

Zeitschrift: Museum Helveticum : schweizerische Zeitschrift für klassische Altertumswissenschaft = Revue suisse pour l'étude de l'antiquité classique = Rivista svizzera di filologia classica

Herausgeber: Schweizerische Vereinigung für Altertumswissenschaft

Band: 53 (1996)

Heft: 1

Artikel: An echo of Hilary of Poitiers in Jerome

Autor: Adkin, Neil

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-41326>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 09.07.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

An Echo of Hilary of Poitiers in Jerome

By Neil Adkin, University of Nebraska at Lincoln

A quarter of a century ago Doignon remarked that “un domaine qui est encore inexploré est celui de l’influence du style d’Hilaire sur la littérature chrétienne postérieure”¹. In the particular field of Hilarian influence on the style of Jerome no advance would seem to have been made since Doignon’s observation. Such lack of progress is surprising. Hilary is mentioned alongside Tertullian as an author to whom the young Jerome had devoted close attention (*Epist.* 5.2.2–3)². Jerome also commends Hilary together with Tertullian as a model of arresting diction³. Jerome’s debt to Tertullianic phraseology has recently been shown to be very considerable indeed⁴. It would accordingly be natural for Jerome to have made similar use of Hilary. The purpose of the present note is to draw attention to an instance of such borrowing from Hilary’s *De trinitate*.

In the above-mentioned letter Jerome asks for the return of two works of Hilary which he had copied with his own hand. The passage contains no explicit reference to the *De trinitate*; however it is clear that Jerome was thoroughly familiar with this treatise. The *De synodis*, to which the letter does refer, was closely associated with the work⁵. The notice devoted to Hilary in Jerome’s *De viris illustribus* (ch. 100) places the *De trinitate* first. On two other occasions Jerome makes detailed references to the contents of books seven and eleven respectively⁶. He also pays explicit tribute to the *De trinitate*’s style (*Epist.* 70.5.3).

1 J. Doignon, “Hilaire écrivain”, in: *Hilaire et son temps* (Paris 1969) 277.

2 Latin works are cited according to *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae: Index Librorum Scriptorum Inscriptionum* (Leipzig 1990); the editions used are those in H. J. Frede, *Kirchenschriftsteller: Verzeichnis und Sigel*, Vetus Latina 1/1 (Freiburg 1981) and its *Aktualisierungshefte* (1984 and 1988).

3 *In Is. lib.* 8, praef. ll. 11ff.: *qui si flumen eloquentiae et concinnas declamationes desiderant, legant ... Tertullianum ... Hilarium*. On Jerome’s estimate of Hilary’s *eloquentia* cf. J. Doignon, *Hilaire de Poitiers avant l’exil* (Paris 1971) 49–55.

4 For a summary of the pertinent scholarship from 1968 to 1988 cf. the present writer, “Tertullian in Jerome (*Epist.* 22.37.1f.)”, *SOslo* 68 (1993) 129f. For additional evidence of Jerome’s indebtedness cf. further the present writer, “Tertullian’s *De ieiunio* and Jerome’s *Libellus de virginitate servanda* (*Epist.* 22)”, *WSt* 104 (1991) 149–160; id., “‘Istae sunt, quae solent dicere’: Three Roman Vignettes in Jerome’s *‘Libellus de virginitate servanda* (*Epist.* 22)’”, *MusHelv* 49 (1992) 131–140; id., “Tertullian’s *De idololatria* and Jerome”, *Augustinianum* 33 (1993) 11–30; id., “Tertullian’s *De praescriptione haereticorum* and Jerome’s *Libellus de virginitate servanda* (*Epist.* 22)”, forthcoming in *Eirene* 30 (1993).

5 In ancient MSS it appears as the 13th book of the *De trinitate*; cf. X. Le Bachelet, “Hilaire (Saint)”, *Dict. de Théol. Cath.* 6. 2 (1947) 2398.

6 *Viz. Vir. ill.* 86; *Epist.* 55.3.2.

