

ARTICLE

The Language of Imperial Cult and Roman Religion in the Latin New Testament: The Latin Renderings of ‘Saviour’

Anna Persig 

Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, Research Unit of Biblical Studies, KU Leuven,
Sint-Michielsstraat 6, 3000 Leuven, Belgium
Email: anna.persig@kuleuven.be

Abstract

The title σωτήρ, ‘saviour’, is bestowed on Christ and God in the New Testament and rendered in the Latin translations by *conseruator*, *saluificator*, *salutificator*, *salutaris* and *saluator*. Although these terms convey the same meaning, they are not interchangeable: this study argues that *conseruator*, which is the most frequent word for saviour on imperial coins, is rarely attested in the Latin versions because of its association with the imperial cult. The predominant translation, *saluator*, was coined as an alternative rendering to the other words which had religious and political connotations.

Keywords: saviour; *conseruator*; Vetus Latina; Vulgate; Roman coins; imperial cult

1. Introduction

The honorific title σωτήρ was employed in the New Testament, following its longstanding use as a religious and political epithet for rulers and gods. Jewish literature, and especially the Septuagint, in which the title refers to the god of Israel, presumably influenced the New Testament attestations of σωτήρ.¹

The frequency of σωτήρ referring to deities of the Greco-Roman pantheon and Roman emperors in literary and epigraphic sources illustrates the wide circulation of the word in the period preceding, and contemporary with, the composition of the New Testament.² The attestation of a term with such fixed connotations in the New Testament has been explained either as the indirect influence of the language of the imperial cult, or as

¹ The title is attested in poetic (Pss 23.5, 24.5, 26.1 and 9, 61.3 and 7, 64.6, 78.9, 94.1; Wis 16.7; Ecclus 51.1; Pss Sol 3.6, 8.33, 16.4, 17.3; Odes 2.15, 4.18, 9.47) and narrative books (Deut 32.15; 1 Sam 10.19; Esther 5.1; Jdt 9.11; 1 Macc 4.30; 3 Macc 6.29 and 32, 7.16; Mi 7.7; Hab 3.18; Isa 12.2, 17.10, 45.15 and 21, 62.11; Bar 4.22). See the analysis of these passages in F. Jung, *ΣΩΤΗΡ. Studien zur Rezeption eines hellenistischen Ehrentitels im Neuen Testament* (Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen 39; Münster: Aschendorff, 2002) 177–238.

² The bestowal of the honorific title σωτήρ on Hellenistic and Roman rulers has received much scholarly attention: see especially L. Cerfaux and J. Tondriau, *Un concurrent du Christianisme. Le culte des souverains dans la civilisation gréco-romaine* (Paris: Desclée, 1957); C. Habicht, *Gottmenschentum und griechische Städte* (Munich: Beck, 1970); A.D. Nock, ‘Soter and Euergetes’, *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World* (ed. A.D. Nock and S. Zeph; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972) 720–35; S.R.F. Price, *Rituals and Power. The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

intended to emphasise the opposition between God and Christ, the true saviours, and Roman emperors.³ This article goes beyond this dichotomy, in order to expand the discussion about the language of power in the New Testament by considering the renderings and interpretation of σωτήρ in the Latin-speaking areas of the empire. In fact, the Latin translations of the New Testament, produced from the end of the second century onwards, attest the circulation of more than one rendering of σωτήρ before the establishment of *saluator* as its Latin counterpart. This contribution examines the variety of translations of σωτήρ in the Latin New Testament and patristic literature in light of socio-political factors: since every translation is an interpretation, the Latin renderings of σωτήρ inform us how the word, with its close relationship with the semantic area of the imperial cult, was perceived in the West in the centuries following the composition of the New Testament.

The New Testament attestations of σωτήρ and their relationship with the imperial cult are outlined in the first section of the article. The second part discusses the Latin renderings of σωτήρ in the *Vetus Latina* and the Vulgate, with a focus on the occurrences of *salutaris*, *saluator* and *saluificator/salutificator* in non-Christian and Christian literature. Thirdly, the word *conseruator* is analysed in its use on coins. The semantics of *conseruator* in biblical citations and patristic writings is described in the fourth part of this contribution. In the concluding remarks, an explanation for the isolated attestations of *conseruator* in the Latin New Testament and in Christian sources is proposed, and its impact on our understanding of the New Testament determined.

2. Σωτήρ in the New Testament

Σωτήρ is attested twenty-four times in the editorial text of the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* (NA28). The word never occurs as a free-standing title, but refers either to God or, in the majority of the instances, to Jesus.⁴ The term is attested in different contexts and with multiple nuances, which will be briefly described below, in order to investigate whether the context might have influenced the choice of the Latin renderings, analysed in the next section.

At Luke 1.47 and 2.11 and Acts 5.31 and 13.23, God and Jesus are named as saviours in that they bring the salvation promised to Israel while, in John 4.42 and at 1 John 4.14, Jesus is acknowledged as the saviour of the world sent by God. Jesus is also called saviour with reference to the *parousia*, the coming of Christ from heaven (Phil 3.20).

The word occurs in passages in which firmness and witness to faith are encouraged (1 Tim 4.10 and 2 Tim 1.10), and believers are exhorted to live a righteous life founded on the knowledge of Christ (2 Peter 1.11; 2.20; 3.2 and 3.18). Σωτήρ is also attested in relation to Christ as bringer of order between husbands and wives (Eph 5.23), slaves and masters (Titus 2.10), of concordance with rulers (1 Tim 2.3) and within humankind (Titus 3.4 and 6).⁵ The epithet is also recurrent at the beginning and ending of some of the Pastoral and

³ See the *status quaestionis* and bibliography in Jung, *ΣΩΤΗΡ*, 1–43. The biblical passages that have been read as stances against the cult of the emperor are Jude 25, in which God is called the only saviour (μόνον θεῶ σωτήρι), and John 4.42, in which the Samaritans acknowledge that Jesus is truly the saviour of the world (οὗτός ἐστιν ἀληθῶς ὁ σωτήρ τοῦ κόσμου).

⁴ Σωτήρ is an epithet of God at Luke 1.47; 1 Tim 1.1, 2.3 and 4.10; Titus 1.3, 2.10 and 3.4; Jude 25 (except GA 1838 in which the title refers to Jesus). The word refers to Jesus at Luke 2.11; John 4.42; Acts 5.31 and 13.23; Eph 5.23; Phil 3.20; 2 Tim 1.10; Titus 1.4, 2.13 and 3.6; 2 Peter 1.1, 1.11, 2.20, 3.2 and 3.18; 1 John 4.14.

⁵ The expression ‘saviour of the body’ (σωτήρ τοῦ σώματος) at Eph 5.23 either refers to Jesus as the saviour of the body of the church or to the husband as saviour of the body of the wife. For the different interpretations of the passage, see J. Muddiman, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Black’s New Testament Commentaries; London and New York: Continuum, 2001) 259–63.

