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## **Jerome's Interpretation of the Transfiguration in the Light of Some Recent Patristic Discoveries (Origen, Fortunatian, Chromace)**

*Hieronimova razlaga Kristusovega spremenjenja v luči nekaterih nedavnih patrističnih odkritij (Origen, Fortunacijan, Kromacij)*

*Abstract:* This paper synthesizes and analyses Jerome's interpretation of Christ's Transfiguration event, described in the synoptic gospels (Matt 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36), to which he paid special attention in his works *Tractatus in Marci evangelium* (CPL 592) and *Commentarium in Matthaeum* (CPL 590). The second part of the study is dedicated to comparing Jerome's interpretation with three recently discovered Patristic works: Origen's *Homiliae in Psalmos*, *Commentarium in evangelia* of Fortunatian of Aquileia, and the works of Chromace of Aquileia and Victorinus of Poetovio. Based on this confrontation, it is possible to understand better Jerome's interpretation and the development of the Patristic exegesis of this critical episode in the life of Jesus in general.

*Keywords:* Transfiguration on the Mount, Victorinus of Poetovio, Patristic exegesis, Christology, Scripture

*Povzetek:* Prispevek sintetizira in analizira Hieronimovo razlago Kristusovega spremenjenja, opisanega v sinoptičnih evangelijih (Mt 17,1-8; Mr 9,2-8; Lk 9,28-36), ki se mu je Hieronim posebej posvetil v delih *Tractatus in Marci evangelium* (CPL 592) in *Commentarium in Matthaeum* (CPL 590). Drugi del študije je namenjen primerjavi Hieronimove interpretacije s tremi nedavno odkritimi patrističnimi deli, to so: Origenove *Homiliae in Psalmos*, *Commentarium in evangelia* Fortunacijana Oglejskega in dela Kromacija Oglejskega ter Viktorina Ptujskega. Na podlagi te konfrontacije je mogoče bolje razumeti Hieronimovo razlago, pa tudi nasploh spremljati razvoj patristične eksegeze te pomembne epizode iz Jezusovega življenja.

*Ključne besede:* Kristusovo spremenjenje, Viktorin Ptujski, patristična eksegeza, kristologija, Sveto pismo

## 1. Introduction

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When Jerome in 386 wrote from Bethlehem to Marcella, describing the charms of the Holy Land and urging her to leave Rome, he also mentioned mount Tabor: »We shall make our way to Tabor and see the tabernacles there which the Savior shares, not, as Peter once wished, with Moses and Elijah, but with the Father and with the Holy Ghost.« (Hier., *Ep.* 46.13)<sup>1</sup> After Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, and Cyril of Jerusalem (Baldi 1955, 318–321), Jerome was among the first Christian authors who identified Tabor as the Mount of Christ's Transfiguration.<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to examine Jerome's interpretation of the Transfiguration. However, although Jean-Louis Gourdain compared Jerome's *Tractatus in Marci ev.* 6 with Origen's *Comm. in Mt.* in his insightful article (1994), a study encompassing and systematizing Jerome's interpretation of Christ's Transfiguration still has not been made.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the first section of this paper will present a synthesis of the two works in which he discussed this Gospel narrative. In contrast, the second part is concerned with Jerome's interpretation with some recent Patristic discoveries to present some new insights on the exegesis of the Stridonian.

## 2. Jerome's Interpretation of the Transfiguration

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The Transfiguration account is discussed in two of Jerome's exegetical works: *Tractatus in Marcum* and *Commentarium in Matthaem*.

### 2.1 *Tractatus in Marcum* 6: »In pectore meo tabernaculum facere«

This work is a rare example of the early Christian exegesis of Mark's Gospel. The homily *Tractatus* 6, dedicated to the Transfiguration account in Mark 9:1-8, is the most essential and theologically rich among other homilies of *Tractatus in Marci Euangelium*, since it includes many examples of spiritual interpretation and allegorization.

Germain Morin attributed to Jerome a corpus of various homilies as recently as the 19<sup>th</sup> century: besides his famous *Tractatus in Psalmos* and other works, are there also ten homilies on the Gospel of Mark (CCSL 78). They indeed belong to Jerome's Bethlehem period, but it is challenging to determine the exact date. Morin proposed the years between 401 and 410, but Gourdain, confronting it with the second phase of Origenist controversy, asserts that they can be dated between 397 and 402 (Gourdain 2005, 12–15).

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<sup>1</sup> This article was written as a result of work within the research programme P6-0262, which was co-funded by the Slovenian Research Agency.

<sup>2</sup> »She made the ascent of mount Tabor whereon the Lord was transfigured [*scandebat montem Thabor, in quo transfiguratus est Dominus*].« (Hier., *Ep.* 108.13) For the Latin text of Jerome's letters Hilberg's CSEL editions are used.

<sup>3</sup> A part of the otherwise more extensive transverse study is also devoted to the discussion of Jerome's interpretation of the Transfiguration of Christ (Bogataj 2020b, 234–241).

After the spiritual-moralistic reading of the verse Mark 9:1 – about those who will not taste death until they have seen the kingdom of God –, Jerome proceeds to the interpretation of Christ's Transfiguration. He briefly describes the literal sense of the account (*historia*) and harmonizes the divergence between Matthew's version, which speaks about the 'eighth day' and Mark's version, which describes the 'sixth day', by saying that the first counted the first day and the last, whereas the latter reckoned only the time between. Quickly, Jerome passes on to the spiritual interpretation: »We are not denying the historical event, but prefer a spiritual explanation [*Non historiam denegamus, sed spiritalem intellegentiam praeferimus*].« (Hier., *In Marci ev.* 6 [CCSL 78, 479]) The phrase »after six days« (Mark 9:2) for Jerome represents the eschatological setting of the event: »Not until this world shall pass away – that is the force of the six days – shall the new kingdom appear.« Afterwards, our scholar from Stridon introduces etymologies for the names of all three apostles present on the mountain.

