

Saint Jerome

Scripture, Asceticism, and the Labor of Words

A historical and hagiographic biography

Contents

1	Holiness in the Labor of Words	1
2	From Stridon to the Greek East	1
3	Rome, its women scholars, and Bethlehem	2
4	Making Latin Scripture	4
5	Friendship, authority, and controversy	6
6	Books as a form of ascetic life	8
7	Loss, final labor, death, and received memory	9
8	Tradition under review	11
9	A sanctity tested in the labor of words	13
A	Scope, Chronology, and Evidence	14
B	References	18

1 Holiness in the Labor of Words

Jerome's holiness was not a quiet escape from language. It was pursued through the dangerous abundance of words: learning languages, comparing manuscripts, teaching Scripture, forming ascetic communities, defending convictions, and sometimes wounding other Christians with rhetoric. A truthful hagiography receives his fierce labor for the biblical text while refusing to make ferocity itself a virtue.

2 From Stridon to the Greek East

2.1 A borderland family and a Roman education

Stridon stood somewhere near the late Roman boundary of Dalmatia and Pannonia. Jerome says Goths destroyed it (*De viris illustribus* 135), a brief notice that joins local loss to the wider instability of the fourth-century Balkans. The exact site remains unknown. His family could finance advanced education and later appears to have had property; Jerome's brother Paulinian and a sister also entered Christian ascetic networks. The family was Christian, but Jerome, following a common fourth-century pattern, was not baptized as an infant.

At Rome he studied under the grammarian Aelius Donatus, mastering the canon of Latin prose and poetry, rhetorical argument, memory, and style. He copied or acquired books and visited places associated with the martyrs. His letters later show a writer who could never simply cease being classically trained. Even denunciations of Cicero employ Ciceronian resources. Education furnished the precision and aggression with which he would defend asceticism and Scripture.

The disputed birth date changes how this education is plotted. A birth in 331 makes Jerome considerably older at Rome, Antioch, and death; a birth around 347 makes his references to school contemporaries and recent imperial history easier to coordinate. The older chronology traditionally appeals to Prosper, whose exact entry still requires collation for this edition; the later date should not be called unanimous. The biographical sequence is firmer than the age labels.

Jerome was baptized at Rome, often placed during the episcopate of Liberius (352–366). He later traveled to Trier, perhaps in connection with an administrative career, and moved within the ascetic circle at Aquileia. There he formed or deepened relationships with Rufinus, Bonosus, Heliodorus, and others. Jerome later called the group a choir of the blessed, but conflict eventually scattered it. Ascetic commitment grew within friendship and correspondence, not in a social vacuum.

2.2 Antioch, fever, and the Ciceronian dream

Travel east brought Jerome to Antioch. Severe illness and the deaths of companions marked the period. In Letter 22.30, written years later to the Roman ascetic Eustochium, he tells of a feverish dream in which he stood before the Judge and was accused of being “a follower of Cicero and not of Christ.” He swore off pagan books, was beaten, and awoke bearing the memory of terror.

The dream is A, but its first surviving telling belongs to 384 and to a deliberately rigorous instruction on virginity. It cannot be read as a diary entry from the fever. Jerome's later writing continued to display classical learning. Rufinus later made the dream an exact partisan exhibit against him, charging that the narrated renunciation conflicted with Jerome's continuing use and teaching of classical literature (*Apology against Jerome* 2.6). The episode therefore reveals both ascetic conscience and the hazards of publishing the self as an example; Rufinus's charge is evidence of a contested self-portrait, not a neutral verdict.

Jerome withdrew to the region of Chalcis east of Antioch around 375–377. His letters do not describe a wholly isolated retreat. They disclose a networked existence: books, copyists, visitors, ecclesiastical factions, and difficult study. He began serious Syriac and Hebrew work with teachers, describing the painful acquisition of unfamiliar sounds in Letter 125.12. The degree of his later Hebrew command remains debated, but the labor was neither invented nor wholly independent of Jewish and Greek scholarly help.

Chalcis also entangled him in the Antiochene schism. Rival claimants and theological vocabularies divided the church. Letters 15 and 16 appeal to Pope Damasus for guidance about communion and terminology. Jerome presents his loyalty to Rome sharply, but the local conflict cannot be reduced to a clear Roman answer confronting simple heresy. Around 378/379 Paulinus ordained him a presbyter. Jerome seems to have accepted on conditions consistent with his ascetic vocation and did not become an ordinary parish pastor.

2.3 Constantinople and Greek Christian learning

In Constantinople Jerome encountered Gregory of Nazianzus, whom he later called his teacher. The city placed him close to the theological world of the Council of Constantinople in 381, although claims about his exact official role should remain modest. He read and translated Greek works, including Origen, Eusebius, and homiletic materials. Origen's exegetical learning and spiritual interpretation deeply marked him before the later controversy made that debt dangerous.

This Greek apprenticeship complicates the later emblem of Jerome as an isolated champion of Hebrew truth against a Greek Bible. His Latin biblical work drew on a layered scholarly world: existing Old Latin forms, Greek manuscripts, Origen's Hexaplar comparisons, Hebrew texts, Jewish teachers, Christian predecessors, scribes, and patrons. His particular achievement was real, but it was never creation from nothing.

2.4 Ascetic vocation and social position

Jerome's asceticism renounced marriage, sexual activity, status display, rich food, and conventional career. It did not eliminate class, literacy, or patronage. Books, long travel, buildings, teachers, and secretarial work required resources. Elite Roman women would later finance and intellectually sustain the Bethlehem enterprise. Jerome's insistence on renunciation could therefore expose aristocratic wealth to radical demands while continuing to depend on it.

His rhetoric often ranked virginity above marriage and used bodily discipline as a battlefield of salvation. The hierarchy had patristic precedents, but Jerome made it combative. The biographer must hold together three facts: voluntary celibacy opened real alternatives to ordinary elite marriage; women such as Marcella, Paula, and Eustochium exercised serious scriptural and institutional agency within it; and polemical exaltation of virginity could demean married Christians and turn the body into a theater of suspicion.

Claim: Jerome lived ascetically in the region of Chalcis and pursued language study there.

Witness: Letters 14–17 and the retrospective account of Hebrew study in Letter 125.12.

Limit: "Desert" names an ascetic geography, not total isolation. The letters reveal networks, books, messengers, teachers, and ecclesiastical controversy.

3 Rome, its women scholars, and Bethlehem

3.1 Damasus and a dangerous Roman prominence

Jerome returned to Rome in 382 in the company of bishops involved in the Antiochene dispute. Pope Damasus valued his eastern experience, languages, and command of Latin. Jerome answered biblical questions for him and undertook the revision of the Latin Gospels at his urging. The surviving Gospel preface addresses Damasus directly; Letters 19–21 and 35–36 also preserve an intellectual exchange. These are firmer descriptions than a later job title.

Official Catholic retrospectives have called Jerome Damasus's secretary, counsellor, or close associate. The underlying relationship is real, but the fourth-century evidence does not establish a modern curial secretariat with a defined portfolio. Nor was Jerome a cardinal. Pope Francis's 2020 letter explicitly calls cardinal dress anachronistic. In Rome Jerome was an eastern-ordained presbyter serving the pope through scholarship, correspondence, and controversy. No broader art-historical claim is made here.

The association with Damasus gave Jerome an audience and enemies. His biblical corrections disturbed familiar wording. His attacks on comfortable clergy and ascetics made moral criticism personal. His own later account in

Letter 45 claims that Rome had praised him until his relationship with Paula's household became a scandal. That letter is indispensable evidence for the accusations and his departure, but it is a defense written while leaving the city, not the minutes of an impartial inquiry.

