

LABOR TAM UTILIS: SALLUST IN AUGUSTINE ON THE VULGATE

Abstract

Though the famous correspondence between Augustine and Jerome has recently been the object of much scholarly attention, commentators have failed to identify the reminiscence of Sallust's *Jugurtha* (4,3: *tam ... utili labori*) which Augustine employs in *epist.* 71,6 in order to acclaim Jerome's "Vulgate" text of the Gospels; the same phraseology is again echoed by Augustine in the same connection at *epist.* 82,35. Augustine's use of this Sallustian language would seem to have been suggested by Jerome's own allusion to the same passage of the *Jugurtha* in the preface to his LXX Job.

The celebrated exchange of letters between Augustine and Jerome presents a fascinating picture of the disparate aims and temperaments of two of the Doctors of the Church. This correspondence has recently been the subject of a large number of substantial studies. In this connection reference may be made to the work of White,¹ Hennings,² and Fürst, who besides a monograph³ has also produced a 2-volume edition of the correspondence.⁴ This latter *opus magnum* equips the letters with a "sehr reichhaltige[n] Kommentierung", thanks to which "die Korrespondenz zum erstenmal richtig erschlossen [wird]".⁵ The Augustinian letters at issue in the present article have recently been supplied with a critical text by Daur, who also furnishes a comprehensive *apparatus fontium*.⁶ A new and fully annotated translation of these epistles of Augustine has likewise been made

¹ C. White, *The Correspondence (394-419) between Jerome and Augustine of Hippo* (Studies in the Bible and Early Christianity, 23), Lewiston-Queenston-Lampeter, 1990.

² R. Hennings, *Der Briefwechsel zwischen Augustinus und Hieronymus und ihr Streit um den Kanon des Alten Testaments und die Auslegung von Gal. 2,11-14* (Supplements to *Vigiliae Christianae*, 21), Leiden, 1994.

³ A. Fürst, *Augustins Briefwechsel mit Hieronymus* (Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum, Ergänzungsband, 29), Münster, 1999.

⁴ A. Fürst, *Augustinus – Hieronymus: Epistulae mutuae I-II* (Fontes Christiani, 41/1-2), Turnhout, 2002.

⁵ So the review of Fürst, *Augustinus* by W. Löhr in *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 46 (2003), 182-186, on 183.

⁶ K. D. Daur, *Sancti Aurelii Augustini epistulae LVI-C* (CCSL, 31A), Turnhout, 2005.

available by the *Augustinian Heritage Institute*.⁷ The latest contribution is an article by Squires in the present journal.⁸ The aforementioned review of Fürst's most recent work states: "Der Kommentar... erschliesst dem Leser in bewundernswerter Fülle die Feinheiten einer Zitat und Anspielung souverän einsetzenden literarischen Hochkultur".⁹ It is therefore unfortunate that like all the rest of this recent scholarship on the correspondence between Augustine and Jerome Fürst's commentary should have failed to identify the echo of Sallust that is the object of the present note.

Labor tam utilis is the title of an important article by Tkacz.¹⁰ These words *labor tam utilis* are the syntagm with which a letter of Augustine to Jerome commends the latter's "Vulgate" version of the Gospels from the Greek: *si quaedam rarissima merito mouent, quis tam durus est qui labori tam utili non facile ignoscat?*¹¹ This very same syntagm had been employed in Sallust's defence of historiography in the preface to the *Jugurtha* (4,3): *ego credo fore qui, quia decrevi procul a re publica aetatem agere, tanto tamque utili labori meo nomen inertiae inponant*. No further instance of the combination of *labor* and *tam utilis* is provided by either the online *Library of Latin Texts* or by the *Patrologia Latina Database*. Augustine was thoroughly familiar with Sallust, who with Cicero, Virgil and Terence made up the *quadriga* of authors on which the educational system of late antiquity was based. In particular Augustine was fascinated by the preface of the *Jugurtha*.¹² As well as being common to Sallust and

⁷ R. Teske, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century II, I: Letters 1-99*, New York, 2001.

⁸ S. Squires, *Jerome's Animosity against Augustine*, in *Augustiniana* 58 (2008), 181-199. Squires' paper detects in the epistolary exchange between Augustine and Jerome the shadow of the third of the four Doctors of the Church, Ambrose. Squires thereby draws heavily on the investigation of the relations between Ambrose and Jerome by N. Adkin: *Ambrose and Jerome: The Opening Shot*, in *Mnemosyne* n. s. 46 (1993), 364-376; id., *Jerome on Ambrose: The Preface to the Translation of Origen's Homilies on Luke*, in *Revue Bénédictine* 107 (1997), 5-14.

