Jerome and Palestine

Fergus Millar

1. Introduction

For the historian of the Late Roman Near East a unique vantage-point, and a unique body of material, is offered by the works of Jerome, who was born (as it seems) about 347 and died in Bethlehem in 419. Long before he took up residence as a monk in Bethlehem in 386, he had wrestled, as a native Latin speaker, with the Greek of the Septuagint and of later Greek translations of the Hebrew Bible; in the mid-370s he had spent a relatively brief period as a monk near Chalcis in Syria, in a border-zone between *Syri* and *Saraceni*. At about this time, as a *iuvenis* or *adulescentulus*, he had begun to study Hebrew, and by the time of his stay in Rome in the earlier 380s he was already engaged on text-critical studies of both the Hebrew Bible itself and the Greek translations.

As a result, when he settled in Palestine, a region marked by multiple ethnic, religious and linguistic diversities, he was better equipped than any other Christian native speaker of Latin known to us to cope not only with Greek, but with Semitic languages: not just with the Hebrew Bible, but (less confidently) with those parts of it which, as he had discovered long before, were written in Jewish Aramaic; with the relevance to biblical study of Syriac; with the Bible in the Samaritan form and script; and on occasion with what he calls *Arabicus sermo*. Whether he could actually converse in any Semitic language is uncertain, and remains very improbable. But, as we will see, he makes unmistakable claims to the ability to understand Biblical passages when read to him, and to pronounce them himself. On the other hand, it seems equally clear that the discussions which he held with learned Jews were conducted in Greek.

The much-canvassed notion that Jerome's Hebrew learning was merely derivative from that of Origen in the third century has been conclusively disproved in recent work.[1] His study of Hebrew was far more intensive, was pursued over a period of some four decades, and went into a much wider range of textual detail than that of any other Christian scholar of the period. Moreover, both in Rome in the 380s and in Palestine, he sought active instruction from Jewish teachers of Hebrew, as he had earlier from at least one Jewish convert to Christianity. However, his importance for the historian does not lie only in his truly remarkable efforts to cross the boundaries between Latin and Greek, and between them and Hebrew and other Semitic languages, but in the force and clarity of his writing, and the almost journalistic cast of mind which led him to introduce, in his commentaries on books of the Bible above all, vivid vignettes from his own contemporary environment. From which other Christian writers or Biblical scholars in Late Antiquity could we expect a report on the competitive weight-lifting practised in the

[1] See D. Brown, *Vir Trilinguis: A Study in the Biblical Exegesis of Saint Jerome* (Kampen, 1992), and above all M. Graves, *Jerome's Hebrew Philology: a Study Based on his Commentary on Jeremiah* (Supp. to Vigiliae Christianae 90, 2007).

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cities and villages of Palestine? This is what he records — and does so in passing, in the course of his *Commentary* on Zechariah, written in 391/2, some five years after his arrival (for a table of texts and dates see App. I below):[2]

> Mos est in urbibus Palaestinae, et usque hodie per omnem Iudaeam vetus consuetudo servatur, ut in vi‹n›culis, oppidis et castellis rotundi ponantur lapides gravissimi ponderis, ad quos iuvenes exercere se soleant; et eos pro varietate virium sublevare, alii usque ad genua, alii usque ad umbilicum, alii ad humeros et caput, nonnulli super verticem, rectis vinctisque manibus, magnitudinem virium demonstrantes, pondus extollant.
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> It is the custom in the cities of Palestine — and up till to-day the ancient practice is preserved throughout Judaea — that in the villages, towns and settlements, round stones of very great weight should be laid out, and that the young men should be accustomed to exercise themselves with them, and to lift them as far as the variations of their strength allow — some as far as the knees, others to the navel, others to the shoulders and head, while a few raise the weight above their heads, with their arms straight and brought together, demonstrating the magnitude of their strength.

It is very characteristic of Jerome's writing that such observations on aspects of society in Palestine tend to appear as asides in his discussions of Biblical works, rather than where one might more readily expect them, in his letters. These do contain very important items of autobiography and social observation, as will be seen below; but the general focus of his correspondence is more on inter-regional issues of theology, learning or faith, arising in exchanges with acquaintances (or enemies) from outside Palestine, rather than on the life of the province itself. Passing allusions to aspects of Palestinian society apart, which are far more numerous than can be collected here, there are three works of Jerome's which do treat one or other feature of the province in a consistent way. These are his new edition of Eusebius' *Onomasticon*, produced in 390, and adding in Latin details deriving from the period since Eusebius; his vividly novelistic *Life* of the monk Hilarion, looking back to the very end of the third century, and the first two-thirds of the fourth; and his *Letter* 108, written in 404 after the death of the pious noble Roman lady, Paula, and describing her journey through Palestine in 386. It is in his updated *Onomasticon* above all that he offers information on one of the most significant factors in fourth-century Palestine, the building of new churches at sites with Biblical associations (elsewhere, surprisingly, references to specific churches, or to Jewish or Samaritan synagogues are few). So, for example, he records the following (page-references from Klostermann's standard edition): at Aggai on the road from Neapolis to Aelia, a church built where Jacob slept (7); similarly a church built at Mambre, and others at Bethany and Gethsemane (175). At Sebaste, as he records, the remains of John the Baptist were buried (155).

Such entries in a geographical reference-book did not offer much scope for Jerome's powers of description (though we will see a striking anecdote told in this work about one of his Jewish teachers). But the *Life* of Hilarion and the account of Paula's journey, both,

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2 *Commentary* on Zechariah III.12.3 (CCL LXXVIA, 861-2). For abbreviations used in referring to modern editions of Jerome's works see App. I.

like his *Onomasticon*, excellently discussed by Susan Weingarten,[3] were more evocative subjects. We will return later to one of the quite significant, and puzzling, features of Palestinian society as portrayed in the *Life*. But for the moment it will be sufficient to quote his account of a chariot-race in Gaza, where a chariot entered by a Christian owner from the port of Maiouma, recently rewarded for its Christian faith by Constantine with the status of a city with the name 'Constantina', was competing with a pagan-owned one from Gaza itself. The chariot owner from Maiouma, named Italicus, asked Hilarion for some means of protection against the spells of his pagan rival from Gaza. Hilarion was at first reluctant (11, 7-11):

> Cumque subrideret et diceret: 'Cur non magis equorum pretium pro salute animae tuae pauperibus erogas?'. Ille respondit functionem esse publicam, et hoc se non tam velle quam cogi, nec posse hominem christianum uti magicis artibus, sed a servo Christi potius auxilium petere, maxime contra Gazenses, adversarios Dei, et non tam sibi quam Ecclesiae Christi insultantes. Rogatus ergo a fratribus qui aderant, scyphum fictilem, quo bibere consueverat, aqua iussit impleri eique tradi. Quem cum accepisset Italicus, et stabulum et equos et aurigas suos, rhedam carcerumque repagula aspersit. Mira vulgi exspectatio; nam et adversarius hoc ipsum irridens diffamaverat, et fautores Italici sibi certam victoriam pollicentes exsultabant. Igitur dato signo hi avolant, illi praepediuntur; sub horum curru rotae fervent, illi praetervolantium terga vix cernunt. Clamor fit vulgi nimius, ita ut ethnici quoque ipsi concreparent: 'Marnas victus est a Christo'.
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> When he smiled and said, 'Why do you not rather spend the price of the horses on the poor for the salvation of your soul?', he [Italicus] replied that this was a public duty, one that he did not so much wish for as that he was obliged. Nor could a Christian deploy magic arts, but rather seek help from the servant of God, and above all against the Gazans the enemies of God, who insulted not so much himself as the Church of Christ. Beseeched therefore by the brothers who were present, he [Hilarion] gave instructions that a pottery cup, from which he was accustomed to drink, should be filled with water and given to him. When Italicus received it, he sprinkled the stable and the horses and his charioteers, as well as the chariot and the bars of the starting-gates. There was a remarkable level of expectation among the crowd. For his opponent had mockingly decried this measure, while the supporters of Italicus were exultant, promising themselves a certain victory. So when the signal was given, one team flies off, while the other is held back. Under the chariot of one team the wheels are scorching, while the others can barely see their backs as they fly past. A great shout arises from the crowd, 'Marnas has been conquered by Christ!'.

