

***factor, creator, conditor* — OBSERVATIONS ON THE IMPACT OF THE SEPTUAGINT ON THE VOCABULARY OF CREATION IN THE LATIN BIBLE**

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Abstract. The aim of this article is to study the Latin terminology of creation used in the Vulgate and in Jerome’s commentary on the biblical writings. The following questions will be addressed: 1° Which words or word groups are Jerome’s favourite terms when it comes to speaking of God as the creator and the creation? 2° To what extent can we explain these terminological choices against the background of the Greek Bible or an already-existing Latin theological terminology attested in the *Vetus Latina* or in other Latin speaking authors? To what degree is Jerome influenced by the Hebrew biblical text? 3° Is Jerome aware of the specific connotations of the various terms referring to the creator and the creation and, if yes, does he make any observations in this regard?

Keywords: Septuagint, *Vetus Latina*, Vulgate, Jerome, Creation, Latin biblical terminology.

1. Introduction: How to Speak of “Creation” in Latin?

In English and the Romance languages, the nouns meaning “creation”, in its theological meaning, are derived from the Latin term *creatio*: “creation” in English, “création” in French, “creación” in Spanish, “creazione” in Italian, and “criação” in Portuguese. Classical Latin, however, was not familiar with this specific use of the term. In Cicero, e.g., *creatio* refers to the appointment of public officials (*De legibus* 3.10) while *procreatio liberorum* means the procreation of children (*Tusc.* 1.14). It is true that the *Vetus latina*, at least in some manuscripts, translates the Greek noun κτίσις in Heb 9:11 with *creatio*.¹ However, this is apparently an exception. In Jdt 9:17[12]; 16:14, e.g., the same Greek word, κτίσις is rendered with *creatura*.² Perhaps the use of *creatio* for “creation” as a whole, or at least for the process of creation, was not at all self-evident in Latin-speaking

¹ See FREDE (1990) 1393.

² Thus the so-called text C of the *Vetus Latina*, see BOGAERT/HAELEWYCK (2001-2020) 345, 518.

ancient Christianity. Therefore, the problem remains of how to find a terminology that was considered suitable for rendering in Latin the idea of creation, an idea that ultimately originates in the Hebrew Bible.

To shed more light on this question, it is necessary to investigate the works of Jerome († 420 C.E.), translator and commentator of the Bible. What kind of terminology did he use when rendering biblical texts dealing with creation into Latin and when explaining their message to his Latin-speaking audience? To what extent is he influenced, on the one hand, by the principle of translating the *hebraica veritas*?³ And where can we detect some traces of *graeca veritas*, i.e., the influence of the Septuagint, on the other?

The purpose of this brief article is to gain more insight into Jerome's use of the Latin vocabulary of creation. Admittedly, recent research has claimed the importance of an in-depth investigation of the Septuagint, in comparing meticulously the Hebrew and the Greek biblical texts with the aim of describing how the latter transformed the "heritage" of the first. In other words, the question arises of how translators proceeded, to use an expression that goes back to Emmanuel Lévinas, when it comes to "dire les choses juives en grec".⁴ There is no doubt that in the last three decades, biblical research has made great progress in recognising the countless innovations to be found in the Septuagint, both on the level of terminology and of contents.⁵ But it is just as worthwhile to describe how the heritage of the Greek Bible has often been indirectly preserved in the Latin Bible, not only in the *Veteres latinae* but also in the Vulgate.⁶ However, research in this area is still in its infancy.⁷

Within the scope of the present article, it will suffice to quote some selected passages of Jerome's works without claiming to be exhaustive. Bearing in mind that, as a *vir trilinguis*⁸, Jerome was familiar with Greek and Hebrew, let alone Latin, a threefold question arises:

³ For this principle, see Jerome, *Epistula* 106.2 (ed. I. HILBERG [= CSEL 55, 249]): *Sicut autem in novo testamento, si quando recurrimus ad fontem Graeci sermonis [...], ita in veteri testamento, si quando inter Graecos Latinosque diversitas est, ad Hebraicam confugimus veritatem, ut, quicquid de fonte proficiscitur, hoc quaeramus in rivulis.*

⁴ See DORIVAL (1996) 527–528.

⁵ For the state of the art, see e.g. SALVESEN/LAW (2021).

⁶ The fact that Jerome's translation depends sometimes on the Greek text of the Bible and not on the Hebrew text is illustrated by WEIGERT (2016) 223–239.

⁷ See LANG (2023) 5: "Although the Vulgate – the Latin Bible of Western Christianity from antiquity to the twentieth century – has for so long been present in culture, church, research, and teaching, it has been, and still is, neglected in research."

