

THE PROLOGUE TO JEROME'S COMMENTARY ON EPHESIANS: *QUIA NOSTRA NON SCRIBAS*

Jerome's reputation is due in large measure to his achievement as a biblical commentator. The first-fruits of this activity would seem to have been his expositions of the Pauline epistles¹. Commentaries on Philemon and Galatians were quickly followed by one on Ephesians. In the prologue of this work Jerome took the opportunity to make a spirited response to malicious criticism of his biblical scholarship. It is unfortunate that this important prologue has never been given a critical edition; for all Jerome's commentaries on St. Paul the reader has to depend on the eighteenth-century text of Domenico Vallarsi². Near the start of this prologue Jerome inserts a *subiectio*³ including a question which in Vallarsi's edition takes the following form: *numquid te manu conserta in ius trabo, quia nostra non scribas [Forte legas]?* (p. 439^B).

Here *scribas* cannot be correct, since Jerome's critics do not write anything; he repeatedly urges them to do so (cf. e.g. *tua forsitan dicta si scripseris, Tullius admirabitur*, p. 439^B; *quibus obsecro respondeatis, ut figant ipsi stylum, tria ut dicitur verba coniungant*, p. 440^A). Nor is the conjecture *legas* an improvement. On the one hand 'not reading' is no ground for taking to court. On the other it is clear that these critics do indeed read Jerome's work⁴ (cf. e.g. *parum eloquens sum . . . disertiolem lege. non digne Graeca in Latinum transfero: aut Graecos lege*, p. 439^B; *obsecro . . . ne facile maledicis et invidis opuscula mea tradatis*, pp. 439^C-440^A). If then neither of these readings is acceptable, what can the correct text be?

The leitmotiv of this whole section of the prologue is the divergent attitude to scriptural scholarship which divides Jerome and his critics: *miror quosdam existisse, qui aut ipsi se inertiae et somno dantes nolint quae praeclara sunt discere: aut ceteros, qui id studii habent, reprehendendos putent* (p. 439^A). This disjunction finds its most explicit formulation just three sentences before the one currently at issue: *et quomodo ego non reprehendo, non damno quod faciunt: ita illos ineptias meas mihi debere concedere* (p. 439^B)⁵. The defective text might accordingly be

1) For the view that they are earlier than his commentary on Ecclesiastes cf. P. Jay, L'exégèse de Saint Jérôme d'après son 'Commentaire sur Isaïe' (Paris 1985) 407-9 (Annexe 1: La date des commentaires pauliniens et de l'In Ecclesiasten'). For the case that the allegorical commentary on Obadiah which Jerome alleges he wrote in his youth (in Abd. prol.) is in fact a fabrication cf. P. Nautin, La liste des œuvres de Jérôme dans le 'De viris illustribus', Orpheus n.s. 5 (1984) 326.

2) Reproduced in PL 26 (1845); the prologue to Ephesians is found on pp. 439-42. A. Souter, The Earliest Latin Commentaries on the Epistles of St. Paul (Oxford 1927) 101-4 lists over 100 extant manuscripts containing Jerome's commentaries on these letters.

3) On this rhetorical figure cf. H. Lausberg, Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik (Munich 1960) 381-3.

4) The sarcastic *me imperitor quisque lecturus est* (p. 439^B) refers only to the future.

5) In the preceding sentence the disaccord is expressed in conjunction with the phrase *quod vel apud iniquissimum iudicem obtineam* (p. 439^B), which forms a clear link with *in ius trabo* in the first half of the sentence under consideration.

expected to denote a conflict of opinion: when emended to *quia nostra non sentias*, it does so perfectly. Paleographically the corruption of *sentias* to *scribas* presents no difficulty: *e* and *c* are very similar, while *n* could easily be misread as *ri* and *ti* as *b*⁶. Corroboration that *sentias* is in fact the right reading comes from another of Jerome's prologues, in which he is again defending himself against critics: at adv. Pelag. prol. 2 he employs the words *si quis autem falso se infamari clamitat et gloriatur nostra sentire*.

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6) The error was no doubt facilitated by the adjacent *scripseris*.

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