

Jonah in Antioch

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Abstract: Though the Gospels offer a range of interpretations of the story of Jonah, early commentators found this prophetic book challenging, including those from Antioch. Working from a distinctive form of the Septuagint version, Theodore of Mopsuestia was unnerved by the “novel and extraordinary things” in the book, to which he tried to apply his distinctively literalist approach by having recourse to typology. Aware of his predecessor’s interpretation, and better equipped to handle the text, Theodoret comes closer to the biblical author’s theological and satirical portrait of this intriguing figure for readers in Antioch.

EVERYONE, NO MATTER HOW BIBLICALLY (IL)LITERATE, presumes a familiarity with the quaint character of Jonah, whose name – rightly or wrongly – has become proverbial for a bringer of bad luck. Jesus counted on his audience’s responding to one or another aspect of the story of Jonah, his hermeneutic of it coming to us in two forms, found respectively in Mark 8:12 and in the “Q” elaboration occurring with modifications in Matt 12:38-42 and Luke 11:29-32. In the former, Jesus simply refuses to give the pharisees the sign they request, Matthew in 16:4 modifying this refusal of a sign with the slight concession of “the sign of Jonah”. The dominical hermeneutic of the Jonah story is fuller in the “Q” tradition found in Matthew and Luke – in fact, we are left to wonder whether the central point of allusion to the prophet is the three-day sojourn within the sea monster as a type of Jesus’ own death and resurrection, the importance of preaching and repentance, the Gentiles’ greater receptivity to God’s messengers relative to that of the Jews, the power of God’s word and wisdom, or the universality of salvation.¹

1. J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV* (AB 28A; New York; Doubleday, 1985) 930-37, traces the development of the Jonah saying as found in the Marcan text and in “Q” to its form in the other Synoptics. In the Fourth Gospel Jesus does not seem to evoke Jonah as a sign; commentators do not see a connection between his promise to raise up “in three days...the temple of his body” (John 19:20-21) and Jonah’s emergence from the sea monster after that time (2:1,10 Heb.). Raymond E. Brown – who does not contemplate such a connection – remarks simply, “Perhaps the best solution lies in recognizing that ‘three days’ was an expression that meant a short but indefinite time” (*The Gospel According to John I-XII* [AB 29; New York: Doubleday, 1966] 123). Interestingly, the LXX version(s) of

Such ambivalence has naturally affected the interpretation of this Old Testament figure and text by later commentators, including the Fathers, as we shall see. Christian readers of the book today likewise, in fact, with the twofold evangelical tradition in mind, come to it with pre-suppositions that may obscure the author's purpose, even if not tempted like their patristic predecessors to take it historically. Lucan commentator Joseph Fitzmyer, for instance, while admitting that "the story carries its own message to Christians of every generation", sees some usefulness of the Lucan pericope in evaluating "the credence put in private revelations of one sort or another over the centuries".² Today's readers of the book, however, would have to concede that decision on its meaning turns primarily on identifying its literary genre, which has been characterised variously as fable, didactic novel, prophetic legend, sensational literature, parable, midrash, allegory, didactic prophetic narrative.³ Less urgently relevant to determination of its major purpose – whether dealing with the lack of fulfilment of prophecy against the nations or extending the message of salvation to them – is the question of the book's literary integrity: is the psalm that forms chapter 2 a late addition,⁴ and has 4:5 been transposed from a position following 3:4?⁵

PATRISTIC COMMENTARIES

Commentators in the east in the patristic period were predictably far less ready to entertain questions of the literary integrity of any biblical book, all the authors being taken to be inspired – *prophetai*, in the sense employed in the Constantinopolitan creed of 381⁶ – and their work proof against tampering. We also find them less anxious than their modern counterparts to identify literary genres or, incidentally, as in the case of the Psalms, liturgical setting. But they fell to commenting on the Bible's prophetic corpus with only slightly less relish than the Psalms.⁷

Jonah's specification in 3:4 of the period of grace before the destruction of Nineveh reduces it from forty to three days as well, perhaps under the influence of the previous verse.

2. Fitzmyer, *Luke X-XXIV*, 934.

3. The alternatives are canvassed by, among others, Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (London: SCM, 1979) 419; Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, (WBC 31; Waco TX: Word Books, 1987) 435-37.

4. For Childs, *Introduction*, 419, this position is "widely accepted"; for Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament. An Introduction* (ET; Oxford: Blackwell, 1965) 406, it is beyond discussion, whereas for Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 438-40, it is unacceptable. Stuart's more conservative position had been defended by George M. Landes, "The Kerygma of the Book of Jonah", *Interpretation* 21 (1967) 3-31, who traces the opposing view to the eighteenth century.

5. The transposition had been proposed by Hugo Winckler, "Zum Buche Jona", *Altorientalische Forschungen* 2/2 (1900) 260-65, and resisted by Landes, "The Kerygma" and Norbert Lohfink, "Jona ging zur Stadt hinaus (Jona 4.5)", *Biblische Zeitschrift* NF 5 (1961) 185-203.

6. *DS* 150.

7. Scores of commentaries on the Psalms known to have been composed in the patristic period are surveyed by Marie-Josèphe Rondeau, *Les commentaires patristiques du Psautier*

This relish for the Prophets is illustrated in the case of the Antiochene Fathers in the golden age of patristic composition. "The Antiochenes were fascinated by prophecy", Frances Young tells us in her survey, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture*.⁸ The degree of their fascination emerges, for example, from one datum: Theodoret, bishop of Cyrus (a town about 100 km NE of Antioch), in introducing his Commentary on the Psalms in the 440's, excuses himself for not having commenced his exegetical corpus with this work, as seems to have been the tradition followed a half century earlier by his Antiochene predecessors, Theodore of Mopsuestia and (to judge from signs of immaturity⁹) John Chrysostom in Antioch, on the grounds that he had been importuned to provide guidance on other biblical books first, especially some of the Prophets. Theodoret explains:

I wanted to do a commentary on this piece of inspired composition first of all... But we were prevented from putting this desire into effect by those who requested from us commentaries on the other divine Scriptures: some required of us clarification of the Song of Songs, others were anxious to have a close knowledge of the inspired composition of the Man of Passion, still others of the work of the divinely inspired Ezekiel, while others were impatient for the predictions of the Twelve Prophets, shrouded in obscurity, to be rendered clear and obvious.¹⁰

And before the close of that decade Theodoret had proceeded to complete work on the Prophets with commentaries also on Isaiah and Jeremiah (including Baruch and Lamentations, but not The Letter of Jeremiah).¹¹

Unfortunately, the bulk of these Antiochene commentators' work on the prophets has not survived. Diodore of Tarsus, who died towards the end of the fourth century, and had been mentor of Chrysostom and

(IIIe-Ve siècles), *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 219, 220 (Roma: Pont. Inst. Stud. Orient., 1982, 1985).

