Jerome, Jews, and "Hebrews"

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During his own lifetime St Jerome attracted controversy over his espousal of the Hebrew text as the source of scriptural authority for the Christian Old Testament. However, the eventual acceptance of the version he translated from the Hebrew was recognised in 1298 when he was proclaimed a "Doctor" of the Catholic Church. Yet in recent scholarship Jerome has become a rather ambivalent figure not only for his negative attitudes to sexuality and the body, but for mining "Hebrew" informants for their insights into Scripture while characterizing Jewish interpretations of the same Scriptures as carnal or ridiculous. This essay explores the contradictions in Jerome's attitude towards adherents of the elder faith.

Although Jerome wrote all kinds of works — learned letters, commentaries on the bible, saints' lives, translations of Greek theological works — his most influential and lasting achievement was his rendering of the Hebrew Bible into Latin. Although it was later known as the Vulgate, the "common" or "widely known" version, Jerome referred to it as the *iuxta Hebraeos* (henceforth IH), the version "according to the Hebrews", "Hebrews" being the term Jerome employed for Jews who were thoroughly conversant with Hebrew.

The IH version was an astonishing piece of scholarship and indeed a superb legacy to the Latin Church. Yet it took centuries to supersede and displace texts of the "Old Latin" version, a series of piecemeal translations based on the Greek Septuagint version.[2] (The Septuagint had itself started out as a series of translations carried out by Jews between the mid-third century BCE and the late first century CE, and in due course was credited by Greek and Latin Christians as uniquely and providentially inspired.)

Jerome's biography has been explored by a number of scholars, including John Kelly,[3] Stefan Rebenich,[4] and Megan Hale Williams.[5] He was born sometime in the 340s in Stridon in Dalmatia, to

[1] An earlier form of this essay was delivered as a Montefiore Lecture at Southampton University in November 2019. It is a great honour and privilege to be able to offer a more considered form to Martin Goodman, in recognition of and gratitude for his scholarship, his friendship, and his support (something especially appreciated by a female scholar with young children, in what was initially a very male and traditional environment), over the course of more than thirty years.

[2] See Stefan Rebenich, "Jerome: the 'Vir Trilinguis' and the 'Hebraica veritas'", *Vigiliae Christianae* 47 (1993): 50–51 [50–77].

[3] J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies*. (London: Duckworth, 1975).

[4] Stefan Rebenich, *Jerome*. Early Church Fathers (London: Routledge, 2002).

[5] Megan Hale Williams, *The Monk and the Book. Jerome and the Making of Christian Scholarship* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

a Christian family that was comfortably off but not aristocratic. (This may have been a factor in what became his relentless pursuit of upper-class patrons in the course of his career.) Sent off to Rome for secondary education, he was baptised, then went to Trier, capital of Roman Gaul, perhaps hoping to become a civil servant. At this point he became strongly drawn to an ascetic Christian lifestyle. In the fourth century, under Constantine's successors, martyrdom for the faith was no longer either a possibility or an option. Christians ambitious for spiritual reward were therefore attracted to renunciation of the world and worldly values during their earthly lives.[6] This entailed celibacy, and giving up more than the most basic food, clothing and levels of comfort. Jerome left off pursuing a secular career and spent some time in a newly established, semi-monastic community in Aquileia.[7] He then planned a pilgrimage to Jerusalem but only managed to reach Antioch. In Syria he tried out the ascetic lifestyle in what he refers to as the "desert" or solitude of Chalcis[8] for a couple of years, c. 374/5. In later life he often boasted about his experience there, to encourage other elite Christians to commit to a similar way of living. Stefan Rebenich has disputed his presentation of this period, noting that in the long letters that Jerome wrote at the time to his friends in various places he talks of reading and dictating to students and studying, something rather difficult to do in a remote cave in the desert with few amenities. So as Rebenich suggests, it is more likely that Jerome merely led a semi-secluded life on Maronia, the country estate of his friend Evagrius.[9] Jerome later chose to represent his time in Chalcis as an imitation of the great ascetic heroes like St Antony of Egypt, in an attempt to attract high-born Christian friends to a similar life-style. In any case, this rather brief period of a couple of years came to an end when Jerome became embroiled in theological controversy and had to leave for Antioch, where he was ordained as a priest.

A key aspect of Jerome's stay in Chalcis is that he claims that this was where he started to learn Hebrew. First he overcame his Roman prejudice towards "barbarian" languages by learning spoken Aramaic, the language of the local people, who apparently knew no Latin or Greek.[10] Then a "brother" in the community who was a Jewish convert to Christianity taught him Hebrew.[11]

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[6] Williams, *The Monk and the Book*, 10–11.

