towards a More Precise Characterisation of Translation Technique in the LXX of Song of Songs”, in *Scripture in Transition : Essays on Septuagint, Hebrew Bible and Dead Sea Scrolls*, FS R. Sollamo, ed. by A. VOITILA and J. JOKIRANTA (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism 126), Leiden, 2008, pp. 27-51.

² On the semiotic value of the animals, see C. FRANCO, “Animali e analisi culturale”, in *Buoni per pensare. Gli animali nel pensiero e nella letteratura dell’antichità*, a c. di F. GASTI and E. ROMANO, Pavia, 2003, pp. 63-81; M. BETTINI, “Laughing Weasels. Animal Voices from Myth to Natural History”, *Quaderni del ramo d’oro* 1, 2008, pp. 209-216, especially pp. 214-215.

also as a “literary” translation,³ offers a privileged and important insight into cross-cultural interactions between Hebrew tradition and Greek culture.

By comparing the Hebrew and the Greek text, one can easily observe that it is difficult, to the modern reader, to recognize the animals being referred to by several Hebrew terms; they are often *hapax legomena* or rare names, which could be vaguely known, or unknown, to the ancient translator as well. In such cases, a creative, free, or “anaphoric”⁴ translation often occurred, apparently without a clear textual criterion. In other cases, the Hebrew referent was probably known to the translator, but for contextual reasons he decided to search for an equivalent term. Several animals belonging to what has been described as the “*Job’s* bestiary”⁵ in the LXX later became very popular in Early Christian exegesis, the problematic or “aporetic” animal being particularly suitable for symbolical interpretation.⁶ Let us turn now to some examples.

1. COMPOUNDED ANIMALS, MYTHIC HYBRIDS AND ETHNOGRAPHIC ANOMALIES

The first case concerns a possible neologism adopted by the translator. In the Hebrew text of *Job* 4, 11 we read: “The lion (לִיָּא) perishes for lack of prey”. The rare word לִיָּא appears in *Proverbs* 30, 30 as a metaphor of invincible strength.⁷ In the Septuagint, its correspondent is μυρμηκολέων, literally the “ant-lion”. The word is attested here for the first time in Greek literature, and it is transliterated in Old Latin versions (*myrmicoleon*). That it should be considered an inappropriate choice is confirmed by the fact that later revisions preferred λῆς, “cheetah”, that morphologically corresponds

³ The literary character of the LXX of *Job* was already recognised by G. GERLEMAN, *Studies in the Septuagint. I. Book of Job*, Lund, 1946, especially pp. 32-48, which deal mainly with flora and fauna. J. ZIEGLER, *Beiträge zum griechischen Job* (Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen. Philologisch-Historische Klasse 3), Göttingen, 1985, gave a list of Homeric expressions employed by the translator. On the literary context of the Septuagint of *Job* see recently the significant contribution of C. COX, “The Historical, Social and Literary Context of Old Greek *Job*”, in *XII Congress of the IOSCS: Leiden, 2004*, ed. by M. K. H. PETERS, Atlanta, 2006, pp. 105-116. Despite some tendencies to set the translation of the so-called Old Greek *Job* within a Palestinian context, an Egyptian setting seems more probable: see J. COOK, “The Provenance of the Old Greek *Job*”, in *XIV Congress of the IOSCS: Helsinki, 2010*, ed. by M. K. H. PETERS, Atlanta, 2013, pp. 73-92. For a general introduction to the Greek text of *Job* see recently M. WITTE, “The Greek Book of *Job*”, in *Das Buch Hiob und seine Interpretationen. Beiträge zum Hiob-Symposium auf dem Monte Verità vom 14.-19. August 2005*, hrsg. von T. KRÜGER et al., Zürich, 2007, pp. 33-54 and A. RAVASCO, “Giobbe”, in *La Bibbia dei Settanta. Vol. III: Libri poetici*, a c. di C. MARTONE, Brescia, 2013, pp. 713-720. On the quantitative differences between the Old Greek *Job* and the text of the LXX see P. GENTRY, *The Asterisked Materials in the Greek Job*, Atlanta, 1995 and M. GOREA, *Job repensé ou trahi? Omissions et raccourcis de la Septante* (Etudes Bibliques Nouvelle Série 56), Paris, 2007.

⁴ I am referring to the expression used by Heater to characterize the work of the translator of the Old Greek *Job*, i.e. the use of words or expressions that he drawn from other biblical passages, within the book itself or in the rest of the LXX. H. HEATER, *A Septuagint translation technique in the Book of Job* (The Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 11), Washington, 1982.

⁵ This expression refers to D. BERTRAND, “Le bestiaire de *Job*. Notes sur les versions grecques et latines”, in *Le livre de Job chez les Pères*, (Cahiers de Biblia Patristica 5), Strasbourg, 1996, pp. 215-271.

⁶ See on this topics the classic study of D. SPERBER, “Pourquoi les animaux parfaits, les hybrides et les monstres sont-ils bons à penser symboliquement ?”, *L’Homme* 15, 1975, pp. 5-34.

⁷ See also Is 30, 6.

to the Hebrew *לִי* (Aquila), or ἀνυπόστατος λέων “invincible lion” (Symmachus).⁸ To convey the idea of ferociousness implied by the name Jerome opted for the exotic *tigris*, that remains an *hapax* in the Vulgate.

The origin of the noun μυρμηκολέων is unknown. Probably the translator knew some traditions concerning the μυρμήκες, lions or ferocious animals that were supposed to live in Arabic lands. We have some information in this regard from Hellenistic writers and ethnographers such as Agatarchides, Strabo and Aelianus.⁹ Although the direct dependence of the LXX on these sources must be excluded for reasons of chronology,¹⁰ it is probable that both refer to a common background, especially if we consider that Agatarchides is supposed to have worked at the Ptolemy library. A look at the context helps us to understand why this unusual term has been adopted. This biblical expression is found in a couple of verses where four nouns for “lion” are employed in Hebrew (*לִישׁ, כַּפִּירִים, שָׁחַל, אַרְיָה*). However, Greek language knows only one noun for the animal. Therefore, it is possible that the translator, looking for a synonymous, had some records of the Arabian μύρμηξ and joined to it “-λεων” as a specification suffix to distinguish it from the homonymous μύρμηξ, “ant”. Although we cannot completely exclude the possibility that this substantive already existed in Greek (a possibility that is difficult to either confirm or deny due to the scarcity of evidences at hand), it seems most likely to be a neologism.¹¹ In fact, it is not only unattested in the Greek literature before the LXX; but it also seems to be specifically used in the Christian literature clearly depending from the LXX. In addition, the substantive is formed by the juxtaposition of two different names, like others Greek expressions used to denote exotic animals, as τραγέλαφος, καμηλοπάρδαλις, ιππαλέκτρων, ὄνοκένταυρος, ιππέλαφος, and so on. Some of these nouns are attested since the archaic or classical period (as the ιππαλέκτρων, “horse-cock” or “gryphon”);¹² others are typical of Hellenistic language, and occur even elsewhere in the LXX. For example, this is the case for ὄνοκένταυρος, “ass-centaur”, that is mentioned for the first time by the

⁸ See I. ZIEGLER, *Septuaginta. Vol. XI, 4. Hiob*, Göttingen, 1982, p. 228; D. BERTRAND, *Le bestiaire de Job* (*supra*, n. 5), pp. 222-224.

