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JEROME'S DREAM AND THE BOOK OF DANIEL¹

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Abstract. Recently Smolak has argued that in the famous account of Jerome's dream (Epist. 22,30,2) the *propheta* whose language put him off is Daniel. This passage is also connected by Smolak with Jerome's later reference to Daniel's *clarus sermo* (Epist. 53, 8,16): in Smolak's view Jerome is here claiming that he has now come to an understanding of Daniel's "stilistische Klarheit". The present article endeavours to refute both of these cases.

Kurt Smolak is a patristician of great distinction.² He concludes a recent and valuable article on Jerome's activity as a translator by giving specific attention to his treatment of the book of Daniel.³ Here Smolak considers a passage from the famous Hieronymian epistle that supplies Paulinus of Nola with a synopsis of every biblical book: from the eighth century onwards this conspectus assured for the letter in question (53) a place as a general preface to the entire Bible.⁴ Smolak finds that Jerome's discussion of the four Major Prophets reserves for Daniel the tribute of achieving "stilistische Klarheit": *claro sermone* (Epist. 53,8,16). This verdict strikes Smolak as "sicher eine provokante Feststellung", since he considers it "höchstwahrscheinlich" that Daniel is the *propheta* whose language had been said in Jerome's celebrated account of his dream to have on the contrary put him off (Epist. 22,30,2): the change of attitude is due to Jerome's study of Aramaic, in which Daniel is partly written. Further support for this interpretation is found in the occurrence of "eine Aussage über sprachliche Dunkelheit" in connection with both the *propheta* of the dream and with the Vulgate version of Daniel.⁵ Smolak concludes that by the contrastive use of

¹ Works are cited according to Thesaurus Linguae Latinae: Index librorum scriptorum inscriptionum. 2nd ed. Leipzig 1990.

² Cf. (e.g.) the review of his Sulpicius Severus: Leben des Heiligen Martin (Vita Sancti Martini). Eisenstadt 1997. by S. Posch. Anz. Altertumswiss. 51 (1998) 55: "[der Rezensent] kann...ein uneingeschränkt positives Urteil abgeben".

³ K. Smolak, Hieronymus als Übersetzer. In: H. Loos (ed.), Athlon: Festschrift für Hans-Joachim Glücklich. Speyer 2005, 131-132.

⁴ Cf. H. Quentin, Essais de critique textuelle. Paris 1926, 131.

⁵ Cf. Jerome, Praef. Vulg. Dan. p. 6,15.

claro sermone Jerome is claiming that Daniel has become stilistically “clear” in both the original and – by implication – in the Vulgate: Jerome is thereby staking a claim to be both *Ciceronianus* and *Christianus* despite the antithetic use of these terms in the dream.⁶ Is Smolak’s interpretation right?

It may in the first place be questioned whether in Letter 53 Jerome is in fact using *claro sermone* as a term of literary criticism in order to denote Daniel’s “stilistische Klarheit”. The full Hieronymian context is the following: *temporum conscius et totius mundi φιλοῖστωρ* (sc. Daniel), *lapidem praecisum de monte sine manibus*⁷ *et regna omnia subvertentem claro sermone pronuntiat*. Here it would seem that Jerome is not talking about the clarity of Daniel’s style, but about the explicitness of his prophecy. Corroboration is conveniently supplied by the amplificatory paraphrase of this statement in the *Praefatio Theodulfiana* to the Vulgate version of Daniel:⁸ *hic* (sc. Daniel) *de Christo cunctorum manifestior prophetarum in prophetia sua claro sermone regna orbis pronuntiat et tempus adventus Christi manifestissima praedicatione adnotat*.⁹ Jerome’s characterization of all four Major Prophets in this passage is in fact concerned exclusively with content: if stylistic commendation were to be applied to any of them, it would not be to Daniel, but to Isaiah.¹⁰ There is accordingly no warrant for Smolak’s belief that Jerome’s use here of *clarus* in connection with Daniel signifies a “klassizistisches Stilideal”: the “clarity” is solely contentual.

