

The Monk and the Book

*Jerome and the Making of
Christian Scholarship*

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The University of Chicago Press

CHICAGO AND LONDON

Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	xi
Introduction	1
1 The Making of a Christian Writer	25
2 Experiments in Exegesis	63
3 Interpretation and the Construction of Jerome's Authority	97
4 Jerome's Library	133
5 Toward a Monastic Order of Books	167
6 The Book and the Voice	201
7 Readers and Patrons	233
Epilogue	261
<i>Appendix: Chronology of Jerome's Career</i>	267
<i>Bibliography</i>	303
<i>Index</i>	313

INTRODUCTION



IN THE fifteenth century, a standard iconography of Saint Jerome emerged, taking two distinct forms.¹ Two of Albrecht Dürer's most famous prints exemplify the alternatives. The more familiar iconographic type portrays Jerome as a scholar (fig. 1). Dürer's Jerome sits in his study, bent over a book. In the foreground, a small dog is curled up asleep, serving as a visual indication of the silence of the scholar's workroom. Jerome's traditional lion — a figment of the twelfth-century *Golden Legend* of Jacobus de Voragine — is also asleep, though his eyes remain slightly open, the left seeming to peer at the viewer. Medieval science credited to the lion the ability to sleep with its eyes open.² Though the saint wears the garb of a Roman cardinal, a traditional attribute,³ his distinctive hat hangs on the wall above him, suggesting that he has left behind the tumult of ecclesiastical politics for the moment and reinforcing the impression of domesticity conveyed by the postures of the animals and the orderly arrangement of the room, with its spare yet luxurious furnishings.

The alternative image depicts Jerome as a penitent ascetic in a harsh, rocky landscape (fig. 2). The saint kneels in three-quarter view, his gaze again turned away from the viewer. His attributes are those of a desert hermit. He is naked to the waist, only his lower body covered by a length of drapery, and he holds a stone with which he is about to beat his breast.

1. Rice, *Jerome*, 76ff., 104ff., describes the fifteenth-century evolution of Jerome's iconography.

2. Rice, *Jerome*, 41.

3. Rice, *Jerome*, 35–37.



FIGURE 1. Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), *Jerome in his study*. 1514.
Fondazione Magnani Rocca, Corte di Mamiano, Italy. Scala / Art Resource, NY.



FIGURE 2. Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), *Jerome in the wilderness*.
Foto Marburg / Art Resource, NY.

The prominence of his well-muscled trunk in the image reminds us that his ascetic regimen used the body as a means to train the soul. The lion, again, occupies the very foreground. In this image, however, instead of resting with eyes almost closed, it crouches tensely, glaring out of the page.

The contrast between the peace of the scholar's study and the torment of the repentant hermit at prayer is sharp, despite the restraint with which Dürer portrays the saint's agony in the latter of the two etchings. The contrast is driven home not only by the traits of the saint himself but also by his physical setting. One figure is seated, indoors, fully clothed, his attention directed toward his book. His workroom is a model of bourgeois order.⁴ The other kneels on the bare earth, his body exposed to the elements, his expression pained, his mind focused inward in recollection of his sins. The dramatic landscape, with its jagged rocks and spiky pine trees, contrasts with the solid horizontality of the scholar's study. The man-made interior could not be more distinct from wild nature, in both visual and moral terms.

The two different versions of Saint Jerome canonized in the Renaissance iconographic tradition reflect a fundamental problem that the saint presents for those who attempt to understand his life and legacy. The ways of life of the scholar and of the Christian ascetic are not readily seen together, much less brought together in practice. The monastic ideal emphasizes the virtues of poverty, chastity, and humility. This is particularly so for the cenobitic monastery, where the monks hold their property and keep their rule in common. Although scholarship too can readily be conceived of in ascetic terms, its values are at odds with those of the monastery.

While the scholar may be chaste, his activities characteristically require an expensive infrastructure: a library, a workplace—some fifteenth-century images of Jerome show him seated in a *studiolo* that would have been the envy of a North Italian prince—and the means of disseminating his work, whether in print or through the labor of a staff of copyists. Scholarship thereby violates the monastic norm of poverty. Furthermore, the scholar by his very assumption of that identity asserts his authority. In particular, biblical criticism, the establishment of the text of scripture and its explication, implies the interpreter's authority over the sacred word. Such an assertion

4. Other versions of this iconographic type represent Jerome as an aristocratic cardinal, for example the painting by Antonello Da Messina in the National Gallery in London. Dürer also depicted Jerome as a hermit in his cave surrounded by books, in a woodcut of 1512. The image is reproduced in E. Panofsky, *Albrecht Dürer*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (Princeton, 1945), 2:40, no. 333 (Rice, *Jerome*, 106, citing Panofsky in n. 72).

of authority sharply differentiates the exegete from the monk in terms of their relation to the text. The traditional monastic reading practice of the *lectio divina*, already well developed by the fathers of the Egyptian desert, aimed at submission to the Word embodied in the scriptures, not at the exercise of critical judgment over it. Exegesis can readily be seen as threatening to violate the norm of humility.

On several levels, then, Jerome presents an enduring challenge to his interpreters and to his cultural heirs. Not only did he have the audacity to fuse the identities of scholar and monk: he went so far as to represent textual scholarship at the highest level as itself a form of *askesis*, of spiritual “training,” appropriate for a cenobite. This book aims to address that challenge by interpreting Jerome’s career as a biblical scholar and Christian writer within its immediate historical context, in the last decades of the fourth and the first decades of the fifth centuries. Jerome himself, seen through the lens of his own writings, will be the focus of attention. Taking advantage of progress in the historiography of the period, and of innovations in the history of scholarship in general, I will propose new interpretations of Jerome’s scholarship that promise to remove enduring obstacles to understanding this major figure in the Western tradition.

