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Integrating Pagan Knowledge: The Virgilian Quotations in Jerome's Letters

Vključevanje poganskega znanja: Vergilijanski navedki v Hieronimovih pismih

Abstract: This paper analyses Jerome's treatment of quotations from Virgil, whose works had a status as the collective memory of antiquity in the Latin West in the fourth century. Four central topics in Jerome's letter collection are examined: language, chastity, barbarian invasions, and asceticism. Examples from famous letters like *Ep. 22* to Eustochium, *Ep. 123* to Geruchia, *Ep. 14* and *60* to Heliodorus, and others, show how and in which context Jerome uses such pagan quotations to approach and connect with the pagan heritage. The stories of Aeneas and Dido, the Tartarus, or the fall of Troy are used as *bona* or *mala exempla* and role models for Christian and everyday life and as rhetorical tools in Jerome's argumentation for their general educational value. For Jerome, Virgil serves as an authority for language and knowledge and moral questions. Herein Jerome finds the best argument for a connection between pagan ideas and the Christian faith.

Keywords: Jerome, letters, Virgil, Aeneid, intertextuality, pagan heritage

Povzetek: Avtor v članku analizira Hieronimovo navajanje Vergilija, čigar dela so v 4. stoletju na latinskem Zahodu veljala za skupno antično dediščino. Obravnava štiri osrednje tematike v Hieronimovi zbirki pisem: jezik, čistost, barbarske vpade in asketicizem. Zgledi iz slovitih pisem Evstohiji (*Ep. 22*), Geruhiji (*Ep. 123*), Heliodoru (*Ep. 14* in *60*) in drugim kažejo, kako in v kakšnih kontekstih je Hieronim uporabljal navedke iz poganske književnosti, da bi jih približal in povezal s poganskim znanjem. Zgodba Eneja in Didone, podoba Tartarja in slika padle Troje so uporabljene kot *bona* ali *mala exempla*, s tem pa tudi kot vzori za krščansko in nasploh vsakodnevno življenje. Še več, pomenijo retorična orodja v Hieronimovi argumentaciji in se uporabljajo v splošne vzgojne namene. Za Hieronima je Vergilij avtoriteta, ne le glede jezika in znanja, marveč tudi glede moralnih vprašanj. Pri njem Hieronim najde najboljši argument za povezavo med poganskimi idejami in krščansko vero.

Ključne besede: Hieronim, pisma, Vergilij, Eneida, intertekstualnost, poganska dediščina

1. Introduction: Jerome and the Latin classics

»Illustris poeta, poeta eloquentissimus, alter Homerus apud nos« (Hier., *Ep.* 140.10.2; 129.4.3; 121.10.5) – these are just some of Jerome's attributes to describe his admiration for the Augustan poet Virgil, the second most cited pagan author in Jerome's oeuvre besides Cicero (Hagendahl 1958, 298).¹ The omnipresence of Virgil and other pagan authors throughout Jerome's works and especially in his highly stylized letter collection is not surprising since his school education had focussed on a small canon of classical authors among whom Virgil had a pre-eminent position. Although Jerome was born into a Christian family, he was raised in the traditional manner of ancient Roman education, even with the most famous *Grammaticus* of that time: Aelius Donatus, one of the leading experts of Virgilian exegesis in those days.²

However, Jerome's attitude towards the pagan classics was highly ambivalent and oscillated between great admiration and radical rejection,³ which is most evident in the description of his famous dream in *Ep.* 22.30.⁴ Nevertheless, he was fully aware of the cultural heritage and the collected knowledge of the ancient world, which was passed on by pagan literature and thereby created a connection between the (pagan) past and the (Christian) present. Primarily Virgil was understood as the leading authority on Roman culture and religion, his works were regarded as containing the knowledge and wisdom of the whole world, and thus his works had a similar status as the Bible.⁵ Pelttari, who states a close connection between the reception of literature and literary production in late antiquity, has shown that »the reading of Virgil's text as containing deeper wisdom was a significant act of appropriation performed by late antique readers« (Pelttari 2014, 43; see also Stefanie 2019, 193–195). Reading, therefore, was a relevant act to understand the world as a whole, and in this context, Jerome, who continued reading and also citing pagan books even after his dream (Revellio 2020, 397), appears as the »ideal author-as-reader« (Pelttari 2014, 17) who aimed at an integration of

¹ In succession to Luebeck (1872), Hagendahl collected a large number of quotations from several pagan authors: Virgil, of course, but also Horace, Terence, Cicero, Quintilian and others. Further important studies on the topic include Courcelle's *opus magnum* about the reception of Virgil's *Aeneid* in Christian and pagan authors (1984) and the recent works of Jeanjean (2018) and Revellio (2020).