The stately progress of a great Roman lady through Palestine was of course not attended by quite such signs of popular excitement. But yet in *Letter* 108 Jerome makes clear that Paula had been offered accommodation in Jerusalem by the proconsul of the province, and that the whole population could bear witness to the tears which she shed at the Holy Sepulchre (para. 9). But the entire letter offers not just a tour of the Holy Land as it then was, but a many-layered evocation of the Biblical and Christian associations of each place in it. Particularly characteristic of Jerome's combination of vivid reportage,

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[3] S. Weingarten, *The Saint's Saints: Hagiography and Geography in Jerome* (Leiden – Boston, 2005). For the text of the *Vita* see *Vite dei Santi*, ed. Chr. Mohrmann, IV (Milan, 1975), 69-143.

pedantry and religious polemic is his account later in the same letter of Paula's visit to Samaria (para. 13.2-4):

> Quid narrem Silo, in quo altare dirutum hodieque monstratur et raptum Sabinarum a Romulo tribus Beniamitica praecucurrit? transivit Sychem — non, ut plerique errantes legunt, Sichar — quae nunc Neapolis appellatur, et ex latere montis Garizim extructam circa puteum Iacob intravit ecclesiam, super quo dominus residens sitiensque et esuriens Samaritanae fide satiatus est, quae quinque Mosaicorum voluminum viris et sexto, quem se habere iactabat, errore Dosithei, derelicto verum Messiam et verum repperit salvatorem. atque inde devertens vidit duodecim patriarcharum sepulchra et Sebasten, id est Samariam, quae in honorem Augusti ab Herode Graeco sermone Augusta est nominata. ibi siti sunt Heliseus et Abdias prophetae et — quo maior inter natos mulierum non fuit — Baptista Iohannes.
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> What shall I relate of Shiloh, where the altar was destroyed and is still today pointed out, and where the tribe of Benjamin foreshadowed the rape of the Sabine women by Romulus? She moved on to Sychem — not, as many erroneously read, 'Sichar' — which is now called Neapolis, and entered the church built on the side of Mt Gerizim next to the well of Jacob, near which the Lord sat, and when thirsty and hungry was refreshed by the faith of the Samaritan woman — she who abandoned five husbands (corresponding to the five books of Moses) and the sixth whom, according to the error of Dositheus, she boasted of (now) having, and found the true Messiah and true Saviour. From there she [Paula] made a diversion and saw the tombs of the twelve Patriarchs, and Sebaste, that is Samaria, which was named 'Augusta' by Herod in Greek in honour of Augustus. There are buried the prophets Elijah and Abdias and — he than whom there has been no greater among the sons of women — John the Baptist.

Many Christian tourists came to the Holy land in the fourth and fifth centuries, with the Old and New Testaments literally or figuratively in hand. But Jerome's engagement both with the Bible and with the past and present associations of the land of Palestine was at a deeper level, not only because he settled there, and stayed for more than three decades, but because he had prepared himself by a process of arduous study and learning which had begun long before, and continued after, his arrival.

2. Steps towards Bethlehem

The main stages in Jerome's development up to about the age of nearly 40, when he arrived in Palestine, will be sketched here, with no pretence to originality, but with a particular emphasis on the experiences and efforts which meant that he had already devoted himself to the Bible, both in its various Greek translations and in the original Hebrew, and had acquired an acquaintance with Semitic languages — Hebrew, 'Chaldaean' (Jewish Aramaic) and Syriac — and the relations, and the contrasts, between them, which was far beyond what was normal for even learned Latin-speaking Christians of his time.

It is Jerome himself, in the last chapter (135) of his *De viris illustribus*, who reports that he came from Stridon, on the borders of Pannonia and Dalmatia (where he was born,

probably in 347).[4] He had the normal literary education of boys from established families, and was a *puer* in a grammarian's school at the time of Julian's revival of paganism in 361-3 (*Commentary* on Habakkuk III.14, CCL LXXVIA, p. 645). This was apparently in Rome, where he was baptised. So far as I can find, there is no information on where or when he studied Greek, which was not an obligatory element in the education of Latin-speakers, and in which he was far more proficient than most of his contemporaries. In the later 360s and earlier 370s he spent periods in Trier and then Aquileia, where he belonged to an ascetic circle; and after that, in one of the most crucial phases in his development, he moved to Antioch in 373, and passed most of the rest of the 370s in Syria. It was there, in the desert near Chalcis, that he spent his first period as a hermit — perhaps as Megan Hale Williams suggests, not for very long, just 375-6. This period was important for two aspects of his linguistic development. Firstly, he gained at least a passing acquaintance with Syriac as a spoken language. In letters written at this period he describes himself as living in an area between Syria, or the *Syri*, and 'Saracen' territory (*Letters* 95.1; 7.1; 15.2; 16.2); and makes two jokes, first on the need either to learn a *barbarus sermo* or to keep silent (7.2), and the second inviting his addressee to imagine him going round the churches of the region preaching in either Syriac or Greek (17.2). There is no explicit claim to his having studied Syriac at this moment; but he must have done so at some time, for in his subsequent discussions of readings in Biblical texts he not only refers frequently to Syriac terms, but always distinguishes between Syriac and what he calls 'Chaldaean', which invariably means Jewish Aramaic (as found for instance in Daniel or Ezra, see below).

He does not in these letters speak of studying Hebrew, though by 381/2 he is already discussing the meaning of Hebrew terms in the Bible (*Letters* 18A; 18B). This silence led Megan Hale Williams to ask whether his later representations of his early struggles with Hebrew were not self-dramatising fiction.[5] That is possible, but Jerome returns to these efforts several times, and (as above 59) had certainly begun Hebrew by the early 380s.

Thus in *Letter* 125, written in 412, he looks back (para. 12) to when, as a *iuvenis*, he had been surrounded by the 'desert solitude', and found it hard, even with the aid of frequent fasting, to resist thoughts of a sexual nature. So he took as a Hebrew teacher another monk who had converted from Judaism, passing from the agreeable study of Latin authors to learn the alphabet and contemplate the *stridentia anhelentia verba*, with which Hebrew confronted him. Often despairing, he was finally grateful to God 'that from a bitter seed I reaped the sweet fruits of learning'. A very similar — and equally emotive — picture of his struggles as an *adulescentulus* is given in the Prologue to his translation of Daniel, made in 404-5, of which the first part is printed and translated in App. 2 below. In this case he describes how, having made some progress in Hebrew, he was then thrown into renewed despair by encountering the Aramaic (*sermo chaldaicus*)

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4 For the biography of Jerome see of course the classic work of J.N.D. Kelly, *Jerome: his Life, Writings and Controversies* (London, 1975); S. Rebenich, *Jerome* (London - New York, 2002); and now, for an excellent discussion both of chronology and his intellectual evolution, on which I rely without constant reference for details, M. Hale Williams, *The Monk and the Book: Jerome and the Making of Christian Scholarship* (Chicago, 2006).

5 Hale Williams (n. 4), 26-7.

of Daniel. But his *Hebraeus* encouraged him, so that he could subsequently read and understand it — but had more difficulty in pronouncing it. The question of his capacity to speak (or merely read aloud?) any Semitic language will be discussed further below. Finally, as regards this phase, we have his report in *De viris illustribus* 3, on Matthew and his Gospel. There was a copy, he says, of the (original?) Aramaic text in Pamphilus' library in Caesarea: 'and I too was given by the Nazarenes, who in Beroea, a city of Syria, use this *volumen*, the opportunity to copy it out' (elsewhere, he reports that this Gospel was written 'in the Chaldaean [Jewish Aramaic] and Syrian language, but in Hebrew letters').[6] The reference to Beroea must indicate his 'Syrian' period, and must imply either that he himself copied this Gospel from the Aramaic (but in Hebrew letters or in transliteration?), or that someone else did so for his future use.

His letters from the two following periods, in Constantinople in 381/2 and in Rome in 382/5, provide abundant evidence both that he had *Hebraei* as teachers and that he was working on the Hebrew Bible.[7] Not all of these need be quoted here, and perhaps the best material is provided by *Letter* 36, addressed to Damasus, the bishop of Rome. In the first paragraph he apologises for his delay in writing. He had been just about to start, when there was an interruption:

> Cum subito Hebraeus intervenit deferens non pauca volumina, quae de synagoga quasi lecturus acceperat. et ilico 'habes', inquit, 'quod postulaveras', meque dubium et, quid facerem, nescientem ita festinus exterruit, ut omnibus praetermissis ad scribendum transvolarem; quod quidem usque ad praesens facio.
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> When suddenly a *Hebraeus* appeared, bringing me no few *volumina*, which he had obtained from a synagogue on the pretext that he was going to read them, and said 'There you have what you had asked for', and, while I hesitated and did not know what to do, he so urgently alarmed me that, leaving everything aside, I flew over to transcribing them; which indeed I am still doing at the present moment.

