

Tobit and Jerome¹

It was around 390 that Jerome embarked upon his translation of the bible from the Hebrew. This conversion to the *hebraica veritas* also entailed an acceptance of the Hebrew canon, which excluded the deuterocanonical works commonly read in the church. Henceforth Jerome makes a point of stressing the uncanonical nature of these books². In practice however he continues to quote them as if they were scripture. Texts are cited with particular frequency from Ecclesiasticus, Wisdom of Solomon and the deuterocanonical parts of Daniel³. On the other hand quotation from the Book of Tobit is rare. Only three passages have so far been identified: all of them belong to the later period of Jerome's life in which he expressed serious reservations about such uncanonical books. It is the purpose of the present article to add a further passage to the dossier of Jerome's quotations from Tobit. This one is significantly earlier than the other three.

The three passages which have hitherto been recognized are listed by Penna⁴. The earliest occurs in Jerome's commentary on Ecclesiastes, which was produced around 389. There he cites Tobit

1 Citation of Latin works follows the method of *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae: Index Librorum Scriptorum Inscriptionum*², Leipzig 1990. For Latin Fathers the editions used are those given in H. J. Frede, *Kirchenschriftsteller: Verzeichnis und Sigel*, Freiburg/B. 1981; *Vetus Latina* 1/1, and its *Aktualisierungshefte* (1984 and 1988). Greek patristic works are cited according to the conventions adopted in G. W. H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Oxford 1961-8, pp. xi-xlv; the editions used are those given in M. Geerard and F. Glorie, *Clavis Patrum Graecorum* 1-5, Turnhout 1974-87.

2 His pronouncements on the subject are assembled and discussed by G. M. Perrella, «S. Girolamo e i Deuterocanonici del V. T.», *Divus Thomas* (Piacenza), 47-49 (1944-46) 228-35.

3 Cf. A. Penna, *S. Gerolamo*, Turin-Rome 1949, 387-8.

4 *O.c.* (n. 3) 388.

12, 7: *et hoc est, quod in Tobiae libro scribitur: «mysterium regis abscondere bonum est»* (In eccles. 8, 2 ll. 47-9). In 396 the preface to his commentary on Jonah introduces a quotation from Tobit in the following terms (In Ion. prol. ll. 52-7 D): *liber quoque Tobii, licet non habeatur in canone, tamen, quia usurpatur ab ecclesiasticis viris, tale quid memorat, dicente Tobii ad filium suum: «fili, ecce seniu et in eo sum ut revertar de vita mea. tolle filios tuos et vade in Mediam, fili. scio enim quae locutus est Ionas propheta de Nineve, quoniam subvertetur»* (Tob. 14, 3f. LXX). The third passage is found in the commentary on Daniel, which belongs around 407. Here Jerome states: *ubicumque autem medicina et sanatio necessaria est, «Raphael» mittitur qui interpretatur «curatio» vel «medicina dei» —si cui tamen placet Tobiae librum recipere* (In Dan. 8, 16 ll. 929-32). The reference is to Tobit 3, 25: *et missus est angelus domini sanctus Rafahel, ut curaret ambos.*

Jerome's use of deuterocanonical texts has also been examined by Schade⁵. He cites the three passages that are adduced by Penna. However Schade finds evidence for a fourth quotation as well. The passage in question is from Jerome's commentary on Matthew: *primo dicitur gentilium populo per naturalis legis notitiam: «vade et operare in vineam meam», hoc est: quod tibi non vis fieri, alteri ne feceris* (In Matth. 21, 28 ll. 1510-13). Here Schade detects an allusion to Tobit 4, 16: *quod ab alio odis fieri tibi, vide ne alteri tu aliquando facias*⁶. Schade failed however to adduce the similar passage in Jerome's letter to Algasia: *idcirco iustum iudicium dei est scribentis in corde generis humani: «quod tibi fieri nolueris, alteri ne feceris»* (Epist. 121, 8, 12). Here Hilberg's *apparatus fontium* identifies Tobit 4, 16 as the source⁷.

