JESSICA VAN 'T WESTEINDE

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Roman Values and Christian Asceticism for Socialites

Mohr Siebeck

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Dedicated to Petrus Franciscus Leonardus van ’t Westeinde

My beloved father

Who sailed into the west in 2013

Preface

One famous Headmaster once spoke the wise words "it is our choices that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities".[1] Whilst this holds true for Jerome, it applies to the current author, too: Jerome gave up his career in the imperial administration in favour of a life as an ascetic mentor and author of scholarly and spiritual writings. The current author chose an academic path at the cost of a musical career. Similarly, converting a doctorate into an accessible book is a deliberate choice. With this book on Jerome and his Roman aristocratic patrons I wish to offer the reader a glimpse into one tiny aspect of the complex world of the later Roman Empire, and bring it to life. This book is the stage where I present Jerome and his *socialites*. The reader will have to imagine the dramatic music.

The embarkation on the doctoral path marked the start of a long journey which from the beginning had to manoeuvre through rocky waters, at times tortured by temperamental tides that almost shipwrecked the entire mission. An expression of gratitude is therefore in order for those who helped me reach the other shore. First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisors Lewis Ayres and Carol Harrison. Many thanks to Lewis in particular for his confidence in my abilities which helped me get through the last stages of writing and submitting the thesis. Needless to say, this work could not have been completed if it were not for their continued support. Secondly, I would like to thank my examiners Neil McLynn and Robert Hayward for their constructive feedback, instructive remarks, and for the inspiring discussion we had during the *viva voce*. I have tried to follow their suggestions to the best of my abilities (especially for this revised and extended edition). Any flaws that remain are my own. Yet, much of the initial work would not have reached its final form were it not for Markus Vinzent. Markus' refreshing take on texts inspired me greatly, and opened up new avenues for interpreting Jerome's rhetoric. He challenged me profoundly, and together with Jörg Rüpke he inspired me to apply a new methodology to the analysis of Jerome's correspondence with aristocrats. Much gratitude also goes to fellow *Hieronymians* Josef Lössl, Thomas Hunt, Andrew Cain, and Hillel Newman. Many thanks to Éric Rebillard for so generously sharing the proofs of his article "Everyday Christianity in Carthage at the Time of Tertullian",

[1] J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, London: Bloomsbury, 1998.

where he develops a new methodology which proved important to consider in the study of Jerome's Roman aristocrats. I also thank Peter Gemeinhardt, David Hunter, Christopher Nunn, Silvia Georgieva, and Mattias Brand for much valued research conversations. I thank the editors of STAC, Christoph Markschies, Martin Wallraff, and Christian Wildberg for accepting this book in their series, and I thank Klaus Hermannstädter, Elena Müller, Tobias Städler, and the team at Mohr Siebeck for their incredible support. Finally, I owe an expression of gratitude to the one who first sparked my interest in the field, who first taught me – *exemplo suo* – the skills and, more importantly, the love for doing research: Mathijs Lamberigts. He will never forgive me for having abandoned Pelagius for Jerome, but at least I have not become an Augustinian.

Although the road of writing a book can be a solitary and lonesome one, it cannot be achieved without the support of cheering backers on the sideline or the athletes who walk with you for parts of the journey. Many thanks go to Andrew Moss in Durham for being my academic partner in crime, and dear friend: thank you so much for the coffee breaks in Dun Cow Cottage, the rants we could have when faced with research that seemed not to be moving in any direction, but equally the fun and laughter we had; not to forget the cricket matches at Chester-le-Street that proved very welcome breaks from writing. Throughout my time at university Laurens de Rooij has been a stable factor of presence: thank you for your friendship, and I hope our friendship may last wherever (academic) life may take us. Likewise a massive *todah rabah* to my fellow-sufferers at Durham Jewish Society: particularly Ben Kasstan (thank you for being a safe harbour in the tumultuous sea of the last-stage PhD) and Lee Goldfarb. Friday nights reminded us that a good chicken soup is a cure to most ills, even PhD-*mesjoggene*.

Last but not least, I thank my family for their continuous support even at the hardest of times. Special thanks go to my father of blessed memory who, despite everything, convinced me to pursue doctoral studies. I wish he could have lived to see the result. In honour of his memory I dedicate the fruit of these studies to him.

