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## Ποταμοφόρητος (Rev 12 : 15) – from Etymology to Theologoumenon

### 1. Discrepancies in the translation of ποταμοφόρητος

In the translation of Rev 12:15 in the New American Bible we can read the following words: “The serpent, however, spewed a torrent of water out of his mouth after the woman to sweep her away with the current.” The original Greek version is as follows: καὶ ἔβαλεν ὁ ὄφης ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ ὀπίσω τῆς γυναικὸς ὕδωρ ὡς ποταμόν, ἵνα αὐτὴν ποταμοφόρητον ποιήσῃ.<sup>1</sup>

G. Schneider suggests the correction of the meaning of the word ποταμοφόρητος towards a considerable simplification: “in order to drown her.”<sup>2</sup> Since the comments concerning this fragment of the text are not detailed, the effort we are making in this paper to analyse it seems reasonable.

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<sup>1</sup> There are no significant differences shown by the critical apparatus, except for slight changes, e.g. ταυτην instead of αυτην or ποιησει instead of ποιηση; cf. *Novum Testamentum Graece. Editio octava critica maior*, rec. C. Tischendorf, vol. 2, Lipsiae 1872, ad loc. Regardless of the passage of time, Tischendorf’s edition is still the most detailed one.

<sup>2</sup> “um sie vom Strom forttreiben zu lassen, d.h. sie zu ertränken;” G. Schneider, ποταμοφόρητος, [in:] *Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 1–3, hrsg. H. Balz, G. Schneider, Stuttgart-Berlin-Köln 1992<sup>2</sup>, vol. 3, p. 338. K. H. Rengstorf’s proposal is marked in italics, with no details of interpretation included; cf. K. H. Rengstorf,

Is it really “drowning, making someone drown” that the author had in mind? The author of the Revelation uses the word which is rare not only in the biblical literature, but also in the Greek language and literature as well. Since the author of the Revelation was not proficient in Greek, one would expect that the term used to refer to making someone drown should be a bit more common and the grammar structure applied should be less complex, like in the case of the description of the intention to devour the child (Rev 12: 4: ἵνα ὅταν τέκη τὸ τέκνον αὐτῆς καταφάγη). The complex structure of ἵνα αὐτὴν ποταμοφόρητον ποιήσῃ is slightly similar to ἡρημωμένην ποιήσουσιν αὐτὴν καὶ γυμνὴν in Rev 17: 16 and the similarity between the two can be explained by the author’s willingness to draw the reader’s attention to the intended parallel of the two women. However, it still does not explain the use of the extremely rare word and does not help much when we try to determine its significance.

## 2. The method of finding the meanings of words

In order to be able to determine the meaning of an unknown word, a few actions have to be taken. Firstly, the meaning of the word needs to be analysed in parallel texts, with all similarities and differences between the texts, authors, genres and the context of the time when the text was written taken into consideration. Etymology can be a source of useful clues, however, it brings a considerable risk of drawing premature conclusions – so it cannot be a determining factor of the interpretation. “In language everything boils down to differences but also to groupings. The mechanism of language, which consists of the interplay of successive terms, resembles the operation of a machine in which the parts have a reciprocating function even though they are arranged in a single dimension.”<sup>3</sup>

As far as the Bible is concerned, especially the Old Testament, *Septuagint* can be of great help if we reach for the comparison between the Masoretic

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ποταμός, ποταμοφόρητος, Ἰορδάνης, [in:] *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 1–10, hrsg. G. Kittel, G. Friedrich, Stuttgart-Berlin-Köln 1990<sup>2</sup>, vol. 6, p. 608.

<sup>3</sup> F. de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, transl. W. Baskin, New York 1959, p. 128.

Text and *Septuagint*, keeping in mind that the source text for the translation of *Septuagint* was different from the Masoretic Text. While reading the New Testament, verification of the uses of given words in *Septuagint* or Aramaic or Hebrew equivalents is one of the most effective ways of understanding the intentions of the inspired authors.

Other ancient translations, such as *Vetus Latina*, *Vulgate* and *Peshitta* have also got their own place in this process. If we look at them from the perspective of the two thousand years, they often prove to be created not much later than the original text. Although they have their limitations, they are the evidence of the times of a different level of proficiency in biblical languages.

The situation becomes more complicated when we analyse words that appear only once, the so-called *hapax legomena*. We naturally turn to etymology, especially when the unknown word is built from known components. Ancient translations, however, being the testimonies of people closer to the origin of biblical texts in terms of time and cultural background, will bear more significance. The harmony of a given meaning with the immediate context of the word, which gives sense to the composition, will still be of more importance.<sup>4</sup>

Interesting conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of *Sitz im Leben* of an unknown word. In the case of ποταμός in Rev 12:15 one should ask about the archetype of the image of river and try to determine its connotations with the term ποταμοφόρητος.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. B. Kedar, *Biblische Semantik. Eine Einführung*, Stuttgart 1981, p. 104f.; F. de Saussure, *Course...*, op. cit., p. 127.

### 3. Attempts to determine the meaning of ποταμοφόρητος

#### 3.1. *Hapax legomenon*

Rev 12:15 is the only fragment of the Bible in which the word ποταμοφόρητος is used.<sup>5</sup>

#### 3.2. Etymology

The adjective ποταμοφόρητος constitutes *compositum* built according to general rules on the basis of the noun ποταμός and the verb φορέω, where the first part describes the tool and the second one the type of activity.<sup>6</sup>

##### 3.2.1. ποταμός

Ποταμός to describe “flowing water, river, stream” according to some is cognate with the verb πίπτω – “fall,”<sup>7</sup> according to others with πετάννυμι – “spread,”<sup>8</sup> and still others claim it is cognate with πέτομαι – “rush, hurry.”<sup>9</sup> Initially it is connected with fierceness, abruptness and rush.

Diachronic approach to the meaning of ποταμός may help us see a broader picture, since ποταμοφόρητος was documented considerably late, therefore, it is possible that it was established late, when the word

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<sup>5</sup> Ποταμοφόρητος is by no means the only *hapax legomenon* in the Revelation. Among the peculiarities of this book's vocabulary we can find 6 neologisms, 8 *hap. leg.* of the whole Bible and 108 *hap. leg.* of the New Testament out of 913 terms used in the Revelation; cf. A. Jankowski, *Apokalipsa św. Jana. Wstęp – przekład z oryginału – komentarz*, Poznań 1959, p. 85 (Pismo Święte Nowego Testamentu, 12). The calculations in particular commentaries may vary slightly, depending on the accepted or rejected versions of the text.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. J. H. Moulton, W. F. Howard, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 2, Edinburgh 1990, p. 271.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. H. Frisk, *Griechisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, vol. 2, Heidelberg 1970, s.v.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. J. Wackernagel, *Vorlesungen über Syntax*, vol. 2, Basel 1928<sup>2</sup>, p. 30f.

<sup>9</sup> E.g. K. H. Rengstorf, *ποταμός...*, op. cit., p. 596.

ποταμός was being used, without putting so much emphasis on the most dangerous effects of its dynamism.

In Ancient Greek ποταμός is a dangerous element that can cost a man his life, whilst in the metaphorical sense it can describe a violent character of a person.<sup>10</sup> In papyrus writing it is used as a synonym of the Nile, its arms or canals.<sup>11</sup> Biblical literature uses this term with reference to rivers like the Nile, the Euphrates or the Jordan, and extremely rarely when mentioning seasonal rivers – *wadi*. In the metaphorical sense the word is used to describe God's peace, blessing, grace, divine fulness. The Revelation mentions ποταμός together with the name only with reference to the Euphrates.<sup>12</sup> Without its proper name ποταμός ὕδατος ζωῆς<sup>13</sup> is mentioned, a parallel, as it is later revealed, of the devil's ποταμός from Chapter 12.

### 3.2.2. φορέω

Φορέω is a verb well known in Ancient Greek. It derives from φέρω, “bear,” “bring,” and was used to describe the duration of the activity (*durativum*) or its intensity (*intensivum*).<sup>14</sup> The adjective φορητός which comes from the verb φορέω literally can be translated as “borne” or “the one that can be borne”; used metaphorically it means the same as “bearable, tolerable”<sup>15</sup>.

#### 3.2.2.1. Compounds of φορέω and φορητός with nouns

Compounds formed with a noun and the verb φορέω or the verbal adjective φορητός are common in Greek literature, from Homer to different poets, orators, philosophers, historians, doctors and even astrologers.<sup>16</sup> In

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *ibidem*.

<sup>11</sup> J. H. Moulton, G. Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, Peabody 1997, s.v.

<sup>12</sup> Rev 9:14; 16:12.

<sup>13</sup> Rev 22:1.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. A. Vaniček, *Griechisch-lateinisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Leipzig 1877, vol. 2, p. 598.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. H. Frisk, *Griechisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, op. cit., s.v. φέρω 11.

<sup>16</sup> This large group includes the following terms: ἀ-δορυ-φόρητος, ον (“having no bodyguard”), ἀμαξο-φόρητος, ον (“ridden in a cart”), ἀ-ψηφο-φόρητος, ον (“the one who hasn't voted yet”), δασμο-φορέω (“give tribute”), διφρο-φορέω (“carry in a sedan chair”),

this group we can also find words the first part of which refers to elements or stars:

ἄερο-φόρητος, ον – “carried by the wind, the air”

ἀνεμο-φόρητος, ον – “carried by the wind”

ἄστρο-φόρητος, ον – “carried by the stars”

αὐρο-φόρητος, ον – “carried by the wind”

ὕδρο-φόρητος, ον – “carried on water”

### 3.2.2.2. Compounds of φέρω and φορέω with prepositions, used together with ὑπὸ τοῦ ποταμοῦ, τῶν ποταμῶν

We can obtain some interesting material for analysis when we compare the verb φέρω and compounds of φέρω and φορέω with prepositions, used together with the expression ὑπὸ τοῦ ποταμοῦ, τῶν ποταμῶν in the writings between the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC and the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD.<sup>17</sup> What we encounter are the synonyms referring to situations when city dwellers, their possessions, slime, gold, etc. are carried on the waves.<sup>18</sup> In their descriptions of people’s encounters with natural elements, the authors never mention death as their result.