8. Frances Young, *Biblical Exegesis and the Formation of Christian Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)165.

9. I have discussed these signs in "Chrysostom's Commentary on the Psalms: homilies or tracts?" in P. Allen and others (eds.), *Prayer and Spirituality in the Early Church*, (Brisbane: Australian Catholic University, 1998) 301-17, and in the introduction to my *St John Chrysostom. Commentary on the Psalms* (2 vols; Brookline MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998).

10. PG 80.857,860; translation from my *Theodoret of Cyrus. Commentary on the Psalms*, 1-72, *Fathers of the Church* 101 (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2000) 39-40. "Man of Passion" is the term for Daniel found in the Greek version of Dan 9:23 attributed to Theodotion.

11. The text of all Theodoret's commentaries on the Prophets is found in PG 81. A critical edition exists only for the Isaiah Commentary (by Jean-Noël Guinot, *Théodoret de Cyr. Commentaire sur Isaïe*, Sources Chrétiennes 276, 295, 315 (Paris: Cerf, 1980, 1982, 1984). Doubts of authenticity are held of the PG text of the Jeremiah Commentary (cf *Clavis Patrum Graecorum* 6205).

Theodore, is reputed to have composed commentaries on all the biblical books,¹² but not even fragments of work on the prophets are extant. The degree to which Chrysostom in his pulpits in Antioch and Constantinople spoke on the prophets is uncertain. Six homilies on the opening verses of Isaiah 6, known as *In Oziam*,¹³ are extant. There are also authentic single homilies on Isaiah 45:7¹⁴ and Jeremiah 10:23.¹⁵ Regarding a longer commentary on Isaiah, scholarly opinion is divided as to whether a work on 1:1-8:10 extant in Greek¹⁶ or a complete commentary in an Armenian version should be accepted as authentic.

ANTIOCHENE COMMENTATORS

We do have, however, commentaries on The Twelve, not only from Alexandria (from the hand of Cyril¹⁷) but also from Antioch, from both Theodore and Theodoret – all within the fifty years from the end of the fourth century to the middle of the fifth, a period that Cardinal Angelo Mai, in his 1832 edition of Theodore's text, calls the Church's "most learned", *doctius Ecclesiae aevum*.¹⁸ On the evidence of Jerome¹⁹ we know that Cyril had several Alexandrian predecessors in this work, including Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea and Didymus. It is probably not his esteemed Antiochene mentor Diodore, but some of these, who, as "some commentators", Theodore can acknowledge and dismiss at rare intervals, especially if they show themselves fastidious about details he chooses not to explore. When, for instance, the Lord in Amos 9:7 expresses concern not only for Israelites but also for Ethiopians, Philistines and (in the Septuagint text) "Syrians from Bothros", Theodore brushes his predecessors aside:

12. Johannes Quasten, *Patrology III* (Westminster MD: Newman, 1960, 399) cites the evidence of Theodorus Lector to this effect.

13. Or *In illud, Vidi Dominum* (CPG 4417; critical edition by Jean Dumortier, *Jean Chrysostome. Homélie sur Ozias*, Sources Chrétiennes 277 [Paris: Cerf, 1981]). The authenticity of Homily Four has been the subject of debate, denied by Dumortier, affirmed by Pierre Augustin, "La pérennité de l'Eglise selon Jean Chrysostome et l'authenticité de la IVe Homélie Sur Ozias", *Recherches Augustiniennes* 28 (1995) 95-144.

14. CPG 4418; text in PG 56.143-52.

15. CPG 4419; text in PG 56.153-62.

16. CPG 4416; critical edition by Jean Dumortier, *Jean Chrysostome. Commentaire sur Isaïe*, Sources Chrétiennes 304 (Paris: Cerf, 1983).

17. PG 71, 72.

18. PG 66.119. Mai cites Jerome and Rufinus in the West as also contributing commentaries on the The Twelve in that period. Mai also posits a commentary by Chrysostom on the basis of claims by Rufinus and Ephrem of Antioch, but no trace of it remains. Chrysostom's two homilies *De prophetiarum obscuritate* (CPG 4420; critical edition by Sergio Zincone, *Omèlie sull'oscurità delle profezie*, Verba Seniorum N.S. 12, [Roma: Edizioni Studium, 1998]) deal not only with prophetic but with all OT inspired works (*prophetes* referring to any OT author in being inspired). See my "Chrysostom on the obscurity of the Old Testament", *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 67 (2001) [forthcoming].

19. In his preface to Hosea (PL 25.819-20).

While some commentators claimed the phrase *from Bothros* should be read to refer to what is now called Kara and at one time Haran, I shall pass over this effort at precision on the place hereby indicated as a pointless exercise contributing nothing to the meaning, and treat of the sense in the present case.²⁰

This lack of deference to his betters is perhaps a mark of immaturity. Leontius of Byzantium implies, as we have said, that the Psalms Commentary was Theodore's first exegetical work;²¹ and the view that the Commentary on The Twelve immediately followed is confirmed by reference within it almost exclusively to the Psalms (though still not frequently: the paucity of Theodore's scriptural documentation in this work contrasts with his Antiochene predecessors' habits).