Another important hermeneutical insight presented by Jerome is the difference between those who remain at the bottom of the mountain (*litteram sequuntur* / following the letter) and those who ascend the mountain (*spiritaliter intellegere* / reading Scriptures spiritually).<sup>4</sup> Jerome states that to this very day, Jesus is down below for some and up above for others: for those who read Scriptures spiritually, Jesus is instantly transfigured (*statim commutatur*), and his garments – an allegory of the Scriptures themselves – shine exceedingly.

Explaining the fullers, who cannot make garments as white as those of Jesus, Jerome surprises his audience with an unusual interpretation. He confronts Scripture with some of the finest authors of the classical literature – Plato, Aristotle, Zeno, and Epicurus –, but convincingly states that they could not make garments, i.e., their writings, as white as those of Jesus, »because they were on the earth, their treatises are all about earthly matters [*quoniam super terram erant, totum de terrenis disputabant*].« (6 [CCSL 78, 481]) For Jerome, no arbiter of secular literature (*disceptator saecularis litteraturae*) could fashion garments such as Jesus possesses on the mountain.

Establishing a similar contrast, commenting on the presence of Moses and Elijah on the mountain, Jerome mentions Jews who follow only the letter that kills and cannot see Jesus transfigured. However, the conversation of these two significant figures with Jesus symbolizes harmony between the two covenants.<sup>5</sup> Jerome regards Peter's proposal for pitching three tents as separating the Law, the prophets, and the Gospel, which cannot be done. Thus Jerome asserts that he wanted to build in his heart a tabernacle (*volo in pectore meo tabernaculum facere*) for Christ,<sup>6</sup> the Law, and the prophets, by saying: »It was Peter's miscom-

<sup>4</sup> »Iesu, donec deorsum est, non transfiguratur; ascendit, et transmutatur.« (Hier., *In Marci ev.* 6 [CCSL 78, 480])

<sup>5</sup> For an exegetical discussion of Christ as the fulfilment of messianic expectations, see Celarc 2019.

<sup>6</sup> »Ut quorum sit una divinitas unum sit et in pectore tuo tabernaculo.« (Hier., *Comm. in Mt.* 17,4 [CCSL 77, 148]). See also 17,5.

prehension when he proposed three different tents conferring honour upon the servants equally with the Lord. Unless they dwell together, they cannot be in harmony [*nisi simul habitauerint, non possunt habere concordiam*].<sup>7</sup>

When interpreting the cloud that overshadowed them instead of the tents, Jerome regards it as the grace of the Holy Spirit, and this Trinitarian reference serves to illustrate with great precision his most important hermeneutical principle:

»See the mystery of the Trinity, according to my power of understanding, at any rate. Everything that I perceive, I want to understand in Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the Father. Unless I understand in the Trinity that will save me, no understanding can be sweet to me.

[Vide mysterium Trinitatis, secundum meam tamen intellegentiam. Ego enim omne quod intellego, sine Christo et Spiritu Sancto et Patro nolo intellegere. Nisi intellexero in Trinitate quae me saluabit, dulce mihi non potest esse quod intellego.]« (6 [CCSL 78, 483])

Understanding for Jerome does not consist of a mere gathering of knowledge, but it is related to the divine operation, which is not only theoretical but, first and foremost, experiential, practical, and soteriological.

The culmination of the homily is the Father's voice affirming Jesus' divine identity. Commenting on that, Jerome echoes post-Nicene Trinitarian theology: »This is My Son, of My nature, of My substance, abiding in Me, and He is all that I Am. This is My beloved Son [Hic est Filius meus: de mea natura, de mea substantia, in me manens, et totus quod ego sum. Hic est Filius meus carissimus.].« (6 [CCSL 78, 483]) After this, the homily ends with Christ alone remaining on the mountain, demonstrating his divine nature, uniqueness, and elevation above the other two. »I may even say: in One, they find three. Moses, in fact, and Elias, too, are more apt to be found if they are brought together in one with Christ.« (6 [CCSL 78, 484]) Once again, Jerome is presenting his hermeneutical position in the harmonization of the two testaments.

Unsurprisingly, Jerome relies on his interpretation of Origen's *Commentary on Matthew* (*Commentarii in Matthaeum* 12.31–43 [GCS 40, 150–170]). Gourdain, who compared these two texts, maintains that despite the different similarities, Jerome was independent and that there is no direct relation to Origen (Gourdain 1994; Cerami 2008, 53 n. 152). Nevertheless, it is difficult to speak about Jerome's originality because he explains commentaries as compilations and collections of many existing interpretations to offer the reader the opportunity to make their own decision.<sup>8</sup> However, on the other side, as Gourdain emphasizes (1994, 369), there is some originality present in Jerome's work, one that is more methodological. Due to the pedagogical adaptation or simplification, Jerome can develop his

<sup>7</sup> The idea of the unity of one Trinitarian tent is present also in Jerome's *Comm. in Mt.* 17,4: »Sed fac tria tabernacula, immo unum Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto.« (CCSL 77, 148). Cf. also Hier., *Ep.* 46.13.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Hier., *Apologia contra Rufinum* 1.16 (SC 303, 44–46).

original explanation. In the cited passages, he demonstrates some of his most critical exegetical principles: insufficiency of the letter, a necessity for the spiritual understanding, unity of both Testaments, the light of the Spirit of Christ, and the Trinity itself. It is more a process of (indirect?) appropriation from Origen and not mere copying. If Origen only stated that in the spiritual experience, the garments of transfigured Christ are the words of the Scripture (Scognamiglio 1998, 385–393), Jerome makes this idea central to his homily, continuing this allegory and applying it to the whole process of reading Scriptures.

