Preliminary Remarks on the Latin of Jerome

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INTRODUCTION

Linguistic style is often developed through schooling and studies, over decades.[1] Jerome of Stridon was not an exception. The present paper aims at rediscovering the artistic qualities of Jerome's Latin, an aspect not exactly in the center of scholarly attention.[2] This being a preliminary project, the author does not attempt to list every single aspect of Jerome's Latin in detail, an impossible task due to the vast literary landscape he has left behind. Instead, this article strives to explore the beauty of the Stridonian's idiom. To understand Jerome as a writer, it seems opportune to trace back his erudition, to understand how he was formed. Jerome, like so many other *discipuli* of his time, attended classes in grammar and rhetoric by Aelius Donatus and Marius Victorinus. Donatus was a particularly strong influence.[3] After

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[2] To compare the number of the recent studies on Jerome as theologian, exegete, translator, or biographer, on the one hand, and the number of those that address Jerome as a stylist, on the other, is a sombering task, as the intensity of research differs by several orders of magnitude. One of the key works on Jerome's Latin dates back to 1964; see Wiesen, *St. Jerome as a Satirist*. Even though he is being hailed as "the Christian Cicero" (see Hritzu, "Comments on Patristic Literature," 230), little can be found regarding his literary talents. This is not to say that such studies do not exist; for a recent example, see Cain, "Two Allusions to Terence, *Eunuchus* 579 in Jerome."

[3] Campenhausen, *I Padri della Chiesa latina*, 138; Colafrancesco, "Una lezione da 'maestro' nell'epistolario di Girolamo," 169–170; Brugnoli, "Donato e Girolamo."

concluding his studies in Rome,[4] Jerome went to Trier (after 367),[5] where he decided to become a monk and follow the ascetic life.[6] At the beginning of his newly converted existence, after his short stay at Aquileia, Jerome traveled several times to see the Desert Fathers and other influential figures of his time, becoming acquainted with both geography and inhabitants of the Holy Land. The following passage is from his *Epistula* 84:

> Apollinarem Laodicenum audiui Antiochiae frequenter et co-lui et, cum me in sanctis scripturis erudiret, numquam illius contentiosum super sensu dogma suscepi. […] perrexi tamen Alexandriam, audiui Didymum. in multis ei gratias ago. quod nesciui, didici; quod sciebam, illo diuersum docente non perdidi. putabant me homines finem fecisse discendi: rursum Hierosolymae et Bethleem quo labore, quo pretio Baraninam nocturnum habui praeceptorem! timebat enim Iudaeos et mihi alterum exhibebat Nicodemum. horum omnium frequenter in opusculis meis facio mentionem.[7]

> At Antioch I frequently listened to Apollinaris of Laodicea, and attended his lectures; yet, although he instructed me in the holy scriptures, I never embraced his disputable doctrine as to their meaning. […] Yet I went on to Alexandria and heard Didymus. And I have much to thank him for: for what I did not know I learned from him, and what I knew already I did not forget. So excellent was his teaching. Men fancied that I had now made an end of learning. Yet once more I came to Jerusalem and to Bethlehem. What trouble and expense it cost me to get Baraninas to teach me under cover of night. For by his fear of the Jews he presented to me in his own person a second edition of Nicodemus. Of all of these I have frequently made mention in my works.[8]

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4   The Roman school in the imperial period was divided into three progressive phases, with *ludi magister* responsible for primary learning, followed by secondary learning with *grammaticus*, and finally with *rhetor*. For more information see Ricucci, *Storia della Glottodidattica*, 17–44.

5   Cavallera, *Saint Jérôme: Sa vie et son oeuvre*, 17–19.

6   For Jerome's biography and writings, see Cavallera, *Saint Jérôme*; Kelly, *Jerome*; Rebenich, *Jerome*, 3–59.

7   *Ep.* 84.3 (CSEL 55, 122–123).

8   Translated by Fremantle, Lewis, and Martley; their translation for *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* is available online.

Jerome was influenced by the words of Apollinaris of Laodicea and Didymus the Blind, and, more significantly, Gregory of Nazianzus, who resided in Constantinople in 380–381. Later, in Bethlehem, Jerome learned Hebrew under the guidance of learned Jewish rabbis, occasionally turning to them while seeking convincing scholarly answers to biblical questions.