⁹ Löhr, rev. of Fürst, *Augustinus*, 183.

¹⁰ C. B. Tkacz, *Labor tam utilis: The Creation of the Vulgate*, in *Vigiliae Christianae* 50 (1996), 42-72.

¹¹ Augustine, *epist.* 71,6 (= [Jerome], *epist.* 104,6).

¹² Cf. H. Hagendahl, *Augustine and the Latin Classics II* (*Studia Graeca et Latina Gothoburgensia*, 20/2), Göteborg, 1967, 637f.; 757. It may be added that such passages from the beginning of a work were especially easy to remember; cf. P. Petit-mengin, *Saint Jérôme et Tertullien*, in Y.-M. Duval (ed.), *Jérôme entre l'Occident et l'Orient. XVI^e centenaire du départ de saint Jérôme de Rome et de son installation à Bethléem. Actes du Colloque de Chantilly (septembre 1986)*, Paris, 1988, 43-59, on 50: "des emprunts incontestables, faits souvent au début ou à la fin d'un traité..., c'est-à-dire aux passages qui restent le mieux gravés dans la mémoire".

Augustine, the collocation *labor tam utilis* is also used by both in a way that is strikingly similar: in each text this phrase occurs as a dative singular at the start of a clause after a generic *qui* followed by a subjunctive. The context is likewise the same: in both passages the reference is to criticism of a work of literature. The conclusion may accordingly be drawn that the syntagm *labor tam utilis* has been appropriated by Augustine from Sallust: this hitherto unidentified echo should be added to the dossier of Augustine's borrowings from the Roman historian.

This Sallustian syntagm would appear to have left a further trace on the correspondence between Augustine and Jerome. A letter which Augustine wrote to Jerome two years later¹³ speaks of people *qui me inuidere putant utilibus laboribus tuis*.¹⁴ Again the reference is to Jerome's biblical translations. This time Augustine's *utilibus laboribus tuis* matches the Sallustian word-order exactly: *utili labori meo*. Furthermore the phrase now ends on each occasion with a possessive adjective: *meo / tuis*. In the present letter Augustine has merely shifted to the plural by a species of *auxesis*,¹⁵ which is no doubt intended to make a favourable impression on the epistle's recipient.

It is perhaps possible to show that Augustine's recourse to this Sallustian phrase in these two letters has been prompted by Jerome himself. The preface to Jerome's version of Job from the LXX had ended with the following sentence: *necnon et illa quae... ita corrupta erant, ut sensum legentibus tollerent, orantibus uobis magno labore correxi, magis utile quid ex otio meo ecclesiis Christi euenturum ratus quam ex aliorum negotio*. Jerome's antithesis between *otium* and *negotium* at the end of this text (*ex otio meo... euenturum... quam ex aliorum negotio*) has clearly come from the preface to Sallust's *Jugurtha* (4,4): *existumabunt... maius... commodum ex otio meo quam ex aliorum negotiis rei publicae uenturum*.¹⁶ It has however been argued recently that Jerome's wording earlier in this sentence (*magno labore... utile*) has been inspired by Sallust's *tanto... utili labori*, which likewise

¹³ For the relative chronology cf. Fürst, *Augustinus*, 15.

¹⁴ Augustine, *epist.* 82,35 (= [Jerome], *epist.* 116,35).

¹⁵ Cf. H. Lausberg, *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik: Eine Grundlegung der Literaturwissenschaft*⁴, Stuttgart, 2008, 145f.

