

Jerome, Paula, and the Story of the Adulteress: Why Did Jerome Overrule His Old Greek Copies?

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In his *Praefatio in evangelio*, Jerome claims to have consulted only old Greek manuscripts in producing his Vulgate revision of the Old Latin gospels. If this is true, it is surprising that he included the story of Jesus and the adulteress after John 7:52 in his revision, given that our oldest surviving Greek manuscripts consistently lack this story. At the same time, the manuscript tradition of the Vulgate is unanimous in including the story, suggesting that it was present in this version from the beginning due to Jerome's own editorial decision to include it. In this paper, I examine points of contact between the story in its Vulgate form and the circumstances of Jerome's bitter departure from Rome in 385, concluding that Jerome may have had personal motives to include the story even if it were not present in the old copies he presumably consulted.

In the *Praefatio* to his Vulgate revision of the Old Latin gospels, Jerome affirms that he is presenting in his edition "the four gospels only, which are to be taken in the following order, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, as they have been revised by a comparison of the Greek manuscripts," claiming in particular to have consulted "only old Greek manuscripts" and assuring his critics that he had "corrected only such passages as seemed to convey a different

meaning.”¹ If Jerome in fact adhered to these stated principles, it is surprising that he included the story of Jesus and the adulteress, the so-called *pericope adulterae*, after John 7:52 in his revision, given that our oldest surviving Greek manuscripts—the same kinds of manuscripts he claims to have consulted—consistently lack this story.² Even if Jerome had actually seen a continuous Greek manuscript with the pericope when he produced his revision in the mid-380s, it is difficult to believe, based on the character of the surviving manuscript evidence and the kinds of textual decisions Jerome made elsewhere in his gospel revision, that such a manuscript could have been among the old manuscripts he claims

¹ “*Codicum graecorum emendata conlatione sed veterum ... ita calamo imperavimus ut, his tantum quae sensum videbantur mutare correctis,*” Jerome, *Praefatio in evangelio* (Robert Weber and Roger Gryson, eds., *Biblia sacra iuxta Vulgatam versionem*, 5th ed. [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007], 1515, 1516; *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.6, 488). The precise character of the Greek texts referenced by Jerome in revising the Old Latin version is uncertain, though more pertinent to our inquiry is the likelihood that any of these texts contained the *pericope adulterae*. In general, Jerome’s Greek sources appear to have been at least conventional if at times independent texts, perhaps close to 03 and its relatives, though apparently not resembling the text of Codex Bezae. See James Keith Elliott, “The Translations of the New Testament into Latin: The Old Latin and the Vulgate,” 198–245 in Hildegard Temporini and Wolfgang Haase, eds., *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* 26, No. 1 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993), 223, who notes Jerome’s tendency “to move away from the so-called Western text-type.” The question is considered by Bruce M. Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament: Their Origin, Transmission, and Limitations* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1977), 355–56, who supplies references to earlier discussion. If surviving period manuscripts are any guide, we would not expect the pericope to have appeared in Jerome’s old Greek witnesses given that our earliest Greek manuscripts uniformly lack the pericope, with the exception of Codex Bezae, whose text form, however, Jerome appears to have avoided.

² For example, the story is lacking in our papyri P⁶⁶ and P⁷⁵ as well as fourth-century majuscules, such as 01 and 03.

primarily to have consulted.³ At the same time, the manuscript tradition of the Vulgate is unanimous in including the pericope, strongly suggesting that it was present in this version from the beginning and, hence, that its presence is attributable to Jerome's own editorial decision to include it or, at least, not to exclude it.⁴

In this article, I examine the question as to why Jerome might have chosen to include the story apparently against the critical principles he outlines in the *Praefatio* to his edition, focusing on parallels between the story in its various forms and the circumstances of Jerome's bitter departure from Rome in 385 as a potential motivator behind Jerome's decision to include the story. At the time Jerome was revising the Latin gospels in the mid-380s, he was himself accused of sexual misconduct in connection with his patroness Paula.⁵ Summoned before a tribunal of Roman clerics, Jerome was summarily evicted from Rome over vain professions of his innocence, referring to his accusers as a "senate of Pharisees," given their own hypocritical entanglements with women, and nursing a bitter grudge against those whom he perceived as responsible for his downfall. One of these individuals appears to have been Ambrose, against whom Jerome launched a sustained literary attack at about this time, apparently under the belief that Ambrose had supported his removal from Rome, as Oberhelman observes,

³ Jerome *Adversus Pelagianos* 2.17.

⁴ It is possible that the story was found in existing Old Latin gospels. See Jennifer Wright Knust and Tommy Wasserman, *To Cast the First Stone: The Transmission of a Gospel Story* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 224, 232.

⁵ The conventional date for the completion of the Vulgate gospels is 384. See Megan Hale Williams, *The Monk and the Book: Jerome and the Making of Christian Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 280 and Elliott, "Translations," 221.

common sense and historical probability should tell us that Ambrose and pope Siricius either must have been participants in this “senate of Pharisees” or must have granted tacit approval by refusing to come to Jerome’s defense. ... Jerome’s very specific hostile and bitter attack on Ambrose cannot have risen from happenstance; Jerome must have known something concrete regarding Ambrose and his own expulsion, namely that Ambrose did not intervene on his behalf, either when asked or simply by not acting.⁶

Rufinus documents Jerome’s attack on Ambrose and its deleterious effect on church order, observing “how violently he attacks a man who is worthy of all admiration, Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, ... [and] rends him with his foul abuse, and declares that there is nothing manly in a man whom God has singled out to be the glory of the churches of Christ,” later recalling “how shamefully and foully he assailed even Ambrose, that saintly man.”⁷ Rufinus depicts how Jerome “tears to pieces ... Ambrose that Bishop of sacred memory. In what manner, and with what disparagement he attacks him, I will show ... he knows that I possess a letter of his in which, while he discharges others, he makes his strictures fall upon Ambrose.”⁸ To support his point, Rufinus brings forward yet

⁶ Steven M. Oberhelman, “Jerome’s Earliest Attack on Ambrose: *On Ephesians*, Prologue (ML 26:469D–70A),” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 121 (1991): 377–401 at 391–92.

⁷ Rufinus, *Apologia adversus Hieronymum* 2.23, 25, 43 (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.3, 470, 471, 480).