The above mentioned examples show that the component -φόρητος of the adjective in question, for the contemporary of the author of the Revelation should not indicate any direct threat to life, however, combined with the name of an element, could be associated with some kind of danger or difficulty.

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δορυ-φορέω (“watch over sb,” lit. “carry a spear”), θεο-φόρητος, ον (“inspired by deity”), κηρесси-φόρητος, ον (“brought by Keres-Erinyes, female death-spirits”), μοιρη-φόρητος, ον (“brought by Moirai, fate”); μισθο-φορέω (“serve in exchange for pay”); ναυσι-φόρητος, ον (“travelling by ship”); χρυσο-φορέω (“wear gold clothes or jewellery”).

<sup>17</sup> Herodotus, Plato, Aristotle, Diodorus Siculus, Strabo, Posidonius, Appian, Clement of Alexandria, Libanius, Proclus.

<sup>18</sup> The group includes the following expressions: κατα-φέρομαι ὑπὸ τοῦ ποταμοῦ, κατα-φορεόμενος ὑπὸ τῶν ποταμῶν, παρα-φερόμενος ὑπὸ τοῦ ποταμοῦ, συγ-κατα-φερόμενος ὑπὸ τῶν ποταμῶν, φέρομαι ὑπὸ τ. π.

### 3.3. The use of ποταμοφόρητος in extra-biblical literature

In extra-biblical writings the adjective ποταμοφόρητος was documented only several times. Over the centuries, however, up till the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, only two pieces of writing in which it appeared were known: the Book of Revelation and the Lexicon of Hesychius of Alexandria from the turn of the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 6<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>19</sup>

#### 3.3.1. Lexicon of Hesychius of Alexandria

With the use of ἀπέπνιξε and ποταμοφόρητον ἐποίησεν Hesychius explains the aorist ἀπόερσε, which usually appears in third person singular and is known from a few fragments of *Iliad*.<sup>20</sup> The context of *Iliad* allows for the translation of ἀπόερσε as “wash away, carry”<sup>21</sup> on the waves – always in the context of a deadly threat. However, the word ἀποπνίγω meant “choke” (or metaphorically “torment”), pointing towards the result of an action, rather than its course.

The order of words preserved by Hesychius is significant: ἀπόερσε-ἀπέπνιξε. τουτέστι ποταμοφόρητον ἐποίησεν. It shows that, most probably, in the times of Hesychius the term ποταμοφόρητος was recognised so widely that it allowed to explain the meaning of other terms, and that, regardless of its etymology, the emphasis was put not on the type of danger but on its result.

Another characteristic fact is that the term in question was documented only in Alexandrian writings. What needs to be kept in mind is the fact that the Lexicon of Hesychius presents the reality separated from the Revelation by about half a millennium.

If the lexicon of Hesychius was the only point of reference for ποταμοφόρητος in Rev 12:15, as was the case 120 years ago, it would

<sup>19</sup> *Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon*, vol. 1: Α-Δ, rec. K. Latte, Hauniae 1953, s.v.

<sup>20</sup> E.g. *Ilias*, VI, 348; XXI, 283. 329.

<sup>21</sup> In *Iliad* in Book VI, 348 the subject is κύμα (“wave”) in the context of the previously used κύμα πολυφλοίσβοιο θαλάσσης; in Book XXI, 283 – ἔναυλος (“torrent”) parallel to ἐν μεγάλῳ ποταμῷ from the previous verse; in XXI, 329 – μέγας ποταμὸς βαθυδίνης (“dark-crested wave”).

serve as justification for a simplified translation of G. Schneider. Yet, on the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century our knowledge about the Greek language of the pre-Christian and the early-Christian periods was broadened due to the discovery of the Egyptian papyri.

### 3.3.2. Papyri

The oldest known text containing the adjective ποταμοφόρητος is an official farmland registry from Memphis, Egypt, or its vicinity, probably dated back to 110 BC.<sup>22</sup> In this document the word ποταμοφόρητος appears five times<sup>23</sup> and is used as a technical term referring to a piece of land that cannot be cultivated due to excessive irrigation. Being an antonym of the adjective ἄβροχος, “waterless,” it is at the same time a synonym of κατεξύσμενος,<sup>24</sup> which, according to the publisher, could also be used with reference to damages caused by the waters of the Nile.<sup>25</sup>

The same meaning of the word ποταμοφόρητος can be found in the lease agreement from Hermopolis from 78 AD.<sup>26</sup> The agreement mentions excessive flooding of the Nile, drought (the term ἄβροχος is also used here) and sand inundation as circumstances resulting in lowering of the lease fee.

Ποταμοφόρητος is used four times in the land survey found in Ūmm El Baragât (ancient Tebtunis) dated back to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD,<sup>27</sup> and once in a similar survey from the village of Theadelphia,<sup>28</sup> also from the 2<sup>nd</sup>

<sup>22</sup> W. Schubart, E. Kühn (bearb.), *Aegyptische Urkunden aus den staatlichen Museen zu Berlin. Griechische Urkunden*, vol. 6: *Papyri und Ostraka der Ptolemäerzeit*, Berlin 1922 (reprint Milano 1972), p. 18ff. (BGU VI. 1216).

<sup>23</sup> BGU VI. 1216<sup>98. 110. 170. 183. 187</sup>.

<sup>24</sup> It comes from the verb καταξύω (“tear off,” “scrape,” “polish”).

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem, verse 194 footnote.

<sup>26</sup> B. P. Grenfell, A. S. Hunt, *The Amherst Papyri. Part II. Classical Fragments and Documents of the Ptolemaic Roman and Byzantine Periods*, London 1901, p. 105 (PAmh II. 85<sup>16</sup>).

<sup>27</sup> *The Tebtunis Papyri. Part II*, eds. B. P. Grenfell, A. S. Hunt, E. J. Goodspeed, London 1907, p. 330 (PTebt II. 610).

<sup>28</sup> J. de M. Johnson, V. Martin, A. S. Hunt, *Catalogue of the Greek Papyri in the John Rylands Library, Manchester*, vol. 2: *Documents of the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods (Nos. 62–456)*, Manchester 1915, p. 410 (PRyl II. 378<sup>2</sup>).

century AD. It is probably mentioned once<sup>29</sup> in 262 AD in the sentence of the prefect from Hermopolis, where the lack of income from the use of the land is mentioned.<sup>30</sup>

A noteworthy text in which the term ποταμοφόρητος was used is the so-called *Great Paris Magical Papyrus*, also of Egyptian origin, dated back to the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD.<sup>31</sup> In the spell that was supposed to coerce inspiration for the medium, Osiris is called Ἔσειεσ καὶ ποταμοφόρητος.<sup>32</sup> Osiris was the god of the fertile flooding of the Nile. Ἔσειεσ is the Greek equivalent of the demotic *ḥsy*, a noble title attributed also to those who attained apotheosis by drowning in the Nile and, as a result, were eaten by a crocodile.<sup>33</sup> As early as the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, Herodotus' writings mention the tradition of treating with enormous respect the ones whose lives were ended in this way, and emphasise the obligation of burying them in the temple of the god of the Nile – Hapi.<sup>34</sup> This tradition was preserved up till the Ptolemaic period and the title appeared in spells for four centuries AD.<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately, ποταμοφόρητος, which seems to be the translation of Ἔσειεσ,<sup>36</sup> is used in magical texts only once, although it contains a reference to the myth of the dramatic death of Osiris and sinking his body divided into pieces in a locked chest in the waters of the Nile, which carried it out to the sea.

<sup>29</sup> The letters, illegible due to the crudeness of the scribe, can be read in different ways.

<sup>30</sup> F. Preisigke, *Griechische Papyrus der kaiserlichen Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek zu Strassburg*, vol. 1, Leipzig 1912 (reprint Lexington 2011), p. 25 (PStrass I. 5<sup>10</sup>).

<sup>31</sup> K. Preisendanz, *Papyri Graecae Magicae. Die griechischen Zauberpapyri*, hrsg. A. Henrichs, vol. 1, Stuttgart 1973<sup>2</sup>, p. 64 (Pap. Bibl. Nat. suppl. gr. 574).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 102, v. 876.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. F. Ll. Griffiths, *Herodotus II. 90. Apotheosis by drowning*, "Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde" 46 (1909–1910), p. 132–134, 132.

<sup>34</sup> Herodotus, *Historiae*, II, 90.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. F. Ll. Griffiths, *Herodotus*, op. cit., p. 132.

<sup>36</sup> In other papyri cited by Griffiths the title *ḥsy* is expressed with the adjective ὑποβρύχιος "being under water, immersed;" *ibidem*, p. 133.

### 3.3.3. Meaning range of ποταμοφόρητος in non-Christian literature

A few conclusions can be drawn from the aforementioned observations. The use of the adjective ποταμοφόρητος can be confirmed – apart from the lexicon of Hesychius – only in Egyptian papyri.

Both in the case of the lexicon of Hesychius and in the case of papyri the place where the word was used is distinctive – Alexandria and Egypt in general and, at least as far as papyri are concerned, the word's reference to the Nile.