¹⁶ The echo is already registered in A. Luebeck, *Hieronymus quos nouerit scriptores et ex quibus hauserit*, Leipzig, 1872, 119. For a lengthy discussion of Jerome's "Christianization" of this Sallustian antithesis in the present passage of his prologue to Job cf. A. de Vogüé, *Histoire littéraire du mouvement monastique dans l'antiquité I: Le monachisme latin; De l'Itinéraire d'Égérie à l'éloge funèbre de Népotien* (384-396), Paris, 1993, 253-255.

occurs immediately before the antithesis of *otium* and *negotium*.¹⁷ Augustine himself refers to Jerome's version of Job from the LXX shortly before his own echo of the Sallustian *tanto tamque utili labori* in the first of the letters at issue in the present article (71,3). In particular Augustine also refers here to Jerome's use of asterisks and obeli, which had likewise been mentioned by Jerome himself in the sentence of his preface to Job immediately before the one containing his own reminiscence of the Sallustian *tanto... utili labori*. Augustine will certainly have recognized the verbatim echo of Sallust in Jerome's *ex otio meo... quam ex aliorum negotio*.¹⁸ Hence Augustine may also be supposed to have recognized in Jerome's antecedent wording an allusion to Sallust's similarly foregoing *tanto tamque utili labori*. When therefore shortly afterwards in the same letter Augustine himself employs the same Sallustian phrase with the same approbatory reference to Jerome's biblical renderings from the Greek, he may be supposed to have been prompted to do so by Jerome's own use of the very same language.

If Augustine recognized Jerome's allusion to Sallust's *tanto tamque utili labori* in the preface to Job, there may be evidence to show that Jerome in turn recognized Augustine's allusion to the same Sallustian text in letter 71.¹⁹ The Augustinian missive in question was answered by Jerome in the following year with his own letter 112, which begins with the following statement: *taceo de blanditiis, quibus reprehensionem mei niteris consolari*.²⁰ In the previous sentence Jerome himself employs a classical allusion: here Fürst assumes that Jerome has in mind only Augustine's reminiscence of the classics in letter 40,3.²¹ However the sentence immediately preceding Jerome's own echo of the classics in letter 112 refers directly to a statement of Augustine in the very same paragraph as the latter's evocation of Sallust.²² Jerome's resort to the classics in letter 112 may accordingly

¹⁷ Cf. N. Adkin, *Virgil, Eclogues 2 and 10 in Jerome*, in *Eirene* 35 (1999), 102-113, on 107f. In Sallust the two texts are found in directly successive sentences.

¹⁸ Since these words are the very last ones of Jerome's prologue, they will have stamped themselves with particular sharpness on Augustine's mind; cf. Petitmengin, *Jérôme*, 50 (cited in n. 12 above).

¹⁹ Jerome shared Augustine's fascination with the prologue to the *Jugurtha*; cf. H. Hagendahl, *Latin Fathers and the Classics: A Study on the Apologists, Jerome and Other Christian Writers* (*Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis*, 64/2), Göteborg, 1958, 412.

²⁰ Jerome, *epist.* 112,2 (= [Augustine], *epist.* 75,2).

²¹ Fürst, *Augustinus*, 172, n. 201.

²² *Epist.* 71,6; cf. Fürst, *Augustinus*, 172, n. 200.

have been prompted equally by his recognition of this Augustinian allusion to Sallust.²³

Augustine certainly expected that Jerome would recognize his phrase *labor tam utilis* as an echo of Sallust. Such a classical cachet with its double notion of toil and utility in a single terse and canonical formulation was unquestionably meant to flatter, especially since Augustine was thereby signalling his own recognition of Jerome's reminiscence of the same text: he was echoing his correspondent's echo. Such blandiloquence is also intended to gloze over the very slight reservation expressed at the start of this sentence in regard to Jerome's renderings from the Greek: *si quaedam rarissima merito mouent*. It is not therefore surprising that Augustine should have been upset to discover from the brusqueness of Jerome's response (*taceo de blanditiis*)²⁴ that his addressee had not been flattered: Augustine's ploy had accordingly miscarried. In the light of such literary prestidigitation on Augustine's part it will be appropriate to conclude this article by returning to its opening paragraph, where the reviewer of Fürst's commentary on Augustine's correspondence with Jerome was quoted as acclaiming this scholar for making clear "die Feinheiten einer Zitat und Anspielung souverän einsetzenden literarischen Hochkultur".²⁵ The foregoing examination of Augustine's use of the Sallustian phrase *labor tam utilis* would seem to have demonstrated that these epistolary "Feinheiten" were even "feiner" than Fürst has already shown.

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²³ The classical text at issue in *epist.* 112 is from Terence; for a hitherto unidentified echo of Terence in Jerome's immediately antecedent letter to Augustine (105,3) cf. N. Adkin, *Hieronymus Eunuchinus*, in *Giornale Italiano di Filologia* 58 (2006), 327-334, on 329f.

²⁴ Cf. n. 20 above.

²⁵ Cf. n. 9 above.