Catholic Epistles as a formulaic title of Jesus and God (1 Timothy 1.1; Titus 1.3 and 4; 2 Peter 1.1 and 3.18; Jude 25).⁶

The association of the word with κύριος, 'lord', (Luke 1.47 and 2.11; Phil 3.20; 2 Peter 1.11, 2.20, 3.2 and 3.18) and ἀρχηγός, 'prince' (Acts 5.31) indicates its honorific character and demonstrates that σωτήρ belongs to the semantic sphere of power. The honorific connotation of the title is also well attested in inscriptions dedicated to rulers, in which σωτήρ is usually accompanied by the honorific epithets κτίστης ('founder') and εὐεργέτης ('benefactor').⁷ In addition, some of the collocations of σωτήρ in the New Testament recall phraseologies of the imperial cult. At John 4.42 and 1 John 4.14 Jesus is called 'saviour of the universe' (ὁ σωτήρ τοῦ κόσμου), while at 1 Tim 4.10 God is 'saviour of all people especially of those who believe' (σωτήρ πάντων ἀνθρώπων μάλιστα πιστῶν); similar universalistic claims of salvation, although interpreted in a different way, are frequent in inscriptions dedicated to Roman emperors.⁸ Another parallel with the imperial cult is the mention of Jesus' and God's virtues in the passages of the Pastoral Epistles (Titus 1.3–4 and 1 Tim 1.13–16) and Jude 25, which resemble the celebration of the virtues of the emperors in inscriptions.⁹ Moreover, the element of light during the announcement of Jesus' birth to the shepherds (Luke 2.9) and at 2 Tim 1.10 with reference to the epiphany of Jesus, is a descriptive feature typical of the imperial ceremony known as *adventus*.¹⁰ The instances of σωτήρ in the Pastoral and Catholic Epistles have been considered by Jung to be deliberate references to the language of imperial cult, which, in his opinion, were part of a missionary strategy aiming at the conversion of gentiles through the use of expressions known to them.¹¹ On the other hand, Karrer has argued that these statements have only an apparent similarity with imperial inscriptions, since σωτήρ acquires in the New Testament a christological and eschatological meaning unattested elsewhere: the salvation brought by the emperor is relevant to the earthly world, while that of Jesus applies to the separate dimension of the afterworld.¹² Regardless of the intentional or unintentional character of these similarities and the semantic differences between the imperial and Christian message, the language of power is certainly present in the New Testament, as the use of honorific epithets attests. The following section will focus on how the Latin translators rendered σωτήρ in their versions of the New Testament.

3. The Latin Translations of σωτήρ in the New Testament

The terms corresponding to σωτήρ in the Latin versions of the New Testament are *saluator*, *salutaris*, *conseruator*, *saluificator*, *salutificator* and *salus*.¹³ An overview of the distribution of these renderings is presented in Table 1 below. The renderings in the Vulgate are

⁶ The association with the imperial cult is particularly notable considering that σωτήρ occurs predominantly in New Testament writings closely related to the Greco-Roman world: the author of Luke and Acts was acquainted with Hellenistic culture, the Pastoral Epistles demonstrate knowledge of Roman social standards and the Catholic Epistles, which are late writings, are embedded in their contemporary Roman setting.

⁷ See the numerous examples of honorific inscriptions attesting σωτήρ in M.J. Payne, *Aretas Eneken: Honors to Romans and Italians in Greece from 260 to 27 B.C.* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1984).

⁸ Jung, *ΣΩΤΗΡ*, 123–76.

⁹ Jung, *ΣΩΤΗΡ*, 323–35.

¹⁰ The *adventus* is the manifestation of a deity and, in the imperial context, the celebration of the arrival of the ruler. On the character of the *adventus*, see P. Dufraigne, *Adventus Augusti, adventus Christi: recherche sur l'exploitation idéologique et littéraire d'un cérémonial dans l'antiquité tardive* (Paris: Institut d'Études Augustiniennes, 1994) 121.

¹¹ Jung, *ΣΩΤΗΡ*, 332.

¹² M. Karrer, 'Jesus, der Retter (Sôtêr). Zur Aufnahme eines hellenistischen Prädikats im Neuen Testament', *ZNW* 93 (2002) 153–76, at 172.

¹³ It is noticeable that *seruator*, attested from the first century BCE onwards, and the postclassical word *sospitator* are not employed as renderings of σωτήρ in the Latin versions. *Sospitator* is first used by Apuleius in a pagan

Table 1. Renderings of σωτήρ in the Latin New Testament

Biblical reference	Vulgate	Vetus Latina
Luke 1.47	<i>salutaris</i>	<i>salutaris] saluator</i> (VL 5)
Luke 2.11	<i>saluator</i>	<i>saluator] conseruator salutis</i> (VL 14 and AN Wil)
John 4.42	<i>saluator</i>	<i>saluator] salus</i> (VL 11 and 11A)
Acts 5.31	<i>saluator</i>	<i>saluator</i>
Acts 13.23	<i>saluator</i>	<i>saluator] salutaris</i> (VL 32 and 51)
Eph 5.23	<i>saluator</i>	<i>saluator</i>
Phil 3.20	<i>saluator</i>	<i>saluator] salutificator / saluificator</i> (X), <i>salutaris</i> (I)
I Tim 1.1	<i>saluator</i>	<i>saluator] salutaris</i> (D)
I Tim 2.3	<i>salutaris</i>	<i>salutaris] salutificator</i> (TE), <i>saluator</i> (I)
I Tim 4.10	<i>saluator</i>	<i>saluator] salutificator / saluificator</i> (X), <i>salutaris</i> (D and I), <i>salus</i> (VL 89 R ^B ; AMst ^{com} ; PAU-N; SED-S)
2 Tim 1.10	<i>saluator</i>	<i>saluator] salutaris</i> (VL 32; TIT IV Var; CO 2,2 N?)
Titus 1.3	<i>saluator</i>	<i>saluator] salutaris</i> (Γ ^{A*} ; AMst Var)
Titus 1.4	<i>saluator</i>	<i>saluator] salutaris</i> (D)
Titus 2.10	<i>salutaris</i>	<i>salutaris] saluator</i> (D and I)
Titus 2.13	<i>saluator</i>	<i>saluator] salutaris</i> (I)
Titus 3.4	<i>saluator</i>	<i>saluator] salutaris</i> (I)
Titus 3.6	<i>saluator</i>	<i>saluator] salutaris</i> (I)
2 Peter 1.1	<i>saluator</i>	<i>saluator] salutaris</i> (VL 55 and 64?)
2 Peter 1.11	<i>saluator</i>	<i>saluator] salutaris</i> (VL 55), <i>conseruator</i> (AM)
2 Peter 2.20	<i>saluator</i>	<i>saluator] conseruator</i> (AU op 46 and SALV gu 4,93), <i>seruator</i> (AU op Var mss BN)
2 Peter 3.2	<i>saluator</i>	absence
2 Peter 3.18	<i>saluator</i>	<i>saluator</i>
I John 4.14	<i>saluator</i>	<i>saluator</i>
Jude 25	<i>saluator</i>	<i>saluator</i>

shown in the second column, while the renderings supported by the majority of the Old Latin manuscripts and citations of the Church Fathers are indicated in first place in the third column and separated by a square parenthesis from other variants found in the Vetus Latina tradition in each verse.¹⁴

context (*Apologia* 64, *De mundo* 24 and *Metamorphoses* 7.10 and 9.3) and by Arnobius the Elder to refer to Christ (*Aduersus nationes* 1.53 and 2.74–5).