⁹ Str. 16, 4, 15: πληθύνει δ' ἐλέφασιν ἡ χώρα καὶ λέουσι τοῖς καλουμένοις μύρμηξιν· ἀπεστραμμένα δ' ἔχουσι τὰ αἰδοῖα * καὶ χρυσοειδεῖς τὴν χροάν, ψιλότεροι δὲ τῶν κατὰ τὴν Ἀραβίαν· φέρει δὲ καὶ παρδάλεις ἀλκίμους καὶ ῥινοκέρωτας: (“The land is full of elephants and lions, the so called *myrmēkes* (= ants): their genitals are inverted and their skin is golden, but they are less hairy than the Arabian ones; the land presents also savage leopards and rhinoceros”). This notice is already found in Agath., *De mari Erythreo* 69, 1. Claudius Aelianus (*NA* 7, 47) quotes a list of lions cubs, leopards, tigers, *myrmēkes* and panthers. The Greek authors are quoted according to H. LIDDELL, R. SCOTT and H. JONES, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford, 1996; the Latin writers according to P. GLARE, *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, Oxford, 1996. Unless a different indication is given, the translations from Greek, Latin and Hebrew are mine.

¹⁰ Scholars agree that the translation of the Old Greek *Job* probably took place during the second half of the second century B:C.E. The translator could have been, at most, almost contemporary to Agatharchides.

¹¹ On the criteria used to identify a neologism in the Septuagint and related problems, see the relevant study of J. AITKEN, “Neologism: A Septuagint Problem”, in *Interested Readers: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David J. A. Clines*, ed. by K. AITKEN, C. MAIER and J. CLINES, Atlanta, 2013, pp. 315-329.

¹² Ar., *R.* 935-397.

translator of the LXX of *Isaiah*,¹³ and of καμηλοπάρδαλις, “giraffe”, appearing in the Septuagint of *Deuteronomy*.¹⁴ At the same time, both nouns are found in a late Hellenistic Nilotic mosaic conserved in Preneste.¹⁵ The creative exegesis of the LXX translator could therefore reflect a method of linguistic formulation that is typical of Greek language and was operative especially during the Hellenistic period. As it has been rightly underlined by Aitken, the Koine speakers were particularly productive in generating new words.¹⁶

Although it seems assured from the immediate context of the LXX of *Job* 4, 9-11 that the μυρμηκολέων refers to a wild feline perceived as exotic, the ant-lion, hybrid in its name, will take on a double aspect and behavior in the Christian interpretation. The Greek version of *Physiologos* explains that the antlion “perishes because of lack of prey” (*Job* 4,11) because it has the face of a lion and the back of an ant. It is the product of an irregular birth: as its father is carnivorous and its mother vegetarian, it cannot neither feed or reproduce itself.¹⁷ Some suggestions for a slightly different interpretation came to the Church Fathers from the widespread legend of antiquity concerning the Indian giant-ants that find the gold by digging the sand.¹⁸ Furthermore, a passage from *Cyranides* describes the μυρμηκολέων as a big, colored and carnivorous ant.¹⁹ Therefore, it is sometimes interpreted as an insect, which combines size and behavior of opposing features: it has the microscopic size of an ant, mixed with the aggressive attitude of a lion. As such, it will become a metaphor for a morally ambivalent behavior: high-and-mighty toward the weak, but compliant toward the people of influence.²⁰

Neologism remains, however, quite a rare option in translating animal onomastic of the Septuagint of *Job*. In a few cases, in order to solve a textual problem, the translator referred to names denoting popular creatures of Greek mythology. In the Masoretic Text (MT) of *Job* 30, 29,

¹³ Is 13, 22; 34, 11 and 14.

¹⁴ Dt 14, 5. See J. AITKEN, *Neologism* (*supra*, n. 11), pp. 79-80.

¹⁵ On the “ass-centaur” in this mosaic, see P.G.P. MEYBOOM, *The Nile Mosaic of Palestrina: Early Evidence of Egyptian Religion in Italy* (Religions in the Greco-Roman World 121), Leiden, 1995, pp. 20-22; 43-50; 111-114. On the relationship between this mosaic and the LXX text, see J. AITKEN, *No Stone Unturned. Greek Inscriptions and Septuagint Vocabulary* (Critical Studies in the Hebrew Bible 5), Winona Lake, 2014, pp. 77-79.

¹⁶ J. AITKEN, *Neologism* (*supra*, n. 11), p. 318.

¹⁷ *Phys. Graec.* 20 (ed. F. SBORDONE, Milano, 1936, pp. 73-75).

¹⁸ Hdt. 3, 102; see also Plin., *NH* 11, 31 (111); Mela, 3, 62. Str., 15, 1, 37 and 44, quotes as sources Megasthenes and Nearcus, who affirms having seen the skins of the ants digging the gold, and that it is similar to the panthers skin; Ael., *NA* 3, 4; 16, 5; Clem. Alex., *Paed.* 2, 12, 120.

¹⁹ *Cyr.* 2, 25, 7-9: οἱ καὶ μυρμηκολέοντες λέγονται, μείζονές τε ὄντες τῶν ἄλλων καὶ ποικίλοι· φυσικῶς δὲ εἰσιν οὗτοι σαρκοφάγοι τάχιον ἀποθνήσκοντες; *Aliae autem myrmicoleonτες, id est formicae leoninae, magnae ac variae et alatae, et carnes comedunt, sed cito moriuntur* (ed. L. DELATTE, Liège / Paris, 1942, *De formicis*, p. 120).

²⁰ See for example Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job* 5, 20, 40, whose source is probably Isidore, *Etymologiae* 12, 3, 10. For a complete repertory of classic and Christian references on the antlion, see L. GEEHART, “The Ant-lion”, *Vivarium* 3, 1965, pp. 1-23. It was via this way that the antlion found his feet in the modern zoology, where the terms is applied to a specific group of insects.

when the protagonist is complaining to himself, because he is banished from every human society, he says:

I became a brother of *jackals* (תנים) and a companion of ostriches (בנות יענה).

Whereas in the LXX we read:

I became a brother of sirens (σειρήνων), a companion of ostriches (στρουθῶν).

The translator choose to render תנים with σειρήν, “siren”: my hypothesis is that the Hebrew name, which was not clearly understood, has been translated analogically in light of the second hemistich, the trait shared between the two probably being their tearing and funereal cry. In fact, the previous verse reads: “I stood up in the assembly and cried for help”. By using this metaphoric expression, the author highlights two aspects: the exclusion of the individual from the human society and his subsequent weeping. In Hebrew, תנים is a problematic substantive, whose meaning is ambiguous. Modern versions often translate it by “jackal”. It is attested only in the plural form (once תנות),²¹ and sometimes in the biblical text it is confused with תנינים, the plural of תנין “dragon” or “sea-monster”.²² This name sometimes appears in the Hebrew Bible alongside serpents, nocturnal birds and others animals inhabiting the desert or ruins. Most of them are mentioned in the woe-oracles against Babylon and Edom that foretell divine destruction, and especially in two interrelated passages of *Isaiah* (Is 13, 21-22; 34, 11-14), where the problematic *Lilith* is included, making its first and unique appearance in the Hebrew Bible.²³ The identification of the fauna to which these nouns refer from a zoological perspective is beyond the scope of this paper; nevertheless, it should be noted that they occur as markers of the transformation of living and flourishing cities into desolated and wasted lands. In these cases, humans will be replaced by beasts dwelling among the ruins. Following Janowski, these animals can be considered as representative of a *gegenmenschliche Welt*.²⁴ Concerning תנים, the referent was probably lost for the Greek translators, as it is demonstrated by the fact that the noun is variously rendered in different books of the LXX, as well as within the same book: its meaning was at each point reconstructed on a contextual basis.²⁵ When תנים is paired with בנות יענה, as it is the case in *Job* 30, 29, one of two terms is

²¹ Mal 1, 3.

²² The origin of both terms is uncertain. See C. FREVEL, “*tan”, in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament. Band 8*, ed. by G. J. BOTTERWECK *et al.*, Stuttgart, 1995, col. 701-709; H. NIEHR, “tannîn”, *ibid.*, col. 717-720.