It would seem however that neither of these passages is in fact a quotation from Tobit. In connection with the second Hilberg also referred to Otto's collection of proverbs⁸. Otto does indeed list the formulation *quod tibi fieri non vis, alteri ne feceris*. At the same

5. L. Schade, *Die Inspirationslehre des heiligen Hieronymus: eine biblisch-geschichtliche Studie*. Feiburg/B. 1910; *Bibl. Stud.* 15, 4-5, 184-201.

6. *O.c.* (n. 5) 193. A reference to this text of Tobit is also assumed by D. Hurst and M. Adriaen, *S. Hieronymi presbyteri commentariorum in Matheum libri 4*, Turnhout 1969 (CCSL 77) 194 (*ad. loc.*).

7. I. Hilberg, *Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi epistulae* 3, Vienna-Leipzig 1918 (CSEL 56) 33.

8. A. Otto, *Die Sprichwörter und sprichwörtlichen Redensarten der Römer*, Leipzig 1890, 16.

time he also encloses it in brackets: in his view this phrase is simply a citation of Tobit 4, 16. Here Otto is however mistaken. Szeliński adduces a passage of Augustine's *De ordine: satis est servare unum hoc vulgare proverbium: nemini faciant quod pati nolunt* (2, 8, 25)⁹. Szeliński observes that Otto was wrong to bracket the phrase and concludes: «ein späteres Sprichwort ist es sicher». There is accordingly no justification for detecting a reference to Tobit when Jerome employs this formula himself: Schade and Hilberg were therefore mistaken.

It is nonetheless possible to make an addition to the three quotations of Tobit that are recorded by Penna. In the spring of 384 Jerome produced his *Libellus de virginitate servanda* (*Epist.* 22). Here he has occasion to counsel against the dangers of wine. As a warning example he describes how after the destruction of Sodom Lot's daughters made their father drunk and then lay with him: *et licet putarent genus hominum defecisse et hoc facerent liberorum magis desiderio quam libidinis, tamen virum iustum sciebant hoc nisi ebrium non esse facturum* (*Epist.* 22, 8, 5). At Tobit 6, 22 the angel had told Tobias: *transacta autem tertia nocte accipies virginem cum timore domini amore filiorum magis quam libidinis ductus*. It would seem that Jerome's striking phrase *liberorum magis desiderio quam libidinis* has come straight from Tobit: *amore filiorum magis quam libidinis*.

This particular passage of Tobit (6, 18-22) is found only in Jerome's Vulgate version¹⁰; it occurs nowhere else. These verses must accordingly have been part of the «Chaldaean» text on which Jerome based his translation¹¹. Jerome describes how during his sojourn in the East he had embarked on the study of biblical texts in «Chaldaean» under the guidance of his Jewish mentor: *adhortante me Hebraeo et illud mihi sua lingua crebrius ingerente: «labor omnia vicit improbus», qui mihi videbar sciolus inter eos, coepi rur-*

9 V. Szeliński, *Nachträge und Ergänzungen zu Otto, Die Sprichwörter und sprichwörtlichen Redensarten der Römer* (Diss.), Jena 1892, 30-1; repr. in R. Häussler, *Nachträge zu A. Otto: Sprichwörter und sprichwörtliche Redensarten der Römer*, Hildesheim 1968, 42-3. Häussler records numerous additional examples of this formulation; cf. p. 300, n.º 69.