⁸ Rufinus, *Apologia adversus Hieronymum* 2.22, 23 (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.3, 469, 470), adding “But, since that letter contains certain more secret matters, I do not wish to see it published before the right time,” a remark that illustrates something of Rufinus’s restraint in what we acknowledge to be his own polemic against Jerome. As Rufinus assures his readers elsewhere, “for God is my witness how truly I can say that I have kept silence on many more points than I have brought forward” 2.44 (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.3, 481), comparing himself to David in sparing Saul’s life when he might have taken it (1.31a). Clearly, Rufinus possesses more

another instance of Jerome's petty vindictiveness in his response to Melania the Elder: "when he found that some of his deeds were disapproved by this lady through the stricter discipline of her life, he erased her name from all the copies of his work."⁹ Rufinus concludes with a damning assessment of Jerome's seemingly incessant attacks on his fellow Christians:

there is in all this no care for the faith or for truth, no earnest thought of religion and sound judgment; there is nothing but the practiced lust of evil speaking and accusing fellow believers which works in his tongue, nothing but rivalry with his fellow human beings in his heart, nothing but malice and envy in his mind.¹⁰

So in giving account of Jerome's motives, we cannot underestimate his capacity to act on personal grudges for what he took as wrongs against himself, indulging in extended and calculated polemic against perceived adversaries with his writings as the preferred vehicle of this retribution.

THE VULGATE WITNESS TO THE *PERICOPE ADULTERAE*

The Vulgate gospels represent our earliest securely datable witness of the *pericope* in John, mainly because their date can be fixed to 384, the year of Damasus's death, or shortly thereafter, after which we encounter an explosion of interest in the story in the Latin

damning information against Jerome that he refuses to disclose if it does not bear on his own defense against Jerome's attacks.

⁹ Rufinus, *Apologia adversus Hieronymum* 2.26 (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.3, 471).

¹⁰ Rufinus, *Apologia adversus Hieronymum* 2.29 (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.3, 473, modified).

West. Jerome's decision to include the story in his edition certainly contributed to its establishment in the canon of the Latin church, whatever his role in the story's final placement in John. It is possible that Jerome found the story in John already in certain Old Latin manuscripts and chose on this basis to include it in his edition despite its probable absence from the Greek manuscripts he consulted.¹¹ But this possibility is far from certain given the story's absence from our only contemporary Latin manuscript, Codex Vercellensis, dated to the fourth century.¹² It is the alternative possibility, however, that I intend to consider in this article. When we consider the timeline of the story's appearance in surviving continuous traditions of John and the fact that the Vulgate is our earliest tradition that uniformly attests the story, we cannot entirely evade the possibility that Jerome himself introduced the story into this gospel in his revision of the four gospels, perhaps even shaping the story into its final Johannine form.¹³ As Chris Keith observes, "The evidence concerning Ambrose and Jerome being the first Christian authors to comment upon Jesus's acts of writing in PA [a

¹¹ Evidence that the story existed in the Old Latin gospels prior to the Vulgate is mixed. The fact that the story is missing in our only fourth-century Latin manuscript and unevenly attested in later manuscripts suggests that it was still a recent addition to the tradition as late as the fifth century. The problem with the four fifth-century manuscripts that either contain (VL 2 5 8) or contain room for the story (VL 4) is that their evidence can be cited either way: It is possible that they attest an older form of the story preserved in fifth-century manuscripts. But it is equally possible by this time that they reflect the influence of the Vulgate.

¹² *Codices Latini Antiquiores*, ed. Elias Avery Lowe, 12 vols. (Oxford, Clarendon: 1934–1971), 4:467.

¹³ On the desideratum that the Vulgate be considered as a literary document, see Catherine Brown Tkacz, "Labor tam utilis: The Creation of the Vulgate," *Vigiliae Christianae* 50 (1996): 42–72; here 42. Tkacz considers the question as to whether certain parallels with the diction of Ovid in the Vulgate of Esther and Mark reflect Jerome's literary interests.

feature only in the Johannine version of the story] may suggest that PA's insertion is closer to the context of these fathers in the fourth century."¹⁴ This convergence of evidence for the story's ascendancy in the canonical tradition of John, particularly in the West, at the time of Jerome's revision of the four gospels and Jerome's own role in promoting the story, through the simple act of including it in his edition, places Jerome at the center of the question as to how the story ultimately ended up in the gospel of John.

Any consideration of Jerome's role in placing the story in John turns the spotlight on his remarks offered some thirty years later in 415–416, in which he claims to have found the story “in the gospel according to John in many both Greek and Latin manuscripts.”¹⁵ Jerome's claim is peculiar in its appeal to the Latin tradition in support of a Greek reading. Why mention Latin manuscripts at all if there were trustworthy Greek manuscripts that attested the pericope? Jerome's appeal to the Latin tradition is remarkable considering that in other places he is content to cite *only* the Greek tradition without reference to Latin authorities, which he typically dismisses as entirely lacking the authority of original-language documents. In *Epistula 27* “To Marcella,” Jerome contrasts the Greek tradition as a “clear spring” to the Latin as a “muddy streamlet,” arguing that “the Latin manuscripts of the Scriptures are proved to be faulty by the variations which all of them exhibit.”¹⁶ In the *Praefatio* to his

¹⁴ Chris Keith, *The Pericope Adulterae, the Gospel of John, and the Literacy of Jesus*; *New Testament Tools: Studies and Documents* 38 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 252.

¹⁵ “*In Euangelio secundum Iohannem in multis et Graecis et Latinis codicibus inuenitur de adultera muliere, quae accusata est apud Dominum,*” Jerome, *Adversus Pelagianos* 2.17 (Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 80, 76). For the date of the *Dialogi contra Pelagianos*, see Roger Gryson, et al., *Répertoire général des auteurs ecclésiastiques latins de l'antiquité et du haut Moyen Âge* (2007), 542, and Williams, *Monk*, 300.

¹⁶ “*quibus si displicet fontis unda purissimi, caenosos riuulos bibant ...*”

revision of the four gospels, Jerome observes concerning the Latin gospels that “as we have it in our language it is marked by discrepancies,” noting that “error has sunk into our books” on account of the carelessness and liberties of copyists.¹⁷ So Jerome’s citation of the Latin tradition in support of the presence of the story of the adulteress in John suggests his awareness of a certain defectiveness in the Greek tradition, which we can infer from the state of our surviving Greek copies. While not excluding the possibility that the story was found in some Greek manuscripts, we might understand Jerome’s carefully worded appeal to both the Greek and Latin traditions as implicit acknowledgment of the story’s sparse attestation in Greek. Perhaps the story existed in Greek in the work of Jerome’s teacher Didymus, or in non-canonical gospels, or affixed to the gospel of John as in Family 1, or after Luke 21:38 as in Family 13, or in certain “Western” texts that Jerome did not regard as reliable, or perhaps even in Greek texts that had been influenced by the Vulgate in this span of three decades.¹⁸ Jerome’s remarks concerning the story’s attestation may well have been true or partially true in 415–416 in any number of ways while informing us not at all about the state of the manuscript tradition in 384–385 when he produced his revision.