The *volumina* (scrolls) concerned presumably contained various books of the Bible, for there is nothing to suggest that Jerome had any acquaintance with any written texts of 'rabbinic' literature, even if — as is highly uncertain — some of this literature already circulated (but, if at all, as far as we know only in Palestine) in written form. We should note, however, that already when in Constantinople he had referred (*Letter* 18B.4.20) to Jewish teaching as *deuterōseis* ('repetitions'), just as he would later in Palestine (*Letter* 121, see below). *Scribendum* in *Letter* 36 must surely mean 'transcribing', as *describendum* does in *De vir. ill.* 3 (see above), not to consequential writing of a commentary type. For the passage clearly implies that his 'Hebrew' contact needed to return the *volumina* as soon as possible. The notion that copies of the books of the Bible in Hebrew were not available in the Diaspora needs to be re-examined.

Immediately after, in the second paragraph of the same long *Letter* 36, Jerome gives an example of how he transcribes in Latin characters a whole sentence from Genesis (4:15):
Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia:

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6 *Dialogus adversus Pelagianos* III.2 (CCL LXXX, p. 99).

7 See Letters 18A and 18B (Constantinople); 20; 25; 26; 28; 29; 30; 32; 34; 39.

ואמר לו יהוה לכן כל הרג קין שבעתים יקם

Jerome:

Vaiomer lo Adonai lochen chol orec Cain sobathaim ioccamo
Adonai said to him 'not so; if anyone slays Cain, sevenfold will he be pursued'

It seems clear that Jerome's text read לא כן (LXX: οὐχ οὕτως) and יקמהו. Jerome's difficulties in balancing between whatever Hebrew text he had before him, and several Greek translations, in order to produce either a Latin transliteration or a translation, were not ones which have since been overcome. But Jerome, unlike modern scholars, worked without any tradition of Hebrew philology in Latin, and without dictionaries or concordances. It should be conceded that when he set off for Palestine in 385, and settled in Bethlehem in 386, he was unusually, perhaps uniquely, qualified to benefit from contact with native speakers of Semitic languages, and to use his powers of observation and reportage on the complex social, religious and linguistic environment in which he now found himself.

3. Palestine: Hebrew Contacts, Guides and Teachers

As we have seen, Jerome's commitment to Hebrew and to reading the Hebrew Bible (like his reluctant confrontation with Jewish Aramaic), and his habit of studying with *Hebraei*, was not the product of his three decades of residence in Palestine, and would presumably have continued if he had established himself elsewhere.[8] But it was clearly reinforced, and deliberately so, by the contacts with 'Hebrews' which he made there. There are paradoxical aspects to this well-attested effort. Firstly, Bethlehem, where he set up his monastery, lay in the territory of Aelia, from which, ever since its re-foundation by Hadrian as Aelia Capitolina, Jews had been excluded. Christian narratives relating to Julian's project to rebuild the Temple do indicate that some Jews had by now re-established themselves there, and had at least one synagogue.[9] But a continuing general exclusion is clearly implied by Jerome's own famous, and painfully triumphalist, report in his *Commentary* on Zephaniah, on how miserable and impoverished Jews were allowed in once a year to mourn, surrounded by the visible symbols of Christian victory.[10] So Jerome neither took up residence where contacts with Jews would be easy, and nor was he free of disdain for Jews as a religious community. But his commitment both to exploring the true original Hebrew text of the Bible, and, where relevant, to relating its contents to the topography of Palestine, meant that he put aside any such hesitations as he may have had. Both motives are vividly expressed in the letter which he wrote to Domnion and Rogatianus, and which is printed as a second preface to his

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8 Thus, when in his *Commentary* on Galatians, written in 386, the first year of his residence in Bethlehem, he speaks of the Hebraeus who had given him instruction in the Scriptures (PL XXXVI, col. 361), he is probably recalling an earlier stage. The same may be true of the 'Hebraeus qui me in Scripturis sanctis erudivit', *Commentary* on Amos II.3.11 (CCL LXXVI, p. 250), even though this was written in 406.

9 See F. Millar, 'Rebuilding the Jerusalem Temple: Pagan, Jewish and Christian Conceptions', *Vestnik Drevnei Istorii 1* (264) (2008), 19-37, on p. 28.

10 *Commentary* on Zephaniah I.15-16 (CCL LXXVIA, pp. 673-4).

translation of Chronicles, made in 396 (*Biblia Sacra* VII, pp. 7-8; not included in the edition of the letters in CSEL):

> Eusebius Hieronymus Domnioni et Rogatiano suis in Iesu Christo salutem. Quomodo Grecorum historias magis intellegunt qui Athenas viderint, et tertium Vergilii librum qui Troade per Leucaten et Acroceraunia ad Siciliam et inde ad ostia Tiberis navigarint, ita Sanctam Scripturam lucidius intuebitur qui Iudaeam oculis contemplatus est et antiquarum urbium memorias locorumque vel eadem vocabula vel mutata cognoverit. Unde et nobis curae fuit cum eruditissimis Hebraeorum hunc laborem subire, ut circuiremus provinciam quam universae Christi Ecclesiae sonant. Fateor enim, mi Domnion et Rogatiane carissimi, numquam me in divinis voluminibus propriis viribus credidisse nec habuisse magistram opinionem meam, sed etiam ea de quibus scire me arbitrabar interrogare me † solitum †, quanto magis de his super quibus anceps eram. Denique cum a me nuper litteris flagitassetis, ut vobis Paralipomenon latino sermone transferrem, de Tiberiade legis quondam auctorem, qui apud Hebraeos admirationi habebatur, adsumpsi, et contuli cum eo *a vertice*, ut aiunt, *usque ad extremum unguem*, et sic confirmatus ausus sum facere quod iubebatis.
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> Eusebius Hieronymus to his dear Domnion and Rogatianus, greetings in Jesus Christ,Just as those understand the histories of the Greeks better who have seen Athens, and the third book of Vergil those who have sailed from the Troad past Leucas and Acroceraunia to Sicily and then to the mouths of the Tiber, so that one will see the Sacred Scriptures more clearly who has observed Iudaea with his own eyes and has got to know the traces of ancient cities and the unchanged or altered names of places. Hence I took care that, along with the most learned of the *Hebraei*, I should undertake this labour, namely that we should go round the province which all the churches of Christ proclaim. For I confess, my dearest Domnion and Rogatianus, that I have never felt confidence in my own capacities in regard to the divine books, and have never treated my own opinion as authoritative; but even as regards these matters on which I thought my knowledge secure, I have been accustomed to question others, and all the more so on those issues on which I was dubious. Recently, since you asked me by letter to translate *Chronicles* for you into Latin, I took from Tiberias a certain authority in the Law, who was regarded with admiration among the *Hebraei*, and with him examined (the text), as they say, 'from head to toe', and with this reassurance had the confidence to do what you bade me.