Secondly it may be questioned whether Jerome is in fact referring specifically to Daniel when in the famous account of his dream he speaks of *propheta*. Again the context may be cited in full: *itaque miser ego lecturus Tullium ieiunabam; post noctium crebras vigiliis, post lacrimas, quas mihi praeteritorum recordatio peccatorum ex imis visceribus eruebat, Plato*¹¹ *sumebatur in manibus. si quando in memet reversus prophetam legere coepissem, sermo horrebat incultus*. In this connection three points may be made. Firstly the problem of

⁶ Cf. *Epist.* 22,30,4: *Ciceronianus es, non Christianus*.

⁷ The Danieline *lapis* was regularly understood as a reference to Christ; cf. (e.g.) Jerome, *Epist.* 22,19,5: *qui* (sc. Christ) *...lapis praedicatur abscisus de monte sine manibus*.

⁸ *Biblia Sacra* 16: Danihel. Rome 1981, 13.

⁹ Cf. also Jerome, *In Dan. prol.* ll. 14-19: *illud in praefatione commoneo, nullum prophetarum tam aperte dixisse de Christo: non enim solum scribit eum esse venturum, quod est commune cum ceteris, sed quo tempore venturus sit docet, et reges per ordinem digerit et annos enumerat ac manifestissima signa praenuntiat*.

¹⁰ Cf. Jerome, *Praef. Vulg. Is.* p. 3,7-10: *ac primum de Esaia sciendum quod in sermone suo disertus sit, quippe ut vir nobilis et urbanae elegantiae, nec habens quicquam in eloquio rusticitatis admixtum; unde accidit ut prae ceteris florem sermonis eius translatio non potuerit conservare*.

¹¹ Here the MSS are equally divided between the readings *Plato* and *Plautus*, the latter of which has so far been preferred by editors. It would seem however that *Plato* should be adopted instead; cf. the present writer, *Plato or Plautus?* (Jerome, *Epist.* 22,30,2). *Emerita* 62 (1994) 43-56.

biblical language tended to be associated with its heavy reliance on “tropology”.¹² However the first half¹³ of Daniel is straightforward narrative. It is therefore less open to the charge of putting the reader off: the real problem was the other prophetic books. In the second place Jerome’s own preface to his Vulgate version of Daniel remarks that the Jews do not consider this author a “prophet” at all.¹⁴ Given the importance Jerome attached to Jewish opinion in such matters,¹⁵ he is unlikely to have singled Daniel out metonymically as the “prophet”. Finally the singular *propheta* is not in any case being used here to designate one particular author: it is just a “repräsentativer Singular”,¹⁶ which is merely intended to match the similar singulars in the previous sentence.¹⁷

A third objection may be raised to Smolak’s interpretation. This time it concerns the link he perceives between the two “Aussagen über sprachliche Dunkelheit” that Jerome makes when speaking of the “prophet” of his dream and when discussing his Vulgate version of Daniel. Once again both of the pertinent texts may be quoted. In connection with his dream Jerome says: *si quando ...prophetam legere coepissem, sermo horrebat incultus et, quia lumen caecis oculis non videbam, non oculorum putabam culpam esse, sed solis*. In the preface to his translation of Daniel he states: *cum me in linguae huius (sc. Hebrew) pistrinum reclusissem et multo sudore multoque tempore vix coepissem halantia stridentiaque verba resonare et, quasi per cryptam ambulans, rarum desuper lumen aspiceret, inpegi novissime in Danihelem et tanto taedio affectus sum, ut desperatione subita omnem veterem laborem voluerim contemnere*. Smolak is mistaken in believing that Jerome’s use of *lumen* in these two passages constitutes a “stilkritisches Urteil”.¹⁸ In these texts Jerome is not passing judgment

¹² Cf. (e.g.) Augustine, *Doctr. christ.* 4,48: *...de eloquentia prophetarum, ubi per tropologiam multa obteguntur. quae quanto magis translatis verbis videntur operiri...* (cf. *ib.* 50: *prophetas nostros tamquam ineruditos et elocutionis ignaro...contemnunt*).

¹³ Cf. Jerome’s *coepissem*.

¹⁴ *Praef. Vulg. Dan.* p. 9,51 (*non haberi Danihelem apud Hebraeos inter Prophetas*); cf. *Praef. Vulg. reg.* p. 7,3-4.

¹⁵ Cf. *J.N.D. Kelly*, *Jerome: His Life, Writings and Controversies*. London 1975, repr. Peabody, Mass. 1998, 160-161.

