

REVIEWS

Thomas Hägg and Philip Rousseau (eds), *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press. 2000.

This attractive collection, the product of a 1996 colloquium at the University of Bergen on the theme ‘Rhetoric and the Translation of Culture’, focuses on the role played by Greek biographical and panegyric works in the transition to a Christian Hellenic culture in late antiquity (p. ix). Opening with two essays on Neoplatonism (Clark, Edwards), it takes in Eusebius’ *Life of Constantine* and the *Life of Antony* (Averil Cameron, Rousseau), chews on Gregory Nazianzen’s funeral oration for Basil from three separate viewpoints (Norris, Konstan, Børtnes), with a final pirouette on Themistius (Penella) and the Syriac *Life of Rabbula* (Bowersock); Rubensen explores the broader topic of education in biography, while Cox Miller tackles collective biography, as represented by Eunapius and the *Historia Monachorum*. This table of contents does not do justice to the admirable coherence of the collection, but it does signal the high level of expertise among contributors. Each chapter has a valuable bibliography, and a General Index and Index locorum is provided.

The volume reflects growing interest in the field of late-antique biography in particular: Cox’s *Biography in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1983) is cited by more than one author as a trailblazer, while M. J. Edwards and Simon Swain’s *Portraits: Biographical Representation in the Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire* (Oxford 1997) now complements our collection; the latter has a more Roman flavour and fewer Christian texts, but an additional facet in chapters on Jewish martyr-literature (Rajak) and the Samaritan Simon Magus (Mark Edwards). Hägg and Rousseau’s introduction concentrates on broad literary issues, tracing the history of their two genres back to the fourth century BC before surveying the texts discussed and considering how they should be read: biography is no more transparent than panegyric, in its own way creating a nexus between subject, text, immediate and future audience. It has the power to distance subject and audience, but also to transport either to new locations—an urban audience to the desert or Antony to Trier, as in his *Latin Life*. Audience expectations and existing models continue influential, but this period sees an evolution in the concept of the ‘good’ man and a new tone of familiarity, comradeship and affection in the Christian writers. At the same time these texts create a strong and in-

spirational presence, enabling readers to transcend the boundaries of their own lives.

Gillian Clark's clear and masterly 'Philosophic Lives and the Philosophic Life', juxtaposes Porphyry and Iamblichus and their approaches to *bios*, seeking to highlight differences between them and remove common misconceptions. Their *Lives* of Pythagoras (Porphyry, Iamblichus) and Plotinus (Porphyry) were not self-standing, but elements of larger enterprises and intended as protreptics for potential students: both Porphyry and Iamblichus are concerned with students' needs—their relationship to the master and how they should be taught to live. Pythagoras and Plotinus had divergent approaches to students, the first testing candidates and limiting access to himself, the other offering a free-for-all Socratic-style 'tutorial' system. Undue, and anachronistic, emphasis has been placed on anti-Christian polemic in these works, which are better interpreted as a sustained defence of the antiquity of the philosophic tradition: it was Christians who saw the Neoplatonists as opponents. Clark concludes by stressing the variety of pagan asceticism—and that Christians often responded to the same challenges with greater extremism. This essay offers an excellent starting-point for novices in Neoplatonism.

The focus narrows in M. J. Edwards' elegant and probing 'Birth, Death and Divinity in Porphyry's *On the Life of Plotinus*. An 'attempt to grasp the pattern and spirit of the whole' and hence to exemplify the uses of the biographical genre, it examines the account of Plotinus' birth and death, suggesting that the key to their riddling nature lies in familiarity with the *Enneads*: the *Life* aims to make the reader privy to a mystery hidden from pupils and opponents alike during Plotinus' lifetime. He indeed 'had something more by birth than others', but his divinity is perceived only after his death. Edwards draws attention to the panegyric nature of this and similarly titled works, leading to comparison with the Gospel of John. Stopping short of calling Porphyry's work a gospel, he points to common themes and elements, a demonstrable unity of aim and possible influence: Plotinus is presented as a pagan Christ. This challenging piece will surely provoke response from experts, while for non-specialists it offers insight into the sophisticated undertones of Porphyry's text. As in Clark's chapter, much is achieved by locating the work in context.