As for the first element, Jerome's tour of the province with learned Jewish guides, we catch a reflection of it in the Prologue to his *Commentary* on Nahum, which belongs a few years earlier, in 392/3 (CCL LXXVIA, p. 526), discussing the meaning of נחום האלקשי in 1:1:

> Porro quod adalit Naum Elcesaei quidam putant Elcesaeum patrem esse Naum, et secundam Hebraeam traditionem etiam ipsum prophetam fuisse, cum Elcesi usque hodie in Galilea viculus sit, parvus quidam et vix ruinis veterum aedificiorum indicans vestigia, sed tamen notus Iudaeis, et mihi quoque a circumducente monstratus.
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> Further, because 'Elcesaei' is added to 'Nahum', some think that Elcesai was the father of Nahum and that according to the Hebrew tradition he too had been a prophet, although until today there is in Galilee a little village 'Elcesi', small indeed and barely revealing

> traces of ancient buildings, but none the less known to the Jews, and shown to me too by my guide.[11]

Jerome is surely alluding once again to guidance from a learned *Hebraeus* on the topography of the Holy Land when he records in his *Onomasticon* (p. 21) that the *Hebraeus* with whom (*quo praelegente*) he studied the Scriptures, affirms that the 'Aermon' which Joshua conquered 'is the Mt Hermon which rises above Paneas, which the Euae and Amoraeans once occupied, (and) from which now the summer snows are carried down to Tyre for luxurious consumption'.[12]

With a similar reference to religious tourism which is found in the Prologue to his *Commentary* on Jonah of 396/7 (CCL LXXVI, p. 378) it is not clear whether we are dealing with Jewish or Christian veneration of Biblical sites (or both): he says that the place called 'Geth' (2 Kings 14:23-5) was identified both with a village on the road from Diocaesarea/Sepphoris to Tiberias, where the tomb of the prophet was displayed, and with another place of the same name, in the territory of Lydda/Diospolis, which was also 'shown'. But Jerome makes two very clear references to contact with a 'Hebrew' teacher from Lydda (very possibly the same one). The first is in his *Commentary* on Habakkuk of 392/3 (CCL LXXVIA, p. 610): 'I heard at Lydda a certain one of the *Hebraei*, who was called among them "wise" and a δευτερώτης, who retailed a tradition about Zedekiah'. The use of the Greek term δευτερώτης ('rehearser'?) is of interest (see below), as is the clear implication either that the man repeated the tradition in Greek, or that Jerome could understand either Hebrew or Aramaic when spoken. The second reference comes from the Prologue to his translation of Job, made in 389/92 (*Biblia Sacra* IX, p. 71):

> I recall that for the understanding of this book I hired for no small sum a teacher from Lydda, who among the *Hebraei* was considered to be of the first rank. Whether I made any progress through his teaching, I do not know; but this one thing I do know, that I would not have been able to translate anything except what I had already understood.

The question of communication between Jerome and his 'Hebrew' teachers arises again in the well-known passage of *Letter* 121, 10.19-22, where he spells out in Greek the key terms relating to Jewish religious (rabbinic?) teaching: 'doctores eorum σοφοί, hoc est "sapientes", vocantur; οἱ σοφοὶ δευτεροῦσιν, id est "sapientes docent traditiones"'. There seems to me to be a clear indication here that these established Jewish teachers could and did explain their teaching practice to Jerome in Greek (just as, as we saw earlier, he had heard a learned Jew discussing the Greek text of Daniel). But that is not quite certain, for we have already come across a couple of references by Jerome either to his pronouncing (or reading aloud) a text in Hebrew and (with more difficulty) in

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11 No village of this name is recorded in Y. Tsafrir, L. Di Segni and J. Green (eds.), *Tabula Imperii Romani: Judaea/Palaestina* (Jerusalem, 1994). For the tradition that Nahum came from a place called 'Elcesi' see also the Late Antique text, the Lives of the Prophets, preserved in many different versions; see D. Satran, *Biblical Prophets in Byzantine Palestine: Reassessing the Lives of the Prophets* (Leiden, 1995), 35.

12 For the purchase of snow-chilled water in Byblos in the early fourth century see J.F. Matthews, *The Journey of Theophanes* (New Haven, 2006), 125.

Aramaic, and (perhaps) hearing a *Hebraeus* recounting a tradition in either Hebrew or Aramaic.

The question of Jerome's command of either speaking these languages, or understanding them when spoken, arises again in the Prologue to his translation of Tobit, made in 404-5 (*Biblia Sacra* VIII, pp. 155-6; again this Prologue takes the form of a letter, not included in CSEL):

> Cromatio et Heliodoro episcopis Hieronymus in Domino salutem. Mirari non desino exactionis vestrae instantiam. Exigitis enim, ut librum chaldeo sermone conscriptum ad latinum stilum traham, librum utique Tobiae, quem Hebrei, de catalogo divinarum Scripturarum secantes, his quae Agiografa memorant manciparunt. Feci satis desiderio vestro, non tamen meo studio. Arguunt enim nos Hebreorum studia et inputant nobis, contra suum canonem latinis auribus ista transferre. Sed melius esse iudicans Phariseorum displicere iudicio et episcoporum iussionibus deservire, institi ut potui, et quia vicina est Chaldeorum lingua sermoni hebraico, utriusque linguae peritissimum loquacem repperiens, unius diei laborem arripui et quicquid ille mihi hebraicis verbis expressit, haec ego accito notario, sermonibus latinis exposui.
>
> To bishops Cromatius and Heliodorus, Hieronymus (gives) greetings in the Lord. I do not cease to be amazed at the pressure of your demands. For you request that I should translate into Latin a book written in the Chaldaean [Aramaic] language, namely the book of Tobit, which the *Hebraei*, excluding it from the canon of the Holy Scriptures, have transferred to those which they classify as Hagiographa. I have fulfilled your wish, but not however my own inclination. For people criticise me over my study of Hebrew texts, and blame me for reproducing these for Latin ears against their canon. But, considering it better to offend the judgement of Pharisees and obey the orders of bishops, I have set to work as best I could; and because the Chaldaean language is close to Hebrew speech, finding a most expert speaker (*loquax*) of both languages, I seized the opportunity of a single day's work, and whatever he expressed for me in Hebrew words I, summoning a *notarius*, set out in Latin phrases.

Jerome's claims to linguistic or verbal expertise have often, in modern scholarship, been greeted with scepticism, quite wrongly in my view. At any rate we should attend to what he seems to be claiming here, even if we then choose to disbelieve it. What he reports, as the substance of a day's intensive work, is that an expert in both Hebrew and Aramaic (Jewish, clearly, as did not need to be stated explicitly) read the Aramaic text of Tobit aloud in Hebrew — clearly, sentence by sentence in the manner of a *dictée* — and Jerome dictated a Latin version of this to his *notarius*. We should, I argue, interpret this as a simultaneous process of two-stage oral transmission, not of the production first of a written Hebrew version and then of a written Latin one. For in that case the use of the term '*loquax*' ('speaker') becomes otiose, and so does the (typically boastful) claim to have completed the whole task in a single day. Tobit occupies some 14 pages in the *Jerusalem Bible*, or some 40 half-to one third-pages in *Biblia Sacra* IX (pp. 169-209). So it would have been a formidable, but not impossible, task for (say) ten hours of parallel dictation in Hebrew and Latin.

If this interpretation is correct, it confirms again that Jerome was familiar with the Aramaic of the Bible, but found it, by comparison with Hebrew, more difficult to understand when read aloud, or to read aloud himself. But when an Aramaic text was read aloud to him in a Hebrew version, he could understand it, and produce a Latin

translation of it. But of course we can assume that his knowledge of Biblical Hebrew — which, however imperfect, was far beyond that of any of his Latin-speaking contemporaries — primarily related to the written text, which could be laboriously compared to the LXX, and to the later Greek versions of Symmachus, Aquila and Theodotion.

But in what we must take to have been primarily an oral culture, which light does Jerome throw on communal relations and oral exchanges between groups or individuals in Palestine belonging to different social frameworks, and different religions?

4. Palestinian Society: Communal Co-Existence, Languages and Scripts

As suggested above, Jerome's extensive works, and above all those concerned with the interpretation of Biblical texts, contain a mass of often vivid and detailed passing comments on the history, geography and society of the province. Scattered and disparate by their nature, as observations made in the course of textual study, these reports would be best used as elements in an integrated history of Late Antique Palestine. So only a few examples will be given here before the discussion moves on to the striking possibilities which are opened up by Jerome's lifelong focus on language.