¹⁶ Cf. *J.B. Hofmann* and *A. Szantyr*, *Lateinische Syntax und Stilistik*. 2nd ed. Munich 1972, repr. 1997 (*Handb. d. Altertumswiss.* 2,2,2), 13. Reference might also be made to the v. l. *prophetas*, which is printed in Migne, PL 22, 416. In Jerome’s text there is no warrant for the tendentious “am meisten” that Smolak employs in this connection.

¹⁷ *Viz.: Tullium...Plato*.

¹⁸ In this connection Smolak also refers to Jerome’s employment of “Termini...der antiken Rhetorik” in his Vulgate version of Isaiah: “Der Prophet schreibe Kunstprosa (*per cola et commata, admixtum...flore sermonis*) und wird mit Demosthenes und Cicero verglichen”. What Jerome in fact says is the following: *sed quod in Demosthene et Tullio solet fieri, ut per cola scribantur et commata, ...nos quoque utilitati legentium providentes, interpretationem novam novo scribendi*

on the style of the prophet Daniel: the “Dunkelheit” is not Daniel’s, but Jerome’s (*quia lumen caecis oculis non videbam / cum...coepissem...rarum desuper lumen aspicere*). When *à propos* of his dream Jerome speaks of “the light he could not see”, he is in fact talking about the need to put content above form.¹⁹ When on the other hand Jerome’s preface to Daniel speaks of “the light he *could* see”, he is referring to his progress with Hebrew.²⁰ So far therefore from being a “stilkritisches Urteil” on Daniel and the “prophet”, Jerome’s employment of *lumen* in these two passages has nothing whatever to do with either.

A final point may be made. In connection with the *propheta* whom Smolak believes to be Daniel Jerome states in the account of his dream: *sermo horrebat incultus*. Smolak contrasts the phrase *sermo...incultus* with *claro sermone* and associates it with “sprachliche Schwierigkeiten”. The syntagm *sermo...incultus* can however be shown to have no connection with either lack of “stylistic clarity” or with “linguistic difficulty”. The meaning of *incultus* in such a context is made conveniently plain by *Synonyma Ciceronis* (p. 431,19-20): *incomptus, incultus, horridus, sordidus, abiectus*.²¹ Jerome’s account of his dream is merely

genere distinximus (*Praef. Vulg. Is.* p. 3,3-6). It is therefore clear that contrary to Smolak’s assertion Jerome is not comparing Isaiah to Demosthenes and Cicero or claiming that he writes *Kunstprosa*: here Jerome is merely informing the reader that his own translation is arranged *per cola et commata*, as is the case with the classical orators. Smolak is also wrong to link *admixtum* with *florem sermonis*; cf. n. 10 above.

¹⁹ The problem had already been conveniently pinpointed in the preface to his version of Eusebius’ *Chronicle*: *inde adeo venit, ut sacrae litterae minus compta et sonantes videantur, quod deserti homines...dum superficiem, non medullam inspiciunt, ante quasi vestem orationis sordidam perhorrescant quam pulchrum intrinsecus rerum corpus inveniunt* (*Chron. epist.* p. 3,12-18). In his use of the particular term *lumen* Jerome is merely availing himself of a proverbial form of expression; cf. *A. Otto*, *Die Sprichwörter und sprichwörtlichen Redensarten der Römer*. Leipzig 1890, repr. Hildesheim 1962, 326 (no. 1663); *R. Häussler*, *Nachträge zu A. Otto, Sprichwörter und sprichwörtliche Redensarten der Römer*, Hildesheim 1968, 321. For Jerome’s wording as a whole (*quia lumen caecis oculis non videbam, non oculorum putabam culpam esse, sed solis*) reference may be made to the exact analogue in Nilus, *Epist.* 4,19 (on Rom. 1,26: “God gave them up to dishonourable passions”), which is not in Otto or Häussler: *ὡσπερ εἰ τινος εἰπόντος, ὅτι μὴ ὀφθῆις ὁ ἥλιος τὸν ἀνθρώπον τῷ βοθύνῳ ἔρριψεν, οὐχὶ λογιζόμεθα τοῦτο, ὅτι ὁ φωστήρ τὸν μὴ βουληθέντα πρὸς αὐτὸν ἰδεῖν εἰς τὸν βόθυνον ἀπώσατο, ἀλλ’ ὅτι αἰτιὸν ἐστὶ...τὸ μὴ μετέχειν τοῦ φωτός*.