It was probably as a young man, then, and thus before his appointment as bishop of Mopsuestia in Cilicia in 392, that Theodore came to comment on The Twelve; and it proved to be his only work of any kind – exegetical, theological, polemical, liturgical – that would survive in its entirety in the original Greek. For his Nestorian sympathies he was condemned by the second council of Constantinople in 553,²² and his works expunged by all except Nestorian Syriac writers of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It was a sad fate for a man whom Johannes Quasten describes as

the most typical representative of the Antiochene school of exegesis and by far its most famous author.... He wrote commentaries to nearly all the books of the Bible which are remarkable for their free and critical investigations into questions of authorship and date and for their highly scientific, philological and historical approach. He was the first to apply literary criticism to the solution of textual problems.²³

We shall have to see, however, whether Theodore brings these mature gifts to this early work and in particular the book of Jonah.

20. PG 66.300. Likewise, on noting that his predecessors have suggested as alternatives to the "Tarshish" of Jonah 1:3 Tarsus or even Rhodes, Theodore dismisses them on the score that "I consider this entire chase after detail to be irrelevant" – an attitude Theodore as a good Antiochene will disown when he comes to debate the same point (PG 81.1724-25).

21. *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos* 3 (PG 86.1364). Quasten, *Patrology* III, 404, adopts this view, claiming Theodore was "scarcely twenty years of age" at the time, and that the work on the Twelve Prophets was "composed very probably immediately after" (405). Dimitri Z. Zaharopoulos, *Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Bible. A Study of his Old Testament Exegesis* (New York: Paulist, 1989) 30-32, also adopts this chronology. Theodore's Psalms Commentary, thought lost, has been partly recovered by Robert Devreesse, *Le Commentaire de Théodore de Mopsueste sur les Psaumes (1-80)*, Studi e Testi 93 (Roma: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1939).

22. See DS 424-26, 434-36.

23. *Patrology* III, 402, a fulsome endorsement hardly supported by the Commentary on the Twelve. Quasten mentions that Theodore's Commentary on the Gospel of John has survived in a complete Syriac version (406).

In view of this wholesale rejection of Theodore's literary output the obvious question to ask is: why did the Commentary on The Twelve survive, so that we are still in a position to assess his treatment of Jonah? Was it thought, despite Quasten's encomium of his exegetical skills, to be of no consequence? The eminent patrologist supplies an answer to this query: "no doubt because it offers almost nothing of Christological import".²⁴ That other possibility still lingers, however: that the work has nothing particular to recommend it, and that instead of Quasten's superlatives we should recall instead the verdict of Photius, that Theodore was considered extremely tautological, and struck one as lacking charm, unpleasing, short on clarity.²⁵

THEODORE AS COMMENTATOR ON JONAH

So let us take, as Antioch's first extant response to the book of Jonah, Theodore's commentary to see if it measures up to Quasten's assessment, if it is in fact "most typical of the Antiochene school of exegesis",²⁶ if the skills of commentary it exemplifies ("exegesis" being an inappropriate criterion to apply)²⁷ are such as to deserve recognition with the consequent risk of destruction, and if a Christological dimension is missing from its hermeneutic. For a start, it is hard to sustain Quasten's explanation of the work's survival on the grounds of lack of a Christological dimension. Like Theodore's approach to some others of The Twelve, though to an exceptional extent, the commentary on Jonah begins with a lengthy introduction – a third of the total text, in fact – relating this Old Testament prophecy to its New Testament realisation by means of an unaccustomed Antiochene procedure: typology. Theo-

24. *Patrology* III, 405 – words repeated verbatim by Zaharopoulos, *Theodore*, 32. They appeared first, however, it would seem, in Francis A. Sullivan, *The Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia*, (Analecta Gregoriana 82; Roma: Gregorianum, 1956) 1. So perhaps this verdict has become uncritically accepted in much the same way as the libel by Cyril of Alexandria regarding Theodore as not the disciple but the master of Nestorius (uncritically accepted and transmitted, e.g., by Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, IV, 34). A further effect of Sullivan's dismissal of this work of Theodore's may be seen in R. A. Norris, *Manhood and Christ. A Study in the Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), who makes little if any reference to it. To Sullivan can also be attributed a further uncritical epithet on Theodore as "the foremost exponent of Antiochene exegesis" (*Christology*, iv).

25. *Bibliotheca* 38,177 (PG 103.69-72,520).

26. Young's study, *Biblical Exegesis*, gives a good account of several principles of Antioch's approach to the biblical text, even though some of the major (OT) commentaries have yet to be made available in English (a task assumed by the present writer). See also Christoph Schäublin, *Untersuchungen zu Methode und Herkunft der Antiochenischen Exegese* (Theophaneia: Beiträge zur Religions- und Kirchengeschichte des Altertums 23, Köln-Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1974).

27. See the monitum of Chrysostom's biographer, J. N. D. Kelly: "Neither John, nor any Christian teacher for centuries to come, was properly equipped to carry out exegesis as we have come to understand it. He could not be expected to understand the nature of the Old Testament writings" (*Golden Mouth. The Story of John Chrysostom, Ascetic, Preacher, Bishop* [Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1995] 94).

dore explains at the outset that certain Old Testament events had a significance and a utility not only for their time but also and more especially for later times:

The events in olden times were found to be a kind of type of what came later, containing some outline of them as well as meeting needs at the time, while suggesting by the events themselves how far they were inferior to the later ones.²⁸

This principle allows him on the authority of Matthew 12:40-41 – a necessary condition of recourse to typology for an Antiochene – to see what happened to Jonah, and especially his three days in the sea monster, as a foreshadowing of Christ's life and especially his resurrection.