*

Jerome lived through a time of immense change for the Roman world. Two long-term developments converged in the period under discussion to create a new Roman culture. A trend toward centralization and rule by decree that had begun in the political crisis of the mid-third century reached its first peak under Diocletian and the Tetrarchy at the end of that century. The same tendency continued to unfold during the next century, completely changing the structure of the Roman elite and its relation to both the central government and the mass of the population. Simultaneously, Christianization—begun under Constantine, but proceeding with new intensity under Theodosius I and his successors—reshaped the elite from the inside out.

Imperial rule, from Augustus through the end of the second century, was a rather decentralized affair. Much legislation was driven not by the emperor’s own initiatives but by requests from the periphery. Emperors who lacked the bureaucratic apparatus to rule their far-flung dominions more directly depended on local elites to administer justice and collect taxes. During the third century, the internal dynamics of imperial government had driven a slow shift away from this model, toward a new emphasis on imperial power and policy. Already in the third century the importance of pro-

vincial cities and, especially, of their elites was on the decline. No longer could civic elites, in particular the hereditary *curia* or city councils, effectively mediate imperial power. Curial status, once a privilege, became a burden. The extension of Roman citizenship to all inhabitants of the empire under Caracalla in the 230s, the reorganization of the provinces under Diocletian around 290, and an ongoing reshuffling of the armies all contributed to, and reflected, the new tendency.⁵

Administratively, the first Christian emperor, Constantine, continued his pagan predecessors' policies, but his religious policy brought further changes in its wake. Under Constantine and his successors in the mid-fourth century, the decline of the urban elites in favor of a new administrative and military class accelerated. At the same time, the hierarchy of the Christian church began to take on the contours of an alternative civic leadership. Already, Constantine had entrusted important civic functions to Christian bishops. These duties, and the informal influence that accompanied them, were only to expand over the course of the century. The old urban elites did not entirely disappear, but their values and their relations to imperial administration and to other major institutions were transformed. A new culture — late Roman and Christian — emerged.

Since at least the early second century of our era, the elites of the Roman empire had shared a literary culture, and an educational system, whose roots lay far back in the late Republic and the Hellenistic kingdoms. The school curriculum was based on a narrow canon of literary texts. Students learned to regard the literary tradition as a continuum, whether it spanned the centuries from Homer to Demosthenes or the decades that separated Cicero from Seneca, and to feel a profound sense of continuity with this unitary past. Educated men situated themselves in a relationship of atemporal closeness to their illustrious precursors, whose works they adopted as models both for written and spoken self-expression and for the conduct of the virtuous life. Their schooling distinguished the ruling class of late antiquity from their less educated peers by instilling stereotypical patterns of spoken and written expression that served as passports to careers as advocates and bureaucrats.

Contemporary prescriptive texts divided literary education into three phases: the *ludus litterarius*, the humble school of letters; the school of the *grammaticus*, where students moved from basic literacy skills to the study of

5. For this picture of the political and administrative development of the Roman empire, see fundamentally Millar, *Emperor*, supplemented by Ando, *Imperial Ideology*.

literature; and the rhetorician's school, where young men mastered advanced exercises in composition, with an emphasis on improvisation. In reality, the three stages tended to run together, and only in major cities was the full curriculum even available. Schooling in basic literacy was available almost everywhere, and to children from virtually any background if they could be spared from work. Grammatical schooling was available in many small towns, but the demands placed on the pupils might be much lower there than in a larger center. Rhetoricians, finally, tended to cluster in a few cities, either great capitals or traditional centers of learning.⁶

Formal schooling began with the *grammaticus* or grammarian, who taught reading, writing, and the language itself—"grammar" in the modern sense. He introduced students to the basic elements of literary study, including the vocabulary of the poets and the history, geography and mythology necessary to understand them.⁷ The texts studied did not include prose authors: poetry was considered more appropriate for the young. The archaism of the curriculum led to the rise of an extensive commentary literature, which extended the preoccupations of the *grammaticus*—mythography, geography, and an obsession with rare words and grammatical oddities—to a more serious intellectual level. Grammatical education culminated with the *progymnasmata*, a series of increasingly complex exercises in composition.⁸

Boys from elite backgrounds attended a rhetorician's school beginning in their mid- to late teens. There, these privileged young men read the canonical orators and learned to produce and present sample speeches, called

6. The classic study of ancient Greek and Roman education is Marrou, *History of Education*; more recent work has modified many of his interpretations, although the overall reconstruction of the educational system remains much the same: see Morgan, *Literate Education*, Criboire, *Gymnastics*, and, for a study of the educational papyri as sources for grammatical study, Criboire, *Writing*. On the stages of education and the organization of schools, see Marrou, *History of Education*, 358–59; Morgan, *Literate Education*, 50–89; Criboire, *Gymnastics*, 36–44.

7. On Latin grammatical education, see Marrou, *History of Education*, 369–80; Bonner, *Education*, 47–64, 189–276. On the status of the grammarian, see Kaster, *Guardians*, and Bonner, *Education*, 146–62. Morgan, *Literate Education*, 163–89, gives some attention to the study of "grammar" in the modern sense, while Criboire, *Gymnastics*, 185–219, deals with the *grammatika* as found in the school papyri.

8. Greek manuals of *progymnasmata*: second century CE, Theon and Aelius [Donatus], *Progymnasmata*, ed. Michel Patillon and Giancarlo Bolognesi (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1997), and Hermogenes, *Opera*; fourth century, Aphthonius, *Aphthonii Progymnasmata*. Translations are available in Kennedy and Spengel, *Progymnasmata*. Libanius left an impressive corpus of examples, covering each type of *progymnasma*: see Libanius, *Opera*, vol. 8. For *progymnasmata* in the school papyri, see Criboire, *Gymnastics*, 220–44.

declamations, in imitation of their models.⁹ Declamation was the practice of presenting artificial speeches before a school audience, often on fantastic, even bizarre topics. The declaimer's art attracted great attention, among both the rhetorically schooled and the public at large. Rhetorical education also used the *progymnasmata*, so that the two different schools overlapped to a considerable extent. Indeed, throughout the curriculum students returned repeatedly to the same texts and the same types of exercise, which they repeated with increasing degrees of sophistication.¹⁰