In the times nearer the composition of the Revelation it is a technical term, used about farmland that cannot be cultivated due to excessive flooding of the Nile. It is also used once with reference to Osiris and his body being carried on the waves of the Nile.

### 3.4. Ποταμοφόρητος in early Christian translations and commentaries

The role of Ancient Bible translations while searching for the meaning of hapax legomenon is unquestionable. It is obvious, especially when we take into account translations created relatively near in time to the original Greek text and from the cultural background in which knowledge of Greek was common among educated people.

The comparison of the Church Fathers' commentaries to Rev 12:15, even if the authors quote this verse or its translation but do not attempt to interpret the term ποταμοφόρητος, is a source of solid data and is of great value when trying to determine the meaning of this *hapax legomenon*. The commentators treated the attack on the woman described in verse 12 and 15n in an integral manner, and, as we will see, they chose to interpret it in their own ways, rather than to elaborate on particular details of this symbol. The lack of direct references to ποταμοφόρητος does not mean the word was overlooked or misunderstood, especially that the way of interpreting the symbol as a whole proves taking into account one of the two meanings of ποταμοφόρητος we are familiar with.

### 3.4.1. Latin tradition

Although some of the translations quoted below were preserved as integral parts of commentaries, they will be analysed separately for greater clarity of interpretation.

#### 3.4.1.1. Translations of the Revelation

In Latin the Revelation was preserved in the translations of *Vetus Latina*<sup>37</sup> and Vulgate.

One of the characteristics of *Vetus Latina* were numerous discrepancies between its different versions that it is composed of, so numerous in fact that it was difficult to find two codices consistent with each other.<sup>38</sup> Although we do not know the authors of these translations, they are valuable evidence of the interpretation of the original text of the Bible, which probably originated in the north of Africa. *Vetus Latina* influenced the presentation of the Greek text itself between the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD.<sup>39</sup>

#### VETUS LATINA, TYPE I

*Codex Gigas*,<sup>40</sup> created in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century in the Benedictine monastery of Bohemia (modern Czech Republic), is one of the three

<sup>37</sup> Cf. critical edition: *Vetus Latina. Die Reste der altlateinischen Bibel*, vol. 26.2: *Apokalypsis Johannis*, hrsg. von R. Gryson: 6. Lfg. *Apc 9, 19–13, 1*, Freiburg 2002.

<sup>38</sup> *Tot sunt (exemplaria) paene quot codices*; Hieronymus, *Epistula ad Damasum*, [in:] *Nouum Testamentum Domini Nostri Iesu Christi Latine secundum editionem Sancti Hieronymi*, rec. I. Wordsworth, H. I. White, pars I, fasc. I, Oxonii 1889, p. 2, fn. 2.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. H. J. Vogels, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der lateinischen Apokalypse-Übersetzung*, Düsseldorf 1920 (reprint Lexington 2011), p. 19.

<sup>40</sup> *Codex Gigas* (English: Giant Book), is the largest medieval manuscript in the world (92×51×22 cm or 36.2×19.7×8.6 in.). Shrouded in a vivid legend (“the Devil’s Bible”). Kept in the National Library in Stockholm, it is fully available in the form of digital photographs or online: <http://www.kb.se/codex-gigas/eng/Browse-the-Manuscript> (20 Jan 2012). *Vetus Latina* is represented in this text only by the translations of Acts and Rev, the former being much earlier. The text of the Revelation has been published twice: J. Belsheim, *Die Apostelgeschichte und die Offenbarung Johannis in einer alten lateinischen Uebersetzung aus dem “Gigas librorum“ auf der königlichen Bibliothek zu Stockholm, [...]*

medieval codices that contain, among others, a few books of the Holy Scripture in the translation of *Vetus Latina*, proving the resilience of this version, despite Hieronymus' efforts.<sup>41</sup> The body of the translation of the Revelation preserved in the codex is qualified as type I – it is the revision of the African text, most popular among European authors of the late 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>42</sup>

In the codex the fragment Rev 12: 15 appears as: “ut eam faceret ictu fluminis trahi ad se.” The translation paradoxically preserves both meanings of the word ποταμοφόρητος. *Ictus fluminis* stands for “rapidity of the river, surge of the water” and this meaning is confirmed in Hesychius' text, in which the word ἀποπνίγω emphasised the possibility of a deadly consequence of the encounter with this element of nature. What is interesting is the fact that the translator of the text decided to add the adverbial *ad se*, which does not appear in the original text, in order to indicate that the river was not supposed to drown the woman, only deprive her of her freedom – abduct her and bring to the Dragon.

#### VETUS LATINA, TYPE S

Another version of *Vetus Latina* was reconstructed on the basis of the reconstructed commentary of the Donatist writer Ticonius († c. 390).<sup>43</sup> This particular author had a huge influence on the interpretation of the Revelation in the west, from the times of Augustine till late Middle Ages,<sup>44</sup>

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*nebst einer Vergleichung der übrigen neutestamentlichen Bücher in derselben Handschrift mit der Vulgata und mit anderen Handschriften*, Christiania 1879, p. 63–90; H. J. Vogels, *Untersuchungen...*, op. cit., p. 165–175.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. B. M. Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament. Their Origin, Transmission and Limitations*, Oxford 1977 (reprint 2001), p. 330.

<sup>42</sup> *Vetus Latina. Die Reste der altlateinischen Bibel*, vol. 26.2: *Apokalypsis Johannis*, hrsg. von R. Gryson: 2. Lfg. *Einleitung (Fortsetzung und Schluss). Apc 1, 1–2, 7*, Freiburg 2000, p. 89f.

<sup>43</sup> The individual fragments of the reconstructed texts can be found in: H. J. Vogels, *Untersuchungen...*, op. cit., 179–208.

<sup>44</sup> The issue was elaborated on by K. B. Steinhauser in his doctoral thesis, *The Apocalypse Commentary of Tyconius. A History of Its Reception and Influence*, Frankfurt-New York

which can be explained by the availability of the text that he used. It was one of the African reviews, contemporary with *Codex Gigas*. The translation of Rev 12:15 was only preserved in the commentary from the late 8<sup>th</sup> century, written by Beatus of Liébana († 798) from the north of Spain.

The fragment of the verse in question (Rev 12:15) is as follows: “ut eam a flumine auferret.”<sup>45</sup> *Auferre* means “lift sth, carry away, destroy.” Here it refers to being carried away by the water current, which could end in death.<sup>46</sup>

#### VETUS LATINA, TYPE C

A translation different from the one in *Codex Gigas* can be found in the commentary of Primasius of Hadrumentum (6<sup>th</sup> century). The main source text that his commentary was based on, was the aforementioned commentary of Ticonius, however, the Latin text of the Revelation that he used is not the same as the one referred to by Ticonius.<sup>47</sup> It was known by the African authors in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The fragment from Rev 12:15 is used in the form of: “ut eam perderet.” The verb *perdere* has a strong meaning here – “lose, destroy, kill.” There is no indication that the unknown translator of the text had access to the Greek text with a different adjective than ποταμοφόρητος.

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1987 (European University Studies, 301); cf. P. Frederiksen, *Tyconius and Augustine on the Apocalypse*, [in:] *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. R. K. Emmerson, B. McGinn, Ithaca 1992, p. 20–37.

<sup>45</sup> In the edition of H. J. Vogels, *Untersuchungen...*, p. 192 the word *afferret* is used instead. However, it is a typographical error (the exchange of one letter changes the meaning of the word significantly: *afferre* means “bring, deliver, approach”).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, ed. P. G. W. Glare, Oxford 1996<sup>2</sup>, s.v.

<sup>47</sup> The text, reconstructed on the basis of Primasius’ commentary, was published twice: J. Haussleiter, *Die lateinische Apokalypse der alten afrikanischen Kirche*, [in:] *Forschungen zur Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons und der altkirchlichen Literatur*, hrsg. J. Haussleiter, T. Zahn, part 4, Erlangen-Leipzig 1891, p. 80–175 and H. J. Vogels, *Untersuchungen...*, op. cit., 153–164. For the commentary as well as the text cf. *Primasius episcopus Hadrumentinus. Commentarius in Apocalypsim*, cura et studio A. W. Adams, Turnholti 1985 (Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina, 92).

## VULGATE (TYPE V)

The attempts to determine whether Hieronymus had access to some particular version of *Vetus Latina* while correcting the Latin translation of the Bible were not satisfactory enough.<sup>48</sup> We can assume that, as far as the Revelation is concerned, he reached for the type I text. When compared with the text of Hieronymus, there are many similarities that cannot be coincidental.<sup>49</sup>

There is no certainty as to what Greek text Hieronymus used as a basis for correcting the translation of the Revelation<sup>50</sup> (although M.-J. Lagrange supported the theory of the great uncial codices<sup>51</sup>), however, in the context of the analysis of Rev 12: 15, the problem proves to be insignificant, as the differences between Greek lessons concern word order only.

In the Latin version, later called Vulgate, in Rev 12: 15 the following expression is used: “ut eam faceret trahi a flumine.”<sup>52</sup>

This sentence shows resemblance to *Codex Gigas*: both verbs are context specific and do not occur in any other place in any other version of the text. The meaning is slightly toned down if compared with type I – it seems to have been reduced to the etymology of the word ποταμοφόρητος.