²⁰ Here Jerome’s use of *lumen* (*quasi per cryptam ambulans, rarum desuper lumen aspicere*) is merely a recollection of his youthful experiences in the catacombs of Rome; cf. In Ezech. 40,5 ll. 243-251: *dum essem Romae puer..., solebam...cryptas ingredi,...quia obscura sunt omnia, ut...raro desuper lumen admissum horrorem temperet tenebrarum*. The two instances of *crypta* in this pair of Hieronymian texts are wrongly separated in *Thes. Ling. Lat.* 4 coll. 1260,69-71 and 1261,20-22 (s.v.).

²¹ Cf. also *Thes. Ling. Lat.* 7,1 coll. 1070,42 and 1070,71 - 1071,4 (s.v. *incultus*: “i.q. non ornatus, indecorus, sordidus...speciatim de oratione”). Since this Hieronymian text employs the epi-

an illustration of the conventional caveat against eloquence: *nec tibi disertum velis videri* (*Epist.* 22,29,6). Accordingly Jerome's problem with the *propheta* was not the "linguistic difficulty" of the text, but his own over-concern with rhetorical finesse. The verdict which Jerome heard in his dream was dead on target: *Ciceronianus es, non Christianus*.²²

thet in the clause *sermo horrebat incultus*, reference may also be made to the Thesaurus article on *horreo*: 6,3 col. 2978,46-50 ("de habitu aspero, rudi, incompto...speciatim de sermone"). According to Smolak (*Christentum und römische Welt: Auswahl aus der christlichen lateinischen Literatur 2: Kommentarband*. 2nd ed. Vienna 1991 [Orb. Lat. 1,2], 81) the collocation *horrebat incultus* is a "Metapher aus der Landwirtschaft". There would seem to be no warrant for such an assertion; cf. the Thesaurus articles on both words, esp. the sections just cited. This commentary of Smolak's on Jerome's dream would also appear to be unsatisfactory in some further respects. When Jerome describes his abjuration of the classics, he says (*Epist.* 22,30,5): *ego, qui tanto constrictus articulo vellem etiam maiora promittere*. Here Smolak refers *articulo* to the intercession of the bystanders: he accordingly understands the word to mean "Fürsprache, Gnadenappell" (ib. 80). However the addition of *tanto* would seem to show that here the term is instead being used "de tempore...: subest...nota...necessitatis, periculi"; cf. *Thes. Ling. Lat.* 2 coll. 693,79-694,45 (s.v.), esp. 694,24-25, where the present passage is adduced. When Jerome concludes the account of his dream, he says (*Epist.* 22,30,6): *ita mihi numquam contingat talem incidere quaestionem!* This time Smolak takes *quaestionem* to signify "Verhör, Untersuchung" (ib. 80). Here however Jerome is in fact referring to the antecedent description of the beating: *inter verbera - nam caedi me iusserat* (*Epist.* 22,30,4); cf. *W. Waldstein*, *quaestio 2*. in: *A. Pauly, G. Wissowa and W. Kroll* (edd.), *Real-Encyclopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft* 24 (1963) 786-787 ("*quaestio*...in der Bedeutung 'Folterung'"). For such *verbera* in the *quaestio* cf. *J. Vergote*, *Folterwerkzeuge*. in: *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 8 (1972) 124-125 ("In der Kaiserzeit [wurde] Prügelstrafe...vornehmlich für die *quaestio* verwendet").

²² For "tatsächliche Ciceronianismen in den Werken des Hieronymus" Smolak's concluding footnote refers to the present writer, *Hieronymus Ciceronianus: The Catilinarians in Jerome*. *Latomus* 51 (1992) 408-420. It would however have been more pertinent to cite *id.*, *Biblia Pagana: Classical Echoes in the Vulgate*. *Augustinianum* 40 (2000) 80-81, and *id.*, *Biblia Catilinaria*. *Maia* 55 (2003) 93-98, since here the Ciceronianisms occur in the Vulgate itself.