² For details on Jerome's life see the many biographies available, for example Rebenich (2002) and Schlang-Schöningen (2018).

³ For example, he calls the pagan classics »mendacis ficta miracula« (Hier., *Ep.* 3.4.1) in comparison with the Bible.

⁴ His ambivalent attitude, which was quite common among Christian authors of the post-Constantinian era, has been subject to several investigations, for example by Pease (1919), Hagendahl (1958, 328; 1983, 88–91), and recently by Mohr (2007, 307–313).

⁵ Recently, Stefanow (2019, 196) has shown that Didymus the Blind, who was teacher to Jerome, taught his students the use of the tools of ancient grammar for biblical texts: »[T]he text was understood as a microcosm of all knowledge. As a microcosm of the total, the text necessarily included knowledge of the past. Since it gave access to universal knowledge, it was necessarily also valid for the future and an appropriate bequest for the next generation.« While Jerome was familiar with pagan literature from schooldays, he was encouraged by Didymus to value pagan methods and ideas also for his Christian purposes and thus to use the Virgilian and the biblical text in a similar way.

the pagan heritage into the new Christian lifestyle. This becomes most apparent in his treatment of quotations from the pagans, especially Virgil, whom he cites in many of his letters, mainly when he expects his addressees to recognize and understand the references.⁶

Therefore, this paper will deal with the question in which way and for which reasons Jerome uses quotations and allusions to Virgil's works.⁷ The examination will focus on certain topics which are particularly susceptible to quotations from Virgil's works, as they refer to Virgil as a central authority: asceticism, chastity, philology, and contemporary history. These topics are of great importance for Jerome's life and work and are repeatedly mentioned by him. Based on select examples from his letters, it will be shown that Jerome was in search of an appropriate handling of the pagan heritage all his life and saw pagan literature as a possibility of approaching, connecting, and integrating pagan knowledge into the new Christian culture of life.

2. Jerome and Virgil

2.1 *Quod et illustris poeta testatur* – Jerome on Philology

First of all, Virgil serves as an unquestionable authority on grammatical and metrical problems and has a strong influence on Jerome's language and style. One example of his dealing with articulation questions can be found in *Ep.* 20, where he explains to Damasus the meaning of the word *OSANNA*, which, as he writes, is a combination of the two Hebrew words *OSI* and *ANNA* with the elided vowel *I* in the middle. For a better understanding of the metrical phenomenon, he uses an example from Virgil's epic: »*sicut facere solemus in versibus, quando mene incopto desistere victam, scandimus ›men incopto‹.*« (Hier., *Ep.* 20.5.2; Verg., *Aen.* 1.37)⁸ It is not clear why he chose this particular verse from the beginning of Juno's angry speech in book 1, but it works very well as an example for elision and shows how Jerome uses well-known pagan texts for explanatory reasons in linguistic contexts.

Another example appears in Hier., *Ep.* 106.57, where he replies to a question regarding his translation of Ps 88,8 – *magnus, et horrendus* for Greek μέγας και

⁶ Many of Jerome's addressees were highly educated people, the intellectual and also ecclesiastical elite of their time (e.g. Augustin or pope Damasus), for whom the classics served as a kind of stylistic code (Cameron 2011, 406; Conring 2001, 225; Rebenich 1992; Revellio 2020, 401).

⁷ Several studies have already dealt with the question of the function of the pagan quotations in Jerome's works, including Pease (1919, 163–166) and Jeanjean (2013–2014, 166–169). While the first emphasises the exemplary and educational value of the quotations, the latter points out their two functions within the text, either as a rhetorical tool or a dialectic one. Already in pre-Constantinian Christian texts quotations from Virgil were used as stylistic models and for argumentative reasons, although quotations were much rarer at that time (Freund 2000, 355–361). Augustine as Jerome's contemporary, however, uses such quotations primarily for dealing with the pagan faith and as a tool for his missionary work (Müller 2003, 448–454).