[7] The city was much larger in antiquity, but still survives today. It is located in north-eastern Italy on the edge of the Adriatic.

[8] He uses the terms *heremus* "wilderness", *solitudo* "solitude", and *desertum* "deserted place" in *Epp*. 5.1; 7:1; 15:2; 16.2 written during that period, and speaks of "heremus… vasta solitudo" "a wilderness… an empty desert" around a decade later, in *Ep*. 22.7.

[9] *Jerome*, 13–19.

[10] *Barbarus semisermo*, "barbarous gibberish" (tr. Rebenich, *Jerome*, 15), in a letter dating from this same period: *Ep*. 7.2.1. (Rebenich deems unlikely Hilberg's suggested reading "barbarus seni sermo", *Jerome*, 165 n. 17, which Labourt retains and renders as "une langue barbare (à mon âge!)" [J. Labourt, *Saint Jérôme. Lettres*. Tome I. Paris: Société d'Edition, Belles Lettres, 1949, p. 21 and 162]).

[11] According to the much later letter, *Ep*. 125:12 (written in 412 CE), the study of Hebrew was aimed at helping Jerome to conquer his youthful lusts, though his account portrays the Hebrew language as equally intractable: "When I was a

Journeying next to Constantinople around 380, Jerome met a number of influential scholars and clergy. Here he also embarked on translations of Greek theological works into Latin, including works by Origen and Eusebius. This activity presented him with the challenge of achieving renderings that were both theologically accurate and acceptable from a literary point of view.[12] It was useful experience for the next stage in his career, since on moving back to Rome in 382 and becoming the secretary to Pope Damasus, the pope asked him to improve on the Old Latin versions of scripture.[13] Now that Christianity was established as a state religion, it needed to appeal to the Latin educated elite, and the literary level of Greek and Latin scripture was notoriously poor.[14]

During Jerome's time in Rome he not only collected information on Hebrew terms from earlier Christian sources such as Origen and Eusebius and from the later Jewish Greek bible translation of Aquila,[15] but also exploited contacts with local Jews. In one letter to to Damasus, Jerome's excuse for not replying to the pope more promptly is that a *Hebraeus* had unexpectedly turned up with some books (*uolumina*) he had borrowed from the synagogue under the pretext of wishing to read them himself. Jerome was forced to put aside other commitments in order to get these transcribed quickly. It is unclear what these books were, whether they were in Greek or Hebrew, or the identity of Jerome's "Hebrew" contact, particularly whether this man was a convert to Christianity (implied by contact with the papal secretary) or still maintaining his Jewish faith (as suggested by his easy access to the synagogue's "library").[16]

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young man, though I was protected by the rampart of the lonely desert, I could not endure against the promptings of sin and the ardent heat of my nature. I tried to crush them by frequent fasting, but my mind was always in a turmoil of imagination. To subdue it I put myself in the hands of one of the brethren who had been a Hebrew before his conversion, and asked him to teach me his language. … What efforts I spent on that task, what difficulties I had to face, how often I despaired, how often I gave up and then in my eagerness to learn began again, my own knowledge can witness from personal experience and those can testify who were then living with me. I thank the Lord that from a bitter seed of learning I am now plucking sweet fruits" (Trn. F. A. Wright, *Select Letters of St. Jerome*. Loeb Classical Library 262 [London: William Heinemann, 1933], 419–21).

[12] See Kelly, *Jerome*, 72; Rebenich, *Jerome*, 26–28, also Adam Kamesar, *Jerome, Greek Scholarship, and the Hebrew Bible. A Study of the* Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim. Oxford Classical Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 43–49.

[13] Rebenich, *Jerome*, 32–33.

[14] Kamesar, *Jerome, Greek Scholarship*, 46.

[15] E.g. *Ep*. 32.1 "iam pridem cum uoluminibus Hebraeorum editionem Aquilae confero, ne quid forsitan propter odium Christi synagoga mutauerit", "for some time now I have been comparing Aquila's version with the scrolls of the Hebrews, lest by any chance the 'synagogue' has changed it through hatred of Christ".

[16] "...cum subito Hebraeus interuenit deferens non pauca uolumina, quae de synagoga quasi lecturus acceperat. Et ilico 'habes', inquit, 'quod postulaueras' meque dubium et quid facerem nescientem ita festinus exterruit, ut omnibus praetermissis ad scribendum transuolarem; quod quidem usque ad praesens facio" "when suddenly a Hebrew interrupted, carrying a number of scrolls, which he had got from the synagogue as if he were going to read them. And then he said, 'Here's what you asked for!'. I wavered and was uncertain what to do, but he quickly alarmed me so much that having put everything aside I flew to copying them. And that's what I have been doing up to the present" (*Ep*. 36.1). See Salvesen, "'*Tradunt Hebraei...*' The problem of the function and reception of Jewish midrash in Jerome," in *Midrash*

This period in Rome was interrupted by the scandal connected with the death of Blesilla, a young and aristocratic widow, who may have perished as a result of the extreme ascetic practices Jerome was apparently advocating.[17] In 385 Jerome therefore left Rome, headed east, and was joined by his friend Paula on the way. They finally settled in Bethlehem, where Paula's money went towards founding two monasteries, one for men and one for women. And this was where he stayed for the most productive part of his life, until his death in c. 419–20.