¹⁴ The abbreviation system of the Vetus Latina editions is followed and, where possible, text types (X, D and I) are used for the sake of clarity and brevity instead of the quotation of the witnesses supporting each rendering. When witnesses are quoted in the table, a distinction is made between Old Latin manuscripts (VL 5, 11, 11A, 14, 32, 51, 55, 64, 89), Vulgate manuscripts (R, Γ^A, Γ^B), Church Fathers (Ambrosiaster (AMst), Paulinus of Nola (PAU-N), Sedulius Scottus (SED-S), Ambrose (AM), Augustine (AU), Salvian of Marseilles (SALV)) and other

The synopsis of the renderings of σωτήρ shows that *saluator* and *salutaris* are the most frequent translations in the Latin New Testament. The Vulgate attests *saluator* in most instances and *salutaris* three times at Luke 1.47; 1 Tim 2.3; and Titus 2.10, in passages in which the majority of the Old Latin sources also feature *salutaris*. The alternation between *saluator* and *salutaris* is more prominent in the Vetus Latina than in the Vulgate: variations internal to the Vetus Latina are attested in most instances, except Acts 5.31; Eph 5.23; 2 Peter 3.18; 1 John 4.14; and Jude 25. The renderings *salutificator/saluificator* in Tertullian's biblical text (Phil 3.20; 1 Tim 2.3; and 4.10) and *conseruator* (Luke 2.11; 2 Peter 1.11 and 2.20), which is attested predominantly in citations, are each used three times whereas *salus* is present twice (John 4.42 and 1 Tim 4.10) and once in conjunction with *conseruator* at Luke 2.11. A difference in meaning between *salutaris* and *saluator* is not noticeable, although, from the morphological perspective, the latter was probably perceived to be a closer match for the noun σωτήρ than the adjective *salutaris*.¹⁵ Not only morphological considerations, but also other factors might have influenced the prevalence of one rendering over the others. Latin versions sometimes attest a preference for a particular rendering throughout a manuscript. For example, *salutaris* is used at Acts 13.23 and 2 Tim 1.10 in VL 32 and at 2 Peter 1.1 and 2 Peter 1.11 in VL 55. The choice of the renderings could also be motivated by stylistic reasons, for instance at Titus 2.10 and 2.13, where the sources of text type I feature *saluator* and *salutaris* respectively, possibly to introduce lexical variations between neighbouring passages. The prevalence of a particular rendering in certain geographical areas may have also fostered a particular word. The table attests to the frequency of *salutaris* in text type I of the Pauline Epistles, which was in circulation in the mid-fourth century in Italy, and in other sources connected to Northern Italy, such as Ambrose, Ambrosiaster and manuscript Γ^A (Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, E. 53 inf.), transmitting a text in use in Milan.¹⁶

Notably, the socio-political context in which these terms were used might have favoured one rendering to the detriment of the others. The diachronic distribution of the Latin renderings of σωτήρ, the moment at which they emerged and especially the semantic areas with which they were associated, cast light on their cultural and social connotations and possibly on the reasons behind their use.

The earliest attestations of *salutaris* go back to the first century BCE: in its more general sense, the adjective means 'beneficial', but it is usually employed in a medical context and in metaphors related to well-being with the meaning 'healthful'.¹⁷ In literary sources, it refers to objects and rarely to people: however, in Suetonius, Tiberius is *bonus et salutaris princeps* (Tiberius 29). The contemporary inscription to *Augusta salutaris* from Africa Proconsularis (TM 200458), dated to 30 CE, might refer to Livia, the late wife of Augustus and mother of the current emperor Tiberius, but it is not sufficient to demonstrate a widespread use of the adjective as honorific epithet.¹⁸ On the other hand, the

sources (*Catechesis celtica* (AN Wil), *Tituli Psalmorum* (TIT), *Concilia Oecumenica* (CO)). A full list of abbreviations is contained in R. Gryson, *Répertoire général des auteurs ecclésiastiques latins de l'antiquité et du haut moyen âge* (2 vols.; Freiburg: Herder, 2007) and a description of the Latin manuscripts cited in the table can be found in H.A.G. Houghton, *The Latin New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹⁵ Lactantius (*Diuiinarum institutionum libri* 4.12.6) regards *salutaris* and *saluator* as synonymous Latin translations of the name Jesus.

¹⁶ Γ^A is indicated as B in the Stuttgart Vulgate.

¹⁷ See *salutaris* in A. Forcellini, I. Furlanetto, F. Corradini and I. Perin, *Lexicon totius Latinitatis* (Padua: Tipografia del seminario, 1940) and C.T. Lewis and C. Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1933).

¹⁸ The inscriptions are quoted with the reference number of Trismegistos (<https://www.trismegistos.org/index.php>), if available, which contains the cross-references to the other epigraphic corpora. Otherwise, the sigla of the epigraphic collections, such as the Heidelberg database (HD), the Epigraphic Database Roma (EDR), the Hispania Epigraphica Online (HEpOI) and the Epigraphik-Datenbank Clauss/Slaby (EDCS), are employed.

religious connotation of *salutaris* is well attested in Cicero, who shows that the term belongs to religious discourse as an epithet of Jupiter (*De finibus* 3.20.66). A closer examination of the epigraphic witnesses that have been preserved, shows that *salutaris* is a title of various gods.¹⁹ Jupiter is invoked as *salutaris* in eight votive inscriptions, and the connection with the semantic sphere of health is found in the epigraphic witnesses in which the god is thanked for assistance in matters of health: healing from a serious disease (TM 475721 and TM 404734), protection of personal and family health (TM 190694) and in a votive inscription dedicated by a doctor of the fleet of Ravenna (TM 509936).²⁰ According to other inscriptions, however, the epithet is bestowed on the Nymphs and Fortuna more frequently than on Jupiter, nine and eight times respectively, and once together for the protection of the brother and family of the dedicator (HD 075021).²¹ It is not surprising that the epithet is used of Aesculapius, the god of medicine, and Hygieia, goddess of health, who are often invoked together.²² Similarly, Apollo, father of Aesculapius, is invoked as protector of family health with the title *salutaris* (TM 178515), as well as *salutaris* and *medicinalis* (EDR 161197). It is unclear for what functions and merits Hercules, Silvanus, Genius and Sol are given the epithet.²³ The title is collectively bestowed on Apollo, Diana, Leto and other local gods and goddesses (TM 178416), to the Lares (TM 279087), who were the gods of the household, on the gods in general (*dii*), the gods of war (*dii militares*) and on the local *dii Mauri* invoked by officers serving in the province of Mauretania.²⁴

