

JEROME'S VIEW OF THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE
PRISCILLIANISTS AND PELAGIANS

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Some of the influences on the Pelagians—such as the rise of asceticism during the fourth century, Origen of Alexandria, the ‘Holy Priest’ Rufinus, Ambrosiaster, the Anonymous Commentator on Paul, Chromatius of Aquileia, Cyprian, Tertullian, Lactantius and even Augustine himself—have been explored previously by modern scholars.¹ Although no modern scholar has detected any influence of Priscillian and the Priscillianists on the

1. Alexander Souter, *Pelagius's Expositions of Thirteen Epistles of St. Paul: Introduction* (ed. J. Armitage Robinson; Text and Studies: Contributions to Biblical and Patristic Literature, 9; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), p. 185; Theodore De Bruyn, *Pelagius's Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* (O ECS; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), pp. 2-7; C.A. Garcia-Allen, ‘Was Pelagius Influenced by Chromatius of Aquileia?’, *StPatr* 17 (1982), pp. 1252-55; G. Bostock, ‘The Influence of Origen on Pelagius and Western Monasticism’, in W.A. Bienert and Uwe Kühbeweg (eds.), *Origeniana Septima: Origenes in den Auseinandersetzungen des 4. Jahrhunderts* (BETL, 137; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1999), pp. 381-96 (381-93). Pelagius also shows his influences in other texts, such as Basil, Evagrius, *Sentences of Sextus*, Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose of Milan, John Chrysostom, Early Syriac Christianity and Jerome. See Augustine, *Nat. grat.* 61.71–66.79; *Grat. Chr.* 1.42.46–50.55. Nozomu Yamada, ‘The Influence of Chromatius and Rufinus of Aquileia on Pelagius—as seen in his Key Ascetic Concepts: *exemplum Christi*, *sapientia* and *imperturbabilitas*’, *StPatr* 70 (2013), pp. 661-70; Henry Chadwick, *The Sentences of Sextus: A Contribution to the History of Early Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959); L.W. Barnard, ‘Pelagius and Early Syriac Christianity’, *Recherches de Théologie Ancienne et Médiévale* 35 (1968), pp. 193-96.

Pelagians, Jerome was convinced that the Priscillianists were theological ancestors of the Pelagians.² To fully understand the Pelagian controversy from Jerome's perspective, therefore, we must explore this perceived connection.³

What did Jerome see that led him to conclude that the Priscillianists⁴ had influenced the Pelagians? There certainly is no connection between them on the two main charges against Priscillian and his colleagues that led to their executions—that of being a Manichaean and dabbling in magic.⁵ The Pelagians also cannot be saddled with any of the additional accusations leveled against the Priscillianists that began to accumulate over the years after their deaths.⁶

2. Jerome, *Epist.* 133.3-4; Jerome, *Pelag.* 1.pref. Orosius of Braga also saw a connection between Priscillian and the Pelagians. He, too, did not make any concerted effort to make the connection between the two. Orosius, *Lib. apol.* 1.

3. Jerome often made genealogical connections. For example *Pelag.* 1.pref. See also Susanna Elm, 'The Polemical use of Genealogies: Jerome's Classification of Pelagius and Evagrius Ponticus', *StPatr* 33 (1997), pp. 311-18.

4. For an introduction to Priscillian and the Priscillianists, see Fernando Sánchez Dragó, *Prisciliano y el Priscilianismo* (Oviedo: Caja de Ahorros de Asturias, 1982).

5. Priscillian, *Tract.* 1.357-66, 380-90; Augustine, *Haer.* 70.1; Henry Chadwick, *Priscillian of Avila: The Occult and the Charismatic in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 51, 126, 143; Virginia Burrus, *The Making of a Heretic: Gender, Authority, and the Priscillianist Controversy* (Transformation of the Classical Heritage, 24; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 80; Victoria Escibano, 'Heresy and Orthodoxy in Fourth-Century Hispania: Arianism and Priscillianism', in Kim Bowes and Michael Kulikowski (eds.), *Hispania in Late Antiquity: Current Perspectives* (The Medieval and Early Modern Iberian World, 24; Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 121-50 (123). For a discussion of Priscillianist teaching, see Sylvian Jean Gabriel Sanchez, *Priscillien un Chrétien Non Conformiste: Doctrine et Pratique du Priscillianisme du IVe au VIIe Siècle* (ThH, 120; Paris: Beauchesne, 2009).