We can observe a kind of caution on the side of Hieronymus: known for the consistency in his translations and the understanding that in the Bible even the word order may convey a mystery,<sup>53</sup> his interpretation did not go as far as the ones of the translators of versions C and S. However,

<sup>48</sup> Cf. B. M. Metzger, *The Early Versions...*, op. cit., p. 352n.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. *Vetus Latina...* 2. Lfg..., op. cit., p. 90.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. H. J. Vogels, *Untersuchungen...*, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. M.-J. Lagrange, *Introduction à l'étude du Nouveau Testament. Deuxième partie. Critique textuelle*, vol. 2: *La critique rationnelle*, Paris 1935<sup>2</sup>, p. 615.

<sup>52</sup> *Nouum Testamentum Latine Secundum Editionem Sancti Hieronymi*, rec. J. Wordsworth, H. I. White, H. F. D. Sparks, A. W. Adams, pars III, Oxonii 1954, p. 508.

<sup>53</sup> ... libera uoce profiteor me in interpretatione Graecorum absque scripturis sacris, ubi et uerborum ordo mysterium est, non uerbum pro uerbo, sed sensum exprimere de sensu, Hieronymus, *Epistula LVII ad Pammachium de optimo genere interpretandi*, 5, [in:] *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistulae*, part 1: *Epistulae I-LXX*, rec. I. Hilberg, Vindobonae-Lipsiae 1910, p. 508 (*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, 54).

his translation is not literal, both due to its grammar structure<sup>54</sup> and the choice of vocabulary. The Latin equivalents *ferre* and *aufferre* have a far closer meaning to the adjective ποταμοφόρητος than *trahere* that was actually used. Since no Revelation commentary of Hieronymus was preserved, and there is no explanation as to his reasons to correct the translation in this way, there are many speculations concerning this fact.

Assuming that Hieronymus used the fragment of Rev 12:15 we know from the *Codex Gigas*, he removed the *ictus fluminis*, if he was familiar with the word ποταμοφόρητος in its more gentle sense, e.g. with reference to the inundation of the Nile. *Trahere*<sup>55</sup> appears to have a slightly less frightening meaning than *aufferre*, although it emphasises the use of force more than *ferre* does. It is possible that this use of force when sending the river after the woman was the reason for using the word *trahere*. The expression *ad se* could have been removed due to the fact that it did not occur in the original text, but it is less probable that his decision was caused by the fact that *trahere* comprises the idea of a backward movement (in the sense of *drawing back*), as it is not always the case.

#### 3.4.1.2. Patristic commentaries<sup>56</sup>

In this section we will analyse the commentaries of the Church Fathers from the first six centuries: Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, Victorinus of Pettau, Ticonius, Caesarius of Arles, Primasius and Cassiodorus. Only about 150 years after the commentary of Cassiodorus, about 730 AD, the commentary of Bede the Venerable appeared, thirty years later – Ambrose’s and in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century – the one of Beatus of Liébana. The last three followed their predecessors and did not make any discoveries concern-

<sup>54</sup> A similar structure in Rev 17:16: ἡρημωμένην ποιήσουσιν αὐτήν is expressed by Hieronymus with the use of *desolatam facient illam*, in accordance with type I.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. *Oxford Latin Dictionary*..., op. cit., s.v.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Latin patristic commentaries: R. Gryson, *Les commentaires patristiques latins de l'Apocalypse*, “Revue théologique de Louvain” 28 (1997) 305–337. 484–502. Other older detailed works include: J. Haussleiter, *Die lateinische Apokalypse*..., op. cit., p. 1–224 and H. J. Vogels, *Untersuchungen*..., op. cit.

ing Rev 12:15.<sup>57</sup> The fact that Greek commentaries were outnumbered by the Latin ones can be accounted for by a greater popularity of the Revelation in the west.<sup>58</sup>

PSEUDO-CYPRIAN, BISHOP OF CARTHAGE

The alleged letter of Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, *To Novatian*, is a polemical text, a pamphlet, the author of which is unknown,<sup>59</sup> dated back to 253–257 AD. The author of the letter addresses bishop Novatian known for his rigorous attitude towards the Christians who had lapsed and wished to return, using, among others, the quote from Rev 12:15. “Tu hodie retractas an debeant lapsorum curari uulnera, qui nudati a diabolo ceciderunt, uiolentia aquae quam suo ore (opere K) serpens emisit post mulierem?”<sup>60</sup>

*Vulnera lapsorum*, the sin of denying Christ, which the ‘fallen ones’ committed faced with persecution, together with *nudati*, most probably referring to being deprived of the baptism robe, are the results of the battle with the Church during the reign of Decius. With these expressions the author presents the image of the attack of the element of water, and does not refer to *ποταμοφόρητος* directly. *Violentia aquae* is similar to *ictus fluminis* from the type I text.

<sup>57</sup> For the diagram referring to the source texts used in commentaries cf. R. Gryson, *Les commentaires...*, op. cit., p. 306. A little less precise and slightly different approach presented in E. A. Matter, *The Apocalypse in Early Medieval Exegesis*, [in:] *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, op. cit., p. 42.

<sup>58</sup> H. J. Vogels, *Untersuchungen...*, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>59</sup> The authorship of the text was a subject of intense discussions between 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century: among the alleged authors of the text there were: Cornelius, Sixtus II and an unknown bishop from around Rome or from Africa, having similar views as Cyprian. However, none of the proposals was accepted and the problem has remained unsolved. Discussion summary in: G. F. Diercks, *Some Critical Notes on Novatian's De Bono Pudicitiae and the Anonymous Ad Novatianum*, “*Vigiliae Christianae*” 25 (1971), p. 121, fn. 2.

<sup>60</sup> *Novatiani Opera, quae supersunt, nunc primum in unum colecta ad fidem codicum qui adhuc extant necnon adhibitis editionibus veteribus*, ed. G. F. Diercks, Turnholti 1972, p. 148 (Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina, 4).

VICTORINUS OF PETTAU († 304)

Victorinus, the first ecclesiastical writer who used Latin, and the first commentator of the Revelation whose commentary was fully preserved. According to Hieronymus *he was more proficient in the Greek language than he was in Latin*.<sup>61</sup> Unfortunately, he does not pay special attention to the adjective ποταμοφόρητος. However, he explains the meaning of the water disgorged from the devil's throat in the following way: "Aqua autem quam misit de ore suo serpens: iussu suo exercitum sequi eum significat."<sup>62</sup>

In Victorinus' edition there is a slightly problematic personal pronoun – *eum* (masculine) and the publisher presupposes *serpentem uel diabolum*. *Sequor* here has a neutral meaning of "follow someone." This text should be translated as having the sense of 'the snake ordered the *exercitus* to follow him'.

In his review of this commentary Hieronymus changed the gender of the pronoun to feminine. Similarly, in later reviews the word *sequor* was changed into the less ambiguous *persequor*, "chase, persecute." As a result of these modifications the sentence took on a different sense: *exercitus* was ordered by the snake to persecute the woman.

Nevertheless, all these changes do not alter the context itself. Regardless of the modifications, according to Victorinus the woman in this fragment represents the Catholic Church and the aim of the opponent is persecuting it.

Victorinus' *exercitus* must be understood as organised forces. In military terminology the expression was used with reference to infantry and marines, but not cavalry or auxiliary units.<sup>63</sup> Victorinus does not point to any particular institution hostile towards the Church, although a few sentences before he mentions: "septem capita: septem reges Romanos, ex quibus et Antichristus."<sup>64</sup> Later reviews, instead of *exercitum*, used *populum qui persequantur* (-atur, -ebatur).

<sup>61</sup> Hieronymus, *De viris illustribus liber ad Dextrum*, LXXIV, 719f.

<sup>62</sup> *Victorini episcopi Petavionensis Opera*, Vindobonae-Lipsiae 1916 (reprint New York-London 1965), p. 112f. (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, 49)

<sup>63</sup> *Oxford Latin Dictionary*..., op. cit., s.v.

<sup>64</sup> I. Haussleiter (rec.), *Victorini*..., op. cit., p. 110.

Later reviews of the commentary of Victorinus used the Latin text of Rev 12:15 almost identical to type S: “ut eam eo flumine auferret.”<sup>65</sup>

TICONIUS († c. 390)

Ticonius' commentary on Rev 12:15 was preserved in the *Tyconii Afri Fragmenta Commentarii in Apocalypsim*.<sup>66</sup> In Rev 11–14 Ticonius distinguishes ten *capitula*, every one of which in some way characterises the whole history of the Church.<sup>67</sup> The river, being the devil's torrent of water, and its activity towards the woman, is included in the seventh *capitulum*.

This commentary also lacks any direct reference to ποταμοφόρητος. “Septimum (-mus cod) est ubi serpens misit post mulierem ex ore suo aquam ut flumen.”<sup>68</sup> *Mulier* is understood in the ecclesial sense,<sup>69</sup> and the hostile activity of the river is understood as directed at the Church.

CAESARIUS OF ARLES († c. 542)

*Explanatio in Apocalypsin* is a collection of eighteen<sup>70</sup> texts usually referred to as sermons, although they bear more resemblance to sermon notes and, most probably, were never delivered.<sup>71</sup> The commentary on Rev 12:15 appears in *Sermon X*.

<sup>65</sup> Ibidem, p. 113.

<sup>66</sup> 44 pages, the first time published *in folio* at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century: *Tyconii Afri Fragmenta Commentarii in Apocalypsim*, ed. A. Amelli, Monte Cassino 1897, p. 261–331 (Spicilegium Casinense, III.1); critical edition: F. Lo Bue, *The Turin Fragments of Tyconius' Commentary on Revelation*, Cambridge 1963 (reprint Lexington 2011).

<sup>67</sup> ...*quae capitula non ut se actus ecclesiastici per tempora sequuntur ordinata sunt, sed unumquodque capitulum totius temporis significat praecedentia et futura*; F. Lo Bue, *The Turin Fragments...*, op. cit., p. 186.

