

In Ambrosiaster's Shadow: A Critical Re-Evaluation of the Last Surviving Letter Exchange between Pope Damasus and Jerome*

In modern critical editions of Jerome's letters the correspondence between Jerome and Pope Damasus I encompasses six letters from the former (*Epp.* 15, 16, 18,¹ 20, 21, 36) and two from the latter (*Epp.* 19, 35). The fame of both correspondents endowed these letters with immense popularity throughout the Middle Ages and it even generated an explosive consumer market for apocryphal correspondence between them.² Until the early 1980s the genuineness of their last surviving letter exchange, preserved in Jerome's epistolary corpus as

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1. *Ep.* 18 (A+B), a commentary on the vision recorded in Isaiah 6, had been composed at Constantinople but dedicated to Damasus a few years later when Jerome was in Rome. See P. NAUTIN, "Le *De Seraphim* de Jérôme et son appendice *ad Damasum*" in M. WISSEMAN, ed., *Roma Renascens. Beiträge zur Spätantike und Rezeptionsgeschichte. Festschrift Ilona Opelt* (Frankfurt, 1988), p. 257-293.

2. For studies of various of these apocryphal letters see G. MERCATI, "Il carne Damasciano de Davide e la falsa corrispondenza di Damaso e Girolamo riguardo al Salterio," *Note di Letteratura Biblica e Cristiana Antica* (Rome, 1905), p. 113-126; P. BLANCHARD, "La correspondance apocryphe du pape S. Damase et de S. Jérôme," *BiblEphL*, 63, 1949, p. 376-388; J. BIGNAMI-ODIER, "Une lettre apocryphe de saint Damase à saint Jérôme sur la question de Melchisédech," *MEFRA*, 63, 1951, p. 183-190; A. DE VOGÜÉ, "La Règle du Maître et la lettre apocryphe de saint Jérôme sur le chant des Psaumes," *StudMon*, 7, 1965, p. 357-367; R.E. REYNOLDS, "An early medieval mass fantasy: The correspondence of Pope Damasus and St Jerome on a Nicene canon" in P. LINEHAN, ed., *Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Medieval Canon Law* (Cambridge, July 23-27, 1984) (Rome, 1988), p. 73-89. For a general survey of ancient Christian apocryphal correspondence see G. BARDY, "Faux et fraudes littéraires dans l'antiquité chrétienne," *RHE*, 32, 1936, p. 5-23, 275-302.

Epp. 35-36, had always been taken for granted by scholars. But then Pierre Nautin published an iconoclastic study in which he argued that Jerome had authored *both* letters in 387, almost three years after Damasus' death, as part of a revenge plot against Ambrose of Milan for allegedly conspiring with others to have him expelled from Rome in the late summer of 385.³ Nautin's devastating and influential critique of *Epp.* 35-36 has so far remained not only largely unchallenged but even applauded.⁴ His methodology has far-reaching implications for how we read Jerome's letters in general,⁵ and so it seems worthwhile and even necessary to revisit this controversial debate. In the course of this investigation I hope to show that Nautin's conclusions are unwarranted and in fact untenable because they are rooted in a profound misinterpretation of *Epp.* 35-36 in light of the ancient epistolary situation. I shall then argue that Jerome circulated both sides of this authentic exchange in Rome in the middle 380s to distinguish himself as a biblical scholar of the *Hebraica veritas* and in the process to level a covert attack not against Ambrose but against a weighty rival biblical exegete at Rome, Ambrosiaster.

3. "Le premier échange épistolaire entre Jérôme et Damase: lettres réelles ou fictives?," *FZPhTh*, 30, 1983, p. 331-344. Two letter exchanges between Damasus and Jerome survive and are preserved in the latter's correspondence as *Epp.* 19-20 and 35-36. Nautin mistakenly calls *Epp.* 35-36 their first exchange. He ends his article with a promise (which he did not keep) to prove that the first extant exchange (*Epp.* 19-20) is "du même genre" (p. 344) as the last one.

4. For a favorable assessment see S. OBERHELMAN, *Rhetoric and Homiletics in Fourth-Century Christian Literature* (Atlanta, 1991), p. 82 n. 79, who states Nautin's findings as fact. See also L. DOUTRELEAU, "Le prologue de Jérôme au *De Spiritu Sancto* de Didyme" in *Alexandrina. Hellénisme, Judaïsme et Christianisme à Alexandrie. Mélanges P. Claude Mondésert* (Paris, 1987), p. 297-311 (p. 299 n. 8); M. VESSEY, "Jerome's Origen: The Making of a Christian Literary Persona," *StP* 28 (1993), p. 135-145 (p. 140 n. 15): both lean strongly in favor of Nautin. B. CONRING, *Hieronymus als Briefschreiber. Ein Beitrag zur spätantiken Epistolographie* (Tübingen, 2001), p. 200 n. 273, remains open to Nautin's hypothesis after some uneventful fence-sitting. Cf. S. REBENICH, *Hieronymus und sein Kreis. Prosopographische und Sozialgeschichtliche Untersuchungen* (Stuttgart, 1992), p. 145-147, who cursorily takes Nautin to task but does not develop at length any criteria for determining exactly *why* he was wrong. Y.-M. DUVAL, *La décrétole Ad Gallos Episcopos: son texte et son auteur. Texte critique, traduction française et commentaire* (Leiden, 2005), p. 126-127, acknowledges that "certaines de ses observations sont justes" but he briefly signals disapproval of Nautin's "conclusions abusives" about the Ambrose-Jerome-Damasus triangle. Duval nevertheless suspects that Jerome did author Damasus' side of the exchange.

5. It may be noted that Nautin was by no means the first scholar to question the authenticity of one or more of Jerome's letters. E.g., see D. DE BRUYNE, "La lettre de Jérôme à Sunnia et Fretela sur le Psautier" and "Lettres fictives de s. Jérôme," *ZNTW*, 28, 1929, p. 1-13 and p. 229-234, respectively. NAUTIN, "Échange," p. 331 n. 1, cites de Bruyne's two studies approvingly and regards them as a precedent for his own work. For a rejoinder to de Bruyne's "Lettres fictives" see A. CAIN, "Defending Hedibia and Detecting Eusebius: Jerome's Correspondence with Two Gallic Women (*Epp.* 120-121)," *Medieval Prosopography*, 24, 2003, forthcoming.

I. – NAUTIN ON *Ep.* 35 AND A REBUTTAL

Ep. 35 was purportedly written by Damasus between 383 and 384 when Jerome was employed as a secretary of the papal court.⁶ It is a short but rhetorically elaborate request for answers to five questions touching on exegetical problems in the book of Genesis. The letter, minus the five questions forwarded with it in the form of a *subscriptio*, reads in full:

Dormientem te et longo iam tempore legentem potius quam scribentem quaestiunculis ad te missis excitare disposui, non quo et legere non debeas—hoc enim veluti cotidiano cibo alitur et pinguescit oratio—, sed quo lectionis fructus sit iste, si scribas. itaque, quoniam et heri tabellario ad me remisso nullas te iam epistulas habere dixisti exceptis his, quas in heremo aliquando dictaveras quasque tota aviditate legi atque descripsi, et ultro pollicitus es te furtivis noctium operis aliqua, si vellem, posse dictare, libenter accipio ab offerente, quod rogare volueram, si negasses. neque vero ullam puto digniorem disputationis nostrae confabulationem fore, quam si de scripturis inter nos sermocinemur, id est, ut ego interrogem, tu respondeas. qua vita nihil in hac luce puto iocundius, quo animae pabulo omnia mella superantur. quam dulcia, inquit propheta, gutturi meo eloquia tua, super mel ori meo. nam cum idcirco, ut ait praecipuus orator, homines a bestiis differamus, quod loqui possumus, qua laude dignus est, qui in ea re ceteros superat, in qua homines bestias antecellunt? accingere igitur et mihi, quae subiecta sunt, dissere servans utrobique moderamen, ut nec proposita solutionem desiderent nec epistulae brevitatem. fateor quippe tibi, eos, quos mihi iam pridem Lactantii dederas libros, ideo non libenter lego, quia et plurimae epistulae eius usque ad mille versuum spatia tenduntur et raro de nostro dogmate disputant; quo fit, ut et legenti fastidium generet longitudo et, si qua brevia sunt, scolasticis magis sint apta quam nobis de metris et regionum situ et philosophis disputantia.⁷

Nautin's first argument against its authenticity revolves around Damasus' general tone and self-presentation. By repeatedly asking Jerome for a reply, Damasus—Nautin alleges—appears to be groveling in a manner unbefitting a pope.⁸ How could he abdicate his ecclesiastical *dignitas* while a subordinate in the meantime disrespectfully puts off sending a reply?⁹ How could the figure-head of western Christendom condescend to play the “disciple” to Jerome's “maître”?¹⁰ This surface reading of the text rests on a fundamental misunder-

6. On Jerome's secretarial duties under Damasus see the recent excellent summary by DUVAL, *Décrotale*, p. 125-138.

7. *Ep.* 35, 1-2 (CSEL 54, p. 265-266).