6. Burrus, *The Making of a Heretic*, pp. 3, 34. Around 428 CE, Augustine, for example, gave a list of the deviance of the Priscillianists that far exceeded the charges leveled against Priscillian in his own day: they were Gnostics, they 'swear, commit perjury, never betray a secret'; they claim that the soul has the same nature and substance as God, the soul 'comes down in stages through the seven heavens and their various principalities to enter into a certain voluntary contest on earth, that

Jerome's experience with the Priscillianists can be dated to his time in Rome in the mid-380s CE after Priscillian had attempted to gain an audience with Damasus,⁷ but his first text mentioning Priscillian, in 392, did not present him as a danger.⁸ But, by the time Jerome wrote his letter (*Epist.* 133) to Ctesiphon in 414 when Pelagius was living in Palestine,⁹ he had read Sulpicius's *Chronica* and attacked the Priscillianists for having influenced the Pelagians on two points: for claiming to have reached a state of perfection, and for inappropriate associations with women.¹⁰ These two accusations must be taken seriously.¹¹

Jerome's first accusation that the Priscillianists and Pelagians were the same in their teaching about perfection comes from his assumption that both groups (as well as the Manichaeans)¹² practiced deviant forms of asceticism.¹³ For Priscillian, the Church in Spain had become soft,¹⁴ and the only

they come upon the evil prince who, they claim, made the world, and that they are sown by this prince in different bodies of flesh', that humans are controlled by the stars and bodies are composed in accord with the twelve signs of the zodiac; they dismiss meat as unclean and believe flesh is evil and comes from wicked angels; they also read apocryphal texts along with canonical Scripture (which had been a charge against them during Priscillian's life) and are Sabellianists in their theology. Augustine, *Haer.* 70.

7. Burrus, *The Making of a Heretic*, p. 129; Diego Augusto, '... At Tum Instantius, Salvianus et Priscillianus Romam Profecti: El Viaje de los Priscilianistas Hacia la Ciudad Eterna', *Antiquité Tardive* 22 (2014), pp. 156-76.

8. Jerome (*Vir. ill.* 121) says that Priscillian 'published many short writings, some of which have reached us. He is still accused by some, of being tainted with Gnosticism, that is, with the heresy of Basilides or Mark, of whom Irenaeus writes, while his defenders maintain that he was not at all of this way of thinking.'

9. Burrus, *The Making of a Heretic*, p. 138.

10. Jerome, *Epist.* 133.3-4; Jerome, *Pelag.* 1.pref.

11. Ferreiro has stated that 'presumably whatever Jerome attributed to the Priscillianists he impugned upon the Pelagians as well'. A. Ferreiro, 'Jerome's Polemic against Priscillian in his *Letter* to Ctesiphon (133,4)', *REAug* 39 (1993), pp. 309-32 (311).

12. Francois Decret, 'Du bon usage du mensonge et du parjure: Manichéens et Priscillianistes face à la persécution dans l'Empire chrétien (IVe-Ve siècles)', *Annales littéraires de l'Université de Besançon* 413 (1990), pp. 141-49.

13. Jerome, *Epist.* 133.3-4; Jerome, *Pelag.* 1.pref.; Ernest Ch. Babut, *Priscillien et le Priscillianisme* (Paris: Champion, 1909), pp. 57-78.

remedy was a strict asceticism.¹⁵ His form of asceticism, however, was neither the eremitic form exemplified by Antony of Egypt, nor the cenobitic form exemplified by Pachomius. Priscillian's asceticism was not for the spiritual professionals, but was intended for the entire Church. They did not seem to follow a defined *regula*,¹⁶ nor did they call their followers to set themselves off from the rest of the Church through either donning monastic garb or establishing communal societies.¹⁷ Priscillian, furthermore, did not see a conflict between the ascetic life and the ecclesiastical life, as he allowed himself to be ordained the Bishop of Avila.¹⁸

The driving force behind Priscillianist asceticism was a radical rejection of the world. At the beginning of his letter to Damasus,¹⁹ for example, he told the Pope that 'we had entirely given ourselves to God, being renewed with the regeneration of the living bath and rejecting the sordid darkness of worldly activities'.²⁰ This rejection of the world led to a variety of ascetic behaviors, such as celibacy, poverty, vegetarianism, fasting and temporary abandonment of the world through periodic retreats.²¹ Some of these practices were explicitly condemned by the Synod of Saragossa. The second canon declared that fasting on Sundays and taking retreats in monastic cells or in the mountains during the season of Lent are anathema.²² Similarly, the fourth canon insisted on the presence and participation of all the faithful

14. Priscillian, *Tract.* 3.90-250; Chadwick, *Priscillian of Avila*, pp. 72-73.

15. Priscillian, *Tract.* 4.1-20; Chadwick, *Priscillian of Avila*, p. 8; Marco Conti, 'Introduction', in Marco Conti (ed.), *Priscillian of Avila: The Complete Works* (OECT; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 1-30 (1); Alberto Ferreiro, 'Simon Magus and Priscillian in the *Commonitorium* of Vincent of Lérins', *VC* 49 (1995), pp. 180-88 (180).