The Roman rhetoric studies of the academic *iter*, the teachings of Greek and Jewish masters whom Jerome met *extra Urbem*, and his vast reading experience contributed to his immense knowledge of the culture of his era. Norden himself praised his intellectual niveau, calling him the most learned amongst all the Christian Latin writers in a long time.[9]

INFLUENCES ON JEROME'S LATIN

Jerome himself confirmed that, until his "literary" conversion, he kept returning to the works of classical Latin writers in his personal readings. His famous *Epistula* 22 addressed to Paula's daughter Eustochium is a case in point. In this letter, Jerome, who was by that time already a Christian and a monk, admitted that he was excessively indulgent with pagan literature in his past. He made this revelation by reporting the well-known accusation of the Supreme Judge in his dream: *Ciceronianus es, non Christianus!*[10] Yet who were those pagan writers that Jerome was accused of reading? Some hints can be found in his own confession:

> [B]ibliotheca, quam mihi Romae summo studio ac labore confeceram, carere non poteram. itaque miser ego lecturus Tullium ieiunabam. post noctium crebras uigilias, post lacrimas, quas mihi praeteritorum recordatio peccatorum ex imis uisceribus eruebat, Plautus sumebatur in manibus.[11]

> I could not bring myself to forget the library which with great care and labour I had got together at Rome. And so, miserable man that I was, I would fast, only to read Cicero afterwards. I would spend

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9　Norden, *La prosa d'arte antica*, 655.

10　*Ep.* 22.30 (CSEL 54, 190). For further information on the influence of the classical culture on different Christian writers see Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture.*

11　*Ep.* 22.30 (CSEL 54, 189).

long nights in vigil, I would shed bitter tears called from my inmost heart by the remembrance of my past sins; and then I would take up Plautus again.[12]

Besides Cicero and Plautus, the two authors cited in this passage, Jerome read other luminaries during his Roman education. Some of these writers, such as Virgil, Sallust, Terence, and Horace, are mentioned in his *Apologia* against Rufinus:

Puto quod puer legeris Aspri in Vergilium ac Sallustium commentarios, Vulcatii in orationes Ciceronis, Victorini in dialogos eius, et in Terentii comoedias praeceptoris mei Donati, aeque in Vergilium, et aliorum in alios, Plautum uidelicet, Lucretium, Flaccum, Persium atque Lucanum.[13]

I believe that, as a boy, you read Asper's commentaries on Virgil and Sallust, Vulcatius' on Ciceronian *Orations*, Victorinus' on his own *Dialogues* and on the comedies of Terence, and Donatus', my master's, on Virgil and on other writers such as Plautus, Lucretius, Flaccus, Persius, and Lucan.

This extended list of Latin writers could be much longer, if one considers the names of those *auctores* usually mentioned in the context of the *grammaticus.* These included Virgil, Sallust, Terence, Lucretius, Horace, Persius, Lucan, and several others.[14]

In addition to classical texts, the Stridonian studied both Greek and Latin Christian writers.[15] He mentions the *scriptores ecclesiastici,*[16] such as Tertullian, Cyprian, Lactantius, Hilary, and Ambrose.[17] Christians commonly read their works, and Jerome was no exception. When he was in Trier (after 366), he copied the codex of Hilary of Poitiers for

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12   Translated by F. A. Wright, *Select Letters of St. Jerome* (LCL 262, 125).

13   *Apologia adversus libros Rufini* 1.16 (SC 303, 46).

14   Pugliarello, "A lezione dal *grammaticus,*" 592–610.

15   Apart from Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, Brown thinks Jerome must have had only a minimal knowledge of Syriac and Aramaic: Brown, *"Vir Trilinguis,"* 82–85. On the other hand, Canellis points out that in addition to biblical Hebrew, Jerome had knowledge of biblical Aramaic, which he called "Syriac" or "Chaldean," as well as some rudiments of Syriac proper (the Aramaic spoken in Edessa) and Arabic: Canellis, *Saint Jerome*, 77–88.

16   *De viris illustribus*, praefatio 1.

17   For example, in *Letter* 22 of Jerome one finds direct and indirect quotes of Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose (22.15; 22.22).

his friend Rufinus.[18] The codex contained an exegetical commentary of the Psalms and through this experience, Jerome familiarized himself with Hilary's Latin. In *De viris illustribus,* Jerome commented on the Latin and the style of each included author.