10 Jerome's sole reason for translating this uncanonical work was to satisfy the insistent demands of some influential friends and benefactors; cf. *Praef. Vulg. Tob.* p. 155, 2-9. The translation was produced at some time before 407; cf. J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies*, London 1975, 284, n. 8. A date around 390 was conjectured by A. Vaccari, in *Institutiones Biblicae* 1³, Rome 1929, 282.

sum discipulus esse chaldaicus (*Praef. Vulg. Dan.* p. 6, 17-20). It was presumably at this period that Jerome came across the present passage of Tobit; he will have read the book without qualms, since at that time he regarded it as canonical¹². The arresting formulation which reappears in the *Libellus de virginitate* will have stuck in Jerome's mind¹³. The phrase was all the more memorable inasmuch as the passage in which it occurs has to do with a topic very dear to Jerome's heart: these verses deal with the celebrated «Tobias nights», in which abstinence from intercourse is recommended for the first three nights after marriage.

Jerome uses this phrase from Tobit in connection with the incestuous union of Lot's daughters with their father. He exonerates them on the ground that they «thought the human race had perished». This excuse was widely used: no fewer than eight passages in which it occurs can be adduced from other authors¹⁴. It is therefore noteworthy that Jerome should be alone in feeling the need to enhance this exculpation with an arresting conceit that has been borrowed from Tobit. One is also struck by the difference of context in which the formulation is employed: while in the bible it had formed part of the angel Raphael's prediction of Tobias' chaste union with his wife, Jerome does not shrink from applying the same words to the most shocking incest. There is also of course no indication that the phrase is a biblical quotation; this circumstance distinguishes it from Jerome's other three citations of Tobit. In this connection it may be noted that the appropriation of striking second-hand phraseology without acknowledgment is in fact a cha-

11 So M. M. Schumpp, *Das Buch Tobias*, Münster/W. 1933, *Exeg. Handb. z. Alt. Test.* 11, XXXII and 148; J. Gamberoni, *Die Auslegung des Buches Tobias in der griechisch-lateinischen Kirche der Antike und der Christenheit des Westens bis um 1600*, Munich 1969; *Stud. z. Alt. u. Neu. Test.* 21, 94.

12 Cf. Schade, *o.c.* (n. 5) 184. For Jerome's immersion in scriptural studies at this period cf. (*e.g.*) *Epist.* 5, 2.

13 On the astonishing capacity of Jerome's magpie mind to pick up and reuse any sort of flashy phrase or clever conceit cf. the present writer, «Some Features of Jerome's Compositional Technique in the *Libellus de virginitate servanda* (*Epist.* 22)», *Philologus*, 136 (1992) 234-55. His prodigious memory has of course long been recognized; cf. (*e.g.*) P. Antin, «Touches classiques et chrétiennes juxtaposées chez s. Jérôme», *Rev. Philol.*, 34 (1960) 63; repr. in *id.*, *Recueil sur s. Jérôme*, Brussels 1968 (*Coll. Latomus* 95), 54: «Le cratère qu'est la mémoire de Jérôme».

14 *Viz.* Philo, *Quaest. in Gen.* 4, 56; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4, 31, 2; Origen, *Cels.* 4, 45; *id.*, *Hom. in Gen.* 5, 4; Ambrose, *Abr.* 1, 4, 24; *ib.* 1, 6, 56; Pseudo-Chrysostom, *Synops.* p. 319; Sulpicius Severus, *Chron.* 1, 6, 7.

racteristic feature of Jerome's technique of composition in the *Libellus de virginitate servanda*.

The practic can be amply illustrated from the same section of the *Libellus* in which this quotation of Tobit occurs. A mere four lines earlier in the chapter Jerome makes the following comment on Noah's inebriation and subsequent self-exposure: *prius venter et statim cetera* (8, 4). The phrase has been lifted straight from Tertullian's *De ieiunio: prior venter et statim cetera* (1 p. 274, 9)¹⁵. Jerome opens the immediately succeeding chapter with a sarcasm about the angel's provision of bread and water during Elijah's flight from Jezebel: *revera non poterat deus conditum ei merum mittere et ex oleo cibos et carnes contusione mutatas?* (9, 1). Again Jerome has borrowed from the *De ieiunio*, where in connection with the same episode Tertullian had asked *an difficile angelo fuerat aliquem aliquid de convivio regis ministrum cum instructissimo ferculo raptum ad Heliam transferre?* (9 p. 285, 8-10)¹⁶.