What was Syria Palaestina like when Jerome arrived? Following the double misfortune of the Jewish War of 66-70 CE and the Bar Kokhba Revolt of 132–135, Jewish life in Roman Palestine had declined. Jerusalem had been renamed Aelia Capitolina, settled with Roman veterans and their families, and Jews had been evicted. The city had a church and bishop, but these were all from gentile origins, and the remains of the Temple had been pillaged for stone to use for other buildings.[18] However, the ban on Jews living in the area of Jerusalem seems to become less strictly applied. There is evidence for a Jewish community in Aelia in the third century, and there was certainly at least one synagogue standing there in the early part of the fourth century, plus family vaults that Jews would visit.[19] The evidence from inscriptions and archaeology from this period suggests that the Roman province had a very mixed population of pagans, Jews, Samaritans and Christians, and in fact Caesarea on the coast already had a roughly equal balance of these groups by the end of the previous century.[20] However, Jews mainly lived in rural areas and small towns, and were more concentrated in the Golan and Galilee regions as well as in the south of Judea.[21] Seth Schwartz believes that it was the rise of the Christian state in the fourth century that caused a "re-Judaization" of Jewish communities,[22] while Hayim Lapin argues that the gradual rise of the Palestinian rabbinic movement

Unbound: Transformations and Innovations (eds. Michael Fishbane and Joanna Weinberg; Oxford: Littmann Library, 2013), 64–65, n. 29.

[17] Rebenich, *Jerome,* 39.

[18] Nicole Belayche, *Iudaea-Palaestina. Pagan Cults in Roman Palestine (Second to Fourth Century)*. Religion der römischen Provinzen, 1. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 129–34.

[19] Belayche, *Iudaea-Palaestina,* 113.

[20] Belayche, *Iudaea-Palaestina,* 198–99

[21] Belayche, *Iudaea-Palaestina,* 82–107.

[22] *Imperialism and Jewish Society, 200 B.C.E. to 640 C.E.* Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 14–16, 180–202. See also the review article by Fergus Millar, "Transformations of Judaism under Graeco-Roman Rule: Responses to Seth Schwartz's *Imperialism and Jewish Society*", *Journal of Jewish Studies* 57.1 (2006): 139–58, on the "border-zone" between Jews and pagans, with Christians progressively usurping the pagan area from the fourth century onwards (147). Millar criticises Schwartz for largely ignoring the important evidence for the energence of rabbis provided by Jerome (151).

became clearly perceptible in this period[23] — a circumstance that is highly relevant, in fact, to Jerome's encounters with Jewish sages there.

The changing face of Eretz Israel from Roman Palestine to Christian Holy Land, has been usefully examined through the lens of postcolonial criticism by Andrew Jacobs.[24] As is well known, Constantine, his mother and mother-in-law encouraged the development of biblically-related sites as places of pilgrimage for Christians across the Empire.[25] The region had already begun to be recognised as a place of pilgrimage for the holy sites associated with the birth, death, and ascension of Jesus Christ. Various sites linked to the Bible were often taken over from previous pagan or Jewish veneration, Christian imperial power allowing such appropriation by the Church within the demographically mixed province.[26] Along with appropriation there was also destruction: during Jerome's time in Palestine, Porphyry bishop of Gaza ordered the destruction of the pagan sanctuary known as the Marneion, even though the number of pagans in Gaza vastly outnumbered the tiny Christian population there.[27] Such was the power of the Christianized state. To a limited extent these actions could be seen a reaction to the Emperor Julian's failed attempt to restore paganism in the Empire (360–63), but such manoeuvres did not bode well for the future.

When Jerome arrived with Paula in 386, the Holy Land was still a mosaic of different communities. It was not a biblical landscape, exactly, even though this is the aspect that Jerome wanted to "sell" to Christians outside the Land, to persuade them to visit on pilgrimage and appropriate what he saw as their heritage.[28] Yet Jerome himself was more than just a pilgrim. Andrew Jacobs notes that like his great hero Origen, Jerome felt that the province of Palestine was more 'biblical' than any other place in the Empire, and so it would be the best place to study and interpret

[23] Hayim Lapin, *Rabbis as Romans. The Rabbinic Movement in Palestine, 100-400 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), on the fourth century as "the first period in which we can actually document Rabbis outside of rabbinic texts alone. … it was precisely in this period that Rabbis made the transition from a religious association to an 'orthodoxy'" (167).