Jessica van 't Westeinde

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Part III: Senior Correspondents

Abbreviations

AJA	*American Journal of Archaeology*
AJS	*American Journal of Sociology*
ANF	*Ante-Nicene Fathers*
BBKL	*Biographisch-bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon* (F.W. Bautz, ed.)
BSNAF	*Bulletin de la Société Nationale des Antiquaires de France*
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina
CH	*Church History*
CIJ	*Corpus Inscriptionum Judaicarum*, 2 vols. (J.B. Frey, ed.)
CIL	*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*
CP	*Classical Philology*
CPL	Clavis Patrum Latinorum
CQ	*The Classical Quarterly*
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
CTh	*Codex Theodosianus*
CV	*Echos du Monde/Classical Views*
CW	*The Classical World*
ECCA	Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity
Ep./Epp.	*Epistula/Epistulae*
ETL	*Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*
Gest. Pel.	*De gestis Pelagii*
Historia	*Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*
ILS	*Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*
JECS	*Journal of Early Christian Studies*
JFSR	*Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*
JLARC	*Journal of Late Antique Religion and Culture*
JMEMS	*Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*
JRS	*Journal of Roman Studies*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
LAA	*Late Antique Archaeology*
LCL	The Loeb Classical Library
LLT-A	Library of Latin Texts, Series A
LRE	*The Later Roman Empire, 284–602*, A.H.M. Jones
MP	*Medieval Prosopography*
NPNF	*Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Fremantle)
NRT	*Nouvelle Revue Théologique*
PCBE	*Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire*
PL	*Patrologia Latina* (J.J. Migne)
PLRE	*Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* (A.H.M. Jones, J.R. Martindale, and J. Morris, eds.)

PTS	Patristische Texte und Studien
REA	*Revue des études augustiniennes*
REL	*Revue des études latines*
RLT	*Roman Legal Tradition*
RRE	*Religion in the Roman Empire*
SC	Sources chrétiennes
SO	Symbolae Osloenses
STAC	Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum
StudPatr	*Studia Patristica*
TJT	*Toronto Journal of Theology*
TSAJ	Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism
WS	*Wiener Studien*

Introduction

"The most distinguished privilege loses its prestige when lavished on a crowd, and dignities themselves become less dignified in the eyes of good men when held by persons who have no dignity."[1] These words of Jerome capture exactly what this book is about: the preservation of the exclusivity of Roman *nobilitas* through appropriation of Christian asceticism to create the perfect 'Christian' *nobilitas*. It is not an appropriation of *nobilitas* for the sake of Christianity, but an appropriation of Christian asceticism for Roman aristocrats so that they can retain their noble superiority in an environment where their senatorial status seems to be in decline. As such, I am turning upside down the approach which perceives Christianity as adopting (and thereby altering) Roman aristocratic values and manners in order to accommodate aristocratic converts. I will show that the careful selection of Christian ascetic elements by these aristocrats into their daily lives forces us to nuance our perception of an otherwise overrated powerful and dominant, institutional Christianity.

What needs to be asked is how 'Christian' was Jerome's model, and how should we understand the social relation between this provincial advocate of asceticism and his aristocratic associates? These are the primary questions of my research project, where I have analysed Jerome and his epistolary correspondence with Roman aristocrats. As such my research concentrates on an individual agent, embodied and embedded in Roman aristocratic society. In other words: it starts from Jerome as an individual agent rather than the more common approach of seeing Jerome as spokesperson of an institution[2] or Jerome wishing for himself to be seen as such yet portraying him as more of a marginal figure.[3] These scholars tend to present an interpretation of Jerome's

[1] *Ep.* 66.7 (CSEL, 54), translation by Fremantle, *NPNF*, 206: "*quamvis clarus honor vilescit in turba: et apud viros bonos indignior fit ipsa dignitas, quam multi indigni possident […]. Quod ante per manus patritias tradebatur, et sola nobilitas possidebat, […] nunc sola militia possidet, et agrestia dudum corpora, fulgens palma circumdat.*"

[2] See for example Michele R. Salzman, "Elite Realities and *Mentalités*: The Making of a Western Christian Aristocracy", in *Arethusa* 33/3 (2000), 347–362, at 355. See also John Curran who refers to Jerome as a churchman: *Pagan City and Christian Capital: Rome in the Fourth Century*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, 316.