## 2.2 *Commentarium in Matthaem 17:1-9: »Transformatio splendorem addidit, faciem non subtraxit«*

Jerome's interpretation of Christ's Transfiguration in his *Commentarium in Matthaem*<sup>9</sup> is much shorter. He wrote this work to fulfil Eusebius of Cremona's promise in 398, stating that the interpretation will be only literal. Fortunately, he does not stick to this intention strictly, but this text is much more concise than the *Tractatus in Marci ev.* 6, with only a few allegorizations.

Jerome contextualizes the Transfiguration account in the eschatological announcement after Jesus' first declaration of his future death and Resurrection (Matt 16:21-28). Christ's Transfiguration on the mountain has, for Jerome, a consolatory role for his disciples: »Seeing in advance that they could make such objections, then, the one who knows secrets compensates for their present fear with an immediate reward [praevicens ergo occultorum cognitor quid possent objicere, praesentem timorem praesenti compensat praemio].« (Hier., *Comm. in Mt.* 3. 16,27 [CCSL 77, 146]) Transfiguration reveals already in the present what is to come: »He appeared to the apostles in the form in which he will appear at the time of judgment [qualis futurus est tempore iudicandi].« (3. 16,27 [CCSL 77, 147])

Proceeding to the interpretation of the Transfiguration itself (Matt 17:1-8), Jerome points out the physical reality of Christ's body even during Transfiguration:

»But as for what it says: »He was transfigured before them,« let no one think that he lost his original form and appearance [*nemo putet pristinam eum formam et faciem perdidisse*], or that he lost the reality of his body and took up either a spiritual or an airy body [*vel amisisse corporis veritatem et adsumpsisse corpus uel spirituale uel aerium*]. On the contrary, the evangelist shows how he was transformed when he says: *And his face shone like the sun, and his clothing became white like snow.*« (Hier., *Comm. in Mt.* 3. 16,27 [CCSL 77, 147])

We can detect an echo of anti-Origenist polemic (McGuckin 1986, 270, n. 68) since Jerome asserts that Jesus' body, even at the moment of the Transfiguration, did not cease to be physical, or either only »spiritual [*vel spirituale*] or ethereal [*vel aereum*]«. He uses Mark's allusion to an earthly fuller to emphasize that the

<sup>9</sup> Latin text is quoted from D. Hurst and M. Adriaen's critical edition (CCSL 77, 146–150), whereas the passages translated in English are from T. P. Scheck's translation (2008, 197–201).

glory of Jesus appears in is entirely visible to mortal sight. Jerome seems to exclude here the notion found in Tertullian that the vision of the Transfiguration is comparable in any way to the imaginary mechanisms that produce dreams. (Anthony 2014, 232–233; McGuckin 1986, 270, n. 68)

Christ's substance is not changed; only the glory is different – he appears in more extraordinary splendour. While it changes in glory, the Son of God remains the same.

»When the splendour of the face is shown, and the brilliance of the clothing is described, it is not that the substance is removed, but the glory is changed [*non substantia tollitur sed gloria commutatur*]. »His face shone like the sun.« Surely, the Lord was transformed into that glory [*transformatur in eam gloriam*] with which he will come later in his kingdom. The transformation added splendor; it did not make his face disappear [*transformatio splendorem addidit, faciem non subtraxit*].« (Hier., *Comm. in Mt.* 3. 16,27 [CCSL 77, 147]).

The main point Jerome wants to emphasize seems to be the physicality of Christ's body. He is once more arguing against over-spiritualization.

»Let it be that his body became spiritual. Were his garments also changed, which became so brilliant that another evangelist said: »Such as a fuller on earth is not able to make them?« Well, what a fuller on earth cannot do has to be something bodily and tactile [*corporale est et tactui subiacet*], not something spiritual and airy that deceives the eyes and is seen only as an imaginary representation [*non spiritale et aerium, quod inludat oculis et tantum in fantasmate conspiciatur*].« (3. 16,27 [CCSL 77, 147]).

The second mention of the *corpus uel spirituale uel aerium*, emphasized with two other expressions (Christ's body was still physical, tactile, and did not become a *fantasma*) shows evidently that Jerome here is introducing anti-Origenist rhetoric. Jerome's position on embodiment in the Origenist controversy is well-known (Clark 1990, 154, 159–162).<sup>10</sup> Even though he does not mention the Alexandrian explicitly and also that Origen had a subtle and often misunderstood or erroneously interpreted understanding of the 'spiritual body' (Clark 1992, 93; Eichinger 1969, 63–119), otherwise away from Docetic doctrine, this argumentation can be proved by a reference to the *Liber adversus Iohannem Hierosolymitanum* (25–26), where Jerome presents his understanding of Origen's doctrine about the negation of the Resurrection of the body. Although Christ did eat, drink, and was clothed after the Resurrection – according to the doctrine of Origen as presented by Jerome – he did not conceal the spiritual and aerial nature of his body (*non dissimulat naturam aerei corporis et spiritualis*), since he also passed through the closed door (PL 23, 378C).<sup>11</sup> Cruzel claims that Jerome did not conceive the

<sup>10</sup> For an interesting philosophical reflection on creation and corporeality, see Esterbauer 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. »Transfigurabit Dominus corpus humilitatis nostrae, conforme corporis suae gloriae. Quando dixit

difference between *aerei* (deriving from *aërius*) and *aetherei* [*corporis*] and that Origen certainly talked about the latter (1980, 258–259, n. 67). Air is, however, one of the four essential elements. Henceforth, Jerome is wrong to regard Christ's transfigured body as purely spiritual or ascribe to him only the aerial dimension of the everyday earthly existence, which would be again an over-spiritualization.