[24] Andrew S. Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews: The Holy Land and Christian Empire in Late Antiquity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), esp. 5–25.

[25] Belayche, *Iudaea-Palaestina*, 170, on Jerusalem's "rapid and monumental Christianization, supported by the emperors of Constantinople", which effaced the preceding two centuries of pagan Graeco-Roman settlement.

[26] Joan E. Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places: the Myth of Jewish-Christian Origins* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 285–314. However, see the criticisms of Belayche, *Iudaea-Palaestina*, 32, 114–15 and notes.

[27] See Kelly, *Jerome*, 273 n. 1. The destruction took place in 402.

[28] Susan Weingarten argues that Jerome creates "a new Christian geography centred on the Holy Land", rather than on Rome (ch. 4, "Jerome's *Ep*. 108 and the Christian Appropriation of the Holy Land", ch. 4 in *The Saint's Saints*: *Hagiography and Geography in Jerome*. AJEC 58 [Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2005], 193–265). However, Brouria Bitton-Ashkelony notes Jerome's "vacillation" concerning Christian pilgrimage to Palestine in *Epp.* 46 and 58, partly over the "moral" dangers of religious tourism and partly over a valuation of the physical place over the spiritual destination (ch. 2 "Jerome on Pilgrimage"in *Encountering the Sacred: The Debate on Christian Pilgrimage in Late Antiquity*. Transformation of the Classical Heritage 38 [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005], 65–105).

Scripture.[29] Most crucially, the Holy Land was the place where Jerome could focus on his growing interest in the Hebrew language, the key to what even back in Rome he had frequently referred to as "the Hebrew Truth", *Hebraica ueritas*.

Jerome's project to render Hebrew Scripture into Latin had arisen out of his growing conviction that despite widespread Christian belief in the providential inspiration of the Septuagint, using the latter as the basis for a Latin translation was not an intellectually sound procedure. The slippage from one translation to the next, Hebrew to Greek to Latin, inevitably led to a dilution or diminution ("poured into the third jar"),[30] of what he had come to consider as the "Hebrew Truth", the *Hebraica veritas*. This term is often glossed by modern scholars as "the Hebrew original text". Though it does have that sense, from a theological standpoint it is actually bolder: Andrew Cain defines the concept of *Hebraica ueritas* as "a hermeneutical methodology that privileges the Hebrew text as the holder of 'truth' in all matters of Old Testament exegesis".[31] Often Jerome refers to the Hebrew biblical text as a *fons*, a fount, origin, water source, with positive connotations of originality, refreshment, and purity.[32]

Though in Rome he had looked to Hebrew only as a means of understanding key terms like Hosanna, and short passages, in Palestine he began to render entire books from Hebrew. This was highly controversial among Greek and Latin Christians because of the high status of the Septuagint, whose authority and inspiration was transmitted to the Old Latin renderings and provided an crucial link between Greek and Latin Christians. This bond was threatened by Jerome's valorization of the Hebrew as a superior textual authority that should form the basis of the new Latin version. To look to Hebrew as the source of authority also meant overcoming the Graeco-Roman superiority complex towards "barbarian" languages and cultures, as well as the Christian suspicion that Jews had distorted the Hebrew text in some attempt to discredit Christian beliefs. On the other hand, Susan Weingarten argues that Christians still regarded Judaism as "the source of the original divine authority, albeit now

[29] Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews*, 67.

[30] "in tertium uas transfusa", *Prol. in libris Salomonis de hebraeo translatis*. See Kamesar, *Jerome, Greek Scholarship*, 45.

[31] Andrew Cain, *The Letters of Jerome: Asceticism, Biblical Exegesis, and the Construction of Christian Authority in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 54, citing as early examples of this approach *Epp*. 18 A, B, 20, and 36.

[32] E.g. in *Ep*. 20:2, Hebrew as "the very spring from which the gospel writers drew" (ipsum fontem unde ab evangelistis sumptum est); *Ep*. 28:5 "these things we have drawn from the deepest well of the Hebrews" (haec nos de intimo Hebraeorum fonte libavimus); *Ep*. 34:4 "in order that we may return once more to the source of the Hebrew language" (ut rursum ad fontem sermonis recurramus Hebraei).

supplanted by Christianity".[33] A number of scholarly explanations have been offered for Jerome's own regard for Hebrew, including the important precedent of Origen's own use of Hebrew and Jewish versions; the appeal of arcane knowledge among educated Romans; the psychological boost to Jerome's own self-worth, and his academic curiosity.[34]

Jerome's tools for his work of translation were limited. The study of Hebrew grammar was unknown, and though word lists between Greek and Hebrew may have existed, no examples have survived. However, Jerome was able to use the synoptic edition of scripture created by Origen known as the Hexapla. The Hexapla's six columns usefully lined up the Hebrew text word by word with the various Greek versions. They included one column with the Hebrew transcribed and vocalised in Greek letters,[35] one containing the Septuagint text, and one for each of the later Jewish Greek versions of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion. These last three were useful for supplementing or correcting the text in the Septuagint column.