3.2 Marcella, Paula, Eustochium, and a school of Scripture

The most consequential Roman relationships were not an ornamental circle around a male scholar. Marcella had cultivated ascetic and scriptural learning before Jerome arrived. Paula supplied wealth, mobility, and institutional capacity; Eustochium made lifelong virginity and study her vocation. Asella, Lea, Blaesilla, Fabiola, and other women belonged to overlapping households and correspondence networks. They posed exegetical questions, learned Greek and some Hebrew, copied and circulated texts, received dedications, and made the work socially possible.

Jerome was their teacher and spiritual adviser, but the archive is mostly in his voice. Letter 108, his memorial of Paula, describes her scriptural study, pilgrimage, financing of buildings, government of women ascetics, and care for pilgrims. Its praise makes her visible while arranging her life as Jerome's ascetic exemplar. Pope Francis's 2020 reception notes that Paula and Eustochium entered the company of translators and read the Psalms in Hebrew, citing Jerome's preface to Esther and Letter 108.26. That establishes learned collaboration and official recognition within the translation workshop.

The school also carried unequal risks. Letter 22 to the young Eustochium is a brilliant and often severe ascetic manifesto. It opens alternatives to elite marriage and makes sustained learning a woman's vocation, yet it also ranks virginity through imagery that can demean marriage, sexual desire, and women's bodies. Blaesilla's turn to asceticism, illness, and death intensified Roman anger. Jerome's surviving defenses do not let a biographer determine a medical cause or assign sole responsibility. They do show that bodily discipline, grief, gender, reputation, and pastoral authority were contested in the circle, not merely misunderstood by outsiders.

Women and authorship. Calling Paula and Eustochium "patrons" is true but incomplete; calling them proven co-translators of the whole Vulgate exceeds the evidence. They were learned readers, questioners, organizers, financial enablers, ascetic leaders, and addressees whose work shaped the conditions and purposes of Jerome's scholarship. The asymmetry of the surviving record must remain visible.

3.3 Departure rather than a clean verdict

Damasus died in December 384. Without his patronage, disputes around Jerome became harder to contain. In August 385 Jerome sailed from Ostia. Letter 45 rejects charges concerning his intimacy with Paula and Eustochium. Years later, *Against Rufinus* 3.22 insists that he chose the date and route and left with companions and public farewells. The sources therefore establish a contentious departure, not the tidy alternatives "promoted to the East" or "formally expelled after conviction." The exact process cannot be recovered from Jerome's defense alone; competing modern reconstructions remain for specialist review.

Paula and Eustochium followed on a distinct journey. The group traveled through Antioch and the biblical sites of Palestine and visited Egyptian monastic centers; Jerome renewed contact with Didymus the Blind in Alexandria. Letter 108.6–14 turns that itinerary into sacred geography, often imagining the biblical scene as immediately present. It is both evidence of travel and a theology of pilgrimage, not a neutral gazetteer.

3.4 Bethlehem as household, institution, and workshop

In 386 the company settled at Bethlehem. Paula's resources financed a women's community, a men's community, and hospitality for travelers; Letter 108.14 and later official reception connect the hospice with the Holy Family's lack of lodging. Jerome led the male community and its school. Paula governed the women; after her death in 404, Eustochium continued that responsibility. "Jerome's monastery" is useful shorthand only when it does not absorb these distinct communities or their material owner into his biography.

Bethlehem supplied proximity to Jerusalem, Caesarea's textual inheritance, Greek- and Semitic-speaking teachers, pilgrims, manuscripts, and networks of messengers. It also required money, buildings, food, copying, dictation, and

administration. The translations were not the work of an unaided solitary. Secretaries took dictation; copyists multiplied texts; friends obtained manuscripts; students and correspondents tested readings; Paula and Eustochium supported the household and study.

Two external witnesses prevent the self-portrait from standing alone. In *Dialogue* 1.8–9, Sulpicius Severus’s traveler praises Jerome’s Latin, Greek, and Hebrew learning and depicts him perpetually reading or writing. The admiration comes through a literary travel dialogue, not a measured work diary. Palladius, an Origenist partisan hostile to Jerome, reports the opposite moral judgment: Jerome’s temper and jealousy harmed Paula and drove holy people away (*Lausiac History* 36.6–7; 41.2). Palladius cannot diagnose private motive for the project, but his testimony proves that Jerome’s leadership was experienced as destructive within a near-contemporary ascetic counter-network.

Claim: Bethlehem was a collaborative ascetic and scholarly center, not an isolated translator’s cave.

Witness: Jerome, Letter 108.14, 19–21, 26; his biblical prefaces and dedications; Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogue* 1.8–9; Palladius, *Lausiac History* 36 and 41.

Limit: Jerome’s memorial idealizes Paula; Sulpicius praises; Palladius attacks. Their convergence secures communities, learned labor, patronage, and conflict, not one witness’s complete judgment of character.

4 Making Latin Scripture

4.1 A Bible before “the Vulgate”

Latin Christians already possessed Scripture. Their biblical books circulated in forms now gathered under the convenient label Old Latin, with revision, mixture, and regional variation across manuscripts. Jerome did not confront an empty page or receive a commission to create a complete Bible in one operation. He entered a living textual tradition whose familiar wording had liturgical, doctrinal, and emotional weight.

The later word *Vulgate* can therefore mislead in two directions. It may suggest that Jerome produced every included book, and that one authorized codex left his desk ready for universal adoption. Neither is true. The collection that eventually predominated combined Jerome’s work with Latin texts made or revised by others, and it reached relative stability through centuries of copying, correction, mixture, and use. In Jerome’s own day *editio vulgata*, the “common edition,” could refer to the Septuagint-based Old Testament rather than to a bound Jerome Bible.

4.2 The Roman Gospel revision

The first securely bounded project was a revision, not a fresh New Testament translation. In the preface addressed to Damasus in 383, Jerome describes the pope’s request that divergent Latin copies be compared with Greek witnesses. He promises the four Gospels, arranged Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and says he changed passages that appeared to alter the sense while leaving much of the customary Latin intact.

H. A. G. Houghton’s manuscript-based analysis confirms the limited scale and scope: Jerome revised the Gospels in 382–384, intervened unevenly, and appears to have altered Matthew more heavily than John. His later citations do not support the old attribution of the Vulgate Acts, Catholic Epistles, Pauline letters, and Apocalypse to him. At places in his Pauline commentaries he even criticizes a Latin reading that remains in the later Vulgate form—unlikely behavior if that form were his own revision. The responsible summary is thus “Jerome revised the Latin Gospels,” not “Damasus commissioned Jerome to translate the entire New Testament.”

Jerome also worked on Psalters, but their history is layered. A Roman revision, the widely received Gallican Psalter derived from comparison with Origen’s Hexaplar Greek, and a translation beside the Hebrew are associated with him in different ways. Attribution and textual descent require manuscript-level qualification. No single phrase such as “Jerome’s Psalms” identifies every Latin psalter later copied under his name.

4.3 From Greek comparison to Hebrew sources

At Bethlehem Jerome increasingly translated Old Testament books from Hebrew. He invoked *Hebraica veritas*: when Greek and Latin witnesses diverged, the Hebrew source could adjudicate and disclose a wording obscured downstream. This turn was neither an abandonment of Greek nor a discovery made without predecessors. Jerome used the Septuagint, other Greek versions, Origen's Hexapla, existing Latin texts, place-name and name lists, and the exegetical traditions available around Palestine.

He also learned from Jewish teachers. Letter 125.12 remembers the difficulty of acquiring Hebrew sounds from a converted Jewish instructor; other prefaces and commentaries acknowledge consultation with Hebrews. Modern assessment ranges from admiration of his unusual practical competence to debate about fluency, dependence on Greek tools, and rhetorical exaggeration. The surviving work demonstrates serious and sustained Hebrew engagement. It does not demonstrate that he worked without oral teachers, lexical aids, or uncertainty.