If Jerome’s confidence in the Greek testimony was so dubious that he found himself compelled to cite even the Latin evidence in

sed Latinorum codicum uitiositatem, quae ex diuersitate librorum omnium conprobatur,” Jerome, *Epistula* 27.1 (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 54, 224; *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.6, 44).

¹⁷ “*Hoc certe cum in nostro sermone discordat ... in nostris codicibus error inolevit,*” Jerome, *Praefatio in evangelio* (Weber and Gryson, eds., 1515, 1516; *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.6, 488; Kevin P. Edgecomb, “Letter of Jerome to Pope Damasus,” online: http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/jerome_preface_gospels.htm).

¹⁸ On Jerome’s apparent aversion to so-called “Western” texts, see Elliott, “Translations,” 223.

support of it, we must wonder whether this testimony is to be trusted at all. Jerome's tendency to exaggerate is legendary, especially when he had a motive to do so—as we might presume he would when citing a passage of doubtful canonicity in a heresiological treatise. Jerome's reliability on this point is not abetted by the fact that he contradicts himself in other places where he claims even substantial support for a Greek reading. As a case in point we might refer to Jerome's conjecture in his *Commentariorum in Matthaeum* (398) that the name Asaph originally stood for Isaiah or simply “the prophet” at Matt 13:35, that just three years later, in his *In Psalmos homiliae* on Ps 78 (77 LXX, 401), he now claims “is found in all the ancient copies.”¹⁹ When Jerome first mentions the reading “Asaph” in *in Matthaeum*, he openly admits that it is his own conjecture:

I have read in several manuscripts [*Legi in nonnullis codicibus*], ... that ... it is written as “through Isaiah the prophet, saying.” Because the text is not at all found in Isaiah, I think it was later removed by prudent men. In my judgment [*Sed mihi uidetur*], it was originally published as follows: “[in order that what was written] through Asaph the prophet, saying.”²⁰

Yet just three years later, in his homilies on the Psalms, Jerome confidently asserts that what he had formerly conjectured to be the initial reading “is found in all the old manuscripts”[*in omnibus*

¹⁹ For the dating of these works, see Gryson, et al., *Répertoire*, 540, 545. I am indebted for the following observations to Amy M. Donaldson, “‘What Was Spoken through the Prophet Asaph’ (Matt 13:35): Textual Evidence from Jerome, or Conjectural Emendation by Origen?” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Pacific Northwest Chapter of the Society of Biblical Literature, Moscow, ID, 21 May 2016).

²⁰ Jerome, *Commentariorum in Matthaeum* 13:35 (Fathers of the Church 117, 160–61; Sources Chrétiennes 242, 284).

ueteribus codicibus].²¹ It is possible of course that Jerome had discovered new manuscripts in the three-year span between these remarks, but then it is hard to see how he could claim that the reading was found in *all* old manuscripts, the same manuscripts he supposedly had access to as early as 384–385 when he revised the Old Latin gospels. We wonder why he chose not to mention any of these manuscripts in 398. Nor does the Vulgate text, which reads “through the prophets” (*per prophetam*), suggest that Jerome had access to old Greek manuscripts with the reading “Asaph” at a time when he claims to have cited such manuscripts. It is certainly fair then to question Jerome’s veracity on his later claim that the reading was “found in all the old manuscripts,” when he cites only his own conjecture in 398 without citing any manuscripts at all, while at the same time, if his later claim were true, he must have known of some of the old manuscripts in CE 384–385 to which he later refers in 401. Yet to this day, Jerome remains our only source for the reading “Asaph” at Matt 13:35, a situation that does little to bolster his credibility when citing Greek evidence for the story of Jesus and the adulteress in CE 415–416 against the Pelagians.

THE LITERARY BACKGROUND OF THE VULGATE *PERICOPE* *ADULTERAE*

A story of a woman accused of sin survives in at least two fourth-century documents before its appearance in the Vulgate. The first of these documents is Didymus’s *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, a document that is particularly significant in light of the esteem Jerome held for its author, whom Jerome regarded as a mentor, at the time he produced the Vulgate gospels, as he effuses,

²¹ Jerome *Homilia* 11 (Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 78, 66–67).

Didymus, my own Didymus, who has the eyes of the bride in the Song of Songs, ... looks afar into the depths, and has once more given us cause to call him, as is our wont, the Seer Prophet. ... He is rude in speech, yet not in knowledge; his very style marks him as one like the apostle as well by the grandeur of the sense as by the simplicity of the words.²²

It is not impossible that Jerome knew of Didymus's version of the story, whether from the *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (especially if he consulted Didymus for his own commentary on this book), from another now lost work of Didymus, or perhaps during his brief time with Didymus in Alexandria.²³ In the *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, the story appears as follows:

We find, therefore, ⁷in certain gospels [the following story], A woman, it says, was condemned by the Jews for a sin and ⁸was being sent to be stoned in the place where that was customary to happen. The savior, it says, ⁹when he saw her and observed that they were ready to stone her, said to those ¹⁰who were about to cast stones, "He who has not sinned, let him take a stone and cast it." ¹¹If anyone is conscious in himself not to have sinned, let him take up a stone and smite her. And no one ¹²dared. Since they knew in themselves and

²² Jerome *Praefatio in Libro Didymi de Spiritu Sancto*, cited by Rufinus *Apologia adversus Hieronymum* 2.24 (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.3, 470). But Rufinus offers a scathing rebuttal of Jerome's claim that Didymus was his mentor: "He [Jerome] ... has not in his whole life stayed more than thirty days at Alexandria where Didymus lived; yet almost all through his books he boasts, at length and at large, that he was the pupil of Didymus the seer ... and the material for all this boasting was acquired in a single month." Rufinus *Apologia adversus Hieronymum* 2.12 (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.3, 466).

