

Jonah's Commission

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses repetition and variance in God's two commissions to Jonah. The differences do not only concern the fact that the commissions occur at subsequent points in narrated time and that Jonah first disobeys and afterwards obeys, but also entail intertextual references, subtle idiomatic variance, plusses and minuses, and even a curious assortment of pointing phenomena in the Codex Leningradensis B19a. It is argued that the subtlety constitutes an adept application of the literary device of repetition. The technique is a means by which the narrator activates his options for opening new windows in the following sections on the confrontation of the Ninevites with the word of God. The curious pointing in B19a may merely be due to Samuel ben Jacob's following the pronunciation he was used to instead of the "correct" pronunciation or simple scribal errors, but it may also be that this was his way to draw attention to the shift.

A INTRODUCTION

A flurry of studies appearing almost simultaneously in the seventies and another excellent cluster from the early nineties clearly illustrate that the well-wrought symmetrical structure of the Book of Jonah is not seriously doubted in Old Testament scholarship, not even on the historical-critical submission that it is the product of a so-called Yahweh-strand having been expanded by a so-called Elohim-strand.¹ This is the case both in the typical German form-critical tradition of the time² and in Jewish readings³ as well as in later analyses of the literary character.⁴

¹ L. Schmidt. »De Deo«. *Studien zur Literarkritik und Theologie des Buches Jona, des Gesprächs zwischen Abraham und Jahwe in Gen 18,22ff. und von Hi 1* (Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1976).

² Cf. W. Rudolph, *Joel – Amos – Obadja – Jona* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1971), H. W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheton 3. Obadja und Jona* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 1977) and A. S. Van der Woude, *Jona. Nahum* (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1978).

³ Cf. J. D. Magonet, *Form and meaning. Studies in Literary Techniques in the Book of Jona* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1976).

⁴ E.g. J. H. Potgieter, "Jonah – a semio-structuralistic reading of a narrative." *OTE* 3/1 (1990): 61-69 as well as 'n Narratologiese Ondersoek van die Boek Jona. *HTS Suppl* 3. (Pretoria: Perskor, 1991); F. W. Golka, *Jona* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1991); R. Lux, *Jona. Prophet zwischen „Verweigerung“ und „Gehorsam“* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992); K. A. Deurloo, *Jona* (Baarn: Callenbach, 1995); another influen-

The purpose of this paper is neither to review these positions yet again nor to analyse the Jonah story as a whole, but rather modest in scope, notably to compare the two passages on the commission of Jonah. Here we do not only find a clear instance of literary repetition with variations, but each in its own right and both together also provide the pivotal perspective for understanding the story as a whole. This will present the spin-off question whether the pointed text as it appears in the Codex Leningradensis perhaps reflects an awareness of such windows on the message or draws attention to their significance.

The structure of the overall narrative is surprisingly similar in its treatment by several recent commentators, consisting of two halves (chapters 1-2 and 3-4) in turn made up of two sections each⁵.

B THE TEXT OF THE COMMISSION

The text of the two passages is printed in two columns below. I have used the following indicators in the printed form:

- The changes in Chapter 3 vis-à-vis Chapter 1 are marked grey.
- Text present in the commission passage of Chapter 1, but missing in Chapter 3 is italicised.
- The plus of Chapter 3 vis-à-vis Chapter 1 is in bold print.

Jonah 1:1-3	Jonah 3:1-3a
<p>1 וַיֹּהִי דְּבָרִיְהוּה אֶל־יُونָה בֶּן־אַמֹתִי לְאמֹר:</p> <p>2 קֹם</p> <p>לְךָ אֶל־נִינְוָה הַשִּׁיר הַנְּרוֹלָה</p> <p>וְקַרְא שְׁלִיחָה</p> <p>כִּי־שְׁלִיחָה רְעַתָם לִפְנֵי:</p>	<p>1 וַיֹּהִי דְּבָרִיְהוּה אֶל־יُונָה שְׁנִית לְאמֹר:</p> <p>2 קֹם</p> <p>לְךָ אֶל־נִינְנָה הַשִּׁיר הַגְּרוֹלָה</p> <p>וְקַרְא אֶלְיחָה</p> <p>אַחֲרַת־קְרִיאָה אֲשֶׁר אַנְכִי דָבַר אֲלֵיכָה:</p>

tial Jewish reading by U. Simon *Jona. Ein jüdischer Kommentar* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1994), and J. Jeremias *Jeremias, J. Die Propheten Joel, Obadja, Jona, Micha* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007).