Chapter thirty-nine of Jerome's *Libellus de virginitate servanda* (Epist. 22) stresses the difficulty of the virgin's calling. Here the following passage occurs: *dei filius pro nostra salute hominis factus est filius, decem mensibus in utero, ut nascatur, expectat, fastidia sustinet, cruentus egeritur, involvitur pannis, blanditiis deridetur et ille, cuius pugillo mundus includitur, praesepe continetur angustis. taceo, quod usque ad tricesimum annum ignobilis parentum paupertate contentus est; verberatur et tacet; crucifigitur et pro crucifigentibus deprecatur. quid igitur retribuam domino pro omnibus, quae retribuit mihi?* (39.2–3). This and the adjacent sections of the chapter contain multiple borrowings from Tertullian, Cyprian and Ambrose⁷. It would therefore be no surprise if an echo of Hilary were also present.

Catalogues of the stages of Christ's abasement such as the one quoted above occur three times in Tertullian⁸; Jerome borrows from two of them in this section of the *Libellus*⁹. Apart from a passage in Melito of Sardis¹⁰, the only other example of such a catalogue prior to Jerome would seem to be found in Hilary's *De trinitate* (2.24–27). This particular instance is especially memorable owing to expansion and then multiple repetition of the initial formulation¹¹. The passage in question also occupies a prominent position near the

7 S. Deléani, "Présence de Cyprien dans les œuvres de Jérôme sur la virginité", in: Y.-M. Duval (ed.), *Jérôme entre l'Occident et l'Orient* (Paris 1988) 77 thinks the passage quoted is a summary of chs. 6–9 of Cyprian's *De bono patientiae*. The assumption is unwarranted; cf. the present writer, "Some Alleged Echoes of Cyprian in Jerome" (forthcoming). Deléani (ib.) correctly identifies *in utero ... expectat* as an echo of Tertullian, *Patient.* 3.2. However the influence of this section of Tertullian's treatise is far more substantial here: for Jerome's *taceo, quod ... crucifigitur* cf. the Tertullianic *taceo quod figitur* (3.9); for his *usque ad tricesimum annum ignobilis* cf. *adultus non gestit agnosci* (3.2); for *verberatur* cf. *verberatur* (3.9); finally for *tacet* (the detail is not biblical) cf. *non ... aperit os* (3.7). In addition Jerome has appropriated *blanditiis deridetur* from Tertullian, *Carn.* 4 l. 13. His *fastidia sustinet* echoes Vergil, *Ecl.* 4.61; cf. W. H. Fremantle, *The Principal Works of St. Jerome*, Sel. Libr. of Nic. and Post-Nic. Fathers 2. 6 (Oxford 1893) 40 n. 5. Shortly before and after the section quoted Jerome borrows two striking phrases (*conmortuus est domino suo et conresurrexit* [39.1]; *sanguis sanguine compensatur* [39.3]) from Ambrose, *Virginit.* 13.82 and 19.127; cf. the present writer, "The Date of Ambrose's *De virginitate*", *WüJbb* n.s. 18 (1992) 242f. Finally Jerome's *Abel iustus occiditur* (39.4) has been lifted from Cyprian, *Epist.* 6.2.

8 Viz. *Carn.* 4 ll. 3–13; *Adv. Marc.* 4.21 pp. 490.24–491.9; *Patient.* 3.2–9.

9 Cf. n. 7.

10 *New. fr.* 2.6 (ed. S. G. Hall, *Melito of Sardis On Pascha and Fragments*, Oxford 1979, 87f.). There is no evidence that Jerome had any first-hand knowledge of Melito; cf. S. von Sychowski, *Hieronymus als Litterarhistoriker*, Kirchengesch. Stud. 2. 2 (Münster/W. 1894) 116.

11 The expansion, in which each item of Hilary's original catalogue (pp. 60.13–61.1 of P. Smulders' edition, *CCSL* 62, Turnhout 1979) undergoes amplification in the form of an elaborate paradox, occupies the first half of ch. 25 (p. 61.3–10). The terms of the initial catalogue are then repeated in a section linking the very end of ch. 26 to the start of the next (p. 62.1f.) and again at the close of ch. 27 (p. 63.22f.); they also recur in reverse order at the beginning of ch. 26 (p. 61.1–3 [bis]) and once again in the middle of ch. 27 (p. 63.16–20). Neither the expansion nor the multiple repetition is registered by E. P. Meijering, "Hilary of Poitiers on the Trinity: *De Trinitate*, 1.1–19.2.3", *Philos. Patrum* 6 (Leiden 1982) 108–114; he also fails to cite any parallels for this catalogue of Christ's humiliations.

beginning of the treatise¹². These words of Hilary in fact enjoyed a certain celebrity: they are quoted twice in the tractates ascribed to Priscillian and once by John Cassian¹³.