Jerome's knowledge of Latin literature, which thus included both pagan and Christian writers, consequently impacted his Latin proficiency.[19] By his time, *sermo Christianorum Latinus* was already maturing through the effort of writers such as Tertullian, Cyprian, and Lactantius.[20] The particular stylistic contribution of Jerome can be found by examining the biblical and monastic Latin, two of the newly formed genres within the vast domain of Christian Latin. Monastic Latin emerged in the fourth century,[21] interwoven by different literary genres – the lives of saints,[22] letters, monastic sermons, including those preached by Jerome to his fellow brothers in Bethlehem, and monastic rules (*regula*). Jerome himself coined a specific usage for numerous Latin words like *monachus*, *fratres*, *cella*, *cellula*, or *eremus*.

Biblical Latin, in the form of *Vetus Latina*, emerged in the second century, as can be seen in the biblical quotations of Cyprian and Tertullian. Jerome as an exegete and a Bible translator has decisively contributed to its development. On the mandate of Pope Damasus, Jerome was entrusted with the task of updating the translation of *Vetus Latina,*[23] and his new biblical translation was based on the *veritas Hebraica* and the *veritas Graeca*.[24] Through this mission, the Stridonian influenced vocabulary and syntax while creating a literary and faithful Latin translation of Greek and Hebrew texts. Further illustration will be given in the following section.

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18 Cavallera, *Saint Jérôme*, 19.

19 Hagendhal*,* "Jerome and the Latin Classics."

20 On the development of Latin theological terminology from Tertullian onwards see Simonetti, "Alcuni aspetti del linguaggio teologica da Tertulliano ad Agostino."

21 On the formation of monastic Latin and ascetic vocabulary see Pricco, "Alcune considerazioni sul linguaggio monastico"; and "Alle origini del latino monastico."

22 Jerome wrote biographies of three monks, Paulus, Malchus, and Hilarion.

23 *Vetus Latina* ("Old Latin," sc. Bible) was an umbrella term used to describe the many Latin translations of the Bible before Jerome's revision; see Burton, *The Old Latin Gospels*, specifically the book's third part, *The Old Latin Gospels as Linguistic Documents*.

24 Mazini, *Storia della lingua latina e del suo contesto* 2 (dealing with *Lingue socialmente marcate*), 125–127.

JEROME'S WIDE-RANGING LATIN STYLE

In general, the Latin of Jerome can be defined as Ciceronian, with inevitable variations,[25] which are due to the natural development of Latin in the imperial era and the influence of innovations within the Christian community. Later scholars sometimes referred to them as Christian Latin, *Latinitas Christianorum*.[26]

Jerome's Latin and his Translations

Jerome's Latin was versatile, indeed, almost chameleonic; and this diversity was carefully crafted to serve different purposes. The principal aim was translating different texts into Latin. By the time of Jerome, Greek illiteracy was an almost expected standard in the West.[27] Furthermore, there was the ecclesiastic necessity of translating Hebrew texts, particularly the Holy Scriptures. It is noteworthy that Jerome followed two different principles when he translated:

> Ego enim non solum fateor, sed libera uoce profiteor me in interpretatione Graecorum absque scripturis sanctis, ubi et uerborum ordo mysterium est, non *uerbum e uerbo*, sed *sensum exprimere de sensu*. Habeoque huius rei magistrum Tullium, qui Protagoram Platonis et Oeconomicum Xenofontis et Aeschini et Demosthenis duas contra se orationes pulcherrimas transtulit. Quanta in illis praetermiserit, quanta addiderit, quanta mutauerit, ut proprietates alterius linguae suis proprietatibus explicaret, non est huius temporis dicere.[28]

> For I myself not only admit but freely proclaim that in translating from the Greek (except in the case of the holy scriptures where even the order of the words is a mystery) I render *sense for sense* and not *word for word*. For this course I have the authority of Tully who has so translated the Protagoras of Plato, the Oeconomicus of Xenophon, and the two beautiful orations which Aeschines and Demosthenes delivered one against the other. What omissions, additions, and alterations he has made substituting the idioms of his own for those of

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25 Visočnik, "Latinski klasiki v Hieronimovih pismih," 150.

26 The interest in the study of Christian Latin was aroused by Schrijnen, *Charakteristik des altchristlichen Latein;* for *Nachleben* of the term and the discipline, however, see also Denecker, "Among Latinists."