Averil Cameron juxtaposes Eusebius' *Life of Constantine* with Athanasius' *Life of Antony* (ch. 3), drawing out parallelisms between these near-contemporary works produced from opposing camps by authors who were acquainted but hostile. Both Constantine and Antony come to knowledge from simplicity, are plagued by demons/pagan gods, operate with the aid of signs and wonders, educate through teaching and debate, address pagans, are proclaimed as orthodox and are exemplary in death. At this period the

genre of biography is as yet fluid, although both texts aim to set up a Christian alternative to the pagan *Life*, whether the Plutarchan or those of pagan holy men. C. floats the idea that the *Life of Antony* may be a response to Eusebius: at least the real Antony is as hard to recover as the real Constantine. This suggestion may not meet with universal favour, but few will dispute her overall message that these works must be read as texts, not as sources, and that attempts to interpret them through a straitjacket of genre fail to reach their core.

Rousseau's disarmingly simple title, 'Antony as Teacher in the Greek *Life*' masks an elegantly constructed investigation of major problems connected with this text. His reading accumulates a range of evidence that Antony's authority was based on an active didactic role both in his immediate circle and, later, with philosophers and bishops. Accepting the Greek text as primary, R. asks how his conclusion melds with Athanasian authorship: either Athanasius was more sympathetic to ascetic teaching than is usually believed, or he is not the author. R. finds it easier to reject Athanasius' authorship than to deny his view of the text as an ancient attempt to approve the teaching authority of Egyptian ascetics. Furthermore this emphasis on Antony's role as teacher in the *Life* narrows the gap which others have discerned between it and the letters attributed to Antony. This is a subtly argued case—and likely to stimulate renewed debate on major issues.

Rubenson ('Philosophy and Simplicity: the Problem of Classical Education in Early Christian Biography') sets out from the opening chapter of the *Life of Antony* on a rather different path, exploration of how biographers of the late fourth and early fifth centuries view classical *paideia*. Study of Jerome, Gregory of Nyssa and the *Life of Pachomius* reveals considerable diversity, indicative, not surprisingly, of the authors' individual preoccupations. Only the *Life of Antony* explicitly rejects Greek *paideia* in favour of a superior education founded in spiritual training in the desert. Jerome's heroes St Paul the Hermit and St Hilarion are educated men for whom faith does not come into conflict with *paideia*, whereas for Gregory of Nyssa secular learning forms the foundation of higher Christian education, except in the case of Macrina, who received a Christian education from the outset. Only figures on the borders of the Greek world, Jerome's Malchus and St Pachomius (and the female Macrina) find Greek education irrelevant, but it is here that the first traces of a purely Christian *paideia*, as it was to be advocated by Augustine, are to be found.

In the first of three interlocking studies of Gregory of Nazianzus' funeral oration for St Basil ('Your Honor, My Reputation'), Frederick W. Norris is also much concerned with *paideia*, both as deployed by Gregory in this sophisticated piece of rhetoric and because an important part of the oration is concerned with Gregory and Basil's student days together in Athens, an en-

vironment more congenial to Gregory than to Basil. Stressing the care with which such texts must be read, N. assesses the oration's fine balance between self-promotion and honour of its subject, against the background of Gregory's recent resignation from his bishopric after the 381 Council of Constantinople. Comparison with Gregory's orations for Cyprian and Athanasius, as well as his brother Caesarius, provides a control. Gregory may have given more prominence than Basil himself to the importance of family because of his own family's powerful influence on Gregory's life, while his silence about Basil's visit to the monastic communities of Egypt and Palestine is explicable because it abruptly terminated their studies together in Athens and because of Gregory's own battle between his preference for the monastic life and his enforced prominence in the Church. Basil's appointment of Gregory to the bishopric of Sasima, regarded by Gregory as a betrayal matched only by his own father's demand that he enter the priesthood, is accorded more restrained treatment here than elsewhere in Gregory.