The canonical texts were pressed into serving different purposes at different stages. Homer or Virgil could function as a primer for boys learning to read, as a source of moral examples and mythological and geographical trivia a few years later, and finally as a mine of well-turned phrases to be deployed by the declaimer at crucial turns in his argument. Boys in grammatical school were taught to avoid solecism and barbarism, and to eschew neologisms and expressions typical of everyday spoken language in favor of a consciously archaic diction. Examples from canonical works were used to teach moral lessons. Later, intensive study of the canonical orators and the production of sample discourses on stock themes produced an effect of assimilation of both word and thought to the models of the tradition. The result was a cohort of young men whose every word and gesture set them apart from their inferiors, and bound them to each other, as members of a cultured elite.¹¹

The changes in the structure of Roman society that took place from the mid-third through the fourth centuries were accompanied by more subtle shifts in elite culture. Peter Brown, in *The Making of Late Antiquity*, describes the transformation as a passage "from an age of equipoise to an age of ambition," from a society where the paradigmatic social relation for the elite was that of competition for prestige among equals to one where centralized power imposed itself with scarcely veiled brutality.¹² For the urban elites of the age of the Antonines, participation in a common literary culture had

9. On the development of Latin rhetorical education, Marrou, *History of Education*, 381–87; Bonner, *Education*, 65–75, 75–111. Grammarians versus rhetoricians: Marrou, *History of Education*, 378–79.

10. That the same canonical texts were studied repeatedly at different points in the curriculum, producing the effect described in the next paragraph, is a central observation of Cribiore, *Gymnastics*.

11. On rhetorical education as a means of producing embodied signs of social distinction, see Gleason, *Making Men*. On the importance of shared literary culture in binding together the elites that ruled the far-flung Roman empire, see Brown, *Power and Persuasion*.

12. Brown, *Late Antiquity*, 34.

been one of the characteristics that delineated their social milieu. The competitive nature of that culture had provided an important outlet for the agonistic energies that drove the machine of urban society and at the same time threatened to burst out of it.

The fourth century was far more suspicious of competition, even among near equals within the urban elites. The stakes had been raised, the game was being played in deadly earnest. Rhetoric was now a device directed not at one's peers, but primarily at the emperor himself, an emperor become newly distant and majestic. Cultivated speech, in this context, could serve to mollify an enraged potentate, or to sway him to be well disposed. The two roles, of competition among peers and appeal to the higher power, had co-existed already in the second century. In the fourth century, the latter came greatly to outweigh the former.

At the same time that the changed political order placed traditional elite culture in new contexts, Christianization subjected it to a new kind of scrutiny. The question of the value of Greek and Latin literature for Christians was by no means new in the second half of the fourth century. Traditional education focused unrelentingly on a canon of classical literature in which pagan gods appeared on every page. Its aims were shaped by an agonistic society in which elite males competed in public for prestige, civic standing, and the rewards these brought. Not only was rhetorical culture competitive, selfish, and potentially coercive, but it sanctioned a level of duplicity that sat poorly with Christian emphases on simplicity and truth. On many levels, the culture of the literate elite had been fundamentally at odds with Christianity from the moment of their first encounter.

But as the fourth century gave rise to a Christian ruling class, the problem was posed with new urgency. Fourth-century Christian writers express a profound suspicion of rhetorical culture and, more broadly, of literary cultivation in any form. To some extent, this suspicion rested on the pagan content of classical literature. But it did not end there. Augustine lays out the problem in characteristically explicit terms in his *De doctrina christiana*. His ideal of *caritas*, and the transparent honesty it demanded, were profoundly at odds with rhetorical culture. Rhetoric, by its very nature as a form of persuasion with the potential to make the worse cause seem the better, had been portrayed as a form of coercion — if not violence — since the days of Gorgias in the fifth century BCE. As such, it was a treacherous weapon for a Christian bishop to wield.

As an alternative to the *rhetor* as intercessor before emperors, Christianity in the fourth century put forward the holy man. The holy man's power

to intercede rested on his status as one who chose to remain outside of the elite and its struggle for precedence—indeed, in many cases, physically outside the city itself, even outside of civilization. Because his radical asceticism stood as concrete and undeniable proof of his disinterestedness, the holy man could be regarded by all sides to a dispute as a neutral broker. He had nothing to gain, because he had already lost everything—voluntarily. Extreme forms of Christian *askesis*, therefore, produced figures who came from the humblest of backgrounds, yet could compete for the social roles previously monopolized by the educated, whether they were philosophers, sophists, or bishops. One who could combine the prestige of the two traditions, it might seem, would wield all the more power. Ascetic renunciation of the quest for power might tame the disturbingly self-centered aspects of rhetorical culture.

Christian asceticism by the fourth century had already a long history. In the first century CE, Jews and those messianic Jewish sectaries who followed the crucified Jesus of Nazareth had assembled in ascetic conventicles. We know of one such group, outside Alexandria, from the Jewish author Philo. In Syria in the second century, Christians had advocated and practiced *enkrasis* or “restraint,” abstaining from sex, from food, and from participation in the larger society, in the attempt to prepare for the imminent reign of God. Even as third-century emperors produced martyrs in increasing numbers, Christian ascetics retreated to the deserts of Egypt to seek the “white martyrdom” of renunciation. By the early fourth century, ascetics in the East had pioneered several forms of monastic organization, from the solitary life of the hermit, supervised only by a spiritual father, to the cenobitic (from the Greek *koinos bios* or “common life”) model instituted by Pachomius, an Egyptian peasant, in upper Egypt. News of the heroism of the desert fathers quickly spread throughout the empire and even beyond, attracting imitators wherever it went. By the late fourth century, asceticism had become a powerful social force—in the form of both the communities of monks it fostered, and the holy men who emerged from their ranks.