Since Origen's Hexapla and his commentaries were Christian productions, and deposited in the bishop's library in nearby Caesarea, Jerome could have avoided criticism of his version by relying exclusively on them. However, he chose to employ Jewish teachers to further develop his knowledge of Hebrew, and he mentioned them openly in his letters and works as authorities for his statements about the interpretation of words in the Bible. In this he apparently went well beyond what his hero Origen had done in terms of asking local Jews for information.[36] Though Jerome's first Hebrew teacher in Chalcis had been a convert to Christianity, and perhaps also the *Hebraeus* who had borrowed books for him from the synagogue in Rome, it seems that in Palestine most of his teachers were still members of the Jewish community rather than converts. Ancient biblical translations rarely carry explanations or justifications for their procedures (the Prologue to Sirach is a rare exception). So we are fortunate in having Jerome's other works, the prefaces and prologues to the translated books, the commentaries he wrote to accompany some of them, and defences of his practice that he set out in correspondence.

In these works we soon encounter the phenomenon of Jerome's employment of the terms *Iudaeus/Iudaicus*, "Jew/Jewish", and *Hebraeus/Hebraicus*, "Hebrew". These terms were hardly

[33] *The Saint's Saints*, 44. See also the important study by Edmon L. Gallagher, *Hebrew Scripture in Patristic Biblical Theory*: *Canon, Language, Text*. SupVC 114 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2012).

[34] See Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews*, 58–59.

[35] See Benjamin P. Kantor, "The Second Column (Secunda) of Origen's Hexapla in Light of Greek Pronunciation", PhD thesis University of Austin, 2017.

[36] The classic account is that of N. R. M. de Lange, *Origen and the* Jews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), and more recently Michael Graves, *Jerome's Hebrew Philology: A Study based on his Commentary on Jeremiah*. SupVC 90 (Leiden / Boston: Brill, 2007), ch. 3, "The Sources for Jerome's Hebrew Scholarship", with Jerome's defence of his use of Jewish informants by citing the examples of Origen, Eusebius, and Clement (*Apol. c. Ruf.* 1.13).

unprecedented among Christian writers. Sabrina Inowlocki has discussed their employment in Greek by Origen and Eusebius of Caesarea, both of whom were greatly admired by Jerome.[37] For Eusebius she argues that the main distinction is chronological, with "Hebrew" being used to refer to the time before Moses, and "Jew" for the subsequent period, but he is inconsistent, for instance in referring to Aristobulus and Eleazar in the *Letter of Aristeas* as "Hebrews". In contrast, "Hebrew" is sometimes used in polemical contexts where we might expect "Jew", and vice versa. However, she concludes, "The web of signification is more complicated than a mere opposition between 'good Jew' and 'bad Jew'".[38]

Andrew Jacobs has also commented on Eusebius' presentation of Ἑβραῖοι as "ur-monotheists" as opposed to polytheistic Hellenes, and as the spiritual ancestors of Christians. He argues that Eusebius' use of "Hebrews" also denotes "their utility in constructing a historicizing authentication of Christian truth". Thus the first century Jewish writers Josephus and Philo could also be called "Hebrews", since they were useful to Christians.[39] In contrast, Eusebius uses Ἰουδαῖος in negative contexts such as the period of strife under Jewish rule in Palestine before the Romans under Augustus took over, and in relation to the Jewish War in the 60s CE.[40]

The use of the terms "Hebrew", "Jew", and "Jewish" by Origen and Eusebius surely influenced Jerome's own practice.[41] Broadly speaking, when Jerome talks about Jews as practitioners of their religion, or Jewish slanders of Christians or their faith, or aggadic tales that he finds absurd,[42] he uses the adjective *Iudaeus* or *Iudaicus*. When he defends his biblical translations, he frequently appeals to his readers to check them by going to ask the *Hebraei*,[43] and he refers to those who taught him Hebrew as "Hebrews" also. For him, "Hebrew" denotes useful Jews who know the Hebrew language well (whether they live in Rome or Palestine);[44] traditions found among them that help elucidate the biblical text; and notably the "Hebrew truth" —note that he does not call it the "*Jewish*

[37] Sabrina Inowlocki, *Eusebius and the Jewish Authors: His Citation Technique in an Apologetic Context*. Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 64. (Leiden / Boston, 2006), ch. 4: "The 'Hebrews' and the 'Jews' according to Eusebius: the Jewish Authors' Status in the Apodeixis", 105–38, which includes a survey of previous usage from the first to fourth centuries, prior to Jerome, and also a summary of previous scholarship on the issue.