⁵ Here the principle remains but the details sometimes differ, cf. Magonet, *Form and Meaning*, 55 as opposed to Potgieter, “Jonah,” 65 and Simon *Jona*, 49 [original Hebrew 1992] on the one hand and Golka, *Jona* on the other. Wolff, *Dodekapropheton* does not account for the structure in as systematic a way as these authors (cf. Lux *Jona*, 42-43), but his demarcation of sections remains similar (with the difference of including the second commission in the unit 2:1 - 3:3a).

<p>3 וַיָּקֹם יוֹנָה לְבָרֵךְ תְּרִשְׁוּשָׁה מִלְפָנֵי יְהוָה וַיֹּרֶא יְפֹוֹ וַיֹּמֶת אָנָּה בְּאָה תְּרִשְׁוּשָׁה וַיַּתְּמַן שְׁכָרָה וַיַּלְךְ בָּה לְבֹנָא עַמְּהֶם תְּרִשְׁוּשָׁה מִלְפָנֵי יְהוָה:</p> <p>1 Now the word of Yahweh came to Jonah son of Amittai, saying, 2 'Stand up, go to Nineveh, the great city, and call out against her; for their wickedness has come up before me.'</p> <p>3 But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from Yahweh's presence. But he went down to Joppa and found a ship going to Tarshish; and he paid its fare and went on board, to go with them to Tarshish, away from Yahweh's presence.</p>	<p>3 וַיָּקֹם יוֹנָה וַיַּלְךְ אֶל-נִינְוָה כְּדָבָר יְהוָה . . .</p> <p>1 And the word of Yahweh came to Jonah for the second time, saying: 2 'Stand up, go to Nineveh, the great city, and call out to her whatever I tell you!</p> <p>3 And Jonah stood up and went to Nineveh... ... as Yahweh had said.</p>
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C ASPECTS OF REPETITION AND THEIR RAMIFICATIONS⁶

We will now consider the two texts by attending to the aspects they contain within themselves as well as how they interlock with the rest of the Jonah story.

1 The introductory section: Jonah's first commission (1:1-3)

1a Jonah 1:1

Several elements in the first verse of the story either contain or prepare the liberal use of irony deployed in the narrative.

(i) The word formula

The first of these is the use of the conventional “word formula” as the very opening words. No details about date or revelatory type are provided, which from the outset confirms the narrative’s fictional character.

This enables the reader to appreciate the irony of the last words of the commission scene, notably the phrase “away from the presence of Yahweh” (v. 3). The association with a series of stories about the prophet Elijah is especially significant, since this will play a major intertextual role later in the book.⁷ This network equips the reader to realise and appreciate the absurdity of running away from Yahweh. The simple word formula, “and the word of Yahweh happened to,” manifests the prophetic motif of divine constraint and manifests what C. H. Ratschow⁸ long ago appropriately called “the arresting power” of

⁶ Although J. P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative. An Introductory Guide* (Louisville: Westminster-John Knox Press, 1999), 112-122 has a chapter entitled “The power of repetition” and subtitled “The dialectics of similarity and difference,” which is exactly what I am interested in for the purpose of this article, the materials treated by him do not include the passages in the Book of Jonah.

⁷ Both prophets flee from their duty, both travel a day’s journey into the wilderness, both lie under a bush in the desert, but wish to die, both are refreshed, and both are refused leave to resign from the prophetic office (cf. 1 Kgs 19:4ff. 15; Jonah 3:4 + 4:5; 4:6, 8). A close intertextual relationship with the prophet Jeremiah is also clear, although Jeremiah does not physically abscond: refusal to carry out the prophetic assignment (Jer 1:6), anger (Jer 15:15; 17:18; 18:19-23), withdrawal (Jer 15:17) and death wish (Jer 15:10; 20:14-18), cf. C. A. Keller, “Jonas. Le portrait d’un prophète,” *ThZ* 21 (1965): 329-340. Jeremias, *Die Propheten*, 84 also points out the intertextual relationship with Gen 4:6 (Cain’s distance from God’s face). So we have the interlocking of Jonah with Elijah, Jeremiah as well as Cain.