4.4 What Jerome did and did not translate

Across roughly 390–405 Jerome produced Hebrew-based Latin versions of most of the books that form the Catholic Old Testament, along with prefaces explaining choices and defending the enterprise. The exact project chronology varies by book. Tobit and Judith were rendered through what he calls “Chaldean” (Aramaic), with an intermediary and under haste, rather than by the same method as a sustained Hebrew-based prophetic translation. Wisdom, Sirach, Baruch, and the books of Maccabees in the later Vulgate do not become Jerome translations merely because a medieval Bible placed them beside his work.

The biblical prefaces are therefore part of the biography. They disclose patrons, assistants, complaints, source choices, speed, uncertainty, and Jerome's campaign for authority. They also document a canon problem. In the “helmeted prologue” to Kings he groups the Hebrew books and places writings outside that list among apocrypha for purposes of doctrinal confirmation. Yet Christian use of Wisdom, Sirach, Tobit, Judith, and Maccabees did not disappear, and Jerome himself translated Tobit and Judith. The Catholic canon later defined at Trent cannot simply be replaced by Jerome's personal classification.

4.5 A translator's stated method

Letter 57.5, written in defense of a disputed translation of Epiphanius, famously says that Jerome ordinarily renders sense for sense rather than word for word, while treating Scripture differently because even word order may matter. The statement is contextual, not a timeless algorithm. His Gospel preface emphasizes restraint; Hebrew-based prefaces defend return to source; individual translations range from close formal correspondence to explanatory rendering. Translation for Jerome was judgment exercised under theological, textual, and rhetorical pressure.

His commentaries display another dimension. He often offers several inherited interpretations so that a trained reader can weigh them. This openness did not make him neutral: he selected, abbreviated, attacked, translated predecessors, and adapted inherited interpretations. Attribution must distinguish Jerome's philological decision, his translation of a predecessor, and his adaptation of that predecessor. No claim about reconstructing a lost Greek text is made without a directly inspected specialist locus.

4.6 From contested versions to ecclesial monument

Readers did not immediately accept Jerome's changes. Augustine worried that a Hebrew-based wording read publicly would unsettle congregations formed by the Septuagint; their exchange over Jonah's plant makes the pastoral problem concrete (Augustine Letter 71; Jerome Letter 75, in the dual-numbered correspondence). Manuscript mixture continued long after both men died.

Over centuries the collection came to shape western theology, prayer, education, literature, and law. The Council of Trent received the old and widely used Latin Vulgate as authentic for public ecclesial use amid sixteenth-century controversy. As Pope Francis's *Scripturae Sacrae affectus* explains, that act did not forbid original-language study. The *Nova Vulgata*, promulgated in 1979 after modern revision, is the Catholic Church's current typical Latin edition; it is not a claim that every one of its readings was penned by Jerome.

Claim: Jerome was the decisive individual contributor to the later Vulgate, but not the translator of its whole Bible.

Witness: Gospel preface to Damasus; Old Testament prefaces; *De viris illustribus* 135; Houghton, *The Latin New Testament*, pp. 31–35; Francis, *Scripturae Sacrae affectus*.

Limit: Jerome's broad self-summary must be tested book by book. The later collection contains other translators' work and a transmission history no author controlled.

5 Friendship, authority, and controversy

5.1 Rufinus and the Origenist rupture

Rufinus of Aquileia belonged to Jerome's early ascetic friendship. Both men traveled east, learned from Greek Christianity, translated Origen, and joined Latin ascetic networks sustained by elite women. Rufinus lived in Jerusalem with Melania the Elder while Jerome settled at Bethlehem with Paula. Their later war was therefore not a clash between an Origenist stranger and a man untouched by Origen. It was a struggle over how to receive a formative teacher, which propositions to reject, who had concealed or corrected them, and which translator could control the record of his own debt.

The Palestinian Origenist controversy intensified in the 390s. Epiphanius of Salamis condemned teachings attributed to Origen; John, bishop of Jerusalem, resisted the campaign and clashed with Jerome's circle. Epiphanius's ordination of Jerome's brother Paulinian outside John's ordinary control added a concrete jurisdictional grievance. Jerome's *Against John of Jerusalem*, Letter 84, and later apologies defend his orthodoxy. Their detail is evidence for the conflict, but not a neutral summary of John's position.

Rufinus's Latin rendering of Origen's *On First Principles* in 398 and its preface associated Jerome with a similarly selective translation practice. Jerome answered with a more literal rival rendering and public denunciation. Jerome's three books *Against Rufinus* preserve charges, countercharges, private letters turned into exhibits, and learned insult in Jerome's arrangement. Rufinus's *Apology against Jerome* 2 now supplies a controlled counter-archive at decisive points. Rufinus makes Jerome's own Letter 22 an exhibit: he attacks its satire of clergy and ascetics, charges that the Ciceronian dream's renunciation conflicts with Jerome's later teaching of classical authors, and contests the Hebrew-based revision as an injury to the Church's received Greek Scriptures. These are an opponent's arguments, not neutral verdicts; they prove that Jerome's self-revision and textual program were disputed in precise terms rather than by vague personal jealousy. When the Alexandrian bishop Theophilus moved against Origenist monks around 399–400, Jerome celebrated an alliance that further isolated his former friends.

Some disputed propositions were serious: the pre-existence and restoration of souls, the resurrection body, and the final fate of the devil bore on Christian doctrine. Yet doctrinal gravity does not sanctify every tactic. Jerome reshaped the story of his own dependence, attributed motives he could not inspect, and used ridicule as a weapon. Historical judgment requires both archives and refuses the victor's retrospective simplicity. Book 2 of Rufinus is now controlled, while the full reciprocal corpus and institutional sequence still limit judgment.

5.2 John of Jerusalem and the limits of local power

Jerome's international reputation could not erase ecclesial geography. Bethlehem lay within the jurisdiction of Jerusalem's bishop. Jerome was a presbyter, not the autonomous bishop of a scholarly republic. Disputes over communion, Paulinian's ordination, buildings, and access to worship exposed the tension between charismatic textual authority and local episcopal government. Jerome's appeals to Rome and powerful friends made the conflict Mediterranean. They did not make jurisdiction irrelevant.

The episode also complicates later claims that Jerome consistently stood above party. He could defend Roman communion in the Antiochene schism, support Epiphanius against John, and later use Theophilus of Alexandria as an orthodox ally. Each alignment had theological reasons and institutional consequences. "The Church condemned Origen" is too undifferentiated to explain who acted, when, against which propositions, and through what local authority.

5.3 Augustine: a friendship entirely in letters

Augustine and Jerome never met. Their relationship was made by copied letters, messengers, delays, and accidental publication. Around 394 Augustine challenged Jerome's interpretation of Galatians 2:11–14. Jerome followed a traditional reading in which Peter and Paul's conflict was staged for pastoral effect; Augustine feared that attributing a useful falsehood to an apostle would weaken Scriptural truth. A letter intended as private correction circulated before Jerome received it, making intellectual disagreement a question of honor.

Their long Letter 82/116 exchange does not dissolve the disagreement. Augustine argues that Paul's rebuke was truthful and asks for frank correction between friends; Jerome answers with erudition, rank-conscious courtesy, and eventual desire for peace. The so-called gourd dispute over Jonah's plant likewise joined Hebrew philology to a congregation's received wording. Augustine did not reject Hebrew study; he feared pastoral disruption and valued the Septuagint's ecclesial authority.

The relationship matured. They exchanged questions about the soul and later opposed Pelagian positions, but even alliance did not make their methods identical. Their correspondence is an unusually valuable N as well as A dossier: each author controls his own letter, while the exchange exposes the other's claims to challenge.

5.4 Marriage, virginity, and the price of victory

Jerome's *Against Jovinian* (393) opposed claims he understood to level the reward of virginity and marriage, diminish fasting, and overstate baptismal security. He defended voluntary virginity and ascetic discipline within a Christian tradition larger than himself. The controversy also displays his habit of making hierarchy sound like contempt. Even allies worried that his comparisons injured Christian marriage; Letter 49 acknowledges Pammachius's attempt to limit circulation while defending the work.