8. “Échange,” p. 334: “Il est surprenant de voir Damase solliciter, fût-ce une seule fois, une lettre de Jérôme; et il est encore plus incroyable qu'après avoir essuyé un premier refus il se soit abaissé jusqu'à insister.”

9. “Échange,” p. 334: “Et qui était donc Jérôme pour traiter le pape avec autant de mépris, lui qui n'appartenait ni à une illustre famille de Rome ni au clergé de la Ville.”

10. “Échange,” p. 335: “Le pape, tel un disciple, posera les questions et Jérôme, tel un maître, répondra.”

standing of the dynamics of ancient epistolary role-play. What appears as self-deprecation and deference is actually conventional late Roman *politesse*; in epistolary situations this amounted to the writer's exaltation of the addressee at the expense of himself.¹¹ Such decorum was central to the friendship discourse of Christian late antiquity, where it often transposed into the humility *topos*.¹² Likewise when the seemingly inordinate flattery of Jerome (e.g., *qua laude dignus est, qui in ea re ceteros superat, in qua homines bestias antecellunt?*) couched in the letter's *exordium* is considered from the perspective of ancient rhetorical standards, it reads as a finely tuned *captatio benevolentiae* designed to make Jerome more amenable to an explicit request for answers to exegetical questions (*accingere igitur et mihi, quae subiecta sunt, dissere*).¹³

Furthermore, it may be noted that the self-presentation of "Damasus" in this letter as a consummate Christian *vir litteratus* squares nicely with the historical Damasus' notorious aspirations about being a great poet. Almost a decade after the pope's death Jerome, hardly an objective critic, paid this generous tribute to his supposed prowess in verse composition: *elegans in versibus componendis ingenium habuit multaque et brevia opuscula heroico metro edidit*.¹⁴ Through a self-conscious literariness—from the stylish evocation of epistolary *topoi*¹⁵ to pompous quotations from the classics and the Bible—"Damasus" shows in

11. Cf. P. BRUGGISSER, *Symmaque ou le rituel épistolaire de l'amitié littéraire. Recherches sur le premier livre de la correspondance* (Freiburg, 1993), p. 20: "Les relations épistolaires sont empreintes de discrétion par rapport à soi et d'éloge d'autrui. La bienséance commande, en particulier dans le domaine littéraire, le dénigrement de soi-même (dépréciation de soi) et l'exaltation de l'autre."

12. D. KONSTAN, "Problems in the History of Christian Friendship," *JECS*, 4, 1996, p. 87-113, esp. p. 97-106; see also C. WHITE, *Christian Friendship in the Fourth Century* (Cambridge, 1992).

13. On the *captatio benevolentiae* in oratory, on which the epistolary *captatio* is modelled, see CICERO, *De invent.* 1, 20-22 and ANON., *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 1, 7-8. On epistolary *captatio* see G. KARLSSON, *Idéologie et cérémonial dans l'épistolographie byzantine* (Uppsala, 1962), p. 79-83.

14. *De vir. ill.* 103 (A. CERESA-GASTALDO, *Gerolamo. Gli uomini illustri (De viris illustribus)* [Firenze, 1988], p. 208). The critical edition of Damasus' epigrams is by A. FERRUA, *Epigrammata Damasiana* (Rome, 1942). The scholarly verdict on his poetry has been mixed, ranging from harsh appraisals, e.g., by A. BAUMGARTNER, *Geschichte der Weltliteratur* (Freiburg, 1905), IV, p. 125, to more charitable ones, e.g., by S. PRICOCO, "Valore letterario degli Epigrammi di Damaso," *MSLC*, 4, 1954, p. 19-40; S. ROCCA, "Memoria incipitaria negli Epigrammi di papa Damaso," *VetChr*, 17, 1980, p. 79-84.

15. E.g., the *brevitas* convention at 35, 2 (CSEL 54, p. 266): *servans utrobique moderamen, ut nec proposita solutionem desiderent, nec epistulae brevitatem*. Also, epistolary discourse as a *sermo absentium* at 35, 1 (CSEL 54, p. 265): *neque vero ullam puto digniorem disputationis nostrae confabulationem fore, quam si de scripturis inter nos sermocinemur*. On this latter convention see K. THRAEDE, *Grundzüge griechisch-römischer Briefftopik* (Munich, 1970), p. 162-164.

Ep. 35 that poetic pretensions translate well into prose.¹⁶ For instance, he artfully juxtaposes gratuitous quotations from the Psalms (*quam dulcia, inquit propheta, gutturi meo eloquia tua, super mel ori meo*¹⁷) and Cicero (*nam cum idcirco, ut ait praecipuus orator, homines bestiis differamus, quod loqui possumus*¹⁸). By his criticism of Lactantius for being overly verbose and tedious (*plurimae epistulae eius usque ad mille versuum spatia tenduntur*) “Damasus” also betrays dilettantish interests in patristic literature. The additional snobbish complaint about Lactantius’ writings not exuding orthodoxy often enough for his tastes (*raro de nostro dogmate disputant*) accentuates his conscientiousness about appearing orthodox, another trait of the historical Damasus.¹⁹ Moreover, a reading of *Ep.* 35 in light of the ancient *Briefsituation* gives no reason to reject Damasian authorship. To the contrary, the letter evinces what very well may be the highly rhetoricized but nonetheless real voice of the historical Damasus showing what Georg Grützmacher calls “eine markante Individualität.”²⁰

Nautin’s argument that Jerome is the secret author of *Ep.* 35 turns next to diction. He compiles a list of words and expressions employed in it that occur elsewhere in Jerome’s letters:

quaestiuncula—*Epp.* 42, 1; 85, 2; 119, 12; 126, 1

furtivis noctium operis—*Epp.* 34, 6; 119, 12¹

disputatio as a synonym for *epistula*—*Epp.* 42, 3; 49, 7

confabulatio—*Epp.* 11; 21, 2; 29, 1; 32, 1 (*epistolicae confabulationis*)

nihil...iocundius omnia mella superatur—*Ep.* 30, 13 (*quid...iocundius?...quae mella sunt dulciora?*)

accingere—*Ep.* 58, 11

nostrum dogma—*Ep.* 19, 1

On the basis of this list Nautin prematurely concludes: “voilà déjà de quoi douter sérieusement de l’authenticité de la lettre de Damase.”²² He is correct in observing that neither the expression *furtivis noctium operis* nor any plausible variant of it is attested in a patristic writer other than Jerome, who used it now

16. According to JEROME, *Ep.* 22, 22 (CSEL 54, p. 175), Damasus wrote on virginity in prose and verse (*super hac re versu prosaque conposita...scripsit opuscula*). On the identification of these *opuscula* see FERRUA, *Epigrammata*, p. 7-10.

17. Ps. 118, 103.

18. *De orat.* 1, 32-33.

19. See C. PIETRI, *Roma Christiana. Recherches sur l’Église de Rome, son organisation, sa politique, son idéologie de Miltiade à Sixte III (311-440)* (Rome, 1976), I, p. 733-736, 741-745, 832-840.

20. *Hieronymus. Eine biographische Studie zur alten Kirchengeschichte* (Berlin, 1969), I, p. 206.

21. Nautin missed *Ep.* 114, 1 (CSEL 55, p. 394): *furtivis per noctem operis*.

22. “Échange,” p. 336.

and then in his letters and other works.²³ But does its appearance in *Ep.* 35 automatically preclude Damasian authorship? A close reading of the passage in which the phrase is embedded affords a simple answer to this question: *ultra pollicitus es te furtivis noctium operis aliquas, si vellem, posse dictare. Furtivis noctium operis* is governed by *pollicitus es* in indirect discourse. Damasus is therefore quoting Jerome's words back at him in order to maintain a common rhetorical vocabulary for their exchange as well as to pay a compliment to his *eloquentia*.