The numismatic attestations of *salutaris* are not numerous: the word refers to gods on thirteen types of coin.²⁵ It is possible to conclude that *salutaris* was employed to indicate the saviour in Roman religion, as well as to express the Christian concept of salvation in biblical translations.²⁶

Unlike *salutaris*, *saluator* is a Christian neologism, attested from the third century onwards (Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem* 3.18.3 and 4.14.2), in order to be the Latin term corresponding to σωτήρ, as Augustine states (*Sermo* 299.6 and *De trinitate* 13.10) when interpreting the name Jesus as *saluator*.²⁷ The affirmation of Augustine is

¹⁹ The EAGLE Europeana database (<https://www.eagle-network.eu>) contains 60 inscriptions dated to the imperial period featuring the term *salutaris* as an epithet of gods. The uses of *salutaris* as a personal name in funeral inscriptions and as part of formulaic expressions of imperial decrees have been excluded from the count.

²⁰ The inscriptions are addressed to Jupiter (TM 214329 and TM 509936), Jupiter Optimus Maximus (TM 190694; TM 475721; TM 404734; TM 205208 and EDR 168932) and Jupiter and Serapis as *dii patrii* and *dii salutare*s (TM 328863). The *Dominus sanctus* in EDR 164507 probably refers to Jupiter too.

²¹ The Nymphs are called *salutare*s in TM 408621, TM 408623, TM 193440, TM 706106, TM 489722, EDCS-68100095, EDCS-68100094 and HD 074973 in association with Serapis, while Fortuna is *salutaris* in TM 425269, TM 195064, TM 281224, HD 077049, EDR 161278, EDR 161286, HD 032034 and TM 193705, in which Fortuna is reconstructed as the recipient of the title.

²² C. Mohrmann, 'Les emprunts grecs dans la latinité chrétienne', *Vigiliae christianae* 4.4 (1950) 193–211, at 203, notices the association with Apollo. Apollo and Hygieia are called *salutare*s for their help during sickness (HD 029268), after recovery from blindness (TM 179307) and in conjunction with Fortuna (TM 415052). Hygieia is invoked alone as protector of the health of a town (TM 260978) according to the reconstructed text.

²³ They are invoked as *salutaris* in the following inscriptions: Hercules in TM 196730, TM 509984 and TM 569745; Silvanus in TM 405859, TM 265143, TM 263062, TM 569973 and TM 270138; Genius in TM 182368 and Sol in TM 175310.

²⁴ *Dii* are referred as *salutare*s in TM 183857, TM 193206 and TM 179326; *dii militares* in TM 404313 and *dii Mauri* in TM 203889, TM 204274 and TM 339725.

²⁵ *Salutaris* is an epithet of Vulcan (RIC I (second edition) Civil Wars 30), Cybele (RIC III Antoninus Pius 1145a and 1145b) and Mars (RIC IV Trebonianus Gallus 5, 19, 32, 103, 104; RIC IV Volusian 188, 247, 248; RIC IV Aemilian 27; RIC V Valerian 76).

²⁶ See B. Fischer, 'Praeceptis salutaribus moniti', *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft* 1 (1950) 124–7 on the meaning of *salutaris* and its Christian equivalent *saluator*.

²⁷ Mohrmann, 'Les emprunts grecs', 205.

corroborated by the lack of non-Christian inscriptions and numismatic witnesses which attest *saluator* in the period preceding the third century.²⁸ *Saluator* is, therefore, a specialised term coined by Christian writers to match σωτήρ on the basis of the verb *saluare*, which translates σώζω.²⁹ This is not the only neologism translating σωτήρ in the biblical versions: the renderings *salutificator* and *saluificator* are first attested in Tertullian's writings and possibly coined by him.³⁰ The corresponding verb *saluificare* is attested later than the noun, in fourth-century writings, according to the sources preserved.³¹ Attestations of *saluificator* in the following centuries are scarce: Jerome interprets the name Moses as *saluificator* (*Liber interpretationis hebraicorum nominum* p. 42.24 ed. Lagarde), and Hilary of Poitiers employs the term in his quotations of Phil 3.20 (*Tractatus super psalmos: psalmi* 131.26 and 141.8).³² According to de Labriolle, *saluator* and *saluificator/salutificator* were coined because *conseruator* and *salutaris*, which indicated protection and preservation of life, were incompatible with the Christian concept of salvation after death.³³ However, the epigraphic and numismatic evidence suggests that *salutaris* was employed in the Latin New Testament, in continuity and in parallel with its use in Roman religion. The case of *conseruator*, which is a rarer rendering than *salutaris* in the Latin New Testament, appears to be different: the next section will therefore discuss the political connotation of *conseruator* and its implications for the biblical translations.

4. *Conseruator* as a Religious and Political Title in Coins

The coinage of matching words for σωτήρ, *saluator* and *saluificator/salutificator*, which appeared as early as in the third century, indicate that the existing terms, *conseruator* and *salutaris*, were not perceived as adequate translations of the Greek epithet.³⁴ As demonstrated above, *salutaris* was a title with a strong religious connotation used to refer to gods as protectors of physical health. The term was also subject to semantic extension and was sporadically employed in the Vetus Latina and Vulgate to refer to

²⁸ Most of the inscriptions with *saluator* in the EAGLE Europeana database refer to Christ and God. *Saluator* is used once for the Apostle Peter (TM 421262) and three times as a personal name (TM 156485, TM 263318 and TM 622788). The OCRE database of coins of the Roman Empire (<http://numismatics.org/ocre/>) contains only one instance of a coin dated to 350 CE (RIC VIII Siscia 260) and issued by Constantius II with the legend *saluator rei publicae* on the reverse, which surrounds Vetrano crowned by Victoria.

²⁹ A. Ernout and A. Meillet, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine* (Paris: Klincksieck, 2001⁴) 591.

³⁰ *Salutificator* is attested in *Aduersus Marcionem* 2.19.3 and 5.15.7 and in passages in which Tertullian cites the biblical text: *De carne Christi* 14.3 (1 Tim 2.3); *De resurrectione carnis* 47.15 (Phil 3.20, variant *saluificator* mss Gel); *De ieiunio aduersus psychicos* 6.3 in a citation of Deut 32.15 (*salutaris* in the Vulgate) and *De pudicitia* 2.1 when citing 1 Tim 4.10 (variant *saluificator* mss Vrs). Mohrmann, 'Les emprunts grecs', 204, notes that Tertullian attests to the use of the loan-word *soter* as epithet of Christ by the Valentinians (*Aduersus Valentinianos* 12.4).