16. Priscillian, *Tract.* 2.15-25; Burrus, *The Making of a Heretic*, p. 29.

17. Diego Piay Augusto, *El Priscilianismo: Arqueología y Prosopografía, Estudio de un Movimiento Aristocrático en la Gallaecia Tardorromana* (Studia Archaeologica, 222; Rome: 'L'Erma' di Bretschneider, 2018), pp. 15-42.

18. Chadwick, *Priscillian of Avila*, pp. 8-10.

19. Babut, *Priscillien et le Priscillianisme*, pp. 136-67.

20. Priscillian, *Tract.* 2.14-17. See also 2.23-34; 4.1-17; 4.22-31.

21. Priscillian, *Tract.* 1.20-50; Chadwick, *Priscillian of Avila*, pp. 8-9, 16; Pedro María Sáenz de Argandoña, *Antropología de Prisciliano* (Collectanea científica Compostellana, 2; Santiago de Compostela: Instituto Teológico Compostelano, 1982).

22. Burrus, *The Making of a Heretic*, p. 35.

during the period from 17 December to 6 January: 'let no one be allowed to be absent from the church: they are not to be concealed in houses, nor to stay on estates, nor to head for the mountains, nor to walk with bare feet, but to flock to the church'.²³ The bishops at the Synod were concerned that Priscillianist rigor was causing a rift in the communal life of the ecclesial body.²⁴ None of this necessarily points to a Priscillianist claim of perfection, as Jerome had concluded, but this ascetic severity was enough for Jerome to connect them to the Pelagians and their claim to the possibility of living a sinless life.

Many of these Priscillian traits can be detected in the Pelagians as well. First, like the Priscillianists, the Pelagians thought that the Christians had become soft and complacent. In their writings, the Pelagians constantly urged their readers to faithfully persevere.²⁵ Secondly, the Pelagians were not interested in addressing only an ascetic elite or establishing a professional class of ascetics. They wanted the entire people of God to be transformed, as did the Priscillianists.²⁶ Their prescription for a vigorous Christian life, therefore, was taught to all. Thirdly, the Pelagian movement, like the Priscillian movement, was not a formally organized movement that insisted on adherence to a defined *regula*. Fourthly, they did not live together in permanent settlements, either in loose associations of individuals heroically striving for perfection in the desert or in tightly organized cenobia. Fifthly, they, like the Priscillianists, were not suspicious of the hierarchy as detrimental to the spiritual life. Caelestius had sought the priesthood while in Carthage and eventually received it in Ephesus, and Julian was the Bishop of Eclanum.²⁷

There were, of course, aspects of the Priscillianists that did not map perfectly onto the Pelagian agenda. First, the most significant difference was that the Pelagians did not promote celibacy for everyone. Secondly, the Pelagians were not as stringent in their asceticism. Although they promoted

23. Burrus, *The Making of a Heretic*, p. 37.

24. D. Augusto, '... Exim in Gallaeciam Priscillianistarum Haeresis inuasit: The Success of Priscillianism in Gallaecia Following the Trials at Trier', *Kilo* 98 (2016), pp. 634-52 (637-51).

25. Pelagius was constantly exhorting his readers not to become complacent. For example: *Demetr.* 27.3; *Ad Cel.* 32.

26. Pelagius, *Div. leg.* 9.3.

27. Augustine, *Epist.* 175.1; 176.4; Marius Mercator, *Sub.* pref. 4.

the practice of fasting, their practice was not nearly as demanding,²⁸ nor did they insist that Christians should walk unshod. Thirdly, the Pelagians did not view the world as corrupting to the same extent as the Priscillianists. Like all Christians, they were suspicious of the world and instructed their followers not to embrace it.²⁹ But they did not deem it as evil as had the Priscillianists, which undoubtedly was the root of the charge of Manichaeism against the Priscillianists at Trier.³⁰