²³ Is 34, 14. For a similar context, see also Jer 9, 10; Zeph 2, 14; Ps 102, 7.

²⁴ See B. JANOWSKI, “Repräsentanten der gegenmenschlichen Welt. Ein Beitrag zur biblische Dämonologie”, in *In dubio pro Deo. FS G. Theissen*, hrsg. von D. TROBISCH, Heidelberg, 1993, pp. 154-163. More recently, see also P. RIEDE, “Ich bin ein Bruder der Schakale (Hi 30,29). Tiere als Exponenten der gegenmenschlichen Welt in der Bildsprache der Hiobdialoge”, in ID., *Im Spiegel der Tiere. Studien zum Verhältnis von Mensch und Tier im alten Israel* (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 187), Fribourg, 120-132.

²⁵ Στρουθός in Job 30, 29; Jer 10, 22; 40, 33 (= 30, 27 LXX); σειρήν in Is 34, 13; 43, 20; δράκων in Jer 9, 10; Lam 4, 3; Mi 1, 8; ὀρνέα in Is 35, 7; ἐχῆνος in Is 13, 22; κακῶσις in Ps 44, 20; the noun is not recognized or not translated in Jer 14, 6; 51, 37 (=28, 37 LXX); Mal 1, 3.

commonly translated in the LXX by σειρήν.²⁶ In Mi 1, 8 for example, תנים is translated by δράκων while the Hebrew word for ostriches (בנות יענה) is translated by the Greek θυγατέρων σειρήνων:

MT:

על-זאת אספדה ואילילה אילכה שילל וערום אעשה מספד כתנים ואבל כבנות יענה

For this I will wail and howl, I will go barefooted and naked, and I will wail like the *tannîm* (jackals?), and mourn like the ostriches.

LXX: Ἐνεκεν τούτου κόψεται καὶ θρηγήσει, πορεύσεται ἀνυπόδετος καὶ γυμνή, ποιήσεται κοπετὸν ὡς δρακόντων καὶ πένθος ὡς θυγατέρων σειρήνων.

Therefore she will lament and wail, she will go barefooted and naked, she will make lamentation as that of serpents, and mourning as of the daughters of sirens.

The voice of ostriches is considered similar to a funereal complaint: for that reason, it is associated with the siren's song. Morphologically, the Greek σειρήνες appears as an etymological exegesis of בנות יענה, "daughter of the song". In fact, by analyzing all the six occurrences of σειρήνες in the LXX²⁷ we find they express both the idea of marginality and of inhabiting the borders, as well as being reminiscent of a funereal complaint. In a passage from the fourth book of *Maccabees* the siren's cry is even compared to the torment of mothers as they face the torture of their children.²⁸ That is not surprising, if we consider that in the Greek tradition the siren's song is doubly associated with death. On one hand, it has a fascinating power that leads to death; on the other hand, the similarity between its cry and a funeral complaint was one of the features that ancient Greeks attributed to the siren. In addition to literary sources, whose the most famous example is probably Elena's mourning in the homonymous Euripides drama,²⁹ there is archeological evidence of funerary sirens sculpted on tombs; several examples are attested even during the Hellenistic period.³⁰ Between the many cultural values attributed to sirens in the ancient tradition, the translator of Old Greek text of *Job* selected the trait of a funereal sonority, which was deeply rooted in the Greek mythology and ritual. This was not an isolated choice, since the translator of the LXX of *Isaiah* and translator of the LXX of Twelves did the same: they could perhaps have been his models

²⁶ See also Is 34, 13; 43, 20.

²⁷ Namely Is 13, 21; 34, 13; 43, 20; Mi 1, 8; Jer 27, 39; 4Macc 15, 21.

²⁸ 4Macc 15, 21.

²⁹ Eur., *Hel.* 164-173: ποῖον ἀμιλλαθῶ γόνον ἢ τίνα μοῦσαν ἐπέλθω/ [δάκρυσιν ἢ θρήνοις ἢ πένθεσιν]; αἰαῖ./ πτεροφόροι νεάνιδες, /παρθένοι Χθονὸς κόραι, /Σειρήνες [...]/ τοῖς ἐμοῖσι σύνοχα δάκρυα, / πάθεσι πάθεα, μέλεσι μέλεα...πέμψαιτε ("What strenuous keening shall I make, or what Muse shall I call to my aid [with tears or laments or cries of sorrow]? Ah me! You winged maids, virgin daughters of the Earth, you Sirens [...]: as songsters harmonious with my lamentations send forth tears in accord with my tears, woes with my woes, and songs with my songs") [transl. Kovacs, 2002].

³⁰ For some examples of funerary sirens in Hellenistic art and literature, see recently L. MANCINI, "Sirene del deserto. Animali mitici al crocevia di culture", *Quaderni del Ramo d'Oro*, numero speciale 2012, pp. 151-176, esp. pp. 159-160. More generally, on the role of the siren in the funerary Greek art and literature see E. VERMEULE, *Aspects of Death in Early Greek Art and Poetry*, Berkeley et al., 1979, p. 201 ff.; J. LECLERQ-MARX, *La Sirène dans la pensée et dans l'art de l'Antiquité et du Moyen Âge. Du mythe païen au symbole chrétien*, Bruxelles, 1997; L. MANCINI, *Il rovinoso incanto. Storie di sirene antiche*, Bologna, 2005.

for the translation of this passage. This association between mourning and the siren's song persisted in the Christian tradition. John Chrysostom's direct quotation of *Job* 30, 39 still implies that the reference underpinning this translation is the voice of the animal: "I became a brother of sirens, and companion of ostriches. Indeed the significant misfortunes that befell him forced him to cry (θρηνεῖν) and complain (ἀποδύρεσθαι)".³¹

Sirens are not the only mythic beings the translator introduced by borrowing from Classical tradition. As Gerleman had already remarked, in *Job* 42, 14 the translator changed the name of one of Job's daughters from the enigmatic name קרן הפוך (perhaps "make-up box"?)³² into Ἀμαλθείας κέρας, "Amalteas horns". In so doing, he refers to the mythic she-goat nurse of Zeus, or maybe to the Cretan nymph who, in some versions, was the owner of the goat. He also indirectly refers to the marvelous property of its horn, which became in later times a sign of abundance (the so-called *cornucopia*). He was either taking הפוך as a passive participle of the verb הפך, "to change", "to transform", as Gerleman suggests,³³ or was referring to the original meaning of the root פוך (or פכך), literally "to crush", "to cut". According to some later versions, in fact, the horn was broken and filled with flowers by the nymph;³⁴ according to others, Zeus himself broke off the horn and gave it to Melisseus, endowing it with magical properties.³⁵

A different translational strategy has been applied in the case of *Job* 39, 9, where רים is mentioned in a list of savage animals that cannot be subdued by human will: "Is the wild ox (רים) willing to serve you? Will it remain at your crib?". The name רים, which is secondary spelling of ראם, is not uncommon in the Hebrew Bible. We find it mentioned in the Pentateuch, *Isaiah* and *Psalms*, as a symbol of indomitable strength.³⁶ It is usually identified with a wild bull or with a sort of buffalo. In Nu 23, 22 and 24, 8 the metaphor is used to refer to God, who is "like the horns of the wild ox" to Israel. In the Old Greek of *Job* the term is translated with μονόκερως. This choice is consistent with the rest of the LXX, where רים is almost always translated by μονόκερως. Here, two points should be clarified: the Greek term does not refer neither to the modern category of "rhinoceros" (despite the fact that this animal was known in antiquity), nor, probably, to the mythological beast of particular interest to the early Christian writers, i. e. the "unicorn". On the one hand, although Aquila and other ancient interpreters replaced it with

³¹ Johannes Chrysostomus, *Comm. in Job* 157 (*Job* 30, 29).