⁸ Often in Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Haggai; cf. Jer 1:4-7, where the divine constraint is particularly clear; further Jer 1:11.13; 2:1.4.31 and *passim*; Ezek 1:3; 2:2; 3:1, 16, 17 and *passim*; Hag 1:1, 3; 2:1, 10, 20 in addition to Elijah (cf. above) and Moses (cf. Exod 4:14ff). Ratschow’s phrase is, “die hinnehmende Gewalt dieses Wortes” (C. H. Ratschow, *Werden und Wirken. Eine Untersuchung des Wortes hajah als Beitrag zur*

God's word. The opening words therefore interlock ironically with the last words of the commission scene because the readers' intertextual competence enables them to recognise a clear irony of the type called "contradictory opposition" ("kontradiktorischer Gegensatz") by Müller.⁹ Not allowing the effect of the word contradicts the "happening of the word." Since it is impossible to escape the compulsion of the "happening word," the disobedience of going in the opposite direction not only opposes God, but necessarily also has to dismantle itself. The reader is therefore prepared for the following storm scene which deploys the irony that running away from God means running into confrontation with him. Far from precluding a line of tension, it makes precisely that possible, for the real question now is how God is going to handle the human absurdity.

Lux¹⁰ develops an earlier proposal by Wolff¹¹ to the effect that this use of the "word formula" is fundamentally different from its use in the captions of prophetic books, since it introduces a narrative *about* the word¹² as opposed to a title of a book *containing* that word.¹³ That may be true, of course, but it does not impact on the intertextual effect of the formula's use. By virtue of the narrative's reliance on the readers' competence to interrelate the concept of the happening word within the network of narratives, Jonah's status is established as a prophet of Yahweh to whom the word "happens." The terminology is known from the Samuel tradition in the stories about the early monarchy¹⁴ and from the stories in the Book of Kings quoted above, thereby placing the events in the time of the monarchy, which suits the setting and the role allotted to Nineveh.

(ii) The name of the prophet

The second ironical element is provided by the name chosen for the prophet. This is perhaps the most explicit intertextual reference in the story, referring as it does to 2 Kings 14:25. Through his name, complete with patronymic, Jonah is explicitly identified with the prophet mentioned in 2 Kings 14. This is done

Wirklichkeitserfassung des Alten Testamentes [Berlin: Töpelmann, 1941], 35). Cf. also J. Lindblom *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965), 62, 65.

⁹ The third type of irony mentioned by W. G. Müller, "Ironie," in *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft Band 2* (Ed. H. Fricke. Berlin & New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007), 185, following J. D. Knox, *Ironia. Medieval and Renaissance ideas on irony* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 19-37.

¹⁰ Lux, *Jona*, 93.

¹¹ Wolff, *Dodekapropheton*, 75.

¹² This is also the case in stories about other prophets, cf. 1 Kgs 17:2-3. 8-9; 21:17-18; cf. 18:1; Jer 1:11.13; 2:1-2 etc.

¹³ E.g. Hos 1:1; Joel 1:1; Mic 1:1; Zeph 1:1.

¹⁴ E.g. 1 Sam 15:10.

by the text and *in* the text. But by the same token it invites the reader to participate in the intertextual signification.

יְוָנָה means “dove”, which was a symbol of peace already in pre-Christian times.¹⁵ That means that already the choice of a name for his main character expresses the author’s sense of irony, since Jonah himself confesses to take offence at God’s characteristic willingness to forgive sins instead of punishing them, in this case by destroying Nineveh as he had done to Sodom.¹⁶ This is an instance of diametrical or polar irony (“polarer Gegensatz”)¹⁷ because the name represents the diametrical opposite of its bearer’s disposition.

Exactly the same is the case in the patronymic אַמְתִּי. It is derived from אַמְתָּה יְהוָה, roughly corresponding to the German name “Traugott” and can be interpreted as ambivalent commentary. Both aspects of the ambivalence constitute cases of contradictory irony: God does not remain “true” to his threatening word in the sense of standing by it (אַמְתָּה יְהוָה is then a subjective genitive); Jonah is not “true” to the God who sent him (אַמְתָּה יְהוָה is then an objective genitive). The intertextual reference concerns Jonah ben Amittai of 2 Kings 14:25, a prophet of salvation who prophesied against a foreign people, as Jonah was commissioned to do:

He [Jeroboam II] restored the border of Israel from Lebo-hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah, according to the word of Yahweh, the God of Israel, which he spoke through his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was from Gath-hepher.