³¹ See E. Marini, 'Les verbes en -ficare dans les siècles II/III à VII: une mise au point', *Latin vulgaire - latin tardif* X. Actes du X^e colloque international sur le latin vulgaire et tardif, Bergamo, 5-9 septembre 2012. (ed. P. Molinelli, P. Cuzzolin and C. Fedriani; Bergamo: Bergamo University Press, Sestante edizioni, 2014) 133-50 on the verbs ending in -ficare. According to Library of Latin Texts (<http://clt.brepolis.net/llta/pages/Search.aspx>), the verb is frequent in Hilary of Poitiers and used by Jerome and other writers to render the word *osanna* (*Epistulae* 20.54.5 and *Liber interpretationis hebraicorum nominum* p. 62.29) and as a synonym of *saluum facere* (*Epistulae* 20.54.3 and Augustine, *Sermones ad populum* 130A.3 (Dolbeau 19, Moguntinus 51)). It is also attested at John 12.27 in the Vulgate and in the manuscript tradition of the Vetus Latina (VL 4, 8^c, 9A^c, 11A, 27, 29, 30, 33, 35, 39 and 40, cfr. <http://www.iohannes.com/>).

³² A later attestation is contained in *Corpus orationum* (CC SL 160E, *oratio* 4127).

³³ P. de Labriolle, 'Saluator', *Archivum Latinitatis Medii Aevi* 14.1 (1939) 23-36, at 30.

³⁴ E. Wölfflin, 'Moderne Lexikographie', *Archiv für lateinische Lexikographie und Grammatik* 12 (1902) 373-400, at 385-6, affirms that *seruator* and *conseruator* were not suitable translations of σωτήρ because of their meaning 'keeper'.

Christian salvation.³⁵ On the other hand, *conseruator* represents a more radical case of a word with a marked religious and political connotation. In most of the attestations of the term in Cicero's writings, *conseruator* is the protector of the state and of its institutions troubled by the civil wars.³⁶ In this sense, it became a title of Augustus, who presented himself as the restorer of Rome after the civil wars, and of his successors: *conseruator* gradually became an encomiastic and formulaic title of Roman emperors, regardless of their real merits.³⁷ More than seventy honorific inscriptions dated to the imperial period demonstrate the wide circulation of *conseruator* in the political language of the time as the Latin corresponding word for the honorific epithet σωτήρ, which is well attested in inscriptions dedicated to the emperors in the eastern provinces of the empire.³⁸ Moreover, *conseruator* is the epithet of Olympian, eastern and minor Roman gods in over 500 epigraphic attestations as well as in a few literary sources.³⁹ Coins offer additional support to the claim that *conseruator* was a specialised term in the religious and political discourse of imperial Rome. In his survey of the attestations of *conseruator* in literature and coins, Alföldi has observed that the legend *OB CIVES SERVATOS*, which is semantically equivalent to *conseruator*, was more popular than the title in coins.⁴⁰ Since Alföldi's studies, 1228 types of coin attesting *conseruator* can be identified, while the total number of preserved coins is even higher, given that the same type can be represented in more than one coin.⁴¹

In 114 coin types, *conseruator* refers to Roman rulers. The concept of the *conseruatio rei publicae* is present in the *denarii* of Augustus: four types dated to 18 BCE (RIC I (second edition) Augustus 96–101) have the legend *S(enatus) P(opulus)Q(ue) R(omanus) P(arenti) CONS(eruatori) SVO* on the obverse and *CAESARI AVGVSTO* on the reverse, whereas two types dated to 16 BCE (RIC I (second edition) Augustus 356–7) read *S(enatus) C(onsulto) OB R(em) P(ublicam) CVM SALVT(e) IMP(eratoris) CAESAR(is) AVGVS(ti) CONS(eruatam)* on the obverse.⁴² The position of the legend with *conseruator* on the obverse is peculiar to Augustus' coins: in the following types, the title mainly appears on the reverse together with a figure or symbol of a god and refers to the god protector of the emperor rather than to the

³⁵ P. Burton, 'Christian Latin', *A Companion to the Latin Language* (ed. J. Clackson; Chichester/Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011) 485–501, at 491, observes that the terms *sacerdos* and *antistes* were employed for bishops despite their association with Roman religion while *pontifex*, a term connected with imperial cult, was not accepted immediately in the Christian language.

³⁶ See A. Alföldi, 'Die Geburt der kaiserlichen Bildsymbolik. Kleine Beiträge zu ihrer Entstehungsgeschichte', *Museum Helveticum* 9.4 (1952) 204–43, on the terms for saviour in Cicero.

³⁷ Augustus is hailed as *conseruator* in Velleius Paterculus (*Historiae Romanae* 2.60.1) while the title is later bestowed in the collection of imperial orations known as *Panegyrici latini* on Constantine (*Oratio* IV (X) 38.6 and *Oratio* V (VIII) 14.4) and on Maximian and Diocletian (*Oratio* X (II) 13.2).

³⁸ For instance, the following Greek inscription refers to Augustus as σωτήρρος τῶν Ἑλλήνων τε καὶ τῆς οἰκουμένης πάσης (IvO 366).

³⁹ See Cicero (*Pro P. Sestio* 53), Tacitus (*Historiae* 3.74.1), *Panegyrici latini* (*Oratio* 12 (IX) 18.1) and Pliny the Younger (*Panegyricus* 1.6).

⁴⁰ Alföldi, 'Die Geburt der kaiserlichen Bildsymbolik', 233.

⁴¹ The type is 'the principal device or image' that appears on a coin according to the definition of W.E. Metcalf, 'Introduction', *The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Coinage* (ed. W.E. Metcalf; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 3–10, at 4. On the difficulty of identifying consistent types see F. Kemmers, *The Functions and Use of Roman Coinage* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2019) 9. The OCRE database (<http://numismatics.org.ocre/>) contains the types of coins published in the Roman Imperial Coinage (RIC) from 31 BCE to 491 CE. The coins with *conseruator* in the legend have been collected from the database and double-checked in the printed edition of RIC (volumes I–VII).