³² See HALOT, s.v. הפוך.

³³ GERLEMAN, *Studies* (supra, n. 3), p. 38.

³⁴ Ov., *Fast.* 115 ff.

³⁵ Apollod. 1, 1, 6. This horn is sometimes confused with the horn of Achelous, broken off by Herakles. Other Greek sources are mentioned by M. KEPPER and M. WITTE, "Hiob", in *Septuaginta Deutsch. Erläuterungen und Kommentare zum griechischen Alten Testament. Band II. Psalmen bis Daniel*, hrsg. von M. KARRER and W. KRAUS, Stuttgart, 2011, p. 2106. See also J. BREMMER, "Amalthea", in *Der neue Pauly, I/A-Ari*, ed. by H. CANKIK and H. SCHNEIDER, Stuttgart, 1996, col. 568-569.

³⁶ Nu 23, 22 and 24, 8; Dt 33, 17; Ps 22, 22; 29, 6; 77, 79; 92, 11; Is 34, 7.

μόνοκερως, and most modern commentators agree that the μόνόκερως should be identified with it, this was not the case for the Greeks (and for the Romans), in whose cultural encyclopaedia the two beings were considered two distinct species.³⁷ On the other hand, we can find no speculation about the “fantastic” nature of the μόνόκερως in classical sources. Instead, Aristotle uses this term to classify some exotic animals who have only a single horn. The best example known to him (and to us) was the one-horned Indian ass.³⁸ The fifth century writer Ctesias of Cnidus left us one of the earliest and most detailed descriptions of this beast, whose horn grew on its brow (and not on its nose!) and was endowed with healthy and therapeutic properties.³⁹ Other mentions of various kinds of μονοκέρατα are found in ethnographic writings of the late Hellenistic and Early Imperial Period.⁴⁰ The unicorn was therefore considered not so much as a mythic being, but rather as an exotic specimen of the contemporary zoology and ethnography. In several sources, the horn is said to have an invincible power.⁴¹ In our biblical passage, the Greek translator followed the same interpretative choice made in the LXX of Pentateuch and *Psalms*. In fact, in some crucial passages of the Hebrew Bible where the קרן appear, (e.g. Nu 23, 22; 24, 8 and Dt 33, 17) there is a specific reference to the power that comes from its horns: for that reason the μόνόκερως, with its powerful horn, was probably considered as a good correspondent to קרן during Hellenistic times.⁴²

We can find other examples of exotic animals belonging to Greco-Roman ethnographic scenario, which are used to translate Hebrew referents. Surprisingly, even later revisers seem to have sometime applied this translation technique. In *Job* 39, 1a - an asterisked hemistich whose provenance is unknown -⁴³ we find mention of a τραγέλαφος, literally a “goat-deer”, which translates the Hebrew word יעל, probably meaning “mountain goats”, or “ibex”: a wild ruminant, which rears its young on remote and hidden mountains. יעל occurs either in Ps 104, 18, where it is translated by ἔλαφος, “deer”. The translator of *Deuteronomy* had already used τραγέλαφος to translate the Hebrew קרא, again a “wild goat” or maybe “ibex”, in a list of pure and edible animals.⁴⁴

³⁷ For further details on this, see the relevant study of P. LI CAUSI, “Cognitive Applicability. The Natural History of the Unicorn from Ctesias to TV News”, *Annali On-line di Ferrara – Lettere* 7/2, 2012, pp. 12-30.

³⁸ Arist., *HA* 499 b 19 ff. A quick mention of a Libyan one-horned ass is found in *Hdt* 4, 191, 4.

³⁹ *FGrHist* F 45 q.

⁴⁰ As Megasthenes, Claude Aelian or Pliny the Elder. See references in P. LI CAUSI, *Cognitive Applicability* (*supra*, n. 37) and related bibliography.

⁴¹ See for example the animal called *Kartazonus* by Ael., *NA* 17, 44.

⁴² Some of these points have been rightly underlined by J. L. SCHAPER, “The Unicorn in the Messianic Imagery of the Greek Bible”, *Journal of Theological Studies* 45, 1994, pp. 117-136. However, I am not sure that we need to resort to messianic notions to explain the presence of unicorn in the Greek Bible. As he admits, it does not work, at least, in the case of the LXX of *Job*. The horn can certainly be seen as a symbol of mighty and royalty by Hellenistic times. But Proclus’s interpretation of the unicorn as a symbol of a sacred beginning is quite late: it dates back up to the fifth century C.E.; even the rabbinic sources probably reflect a late development. I am of the opinion that the extraordinary and positive qualities attributed to the horn of the μόνόκερως in Hellenistic zoology and ethnography are sufficient to justify its presence in similar contexts.

⁴³ According to P. GENTRY, *Asterisked Materials*, (*supra*, n. 3) pp. 81-82, this verse does not belong to Theodotion.

⁴⁴ *Dt* 14, 5.

It is possible that the reviser who added the first hemistich to *Job* 39, 1a could not use ἔλαφος, since this term was already present in the Old Greek of the *Job* 39, 1b,⁴⁵ and so followed the pentateuchal authority by opting for τραγέλαφος. For the translator of *Deuteronomy* the noun was probably “available” because, again, in Hellenistic ethnography the τραγέλαφος is included in lists of exotic beasts, attested by Pliny⁴⁶ and Diodore of Sicily. The animal belongs to the “double animals” (δίμορφα ζώων) of Arabian lands, like καμηλοπάρδαλις, “giraffe”, or βούβαλος, “buffalo” or “African antelope”:

γίνονται δὲ καὶ τραγέλαφοι καὶ βούβαλοι καὶ ἄλλα πλείω γένη δίμορφα ζώων καὶ τὴν σύνθεσιν ἐκ τῶν πλεῖστον τὴν φύσιν κεχωρισμένων ἔχοντα, περὶ ὧν τὰ κατὰ μέρος μακρὸν ἂν εἴη γράφειν.

There are also bred goat-stags and *bubali* and many others variety of animals which are of double form and combine in one body the natures of creatures most widely different, about all of which it would be a long task to write in detail.⁴⁷

Mention of crocodiles, elephants and enormous snakes follows. The abundance of these multiform and mysterious species is attributed to the strong influence of sunlight in this land, according to the well-known belief of ancient Greeks in the environmental conditioning of biologic development. Nevertheless, the choice of τραγέλαφος is not as neutral as it could appear at a first glance. In fact, beside the ethnographic belief concerning the “goat-stag”, another tradition existed for a long time, according to which this name symbolized *par excellence* something that does not exist. Aristophanes used it with this meaning for the first time, in a parody of Aeschylus’ magniloquent language.⁴⁸ It became a favorite example for Plato and Aristotle, in order to show the difference between essence (“being”) and existence (“reality”):

Ἔτι πῶς δείξει τὸ τί ἐστίν; ἀνάγκη γὰρ τὸν εἰδότα τὸ τί ἐστίν ἄνθρωπος ἢ ἄλλο ὅτιοῦν, εἰδέναι καὶ ὅτι ἐστίν (τὸ γὰρ μὴ ὂν οὐδεὶς οἶδεν ὃ τί ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ τί μὲν σημαίνει ὁ λόγος ἢ τὸ ὄνομα, ὅταν εἴπω τραγέλαφος, τί δ' ἐστὶ τραγέλαφος ἀδύνατον εἰδέναι).

How can one prove the essence? Anyone who knows *what* “man” or any other thing is must also know *that* it is; because no one knows what a non-existent thing is. (He may know the meanings of a phrase, or of a name if, e.g., I speak of a “goat-stag”; but it is impossible to know *what* a “goat-stag” is).⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Which reads: ἐφύλαξας δὲ ὠδῖνας ἐλάφων;

⁴⁶ Plin., *NH* 8, 120, who mentions a τραγέλαφος, similar to a deer, living only around the Phasis river in Pontus Euxinus, on the border between Europe and Asia.

