

## ADAM IN PSALM 81.7 (=82.7) IN THE PSALTER ACCORDING TO THE HEBREW BIBLE OF THE VULGATE\*

TAMIKO ISAKA

The translations of the Hebrew word אָדָם ('*ādām*) in Ps.81.7 differ between the two versions by Jerome (c.345–420), namely, *the Psalter according to the Septuagint* and *the Psalter according to the Hebrew Bible*. The former version was translated by Jerome from the Hexaplaric Greek text of the Septuagint in approximately 386. The latter is the version directly translated from the Hebrew text available between circa 390 and 392.<sup>1</sup> He translated אָדָם as *homines* (“human beings”) in *the Psalter according to the Septuagint* but as *Adam* in *the Psalter according to the Hebrew Bible*. What was his reason for changing the translation? Cameron remarks, “The patristic tradition of interpreting verses 6–7 in relation to Adam is almost certainly the explanation for Jerome’s translation of 7a אֲנִי כְּאָדָם תְּמוּתָיון as *ergo quasi Adam moriemini* in the IH [*sc. Iuxta Hebraeos* (the Psalter “according to the Hebrew Bible”)] ...when his usual practice is to translate אָדָם as *homo*,” and refers us to Mosser, who traced the history of early patristic exegesis of Psalm 81.<sup>2</sup> Cameron’s remark is indeed plausible, but he did not consider the problem any further. In fact, Jerome left some remarks on Ps.81.7 in his writings, namely, the *Commentarioli in Psalmos* (“Notes on the Psalms”) and the *Tractatus in Psalmos* (“Tractates on the Psalms”). By examining what he said in these writings, we will explore the issue in more detail and provide a brief account of the process of his translation based on the Hebrew original. We will start by checking what Christian writers before Jerome said concerning the words ἄνθρωποι (the translation in the Septuagint) or *homines*. Then, we will consider Jerome’s thoughts on the difference between the two translations in his writings.

---

\* We have cited the Vulgate according to *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*, edd. R. Weber, R. Gryson, et al., Fifth Edition, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007. The Septuagint is cited from *Septuaginta, Id est Vetus Testamentum graece iuxta LXX interpretes*, ed. Alfred Rahlfs, Editio altera quam recognovit et emendavit Robert Hanhart, Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006. We have followed the numbering of the *Iuxta Hebraeos* Psalter of the Weber/Gryson edition. Where the verse in question is numbered differently in the Massoretic text—the original text of the modern language translations of the Old Testament—we have shown the latter numbering in parentheses at the first appearance. Other works are cited either from *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (CCSL), from the *Patrologia Latina* database (PL), or from the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* database (TLG).

<sup>1</sup> *The Psalter according to the Septuagint* has been traditionally called the “Gallican Psalter,” since it was introduced and became very popular in Gaul. For the date, see Kelly, J.N.D., *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies*, London: Duckworth, 1975, pp.158, 161. The “Gallican Psalter” gradually superseded the Psalter from Hebrew, and, instead of the latter, was normally printed in the editions of the Latin Bible. The Weber/Gryson edition includes both Psalters.

<sup>2</sup> Cameron, J.S., *The Vir Triculus: An Investigation of the Classical, Jewish and Christian Influences on Jerome’s Translation of the Psalter Iuxta Hebraeos*, dissertation, Univ. of Oxford, 2006, p.163. For Mosser, see the note 9.

## I. Homines (“human beings”) or Adam

Ps.81.6-7

*The Psalter according to the Septuagint:*

<sup>6</sup>ego dixi dii estis et filii Excelsi omnes <sup>7</sup>vos autem sicut homines moriemini et sicut unus de principibus cadetis (“I said, ‘you are gods and the sons of the Lofty one, all of you. But like human beings you will die, and like one of the rulers you will fall.’”<sup>3</sup>)

*The Psalter according to the Hebrew Bible:*

<sup>6</sup>ego dixi dii estis et filii Excelsi omnes vos <sup>7</sup>ergo quasi Adam moriemini et quasi unus de principibus cadetis (“I said, ‘you are gods and the sons of the Lofty one, all of you. Nevertheless<sup>4</sup>, like Adam you will die, and like one of the rulers you will fall.’”)