²³ Jerome's *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* dates to CE 388, three years after he completed the Vulgate gospels. See Gryson, et al., *Répertoire*, 528.

perceived that they themselves were guilty in some things, they did not ¹³dare to strike her.²⁴

The second document is the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, which offers the following account:

If ... you do not receive a penitent back, being without mercy, you have sinned against the Lord God, since you would not have obeyed nor trusted in God our Savior, nor acted as did he on account of the woman who had sinned, when the elders set her before him and departed, leaving judgement in his hands. He looked into her heart and asked whether the elders had condemned her. When she said not, he said to her: “Go, nor do I condemn you.”²⁵

Didymus’s reference to “certain gospels” as the source of this story is significant in supplying some justification for its ultimate inclusion in a gospel text, whether it appeared first in Jerome’s revision of the four gospels or in the Old Latin version that he revised. If Jerome had included the story in his revision in 384–385 at least partially on the authority of Didymus at a time when, in Rufinus’s words, Jerome “praise[d] Didymus to the sky,” it is understandable that in 415–416 his appeal to Didymus would later have proved an embarrassment, after Didymus had fallen from favor for his Origenist views.²⁶ As Rufinus observes, “Didymus, whom he [Jerome] had formerly ranked among the seer-prophets and Apostles, now he places among those whose teaching diverges from

²⁴ Bart D. Ehrman, “Jesus and the Adulteress,” *New Testament Studies* 34 (1988): 24–44 at 25, translating Didymus of Alexandria, *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* 223.6b–13a.

²⁵ Alistair Stewart-Sykes, ed., *The Didascalia Apostolorum: An English Version* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 144, translating *Didascalia Apostolorum* 2.24.3.

²⁶ Rufinus *Apologia adversus Hieronymum* 2.23 (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.3, 470).

that of the churches.... he has since cast him down even to the infernal region.”²⁷ Any support Jerome might have relied upon from Didymus’s reference to the story “in certain gospels” in 384–385 had evaporated by 415–416, following Jerome’s public disavowal of his former teacher. In his entanglement with the Pelagians, Jerome would have had every incentive to dissemble and deflect to the manuscript evidence, however sparse, rather than cite his now-heretical teacher and his extra-canonical gospels. As we observed above, Jerome’s delicately-phrased invocation of the Greek and Latin manuscripts in his treatise against the Pelagians—significantly, in the *present* tense—refers not necessarily to the existence of such manuscripts in 384–385, when he revised the Old Latin gospels, but to their existence in 415–416, when the times were very different. By this time, there were certainly Latin manuscripts with the story, namely, those of his own edition, and perhaps some Greek manuscripts as well, particularly bilinguals such as Codex Bezae, that were already closely associated with the Latin tradition and which may in fact have obtained the story from Latin gospels.²⁸

²⁷ Rufinus *Apologia adversus Hieronymum* 2.43, 23 (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.3, 480, 470).

²⁸ Knust and Wasserman argue that the story’s placement in Codex Bezae appears to confirm that Jerome found it in some Greek manuscripts. See Knust and Wasserman, *Stone*, 267. David C. Parker dates Codex Bezae, which contains the story in parallel Greek and Latin columns, to 400 CE, that is, some fifteen years after its appearance in the Vulgate. See David C. Parker, *Codex Bezae: An Early Christian Manuscript and its Text* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 30. Ambrose cites the *pericope adulterae* in a number of his letters, but may however depend on the Vulgate form of the story, despite citing it in his own words. For example, Ambrose’s *Epistulae* 50, 64, and 68, which cite the *pericope adulterae*, all date from 385–387, that is, immediately following the appearance of Jerome’s revision of the four gospels. *Epistula* 68 mentions that the story comes from John’s gospel. If so, Ambrose is representative of the sudden explosion of interest in the

THE JOHANNINE *PERICOPE* *ADULTERAE* IN THE CONTEXT OF JEROME'S VULGATE REVISION

Comparison with earlier forms of the story reveals at least four distinctive features of the Johannine Vulgate form of the pericope that align with known details of Jerome's personal situation at the time of his revision of the four gospels: first, the sin of the woman is identified specifically as a sexual sin, namely, adultery (John 8:4), consistent with the charge of sexual misconduct leveled against Jerome and implicitly against Paula; second, the Jews of Didymus's account and the elders of the *Didascalia* are identified as scribes and Pharisees (John 8:3), consistent with Jerome's characterization of the tribunal of clerics that ousted him from Rome; third, the intent of the accusers *of the woman* is to trap *Jesus* (John 8:6), consistent with Jerome's portrayal of his accusers' motives in bringing false charges against himself and, implicitly, against Paula; and, fourth, Jesus bends down and writes on the ground (John 8:6, 8), an act that Jerome understands significantly in light of Jeremiah's indictment against his own hypocritical persecutors. These points of comparison raise serious questions concerning Jerome's motives in including the story in his edition of John and, hence, the reliability of this edition as a textual witness of the story's presence in Greek manuscripts of John at the end of the fourth century. In light of Jerome's well-documented habit of nearly continuous engagement in scurrilous literary attacks throughout his long career, it is possible that he had other more personal motives to include the story—and possibly even to expand it—even if it were not present in the old copies he claims to have consulted, as a kind of last word against his

story—exclusively in the West—at the end of the fourth century.

hypocritical accusers in Rome, disguised in Jeremiah's indictment and the teachings of Jesus.

As sole editor of the Vulgate, Jerome had unparalleled access to the text with little if any oversight, except, as he claims, from Damasus, who in any case was in no position to verify the accuracy of Jerome's use of the Greek tradition. Our sources are thin as to whether Jerome had any real sponsorship for his efforts beyond what he himself states in the *Praefatio* to his edition and his putative literary exchange with Damasus, which we have only from his own collection of letters.²⁹ Concerning the origin of the Vulgate we are entirely dependent on Jerome's own account, as apparently also were his contemporaries, who challenged Jerome's autonomy and unaccountability. Referring to Jerome's Old Testament translation, Rufinus accuses Jerome of arrogance in rejecting the text that had been approved by the apostles, inquiring,

what are we to do when we are told that the books ... are to be had from you in a truer form than that which was approved by the Apostles? ... Which of all the wise and holy men who have gone before you has dared to put his hand to that work? Which of them would have presumed thus to profane the book of God, and the sacred words of the Holy Spirit? Who but you would have laid hands upon the divine gift and the inheritance of the Apostles?³⁰

²⁹ On the possibility that Jerome fabricated his commission from Damasus, see Pierre Nautin, "Le premier échange épistolaire entre Jérôme et Damase: lettres réelles ou fictives?" *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 30 (1983): 331–44 at 331. It is also possible that Jerome committed an originally verbal commission to writing.

³⁰ Rufinus *Apologia adversus Hieronymum* 2.32 (Patrologia Latina 21, 611; *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.3, 475).