⁴⁷ D.S. 2, 51, 2 [transl. Oldfather, 1933].

⁴⁸ Ar., *Ra.* 935-937: {EY.} Εἴτ' ἐν τραγωδίαις ἐχρῆν κάλεκτρούνα ποιῆσαι; {AI.} Σὺ δ', ὃ θεοῖσιν ἐχθρέ, ποῖ ἄττ' ἐστὶν ἄττ' ἐποίεις; {EY.} Οὐχ ἱππαλεκτρούνας μὰ Δί' οὐδὲ τραγελάφους, ἅπερ σύ, ἂν τοῖσι παραπετάσματος τοῖς Μηδικοῖς γράφουσιν. (“Eur.: ‘Then, did you have to create a rooster in tragedy?’ Aesch.: ‘You god-detested wretch! What sort of things did you used to compose?’ Eur.: ‘Not hipporoosters, by God, nor goat-stags, like you, which they depict on Persian tapestries’”). [transl. Dillon, 1995].

⁴⁹ Arist., *Apo* 92 b 4-8 [transl. Tredennick 1960, slightly modified]. See also *APr.* 49 a 24; *Int.* 16 a 10-20; *Phys.* 208, 32.

For the Stagirite, this hybrid works as a “logic operator”,⁵⁰ much like another favorite example of philosopher, that is the triangle: as such, it represents an intermediary link between natural material objects and mathematic abstract entities.⁵¹ Ancient interpreters of Aristotle will be more drastic in defining τραγέλαφος as ἀδύνατον, i.e. as something that not only does not exist, but whose existence is impossible, or at least indemonstrable.⁵² The existence of this animal is therefore excluded from any possible experience. In the Aristotelic world, it is not ἐπιστητόν (knowable), but δοξαστόν (arguable): not an object of science, but of opinion.⁵³

How could the τραγέλαφος of ancient philosophical tradition and of ethnography have coexisted? Far from the philosophical perspective, with its strong conceptual categorization, the borderline between “scientific knowledge” (ἐπιστητόν) and “popular opinion” (δοξαστόν), became thin and fluid in the Hellenistic period. This belief system was more oriented toward the *mirabilia*, paradoxical descriptions and exotic originalities. For that reason, this zoological system, typical of the late-Hellenistic imperial age, has been rightly called an “epistemologically weak model”.⁵⁴ Here, the fact that the parts of which the animal is composed are normally separated by nature, or are “against-nature”, does not raise any theoretical questions, but is rather considered another part of the weird nature of the animal, that generates interest and stimulates curiosity. We may wonder if the translator of *Deuteronomy* (and later the reviser of *Job* 39, 1), who drew from this secondary and later tradition, was aware of the complex ontological status of the τραγέλαφος. It is unlikely, since the hybrid would have struggled to find its way into a conservative translation like the LXX of *Deuteronomy*. Interestingly, the ambiguous ontology of τραγέλαφος did not escape to Origen’s exegesis, who in his *De Principiis* recognizes this animal as a paradigm of ἀδύνατον. According to Origen, the dietary laws of *Leviticus* and *Deuteronomy* include some illogical or impossible

⁵⁰ I borrow this definition from S. EBBESEN, “*Le bestiaire de la logique*”, in *L’animal dans l’antiquité*, éd. par B. CASSIN and J.L. LABARRIÈRE, Paris, 1997, pp. 533-544 (p. 537).

⁵¹ Elsewhere Aristotle quotes explicitly the goat-stag as an example of a non-being, because its existence cannot be ascertained. See Arist., *Phys.* 208, 30: τὸ γὰρ μὴ ὄν οὐδαμοῦ εἶναι· ποῦ γὰρ ἐστὶ τραγέλαφος ἢ σφίγξ; (“the non-being cannot be anywhere: where are, in fact, the goat-deer or the sphinx?”). On the Greek history of τραγέλαφος see the detailed study of G. SILLITTI, *Tragelaphos. Storia di una metafora e di un problema*, Napoli, 1980.

⁵² For exemple Philop., *In De Gen. et Corr.* 284, 15-19.

⁵³ G. SILLITTI, *Tragelaphos*, (*supra*, n. 51), p. 64. I am referring to a distinction made by Aristotle in defining dianoetics virtues. See Arist., *EN* 1139 b 14-23: ὑπολήψει γὰρ καὶ δόξῃ ἐνδέχεται διαψεύδεσθαι [...]. πάντες γὰρ ὑπολαμβάνομεν, ὃ ἐπιστάμεθα, μὴδ' ἐνδέχεσθαι ἄλλως ἔχειν· τὰ δ' ἐνδεχόμενα ἄλλως, ὅταν ἔξω τοῦ θεωρεῖν γένηται, λανθάνει εἰ ἔστιν ἢ μὴ. ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἄρα ἐστὶ τὸ ἐπιστητόν. (“Conception and Opinion are capable of error [...] We all conceive that a thing which we know scientifically cannot vary; when a thing that can vary is beyond the range of our observation, we do not know whether it exists or not. An object of Scientific Knowledge, therefore, exists of necessity”) [transl. Rachkam, 1934]. See also *ibid.* 1140 b 26. Paradoxically, the more the substantive loses a real referent, the more it enjoys semiotic. By ancient grammarians it is transferred to the neuter gender and it means generically “thingumbob”, “gadget”, “tool”: Hdn., *De pros. cath.* 3, 1 p. 227; Et. M., s.v. *Galepsos*; Steph. Byz., *Ethnica* 197, 11-17.

⁵⁴ E. ROMANO, “Pensare le credenze. Le *opiniones* nella cultura romana attraverso una lettura di Cicerone”, *I quaderni del ramo d’oro* s.n., 1998, pp. 137-156.

precepts, for instance the griffin or the goat-stag. Everyone knows that they do not exist, although Moses commands the people not to eat them:

And if you wish to see impossibilities contained in the legislation, let us observe that the goat-stag is one of those animals that cannot exist (ἐπισκεψώμεθα ὅτι τραγέλαφος μὲν τῶν ἀδυνάτων ὑποστῆναι ζῆον τυγχάνει), and yet Moses commands us to offer it as being a clean beast; whereas a griffin, which is not recorded ever to have been subdued by man, the lawgiver forbids to be eaten.⁵⁵

In this way, Origen criticizes both the Jews in their strict adherence to a law that, if taken literally, seems in fact to be meaningless, and also the Christians who limit themselves to a literal reading of the Holy Scriptures. Furthermore, Origen's remarks about τραγέλαφος offer an important glimpse into the conceptual logic of the Church Fathers. The "impossible animal", whose acceptance would bring in to question the laws of the reality, necessarily requires an allegorical interpretation. The contradiction between the inexistent hybrid and the perfection of Mosaic Law is resolved through a metaphorical interpretation. From this perspective, one could say that the Church Fathers followed the path opened by the ancient philosophical tradition: we have seen that τραγέλαφος was for long time an object apt for symbolic representation in Greek Literature.

If now we come back to the work of the LXX translators, and specifically to the translator of the LXX of *Job*, we can see that different criteria are adopted to solve lexical difficulties in translation of fauna nomenclature: either neologisms; loans words from Greek mythological tradition; or from contemporary ethnographic literature. The general panorama of the Greek text seems to include a larger portion of reality than its Hebrew source, and tends toward a more "fantastic" reading. Nevertheless, we can simultaneously trace a quite different tendency in the practice of the Greek translator.