⁴² RIC I (second edition) 357 and 358 have on the reverse a cippus inscribed with *IMP CAES AVGV COMM CONS*. A. Wallace-Hadrill, 'Image and Authority in the Coinage of Augustus', *JRS* 76 (1986) 66–87, at 78, interprets the text as *COMM(uni) CONS(eruatori)* instead of *COMM(uni) CONS(ensu)*. Because of the uncertain character of the legend, RIC I (second edition) 356–8 are excluded from the final count of the types attesting *conseruator*.

emperor himself.⁴³ Nonetheless, in a few types dated to the second half of the third century, the epithet refers directly to the emperors when it is accompanied by their bust, which, in these cases, is imprinted on both sides of the coins. *Conseruator* is part of formulaic expressions which emphasise the virtues of the emperors, mostly pertaining to the military and moral sphere: Gallienus is *CONSERVATORI ORBIS*, *CONSERVAT(or) PIETAT(is)* and *CONSERVATOR EXERC(itus or -itum)*; Claudius Gothicus *CONSERVAT(or) PIETAT(is)*; Aurelian *AVG(ustus) CONS(eruator)* and *CONS(eruator) PRINC(eps) AVG(ustus)*; and Tacitus *CONSERVATOR MILIT(um)*.⁴⁴ At the beginning of the fourth century, the title is associated with Maxentius, Maximian and Constantine in the collocation *CONSERVATOR/CONSERVATORES VRB(is) SVAE* which stresses the centrality of Rome, depicted on the reverse.⁴⁵ These rulers are also defined as *CONSERVATOR/CONSERVATORES KART(aginis) SVAE* and *CONSERVATOR AFRICAE SVAE* with Carthage and Africa represented on the reverse.⁴⁶

The coins in which *conseruator* refers to the protective deities of the emperors are more numerous than those in which the noun is the epithet of rulers: 1114 types of coin associate *conseruator* with gods. Gods of the Roman pantheon are invoked as *conseruatores* of the emperors, such as Jupiter (711 types), Mars (157), Apollo (63), Hercules (55), Neptune (10), Asclepius (4), Liberus (4), Mercury (3), Janus (1) and the Dioscuri (1), as well as the eastern gods Sol (54), Elagabal (7) and Serapis (2). In a few types, the epithet is bestowed on the goddesses Diana (12) and Juno (8) and in one type on either Minerva or Roma.⁴⁷ The gods are sometimes mentioned in pairs: Jupiter and Hercules (12), Jupiter and Fortuna (3), Mars and Victoria (2), Apollo and Diana (2), Jupiter and Victoria (1) and Minerva and Hercules (1). By the mid-fourth century, no coins with *conseruator* referring either to gods or emperors were minted any more according to the surviving evidence.

The numismatic evidence demonstrates that in the imperial period *conseruator* was a political and religious title widespread throughout the empire.

Coins minted between the end of the third and the beginning of the fourth century CE were means of propaganda aiming to reinforce imperial power in a period of great political instability, in which emperors were acclaimed and overthrown by the army.⁴⁸ The

⁴³ However, RIC V Gallienus 15 has the legend with *conseruator* on the obverse. See L. De Blois, *The Policy of the Emperor Gallienus* (Leiden: Brill, 1976) 120–74, on the self-representation of Gallienus as keeper of peace and saviour in coins.

⁴⁴ RIC V Gallienus 15, 171, 171A, 173; RIC V Claudius Gothicus 28; RIC V Aurelian 2, 3, 319–22; RIC V Tacitus 16–17, 133–4, 191–4. The abbreviation *CONS* in Aurelian's coins could be interpreted as *conseruator* or, as suggested by A. Watson, *Aurelian and the Third Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999) 190–1, *consecrator* or *consecrauit*.

⁴⁵ The title refers to Maxentius (RIC VI Aquileia 113–6, 118A–20, 122–6; RIC VI Rome 135, 143, 144, 166, 177, 178, 187, 202, 204, 205, 208–13, 258–63, 278–80; RIC VI Ostia 2; RIC VI Ticinum 91, 94, 95, 100, 101, 105, 106, 108–110), Maximian (RIC VI Ticinum 92), Constantine (RIC VI Rome 203; RIC VI Ticinum 93) and, in the plural form, to Maxentius, Maximian and Constantine before their disagreement in 308 CE (RIC VI Ticinum 84a, 84b, 85, 86, 102–4, 107; RIC VI Rome 162–5, 194a, 194b, 195–7, 198a, 198b, 199, 200, 201). See M. Cullhed, *CONSERVATOR URBIS SVAE. Studies in the politics and propaganda of the emperor Maxentius* (Stockholm: Svenska Institutet i Rom, 1994) 45–9, on Maxentius's propaganda for the promotion of Rome and the restoration of its traditions.

⁴⁶ These titles are bestowed on Maximian (RIC VI Carthage 52, 56, 59), Maxentius (RIC VI Carthage 53, 54, 57, 60) and Constantine (RIC VI Carthage 49, 55, 58, 61).

⁴⁷ The feminine noun *conseruatricis* is also attested in coins with reference to Juno (RIC IV Caracalla 377; RIC IV Elagabalus 219, 257, 258; RIC IV Severus Alexander 342–4, 685–8; RIC IV Philip I 128) and Diana (RIC V Macrianus Minor 1) as protective deities of the female members of the imperial family.

⁴⁸ The propagandistic value of coins was intensely debated at the end of the twentieth century: as a result, the belief, which is now predominant, that coinage is a political instrument has been affirmed by N. Hännestad, *Roman Art and Imperial Policy* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1986) 11 and Wallace-Hadrill, 'Image and Authority in the Coinage of Augustus', 69. The widespread practice of the acclamation of the emperors by the army in the third century is discussed in S.A. Cook, F.E. Adcock, M.P. Charlesworth and N.H. Baynes, ed., *The*

legends *conseruator militum* and *conseruator exercitus* indicate that soldiers, who were paid in coins, were recipients and distributors of this propaganda. Coins have been discovered in contested areas of the empire: RIC V Gallienus 171A was found in Britannia, controlled by the usurper Postumus.⁴⁹ The coinage of Tacitus with the legend *conseruator militum* (RIC V Tacitus 191–4) was minted in Serdica, modern Bulgaria, and was possibly distributed to the soldiers defending the Black Sea against barbarian attacks.⁵⁰ Not only did the large-scale message delivered by coins reach the army, but also the literate and semi-literate population which is likely to have been aware of the religious and political undertones of *conseruator*.⁵¹ Consequently, the political connotation of *conseruator* was widespread, at least among educated Romans, at the time in which the New Testament was translated into Latin.

5. *Conseruator* in the Latin New Testament and Patristic Literature

The numerous attestations of *conseruator* on coins contrast with the scarce use of the word in the Latin New Testament and patristic literature. As outlined above, *conseruator* is attested once in a manuscript and in four patristic writings quoting Luke 2.11 and 2 Peter 1.11 and 2.20. The rendering *conseruator salutis* at Luke 2.11 seems to be connected to a biblical text circulating in Ireland, as it is attested in VL 14 (Dublin, Trinity College 55, *Codex Usserianus primus*), a seventh-century Old Latin manuscript copied in Ireland and belonging to the Gallo-Irish manuscript group, and the *Catechesis celtica* (abbreviated in the *Vetus Latina* edition as AN Wil 11, Luke 2.11 p. 93 and line 156, p. 103).⁵² The latter is a collection of homilies with a probable Irish affiliation transmitted by a single manuscript (MS Vat. Reg. lat. 49).⁵³ In 2 Peter, the rendering *conseruator* is exclusively attested in patristic citations. In order to demonstrate that the reign of the Father and the Son is not divided, Ambrose (*De fide* 3.12.93 ed. Faller) quotes 2 Peter 1.10–11 in a unique textual form, indicated by Thiele as text type M, without any adjustment of the biblical text to the context of the passage.⁵⁴ 2 Peter 2.20 is also cited *verbatim* by Augustine in two consistent citations of the same verse (*De fide et operibus* 24.45 and 25.46) and by Salvian of Marseilles (*De gubernatione Dei* 4.93) in support of their claims.