A final point may be made. In the Vulgate this passage of Tobit runs *amore filiorum magis quam libidinis ductus*. Jerome's formulation of the phrase in the *Libellus de virginitate* on the other hand marks a significant improvement in stylistic terms: *liberorum magis desiderio quam libidinis*. Harendza registered the paronomasia in *liberorum / libidinis*¹⁷. It may be noted further that the effect is all the more impressive because the two words enclose the entire phrase. The noun on which they both depend has been moved to the centre: the resulting alternation of polysyllabic nouns and short adverbs creates an elaborate chiasmic structure that is very impressive indeed (a b c b a).

Such stylistic enhancement of the material which Jerome has appropriated from elsewhere is a further distinctive feature of the *Libellus*. Again it can be abundantly documented from the same chapter in which he borrows from Tobit. Near the beginning Jerome stipulates *ut sponsa Christi vinum fugiat pro veneno* (8, 1). Here too his source is Tertullian's *De ieiunio: cibum... pro veneno*

15 Cf. further the present writer, «Tertullian's *De ieiunio* and Jerome's *Libellus de virginitate servanda* (Epist. 22)», in *Wien. Stud.*, 104 (1991) 154-6.

16 Jerome's *conditum merum*, which is otherwise unattested, has come from *Ieiun.* 12, p. 291, 4 f. Jerome has lifted it quite nonchalantly from a violently anti-Catholic context; cf. *art. cit.* (n. 15) 150.

17 W. Harendza, *De oratorio genere dicendi, quo Hieronymus in epistulis usus sit*, Breslau 1905, 17.

deputarem (3 p. 277, 19-20)¹⁸. Again Jerome has introduced a striking paronomasia: *vinum / veneno*. In the following line he states: *non sic avaritia quatit, inflat superbia, delectat ambitio* (8, 2). Deléani notes that here Jerome's wording has been borrowed from the third chapter of Cyprian's *Ad Donatum: inflat superbia... ambitio delectet*¹⁹. The chiasmic parison of Jerome's elegant formulation is recorded by Hritzu²⁰.

Deléani did not observe that Jerome's next sentence has also been taken from Cyprian: *hic hostis intus inclusus est: quocumque pergimus, nobiscum portamus inimicum* (8, 2). This time it is the *De zelo et livore* which has been the source: *ubicumque fueris, adversarius tuus tecum est, hostis semper in pectore est, pernicies intus inclusa est* (ch. 9). Here Jerome has applied to wine a text that concerned envy. He has also increased its rhetorical *élan*: apart from reversing the order, he tightens up the wording of Cyprian's first two clauses and condenses the next two into one. A final instance of the same tendency may be cited from the following sentence. Jerome's *vinum et adulescentia duplex incendium voluptatis* (8, 2) has evidently been taken from Ambrose's *De virginibus: incendunt enim pariter duo, vinum et adulescentia* (3, 2, 5). Once again Jerome has enhanced the rhetorical impact of the material he has appropriated.

It is clear from the foregoing that Jerome's treatment of this arresting formulation from the Book of Tobit conforms to pattern. In this case the «citation» is simply one element among many in the dazzling plagiaristic patchwork that constitutes the *Libellus de virginitate servanda*.

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18 Cf. *art. cit.* (n. 15) 153-4.

19 S. Deléani, «Présence de Cyprien dans les œuvres de Jérôme sur la virginité», in Y. M. Duval (ed.), *Jérôme entre l'Occident et l'Orient: XVI^e centenaire du départ de saint Jérôme de Rome et de son installation à Bethléem*, Paris 1988, 69.

20 J. N. Hritzu, *The Style of the Letters of St. Jerome*, Washington 1939 (*Cath. Univ. of Am. Patr. Stud.* 60) 88.