Against Helvidius defended Mary's perpetual virginity and the ascetic honor of virginity. Its doctrinal conclusion became Catholic reception; its philological arguments and invective remain the work of a fourth-century controversialist. *Against Vigilantius* (406) defended veneration of martyrs' relics, vigils, almsgiving to Jerusalem, and celibate asceticism. It also attacks Vigilantius's occupation, region, appearance, and alleged drinking with language so abusive that the opponent's actual pastoral concerns can disappear. The treatise must be read as evidence for developing cult and ascetic practice and for Jerome's failure of proportion.

Women gained genuine alternatives through ascetic communities: education, property redirected to charity, leadership outside remarriage, and sustained scriptural work. At the same time, Jerome's praise could make a woman's body a symbol in male controversy, treat family affection as weakness, and presume authority over wealth he did not own. Letter 130 to Demetrias, written thirty years after Letter 22, is more moderated about fasting and work. Development matters, but it does not delete earlier words or their effects.

5.5 Pelagian controversy and physical danger

Around 415–417 Jerome composed the *Dialogue against the Pelagians*, presenting the positions through literary interlocutors rather than a neutral transcript of Pelagius. He emphasized the necessity of grace and the possibility of post-baptismal sin. His alliance with Augustine now mattered more than their old friction.

Augustine, Innocent, and Jerome report that the Bethlehem monastic complex was attacked and burned in 416. Augustine uses report language while alleging a deacon's death (*Proceedings of Pelagius* 66). Innocent's Letters 136–137 express sympathy and blame local episcopal failure, but also say that no individual accusation had been made and that reports remained rumor rather than a pleaded case. Jerome's Letters 138–139 describe danger, displacement, and the destruction of his house's material resources in openly partisan language. The convergence supports serious violence and physical destruction; it does not establish a casualty register, perpetrator, legal finding, command responsibility, or rebuilding history.

Controversy as biography. Jerome's disputes were not detachable bad manners around a pure scholarly core. They shaped which books he translated, which alliances sustained the workshop, which opponents survived in Latin, and how he narrated himself. Zeal for truth explains the stakes; it does not make humiliation, caricature, or uncertain accusation into virtues.

6 Books as a form of ascetic life

6.1 The library, the voice, and the page

Jerome made scholarship bodily. Reading strained eyes; Hebrew required the mouth to learn unfamiliar sounds; dictation depended on breath, memory, and a secretary's speed; books had to be found, borrowed, copied, carried, and corrected. Sulpicius Severus's traveler remembers a man always reading or writing (*Dialogue* 1.9.5). The statement is admiring compression, but the surviving range makes the compression plausible.

His library was both material collection and claimed identity. It held biblical codices, Greek exegetes, classical authors, chronicles, geographical works, and his own copies and notes. The combination helped make advanced biblical study itself appear as monastic labor. That is a project synthesis supported by Sulpicius and Jerome's letters, not a claim that all later monastic scholarship descends from Jerome alone.

Study did not replace common ascetic work. Letters 52.7, 125.11, and 130.15 join Scripture, prayer, discipline, teaching, and manual occupation. Jerome warns against idleness and against a teacher whose life contradicts his words. His advice ranges from severe bodily suspicion to practical moderation. It should be dated and addressed, not merged into a single rule that he imposed unchanged for fifty years.

6.2 Commentary and the authority of sources

Jerome wrote commentaries on prophets, Gospel texts, and Pauline letters, alongside philological works on Hebrew names, places, and questions in Genesis. The commentaries combine grammar, textual variants, geography, typology, history, doctrine, and moral reading. They sometimes offer competing interpretations for a learned reader's judgment. They also borrow extensively. Origen is the most important presence, even after Jerome's public repudiation of Origenist propositions; Didymus, Eusebius, Greek historians, and Jewish informants also stand behind the Latin page.

Ancient conventions did not use modern footnotes, yet source dependence still matters. A passage transmitted by Jerome may be his own synthesis, a translated Greek predecessor, an unattributed adaptation, or a report of Hebrew teaching. His polemics sometimes accuse others of exactly the selective handling he practiced. A source-first biography therefore treats the corpus not as a single transparent voice but as a workshop whose materials can sometimes be reconstructed.

The famous sentence that ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ belongs to the prologue of Jerome's commentary on Isaiah. It gives a genuine center to the life: biblical knowledge is ordered to a person, not to antiquarian mastery. Its authenticity does not make every interpretation equally successful or turn philology into an automatic proof of sanctity.

6.3 Historian of writers and maker of his own archive

Jerome translated and continued Eusebius's *Chronicle*, carrying a Greek chronographical form into Latin and adding material through 378. Its dates and notices became enormously influential; they are also subject to ordinary source criticism. A chronicle entry can preserve a contemporary memory while still compressing causation, repeating rumor, or serving confessional polemic.

Around 392/393 *De viris illustribus* catalogued 135 Christian writers from apostolic figures to Jerome himself. Chapter 135 supplies the strongest self-identification: Jerome, son of Eusebius, from Gothic-destroyed Stridon on the Dalmatian-Pannonian border. It also advertises an immense bibliography and ends with current projects. The catalogue brought Christian learning into a classical literary-historical genre and argued that the Church possessed an intellectual tradition. By ending with himself, Jerome became archivist and exhibit at once.

The catalogue must not settle every attribution. Works could be lost, revised, continued, or transmitted under more famous names. Jerome's assertion that he rendered the New Testament from Greek and the Old from Hebrew is a programmatic self-summary whose book-level limits are supplied by prefaces, citations, and manuscripts. It is evidence for how he wanted the achievement remembered, not a substitute for textual history.

6.4 Letters that were never merely private

The surviving correspondence includes condolences, rebukes, exegetical answers, patronage appeals, ascetic treatises, travel invitations, and public defenses. A named addressee did not guarantee a private audience. Jerome organized collections, circulated exemplary letters, and protested when hostile or unfinished texts escaped control. Letter 57 itself arose because a translation intended for one reader became a public controversy.

Women are central to this epistolary authorship. Marcella's questions, Eustochium's vocation, Paula's travel and death, Fabiola's charity, Principia's memory of Marcella, and Demetrias's renunciation are known through letters that also construct Jerome as adviser. The documents disclose real relationships; they are not transcripts of the women's independent voices. Reading against the grain can recover constraints and agency, but it cannot invent speeches or motives absent from the record.

6.5 Three ascetic lives as Jerome's literary work

The *Life of Paul*, *Life of Hilarion*, and *Life of Malchus* are now controlled in the public-domain NPNF text as works by Jerome rather than mined as transparent desert archives. The *Life of Paul* 1 opens by arguing that Paul preceded Antony in the eremitical life. The *Life of Hilarion* 1 announces praise of a holy ascetic and explicitly positions the narrative beside Antony's received life. The *Life of Malchus* 1–2 calls itself a small preliminary exercise for a larger Church history and frames its central account as a story Jerome heard from an aged monk. Those prologues make literary purpose, competitive memory, and mediated testimony part of the evidence. The vivid episodes remain evidence for Jerome's ascetic imagination and hagiographic craft unless independently controlled; they do not become fourth-century event reports merely because Jerome wrote them.

6.6 Doctrine, opinion, and the title Doctor

Jerome's enduring theological service includes defense of Nicene faith, Christological reading of Scripture, Mary's perpetual virginity, Christian asceticism, and the textual labor that gave the Latin West access to biblical sources. His commentaries also preserve dated exegesis, polemical judgments, and social assumptions that the Church has not made irreformable.

Catholic reception names him Father and Doctor of the Church. "Doctor" recognizes eminent teaching for the communion; it does not certify every chronicle date, invective, textual attribution, or private opinion. Pope Francis's 2020 apostolic letter receives Jerome above all as a lover of Scripture and translator whose work was collaborative and ecclesial. That is M: authoritative reception of his significance, not a modern critical edition of his biography.