⁸ Jerome, *Adversus Rufinum*, 3, 6 (CCL 53, p. 463): *ego philosophus, rhetor, grammaticus, dialecticus, hebraeus, graecus, latinus, trilinguis.*

a) Which words or word groups are Jerome's favourite terms when it comes to speaking of God as the creator and the creation?

b) Can we explain these terminological choices against the background of the Greek Bible or an already-existing Latin theological terminology attested in the *Vetus Latina* or in other Latin speaking authors? To what degree is Jerome influenced by the Hebrew biblical text?

c) Is Jerome aware of the specific connotations of the various terms referring to the creator and the creation and, if yes, does he make any observations in this regard?

Before answering the above questions in sections 3–4 of this article, it is useful to give a brief overview of some specific features of the Hebrew and Greek terminologies of creation that was available to Jerome in principle at the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 5th century C.E., *i.e.*, when he commented on the Bible and translated it into Latin.⁹

2. The Linguistic Background of the Latin Bible: Hebrew and Greek Terminologies of Creation

Regarding the Hebrew Bible, we can easily distinguish between the specific verb *bārā'*, “to create” (e.g. Gen 1:1; Isa 54:16; Amos 4:13), on the one hand, and a few very common verbs borrowed from everyday life, on the other, namely *'āsāh*, “to make” (Ps 33:6), or *yāšar*, “to form, to shape [*i.e.* like the potter]” (e.g. Isa 45:7; Amos 4:13), furthermore verbs like *kūn*, “to establish” (Deut 32:6; Ps 119:73), *qānāh*, “to form” (e.g. Ps 139:13), and, finally, a series of less frequent words.¹⁰ Surprisingly, terms that could denote God himself as the creator are completely lacking from the Hebrew Bible, except from some participles of the verbs already quoted, e.g. *bōrē'*, “creator” (of heaven in Isa 45:18), *bōrē' æykā*, literally “the one who has created you [*i.e.* the young man]” in Eccl 12:1, *'osæh*, literally “maker” (of heaven and earth) in Ps 146:6, *'osēnî*, literally “the one who created me [= Elihu]” in Job 32:22, and similar forms of the participle of the verb *'āsāh* with enclitic pronouns in Ps 149:2; Isa 17:7; 51:13; 54:5; Prov 14:31; 17:5; and Sir^B 32:13; 47:8. Likewise, concerning the idea of creation, understood either as an action performed by God or as the result of the latter, the Hebrew Bible has no specific word, e.g. a cognate noun of *bārā'*. In the few texts that mention

⁹ For the chronology of Jerome's writings, including his biblical commentaries, see LEANZA (1988) 267–268; FÜRST (2016) 122–125.

¹⁰ For a more exhaustive list of the Hebrew verbs denoting creation, see e.g. ANGERSTORFER (1979) 12; for more detailed observations on the use and the specific meaning of the Hebrew verbs quoted, see e.g. SCHREINER (1995) 133–139.

creation as a whole or single creatures, the various writers speak more generally of God's work, *ma'asæh* (e.g. Eccl 7:13; 8:17; Sir^{BM} 42:15), the work of his hands (e.g. Isa 19:25), "heaven and earth" (e.g. Ps 115:15; 134:3; 146:6), even of "everything", *hakkol*, as in Ps 119:91.

Unlike the authors of the numerous texts of the Hebrew Bible, the Greek-speaking Jewish communities of the Hellenistic era created a specific vocabulary when dealing with the theological issue of creation. To be sure, in the first verse of the Bible, Genesis 1:1, the Septuagint translates the Hebrew verb *bārā'* by the "catch-all verb" ποιέω: ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν. Nevertheless, in the course of the last two centuries B.C.E., the translators and/or authors of the Septuagint books shaped a new vocabulary when dealing with the topic of creation. Among these terms, the most conspicuous is the verb κτίζω, which in non-biblical Greek in general means "to found", namely a city or an important building, as well as the cognate nouns κτίσις/κτίσμα and κτίστης that denote, respectively, the creation and God as the creator.¹¹ Concerning these terms, two ideas deserve attention¹²:

a) The choice of the verb κτίζω, rather than ποιέω, can probably be explained by the translators recognizing in the current use of κτίζω – perhaps intuitively – several connotations that at least did not prevent a certain semantical shift. Thus, the connotations of κτίζω present in non-biblical Greek usage do not recede in favour of a new, specifically biblical meaning of the verb as soon as God becomes its grammatical or logical subject. Rather, both "ingredients" – the biblical and the Greek – form a synthesis insofar as the biblical notions of creation undergo a certain *interpretatio graeca* once they are translated into Greek. Concerning the specific connotations of κτίζω¹³, it should be highlighted that the verb occurs in more or less legendary foundation narratives dealing with the origin of cities in a remote past (e.g. Herodotus, *Hist.* 1.170; 2.99). Leaving aside the question of the historicity of these texts, they have in common the idea that the founding of a city requires a carefully structured procedure. What proves to be essential is a systematic planning and detailed organization of various administrative, financial and technical measures. The founding of a city thus aims at the production of a reality that possesses the characteristics not only of the new but also of the permanent. Moreover, it serves a collective, not just the interests of a

¹¹ For more details with regard to this terminology, see ZIMMERMANN (2007) 348–355; BONS (2022) 78–86.