In this case God kept his word at the cost of the foreign people, which also in the Deuteronomistic History precipitated our narrative’s topic of the permanent validity of a divine threat once it is given (2 Kgs 14:26-27):

For Yahweh saw that the distress of Israel was very bitter; there was no one left, bond or free, and no one to help Israel. But Yahweh had not yet said that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, so he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam son of Joash.

How could God help Israel when he announced the blotting out of his people? From the Deuteronomistic perspective it was a problem that God could announce doom through a prophet and nevertheless help the objects of his wrath.

¹⁵ Cf. Gen 8:11, the dove as symbol of salvation from catastrophe and destruction by flood waters. Attested in Josephus, Ant 1.3.5; Seder Olam Rabba 4; Bereshit Rabba 33.6; cf. T. W. Franxman, *Genesis and the “Jewish Antiquities” of Flavius Josephus*. (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1979), 86-87. However, cf. the negative, albeit hesitant, interpretation of Wolff, *Dodekapropheton*, 76 in light of Hos 7:11.

¹⁶ נָפַת in 4:2; cf. Gen 19:29; also the context of violence in Esth 9:1, where the same verb is used.

¹⁷ The first type of irony listed by Müller, “Ironie,” 185.

This is exactly what the story of the Book of Jonah is about. Even if Simon¹⁸ is right that there is a difference between the two texts in that the text in the Book of Kings mentions no repentance on the part the objects of God's help while the Book of Jonah does, and even if one may add that in the former case the foreign people are the losers whereas they are the winners in the Book of Jonah – in both cases a major theological issue is raised by God's compassion overriding his retributive justice: the problem of retracting the divine word.

Moreover, since Jonah ben Amitai was a prophet of salvation (not necessarily a “false” prophet) in the Northern Kingdom at about the time of Jeroboam II (8th century), that makes him a contra-pole to Amos, the contemporary prophet of doom *par excéllence* who was active exactly at that time and place.¹⁹ Through the intertextual identification, Jonah becomes the antipode to Amos – which will have another ironic turn in Chapter 4, where the polarity of opposites is not only present, but also resolved as salvation overcomes doom on the level of the “final” composition and thereby answers the question as to the retractability of the divine word.

1b Jonah 1:2

Although Wolff does not operate with the concept of intertextuality, his form-critical thoroughness has enabled him to notice an important aspect of the interplay of intertextual signs in the text and the role of the competent reader (thus illustrating that trendy terminology is not necessarily a prerequisite for noticing fundamental literary issues). He notices the referential network in the use of the verb קום accompanied by לֹא.²⁰

(i) Standing up and going

According to Wolff, קום followed by לֹא always introduces a positive action. He says²¹:

It [the commission] must cause extreme tension in the reader. For he knows from the tradition of prophetic stories that “Get up and go!” (קום לך) from the mouth of Yahweh is followed by, “And he got up and went” (וילך; 1 Ki 17:10; cf Jer 13:5).

This refers to the competence of the reader to relate Jonah's commission to intertexts and derive a perspective relevant for the meaning from the network. It will presently have its effect when Jonah does get up in the next verse, but does not go where he is told.

¹⁸ Simon, *Jona*, 59-60.

¹⁹ Amos 1:1; 7:10-11.

²⁰ Wolff, *Dodekapropheton*, 78.

²¹ Wolff, *Dodekapropheton*, 78.

(ii) The periphrastic construction.

The construction used to mention Nineveh identifies the city as special. **ニנוּה הַנְּדוּלה** is a periphrastic superlative,²² consisting as it does of a generic adjective with the article **ה**. That means the city is the large one *par excellence*,²³ therefore the biggest city in the world. In the Jewish reception the city was viewed extremely negatively.²⁴ The periphrastic construction fits in with this picture and also contributes to the development of the theme of God's mercy vis-à-vis his justice. If the opposite of the expected and, as it turns out, Jonah's wishes can happen to *this* city, it can happen to the whole world. This is irony in Müller's²⁵ second sense: not polar opposition (such as "good :: bad"), but contrary opposition ("konträrer Gegensatz"), where the turnaround does not hinge on logical opposites, but on the unexpected inversion of events.