The discipline of admiration. Jerome's immense output invites the reader either to excuse cruelty because the books are great or to dismiss the books because the author could be cruel. The sources require a harder reading: his learned service was real, his ascetic intention serious, his dependence on others pervasive, and the wounds of his rhetoric consequential.

7 Loss, final labor, death, and received memory

7.1 Paula's death and an epitaph made of a life

Paula died at Bethlehem on 26 January 404. Letter 108, addressed to Eustochium, is Jerome's long epitaph. It follows ancestry, widowhood, renunciation, pilgrimage, government of the community, charity, Scripture, illness, death, and burial. It also records Jerome's dependence: the enterprise whose books carried his name had lost its principal material founder and one of its most demanding readers.

The letter is both source and monument. Jerome gives dates, routes, buildings, family relations, and practices; he also arranges Paula as the fulfillment of an ascetic ideal. Her own speech reaches the reader through his selection. The biographer should neither discard the details because the work praises nor mistake praise for equal access to

every conflict in the household. Palladius's hostile counter-memory proves that other ascetics judged the partnership very differently.

Eustochium succeeded her mother in the women's community and remained central to Jerome's scholarship. Her death is usually placed in late 418 or early 419, but the exact date is not secured by a source collated for this study. The loss left Jerome dependent on a younger Paula and other members of the household. The names matter: "Jerome continued translating" can conceal successive generations who preserved the conditions of continuation.

7.2 Rome's fall heard from Bethlehem

The Gothic sack of Rome in 410 reached Jerome through letters and refugees. Letter 127, his memorial of Marcella, reports the city's terror and her abuse by soldiers before her death. Jerome explicitly distinguishes what he heard from what persons present reported. Even so, the letter turns catastrophe into an ascetic and providential narrative. It is close relational evidence, not an urban casualty register.

Bethlehem received displaced persons while its own finances tightened. The events made Jerome's long contrast between Rome and Jerusalem painfully concrete: the city that had educated and rejected him remained populated by friends, churches, and readers. He did not watch its destruction from serene distance. Grief enters late commentaries and correspondence alongside continued textual work.

7.3 Reported attack and an unfinished old age

Checked reports associated with Jerome's network describe an attack and burned buildings at Bethlehem in 416. Augustine's *Proceedings of Pelagius* 66, Innocent's Letters 136–137, and Jerome's Letters 138–139 converge on serious violence and material destruction. They also expose the limit: Augustine reports an alleged killing, Innocent says that no named accusation had yet been laid and distinguishes rumors from a case, and Jerome writes as a combatant. The publication therefore withholds casualty certainty, perpetrator identity, individual command responsibility, legal adjudication, and any rebuilding narrative.

Jerome continued commentary, correspondence, and anti-Pelagian argument amid illness and bereavement. There is no equivalent of Possidius's continuous near-contemporary death scene for Augustine. The last years must be assembled from the ends of works, correspondents, and later chronology. A sparse record should not be filled with a serene final speech invented to complete the arc.

7.4 419 or 420, and what 30 September means

Jerome died at Bethlehem. The Roman Catholic Church receives 30 September 420; Pope Francis's 2020 apostolic letter was issued for the sixteen-hundredth anniversary on that basis. Benedict XVI's 2007 catechesis itself printed "30 September 419–420," and a 419 placement persists in critical chronologies. This biography therefore gives the event as 419 or 420 and identifies 30 September 420 as official reception rather than pretending the dispute does not exist.

No near-contemporary burial narrative survives in this source set. A more limited early control does: Adomnán's late-seventh-century *De locis sanctis* 2.5 records the pilgrim Arculf saying that he saw Jerome's tomb at Bethlehem. That is early pilgrim reception of a localized tomb, not eyewitness burial testimony. The claimed later transfer to Rome still lacks a directly controlled primary dossier, custody record, or scientific identification.

7.5 The fourfold western Doctor and the biblical saint

Jerome's posthumous reception was strongly textual: the biblical revisions, prefaces, commentaries, and letters continued to be copied and read. This edition does not assign a date or narrative to the four-Doctor grouping because its item-level witnesses were not collated.

The Council of Trent's reception of the Vulgate made Jerome newly important in confessional controversy. Catholic, Protestant, and humanist scholars could all appeal to him—to Latin ecclesial use, to Hebrew sources, to textual correction, or to patristic authority—while disagreeing about what his example required. Modern biblical scholarship

honors the philologist while revising many attributions and readings. Ecclesial honor and critical correction are not opposites.

In the Roman Rite his memorial is kept on 30 September. Pope Benedict XVI's 2007 catecheses and Pope Francis's 2020 *Scripturae Sacrae affectus* receive him as priest, Doctor, exegete, ascetic, and lover of the Word. Such acts establish current Catholic commemoration and interpretation. They do not adjudicate every disputed year, polemical motive, or manuscript stemma.

7.6 Uncollated visual and patronage reception

Pope Francis's 2020 letter directly controls one negative claim: cardinal dress is anachronistic for Jerome. No item-level visual history, portrait, object, cave identification, lion witness, symbolic interpretation, or occupational patronage source was controlled for this edition. Those subjects remain research leads and carry no narrative, date, meaning, current status, or list in this publication.

A holy death without a scripted scene. The surviving record supports an old scholar working through bereavement, insecurity, and illness in the community at Bethlehem. It does not provide the hour-by-hour witness available for some saints. Restraint here honors the life better than a fabricated final tableau.

8 Tradition under review

Jerome deliberately wrote himself into the history of Christian letters. It is unsurprising that later Christians completed his image. The following traditions can be retained only when their evidentiary status remains attached.

8.1 The Ciceronian dream as instantaneous conversion

The dream is not a late medieval invention. Jerome tells it in Letter 22.30, written to Eustochium in 384: during a severe fever he stood before the Judge and was rebuked as “a follower of Cicero and not of Christ.” The public-domain NPNF English rendering supplies that short wording. The first surviving account was written years after the illness for an ascetic argument. Rufinus later made the account an exhibit against Jerome (*Apology against Jerome* 2.6), alleging inconsistency between the vow and Jerome's continuing use and teaching of classical literature. The charge is partisan but exact; it confirms that contemporaries contested Jerome's effort to narrate a clean rupture.

The responsible status is A: powerful retrospective self-witness. It may mark a genuine crisis without supplying the exact date, a transcript of heavenly speech, or proof that Jerome thereafter abandoned the classics. His education remained audible in nearly every page.

8.2 The solitary author of the whole Vulgate

No single episode made Jerome translate every biblical book. The Gospel preface promises four revised Gospels; Houghton's textual analysis excludes Jerome as reviser of the rest of the later Vulgate New Testament. Most of his Old Testament work was Hebrew-based, while several later Vulgate books came from other Latin histories. Paula, Eustochium, teachers, scribes, and readers belonged to the workshop.

Jerome's individual initiative and endurance remain clear, but “the Vulgate” was not one autograph and the inspected sources do not permit collaborators to vanish from its history. No later visual material is used as production evidence here.

8.3 Papal secretary, cardinal, or frustrated pope

Damasus used Jerome's scholarship and kept him close. A later administrative label may summarize that access, but the exact modern office “papal secretary” is not established by the sources used here. Cardinal dress is more clearly

anachronistic; Pope Francis explicitly identifies that anachronism. No broader visual history or symbolism is claimed here.

Letter 45.3 says people once judged Jerome worthy of episcopacy and that Damasus spoke through him. It does not prove that Jerome was the agreed next pope or lost a conclave. The vivid frustrated-papacy story is unsupported in the inspected corpus.