¹² For the following two paragraphs, see BONS (2011) 207–213.

¹³ For the use of the verb in Greek texts from archaic times until the classical era, see e.g. CASEVITZ (1985) chapters 2–3.

single individual.¹⁴ Hence, the verb κτίζω denotes an activity of which the material, conceptual and organizational dimensions exceed by far those of the everyday work of the craftsman. This may be the reason why the Jewish Hellenistic translators did not choose the verb δημιουργέω, “(to create) by hand, to manufacture”, but κτίζω.¹⁵

b) With the founders of cities mentioned in Greek texts God would have in common that he not only gives the initial impulse for the emergence of his works but also that he carries out his plan with care and authority. Moreover, he assigns to each of his works its specific place and function in the whole of creation. It is precisely the latter idea that is evident from Gen 1:31 where God concludes that everything he had made was very good. This idea is developed elsewhere in the Septuagint, albeit in different contexts and writings. Compared with their Hebrew *Vorlage*, some texts undergo a certain reinterpretation that emphasizes an idea totally absent from the Hebrew biblical text.¹⁶ Thus, the rhetorical question in Ps 88:48b^{LXX} (μη γὰρ ματαίως ἔκτισας πάντας τοὺς υἱοὺς τῶν ἀνθρώπων;) suggests that God did *not* create all humans at random. In fact, the negation μή, added by the translator, requires such a negative answer.¹⁷ In a more systematic way, the idea of meaningfulness of the creation is the topic of chapters 38–40 of the book of Sirach whose Greek translation dates from the second half of the 2nd century B.C.E. Without going into too much detail, just one verse should be emphasized. In Sirach 39:21, the teacher of wisdom admonishes his disciple not to call into question the *raison d'être* of an individual element of the creation. Rather, he invites him to acknowledge that everything has been created for a particular purpose (οὐκ ἔστιν εἰπεῖν· τί τοῦτο; εἰς τί τοῦτο; πάντα γὰρ εἰς χρείας αὐτῶν ἔκτισται).

As regards Jerome, who translated the Hebrew scriptures into Latin some centuries later, we can take for granted that he was not only familiar with the different Hebrew, Greek and Latin versions of the Bible but also open to a wide

¹⁴ Albeit of a more recent date, the biography of Alexander the Great by Plutarch can illustrate the problem insofar as it reflects the information contained in many texts prior to the Septuagint dealing with the issue of the foundation of a city. In his biography of the king of Macedonia, Plutarch explains (*Alex.* 26.4–10) that, after conquering Egypt, Alexander intended to found a large city for a Greek population that was to bear his name. Its exact location – the island of Pharos – was not yet known to the king but was revealed to him in a vision. For the implementation of the plan, the expertise of specialists of various professions was required. They considered the location of the future city on the sea to be suitable as it enabled the construction of a harbour, a prerequisite for flourishing trade. In addition, its hinterland offered the inhabitants enough food, another important criterion for the foundation.

¹⁵ For the question of vocabulary see already Philo, *Somn.* 1.76, who claims that in the case of God, who has created what before had no existence, the noun κτίστης is more fitting than δημιουργός: ὁ θεὸς τὰ πάντα γεννήσας οὐ μόνον εἰς τοῦφανές ἤγαγεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἃ πρότερον οὐκ ἦν, ἐποίησεν, οὐ δημιουργός μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ κτίστης αὐτὸς ὢν. .

¹⁶ For the following biblical texts, see BONS (2022) 80–82.

¹⁷ See BDF, § 427.

range of their linguistic subtleties¹⁸, especially the shifts of meaning between words of various languages, their specific connotations and the textual variants between the biblical texts available to him.

In the following two sections, some selected examples of Jerome's terminology of creation and the corresponding biblical texts will be presented. To describe his approach more precisely it is necessary to take into consideration the following problems: the difficulties of translating an unvocalized Hebrew or Aramaic text; Jerome's own understanding of the Hebrew and Greek biblical texts in the wake of earlier Christian traditions; the explanation of the biblical texts against the background of his own principles of interpretation; and, last but not least, his specific theological convictions.

3. Terms Denoting the Creator and the Creation in Jerome's Writings

3.1 *The Explanation of Ecclesiastes 2:12*

To begin with, it is noticeable that Jerome does not use a uniform vocabulary when speaking of the creator or the act of creation. This can be illustrated by an example taken from one of his first commentaries on an entire biblical book, the *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten* that was completed in 389.¹⁹ The passage at issue is the commentary on Eccl 2:12. In Jerome's translation, the Latin text of the verse reads as follows: *Et respexi ego, ut viderem sapientiam et errores et stultitiam, quia quis est hominum, qui possit ire post regem ante factorem suum?* Obviously, in this quotation, the noun *factor* denotes God as the creator of humans. This rendering is not at all surprising because the relative clause of the underlying Hebrew text has the verb *'āśāh*, "to make". Thus the Masoretic text reads: *'ēt 'āśār k'bār 'āsūhū*, perhaps with the meaning "whom they [i.e. anonymous persons] have already made king [i.e. appointed as king]".²⁰ Admittedly, the Masoretic text is anything but clear. Moreover, we cannot take for granted that Jerome had access to the same text. Nevertheless, while Jerome argues that, in this case, the text of the Septuagint diverges considerably from the *hebraica veritas* (CCL 72, 268: *Multum enim a Septuaginta interpretatione in hoc loco diversus est sensus, i.e.*, the mean-