Rufinus continues,

In all this abundance of learned men, has there been one who has dared to make havoc of the divine record handed down to the Churches by the Apostles and the deposit of the Holy Spirit? For what can we call it but havoc, when some parts of it are transformed, and this is called the correction of an error?³¹

Rufinus is particularly disturbed by Jerome's absolute autonomy in producing his edition, arguing that "this version [the LXX] must certainly be of more authority with us than a translation made by a single man."³² Rufinus assails Jerome's "daring temerity" in deciding unilaterally which books are heretical and which are sound for the rest of the church, accusing Jerome, "with that 'censor's rod' of yours, and by your own arrogant authority, you make your decrees ... 'Let this book be cast out of the libraries, let that book be retained,'" expressing his belief that Jerome was accountable to no one in exercising his prerogative as editor.³³ Rufinus rebukes Jerome specifically for acting alone with no prior authorization to undertake his revision, at least his OT revision, asserting, "This action is yours, my brother, yours alone. It is clear that no one in the church has been your companion or confederate in it."³⁴ Augustine expresses a similar unease referring to Jerome's

³¹ Rufinus *Apologia adversus Hieronymum* 2.32 (Patrologia Latina 21, 611–612; *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.3, 475).

³² Rufinus *Apologia adversus Hieronymum* 2.32 (Patrologia Latina 21, 612; *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.3, 475).

³³ Rufinus *Apologia adversus Hieronymum* 2.32, 30 (Patrologia Latina 21, 610; *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.3, 475, 474).

³⁴ "Tuum igitur, frater, tuum istud factum, nec quemquam te in hoc comitem vel socium in Ecclesia habuisse," Rufinus *Apologia adversus Hieronymum* 2.37 (Patrologia Latina 21, 615; *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.3, 477).

controversial translation of a particular word in Jonah, writing “After this, it seems to us that you, also, among others, can be wrong.”³⁵ It is clear that Augustine places full responsibility for the translation on Jerome, observing that “you see the sort of thing that can happen when a text cannot be corrected by comparison with the familiar languages,” but presumably only by consultation with Jerome personally.³⁶ Working alone in the 380s on his revision of the Old Latin gospels, Jerome could have had no idea how successful his edition would ultimately become nor of what sort of account he might be expected to supply as to his editorial decisions. In this respect Jerome’s revision of the Old Latin gospels was an intensely personal endeavor despite his claim of papal sponsorship and any initial ambitions he may have had for the final product. Even the publication and dissemination of this revision was closely managed by Jerome himself. According to Rufinus, Jerome’s method was to send unsolicited copies of his work to cities and towns throughout the empire, as he inquires, “how are we to regard those translations of yours which you are now sending about everywhere, through our churches and monasteries, through all our cities and walled towns?”³⁷ Rufinus is clearly troubled by Jerome’s lack of accountability in circumventing episcopal leadership in the distribution of his revision, flooding unsuspecting churches and monasteries with his work. In Rufinus’s view, Jerome’s autonomy undermined the ecclesiastical authority by which a work of such importance ought to have been distributed, allowing unprecedented

³⁵ Augustine *Epistula* 71.5 (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 34, No. 2, 253; Fathers of the Church 12, 327).

³⁶ Augustine *Epistula* 71.5 (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 34, No. 2, 253; Fathers of the Church 12, 327).

³⁷ Rufinus *Apologia adversus Hieronymum* 2.32 (Patrologia Latina 21, 611; Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 2.3, 475).

and virtually unchecked license in determining the final shape of the text.

An Accusation of Adultery

The first distinctive feature of the Vulgate account compared to earlier accounts is that the sin of the woman is identified specifically as adultery, that is, a sexual sin, an accusation with some relevance to Jerome's circumstances at the time he was completing his revision of the gospels, when he was himself hauled before a tribunal of Roman clerics to answer to charges of sexual misconduct in connection with certain of his patronesses, in particular, his wealthy sponsor Paula, as he relates,

It often happened that I found myself surrounded with virgins ... Our studies brought about constant communication, this soon ripened into intimacy, and this, in turn, produced mutual confidence.... My gender is my one crime, and even on this score I am not assailed, except when there is talk of Paula going to Jerusalem. Very well, then. They believed my accuser when he lied.... People have laid to my charge a crime of which I am not guilty.³⁸

Of course, the accusations against Jerome implicitly implicated the women with whom he associated, particularly Paula, whose plans to follow Jerome to Palestine appear to have fueled rumors of an indiscretion. In an unguarded comment, Jerome describes his attachment to Paula:

Of all the women in Rome only one had power to subdue me, and that one was Paula.... The only woman who took my fancy was one whom I had not so much as seen at table.

³⁸ Jerome *Epistula* 45.2, 6 "To Asella" (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.6, 59, 60), modified. The date of the letter is 385. See Williams, *Monk*, 280. The date of 383, given by Gryson, et al., *Répertoire*, 530, is not possible based on the letter's contents.

But when I began to revere, respect, and venerate her as her conspicuous chastity deserved, all my former virtues forsook me on the spot.³⁹

Jerome remarks ironically that had Paula “frequented the baths, or chosen to use perfumes, or taken advantage of [her] wealth and position ... to enjoy life..., [she] would have been saluted as [a woman] of the highest rank and saintliness,” but as a true ascetic she is “[of] all the women in Rome, the only ... [one] that caused scandal.”⁴⁰ Jerome’s admiration for Paula is reflected in his long eulogy for her in *Epistula* 108, where he assures the reader that Paula “bore herself so admirably that the most slanderous never ventured to couple scandal with her name,” offering a seeming apology on her behalf regarding the scandalous rumors that had driven him and possibly her as well from Rome almost twenty years earlier.⁴¹ It is easy to see then how charges of sexual impropriety leveled against Jerome and, indirectly, against Paula, might have inspired a degree of sympathy on his part for the woman accused of sin and perhaps inclined him to keep or even to find a place for this story in his edition.

³⁹ Jerome *Epistula* 45.3 “To Asella” (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.6, 59), modified.

⁴⁰ Jerome *Epistula* 45.4 “To Asella” (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.6, 59), modified.

⁴¹ Jerome *Epistula* 108.15.2 (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.6, 203). The date of the letter is 404. See Gryson, et al., *Répertoire*, 532; Williams, *Monk*, 297. See also Andrew Cain, *Jerome’s Epitaph on Paula: A Commentary on the Epitaphium Sanctae Paulae with an Introduction, Text, and Translation* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 319, where Cain observes that Jerome “clearly is aiming to insulate her [Paula] from any whiff of scandal related more generally to the widespread practice of *subintroductio* [i.e., spiritual marriage]..., and more specifically to the controversy that had smeared both of their reputations, and especially his, in Rome back in 385.”

