



ANABASES

Traditions et Réceptions de l'Antiquité

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Ovide et le rapprochement France-Roumanie
*Jean-Léon Gérôme et le rêve de "reconstruire
un gladiateur" L'Antigone de Michael Meschke,
une écriture d'atelier ? Les intraduisibles*
Jean Leclant et la genèse des études
isiaques *Entretien avec Dominique Briquel*

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When a Sophist Speaks of Sophists: Untranslatables and Holy Men in Lucian (*Peregr.* 13)

LUCA BELTRAMINI¹

Translating Lucian is never as easy as it might seem. His pure and clear Greek – sometimes taken for an “easy” Greek – hides in fact insidious traps for the translator. Indeed, while his syntax is generally plain, a great difficulty is represented by two different – though strictly bound – elements. The first one is the exact rendition of the peculiar tone of his prose. It is no secret that one of the problems *par excellence* with Lucian consists in stating what he really thought of the topics and the characters he discussed – that is, understanding each time whether his verdicts are to be taken seriously or not². The second difficulty lies instead in his rich and varied vocabulary³. Labelling Lucian as an Atticist purist is way too simple and means ignoring the extraordinary work of revitalisation of

¹ I wish to express my gratitude to the organisers and to all the participants of the conference for the stimulating discussion and the useful suggestions. Special thanks to the staff of the *American School of Classical Studies at Athens* for having hosted me during the writing of this article, to Hanneke de Bruijn for her kind and constant help, to Matilde Garré for her patience during the review process, and to Orestis Karavas for the precious and careful Athenian advice.

² Moreover, one must take into account the constant and complex parodical mechanisms created by Lucian, which complicate even more the understanding of his statements (cf. CAMEROTTO 1998, 120-140 on his peculiar game of *spoudogeloion*). On the thorny question of Lucian’s reliability see BOMPAIRE 1958, 513-518, BALDWIN, 1973, 115-118, BRACHT BRANHAM 1984 and 1989 *passim*.

³ On the effort required to the translator by Lucian’s vocabulary, see also GÓMEZ CARDÓ and MESTRE 2010.

Ancient Greek carried on by him, and also minimising the great creative effort that lies behind his respect for the classic norm⁴: his “simple” language is dotted with neologisms, lexical rarities and common terms used with unexpected nuances of meaning, that are all together hard to reproduce in the target language. So, when facing one of Lucian’s works, the translator must deal with a double obstacle: the interpretation of an ambiguous meaning and the rendition of a subtle vocabulary. Generally, the choice of a good translation for a dubious word relies, to a great extent, on the context of the passage. But if that word is particularly uncommon or, quite the opposite, covers a wide range of possible meanings, and if at the same time the context that surrounds it is uncertain, then that word appears to be potentially a real untranslatable.

Starting from this general consideration, in the following pages a peculiar case study of an untranslatable situation in Lucian’s works will be analysed, both under the lexical and the interpretative perspective. Our final aim, after this two-sided analysis, and after having considered the most recent translations of the passage chosen, is to give a new proposal of translation which, far from being definitive, could help us instead to understand what untranslatability really is and how it could be faced from time to time.

Lucian’s *De morte Peregrini* and the mentions of Jesus

Among the many examples of this situation, a peculiar case of the *De morte Peregrini* epitomizes perfectly this double translation obstacle, depending on both lexical and interpretative ambiguity. This work (from now on referred to as *Peregr.*) consists in a satirical attack against the shady Peregrinus and was written between 165 and 175 AD with the purpose to show how this man – who had gained great popularity in the central decades of the second century in the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire – was a charlatan⁵. To do so, Lucian dedicates the largest section of this work (§§ 9-20) to the description of Peregrinus’ life and career, from his birth to his spectacular suicide (committed at the Olympic games of 165 and reported in the final chapters), and to this “biographical” section belongs one of the most famous and discussed passages in the whole Lucianic corpus. There he tells of an unexpected Christian phase of Peregrinus, and in that context he mentions

⁴ A recent and useful summary about Lucian’s language and his correlation with Atticism is in KARAVAS 2005, 10-22. See also WEISSENBERGER 1996, 11-25, BOMPAIRE 1994 and the (quite aged but full of precious data) works of SCHMID 1887, 214-432, CHABERT 1897 and DEFERRARI 1916.

⁵ The most recent editions and commentaries available for this work are PILHOFER *et alii* 2005, STELLA 2007, MARQUIS 2017.