The particular wording of Hilary's initial formulation of his catalogue is the following: *dei igitur imago invisibilis pudorem humani exordii non recusavit, et per conceptionem partum vagitum cunas omnes naturae nostrae contumelias transcucurrit. quid tandem dignum a nobis tantae dignationis adfectui rependetur?* (2.24f.). It is noteworthy that Jerome's catalogue concludes with exactly the same question as Hilary's¹⁴: *quid igitur retribuam domino pro omnibus, quae retribuit mihi?* (39.3). Here the *De trinitate* would seem to have given Jerome his cue. Unlike his predecessor however Jerome has characteristically chosen to express himself in the language of scripture: his own wording is a slight adaptation of *Psalm* 115.12¹⁵.

The second sentence in Hilary's expansion of this catalogue runs as follows: *qui omnia continet, et intra quem et per quem cuncta sunt, humani partus lege profertur* (2.25). Precisely the same paradox occurs in the middle of Jerome's own enumeration of Christ's humiliations: *ille, cuius pugillo mundus includitur, praesepe continetur angustiis* (39.2). Here too Jerome is evidently drawing on the *De trinitate*¹⁶. However Hilary's rather plain antithesis has again been invested with the language of the bible: the first half of Jerome's formulation echoes Isaiah 40.12, which in the Old Latin version runs *quis mensus est manu aquam et caelum palmo et omnem terram pugillo?*¹⁷.

12 It occurs in the second of the *De trinitate*'s twelve books. The first three would seem to have formed a separate entity (cf. C. Kannengiesser, "Hilaire de Poitiers (saint)", *Dict. de Spiritualité* 7, 1, 1969, 477, 479); they set out the doctrine of the trinity, whereas the remaining nine refute Arian objections. Since the first book is largely a summary of the work's contents, the second is highly prominent. On Jerome's partiality for borrowing from the early sections of a work cf. P. Petitmengin, "Saint Jérôme et Tertullien", in Y.-M. Duval (n. 7) 50.

13 Priscillian, *Tract.* 4.79 and 6.104; Cassian, *C. Nest.* 7.24.3.

14 Such a question is found in no other instance of these enumerations of Christ's self-abasement.

15 He follows it with verses 13 and 15. The same combination had also occurred in Cyprian, *Epist.* 76.4; there too the reference had been to martyrdom, as in the present passage of the *Libellus*. However there is no reason to see Cyprianic influence here: verse 14 is regularly omitted from the Old Latin version (cf. P. Sabatier, *Bibliorum sacrorum latinae versiones antiquae* 2, Reims 1743, 228), while verse 15 is commonly applied to martyrdom (cf. [e.g.] Cyprian, *Fort.* 12; *Testim.* 3.16).

16 No other example of this particular paradox would seem to be earlier than the *Libellus*.

17 So P. Sabatier (n. 15) 580. For the heavy reliance on biblical allusion in the *Libellus* cf. the present writer, "Jerome's Use of Scripture Before and After his Dream", forthcoming in *ICS* 20 (1995). The second half of Jerome's antithesis also marks a stylistic improvement over the *De trinitate*: he introduces a vividly concrete reference to the manger as well as an elegant hyperbaton (for the double cretic clausula cf. M. C. Herron, "A Study of the Clausulae in the Writings of St. Jerome", *Cath. Univ. of Am. Patr. Stud.* 51, Washington 1937, 27–32). The whole formulation is in fact subtly chiasmic: *pugillo ... includitur ... continetur angustiis*. On Jerome's habit of enhancing the stylistic finesse of the material he borrows cf. the present writer, *artt. citt.* (n. 4) *passim*.

This section of the *De trinitate* would also appear to have influenced one other passage of Jerome. Just a few months before his *Libellus de virginitate* he had produced the *Adversus Helvidium de Mariae virginitate perpetua*¹⁸. This treatise also includes a catalogue of Christ's humiliations at the incarnation (18). Here too Jerome is indebted to Tertullian: the phrase *uterum insolescentem* has been lifted straight from the parallel enumeration in *De carne Christi* (4 ll. 6f.).