The classical tradition of literary scholarship had its profoundly ascetic aspects. Like philosophy, rhetorical and literary activities could be represented in terms of exercise or *askesis*, as forms of training that could eventually bring about a profound transformation of the person. This was true for ancient literary education, which aimed at instilling specific moral dispositions, at creating a particular kind of person, at least as much as it served to transmit to the new generation a body of skills and information. It was also true for the uses to which adult men who were products of this educational system put literature in their daily lives. Furthermore, literary pur-

suits could readily be figured in terms of the renunciation of other activities, and therefore in terms of restraint or renunciation *tout court*. From Seneca to Tacitus, Apuleius, and Augustine (to draw only on the Latin part of the empire), we find examples of the literary life described as a turning away from the combative, dangerous, and all-too-corrupt world of the city to a purer, more austere, less self-interested condition, set apart from both the pursuit of power and the struggle to survive.¹³

Yet the *otium*, or leisure, of the aristocrat on his south Italian estate was a far cry from the harsh existence of the desert fathers in Egypt and Syria. Michel Foucault, influenced by the work of the historian of philosophy Pierre Hadot, describes the *askesis* of the elite male of the classical Greek and Roman world as the expression of an ethic of care of the self.¹⁴ His thesis was taken up by Peter Brown, who in the first chapter of *The Body and Society* describes vividly the austerity that this ethic could imply.¹⁵ Yet the ascetic training these men practiced was directed toward a larger goal. The well-bred male of the ancient Mediterranean world learned self-control so that he could control others. His *askesis*, both in boyhood and for the rest of his life, created and sustained the dispositions that would allow him to exercise command, whether over women, slaves, or free men in positions of social subordination.

The *askesis* of the monks, on the other hand, was based on a fundamentally different ethic: one of self-mortification rather than self-care. Specific examples seem to argue against this description. Anthony, the founder of the Egyptian eremitic tradition, ate only bread and water brought to him every six months by a nameless supporter, yet according to Athanasius his body was still strong and healthy even in advanced age.¹⁶ Pachomius's monks adhered to a severe regimen of prayer, work and fasting, which nevertheless

13. Seneca: e.g. *De tranquillitate animi*; Tacitus: *Dialogus de oratoribus*. On asceticism in the second-century empire, see Francis, *Subversive Virtue*. In his *Apology*, Apuleius describes the physical effects of his devotion to rhetorical studies at the expense of all other pursuits in sharply ascetic terms. Augustine, in his Cassiciacum dialogues, presents an ideal of Christian asceticism as learned *otium*, a retreat to a country estate where theological concerns can be the central preoccupation of a group of elite Christians. On the tradition of representing the literary life as a withdrawal from politics and the city, see André, *Otium*, covering the earlier period; Madec, *Saint Augustin*, 45–52, for Augustine; also Harries, *Sidonius*, 103–24.

14. Foucault, *Care of the Self*; Hadot and Davidson, *Philosophy*. On the asceticism of second-century elites and philosophers, see also Francis, *Subversive Virtue*. Some fourth-century Christian ascetics, notably Augustine, were strongly influenced by third-century, especially Neoplatonic, models.

15. Brown, *Body and Society*, 5–32.

16. *Life of Anthony*, 93.

allowed for considerable relaxation in the case of the elderly, the ill, and the very young.¹⁷ Simeon, who in the early fifth century ascended a pillar in the hinterland of Antioch, makes a stronger argument for monastic *askesis* as self-mortification. His standing posture, maintained for decades, caused his flesh literally to rot on his bones.¹⁸ Such extremism might allow his model to be dismissed too easily, but its very marginality is what makes it most useful in defining an ideal type.

As the work of Foucault and Brown has shown, Christian *askesis* both appropriated and transformed practices and language already well developed in the classical tradition. The goal of the Christian ascetic, like that of the classical philosopher, was to perfect the self. The context in which that perfection would be realized, however, was not rulership in this world but salvation in the next. Monks did not aspire to be philosopher-kings. Instead, they held humility and obedience as cardinal virtues. Nor did they learn to obey in order that they might command. Rather, they practiced submission to a spiritual father, or to a monastic superior, as a way of breaking down the human will so that it could submit fully to the commandments of God. In the context of this other-worldly orientation, self-mortification became, paradoxically, a path to self-perfection. The ethic of care of the self was a way of life directed toward the city of men; that of self-mortification toward the city of God. One had to die to this world in order to live in the next.



Reflecting the centrality of the grammatical and sophistic traditions to second-century Roman culture, Christian commentary on scripture emerged early on and quickly developed into a substantial corpus. The first Christian commentary that we know of was written by the Gnostic teacher Heracleon in about 140. In the late second and early third centuries, biblical exegesis blossomed among Christians of all kinds. Very little of their work survives. We have commentaries on several books of the Bible by Hippolytus, perhaps a bishop of Rome in the late second century; the *Stromateis*, a collection of notes on many problems, including exegetical issues, by Clement, a Christian teacher at Alexandria in the same period; and a substantial corpus of

17. Pachomian rule: for translation see Veilleux, *Pachomian koinonia*, 2:145–67; for discussion see Rousseau, *Pachomius*; for rigorous regimen see Elm, *Virgins*, 283–89, 96–98; for care of the sick, young, and old, see Veilleux, *Pachomian koinonia* 2, precepts 40–43 (pp. 151–52).

18. Theodoret, *History*, XXVI, 23; Simeon developed an ulcer in his foot from standing; the anonymous Syriac life of Simeon, 48–54, says that maggots inhabited Simeon's wounds, which gave off a terrible stench.

exegesis, in the form of homilies and commentaries, from the pen of Origen, who wrote at Alexandria and at Caesarea in Palestine in the first half of the third century. In the fourth century, as the church became a mainstream institution and benefited from imperial patronage, exegetical writings exploded. For the entire period, the evidence suggests that lost exegetical works vastly outnumber those that survive.