[38] *Eusebius,* 138.

[39] Inowlocki similarly notes that both these authors are the only Jews mentioned in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* (*Eusebius*, 137).

[40] Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews*, 26–36.

[41] Of the hundreds of instances of the use of the adjectives *Hebraeus* and *Hebraicus/-a* in Jerome's works, many refer to either the Hebrew text or the Hebrew language, and of course, the *Hebraica veritas*. The present essay focuses on their use in Jerome to describe individuals.

[42] See Salvesen, "'Tradunt Hebraei'".

[43] E.g. *Prol. in libro Regum,* "interroga quemlibet Hebraeorum", "ask any of the 'Hebrews' you like"; cf. *Apol. adv. libros Ruf.* 2.27, *Praef. in libro Psalmorum* IH.

[44] Note Jerome's reference to "Hebraeus meus", almost "my tame Hebrew", in *Comm. Eccles*. 4.13.

truth" (*Iudaica ueritas*), which would be an oxymoron from Jerome's point of view. In other words, Jerome awarded the term "Jewish" or "Hebrew" depending on the value to him and (as he believed) to the Church: "Jews" were theologically wrong, and bad (as responsible for the crucifixion of Christ); but "Hebrews" were Jews who had access to information that clarified the Hebrew biblical text, and so were useful for Christian purposes, within that role alone.[45]

In theory, then, for Jerome an individual Jewish person could be both a *Iudaeus* and a *Hebraeus*: *Iudaeus* as an adherent of the Jewish faith and practice, but also *Hebraeus* if he was well versed in the Hebrew language and prepared to share that knowledge with Jerome. Several of Jerome's contacts must surely have fallen into this middle, overlapping category, but it would hardly suit his literary or theological purposes to point this out to his readers. And his use of the categories "Hebrew" and "Jewish" are primarily aimed at his readers, in order to promote his own championing of Hebrew text and language (along with his employment of Jewish informants), to defend those practices from the criticism of fellow Christians by distinguishing them from the adherents of wrong-headed and perfidious Judaism. Despite the intrinsic connection between the terms "Hebrew" and "Jewish", Jerome (like his predecessors, but to an even greater degree) needed to maintain their separateness as far as possible. For orthodox Christianity, Judaism needed to be clearly flagged up as a theological blind alley. Yet Jerome needed Jewish expertise in Hebrew language and biblical knowledge in order to support his translational project. Since Jerome was no great theologian in his own right, this was a vital and unique selling point for his interpretations of the Bible that meant he could go beyond recycling ideas from the brilliant works of Origen and Eusebius. He performed a comparable juggling act with regard to Origen, constantly distinguishing between his admiration for Origen's text-critical work on scripture, and Origen's theology that had become doctrinally suspect among Jerome's peers.

Where Jerome alludes to his Hebrew informants, he speaks with a reasonable degree of respect for them, at least when he approves of their ideas.[46] Andrew Jacobs states that Jerome preserves a Christian superiority over his Hebrew teachers by referring to them as *praeceptores*,

[45] Jacobs's tendency to render both *Hebraeus* and *Iudaeus* in Jerome's works as "Jew/Jewish" affects his analysis of their significance by obscuring important distinctions in the ways in which Jerome employs them.

[46] E.g. "Hebraeus...qui nos in Scripturis sanctis erudivit", "the Hebrew who instructed me in the holy scriptures", *Comm. in Amos* ii, 5, 8; "Hebraeus qui me in scripturis erudiuit, ita legi posse asseruit..." "the Hebrew who instructed me in the Scriptures stated that it was possible to read it this way", *Comm. in Naum*, iii, 8–12 (text in ed. M. Adriaen, *S. Hieronymi Presbyteri Opera*. *Commentarii in prophetas minores*. CCSL vol. 76A [Turnhout: Brepols, 1969]).