The most remarkable difference between the two Psalters is the choice of *homines* and *Adam* as translations of אָדָם in the Hebrew original. This Hebrew word means both “man, mankind” as a collective noun and “Adam” as a proper name. In the Septuagint, it was translated as ἄνθρωποι (anthrōpoi, “human beings”), and this translation was followed by *the Psalter according to the Septuagint*.<sup>5</sup> It is obvious in the context of the Hebrew Bible that the contrast between “gods” and “human beings” is intended. The contrast is also evident in the translation of *homines* in *the Psalter according to the Septuagint* but apparently not in the translation of *Adam* in *the Psalter according to the Hebrew Bible*.

In addition, Origen (c.185–c.254) and Basil of Caesarea (or Basil the Great. c.330–79) cited Ps.81.6-7 in connection with the passage, “every human being is a liar” at Ps.115.11 (= 116.11)<sup>6</sup>. Similarly, Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea (c.260–c.340), and Didymus the Blind (c.313–98) associated the verses with 1 Corinthians 3.3: “are you not of the flesh, and walk as a human being?”<sup>7</sup> They made these associations because all these passages have the word “human being” in common. The change of *homines* for *Adam* at Ps.81.7 in Latin might have caused confusion about the associations of the Christian commentators. Jerome chose to change

<sup>3</sup> All translations are my own, unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>4</sup> For this meaning of *ergo*, see *Dictionnaire latin-français de auteurs chrétiens*, A. Blaise, revu spécialement pour le vocabulaire théologique par H. Chirat, réimpression anastatique par Brepols, Turnholt: Brepols, 1993 (édition originale, 1954), p.313 (1 *ergo*, 2).

<sup>5</sup> The text of the verses 6-7 of *the Psalter according to the Septuagint* is exactly the same as that of the Old Latin versions. The Old Latin versions are the Latin versions of the Bible used in the Latin-speaking Church until the Vulgate superseded them. Regarding the Psalter of the Old Latin versions, we have used the “Roman Psalter” in *Le Psautier Romain et les Autres Anciens Psautiers Latins*, Édition Critique par Dom Robert Weber, moine bénédictin de l’Abbaye Pontificale de Saint-Jérôme in Urbe, Collectanea Biblica Latina, Vol.X, Roma: Abbaye Saint-Jérôme, e Città del Vaticano: Libreria Vaticana, 1953. It is supposed that the “Roman Psalter” is close to the text that Jerome worked with and which he corrected. See Weber, *ibid.*, p.IX; Kelly, *op.cit.*, p.89; Bogaert, P.-M., “The Latin Bible,” *The New Cambridge History of the Bible, vol. 1: From the Beginnings to 600*, edited by J. C. Paget and J. Schaper, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2013, p.515.

<sup>6</sup> Origen, *Commentarii in evangelium Joannis* 20.27.241-243. Basil of Caesarea, *Homilia in Psalmum 115* [Migne, PG 30.109].

<sup>7</sup> Origen, *Commentarium in evangelium Matthaei* 16.29; 17.19. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Commentaria in Psalmos: Psalmum 55 (=56)* [Migne, PG 23.497, 500]. Didymus the Blind, *Commentarii in Ecclesiasten* (7-8.8), codex p.199, l.11; *Commentarii in Psalmos* 29-34, codex p.151, l.2, p.152, l.19.

the traditional translation in spite of these disadvantages.

We will now move on to the patristic interpretation of the verses in relation to Adam, explained by Mosser. He studied three early Christian writers: Justin Martyr (c.100–c.165), Irenaeus (c.130–c.200), and Clement of Alexandria (c.150–c.215). He noted that “the patristic writers saw in Ps.82:6-7 a summary of salvation history consisting of two parts. The first related to the creation and fall of Adam, the immortality that was his if he obeyed God’s command, and the corruption, mortality, and loss of glory resulting from his disobedience. The second part saw the eschatological reversal of these traits in the resurrected Christ, the second Adam who bestows his incorruption, immortality, and glory on those who are joined to him.”<sup>8</sup> The first patristic writer who explained the psalm in this way was Justin. According to Mosser, Justin employed a testimonial source for his interpretation of the verses, and the “source appears to be indebted to an antecedent Jewish interpretation of Ps.82:6-7 that saw it as descriptive of humanity’s creation and fall,” because many elements from the first part of salvation history are found in Second Temple and other early Jewish literature.<sup>9</sup> The motive word in the Hebrew Bible that connects Ps.81.6-7 to the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis is אדם at verse 7. Justin used the Septuagint, in which אדם was translated as ἄνθρωποι; however, he rephrased the Greek word as “Adam and Eve” in his subsequent discussion on Psalm 81. This is probably because the testimonial source to which he had access explained ἄνθρωποι as “Adam” or “Adam and Eve.” After citing the whole psalm of the Greek Bible that was used by the Jews, he said:

In the Septuagint it is told, “Behold, like human beings you die, and like one of the rulers you fall,” to point out the disobedience of human beings—of Adam and Eve, I’m saying—, and also the fall of one of the rulers, namely, that one called “serpent” who fell with a great fall because he deceived Eve.<sup>10</sup>

Justin repeated their names twice at 124.4 in a brief discussion. In contrast, we do not find their names in the passages of the other two patristic writers Mosser examined.<sup>11</sup> Neither Irenaeus nor Clement of Alexandria referred to the “human beings” of verse 7, nor mentioned Adam. Judging from the context, Irenaeus seems to have considered human beings in general, after Adam. Moreover, until roughly the time of Jerome, no Christian writer in either Greek or in Latin explained “human beings” in Psalm 81 as Adam (and Eve), as far as I have checked. Similarly, only few of them noticed who the “human beings” were. Among these, Ambrosiaster (who wrote in the later 4th century) regarded them as “those who boast in being human,” and Zeno of Verona (who died c.375) regarded them as “angels.”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Mosser, C., “The Earliest Patristic Interpretations of Psalm 82, Jewish Antecedents, and the Origin of Christian Deification,” in *Journal of Theological Studies*, New Series, 56.1 (April 2005), pp.37-38, 44, 58-59, here 65. Mosser chiefly focused on the patristic interpretation that Christians were the sons of God.

<sup>9</sup> Mosser, *op. cit.*, pp.35, 38, 40-41, 65-72. The quotation is from p.40.

<sup>10</sup> *Dialogus cum Tryphone* 124. 3: “ἐν δὲ τῇ τῶν ἐβδομήκοντα ἐξηγήσει εἰρηται· Ἰδοὺ δὴ ὡς ἄνθρωποι ἀποθνήσκετε, καὶ ὡς εἷς τῶν ἀρχόντων πίπτετε· ἵνα δηλώσῃ καὶ τὴν παρακοὴν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, τοῦ Ἀδὰμ λέγω καὶ τῆς Εὕας, καὶ τὴν πτώσιν τοῦ ἐνὸς τῶν ἀρχόντων, τοῦτ’ ἔστι τοῦ κεκλημένου ἐκείνου ὄφεως, πεσόντος πτώσιν μεγάλην διὰ τὸ ἀποπλανῆσαι τὴν Εὕαν”.

<sup>11</sup> Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 3.6.1; 3.19.1; 4.38.4. Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* 12.122.4-123.1; *Paedagogus* 1.26.1-2.

<sup>12</sup> Ambrosiaster, *Commentaria in Epistolam ad Corinthios Primam* 3.4 [PL 17.198]. Zeno of Verona, *Tractatus* 2.13.4 [PL 11.432].

From this observation it seems that, while they continued to read a summary of salvation history at Ps.81.6-7 in the Septuagint or the Old Latin versions after Justin, they no longer paid attention to the identification of “human beings” with Adam, and in the course of time the identification ceased to be handed down by Christians. This is probably because Christian writers came to focus entirely on the second part of salvation history and its center, Christ. Jerome also failed to interpret *homines* as Adam, as we will see in the following section.

## II. *The Interpretations of Ps.81.7 in the Commentarioli in Psalmos and the Tractatus in Psalmos*

Regarding the Psalter, Jerome wrote the *Commentarioli in Psalmos* (hereafter *Commentarioli*), the *Tractatus in Psalmos quattuordecim* (“*Tractates on the fourteen Psalms*”), and the *Tractatus in Psalmos* (hereafter *Tractatus*). He studied Psalm 81 in the *Commentarioli* and the *Tractatus*. The *Commentarioli* is supposed to have been written in the period between the production of the *Psalter according to the Septuagint* and the *Psalter according to the Hebrew Bible*.<sup>13</sup> As Jerome states in the preface, it was based on the *Enchiridion*, which was a commentary on the Psalms by Origen and is not extant; he produced the *Commentarioli* for one of his friends, who had read the *Enchiridion* with him; he gathered the remarks of Origen from his other writings on many points that had not been sufficiently explained or dealt with at all in the *Enchiridion*, and at the same time he added his own remarks in the *Commentarioli*. In contrast, nothing is known regarding the date of the *Tractatus*, which deals with 59 psalms, except that it was written after Jerome’s migration to Bethlehem. It is thought to be “addresses delivered by the saint [*sc.* Jerome] to his fellow monks at Bethlehem.”<sup>14</sup>