Jerome's suspicion of Priscillian and Pelagian forms of the Christian life is ironic, because his version of asceticism had been impugned by others. His enthusiasm for rigorous asceticism contributed to his exile from Rome. Writing to Paula after Blesilla's turn to the ascetic life at the encouragement of Jerome that led to her premature death, Jerome described her as pallid, dressed in clothes as humble as her handmaids and so weak that she was unable to walk in a straight line or even support the weight of her own head.³¹ At Blesilla's funeral, when Paula—overwhelmed with grief—fainted, Jerome heard accusatory whispers all around him insisting that Blesilla had died from fasting, and asking 'how long must we refrain from driving these detestable monks out of Rome? Why do we not stone them or hurl them into the Tiber? They have misled this unhappy lady; that she is not a nun from choice is clear'.³² Jerome's vision of the Christian life was no less rigorous than the Priscillianists, and more rigorous than the that of the Pelagians.

The second connection Jerome made between the Priscillianists and Pelagians was that they both had inappropriate relationships with women.³³ Both groups, in fact, did have a following of women that seemed dangerous to their opponents.³⁴ Right from the beginning of Priscillian's troubles at the Synod of Saragossa, the first canon promulgated insisted that a strict demarcation between men and women must be upheld.³⁵ Under the authority of the Apostle Paul, the bishops insisted on preserving social norms they

28. For example: Pelagius, *Cel.* 22; Anonymous Sicilian, *De cast.* 15.4.

29. For example: Pelagius, *Virg.* 4.5, 16.2; *Div. leg.* 8.2; *Vit. Christ.* 14.2.

30. Priscillian, *Tract.* 4.1-4; See Sanchez, *Priscillien.*

31. Jerome, *Epist.* 39.1.

32. Jerome, *Epist.* 39.6.

33. Jerome, *Epist.* 133.3-4.

34. Jerome, *Epist.* 133.3; Chadwick, *Priscillian of Avila*, p. 37; Ferreiro, 'Simon Magus', p. 180.

35. Burrus, *The Making of a Heretic*, p. 33.

thought were being threatened by Priscillian's egalitarian ascetic message.³⁶ Sulpicius Severus, too, was concerned about Priscillian's influence on women. Priscillian, according to Sulpicius,

attracted many of the nobility and a large number of the common people into allying themselves with him through his persuasive authority and the art of flattery. To this number, women—with a lust for new things, wavering in their faith, and with minds drawn to every new curiosity—flocked to him in great crowds. Clearly, by offering an appearance of humility in his speech and dress, he instilled reverence and honor for himself among his followers.³⁷

There is plenty of blame to go around. While women must be blamed for disordered desires and affections, Priscillian seduced them through his rhetoric and comportment. Although Sulpicius indicates that women flocked to him in great crowds, we only know of a few women by name who became his followers. One woman, Agape, (and a rhetor named Helpidius) was Priscillian's first student, about whom we know nothing other than that she was of some social rank.³⁸ We know slightly more about two other disciples, Euchrotia and her daughter Procula. On their way to Italy after having been driven out of Bordeaux, Instantius, Salvian and Priscillian stayed for a short time at Euchrotia's estate. Euchrotia was the Christian wife of the pagan Attius Tiro Delphidius, a leading public figure in Aquitaine who probably had died shortly before the arrival of the Priscillianists.³⁹ A rumor was circulating that Priscillian had raped Procula and impregnated her that led to an abortion by herbs, but this is likely false, because Euchrotia never abandoned her teacher; in fact, Euchrotia was one of those who were executed by decapitation along with Priscillian at Trier.⁴⁰ There at Trier, as previously mentioned, Priscillian confessed to nocturnal gatherings with immoral women.⁴¹ Although the authenticity of these accounts between Priscillianists and women may have been inflated by Sulpicius in the hopes of creating

36. Burrus, *The Making of a Heretic*, p. 5.

37. Sulpicius Severus, *Chron.* 2.46.2.

38. Sulpicius Severus, *Chron.* 2.46.1.

39. Jerome, *Epist.* 120.pref; Chadwick, *Priscillian of Avila*, pp. 36-37.

40. Sulpicius Severus, *Chron.* 2.51.1.

41. Sulpicius Severus, *Chron.* 2.50.3.

a scandal,⁴² it certainly was the case that women were an integral part of the Priscillianist movement.⁴³