[3] It appears Andrew Cain's argument would veer more in that direction, when he states that Jerome is a rather marginal figure yet he fashions himself as a representative of the

advances to the Roman aristocracy as attempts to convert, or to fit these attempts into the 'conversion model'. Instead, my research looks at Jerome's highly idiosyncratic efforts to redefine and, to a certain extent, transform Christian *nobilitas* by adopting the basic notions of Roman *nobilitas*, even though he seems to do the opposite and make Roman nobles adopt a Christian form of life.[4] Of course, the process is intertwined, and becomes more complex, taking into account the various differing backgrounds of the noble people with whom Jerome interacts. It emerges that Jerome's modelling of Christian *nobilitas* allows his patron-students to retain *nobilitas* in the old Roman sense, and even restores the traditional Roman understanding of it within a new and slowly emerging Christian framework which contrasts with the recent changes that had been brought by the emperor to the *clarissimate* and had triggered a devaluation of the 'original' aristocracy.[5] Although 'the institution' and Christian tradition have been eager to emphasise a radical rupture between the former Roman 'pagan' state and highlighted conversion to Christianity, between the old life of abundance, luxury, and status in contrast to asceticism, I argue that reality was much more complex and that the example of Jerome, formerly used as an example *par excellence* for this model of a Christianity of discontinuity,[6] offers in fact insight into the

'orthodox' Christian institution, *The Letters of Jerome: Asceticism, Biblical Exegesis, and the Construction of Christian Authority in Late Antiquity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, especially 130ff. Similarly, Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012, 260.

[4] John Curran appears to have accepted Jerome's rhetoric and contrasts those aristocrats whom Jerome (and others) successfully 'converted' with their more moderate Christian peers; see chapter 7 of his *Pagan City*.

[5] This is exactly what Jerome is alluding to in the segment quoted at the beginning. For imperial changes, see Michele R. Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy: Social and Religious Change in the Western Roman Empire*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002, esp. 178ff. See already Stefan Rebenich, *Jerome*, London – New York: Routledge, 2002, who has observed that the adaptation took place more on the side of the Christian 'missionaries' than on the side of the aristocrats, see in particular p. 34: "[…] [Jerome] sought to reconcile Christian virtues with the traditional primacy of the Roman senatorial aristocracy […]. Ascetic virtues now guaranteed the superiority of the Roman ladies and transcended their noble origin. […] Jerome Christianized aristocratic competitiveness and emphasized that the holy women of asceticism surpassed the old nobility of birth and office […]. The better part of mankind, to use Symmachus' definition of the senatorial aristocracy, still identified itself by impressive genealogies, immense fortunes, overwhelming prestige, and social munificence; Jerome just added ascetic values, above all sexual renunciation and virginity." But Stefan Rebenich *et al.* all have their eyes set on the Roman ladies (not unlike Jerome, to some extent …), whereas I try to take their conclusions further and see if we can argue along similar lines, or even more radical lines, for the male aristocrats.

[6] See still Alfons Fürst, *Hieronymus: Askese und Wissenschaft in der Spätantike*, Freiburg – Basel – Wien: Herder, 2003, 43, who illustrates Jerome as „militante[n] Propagan-

entanglement of concepts where lines between traditions, social customs, and religions are very much blurred. Jerome can be regarded as mediating agent, but he is also a 'counter' agent. Often scholars have argued there is a broken line between Christian asceticism and Roman *nobilitas*,[7] although recently there has been a shift in scholarly thinking which reveals a more nuanced view.[8] Although Jerome seems to sound like he is subscribing to this, in effect by reading his work from an embodied perspective he argues quite often the opposite and advocates for the contrary. The findings of my work challenge our most fundamental sense of identity, i.e. 'us' vs. 'them' which is often how history is portrayed by scholars, institutions, religious agents, and religious affiliations. This was particularly true for the *clarissimate*, and within the *clarissimate* for the *nobilitas*. We observe how Jerome plays to this sentiment and desire to define boundaries and to emphasise distinction. However, other than definition of identity based on social standing, it has become clear that other identity markers – religion, tradition, customs, and ethical behaviour – are much more vague and complex than what is often represented to be the case.[9]

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dist[en] des Mönchtums[, der] die asketische Lebensform ausdrücklich als kritische Reaktion auf das reichskirchlich bedingte Missverhältnis zwischen Reichtum und Einfluss der Kirche einerseits, Aushöhlung ihrer ethischen Substanz andererseits [verstand]".