Another peculiarity found in Jerome's *Commentarium in Matthaeum* is the three reasons for fear of the three apostles (Matt 17:6). They were frightened either because they recognized that they had erred because of the bright cloud or the Father's voice. »Human weakness cannot bear the sight of greater glory [*humana fragilitas conspectum maioris gloriae ferre non sustinet*].« (Hier., *Comm. in Mt.* 3. 17,6 [CCSL 77, 149]) This is why Jerome scolds the apostles: »In proportion to how much someone seeks what is more, to that degree it falls to what is lower if it fails to recognize its own measure [*quanto quis ampliora quaesierit, tanto magis ad inferiora conlabitur, si ignorauerit mensuram suam*].« (3. 17,6 [CCSL 77, 149])

Summarizing his interpretation in the *Commentarium in Matthaeum*, we can assert that Origen undoubtedly influenced Jerome. Marie-Anne Vannier affirms that »Jerome s'inspire d'Origène mais pour donner une interprétation personnelle du récit de la Transfiguration« (2014, 55).

The Stridonian himself, however, named precisely all the works he read in preparation for writing his *Commentarium in Matthaeum*: the interpretations of Hippolytus the martyr, Theodor of Heraclea, Apollinaris of Laodicea and Didymus of Alexandria among the Greeks, and Hilary of Poitiers, Victorinus of Poetovio and Fortunatian of Aquileia among the Latin authors.<sup>12</sup> In the first place, though, he mentions Origen, but Jerome seems to be distancing himself from the Alexandrian owing to the recent controversies about Origenism.

### 3. New Aspects on Jerome's Work from Some Recent Discoveries

To enrich the knowledge on Jerome's perception of the Transfiguration, we can now discuss some recent Patristic discoveries, which will shed some new light on the early Latin tradition of the interpretation of Christ's Transfiguration on Mount Tabor. Origen's *Homiliae in Psalmos*, discovered in 2012, open a new chapter

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transfigurabit, id est, μετασχηματίζει, membrorum, quibus nunc utimur, diversitas denegatur. Aliud nobis spirituale et aethereum promittitur: quod nec tactui subjacet, nec oculis cernitur, nec pondere praegravatur: et pro locorum, in quibus futurum est, varietate mutabitur.« (Hier., *Liber adversus Iohannem Hierosolymitanum* 26 [PL 23, 378A–B]). What Jerome is mentioning here, referring to the Phil 3:21, is the transformation of our bodies and conformation of them to Christ's glory. Cf. also Origenes, *HomLc* 17 (GCS 9, 104).

<sup>12</sup> »Legisse me fateor ante annos plurimos in Matheum Origenis viginti quinque volumina et totidem eius omelias commaticumque interpretationis genus, et Theophili Antiochenae urbis episcopi commentarios, Hippolyti quoque martyris et Theodori Heracleotae Apollinarisque Leodiceni ac Didimi Alexandrini et Latinorum Hilarii, Victorini, Fortunatiani opuscula, e quibus – etiam si parva carperem – dignum aliquid memoriae scriberetur.« (Hier., *Comm. in Mt.* Praef. [CCSL 77, 4–5])

in our understanding of the relation between Origen and Jerome; Fortunatian of Aquileia's *Commentarii in evangelia*, found in 2012 as well, are also very closely related to Jerome and, finally, an essential fragment of Chromace of Aquileia, discovered in 1978, could reveal to us a glimpse of the interpretation of the Transfiguration by Victorinus of Poetovio.

### 3.1 Origen's *Homiliae in Psalmos*: Christ's Body at the Transfiguration and Ps 15:9-10

In May 2012, in the *Codex Monacensis Graecus* 314 of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Marina Molin Pradel identified 29 of Origen's homilies, the Psalms of which only a few have been preserved in Latin translation. As one of the most significant Patristic discoveries over the last decades, it caused much interest since it shed new light on the person and work of the great Alexandrian scholar and many other Patristic works.

Apart from Origen's influence on Jerome's commentaries on the Gospels of Marc and Matthew, discussed above, we now find one interesting typical detail about the nature of Christ's body at the Transfiguration in both Origen's and Jerome's homilies on Psalm 15. Before Pradel's discovery, Jerome's authorship of 74 homilies of Psalms (*Tractatus lix in Psalmos* – CPL 592 and *Tractatum in Psalmos series altera* – CPL 593), written probably in 401, was convincingly challenged by Vittorio Peri, who claimed that Jerome only translated and did some minor redaction work of Origen's homilies on Psalms (Peri 1981; Coppa 1993, 13–32). Now, with the critical edition of the original 29 homilies of Origen (GCS NF 19), a reexamination of the corpus of Jerome's homilies can be done in order to elucidate Jerome's role.<sup>13</sup>