The Pelagians, in Jerome's mind, also had inappropriate relationships with women. In his *Dialogi contra Pelagianos*, Jerome accused them of encouraging women to enter into educational and liturgical spheres that were unsuitable for them. The Pelagians, he said, taught that women should be educated in the law, even though Paul said that women must be silent in church and that they should ask their husbands if they have any questions (1 Cor. 14.34-35).⁴⁴ He was also furious that the Pelagians encouraged women to sing publicly to God, which he said was only appropriate for women to do in private.⁴⁵ Later in the same text, Jerome disparaged the Pelagians for claiming that their sinlessness (which, of course, they never claimed) allowed them to mingle with women without any danger. Taking on the voice of the Pelagians, Jerome mockingly said that 'other men [monks] shut up in their cells and who never see women, because, poor creatures! They do not listen to my words, are tormented with desire: crowds of women may surround me, I feel no stirring of concupiscence.'⁴⁶

Although the relationship between the Pelagians and women was probably not as scandalous as Jerome had insinuated, it is true that, like the Priscillianists, they did have a following of women. Of the five extant letters from Pelagius written sometime between 404–414,⁴⁷ four of them were addressed to women.⁴⁸ We also have seven miscellaneous letters from

42. Alberto Ferreiro, 'Priscillian and Nicolaitism', *VC* 52 (1998), pp. 382-92 (391).

43. Raymond Van Dam, *Leadership and Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Transformation of the Classical Heritage, 8; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 100.

44. Jerome, *Pelag.* 1.25.

45. Jerome, *Pelag.* 1.25.

46. Jerome, *Pelag.* 2.24.

47. B.R. Rees, 'Introduction', in *Pelagius: Life and Letters* (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 1998), pp. 71, 106, 128.

48. Pelagius, *Epistula ad sacram Christi virginem Demetriadem; Epistula ad Claudiam de virginitate; Liber de vita Christiana; Epistula ad Celantiam.*

unknown Pelagian authors; three of those seven are addressed to women.⁴⁹ All of these letters were deeply concerned with instructing their addressees in the proper Christian behavior for a woman, often proper behavior for a consecrated woman. While the Pelagians clearly had a following of women, they did not seem to have any personal companions as Priscillian did with Euchrotia.

Jerome's accusations against the Pelagians were ironic considering the same accusations that had been leveled against his asceticism while in Rome. Similarly, Jerome's accusations against the Priscillianists and the Pelagians for their associations with women are senseless considering his own relationships with women.⁵⁰ In his writings about women, Jerome had very little that was positive to say about interacting with them. He had written to a certain Nepotian, for example, who sought advice from Jerome about how he, as a priest, can remain oriented towards God. Among other pieces of advice, Jerome told him that women should seldom, if ever, enter his home, and that he should not linger in the same room with them. He also suggested that, if he must visit a widow or a virgin, he should bring someone else along with him as he should never be alone with any women.⁵¹

In his own life, however, Jerome cultivated several intimate friendships with women.⁵² Jerome recounts that, while still in Rome, he was often in the company of consecrated virgins explaining sacred texts to them. These experiences, he said, 'brought about constant intercourse, this soon ripened into intimacy, and this, in turn, produced mutual confidence'.⁵³ We have already seen that he developed special relationships with the Roman aristocrat

49. Anonymous Pelagians, *De viduitate servanda; Epistula sancti Severi presbyteri ad Claudiam sororem suam de ultimo iudicio; Epistula ad virginem devotam*.

50. Clark wrote two excellent studies investigating Jerome's relationships with women: Elizabeth A. Clark, 'Friendship between the Sexes: Classical Theory and Christian Practice', in *Jerome, Chrysostom, and Friends: Essays and Translations* (Studies in Women and Religion, 1; Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1979); Elizabeth A. Clark, 'Theory and Practice in Late Ancient Asceticism: Jerome, Chrysostom, and Augustine', *JFSR* 5 (1989), pp. 25-46.

51. Jerome, *Epist.* 52.5.

52. Clark, 'Theory and Practice in Late Ancient Asceticism', p. 25.

53. Jerome, *Epist.* 45.2.

Paula, and her daughters Blesilla and Eustochium.⁵⁴ These relationships were the most important of his life. When Blesilla had died, he wrote an encomium addressed to Paula describing the emotional torment he experienced at her passing: ‘for her sake I do not grieve, but for myself I must; my loss is too great to be borne with resignation’,⁵⁵ and later said that ‘I make no secret of my feelings; this entire letter is written with tears’.⁵⁶ His experience of loss years later at Paula’s passing was even more traumatic, because ‘of all the ladies in Rome but one had the power to subdue me, and that one was Paula’,⁵⁷ as he had begun to ‘revere, respect, and venerate her as her conspicuous chastity deserved’.⁵⁸ Composing another eulogy at Paula’s death (this time addressed to Eustochium), Jerome spoke of his love (*diligere*) for Paula⁵⁹ and said that he was so overcome with grief—a grief as deep as Eustochium’s—that he could not write it himself and was forced to dictate it to a scribe, because ‘as often as I have taken up my pen and have tried to fulfil my promise, my fingers have stiffened, my hand has fallen, and my power over it has vanished’.⁶⁰