Thus, among a significant number of references to Vespasian, Titus and the fall of Jerusalem, and to Hadrian's foundation of Aelia, one stands out for its combination of historical recall, a report of diverse Jewish interpretations, and social observation (*Commentary* on Jeremiah VI.18.5-6, CCL LXXIV, p. 307):

> Quia igitur Rachel in Ephratha, hoc est in Bethleem, condita est — sicut et scriptura sancta et titulus sepulchri eius hodieque testantur — flere dicitur pueros, qui iuxta se et in suis regionibus interfecti sunt. Quidam Iudaeorum hunc locum sic interpretantur, quod capta Hierusalem sub Vespasiano per hanc viam, Gazam et Alexandriam infinita milia captivorum Romam directa sint; alii vero, quod ultima captivitate sub Hadriano, quando et urbs subversa est Hierusalem, innumerabilis populus diversae aetatis et utriusque sexus in mercato Terebinthi venundatus sit; et idcirco exsecrabile esse Iudaeis mercatum celeberrimum visere [vivere?].
>
> So because Rachel is buried in Ephratha, that is in Bethlehem — as both Holy Scripture and the epitaph on her tomb until today testify — she is said to have wept for the sons who had been killed in her presence or in their own regions. But some of the *Iudaei* attach to this place the meaning that, after Jerusalem had been captured under Vespasian, along this road, to Gaza and Alexandria, endless thousands of captives were sent on the way to Rome. But others, that, at the final captivity under Hadrian, when the city of Jerusalem was destroyed, an innumerable crowd of various ages and both sexes was sold in the market at the Terebinth; and therefore it is hateful for Jews that this much-frequented market should flourish(?).[13]

As regards social history, vivid descriptions are given, for instance, of mourning-customs among women in Palestine,[14] or of the devastating effects of raids by the Huns,[15] or by

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13 For rabbinic evidence of Jewish attitudes to this fair see Z. Safrai, *The Economy of Byzantine Palestine* (London, 1994), 252-53.

14 *Commentary* on Jeremiah II.79 (CCL LXXIV, p. 98).

15 Letters 60.16; 77.8.

Isaurians,[16] or by barbarians who are identified as 'Ismael'[17]— hence Arabs or Saracens, on whom see below. Similarly, Imperial measures are recorded, for instance, the recent division of Palestine and the consequential creation of Palaestina Salutaris: commenting on the place-name 'Gerar', he says, 'where also there is until now a town Bersabe [Beersheva]. Not long since, this province, by division of governors, was named "Palaestina Salutaris"'.[18] Then he alludes to the removal by Arcadius (395-408) of the bones of Samuel from Judaea to 'Thracia' [Constantinople], characterising the Emperor, with remarkable audacity, as 'sacrilegious', and pouring scorn on the bishops and the devout crowds along the way, who appeared to be worshipping Samuel rather than Christ.[19]

But perhaps the most remarkable, and puzzling, of his passing reports, is that on meat-eating in Egypt and Palestine, and on a conservation measure by the Emperor Valens (364-378), included in his *Against Jovinianus* of 393:[20]

> In Aegypto et Palaestina propter boum raritatem nemo vaccam comedit, taurorumque carnes et boum vitulorumque assumunt in cibis. At in nostra provincia scelus putant vitulos devorare. Unde et Imperator Valens nuper legem per Orientem dederat, ne quis vitulorum carnibus vesceretur, utilitati agriculturae providens, et pessimam judaizantis vulgi emendans consuetudinem, pro altilibus et lactentibus, vitulos consumentis.
>
> In Egypt and Palestine, on account of the scarcity of cattle, no-one eats (the meat of) a cow, but they take as part of their diet the meat of bulls and of oxen and calves. But in our (native) province [Pannonia] they think it a crime to consume calves. Hence also the Emperor Valens recently promulgated a law throughout [the civil diocese of] Oriens, to the effect that no-one should consume the flesh of calves, making provision for the effectiveness of agriculture, and correcting the deplorable custom of the judaising mob, who eat calves instead of fowl or suckling pigs.

I can find no trace of this measure in any other evidence.[21]

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16 Letters 114.1.

17 Letters 126.2-3.

18 *Hebrew Questions on Genesis* 21:30-1 (CCL LXXII, p. 26); see C.T.R. Hayward, *Jerome's Hebrew Questions on Genesis, Translated with an Introduction and Commentary* (Oxford, 1995), 54. Jerome never seems to refer to the subsequent division into three provinces of Palaestina, first attested in 409, C. Theod. VII.4.30, see F. Millar, 'Not Israel's Land then: the Church of the Three Palestines in 518 CE', in J. Geiger, H.M. Cotton and G.D. Stiebel (eds.), *Israel's Land* (Raanana, 2009), 147*-178*, on pp. 154* I have not seen J. Sipilä, *The Reorganisation of Provincial Territories in the Light of the Imperial Decision-making Process* (Commentationes Humanorum Litterarum 126) (Helsinki, 2009).

19 *Adversus Vigilantium* 5 (CCL LXXIXC, pp. 12-13), written in 406, while Arcadius was still on the throne.

20 *Adversus Jovinianum* II, 7 (PL XXIII, col. 295; there is no more recent edition).

21 I have failed to find any reference to it either in O. Seeck's *Regesten der Kaizer und Päpste* (Stuttgart, 1919), or A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1964), or F. Pergami, *La legislazione di Valentiniano e Valente* (364-375) (Milan, 1993), or in the excellent study by N. Lenski, *Failure of Empire: Valens and the Roman State in the Fourth Century AD* (Berkeley, 2002), who stresses (283-86) the attention which Valentinian and Valens paid to

These passing allusions give no more than a taste of the wealth of historical and social information to be found in the pages of Jerome's writings, but as such they cannot by their nature constitute any coherent theme. But potentially at least, given Jerome's intense commitment to the study of languages, to their mutual relations and to the problems involved in translating one into another, what he has to say about patterns of language, written but also spoken, in the Palestine of his time, could be of real interest. The social and religious complexity of Palestinian society needs to be recalled. The two most widespread languages were, beyond question, Greek and the *Syrus sermo*, which it is simplest to label in English as 'Syriac'. We can assume that these two languages were in use among gentiles, both pagan and Christian. As far as I know, however, there is no documentary material in Syriac produced by pagans in Late Antiquity, and no trace of literary expression by them in Syriac. At the most there are occasional reports by third parties of spoken Syriac. As regards Jews, between the mass of rabbinic compositions using Hebrew and Jewish Aramaic, and the considerable corpus of synagogue-inscriptions, especially from mosaic floors, we can be certain that Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek were all in use; but there is no evidence of Jewish literary composition in Greek by Jews in this period, whether in Palestine or anywhere else.

Samaritans, who, as major revolts in the fifth and sixth centuries were to show, were a significant element in the overall population, used the Pentateuch in Hebrew. Some inscriptions from Samaritan synagogues — which are identified as such by their distinctive script (but see further below) — also use Greek, and we should no doubt assume that in daily life they used both Greek and Syriac. Jerome's comments on them and their writing-system will be considered below.

Palestine also included some groups of Jewish Christians, 'Nazareni' or 'Nazaraei', using both the Hebrew Bible and (like those in Syria, see above) at least Matthew's Gospel in an Aramaic version. As to whether their language-use in ordinary life was different from those of other religious communities, there appears to be no evidence.

Finally, there were those unsettled groups whom moderns call 'Arabs', but whom contemporaries writing in Greek or Latin, including Jerome, most frequently called 'Saracens', while also on occasion speaking of 'Ishmaelites' or 'Hagarenes'. 'Arabs' was however certainly one common term for them, which does not make it any easier to understand what he means when he speaks of 'Arabicus sermo' (see below).[22]

Greek was of course the dominant official language of state, society and Church in the East. This hardly needed to be said — but in fact Jerome does say it explicitly, in mentioning the Celtic which was still used in Galatia 'apart from *sermo graecus*, in which the whole Orient speaks'.[23] That might still have allowed for some regional variations in either pronunciation or vocabulary, though both are in fact remarkably little commented on in the Imperial period. Jerome does however seem in one instance to note a particularly Palestinian item of vocabulary in Greek. Commenting on Hosea 3:2, on the

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agriculture. My translation is indebted to that of W.H. Fremantle in *Nicene and post-Nicene Fathers VI* (Oxford and New York,1893), p. 393.

22 F. Millar, 'The Theodosian Empire (408-450) and the Arabs: Saracens or Ishmaelites?' in E. Gruen (ed.), *Cultural Borrowings and Ethnic Appropriations in Antiquity* (Stuttgart, 2005), 298-314, on 303-5.

23 *Commentary* on Galatians, ch. 2 (CCL LXXVIIA, p. 83).

word γομορ as used in the LXX to transliterate חמר (a unit of measurement), he says that all versions except the LXX had translated this as 'corus' (κόροϛ), as being the normal Greek, 'and especially the Palestinian', term (CCL LXXVI, p. 34). However, given that Greek was the established language of city and Church, it is more relevant here to look at whatever evidence there is for how it interacted with other languages. In Jerome himself, in *Letter* 108, already quoted above, we find in para. 29, his report on the funeral of Paula in Jerusalem: 'Graeco, Latino Syroque sermone psalmi in ordine personabant'.