27 Simonetti, *Storia della letteratura cristiana antica*, 497–498.

28 *Ep.* 57.5 (CSEL 54, 508), italics added.

another tongue, this is not the time to say. I am satisfied to quote the authority of the translator who has spoken as follows in a prologue prefixed to the orations.[29]

For the biblical texts, he employed the principle of *ad verbum* translation (or *verbum e verbo*, word-by-word, i.e., literal translation), which forbade him to pose with his linguistic talents. For the non-biblical texts, Jerome's Latin style changed drastically. He employed the principle of *ad sensum* (*sensum exprimere de sensu*, sense-by-sense). This can be seen in his translating of the works of Origen, where the style of his language was clearly modeled after Cicero.

To further illustrate Jerome's philosophy in translating texts from Greek to Latin, one can have a look at the biblical verse taken from *Revelation* 6:4 in order to show how faithful he was in rendering Greek into Latin and in his application of the translation *ad verbum*:

καὶ τῷ καθημένῳ ἐπ᾽ αὐτὸν ἐδόθη αὐτῷ λαβεῖν τὴν εἰρήνην […] καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ μάχαιρα μεγάλη

et qui sedebat super illum datum est ei ut sumeret pacem […] *et* […] *datus est illi gladius magnus*

An altogether different kind of Latin was used in his non-biblical translations, for the works of Origen, Didymus the Blind, or Eusebius of Caesarea.[30] As seen above, Jerome allowed himself more freedom, since he followed the *ad sensum* translation principle. His model was Cicero. In short, Jerome stated that he did not care for rendering word for word like a *fidus interpres*, and added that the approach which his malignant denigrators called "translation accuracy" (*veritas interpretationis*) was actually considered as *kakozelia,* "misdirected imitation," by the *docti,* the erudite class of Jerome's contemporaries. He quoted different classical writers as supporting evidence in the preface of his Latin translation of Eusebius' *Chronicon*, written in Constantinople, where he was influenced by Gregory of Nazianzus (380–381):

Terentius Menandrum, Plautus et Cecilius veteres comicos interpretati sunt. Numquid haerent in verbis: ac non decorem magis et elegantiam in translatione conservant? Quam vos veritatem

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29 Translated by Fremantle, Lewis, and Martley.

30 For a concise overview of his translations, see Gribomont, "Girolamo"; Rebenich, *Jerome*, 10–14.

interpretationis, hanc eruditi κακοζηλίαν nuncupant. Unde et ego doctus a talibus ante annos circiter viginti, et simili tunc quoque errore deceptus, certe hoc mihi a vobis obiiciendum nesciens, cum Eusebii Caesariensis Χρονικὸν in Latinum verterem, tali inter caetera usus sum Praefatione: "Difficile est alienas lineas insequentem, non alicubi excidere: et arduum, ut quae in alia lingua bene dicta sunt, eumdem decorem in translatione conservent. Significatum est aliquid unius verbi proprietate: non habeo meum quo id efferam: et dum quaero implere sententiam longo ambitu, vix brevis vitae spatia consummo. Accedunt hyperbatorum anfractus, dissimilitudines casuum, varietates figurarum: ipsum postremo suum, et, ut ita dicam, vernaculum linguae genus. Si ad verbum interpretor, absurde resonant: si ob necessitatem aliquid in ordine, vel in sermone mutavero, ab interpretis videbor officio recessisse."[31]

Terence has translated Menander; Plautus and Caecilius the old comic poets. Do they ever stick at words? Do they not rather in their versions think first of preserving the beauty and charm of their originals? What men like you call fidelity in transcription, the learned term pestilent minuteness. Such were my teachers about twenty years ago; and even then I was the victim of a similar error to that which is now imputed to me, though indeed I never imagined that you would charge me with it. In translating the Chronicle of Eusebius of Caesarea into Latin, I made among others the following prefatory observations: It is difficult in following lines laid down by others not sometimes to diverge from them, and it is hard to preserve in a translation the charm of expressions which in another language are most felicitous. Each particular word conveys a meaning of its own, and possibly I have no equivalent by which to render it, and I make a circuit to reach my goal, I have to go many miles to cover a short distance. To these difficulties must be added the windings of hyperbata, differences in the use of cases, divergencies of metaphor; and last of all the peculiar and if I may so call it, inbred character of the language. If I render word for word, the result will sound uncouth, and if compelled by necessity I alter anything in the order or wording, I shall seem to have departed from the function of a translator.[32]

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31   *Ep.* 57.5 (CSEL 54, 508).
32   Translated by Fremantle, Lewis, and Martley.