(iii) Calling out

The expectation called forth by the name Nineveh is confirmed by God. Jonah is to "call out against her" (וּקְרָא עַלְיהָ). That this is the meaning of the expression with the preposition **על**, is clear from the substantiation for the commission provided by God himself: their evil has come up into his presence ("before my face").²⁶ The ambiguity of the ending is not a weakness, since both possibilities work: **כי** is either *motivationis* or *recitativum*.²⁷ Whether Jonah is to call out *because* their²⁸ wickedness came before God or whether he has to call out *that* their wickedness has come before him, the sins of the city cry to heaven, which seems only to cry out for punishment. But precisely at this point a significant alteration is brought into the repetition at Jonah 3:3.

1c Jonah 1:3

No mention is made of a refusal, simply that the prophet fled, which is functional: otherwise the author would have highlighted *one* of his thematic motifs (hatred for heathens) too much at the outset and that would have sidelined the others (validity of a once given divine word + relationship God-prophet).

²² Cf. GK 133g.

²³ This image is corroborated by Strabo (16.13) and Diodorus (2.3). Cf 3:3b, where the size is described as "huge unto God."

²⁴ Cf. Nah 2:12-14; 3:1ff.

²⁵ Müller, "Ironie," 185; cf. Knox, *Ironia*, 19-37.

²⁶ Cf. Deurloo, *Jona*, 23 for a similar argument concerning **לָע**. Cf. also Gen 4:10, where the same idea is expressed by other words (the blood calling to God from the earth below).

²⁷ Cf. Jonah 3:2 + 3:4.

²⁸ The plural suffix in **רַעֲתָם** is the *constructio ad sensum* and represents a slightly different focus: not the city as a collective entity, but every inhabitant personally has been found to be wicked. This tallies well with the inclusiveness of every single person, big and small as well as every animal occupying the city (Jonah 3:5-8).

(i) Standing up and not going

Jonah in fact does get up (וַיַּקְם), but the normal **וַיַּלְךְ** does not follow. It is supplanted by the unexpected **וַיַּרְדֵּת יְפֹעַל**, preceded by the shocking addition **לְכַלְלָה**. This puts into effect what the word formula has prepared, namely the absurdity of fleeing from a God who is Lord of the whole world. Although not a major theme in the story, the absurdity does ridicule Jonah's henotheism.

(ii) Plusses over against 3:3

The rest of the plusses in the verse over against 3:3 (in italics above) have at least two literary functions: to highlight the absurdity and to provide motivation for the scene on the ship. Firstly, Tarshish is most probably Tartessos on the Guadalquivir in Spain.²⁹ The readers must imagine the fare, which must have been huge for such a long journey. Jonah becomes the opposite of a professional prophet: instead of being paid for his prophecy, he himself pays *not* to have to prophesy, which is implicit irony. Secondly, Jonah “goes down deep”: the verb **יַרְדֵּת** is used twice. It not only prepares Jonah’s being sought out by the captain in next chapter, but also underscores his descent away from God, which will presently lead to a further descent to the depths of the sea (Jonah 1:15; 2:2.3.5.6).

2 The second commission (3:1-3a)

The similar structure and parallel content of the fourth and the first sections suggest that a second half of a similar structure and parallel content is about to follow.

2a Jonah 3:1

Apart from substituting **שְׁנִית** for Jonah’s patronymic, the opening verse of the second commission scene is identical to the first.

(i) The motif of the second chance

The motif of the second chance is introduced in the place of Jonah’s patronymic. The patronymic is not omitted only because the readers already know from the first time who Jonah is,³⁰ but has a literary effect as well. Since the intertextuality with 2 Kings 14 has been established, the omission makes room for the adverbial **שְׁנִית**, “for the second time.”

In this way the narrator explicitly alerts his readers to the fact that this is now a repetition. The result is that the focus now shifts to the *force* of the repe-

²⁹ Cf. Gen 10:4, where the place name is used in connection with Jawan = “Westerners.” Esarhaddon mentions a *tarsisi* (ANET³, 290), presented as farther than Jawan (Greece).

³⁰ Potgieter, *Jonah*, 67.

tition, made all the more effective by the laconic use of only one term to relay attention to the major motif of the happening word for a second time. The “word formula” is identical, but the situation is not. In light of the intervening events at sea this is not merely a repetition in the sense of a replication (German *Wiederholung*³¹), but also in the sense of a return (German *Wiederkehr*). Jonah finds himself back where he started, which not at all spoils the line of tension, but prompts the question whether he now is the wiser for the fact that a repetition takes place at all. This in itself may not be called irony, but it does underscore the irony prepared by the happening word and the absurdity of his flight from the God who makes the word happen.