8.4 The lion migrated before the *Golden Legend*

The lion is absent from Jerome's own life and works. John Moschus's early-seventh-century *Spiritual Meadow* 107 attaches the healed-paw and obedient-lion cycle to Gerasimus of the Jordan, who lived after Jerome. A ninth-century Jerome life beginning *Plerosque nimirum* already transfers the animal cycle to Jerome. Jacobus de Voragine's thirteenth-century *Golden Legend* then retells the developed monastery story: Jerome treats the paw, the lion guards an ass, and a mistaken accusation is repaired. Thus the *Golden Legend* popularized but did not invent Jerome's lion.

Similarity between the names Gerasimus and Geronimus is a plausible scholarly explanation for transfer, not a witnessed event. The tradition signifies hospitality, healing, disciplined strength, and restored trust; it supplies no animal episode in Jerome's historical life.

8.5 Visual objects and identified-place claims

Letter 22.7 supports Jerome's remembered penitential practice. It does not identify a particular object, portrait, tableau, cave, cell, or current shrine. No item-level visual, archaeological, or custodial witness for those later claims was controlled, so they remain leads without a published narrative, date, symbolism, or location.

8.6 Giving Christ his sins

Pope Francis's 2020 letter explicitly calls apocryphal a dialogue in which Jerome offers Christ many gifts and is finally asked to give his sins so that they may be forgiven. Francis cites a 1990 spiritual work by André Louf; this project did not locate an ancient witness or inspect Louf's edition directly. The story may teach grace and repentance. It must not be printed as an event in Chalcis or a quotation from Jerome.

8.7 Burial and relic-translation leads

The inspected source set contains no near-contemporary burial narrative. Adomnán's *De locis sanctis* 2.5 does preserve Arculf's late-seventh-century report that he saw Jerome's tomb at Bethlehem. This locates an early received tomb; it neither reconstructs the burial nor proves a later translation to Rome. The Roman transfer, continuous custody, and any scientific identification remain uncollated.

8.8 A precise modern nationality and a settled full name

Jerome says Stridon stood at the Dalmatian-Pannonian border and had been destroyed by Goths. Because the site is unresolved, assigning him exclusively to a modern Croatian, Slovenian, Bosnian, or Italian national territory exceeds the evidence. Regional devotion need not become false cartography.

Likewise, "Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus" is a familiar expanded name, but *De viris illustribus* 135 calls him Jerome, son of Eusebius. Sophronius was also the name of a contemporary translator of Jerome's works into Greek. The expansion is not used here as a secure civil name.

8.9 Paula's documented agency

Jerome's records establish Paula as patron, ascetic leader, pilgrim, student of Scripture, institutional founder, and demanding reader. Palladius's hostile external account instead depicts her subordination to Jerome.

The responsible claim is collaborative production with differentiated roles and an unequal surviving archive. Further work on dedications, prefaces, and manuscripts may refine those roles.

8.10 Sayings detached from their works

Several genuine sayings need their loci.

- The claim that ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ belongs to the prologue to the Isaiah commentary. It concerns encounter with Christ through Scripture, not information as a substitute for charity.
- Letter 57.5's preference for sense over word in ordinary translation is immediately qualified for Scripture. It cannot be cited as proof that Jerome always paraphrased or always translated literally.
- Letter 52.7's instruction that a priest's conduct agree with his speech is genuine ascetic counsel, not evidence that Jerome always met his own test.
- Attractive sayings assigned to Jerome without work, section, edition, and translation remain unverified. The saint's reputation is not a locus.

8.11 Paul as the "first hermit"

Jerome's *Life of Paul* 1 explicitly enters a priority dispute and prefers the claim that Paul of Thebes led the eremitical life before Antony. That is a controlled claim by Jerome within an ascetic saint's life, not independent third-century evidence. The text establishes Jerome's intervention in a competitive memory of monastic origins; it does not settle Paul's historical chronology by authorial assertion alone.

What classification protects. Calling a story late does not forbid art, preaching, affection, or theological reflection. It protects both history and devotion from being asked to provide the wrong kind of proof. A source-first hagiography deserves no less careful a reading when Jerome becomes its subject.

9 A sanctity tested in the labor of words

Jerome made words his ascetic matter. He submitted a classical education to Scripture without ceasing to write like a Roman rhetor. He crossed languages to bring Latin readers closer to Greek and Hebrew sources. He built, with Paula, Eustochium, teachers, scribes, and patrons, a Bethlehem institution in which a manuscript could become prayer, controversy, hospitality, and a gift to readers centuries away.

The same medium carried his failures. Words clarified textual variants and also humiliated opponents. Ascetic argument opened learned Christian lives to women and also made their bodies instruments of hierarchy. Hebrew study depended on Jewish teachers whose contribution the archive only partly preserves. Loyalty to doctrine did not prevent selective memory of Origen, and service to Roman communion did not erase collision with the local bishop. Received holiness must still be distinguished from automatic imitation where the controlled sources permit judgment.

A source-first hagiography must apply its discipline to Jerome himself. Sanctity is not bare recoverable data, yet it is not protected by invented data. The Church receives his love of Christ in Scripture, learning, prayer, renunciation, endurance, and service. Historical study tests the witnesses, keeps Paula and Eustochium from disappearing, and lets Rufinus, Augustine, Sulpicius, and Palladius complicate the self-portrait. Uncollated later traditions remain research leads rather than narrative evidence.

His deepest legacy is neither a single perfect codex nor a method captured in one slogan. It is a vocation to patient mediation: source and reader, Hebrew and Greek and Latin, ancient text and present Church, learned difficulty and the desire to know Christ. That vocation remains unfinished. Modern critical editions correct Jerome; new manuscript work redistributes old attributions; Christian conscience judges inherited abuse. Correction need not be ingratitude. It may be the most faithful way to honor a scholar who kept returning to the text.

Unresolved questions remain substantial: the birth year and exact Stridon; the development of Hebrew competence; the boundaries of collaborators' roles; the process behind departure from Rome; precise responsibility for the 416

violence; the death year; and the uninspected visual, patronage, burial, relic, and lion dossiers. A deep biography names those limits because Jerome’s stature does not require false completion.

A Scope, Chronology, and Evidence

Jerome—Hieronimus in Latin—is at once one of late antiquity’s most talkative authors and one of its more difficult biographical subjects. He left letters, biblical prefaces, commentaries, polemics, and a catalogue of Christian authors ending with himself. These works disclose education, travel, friendships, patrons, labor, illness, anger, and prayer. They also manage reputation. Jerome could turn a letter into a public manifesto, a funeral praise into an ascetic model, or a quarrel into a struggle for orthodoxy. No Possidius wrote a near-contemporary, continuous life to stand beside this self-portrait.

External voices exist, but they too are interested. Rufinus answers Jerome from the wreckage of a friendship. Augustine’s letters reveal genuine exegetical disagreement and eventual cooperation, yet come from a bishop with his own agenda. Sulpicius Severus reports Jerome’s Bethlehem community through another visitor. Palladius preserves sharply hostile Origenist memory of Jerome’s temper and influence over Paula. Such witnesses are not disqualified by praise or hostility. They require triangulation.

This study treats Jerome as a Roman provincial Christian, classically trained writer, ascetic, presbyter, exegete, translator and reviser, controversialist, hagiographer, saint, Father, and Doctor of the Church. It asks how devotion to Scripture became a material life of travel, language study, patronage, dictation, manuscript comparison, teaching, and conflict. It also asks what was lost when later memory compressed the collaborative and composite history of the Latin Bible into the image of one solitary man translating the whole Vulgate.

A.1 Name, dates, and scope

Jerome identifies his birthplace as Stridon, a town destroyed by Goths near the border of Dalmatia and Pannonia, and calls Eusebius his father (*De viris illustribus* 135). The exact site has not been securely identified. Modern Croatian, Slovenian, Bosnian, and other national claims may express regional reception but cannot turn a late Roman border description into a precise modern nationality.