Jerome's Scholarly Latin

Jerome also worked at creating reference texts and dictionaries, helping the scholars of his time to better grasp both the Scriptures and their historical background. Among his memorable titles were *Onomasticon*, *Liber interpretationum Hebraicorum nominum* (in which one can find the etymology of the proper names mentioned in the Bible), the *Liber locorum,* "Book of Places," or *De locis Hebraicis,* "Book of Interpretation of Hebrew Names," which is a reference book of biblical topography, and *Hebraicae quaestiones in libro Geneseos,* "Book of Hebrew Questions on Genesis," covering topics from philology and geography to the historicity of the First Book of Moses.[33] In these works, Jerome dressed his Latin in a different garb, a scholarly outfit – a somewhat plainer, sober Latin, without traces of pomposity.

To offer a better idea, a passage of his *Hebraicae quaestiones in libro Geneseos* follows below. This work, which Jerome wrote as a *studium*,[34] has a fairly straightforward objective: to clarify certain erudite doubts regarding the Book of Genesis.

> *In principio fecit deus caelum et terram.* plerique aestimant, sicut in altercatione quoque Iasonis et Papisci scriptum est et Tertullianus in libro contra Praxeam disputat nec non Hilarius in expositione cuiusdam psalmi affirmat, in hebraeo haberi *in filio fecit deus caelum et terram*: quod falsum esse rei ipsius ueritas comprobat. nam et LXX interpretes et Symmachus et Theodotion *in principio* transtulerunt et in hebraeo scriptum est *bresith*, quod Aquila interpretatur *in capitulo*, et non *baben*, quod appellatur *in filio*. magis itaque secundum sensum quam secundum uerbi translationem de Christo accipi potest: qui tam in ipsa fronte Geneseos, quae caput librorum omnium est, quam etiam in principio Iohannis euangelistae caeli et terrae conditor approbatur. unde et in psalterio de se ipso ait *in*

33 Piras, *Storia della Letteratura patristica*, 317.
34 Cf. *Hebraicae quaestiones in libro Geneseos* (CCSL 72, 1–2): "Studii ergo nostri erit uel eorum, qui de libris hebraicis uaria suspicantur, errores refellere uel ea, quae in latinis et graecis codicibus scatere uidentur, auctoritati suae reddere, etymologias quoque rerum, nominum atque regionum, quae in nostro sermone non resonant, uernaculae linguae explanare ratione." ("The task of our study will therefore be either to reject the errors of those who suspect various things about Jewish books or, to restore proper authority to those things, which seem to abound in the Latin and Greek codices, and to explain through the reason of the vernacular language the etymologies of things, names and even regions, which do not resonate in our language.")

capitulo libri scriptum est de me, id est in principio Geneseos, et in euangelio *omnia per ipsum facta sunt, et sine ipso factum est nihil.* sed et hoc sciendum quod apud Hebraeos liber hic *bresith* uocatur, hanc habentes consuetudinem, ut uoluminibus ex principiis eorum nomina inponant.[35]

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. Many believe as it is also written in the debate between Jason and Papiscus and discussed by Tertullian in the book *Against Praxeas*; Hilary also confirms in his psalmodic exposition, which in the Hebrew language says: *in the son God created heaven and earth*: that it is false confirms the truth of the thing itself. In fact, even the LXX translators and Symmachus and Theodotion have translated *in the beginning* and in Hebrew one finds *bresith*, which Aquila translates into *chapter (head of a structure)*, and not *baben*, which means *in the son*. Therefore one could rather accept the translation according to the sense than according to the word about Christ, who is thus at the forehead of the book of Genesis, which is the head of all books, since even in the beginning of John the Evangelist he is stated to be the creator of heaven and earth. Therefore he also says this about himself in the Psalter: *In the headline chapter of the book it is written about me*, that is, in the beginning of Genesis and in the Gospel: *Everything was done through him and without him nothing was done*. But one must also know that among the Jews this book is called *bresith*, having this habit that they put the titles to the volumes from their beginnings.