"instructors", rather than *magistri,* "teachers, masters".[47] Certainly this was a point of contention: Jerome reacts testily to Rufinus' suggestion that the Jew whom Rufinus mockingly refers to as "Barabbas" was Jerome's *praeceptor*, and denies that he said that Baranina was his *magister*.[48] However, this senstitivity over using terms such as *praeceptor* and *magister* for Jewish informants may be considered in the light of Jerome's translation of the Gospels. He reserves *magister* as a rendering of διδάσκαλος, "teacher", for Jesus alone.[49] In Luke's Gospel Jerome uses *praeceptor* for a different Greek word, ἐπιστάτης, "master" or "overseer", but once more, only of Jesus.[50] In fact, when Jerome does use *magister* (the term considered by Jacobs to imply greater prestige), he uses it negatively, of the "teachers of the Jews" who take a literalist approach to the text of scripture, not of his own Hebrew teachers.[51]

Jerome's confidence that "Hebrews" would support his interpretations could backfire, most famously over his rendering of the Hebrew word קיקיון *qîqâyôn* in Jonah 4:6. This had been rendered

[47] "…a relationship that can retain connotations of subordination and hierarchy", *Remains of the Jews,* 87. Certainly, the comment at *Comm. Isai*. 5.13.10, "Hebraeus, quo ego praeceptore usus sum", "the Hebrew whom I myself employed as a teacher", does not appear particularly respectful, but see n. 46 above, on Jerome's references to "the Hebrew who instructed me in the scriptures", which is more neutral.

[48] Rufinus claims Jerome said that he hired teachers from the synagogue ("quod numerans doctores suos, quos se de synagoga dicit esse mercatum"), *Apol. c. Hier*. 2.15, and ibid., "that Barabbas of yours from the synagogue, whom you chose in place of Christ, taught you" ("ille vero de synagoga Barabbas tuus, pro Christo electus, docuit te…. "). Jerome, *Apol. c. Ruf.* I.13, "I hear that …you mock me…on account of my having called Barabbas the Jew my instructor… I was not the one to say that he was my teacher. Rather, I wished to prove my own zeal for the holy Scriptures, so as to show that I had read Origen just as I had listened to that man [i.e. Baranina]" "audio … te … in me … ludere, eo quod Barabban Iudaeum dixerim praeceptorem meum… ego non illum magistrum dixi, sed meum in Scripturas sanctas studium uolui conprobare, ut ostenderem me sic Origenem legisse quomodo et illum audieram" (see P. Lardet, *Saint Jérôme. Apologie contre Rufin.* Paris: Cerf, 1983, 36–39).

[49] Perhaps Jerome was heeding Jesus's injunction in Matt 23:8,10, "vos autem nolite vocari rabbi unus enim est *magister* vester omnes autem vos fratres estis… nec vocemini magistri quia *magister* vester unus est Christus", "you must call no one 'rabbi', for you have one teacher and you are all brothers; and do not be called 'teachers' because your only teacher is Christ". However, Megan Hale Williams may be correct in claiming that "when the titles of respect that Jerome applies to his Jewish teachers are read against the background of his use of these terms in other contexts, his seemingly laudatory descriptions reveal an edge of scorn" (*The Monk and the Book*, 225).

[50] In Luke 21:7 *praeceptor* stands for διδάσκαλος, of Jesus.

[51] *Comm.Amos*. I, i, 6-8, "These people I consider to be the 'teachers of the Jews', along with all who follow the 'letter that kills', and refuse to receive the life-giving Spirit; instead, whatever they interpret and understand, they wish to be earthly" ("Hos ego arbitror Iudaeorum magistros, et omnes qui occidentem sequuntur litteram, noluntque recipere spiritum uiuificantem, sed quaecumque interpretantur et sapiunt, uolunt esse terrena"; text in ed. M. Adriaen, CCSL vol. 76A).

in the LXX as κολόκυνθη, "gourd", and therefore as *cucurbita* in the Old Latin. Jerome's *Iuxta Hebraeos* version opted for the rendering *hedera* "ivy", following the choice of κισσός in the later Jewish translations.[52] The shock that this caused in the church of Oea/Tripoli when it was read out in Jerome's version was not calmed by the leaders doing exactly what Jerome frequently exhorted people to do to justify his choice of rendering: when they went and consulted the local Jewish community, the latter supported the traditional rendering. Jerome's reaction was to accuse the Jews consulted in North Africa as "*your* Jews" (*Iudaei uestri*, not his own "Hebrews") who gave the answer they did through "malice or ignorance".[53]