⁸ »This is how we usually deal with the verses when we pronounce ›men incopto‹ for ›mene incopto desistere victam‹.«

φοβερός – in comparison to the Septuagint.⁹ He explains that he understands φοβερός in its original meaning as *terribilis*, *timendus*, *formidandus* or more precisely *horrendus* (which all could be translated to ‚terrible‘ or ‚horrible‘) and not as *despiciendum* („despicable“) or *squalidum* („rough, filthy“), as most people use it colloquially according to him (106.57).¹⁰ The passage in question (Ps 88) provides a picture of the punishing God of the Old Testament, the creator and ruler of heaven and earth who should be feared by everyone that surrounds him. To illustrate his understanding of φοβερός as *horrendus*, Jerome cites three passages from the *Aeneid*, in which he presents Virgil’s use of the word. The first (»mihi frigidus horror membra quatit« [Verg., *Aen.* 3.29–30]) is taken from the Polydorus episode in book 3: Aeneas wants to make a sacrifice to the gods for his newly built city in Thrace, but when he tears branches off a bush, they start bleeding. The voice of the Trojan prince Polydorus tells the horrified Aeneas that the Thracians had killed him and that Aeneas should immediately leave with his companions.¹¹ The second quote (»horror ubique animo, simul ipsa silentia terrent« [2.755]) describes Aeneas’ feelings at the end of book 2, when he re-enters the fallen city of Troy to search for his wife Creusa whom he had lost during his escape – the most horrible event for him in the entire epic (Binder 2019, 184). The last one (»monstrum horrendum, ingens« [3.658]) is the shortened description of the Cyclops Polyphemus, the monstrous son of Poseidon who had eaten six of Ulysses’ companions before they could escape from his cave (Hom., *Od.* 9.105–566). All these passages represent situations that are hard to beat in terms of horror. Through his translation and his explanations, Jerome tries to portray the God of Ps 88 as one who can cause such horrors that he finds described in the *Aeneid*. Virgil serves as a stylistic and linguistic example and provides vivid images, which the reader associates with the ideas of the Psalm. Thus, Virgil also influences Jerome’s exegetical work.

2.2 *Quid expectandum est a vidua Christiana – Jerome on Chastity*

A subject of great importance for Jerome was virginity and chastity. Some of his most famous letters deal with the question of a chaste life, for example, *Ep.* 22 *de virginitate servanda* to Eustochium. Because of its specifically Christian topic, *Ep.* 22 contains many biblical quotations, but only a few from the pagan classics. Nevertheless, in *Ep.* 22.6.6, Jerome adds a slight allusion to Virgil to his demand for a pure and chaste life.¹² Eustochium must ensure her chastity both in mind and deed and must not be overcome by Babylonian sins,¹³ which should somewhat

⁹ His translation was based on the critical Greek edition of the psalter by Origen and not the common text of the Septuagint (Rebenich 2002, 25).

¹⁰ In spoken or colloquial language *horrendus* seems to have been mixed with the meaning of *horridus* („rough, bristly“) which both stem back to *horrere* and *horror* (Lammert 1918, 401).

¹¹ In addition, this whole episode is introduced as *horrendum monstrum* (Verg., *Aen.* 3.26).

¹² Consider Virgil’s name in this context, which his biographer Aelius Donatus (Jerome’s teacher!) etymologically derived from *virgo*, on account of which Virgil – especially in the middle ages – is known as the »virgin« poet (*vita Verg.* l. 35–37).

¹³ Babylon, which Jerome refers to twice in the passage, is understood as the biblical commonplace for luxury, heresy, and sin. Compare the »whore of Babylon« (Rev 17,5).

shatter on a rock. Jerome concludes the paragraph as follows:

»Quia ergo impossibile est in sensum hominis non inruere notum medullarum calorem, ille laudatur, ille praedicatur beatus, qui, statim ut coeperit cogitare, interficit cogitatus et elidit eos ad petram: petra autem est Christus.«

»It is impossible that the body's natural heat should not sometimes assail a man and kindle sensual desire, but he is praised and accounted blessed, who, when thoughts begin to rise, gives them no quarter, but dashes them straightway against the rock: And the rock is Christ.« (trans. Wright)