The dense grouping of other Hieronymian locutions in *Ep.* 35, which Nautin takes as certifying Jerome's authorship of the letter, can be explained by this same logic of complimentary *imitatio*. In addition, some lexicographical footwork shows that these other words and phrases assumed by Nautin to be exclusively Hieronymian are in fact not peculiar to Jerome at all. For instance, Jerome uses the diminutive *quaestiuncula* to refer to exegetical and theological questions, but he is certainly not the only Christian writer to do so. Its frequency in Ambrose and Augustine, to name just two writers, suggests that it was standard exegetical jargon in the late fourth and early fifth centuries.²⁴ The phrase *nostrum dogma* for "our religion" is not a Hieronymian coinage either. Its first documented patristic usage was by Lactantius.²⁵ In the fourth century it was used in this same context by Marius Victorinus²⁶ as well as by the anonymous author of *De trinitate*,²⁷ and later in the sixth century by Ennodius in a letter to Caesarius of Arles.²⁸

The results of the foregoing analysis may be summarized briefly. Nautin's first argument against the Damasian authorship of *Ep.* 35 originates from a failure to appreciate how correspondents in antiquity scripted roles for themselves as the rhetorical situation of the moment demanded. The second

23. E.g., in *Comm.Hiez.* 7, prol. (CCL 75, p. 277): *nulla hora nullumque momentum est, in quo non fratrum occurrimus turbis, et monasterii solitudinem hospitem frequentia commutamus...ut lucrativis immo furtivis noctium operis, quae hieme propinquante longiores esse coeperunt, haec ad lucernulam qualiacumque sunt dictare conamur.*

24. E.g., in AMBROSE, *Ep.* 68, 1 (CSEL 82/2, p. 169) it refers to a doctrinal question: *etsi iam superiore epistula hanc quam proposuisti quaestiunculam absolverim.* Cf. AUGUSTINE, *Conf.* 9, 15; 12, 21; *Epp.* 13, 2; 37, 3; 80, 2; 118, 2; *De util. cred.* 6, 13.

25. *Div. instit.* 3, 30 (CSEL 19/1, p. 271-272): *una igitur spes homini, una salus in hac doctrina quam defendimus posita est, omnis sapientia hominis in hoc uno est, ut deum cognoscat et colat: hoc nostrum dogma, haec sententia est.* On Jerome's reading of Lactantius see M. PERRIN, "Jérôme lecteur de Lactance" in Y.-M. DUVAL, ed., *Jérôme entre l'Occident et l'Orient: XVI^e centenaire du départ de saint Jérôme de Rome et de son installation à Bethléem. Actes du Colloque de Chantilly* (Paris, 1988), p. 99-114.

26. *Adv. Arium* 1, 44 (CSEL 83/1, p. 135): *unde differt nostrum dogma a Patripassianis.* Also *De hom. recip.* 1 (CSEL 83/1, p. 278): *nostrum igitur dogma est ad probandum, quod docuit veritatem et correxit errorem.*

27. *De trin.* 15 (PL 17, c. 528): *in fine dogmatis nostri carnis nostrae ponitur resurrectio.*

28. *Ep.* 9, 33 (CSEL 6, p. 257): *nostrum dogmatis sectatores.*

argument, armed with illusory lexical evidence, also leads to dubious conclusions. For it has been demonstrated that the locutions common to *Ep.* 35 and various letters of Jerome are common to other late antique Christian writers as well, and therefore their appearance in this particular letter does not necessarily indicate a Hieronymian fingerprint.

II. – NAUTIN ON *Ep.* 36 AND A REBUTTAL

Nautin's critique of *Ep.* 36 is also vulnerable to criticism. First, let us examine the letter's preamble.

Postquam epistolam tuae sanctitatis accepi, confestim accito notario, ut exciperet, imperavi; quo ad officium praeparato, quod eram voce prompturus, ante mihi cogitatione pingebam. interim iam et ego linguam et ille articulum movebamus, cum subito Hebraeus intervenit deferens non pauca volumina, quae de synagoga quasi lecturus acceperat. et ilico 'habes,' inquit, 'quod postulaveras' meque dubium et, quid facerem, nescientem ita festinus exterruit, ut omnibus praetermissis ad scribendum transvolarem; quod quidem usque ad praesens facio.²⁹

Nautin doubts not that *Ep.* 36 was written by Jerome, only that it was written while Damasus was still alive, citing Jerome's unrealistic rudeness and cool indifference to the pope's advances. How could he not immediately respond to Damasus but put off the reply while he busied himself with copying some Hebrew books?³⁰ And how could he answer only three of the questions instead of all five?³¹ An attentive reading of the passage above shows rather that Jerome is being deferential toward Damasus and has an acute concern to please him. After addressing the pope with an appropriate honorific (*tua sanctitas*³²) he emphasizes that he has made Damasus' request his main priority. As soon as he received the letter, he immediately (*confestim*) summoned his secretary. But before he dictated anything, he first thought carefully about what he would say (*ante mihi cogitatione pingebam*). The motif of spontaneous dictation is perva-

29. *Ep.* 36, 1 (CSEL 54, p. 268).

30. "Échange," p. 337: "Jérôme dit qu'il répond au pape avec retard, et il l'explique par la nécessité où il était de copier des manuscrits hébreux. Mais imaginons quelle pouvait être l'émotion et les sentiments d'un prêtre étranger résidant à Rome et recevant un jour une missive du pape qui le pria de donner son avis sur des questions d'exégèse. Jérôme n'aurait pas seulement couru, il aurait volé toutes affaires cessantes au devant des désirs du pape."

31. "Échange," p. 338: "Le pape a posé cinq questions et Jérôme répond seulement à trois. Cela aussi est-il croyable? Remettons-nous encore dans l'état d'esprit d'un clerc réellement questionné par la plus haute autorité de l'Église. Jérôme aurait été trop heureux de répondre sur tout."

32. On this title see M.B. O'BRIEN, *Titles of Address in Christian Latin Epistolography to 543 A.D.* (Washington, D.C., 1930), p. 187. In his other extant letters to Damasus Jerome uses the honorific *beatitudo tua* (*Epp.* 15, 2; 16, 2; 20, 5; 21, 1), which like *sanctitas* was usually reserved for bishops or popes in late antiquity.

sive in Jerome's letters,³³ and so the fact that he represents himself as using forethought instead of dictating extemporaneously conveys a thoughtful respect for his correspondent.

Jerome justifies his delay in writing by claiming that he was interrupted by a Jew (*Hebraeus*) who had arrived with some books that he previously had requested to copy. The Jew was insistent that he put aside everything else for the time being and focus just on transcribing the texts. Jerome buckled under the pressure and did as he was told. But why all this urgency? A closer look at the wording offers some insight. "Suddenly a Jew showed up bearing several books which he had taken from the synagogue *as if (quasi)* he were going to read them." When he procured the volumes from the synagogue, the Jew apparently pretended that he would be the one who would use them. He was concealing his true motives because the local Jewish authorities presumably would not have welcomed the idea of their holy books falling into the hands of a Christian. This cloak-and-dagger vignette, with its element of suspense, adds a nice touch of liveliness to the narrative.³⁴

The book-borrowing incident sounds too circumstantial to be invented. But regardless of whether or not it was contrived, there were several reasons why Jerome might have chosen to report it. First of all, it buttresses a running theme in his exegetical letters to Damasus, that of the supremacy of the *Hebraica veritas* and of himself as its champion.³⁵ Related to this point, the story also

33. E.g., *Ep.* 33, 6 (CSEL 54, p. 259): *haec quare scripserim et ad pauperis lucernae igniculum cito, sed non cauto sermone dictaverim, potestis intellegere*; *Ep.* 117, 12 (CSEL 55, p. 434): *haec ad brevem lucubratiunculam celeri sermone dictavi...extemporalis est dictatio et tanta ad lumen lucernulae facilitate profusa, ut notariorum manus lingua praecurreret*; 118, 1 (CSEL 55, p. 435): *itaque non scribentis diligentia, sed dictantis temeritate longum ad te silentium rumpo...extemporalis est epistula absque ordine sensuum, sine lenocinio et conpositione sermonum*. On dictation in Jerome see A. WIKENHAUSER, "Der heilige Hieronymus und die Kurzschrift," *ThQ*, 29, 1910, p. 50-87; P.E. ARNS, *La technique du livre d'après saint Jérôme* (Paris, 1953), p. 37-50; H. HAGENDAHL, "Die Bedeutung der Stenographie für die spätlateinische christliche Literatur," *JbAC*, 14, 1971, p. 24-38 (p. 29-33); CONRING, *Hieronymus*, p. 106-118.

34. There may be a faint allusion to Nicodemus' visiting Christ secretly by night to avoid being seen by his fellow Pharisees (Jn. 3, 1-21); Jerome plays the part of Christ and his Jew is a book-bearing Nicodemus.