In the *Commentarioli*, Jerome left no comments on Ps.81.7a, but noted on verse 7b:

“And like one of the rulers you will fall.” One of the rulers is Adam or the Devil, about whom the Lord says, “Behold, Adam has become like one of us” [Gen.3.22].<sup>15</sup>

Regarding the identification of “one of the rulers” with Adam, Jerome seems to have been influenced by Origen’s interpretation of this verse in his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*. Origen cited Gen.3.22 and associated its expression of “like one” with the same expression at Ps.81.7, though he did not regard “one of the rulers” as Adam.<sup>16</sup> Jerome, however, connected Gen.3.22 directly with Ps.81.7, and identified “one of the rulers” with Adam.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Kelly, *op. cit.*, pp.157-158; Cameron, *op. cit.*, p.15, n.49. According to Kedar, it was written in c.392 (Kedar, B., “The Latin Translations,” in Mulder, M.J.(ed.), *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading and Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, Assen / Maastricht: Van Gorcum, and Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988, p.319).

<sup>14</sup> Pease, A.S., “Notes on St. Jerome’s Tractates on the Psalms,” in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 26.2 (1907), p.107; cf. pp.112-13.

<sup>15</sup> *Commentarioli in Psalmos* 81.7 (CCSL 72, p.220): “*Et tamquam unus de principibus cadetis. Vnus de principibus, Adam est siue diabolus, de quo Dominus loquitur: ‘Ecce Adam factus est quasi unus ex nobis’.*” אדם at Gen.3.22 in the Hebrew Bible was translated as Αδამ in the Septuagint, as *Adam* in the Old Latin Versions and the Vulgate, and as “the man” in the English Standard Version.

<sup>16</sup> Origen, *Commentarii in evangelium Joannis* 32.18.233-34. Didymus the Blind in *In Genesim* 3.22 (codex p.109) also associated Gen.3.22 with Ps.81.6-7 in the same way as Origen, and did not take “one of the rulers” as Adam, either.

In the *Tractatus*, Jerome considered Ps.81.7 in its entirety. The following passage is the first part of his words:

“But like human beings you will die.” Therefore, you see that one who is a human being dies. God indeed does not die. And Adam, as long as he observed the command and was a god, did not die. But after he tasted from the forbidden tree, he died at once. For God says to him, “In whatever day you will taste, you will die the death” [Gen.2.17]. It says better in the Hebrew scripture, “But like Adam you will die.” As he was ejected from the Paradise, so we too were ejected.<sup>18</sup>

First, he cited verse 7a, which contains the same text as the Old Latin versions and the *Psalter according to the Septuagint*; he then offered the translation in which *homines* was replaced by *Adam*.<sup>19</sup> Thereafter, he considered verse 7b and asserted that “one of the rulers” should be regarded as the Devil, rejecting the identification with Adam:

Who is that one of the rulers who fell? Even if you want to say “Adam,” it was already said in the previous verses that “but like Adam you will die.” .... In fact, the Devil, who was the ruler and fell, did not die.<sup>20</sup>

It was Jerome himself, however, who said that “one of the rulers” was Adam, which has been shown in the *Commentarioli* passage quoted above. This view was probably known to the monks he was addressing in the *Tractatus*. He must certainly have thought this at the time of producing the *Commentarioli*, because he had not yet noticed that “human beings” in the Septuagint and the Old Latin versions was the translation of אָדָם in the Hebrew original. When he found out about it, he would have recognized that the original word “Adam” led to the interpretation of a summary of salvation history. However, it would have been possible for him to explain Ps.81.6-7 as the summary according to the unchanged translation, just as the patristic writers before him had continued to explain it. After he realized his own misunderstanding, he would have judged it necessary to translate the Hebrew word as a proper name in the *Psalter according to the Hebrew Bible* in order to practice exegesis correctly.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Jerome also interpreted “one of the rulers” as the Devil. This identification with the Devil is seen in Eusebius of Caesarea’s *Commentaria in Psalmos: Psalmum 81* [Migne, PG 23, 988], Didymus the Blind’s *In Genesim* 3.22 (codex p.109), and Augustine of Hippo’s *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 38.18; 81.6; 115.3.