2- CHAOTIC MONSTERS (AND OTHER ANIMALS?) DISAPPEARING

As has long been noted, the names of the mythical monsters Leviathan and Behemoth whose description occupies chapters 40-41 of *Job* never appear in the Greek text of the book nor anywhere else in the LXX. In this case, a generic Greek name corresponds to a proper Hebrew name. In *Job* 40, 25 Behemoth (בהמות) is translated by the collective plural θηρία, "ferocious beast", with a morphologic and semantic calque on the Hebrew.⁵⁶ Aquila and Theodotion suggest κτήνη, "cattle", which was the meaning currently given to the word in other contexts.⁵⁷ In a similar way, the noun Leviathan (לוייתן) is alternatively translated either with the generic δράκων (*draco* in Old Latin), meaning "dragon", or "snake", or κῆτος (*cetus* in Old Latin), meaning "sea-monster": the

⁵⁵ Or., *De princ.* 4, 3, 2 [transl. Crombie, 1885].

⁵⁶ See also Ps 49, 10; Jerome Old Latin has *bestia*.

⁵⁷ In the LXX the regular translation of בהמה is κτήνη, "bovine", or τετράπους, "four-footed". In Ps 73 (= 72 LXX), 22 the term is rendered as κτηνῶδες, "brute", "stolid".

translators of *Job* choses κῆτος in 3, 8, but δράκων in 40, 25. A similar alternation is also found in *Psalms*, while the translator of the LXX of *Isaiah* renders לִיָּתָן with δράκων.⁵⁸ Aquila and Symmachus suggest the transliteration (Λευιαθάν), as did Jerome in the Vulgate (*Leuiathan*). Moreover, concerning the few occurrences of the name of the sea monster Rahab (רָהַב), whose character is quite obscure in the Hebrew Bible,⁵⁹ several variants are registered in the books of LXX. The expression “the helpers of Rahab” in *Job* 9, 13 is rendered in Greek by κῆτη τὰ ὑπὸ οὐρανόν, “sea-monsters which live under the sky”.⁶⁰ In the Greek Psalter, its name is translated with various substantives belonging to the semantic sphere of pride, vanity (μάταιος, ματαιότης, to which corresponds Latin *vanitas*) and arrogance (ὑπερήφανος, Latin *superbus*). This probably reflects the meaning of the root רָהַב in late Aramaic: “be proud”, “boasting”.⁶¹ The translator of the LXX of *Isaiah* omitted its name: in this case, revisers did not suggest a transliteration, as they did for Leviathan, but rather proposed various options such as δράκων and κῆτος.⁶² All the chaotic monsters of biblical tradition seem in this way to have lost their proper individuality. In an article dealing with the antecedents of the myth of dragon in biblical history, Kiessling explained these changes by suggesting that they reflect a confusion within the biblical lexicon, or a lack of knowledge of the myth by the Greek translators.⁶³ It seems to me scarcely plausible that translators, who were part of the literary élite, would ignore such a constitutive, fundamental and cosmological myth, which was widespread and well-known in antiquity. We could at best imagine that the figure of Rahab was badly known and so the translation of its name was often based upon an etymological reading; but, again, this does not seem to be the case for the translator of *Job*. It is clear, for example, that the use of κῆτος as equivalent to Leviathan is in itself an allusion to this myth. This term does not simply means “cetaceous” or “whale”, but it has a strong emotive connotation in Greek, and can be used to refer to the most dreadful dangers of the sea.⁶⁴ The same can be assumed for δράκων, which, while remaining at the margins in Aristotle’s scientific taxonomy, is well

⁵⁸ Cf. Ps 74, 14 e 104, 26; Is 27, 1.

⁵⁹ For an introduction on Rahab as chaotic monster and on its Near-Eastern background, see K. SPRONK, “Rahab”, in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. by K. VAN DER TOORN *et al.*, Leiden / Boston / Köln 1999², pp. 684-686.

⁶⁰ Similarly in *Job* 26, 12.

⁶¹ Ps 40 (= 39 LXX), 5 and 89 (= 88 LXX), 11; it is transliterated only once in Ps 87 (= 86 LXX), where its name indicates Egypt. See also Is 30, 7, where it is translated again μάταιος. See M. JASTROW, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature*, Peabody, Mass. (reprint of New York 1943 edition), s.v. רָהַב.

⁶² Is 51, 9. See J. ZIEGLER, *Septuaginta. Isaias*, Göttingen, 1939, p. 314.

⁶³ N.B. KIESSLING, “Antecedents of Medieval Dragon in Sacred History”, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 89, 1970, pp. 167-177.

⁶⁴ See A. ZUCKER, “Étude épistémologique du mot κῆτος”, in *Les zoonymes. Actes du colloque international tenu à Nice le 23, 24, 25 Janvier 1997*, éd. par S. MELLET, Nice, 1997, pp. 425-454; A. ANGELINI, “Inghiottiti e inghiottitori. Di alcuni mostri nel mito antico”, in *Zoomania. Animali, ibridi, mostri nelle culture umane. Siena, 4-5 giugno 2007*, a c. di S. BETA e F. MARZARI, Firenze, 2010, pp. 237-264.

represented in mythology.⁶⁵ Furthermore, a series of hints in the description of Behemoth and Leviathan suggests that the translator was well aware of the mythological background against which Leviathan and Behemoth were interpreted. For instance, although the translation of Behemoth with θηρία corresponds to the Hebrew plural form, the syntax of the following verses shows that the name refers to a single creature and not to a plurality of animals (possessives and verbs are at singular).⁶⁶ Furthermore, Leviathan is defined as “the king of all beings that are in the waters”, in the LXX of *Job* 41, 26. In the Greek text of *Job* 40, 19 and 41, 25 the phrase: πεποιημένον ἐγκαταπαίξεσθαι ὑπὸ τῶν ἀγγέλων αὐτοῦ (“He has been created to be made sport of by my angels”), refers firstly to Behemoth and subsequently to Leviathan. It has no equivalent in Hebrew. The phrase has probably been inserted under the influence of *Psalms* 104 (= 103 LXX), 26b, where it is said that Yhwh created Leviathan to play with him, or “to make sport of it”. Here, in Greek the verb ἐμπαίζειν is used. However, as Heater rightly underlined,⁶⁷ the semantic area of ἐμπαίζειν, “mock”, “jeer at” is used elsewhere in the LXX to indicate a violent killing.⁶⁸ Therefore, the anaphoric use of the verb ἐγκαταπαίζειν transmits both the ideas of scorn and murdering. Its meaning becomes fully understandable only against the background of the fight between Yhwh and the chaotic monster; at the same time, it seems to anticipate the final clash between angels and monsters in messianic times, a theme well attested in apocryphal and rabbinic literature.⁶⁹

This evidence suggests that we cannot assume that the Greek translator did not know about combat myth between the deity and chaotic forces, which still plays a central role in *Job*’s theodicy, in both the Hebrew and Greek versions. Rather, the lack of a specific “personality” for Leviathan and Behemoth is due to the will of making this myth understandable to Greek ears. The translator’s interpretative choice to transfer this myth into Greek cultural categories reveals his aim to reach a larger audience for his book that, as has been often rightly underlined, was conceived as an autonomous literary production. Furthermore, this rendering appears at one time as a literary and a

⁶⁵ Among the copious bibliographies on this topic, see especially the studies of L. BODSON, *IERA ZWIA. Contribution à l’étude de la place de l’animal dans la religion grecque ancienne*, Bruxelles, 1987; “Observations sur le vocabulaire de la zoologie antique: les noms de serpents en grec et en latin”, *Documents pour l’histoire du vocabulaire scientifique* 8, 1986, pp. 65-120; “L’évolution du statut culturel du serpent dans le monde occidental, de l’Antiquité à nos jours”, in *Histoire et animal*, vol. 3, éd. par A. COURET and F. OGE, Toulouse, 1989, pp. 525-548; see also M. L. SANCASSANO, “Il lessico greco del serpente. Considerazioni etimologiche”, *Athenaeum* 84, 1996, pp. 49-69; EAD., *Il serpente e le sue immagini. Il motivo del serpente nella poesia greca, dall’Iliade all’Oresteia*, Como, 1997.