35. E.g., *Epp.* 20, 2 (CSEL 54, p. 105): *ex Hebraeis codicibus veritas exprimenda est...ipsa Hebraea verba ponenda sunt et omnium interpretum opinio digerenda, quo facilius, quid super hoc sentiendum sit, ex retractatione cunctorum ipse sibi lector inveniat*; 36, 2 (CSEL 54, p. 269): *antequam de quaestione dicamus, rectum videtur, ut editiones interpretum singulorum cum ipso Hebraico digeramus, quo facilius sensus scripturae possit intellegi*. See G. MILETTO, "Die *Hebraica veritas* in S. Hieronymus" in H. MERKLEIN, K. MÜLLER, G. STEMBERGER, edd., *Bibel in jüdischer und christlicher Tradition. Festschrift Johann Maier* (Frankfurt, 1993), p. 56-65. On Jerome's knowledge of Hebrew see E. BURSTEIN, *La compétence en hébreu de S. Jérôme* (diss: Poitiers, 1971); S. REBENICH, "Jerome: The *vir trilinguis* and the *Hebraica veritas*," *VChr*, 47, 1993, p. 50-77; N. ADKIN, "A note on Jerome's knowledge of Hebrew," *Euphrosyne*, 23, 1995, p. 243-245.

subliminally accentuates Jerome's self-styled uniqueness among contemporary western exegetes in maintaining—or at least giving the appearance of maintaining—close ties to the rabbinical tradition,³⁶ and in this sense he was patterning himself after his hero Origen, another famous Christian connoisseur of Judaica.³⁷

Something else fundamental is accomplished by the book-borrowing scene. An anecdote by its very nature conveys a more vivid impression than a flat, generic statement that one has been busy with other tasks. Jerome strategically places it near the beginning of the letter to rebut Damasus' playful insinuation that he lately has been idle and sleeping (*dormientem*³⁸ *te et longo iam tempore legentem potius quam scribentem*³⁹). Damasus' request for answers to some exegetical questions is a covert attempt at obtaining a progress report from his client, and Jerome seizes the opportunity to prove that he is not squandering his time in useless pursuits but rather he is engaging in activities that promote his scholarship.⁴⁰ Hence he is voicing the timeless anxiety of the client.⁴¹ In its tone

36. See G. BARDY, "St. Jérôme et ses maîtres hébreux," *RBén*, 46, 1934, p. 145-164; C.T.R. HAYWARD, "Jewish traditions in Jerome's commentary on Jeremiah and the Targum of Jeremiah," *PIBA*, 9, 1985, p. 100-120; ID., "Saint Jerome and the Aramaic Targumim," *JSS*, 32, 1987, p. 105-123; ID., "Some Observations on St. Jerome's 'Hebrew Questions on Genesis' and the Rabbinic Tradition," *PIBA*, 13, 1990, p. 58-76; R. HENNINGS, "Rabbinisches und Antijüdisches bei Hieronymus Ep. 121.10" in J. VAN OORT and U. WICKERT, ed., *Christliche Exegese zwischen Nicaea und Chalcedon, 325-451* (Kampen, 1992), p. 49-71; A. KAMESAR, *Jerome, Greek Scholarship, and the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford, 1993), p. 176-191; S. LEANZA, "Gerolamo e la tradizione ebraica" in C. MORESCHINI and G. MENESTRINA, ed., *Motivi letterari ed esegetici in Gerolamo. Atti del convegno tenuto a Trento il 5-7 dicembre 1995* (Brescia, 1997), p. 17-38.

37. See N.R.M. DE LANGE, *Origen and the Jews* (Cambridge, 1976).

38. In classical and patristic Latin the verb *dormire* is often used metaphorically to denote idleness: see *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* sv. "*dormire*," V, i, p. 2032-2033.

39. *Ep.* 35, 1 (CSEL 54, p. 265).

40. An interesting parallel to this situation is found in another letter (*Ep.* 32) by Jerome written around this same time to another Roman patron. Marcella had wanted to engage him in some kind of epistolary *confabulatio*, but he postponed it for the time being because he was busy comparing Aquila's Greek translation of the Old Testament with the Hebrew original. As with Damasus, here Jerome puts off his patroness momentarily in favor of working on a Hebrew-related project.

41. Cf. HORACE, *Epod.* 14, where the poet, stricken with a *mollis inertia* evidently brought on by a recent love affair, responds to Maecenas' frequent inquiries about the snail-paced progress of his verse output. On literary patronage in the ancient Roman world see R.P. SALLER, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire* (Cambridge, 1982); B.K. GOLD, *Literary Patronage in Greece and Rome* (Chapel Hill, 1987); A. WALLACE-HADRILL, ed., *Patronage in Ancient Society* (London, 1990).

Ep. 36 is, moreover, in complete conformity with the expectations implicit in the ancient patron-client relationship.⁴²

III. – DIDYMUS, AMBROSE, AND JEROME

The final stage of Nautin's critique turns to the collective propagandistic goal of *Epp.* 35-36. Even though the exchange gives the appearance of having taken place while Damasus was alive, both letters allegedly were authored by Jerome after the pope's death (11 December 384) as a ruse ultimately to discredit Ambrose. In *Ep.* 36, 1 Jerome announces his plans to translate Didymus' *On the Holy Spirit* (dated to the late 350s⁴³) from Greek and then to dedicate the finished product to Damasus: *Didymi de spiritu sancto librum in manibus habeo, quem translatum tibi cupio dedicare*.⁴⁴ In the translation's preface (dated to 387⁴⁵) Jerome declares unequivocally that Damasus was the one who first edged him toward the project.⁴⁶ He also states that his translation would expose the literary thefts (*furta*) of the *informis cornicula* (=Ambrose),⁴⁷ who when he wrote his own essay on the Holy Spirit in 381 at the insistence of the emperor Gratian stole material from Didymus and passed it off as his own.⁴⁸ This comment seems to coincide with Rufinus' charge that Jerome translated Didymus'

42. This conclusion is consistent with the analysis of Damasus' and Jerome's relationship as given by S. REBENICH, *Hieronymus*, p. 141-153. Cf. F. CAVALLERA, *Saint Jérôme. Sa vie et son œuvre* (Paris, 1922), I, p. 75-84.

43. On this dating see E. STAIMER, *Die Schrift 'De spiritu sancto' von Didymus dem Blinden von Alexandria* (Munich, 1960), p. 117-171.

44. *Ep.* 36, 1 (CSEL 54, p. 269).

45. P. NAUTIN, "L'activité littéraire de Jérôme de 387 à 392," *RThPh*, 115, 1983, p. 247-259 (p. 257).

46. *Dum in Babylone versarer et purpuratae Meretricis essem colonus et iure Quiritum viverem, volui aliquid garrere de Spiritu Sancto et coeptum opusculum eiusdem urbis Pontifici dedicare* (SC 386, p. 136).

47. *Et ut auctorem titulo fatear, malui alieni operis interpretis existere quam, ut quidam faciunt, informis cornicula alienis me coloribus adornare. Legi dudum de Spiritu Sancto cuiusdam libellos et, iuxta Comici sententiam, ex graecis bonis latina vidi non bona...Certe qui hunc [sc. Didymum] legerit latinorum furta cognoscet, et contemnet rivulos cum coeperit haurire de fontibus* (SC 386, p. 138-140). The satirical nickname *informis cornicula* may be an allusion to his prose style, i.e. Ambrose was a "cacophonous squawker." On Jerome's criticism of Ambrose's style in this preface see DOUTRELEAU, "Prologue," p. 300. Cf. *Ep.* 40, 2 (CSEL 54, p. 310), where Jerome uses *cornicula* in roughly the same polemical sense, when referring to his rival Onasus as a "babbling crow" (*cornicula garriens*).