Jesus – although implicitly – twice: it is right in these problematic pages that it is possible to find the translation problem we are looking for. Let us consider the following passage from § 13:

ὁ νομοθέτης ὁ πρῶτος ἔπεισεν αὐτοὺς ὡς ἀδελφοὶ πάντες εἶεν ἀλλήλων, ἐπειδὴν ἅπαξ παραβάντες θεοὺς μὲν τοὺς Ἑλληνικοὺς ἀπαρνήσωνται, τὸν δὲ ἀνεσκολοπισμένον ἐκείνον σοφιστὴν αὐτὸν προσκυνῶσιν καὶ κατὰ τοὺς ἐκείνου νόμους βιώσιν.⁶

their first mentor convinced them that they were all brothers to each other, once they had denied and rejected the Greek gods, and if they had worshipped that same σοφιστής hung to a pole⁷ and had lived according to his precepts.

It is easy to imagine how this passage, although short and quite laconic, triggered scholiasts and scholars from the Byzantine age onwards. Because of it, Lucian was stigmatised as an atheist and an antichristian writer, and his works were included in the *Index prohibitorum librorum* of the Church in 1590⁸. But letting the complicated question of the interpretation and the reception of this section momentarily aside, and focussing our attention to the text, we notice three main pieces of information mentioned about Jesus. The first is his death by crucifixion (recalled also in § 11 with the same wording); the second is his status as νομοθέτης, meant as someone who gave rules of life to his disciples; finally, his definition as σοφιστής. Such a term, referred to Jesus, is highly surprising and, above all, offers a wide range of possible semantic values⁹. Indeed, σοφιστής is one of the words that B. Cassin included in her *Dictionnaire des intraduisibles* as an example of term testifying a situation in which “d’une langue à l’autre, tant les mots que les réseaux conceptuels ne sont pas superposables”¹⁰. But while in the other occurrences of

⁶ Lucian’s works are quoted following the text established by MACLEOD 1972-1987. If not otherwise specified, all translations from Ancient Greek are my own.

⁷ On the choice of translating ἀνασκολοπίζω (lit. “to impale”) with this neutral form (“to hang to a pole”) see BELTRAMINI 2018-2019, 52-54 and the quick but penetrating observations in KARAVAS 2005, 186 n. 37.

⁸ The literature on this passage and, more generally, the reception of Lucian in relation to Christianity is particularly vast. The most important xxth-century studies on the topic are those of Betz (1959 and 1961), who collected all the previous references and marked a turning point in the field. More recently, Karavas has published an article (KARAVAS 2010) with useful hints, and in the last years I have dedicated my research to a new re-examination of the whole question: see BELTRAMINI 2018-2019 (esp. 7-11 for a survey of previous studies with further bibliography) and BELTRAMINI 2020. For a quick summary of the main interpretations on this passage see *infra*.

⁹ No other occurrence of σοφιστής referred to Jesus (both to his very name and to his most recurrent epithets) is attested.

¹⁰ Cf. CASSIN 2004, xviii and the entry “sophisme, sophiste” (p. 1198). Cassin devoted

it in Lucian the context is always clear enough to suggest a way to translate it, in this specific passage of *Peregr.*, as we will see, a univocal interpretation is by no means possible. Therefore, in the definition of Jesus as σοφιστής of *Peregr.* 13 it is possible to recognise the perfect case study of an untranslatable term as a result of the combination of a semantic problem and an interpretative difficulty.

“What’s in a name?” Meanings of σοφιστής

A good strategy to face an untranslatable word should start from the analysis of the whole spectrum of meanings that such word might embrace – that is, from a linguistic and semantic investigation. This kind of investigation, in turn, can only be effective if it takes both the general level of the *langue* and that of the author’s *parole* into account¹¹. Namely, the reconstruction of the history of σοφιστής in Ancient Greek is necessary in order to have a clear theoretical basis to tackle our issue with; but in addition, since our issue is to find a solution to a specific situation of untranslatability – which is bound not to one word abstractly conceived, but rather to its usage in a specific context and by a specific author – we must also consider the peculiar nuances with which Lucian employs it, and therefore the values of σοφιστής in Lucian’s *parole*, meant as “un acte individuel de volonté et d’intelligence” made up by “les combinaisons par lesquelles le sujet parlant utilise le code de la langue en vue d’exprimer sa pensée personnelle”¹². Finally, this two-sided linguistic analysis, combined with a quick overview of its renderings in some of the modern Western languages, will enable us to wholly embrace the first of the two sources of untranslatability identified for the present case – lexical ambiguity – and will constitute the basis for the further investigation.

another crucial study (CASSIN 1995) to the specific notion of “sophistique” and its evolution over the centuries, read from both philosophical and literary perspectives (see esp. 7-15, 448-512).

¹¹ The obvious reference is to Saussure and his distinction between *langue* and *parole* (SAUSSURE 1995 [1916], 30-39).

¹² SAUSSURE 1995 [1916], 30s. It must be clarified, anyway, that the Saussurean notion of *langue* is here used with some forcing and only for convenience’s sake, since the only way we have to reconstruct the values of σοφιστής in Ancient Greek *langue* is, in the end, to put together the single *paroles* of different authors (cf. CASSIN 2004, xx-xxi on the “multiplicité des langues”).