It thus seems that the *varietas* of Jerome's language depended on specific necessity of the moment. The cases stated above are merely a handful of examples, illustrating his translation principle, be it *ad verbum* or *ad sensum*, his various literary genres, and his target readers.[36]

Jerome's Creative Latin

Jerome's Latin earned its particular admiration and its high acclaim by his astonishing mastery of the three literary genres – *epistula*, *vita*, and *apologia*. He revealed the true color of his Latin style in his numerous letters, in the three ascetic biographies, in several of the entries in *De viris illustribus,* and in his apologetical writings, composed to defend himself from the accusations of being an Origenist.

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35   *Hebraicae quaestiones in libro Geneseos* 1.1 (CCSL 72, 3).
36   Lagioia, "Alle soglie dei *commentarii.*"

In these works, he unleashed his thoughts, sentiments, spirituality, and erudition.[37] The copious content of his *epistolarium* can be seen as the epitome of all his learning. Even though only 125 of his letters are preserved, they present a dazzling illustration of his artistic talents and literary capability, in frequently incredibly personal writings. As Bardy noted, some present exegesis of obscure biblical passages; others are moral teachings on how to conduct ascetic life; and some are unique manifestations of his personal sentiments.[38] The following sections will investigate only some of the aspects of Jerome's Latin; namely his choice of imagery, attentiveness to detail, use of diminutives, and the positioning of short sentences. Examples from his letters, *Vita Malchi,* and *Chronicon* will serve as explanatory instruments, perhaps facilitating appreciation of Jerome's stylistic originality.

The Use of Imagery

The frequent use of images is a quality always present in Jerome's writings. In his *Epistula* 16, for example, he introduces his eulogy for the desert life with the imagery of a fragile boat amid tidal waves and the singing of the rowers:

> Sed quoniam e scopulosis locis enauigauit oratio et inter cauas spumeis fluctibus cautes fragilis in altum cumba processit, expandenda uela sunt uentis et quaestionum scopulis transuadatis laetantium more nautarum epilogi celeuma cantandum est. o desertum Christi floribus uernans! o solitudo, in qua illi nascuntur lapides, de quibus in

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37   Del Ton, "De latino scribendi genere sancti Hieronymi."

38   Bardy, *Storia della letteratura cristiana antica latina*, 289: "Everything is in his letters. One finds teachings on some of the more obscure passages of the Holy Scripture, aiming to enlighten Pope Damasus, Marcella, Sunnia, Fretela, and many others. One finds asceticism, which is meant to inspire the addressees with love for solitude and the horror of the world. One finds mercy, devotion, joy, sadness, resentment, hatred, and love. Sometimes Jerome surrenders himself to the sweetest intimacy. Sometimes he writes beautiful prose of eloquence for the general public. Such letters include those reporting the death of Nepotianus, of Paula, of Marcella; the *consolationes* to Paul and to Pammachius; the much-acclaimed letters to Eliodorus and to Nepotianus, where he discusses what a perfect life is. Jerome's correspondence is found in all countries; it reached Gaul, Spain, and even the Goths. Everyone wrote to him, and he replied to each of the senders. The approximately 125 letters we have of him sketch out a vivid portrayal of the Christian society between the late fourth and the early fifth century." (Translated by the author.)

Apocalypsi ciuitas magni regis extruitur! o heremus familiari deo gaudens! quid agis, frater, in saeculo, qui maior es mundo? Quam diu te tectorum umbrae premunt? quam diu fumeus harum urbium carcer includit?[39]

My discourse has now sailed clear of the reefs, and from the midst of hollow crags with foaming waves my frail bark has won her way into deep water. Now I may spread my canvas to the wind, and leaving the rocks of controversy astern, like some merry sailor sing a cheerful epilogue. O wilderness, bright with Christ's spring flowers! O solitude, whence come those stones wherewith in the Apocalypse the city of the mighty king is built! O desert, rejoicing in God's familiar presence! What are you doing in the world, brother, you who are more than the universe? How long is the shade of a roof going to confine you? How long shall the smoky prison of these cities shut you in?[40]

In *Vita Malchi*, Jerome employed the imagery of the maritime battle because a sailor was required to train in preparation for the possible armed confrontation. With this imagery, Jerome presented his *excusatio* for having composed this short piece as "training," before commencing his more important work – the *Chronica*:

Qui nauali proelio dimicaturi sunt, ante in portu et in tranquillo mari flectunt gubernacula, remos trahunt, ferreas manus et uncos praeparant, dispositumque per tabulata militem pendente gradu et labente uestigio stare firmiter assuescunt, ut quod in simulacro pugnae didicerint, in uero certamine non pertimescant. Ita et ego, qui diu tacui – silere quippe me fecit cui meus sermo supplicium est – prius exerceri cupio in paruo opere et ueluti quandam rubiginem linguae abstergere, ut uenire possim ad historiam latiorem.[41]

Those who are about to fight a naval battle, first wield the rudder in the harbor and on a quiet of the sea, pull up the oars, prepare hooks and harpoons, and accustom the marines deployed on deck, upholding firmly their position even in a sliding footing, so that they will not be afraid at the time of the real contest as they have learned during

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39 *Ep.* 14.10 (csel 54, 59–60).

40 Translated by F. A. Wright in *Select Letters of St. Jerome* (lcl 262, 49–51).

41 *Vita Malchi* 1.1–2 (sc 508, 184). For a detailed account on the ship metaphor, see Janson, *Latin Prose Prefaces*, 146–147, especially 147, where the author made a comparison of Quintilian and Jerome regarding the same imagery.

the mock battle. So I too, who have been silent for long – a certain man, to whom my words are a torture, forced me to be quiet– wish to practice myself first with a small piece of work, and cleanse, if I may put it that way, my tongue of rust, so that I can move on to a historical work of wider scope.

Attention to Detail

As a writer, Jerome was incredibly attentive and meticulous in describing details. The example of his description of ants in *Vita Malchi* illustrates this writing trait. Malchus the monk was enslaved and had to become a shepherd, watching his flock. One day, when he was taking a rest, he observed the ants' labor. These tiny creatures were dragging things that were bigger than they were, including a variety of seemingly small yet comparatively huge objects, such as the seeds of various plants. The ants then dug up the soil and constructed their anthill (*agger*); they transported corpses of other ants; and so forth. The scrupulous account impressed his readers. It gave the impression that Jerome himself was actually observing the ants through Malchus, even more, that the readers themselves were observing the tiny insect together with the enslaved shepherd:

> Sicque cogitans, aspicio formicarum gregem angusto calle feruere. Videres onera maiora quam corpora; aliae herbarum quaedam semina forcipe oris trahebant, aliae egerebant humum de foueis et aquarum meatus aggeribus excludebant. Illae uenturae hiemis memores, ne madefacta humus in herbam horrea uerteret, illata semina praecidebant; hae, luctu celebri, corpora defuncta portabant. Quodque magis mirum esset, in tanto agmine, egredientes non obstabant intranti; quin potius si quam sub fasce uidissent et onere concidisse, suppositis humeris adiuuabant.[42]

> While I am reflecting thus, I see a colony of ants bustling on a narrow path. You would see how the loads were bigger than the bodies. Some were dragging seeds with the pincers of the mouth; others were carrying soil out from the pits and blocking streams of water with ramparts. Still others, having the coming winter in mind, were cutting off the collected seeds so that the humid soil would not turn their barns into shoots; others were carrying away the corpses of the deceased, in a mournful procession. But the most marvelous thing

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42   *Vita Malchi* 7.2 (sc 508, 200–202).

was that, in all that swarming, those exiting were not a hindrance to
those entering; indeed, if they saw a companion fall under the load,
they would provide assistance by putting the load on their shoulders.

The Use of the Diminutive

Jerome was particularly partial to diminutives. Perhaps a few examples
from *Vita Malchi* can exemplify this inclination: *viculus* (2.1. < *vicus*
– village), *adulescentulus* (2.1, 11 < *adulescens* – adolescent), *agellus* (3.1
< *ager* – field), *possessiuncula* (3.5 < *possessio* – possession), *muliercula*
(4.3 < *mulier* – woman), *cellula* (7.3 < *cella* – room).

Lapidary Sentences

A large number of lapidary sentences was another gem of Jerome's
writing. They were inserted in specific positions, depending on the
stylistic need and the context. Their positioning is never mechanical,
sometimes they can be found at the end of a paragraph or a treatise,
serving as a conclusion; sometimes they appear at the beginning of
a paragraph, serving as an introduction to a new topic. These lapi-
dary maxims are not uncommon in classical literature and similar
usage can be found in other Christian and pagan writers, including
Tertullian, Cyprian, and Ambrose, or Sallust, Cicero, and Seneca.
    To give but a few examples of these pointed maxims:

> *Quid agis, frater, in saeculo, qui maior es mundo?*[43]
> What are you doing in the world, brother, you who are more than
> the universe?[44]

> *Ouis quae de ouili egreditur, lupi statim morsibus patet.*[45]
> The sheep that moves away from the fold immediately exposes itself
> to the jaws of the wolf.