48. For the text see CSEL 79, p. 15-222. T. SCHERMANN, *Die griechischen Quellen des hl. Ambrosius in Lib. III de Spiritu Sancto* (Munich, 1902), p. 70-92, identifies a total of forty-four Didymian borrowings. To these O. FALLER, CSEL 79, p. 17*-21*, adds borrowings from Athanasius, Basil, and select other Greek patristic writers.

treatise only to bring to light Ambrose's plagiarism.⁴⁹ Nautin interprets Jerome's failure to defend himself against the charge as a tacit admission of guilt. He further argues that Jerome had been prodded on by a vengefulness towards Ambrose for not interceding on his behalf when he stood condemned at Rome in 385 by a faction of rogue clergymen.⁵⁰

There are serious problems with this analysis. The above explanation for the genesis of Jerome's hostility towards Ambrose was first proposed in the 1960s by Angelo Paredi as a way to account for why Jerome made such an abrupt *volte-face* against Ambrose in the wake of his departure from Rome in the late summer of 385.⁵¹ A decade later John Kelly hailed this view as "the most plausible explanation so far, and one that is in itself very plausible."⁵² However, it has definitively been disproved by Gérard Nauroy⁵³ and even more forcefully by Neil Adkin, who demonstrates that Jerome disliked Ambrose as early as 384.⁵⁴ Fundamentally, the Paredi-Nautin view is based on pure conjecture for it is not known if Ambrose was even in Rome at the time, much less what if any role he might have played in the drama surrounding Jerome's condemnation. As a result, Nautin's entire thesis is rendered even more methodologically shaky

49. RUFINUS, *Apol.c.Hier.* 2, 28 (CCL 20, p. 104): *Ambrosius sanctus de Spiritu Sancto non solum verbis, sed et sanguine suo scripsit: obtulit enim persecutoribus sanguinem suum, quod in se fudit; sed a Deo ad alios adhuc reservabatur labores. quod etiam si secutus est Graecos catholicos nostrorum scriptores, et aliquid de eorum dictis praesumpsit, continuo haec debuit tua esse summa cura, hic labor, hoc studium ut pro hac causa interpreteris librum Didymi de Sancto Spiritu ut furta illius cognoscerentur, qui fortassis etiam necessitatem scribendi passus est, ut insanientibus tunc haereticis responderet?*

50. NAUTIN reiterated this point a few years later in his entry "Hieronymus" in *TRE* 15, 1986, p. 304-315, at p. 305: "Auf einer Kurz danach in Rom stattfindenden kirchlichen Versammlung, an der auch die italienischen Bischöfe teilnahmen, wurde H. von den Anwesenden offen angefeindet, und Ambrosius, der ebenfalls dort war, unternahm nichts zu seiner Verteidigung, wodurch er sich den bitteren Hass von H. zugezog." On Jerome's expulsion from Rome see KELLY, *Jerome. His Life, Writings, and Controversies* (London, 1975), p. 111-114; NAUTIN, "L'excommunication de saint Jérôme," *EPHE* V^e section, 80-81, 1971-1973, p. 7-37 (p. 7-8).

51. "S. Gerolamo e S. Ambrogio" in *Mélanges Eugène Tisserant. Studi e Testi* 235 (1964), V, 2, p. 153-198.

52. *Jerome*, p. 144.

53. "Jérôme, lecteur et censeur de l'exégèse d'Ambroise" in Y.-M. DUVAL, ed., *Jérôme entre l'Occident et l'Orient*, p. 173-203. Cf. N. MCLYNN, *Ambrose of Milan. Church and State in a Christian Capital* (Berkeley, 1994), p. 289, who is justifiably lukewarm toward Paredi's idea.

54. "Ambrose and Jerome: The Opening Shot," *Mnemosyne*, 46, 1993, p. 364-376. See also ID., "Jerome on Ambrose: The Preface to the Translation of Origen's Homilies on Luke," *RBén*, 107, 1997, p. 5-14. Cf. S. OBERHELMAN, "Jerome's Earliest Attack on Ambrose: *On Ephesians*, Prologue (ML 26:469D-70A)," *TAPhA*, 121, 1991, p. 377-401, who suggests that Jerome insults Ambrose obliquely in the prologue to his *Commentary on Ephesians* (386/7).

inasmuch as it is impossible to prove one unknown by citing another unknown as corroboration.

IV. – AMBROSIASER'S GHOST

It seems safe to assume on the basis of the preceding analysis that Damasus really did write to Jerome with five exegetical questions. But what prompted him to write in the first place? In the search for clues let us look to the late fourth-century *Quaestiones veteris et novi testamenti*, a work that addressed miscellaneous theological and exegetical issues in a question-and-answer format.⁵⁵ It was penned by the enigmatic figure "Ambrosiaster," so called because for centuries his commentaries on the Pauline epistles were transmitted under Ambrose's name.⁵⁶ Various opinions about his identity have been advanced but none has garnered a scholarly consensus.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, a tentative profile of this man of mystery can be sketched from autobiographical snippets interspersed throughout his writings: he was of clerical status and moved in Christian aristocratic circles at Rome, where he was living and writing at some point during the pontificate of Damasus (366-384), probably in the early 380s.

55. The *quaestio* genre was popular among both Christians and pagans in antiquity. Jerome himself experimented extensively with the *quaestio* genre in his letters (e.g., *Epp.* 55; 59; 85; 119-121) and treatises (e.g., *Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim*). For a dated but seminal study of the *quaestio* genre in early Christianity see G. BARDY, "La littérature patristique des *Quaestiones et responsiones* sur l'Écriture sainte," *RBi*, 41, 1932, p. 210-236, 341-369, 515-537; 42, 1933, p. 14-30, 211-229, 328-352. See more recently A. VOLGERS and C. ZAMAGNI, edd., *Erotapokriseis. Early Christian Question-and-Answer Literature in Context. Proceedings of the Utrecht Colloquium, 13-14 October 2003* (Leuven, 2004).

56. R. HOVEN, "Notes sur Érasme et les auteurs anciens," *AC*, 38, 1969, p. 169-174, debunks the widespread misconception that Erasmus was the one who coined the nickname "Ambrosiaster." On one occasion Augustine (*Ep.* 82, 24) wrongly referenced a work of his as if Ambrose were the author (cf. *Aug.Ep.* 108, 5, where he cites the same work but does not mention Ambrose). Ambrosiaster's *Quaestiones* were transmitted in the Middle Ages under Augustine's name, and in fact it was not until the early twentieth century that Alexander Souter proved on stylistic grounds that the work was Ambrosiaster's. For a discussion of Ambrosiaster's authentic works see C. MARTINI, *Ambrosiaster. De auctore, operibus, et theologia* (Rome, 1944), p. 9-73. For fragments of some of his other works see A. HAMMAN, ed., *Patrologiae Latinae Supplementum* (Paris, 1958), I, p. 655-670.

57. This debate raged earlier in the twentieth century and was picked up later by scholars in the same century. For an extensive bibliography see M. MARA, "Ambrosiaster" in A. DI BERARDINO, ed., P. SOLARI, trans., *Patrology. The Golden Age of Latin Patristic Literature from the Council of Nicea to the Council of Chalcedon* (Westminster, MD, 1988), p. 181-182. The identity debate is occasionally rekindled despite the fact that the list of all of the even remotely plausible candidates has seemingly been exhausted. For the most recent installment of the ongoing controversy see O. HEGGELBACHER, "Beziehungen zwischen Ambrosiaster und Maximus von Turin?," *FZPhTh*, 41, 1994, p. 5-44, with a response by A. MERKT, "Wer was der Ambrosiaster?," *WissWeis*, 59, 1996, p. 19-33.

Despite his obscurity in the historical record, Ambrosiaster was a key player on the Christian intellectual scene in the late fourth century.⁵⁸ His *Quaestiones* and New Testament commentaries influenced the pre-eminent western writers of the day including Jerome and Augustine, not to mention some lesser lights.⁵⁹ His *Quaestiones* are pertinent to the present study because they treat the same five questions that Damasus posed to Jerome.

Ambrosiaster	Damasus
<i>Quaest. VI. si Lamech occidit Cain, sicut putatur?</i>	<i>Quaest. I. quid sibi vult, quod in Genesi scriptum est: omnis, qui occiderit Cain, septem vindictas exsolvet?</i>
<i>IX. si omnia deus bona fecit, et bona valde, quid est ut dicat ad Noe de mundis et inmundis induc tecum in arcam, cum in absoluto sit inmundum bonum dici non posse?</i>	<i>II. si omnia deus fecit bona valde, quare Noe de mundis et inmundis animalibus praecepit, cum inmundum bonum esse nihil possit et in novo testamento post visionem, quae Petro fuerat ostensa dicenti: absit, domine, quoniam commune et inmundum numquam introivit in os meum, vox de caelo responderit: quod deus mundavit, tu ne commune dixeris?</i>
<i>X. cum deus dicat ad Abraham de filiis Israhel, quod quarta progenie exituri essent de potestate Aegyptiorum, quid est ut e contra lex dicat quinta progenie exierunt filii Israhel de terra Aegypti? valde videtur contrarium.</i>	<i>III. cur deus loquitur ad Abraham, quod quarta progenie filii Israhel essent de Aegypto reversuri, et postea Moyses scribit: quinta autem progenie exierunt filii Israhel de terra Aegypti? quod utique nisi exponatur, videtur esse contrarium.</i>
<i>XII. quare Abraham fidei suae signum circumcisionem accepit?</i>	<i>IV. cur Abraham fidei suae signum in circumcisione suscepit?</i>
<i>XI. si viri iusti voluntas bona est, quid est ut Isaac, non Esau quem voluit, sed Iacob quem noluit benedixit?⁶⁰</i>	<i>V. cur Isaac, vir iustus et deo carus, non illi, cui voluit, sed, cui noluit, deceptus errore benedixit?⁶¹</i>

58. Why Ambrosiaster's real name has not survived is a question for the ages. There are indications that his *Quaestiones* and Pauline commentaries were published anonymously in his own day. See C. MARTINI, "De ordinatione duarum Collectionum quibus Ambrosiastri 'Quaestiones' traduntur," *Antonianum*, 21, 1947, p. 23-48, and ID., "Le recensioni delle 'Quaestiones Veteris et Novi Testamenti' dell'Ambrosiaster," *RicSRel*, 1, 1954, p. 40-62. If this is the case, then it could explain why contemporary and posthumous readers were left guessing about his identity.