In this passage, Jerome alludes to »notusque medullas intravit calor« (Verg., *Aen.* 8.389), a phrase from a famous passage in the *Aeneid*, where Venus successfully coaxes her husband Vulcan to forge weapons for her illegitimate son, Aeneas (8.387–393). Through this allusion, Jerome introduces, on the one hand, Venus, the prototype of the unchaste wife and converse of every Christian *virgo*, and on the other hand, Vulcan, the cheated husband who has absolutely no reason to fulfil her wish. Nevertheless, his flesh is weaker than his spirit, and so he falls victim to Venus' seduction, totally driven by his lust, and finally fulfils her wish. The introduction of these two antipodes of Christian asceticism as *mala exempla* fits perfectly well in the context of Jerome's treatment of Christian chastity: it is not just their behaviour that contradicts every principle of Christian monogamy but also their status as part of the pagan *dei consentes* that reveals the total corruptness of the pagan religion, which Jerome has already attacked with his references to Babylon above.

However, the scenes most frequently quoted in his treatises on chastity are surprisingly taken from the Dido tragedy of the fourth book of the *Aeneid*. In the beginning, Dido is shown as the mourning widow who wants to remain faithful to her dead husband and thus gives a perfect example for the Roman *univira* (Kru-meich 1993, 251–257). The following conversation between Dido and her sister Anna after the death of Dido's first husband Sychaeus is cited twice. In full detail, it can be found in Hier., *Ep.* 123.13.1 *ad Geruchiam de monogamia*:

»Solane perpetua maerens carpere iuventa
nec dulces natos, Veneris nec praemia noris?
id cinerem aut manes credis curare sepultos?
cui breviter respondeat ipsa, quae passa est:
›tu lacrimis evicta meis, tu prima furentem
his, germana, malis oneras atque obicis hosti.
non licuit thalami expertem sine crimine vitam
degere more ferae tales nec tangere curas.
non servata fides cineri promissa Sychaeo.« (4.32–34.548–552)

»Wilt thou, lonely and sad, pine away all thy youth long, and know not sweet children or love's reward? Thinkest thou that dust or buried shades give heed to that?‹ To this, the sufferer replies briefly: ›Won over by my

tears, thou, my sister, thou wert first to load my frenzied soul with these ills, and drive me on the foe. Ah, that I could not spend my life, apart from wedlock, a blameless life, even as some wild creature, knowing no such cares! The faith vowed to the ashes of Sychaeus I have not kept!« (trans. Fairclough)

During the conversation, Dido lets her sister convince her to enjoy the *prae-mia Veneris*, break her *fides* to Sychaeus, and start a relationship with Aeneas. However, he abandons her in the end, and so she finally commits suicide out of despair. Thus, Jerome utilizes Dido as a *malum exemplum* for a desperate widow longing for a new husband. In the following, he explicitly warns Geruchia about the horrors of marriage (Hier., *Ep.* 123.13.2):

»Proponis mihi gaudia nuptiarum; ego tibi opponam pyram, gladium, incendium. non tantum boni est in nuptiis, quod speramus, quantum mali, quod accidere potest et timendum est.«

»You set before me the joys of wedlock. I, for my part, will remind you of Dido's sword and pyre and funeral flames. In marriage, there is not so much good to be hoped for as there is evil which may happen and must be feared.« (trans. Fremantle)

The message for Geruchia is clear: if she does not preserve her widowhood, she has to expect grief and pain instead of the supposed joys. Only in the renunciation of carnal pleasures does she have the opportunity to devote herself entirely to her religious faith.¹⁴

In Hier., *Ep.* 79, a consolation to Salvina on the early death of her husband, Nebridius, Jerome conversely recalls Dido as a *bonum exemplum*, who lives the life of a perfect *univira*, when he cites her (79.7.8):

»Ille meos, primus qui me sibi iunxit, amores / abstulit; ille habeat secum servetque sepulcro. / ... / si tanti vilissimum vitrum, quanti pretiosissimum margaritum? si communi lege naturae damnat omnes Gentilis vidua voluptates, quid expectandum est a vidua Christiana, quae pudicitiam suam non solum ei debet, qui defunctus est, sed ei, cum quo regnatura est?«

»He, my first spouse, has robbed me of my loves. / So be it: let him keep them in the tomb. / If common glass is worth so much, what must be the value of a pearl of price? If in deference to a law of nature a Gentile widow can condemn all sensual indulgence, what must we expect from a Christian widow who owes her chastity not to one who is dead but to one with whom she shall reign in heaven?« (trans. Fremantle)

¹⁴ A second treatment of this scene can be found in Hier., *Ep.* 54.5 *ad Furiam de viduitate servanda*. Here, Anna's words are put in the mouth of Furia's heathen handmaids. Thus, Furia is identified with the *malum exemplum* Dido, who should better preserve her *viduitas* instead of listening to her servants' advice.