⁶⁶ *Job* 40, 16 ff.

⁶⁷ H. HEATER, *A Septuagint Translation Technique* (*supra*, n. 4), pp. 6-7; 126-127.

⁶⁸ Ex 10, 2; 1S 31, 4. In 2Macc 7, 7 ἐμπαίγμων means “torture”, “torment”.

⁶⁹ Again in *Job* 40, 30, where mention is made of merchants arguing over the price of Leviathan’s skin, the Greek reads the verb כרה “trade”, “exchange”, as its homograph “to invite to a feast”. We could think that this reading has been encouraged from the knowledge of the topics of the messianic banquet for the righteous, consisting of the meat of Leviathan. It is known to apocryphal texts and widespread in the rabbinic literature. For a complete catalogue of ancient sources on the final fighting between angels and Leviathan and on the messianic banquet, see K. W. WHITNEY, *Two strange beasts: Leviathan and Behemoth in Second Temple and Early Rabbinic Judaism* (Harvard Semitic Monographs 63), Winona Lake, 2006.

faithful one, because it fully maintains the fundamental sense of the Hebrew names. In fact, the Greek terms that are employed (θηρία, δράκων and κῆτος) all belongs to the semantic field of monstrosity⁷⁰. Moreover, by referring to the notion of θηρία and δράκων in the second speech of Yhwh (chapter 40-41), he completed in a coherent manner the zoological series that already began in the first discourse (chapter 38-39).

We shall conclude our analysis with a final case of transfer from a possible Hebrew mythological referent into a Greek category. We will discuss the disputed passage of *Job* 29, 18, a *crux interpretum* because of its enigmatic meaning. Speaking about his previously happy life, Job remembers his previous desires. The MT reads as follows:

ואמר עם-קני אגוע ובחול ארבה ימים

I was saying: I will die with my nest, and like the sand I multiply my days.

In this verse, rabbinic exegesis saw a reference to the myth of the phoenix, the long-life bird that regenerates itself from its ashes in cyclical periods after death. In fact, חול became one of the names for the phoenix in the rabbinic literature.⁷¹ The hypothesis that חול could already mean “phoenix” in *Job* 29, 18 has been endorsed by the majority of scholars in order to solve the difficulty of this parallelism, that otherwise does not appear completely clear.⁷² Specifically, what puzzled the interpreters is the apparent lack of correspondence between the “death with his nest” in the first half of the verse, the meaning of which is unclear, and the “multiplications of days” in the second part. This is an attractive hypothesis, but should be taken with some caution. It would at present constitute an isolated witness to such a myth in the Hebrew Bible and Levantine literature, for which no convincing etymological explanation has been provided.⁷³ Moreover, the verse is not entirely

⁷⁰ See I. BAGLIONI, “Note alla terminologia e al concetto di “mostruoso” nell’ antica Grecia”, in ID. (ed.), *Monstra. Costruzione e percezione delle entità ibride e mostruose nel Mediterraneo antico*, 2013, Roma, pp.15-32.

⁷¹ For a repertory of rabbinic sources see L. GINZBERG, *The Legends of the Jews*, vol. V, Philadelphia, 1995, p. 51 and n. 151; M. R. NIEHOFF, “The Phoenix in Rabbinic Literature”, *Harvard Theological Review* 89/3, 1996, pp. 245-265. See also M. JASTROW, *A Dictionary* (supra, n. 61), s.v. חול.

⁷² This has been proposed by M. DAHOOD, “Nest and Phoenix in *Job* 29, 18”, *Biblica* 48, 1967, pp. 542-544, and accepted by L. GRABBE, *Comparative Philology and the Text of Job*, Missoula, 1977, pp. 98-100. This translation is adopted by HALOT, s.v. *hōl* II; R. GORDIS, *The Book of Job. Commentary, New Translation and Special Studies*, New York, 1978, p. 321 ff.; N. C. HABEL, *The book of Job: a Commentary (OTL)*, Philadelphia, 1985, p. 411 ff.; H. STRAUSS, *Hiob. 2. Teilband. 19,1-42,17 (BK.AT)*, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 2000, pp. 192 ff.; D. CLINES, *Job 21-37, (WBC)*, Nashville, 2006, p. 940 and 991, and many others. *Contra* S. DRIVER and G. GRAY, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job (ICC)*, Edinburgh, 1921, p. 201 ff.; M. POPE, *Job (AnchB)*, New York, 1965, pp. 189-190; J. HARTLEY, *The Book of Job (NIC.OT)*, Grands Rapids, 1988, p. 392; R. VAN DEN BROECK, *The Myth of the Phoenix. According to Classical and Early Christian Traditions*, Leiden, 1972, p. 58 ff.; id., “Phoenix”, in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons* (supra, n. 59), pp. 655-657.

⁷³ The suggestion of M. DAHOOD, “*Hōl* ‘Phoenix’ in *Job* 29: 18 and in Ugaritic”, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 36, 1974, pp. 85-88, that recalls an hypothesis of Albright seeing a reference to the name of phoenix in a passage of Keret legend (namely KTU 1. 16. i. 9-11), has not been followed by any among Ugaritic scholars. See J. PRITCHARD (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament*, Princeton, 1950, p. 148; T. KLEVEN, “Kingship in Ugarit (KTU 1.16 I 1-23)”, in *Ascribe to the Lord. Biblical and other Studies in Memory of Peter C. Craigie* (Journal for the Study of the

lacking in meaning in its current sense: the idea of “dying with the nest” could refer to Job’s expectation that he would live a long life and die surrounded by his family. It could correspond to the idea expressed in the second part, i.e., the hope of living for a long time. The metaphors of sand is frequently used in the Hebrew Bible to express the idea of a large quantity.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, the phoenix myth would still be a better fit in the immediate context of subsequent verses 19 and 20, which insist on renewals metaphors.⁷⁵ If we now turn to the Greek translation, we have to observe that the translator has partially changed his text:

εἶπα δέ Ἡ ἡλικία μου γηράσει, ὥσπερ στέλεχος φοίνικος πολὺν χρόνον βιώσω·

My manhood will see old age, I shall live a long while like the trunk of a palm tree.⁷⁶

In the first part of the verse, instead of the נֶחֱל, “nest”, the translator probably read a word derived from גָּרַע, “grow old” (perhaps גָּרַע).⁷⁷ Because in Greek the word φοῖνιξ can mean both the bird and the date palm,⁷⁸ some scholars suggest the translation contained a reference to the phoenix, corrected by a later reviser or “softened” by the translator himself, by the addition of στέλεχος, “trunk”, to indicate the palm.⁷⁹ While the hypothesis of a late gloss remains difficult to demonstrate, the idea of an auto-correction by the translator himself would imply that his work was not only sophisticated, but also quite tendentious, aimed at obscuring the meaning of the text more than clarifying it. Moreover, it is not very clear why after he had inserted several Greek mythological references in its translation, he would be disturbed by the only mention of the phoenix, whose legend was known to Hellenistic Judaism, as demonstrates its mention by his contemporary colleague, Ezekiel the Tragedian.⁸⁰ If we consider, instead, the Greek verse in a whole, we observe that the picture has been entirely harmonized in comparison to what we had in Hebrew. The hope of Job, during his previous life, was clearly growing old, until reaching the long age of the palm: this tree is widely used as a metaphor of renewal and long life, not only in Hellenistic and Roman tradition, but also in the Hebrew bible.⁸¹ Moreover, a Hesiod’s fragment which mention the longevity of the φοῖνιξ, currently seen as the most ancient reference to the phoenix myth, has been recently interpreted in a

Old Testament. Supplement Series 67), Sheffield, 1988, p. 29-53; N. WYATT, *Religious texts from Ugarit* (Biblical Seminar 53), London / New York, 2002 p. 220; G. DEL OLMO LETE and J. SANMARTIN, *A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition. Part One: [ʾ(a/i/u) - k]* (Handbook of Oriental Studies 67), Leiden / Boston, 2003 s.v. *hl*.