59. MARTINI, *Ambrosiaster*, p. 45-48. Cf. N. CIPRIANI, "Un'altra traccia dell'Ambrosiaster in Agostino (De pecc. mer. remiss. II, 36, 58-59)," *Augustinianum*, 24, 1984, p. 515-525; A. BASTIAENSEN, "Augustin commentateur de saint Paul et l'Ambrosiaster," *SEJG*, 36, 1996, p. 37-65. Ambrosiaster influenced Pelagius as well: see A. SOUTER, *Pelagius' Expositions of Thirteen Epistles of St. Paul* (Cambridge, 1922), I, p. 176-183.

60. *CSEL* 50, p. 29-30, 33-37.

61. *Ep.* 35, 2 (*CSEL* 54, p. 266-267).

Scholars long have suspected that Damasus' five questions were excerpted from Ambrosiaster's *Quaestiones*.⁶² This suspicion seems justified, for if we are to judge by their relatively low frequency of occurrence in extant fourth- and fifth-century theological literature, their virtual duplication in *Ep.* 35 seems to be something more than a mere coincidence. The repetition of one or two questions might be attributed to chance but not the repetition of all five, especially when phraseological echoes suggest a genetic relationship between the two texts.⁶³ Damasus therefore seems to have lifted the questions from Ambrosiaster's handbook. Souter, recognizing the stemmatic relationship between the *Quaestiones* and *Ep.* 35, speculated that Damasus' primary reason for putting these questions to Jerome was intellectual curiosity.⁶⁴ While there may be a grain of truth to this assertion, it is an oversimplification of the situation. I suggest that we consider Damasus' motivation for writing against the backdrop of Jerome's documented animosity toward Ambrosiaster.

Jerome never once in his writings mentions Ambrosiaster or his *Quaestiones* by name but he was certainly familiar with the work and the reputation of the man behind it. Hence he drops disparaging remarks about Ambrosiaster's interpretations in various letters and other works.⁶⁵ His allusiveness about Ambrosiaster, which is characteristic of his polemical technique,⁶⁶ no doubt had something to do with a sense of territorialism. For as an up-and-coming biblical authority Jerome would have realized the precariousness of igniting a public pamphlet war with another seemingly more established authority with whom he must have competed for an audience among the same aristocratic circles at Rome.⁶⁷ Jerome, it must be remembered, was not yet the legendary exegete of international repute that he would become by the dawn of the fifth century.

62. E.g., SOUTER, *A Study of Ambrosiaster* (Cambridge, 1905), p. 173-174; H. VOGELS, "Ambrosiaster und Hieronymus," *RBén*, 66, 1956, p. 14-19 (at p. 15); KELLY, *Jerome*, p. 89-90.

63. E.g., AMBROSIASTER, *Quaest.* XII (*quare Abraham fidei suae signum circumcisionem accepit?*) and DAMASUS, *Quaest.* IV (*cur Abraham fidei suae signum in circumcissione suscepit?*).

64. AMBROSIASTER, p. 174: "It seems to me clear that what happened was this. Damasus had taken up the *Quaestiones* after publication, perhaps some years after publication, as men who are full of official business can never keep pace with current literature, and had been dissatisfied with the answers to some of the *Questions*. He therefore writes to Jerome, whom he obviously regarded as his most learned friend, to get better answers."

65. E.g., *Quaest.* 101 in *Ep.* 146 and *Quaest.* 109 in *Ep.* 73; see A. SOUTER, ed., *CSEL* 50, p. xxi.

66. Cf. H. HAGENDAHL, *Latin Fathers and the Classics. A Study on the Apologists, Jerome, and Other Christian Writers* (Göteborg, 1958), p. 117: "The insidious way of attacking a person without mentioning his name is characteristic of Jerome's polemics."

67. On Jerome's jockeying for the patronage of Rome's Christian élite see A. CAIN, "Vox Clamantis in Deserto: Rhetoric, Reproach, and the Forging of Ascetic Authority in Jerome's Letters from the Syrian Desert," *JThS*, n.s. 57, 2006, forthcoming.

While in Rome he was still in the process of building a name for himself, and he could not afford to alienate potential patrons whose support would be crucial for funding his scholarship.⁶⁸

The single greatest reason why Jerome disliked Ambrosiaster had to do with the latter's outspoken dismissal of the Greek original of the New Testament in favor of the Old Latin version (*Vetus Latina*).⁶⁹ This position naturally would have irritated Jerome, who around 384 finished his path-breaking revision of the Old Latin Gospels.⁷⁰ The edition was universally panned by the critics, as Jerome's translation of the Old Testament from the Hebrew later would be too. In a letter written to Marcella shortly after the Gospels edition appeared Jerome carped at some unnamed critics who accused him of blasphemously tampering with the Lord's words.⁷¹ Ambrosiaster is surreptitiously implicated as one of the culprits, if not the chief one.⁷² The war of words was not one-sided. In a revealing passage from his commentary on Romans (written c.384) Ambrosiaster launches into a tirade directed almost certainly at Jerome and the brand of textual criticism that he practiced.⁷³ Ambrosiaster's objection to it is that an

68. On Jerome's network of female supporters in Rome see C. KRUMEICH, *Hieronymus und die christlichen feminae clarissimae* (Bonn, 1993); B. FEICHTINGER, *Apostolae apostolorum. Frauenaskese als Befreiung und Zwang bei Hieronymus* (Berlin, 1995), p. 165-274; P. LAURENCE, *Jérôme et le nouveau modèle féminin. La conversion à la vie parfaite* (Paris, 1997), p. 396-413; S. LETSCH-BRUNNER, *Marcella—Discipula et Magistra. Auf den Spuren einer römischen Christin des 4. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1998). For a prosopographical conspectus of these women see now A. FÜRST, *Hieronymus. Askese und Wissenschaft in der Spätantike* (Freiburg, 2003), p. 150-220.

69. For this perceptive suggestion see KELLY, *Jerome*, p. 149.

70. Despite his claims to the contrary (e.g., at *De vir. ill.* 135: *Novum Testamentum Graecae fidei reddidi* [CERESA-GASTALDO, p. 232]), Jerome did not translate the remainder of the New Testament outside of the Gospels. F. CAVALLERA, "Saint Jérôme et la Vulgate des Actes, des Épîtres, et de l'Apocalypse," *BLE*, 21, 1920, p. 269-292, remains seminal. Cf. J. ELLIOTT, "The Translations of the New Testament into Latin: The Old Latin and the Vulgate" in W. HAASE, ed., *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II.26.1, 1992, p. 198-245.