Jerome’s criticism that the Pelagians encouraged women to receive an education, including a scriptural education, is particularly mystifying, because he was not entirely opposed to it himself.⁶¹ Jerome wrote a letter (107) to Paula’s daughter-in-law, Laeta, in Rome who had written to him asking for advice about how to raise her daughter (named Paula) as a consecrated virgin. He wrote a similar letter (128) to a certain Gaudentius who had requested advice on the same topic. Jerome encouraged that these girls be taught both the Greek and Latin alphabets,⁶² proper spelling (including prizes for correct spelling),⁶³ grammar and syntax.⁶⁴ When they are old enough to read serious literature, they should be immersed in the Bible, but

54. Jerome, *Epist.* 45.

55. Jerome, *Epist.* 39.1.

56. Jerome, *Epist.* 39.2.

57. Jerome, *Epist.* 45.3.

58. Jerome, *Epist.* 45.3.

59. Jerome, *Epist.* 108.21.

60. Jerome, *Epist.* 108.33.

61. Jerome, *Pelag.* 1.25.

62. Jerome, *Epist.* 107.9.

63. Jerome, *Epist.* 107.4.

64. Jerome, *Epist.* 128.1.

only those texts that are appropriate for their age.⁶⁵ They should not be exposed to the Song of Songs until they have mastered the rest of the Bible so as to avoid misunderstanding its true meaning as a spiritual, not fleshly, poem.⁶⁶ He encouraged them to read theologians such as Cyprian of Carthage, Athanasius of Alexandria and Hilary of Poitiers,⁶⁷ but they must avoid apocryphal writings,⁶⁸ as well as poetry and musical instruments.⁶⁹ He did not encourage them to be exposed to the pagan classics, but he did quote or allude to many pagan authors—such as Virgil, Persius, Galen, Terence, Aesop, Horace, Quintilian, Cicero, Ovid, Ennius and Sallust⁷⁰—to women to whom he had written letters, and assumed that they would recognize his references.⁷¹

The women in his life were highly educated, and he proudly trumpeted their facility with languages and Scripture. Blesilla's knowledge of Greek was so impressive, he claimed, that anyone would assume that it was her first language; her proficiency with Latin was so flawless that she spoke it without any accent. He even compared her knowledge of Hebrew (which he said she mastered in only a few days) with Origen's.⁷² Paula's accomplishments were even more impressive than her daughter's. She had learned the Holy Scriptures by heart and, like Blesilla (and apparently also Eustochium), Paula could chant the Psalms in Hebrew and pronounce Hebrew without sounding like the native Latin speaker that she was.⁷³ Whether these women truly had exceptional linguistic and memorization talents as Jerome described them to have had, or if (as often was the case) his exaggerations crossed the line of credulity, is irrelevant for our purposes. What is important here is that Jerome offered these women as intellectual models to be admired, which stands in sharp contrast to how he insisted women should

65. Jerome, *Epist.* 107.7.

66. Jerome, *Epist.* 107.12.

67. Jerome, *Epist.* 107.12.

68. Jerome, *Epist.* 107.12.

69. Jerome, *Epist.* 22.29; 107.8.

70. Jerome, *Epist.* 54, 108, 123, 127, 130; Clark, 'Friendship between the Sexes', p. 74.

71. Clark, 'Friendship between the Sexes', pp. 74-75.

72. Jerome, *Epist.* 39.1.

73. Jerome, *Epist.* 108.27.

behave when he criticized the Pelagians for their views on women and education.

Although there is no evidence to support the charge that the Pelagians derived their thought in part from the Priscillianists, we can see why Jerome would have made the connection between the two movements. Both the Priscillianists and the Pelagians offered a vision of the ascetic life that had certain similarities that made Jerome connect the two in his mind. Also, both the Priscillianists and the Pelagians had women followers that Jerome perceived to be scandalous. An influence of the Priscillianists on the Pelagians cannot be historically demonstrated. But, for Jerome, direct textual lineage did not matter. His understanding of the danger of the Pelagians rested in (among other things) their shared perversions with the Priscillianists.