The practice of commentary was important in every area of learned culture in antiquity. Commentaries may date back as far as the origins of written literature. By the Roman period, exegetical texts had proliferated, not only on literary works but on philosophical and technical treatises as well. Some modern scholars have gone so far as to see the commentary as the typical genre of late antiquity, a belated culture whose creativity could express itself only as an appendage of the greatness of the past. It is probably truer to say that ancient learning was always already belated, that commentary was, in some sense, the typical mode of ancient thought almost from the beginning. But certainly, by Jerome's day, the territory was well occupied.

Christian biblical exegesis found its greatest exponent early on, in the person of Origen (185–253).¹⁹ What we know of Origen's life comes from the work of the fourth-century Christian historian, Eusebius, who revered him and went to great lengths to preserve his memory. Eusebius tells us that Origen was born at Alexandria, to Christian parents. Origen received an excellent education in both Greek literature and philosophy. After his father's death in a persecution, he had to work as a *grammaticus*, or teacher of literature, to support his mother and younger siblings. From a precocious age, he was sought out by other Christians as a teacher and spiritual guide. Eventually he gave up his secular career to become a full-time instructor of Christian doctrine and biblical exegesis. His followers at Alexandria included wealthy and highly educated Christians, some of whom became his patrons. Origen's prominence, and his independent ways, led him to clash with the bishop of Alexandria. In 234 he accepted the invitation of the bishops of Caesarea and Jerusalem to relocate to Palestine, where he spent the rest of his life.

Throughout his mature years, Origen maintained an incredible pace of literary productivity, writing or dictating hundreds of works in a variety of genres. His *On First Principles* was the first work of Christian systematic theology. Above all, he produced a vast body of interpretation of both the Old and the New Testaments. His exegesis took several forms: *scholia*, or notes,

19. There is some debate over the exact dates of Origen's birth and death, but these dates reflect the general consensus; see most recently Trigg, *Origen*, for the underlying data.

on many books; homilies preached to congregations and collected for publication; and his great *tomoi*, or commentaries—lengthy, discursive, and excruciatingly detailed expositions of biblical texts, which expounded their meaning on many levels.

Origen's biblical interpretation drew upon a wide range of models from the Greek literary culture of his day, many of which had already been appropriated by earlier Christians. Greek readers had long regarded literary texts as rich in meaning, pregnant with learned arcana, technical information, moral exempla, and even mystical philosophy. Homer, in particular, was regarded as an all-knowing sage. Greek teachers and commentators first had to contend with basic difficulties that literary, and also philosophical, texts presented. Whether their author was Homer, Aeschylus, Demosthenes, or Plato, the classical texts' diction was archaic, their concerns those of worlds remote from the high Roman empire. Obscure language, lost dialects, geographic, mythological, and historical references all required elucidation. Then too, the texts themselves were unreliable. Manuscript transmission leads inevitably to variation. Scholars developed methods to adjudicate between different readings and to determine whether a given line of Homer was truly the poet's or not. Finally, the reverence accorded to the poets led to the view that their works contained meanings beyond those that lay on the surface. Ancient Mediterranean culture revered the past, and regarded innovation with suspicion. Doctrines whose origins could be traced to the earliest ages of mankind, or at least to a long-dead Golden Age, had much greater prestige. Allegorical reading was the tool that made Homer into a philosopher and conferred upon his readers' worldviews the sanction of antiquity.

Little of Origen's massive exegetical oeuvre survives, but there is enough to make clear that he took up all of these methods in turn. He went to great lengths to establish the correctness of the texts he worked on. He mined the work of earlier Christian writers, and of the Jewish authors Philo and Josephus as well, to reconstruct the historical context of biblical stories. He even consulted with living Jews, and used the Hebrew texts and Greek translations that they preserved to help attain a correct text of the Old Testament and to clarify its historical reference. But his great love was allegory, which he used to derive moral lessons and spiritual teaching from both the Old Testament and the New. The events of biblical history were real for Origen, their chronicle of God's saving interventions in the past crucial to salvation today. But even more important was the spiritual message that each story concealed. For Origen, the Bible overflowed with meaning, its inspired texts purposely crafted to provide for the needs of each reader, whether his level

of intellectual and spiritual development left him hungering for factual information, moral teachings, or mystical wisdom. Origen was both a scholar and a philosopher. As such, he was convinced that his philosophical beliefs found their greatest expression in the object of his scholarship, the Bible.

As well as being an exegete, Origen was an ascetic. Indeed, his way of life combined the two roles inextricably, making his literary labors into a form of *askesis*. But Origen's asceticism was not fashioned after a monastic pattern. In his day, no such model existed. Rather, his career—both as a writer and as an ascetic—was little different from that of a contemporary philosopher, such as Plotinus. Indeed, the only surviving contemporary testimony to Origen's activity describes him simply as a philosopher. This is *In Praise of Origen* by his student Gregory, who became bishop of Pontus and whose miracles earned him the sobriquet *Thaumaturgus* or “wonder-worker.” The challenge that Origen faced was not that of fusing scholarship with the life of a Christian monk, but that of fusing the life of a philosopher—whose calling naturally included asceticism—with Christianity. Even the disgust for sexuality that reputedly led him to castrate himself as a teenager can be understood in a philosophical as well as a Christian context.²⁰

Revered in his own lifetime, patronized by the rich, protected by bishops, consulted by an empress, and persecuted almost to death as an old man, Origen became a legend after his death. His legacy was assured by Pamphilus, a wealthy presbyter of Berytus who settled in Caesarea in the late third century and devoted himself to building a Christian library, whose centerpiece was an exhaustive collection of Origen's works. Pamphilus himself perished in the persecution of the first decade of the fourth century, but his protégé Eusebius survived to become bishop of Caesarea and a major beneficiary of Constantine's imperial patronage. Eusebius inherited Pamphilus's library and, having added to it considerably, passed it on to his successors in the see of Caesarea.

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Jerome was born almost a hundred years after Origen's death, into a very different world. The empire had been Christian for decades, and the Christianization of its elite was well underway. Born about 347, Jerome was the son of Christian parents of some standing in a small town in Dalmatia or Pannonia in the northwestern Balkans.²¹ His hometown, Stridon, was suf-

20. This argument is developed more fully, with supporting documentation, in Grafton and Williams, *Christianity*, chapter 1.