It may seem inconsistent to modern readers that Jerome denigrated Jews and their religion yet looked to unconverted "Hebrews" to aid Christian interpretation of Old Testament Scripture. The solution to the apparent contradiction must lie in Jerome's argument that only those who recognise that the Christ has come are in the position to understand the Scriptures correctly. This excluded Jews, whose lack of recognition of Christ as the promised messiah meant that they could only have a "fleshly", non-spiritual approach to the text. This point relies heavily on the distinction between flesh and spirit often made by St Paul (e.g. Rom. 7:14; 1 Cor. 2:14; 3:1; 9:11). Jerome also alludes to Paul's image of a veil being cast over the Law when read by Jews (2 Cor. 3:13–14). So from Jerome's point of view, although "Hebrews" may have a more correct and therefore useful understanding of the words and text of scripture, this is necessarily a superficial grasp of the text (the *littera*), not the spiritual comprehension of its message. However, it should also be noted that for Jerome this criticism did not apply only to Jews but also to non-orthodox Christian groups including the Jewish-Christian sects and Christian "Judaizers". Jerome is insistent that such groups that espouse a material fulfilment of the promises of scripture such as the rebuilding of Jerusalem, restoration of the Temple, agricultural abundance, a messianic reign of a thousand years, and so on, are in error. This is because all such promises have already been *spiritually* fulfilled through Christ and the establishment of the Church.[54]

[52] In *Ep*. 112:22 he claims that the Hebrew term indicates a quick-spreading, broad-leaved shrub with broad leaves. He therefore chose "ivy" in preference to "gourd" so as to be in agreement with the "other interpreters". In fact, it appears from MS 86 that only Symmachus rendered קיקיון as κισσός, while Aquila and Theodotion employed the transliteration *κικεωνα*, a possibility that Jerome explicitly rejected according to this letter (apparatus to Jonah 4:6 in ed. J. Ziegler, *Duodecim prophetae*. Septuagint Vetus Testamentum Graecum XIII, 3rd edn. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1984).

[53] *In Ion*. 4.6; *Apol. c. Ruf.* 1.30; *Ep.* 112.22.

[54] Hillel Newman doubts that any Judaizing groups did believe such things; he explains this oft-repeated theme in Jerome as a deliberate stance to counter his critics' accusations that he himself was Judaizing by depending so much on Hebrew and Hebrews ("Jerome's Judaizers", *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9/4 [2001]: 444). See also Michael Graves, "'Judaizing" Christian Interpretations of the Prophets as seen by Saint Jerome", *Vigiliae Christianae* 61 (2007): 142–156.

Clearly Jerome was far from being a friend of the Jews. He may have appreciated working with his Hebrew teachers and respected their learning, but there is little indication from his writings that he felt either friendship or loyalty towards them.[55] As part of his wider thesis that Christians at this period were colonising the Holy Land, Andrew Jacobs argues that Jerome appropriated Jewish biblical knowledge in a similar colonising manner. He views Jerome's whole project as a kind of "academic imperialism", by which possession of knowledge belonging to the "other" allows one to control them.[56] Yet in positioning Jerome's work as part of a wider imperial and imperialist project, Jacobs rather glosses over the internal tensions within Christian discourse of the period. Jerome's adoption of Hebrew learning and use of Jewish informants was a controversial one, as can be seen in the debates with Augustine, Epiphanius, and Rufinus over scriptural authority. Furthermore, for Jerome to over-emphasise Origen's work as the precedent for his own approach would have been counter-productive, given the rise in anti-Origenism.[57]

On the whole, Jerome was able to perform an adroit balancing act, reflected in his careful deployment of the terms "Hebrew" and "Jewish", in which he differentiated between the timeless and important mysteries of scriptural truth embodied in the *Hebraica veritas* (and revealed by those conversant with Hebrew language and traditions), and Jews with their erroneous and superseded teachings.[58] These may not have been merely rhetorical positions, however, adopted in order to convince his sceptical Christian peers. They may additionally reflect his own internal self-justification for crossing the social and intellectual boundaries between Christianity and Judaism. Arguably Jerome contributed to later Christian anti-Judaism by playing on an entirely artificial distinction between "Hebrews" and "Jews" that gave licence for future Christians to pillage Judaism of its exegetical riches, exploiting Hebrew learning while vilifying Jewish practice, belief, and exegesis.

[55] For an alternative and more positive assessment of Jerome's personal feelings towards Jews of his acquaintance, see the essay by Markus Bockmuehl in this volume.

[56] "Jerome was able to incorporate Jews… into a component of imperial Christian identity", *Remains of the Jews*, 59–60. For an arguably similar appropriation of Philo's account of the Therapeutae by Rufinus in the service of Christian monasticism, see the essay by Sabrina Inowlocki in this volume.

[57] Though Jerome does often cite Origen's as precedent for his own, as well as plagiarizing it: Rebenich, "Jerome: 'Vir Trilinguis'", 53–54.

[58] Note the view of Megan Hale Williams: "Jerome's representation of his Jewish teachers, then, is as contradictory as his use of the exegetical materials he attributes to Jews. His studies with Jews were the capstone of his development as a biblical scholar, yet he represented much of their learning as perverse, even repulsive. Similarly, he trumpets his Jewish teachers' prestige in their own community, while portraying that community and its values as repugnant to any right-thinking Christian" (*The Monk and the Book*, 226).