*The evolution of σοφιστής in Ancient Greek*¹³

From an etymological point of view, σοφιστής is a *nomen agentis* built on the verb σοφίζομαι, which derives in turn from the adjective σοφός¹⁴. It is not, therefore, an original nominal formation, and we have no evidence of it until Pindar (*I.* 5.28). Its first meaning was “expert”, i.e. someone who is skilled in a certain field or craft; this “expertness” was mostly related to poetry and music¹⁵, but σοφιστής could also denote someone who is “skilled” in a more extended and metaphorical way, often with the nuance of “skilled in the craft of life” – i.e. someone who is able to make the right decisions, and therefore wise and sensible – or even just “smart person”.

The use of σοφιστής with these primary meanings was not particularly widespread during the fifth century BC: less than 20 occurrences can be counted with certainty from its first appearance until the end of the century¹⁶. Nevertheless, in the fourth century this number increases dramatically: limiting ourselves to the main authors, we find it 15 times in Xenophon, 10 in Demosthenes, 29 in Isocrates, 24 in Aristoteles (plus a lost work of his named *Σοφιστής*) and 125 in Plato (40 only in *Sophista* and 29 in *Protagoras*)¹⁷. Such a significant increase is not without a

¹³ Cf. *ThGL* 7.528-531, *LSJ*⁹ 1622, *GF*, 1946. In addition, three separate articles on the values of this word in Aeschylus (CITTI 1973-1974), Plato (RODIS-LEWIS 1956) and Plutarch (MESTRE 1999) can prove useful for the comprehension of its evolution over the centuries.

¹⁴ *DELG* 1030s., *EDG* 1373s., *GEW* 2, 754s.; for the nature of this kind of *nomina agentis* see also CHANTRAINE 1968 [1933], 313-318 and BENVENISTE 1948, 28-62. Even though derived from it, the evolution of σοφιστής is only partially connected to that of the verb σοφίζομαι. Namely, the progressive innovations that σοφιστής has undergone from the fourth century BC onwards have given it a certain autonomy from the verb. As a proof of this, one can consider how, when σοφιστής started to take on also the derogatory meaning of “charlatan” (see *infra*), the verb σοφίζομαι had to recur to a preverb to express the analogous semantic field (κατασοφίζομαι), precisely because it had not shared the same evolution of the noun (cf. *DELG* 1031).

¹⁵ As in its first occurrence (the already mentioned Pind. *I.* 5.28) and in a fragment of Sophocles (906 Radt). Moreover, we are informed by the *Suda* (δ 41 A.) that Damastes wrote a treatise significantly entitled *Περὶ ποιητῶν καὶ σοφιστῶν*.

¹⁶ Pind. *I.* 5.28, Aesch. *Pr.* 62, 944, fr. 314 Radt, Soph. fr. 906 Radt, Hdt. 1.29, 2.49, 4.95, Thuc. 3.38, Eur., *Heracl.* 993, *Hipp.* 921, *Supp.* 903, *Rhes.* 924, 949, fr. 905 Kannicht, Ar. *Nu.* 331, 1111, 1309. One could also add the two titles reported by the *Suda* (the already mentioned δ 41 about Damastes and σ 1708, which informs that Plato Comicus composed a lost play called *Σοφισταί*).

¹⁷ These data should be obviously considered with great caution for the state of loss and fragmentation that affects our knowledge of the ancient authors and for the (often consequent) difference of extension of their corpora: equating the seven tragedies

reason. Namely, from the end of the fifth century, σοφιστής started being used to indicate a new specific figure: the teacher for a fee, the intellectual who was paid for his lessons – basically of any kind of discipline but, in fact, mainly of rhetoric. Therefore, the plain reason why, within a few decades, the occurrences of σοφιστής multiplied is that it widened its spectrum of meaning. The renewed popularity of this term at the beginning of the fourth century is linked mainly to Plato, who chose it to label the representatives of the new philosophical current which upset the intellectual and moral background of Athens in the years of the Peloponnesian War¹⁸. But, under this perspective, the role of Plato was not only that of expanding the uses of σοφιστής. Indeed, since he despised this new kind of philosophers, considering them dangerous false-philosophers, in describing them he actively contributed to giving the word another new and pejorative meaning: after Plato, σοφιστής started to be a synonym for “charlatan”, “insincere person” who takes advantage of the others with his malicious cunning.