Conseruator is attested twenty-five times in patristic writings outside biblical citations. If the instances in which *conseruator* stands for ‘keeper’ and is not used as epithet of God and Christ are excluded, thirteen attestations remain, of which eight refer to God and five

Cambridge Ancient History. Volume XII. The Imperial Crisis and Recovery A.D. 193–324 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971) 368–70.

⁴⁹ *The Cambridge Ancient History*, 186–8.

⁵⁰ In 267 CE Goths and Heruli attacked the Balkans and Greece. For a detailed description of the invasion see *The Cambridge Ancient History*, 148–50 and 312.

⁵¹ W.V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) 213, concludes that ‘the creative use of coin legends from the late Republic onwards suggests that they were expected to carry an intelligible message to an audience of a certain size ... This does not imply in any way that the masses were literate or that anyone imagined that they were. And there may have been a more specific audience, namely the army. The legions ... included a very considerable number of literates and semi-literates.’

⁵² See R. Gryson, *Altlateinische Handschriften. Manuscrits vieux latins. Répertoire descriptif. Première partie: Mss 1-275* (Freiburg: Herder, 1999) 37 and Houghton, *The Latin New Testament*, 218, for bibliographical references and the affiliation of VL 14.

⁵³ The text of the *Catechesis Celtica* has been edited by A. Wilmart, ‘Reg. Lat. 49. Catéchèses celtique’, *Analecta Regensia* 59 (1933) 29–112. On the Irish character of the *Catechesis Celtica* see M. McNamara, ‘Sources and affiliations of the *Catechesis Celtica* (MS Vat. Reg. lat. 49)’, *Sacris erudiri* 34 (1994) 185–237.

⁵⁴ W. Thiele, *Vetus Latina. Die Reste der altlateinischen Bibel. Epistulae Catholicae*. VL 26/1. (Freiburg: Herder, 1956–69).

to Jesus.⁵⁵ Ambrose employs the term in an absolute manner with reference to God in *De Abraham* 1.3.17, in which the one who fights for glory and not for a reward, is said to be worthy of the glory of the saviour (*dignus habetur conseruatoris gloriae*). The remaining attestations of *conseruator* can be classified in three groups according to their collocations. The first group contains the word in fixed formulae (Cyprian, *Epistle* 76; Zeno of Verona *Tractatus* 1.13.136 and 1.26.10). The second has the meaning ‘protector’ of humankind and refers to God (Tertullian, *De resurrectione mortuorum* 58.35 and *De cultu feminarum* 1.3.1; Arnobius the Younger, *Commentarii in Psalmos* 72.39; Orosius, *Historiarum aduersum paganos* 1.3.3.2) and Christ (Maximus of Turin, *Sermo* 73.26; Arnobius the Elder, *Aduersus nationes* 2.63–4). The third group attests *conseruator* in lists of epithets of God and Christ (Arnobius the Elder, *Aduersus nationes* 2.65; John Cassian, *De incarnatione Domini contra Nestorium* 6.19).

The noun is part of recurrent formulae attested at the beginning or at the end of letters and treatises (group 1): *conseruator* is employed in the salutation of *Epistle* 76 of Cyprian, in which the recipients of the letter are called martyrs of Jesus and of God our saviour (*conseruatoris nostri*). The formula *per dominum et conseruatorem nostrum Iesum Christum* features at the end of two treatises of Zeno of Verona. In the passages in which the term is an epithet of God and Christ (group 2), it means ‘protector’ of humans and of their body. Tertullian (*De resurrectione mortuorum* 58.35) when arguing in favour of the resurrection of the body, calls God ‘saviour of the flesh’ (*carnis magis utique conseruatorem*).⁵⁶ In another context, Tertullian affirms that God is the saviour of Noah from the flood (*De cultu feminarum* 1.3.1). God is presented as protector (*conseruator*) of the believers in Arnobius the Younger (*Commentarii in Psalmos* 72.39), while Christ is defined as protector in evil things (*in malis noster est conseruator*) by Maximus of Turin (*Sermo* 73.26).⁵⁷ In Orosius (*Historiarum aduersum paganos* 1.3.3.2), God is called *conseruator humilium*, ‘protector of the humble’, for averting a natural disaster after listening to the prayers of the emperor Arcadius and of the Christians.

Conseruator is attested three times in *Aduersus nationes* 2.63–5 in which Arnobius the Elder reports and replies to the arguments of his adversaries. In the answer to the question concerning the destiny of men who lived before Christ, the latter is defined as saviour (*conseruator*) of humankind from death (2.63). In the following counterargument of the gentiles, who complain that salvation is not universal, Christ is named *conseruator generis humani* (2.64) with the same meaning as above. Once again, *conseruator* is used in the objection of the adversaries as an epithet of God (*si deus est potens misericors conseruator*) with the meaning ‘protector’ (2.65). The language of Arnobius might reflect that of his opponents, considering that two out of three instances of *conseruator* are attested in the questions, albeit artificial, expressing criticism of the gentiles.⁵⁸ This hypothesis is reinforced by a further occurrence of *conseruator* in Arnobius (7.48) in which the term

⁵⁵ The Holy Spirit is invoked as *uitae conseruator* in a sermon pseudonymously attributed to Augustine (*Sermo* 132.2 edited by A. Mai), which is an excerpt from the *Meditatio de Spiritu Sancto* probably composed in England in the 13th century and partially edited by A. Wilmart, *Auteurs spirituels et textes dévots du Moyen Age latin* (Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1932) 415–56.

⁵⁶ See footnote 5 on the expression σωτήρ τοῦ σώματος at Eph 5.23. The similar phrasing *conseruatori corporis sui* is attested in an inscription of the second century to Mars (TM 125210), who is invoked as protector of the body. Although the similarity is probably coincidental, it is possible to wonder whether this expression originated in the language of Roman religion or, vice versa, was used in the inscription under the influence of Christianity.

⁵⁷ In the same sermon, *saluator* is attested three times.

⁵⁸ Mohrmann, ‘Les emprunts grecs’, 205, considers the hypothesis that Arnobius used the expression intentionally against the gentiles too subtle. However, the unintentional influence of pagan discourse on Arnobius’ language cannot be excluded either.

refers to a pagan deity, Aesculapius, transformed into the snake living on the Tiber Island and deliverer of the plague.