[7] *Cfr*. John Curran, who suggests that conversion to extreme asceticism often implied a wholesale relinquishing of property, *Pagan City*, 280. Yet Peter Brown has recently convincingly shown, using the example of Paulinus of Nola, that such a 'wholesale' might have been a theoretical ideal but could never be executed in practice, see *Through the Eye of a Needle*, 208ff.

[8] This scholarly shift is aptly captured by Fürst, *Hieronymus* (quoted above, and,) "das asketische Ideal […] [k]onzipiert als elitäre Absage an die Integration des Christentums in 'weltliche' Strukturen und getragen von freien Gruppen wohlhabender Laien, vor allem aristokratischer Frauen, die in solchem Protest eine Möglichkeit der Befreiung aus traditionellen Zwängen erblickten" (pp. 44–45), and further p. 46, "Im Bruch mit der Familie, in der Absage an Reichtum und Nachkommenschaft, in der Abkehr von weltlicher Macht und Prestige erblickten sie einen Verrat an den staatstragenden Idealen der römischen Tradition. Die Hinwendung von Angehörigen der römischen Oberschicht zu einem asketischen Lebensstil wurde als Angriff auf die altrömische aristokratische Identität betrachtet." However, subsequently Fürst, pp. 44–45, does stipulate that this changes in the fifth century, and, referring to Jerome's letters 108, 118, and 130, he argues that the ascetic model has changed and that now the ascetic is the true aristocrat. He summarises this as "Das christliche Askeseideal durchlief eine aristokratische Metamorphose […]. Hieronymus hat diese Entwicklung mit seiner asketischen Propaganda in den oberen und obersten Schichten des Römerreiches maßgeblich mitgestaltet" (p. 48). This transitional thinking also comes to the fore in the works of for example Peter Brown, Michele Salzman, and John Curran.

[9] As Éric Rebillard has recently pointed out, "religion is only one among other membership categories, and does not necessarily have salience", see É. Rebillard, "Everyday Christianity in Carthage at the Time of Tertullian", in *RRE* 2 (2016), 113–124, 114. See

In what follows I will elaborate on the methodology applied for the analysis of the epistolary correspondence, and I will explain the terminology used. Subsequently, I offer an overview of the path paved by the many scholars on Jerome and late antiquity before me; whereafter the reader will be travelling back in time to Jerome's world. The section on Jerome's world encompasses two chapters and consists of a biography and an illustration of the context in which Jerome was so fully emerged: Roman society – particularly in the metropolis Rome –, including the senatorial aristocracy, its values and social norms, patronage, literature and literacy (including *paideia*), Roman legislation, social geography, religion, and the emergence of Christianity in its manifold manifestations. All these sections will exhibit the fluidity of categories and the shifting of paradigms, which all depend on literary and historical context. This introduction together with the first section should offer a substantial basis for the analyses of the letters. Since the aim of this book is to assess if transformation of Roman *nobilitas* did take place we ought to start with the youngest group of addressees, and progress gradually towards Jerome's cherry on the ascetic cake: Pammachius. Therefore, the second section of the book analyses Jerome's correspondence with young aristocrats. Two chapters make up this section: Chapter 3 considers the letters addressed to young 'patricians', and Chapter 4 assesses letters addressed to young 'peripherals'. The section aims to detect a pattern in Jerome's language and attitude towards his young correspondents. It must be stipulated that although I have tried to not make a gender divide, inadvertedly the chapter division created the spalt between genders I had sought to avoid. The chapters on young aristocrats originally formed one entity; yet, because I decided to contrast 'patrician' and 'peripheral', this resulted automatically in a gender division. Furthermore, the letters analysed in Chapter 4 are addressed to young Rusticus and to Nepotian: their social status is obscure and we cannot fully determine if they could be considered aristocrats, but they have definitely come from well-off provincial families, which allows their categorisation as 'peripheral'. As one will notice: it makes them the odd ones out, yet as such they are closest to Jerome himself.