One last but fundamental turning point in the history of the development of this term took place in the Imperial Age, after the end of the first century AD – that is, in the very decades in which Lucian wrote his *Peregr.* Like in the fourth century BC, also this evolution of σοφιστής coincided with an important increase in the use of it. Focussing on a few significant authors – and setting momentarily Lucian aside – this term is employed 112 times by Plutarch, 42 by Dion of Prusa, 159 by Galen, 46 by Aelius Aristides and 117 by Flavius Philostratus. If possible, this increase is stronger than the first one, but the pattern remains quite the same¹⁹: the new diffusion of σοφιστής depends again on a new value taken on by the word, and this new value, in turn, is due to a specific author. Indeed, σοφιστής started to denote a new kind of intellectual: the second-century sophist was a special kind of “itinerant rhetor”, who studied and taught rhetoric and performed public declamations and readings in the main centres of the Roman Empire with a (generally) enthusiastic response from the public and notable earnings. It was Flavius Philostratus that, in the first half of the third century BC, told the lives of these sophists, coining for them the new literary category of “Second Sophistic”: following this trend, σοφιστής gained this new specific nuance of meaning and kept being used to indicate this kind of rhetors at least until the fourth century²⁰.

(plus fragments) of Aeschylus and the more than thirty dialogues of Plato would simply be unfair.

¹⁸ Such as Protagoras, Gorgias, Prodicus, etc. For an overview on the Sophistic movement see ROMILLY 1991, CASSIN 1995 and BONAZZI 2010a.

¹⁹ But cf. *supra* n. 17 on the relative value of such figures, even more problematic with authors like Plutarch and Galen, whose corpora are among the most extensive in the whole of Greek literature.

²⁰ For a picture of the Second Sophistic and the new sophists, see BOWERSOCK 1969,

So, by the end of the Classical Era, this word was equipped with a complex range of different and precise meanings, which have followed diachronically without replacing one another, from the original “expert person” to the representative of the Second Sophistic.

*Uses of σοφιστής in Lucian*²¹

Lucian uses this term quite often in his writings, more precisely 44 times. This should be no surprise, since Lucian was one of the most outstanding authors of the second century, who wrote exactly when the term σοφιστής was gaining a new meaning and a renewed centrality. In this regard, it is of crucial importance to underline the singular fact that Lucian himself, as a representative of the Second Sophistic, can be labelled in turn as a σοφιστής²². Therefore, when facing the problem of understanding what this word meant for him, we must recognise that things are even more complex because of the special weight that such word had gained in those years and because of the personal bond that connected him to it.

That said, from a survey of all the occurrences of σοφιστής in Lucian’s writings, it appears that most of (though not all) the meanings listed above are present, and new subtle nuances of it can be identified as well. Let us consider the following resume of its values within the Lucianic corpus:

1. someone skilled in a certain field (specified from time to time)²³;
2. philosopher in a quite generic sense, as a synonym for wise or educated man²⁴; with this nuance it is sometimes used to refer to someone who teaches and gives moral advice²⁵;
3. representative of the fifth-century Sophistic (Gorgias, Anaxagoras, Hippias

ANDERSON 1993 and WHITMARSH 2005. For the characteristics and the self-presentation strategies of these sophists, see also SCHMITZ 1997 and GLEASON 2012.

²¹ An analogous enquiry has been made in GÓMEZ CARDÓ 2003, but that article, although interesting and highly useful, limits itself to analysing *únicamente quiénes son los individuos – los nombres propios – a los que Luciano se refiere con la denominación explícita de sofista*, and needs therefore to be expanded.

²² Despite the well-known judgement of BOWERSOCK 1969, 114 about the absence of Lucian in Philostratus’ *Vitae Sophistarum*, few doubts can be raised about the clear status of Lucian as an outstanding – although anomalous – representative of the Second Sophistic: see, for instance, BALDWIN 1973, 18s., ANDERSON 1982, BAUMBACH et MÖLLENDORFF 2017.

²³ *Vit. auct.* 12, *Luct.* 20, *Nav.* 23, *Philops.* 16.

²⁴ *Ind.* 23, *Bis acc.* 11.

²⁵ *Tox.* 27, *Anach.* 22.

etc.)²⁶; this value is sometimes connoted by a derogatory nuance, since such philosophers were also atheists and rejected the influence of gods in human lives²⁷;

4. false philosopher, charlatan; more specifically, someone who recurs to subtle and quibbling arguments to cheat the others²⁸; this value is sometimes extended to figures which cannot be strictly identified as philosophers or thinkers *lato sensu*, but are rather closer to the religious and mystical world²⁹;

5. good speaker, skilled rhetor³⁰; it can also indicate someone who is good *only* with words, with a pejorative connotation compared to σοφός³¹;

6. sophist or philosopher in a newer version: not a thinker nor a philosophy school leader, but rather an intellectual who speaks in public about vices and virtues and common-sense rules of life (that what is generally labelled as the Imperial-Age *Popularphilosoph*)³²;

7. second-century sophist and writer, itinerant rhetor (i.e. representative of the Second Sophistic)³³; used with this nuance, σοφιστής often indicates (not without a bit of irony) a famous and successful speaker³⁴.