¹⁸ For more information on this topic, see various recent publications dealing with the philological and linguistical problems Jerome encountered when translating from Hebrew or Greek to Latin, e.g. GRAVES (2007); RICO (2016); FÜRST (2016) 79–83; WEIGERT (2016); GAMBERALE (2021).

¹⁹ For the chronology of Jerome's writings, see note 9.

²⁰ For this interpretation, see e.g. the comments by VÍLCHEZ LÍNDEZ (1994) 203, 206, and SCHWIENHORST-SCHÖNBERGER (2004) 218, 220; for a different interpretation that is based on an emendation of the Hebrew text as it stands, see WEEKS (2020) 428–432.

ing of the Hebrew biblical text)²¹, his own translation of the Hebrew text is not at all far-fetched or completely impossible as has been suggested.²² In fact, the following detail seems not to have been taken into account in the more recent annotated translations of the *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten*²³: while the Masoretic text reads *‘āsūhū*, literally “they have made”, Jerome is likely to have translated another form of the same Hebrew root, vocalizing it differently, i.e. the participle *‘osēhū*, “who has made him [*i.e.* man]”. In so doing, Jerome implicitly identifies the *factor*, “creator”, not only with the *rex*, “king”, but with God himself. This becomes clear from the following explanation (CCL 72, p. 268): *non enim posse hominem tam liquido et pure scire sapientiam creatoris et regis sui, quam scit ille, qui conditor est*. Whoever the king might be in this interpretation – God himself or, what seems more unlikely, Jesus Christ²⁴ – Jerome draws on the principle that human knowledge and wisdom are limited due to *errores*²⁵, humans beings unable to separate folly (*stultitia*) from wisdom (*sapientia*) correctly. God, however, insofar as he is the creator of Wisdom, as appears from Sirach 24:3, is able to have a sort of “full access” to wisdom as a whole.²⁶

As an intermediate conclusion, we can say that Jerome’s explanation of Eccl 2:12 consists in a sort of literal interpretation of the Hebrew text that supposes a vocalization different from that of the future Masoretic text. However, it is difficult to clarify with certainty whether Jerome was aware of the vocalization underlying his own translation. In fact, in this case, he does not quote the Hebrew text in Latin transcription as he does quite frequently in his various biblical commentaries. Likewise, the question remains open as to whether he relied, at least implicitly, on a different interpretation of the Hebrew consonantal text he would have come

²¹ When explaining Eccl 2:12, Jerome does not dwell any more on the Septuagint text of the verse and its possible meanings but only emphasizes the difference between the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible. The Septuagint (τίς ὁ ἄνθρωπος ὃς ἐπελεύσεται ὀπίσω τῆς βουλῆς τὰ ὅσα ἐποίησεν αὐτήν;) does not render the Hebrew word *malək*, “king” but an almost homonymous Aramaic noun, *melkā*, that means “counsel”; see BHQ 18, p. 72*–73*. For the meaning of the Septuagint text of the verse, see the translation by VINEL (2002) 114 (“quel est l’homme qui, après la délibération, l’appliquera en tout ce qu’il a fait?”) as well as her explanations, *ibid.*, 115.

²² Therefore, the following conclusion does not take into consideration the translation technique that Jerome follows here: “D’un texte hébreu et presque aussi obscur [*i.e.* as the Septuagint] ... Jérôme fait ce qu’il peut pour obtenir un sens ...” Ainsi FRY (2001) 109 note 51.

²³ See BIRNBAUM (2014a) 296; BOIRA SALES (2004) 76–77.

²⁴ For this latter interpretation, see BIRNBAUM (2014a) 296 who translates as follows: “Denn der Mensch könne die Weisheit seines Schöpfers und des Königs nicht so zuverlässig und klar kennen, wie sie jener kennt, der ihr Urheber ist.” More likely is the translation by BOIRA SALES (2004) 77 who renders the words in question by “la sabiduría de su creador y rey”. Similarly, FRY (2001) 109, translates as follows : “de la sagesse de son créateur et roi”.

²⁵ The noun *errores* is the rendering of the Hebrew noun *hōlēlōt*, “folly”, understood as a plural form; see BONS (2014) 139–140.