That is a reminder that Paula was a grand lady who had settled in Jerusalem from Rome, and that Jerusalem was still formally a Roman *colonia* (Aelia). Even so, our evidence is clear that Greek was the normal language of the liturgy. This is made very explicit by the report in the *Peregrinatio* of Egeria or Aetheria, dating from some three years before Jerome's arrival there, which is the clearest account we have of linguistic relations in Palestine (47.3-4):[24]

> And since in that province part of the population knows (how to speak) both in Greek and in Syriac (*et grece et siriste*), another part also only Greek and another part only Syriac, therefore the bishop, even if he knows Syriac, nonetheless always speaks Greek, and never Syriac. So therefore a presbyter is always standing there who, as the bishop speaks in Greek, interprets in Syriac, so that everyone may understand whatever is expounded.

The same applied to Biblical readings, where the Greek text was accompanied by a simultaneous oral translation in Syriac (and similar provisions were made for Latin speakers). There is no obvious hint here of a written Syriac Bible, though one had certainly existed for at least a century.[25] As regards the role of Syriac in Jerome's thought, prolonged study of his very many allusions to the *Syrus sermo* would be required. What is clear at least is that Jerome had been familiar with at least the existence of this language since his experiences as a monk in Syria in the 370s; that he was very well aware of the close affinities, and contrasts, between it and Hebrew (see e.g. *Letter* 26.2); that he used the same term for the common Aramaic dialects of Syria and of Palestine; that, so far as I can see, he never refers to a Syriac translation of the Bible, nor to his use of any other written material in Syriac; *a fortiori*, he never refers to the form of the letters in Syriac writing, as he does with Hebrew, for instance in his *Commentary* on Ecclesiastes VIII.6.7 (CCL LXXII, p. 316), and, as we will see below, with the Samaritan Bible. These contrasts are brought out most clearly when he is speaking of passages in the Gospels where expressions are used which we normally label as 'Aramaic'. So, for instance, on Luke 16:9 (*Letter* 121.6.13) he says: 'iniquus autem mamona non Hebraeorum sed Syrorum lingua divitiae nuncupantur, quod de iniquitate collectae sint.' Similarly, but somewhat confusingly, he interprets 'Talitha kum(i?)' in Mark 5:41, by using both Hebrew and Syriac (CCL LXXVIII, p. 472):

> Ait ergo *Talitha kumi*, quod interpretatur, 'Puella surge mihi'. Si diceret, *Talitha kum*, interpretatur 'Puella surge'. Nunc vero, quia dixit *Talitha kumi*, interpretatur de Syra et Hebraea lingua 'Puella surge mihi'.

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24 See P. Maraval, *Égérie, Journal de Voyage (itinéraire)*, Sources Chrétiennes 296, (Paris, 1982).

25 See S. Brock, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition* (Piscataway, N.J., 2006).

There are puzzles both as regards the alleged reading of the Greek transliteration and the interpretation of the final *yod* as meaning 'to me', given that such a *yod* is present in the feminine singular imperative in both Hebrew and Syriac. Has some confusion arisen because in standard spoken Syriac the *yod* was already not pronounced?

As indicated above, there would be scope for a substantial study of Jerome's understanding of Syriac, to match that of Michael Graves on his Hebrew philology (n. 1 above). In this context it will be enough to conclude that he labels the non-Greek spoken language of Palestine as *Syrus sermo* or *Syra lingua*, and takes it to be used by Christians, Jews and (as we will see below) 'Saracens'. He does however make occasional *allusions* to works written in Syriac: in *De viris illustribus* 33 he speaks of Bardesanes as a Syriac writer, and later (115) reports having read one of the works of Ephrem in Greek translation. But, as we have seen already, he gives no indication of having studied any written text in Syriac.

It may well be the case that in the language of everyday speech in Palestine there was no material difference between Jews and gentiles, whether pagan or Christian. If so, what then does he mean by 'Chaldaean'? It might well be thought that the meaning of 'Chaldaean' and 'Syrian' is identical; and this is how it appears in his *Commentary* on Daniel, speaking of Daniel 2:4, when the Chaldaeans (הכשדים) address the King 'in Aramaic' (ארמית). The LXX had translated this as Συριστί. Jerome gives his own interpretation (CCL LXXVA, p. 785):

> Hucusque quae lecta sunt, sermone narrantur Hebraeo; ab hoc loco usque ad visionem anni tertii regis Baldasar quam Daniel vidit in Susis, Hebraicis quidem litteris sed lingua scribuntur Chaldaea, quam hic Syriacam vocat.
>
> Up to this point, the things which have been said are narrated in the Hebrew language; from this point until the vision in the third year of king Baldasar which Daniel saw in Susa, they are written in Hebrew letters but in the Chaldaean language which he (Daniel) here calls '*Syriaca*'.

I cannot find that Jerome ever makes any linguistic distinction between 'Chaldaean' and 'Syriac'.[26] The difference seems to be strictly that 'Chaldaean' denotes the language of a written text, in Hebrew letters, and applies only to those parts of the Bible which were in what both the author of Daniel and moderns call '(Jewish) Aramaic'. One further example to which he refers is Tobit.[27] But even though, as it seems, 'Chaldaean' is identified specifically as the language in which some parts of the Bible were written (and in Hebrew letters), and while in contrast to the *Syrus sermo* — it nowhere appears in Jerome's writing as a spoken language, it does not follow that texts written in it were not read aloud. The person whom Jerome took to help him with his instant Latin version of Tobit (above) was *loquax* in both languages. There is, however, nothing to suggest that

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26 For some further allusions to 'Chaldaean' see e.g. *Commentary* on Malachi 3:8 (CCL LXXVIA, p. 934: 'Hoc quod diximus "haiecba" [היקבע] lingua Syrorum et Chaldaeorum interpretatur "si affiget"'; *Dialogus adversus Pelagianos* III.2: 'In Evangelio iuxta Hebraeos, quod Chaldaico quidem Syroque sermone, sed Hebraicis litteris scriptum est, quo utuntur usque hodie Nazareni' (CCL LXXX, p. 99); *Commentary* on Daniel (CCL LXXVA), passim.

27 See Prologue to Judith, *Biblia Sacra* VIII, p. 213.

Jerome had any awareness of contemporary writing in 'Chaldaean', i.e. Jewish Aramaic, of a type which was actually to be found in rabbinic works, such as the Palestinian Talmud, or in the mosaic inscriptions from synagogues.

The Samaritans, insofar as alluded to by Jerome, represented a comparable case. Nothing is said by him of their spoken language; what distinguished them was their Bible, restricted to the Pentateuch, and their archaic script. The story of the two (marginally) divergent alphabets is told by Jerome in his Prologue to the Books of Kings (*Biblia Sacra*, ed. Weber and Gryson, I, p. 364)

> Viginti et duas esse litteras apud Hebraeos, Syrorum quoque et Chaldeorum lingua testatur, quae hebraeae magna ex parte confinis est; nam et ipsi viginti duo elementa habent eodem sono, sed diversis caracteribus. Samaritani etiam Pentateuchum Mosi totidem litteris scriptitant, figuris tantum et apicibus discrepantes. Certumque est Ezram scribam legisque doctorem post captam Hierosolymam et instaurationem templi sub Zorobabel alias litteras repperisse, quibus nunc utimur, cum ad illud usque tempus idem Samaritanorum et Hebraeorum caracteres fuerint.
>
> That twenty-two letters are in use among the *Hebraei* is also confirmed by the language of the *Syri* and the *Chaldaei*, which is to a large degree closely related. For they also themselves also employ twenty-two letters, with the same sound, but different shapes. The Samaritans also are accustomed to write the Pentateuch of Moses in the same number of letters, but differing in their shapes and terminations. And it is certain that Ezra, the scribe and teacher of the Law, subsequent to the capture of Jerusalem and the re-dedication of the Temple under Zorababel, invented different letters, which we now use, while up to that time the characters used by the Samaritans and the *Hebraei* had been the same.

Jerome evidently had seen actual examples of Samaritan writing, for in his *Commentary* on Ezekiel 9:4-6 (CCL LXXV, p. 106) he says:

> And to come to the present, in the ancient form of the alphabet of the *Hebraei*, which the Samaritans use until this day, the last letter, 'tau', has the form of a cross.