It is obvious from the facts that he chose to employ blessed Jonah and do novel and extraordinary things for the reason that he intended to present him as a type of the life of Christ the Lord, and so for this reason he was led on by such incredible novelty and proved worthy of belief, displaying in his own person a type of such a great reality.²⁹

Theodore, who beyond other Antiochenes is thought to have had a particular attachment to *to historikon* in biblical composition, here reveals the aspect of the book that for him is its most problematic feature: those "novel and extraordinary things". Hence the lengthy introduction to contextualise it properly within the whole divine *oikonomia*. Frances Young tells us that what we find in the Antiochenes, by contrast with the spiritualising effect of Origen's symbolic allegory, "is an important stress on the 'reality' of the overarching narrative from creation, fall, to incarnation and redemption".³⁰ Outside these introductory pieces to some of The Twelve, Theodore does not often invoke that matrix, focussing much more narrowly on the prophetic oracles strictly within their immediate historical situation (as he sees it).³¹ It is the "incredible

28. PG 66.320.

29. PG 66.324.

30. *Biblical Exegesis*, 296. Frequently on the lips of the Antiochenes are those terms denoting the "reality" of the biblical account, *alêtheia*, *pragmata*, as in the quotation from Theodore immediately above.

31. His reputation for historicism and literalism has been heightened by Theodoret's later statements in the prefaces to his commentaries on both Psalms and Song of Songs referring, in the former case, to predecessors who "make the inspired composition resemble historical narratives of a certain kind with the result that the commentary represents a case rather for Jews than for the household of the faith" (PG 80.860), and in the latter to those commentators who "misrepresent the Song of Songs, believe it to be not a spiritual book, come up instead with some fanciful stories inferior even to babbling old wives' tales, and dare to claim that Solomon the sage wrote it as a factual account of himself and the Pharaoh's daughter" (PG 81.29). Modern commentators see Theodore in focus here, though evidence that he actually composed a commentary on the Song comes partly from the statement of Leontius to the effect that Theodore would have excluded the Song from the canon of Scripture (PG 86.1365), and partly from a reading of the Acts of the council of 553 (by Quasten, *Patrology* III, 406) citing a passage from one of Theodore's letters. See the introduction to my *Theodoret of Cyrus. Commentary on the Song of Songs* (Brisbane: Australian Catholic University, 2001).

novelty" of events that do not easily yield to a solely historical approach that obliges him, through typology, to give the book of Jonah an eschatological and specifically christological dimension. Admittedly, contemporary christological positions, Nestorian or Monophysite, for which the council of 553 censured him, are not canvassed in this process. But Quasten's denial to the work of anything "of Christological import" can hardly stand.

It is within this eschatological hermeneutic, influenced by the Matthean redaction of the dominical saying to see as the book's *skopos*, not a satire of contemporary prophetism in the person of a reluctant and parochial Jonah but a prediction that "at the coming of Christ the Lord God would by his grace cause all the nations to take a turn for the better, even if Jews chose not to respond to the teaching in piety",³² that Theodore turns to the biblical text. Unlike his treatment of others of The Twelve, where he proceeds verse by verse, he soon divines – but never acknowledges – that he is reading not a series of oracles delivered through a prophet but a narrative in which the prophet is the eponymous hero (not an anti-hero). So he frequently settles for paraphrase of the text, being somewhat swept away as excitement, or depression, mounts. The psalm in chapter two, clearly being no narrative, is by contrast treated verse by verse.

ANTIOCHENE TEXT OF JONAH

The text which Theodore has before him is that Antiochene form of the Septuagint (unless, with Paul Kahle, we should keep the term "Septuagint" for the Alexandrian form, and speak of the Antioch Greek version independently³³) that is known today variously as the Antiochene recension, the Lucianic recension, the "texte antiochien"³⁴ or even "Palestinian",³⁵ and that according to Theodore's contemporary Jerome "was called by Origen and Eusebius and all the Greek commentators the 'popular text'."³⁶ Though many modern commentators on the prophets – at least those prepared to consider the versions along with their

32. PG 66.325.

33. Kahle, *The Cairo Genizah* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Blackwell, 1959) 209-61, traces the Antioch recension to an independent Greek translation made in Antioch before the version from Alexandria at the end of the second century BCE that we know as "Septuagint". The Antioch text, later revised by Lucian, arose (in Kahle's view) from Jewish translators' anxiety to bring the Greek version into closer touch with the Hebrew original, and in this it resembles the text of the Minor Prophets on the leather scroll from 50 BCE-50 CE found by Bedouin in 1952, based on a Hebrew text resembling our MT.

34. So Dominic Barthélemy, *Les devanciers d'Aquila* (VTS X; Leiden, Brill, 1963) 126-27.

35. Kevin G. O'Connell, "Texts and versions", in R. E. Brown and others (eds.), *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990) 1092, sees the revision being done in Palestine and matching Palestinian Hebrew mss from Qumran.

36. Ep. 106.2 (PL 22.838). Jerome says that in his time this text was also called "the Lucianic text" after its author, Lucian of Antioch, martyred in 312.

Masoretic Hebrew text – are inclined to speak of “Septuagint” as a univocal term, and ignore Jerome’s reminder that in his time three forms were current, respectively, in Alexandria, Constantinople-Antioch and “the provinces in-between”,³⁷ the Antioch text used by Chrysostom, Theodoret and presumably their fellow-Antiochene Theodore is distinctive, and in Dominic Barthélemy’s words is significant for “the important elements of the ancient Septuagint which it alone has conserved for us”.³⁸ It is no longer an adequate statement, even on the lips of commentators on the prophets of the stature of William McKane and Roland Whybray,³⁹ to say that verses in the MT (in the notorious case of Jeremiah, e.g.) are “missing from the LXX” when in fact they occur in the Antioch text,⁴⁰ as editions emanating from the Göttingen project demonstrate.⁴¹ As Natalio Fernandez Marcos points out, we depend on the Antiochene Fathers’ commentaries for knowledge of the nature of this local text.⁴²

In the case of Theodore’s Commentary on The Twelve, however, even if distinctive readings occur occasionally, the commentator evidently has only his local text before him, and not also a copy of the Hexapla (which, as we shall see, Theodoret made use of) offering its form of the LXX, together with the alternative versions associated with the names of the Jewish translators Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion.⁴³ In the Hexapla, of course, a Hebrew text and a transliteration of it would also have been provided, but these would have been lost on Theodore, who like the Fathers generally (excepting Jerome, and perhaps Origen⁴⁴) had no knowledge of Hebrew, nor of

37. *Praef. in Paral.* (PL 28.1324-25).