²⁶ For this interpretation, see BIRNBAUM (2014a) 296; see also *ead.* (2014b) 37.

across at the end of the 4th century C.E. Finally, Jerome’s interpretation is not at all based on the Septuagint insofar as he does not take into consideration the Greek text of the verse, not even for developing a spiritual sense of the verse in question.²⁷ Anyhow, the interpretation of the verse shown above allows Jerome to introduce the topic of creation, both of the individual and of Wisdom as creature *par excellence*. In this case, Jerome’s Latin translation of the biblical text is in line with the Hebrew textual tradition that reads the verb *‘āsāh*, “to make”. This explains the rendering *factor* although this word does not at all correspond to the Masoretic vocalization *‘āsūhū*. Anyhow, the only two nouns Jerome uses in his explanation of Eccl 2:12 are *creator* and *conditor*, obviously two divine epithets. To be sure, we cannot rule out the possibility that Jerome’s concern was to avoid a repetition of the same word²⁸, *factor*. Nevertheless, the question arises as to whether both Latin terms are used synonymously or whether Jerome is aware of the different connotations that each of them could have conveyed, at least for readers in Late Antiquity. To answer these questions, it is necessary to study some more quotations in Jerome’s works, especially in his commentaries.

3.2 *The Explanation of Ecclesiastes 12:1*

The topic of the creation of the individual occurs once more in Ecclesiastes 12:1, a verse that is part of the last and longest exhortations to joy in the whole book (Eccl 11:8–12:7).²⁹ As a sort of ultimate crescendo,³⁰ the teacher of wisdom, hidden behind the name of “Qohelet” or “Ecclesiastes”, admonishes his addressee to enjoy his youth before the discomforts of advanced age cloud the joy of life. Jerome’s Latin translation of the verse in question reads as follows (CCL 72, p. 351): *et memento eius qui creavit te in die iuventutis tuae, antequam veniant dies malitiae et propinquent anni, in quibus dices: non est mihi voluntas in eis*. The phrase at issue in this Latin translation is *qui creavit te*, perfectly corresponding to the Hebrew *bôr^e ‘ékā*, “the one who has created you”, participle of the verb *bāra’*, “to create”, with enclitic personal pronoun. In fact, in the Masoretic text, the first part of the verse reads as follows: *ûz^ekôr ‘æt-bôr^e ‘ékā bîmê b^ehūrôtékā*, “and remember your creator in the days of your youth”. In the Septuagint, we find the verb already mentioned above, κτίζω, the term that in Jewish Hellenistic literature eventually becomes the specific term denoting the act of creation, or, more precisely, the

²⁷ For the interplay of literal and spiritual interpretations in Jerome’s *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten*, see e.g. MORENO GARCÍA/BOIRA SALES (1997) 245–249.

²⁸ For Jerome’s tendency to avoid repetitions, see RICO (2016) 112–113.

²⁹ Other topics of Jerome’s commentary on this passage are studied by SHANZER (2014); BIRNBAUM (2014a) 395–401.

³⁰ For the importance of this last invitation to joy in the structure of the entire book, see especially PINÇON (2008) 117–126.

orist participle κτίσας which means the creator (see also, e.g., 3 Macc 2:3; Josephus, *Bell.* 3.369): καὶ μνήσθητι τοῦ κτίσαντός σε. Once again, in his commentary on the verse, Jerome refrains from using the same terminology as in the translation. In this case, rather than using *creator*, he opts for another noun, *conditor* (CCL 72, p. 351): *semper memento conditoris tui et sic adolescentiae viam gradere, ut mortis ultimae recorderis, antequam tibi tempus adveniat, quo tristia quaeque succedant*. Leaving aside the motif of *memento mori* that Jerome introduces here in his explanation of the exhortation to joy, the fact that he opts for the Latin rendering *conditor* is not at all surprising. Indeed, whether it be consciously or unconsciously, Jerome appears to be influenced by nothing else than the Septuagint rendering of the verse insofar as the verb κτίζω in non-biblical Greek means “to found”. Consequently, the fitting Latin translation of the word “founder” or “the one who has founded”, κτίσας, would be nothing else than the noun *conditor*. As the next example will show, the use of *conditor* as a noun denoting the creator is not at all restricted to the explanation of Ecclesiastes 12:1.