This list clearly shows how complicated it can be to determine what Lucian exactly means when employing the term σοφιστής. Nevertheless, for all the other 43 cases it is always possible to state the precise meaning of this word: despite its patent semantic difficulty, the surrounding context is always clear enough, which means that one of the two necessary requisites for the creation of an untranslatable situation is missing. The case of *Peregr.* 13, instead, combines both problems, and therefore it requires that we consider also the peculiar issues related to the interpretation of that passage – but this not before a quick examination of the modern renderings of σοφιστής. In fact, since our purpose is to solve a translation problem (that is, the rendition of a specific Greek word in a specific target language), it is necessary to consider also how this term evolved in the main modern target

²⁶ *Macr.* 23, *Tim.* 10, *Herod.* 3 and possibly *Fug.* 10.

²⁷ *Iupp. conf.* 6, 7, 19.

²⁸ *D. mort.* 4,2, 11,5, 24,3, 25,3, *Gall.* 4.

²⁹ *Philops.* 16, *Peregr.* 32, *Sacr.* 14. See *infra* for a deeper insight in this regard.

³⁰ As the protagonist of *Soloecista* helplessly claims to be. Cf. also *Prom.* 20.

³¹ *Hipp.* 2.

³² *Demon.* 12, 14, *Iupp. trag.* 14, 19, 30. Regarding the *Popularphilosophen*, connected with the evolution of Cynicism and with the spread of the cynic-stoic diatribe (cf. GOULET-CAZÉ 2017, 229-360), see BILLERBECK 1979 and DÖRING 1979.

³³ *Pseudol.* 6, *Lexiph.* 23.

³⁴ *Pseudol.* 19, 25, *Herod.* 4, 8, *Apol.* 2, *Rh. pr.* 1.

languages. Needless to say, a survey of the renderings of σοφιστής in the most important dictionaries proves once more its deep untranslatable nature³⁵. Indeed, in all the languages considered (including those which do not derive directly from Greek or Latin), σοφιστής always results in a calque from Ancient Greek, as a proof of the impossibility to render such a term – with all its peculiar nuances interconnected with a specific background – in a different cultural and historical context. Moreover, it is worth noting that the meaning of this calque, in each of the languages examined, is fossilised in two nuances, corresponding to only two of the many available options of the ancient word: the first is “representative of the fifth-century Athenian Sophistic”, while the second indicates “someone who recurs to sophistry (i.e. subtle, quibbling and specious reasoning)”, in order to deceive others.

Instead of clarifying our linguistic framework, this last observation made it, if possible, even more complicated. Along with the ambiguity come out in the source language, the survey of the renderings of σοφιστής in the target languages highlighted how such term has no real translation, but only reproduces some of its original meanings in a fixed dichotomy, hardly suitable for an adequate rendition of this and other passages. Therefore, in the light of this linguistic situation, it becomes now even more necessary to shift our attention to the interpretative sphere, searching for a reading of the passage which might enable us to understand how to translate this untranslatable word.

Looking for help: a possible interpretation

If the meanings of σοφιστής detected are many, even more numerous are the interpretations proposed over the centuries for these chapters of the *Peregr.* But while for the linguistic aspect of the problem it has been both necessary and possible (in terms of time and space) to face the whole issue *in extenso* here, this would be impossible for the exegetical questions related to the Christian section of *Peregr.*: the debate has been too vast, and the observations raised too many³⁶. Nevertheless, it is possible to summarise the general statements of the

³⁵ English: *OED* s.v. ‘sophist’; Italian: *GRADIT* s.v. ‘sofista’; French: *LGR* s.v. ‘sophiste’; German: *DWB* s.v. ‘Sophist’; Spanish: *DRAE* s.v. ‘sofista’; modern Greek: *ANET* s.v. ‘σοφιστής’. For a useful sketch of the evolution of σοφιστής and its semantic family in European languages, with a specific focus on its untranslatable nature, see CASSIN 2004, 1198.

³⁶ Cf. BETZ 1961, 6: *zahllose Kommentare sind von den frühesten Zeiten an zu diesem Problem gegeben worden [...]. Fast alle Möglichkeiten der Stellungnahme sind erschöpft worden, von dem frommen Leser, der in einer Handschrift die Worte [...] in Peregr. 11 meinte ausradieren zu müssen, bis zu glänzenden Ehrenrettungen, angesichts deren*

main currents which gained more credit over time; though with (sometimes determining) different details, nuances and feelings, the numerous opinions of scholars can at least be traced back to three basic views:

1. Lucian despised Christians and openly mocked them, describing them as ignorant and stupid and Jesus as a charlatan³⁷;
2. Lucian did not despise Christians – or maybe he even appreciated them – and used no irony in describing them as good people and Jesus as a positive and sage character³⁸;
3. Lucian was not interested in the Christian phenomenon at all and described Christians and their founder with evident irony, just like he did with any other religions and cult leaders³⁹.