Jerome asks for such an attitude from every Christian woman, and in the mythological figure Dido, he finds the perfect role model of a chaste widow for noble Roman women.¹⁵ Intentionally, Jerome takes possession of the manners and mindset of the Roman culture, for which Virgil serves as a moral authority, and uses this pagan way of thinking to promote his ideals of chastity and asceticism.¹⁶

2.3 *Urbs antiqua ruit* – Jerome on the Sack of Rome

In his letters, Jerome repeatedly mentions that he worries about the future of Rome due to the continuing barbarian invasions. He was so profoundly impressed by the sack of Rome that he even pretended to have lost his words after the tragedy (Hier., *Ep.* 126.2.1). Already in 396, 14 years before Alaric defeated Rome, in a consolatory letter to his friend, Heliodorus, on the death of his nephew, Nepotian, Jerome drew a dark picture (60.16.2–60.17.1):

»Viginti et eo amplius anni sunt, quod inter Constantinopolim et alpes Iulias cotidie Romanus sanguis effunditur. Scythiam, Thraciam, Macedoniam, Thessaliam, Dardaniam, Daciam, Epiros, Dalmatiam cunctasque Pannonias Gothus, Sarmata, Suadus, Alanus, Hunni, Vandali, Marcomanni vastant, trahunt, rapiunt. /... / »ubique luctus, ubique gemitus et plurima mortis imago.« Romanus orbis ruit /... / »Non, mihi si linguae centum sint oraque centum, ferrea vox, omnia poenarum percurrere nomina possim.« /... / felix Nepotianus, qui haec non videt; felix qui ista non audit.«

»For twenty years and more, the blood of Romans has every day been shed between Constantinople and the Julian Alps. Scythia, Thrace, Macedonia, Thessaly, Dardania, Dacia, Epirus, Dalmatia, and all the provinces of Pannonia, have been sacked, pillaged, and plundered by Goths and Sarmatians, Quadians and Alans, Huns and Vandals and Marcomanni. /... / »Sorrow and grief on every side we see / And death in many a shape.« The Roman world is falling. /... / »Had I a hundred tongues, a hundred mouths, / A voice of brass, I could not tell the names / Of all those punishments.« /... / Happy is Nepotian, for he does not see these sights nor hear those cries.« (trans. Wright)

The first thing to be noticed in this passage are the allusions to the catalogues of nations and warriors in the ancient epics (Hom., *Il.* 2.484–877; Verg., *Aen.* 7.647–817; 10.163–214). Previously, Jerome had spoken about the successfully converted nations (Hier., *Ep.* 60.4), using a quotation from the ekphrasis of Aeneas' shield (Verg., *Aen.* 8.723) and thereby alluding to Augustus' triumph over the barbarians

¹⁵ Another important quotation in this context is the recurring *dux femina facti* (Verg., *Aen.* 1.346) which Jerome uses for example of Paulina, the second daughter of Paula (Hier., *Ep.* 66.3), or of Artemia, the wife of the Gaul Rusticus (Hier., *Ep.* 122.4). Like Dido, who led the founding of Carthage, these women lead their husbands in their efforts for a chaste marriage.

¹⁶ Nevertheless, his choice of quotations and allusions used seems arbitrary in terms of ideology. He shares this attitude with other early Christian writers, especially Lactantius and Augustine, who regularly reinterpret Virgil for Christian purposes (Schelkle 1939, 195; 207; Heck 1988, 178–179).

depicted there. Now, he spreads out a catalogue of nations involved in the war, thus comparing the current situation of the Roman empire with the mythical wars.