⁷⁴ Gn 22, 17; 32, 12; Josh 11, 4; Judg 7, 12; Ps 139, 18 and Job 6, 3 where it symbolizes weight.

⁷⁵ Job 29, 19-20: “My roots will spread out to the water, and the dew will stay on my branches; my glory will be fresh within me; my bow in my hand will be renewed”.

⁷⁶ Translation C. Cox, *Iob* (NETS, 2009).

⁷⁷ As suggested by R. GORDIS, *The Book of Job* (*supra*, n. 71).

⁷⁸ Its first meanings are “purple”, “Phoenician”, and “date palm”; this three meaning are interrelated. See P. CHANTRAINE, *Dictionnaire Etymologique de la Langue Grecque*, Paris, 1999, s.v. φοῖνιξ; R. VAN DER BROECK, *Myth of Phoenix* (*supra*, n. 71) p. 51 ff.

⁷⁹ This is the hypothesis of D. BERTRAND, *Le bestiaire de Job* (*supra*, n. 5), pp. 233-235.

⁸⁰ Ezek., *Exag.* 254-269.

⁸¹ See for exemple Ps 92 (= 91 LXX), 13-15.

convincing manner as referring to a palm tree.⁸² It attests therefore to the antiquity and the persistence of the imagery related to the palm tree as a metaphor of long life.

Driver and Gray suggested that the translator of the Old Greek *Job* read נחל instead of חול, which could also be interpreted as a name of a palm in another biblical passage. In this case, he would have made an anaphoric translation borrowing the expression στέλεχος φοίνικος, that elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible translates the common name for date palm (תמר).⁸³ But evidences for this hypothesis remain quite scarce.⁸⁴ Therefore, it is more probable that he changed the image by himself, in order to create a more consistent picture with the following verses (19-20), that undoubtedly refer to a tree-metaphor, and that he choose not to translate, according to his “epitomizing” habit.⁸⁵ However, while even in this case the idea of leaving a space for his reader to perform erudite wordplay on the φοῖνιξ name with its parent text cannot be completely excluded, we must recognize that this is not the central image conveyed by the text. This is confirmed by the fact that Christian exegesis, where the phoenix became a central symbol of Christ and resurrection, often quoted others passages of the Old Testament, without hesitation in interpreting the φοῖνιξ “palm” as referring to the bird,⁸⁶ but never mentioned *Job* 29, 18 in this sense. Also in Jerome’s Vulgate, the text refers to the long life of the tree (*in nidulo meo moriar et sicut palma multiplicabo dies*). In other words, since the Greek translation of *Job* 29, 18 on, the ways of the phoenix and of the palm tree have been definitely divided.

CONCLUSION

Let us now summarize our results and try to interpret them. In a first series of remarks, we pointed out how, during the translation process, the translator seemed to have amplified the “fantastic” elements of onomastic coming from its source text, by employing ancient nouns derived from Greek mythology (sirens, Amalthea horn) or Hellenistic ethnography (unicorn, deep-goat) or by recurring to neologism (ant-lion). On the other side, a second series of examples appeared at a first glance as a reduction of some mythic aspects that were inherent to the Hebrew text. We highlighted how specific names that in Hebrew indicate primeval chaotic monsters (Leviathan, Behemoth, Rahab) have been substituted by general names of animals, and a possible mention of the phoenix

⁸² D. FABIANO, *Leçon probatoire 19 février 2015, Université de Lausanne*.

⁸³ Ex 15, 17; Nu 33, 9; Sir 50, 12.

⁸⁴ S. DRIVER and G. GRAY, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (*supra*, n. 71), p. 202; followed by A. DE WILDE, *Das Buch Hiob* (Oudtestamentische Studiën 22), Leiden, 1981, pp. 289-291. Compare Nu 24, 6. The root is known in Arabic: see HALOT, s.v. נחל II. However, if that was really the reading of the translator, one should expect a similar solution adopted also in the LXX of *Job* 40, 22 where ערבינחל means something like “willows” or “poplars”, what is not the case for this verse.

⁸⁵ See at this regard the very detailed analysis of M. GOREA, *Job repensé oh trahi?* (*supra*, n. 3), p. 122-123.

⁸⁶ For example Ps 92, 13-15.

present in the Hebrew text has been converted into a reference to a tree-palm. We may reasonably ask ourselves in which measure we are truly dealing with two contrasting tendencies. Previous studies insisted on the fact that in the Greek translation a “demonizing” tendency is found alongside a “naturalizing” one. Therefore, they came to the paradoxical conclusion that the Greek translator simultaneously “de-mythologizes and showed an intensification of mythologization”.⁸⁷ Such a contradictory result could be avoided by setting the Greek translation in its correct anthropological and contextual frame, and by desisting from opposing “myth” to “rationality”, “natural” to “fantastic”. These modern classifications do not correspond to descriptive categories, and do not belong to the way of thinking in antiquity. On the contrary, the multiple translational strategies adopted by the Greek translator of *Job* serve a common purpose: making the source text clear and coherent to an audience that we could define as “Hellenistic” in a broader sense. For that reason, the translator’s exegetical choices substitute the original imagery for a new one, which becomes fully understandable only against a Hellenistic epistemological background. In such a context, a new attitude toward the animal realm is finding its way. The zoological encyclopedia of late Hellenism is extended to include problematic animals as well as creatures of mythology. This is a first step toward the creation of a new and heterogeneous bestiary, covering a portion of reality that is larger than both biblical zoology and aristotelic scientific taxonomy. We do not detect in it any distinction between different levels of reality and fiction. Domestic animals live together with wild and fantastic ones in a similar condition. The issue of their logical possibility of existence does not seem to raise any specific questions.

This particular attitude towards the natural reality has a number of consequences in the history of reception: it will find its complete fulfillment in early Christian exegesis. We already observed that the Church Fathers, in commenting on these passages, were sometimes confronted by the lack of “logic plausibility” of hybrids and mythical animals. In these cases, they solved the problem raised by the presence of an “impossible” animal within sacred text by recurring to a symbolic interpretation. Some principles of scriptural hermeneutics justify this approach. Among others, Augustine underlines it: *Omne quod dicitur sive fit aut per suam proprietatem cognoscitur, aut significat aliquid figuratae, aut certe habet utrumque: et propriam cognitionem et figuratam significationem*.⁸⁸ Even when we dispose of pieces of information that appear to be too problematic, as it could be the case for a deer-goat, a siren, or an antlion, the last authority is always the Scripture in itself. In these cases, the good Christian must trust the Scripture, and focus on its allegoric meaning (*figurata significatio*) instead of its literal meaning (*propria cognitio*), without concerning

⁸⁷ J. G. GAMMIE, “The Angelology and Demonology in the LXX of the Book of Job”, *Hebrew Union College Annual* 56, 1985, pp. 1-19 (p. 16).

⁸⁸ Augustine, *Sermons* 89, 4. See also *Expositions on Psalms* 66, 10.

to verify its truthfulness. In any case, the final goal has to be moral and practical. Such a perspective not only allows the presence of mythic animals and problematic hybrids to be justified. It also fosters the semiotic potential of animals: during the hermeneutical process, their bi- or polymorphism becomes a privileged vehicle of polysemy.