“Jerome” and “Eusebius Hieronymus” are responsible ordinary forms. The popular expansion “Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus” is not securely established by Jerome’s self-notice and may involve confusion with Sophronius, a contemporary who translated some of Jerome’s work into Greek. This biography does not use it as a settled full legal name.

Even the lifespan needs two columns. An early-330s chronology and a chronology around 347 both remain in circulation. The older position traditionally appeals to Prosper, but his exact entry has not yet been collated for this edition; the later position coordinates Jerome’s descriptions of schooling and living memory differently. The argument remains unsettled. His death is officially and commonly received as 30 September 420, but a 419 chronology persists in critical discussion. The title page therefore does not force a false precision; the chronology records both.

A.2 Evidence key

Code	Meaning
A	Subject-authored evidence: Jerome’s letters, prefaces, commentaries, catalogues, and polemics, read as purposeful literary acts.
N	Near-contemporary external witness: Augustine, Rufinus, Sulpicius Severus, Palladius, and other late-antique evidence outside Jerome’s control.
E	Early received tradition: chronicles, manuscript circulation, cult, and patristic memory near enough to establish early reception.

Code	Meaning
L	Later hagiographic or devotional tradition, used only after an exact witness, date, genre, and transmission status have been controlled. Uncollated visual, relic, and patronage material remains a lead.
M	Official ecclesial reception: liturgical, papal, conciliar, or institutional acts, limited to what the act establishes.
K	Modern critical reconstruction: named philological or historical scholarship with alternatives and confidence stated.
S	Source-grounded project synthesis: an editorial connection supported by named evidence rather than placed in an ancient mouth.

Jerome's own evidence is often closest and most detailed, but proximity is not neutrality. Letter 45 defends his departure from Rome; Letter 108 praises Paula after her death; the anti-Rufinus works answer a public enemy; biblical prefaces justify disputed textual choices. Each may preserve fact and self-fashioning together. Palladius's accusation that Jerome's jealousy harmed Paula's community is likewise evidence for hostile contemporary reception, not a transparent verdict on motive.

A.3 Chronological orientation

Date	Place	Event and evidence	Status
331 or c. 347	Stridon	Born to a Christian provincial family; Jerome names Stridon and his father Eusebius in <i>De viris illustribus</i> 135.	Competing chronologies
350s/360s	Rome	Studies grammar, rhetoric, and classical literature under Aelius Donatus; gathers books and forms friendships.	Relative sequence secure
360s	Rome	Baptized, probably by Liberius; exact year depends on birth chronology.	Approximate
late 360s–early 370s	Trier / Aquileia	Begins ascetic turn and participates in a circle of Christian friends at Aquileia.	Approximate
c. 374–377	Antioch / Chalcis	Illness, the Ciceronian dream later narrated in Letter 22, language study, ascetic withdrawal, and ecclesial controversy.	Sequence strong; dates approximate
c. 378/379	Antioch	Ordained presbyter by Paulinus amid the Antiochene schism, apparently with ascetic conditions.	Probable
c. 380–382	Constantinople	Studies with Gregory of Nazianzus; translates and engages Origen and Greek theology.	Well attested
382–385	Rome	Works closely with Pope Damasus; revises the Gospels; teaches and corresponds with an ascetic circle including Marcella, Paula, and Eustochium; controversy follows Damasus's death.	Well attested
385–386	Eastern Mediterranean	Leaves Rome; travels through Antioch, Palestine, and Egypt with Paula's party.	Well attested, principally A
386–c. 405	Bethlehem	Establishes study and ascetic life; Paula finances monasteries and a hospice; Jerome undertakes major biblical translation and revision.	Well attested; project dates vary
390s–early 400s	Bethlehem / Mediterranean networks	Origenist conflict with Rufinus and John of Jerusalem; anti-Jovinian and other ascetic polemics; exchanges with Augustine.	Well documented, highly partisan

Date	Place	Event and evidence	Status
404	Bethlehem	Paula dies; Jerome composes Letter 108, an epitaphic life.	Well attested
410s	Bethlehem	Anti-Pelagian writing; Roman refugee crisis; checked contemporary sources report an attack on the monasteries in 416 and the burning of buildings; continued commentary and correspondence.	Reported violence and destruction converge; perpetrators, casualties, command, and aftermath remain unresolved
419 or 420	Bethlehem	Dies; 30 September 420 is official Catholic reception. No near-contemporary burial locus was controlled.	Year disputed; exact day received

A.4 Publication boundary

This Triptych study was prepared from Jerome’s letters, prefaces, commentaries, and polemics; contemporary and near-contemporary counter-witnesses; official Catholic reception; and the modern historical scholarship identified in the references and source audit. Sources and mutable claims were checked through 16 July 2026.

This is a source-first historical and hagiographic synthesis, not a critical edition, magisterial act, authentication of relics, or substitute for specialist historical, philological, and theological judgment. Jerome’s forceful self-presentation and the partisan testimony of his opponents require triangulation. Disputed dates, uncertain places, and the composite history of the Latin Bible are therefore stated rather than smoothed away.

A.5 Translation, rights, and review limits

The nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century English translations are research aids, not critical substitutes for CSEL, CCL, or Sources Chrétiennes. Exact CSEL and CCL loci supplied in Pope Francis’s notes were recorded where used; the Latin at those loci was not comprehensively collated, and a complete edition-level review remains outstanding.

Ancient Latin is public domain. The cited NPNF and 1918 Palladius English translations are public-domain research texts; only short necessary wording is quoted. Modern critical editions, translations, scholarship, publisher pages, and Vatican English retain their own rights and are cited or paraphrased. No modern corpus, scan, or substantial quotation is incorporated as project-owned text.

This working biography has internal source, chronology, tradition, and production checks, including settled compilation, log and PDF audit, embedded and subset fonts, complete visual inspection, and byte-identical installation. It has no independent patristic, historical, theological, Hebrew/Greek/Syriac, gender-history, archaeological, art-historical, rights, or ecclesiastical review. The records identify claims requiring critical-edition collation; production quality does not substitute for those reviews and does not by itself authorize distribution. Exact-snapshot distribution status is recorded separately in the release manifest and rights record.

A.6 Detailed chronology

Date	Place	Event and evidence	Status
331 or c. 347	Stridon	Birth to a Christian provincial family; Jerome names his father Eusebius and the Dalmatian-Pannonian border town in <i>De viris illustribus</i> 135.	Competing ancient/modern chronologies
350s/360s	Rome	Grammar and rhetoric under Aelius Donatus; book collecting, classical formation, and visits to martyrs’ memorials.	Relative sequence strong