In the lists of epithets of God and Christ (group 3), *conseruator* stands together with other titles, such as in the aforementioned passage of *Aduersus nationes* 2.65. The collocation of the term in John Cassian's list of epithets of Christ is *hominum conseruator* (*De incarnatione Domini contra Nestorium* 6.19), which is a further instance of the meaning 'protector of humankind' common to the sources included in group 2. A further attestation connected with group 3, in which *conseruator* is not a Christian title, is found in Lactantius: when he summarises the stoic doctrine according to which grace but not wrath are qualities of God, he includes the term *conseruator* in a list of epithets of the stoic God, *lenis tranquillus propitius beneficus conseruator* (*De ira Dei* 5.5). The epithet can be interpreted as 'keeper of the universe' from a stoic perspective, and it was probably employed in this passage because of its pagan connotation.⁵⁹ The passages of Arnobius the Elder and Lactantius demonstrate that *conseruator* was anchored to Roman religion and stoicism. It is possible to conclude from the analysis of the New Testament and patristic instances of *conseruator* that the word is a niche rendering in Christian literature, in which it is less frequent than in imperial inscriptions and coins. The most plausible reason for this discrepancy will be given in the final section of this contribution.

6. Conclusions

In the Greek New Testament, σωτήρ is the word that designates the saviour whereas, in the Latin New Testament, this concept is expressed by *conseruator*, *saluifactor/salutificator*, *salutaris* and *saluator*. This lexical variety might be due to linguistic, geographical, stylistic and socio-political factors. When the Latin translations were made, finding an equivalent word for σωτήρ was not straightforward: the neologisms *saluifactor/salutificator* and *saluator* were coined and used alongside the conventional but marginal renderings *salutaris* and *conseruator*. While *saluifactor* and *salutificator* were unsuccessful formations, *saluator* became the normative word for saviour in the New Testament and Christian literature, probably because of the correspondence between the verbs σώζειν – *saluare* and the nouns σωτήρ – *saluator*. Conversely, the pre-existing terms *salutaris* and *conseruator* are attested in the Latin New Testament to a lesser degree. *Salutaris* is used three times in the Vulgate (Luke 1.47; 1 Tim 2.3 and Titus 2.10) and more often in the *Vetus Latina*. Surviving inscriptions show that *salutaris* was employed in dedications to Roman and eastern gods to ask for health protection. Yet the term underwent semantic extension to express the concept of Christian salvation: *salutaris* is used in the New Testament in continuity with Roman religion, though less frequently than *saluator*.⁶⁰

Conseruator intersects the semantic fields of power and religion since the word occurs in writings, inscriptions and coins conveying religious and propagandistic messages. Cicero employs the term to refer to the saviours of Rome, including himself, from the internal turmoil. It then becomes an imperial title in literature and inscriptions. Coins provide evidence of the wide circulation of *conseruator* in a religious and political context:

⁵⁹ The same conclusion has been reached by Ingremeau in *Lactance, La colère de Dieu. Introduction, texte critique, traduction, commentaire et index* (ed. C. Ingremeau; Sources Chrétiennes; Paris: Cerf, 1982) 240–1. The other instance of *conseruator* in Lactantius (*Epitome diuinarum institutionum* 48.8) has a gnomic and non-religious connotation in that the expression *conseruator hominis* refers to a person acting as saviour of the life of a man committing suicide.

⁶⁰ The phenomenon of the avoidance of words connected with Roman religion by Christian writers is not unknown: Burton, 'Christian Latin', 492, underlines the preference for *oratio* instead of *preces* and for *altare* instead of *ara* because of the association of the latter renderings with paganism.

1228 types of coin, in which either the term refers to the gods as protectors of the emperors or to the emperors themselves, demonstrate that the word was firmly associated with the imperial cult. The wide circulation of *conseruator* in coins contrasts with the sporadic attestations of the title in the New Testament and Christian literature. *Conseruator* is not used in the Vulgate and occurs only in three verses in the Vetus Latina (Luke 2.11; 1 Peter 1.11 and 2.20), in which the rendering is confined to the biblical citations of Augustine, Ambrose and Salvian of Marseilles, except in VL 14 at Luke 2.11. Patristic evidence suggests that *conseruator* was rarely an epithet of God and Christ in Christian sources, in which the title refers to God only eight times and to Christ five times with the meaning 'protector' from disasters, sin and death. The term is also present in formulae inserted in salutations and conclusions of letters and treatises.

The examination of the numismatic and literary sources attesting *conseruator* witnesses the central position of the term in the language of the imperial cult in contrast with the low number of attestations in the Latin New Testament and Christian sources. The uneven distribution of *conseruator* in coins and Christian literature indicates that the term was rarely employed to translate σωτήρ in the New Testament and in patristic literature, most likely because of its widespread political connotation. Numismatic sources show that the noun widely circulated on coins when the New Testament was translated into Latin between the late second and fourth century. That translators were aware of the marked political meaning of *conseruator* is plausible, given its circulation on coins and inscriptions. Apparently, they did not consider it suitable for indicating the saviour in a Christian context.⁶¹ The political connotation of the title may have been the reason why it was not prominent in the Latin translations of the Bible, and why neologisms, such as *saluator*, were coined to designate the Christian saviour. In contrast, *salutaris* became part of the Christian vocabulary, because it was not firmly associated with the imperial cult while its relationship with Roman religion, documented by inscriptions, does not seem to have been considered problematic.

These conclusions indicate that the Latin New Testament differs from the Greek New Testament in the use of the language of power. Lexical items belonging to the semantic area of the imperial cult were integrated into the Greek New Testament: honorific titles, such as σωτήρ, do not seem to have been perceived as unacceptable when the Greek New Testament was written. Furthermore, the recurrence of σωτήρ in the Septuagint as a divine title might have encouraged the use of the term in the Greek New Testament. When the New Testament was translated into Latin, the political circumstances had changed, and the introduction of words related to the imperial cult, such as *conseruator*, may not have been advisable, especially in the period preceding the fourth century. This tendency can be explained with reference to the social-historical context of the time, as an attempt to avoid contrasts with the emperors who persecuted the Christians, who refused imperial worship up to the early fourth century when the persecution of Diocletian took place. Following Galerius' Edict of Toleration in 311 CE and Constantine's Edict of Milan in 313 CE, the tension between Christians and imperial institutions decreased. As a consequence, resistance to the use of political language in Christian writings gradually ceased.⁶² This may also explain why *conseruator* was sporadically employed in patristic sources of the fourth and fifth century, for instance in the biblical citations of Augustine, Ambrose and Salvian mentioned above. However, by this point, *saluator* had already replaced the other existing terms and was the established denomination for the Christian saviour.

⁶¹ P. Burton, *The Old Latin Gospels. A Study of their Texts and Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 171.

⁶² Burton, 'Christian Latin', 491 reaches the same conclusion with reference to the term *pontifex*.

Funding statement. The research for this contribution has been funded by Internal Funds KU Leuven (3H190608).

Competing interests. The author declares none.

Cite this article: Persig A (2023). The Language of Imperial Cult and Roman Religion in the Latin New Testament: The Latin Renderings of 'Saviour'. *New Testament Studies* **69**, 21–34. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688522000212>