The fifth chapter considers Jerome's correspondence with senior 'peripheral' aristocrats: senior aristocrats from the provinces, respectively Lucinus from Spain (Baetica), Julian from Dalmatia, and 'naughty' Rusticus from Gaul. The final section, again consisting of two chapters, deals primarily with Jerome's correspondence with Pammachius, and extends to his other patron-students of patrician pedigree. This group of aristocratic associates are all based in the 'epicentre' of the Empire: Rome. In the original research plan this study also incorporated a chapter on widows. Yet much research has

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also his earlier monograph *Christians and their Many Identities in Late Antiquity: North Africa, 200–450 CE*, Ithaca, N.Y. – London: Cornell University Press, 2012.

already focussed on Jerome and women, one of the most comprehensive studies being Patrick Laurence's *Jérôme et le nouveau modèle féminin*.[10] Therefore, I will only cross-reference those letters where relevant. By contrast, Jerome's correspondence with non-clergy male *socialites* has received little attention. This book seeks to fill this lacuna.

A. Methodology

Whilst I am aware of the risks that come with adopting new approaches to study aspects of Late Antiquity, as pointed out by Stefan Rebenich,[11] I have chosen to adopt a new methodology to analyse Jerome's correspondence with Roman aristocrats in order to see if a new perspective might lead to refreshing insights beyond the veil that has been put up by institutions and apologetic authors. I believe that this methodology, in combination with insights derived from social network and social identity theories, could lay bare those aspects that have been obscured by centuries of ideological (confessional) scholarship and textual transmission,[12] and as such it could reshape the

[10] Patrick Laurence, *Jérôme et le nouveau modèle féminin*, Paris: Institut d'Études augustiniennes, 1997. See also Elizabeth A. Clark, *Ascetic Piety and Women's Faith* (Studies in Women and Religion 20), Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986; Philip Rousseau, "'Learned Women' and the Development of a Christian Culture in Late Antiquity", in *SO* 70 (1995), 116–147; Kate Cooper, "Insinuations of Womanly Influence: An Aspect of the Christianisation of the Roman Aristocracy", in *JRS* 82 (1992), 150–164; Susanna Elm, *Virgins of God: The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994; Barbara Feichtinger, *Apostolae apostolorum: Frauenaskese als Befreiung und Zwang bei Hieronymus*, Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang, 1995.

[11] Stefan Rebenich, "Late Antiquity in Modern Eyes", in *A Companion to Late Antiquity*, ed. Philip Rousseau, Oxford: Blackwell, 2009, 77–92. Although on p. 85 he points at the nineteenth-century scholarly tendency to turn "evolutionary biology into a paradigm of historical discovery", and where "scholars tried to transfer the discoveries made by the natural sciences […] to the cultural evolution of mankind", he writes positively of twentieth-century approaches that borrow from insights of other social sciences (*cfr*. p. 91). Of course we should be cautious when appropriating modern concepts and theories to ancient times – as I will explain in the 'terminology' section – yet with regard to insights from the social sciences there are some helpful tools which might allow us to better understand the world of late antiquity; tools which allow us to look at the world of late antiquity from a different perspective. Similarly, see Jörg Rüpke who acknowledges that "ancient religions are only partially receptive of techniques established in social studies so as to create new data by means of empirical or experimental procedures", J. Rüpke, "Lived Ancient Religion: Questioning 'Cults' and 'Polis Religion'", in *Mythos* 5 (2011), 191–204, at 197.

[12] See below for the difficulties the manuscript tradition brings. See Wendy Mayer who also points to the problem my study partially hopes to alleviate, namely the problem that sources and groups have been looked at from a 'Christianist' perspective. As Mayer argues "the 'Christianist' lens is due as much to the bias of the surviving (textual) sources as the

picture of alleged 'Christianisation' and (radical) 'transformation' of the Roman aristocracy.