When commenting on Psalm 15, »My body, too, abides in confidence; because you will not abandon my soul to the nether world, nor will you suffer your faithful one to undergo corruption.« (Ps 15:9-10a), Jerome asserts very clearly that this verse refers to Christ's descent to the dead with the confidence that he will rise again directly. This allows our exegete to introduce a discourse on the Lord's body and soul, addressing the union of Christ's perfect body (*caro perfecta*) and perfect soul (*anima perfecta*). He refutes here the heresy of Apollinarism, which – based on the Platonic triad of body, soul, and spirit –, argued that Jesus had an average human body, but with a divine mind, instead of a regular human soul.<sup>14</sup>

In Jerome's polemic against the Apollinarians, besides citations from the *Letter to the Oriental bishops* by pope Damasus, unambiguous use of Origenist themes is noticeable (Rondeau 1982, II, 145–156). Commenting on Ps 15:9-10, Jerome maintains that before his Incarnation, the Lord existed not as a composite but in a

<sup>13</sup> In her doctoral dissertation, Elena Orlandi (2013) compared Jerome's and Origen's homilies on Psalms in a general prospective, arguing for a fair amount of Jerome's originality, whereas in her recent article (2018) she concentrated properly on their interpretation of Psalm 15.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. also Jerome, *Hom. in Ps.* 108,31. Jerome uses the well-known Patristic soteriological axiom, *Quod non est assumptum, non est redemptum*, for expressing the sensitive soul (*sensus*) of the incarnated Logos and emphasizing Christ's liberty in accepting the passion as Father's will.



simple form (*simplex et incompositus*); only because composite man (*homo compositus*) was unable to bear the simplicity of God, he assumed our human composite nature (*venit et ipse compositus*). The idea of a human soul in Christ, separated from body descended to hell to save the souls separated from the bodies, has Origenist roots. Origen's expression »σύνθετόν τι χρῆμα« (*Contra Celsum* 1.66 [GCS 2, 119]) according to the Aristotelian and Stoic anthropology, describes the unity of Christ's soul and body, though without falling into the Apollinarian heresy.<sup>15</sup>

What Jerome stresses is that the body of Christ was the same when he suffered, died, and rose from the dead.

»If that same body arose from the dead in the Lord, how do some come to a conclusion that, though it some sort of wonderful and spiritual flesh, yet not like ours [*spiritalē quādam et magnā et non nostrā carnem*]? We are not saying that we deny the body of Christ assumed that glory that we believe we also are going to receive as saints, for then, indeed, this corruptible body will put on incorruption, and this mortal body will put on immortality (cf. 1 Cor 15:53).« (Hier., *Tractatus de psalmo* 15.9 [CCSL 78, 381–382])

Then is proceeded by a mention of the event of the Transfiguration:

»Just as before the Lord suffered His passion, when He was transformed and glorified on the mountain, He certainly had the same body that He had had down below, although of a different glory, so also after the Resurrection, His body was of the same nature as it had been before the passion, but of a higher state of glory and more majestic appearance.

[Sed quodmodo ante quam pateretur transformatus et glorificatus in monte eandem utique carnem habuit quam habuerat et deorsum, licet alterius gloriae;<sup>16</sup> sic et post resurrectionem eiusdem naturae in eo caro fuit quae ante passionem fuerat, sed glorificationis augustiorisque conspectus.]« (15.9 [CCSL 78, 382])

By comparing Jerome's homily on Psalm 15 and Origen's newly discovered ho-

<sup>15</sup> Jerome echoes Origen's doctrine on this problem very clearly. »Quia animae absque corporibus apud inferos tenebantur, quae in sua natura sunt simplices, et ipsa derelicta carne, non Deus Verbum, non homo compositus, sed anima descendit ad inferos.« (*Tractatus de psalmo* 15.9 [CCSL 78, 382–383]); »Deus filius, Deus Verbum quamdiu in caelis fuit, et homines non tantum peccauerunt ut ad eos ipse descenderet, simplex et incompositus cum angelis thronis dominationibus ceterisque uirtutibus morabatur. Quando uero descendit ad homines, eos uidelicet qui ex anima et corpore compacti erant, uenit et ipse compositus, ne compositi simplicem ferre non possent.« (15.9 [CCSL 78, 382]). Cf. »Μόνη ἡ ψυχὴ εἰς ἄδου καταβέβηκεν, ὅπου μόνον ψυχαὶ ἦσαν. Εἰ καὶ ἐνθάδε ψυχαὶ μόνον ἦσαν καὶ μὴ ἦν τὸ ζῶον σύνθετον, οὐκ ἂν ἐηλύθει ἐνθάδε σύνθετος. Ὅθεν πλανῶνται οἱ λέγοντες ὅτι οὐ σύνθετος ὁ σωτὴρ ἐπιδηδήμηκεν, ἀλλὰ ἀναλαβὼν σῶμα ὅμοιον τῆ ὑπερεχούσῃ τοῦ αὐτοῦ λόγου οὐσία, μᾶλλον δὲ ταῦτόν τῆ οὐσίᾳ τοῦ λόγου, καὶ ὅτι ἡ ψυχὴ ταύτῃ τῆ οὐσίᾳ τοῦ λόγου ἦν. Οὗτοι δὲ ἀθετοῦσι τὴν χρηστότητα αὐτοῦ ἐνδυσσαμένου τὸν σύνθετον ἄνθρωπον «καὶ» λέγοντος· ἡ σὰρξ μου κατασκηνώσει ἐπ' ἐλπίδι, οὐκ ἐγκαταλείψεις τὴν ψυχὴν μου εἰς τὸν ἄδην. Ὅπου οὖν γυμναὶ ψυχαὶ ἦσαν, ψυχὴ μόνη καταβέβηκεν· ὅπου οὖν σύνθετον τὸ ζῶον ἦν, ὁ σύνθετος ἦλθε μετὰ ψυχῆς.« (Origenes, *H15Ps* II 8 [GCS NF 19, 108–109]).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Jerome's expressions: »Gloria comutatur.« (*Comm. in Mt.* 3. 17,2 [CCSL 77, 147]); »Sed mutare eam gloriam, non mutare naturam.« (*Commentarium in Ionam* 2,7 [PL 25, 1136])

