

A MISUNDERSTOOD PASSAGE IN ST. JEROME (*EPIST.* 30, 1)

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ABSTRACT

The first sentence of Jerome's first letter to Paula contains a passage which translators have hitherto misunderstood (*Epist.* 30, 1). The present note endeavours to clarify the problem by adducing a passage of Marius Victorinus' commentary on Cicero's *De inventione* (1, 34, 58-9). Comparison of these passages of Victorinus and Jerome illustrates some typical features of the latter's compositional and self-imitatory technique.

Keywords: Cicero, Jerome, Marius Victorinus, *sylogismus*.

St. Jerome's *Letter* 30 is important. It is the first surviving one to be addressed to St. Paula, the woman who was destined to become his lifelong companion. The purpose of this epistle is to elucidate the acrostical (or "alphabetic") Psalms. This letter is accordingly used in the Vulgate as a preface to the

entire Book of Psalms¹. Jerome himself clearly valued this letter very highly: not only did he send a copy to Paula, but also to Marcella, his “élève de prédilection”². This letter’s first sentence points out that, just as philosophers divide their discourse into physics, ethics and logic, so Holy Scripture deals either with the physical world (as in Genesis and Ecclesiastes), or with ethics (as in Proverbs and elsewhere), or with logic, for which the Christian equivalent is theology (as in Canticles and the Gospels). To this remark about logic Jerome then appends the following qualification: *licet apostolus saepe proponat, adsumat, confirmet atque concludat, quae proprie artis dialecticae sunt* (*Epist.* 30, 1). Here *adsumat* is misunderstood by translators. Jerome’s phrase *proponat, adsumat* was rendered in Bareille’s monumental edition of the complete works thus: “établissant sa proposition, la reprenant”³. On the other hand Labourt’s influential “Budé” edition of the *Letters* offered the following translation of this same phrase *proponat, adsumat*: “fait des propositions, inductions”⁴. The edition for “BAC” by Ruiz Bueno then translated *proponat, adsumat* as “sienta proposiciones, induce”⁵, while the more recent “BAC” by Valero renders these same words as “argumenta, induce”⁶. Finally the

1 Cf. D. DE BRUYNE, *Préfaces de la Bible Latine*, Namur 1920, repr. Turnhout (Stud. Trad. Theol. 19) 2015, 49-51.

2 Thus the canonical biography of F. CAVALLERA, *S. Jérôme: Sa vie et son oeuvre* 1, 1, Louvain and Paris (Spic. Sacr. Lovan. 1) 1922, repr. 1985, 85. It may be noted that the sentence mentioning this copy for Marcella (*Epist.* 30, 14, 2), which is the last of this letter, ends with an echo of Rom. 16, 20, which Hilberg’s canonical edition fails to identify (I. HILBERG, *S. Eusebii Hieronymi epistulae*² 1, Vienna [CSEL 54] 1996, 249).

3 J.F. BAREILLE, *Oeuvres complètes de S. Jérôme* 1, Paris 1877, 127.

4 J. LABOURT, *S. Jérôme: Lettres* 2, Paris 1951, repr. 2002, 31.

5 D. RUIZ BUENO, *Cartas de S. Jerónimo* 1, Madrid (BAC 219) 1962, repr. 1972, 235.

6 J.B. VALERO, *S. Jerónimo: Epistolario* 1, Madrid (BAC 530) 1993, 290. This edition by Valero has been reprinted recently as volume 10a (BAC 710; 2013) of the monumental *Obras completas de S. Jerónimo*.

Italian version by Cola translates *proponat, adsumat* quite differently as “fa delle proposizioni, le dimostra”⁷. It would seem that none of these various renderings of *adsumat* is right.

The clue to the correct understanding of this Jeromian passage would appear to be supplied by a passage of Marius Victorinus’ commentary on Cicero’s *De inventione*⁸. Here Victorinus says in connection with “*sylogismus*” (*In Cic. inv.* 1, 34): *et propositionem habet et adprobationem propositionis et rursus adsumptionem et adprobationem adsumptionis et conclusionem*. The same point is made far more ambiguously by Cicero himself (*Inv.* 1, 34, 58-9). Victorinus’ terminology here (*propositio, adprobatio, adsumptio, conclusio*) corresponds to Cicero’s with the significant exception of the last term: whereas Victorinus employs *conclusio*, Cicero instead uses *complexio*. Since Victorinus’ *conclusio* is also the term employed in Jerome’s *Letter 30*, here Jerome is evidently thinking of Victorinus rather than Cicero. In both Victorinus and Cicero *propositio* and *adsumptio* here mean “major premiss” and “minor premiss” respectively⁹. Such is also the meaning in Jerome’s *Letter 30*: here *proponat, adsumat* signifies the “major” and “minor” premiss of a syllogism.

7 S. COLA, *S. Girolamo: Le Lettere* 1, Rome 1996, 271. For this *Letter 30* there is no English (or German) translation. The English translation of Jerome’s *Letters* is being done for “Ancient Christian Writers” by the present writer.