The methodological approach adopted to analyse Jerome's letters and their context is based on Markus Vinzent's newly developed method of *Embodied Early and Medieval Christianity* (EEMC), which in itself takes up from Erfurt's model of *Lived Ancient Religion* (LAR).[13] I have also used Daniel Boyarin's approach of 'reading against the sources',[14] and applied Jörg Rüpke's insights on individuality and individuation.[15] Furthermore, I took into consideration Éric Rebillard's adaptation of Rogers Brubaker's concept of 'everyday nationhood' to 'everyday Christianity'.[16] In addition, I have built upon theories about social network analysis, appropriated for 'prosopographical network analysis' or, maybe even more precise, 'narrative network analysis;'[17] as well as Mark Granovetter's theory of strong ties–weak ties.[18] Although Manuel Castells' theory is focussed on modern society and electronic communication,[19] his argument that social networks empower people and that communication is able to transform society is also relevant for ancient Roman society: it is through exchange of literature and communication (cross-community, cross-borders) that such networks are established, power and authority are expressed and confirmed (or confuted) through these (written) communication channels. Particularly if one connects this with Granovetter's theory of weak ties, as we will see the connection through (textual) communication between the central actor (*in casu* Jerome) and his

biases of the ideological approaches brought to bear in analyzing them. […] it is important to resist (if we are to move beyond them) modes of viewing the late antique world that stem from the late antique world itself." Wendy Mayer, "Approaching Late Antiquity", in *A Companion to Late Antiquity*, ed. Philip Rousseau, Oxford: Blackwell, 2009, 10.

[13] Markus Vinzent, "Embodied Early and Medieval Christianity: Challenging its 'Canonical' and 'Institutional' Origin", in *RRE* 2 (2016), 91–112. 'LAR' is a methodology developed at the Max-Weber-Kolleg, Erfurt, by the LAR research group chaired by Rüpke, see below.

[14] Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judeo-Christianity*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004, where he advocates this approach.

[15] Jörg Rüpke, "Individualization and Individuation as Concepts for Historical Research", in *The Individual in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed. J. Rüpke, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, 3–38; these ideas and concepts are closely connected to the LAR-model.

[16] Rebillard, "Everyday Christianity".

[17] This implies a form of social network analysis tailored to historical research based on prosopography, yet 'narrative network analysis' seems more appropriate since the research and evidence considered are text-based with texts in most cases only from the hand of one author, Jerome, about the subjects (aristocrats) whose profiles and lives we try to grasp and to fit within this particular social network.

[18] Mark Granovetter, "The Strength of Weak Ties", in *AJS* 78/6 (1973), 1360–1380.

[19] Manuel Castells, "Communication, Power and Counter-Power in the Network Society", in *International Journal of Communication* 1 (2007), 238–266.

weak ties (*in casu* peripheral aristocrats) has the ability to build and facilitate networks and empower both parties by expanding their respective social networks, outreach, reputation, and authority.

1. Embodied Early and Medieval Christianity (EEMC)[20]

EEMC is the principal methodology of this study and therefore requires some further elaboration. Against common scholarly approaches to early Christianity through a canonical or institutional perspective, this new methodology starts from the bottom up.[21] It considers actors as individual agents fully embodied in their contemporary context; it reorients "research on materiality, localised and temporal embodiments of the individual – namely the signifiers of an embodied, not only lived, but living religion […]. Its methodology combines a situational, cross-temporal, and multi-local perspective of varied and complex forms of Christianity."[22] I have applied this broader framework to a particular focus on one individual religious agent, Jerome, and his relations – through literary communication – with individual actors situated primarily in Rome (Aventine area), secondarily in the provinces (Baetica, Gaul, Dalmatia, and Altinum [northern Italy]), embedded in an aristocratic milieu, with a temporal range from the late 380s to the early 410s.

The methodological approach of EEMC departs from the stance which takes "people's differing (and often overlapping and interlinking) perceptions, positions, views and – if one can grasp them – emotions seriously as individual expressions of unique attempts at making sense in life. These have to be placed in the broader framework of ancient societies as part of an even wider scenery of traditions to which the developed positions were responses, and which changed together with the traditions that they were part of."[23] In a three-fold way, it seeks to "1) address the undervalued individual religious agent; 2) look at actions of individuals within non-essentialist frames, and 3)

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[20] For a full discussion of the methodology, see Vinzent, "Embodied Early and Medieval Christianity".