(ii) Suspicion of an ironical twist

Since Jonah's second chance constitutes God's willingness to forgive his disobedience, it also prepares the ground for the further development of the ideas of mercy and forgiveness. God's patience in being willing to give him another chance prepares the reader to suspect an ironical twist in the announcement of doom called out by the prophet only two verses further:

“Forty days still, and Nineveh will be destroyed!” (v. 4)

We are now disposed to entertain some suspicion as far as this is concerned, that is, to notice the potential of Jonah's proclamation to be in contradictory opposition to itself. Although this is not irony, it alerts to irony. And, having read through the whole story, we will realise that that was indeed the case: God's patience with / mercy to Jonah can in retrospect become a miniature of his mercy towards all humans and animals, and the preaching of doom will prove to have been a preaching of its opposite.

2b Jonah 3:2

This time no content or substantiation is suggested in the command. Having read 1:2 we expect a message of judgement but this is now undermined by a minus in the text compared to the first commission. The undermining of the expected logic in a repetition which is turning out to be a repetition with a twist is not irony, but it is made possible by the ironies that we have encountered and grows from them.

(i) Minus over against 1:2

No mention is made of Nineveh's sin, which is a highly suggestive variation on what was given in the first commission. It is left to the reader to consider whether the proclamation was indeed to be about the sins of Nineveh or whether perhaps something else or something additional is going to be com-

³¹ The term “Wiederholung” is used for the second commission by Lux, *Jona*, 126-127.

manded by God.

(ii) Calling to instead of calling against

Instead of being commissioned to perform a prophecy of doom against Nineveh, Jonah now receives an open-ended commission. He is to go to Nineveh across the Syrian desert and say whatever God tells him once he gets there. Not knowing whether the new commission has the same content as the first and, to be sure, not knowing anything at all about it, Jonah is now required obey blindly, somewhat like Abraham who had to make the journey in the opposite direction and wait until he got there to receive further orders from God.³² The *hapax legomenon* קָרְיאָה, “proclaiming,” “message” in the company of unusual דבר Qal instead of Piel combines with a number of other noteworthy features in the verse to sharpen the readers’ attention. This is again a modification within the repetition of 1:2 in 3:2. It reminds of Isaiah 40:2: “call unto” in a positive sense with אֶל; it is no coincidence that עַל (1:2) is here changed to אֶל, even if the two prepositions can be used interchangeably in the late books of the Hebrew Bible: if the impact is to be softened, then אֶל still is a better way to indicate it than עַל.³³ The message was to have been a prophecy of punishment for evil (1:2) and will turn out to be an unsubstantiated threat (3:4), but the motif of the second chance has been introduced, precipitating the question whether the threat is really the last word on the issue or whether a second chance may apply to the Ninevites too. This possibility is heightened further by the uncertainty about what God was going to command him to say on arrival. It is clear why the repetition of the commission is necessary at all: Jonah was disobedient but saved from his ensuing crisis and given a second chance. But why is there such a significant hole in the formulation of second case? It is not just an omission because we already know the contents (as we know Jonah’s patronymic), but an explicit change in God’s words of commission in that he now shrouds in mystery what he had earlier spelled out clearly.

All of this is confirmed by the hole in the next section, where we do not hear about God telling the prophet what to proclaim. Once we hear the detail in 3:4, we are left to surmise that the sins of the city have again been addressed. But it is not stated. Only an unsubstantiated threat is proclaimed. The reader is invited to fill the hole with creative participation in giving sense to the narrative: most probably God commanded Jonah to threaten the city by bluntly announcing destruction in forty days. The next step would be to form a very fa-

³² Cf. Gen 12:1, where the motif of the happening word is however not used for God’s speaking to Abram (whereas it is in Gen 15:1, 4).

³³ Cf. Golka, *Jona*, 48-49 and 74 (with reference to A. Brenner, “The language of Jonah as an index of its date,” *Beth Miqra* 24 (1979): 400 and G. M. Landes, “Linguistic criteria and the date of the Book of Jonah,” *Eretz Israel* 16 (1982): 147-170 and Deurloo, *Jona*, 23 and 60 for similar, though not identical, views on the use of קָרְאָה with the respective prepositions.

avourable opinion of the government and people of the city who themselves made the link in terms of the deed-consequence-nexus: in light of the unconditionally accepted truth of the threat, it must also be unconditionally true that their iniquities have caused it and that Yahweh in his sovereignty “may perhaps”³⁴ be willing to accept repentance and forgive them (3:5-9).