As already mentioned, this is not the right place to discuss and analyse all the arguments lying behind the three proposals here resumed. The last option seems to be more suitable to the text and more coherent with Lucian's general attitude⁴⁰; nevertheless, it must also be admitted that – given the subtle and ambiguous nature of the passage and, above all, considering the almost complete lack of other adequate sources which could help clarifying Lucian's perception of the Christian phenomenon – no final word can be said with certainty, and good arguments supporting the other two points can be raised at any time. Such prudence, necessary in any enquiry related to the perception of religious phenomena in Antiquity, is indeed even more vital in the case of Lucian, whose reliability is always in question and whose attitude towards philosophies and religions is always ironically (and intentionally) ambiguous⁴¹.

Begeisterung man denn fragen muß, was eigentlich den Lukian gehindert hat, sich als Christ zu bekennen? Some references on this aspect have already been mentioned (vd. *supra* n. 8), other will be given in the following notes (37-39). See also CLAY 1992, KÖNIG 2006, STELLA 2007, 43-55.

³⁷ Cf. VAN VOORST 2000, 58-64, PERNOT 2002, 246-250, and the scholia to this passage (especially those of Arethas) in Rabe's edition (RABE 1906, 218-220). Here and in the next two notes, I limit myself to some significant names: for further references on this and the following currents, see BELTRAMINI 2018-2019, 10s.

³⁸ Cf. CURTI 1954, 107-109, KARAVAS 2010, 117-120, RAMELLI 2015, 109-112.

³⁹ Cf. BETZ 1959, 234-237, BALDWIN 1973, 102-104, MACLEOD 1991, 269-272.

⁴⁰ For the related arguments see BELTRAMINI 2018-2019, 77-81.

⁴¹ The attitude of Lucian towards religion and philosophy has always been one of the most discussed points in Lucianic studies. Religion, both in its classic expressions (Olympic deities and their myths) and in its new Imperial-Age phenomena (foreign

Bearing this situation of indefiniteness in mind, and therefore without attempting to solve the question once and for all, we can nevertheless try to outline a new reading of this passage (which does not necessarily exclude the others) using the value of σοφιστής as an instrument of enquiry: not a new hypothesis then, but rather a new perspective on the problem. If we limit the analysis of this term only to *Peregr.*, we notice that it is used only twice: once for Jesus, and once for Peregrinus himself (§ 32). It is hardly likely that an author like Lucian, so careful with his lexical choices, and so personally bound to this specific word, would have made this association without purpose. Instead, it is more legitimate to wonder what this juxtaposition might mean, and further research in this direction reveals other peculiar hints indeed. Throughout the text, both Peregrinus and Jesus are labelled as νομοθέται of a community, both are said to have been worshipped as deities by their disciples and of both is mentioned the notorious death. It is therefore clear that Jesus, in *Peregr.*, is presented as a counterpart and precursor of Peregrinus as a Christian leader – in the same way that Socrates is implicitly referred to as his precursor and model as a philosopher⁴². This close association of Jesus with Peregrinus can then be of vital help in our case: indeed, while on the one hand it is not possible to determine the value of σοφιστής associated with Jesus, on the other this is much easier with Peregrinus.

The name by which the enemy of Lucian wanted to be called was Proteus, and this character has indeed a multiform and ambiguous nature, yet one thing is certain: Lucian had by no means a positive consideration of him. Throughout the *Peregr.* he is depicted as a charlatan, a cheater, an immoral person who has done all the possible evil, and it is obvious that, among the seven nuances of σοφιστής detected in Lucian's works, only the fourth one – “false philosopher”, “charlatan” – can fit Peregrinus' description. One first possibility, therefore, could be that of extending this interpretation of σοφιστής also to Jesus. This would be also confirmed by the final words of § 13, where, after describing the Christian way of life, Lucian observes that they easily believe in what they are told “accepting such ideas without any precise proof”, and then concludes:

cults, prophets, oracles), is the main topic of many writings of Lucian (esp. *Conc. deor.*, *D. deor.*, *Iupp. conf.*, *Iupp. trag.*, *Sacr.*, *Alex.*), who always seems to laugh at such world, but without apparently denying it; on this topic see KARAVAS 2009, SPICKERMANN 2009, BERDOZZO 2011. Contemporary philosophers as well are one of the favorite targets of Lucian's dialogues (esp. *Fug.*, *Pisc.*, *Vit. auct.*, *Herm.*, *Symp.*), and much has been discussed about his personal inclinations, especially on his affinities with Cynicism and Scepticism: see DOLCETTI 1996, NESSELRATH 1998, BONAZZI 2010b, DECHARNEUX 2010, SOLITARIO 2017. Such lack of certainty must be reconnected to Lucian's problematic reliability and his attitude to truth and lie: cf. *supra* n. 2.