mily II on Psalm 15, it becomes evident that the Stridonian took the reference to the Transfiguration from the latter but developed his interpretation according to the Apollinaristic polemic regarding Christ's soul and body, emphasizing the oneness of Christ's body even at the event of the Transfiguration. Origen, however, in his newly discovered homily also explores the meaning of Christ's Incarnation through Transfiguration:

»If by descending came down also to the angels – he came from the heights of the heavens – perhaps he was formed according to the place. And so as in this life he was transfigured in front of those who ascended together with him to the mountain and revealed himself gloriously (Matt 17:1-8), so as well when he came from the Father.

[Εἰ καταβαίνων καταβέβηκε καὶ πρὸς τοὺς ἀγγέλους – ἦλθε γὰρ ἀπὸ τῆς ἀκρωρείας τῶν οὐρανῶν –, τάχα κατὰ τόπον ἐμορφώθη. Καὶ ὡσπερ ἐν τῷ βίῳ τούτῳ μετεμορφώθη ἔμπροσθεν τῶν συναναβεβηκότων αὐτῷ εἰς τὸ ὄρος καὶ ἐνδοξότερος ἐφάνη, οὕτως καταβαίνων ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς.]« (Or., *H15Ps* II 8 [GCS NF 19, 109])

The difference is that Origen composes his interpretation by discussing epistemological problems, arguing for the s.c. *polymorphic epistemology*, by which everyone perceives the Lord in their way since He reveals himself in different forms,<sup>17</sup> and Jerome, on the contrary, continues explaining why the Lord had to assume our human composite nature, despite possessing the more straightforward divine nature.<sup>18</sup> The fact that both Origen and Jerome introduced similar references to Christ's Transfiguration, when interpreting an otherwise very different passage from the Psalm 15, clearly supports the strong influence of the Alexandrian on Jerome and these findings became possible only after the discovery of Origen's lost homilies on Psalms. Although they accentuate different aspects, the relevance of Origen for Jerome's understanding of the Transfiguration is thus even more firmly established.

<sup>17</sup> »Ἐπεὶ ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος, καταβαίνων ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς οὐκ ἔμεινε ὁποῖος ἦν πρότερον ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν· οὐ γὰρ ἐχώρουν αὐτὸν οἱ κατώτεροι, ἀλλ' ὡσπερ ἐμοὶ γέγονεν ἄνθρωπος, οὕτως παρ' ἄλλοις ἄγγελος καὶ παρ' ἄλλοις θρόνος, κυριότης, ἀρχή, ἐξουσία· καὶ ἐκάστῳ γίνεται τι ὁ κύριος, ὅπερ ἕκαστος δύναται αὐτὸν χωρῆσαι. Τί λέγω τότε; Καὶ σήμερον ὁ λόγος μεταμορφοῦται. Οὐχ ὁμοίως αὐτὸν βλέπει Παῦλος καὶ Τιμόθεος· ἔνδοξον, μεταμορφούμενον ἐπὶ τὸ θεϊότερον, βλέπει αὐτὸν Παῦλος μᾶλλον ἢ Τιμόθεος· ἔλαττον αὐτοῦ τὴν δόξαν βλέπει Τιμόθεος. Κἂν ἐλάττονα ἐκείνου νοήσης, ὅπει ἐλάττονα μορφὴν τοῦ Ἰησοῦ τῷ ἐλάττοτι ἐμφαινόμενου. Ἐὰν δέ τις ἦ πάνυ ἁμαρτωλός, ὁλῶς οὐ βλέπει τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, ἀλλὰ βλέπει αὐτὸν οὐκ ἔχοντα εἶδος οὐδὲ κάλλος, ἀλλὰ τὸ εἶδος αὐτοῦ ἀτιμον ἐκλείπον παρὰ τοὺς υἱοὺς τῶν ἀνθρώπων· ἄνθρωπον αὐτὸν βλέπει, ἄνθρωπον οὐκ ἀπλήγα ἀλλ' ἐν πληγῇ. Ἐὰν ἦς ἐν πληγῇ, ἐν πληγῇ αὐτὸν βλέπεις· ἐὰν ἦς ἀπλήγης, ἀπλήγα αὐτὸν ὄψει· ἐὰν ἦς ἄμωμος, ὅπει αὐτὸν σοὶ ἄμωμον ἑαυτὸν ἐπιδεικνύοντα. Οὐχ ὅτι αὐτός ποτε μεμώμηται ἢ ὅτι αὐτός ποτε πέπληγε· τὰς ἀσθενείας ἡμῶν φέρει καὶ περὶ ἡμῶν ὀδυνᾷται, καὶ ἡμεῖς ἐλογισάμεθα αὐτὸν εἶναι ἐν πόνῳ καὶ ἐν πληγῇ καὶ ἐν κακώσει. Ταῦτα διὰ τὸ οὐκ ἐγκαταλείψεις τὴν ψυχὴν μου εἰς τὸν ἄδην.» Ἐδεῖ γὰρ παραστήσαι, ὅτι γυμνῇ ψυχῇ πρὸς ψυχὰς γενένηται.« (Origenes, *H15Ps* II 8 [GCS NF 19, 109–110]) See also a recent study of Leoni (2021).