21. For the controversy surrounding the date of Jerome's birth, see the Appendix, section 1.

ficiently obscure that scholars cannot locate it today. All we know of his life before he moved to Antioch in 368, at the age of thirty-one or so, is what can be gleaned from his own later writings, which often reflect literary convention—and Jerome’s self-conception—more than specific realities. But if secure details are few, a clear outline nevertheless emerges.

Jerome’s upbringing was very much the standard one for a young elite male of his day. It was unusual only insofar as his parents obtained for him an education rather above their own status. Provincial notables from a small town, they sent him to school with the sons of Roman senators. He learned his letters at home in Stridon, then began his grammatical studies at Aquileia, at the head of the Adriatic, at that time the great city of the region. From Aquileia he went on to Rome, where he studied with the most famous Latin grammarian of the day, Donatus. He refers to reading the commentaries of the grammarians on a range of both poets and prose writers while he was a boy, which suggests that Donatus’s pupils pursued their literary studies to an advanced level.²² We do not know the name of Jerome’s teacher of rhetoric, but his many references to his rhetorical schooling make clear that it adhered to the conventional pattern, with its emphasis on declamation.²³ At the age of fifty or so, he recalled vividly the terror that had gripped him as a young boy when he had to face an audience and recite a prepared declamation.²⁴ In another context he allows us to glimpse him going with his friends to hear the performances of famous advocates in the law courts of the Roman forum.²⁵ Presumably his parents hoped that he would pursue a career that would yield a return on their investment in his education.

When he was about twenty, in apparent obedience to his parents’ expectations, Jerome traveled to Trier in northern Gaul. At the time, the city was the capital of the emperor Valentinian. Jerome’s childhood friend Bonosus, also from his Dalmatian hometown of Stridon, accompanied him. The two

22. *Puto quod puer legeris Aspri in Vergilium ac Sallustium commentarios, Vulcatii in orationes Ciceronis, Victorini in dialogos eius, et in Terentii comoedias praeceptoris mei Donati, aequae in Vergilium, et aliorum in alios, Plautum uidelicet, Lucretium, Flaccum, Persium atque Lucanum* (Contra Ruf. 1.16).

23. Jerome uses the terms *declamatio* or *declamatiunculus* in the context of such a contrast in the following passages: *Comm. in Esaiam* 8, praef.; *Comm. in Hiezech.* 8, praef., 12.40; *Comm. in Osee* 1.2, 3.10; *Comm. in Soph.* 3; *Comm. in Gal.* 3.427; *Altercat. Lucif. et Orth.* 4.165; *Contra Vigil.* 3.356; *Dialog. contra Pelag.* 3.5; letters 36.14, 52.4, 57.54. Other terms used in the same sense include *controversia* and *oratio*.

24. *Contra Ruf.* 1.30.

25. *Comm. in Gal.* 2.11.

probably hoped to take service in the imperial administration, as many of their peers would have done.²⁶ Instead, they developed a serious interest in Christian asceticism, and in Jerome's case in Christian literature: later, Jerome mentions having copied several Christian works in his own hand during his stay at Trier.²⁷

After a brief stay in the western capital, Jerome and Bonosus left for Aquileia. There they were drawn into a loosely defined ascetic coterie, made up of both well-connected locals and several men from Aquileia and other northern Adriatic cities who had been Jerome's schoolmates at Rome. The city's future bishop Chromatius and his family may have formed the nucleus of the group. The others included Rufinus, a native of Concordia near Aquileia, and Heliodorus, from Altinum on the gulf of Venice, both of whom had studied at Rome with Jerome and Bonosus.²⁸ For unknown reasons, the group at Aquileia broke up within three years of Jerome's arrival.²⁹ In 368, he left Italy and traveled to the east, where he settled for the next decade in Antioch and its environs.³⁰

Jerome was thus the product of a very specific set of circumstances, whose particulars can only be partially documented. We know that his education was of the very highest quality, the best the Latin-speaking world could offer. His works reveal that he became a past master of the language and the intellectual repertoire that such an education sought to instill. He developed a Latin style of great purity and force, and an immense dexterity in deploying literary allusions and developing stock themes in new ways. But despite this success, his background would have made him an outsider in some respects to elite Roman culture. His origins were provincial and obscure,

26. For the date of Jerome's move to Trier, see the Appendix, section 2, and Kelly, *Jerome*, 26–27. In letter 3.5, Jerome describes his move to Trier with Bonosus, and relates that there the two began to take an interest in asceticism. For the opportunities that Valentinian's court offered to ambitious young men, see Matthews, *Western Aristocracies*, 32–55.

27. Letter 5.2.

28. Kelly, *Jerome*, 19; Cavallera, *Saint Jérôme*, 1: 14, n.1; Jerome, *Comm. in Obad.* prol. On Jerome's years at Aquileia, see Rebenich, *Hieronymus*, 42–51; Kelly, *Jerome*, 30–35; Cavallera, *Saint Jérôme*, 19–24. Several of Jerome's letters written from Antioch and the desert between 372 and 379 are addressed to North Italian and Dalmatian ascetics and to former members of the "circle" at Aquileia: letter 3 (Rufinus); letter 7 (Chromatius, Jovinus, and Eusebius); letter 8 (Niceas, a subdeacon and future bishop of Aquileia); letter 9 (Chrysogonus, a monk at Aquileia); letter 10 (Paul of Concordia), sent with the *Vita Pauli*; letter 11 (the virgins at Emona); letter 14 (Heliodorus).

29. Kelly, *Jerome*, 33–35.

30. Rebenich, *Hieronymus*, 76–85; Kelly, *Jerome*, 36–45; Cavallera, *Saint Jérôme*, 24–29.

his family's resources far more modest than those of many of his school-fellows.³¹ Expected to take advantage of his education to make his way in the world, he soon sought to escape it. Perhaps this should not be surprising. The alacrity with which he abandoned Trier and the emperor's court, and even Aquileia, for a remote Greek-speaking metropolis and its desert hinterlands has suggested to many interpreters that even as a young man, Jerome was already alienated from the society for which he had been groomed.