<sup>68</sup> Ibidem, p. 187.

<sup>69</sup> Ibidem, p. 188.

<sup>70</sup> Or nineteen (e.g. J.-P. Migne, R. Gryson) – depending on the division of *Sermon XVI*.

<sup>71</sup> The popularity of *Explanatio* in the Middle Ages was caused by the attributed authorship of Augustine of Hippo. In J.-P. Migne's *Patrologiae cursus completus. Series latina*, the commentary is an additional text among Augustine's works (Parisii 1864, vol. 35, 1417–1452).

Similarly to the previously mentioned texts, this one also lacks explanation of the adjective ποταμοφόρητος. However, a significant context appears: “Et misit serpens ex ore suo post mulierem aquam velut flumen, id est violentiam persecutorum. [...] Aqua de ore draconis emissa (aquam d.o.d. emissam C\*AR\*) exercitum persequentium eam significat.”<sup>72</sup> This short fragment bears many similarities to previous commentaries. *Mulier* stands for *ipsa Ecclesia catholica*.<sup>73</sup> We saw the interpretation of the river as *violentia* in Cyprian’s text, *exercitus* in Victorinus’, and *persecutores* and *persequentes* can be associated with late Victorinus’ reviews.

PRIMASIVS OF HADRUMETUM († BEFORE 567)

More than one hundred years ago the importance of Primasius’ commentary for the reconstruction of one of the versions of *Vetus Latina*, as well as for the critical review of the Greek text of the Revelation,<sup>74</sup> was emphasised. Nowadays, the incredible influence the text, strongly based on the writings of Victorinus and Ticonius, had on the later exegetical tradition<sup>75</sup> is stressed.

This commentary does not give any explanation of the adjective ποταμοφόρητος either, however, the context precisely indicates the level of confrontation between the woman and her opponent. “Et misit ille serpens ex ore suo post mulierem aquam in modum fluminis, ut eam perderet (~p. eam M). Impetum persecutorum aqua significat. Hinc psalmus: Cum insurgerent homines in nos, forsitan vivos absorbuissent

<sup>72</sup> G. Morin, *Sancti Caesarii Arelatensis opera omnia nunc primum in unum collecta*, vol. 2, Maretioli 1942, p. 244 (Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina, 104). English translation: *Saint Caesarius of Arles Sermons Volume II (81–186)*, transl. M. M. Mueller, ed. R. J. Defarrari, Washington 1964 (The Fathers of the Church, 47).

<sup>73</sup> G. Morin, *Sancti Caesarii Arelatensis opera...*, op. cit., p. 244.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. J. Haussleiter, *Leben und Werke des Bischofs Primasius von Hadrumentum. Eine Untersuchung*, Erlangen 1887, p. 3.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. e.g. E. A. Matter, *The Apocalypse...*, op. cit., p. 42–44; W. C. Weinrich, *Revelation*, Downers Grove 2005, p. XXX (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture – NT, 12).

nos. Cum irasceretur animus eorum super nos, forsitan velut aqua deglutissent nos. Torrentem pertransivit anima nostra, etc.”<sup>76</sup>

PRIMASIUS

Primasius explains the Revelation image with the use of a parallel image from Psalm 124, in which the element of water poses a threat to life. The earlier commentary on chapter 12 specifies that it is a threat to eternal life by denying the revealed truth – *damnationis aeternae supplicium*.<sup>77</sup> *Insidiator diabolus* tries to kill *novum hominem*,<sup>78</sup> leading him astray to: *mutabilia, haereticorum falsae sententiae, (serpentis) errores, omnis malorum commixtio* and *idolorum cultura*, to which he is provoked by *inextricabilis inimicitia i acris versutia*.<sup>79</sup> Obviously *mulier amicta sole* represents *Ecclesia Christo induta*.<sup>80</sup>

Among lexical similarities to earlier commentaries the two most common can be distinguished: *persecutores* (cf. late Victorinus’ reviews) and *impetus* (cf. *violentia* in the writings of Cyprian and Caesarius), emphasising the fierceness of the water.

CASSIODORUS († 580)

The commentary on the Revelation is a part of the preserved manuscript *Complexiones*, which were written in the last years of his almost one hundred-year-long life. The conciseness that he promises in the title of his collection of texts (*Complexiones*) is unfortunately reflected in its content. In Rev 12 : 15, although he does not analyse the adjective *ποταμοφόρητος* itself, he offers a generous interpretation. He uses the text of *Vetus Latina* type C, probably referring to Primasius’ commentary as

<sup>76</sup> Primasius Hadrumetinus, *Commentarius in Apocalypsin*, ed. A. W. Adams, Turnholti 1985, p. 188 (Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina, 92).

<sup>77</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 179f.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 181.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 179–188.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 179. E. A. Matter is wrong attributing the mariological interpretation of Rev 12 : 1ff. to Primasius; *The Apocalypse...*, op. cit., p. 44.

well.<sup>81</sup> “Fit iterum commemoratio matris et Domini Christi; quod diabolus credens se matrem laedere ex ore suo vastissimum flumen emisit, qui eam putabatur absorbere; sed illa in tutissimum locum recepta uenena diabolicae fraudis euasit. Illos tamen inueterator malorum persequi non desinit, qui dominicis iussionibus oboedientes esse noscuntur.”<sup>82</sup> The *Mother* is mentioned by Cassiodorus twice more a few sentences before,<sup>83</sup> however, it is difficult to determine if it is Mary that he has in mind, or rather the Church – the second sentence of the two quoted above makes the ecclesial interpretation more probable.<sup>84</sup> The graphic terms *laedere* and *absorbere* mean “harm” and “absorb” respectively, which in the end is synonymous with death; *vastus* in the superlative form describes real power; *venena diabolicae fraudis* and *inventor malorum* point to calculation, tricks and lies as the methods of the opponent. In the summary the author does not get into details, although he suggests that the fact the faithful are persecuted by the *inventor of evil* is a natural phenomenon.

*Persequi* is repeated in this commentary as well, and we have already come across it in the writings of Victorinus, Caesarius and Primasius. *Absorbere* was used in Ps 124 (123):4, which was earlier mentioned by Primasius.

### 3.4.2. Greek commentaries

#### OECUMENIUS (EARLY 6<sup>th</sup> CENTURY)

The commentary of Oecumenius, a rethor of aristocratic origin, is the first Greek commentary on the Apocalypse, most probably created between 508

<sup>81</sup> H. J. Vogels, *Untersuchungen...*, op. cit., p. 114.

<sup>82</sup> M. Aurelius Cassiodorus, *Complexiones XVII* 10, [in:] R. Gryson, *Variorum auctorum commentaria minora in Apocalypsin Johannis*, Turnhout 2003, p. 122 (Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina, 107).

<sup>83</sup> *De matre uero atque Domino Iesu Christo* oraz *matrem uero ipsius*, XVI 5. 8, [in:] R. Gryson, *Variorum auctorum commentaria...*, op. cit., p. 121.

<sup>84</sup> Cassiodorus mentions the name of Ticonius, in whose commentary we can read: “Et genuit, inquit, mulier masculum. Id est ecclesia Christum, qui, cum Deus esset, homo nasci dignatus est” (F. Lo Bue, *The Turin Fragments...*, op. cit., p. 188). So even the expression *mater ipsius*, when placed in the immediate context of Christ, can refer to the Church.

and 518,<sup>85</sup> and discovered in 1901.<sup>86</sup> Similarly to Victorinus and Ticonius in the Latin tradition, Oecumenius had a huge impact on his successors in the Greek tradition – Andreas of Caesarea and Arethas of Caesarea.<sup>87</sup>

Explaining Rev 12:15, Oecumenius quotes this verse in the form we know from today's critical writings: ποταμὸν τὸν πειρασμὸν ἢ θεία ἀλληγορεῖ γραφή, πῆ μὲν λέγουσα διὰ τοῦ Ἰωνᾶ ἀπέρριψάς με εἰς βᾶθη καρδίας θαλάσσης, καὶ ποταμοὶ ἐκύκλωσάν με, πῆ δὲ διὰ τοῦ Κυρίου κατέβη, φησίν, ἢ βροχή, παρήσαν οἱ ποταμοί, ἤλθον οἱ ἄνεμοι καὶ οὐ κατέβαλον τὴν οἰκίαν τὴν τεθεμελιωμένην ἐν τῇ πέτρα. ποταμὸν οὖν λέγει τὸν ἐπὶ τῷ πάθει τοῦ Κυρίου πειρασμὸν, ἵνα διὰ τούτου, φησίν, ἀποπνίξη τὴν παρθένον. καὶ ἀληθῶς, τό γε ἦκον εἰς αὐτὸν καὶ εἰς τὴν τῆς ἀγγελόδοκος ὑπερβολήν, ἴσχυσε πληρῶσαι τὴν πρόθεσιν ὁ δράκων· τί γὰρ λέγει πρὸς αὐτὴν ὁ Συμεὼν καὶ σοῦ δὲ αὐτῆς τὴν ψυχὴν διελεύσεται ῥομφαία, ὅπως ἂν ἀποκαλυφθῶσιν ἐκ πολλῶν καρδιῶν διαλογισμοί;<sup>88</sup> (The Scripture refers to the test with the word 'flood', on the one hand using Jonah's words: "For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the sea, and the flood enveloped me," on the other hand – the words of the Lord, who said: "The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock." The Passion of the Lord is called 'the flood,' happening so that through this flood the Virgin could be killed. And in fact through this flood and His suffering, the Dragon could fulfill his intention. Since she was told by Simeon that: "you yourself a sword will pierce so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed"). Oecumenius understands "the woman" as the Mother of Jesus, and "the flooding river" as her experience of witnessing her Son's death on the cross. The quotes from Jon 2:4 and Mt 7:25

<sup>85</sup> Cf. J. C. Lamoreaux, *The Provenance of Oecumenius' Commentary on the Apocalypse*, "Vigiliae Christianae" 52 (1998) 88–108, p. 101. 106.