Date	Place	Event and evidence	Status
c. 358–366	Rome	Baptism, often associated with Liberius’s episcopate.	Range depends on birth chronology
late 360s–early 370s	Trier / Aquileia	Travel, encounter with monastic ideals, and common ascetic circle with Rufinus, Bonosus, Heliodorus, and others.	Approximate
373/374	Antioch	Arrival in the East; illness and loss of companions.	Approximate A
c. 375	Antioch / Chalcis	Fever and Ciceronian dream as later narrated in Letter 22.30.	Event A; exact date reconstructed
c. 375–377	Chalcis region	Ascetic withdrawal, correspondence, Greek/Syriac setting, and beginning Hebrew study.	Networked, not isolated
c. 378/379	Antioch	Ordained presbyter by Paulinus during the schism.	Probable year
c. 379–382	Constantinople	Studies with Gregory of Nazianzus; translates Greek Christian works; council-era presence.	Role at council not precisely documented
382	Rome	Returns with eastern bishops; enters Damasus’s close scholarly service.	Well attested
382–384	Rome	Revises four Latin Gospels against Greek manuscripts.	Secure project; not whole NT
384	Rome	Letter 22 to Eustochium; Roman ascetic and scriptural school flourishes.	Dated A
11 Dec. 384	Rome	Death of Damasus removes principal papal patron.	External chronology
Aug. 385	Ostia / eastern voyage	Leaves Rome amid controversy; Letter 45 and <i>Against Rufinus</i> 3.22 defend the departure.	Event secure; legal characterization disputed
385–386	Palestine / Egypt	Paula and Eustochium travel; biblical pilgrimage and Egyptian monastic visits.	Principally Letter 108 A
386	Bethlehem	Men’s and women’s communities and pilgrim hospitality established through Paula’s resources.	Strong A/M; roles distinguished
late 380s	Bethlehem	Greek-based Psalm work and first commentaries; deeper Hebrew study and textual collection.	Project sequence approximate
c. 390–405	Bethlehem	Hebrew-based translations of most Old Testament books, with distinct methods and prefaces.	Book dates vary
392/393	Bethlehem	Completes <i>De viris illustribus</i> , ending with his own work list.	Strong date range
393	Bethlehem	Writes <i>Against Jovinian</i> ; Roman allies contest its treatment of marriage.	Dated controversy
393–397	Palestine	Conflict with John of Jerusalem and Epiphanius over Origen and jurisdiction.	Documented, partisan dossiers
c. 394–405	Hippo / Bethlehem by correspondence	Early Augustine exchange over Galatians and biblical translation; letters circulate unevenly.	Dual numbering; dates refined by letter
398–402	Rome / Aquileia / Bethlehem	Rufinus controversy over Origen’s works, translation, and personal authority.	Well documented; mutually hostile
26 Jan. 404	Bethlehem	Paula dies; Jerome composes Letter 108 to Eustochium.	Strong A date
406	Bethlehem	Writes <i>Against Vigilantius</i> on relics, vigils, alms, and asceticism.	Dated polemic
410–411	Rome / Bethlehem	Sack of Rome, refugee crisis, Marcella’s death, and Jerome’s Letter 127.	Sequence strong; letter is memorial
c. 415–417	Bethlehem	Writes dialogue against Pelagian positions; alliance with Augustine deepens.	Dating varies
416–417	Bethlehem / Rome	Augustine, Innocent, and Jerome report serious violence and burned monastic buildings; Innocent also records the absence of named charges.	Destruction converges; casualties, perpetrator, command, adjudication, and aftermath unresolved

Date	Place	Event and evidence	Status
late 418 / early 419	Bethlehem	Eustochium dies; younger Paula and community continue.	Critical reconstruction; exact date open
30 Sept. 419 or 420	Bethlehem	Jerome dies; 420 is official Catholic reception, while 419 persists in critical chronology.	Year disputed; day received
1546	Trent	Council receives the old Latin Vulgate as authentic for ecclesial public use.	M; not whole-Bible authorship ruling
1979	Rome	John Paul II promulgates the <i>Nova Vulgata</i> .	M; revised typical Latin edition
2020	Rome	Francis issues <i>Scripturae Sacrae affectus</i> for the received 1600th anniversary.	M reception

B References

B.1 Jerome and late-antique witnesses actually inspected

- Jerome. Letters 3, 5, 7, 14–16, 19–22, 35–39, 45, 49, 51–52, 57, 84, 108, 125, 127, 130, 138–139; *De viris illustribus* 135; biblical prefaces; *Against Rufinus* 3.22; *Against John of Jerusalem*; *Against Jovinian*; *Against Helvidius*; *Against Vigilantius*; and the *Dialogue against the Pelagians*. English research text: W. H. Fremantle, G. Lewis, and W. G. Martley, trans., in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, vol. 6 (Buffalo, 1893), through New Advent’s Jerome index; accessed 2026-07-16. The translation is public domain; the publication mostly paraphrases it. The short wording from Letter 22.30 is identified as its rendering.
- Jerome. *Prefaces*, especially the Gospel preface to Damasus and the Old Testament prologues, public-domain NPNF translation; accessed 2026-07-16. Prefaces are claims by the translator and are tested against textual history.
- Augustine and Jerome. Letters 28/56, 40/67, 71/75, 73/76, and 82/116, with ancient dual numbering preserved. Public-domain NPNF translation, including Augustine Letter 82 / Jerome 116; accessed 2026-07-16.
- Augustine. *On the Proceedings of Pelagius* 66, public-domain NPNF translation; Innocent I, Letters 136– 137; and Jerome, Letters 138– 139; accessed 2026-07-17. Used for the reported 416 attack; their convergence does not supply a casualty register, complete legal dossier, or neutral attribution of perpetrators and command.
- Rufinus of Aquileia. *Apology against Jerome* 2.5–6, 32–44, trans. William Henry Fremantle, in NPNF, second series, vol. 3, public-domain research text; accessed 2026-07-17. Used as a partisan reciprocal witness to the Ciceronian dream, ascetic rhetoric, Hebrew project, and Origenist dispute.
- Jerome. *Life of Paul* 1; *Life of Hilarion* 1; and *Life of Malchus* 1–2, trans. W. H. Fremantle in NPNF, second series, vol. 6, Paul, Hilarion, and Malchus; accessed 2026-07-17. Used for Jerome’s literary programs and report-frames, not as uncorroborated event history of their subjects.
- Adomnán. *De locis sanctis* 2.5, trans. Denis Meehan, CELT edition; accessed 2026-07-17. Used for Arculf’s late-seventh-century report of a Jerome tomb at Bethlehem, not a burial or relic-custody chain.
- John Moschus, *Spiritual Meadow* 107; the ninth-century Jerome life *Plerosque nimirum*; and Jacobus de Voragine, *Golden Legend*, life of Jerome, in William Caxton’s public-domain rendering, online text. Transmission was checked through Filomena Giannotti, “Saint Jerome’s Posthumous Life: Aspects of His Reception in the Twentieth Century,” *Clotho* 3, no. 2 (2021): 115–127, article DOI; accessed 2026-07-17. Used to show that the *Golden Legend* transmitted rather than invented the Jerome lion cycle; the proposed name-confusion route remains a reconstruction. The modern analysis is paraphrased; no reuse license is inferred from online access.
- Sulpicius Severus. *Dialogue* 1.8–9, public-domain NPNF translation; accessed 2026-07-16. Used for a visitor’s praise of the Bethlehem scholar, not a neutral work diary.
- Palladius. *Lausiac History* 36.6–7 and 41.2. Trans. W. K. Lowther Clarke (London: SPCK, 1918), public-domain English text; accessed 2026-07-16. Used as hostile Origenist counter-witness, not transparent access to Jerome’s motives.

B.2 Official Catholic reception actually inspected

- Benedict XVI. General Audiences, 7 November 2007 and 14 November 2007; accessed 2026-07-15. These catecheses are M and themselves preserve a 419–420 death range.
- Francis. Apostolic Letter *Scripturae Sacrae affectus* (30 September 2020); accessed 2026-07-16. Used for current Catholic reception, its exact ancient loci, collaborative emphasis, official 420 commemoration, and explicit identification of cardinal dress as anachronistic. Vatican English remains third-party wording and is paraphrased.

B.3 Modern critical work actually used

- Houghton, H. A. G. *The Latin New Testament: A Guide to Its Early History, Texts, and Manuscripts*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 31–35. Open-access edition under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0; book DOI. Relevant pages were inspected on 2026-07-15 and are paraphrased, not reproduced. They control the Gospel-revision and non-Jerome New Testament claims.
- Salvesen, Alison G. “Deuterocanonical and Apocryphal Books.” In Alison G. Salvesen and Timothy Michael Law, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Septuagint* (Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 384–402, chapter DOI. The chapter was inspected on 2026-07-15 for Jerome’s prologues and the larger Greek/Latin canon setting; copyrighted prose is not reproduced.
- Canellis, Aline. “L’héritage du latin chrétien: la réception de Jérôme à la Renaissance,” teaching handout (École de Néolatin, 2016), PDF. Accessible chronology consulted 2026-07-16 only for the explicitly qualified 347/419–420 scheme and late-418/early-419 placement of Eustochium’s death.

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