> *O nihil umquam tutum apud diabolum! O multiplices et ineffabiles
> eius insidiae!*[46]
> Ah, there is nothing ever sure of the devil! Ah, how multifaceted and
> indescribable are his pitfalls.

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43 *Ep.* 14.10 (CSEL 54, 59).
44 Translated by F. A. Wright in *Select Letters of St. Jerome* (LCL 262, 49).
45 *Vita Malchi* 3.8 (SC 508, 192).
46 *Vita Malchi* 6.1 (SC 508, 197).

Facilius enim neglegentia emendari potest, quam amor nasci.[47]
The correction of carelessness is an easier matter than is birth of love.[48]

Ignoratio Scripturarum ignoratio Christi est.[49]
Ignorance of the Scriptures means ignorance of Christ.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this short article, serving as an *hors-d'œuvre* in exploring Jerome's Latin, is not to offer an exhaustive investigation of every aspect of Jerome's literary talents. Instead, it aims to present a sketchy overview of Jerome as a writer, since most of the scholarly focus keeps exploring him primarily as an exegete, a translator, or a biographer. By retracing Jerome's literary formation – from his Roman childhood under the supervision of Aelius Donatus, to his imitation of different Latin masters and his personal readings, this preliminary research outlines the two almost inseparable phenomena of his writings, namely his polychromatic literary style and his almost chameleonic Latin. This variety served a particular purpose: to address the necessities of different compositions, and to accommodate the different expectations by different groups of readers. The examples are drawn from Jerome's epistolary and from his biographies of the three monks, since these works showcased his originality and character. In these texts, Jerome was allowed to free himself from the Christian constraints, revealing his true character of a well-versed intellectual with profound knowledge of literature, an ascetic with aspiration to find the good living.

ABBREVIATIONS

CCSL	*Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina*
CSEL	*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*
LCL	*Loeb Classical Library*
SC	*Sources chrétiennes*

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47 *Ep.* 7.2 (CSEL 54, 28).
48 Translated by F. A. Wright in *Select Letters of St. Jerome* (LCL 262, 21).
49 *Commentarii in Esaiam, prologus* (CCSL 73, 1).

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents a preliminary study on the linguistic elements and the diversity of Jerome's Latin, with examples taken from some of his most notable works, his letters, biblical translations, *Vita Malchi*, and *De viris illustribus*, to demonstrate his particular contribution to the oft-discussed and problematized domain, namely the *Latinitas Christianorum*. The article offers a general overview of Jerome's literary formation, discussing the influence by classical Latin writers. To illustrate the kaleidoscope of Jerome's writing style, the analysis presents various genres of his writings, ranging from his biblical to non-biblical translation, from reference books and dictionaries to letters and biographies. The conclusion presents some of the linguistic characteristics of his writings to show the nuance in his mastery of Latin.

KEYWORDS: Jerome, stylistics, Latin translation, Christian Latin, Latin style

NEKAJ IZHODIŠČNIH OPAŽANJ O HIERONIMOVI LATINŠČINI

IZVLEČEK

Članek predstavlja pripravljalno študijo o jezikovnih elementih in raznolikosti Hieronimove latinščine. Primeri so vzeti iz nekaterih njegovih najpomembnejših del, kot so pisma, prevod Svetega pisma, *Vita Malchi* in *De viris illustribus*, prikazati pa skušajo njegov prispevek k razvoju področja, o katerem bi kazalo v luči številnih polemik verjetno še razpravljati; to je *latinitas christianorum*. Besedilo ponuja pregled Hieronimovega literarnega razvoja pod vplivom klasičnih latinskih piscev. Kalejdoskop Hieronimovega literarnega sloga članek predstavi skozi analizo različnih žanrov v njegovem opusu, od njegovih svetopisemskih in drugih prevodov do enciklopedičnih del in slovarjev, od pisem do biografij. Zaključek izpostavi nekatere jezikovne značilnosti Hieronimovih spisov, ki kažejo na izbrušenost njegove latinščine.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Hieronim, stilistika, prevajanje v latinščino, krščanska latinščina, latinski slog