3.3 *The Explanation of Galatians 3:2*

In Galatians 3:2, the apostle Paul addresses his readers with the question of whether they had received the Spirit from the works of the Law or from the faith they received by hearing (ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως; CCL 77A, 68: *ex auditu fidei*). In this context, Jerome quotes a possible objection that somebody could raise against the idea of faith coming from hearing only (*ibid.*, 69): how could people who are born deaf become Christians? In his answer, Jerome alludes to an argument borrowed from the Holy Scriptures (see especially Wis 13:1–9; Rom 1:20–23): God can be known from his creatures with the help of reason (CCL 77A, 69): *Deum quippe patrem ex magnitudine et pulchritudine creaturarum potest quis intelligere, et a conditionibus conditor consequenter agnoscitur*. In this passage, Jerome appears to use synonymously *creaturae* and *conditiones*, i.e., the creatures whose beauty allows the conclusion that they have been made by God who is once more described as *conditor*. Interestingly, the Latin verb *condere* does not appear in this context. However, the noun *creator* appears in a similar context, namely in an allegorical interpretation of Matt 25:16, 20, the Parable of the Talents. In these verses Jesus speaks of the slave to whom his master had entrusted five talents and who has made five more. According to Jerome, the slave had received a knowledge not only of earthly, visible and perishable realities but also of the invisible and eternal world, thus recognizing the creator from the creatures (CCL 77, 239–240: *ex creaturis intelligens Creatorem*³¹). Be that as it may, the question arises as to whether Jerome employs the nouns *creator* and *conditor* as well as the cognate

³¹ For this passage, see the commentary by SCARDIA (2022) 556; see also Jerome, *Comm. Ps.* 18.2 (FChr 79, 112) where Jerome explains Ps 18:2 *caeli enarrant gloriam Dei* as follows: *ex creaturis consequenter creator agnoscitur*.

words synonymously or whether he is aware of some slightly different connotations they might have.

4. The Connotations of the Latin and the Greek Vocabulary of Creation

The passages of Jerome's *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten* cited previously do not provide reflections on the Hebrew biblical text and on the question of how to translate the Hebrew text into Latin correctly. The scenario is completely different in Jerome's explanation of Proverbs 8:22 and of some New Testament quotations. In fact, as *trilinguis*, Jerome was capable of weighing up carefully the possible Latin equivalents of a given Hebrew or Greek term and of arguing in favour of one option instead of another.

4.1 The Explanation of Proverbs 8:22

This verse is one of the key Old Testament texts quoted by the Church Fathers for christological purposes³² since Wisdom, mentioned as the first work of creation, is soon identified with Jesus Christ (see e.g. Origen, *Princ.* 1.2.1). Jerome quotes the verse in Latin in various contexts of his writings³³, not without referring to the *hebraica veritas* (cf. *Comm. Mich.* [CCL 76, 474]; *Comm. Eph.* [PL 26, 471]). More detailed, however, is Jerome's explanation of the Hebrew text in his *Epistula* 140, § 6, written probably in the year 418, where he firstly provides the Latin translation of the quotation (CSEL 56, 275):

*dominus creavit me initium viarum suarum in opera sua,
ante saeculum fundavit me, in principio, antequam terram faceret et abyssos,
priusquam procederent fontes aquarum, priusquam montes firmarentur,
ante omnes colles generat me.*

The quotation of the Latin text is commented upon as follows:

*nullum autem debet verbum creationis movere,
cum in hebraeo non sit 'creatio', quae dicitur 'bara', sed 'possessio'.
ita enim scriptum est: adonay canani bresith dercho,
quod in lingua nostra exprimitur³⁴:
'dominus possedit me initium viarum suarum'
inter possessionem autem et creationem multa diversitas est:*

³² For a brief overview of some important passages, see D'HAMONVILLE (2000) 208; furthermore DOWLING (2002) passim.

³³ For these various passages, see also BURNEY (1926) 172–173.

³⁴ In his *Commentarius in Michaeam*, Jerome explains the Hebrew verb as follows (CCL 76, 474): *canani enim non creavit me, sed possedit me habuitque, significat.*

possessio significat, quod semper filius in patre et pater in filio fuerit, creatio autem eius, qui prius non erat, conditionis exordium.

In his comment, Jerome emphasizes that the Hebrew text of the verse does not read a verb with the meaning “to create”, namely *bārā*, but another one, *qānāh*, “to acquire, to possess”, in Jerome’s Latin transcription *canani*, “he has possessed me”.³⁵ Hence, the Hebrew text would mean that God has “possessed” rather than “created” Wisdom. As long as the verse is not understood as alluding to the relationship between God, Father, and the Son, the problem of translation is of secondary interest. However, what is at stake here is the divine nature of Jesus Christ, identified with Wisdom. As Jerome argues, the difference between the two ideas is that, in the first case, *possessio*, there is no temporal sequence (cf. the word *semper*) in the relationship between God, the Father, and the Son. In the second case, however, *creatio* would mean that something comes into being that previously did not exist. Concerning the nature of Jesus Christ, this idea is implicitly ruled out insofar as the “Son was always in the Father and the Father in the Son” (*quod semper filius in patre et pater in filio fuerit*).³⁶ On the other hand, as Jerome concludes, *creatio* means the *conditionis exordium*.