71. *Ep. 27* (CSEL 54, p. 223-224): *ad me repente perlatum est quosdam homunculos mihi studiose detrahere, cur adversus auctoritatem veterum et totius mundi opinionem aliqua in evangelii temptaverim...ne nos superbiae, ut facere solent, arguant, ita responsum habeant, non adeo hebetis fuisse me cordis et tam crassae rusticitatis...ut aliquid de dominicis verbis aut corrigendum putaverim aut non divinitus inspiratum.* In the preface to his edition Jerome anticipates some degree of backlash (R. WEBER, ed., *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Versionem* [Stuttgart, 1983], p. 1515): *pius labor, sed periculosa praesumptio, iudicare de ceteris ipsum ab omnibus iudicandum, senis mutare linguam et canescentem mundum ad initia retrahere parvulorum. quis enim doctus pariter vel indoctus, cum in manus volumen adsumpsit et a saliva quam semel inbibit viderit discrepare quod lectitat, non statim erumpat in vocem, me falsarium me clamans esse sacrilegum, qui audeam aliquid in veteribus libris addere, mutare, corrigere?*

72. For this argument see VOGELS, "Ambrosiaster," p. 14-19; KELLY, *Jerome*, p. 89-90.

73. On Jerome as Ambrosiaster's main target here see most recently H. CHADWICK, *The Church in Ancient Society: From Galilee to Gregory the Great* (Oxford, 2001), p. 380.

editor can easily adulterate the accepted biblical text and adopt readings that further his own special interests. The “accepted biblical text” meant here is of course the *Vetus Latina*, which according to Ambrosiaster derives its authority from being both based on the oldest and most reliable Greek codices of the New Testament and endorsed by such luminaries as Tertullian, Victorinus, and Cyprian.⁷⁴

Matters of translation and textual criticism aside, a clash of ideologies also put Jerome and Ambrosiaster at odds with each other. Jerome was a notorious hardliner when it came to ascetic pulpitering. His extremist views won the support of only a small minority of Rome’s Christian aristocracy, while the rest of Rome, clerics and laypeople alike, met them with considerable resentment and suspicion.⁷⁵ Ambrosiaster, by contrast, was a more mainstream Christian voice on questions of marriage, sex, and childbearing—central concerns of the urban ascetic movement in the late fourth-century West. For instance, his *quaestio* on original sin has been read quite effectively as a direct, strong-armed response to the proliferation of Jerome’s ascetic ideals in Rome in the middle 380s.⁷⁶

Ambrosiaster and Jerome were thus fully aware but little admiring of each other. Jerome must have known his rival’s exegetical work and so when Damasus sent the five questions to him, he was bound to have recognized their origin immediately. He does answer three of them but refuses to answer the other two, and in the passage below he explains why:

Duabus tantum quaestiunculis praetermissis, non quo non potuerim et ad illas aliquid respondere, sed quod ab eloquentissimis viris, Tertulliano nostro scilicet et Novatiano, Latino sermone sint editae et, si nova voluerimus adferre, sit latius disputandum. certe expecto, quid placeat: utrumne epistulari brevitate sententias tibi velis digeri aut singulorum libros confici. nam et Origenes in quarto Pauli ad Romanos ἐξῆγησεν tomo de circumcissione magnifice disputavit et de mundis

74. *Ad Romanos* 5, 14 (CSEL 81/1, p. 177): *et tamen sic praescribere nobis volunt de Graecis codicibus, quasi non ipsi ab invicem discrepent. quod facit studium contentionis. quia enim propria quis auctoritate uti non potest ad victoriam, verba legis adulterat, ut sensum suum quasi verbis legis adserat, ut non ratio, sed auctoritas praescribere videatur. constat autem quosdam Latinos porro olim de veteribus Graecis translatos codicibus, quos incorruptos simplicitas temporum servavit et probat. postquam autem a concordia animis dissidentibus et hereticis perturbantibus torqueri quaestiones coeperunt, multa inmutata sunt ad sensum humanum, ut hoc contineretur in litteris, quod homini videretur. unde etiam ipsi Graeci diversos codices habent. hoc autem verum arbitror, quando et ratio et historia et auctoritas conservatur. nam hodie quae in Latinis reprehenduntur codicibus, sic inveniuntur a veteribus posita, Tertulliano et Victorino et Cypriano.*

75. See J. CURRAN, “Jerome and the Sham Christians of Rome,” *JEH*, 48, 1997, p. 213-229. On the Roman clergy’s moderate stance on marriage see C. PIETRI, “Le mariage chrétien à Rome” in J. DELUMEAU, ed., *Histoire vécue du peuple chrétien* (Toulouse, 1979), p. 105-131.

76. See D.G. HUNTER, “On the Sin of Adam and Eve: A Little-Known Defense of Marriage and Childbearing by Ambrosiaster,” *HThR*, 82, 1989, p. 283-299.

*atque inmundis animalibus in Levitico plura disseruit, ut, si ipse invenire nihil possem, de eius tamen fontibus mutuarem.*⁷⁷

In declining to answer two (nos. 2 and 4) of the five questions Jerome disingenuously cites epistolary *brevitas*,⁷⁸ then he points out that they have already been answered sufficiently by Tertullian and Novatian in Latin and by Origen in Greek. The reference to these writers serves two functions. On one level, it is a nod to two of his patristic heroes (Tertullian⁷⁹ and Origen⁸⁰). On a more latent level, it seems that by directing Damasus to past Christian writers and not to able *recentiores* (such as Ambrosiaster), he is delivering a tacit indictment of Ambrosiaster and implying that he is not worthy of being included in such distinguished company. Jerome seems to have thought that by suppressing any mention of his competition here he could avoid legitimizing it. This is most likely why he does not devote an entry to Ambrosiaster in his *De viris illustribus*, a conscious omission that Heinrich Vogels aptly dubs “eine Art von *damnatio memoriae*.”⁸¹ Jerome’s attack on Ambrosiaster in *Ep.* 36 follows along similar lines in pretending that he does not exist. Instead of criticizing him by name, Jerome chooses to upstage his competition by displaying the superiority of his own exegetical method based on a rigorous textual criticism and, by implication, the inferiority of Ambrosiaster’s.⁸² This would explain his unusually aggressive campaigning in *Ep.* 36 for the *Hebraica veritas* as well as the casual dropping of Greek words,⁸³ both of which would have the cumulative effect of highlighting his polyglottism and philological credentials.

To Jerome—the self-appointed herald to the Latins of a scientific, text-critical approach to the Bible inspired by Origen—Ambrosiaster would have represented the old guard. Jerome perceived in his influence at Rome a direct threat to his own exegetical programme and plans to revise the New Testament from the

77. *Ep.* 36, 1 (CSEL 54, p. 268-269).

78. On this *topos* generally see THRAEDE, *Grundzüge*, p. 154-157. On Jerome’s use of it see G.J.M. BARTELINK, “Een gemeenplaats uit de briefliteratuur bij een christelijk auteur. *Brevitas epistolaris* bij Hieronymus,” *Lampas*, 10, 1977, p. 61-65, and CONRING, *Hieronymus*, p. 48-62.

79. See P. PETITMENGIN, “Saint Jérôme et Tertullien” in Y.-M. DUVAL, ed., *Jérôme entre l’Occident et l’Orient*, p. 43-59.

80. See A. CAIN, “Origen, Jerome, and the *Senatus Pharisaeorum*,” *Latomus*, 65, 2006, forthcoming.

81. “Ambrosiaster,” p. 15.

82. NAUTIN, “Échange,” p. 339, hints at this much: “Est-ce un hasard si les questions choisies sont justement celles qui permettaient à Jérôme, grâce à cette source, de se montrer plus fort que l’Ambrosiaster?” Cf. REBENICH, *Hieronymus*, p. 147, who agrees that Ambrosiaster’s *Quaestiones* are the subtext of *Ep.* 36. On the intersection of Jerome’s exegesis with his polemics see I. OPELT, *Hieronymus’ Streitschriften* (Heidelberg, 1973), p. 188-193.

83. E.g., the phrase ταῦτά σοι ἐσχεδίασα and the word ἐξηγήτικων. On Jerome’s knowledge of Greek at this time see P. HAMBLENNE, “L’apprentissage du grec par Jérôme : quelques ajustements,” *RÉAug*, 40, 1994, p. 353-364.

original Greek. Damasus, too, may have felt somewhat uneasy inasmuch as he was the ostensible sponsor of this grand enterprise. He may have sent Jerome the five questions as an inconspicuous way to seek a (public) display of his protégé's scholarly talent and consequently a reassurance of the legitimacy of the project in which he had invested his own reputation. Damasus was indeed one of the most image-conscious popes in the first four centuries of the church. He pro-actively shaped his legacy through unprecedented liturgical reforms and architectural ventures, an increasing centralization of papal power based ideologically on Petrine primacy, and an intertwined promotion of the cult of martyrs and his own career as an amateurish writer of Virgilian hexameters.⁸⁴ In Jerome he found that rare gem of a scholar whose academic qualifications uniquely suited him for the task of normalizing the biblical text of the Latin-speaking world, which would be a monumental notch in the belt of his pontifical legacy.

