

St Jerome on a laptop: Intricate mosaic honours Bible translator for the digital age

A major new artwork commissioned to mark the astonishing achievement of St Jerome is to be unveiled on the 1600th anniversary of his death on 30 September.

Jerome (c.AD 347–420) translated the Bible from the original Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek into Latin, the first scholar to do so systematically. His 'Vulgate' translation became the standard biblical text of the Roman Catholic Church and is still used today.

Now a mosaic commissioned by Bible Society and the Catholic Church in England and Wales is celebrating his achievement. Created by Portsmouth-based artist Pete Codling, 'Little Bits of God' tells the story of the Bible using the smalti mosaic technique developed in ancient Byzantium.

Jerome himself is depicted in the mosaic with the traditional symbols associated with him of a lion, a book and a skull. But, says Codling: 'In this contemporary mosaic the book pages on his desk blend into a computer keyboard and his stylised quill pen, or stylus, remind the viewer that Bible reading, learning and studying also now take place online via the internet. The Bible speaks now through the digital as well as the printed text.'

Another modern reference that picks up the theme of mortality and suffering is the depiction of three-year-old Syrian refugee boy Alan Kurdi, drowned in 2015 as his family attempted to leave Turkey.

Biblical figures including Jesus, Mary and St Matthew are also represented.

Codling says: 'The idea behind this artwork has challenged me technically as well as artistically. My research for this artwork took me to Ravenna and Venice in search of materials, technique and craftsmanship. I wanted to portray the Bible visually, and convey the journey of translation from the oral tradition to the digital age in one coherent artwork.'

The mosaic stands on a pedestal which is an integral part of the work. It is over two metres tall and is formed of ten panels created from thousands of pieces of coloured glass. It is currently housed in St John's Catholic Cathedral, Portsmouth. Next year it will begin a tour of England and Wales.

Notes

1. The artwork has been commissioned as part of [The God Who Speaks](#) initiative, a partnership between the Catholic Church of England and Wales and Bible Society aimed at encouraging Catholics to engage more with the Bible. The initiative includes resources aimed at helping Catholics connect the Bible with daily life and increasing their knowledge of the text.
2. [Pete Codling](#) was born in Zambia and lived in Cornwall, Scotland and London before settling in Portsmouth. He is an established artist with a long career as a sculptor and designer of public artworks. He works in ceramic, steel, concrete, bronze, resin, wood and stone, and is developing a portfolio of large-scale charcoal drawings.
3. An interview with Pete Codling in which he discusses 'Little Bits of God' can be seen [here](#).
4. St Jerome was probably born in what is now Slovenia and lived as a hermit before becoming a priest and then secretary to Pope Damasus I. He travelled widely and read deeply in Latin literature as well as learning Greek and Hebrew. According to [Britannica.com](#), 'His influence has been far-reaching and profound, on the early Middle Ages in particular: primarily through the Vulgate (the Latin version that he had translated), but importantly also through his work as an exegete and humanist and because he transmitted much of Greek thought to the West.'
5. For interviews with Pete Codling please contact Fleur Dorrell, National Co-ordinator of The God who Speaks campaign: fleur.dorrell@biblesociety.org.uk, 07909 255 103.