Before getting to the topic of *conditio*, there is still one open question to be answered: why does Jerome underline the fact that the Hebrew biblical text does not read the *verbum creationis*? My contention is that Jerome himself and his contemporaries were probably familiar with the Greek textual tradition that obviously diverges from the Hebrew text: κύριος ἔκτισέν με ἀρχὴν ὁδῶν αὐτοῦ εἰς ἔργα αὐτοῦ. This is not only the textual variant attested by the majority of textual witnesses of the Septuagint but also the one quoted by the Church Fathers as shown by various passages (e.g. Justin, *Dial.* 61.3; Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 1.19.111). However, the variant ἐκτίσαστο, that occurs in Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion and in the late Codex Venetus³⁷, can best be explained by the tendency of adapting the Greek biblical text to the alleged meaning of its Hebrew source. In other words, aware of a possible discrepancy between the Septuagint and the Hebrew biblical text, *i.e.*, between the ideas of creation and possession, these revisions of the Septuagint aimed at making sure that the correct meaning of Proverbs 8:22 was “the Lord acquired/possessed me”.

³⁵ In modern biblical exegesis, the meaning of the verb *qānāh* in Prov 8:22 is still debated. Nevertheless, the majority of scholars plead for the meaning “to create” rather than “to acquire”, “to possess”; see e.g. SCHIPPER (2018) 574.

³⁶ In his *Commentarius in Epistolam ad Ephesios*, Jerome explains the difference between creation and possession as follows: *inter ‘possessionem’ autem, et ‘creationem’ multa distantia est: quia qui possidetur, is utique qui est atque subsistit, et est proprius possidetur* (PIERI [1997], 45).

³⁷ For the text-critical problems of Prov 8:22 and its various ancient textual witnesses, see e.g. FOX (2015) 156–157.

4.2 *The Explanation of Ephesians 2:10*

The first words of Ephesians 2:10, in Latin translation *ipsius enim sumus factura, creati in Christo Iesu in operibus bonis*, prompt Jerome to some reflections on the vocabulary of creation. The following observations refer to a section in his *Commentarius in Ephesios* (PL 26, 470³⁸) that dates from 386 C.E.³⁹ Jerome proceeds in three steps. In a first step, he seeks to explain the use of *factura*, a term that, as he argues, has a rather generic meaning: *Ipsius enim factura sumus, hoc est, quod vivimus, quod spiramus, quod intelligimus et credere possumus, ipsius est, quia ipse conditor noster est*. That means that human existence – beginning from the mere biological functions working up to the intellectual capacities and even faith – has only one cause: God is our creator, *conditor noster*. In a second step, Jerome claims that *factura* is a more fitting term than *plasmatio* because the latter denotes the more “technical” aspect of creation, *i.e.*, drawing from mud (*‘plasmatio’ quippe originem de terrae limo trahit*). By contrast, as Jerome argues, *factura* is more generic insofar as it refers to the creation of humans in the image of God (*factura vero juxta similitudinem et imaginem Dei sumpsit exordium*). That *factura* includes the rather “manual” *plasmatio*, is further confirmed by Psalm 118:73, *Manus tuae fecerunt me, et plasmaverunt me*. As could be inferred from the word order *fecerunt – plasmaverunt*, the first of the two terms, *factura*, occupies the first place, not *plasmatio*, which is the second (*factura primum locum tenet, deinde plasmatio*). Yet, the use of the verb *creare* in Eph 2:10 (*creati in Christo Iesu*) requires an explanation. This leads to the third step. While *factura* as a noun seems fitting in these contexts, this is obviously not the case for the verb *facere*. On the contrary, just as the nouns *creatio* and *conditio* are associated with works of paramount importance, the corresponding verbs refer to the foundation of a city or to the creation of the world from the very beginning (*Et quia ‘creationis’, et ‘conditionis’ nomen ad magna semper solet opera copulari, verbi causa: ‘illa urbs condita est’, et ‘ab initio creatus est mundus’*).⁴⁰

4.3 *The Explanation of Ephesians 4:24*

In the light of the passages quoted in the previous paragraph, one might be tempted to conclude that Jerome employs two word groups synonymously: *creare*, *creator*, and *creatio*, on the one hand, and *condere*, *conditor*, and *conditio*, on the

³⁸ A critical edition of this comment is available in the doctoral dissertation by PIERI (1997). For the texts quoted see *ibid.*, 44–45.

³⁹ See FÜRST (2016) 124.

⁴⁰ In Deut 4:19, in the context of the creation of stars, Jerome renders even the Hebrew verb *hālaq*, “to allot”, with *creavit ... in ministerium*; for a careful interpretation of the Latin translation and its underlying interpretation, see WEIGERT (2016) 162–169.

other. However, this is not the case, as can be illustrated by his reflections on Ephesians 4:24. The phrase that attracted Jerome's attention is – in Latin translation – *et induite novum hominem qui secundum Deum creatus est*, a rather faithful rendering of the Greek text that reads καὶ ἐνδύσασθαι τὸν καινὸν ἄνθρωπον, τὸν κατὰ θεὸν κτισθέντα. The translation of the verb κτίζω by *creare* prompts Jerome to study in more detail the differences between the two words (PIERI [1997], 95):

Qui secundum deum creatus est, non idipsum sonat in latino sermone quod graeco: 'creatio' quippe apud nos 'generatio' vel 'nativitas' dicitur: apud Graecos vero sub nomine 'creationis' verbum 'facturae' et 'conditionis' accipitur; et quod apud nos 'conditio', hoc apud Graecos 'creatio' sonat ... Considerandum igitur quia 'creatio' atque 'conditio' numquam nisi in magnis operibus nominentur; verbi causa: 'mundus creatus est', 'urbs condita est'; domus vero, quamvis magna sit, 'aedificata' potius dicitur quam 'condita', vel 'creata'. in magnis enim operibus atque facturis, verbum creationis adsumitur.