<sup>86</sup> Two critical editions of this commentary have been published: H. C. Hoskier, *The Complete Commentary of Oecumenius on the Apocalypse*, Ann Arbor 1928 and M. de Groote, *Oecumenii commentarius in Apocalipsin*, Leuven 1999.

<sup>87</sup> For a detailed description of the relationships among these authors, cf. M. de Groote, *Oecumenii commentarius...*, op. cit., p. 337–342.

<sup>88</sup> M. de Groote, *Oecumenii commentarius...*, op. cit., p. 182.

are used to confirm this way of interpretation. Referring to the aim of this experience with the use of the verb ἀποπνίγω gives an impression as if it was taken directly from the lexicon of Hesychius. Oecumenius and Hesychius were probably contemporaries, therefore, the observation that they both use ποταμοφόρητον ποιέω and ἀποπνίγω<sup>89</sup> seems even more valuable.

ANDREAS OF CAESAREA († 614)

The work of Andreas, a Greek theological writer and bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, was created between 563–614. It shows how well-read its author was and how great his familiarity with the texts of the Church Fathers from the east was. Unfortunately, it is not very well known and, although it is an important text for the understanding of the Greek commentaries on the Apocalypse, rarely is it analysed.<sup>90</sup>

This commentator also quotes the Rev 12:15 fragment in the form that we know it<sup>91</sup>: Φευγούσης, φησί, τῆς Ἐκκλησίας εἰς τόπους ἀβάτους [καὶ ἀνύδρους] τὴν τοῦ πλάνου ἔφοδον, ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ, δηλαδὴ ἐκ προστάγματος [αὐτοῦ], ὀπίσω αὐτῆς [βάλλει] ὕδωρ ποταμηδόν, τουτέστιν ἀθέων ἀνδρῶν ἢ πονηρῶν δαιμόνων ἢ ποικίλων πειρασμῶν πλῆθος, κατ' αὐτῆς ἐξελεύσεται, ὅπως αὐτὴν δουλώσῃται<sup>92</sup> (After the Church has fled to inaccessible [and waterless] places due to the attack of the deceiver, from [its] mouth, which means at its command, a torrent of water [is spewed], that is the unfaithful or evil spirits or the abundance of tempta-

<sup>89</sup> It is possible that Oecumenius was familiar with the work of Hesychius, however, this fact cannot be proved, so the analogy between the two texts might be coincidental, proving only the broad education of the authors.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. J. Hernández Jr., *The Relevance of Andrew of Caesarea for New Testament Textual Criticism*, “Journal of Biblical Literature” 130 (2011), p. 185–188.

<sup>91</sup> There is an insignificant difference of one letter only: instead of αὐτήν Andreas uses ταύτην.

<sup>92</sup> J. Schmid, *Studien zur Geschichte des griechischen Apokalypse-Textes*, 1. Teil: *Der Apokalypse-Kommentar des Andreas von Kaisarea. Text*, München 1955, p. 134 (Münchener Theologische Studien, 1. Ergänzungsband). Earlier available edition of the commentary: *Andrae Caesariensis commentarius in Apocalypsin*, PG 106, 215–486.

tions, which will contradict it, in order to hold it captive). Despite many similarities between the work of Andreas and the work of Oecumenius, in this particular interpretation of Rev 12:15 he shows his independent views. “The woman” represents the Church and its persecutors can be men, evil spirits, as well as unidentified temptations, or, as far as institutions and societies are concerned, events that serve as tests and difficult experiences. The aim of the attack is also specified – depriving the Church of its freedom. The author does not determine the type of captivity he has in mind, although enumerating the attackers suggests enslavement to sin.

### 3.4.3. Syriac and Coptic translations

Among the Syriac and Coptic translations, apart from *Vetus Latina* and Vulgate, we can find the translations of the New Testament from the source text.<sup>93</sup> They were contemporary with some of the commentaries mentioned before. The Syriac versions translate ποταμοφόρητος reaching for its etymology, whilst the Coptic version (the Sahidic dialect) reflects the idea of destruction and ruin.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Later translations, e.g. Armenian, Georgian, Ethiopic, were not taken into account. Cf. K. Aland, B. Aland, *The Text of the New Testament. An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism*, transl. E. F. Rhodes, Grand Rapids 1989<sup>2</sup>, p. 204.

<sup>94</sup> The oldest Syriac translation of the Revelation is a part of the so-called Philoxenian version, finished in 507 or 508 AD. Up till then the proof of familiarity with the Revelation can be found in the works of Ephrem the Syrian († 373), however, it is still unclear in what language was the text he used. The edition of J. Gwynn, *The Apocalypse of St. John in a Syriac Version hitherto unknown...*, Dublin 1897 (reprint Piscataway 2005) is still irreplaceable. The aim of the translator – bishop Polycarp – was to come up with a translation that could be used for dogmatic purposes. As the result of the reconstruction of the Greek basis of this translation, J. Gwynn got a text which is consistent with contemporary critical editions as far as Rev 12:15 is concerned. As a translation of ποταμοφόρητος Polycarp used the participle of the verb حمل (“carry,” “lift”); cf. part I p. 25 and part II p. 15. Harclensis is a correction of Polycarp’s translation, completed by bishop Thomas of Harkel in 616, which has some features of a critical edition, although it is mostly based on poor Greek texts from the Byzantine family of manuscripts. Correcting the translation, Thomas keeps

#### 3.4.4. Conclusions

The preserved Latin translations show huge discrepancies in the understanding of the adjective ποταμοφόρητος. Hieronymus, whose rules of biblical translation we know on the basis of his own declarations and their consistent application, sticks to the most literal translation: “ut eam faceret trahi a flumine,” which is closer to *Vetus Latina* type I rather than any other version.

The Syriac versions opt for the original meaning of ποταμοφόρητος, the Coptic translation chooses the late interpretation of this adjective, reflecting the idea of destruction.

Unfortunately, none of the above – mentioned authors of commentaries elaborates on the meaning of ποταμοφόρητος *expressis verbis*.

According to *Vetus Latina* type I translation, Hieronymus' corrections (Vulgate) and the commentaries that we analysed, the water torrent attacking the woman was supposed to kill her.

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the verb  $\Delta\alpha\alpha$  (“carry,” “lift”) originally used by Polycarp. Cf. A. Vööbus, *The Apocalypse in the Harklean version. A facsimile edition of MS. Mardin Orth. 35, fol. 143r-159v*, with an introduction by Arthur Vööbus, Louvain 1978, p. 21\* (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 400. Subsidia, 56). In Coptic translations the text of the Revelation was preserved in two of the seven known dialects: Bohairic and Sahidic. The available manuscripts contain the text probably created in the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. The Bohairic dialect of the Coptic translation omits the part of the sentence in which ποταμοφόρητος is originally used in Rev 12:15; cf. G. Horner, *The Coptic Version of the New Testament in the Northern Dialect, otherwise called Memphitic and Bohairic...*, vol. 4: *The Catholic Epistles and the Acts of the Apostles. The Apocalypse*, Oxford 1905, p. 520. Within a hundred years since the first edition of this translation was published, many unknown manuscripts containing complete books of the New Testament were uncovered – other critical editions of the translation of the Revelation may lead to important discoveries; cf. K. Aland, B. Aland, *The Text...*, op. cit., p. 201. The Sahidic text of the Revelation was reconstructed on the basis of more than thirty fragments corresponding with the Greek text of the Alexandrian type. Some of them kept the translation of Rev 12:15, in which the verb  $\alpha\alpha\alpha$  was used (“lose,” “destroy”). The editor loosely translates this part as: *that he should cause her to be drowned*; G. Horner, *The Coptic Version of the New Testament in the Southern Dialect, otherwise called Sahidic and Thebaic...*, vol. 7: *The Catholic Epistles and the Apocalypse*, Oxford 1924, p. 400.

In the tradition of Latin commentaries the ecclesiastic interpretation was usually attributed to the symbol of the woman.

According to Ticonius and Cassiodorus experiencing hostility from the powers of evil is a typical occurrence for the Church.

Oecumenius understands the woman as the Mother of Jesus, however, the experience symbolised by the water torrent is a moral experience and its intended result – destruction – is most probably the crisis of faith.

Although Primasius and Cassiodorus describe the effects of the attacking water with words referring to destruction, when they specify the methods typical of the opponent – calculation, lies, deception – they point to the attempt of perverting the Church. Andreas of Caesarea clearly states that it is the enslavement to sin that it refers to.

### 3.5. Ποταμός and ποταμοφόρητος in Rev 12:15 and the Nile in classical literature and the Old Testament

In contemporary commentaries on the Apocalypse different directions of the search for the archetype of the river in Rev 12:15 can be noticed. Some look for it in the Mesopotamian Mythology, especially that according to its beliefs the cosmic serpent, which is thought to be the archetype of the one in Rev 12:15, is a symbol of evil and darkness.<sup>95</sup> Others claim that the source of the image of the torrent is much less complicated: elephants use their trunks to spit out huge amounts of water, and since in the Hellenistic period they were commonly used in the army, their behaviour might have been the archetype of the torrent in question.<sup>96</sup>

In the papyri that have been preserved the term ποταμοφόρητος refers to the River Nile. Hesychius, who put this word in his lexicon (although without any direct reference to the Nile), came from Alexandria, the Egyptian city by the River Nile. Since these are merely indications or traces of evidence that draw our attention to the Apocalyptic river, the torrent spewing from the devil's mouth, similar to what the Nile

<sup>95</sup> Cf. W. J. Harrington, *Revelation*, Collegeville 1993, p. 135 (Sacra Pagina, 16)

<sup>96</sup> Cf. J. M. Ford, *Revelation. Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, Garden City 1980, p. 192 (Anchor Bible, 38).

represented and how it was perceived at the beginning of the Christian Era, we will try to compare different texts describing these similarities – firstly in the geographical sense, then the ones mentioning the Nile in the context of religion.