<sup>18</sup> Curiously, Jerome states also his conviction that only Christ's soul descended into hell, not his body and not the God-Word, what appears foreign to Catholic belief, since it has been accepted *cum fide*, that the Word of God descended to hell simultaneously with the soul of Christ. Cf. also Theophilus of Alexandria, *Easter Letter of the year 402* (98.7), translated by Jerome. See Ewald 1996, 35, n. 107.

### 3.2 Fortunatian of Aquileia's *Commentarii in evangelia*

In October of the same year, 2012, Lukas Dorfbauer discovered the work *Commentarii in evangelia* (CSEL 103) and ascribed it to the Fortunatian of Aquileia, African bishop of this northern Italian Roman city. In Codex 17 of the Archdiocesan library of Köln from the beginning of the 9<sup>th</sup> century, he identified a commentary on the Gospels, which had been anonymously lying in oblivion for around 1500 years. However, he proved to be probably the oldest preserved Latin Gospel commentary, written in the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

The relation between Jerome and Fortunatian is complex and very intriguing (Bogataj 2018; 2020a). Jerome certainly knew at least Fortunatian's *Commentary* and maybe even the man himself in person.

Fortunatian's work is generally transmitted only in part and, unfortunately, does not include any reference to the Transfiguration account. In the form as it is preserved, there are also some other remarkable lacunae: there is no commentary on the Lord's Prayer, Fortunatian remains silent on a section as long as Matthew 21:42–23:22, his account on Jesus' crucifixion and burial (Matthew 26 and 27) is both lacunose and relatively cursory, and he does not devote a single section on Matthew's concluding chapter 28 narrating Jesus' Resurrection.

As opposed to the discovery of Origen's homilies, which shed new light on Jerome's interpretation of the Transfiguration, Fortunatian's commentary offers us new evidence only *ex silentio*.<sup>19</sup> Without falling into hypothetical speculation, can the question – Why is the comment on the Transfiguration not included in Fortunatian's work – offer at least some different considerations? On the level of textual criticism, the whole text may just not be transmitted in the manuscript tradition. Was there no interest in specific passages, or may there be some correlation with the needs of the commentary's original audience that we fail to see? Was the original author unable to provide an interpretation, or are the omissions indebted to the lack of the appropriate sources? Could there have been some redaction of the text, eliminating the Transfiguration account on behalf of some doctrinal polemics? We suppose, for example, that Augustine abstained from emphasizing this Gospel narrative because the Manicheans over-emphasized it.<sup>20</sup>

No firm answer to these questions is possible, and perhaps, until further evidence emerges, we can do no more than speculate. Nevertheless, Dorfbauer (2015) demonstrated that the North Italian preacher living in the 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> century, whose works are gathered in the collection of the so-called *Epiphanius Latinus*, was well acquainted with the work both of Fortunatian (and Chromace) (2015), it is possible to suggest that in Epiphanius' *Interpretatio Evangeliorum* (CPL 914), sermons 29 and especially 47 (Erikson 1939, 49, 113–118), encompass some kind of 'North Italian (maybe Aquileian)' interpretation. For Epiphanius, the Transfigura-

<sup>19</sup> For some insights regarding this topic I am indebted to Lukas Dorfbauer.

<sup>20</sup> Although Pintard (1972) and Louth (2000) do not explicitly mention this theory, and the issue would require further research, it is nevertheless true that the Transfiguration did not have the same significance for Augustine as it did in the East.

tion of Christ is vital, especially as evidence of Christ's divinity. In both sermons, the author emphasizes Christ's glory and Moses and Elijah as testimonies, and this part of the comment follows Chromace's exposition almost *verbatim* (Dorfbauer 2015, 101).<sup>21</sup> However, Chromace, a couple of decades after Fortunatian, wrote a long and vital treatise on this great mystery of Christ's life.

### 3.3 Chromace of Aquileia and Victorinus of Poetovio

Only seventeen treatises on the Gospel of Matthew and one homily on the eight beatitudes by Chromace of Aquileia were known until Henri Lemarié in 1969 discovered and published another thirty-eight sermons. In the following years, he found three more texts in a 12<sup>th</sup>-century homiliary (Codex 8) of the abbey San Silvestro de Fabriano library in central Italy, which he attributed to Chromace (CCSL 9A Suppl.). Among them, *Tractatus in Matthaemum* 54A – in the homiliary it was intended for the first Saturday of Lent and, interestingly, attributed to Jerome –, contains an interpretation of the Transfiguration event (Matt 16:28–17:9). Lemarié presented this treatise at the Oxford International Conference for Patristic studies in 1979 and comparing the text with that of other similar works, including both Jerome's *Commentarium in Matthaemum* and *Tractatus in Marcum*, demonstrated the originality of Chromace as well as some literary influences, but not the one of Jerome (1980, 213–222).

However, even of greater interest is a tiny detail, one word precisely, in Chromace's explanation of the three tents (Matt 17:4).<sup>22</sup> In assigning three different meanings to them – heaven, paradise, and earth – Chromace refers to an older source: »maiores intellexerunt«. This is the only example of this word in his work and could, according to Lemarié, derive from a millennialist author, presumably Victorinus of Poetovio (CCSL 9A Suppl., 635; Lemarié 1980, 220, n. 17). After the discovery of Fortunatian's *Commentarii in evangelia*, although we are well aware of Chromace's heavy dependence on the work of his predecessor in Aquileia,<sup>23</sup> we know that, though he could have been among Chromace's *maiores*, he probably was not (unless the passage on the Transfiguration disappeared from the work during the transmission of the text).