Jerome's youth and education deserve so much attention because they are crucial to understanding the rest of his career. Throughout his adult life, Jerome traded on his literary skills and their association with a particular elite milieu to attract attention, to persuade his readers, and to legitimate his own works and ideas. At the same time, he repeatedly claimed to have repudiated his past. This apparent contradiction, and much else in Jerome's oeuvre, can be understood only in the context of the nature of late Roman elite education and literary culture, and of fourth-century Christian reactions to it. These reactions included both suspicion and criticism, and the reappropriation of literary culture in new contexts, often those created by the power vacuum left by decline of traditional urban elites. These two tendencies could be opposed to each other, or—as in Jerome's case—brought together in a complex mixture. The end result was that traditional elite culture was not abandoned but transformed, transposed from its existing context in the Mediterranean city into new and sometimes startling social and institutional settings.

Despite the evident relevance of social context to an understanding of intellectual and cultural transformations like those that took place in the late Roman world, historians of the scholarship of that period as of others long interpreted their subject matter in isolation from other phenomena. The first modern approaches to the study of learning in the ancient world focused on the propositional content of ancient works on grammar, rhetoric, and textual interpretation. Scholars evaluated the axioms they extracted

31. In his letter 66, Jerome mentions the sale of the patrimony that he and his brother Paulinian had inherited from their parents: *compulsi sumus fratrem Paulinianum ad patriam mittere, ut semirutas villulas, quae barbarorum effugerunt manus, et parentum communium cineres venderet, ne coeptum sanctorum ministerium deserentes risum maledicis et aemulis praebeamus*, "I was compelled to send my brother Paulinian to our homeland, to sell the half-ruined little country houses that had escaped the hands of the barbarians, along with the ashes of our common ancestors, so that we might not provide naysayers and the envious with an occasion for mockery by abandoning the service of the saints that we had already begun." The brothers' parental estates had suffered from barbarian invasions in the western Balkans, leaving little to sell. The description implies that, even before the invasion, those estates had been relatively modest.

from ancient texts in terms of a timeless standard of truth, against which technical innovations from various periods could be measured with equal validity.³² Social and institutional change might speed or hinder progress in the world of scholarship, but its essential trajectory was immutable: from a state of ignorance to one of knowledge.

More recent work, influenced by innovations in the history of science as well as in literary studies, has eschewed teleological narratives of “progress” and the evaluative comparisons between ancient and modern learning that inevitably accompany them. Instead, scholars such as Peter Brown, Robert Kaster, and Richard Lim have placed ancient grammar, rhetoric, and literary culture in their social context, where they formed part of the apparatus of power by which a narrow elite dominated the late imperial Mediterranean.³³ Even the more recent scholarship, however, often remains content to expose the social roles of learning in antiquity, without attending to the material conditions under which it operated. We come to understand the stakes that ancient elites held in their literary culture, but not what that culture was like as an activity or as a way of life.

In formulating a new approach to the history of scholarship in late antiquity, I have drawn inspiration from several sources. The sociology of Pierre Bourdieu has been particularly important, especially his early work in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. There, Bourdieu develops the concepts of *habitus*, symbolic capital, and strategy. Put simply, Bourdieu’s *habitus* is an enduring set of dispositions that incline an individual to act in stereotyped and predictable ways. The *habitus*, for Bourdieu, is the primary bearer of culture. It is inculcated in each of us in youth, through informal socialization and formal education. In any society, *habitus* varies from one individual to another; yet a class or other social group will display a coherent set of dispositions that together form a collective *habitus*.³⁴

Bourdieu defines symbolic capital as power accumulated and stored not as wealth, social ties, or tools of physical domination, but through the acquisition of traits particular to the *habitus* of an elite. Significantly, education, which produces a particular set of personal dispositions, allows elites to transform money and standing into symbolic capital. Because the edu-

32. The classic example of this approach is Pfeiffer, *Classical Scholarship*.

33. Brown, *Power and Persuasion*; Kaster, *Guardians*; Lim, *Public Disputation*. Kaster, *Guardians*, 158ff., in his discussion of Pompeius, comes close to an analysis of the grammarian’s practice, but the object is always to determine his “mindset” (161).

34. Bourdieu, *Outline*, 72–96 and passim.

cated impress their contemporaries as superior men, they are accorded deference as if in recognition of merit.³⁵ Finally, Bourdieu's concept of strategy describes the ways that individuals schooled in the appropriate *habitus* spontaneously and without apparent reflection choose culturally appropriate courses of action. He uses the metaphor of a "feel for the game" to describe how successful actors unselfconsciously adjust their behavior to their social and cultural situation.³⁶ Together, these three concepts allow Bourdieu to describe social action as the product of individual agency, which nevertheless is constrained by cultural norms and social structure.

More recently, the French cultural historian Roger Chartier has called for a new cultural history, which would take "discourses as practices . . . not reading them only in order to ascertain the overall ideology that they contain but taking into account their mechanisms, their rhetorical apparatuses and their demonstrative strategies." Chartier argues that ideas, texts and the discourses in which they participate must be understood not merely as abstractions, but as activities carried out by specific groups and individuals in history, and shaped by their education, personal habits, and other traits.³⁷ Elsewhere, Chartier has demanded that historians attend to the materiality of discourse. Not only are discourses the activities of particular persons endowed with specific dispositions and placed in specific positions in society, but they are embodied in material forms—books, for example—and perpetuated by social relations and physical behavior. Any approach to the "order of discourse" demands an analysis of the material and social contexts in which discourse takes form, what Chartier calls the "order of books."³⁸

Historians, both of Roman antiquity and of other periods—particularly the early modern era—have in recent decades paid increasing attention to questions of self-presentation and self-fashioning, to the creation and culti-

35. Gleason, *Making Men*, xxi.

36. Bourdieu, *Outline*, 3–9 and *passim*.

37. Chartier also writes, "To consider reading to be a concrete act requires holding any process of the construction of meaning (hence, of interpretation) as situated at the crossroads between readers endowed with specific competences, identified by their positions and their dispositions and characterized by their practice of reading, and texts whose meaning is always dependent on their particular discursive and formal mechanisms." Chartier, *Cultural History*, 10–12.