[21] As Vinzent explains (*ibid*., 108) "the bottom-up perspective of embodied Christianity of individuals will point to overlooked resistance to such changes [e.g. Christianisation of the Roman Empire], to ideological historicising of contingent developments, and will develop historical accounts that go beyond positivistic accumulation of data within given frameworks, and highlight shared and entangled experiences within different religious traditions, instead of writing a teleologically oriented history of exclusion and avoidance of what often has been termed syncretism". Of course, it goes beyond the scope of this thesis to expand on different religious traditions, but I have already embarked on this path by looking at Jerome and his "Jewish network" in Rome and in the Holy Land. For the bottom-up approach, compare Rüpke, "Individualization and Individuation", 14, and 15, Figure 1 for a schematic illustration of his model.

[22] Vinzent, "Embodied Early and Medieval Christianity", 107.

[23] *Ibid.*, 101.

take into account archaeology, iconography and reception history, not mainly canonical and institutionalised belief systems, with a particular regard not mainly for 'typical' features, but for those which in the past have been seen as strange or deviating ones."[24] Rather than committing the same fallacies of institutional typology, one needs firstly to be aware of "the precedence of individual religious activities" and secondly, "much of Christian identity […] is intrinsically linked to local memory, individual and often fictitious biographies and religious activities which hardly go beyond the specific context of those individuals or at best a local group".[25] A fine example here are Jerome's *vitae* which are all tailored for a very particular and limited audience.

As EEMC takes off from LAR this implies that, naturally, I have also used this methodology for my research. LAR focuses on "individual appropriation of traditions and embodiment, religious experiences and communication on religion in different social spaces, and the interaction of different levels facilitated by religious specialists".[26] Applied to the concrete context of this work, the individual appropriation takes place both on the level of the aristocrats who are Jerome's correspondents, as well as on the level of the author, Jerome himself. The different social spaces refer to the temporal and spatial realms of metropolitan Rome and the provinces. Jerome is both the one who signifies individual appropriation of traditions as well as the one who is the facilitator, who presents or represents himself as religious specialist (i.e. Biblical scholar and ascetic expert). The current work offers an "analysis of the interaction of individuals [*in casu* Roman and peripheral aristocrats] with the agents of traditions and providers of religious services [*in casu* Jerome]",[27] but as I just mentioned, Jerome has the dualistic role of being both an agent as well as a – peripheral – individual embodied in Roman society. Therefore I would de-emphasise a perceived dichotomy between individuals and agents, and stipulate that aspect of the methodology which looks at the forming of social coalitions between individuals, individual agents, and religious specialists.[28] In other words, individual appraisal and interaction will be analysed in diverse social spaces, but primarily in what Jörg Rüpke calls "the virtual

[24] *Ibid.*, 101.
[25] *Ibid.*, 104.
[26] Rüpke, "Lived Ancient Religion", 191.
[27] *Ibid.,* 191.
[28] It is not entirely clear what distinction is advocated by LAR, as particularly the terms 'individual' and 'individual agent' are used interchangeably, as well as the seemingly interchangeable use of 'individual agent' and 'religious specialist', see especially Rüpke, "Lived Ancient Religion", 197–198: "[…] scattered evidence will be contextualised and interpreted by relating it to individual agents, their use of space and time, their forming of social coalitions, their negotiation with religious specialists or 'providers', and their attempts to 'make sense' of religion in a situational manner and thus render it effective".

space of literary communication [and the intellectual discourses formed therein]",[29] which I have then teamed up with narrative network analysis.

Similarly, EEMC is connected to Rüpke's ideas of individuation where the individual agent is regarded as agent for religious individuation.[30] In Roman society, emphasis was put on honour and dignity as values that informed individuation.[31] Particularly *memoria dignus* was important and regarded as one of the highest achievements for aristocrats who sought to achieve recognition of reputation and respect. *Memoria dignus* was a sign of honour and dignity that would not only bestow respect upon the '*dignus*' in their life time, but it extended beyond the lifespan of mortals on earth.[32] As such it existed beyond death, and this is an important facet to bear in mind when reading Jerome's claims for novelty when he argues that honour and praise will be bestowed upon his patron-students *even* beyond death.