38. *Les devanciers d’Aquila*, 127.

39. See W. McKane, *Jeremiah* (ICC; 2 vols; Edinburgh: Clark, 1986, 1996); R. N. Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66* (New Century Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975).

40. The instances are numerous: cf Jer 10:1-16; 23:10a; 25:26b; 29:16-20; 33:14-26. In the case of Jer 29:16-20, McKane notes (thanks to Ziegler’s edition; see note 40) the occurrence of the verses in the Lucianic recension, classing it “a correction modelled on MT”. See above for the extant commentaries from the Antiochene Fathers on these prophets.

41. See Joseph Ziegler, *Jeremias, Baruch, Threni, Epistula Jeremiae*, Septuaginta XV (3rd ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976); *Isaias*, Septuaginta XIV (3rd ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983).

42. See N. Fernandez Marcos: “One of the reasons for the uncertainty concerning the Lucianic recension of the Octateuch was the lack of critical editions of the Antiochene Fathers” (“The Antiochene text of the Greek Bible”, in *Scribes and Translators. Septuagint and Old Latin in the Books of Kings* [VTS 54; Leiden: Brill, 1994] 28). The length to which these commentaries run precludes an early appearance of further critical editions. J.-N. Guinot, who edited Theodoret’s Isaiah Commentary, has been preparing (with A. Labate) a Commentary on The Twelve.

43. These alternative versions in the Hexapla would, for example, have alerted Theodore to that copyist’s error reading “three days” in 3:4 (see note 1 above) for the “forty” of the Hebrew and the Syriac, as Theodoret with his Hexapla and his native Syriac discovered.

44. See Henri Crouzel: “Certainly it would be wrong to credit Origen with a knowledge of Hebrew like Jerome’s, but he must have had enough to direct the compilation of the

Theodoret's native tongue, Syriac, to point him in that direction; he does not note the misreading by the LXX of *'ibri* in 1:9, "I am a Hebrew", as *'ibdi*, "I am a servant of the Lord",⁴⁵ and likewise in other cases of confusion of similar forms in The Twelve.⁴⁶

Having failed to discern the author's *skopos*, and being with his historical bent somewhat caught up in the excitement of the narrative, which he takes in literalistic fashion, Theodore succumbs to the temptation against which Childs warns the reader if the book is not to be misinterpreted: "All attempts to defend the prophet's reputation...miss the purpose of the book within the canon. Such apologetics serve to weaken rather than enhance the truth of the book."⁴⁷ On first principles, Theodore cannot allow the prophet to be thought ridiculous or in any other way an object of satire. In his introduction he prepares the reader for encountering a prophet unreasonably despondent at the success of his terse and begrudging ministry.

The prophets, you see, were necessarily despondent in being constantly sent by God to the people, disclosing the future to them and threatening the punishments that would be inflicted. With great zeal they carried out everything designed to achieve their correction, but all to no avail, since the Israelites' wickedness worked against what was done for them by God through the prophets' efforts.⁴⁸

Unable to accept that Jonah would have fled from God (cf 1:3), he takes the phrase "from the face of the Lord" to mean only "he had gone off to some other place far removed". He insists Jonah did not go below only when the hubbub on the ship described in chapter 1 began; this would have been "ridiculous"; Jonah went below as soon as he came on board. He does not draw to his readers' attention (if it has attracted his own) the fact that unwittingly Jonah has brought the mariners to worship of the Lord (cf 1:16). Most of all, with typical Antiochene insistence on the role of human effort in the process of salvation,⁴⁹ he

Hexapla, even if the actual work was done by some assistant" (*Origen* [ET; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989] 12).

45. Admittedly, this escapes Theodoret as well, who would have no reason to go beyond his LXX text at this point.

46. When, in commentary on Zeph 3:1 (PG 66.465,468) in his LXX text, as often, confuses similar Hebrew terms and comes up with a meaning "dove" in place of "oppressive". Theodore blames predecessors who claim Syriac support for seeing the name Jonah intended in "dove" and thus Nineveh at the focus of the prophet's attention in the oracle 3:1-5 rather than Jerusalem (favoured by modern commentators). The basis for Theodore's rejection of these "old wives' tales" as he classes them in his customarily scathing rejection of his predecessors' opinions (though evidently unsure of either the Hebrew or the Syriac evidence), is the *a priori* superiority of the Seventy to some obscure Syriac translator.

47. *Introduction*, 426.

48. PG 66.324.

49. It is significant that Theodore in commentary on 4:2 does not list any of the many litanies of divine goodness and mercy from Exod 34:6; Num 14:18; Neh 9:17; Pss 86:15;

cannot allow it to be understood that a few words proved sufficient to effect the conversion of all the inhabitants of Nineveh (a goodly number, since he interprets the phrase “a hundred and twenty thousand who do not know their right hand from their left” in 4:11 to refer to infants alone). So – like Theodoret rewriting Paul’s words to the Romans⁵⁰ – he rewrites the text of 3:2 to insist that Jonah’s commission regarding Nineveh was not simply “Preach in it” but a lengthy text giving them a recipe for repentance.

They could never have believed in God on the basis of this remark alone, from an completely unknown foreigner threatening them with destruction and adding nothing further, not even letting the listeners know by whom he was sent. Rather, it is obvious he also mentioned God, the Lord of all, and said he had been sent by him; and he delivered the message of destruction, calling them to repentance.⁵¹

Jonah had every right, he maintains, to be distressed (4:1) at the fact that no destruction ensued: he ran the risk of “gaining the reputation for being a sham and a charlatan”. Only at the very end does Theodore seem to admit that the Lord is within his rights to chide him (4:4) in the words, “You seem disappointed that so many have been saved; you ought put the salvation of everyone ahead of your own reputation, and consider your being taken for such a person preferable to the loss of so many people.” But he closes his commentary abruptly at this point as though disappointed at finally having had to admit that Jonah incurs divine criticism, an admission that undermines his interpretation of the book throughout.