A Senate of Pharisees

A second feature of the Vulgate account is that the accusers are identified as scribes and Pharisees rather than as “the Jews” of Didymus’s account or “the elders” of the *Didascalia*, an identification that accords with Jerome’s depiction of his accusers at Rome, as he recounts,

While I was an inhabitant of Babylon, a settler in the land of the purple harlot, ... the whole senate of the Pharisees raised a clamor ... the whole faction of the ignorant ... laid their heads together against me.⁴²

Jerome’s reference to Rome as “Babylon” reveals his view of the city’s true character, despite its Christian veneer, while his characterization of the clergy responsible for his eviction from Rome as “a senate of Pharisees” clearly draws on the gospels’ depiction of the Pharisees as hypocrites.⁴³ Jerome describes his accusers as those who, “disregarding the beams in their own eyes, look for motes in those of their neighbors,” predicting ominously that “the day will surely come when ... not a few [of them] will be in the flames.”⁴⁴ Accusations of sexual impropriety against clergy were not unheard of in the Roman church at the time, where clergy posing as ascetic holy men were sometimes accused of abusing their positions of trust to gain access to Christian women. In his letter to Eustochium, Jerome warns her:

⁴² Jerome *Praefatio in Libro Didymi de Spiritu Sancto*, cited by Rufinus, *Apologia adversus Hieronymum* 2.24 (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.3, 470). The date of the *Praefatio* is 387. See Gryson, et al., *Répertoire*, 528; Williams, *Monk*, 282.

⁴³ “*Pharisaeorum ... senatus*,” Jerome *Praefatio in Libro Didymi de Spiritu Sancto*.

⁴⁴ Jerome *Epistula* 45.4, 1 (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.6, 59, 58–59).

avoid men ... [who], when they have gained admission to the houses of the high-born and have deceived “silly women laden with sins” ... pretend to make long fasts while at night they feast in secret. Shame forbids me to say more.... There are others ... who seek positions in the clergy simply that they may be able to see women with less restraint. ... Certain persons have devoted the whole of their energies and life to the single object of knowing the names, houses, and characters of married women.⁴⁵

Jerome expresses his outrage at the hypocrisy of clergy who seek out liaisons with married women, leading them into adultery, while preaching abstinence in public, a situation having clear parallels with the *pericope adulterae* in its Vulgate form. Jerome tells of a troublesome monk who

[frequents] no society but that of weak women.... He likes, I am told, to visit the cells of widows and virgins, and to lecture them.... What is it that he teaches these ... women in the privacy of their own chambers? ... If his private teaching is the same as his public, he should keep aloof altogether from the society of girls.⁴⁶

In his *Commentariorum in Epistolam ad Titum*, Jerome depicts in vivid detail the drunken exploits of bishops, breaking out in boisterous laughter and hiccups between drinks, hurling goblets at their companions, and making brazen oaths before slumbering in a drunken stupor or, even worse, as he suggests, giving in to sexual

⁴⁵ Jerome *Epistula* 22.28 (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.6, 34), citing 2 Tim 3:6, modified. The date of the letter is 384. See Gryson, et al., *Répertoire*, 529; Williams, *Monk*, 280.

⁴⁶ Jerome *Epistula* 50.1, 3 (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.6, 80, 81). The date of the letter is 393 or 394. For the former, see Williams, *Monk*, 287; for the latter, see Gryson, et al., *Répertoire*, 530.

desire.⁴⁷ According to Jerome, these prelates “vomit that they might drink and drink that they might vomit. They are gluttons occupied with the single office of satisfying their stomach.”⁴⁸ According to Jerome, the result is predictable given those who make ecclesiastical office

into a distinction, such that they do not seek those who are most able to do good for the church..., but rather those whom they love, whose obsequiousness has been ascertained, or for whom certain great relatives have spoken up, and ... who have even offered bribes that they might be made clerics.⁴⁹

In his *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, Jerome observes that bishops are permitted to sin with impunity because “an accusation is difficult against a bishop: if he has sinned, no one believes it, and if he is convicted, he is not punished.”⁵⁰ The accuracy of these hyperbolic depictions aside, they nevertheless reveal something of Jerome’s opinion of his accusers. Defending himself to Rufinus, Jerome observes that “as to what judgment was formed of me at Rome, or what was written afterwards, ... I am not to be tried by your words ... but by the documents of the church.”⁵¹ If Jerome saw

⁴⁷ Jerome *Commentariorum in Epistulam ad Titum* 1:7 (Patrologia Latina 26, 566C, D). The date of the commentary is 386. See Gryson, et al., *Répertoire*, 547; Williams, *Monk*, 281.

⁴⁸ “*Vomunt ut bibant, bibunt ut vomant. Digestio ventris, et guttur, uno occupantur officio,*” Jerome *Commentariorum in Epistulam ad Titum* 1:7 (Patrologia Latina 26, 566C, D). See Oberhelman, “Attack,” 399.

⁴⁹ Jerome *Commentariorum in Epistulam ad Titum* 1:5 (Patrologia Latina 26, 562B), translation mine.

⁵⁰ Jerome *Commentarii in Ecclesiasten* 8:9–11 (Patrologia Latina 23, 1077A, B), translation mine. The date of the commentary is 388. See Gryson, et al., *Répertoire*, 528; Williams, *Monk*, 282.

⁵¹ Jerome *Adversus Rufinum* 3.22 (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.3,

in the *pericope adulterae* a reflection of his own circumstances, the story's placement in the Vulgate is intriguing after Nicodemus asks, "Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he has been doing?" (John 7:51; NIV) Viewed through Jerome's experience of having been falsely condemned, the pericope is well-placed in its Vulgate context after John 7:52.

Intent to Entrap

A third feature of the Vulgate account is the motive assigned to the accusers to test Jesus to find an accusation against him. The Vulgate account occurs after a scene in which the chief priests and Pharisees, exasperated by Jesus's success with the crowds, send out temple guards to arrest him. But the guards report back that they did not carry out the arrest because "No one ever spoke the way this man does" (John 7:46; NIV). It is implied then that envy contributed to their desire to entrap Jesus. Jerome attributes similar motives to his accusers at Rome, implying that it was envy that motivated them to turn against him, after initially praising him upon his arrival in Rome, as Jerome magnificently recalls:

all Rome resounded with my praises. Almost every one concurred in judging me worthy of the episcopate. Damasus, of blessed memory, spoke no words but mine. Men called me holy, humble, eloquent.⁵²

But according to Jerome, envy soon overcame his admirers, as he laments, "Oh! Envy, ... cunning malignity of Satan, that always persecutes things holy!" describing how flattery turned to intrigue:⁵³

530), dated to 402. See Gryson, et al., *Répertoire*, 546; Williams, *Monk*, 294.