Jerome opens this catalogue as follows: *iunge si libet et alias naturae contumelias, novem mensibus uterum insolescentem, fastidia, partum, sanguinem, pannos*. The locution *naturae contumelias* is also found in the *De trinitate* (2.24). However the same expression had occurred in Tertullian's *De carne Christi* as well (4 l. 47)¹⁹. There would nonetheless seem to be good grounds for thinking that here Jerome had the Hilarian passage in mind. In the first place Tertullian's use of the phrase is separated from his enumeration of Christ's abasement by thirty-four lines of text. Hilary and Jerome on the other hand incorporate the formulation into the catalogue itself. Both authors in fact employ the words *naturae contumelias* to summarize an anaphoric sequence of nouns which evoke the lowliness of Christ's birth: the two series show a close similarity²⁰.

Jerome's catalogue in the *Adversus Helvidium* would appear to have taken one more cue from this section of the *De trinitate*. Hilary's expansion of his initial formulation of Christ's self-abasement had been immediately succeeded by the following affirmation: *haec si quis indigna deo recolet, tanto se maioris beneficii obnoxium confitebitur, quanto minus haec dei convenerint maiestati* (2.25). Exactly the same statement rounds off Jerome's own enumeration: *quanto sunt humiliora quae pro me passus est, tanto plus illi debeo*. The phrasing has merely undergone some simplification²¹.

18 On the relative dating of the two works cf. F. Cavallera, *Saint Jérôme: Sa vie et son œuvre* 1, 2, Spic. Sacr. Lovan. 2 (Louvain/Paris 1922) 24f.

19 This particular formulation is unattested elsewhere; cf. *ThLL* IV. 799.18–803.36 (s.v. *contumelia*; the article on *natura* has not yet appeared); *Cetedoc Library of Christian Latin Texts* (Turnhout 1991).

20 The term *partum*, which does not occur in the other descriptions of Christ's abasement, is common to both sequences. Hilary's *vagitum* appears in Jerome two lines later.

21 By way of appendix attention may be given to one last passage from the section of the *Libellus de virginitate* discussed above, where it is perhaps possible to detect the influence of a different work of Hilary. Jerome follows his catalogue of Christ's humiliations by observing that the saints also suffered; in particular it is noted that *Abraham uxorem periclitatur amittere* (39.4). Abraham's tribulations are regularly exemplified by the sacrifice of his son Isaac; cf. (e.g.) Cyprian, *Epist.* 58.5; id., *Testim.* 3.15; Ps. Cyprian, *Laud. mart.* 18. The only passages prior to the *Libellus* in which Sarah's plight had been used in illustration would seem to be Hilary, *In psalm.* 127.7 and 138.4. These psalms belonged to the corpus of Hilary's commentary that was known to Jerome; cf. *Vir. ill.* 100 (his remark there that *imitatus Origenem nonnulla etiam de suo addidit* is unjust; cf. C. Kannengiesser [n. 12] 483). Jerome had copied out Hilary's commentary on the Psalms with his own hand (*Epist.* 5.2.3). In connection with

A number of remarks may be made by way of conclusion. All Jerome's borrowings from Tertullian in the two passages considered above are more or less verbatim. The same is not however true of his debt to Hilary. A reason for this disparity may be advanced. For all his high estimate of Hilary's literary refinement Jerome nonetheless found that his style tended to redundancy and diffuseness: *sanctus Hilarius Gallicano coturno adtollitur et, cum Graeciae floribus adornetur, longis interdum periodis involvitur* (*Epist.* 58.10.2)²². Tertullian on the other hand was partial to sententious formulations; in the same letter Jerome observes that *Tertullianus creber est in sententiis* (*Epist.* 58.10.1). It is precisely this lack of incisiveness in Hilary's style which explains why Jerome's borrowings from him are neither as close nor as frequent as they are from Tertullian.

this passage of the *Libellus* S. Deléani (n. 7) 77f. n. 50 compares Tertullian, *Cult. fem.* 2.2 ll. 45–48; however the reference there is simply to the dangers attendant on beauty, not to the tribulations of the righteous.

- 22 This statement is discussed by P. Antin, "Hilarius Gallicano cothurno attollitur", *RevBén* 57 (1947) 82–88. However he fails to draw any conclusions for the question of Hilary's stylistic influence on Jerome.