If this undermining of the expected is not irony in the normal literary and rhetorical sense as we have used the concept thus far, it is not only precipitated by irony, but simultaneously also strengthens it by feeding back into it and confirming it.

2c Jonah 3:3(a)

A contrasting parallelism to the first section is given. Two aspects of the verse assure the reader that a change has occurred in Jonah.

(i) Multiple irony

This time Jonah accepts the instruction. The reaction to the command קום לך of the previous verse is now precisely what is expected of a prophet and expressed in the consecutive imperfect forms of the same verbs: ויקם וילך. The ironic turn to the motif of obedience is not apparent yet, but presently appears in 4:1. There his obedience is ironicised *because of* its own sequel. Jonah attempts to justify his *disobedient* action in the first commission scene (absconding to Tarshish) and reproaches Yahweh for the result of his accepting the second commission (going to Nineveh).³⁵ The typical formula of prophetic obedience is thus a necessary building block for the multiple irony that follows: disobedience is good, obedience is bad. Both elements taken together constitute a polar type opposition (good :: bad), and each in its own right becomes ironical in the sense of contrary opposition (“konträrer Gegensatz”),³⁶ where the turnaround does not hinge on logical opposites, but on an unexpected inversion, such as positive disobedience and negative obedience. This will be enhanced even further, as towards the end of the story it becomes clear from the Elijah intertext that Elijah’s despondency springs from his lack of success (which is to be expected), whereas Jonah’s displeasure springs from having too much success (which is unexpected inversion and therefore irony of the contrary type³⁷).

³⁴ The expression מִי-יָדָך (3:9) leaves room for Yahweh’s sovereignty and implies that he is not bound in his actions to uphold any nexus of deed and consequence.

³⁵ In 4:1 Jonah claims to have known all along that he should not accept the commission and expresses his disapproval of God’s mercy in the upshot of the proclamation in Nineveh.

³⁶ Cf. above on the periphrastic construction in 1:2.

³⁷ Not only the irony as such, but also the type of irony is so clear (cf. Müller, „Ironie,“ 185) is so clear in this case that I am at a loss to follow Lux (*Jona*, 93) in his

 (ii) Suspect conversion

The second element that makes us think Jonah has experienced an inner conversion is the assurance that he went to Nineveh “according to the word of Yahweh” (כֹּדֶבֶר יְהוָה). This is typical for prophets as well as for deuteronomistic literature.³⁸ Although Jonah now seems to toe the official prophetic line, it does not lessen the tension.³⁹ Quite the reverse: we are forced to wonder what happens when a disobedient prophet has to do against his own wishes what God wills – which is strong motivation for reading on.

D CONCLUSION: EXPANDING POSSIBILITIES

For these reasons the second commission scene certainly turns out to be the repetition that every reader can recognise at a glance, but not an expanded repetition. On the contrary, it is shortened considerably over against the first commission scene. I submit that this quantitative curtailing of text enables a converse qualitative increase in options for the receivers of Jonah's message. The possibilities for Nineveh “grow.” In other words, the horizons for solving the problem of punishment proclaimed over sinners are broadened as the narrative progresses. The readers are drawn into this experience as they are drawn into Jonah's world of repetitive confrontations with God and fellow humans.

This may be compared to Magonet's concept of a “growing phrase” in narrative repetition,⁴⁰ but not only on the level of single identical phrases the expansions of which exemplify the growing intensity of, for example, a storm (1:4, 11, 13) or the fear of sailors (1:5, 10, 16) *etcetera*, but on the level of the narrative as a whole. Since the two commission passages are repetitions, since they contain the significant variations we have been considering, and since they are the platforms on which the two halves of the story are both built and interlocked, they also provide the stuff out of which the intensity of the message can build up a crescendo. Not only is the sin-doom-grace pattern expanded from one man via a crew of men to the largest city of men, women, children and animals, but also the monolithic announcement of punishment for sin grows via the ambiguity of God's reserved judgement to God's own repentance and ultimately to the victory of God's *opus proprium* over his *opus alienum*.

categorical denial of any irony in the reasons for the respective flights of Elijah and Jonah. Cf. further his reserved stance to irony in Jonah (Lux, *Jona*, 170 and 177).

³⁸ E.g. respectively Jer 13:2; 32:8 and 1 Kgs 13:26; 2 Kgs 4:44.