It is not surprising that this prophetic work in particular should test the hermeneutical ability of one slow to look for other levels of meaning in biblical works than the historical. He had elsewhere shown his suspicion of commentators looking in texts for a spiritual meaning: “When they turn to expounding the divine Scripture ‘spiritually’ – spiritual interpretation is the name they would like their madness to be given – they claim Adam is not Adam, paradise is not paradise, the serpent not the serpent. I should like to say this to them, that if they undermine *historia*, they will have no *historia* left.”⁵² The “novel and

103:8; 145:8; Nah 1:3. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (5th ed.; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978) 373, defends Theodore against the charge of being an eastern Pelagius levelled at him by Photius, *Bibliotheca* 177 (PG 103.516), though conceding in him and Theodoret “an intensified emphasis on individualism”. Chrysostom, too, displays a similar accent on human effort; see my “A Pelagian commentator on the Psalms?” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 63 (1998) 261-71.

50. Theodoret in his Commentary on the Fourteen Letters of St Paul (his only New Testament work) has trouble with Paul’s accent on the gratuity of divine mercy; see my “Theodoret Wrestling with Romans”, *Studia Patristica* 34 (2001) [forthcoming].

51. PG 66.340.

52. From the fifth century Latin version of Theodore’s Commentary on Galatians 4:24 (discovered and edited by H. B. Swete, *Theodori Episcopi Mopsuesteni in epistolas B. Pauli Commentarii* I [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1880] 74-75).

extraordinary things" of the book of Jonah led this literalist to write his lengthy introductory apologia and concede Jonah's role as a type (with New Testament encouragement).

Yet despite his historical approach, here and elsewhere, Theodore can turn a blind eye to historical details. We saw him dismissing his predecessors' attempt at precision about the nations attracting the Lord's care in Amos 9:7 as "a pointless exercise contributing nothing to the meaning". Likewise, while the identification of Tarshish in 1:3 has been under debate by other commentators, he has only scorn for their efforts: "For my part, however, I consider this entire chase after detail to be irrelevant to the subject in hand." He does not pursue the matter of Jonah's background beyond the note in the opening verse, making no reference to a provenance from Gath-hepher in Galilee recorded in 2 Kings 14:25, and so he is left to think the prophet is from Judah on the basis of the mention of Temple worship in the psalm (2:4,7).

Of all the "novel and extraordinary things" he attempts to rationalise within his historical approach, it is Jonah's encounter with the sea monster, *kētōs*, that is Theodore's greatest challenge. But he simply throws up his hands and admonishes his readers against prying.

It would, in fact, be a mark of extreme folly, after such extraordinary things happened to him, and most of all his salvation from the sea monster, to pry into the prophet's egress from the sea monster, and to think that one could grasp it by human reasoning and explain how it happened in our terms.⁵³

A consistently historical approach can prove inconvenient for a commentator, even for one whom Quasten rates so highly.

THEODORET'S APPROACH TO JONAH

Theodoret, born in Antioch in the last decade of the fourth century within a year of Theodore's going to Mopsuestia in Cilicia as bishop, can hardly have known his predecessor personally. It is only a presumption (with some encouragement from a hostile Leontius) that Theodoret's disparaging remarks about excessively historicist interpretation in the prefaces to his Commentaries on the Psalms and the Song of Songs refer to Theodore among others, though what is documented above does not weaken that presumption. There is no doubt that he is familiar with his predecessor's Commentary on Jonah, and it is to Theodore that he in fact owes an (unacknowledged) debt for contact with the previous work of others. The efforts of earlier commentators to identify the Tarshish in 1:3, raised and dismissed by Theodore on the grounds that "I consider

53. PG 66.337-40. For my overall assessment of Theodore's achievement in his work of commentary on The Twelve, see my "Theodore of Mopsuestia, Interpreter of the Prophets", *Sacris erudiri* 40 (2001) [forthcoming].

this detail to be irrelevant to the subject in hand”, Theodoret seizes upon but canvasses more seriously as an Antiochene for whom *akribeia* is a commentator’s duty and no detail is irrelevant, and as one with a personal interest in geography, topography and history. The precise force of 3:3b in referring to the dimensions of Nineveh, which the LXX reads as “It was, thanks to God, a very large city. It required a journey of three days, as it were”, had also been debated by earlier commentators, as Theodoret learns from Theodore. He also responds to his fellow Antiochene’s third acknowledgement of predecessors’ views, namely, on the “hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left” in 4:11, accepting his ingenious interpretation as a reference to young people only, and extending his blanket of inculpability to include the “many cattle”. He never cites predecessors outside of these hints. Furthermore, he repeats a phrase used by Theodore, about Jonah’s being “an unknown foreigner” to the Ninevites, and every now and then there occurs the odd inconsequential remark that can only be accounted for on the supposition of his having his predecessor’s work open before him.

If it is imitation, however, that is the sincerest form of flattery, we do not see Theodoret flattering the bishop of Mopsuestia. He approaches the book of Jonah with better equipment and with a more satisfying outcome, as well as with a readiness to differ. He is obviously reading the same local form of the Septuagint as Theodore, but significantly has access as well to a copy of the Hexapla to provide him (in this commentary as in others, like the Psalms and Isaiah) with the alternative versions of Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion and with a (transliterated) Hebrew text. As well, his native Syriac allows him on disputed readings to refer to the Peshitta of the prophets, which for a century and a half had been available and had attained authoritative status,⁵⁴ and thus to cite the Hebrew (that, *pace* some of his commentators, he could not otherwise have accessed).⁵⁵ The value of these resources by comparison with Theodore’s lack of access emerges clearly from two occurrences in this work. Above we noted that the LXX version of 3:4 reads “three days more” for the “forty” of the Hebrew. Where Theodore passed on without comment, Theodoret, on the contrary, is in a position to check the likely confusion with the numeral