⁵² Jerome *Epistula* 45.3.

⁵³ Jerome *Epistula* 45.4 (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.6, 59), modified.

[they] kissed my hands, yet attacked me with the tongues of vipers; sympathy was on their lips, but malignant joy in their hearts.... One would attack my gait or my way of laughing; another would find something amiss in my looks; another would suspect the simplicity of my manner. Such is the company in which I have lived for almost three years.⁵⁴

In Jerome's view, his own innocence was an embarrassment to his accusers, who "think that they have found a remedy for their own doom, if they can disprove the holiness of others."⁵⁵ In his *ad Titum*, Jerome barely disguises his own version of recent events at Rome, as he relates how "in many cities" bishops and presbyters begrudge those who do good "as though it were not permitted to do what the bishop does not do," who in their envious rage expel such individuals from the church.⁵⁶ Again we find the themes of the pericope and its Vulgate context mirrored in Jerome's own experience, with an accused woman caught up in the schemes of those who seek to entrap Jesus out of envy of his success.

Indictment Inscribed in the Dust

The fourth distinctive feature of the Vulgate account is Jesus's act of bending down and writing with his finger on the ground, one of the more perplexing features of the story in John—so perplexing, in fact, that it leads us to wonder whether this detail could tell us anything about those who might have introduced it into a tradition of stories concerning a sinful woman that makes no mention of this striking feature attesting to Jesus's literacy. On the other hand, if this detail had already been present in the tradition, it is easy to see how it might have attracted the interest of Jerome, himself a writer, to

⁵⁴ Jerome *Epistula* 45.2.

⁵⁵ Jerome *Epistula* 45.4 (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.6, 59).

⁵⁶ Jerome *Commentariorum in Epistolam ad Titum* 1:8, 9 (*Patrologia Latina* 26, 568C), translation mine.

include it in his edition. In his monograph on the *pericope adulterae*, Keith considers “the possibility that the interpolator [of the story in John] also added Jesus’s act of writing to the story,” noting a correlation among contemporary writers between knowledge of Jesus’s act of writing and knowledge of the story’s location in John, as he observes, “One must note that every Christian author who knows Jesus’ writing in PA also knows PA in GJohn.... [So] patristic knowledge of Jesus’ acts of writing in PA has an affinity with the version of PA in GJohn.”⁵⁷ This leads Keith to suggest that the narrator’s particular interest in Jesus’s act of writing may reflect the interests of an interpolator, pointing out that “the narrator seems to be the only one in the scene who cares about Jesus’ writing. This raises the possibility that the interpolator added the acts of writing in John 8:6, 8 to the story.”⁵⁸ It is remarkable then that, in his *Adversus Pelagianos*, Jerome seems to have an uncannily clear impression as to what precisely Jesus wrote, asserting that “Jesus bending down began to write with his finger on the ground the sins, of the accusers and indeed of all mortals, according to what is written in the prophet: ‘Those who forsake you shall be written on the earth,’” thereby explicitly linking Jesus’s writing on the ground to Jeremiah’s imprecation against his persecutors in Jer 17:13.⁵⁹ Significantly, Jerome also frames his own experience at Rome in terms of Jeremian imprecations, writing that

⁵⁷ Keith, *Pericope*, 252.

⁵⁸ Keith, *Pericope*, 252.

⁵⁹ Jerome, *Adversus Pelagianos* 2.17, adapted from the translation of Jennifer Wright Knust, “Early Christian Re-Writing and the History of the *Pericope Adulterae*,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 14 (2006): 485–536 at 512, citing Jer 17:13. The addition of “and indeed of all mortals” seems out of place in the context of the Johannine story. It may reflect a later reader’s comment or perhaps Jerome’s adaptation of the saying for use against the Pelagians.

while I was an inhabitant of Babylon ... on a sudden that pot which Jeremiah saw ... began to seethe from ... the North, and the whole senate of the Pharisees ... laid their heads against me.⁶⁰

In the mid-380s, Jerome had only recently translated Origen's homilies on Jeremiah and was making preparations to translate Jeremiah from Hebrew, so at the time of his decision to include the pericope in the Vulgate, Jerome was himself steeped in the writings of Jeremiah. It is possible then that, while enduring the ignominy of his ejection from Rome, Jerome reached for Jeremiah's indictment against his own hypocritical persecutors as a means to express his powerless indignation in the form of an indictment engraved forever into the text of his edition.

CONCLUSION

If we accept the unlikelihood that Jerome found the story of Jesus and the adulteress in the same old Greek manuscripts that he claims to have consulted and seems in fact to have relied upon in his revision of the Old Latin gospels, that is, Greek manuscripts that, unlike Codex Bezae, were not affiliated in any way with the Old Latin version, we are faced with at least two possibilities: First, if Jerome found the story in certain Old Latin manuscripts, we must explain why in this particular instance he chose to overrule his Greek sources which presumably lacked the story, deferring to Old Latin texts for which he otherwise has only words of disparagement. Second, if Jerome did not find the story either in Greek manuscripts or Old Latin manuscripts—and in CE 384–385 we must regard this as a distinct possibility, we are led to conclude that Jerome

⁶⁰ Jerome *Praefatio in Libro Didymi de Spiritu Sancto*, cited by Rufinus *Apologia adversus Hieronymum* 2.24 (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* 2.3, 470).

introduced the story himself, making certain adaptations to bring the story into John. We have good grounds not to take Jerome's claim in *Adversus Pelagianos* at face value, given its peculiarly delicate wording and the rhetorical pressures Jerome was under in confronting the Pelagians with a proof text that he knew to be of doubtful canonicity, not to mention Jerome's less than reliable record in citing Greek manuscripts in support of improbable readings. As with many historical questions of this nature, we regrettably have few criteria upon which to supply a definitive answer as to which of these possible scenarios in fact occurred or whether in fact either occurred. Nevertheless, we are left with the question as to what made this particular story so compelling and sympathetic to Jerome that he placed it in his revision, apparently against his old Greek manuscripts. One potential answer is that the story's themes resonated with his own experience at Rome and, hence, invited the kind of polemical sparring that we find so consistently throughout his wide corpus. In the spirit of his relentless attacks against real or perceived adversaries and from the vantage point of his virtually unchecked power of the pen as sole editor of a new edition, it is well within the realm of plausibility that Jerome, driven by an almost reflexive habit of self-defense via the written word, chose to set aside his Greek manuscripts at just this point, effectively signing his revision with a last word of rebuke against his accusers.