A strikingly similar interpretation of the three tents can be found in the work *De arca Noe* of Gregory of Elvira – preserved for centuries under the name of Origen and only in 1909 attributed to Gregory by A. Wilmart –, where the Iberian bishop delivers a very similar commentary on the three-chambered ark, cit-

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Epiphanius, *Interpretatio Evangeliorum* 29; 47 (Erikson 1939, 49; 115) and Chromatius, *Sermo* 22.2 (CCSL 9A, 101).

<sup>22</sup> »In tribus autem tabernaculis de quibus ait Petrus ad Dominum: »Domine, si uis, faciam tria tabernacula, tres mansiones, id est caeli, paradisi et terrae significatas maiores intellexerunt, quae per uniuersis credentibus tam per Moysen, id est per legem, tam etiam per Heliam, id est per prophetas, quam etiam per ipsum Dominum, id est per euangelicam praedicationem, pro qualitate meritum a Domino repromissae sunt.« (Chromatius, *Tractatus* 54A.10 [CCSL 9A Suppl., 635])

<sup>23</sup> After Fortunatian, and before Chromace, Valerianus was bishop of Aquileia. For the relations between Fortunatian and Chromace, see CSEL 103, 51, n. 142.

ing the same biblical verses as Chromace (John 14:2; Isa 40:31; Matt 13:8).<sup>24</sup> As Lemarié suggested, there would have been one common source of both Gregory and Chromace, and the probabilities direct us to Victorinus' unfortunately lost *Commentary on Matthew*.

#### 4. Conclusion

By examining Jerome's interpretation of Christ's Transfiguration, we can prove the importance of this Biblical event for Jerome and his exegesis. It has become clear that, despite the fact of its absence from Fortunatian's *Commentarii in evangelia*, the event of Christ revealing his divine glory on Mount Tabor had an essential role in the early Latin Biblical interpretation.

Why did the event of Transfiguration not become a central point for understanding Christ in Western theology as it has in the Eastern Greek tradition? One conclusion can be drawn from our investigation since Jerome did accept from Origen the great importance of the Transfiguration, but Augustine, on the other hand, did not. The role of Jerome's work is, therefore, of much importance since it represents some echoes of the Origenistic theology in Latin.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. »Ideo etiam dudum arca in similitudine ecclesiae tricamerata fieri iussa est, ut illic quoque ipsa mansio-  
nem diuersitatem ostenderetur, de quibus scriptum et apud Esaiam inuenimus, ubi dicitur: *Volabunt sicut  
aquilae*, id est hi quibus caelestis mansio debetur. Et addidit: *Currunt et non fatigabuntur*, hi scilicet qui in  
paradisum transferentur; *ambulabunt et non esurient*, hi utique qui in terra, renouato mundo, regnabunt.  
Quod id ipsum etiam tripertito fructu terrae illius optimae, id est in centesimo, sexagesimo et tricesimo,  
significatum potest intellegi.« (Chromatius, *Tractatus* 54A.10 [CCSL 9A Suppl., 635]) »Quod autem bicame-  
rata et tricamerata arca fuisse refertur, mansionum loca et habitationem qualitates, quae sanctis in regno  
dei sunt praeparatae, euidenter ostendit. In una etenim camera paradisi figura est, in altera terrae nouae,  
– ubi Ierusalem caelestis est descendura, /.../ –; in tertia camera caelorum regnum. Inde est quod et salu-  
ator noster ac dominus in euangelio dicebat: *Multae sunt habitationes apud patrem meum qui est in caelo*.  
Sic autem de caelorum regno scriptum est: *Beati qui persecutionem patiuntur propter iustitiam, quia ipso-  
rum est regnum caelorum*. De paradisi autem mansionem ipse utique dominus probat cum dicit: *Vincenti*,  
ait, *dabo edere de ligno uitae, quod est in paradiso mei*. Terrae autem nouae mansionem similiter manife-  
stat, cum dicit: *Beati mansueti, quia ipsi possidebunt terram*; sed et Salomon: *Sancti*, ait, *relinquentur super  
terram, impii autem expellentur ab ea*. Harum itaque tripartitam rationem mansionum sanctorum etiam et apostolis  
suis in euangelio dominus per parabolam manifestasse dignatus est dicens: *Semen, quod cecidit in terram  
bonam, faciet*, ait, *fructum centesimum*. Centesimum itaque fructum facient, qui in caelum habitationes  
accipiunt, sexagesimum, qui in paradiso habitare merentur, tricesimum, qui in terram nouam futuri sunt.  
Vnde iam planum uobis esse debet arcam istam tricameratam ecclesiae, ut saepe dixi, catholicae imaginem  
perspicue indicasse, cuius tripartita habitacula, id est caeli, paradisi et terrae nouae, retro olim a domino  
monstrabatur.« (Gregorius Illiberitanus, *De arca Noe* 15–20 [CCSL 69, 151–152])

## Abbreviations

- CCSL – Corpus Christianorum Series Latina.  
 CPE – Connaissance des Pères de l'Église.  
 CPL – Clavis Patrum Latinorum.  
 GCS (NF) – Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller (Neue Folge).  
 PL – Patrologia Latina.

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