54. So Michael P. Weitzman, *The Syriac Version of the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 253.

55. Evidence from Theodoret’s commentaries (see the introduction to my translation of his Psalms Commentary, 10-11) would confirm his lack of Hebrew. The statement by Pierre Canivet, *Histoire d’une entreprise apologétique au Ve siècle* (Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1957) 27, that “il était bilingue” (in the sense of being familiar with Greek as well as his native Syriac) may account for belief that he had some Hebraic expertise on the part of commentators such as Rondeau, *Les commentaires patristiques I*, 136, who maintains “il peut aisément recourir à l’original sémitique” (*Les commentaires patristiques I*) 136.

in 3:3 by reference to his Hexapla, and does so, proceeding to confirm the alternative reading with a rationale of his own:

Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion render this word "forty", and the Syriac and Hebrew agree with them. As well, this number is the likely one: in one case it took three days for Jonah to cover the whole city, in another the Ninevites performed their laborious repentance to God and enjoyed salvation from him, and in another the prophet sat outside the gates awaiting the fulfilment of the prophecy – hence the period of forty days seems to me closer to the truth.⁵⁶

A second instance also highlights Theodore's relative disadvantage in not following this procedure. Had he done so, he would not have been likely to persist in his policy of defending his hero's depression to the last. Theodoret, not predisposed in Jonah's favour *malgré tout*, is unwilling to defend his behaviour in chapter 4. So when the Lord issues a rebuke in 4:4, he looks beyond the milder wording of the LXX to the severer form in the alternative versions, and reads on to the end of the chapter, where the tone is even harsher.

The good Lord says in reply to the prophet, *Are you very distressed?* Symmachus rendered it more clearly, "Were you justified in being distressed?" and the others said, "Were you right to be distressed?" meaning, Ponder within yourself as to whether you have good reason for your depression. Whereas here he bids him find relief from depression in sound thinking, at the end of the book he accuses him of improper depression and demonstrates the reasonableness of his own decision.⁵⁷

Theodoret invokes resources from his copies of Hexapla and Peshitta again when supporting his view (stated also in his Isaiah Commentary) that the Tarshish of 1:3 is to be understood as Carthage, citing the alternative versions, Syriac and Hebrew of Isa 23:1 and of Ezek (probably 38:13). He is thus better equipped to engage in some textual criticism than his Antiochene predecessor, and not be tempted to dismiss such issues impatiently.

Feeling this greater degree of comfort with the text before him, Theodoret comes to the task of interpreting it for his readers. (He is ever careful not to play the preacher, and only in the typically brief conclusion does he make what might be considered a moral application.) For him Jonah is but one of a bevy of Israel's prophets, as responsible for the narrative of this book as are the other prophets for the oracles that compose theirs; he sees Nahum performing a similar

56. PG 81.1733.

57. PG 81.1737. Of the alternative translators, Symmachus generally gains Theodoret's preference for his clarity, a virtue (along with conciseness) he often aspires to himself.

task in regard to Nineveh.⁵⁸ So he tells us that details such as Jonah's snoring in the ship's hold during the storm have come down to us because "he himself conveyed it in writing". Likewise, the psalm constituting chapter 2, like David's recounting his sin in Psalm 51 to express God's love and the value of repentance, comes to us because with that same moral purpose "the remarkable Jonah put on record the flight, the punishment imposed on him and the salvation accorded him".

Just as Theodoret early in the piece sees Jonah, David-like, as sinner and penitent in the way Theodore never conceded, so he is by no means the literalist that the latter was in approaching the book. He may briefly feel it necessary to account for the survival of Jonah in the sea monster by ruling out problems from its teeth, gastric juices and the confined situation. But he passes on briskly. And when he makes the point on 4:5 that the author has deliberately re-arranged the material to delay the account of Jonah's waiting for a result until *after* the Ninevites' repentance had in fact been recorded in chapter 3, it is an exercise not in literalism but in literary criticism in which he is engaged, something that would be grist to the mill of Landes and Lohfink. He even shows enough (if rare) paleographical acumen to account for that erroneous reading "three days more" in 3:4 by the LXX: "It is likely the Seventy rendered that number in agreement with the others, but the original scribes made a mistake in this item, and this form occurred in the same way in all the copies."⁵⁹

AVOIDING THE EXTREMES OF LITERALISM

The point is that, like any Antiochene, Theodoret is interested in historical veracity of a narrative; but he does not take *to historikon* to such extremes, like Theodore, as to insist that everything must be taken at face value.⁶⁰ So while he sees merit in settling the identification of

58. See Theodoret's introduction to work on The Twelve: "Jonah was also one of this band [Hosea, Amos, Micah]: if he said nothing about the time of his prophecy, the book of the Chronicles [2 Kings 14:25?] clearly informs us of it. After Jonah Nahum received the charism of prophecy; the theme of his work brings this out clearly. That is to say, Jonah preached destruction to the Ninevites and was responsible for their adopting the remedies of repentance, and as a result they did not experience those dire predictions. But when they reverted to their former wickedness and committed deeds deserving of extreme punishment, Nahum later prophesied their ruin" (PG 81.1549). The slip in referring to the Chronicles is not altogether out of character for Theodoret.

59. The rarity of this paleographic comment is due partly to Theodoret's esteem for the Seventy translators, who "not without divine inspiration turned (the Old Testament books) into the Greek language with great consensus" (as he says in his preface to the Psalms: PG 80.864). J.-N. Guinot (*L'Exégèse de Théodoret de Cyr*, [Théologie Historique 100; Paris: Beauchesne, 1995] 177-80) presents evidence of Theodoret's attention to textual criticism.

60. David S. Wallace-Hadrill (*Christian Antioch. A Study of Early Christian Thought in the East* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982] 39) credits Theodoret with a "moderate historicism" by comparison with Theodore.