If there is one takeaway from the preceding discussion, it is that we cannot afford to neglect the circumstances under which the Vulgate was produced in assessing its value as a textual witness of an account unattested in any surviving non-bilingual Greek manuscript before the eighth century, particularly Jerome's position as sole editor, in determining which material to include or to

exclude.⁶¹ With virtual free rein to revise the Latin gospel text, Jerome was ideally positioned to introduce lasting alterations to the text with little apparent oversight beyond what the church in the West was prepared to tolerate. While Jerome claimed to have a commission from Damasus, there is no evidence that his revision was ever reviewed by any ecclesiastical authority with the capacity to challenge his editorial decisions. If Jerome was in fact the first to place the story of the adulteress at John 7:53, this would explain certain historical anomalies, such as the surge in Latin citations towards the end of the fourth century compared to the corresponding scarcity of Greek evidence before the ninth century.⁶² Yet it also raises the question as to where Jerome might have obtained the text of this tradition if not from a Greek manuscript of John. One possibility is the now lost gospels cited by Didymus, a possibility consistent with Jerome's one-time esteem for Didymus and apparent familiarity with non-canonical gospel traditions, such as the so-called Gospel of the Hebrews, which he refers to on numerous occasions and consistently attributes to the apostle Matthew.⁶³ If

⁶¹ The earliest surviving non-bilingual Greek manuscripts containing the pericope are 07 and 0233. See Knust and Wasserman, *Stone*, 280–81.

⁶² Latin references to the Johannine *pericope adulterae* from the century after the Vulgate include those of Ambrose, Ambrosiaster, Augustine, Leo I, Pacian, Prosper of Aquitaine, Quodvultdeus, Rufinus, and Pseudo-Vigilius among others. For a comprehensive list, see Philip H. Burton, Hugh A. G. Houghton, et al., eds., *Evangelium secundum iohannem*; *Vetus Latina: Die Reste der altlateinischen Bibel 19* (Freiburg: Herder, 2011), 534–49. In contrast, there is no known Greek comment before the twelfth century, when Euthymius Zigabenus remarks that “In the most accurate manuscripts [the story] is either not to be found or has been obelized.” See Knust and Wasserman, *Stone*, 251–52.

⁶³ Jerome *Praefatio in evangelio*; Jerome *Epistulae* 5.4, 20.5; Jerome *De viris illustribus* 2, 3, 16; Jerome *In Isaiam* 11:1–3; 40:9–11; 65 (*Praefatio*); Jerome *In Ezechielem* 16:13; 18:5–9; Jerome *In Michaeum* 7:6; Jerome *In Matthaum* 2:5; 6:11; 12:13; 23:25; 27:16, 51; Jerome *Adversus Pelagianos* 3.2. See Albertus Frederik Johannes Klijn, *Jewish-Christian Gospel*

Jerome was willing to base his OT text on Hebrew originals, what authority was he prepared to cede to a putatively apostolic Aramaic or Hebrew gospel had he known of this account from such a document or a translation of such a document? In appropriating such an account, Jerome would have been virtually required to make certain small adaptations to accommodate the story to its new setting in John. While the sin of adultery might be inferred from the capital nature of the offense, the identity and motives of Jesus's antagonists—namely, the scribes and Pharisees seeking a pretext to trap him—are both supplied already by John's narrative. There remains only Jesus's puzzling act of stooping to write on the ground as an element apparently lacking in earlier traditions and not readily derived from the Johannine context. But it is this very detail that most clearly evokes an editor having sympathies much in common with those of Jerome himself, an editor with literary tastes and an exegetical mind, who knew the OT well and was capable of subtle *à propos* allusion. If Jerome did not himself introduce this detail, he makes a remarkably plausible guess as to the intentions of the editor who did, fixing on Jer 17:13 as the inspiration behind Jesus's act. But if this detail were a reflection of Jerome's exegetical imagination at work, it would not be the first instance in Jerome's corpus where we encounter apparently fictional details presented as true events, as Jerome virtually admits himself in *Epistula* 81 "To Rufinus" and his treatise *Against Vigilantius*.⁶⁴ As Donatien de Bruyne pointed out long ago, Jerome's use of fictional narrative settings is not uncommon in his letters, for example, his letter to two

Tradition; Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae*; Texts and Studies of Early Christian Life and Language 17 (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 16–19.

⁶⁴ Jerome *Epistula* 81.1; Jerome *Adversus Vigilantium* 3. See Donatien de Bruyne, "Lettres fictives de s. Jérôme," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 28 (1929): 229–34; here 230–31; Nautin, "Échange," 331.

sojourners in Getica inquiring about differences between Jerome's Roman Psalter and the LXX (*Ep.* 106), his letters to two women from Gaul in answer to their respective exegetical inquiries (*Ep.* 120 and 121), his letter to a mother and daughter advising them against the practice of "spiritual marriage" with monks they had taken into their homes (*Ep.* 117), and his letter to a wayward deacon, Sabinianus, recounting a lurid tale of sexual deviance (*Ep.* 147)—all of which read as compelling fictions.⁶⁵ But if, as De Bruyne points out, this strategic use of fiction as a literary device would not have shocked the original readers of Jerome's published collection of letters, who would have recognized its intent, not to pass off fiction as fact, but rather to supply some form of instruction, what could be more natural than Jesus himself turning the words of the prophet against those who would maliciously entrap him?⁶⁶ Whether shocking or not, such artifice can do little to enhance Jerome's credibility as a witness to traditions otherwise unattested in continuous Greek manuscripts of John. So in light of numerous questions surrounding the nature of Jerome's editorial role in selecting and possibly shaping the story of the woman accused of adultery for his Vulgate revision of the gospels, we are led to conclude at the very least that Jerome's edition cannot be regarded as reliable textual evidence that the story existed in Greek manuscripts of John at the end of the fourth century. At the same time, the evidence invites well-founded speculation that Jerome himself was responsible for the now-canonical Johannine placement and form of the story of Jesus and the adulteress.

⁶⁵ See De Bruyne, "Lettres," 229–34. It is possible that others of Jerome's letters to obscure individuals in faraway places fall into this fictional category.

⁶⁶ De Bruyne, "Lettres," 229.

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