

The Illustrations in St Jerome's

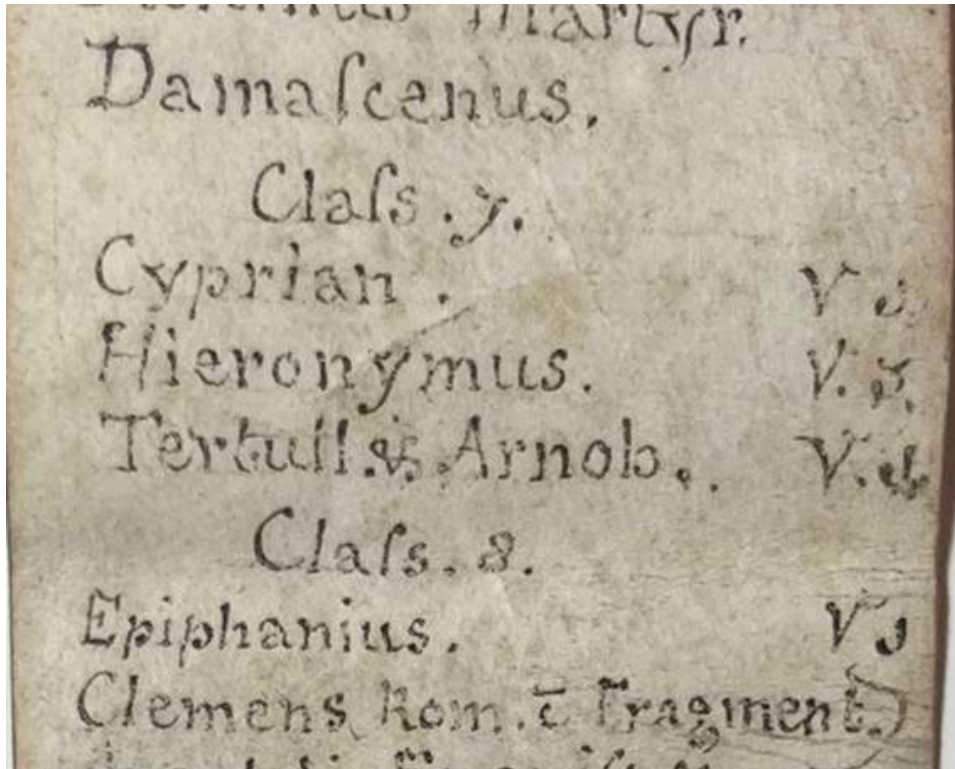
Opera Antwerp, 1578-9

Ancient Library Exhibition



Jill de Laat

The library's three volumes of St Jerome's *Opera* appear in Class 7 of the books of the Ancient Fathers of the Church and are listed as 'Hieronymus' in the inventory given to the church wardens, John Man and William Briggs, when they took up office in 1599.



Each volume has a brass-framed finestra of horn displaying the name of the donor, Edward Cope.



Cope was a gentleman of Bury who studied at St John's College, Cambridge and later at Gray's Inn. In 1594 he bought the Abbey site from Sir Robert Jermyn. Both gave books in 1595 when the library was founded.



The volumes have matching leather bindings on wooden boards which show evidence of clasps:



Christophe Plantin's edition was published in nine books, in this case, as is shown by the fore-edge lettering, bound into three volumes.



The title page in volume three describes Christophe Plantin as the 'Archtypographer (chief printer) to the King', a privilege he was granted when printing the Polyglot Bible for Philip II. Anyone else printing the works of Jerome would have his books confiscated and would be fined eighty florins.

It also shows his printer's mark of the Golden Compasses and his motto *Labore et Constantia* (By labour and constancy).



The handwritten inscription 'St James's Library in Bury St Eds' was written in all our books in about 1715. The library has a copy of the Polyglot Bible and also works by Cassian, Tacitus and Montano printed by the Plantin Press.

This study looks at some of the figures of humans, animals and birds which appear in the illustrated capitals.

Birds and animals



C – This bird, perhaps a dove, is perched in the centre of the letter. Birds had a multitude of profound spiritual meanings. They were often seen as messengers between heaven and earth and the dove came to be particularly associated with this idea. A dove, of course, was sent from the ark and returned with an olive branch, signalling divine reconciliation.

P – These birds are peacocks, one pecking on the ground and the other staring straight ahead.

Peacocks have been considered supernatural throughout history and signify immortality and purification.



H – This image features an owl and something akin to a dove. The owl has pinned the dove to the ground. Is he attacking it? Or feeding it?

Owls have been seen as powerful and symbols of wisdom down through the ages.



Q – This large bird, perched in a palm tree, appears to be eating the fruit.

G – Across various cultures and mythologies, rams symbolise strength, leadership and renewal, often representing determination and resilience.



S – An intriguing image here with a monkey at the top of the S poking a dog underneath with a stick. Quite a playful picture but the dog is not happy.

The monkey, being a playful and wise animal, is clearly enjoying himself.



E - The stag is a symbol for Christ, who tramples and destroys the devil. Early bestiaries describe the stag as a relentless enemy of snakes.

Snakes are symbols of the devil.

V – Three vases or vessels all with faces. The bottom left is pig-like whilst on the right it is more like a bird's beak. The central figure has a human look about it but it could just be the pattern of the vase.



C – This image is very curious. It could be seen as an elephant, on first viewing, but then the ears are small. A dog, perhaps, or a king with a beard? It is wearing a crown and has a large cape, held up by two birds. Whatever it is meant to signify, the character is keen to preserve his modesty.

Human Figures



P – A rescue from a shipwreck. The figure on the right looks saintly (or even Jesus?) saving a man from the waves. Is he symbolically saving a man's soul?

N - A bearded figure stands behind a gate into a city. Is he guarding the gate? It is quite crudely drawn with his feet particularly out of perspective.

This image, like others, appear many times through the three St Jerome books, each with the same letter but none specifically relating to the following text.



L – The winged ox seen here is the symbol of St Luke the Evangelist. Oxen were often used in temple sacrifices and therefore signifies the sacrificial character of Christ in Luke's account.

Luke is one of the patron saints of butchers.



T – Figures either side of the letter seem to grow out of the foliage with leaves and petals forming their lower halves.

B – Two peaceful lions lie either side of this letter, with a youthful face peering through the copious foliage in the upper half. Lions have long been associated with courage and strength and have always had a close association with deities.



S – More crudely drawn than others, this looks like an offering being made. The figure on the right is a monk or man of the cloth as he appears to have a tonsure and priestly robes.

The figure making the offering is wearing similar clothes as the figure in letter N, with the same, out of perspective, feet.



D – A king playing a harp. The lyre and harp are the most common instruments associated with King David.

Known as the 'kinnor', it is the first string instrument to be mentioned in the Bible, appearing in Genesis 4:21.

E – Two monks are looking at a book. It could be an illuminated manuscript, perhaps just completed by one of them.

The text next to one of these images reads 'And the word of the Lord came to pass, saying "receive what is given to you from above"'.



N – This image shows a prone figure, possibly female, under a tree, with a cloak thrown over the branches for shade. On either side are cloven-hoofed, horned demon-like creatures gazing at her. Are these figures in a dream perhaps?