Tarshish on historical, geographical and topographical grounds whereas Theodore dismisses this "chase after detail" as "irrelevant", he cannot second his predecessor's efforts to play up Jonah's plight within the monster. And having extricated the prophet, he proceeds promptly to commentary on chapter 3, only then noting the monitum cited above from his predecessor against "prying into the prophet's egress", which he then quotes verbatim before hurrying on. Certainly, Diodore had left the school of Antioch with the maxim, "We far prefer the literal sense to the allegorical",⁶¹ but, as Frances Young admits, "Whatever they meant by 'literal', it was not exactly 'historical' in the modern critical sense",⁶² and Theodore earns the strictures of his fellow Antiochenes for an unduly rigorous application of that venerable dictum.

The hermeneutical accents of these two Antiochenes in respect of the book of Jonah consequently fall differently. One, with his microscopic attention on the "novel and extraordinary things" happening to his hero, fails to grasp the bigger picture, the "overarching narrative", of an *oikonomia* of divine loving kindness so abundantly documented elsewhere in Scripture (if the commentator is ready and able to cite it). The other presents his anti-hero (in 4:2) admitting to the Lord his fault in taking flight on the grounds of "having seen you giving evidence of patience also with Israel, being merciful and compassionate, long-suffering and rich in mercy, relenting in the case of troubles", which is precisely the divine trait emphasised by the commentator in contextualising the book in his introduction. So while the former was obliged from the outset to have recourse to typology so as to account desperately for "such incredible novelty" by reference to Christ's death and resurrection, the latter can delay this recourse until chapter 2 and thus not allow his whole interpretation of the book to be influenced by the Matthean version of the dominical saying, instead confining the parallel to a phrase in Jonah's psalm (2:2).

In a particular way he was also a type of Christ the Lord, who spent three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matt 12:40); so he was right to say he was in *the belly of Hades*. What is most remarkable of all is that the one who truly tasted death said he would be three days and three nights in the belly of the earth, whereas the one who was under the shadow of death refers to the belly of the sea monster as *the belly of Hades*. In fact, whereas life was not in the power of Jonah, in the case of Christ the Lord death was a matter of choice and resurrection was dependent on his will; hence in the latter case, where there is Hades

61. From fragments of his work on the Octateuch; see C. Schäublin, "Diodor von Tarsus", *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 8:763-67.

62. *Biblical Exegesis*, 168. Schäublin also excuses Theodore on the grounds of Diodore's lack of explication of his dictum, remarking: "Freilich, was heisst in der Sprache der Antiochener 'historisch'?" (*Untersuchungen*, 156).

and death, the term used is “heart of the earth”, whereas in the former case it is the belly of the sea monster that is called *Hades*.⁶³

The figure of Christ, in fact, does not obtrude otherwise into Theodoret’s commentary on Jonah. His hermeneutical context is rather that of divine *philanthropia* throughout sacred history to that point. In this the Jonah Commentary differs markedly from his work on Isaiah, where under the influence of Alexandrian interpretation mediated to him by Cyril and Eusebius his treatment is atypically Christological to the point of forfeiting an Antiochene character (if we may take the Psalms Commentary as a talisman). The upside of this feature of the Jonah Commentary is that no quibbles may be raised about Theodoret’s Christological orthodoxy in the work in respect of the hypostatic union and *communicatio idiomatum*, for example, such as have been raised by modern commentators⁶⁴ (as by Cyril in his time) to the extent of his being referred to recently as a “crypto-Nestorian”⁶⁵ – though evidence from his biblical commentaries would on the whole seem to refute such a label.⁶⁶ We are grateful that his critics in his lifetime (he was briefly deposed from his see in 449, we recall, but reinstated in time to assist in the convocation of the council of Chalcedon) and in later ages did not take such exception to his Christological views as to mete out to them the treatment Theodore’s received. They represent the classic Antiochene approach to Jonah and other Old Testament books.⁶⁷

63. PG 81.1729. The next verse of the psalm prompts Theodoret into a more typically Antiochene interpretation of the text with its phrase “the sea’s heart”, employing the hermeneutical terms *skia* and *alêtheia*: “Once more the mention of ‘heart’ brings out the shadow resembling the reality.” The relationship between Old and New Testaments and eschatological realities in these terms is sketched most fully in his comment on Isa 60:1.

64. See Alberto Viciano, “Theodoret von Kyros als Interpret des Apostels Paulus”, *Theologie und Glaube* 80 (1990) 288: “Er hebt die *unio hypostatica* nicht genügend hervor. Das gilt auch für die *communicatio idiomatum*”. See also Marijan Mandac: “Il est vrai qu’il ne sut pas exprimer avec toute la clarté désirable ce qu’on appelle aujourd’hui l’union hypo-statique et ses conséquences, mais qui connaît la longue histoire de ce dogme ne lui en fera pas grief.” (“L’union Christologique dans les oeuvres de Théodoret antérieures au Concile d’Ephèse”, *ETL* 47 [1971] 64-96, see p. 96).

65. See the second Agreed Statement on Christology by the Joint Commission of the Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches, Geneva, 1990: “Both families condemn the Nestorian heresy and the crypto-Nestorianism of Theodoret of Cyrus.”

66. To judge from internal evidence and from statements in his letters, Theodoret’s biblical commentaries stem from the two decades between the Councils of Ephesus in 431 and Chalcedon in 451 (see introduction to my translation of the Psalms Commentary), the Commentary on The Twelve appearing in the former. In this period Theodoret seems to become increasingly active against the Monophysites (see his *Eranistes*), and his dyophysite accents led to the charges levelled above. A calmer assessment of the biblical commentaries would seem to confirm the verdict of Gustave Bardy: “En réalité, Théodoret n’est pas été nestorien” (“Théodoret”, *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* 15, [Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1946] 224).

67. For Bardy, “Interprétation chez les pères”, *Dictionnaire de la Bible. Supplément IV* (Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ané, 1949) 582, Theodoret distinguishes himself as a commentator for being “modéré”, thus proving for later ages “le noyau ou le terme de comparaison indispensable”.