⁴² See esp. *Peregr.* 12. This and other internal hints suggesting a connection with Socrates are discussed in STELLA 2007, 33-43 and BELTRAMINI 2018-2019, 56-62.

ἦν τοίνυν παρέλθη τις εἰς αὐτοὺς γόης καὶ τεχνίτης ἄνθρωπος ... αὐτίκα μάλα πλούσιος ἐν βραχεὶ ἐγένετο ἰδιώταις ἀνθρώποις ἐγγανών.

If a charlatan and cunning man had come to them [...] he would have become very rich in the blink of an eye by mocking those naive people.

Here Lucian does not speak directly neither of Peregrinus nor of Jesus but refers generically to a potential Christian leader, and it is significant that, as a substitute for σοφιστής (which, we recall once again, has been used for both in their role of charismatic leaders) he uses γόης and ἀλαζών, which explicitly mean “charlatan”. In other words, this last point would seem to confirm that, in this context, σοφιστής means precisely “charlatan”, for both Peregrinus and Jesus⁴³. Nevertheless, this definition alone is not accurate enough. There is a second possibility, which could maybe complete this first one. As already suggested, it must be recalled that Lucian employs σοφιστής with this negative nuance referring not only to false philosophers or false wise men, but also to cult leaders, mystical or prophetic personalities poised in between philosophy, religion and popular superstition. For instance, he calls Pythagoras σοφιστής with this meaning (*Gall.* 4), that is, as a forerunner of that peculiar category of characters who were gaining popularity in the first centuries of the Imperial age and have been later labelled by historians of religions as “holy men”⁴⁴. They were charismatic characters, usually founders of new cults and worshipped by groups of fanatical followers, whose credulity they tended to take advantage of, and whom Lucian – unsurprisingly – laughed at on some occasions. We can find clear examples of his attacks against holy men in the *Alexander* or scattered all through the *Philopseudeis*, and the representation of Peregrinus in the text we are analysing fits perfectly within this trend. Therefore, basing on this interpretative key, when considering the definition of Peregrinus as σοφιστής it is necessary to read behind this term both the meaning of “charlatan”

⁴³ In this regard, see PERNOT 2002, where four different and all coexisting perspectives are recognised for such term: “le talent rhétorique, la subtilité d’une pensée philosophique, la volonté de tromper, le succès remporté par un personnage charismatique” (p. 248).

⁴⁴ On Pythagoras being a model and paradigm of θεῖος ἀνὴρ see BURKERT 1962, 98-142 and ANDERSON 1994, 11s. Besides the Samian, much has been written about this subject. One of the first studies on the θεῖοι ἄνδρες has been BIELER 1935-1936, followed in more recent times by ANDERSON 1994 and SKEB 2013. The present interpretation of σοφιστής as a special synonym for θεῖος ἀνὴρ is supported by the pioneering study of Anderson, who first detected the connections between the two figures (ANDERSON 1994, 6); on the hybrid nature of sophists in relation to the religious sphere (and in particular to Christianity) see also ESHLEMAN 2012.

and that of “holy man” – which are, in the end, not that different⁴⁵. In conclusion, and very plainly, since it is our opinion that in this text Jesus plays the role of forerunner and counterpart of Peregrinus, it seems legitimate to recognise also for him this double value of σοφιστής⁴⁶.

As stated earlier, this need not be the “right” interpretation of the passage – if ever one single right interpretation can exist. Nevertheless, considering the text in the light of its most untranslatable word has made it possible to find a plausible reading of it, which in turn could help finding a translation for the definition of Jesus as σοφιστής. Now, after having considered both the linguistic and the interpretative levels, we must ask ourselves how the results of this investigation can be turned into an adequate translation: how can this double value be rendered in a modern language? Or rather: what word or expression of a 21st-century language can encapsulate both the meaning of “charlatan” and that of “holy man”?

A(ny) final solution?

Before trying to give an answer to these questions, it may be useful to compare some of the translations proposed in different languages in recent years, in order to see how this problem has been addressed so far and then to start from where the question has been left. In this regard, the strategies adopted have always been basically two. The first and most common one consists in preserving the calque from Ancient Greek: we find *sophist* in the English translations⁴⁷, *sophiste* in French⁴⁸, *Sophist* in German⁴⁹ and *σοφιστής* in Modern Greek⁵⁰. The second one, instead, chosen only by Italian and Spanish translators, tries to go beyond the reproduction of the modern calque and to give an interpretation of σοφιστής, even though limited to its generic meaning as “wise man”: Stella⁵¹ translates it

⁴⁵ After all, the Peregrinus described by Lucian is chosen in ANDERSON 1994 as one of the canonical examples of this category, as also in LUCIAN 2020.