38. Chartier, *Order of Books*, ix: "Whether they are in manuscript or in print, books are objects whose forms . . . command the uses that can invest them and the appropriations to which they are susceptible. Works and discourses exist only when they become physical realities and are inscribed on the pages of a book [or] transmitted by a voice reading. . . . Understanding the principles that govern the 'order of discourse' supposes that the principles underlying the processes of production, communication, and reception of books (and other objects that bear writing) will also be deciphered in a rigorous manner."

vation of public, often literary, personae. Stephen Greenblatt, in his *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, emphasizes the importance of self-presentation, and of the “fashioning” of a public self that then shapes the interpretation of one’s words and actions.³⁹ What holds true for the early modern Englishmen he studied goes as well for the Romans, who were acutely aware of the necessity of constructing and maintaining a coherent and authoritative public persona. Maud Gleason’s work on second-century rhetorical culture draws on Bourdieu, and also on Michel Foucault’s work on the production of the self, to interpret sophistic culture, particularly the gendered aspects of sophistic performance. She emphasizes an understanding of “rhetoric as process,” according to which rhetoric must be seen as a set of embodied practices if it is to be understood at all.⁴⁰

Culture, then, is the work neither of rational actors nor of automata. Cultural agents need not be understood as consciously calculating their every move, and social constraints have a very real force, expressed in unthinking adaptation to situations. At the same time, innovation is always possible—though it must manipulate the terms of the existing cultural repertoire in order to be comprehensible. Within that context, the production and the reception of discourse can only be understood as material practices embodied in specific social relations and in specific acts of reading, writing, and transmission. The history of scholarship, therefore, cannot be described merely as a series of transformations of ideas, but must be analyzed in terms of the history of books, readers, and writers, of the people and things in which knowledge is embodied and by which it is shaped. Further, discourse entails not only the production of texts but the construction of literary personae that shape those texts’ reception. Authors work to present themselves in ways that both take advantage of, and innovate within, preexisting assumptions about authority and legitimacy. But strategic self-fashioning need not imply explicit self-knowledge. The doublethink (or, in Bourdieu’s terms, misrecognition) that strategy frequently demands is a natural, perhaps even a necessary, element of participation in culture.⁴¹

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Studies of Jerome’s scholarship have generally been shaped by older, more positivist approaches to the history of learning. His veneration as a saint has

39. Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 1–9.

40. Gleason, *Making Men*, xix–xxix.

41. See Bourdieu and Johnson, *Field of Cultural Production*, 29–73, especially 48–49, and 74–111 on misrecognition as the price of entry into the “cultural field” in modern societies.

also shaped the reception of his work, even in modern times. Evaluations of his exegesis and philology have therefore tended to fall into two camps, the reverential and the iconoclastic. As a doctor of the Western Church and patron saint of scholars and churchmen, Jerome long held a position of real authority among Christian intellectuals. The desire to shore up that authority has inspired centuries of pious appreciations of his biblical scholarship. Since Erasmus, Jerome's standing, and the tendentiousness of his apologists, have also made him a target for increasingly vociferous debunkers. In particular, these latter have attempted to prove that Jerome's scholarship was weak, uncritical, and largely derivative. In some areas their success is undeniable. In others, their extreme skepticism has produced contradictory results. Neither the reverential nor the skeptical approach, however, has produced a coherent interpretation of Jerome's life and work.

My purpose is neither to defend Jerome as a scholar nor to expose his failings. I will therefore stand to one side of the tradition of scholarship on the topic. For the disagreements over whether particular elements of Jerome's scholarly method hold up to scrutiny have obscured what seem to me the most important issues. Whether they are for him or against him, scholars have tended to evaluate Jerome in terms of modern canons of honesty, thoroughness, and originality—standards that were unthinkable in Jerome's own day, which had its own norms for judging the scholarship that it produced. Jerome's statements about his methods have been interpreted not as part of his self-presentation, but as straightforward evidence for how he worked—or, on the other hand, as apparently irrational lies. Efforts to reconstruct his actual practice as a reader and a writer have centered not on the matters that were important to Jerome but on areas where he provides evidence for some question of interest to modern scholars.

This study begins by examining Jerome's earliest attempts to describe himself as a scholar and an adherent of Christian asceticism. It then proceeds to an analysis of the intellectual framework of his most important exegetical works, the commentaries on the Prophets. When these commentaries—particularly the early works on the Minor Prophets—are treated not as sources to be mined for exegetical material but as works in their own right, several new features of Jerome's intellectual project emerge. First of all, the way that Jerome composed his commentaries allowed him to make implicit claims to authority that did not conflict overtly with his status as a monk. Second, the contents of the commentaries demand attention to the relation between the texts Jerome produced and the infrastructure that supported his literary activities. I therefore move outward from the study of the

commentaries themselves to examine the infrastructure of books and skilled assistants that allowed Jerome to produce these and other works. I argue that it was precisely in his representation of this infrastructure that Jerome did the primary work of redescribing biblical scholarship as an ascetic practice suitable for a monk—indeed, as the characteristic practice of his own unique brand of cenobitic monasticism. Finally, I consider Jerome's relation to his readers, as he constructed them in ideal form within his own texts, and as he sought to recruit them to support his scholarly activities, whether by their endorsement, their labor, or their patronage.

Throughout, I show that Jerome's work as a biblical scholar partook of, and helped to construct, a specifically late antique, and specifically Christian, culture of learning. This culture was not yet that of the monasteries of the medieval West, much less of the modern university, but was nevertheless a crucial step toward the institutionalization of knowledge as represented by both the monastery and the university.