Paradoxically, that is the preparation we need before reaching for the parallels of Rev 12:15 in the Old Testament.

### 3.5.1. The River Nile in geographical descriptions

In the view of ancient authors (Herodotus, Seneca, Pomponius Mela, Pliny the Elder) the Nile is the river that *nature has raised up (...) before the eyes of the world* (Seneca, IV II 1).<sup>97</sup> The subject of this comparison with Rev 12:15 is not the relation to actual facts, e.g. what we could learn about the Nile from the geographical or hydrological point of view, but what was known (and often criticised as incorrect) about the River Nile at the beginning of the Common Era.

*Analogia non est genealogia* – the similarity of data is not a proof of correlation, however, it describes the life context of both the author of the Revelation and the translator of the version later called *Vetus Latina* type I, which is enough reason to draw our attention to it.

The similarities between the river in Rev 12:15 and the Nile:

The fragments presented in 3.5.1.1 present the view widespread in the ancient times that the inundations of the Nile were caused by the strong winds blowing from the Mediterranean and pulling its waves back.

Another comparison – point 3.5.1.2 – is generally insignificant for the topic in question. Ancient authors inform about the fact that the waters of the Nile flew into the sands of the desert, making it an underground river.

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<sup>97</sup> Seneca, *Quaestiones naturales*, IV 2, 1; English translation: *Physical Science in the Time of Nero being a Translation of the Quaestiones Naturales of Seneca*, by J. Clarke, with Notes on the Treatise by A. Geikie, London 1910, p. 167.

3.5.1.1. “ut eam faceret ictu fluminis trahi ad se”  
(Rev 12:15 VL type I)

A fragment from one of the translations of *Vetus Latina* and not the Greek text itself is used in the heading, in order to show its similarity to ancient descriptions.

HERODOTUS († c. 425 BC)

“One pretends that the Etesian winds cause the rise of the river by preventing the Nile-water from running off into the sea.”<sup>98</sup>

POMPONIUS MELA († c. 45 AD)

“The Nile increases [...] because the Etesian winds, which blow throughout that period, either drive in clouds that move from north to south as rain directly above the river’s starting points, or **block the advancing water with an adverse wind and forestall the course of the descending water**, or choke the river’s mouths with the sand they drive onto the shore right along with the waves.”<sup>99</sup>

SENECA THE YOUNGER († 65 AD)

“If one may believe Thales, the Etesian winds hinder the descent of the Nile and check its course by driving the sea against its mouths. **It is thus beaten back, and returns upon itself.** Its rise is not the result of increase: it simply stops through being prevented from discharging, and presently, wherever it can, it bursts out into forbidden ground.”<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Herodotus, *Historiae*, II, 20; English translation: *The Histories*, by Herodotus, transl. by G. Rawlinson, London 1997.

<sup>99</sup> Pomponius Mela, *De situ orbis*, I, 9, 53; English translation: *Pomponius Mela’s Description of the World*, by F. E. Romer, Michigan 1998, p. 50.

<sup>100</sup> Seneca, *Quaestiones naturales*, IV, 2, 21; English translation: *Physical Science...*, op. cit., p. 174.

PLINY THE ELDER († 79 AD)

“Its waters are driven back by the Etesian winds, which are blowing at this season of the year from an opposite direction, and that **the sea which lies below is driven into the mouths of the river.**”<sup>101</sup>

3.5.1.2. <sup>16</sup> καὶ ἐβοήθησεν ἡ γῆ τῆ γυναικὶ καὶ ἤνοιξεν  
ἡ γῆ τὸ στόμα αὐτῆς καὶ κατέπιεν τὸν ποταμὸν ὃν  
ἔβαλεν ὁ δράκων ἐκ τοῦ στόματος αὐτοῦ.

SENECA THE YOUNGER († 65 AD)

“As it is, the river wanders through great deserts, spreads out into marshes, among many scattered tribes, before it is for the first time after its wandering, mazy course gathered into one near Philae. [...] Next in its course are the **sandy deserts.**”<sup>102</sup>

PLINY THE ELDER († 79 AD)

“Pouring forth from this lake, the river disdains to flow through arid and sandy deserts, and **for a distance of several days’ journey conceals itself**; after which it bursts forth at another lake of greater magnitude in the country of the Massæsyli, a people of Mauritania Cæsariensis, and thence casts a glance around, as it were, upon the communities of men in its vicinity, giving proofs of its identity in the same peculiarities of the animals which it produces. **It then buries itself once again in the sands of the desert, and remains concealed for a distance of twenty days’ journey**, till it has reached the confines of Æthiopia. Here, when it has once more become sensible of the presence of man, it again emerges, at the same source, in all probability, to which writers have given the name of Niger, or Black.”<sup>103</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Plinius Maior, *Historia naturalis*, V, 10, 55; English translation: Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, J. Bostock, H.T. Riley, Somerville, MA 2006.

<sup>102</sup> Seneca, *Quaestiones naturales*, IV, 2, 3; English translation: *Physical Science...*, op. cit., p. 168.

<sup>103</sup> Plinius Maior, *Historia naturalis*, V, 10, 51; English translation: Pliny the Elder, *The Natural...*, op. cit.

### 3.5.2. The Nile in the mythology and religious writings

In the religious beliefs of the Egyptians, Pharaoh as the embodiment of Osiris was responsible for, among many other natural phenomena, inundations of the Nile.<sup>104</sup> The Nile itself as a place of religious cult is mentioned by Seneca the Younger in *Quaestiones naturales*. The myth of Osiris was minutely described by Plutarch in *Isis and Osiris*.<sup>105</sup> In early Christian times the myth was very popular and the cult of Isis and Osiris gained more and more followers even in Rome, until it was officially accepted by Caligula and Domitian.<sup>106</sup>

SENECA THE YOUNGER († 65 AD)

“The first rise of the Nile is observed near the island Philae which I have just mentioned. A short distance from it the river is divided by a rock in the centre, which the Greeks call the Inaccessible. **No foot approaches it save that of the priestly ministers.** Those cliffs first feel the increase of the river. Then a long distance below that two crags project, called by the natives the veins of the Nile. A great quantity of water is shed out by them, but yet insufficient to flood the land of Egypt. **When the date of the sacred festival comes round, the priests throw into these fountains a public offering, while the magistrates offer gifts of gold.**”<sup>107</sup>

PLUTARCH († C. 125 AD)

“These men are like the Greeks who say that Cronus is but a figurative name for Chronus (Time), Hera for Air, and that the birth of Hephaestus symbolises the change of Air into Fire. And thus among the Egyptians such men say that **Osiris is the Nile** consorting with the Earth, which is Isis, and that the sea is Typhon into which the Nile discharges its waters and is

<sup>104</sup> H. Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion: An Interpretation*, New York 1948, p. 103.

<sup>105</sup> Plutarchus Chaeronensis, *De Iside et Osiride*, [in:] idem, *Moralia*, 351C–384, ed. G. N. Bernardakis, vol. II, Lipsiae 1889, p. 471–557.

<sup>106</sup> *Neues Testament und Antike Kultur*, vol. 3: *Weltauffassung, Kult, Ethos*, hrsg. von J. Zangenberg, Neukirchen-Vluyn 2005, p. 24f.

<sup>107</sup> Seneca, *Quaestiones naturales*, IV 2, 7–8; English translation: *Physical Science...*, op. cit., p. 169–170.

lost to view and dissipated, save for that part which the earth takes up and absorbs and thereby becomes fertilized. There is also a religious lament sung over Cronus. The lament is for him that is born in the regions on the left, and suffers dissolution in the region on the right; for the Egyptians believe that the eastern regions are the face of the world, the northern the right, and the southern the left. The Nile, therefore, which runs from the south and is swallowed up by the sea in the north, is naturally said to have its birth on the left and its dissolution on the right. For this reason the priests religiously keep themselves aloof from the sea, and call salt the ‘spume of Typhon’; and one of the things forbidden them is to set salt upon the table.”<sup>108</sup>

### 3.5.3. The devil’s torrent in Rev 12:15 and Ezek 29:3. 9

R. H. Charles indicated the lack of “any real parallels in the Old Testament or in Judaism” to the spewing torrent in Rev 12:15. He mentioned Hos 5:10; Ps 32:6; 124, 4; Isa 93:2 and the march of the Israelites through the Red Sea, all of them representing either God as putting forth His wrath or the stream of ungodliness overwhelming the righteous, however, he claims they “have no bearing” on Rev 12:15.<sup>109</sup> The image of Dragon, on the other hand, is rich in parallels. Among other places, Ezek 29:3<sup>110</sup> is presented as one of the fragments where the image is used.

Ezek 29:3, when compared to Rev 12:15, is conspicuous after the parallels from classical literature have been analysed.