⁴⁶ This reading fits with the picture of Jesus drawn in SMITH 1978, based on the representations of the Nazarene in other contemporary sources depicting him as a “holy man”, meant as a hybrid character in between a miracle worker, a magician and a charlatan. On the peculiar coexistence of divine and negative attributes in the notion of holy men, see the recent papers collected in PANAYOTAKIS *et alii* 2015, among which the study of I. Ramelli (pp. 105-120) is of great interest for the present research.

⁴⁷ COSTA 2006, 77. His translation is identical (even in the surrounding wording: “that crucified sophist”) to those of HARMON 1955 [1936], 14 and MACLEOD 1991, 155.

⁴⁸ MARQUIS 2017, 86.

⁴⁹ PILHOFER *et alii* 2005, 25.

⁵⁰ LUCIAN 2020, 43.

⁵¹ STELLA 2007, 149. His translation is identical to that of SETTEMBRINI (1862, 109) and similar to LONGO’s (1993, 553) “gran saggio”.

with “sapiente” and Alsina⁵² with “filósofo” generically meant. Both strategies have their reasons and both have some critical sides but, above all, both reveal a precise conception of the act of translating – and, more precisely, of the problem of untranslatability.

Translating the σοφιστής of *Peregr.* 13 with “sophist” means renouncing to render an untranslatable word and preserving the original term with all its ambiguities and subtle different nuances. On the other side, as our analysis of the term has revealed, the calque from Ancient Greek in modern languages has its own steady double meaning (“fifth-century Athenian sophist” or “someone who recurs to sophistry”) which has little to do with this passage. Therefore, finding a different term which could fit better with the context seems more reasonable and, paradoxically, more faithful towards the original text. Nevertheless, rendering σοφιστής with “wise man” is, in turn, too cautious, since it chooses the less specific meaning among the many available, while here Lucian’s wording requires a strong and precise connotation.

Given this situation, it is now time to propose our own translation of this passage, distancing ourselves both from the interpretative proposals given so far and, above all, from the common reproduction of the Greek calque, which implies a consideration of untranslatability as a static and given situation which cannot be solved *a priori*. Quite the opposite, the untranslatable nature of a term is not an absolute, but rather the result of certain – and always different – circumstances, such as, in this case, the coexistence of lexical and interpretative ambiguity. As B. Cassin brilliantly stated, untranslatable is not “ce qu’on ne traduit pas, mais [...] ce qu’on ne cesse pas de (ne pas) traduire. [...] une traduction ne fait jamais que stabiliser un trajet, avec plus ou moins d’intelligence et de bonheur, de force adaptée”⁵³. Therefore, bearing this idea in mind, and in the light of the interpretation of the passage here suggested, I propose to translate τὸν δὲ ἀνεσκολοπισμένον ἐκεῖνον σοφιστήν αὐτόν with “that same holy man hung to a pole”. Indeed, as we have seen, the notion of “holy man”, along with its primary meaning of θεῖος ἀνὴρ, implies by itself the slight nuance of disapproval, or at least of mockery, which – according to our interpretation – Lucian’s definition of Jesus as σοφιστής holds⁵⁴.

⁵² ALSINA 1966, 132.

⁵³ CASSIN 2013. Cf. also, with special reference to ancient texts, MATTIOLI 1993, 53: *non esistono traduzioni definitive, né interpretazioni esaustive, l’idea di una traduzione trasparente, immagine rispecchiata dell’originale, è una pura ingenuità.*

⁵⁴ See *supra* n. 46. An analogous rendering in Italian would be *santone*, which perhaps better reconciles the notion of a religious leader and the sarcasm about his fraudulent nature – but each language contemplates its own concepts and has its own parameters for interpreting the world, and it is pointless to recriminate.

I am perfectly aware that this is not the only way to deal with this untranslatable situation, nor do I think that this can be in any case the “final” translation: translation is a dynamic fact, a dialogue between two actors which involves several factors and variables and cannot be final by definition⁵⁵. Nevertheless, I believe that the method here adopted, far from being the only one, might be an adequate starting point for facing the challenge of translating untranslatables⁵⁶.

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⁵⁵ Cf. CASSIN 2013: “de bonnes traductions, il n'y en a pas qu'une ; en revanche, il y a des traductions meilleures que d'autres à certains moments et pour certaines fins”.

⁵⁶ After all, *se esiste una funzione della traduttologia, anche nel campo della classicità, mi sembra che debba essere proprio questa: rendere consapevoli delle opzioni traduttive sia i traduttori che i fruitori delle traduzioni* (MATTIOLI 1993, 58).

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