³⁹ The claim of Wolff, *Dodekapropheton*, 115 to the contrary cannot be upheld since it overlooks the potential for irony to which so many aspects of the text have thus far alerted the reader.

⁴⁰ J. D. Magonet, *Form and meaning. Studies in literary techniques in the Book of Jona* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1976), 31-33; cf. Potgieter, *Jonah*, 68 and Simon, *Jona*, 51-52.

E AFTERTHOUGHT

Taking another look at the text of the two commission passages, it seems remarkable that some extraordinary, or at least noteworthy, features occur in the vocalising of the text underlying the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, namely the Codex Leningradensis B19a.

- In 3:2 the curious form וְקָרָא occurs, where the pointing of the *waw* with both *shureq* and *hireq* attracts attention, which however does not occur in 1:2.
- In 3:3 the city to which Jonah goes at last, is called נִינְוָה with *segol*, not נִינְוָה with *sere*.
- In 1:3 the ship is referred to as אֲנָנִיה with *qames*, not as usual אֲנָנִיה with *hateph qames*.

Whether pointing errors by the responsible scribe Samuel ben Jacob or not, these are *de facto* variations over against and in the first passage. I propose to question whether these forms are in fact simple scribal errors. In the first place, three of them so close to each other in the repetitive text seem to warrant the question.⁴¹ There are however also other factors to consider:

The first two on the list occur in the second commission passage exactly where an element from the first commission is *altered*.⁴² Now it is not unknown for the copulative *waw* plus a verbal form with *shewa* under the first consonant to have *hireq* with the *waw*. I have found at least six others, one of which is also the second of two imperatives as in Jonah 3:2.⁴³ Whatever the reasons for this, it does happen and cannot be put down to scribal errors. Although it is possible that וְקָרָא is a scribal error, it is also possible that Samuel ben Jacob, rather than offering us an arbitrary choice between two readings, intended to draw attention to the fact that an ambivalence in what Jonah is to קָרָא, has been introduced in the repetition of the command. So to speak, the proclamation to be called out in God's name is not so straightforwardly conventional as it was in the first commission scene. The scribe could have encoded his reading in one extra dot.

Turning to the second unusual pointing, נִינְוָה with *segol*, not נִינְוָה with *sere*, it can again be a scribal error, but would it not be asking too much of coincidence that this time too the unusual vocalising occurs exactly where the text

⁴¹ Others, not part of our enquiry proper, include וַיַּפְלֹא (1:7), where according to J. Barr, *The variable spellings of the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: OUP, 1989), 84 the defective spelling is not expected, and מַלְךָ without *shewa quiescens* in the ג (3:6).

⁴² Apart from the patronymic being replaced by בָּתָה in the respective verses (1:1 and 3:1) for the reasons discussed above.

⁴³ Gen 42:18 חַנְחָה; Josh 8:4 וְחַנְחָתָם; Ezek 37:5, 6, 14 מְחַנְחָתָם; Zech 8:13 מְחַנְחָתָם.

of the first scene is altered? In the light of the emphasis with which, as we have seen above, Jonah now undertakes the journey to Nineveh “according to the word of Yahweh” (and not to Joppa as dictated by his own will), some way of underlining the name of the destination is not out of place. Especially so in view of the fact that Nineveh is the central location of the second narrative half. Reading the sentence as it stands in B19a produces a rhythmic pattern plus the assonance of a threefold *segol*: וַיַּלְךְ אֶל-נִינְוָה.

In the last case on the list, we have אֲנָנָה with full *qames* pronounced ā as opposed to the fleeting *hateph qames*. This unconventional spelling in the reference to the ship occurs in the “plus” of the first scene over the leaner second commission passage. The ship is the focal narrative space of the first half of the story and in terms of narrative space it is the counterpart of the world metropolis dominating the second half. In addition to the admittedly ever-present possibility of a scribal error, it is tempting to consider this in the light of Jonah’s reference to his earlier getaway effort on the ship (given in 4:2). He introduces it with the protesting cry אֲנָה יְהֹוָה, “ah, Yahweh!”, which bears assonantic similarity to the word for ship as it is vocalised here: *ānnā yahweh / āniyyā*.

So the unusual pointing of the central verb, of the name of the central narrative space in the second half of the story and of its counterpart in the first narrative half may suggest that Samuel ben Jacob was one of the first if not the first to notice what commentators like Magonet, Potgieter and Simon have noticed as well as what I am proposing in this article.

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