In Ezek 29:3 Pharaoh is the Dragon (TM: תנינ; LXX: δράκων; usually translated as “Crocodile”) crouching amidst the Niles<sup>111</sup> saying: “The Niles are mine; it is I who made them!” A detail is brought to our attention

<sup>108</sup> Plutarchus Chaeronensis, *De Iside...* (*Moralia*, 363 D–F), op. cit., p. 503; cf. *Neuer Wettstein. Texte zum Neuen Testament aus Griechenland und Hellenismus*, vol. 2: *Texte zur Briefliteratur und zur Johannesapokalypse*, hrsg. von G. Strecker, U. Schnelle, unter Mitarbeit von G. Seelig, Berlin-New York 1996, p. 1556.

<sup>109</sup> R. H. Charles, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, vol. I, Edinburgh 1920, p. 331.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 317f., 331.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. M. Greenberg, *Ezechiel 21–37*, Freiburg-Basel-Wien 2005, p. 279n (Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament).

– the monster (Dragon) attributes creating the rivers to himself. Usurping an attribute of God is the reason why God acts against the Pharaoh. It is explained more clearly in Ezek 29:9 with a structure: because (ⲓⲡ?) you said: “The Niles are mine; it is I who made them.”

Pharaoh puts himself in the opposition to God by attributing the power of creation and the glory that it is followed by to himself.

The meaning of this parallel when perceived through Egyptian beliefs, which identify Pharaoh with Osiris – the one responsible for the inundations of the Nile, becomes clearer. It also seems highly probable that the Nile was the archetype of the spewing torrent in Rev 12.

On the other hand, we cannot be certain that the author of the Revelation reached for Ezek 29:3, 9 while writing Rev 12:15. If, however, the Nile was the archetype of the river in chapter 12, then, although the Pharaoh does not appear in this scene *expressis verbis*, the correspondence of the two images seems to be intentional rather than coincidental.

When we compare the fragment of Rev 12:15 to Rev 22:1, once again<sup>112</sup> we can notice the devil’s sacrilegious attempts to usurpate some of God’s attributes – *diabolus est simia Dei* (Tertulian?).<sup>113</sup>

The attempts of the devil to be like God serve as a reminder that Satan and all his works aim at matching God and are motivated by this desire.

#### 3.5.4. The meaning of the parallels

In the descriptions of the Nile in classical literature we encounter similarities to the Apocalyptic image of the river. The mysterious help that the woman is given from the earth has its reflection in reality. Some parts of this river that ‘nature has raised up’ disappeared in the sands

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<sup>112</sup> Other examples are: the Dragon and two beasts in chapters 12 and 13; *seven heads of the Dragon* as the reverse of the Seven Spirits of God in 12:3; the parody of the triumph of Christ in the enthronement of the second beast in 12:3nn (cf. A. Jankowski, *Apokalipsa...*, op. cit., p. 207, 214n), as well as parallel women in chapters 12 and 17n.

<sup>113</sup> An attempt of making a comparison between these two fragments is confirmed by the use of *ἐκ τοῦ στοματός* instead of *ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου* in Rev 22:1 in some medieval manuscripts of the Revelation, e.g. 1611 and 2329, as well as the comment put on the margin of the translation by Thomas of Harkel.

of the desert changing it into the underground river. These facts make the conclusion that the Nile was the archetype of the river in Rev 12:15 highly probable. If the assumption is true, the whole scene can be easily imagined by an educated reader of that time.

The translation of the Revelation in *Vetus Latina* type I concerning Rev 12:15 seems to be quite literal as well. Although the translation containing *trahi ad se* is a form of interpretation, it is clearly down to earth and can be justified. In one of the popular versions explaining the reasons for the floodings of the Nile, strong winds were considered to be responsible, stopping the river current or even turning it back. The translator might have been familiar with this explanation either because of his knowledge of numerous geographical writings, or because of the common beliefs of people concerning that fact. If he had known the meaning of the adjective ποταμοφόρητος from everyday life, he associated it with the abundance of hydrological phenomena connected with the Nile.

On the other hand, the correlation of the Nile with pagan cults mentioned by secular authors and depicted in Ezek 29:3, 9, can be seen as a factor that influenced the author of the Revelation and became the archetype of the image of Dragon spewing the torrent in Rev 12.

#### 4. Ποταμοφόρητος – drowning or abduction?

To sum up the extensive research aiming at answering the question raised in the introduction of this paper, we need to decide if the word ποταμοφόρητος used in 12:15 expresses the idea of “drowning, killing” the woman, or rather “abduction” and “imprisonment”?

The analysis of the origin of the adjective ποταμοφόρητος, its oldest certified uses, translations and patristic commentaries, as well as the analysis of the probable reasons for its use in the Revelation, suggest that it is the second sense that the author had in mind. The aim that the Apocalyptic opponent of the woman has is to subordinate her, which can be better understood when perceived from the perspective of faith and truth.

## Summary

### Ποταμοφόρητος (Rev 12:15)

#### – from Etymology to Theologoumenon

The paper presents a study on translations of a Greek word ποταμοφόρητος occurring in Rev 12:15. The Greek hapax legomenon ποταμοφόρητος is used in Rev 12:15. The part of the sentence containing ποταμοφόρητος is translated as: *to sweep her away with the current*. G. Schneider suggests a correction of the meaning of the word, concentrating on the conjectural purpose of being taken by water (drowning). In order to analyse this issue we begin with the study of etymology of the ποταμοφόρητος. It comes from the noun ποταμός and the adjective φορητός, which is a derivative of φορέω. *Composita* (compounds) formed with φορητός did not refer to any idea of a mortal threat. Till the turn of 19<sup>th</sup> century ποταμοφόρητος, apart from the Bible, was only certified in the Hesychius' Lexicon (5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century). The Egyptian papyri, uncovered and analysed on the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in which the ποταμοφόρητος is related to the overflows of the Nile, let us doubt Schneider's proposal, however, still do not solve the problem. The next stage of the research consisted of the analysis of the classical and antique translations of Rev (VL, Vg, Syriac and Coptic translations), as well as Latin and Greek patristic commentaries, which support one of the aforementioned interpretations. The commentators understood the river carrying the Woman as the image of Church persecution and a desire to place the Church under the command of evil forces. One of the versions of the translation of Vetus Latina (type I) suggests that the archetype of the water torrent in Rev was the Nile. In the light of classical explanations as to the reasons of the river's floodings, as well as the parallel in Ezek 29:3-6 we can assume that it was the Nile that served as the archetype of the spewing torrent for the author of the Revelation.

## Keywords

The Apocalypse, the Revelation, Vetus Latina, Vulgate, potamoforetos, hapax legomenon, etymology, composita, comparative literature, biblical parallels, the Nile, river, torrent, Church Fathers, papyrus, translation, theologoumenon, ecclesiology, biblical theology

## Streszczenie

### Ποταμοφόρητος (Ap 12, 15) – od etymologii do theologoumenu

Grecki przymiotnik ποταμοφόρητος występuje w Piśmie Świętym tylko raz – w Ap 12, 15. Polski przekład Biblii Tysiąclecia zdanie celowe, w którym ποταμοφόρητος występuje, oddaje jako: „żeby ją rzeka poniosła”. G. Schneider, autor hasła ποταμοφόρητος w *Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, proponuje korektę znaczenia tego słowa, koncentrując się na domniemanym celu porwania przez wodę, czyli spowodowaniu zatonięcia. Aby rozstrzygnąć zaistniały problem, podejmujemy w pierwszej kolejności studium etymologii terminu ποταμοφόρητος (pochodzi od rzeczownika ποταμός – „rzeka” i utworzonego od czasownika φορέω przymiotnika φορητός – „niesiony, dający się unieść”) oraz przegląd kompositów z przymiotnikiem φορητός (nie zawierały one idei śmiertelnego zagrożenia). Do przełomu XIX i XX wieku ποταμοφόρητος był poświęcony poza Biblią tylko w pochodzącym z przełomu V i VI wieku leksykonie Hezychiusza, który mógłby stanowić uzasadnienie propozycji G. Schneidera. Odkryte i opracowane na przełomie XIX i XX wieku papiirusy egipskie, w których ποταμοφόρητος jest odnoszone do wylewów Nilu, pozwalają tę propozycję poddać w wątpliwość, lecz problemu nie rozstrzygają. Następne pole poszukiwań stanowią starożytne przekłady Apokalipsy (VL, Wg, syryjskie i koptyjskie), dostarczające poparcia to jednej, to drugiej możliwości, oraz łacińskie i greckie komentarze patrystyczne, w których uzasadnienie znajduje dotychczasowy polski przekład. Komentatorzy rzekę mającą porwać Niewiastę rozumieją jako obraz prześladowań Kościoła i chęć ich prowadzycy, by Kościół sobie podporządkować. Jedna z wersji przekładu VL (typ I) zwraca poszukiwania w kierunku pierwowzoru, jakim była prawdopodobnie rzeka Nil. W świetle starożytnych opinii na temat przyczyn wylewów Nilu (wiatr od strony Morza Śródziemnego miał powodować, iż Nil zaczynał płynąć w górę swego biegu) oraz czytelnej wówczas paraleli Ez 29, 3. 6 można przypuszczać, że to właśnie ta rzeka była modelem dla autora Apokalipsy. Dane te na tle starożytnych przekładów i komentarzy pozwalają na potwierdzenie słuszności dotychczasowego polskiego tłumaczenia słowa ποταμοφόρητος.

## Słowa kluczowe

Apokalipsa, Objawienie, Vetus Latina, Wulgata, Biblia Tysiąclecia, potamoforetos, hapax legomenon, etymologia, composita, komparatystryka, miejsce paralelne, Nil, rzeka, Ojcowie Kościoła, papiirus, przekład, theologoumen, eklezjologia, teologia biblijna