Jerome was quite proud of Damasus' evidently confident reliance upon his scriptural expertise and he publicized it frequently throughout his writings. Thus, for instance, in his autobiographical notice at the end of *De viris illustribus* (135) he gives his four extant exegetical letters to the pontiff an elevated status by showcasing them as circulating epistolary masterpieces. *Ep.* 36 appears under the title "*De tribus quaestionibus legis veteris.*"⁸⁵ There is reason to think that *Ep.* 35 could have been released with it either before or after Damasus' death. Both letters contain expanded opening salutations (*Dilectissimo filio Hieronymo Damasus* and *Beatissimo papae Damaso Hieronymus*). When he edited various of his epistolary treatises for publication, Jerome would normally replace the opening salutations-*cum*-honorifics of received copies with a subject title that incorporated the original recipient's name in the accusative case following the preposition *ad*.⁸⁶ The case is somewhat different with *Ep.* 36. It contains the same type of salutation heading that might plausibly have appeared in the original received copy. *Ep.* 35 exhibits the same feature. Jerome seems deliberately to have retained salutations in the letters (instead of replacing

84. See J. CURRAN, *Pagan City and Christian Capital. Rome in the Fourth Century* (Oxford, 2000), p. 142-155; D. TROUT, "Damasus and the Invention of Early Christian Rome," *JMEMS*, 33, 2003, p. 517-536; and M. LAFFERTY, "Translating Faith from Greek to Latin: *Romanitas* and *Christianitas* in Late Fourth-Century Rome and Milan," *JECS*, 11, 2003, p. 21-62.

85. The other three letters are: *De seraphim* (*Ep.* 18); *De osanna* (*Ep.* 20); *De frugi et luxurioso filiis* (*Ep.* 21). On the structure of the autobiography and the place of these epistolary treatises in it see P. NAUTIN, "La liste des œuvres de Jérôme dans le *De viris illustribus*," *Orpheus*, 5, 1984, p. 319-334.

86. E.g., *Ep.* 22 is *Ad Eustochium de virginitate servanda* (*De vir. ill.* 135: Ceresa-Gastaldo, p. 231-232), and *Ep.* 123 is *Ad Geruchiam de monogamia*. Cf. *Ep.* 123, 18 (*CSEL* 56, p. 95): *hic libellus 'De monogamia' sub nomine tuo titulum possidebit*. Cf. ARNS, *Technique*, p. 100-101. On this editorial custom among letter writers see G. CONSTABLE, "Letters and Letter-Collections," *Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental* (Turnhout, 1976), fasc. XVII, p. 17-18.

them with the formula *ad* + recipient's name) in order to give the impression to general readers that they were observing both sides of a personal exchange.

The putative circulation pattern of *Epp.* 35-36 in the late fourth century may be reflected in the overwhelming tendency of these letters to circulate as a unit in medieval manuscripts of Jerome's correspondence.⁸⁷ This would not be the only time that Jerome is known to have coupled circulating texts for apologetic purposes. Sometime in late 404 bishop Theophilus of Alexandria sent him a letter⁸⁸ asking him to translate a recently finished *libellus* against John Chrysostom. After having delayed the project for months, citing barbarian incursions into Palestine, a harsh winter, famine, and personal illness,⁸⁹ Jerome sent back the completed draft with an accompanying letter in which he states: *epistulam autem tuam idcirco in Latinum verti et huic volumini praeposui, ut omnes, qui legerint, sciant me non temeritate et iactantia, sed praeceptis beatitudinis tuae suscepisse onus ultra vires meas.*⁹⁰ The *epistula* alluded to here is *Ep.* 113, and *hoc volumen* is the essay against John Chrysostom. Jerome affixed a translation of this letter to the essay and intended the two to circulate together in the West. The reason, as he claims in the conventional language of *recusatio*, is so that every reader might know that he undertook the burdensome project not on any presumption of his own but rather at Theophilus' prompting. Jerome would presumably have had a similar motive for releasing *Epp.* 35-36 as a compact unit. By demonstrating both sides of the letter exchange he could capitalize more poignantly on Damasus' patronage, which (in his mind at least) would vouch for him to a western Christian community still largely wary of his methodologies as a biblical translator and exegete.

V. – CONCLUSION

If Nautin is right about the last surviving correspondence between Pope Damasus and Jerome, then it could easily rank as one of the greatest literary frauds perpetrated in all of antiquity. However, as I have tried to demonstrate in this paper, there are abundantly good reasons for accepting it as an authentic letter exchange between two real and fascinating people that typifies one of the

87. See B. LAMBERT, *Bibliotheca Hieronymiana Manuscripta. La tradition manuscrite des œuvres de Saint Jérôme* (Steenbruge, 1969-1972), I B, p. 513-525.

88. A Latin translation of it is preserved as *Ep.* 113 among Jerome's correspondence.

89. *Ep.* 114, 1 (CSEL 55, p. 394-395): *quod tardius beatitudini tuae Latino sermone translatum librum tuum remitterem, multa in medio impedimenta fecerunt: Isaurorum repentina eruptio, Phoenicis Galilaeaeque vastitas, terror Palaestinae, praecipue urbis Hierosolymae, et nequaquam librorum, sed murorum extructio, ad hoc asperitas hiemis, fames intolerabilis nobis praesertim, quibus multorum fratrum cura inposita est...gravissimo languore correptus et mortis limen ingrediens domini misericordia et tuis orationibus reservatus sum...*

90. *Ep.* 114, 3 (CSEL 55, p. 395).

many ways in which highly educated and theologically informed Christians in late antiquity engaged in meaningful intellectual dialogue with one another through the mediation of the written word. This dialogue between this legendary pope and his monkish protégé followed its own pre-packaged script. In addition to being cast in the terms of a pre-existing literary form (the *quaestio* genre), it is characterized by sharply defined epistolary roles, with Damasus asking the questions and Jerome providing the answers (*ut ego interrogem, tu respondeas*⁹¹). But this is no simple and straightforward question-and-answer session. It is an intensely rhetoricized and pretentious exchange between two very self-consciously literary men. Damasus probably relished the chance to tout his stylistic equality with the precocious young Latinist of his chancery. Jerome, a flamboyant provincial-made-good, must have basked in yet another opportunity to flaunt his privileged status as the personal scriptural advisor to western Christendom's highest ranking bishop.

The free exchange of specialist knowledge about the Bible (and the need to concretize this exchange in a textualized form) was undoubtedly a factor in giving life to the Damasus-Jerome correspondence in question. But there is much more to this correspondence than meets the eye. Once we scratch beneath the surface, we find that Damasus' seemingly innocuous request for answers to some exegetical questions is actually part of an initiative to legitimize the Gospels revision project which he sponsored. Ambrosiaster lurks ominously in the background, casting a long shadow over this ambitious project and over the nascent exegetical career of Jerome. Jerome released *Epp.* 35-36 as a couplet to give himself a platform for sneakily attacking a contemporary *bête noire* and, just as importantly, for openly promoting himself to a western Christian audience as an authoritative biblical commentator of the *Hebraica veritas*—one with a papal stamp of approval, no less—at a time when western exegetes were almost completely ignorant of Hebrew.

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91. *Ep.* 35, 1 (*CSEL* 54, p. 265).

RÉSUMÉ : L'authenticité du dernier échange épistolaire entre Jérôme et Damase (Hier. *epist.* 35-36) a été l'objet de beaucoup de discussions et de débats. Pierre Nautin en particulier a défendu une thèse selon laquelle les deux lettres avaient été écrites par Jérôme trois années après la mort de Damase pour voiler son attaque contre Ambroise de Milan. Cet article tente de montrer qu'il n'y a aucune raison (ni stylistique ni autre) de douter que Damase et Jérôme avaient vraiment écrit ces lettres. L'auteur soutient l'hypothèse que Jérôme avait fait circuler cet échange de lettres à Rome dans les années 380, afin de se distinguer comme un spécialiste biblique de l'*Hebraica veritas* et, en même temps, d'attaquer non pas Ambroise mais son rival en exégèse à Rome, l'Ambrosiaster.

ABSTRACT: The authenticity of Jerome's and Damasus' last surviving letter exchange (Hier. *Epp.* 35-36) has been the subject of much discussion and debate. Pierre Nautin in particular advanced the thesis that both letters were written by Jerome three years after Damasus' death to camouflage his attack on Ambrose of Milan. This article seeks to show that there are no grounds, stylistic or otherwise, for doubting that Damasus and Jerome really did write these letters. The author then argues that Jerome circulated both sides of this authentic exchange in Rome in the middle 380s to distinguish himself as a biblical scholar of the *Hebraica veritas* and in the process to level a covert attack not against Ambrose but against a weighty rival biblical exegete at Rome, Ambrosiaster.