

0347-0420 – Hieronymus – Preface to the Translation of Origen’s Two Omilies on the Song of Songs

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consulship of the Emperor Valens and the second of Valentinianus is entirely my own. Content to end here, I have reserved the remaining period, that of Gratianus and Theodosius, for a wider historical survey; not that I am afraid to discuss the living freely and truthfully, for the fear of God banishes the fear of man; but because while our country is still exposed to the fury of the barbarians everything is in confusion.



Preface to the Translation of Origen's Two Homilies on the Song of Songs.

Written at Rome, a.d. 383.

Jerome to the most holy Pope Damasus:

Origen, whilst in his other books he has surpassed all others, has in the Song of Songs surpassed himself. He wrote ten volumes upon it, which amount to almost twenty thousand lines, and in these he discussed, first the version of the Seventy Translators, then those of Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion, and lastly, a fifth version which he states that he found on the coast of Atrium, with such magnificence and fulness, that he appears to me to have realized what is said in the poem: "The king brought me into his chamber." I have left that work on one side, since it would require almost boundless leisure and labour and money to translate so great a work into Latin, even if it could be worthily done; and I have translated these two short treatises, which he composed in the form of daily lectures for those who were still like babes and sucklings, and I have studied faithfulness rather than elegance. You can conceive how great a value the larger work possesses, when the smaller gives you such satisfaction.

Preface to the Book on Hebrew Names.

The origin and scope of this book is described in the Preface itself. It was written in the year 388, two years after Jerome had settled at Bethlehem. He had, immediately on arriving in Palestine, three years previously, set to work to improve his knowledge of Hebrew, with a view to his translation of the Old Testament, which was begun in 391. This book, therefore, and the two which follow, may be taken as records of studies preparatory to the Vulgate.

Philo, the most erudite man among the Jews, is declared by Origen to have done what I am now doing; he set forth a book of Hebrew Names, classing them under their initial letters, and placing the etymology of each at the side. This work I originally proposed to translate into Latin. It is well known in the Greek world, and is to be found in all libraries. But I found that the copies were so discordant to one another, and the order so confused, that I judged it to be better to say nothing, rather than to write what would justly be condemned. A work of this kind, however, appeared likely