Bearing in mind the meaning and the specific connotations of κτίζω and the cognate nouns, it is possible to understand this long quotation as follows. To begin with, Jerome is aware of the different connotations of the Latin and the Greek words in question. While, in Latin, *creatio* refers to procreation or birth, the corresponding Greek words, κτίζω and the noun κτίσις, refer to the foundation of something. Nevertheless, both *creatio* and *conditio* are fitting terms only with reference to *magna opera*, e.g. the world that is “created” or a city that is “founded”. By contrast, a house, even a large one, is only “built” but not “founded” or “created”.

In conclusion, Jerome points out that both verbs, κτίζω and *creare* as well as the respective cognate words, allegedly convey the same meaning. However, on closer inspection, it turns out that κτίζω, albeit employed in contexts of creation, bears the traces of its original use, *i.e.*, the context of foundation. Nevertheless, just as κτίζω undergoes a shift of meaning in biblical Greek, in biblical Latin, the verb *creare*, whose original meaning is “to beget”, “to give birth”, is provided with a new meaning whose grammatical or logical subject is God: “to create”.

5. Concluding Remarks and Open Questions

The aim of this brief study was to examine some key terms of Jerome's vocabulary of creation as occurring in selected passages taken from his biblical commentaries. At the end of this article, it is necessary to draw attention to open questions and to outline some avenues for further research.

In the *Vetus Latina*, the first verse of the Bible (Genesis 1:1) reads as follows: *In principio fecit Deus caelum et terram*. Jerome, however, seeks to avoid everyday language. Rather, as he argues, *in magnis operibus* a specific vocabulary is to be preferred, e.g. *creare* or *condere*. Accordingly, the Vulgate translates the

verb in question by *creavit*: *in principio creavit Deus caelum et terram*. In a certain sense, the evolution that can be observed in the Septuagint might be compared to Jerome's own choices. While, in the Septuagint, the first verse of the Bible still reads ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν, the Jewish Hellenistic translators opted more and more for the verb κτίζω when translating passages of the books of the Prophets (e.g. Hos 13:4^{LXX}) and the Psalms (e.g. Ps 32:9; 88:13^{LXX}) dealing with creation. Likewise, Josephus, *Ant.* 1.27, reads: ἐν ἀρχῇ ἔκτισεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν.

Be that as it may, it would be interesting to investigate in depth the history of the Christian usage of the terms analysed in this article. In fact, the question arises as to what extent Jerome's terminological options can be adequately explained against the background of authors or texts available to him, e.g. the *Vetus Latina* or other Christian literature in the Latin language. If not, can we observe an evolution in the usage of specific terms? One example might suffice: in Tertullian's works, the specific theological meaning of the noun *conditor* is not yet self-evident because the object of the "foundation" has to be made explicit in order to be understood correctly, e.g. when he criticises the fact that humans are tempted to worship all sorts of idols instead of their creator, the creator of everybody (*Idol.* 4.2: *Omnia igitur colit humanus error praeter ipsum omnium conditorem*).⁴¹ In Jerome's works, however, the use of *conditor* as a divine epithet seems to be more established. *Mutatis mutandis*, similar questions arise concerning *creare* and the cognate nouns as well as the question as to whether these terms continue to convey some connotations of the ancient Greek foundation background.

* * * * *

This article is dedicated to my colleague Erik Eynikel, Universität Regensburg, Germany, who in more than thirty-five years of teaching and research in Belgium, the Netherlands, the United States and Germany has made a major contribution to biblical and religious studies. Organizer of international networks like "Teaching Religion in a Multicultural Society" around two decades ago, he recognised the need for an interdenominational, interreligious and transnational programme that addresses the role of religions in our countries, but also the conflicts that arise from religions. His linguistic skills, which go far beyond the so-called biblical languages, allow him to look at the biblical texts and their messages from a new perspective time and again. With his numerous publications, he has

⁴¹ See the observation by BRAUN (1977) 355–356: "Aussi le vocabulaire de la cité [i.e. conditor as founder of a city] répugnait à entrer dans certaines associations pour marquer l'idée nouvelle que le christianisme lui communiquait. Là encore la valeur ancienne du mot était propre à en retarder l'utilisation théologique."

shown more than enough that biblical philology is not an *ancilla theologiae* or even an optional occupation but is indispensable for making the biblical texts accessible.

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