<sup>18</sup> *Tractatus de Psalmo 81.7* (CCSL 78, p.86): “Vos autem sicut homines moriemini. Videtis ergo quoniam qui homo est moritur. Deus enim non moritur. Et Adam quamdiu seruauit praeceptum et deus fuit, non mortuus est. Postquam uero gustauit de arbore illicita, statim mortuus est. Denique dicit ei Deus: ‘In quacumque die gustaueris, morte morieris’. Melius habet in hebraico: ‘Vos autem sicut Adam moriemini’. Sicut ille eiectus est de paradiso, sic et nos eiecti sumus.”

<sup>19</sup> Because the other words in this translation are not identical to the text of the *Psalter according to the Hebrew Bible*, the *Tractatus* 81 does not seem to have been written after translating Psalm 81 from the Hebrew original. But judging from Jerome’s mention of the Hebrew original, it was certainly written after producing the *Psalter according to the Septuaginta* and the *Commentarioli*, and probably during the same time as his translation of the psalm from the Hebrew Bible.

<sup>20</sup> *Tractatus de Psalmo 81. 7* (CCSL 78, pp.86-87): “quis est iste unus de principibus, qui cecidit? Si uolueris dicere Adam, iam in superioribus uersiculis dictum est, Vos autem sicut Adam moriemini...Diabolus uero, qui princeps fuit, et cecidit, non mortuus est.”

<sup>21</sup> Augustine cited Ps.81.6-7 in the *Sermon* 166, which is supposed to have been written in 410 or after (for the date, see Pellegrino, M., “General Introduction,” in *The Works of Saint Augustine*, ed. J. E. Rotelle, part 3, *Sermons*, I, New York: New City Press, 1990, p.147; Verbraken, P.-P., *Études critiques sur les sermons authentiques de Saint Augustin*,

In addition, because dying like Adam could be understood as different from dying like human beings, the translation of *Adam* would have been required by Jerome. Dying like human beings could be regarded as being mortal and dying biologically; dying like Adam, however, implied the interpretation of Christian writers of losing the life and glory of Eden, where Adam could gaze directly at God's countenance, and of being vested with perishable flesh.<sup>22</sup> It is clear from Jerome's words quoted above that, "after he [*sc.* Adam] tasted from the forbidden tree, he died at once," that he also interpreted the meaning of dying like Adam in this way. With these words he was talking not about the biological death of Adam, who lived up to 930 years after his expulsion from the Garden (Gen.5.5), but about his loss of the glorious life close to God in Eden.

### III. Conclusion

It has been suggested that the traditional interpretation of verse 7 by Christian writers explains the translation of *Adam* instead of *homines* at Ps.81.7 by Jerome. This suggestion is certainly adequate, but by examining Jerome's two writings on the psalm we have demonstrated that not the patristic interpretation per se, but his own experience of misunderstanding the meaning of *homines* could have motivated him to replace the traditional translation of *homines* with *Adam* in the *Psalter according to the Hebrew Bible*. He would have hoped to provide a precise text for interpreting Ps.81.6-7 as a summary of salvation history, in which Adam is one of the key figures. This essay has also shown that, although the word אָדָם in the Hebrew original led the early Jewish interpreters to associate the verses with Adam in Genesis, no Christian writers, except Justin Martyr, seem to have noticed the identification of "human beings" in the Septuagint and the Old Latin versions with Adam until roughly Jerome's time. Jerome did not observe this either, until he found the Hebrew word in the Hebrew original.

---

Instrumenta Patristica 12, Steenbrugis: In Abbatia S. Petri, 1976, p.94). At *Sermon* 166.2, immediately after he cited verse 7a, he said, "man [*i.e.*, human being] is Adam, and not son of man" (in Latin, "Homo enim Adam, et non filius hominis"). He mentioned Adam in relation to verse 7a, probably because the translation of *Adam* by Jerome had been known to him at that time.

<sup>22</sup> See Gary A. Anderson, *The Genesis of Perfection: Adam and Eve in Jewish and Christian Imagination*, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001, pp. 127-28. Anderson quoted the passages of Ephrem the Syrian, Gregory of Naziansus, and Gregory of Nyssa about Genesis 3.