Furthermore, there are two direct quotations from the *Aeneid*. The first one (»ubique luctus, ubique gemitus et plurima mortis imago« [Verg., *Aen.* 2.368–369]) is derived from the narration about the fall of Troy in the second book. The parallel is evident here: Rome is seen as a second Troy,¹⁷ and one could quickly think that Jerome functions as a prophet for the sack of Rome 14 years later. The second quotation, Verg., *Aen.* 6.625–627¹⁸ is taken from Aeneas' *katabasis*, where his guide, the Cumaean Sibyl, concludes her description of Tartarus, the most horrible place in the entire underworld, with those words. Positioned at the end of the paragraph about the barbarians, Jerome shows the parallels between the terrible kinds of torture the sinners are suffering in the underworld and his own life in such dangerous and uncertain times. The barbarian invasion is hell on earth for everyone, and Nepotian is fortunate to have escaped.

In 412 then, two years after the disastrous defeat against Alaric's Goths, Jerome mourns the fate of Rome and his brethren in Christ (Hier., *Ep.* 127.12.3) and cites the passage from book 2 in total length (Verg., *Aen.* 2.361–365,369), replacing the end of verse 365 with verse 369, words he had already used years before in the letter cited above (Hier., *Ep.* 60.16.3).¹⁹ He could not have found more suitable words and images to describe the horrors of that time. Pagan poetry, therefore, seems to have had a more profound truth for Jerome than he was probably aware of: the influence of the mythological underworld on his view of a world out of joint, the mythical enemies that have become a real threat, and of course the fall of Troy as parallel to the fall of Rome show his tremendous reading experience and form points of contact between the pagan heritage and the Christian present.

2.4 *Militia Christi* – Jerome on Asceticism

The last matter to take a closer look at is the strictly ascetic life (as a hermit in the desert), which Jerome considered the best way to serve Christ. The subject is most prominent in Hier., *Ep.* 14, where he tries to convince his schoolmate, the monk, and former military officer, Heliodorus, to live a life of asceticism as a hermit. The setting of the letter is quite martial due to the understanding of asceticism as *militia Christi* – military service for Christ.²⁰ Already, in the beginning, Jerome writes:

»Ecce de caelo tuba canit, ecce cum nubibus debellaturus orbem impera-

¹⁷ Also, the date given in the beginning of the passage (*viginti et eo amplius anni sunt*) recalls the long duration of the Trojan war (more than 9 years) and afterwards the Odyssey (about 10 years).

¹⁸ »Non mihi si linguae centum sint oraque centum, / ferrea vox, omnis scelerum comprehendere formas, / omnia poenarum percurrere nomina possim.« One of Jerome's favourite passages, as it seems; also found at Hier., *Ep.* 66.5; 77.6; 123.16.

¹⁹ He also alludes again to Virgil's description of the underworld when he cites Verg., *Aen.* 6.266 (*sit mihi fas audita loqui*) in the context of his report of a barbarian attack on Marcella's house.

²⁰ A common metaphor for the life of a monk in early Christianity, which stems back to 2 Tim 2,3 and can be found for example in Hier., *Ep.* 52.5.3 (Harnack 1905, 1–46).

tor armatus egreditur, ecce bis acutus gladius ex regis ore procedens obviam quaeque metit.» (Hier., *Ep.* 14.2.1)

»Lo, the trumpet sounds from heaven! Lo, our general fully armed comes forth amid the clouds to subdue the world! Lo, from our king's mouth proceeds a sword twice sharpened, which cuts down all that is in its path!« (trans. Wright)

A small phrase is borrowed from Virgil's *Aeneid* (»proxima quaeque metit gladio« [Verg., *Aen.* 10.513]) that alludes to Aeneas' rage after the death of his young friend Pallas. Another allusion goes back to the beginning of the Revelation (»et de ore eius gladius utraque parte acutus exibat« [Rev. 1,16]), where John describes his vision of the voice that gives him the order to write down the book. Jerome now combines both quotations and creates a new phrase that transports the ideas and concepts of both worlds, the pagan and the Christian one. Like John before Christ and *pious* Aeneas in front of the dead body of Pallas, Heliodorus shall follow his destiny and choose the ascetic life of a hermit to serve God. Thus, Jerome shows parallels between Christian and pagan values and presents a way of approaching and connecting with the other culture.