The observation is correct, though whether he derived it from a copy of the Samaritan Bible or from a mosaic inscription in a Samaritan synagogue, or elsewhere, is quite obscure. It is puzzling, however, that, if we follow the important recent study by Dan Barag, the specifically "Samaritan" alphabet was not the result of ancient tradition, but was adapted from the existing "Paleo-Hebrew" alphabet in approximately the period of Jerome's residence in Palestine.[28] In fact, however, the table of letter-forms provided by Barag (in n.28 on 320) suggests that a cross-shaped *tau* was more characteristic of the Paleo-Hebrew alphabet than of the new and distinctive Samaritan one.

The reflection in Jerome's writing of the co-existence of different ethnic or religious communities in Palestine generally take the form of passing allusions, among which his reports on different languages and scripts stand out as being on occasion relatively detailed. Jerome was not setting out to write sociology, but (above all) to interpret the Bible. None the less, it is very clear that one group, by its novel and alarming nature,

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28 See D. Barag, 'Samaritan Writing and Writings', in H.M. Cotton, R.G. Hoyland, J.J. Price and D.J. Wasserstein (eds.), *From Hellenism to Islam: Cultural and Linguistic Change in the Roman Near East* (Cambridge, 2009), 313-323.

does bring him to make more extensive comments, namely the nomadic inhabitants of the desert zones. There was a problem as to what name to give them: 'the *Arabes* and *Agareni* whom they now call *Saraceni'*, who were to be found in the vicinity of the city of Jerusalem.[29] I have collected elsewhere Jerome's observations on these peoples and on their customs,[30] so will merely stress his reports on the threats posed by them in this area, to the point of inserting a mention of them into his recall of the story of the Good Samaritan, on the road between Jericho and Jerusalem. He is in fact discussing Jeremiah 3:2a, which mentions, in the Latin translation, the words *latro* (robber) and *cornix* (rook):[31]

> Pro 'latrone' et 'cornice' in Hebraeo 'arabe' [ערבי] scriptum est, quod potest et 'Arabes' significare, quae gens latrociniis dedita usque hodie incursat terminos Palestinae et descendentibus de Hierusalem Hierichum obsidet vias, cuius rei et dominus in evangelio recordatur.
>
> Instead of *latro* or *cornix*, in the Hebrew text there is written *arabe*, which may also signify 'Arabs', that race devoted to robbery which to this day makes incursions across the borders of Palestine and infests the roads, to the danger of travellers going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, as the Lord records in the Gospel.

In his *Life* of Hilarion (see above), Jerome also offers a characterization of people whom he calls *Saraceni* (16.1-4):[32]

> … cum infinito agmine monachorum pervenit Elusam, eo forte die, quo anniversaria sollemnitas omnem oppidi populum in templum Veneris congregaverat. Colunt autem illam ob Luciferum, cuius cultui Saracenorum natio dedita est. Sed et ipsum oppidum ex magna parte semibarbarum est propter loci situm. Igitur audito quod sanctus Hilarion praeteriret – multos enim Saracenorum arreptos a daemone frequenter curaverat –, gregatim ei cum uxoribus et liberis obviam processere, submittentes colla et voce Syra: «Barech», id est, «benedic», inclamantes.
>
> …he arrived at Elusa along with an enormous troop of monks, by chance on the day on which an annual ritual had led the whole population of the town to congregate at the temple of Venus. For they worship her on account of Lucifer, to whose cult the *natio Saracenorum* is dedicated. But the town itself is in large part semi-barbarous on account of its situation. When therefore it was heard that the holy Hilarion was passing — for he had frequently cured many *Saraceni* when seized by a demon — they came out to meet him in droves with their wives and children, bending their necks and calling out in the *vox Syra* 'Barech', that is 'bless'.

We have to remember that this is a novelistic portrayal of a period many decades before Jerome himself arrived. All the same, Jerome's representation of the 'semi-barbarian' Elusa, whose inhabitants could be characterized as *Saraceni*, but who spoke 'the Syrian language', is puzzling. Does he mean to imply that these 'Saracens' were immigrants, or that the term could apply to the settled, long-term inhabitants? It is possible that he has

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29 Letter 129.4.2.
30 See Millar (n. 22).
31 *Commentary* on Jeremiah 1.50 (CCL LXXIV, p. 31).
32 See the treatment of this passage by S. Weingarten (n. 3), esp. 112-19.

conflated the inhabitants of the city with the nomads of the region. Two centuries after Hilarion Elusa was still to have a bishop who could subscribe a document in Greek;[33] and, later still, nearby Nessana, which was not even a city or bishopric, could produce both documents and literary works in Greek.[34]

Our confusion only becomes greater when we read what Jerome writes in the Prologue to his translation of Job, which is one of his most striking discussions of what was involved in translation. As regards the bases of his new version he says (*Biblia Sacra* IX, p. 70):

> Haec autem translatio nullum de veteribus sequitur interpretem, sed ex ipso Hebraico Arabicoque sermone et interdum Syro, nunc verba, nunc sensus, nunc simul utrumque resonavit.

As we saw above (63), and App. 2), in the Prologue to his translation of Daniel Jerome also mentions Job, and says that it has many affinities with the *Arabica lingua*.

He appears once again to be referring to a spoken language, not to documents or literary texts. But, if so, where would he have heard people speaking the *Arabicus sermo* or *Arabica lingua*? Was this the tongue of some or all of those whom he normally called *Saraceni*? Or a dialect (of Syriac?) spoken in what was now Palaestina Tertia, including both Elusa and Petra? Or a (purely hypothetical) Semitic dialect which was characteristic of the province to the east of Palaestina, and which was now called 'Arabia' (northern Jordan and southern Syria)?[35] Our understanding of society and language, or co-existing languages, in these provincial areas, as in the wider Arabian peninsula in Late Antiquity, is both at an early stage and evolving rapidly. So we may leave this as a question which Jerome poses for us, as one more product of his unique combination of intellectual energy, descriptive power and boundless curiosity about language.[36]

Appendix 1: Jerome's Works written in Palestine, 386-419

There is a very useful guide to Jerome's works, and the modern (or in some cases only relatively modern) editions of them, in S. Rebenich, Jerome (London - New York, 2002), 139-144, and an invaluable discussion of the chronology of his life and writings in Megan Hale Williams, *The Monk and the Book: Jerome and the Making of Christian Scholarship* (Chicago, 2006), 267-301, which is followed in all essentials below. There is no complete edition more recent than that of Vallarsi, 1734-42, which is reproduced in Migne, Patrologia Latina (PL) XXII-XXX (with index). The most consistent modern

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33 See F. Millar,(n. 18) 169* - 176*.

34 See the classic report by H. Colt et al., *Excavations at Nessana I-III* (London, 1930-62); D. Urman, *Nessana: Excavations and Studies I* (Beer Sheva, 2004); A. Negev, 'Nessana', in E. Stern et al. (eds.), *New Encyclopaedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land III* (Jerusalem, 1993), 1145-9.

35 For the linguistic pattern in this area see now R. Hoyland, 'Mount Nebo, Christian Palestinian Aramaic and pre-Islamic Arabia', forthcoming in M.C.A. Macdonald (ed.), *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies 40* (2010), 37-54.

36 As will be obvious, this paper is not a systematic treatment either of Jerome or of Palestine, but an essay designed to bring out some distinctive aspects of his writing. I am very grateful for the helpful comments of the two referees.

edition of many, but not all, of his works is in Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina (CCL) LXXII-LXXX.

The Prologues to his translations of Biblical books (which form most of the Vulgate) are extremely important for his views of language and translation (see App. 2 below, with a text and translation of the first part of his Prologue to Daniel). They appear in PL XXVIII, but also in the modern text-critical editions by R. Weber and R. Gryson (eds.), *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*[4] I-II (Stuttgart, 1994), and by A. Gasquet (ed.), *Biblia Sacra iuxta Latinam Vulgatam Versionem* I-XVIII (Rome, 1926-95). These editions are not noted further in the table below.

Jerome's letters are edited by I. Hilberg in Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (CSEL) LIV-VI, ed. 2 (1996). The letters written in Palestine begin with no. 46 of the year 386, and continue to no. 154 of the year 419. See also the Budé ed. by J. Labourt, *Saint Jérôme, Lettres I-V* (Paris, 1949-55), with letters 1-108. Individual letters are not dated in the table below.