It must be stipulated that when speaking of religious individuation, it must not be understood as "a wish to be different but rather the contrary […] being different was not a value-informing individuation".[33] The values that were to be acquired included dignity, honour, being better or being perfect:[34] all situated within notions of competition. These fields of competition also included religious practices, euergetic activities (i.e. generosity),[35] displays of cultured taste, and an intensive relationship with a deity or deities.[36] This proves that for example ascetic competition as Jerome presents it is not something uniquely Christian but a phenomenon that occurred across multiple religions. This is rather important in order to understand the degree of appropriation (aristocrats to ascetic Christianity, ascetic Christianity to aristocrats, see above). When it comes to existing models of individuality in antiquity, Rüpke distinguishes five different types. For the purpose of our research, it suffices to highlight two of them: 1) competitive individuality, which, according to Rüpke, "refers to the widespread aristocratic struggle for distinctiveness",

[29] Rüpke, "Lived Ancient Religion", 200.

[30] This approach distances itself from and allows to correct the modernist method of the 19th and 20th centuries which focussed on difference because difference was regarded a central implication, and hence a problem of individuality in antiquity, see Rüpke, "Individualization and Individuation", 10. Of course, this is closely tied in with the LAR-model which also focuses on the experiences and practices of individuals: see Rüpke, "Lived Ancient Religion", 191.

[31] Rüpke, "Individualization and Individuation", 11.

[32] As Rüpke explains, "*Memoria dignus*, worthy of memory, would prolong this beyond the space of one's own lifetime, but to achieve such a memory, a much higher degree of being remarkable, excellent, and different had to be attained" (*ibid*., 10).

[33] *Ibid.*, 8.

[34] *Ibid.*, 8.

[35] With particular emphasis on female euergetic activities, see Emily Hemelrijk, "City Patronesses in the Roman Empire", in *Historia* 53/2 (2004), 209–245.

[36] Rüpke, "Individualization and Individuation", 8, 10.

and it is important to add that these "established aims towards which other social groups would orient themselves".[37] This is an aspect that will come to the fore in the chapter on 'peripheral aristocrats'; and 2) representative individuality, where "individuals may strive to become exemplary and those who succeed would be cited as examples. The aim is not individual difference, but perfection in fulfilling a social or religious role, whether as Roman general, Christian martyr, or male Jew, yet fulfilment is a personal feat."[38] Again, this is an aspect we will come across multiple times in the analyses of the letters, those addressed to patricians in particular. These patricians, in turn, will be mentioned as the 'examples', or, in Rüpke's words "representative individuals", in epistolary correspondence with 'peripherals'. Yet, "rules on representative individuality could easily outlaw a more general understanding of what behaviour is acceptable and preferable in competitive individuality".[39] It is also in this context that Granovetter's theory is applied: Jerome functions as the facilitator to establish ties between the peripherals who seek to achieve recognition and respect from their Rome-based senatorial peers and superiors, namely the Roman patricians with whom Jerome is connected through stronger ties. At the same time, both Jerome and the peripherals seek to be recognised by these same patricians, and seek to achieve the same noble status. The 'weak' ties between Jerome and the peripherals – that is to say, only single letters have survived, there is little to no evidence of more frequent correspondence, which has lead me to determine the ties as 'weak' – could actually better serve to achieve that goal than the strong ties, and this is, in an adapted form, what Granovetter argues when he explains the 'strength of weak ties'. Applied to Jerome's case, the weak ties serve the peripherals in that they are put into contact with the patricians; the ties serve Jerome because he can now claim to be an authority, the ties also serve the peripherals because they have evidence that they consult the same experts or that they patronise the same mentors. Furthermore, the ties serve Jerome because they indicate his strong embeddedness in Roman aristocratic society, and like his aristocrats he has contacts across the Empire; relations which he maintains through the medium of epistolary correspondence, the exchange of literature, and the exchange of gifts.

[37] Rüpke, "Individualization and Individuation", 13. Rüpke also explains that it would often give rise to conflict, and how "individual differences would be sharply noticed by contemporary observers, but evaluated against a discursively constructed common ethos that would stress the commonwealth. The concrete norms would be very much shaped and modified by actual competitive behaviour." This aspect of 'common ethos' and reflections that match the idea of 'commonwealth' are equally apparent in Jerome's model of Christian ascetic *nobilitas*.

[38] *Ibid.*, 13.

[39] *Ibid.*, 14.

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