However, it is not only asceticism that demands a soldier's qualities from Heliodorus. Every day holds adversities and persecution for a true Christian, as Jerome writes hereafter (Hier., *Ep.* 14.4). He explicitly warns Heliodorus about the devil (*adversarius noster*) and immediately accuses him of being far too inattentive, using a quotation from Verg., *Georg.* 2.470, where the author describes a paradise-like place where farmers live a peaceful life far from war and other duties. However, such conditions exist only in the fictional worlds of the pagan poets – not in the real world of Jerome and Heliodorus. There, one is constantly confronted with temptations (*luxuria, avaritia, libido*) and attacks on his Christian beliefs. A paradise on earth is a pagan invention. There is just one heavenly paradise for a Christian, which can only be reached by resisting all worldly temptations. To emphasize his point, Jerome ends the passage with another warning and once again quotes the *Aeneid* (Verg., *Aen.* 7.337), alluding to the Fury Allecto (»hostis, cui nomina mille, mille nocendi artes«), who is described as sowing discord, hate, and violence in order to keep the Trojans from settling in Italy. In the same way, Aeneas faces the Fury, a Christian like Heliodorus has to face the temptations of the devil, who likewise has many faces and knows many wiles, and he always has to be prepared to fight like a soldier for his faith. Thus, Aeneas serves as a role model worth copying for Heliodorus and every true Christian.

3. Conclusion: Jerome and the pagan heritage

»Omnes paene omnium libri /.../ eruditionis doctrinaeque plenissimi sunt«²¹ Jerome writes in *Ep.* 70.6.1, and thereby, the best summarizes his view of pagan literature: first of all, it is helpful for its educational value, even for Christians (Pease 1919, 163; Coffin 1924, 172). As the primary author of school education, Virgil serves as the chief source for knowledge about Roman history, religion, mythology, language, culture, and life. In Jerome's opinion, every erudite Christian must be familiar with his texts. Therefore, he engages in intensive life-long reading of Virgil's texts, which he understood as the cultural memory of the ancient world. Especially in questions of style, Virgil is the foremost authority Jerome refers to repeatedly, first of all in linguistic problems, which may even have exegetical implications for his Latin translation of the Bible, as has been shown.

Nevertheless, one must not read Virgil as a (pre-)Christian poet or Messianic prophet, as some of Jerome's contemporaries do.²² For Jerome, the Bible has the sole claim for truth. Virgil, however, provides memorable images, which Jerome copies and reuses for his purposes. Thus, pagan texts can support a better understanding of the biblical messages or provide exemplary models for a lifestyle to be attained by Jerome's readers. Therefore, allusions and quotations from the classics (Virgil as well as other pagan authors) are usually used as rhetorical tools: as simple examples to support an argument (the catalogue of the invading barbarian nations), for comparisons with historical events or current living conditions (the parallel Rome – Troy; the Tartarus that has become a reality due to the barbarian invasion or asceticism, which is nothing else than military service for Christ), as *bona or mala exempla* (Venus and Vulcan or Dido and Anna as examples of the dangers of an unchaste life) and finally as easily understandable role models for a Christian way of life (Dido, the aristocratic widow and willing *univira* or Aeneas, the pious fighter for his destiny and faith). By citing him over and over again, Jerome creates different authorities of Virgil: as a stylistic example, as a source of knowledge and learning, and finally as an *auctoritas* in a field that is extremely important for the Christian faith: morality, which seems to tie in directly with pagan poetry and its images. For a scholar like Jerome, the easiest way to approach pagan ideas and culture was studying, reading, and writing. Through his intensive examination of the classics, he saw various intersections between pagan traditions and the outline of a Christian's life. So, he integrated whatever he considered helpful from the classics into his writings and thus connected the 'old' pagan world with ideas of the 'new' Christian one.

²¹ »Almost all the books of all these [pagan] authors are extremely full of erudition and learning.«

²² With his criticism of the *Centio*-poets, who saw Virgil as a Christian *vates* who foretold the birth of Christ in *ecl.* 4, he condemns the practice of Christian reinterpretation severely: »ac non sic etiam Maronem sine Christo possimus dicere Christianum /.../ puerilia sunt haec et circulatorum ludo similia.« (Hier., *Ep.* 53.7.3)

Abbreviations

- CSEL** – Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum.
Hier., Ep. – Hieronymus, *Epistulae* [Hilberg 1996].
Hom., Il. – Homerus, *Ilias*.
Hom., Od. – Homerus, *Odyssea*.
Verg., Aen. – Vergilius, *Aeneis* [Conte 2009].

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