The following table gives a bare list of Jerome's known writings of this period, omitting Latin translations of works by Christian Greek writers *Ancient Christian Biographies*, but indicating the stages of his work in translating the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament into Latin:

386 *Lives* of Malchus and Hilarion (PL XXIII; for Hilarion see Chr. Mohrmann ed., *Vite dei Santi* IV (Milan, 1975); P. Leclerc et al., *Jérôme, Trois Vies de Moines* (Paul, Malchus, Hilarion), Sources Chrétiennes 508 (Paris, 2007). English trans. in M.E. Ewald, (Washington, 1952). *Commentaries* on Titus, Ephesians, Galatians, Philemon (PL XXVI; CCL LXXXVIIA,C.

387 *Minor Commentaries* (*Commentarioli*) on Psalms (CCL LXXXII).

388/9 *Commentary* on Ecclesiastes (CCL LXXII).

389/92 Translation, from Greek, of Proverbs, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Chronicles, Job. Translation, from Hebrew (like subsequent OT translations), of Psalms.

390 *Book of Interpretation of Hebrew Names* (CCL LXXII). *Liber Nominum Hebraicorum Locorum* (reproducing and supplementing Eusebius' *Onomasticon*), (see E. Klostermann (ed.), GCS XI.1 = *Eusebius' Werke* III.1 (Leipzig, 1904), printing both texts. See also G.S.P. Freeman-Grenville; R.L. Chapman, J.E. Taylor, *Palestine in the Fourth Century AD: the Onomasticon by Eusebius of Caesarea* (Jerusalem, 2003), translating both, with commentary.

392-3 *Hebrew Questions on Genesis* (CCL LXXII; see C.T.R. Hayward, *Jerome's Hebrew Questions on Genesis*, Oxford, 1995). *Commentaries* on Nahum, Micah, Zephaniah, Haggai, Habbakuk (CCL LXXVI, LXXVIA).

393 *De viris illustribus* (PL XXIII; see E.C. Richardson, *Texte und Untersuchungen* XIV (Leipzig, 1896). *Against Jovinianus* (PL XXIII).

394 Translations of Ezra and Nehemiah.

396 Translation of Chronicles.

396/7 *Against John of Jerusalem* (CCL LXXIXA). *Commentaries* on Obadiah and Jonah (CCL LXXVI; Y.-M. Duval, Jérôme, *Commentaire sur Jonas*, Sources Chrétiennes 323 (Paris, 1985).

398 *Commentary* on Matthew (CCL LXXVII). Translations of Proverbs, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes.
400- Homilies (CCL LXXVIII).
401-2 *Apology against Rufinus*, I-III (CCL LXXXIX).
404-5 Translations of Esther, Tobit, Judith, Daniel.
406 *Commentaries* on Zechariah, Malachi, Hosea, Joel, Amos (CCL LXXVI). *Against Vigilantius* (CCL LXXIXC).
407 *Commentary* on Daniel (CCL LXXVA).
408-10 *Commentary* on Isaiah (CCL LXXIII, LXXIIIA).
410-14 *Commentary* on Ezekiel (CCL LXXV).
414- *Commentary* on Jeremiah, unfinished (CCL LXXIV).
415 *Dialogue against the Pelagians* (CCL LXXX).

Appendix 2: the first part of the Prologue to Jerome's translation of Daniel

Latin text from A. Gasquet (ed.), *Biblia Sacra* XVI (1981), 5-8.

My Latin translation has been checked against that in the splendid volume by W.H. Fremantle, *The Principal Works of Jerome* (*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* VI (Oxford and New York, 1893), 492-3, which has been helpful in correcting misunderstandings. A number of difficulties and uncertainties remain. To the best of my knowledge these are the only translations into any modern language.

> Danihelem prophetam iuxta Septuaginta interpretes Domini Salvatoris eccelesiae non legunt, utentes Theodotionis editione, et hoc cur acciderit nescio: sive enim, quia sermo chaldaicus est et quibusdam proprietatibus a nostro eloquio discrepat, noluerunt Septuaginta interpretes easdem lineas in translatione servare, sive sub nomine eorum ab alio nescio quo non satis chaldeam linguam sciente editus liber est, sive aliud quid causae extiterit ignorans, hoc unum adfirmare possum, quod multum a veritate discordet et recto iudicio repudiatus sit. Sciendum quippe Danihelem maxime et Ezram hebraicis quidem litteris, sed chaldaico sermone conscriptos, et unam Hieremiae pericopen, Iob quoque cum arabica lingua habere plurimam societatem.
>
> Denique et ego adulescentulus, post Quintiliani et Tulli lectionem ac flores rhetoricos, cum me in linguae huius pistrinum reclusissem et multo sudore multoque tempore vix coepissem halantia stridentiaque verba resonare et, quasi per cryptam ambulans, rarum desuper lumen aspicere, inpegi novissime in Danihelem et tanto taedio affectus sum, ut desperatione subita omnem veterem laborem voluerim contemnere. Verum, adhortante me Hebraeo et illud mihi sua lingua crebrius ingerente labor omnia vicit inprobus, qui mihi videbar sciolus inter eos, coepi rursum discipulus esse chaldaicus. Et ut vere fatear, usque ad praesentem diem magis possum sermonem chaldaicum legere et intellegere quam sonare.
>
> Haec idcirco, ut difficultatem vobis Danihelis ostenderem, qui apud Hebraeos nec Susannae habet historiam nec hymnum trium puerorum nec Belis Draconisque fabulas; quas nos, quia in toto orbe dispersae sunt, veru ante posito easque iugulante, subiecimus, ne videremur apud imperitos magnam partem voluminis detruncasse. Audivi ego quendam de praeceptoribus Iudaeorum, cum Susannae derideret historiam et a Graeco nescio quo diceret esse confictam, illud opponere quod Origeni quoque Africanus opposuit, ἐτοιμολογίας has ἀπὸ τοῦ σχίνου σχίσαι καὶ ἀπὸ τοῦ πρίνου πρῖσαι de graeco sermone descendere.

> The churches of our Saviour Lord do not read the prophet Daniel according to the translators of the Septuagint, but use Theodotion's version — and how that came about, I do not know: for whether it is that, because the language is Chaldaean [Aramaic], and in certain characteristics is discrepant from our eloquence, the translators of the Septuagint did not wish to preserve the same forms in the translation; or because the text was published under their (the translators') name by someone else, I do not know who, who was not sufficiently versed in the Chaldaean language — or, being unaware of what other cause may have arisen, I can only affirm this alone, that it differs greatly from the true meaning, and, on a fair assessment, has to be repudiated. One should be aware indeed that the books of Daniel above all and of Ezra are written to be sure in Hebrew letters, but in the Chaldaean language, and that one section of Jeremiah and also Job have a considerable affinity with the Arabic language.
>
> Then I too, as a very young man, after reading Quintilian and Cicero and the fruits of rhetoric, when I had shut myself into the mill of this language, and at the cost of much sweat and much time had barely begun to utter words which were sibilant and harsh, and, as if stumbling through a vault, to catch a rare glimpse of the light above, finally struck on Daniel, and was filled with such depression that, in sudden desperation, I wished to reject all my previous labour. But, with a Hebraeus urging me on, and repeatedly pressing on me in his own language the saying 'persistent work conquers all things', seeming to myself to be a mere dabbler among them [the Hebraei], I began again to be a student of Chaldaean. To confess the truth, until the present day I am more capable of reading and understanding a Chaldaean text than pronouncing it.
>
> This much, therefore, in order to demonstrate to you the difficulty of Daniel, which among the Hebraei includes neither the story of Susanna nor the hymn of the three boys nor the stories of Bel and the Dragon, which we, because they are current throughout the world, have attached, setting aside the truth which would suppress them, so that we would not seem among the ignorant to have cut off a large part of the text. I have heard one of the teachers of the Jews, who mocked the story of Susanna and said that it had been concocted by some Greek, make the objection to it which Africanus also made to Origen, namely that these etymologies, of schisai [to split] from schinos [Mastic-tree] and prisai [to saw] from prinos [Holm-oak], come directly from Greek.

The interesting points made in the second half of the Preface do not have the same relevance to the themes of this paper.

Oriental Institute Oxford