8 Jerome was evidently familiar with both the *De inventione* and with Victorinus’ commentary on it. Cf. *Adv. Rufin.* 1, 16: *lege Rhetoricos* (sc. *libros*; i.e. *De inventione*) *eius* (sc. *Tullii*); ... *puto quod puer legeris... commentarios... Victorini in dialogos eius* (sc. *Ciceronis*). For *dialogos* here as a reference to Victorinus’ commentaries on Cicero’s *Topica* and *De inventione* cf. P. HADOT, *Marius Victorinus: Recherches sur sa vie et ses oeuvres*, Paris 1971, 211-4.

9 Thus the translations in (e.g.) H.M. HUBBELL, *Cicero: De inventione, De optimo genere oratorum, Topica*, London and Cambridge, Mass. (LCL 386) 1949, repr. 1993, 101 and 103. Cf. also *Oxf. Lat. Dict.*² 1 (2012) 209 (s.v. *assumptio*, sect. 3): “(log.) the minor premiss (of a syllogism)”; *ibid.* 2 (2012) 1645 (s.v. *propositio*, sect. 4b): “the major premiss of a syllogism”.

When the wording of Jerome's whole phrase (*proponat, adsumat, confirmet atque concludat*) is compared with Victorinus' (*et propositionem habet et adprobationem propositionis et rursus adsumptionem et adprobationem adsumptionis et conclusionem*), one is struck by Jerome's greater concision: such streamlining is characteristic of his compositional method¹⁰. In particular Victorinus' two words for "proof" are reduced to one: his twofold *adprobationem* becomes one-word *confirmet*¹¹. The result is a string of four Jeromian verbs that are prosodically identical: each is a bacchius (*proponat, adsumat, confirmet atque concludat*). This bacchiac sequence would have been spoiled by Victorinus' dactylic *adprobet*. Furthermore this *adprobet* (... *ādprōbēt / ātquē*) would generate the last two feet of a hexameter, which in prose is an "inexcusable fault"¹². In addition this *adprobet* (... *ad-sumat, ad-probet at-que*) would entail an inconcinuous homoeocatarcton in three directly juxtaposed words¹³. Jerome's *atque concludat* on the other hand produces his favourite clausula: cretic spondee¹⁴. All this *limae labor* is a hallmark of Jerome's treatment of his sources¹⁵.

10 Cf. the present writer, *Jerome on Virginity: A Commentary on the Libellus de virginitate servanda* (Letter 22), Cambridge (ARCA 42) 2003, 457 (index s.v. "source: compression of").

11 For *confirmo* as a synonym of *adprobo* cf. *Thes. Ling. Lat.* 4 (1906-9) 225, 56 (s.v. *confirmo*).

12 Cf. (e.g.) Julius Victor, *Rhet.* 20: *dum ne... in partem versus incidamus; id enim maximum vitium est*.

13 On the need to avoid such collocations cf. (e.g.) Martianus Capella 5, 518: *ab isdem litteris incipientia, ut est "non fuit istud iudicium iudicii simile, iudices",... in eodem vitio habentur*.

14 On this Jeromian *Lieblingskadenz* cf. M.C. HERRON, *A Study of the Clausulae in the Writings of St. Jerome*, Washington (Cath. Univ. Am. Patr. Stud. 51) 1937, 12-16. In the present instance of Letter 30 this clausulation corresponds accentually to the *cursum planum* with concord between metrical ictus and linguistic accent.

15 Cf. the present writer, *o.c.* (n. 10) 457 (index s.v. "stylistic enhancement, of borrowings").

When Jerome enhances the wording of his source in this way, it is his custom to utilize this same enhanced phraseology on subsequent occasions¹⁶. Such can also be shown to be his practice in the present case. If this *Letter 30* to Paula was written in Rome in 384¹⁷, shortly after Jerome's settlement in Bethlehem in 386 he wrote his *Commentary on Titus*, where à propos of the Apostle's command to "avoid foolish questions" (3, 9) Jerome speaks of those who *vel dent propositionem, vel accipiant, adsumant, confirment atque concludant*. In the next decade (394) the *Letter (53)* which opened Jerome's relations with the illustrious Paulinus of Nola contains a famous review of biblical books that was to ensure for this epistle a place as preface to the entire Bible¹⁸. Near the start of this biblical conspectus Jerome characterizes the Book of Job as follows (53, 8, 3): *omnis... dialecticae proponit λήμματα (sc. Iob), propositione, adsumptione, confirmatione, conclusione determinat*. Finally in 396 Jerome produced his *Commentary on Jonah*. Here Jerome says of a passage in the celebrated "Prayer of Jonah" from the whale's belly (2, 5): *ut sit quasi propositionis et adsumptionis confirmationisque ac syllogismi extrema conclusio*.

16 Cf. the present writer, *o.c.* (n. 10) 456 (index *s.v.* "self-imitation, involving language which comes in the first instance from another author").

17 On the dates of Jerome's works cf. the "Repertorium" of the *Vetus Latina Database - Online*.

18 Cf. H. QUENTIN, *Essais de critique textuelle*, Paris 1926, 131.