David Konstan, 'How to Praise a Friend' takes as his starting-point the widespread Christian rejection of the classical language of friendship in favour of terminology centred around *agape* or that of kinship. Gregory of Nazianzus, however, sticks with the Hellenic *philia* tradition, despite its innate assumption of merit in befriended as well as friend. Comparison with Basil's brother Gregory of Nyssa reveals that he avoids *philia* altogether, praising Basil as the perfect man of God, on a par with biblical paradigms, but making no comment at all on Basil's—and of course his own—family. Nazianzus consciously takes an opposing course, with detail on family and his experiences with Basil in Athens, where they were as Orestes and Pylades; only in his peroration is Basil linked with biblical figures, surely in response to Nyssa's approach. Further analogies reveal a standard pattern: Nazianzus foregrounds the family of his brother Caesarius and sister Gorgonia, Nyssa avoids the personal in his oration for Meletius, bishop of Antioch, although his biography of his sister Macrina does deal with her personal life since it is intended as a pattern for others like his life of Moses. In conclusion, however, K. emphasizes that Gregory of Nazianzus' commitment to the classical terminology of friendship expresses a heartfelt belief, for which his oration of Basil is the ideal vehicle.

Jostein Børtnes ('Eros Transformed: Same-Sex Love and Divine Desire') probes the erotic terminology—in particular *eros* and *pothos*—used in Gregory's account of his friendship with Basil in Athens, linking it in particular with Plato's *Symposium*. But whereas Platonic *eros* typically links unequal partners, older *erastes* for youthful *eromenos*, that of Basil and Gregory is closer to Alcibiades' desire for Socrates, in which the younger man's love for his teacher represents that for the *theios aner*. B. highlights remarkably similar

erotic vocabulary in Gregory Thaumaturgus' speech of thanksgiving for his teacher Origen, likewise seen as a *theios aner*. The hierarchical relationship was to prevail in eastern monasticism, whereas Gregory and Basil, by contrast, met as equals, striving together for Christian truth. With Basil's departure from Athens, the yoke-pair (*xunoris*) was severed, and Gregory moves into new registers, *psogos* against Basil's enemies and the rhetoric of biblical quotation. Whereas Basil later successfully combined the philosophic and priestly life, for Gregory priesthood threatened the philosophic life he craved. Gregory formulated a new model for their relationship, that of Paul and Barnabas, but it never recovered the erotic sparkle of their time together in Athens.

These three complementary essays, approach the core of Gregory's oration, the student days with Basil in Athens, from distinctive classical perspectives—conventions of rhetoric, of friendship and of Platonic erotics. Each identifies Gregory's devotion to Hellenic principles not just as an educational preference, but as an ideal for living, which, however, proved unsustainable for one thrust unwilling into a public role within the Church. The complexity of the threads here unravelled gives an inkling of the deep-seatedness of Gregory's Hellenism and assists comprehension of his failure to recover and achieve the successful compromise epitomized by the life of Basil himself.

Robert J. Penella, 'The Rhetoric of Praise in the Private Orations of Themistius', treats a contemporary of Gregory's for whom Hellenism and philosophy were also central tenets, but who was also one of history's great survivors in politics—and a staunch pagan. P. selects four (*Orr.* 20, 34, 30, 33) from the second, 'private', group of Themistius' orations and examines their encomiastic intentions, arguing that, as with Gregory's speech for Basil, encomium is only one aspect of the speaker's purpose. Themistius' funeral speech for his father Eugenius (*Or.* 20) is, like Gregory's, selective in its choice of Menandrian topics, concentrating on the high value of philosophy for Eugenius—Plato now takes second place to Aristotle—and his literary culture. As Norris argued for Gregory, so Penella suggests that the *paideia* here advocated is of course Themistius' own. *Oration* 34 ostensibly a defence of Themistius' urban prefecture of Constantinople thirty years later (AD 384/5), includes a substantial encomium of Theodosius II, thereby vindicating, P. argues, Themistius' own office-holding under this philanthropic figure. *Oration* 30 praises agriculture, a puzzling choice unless some further connection is discerned. P. suggests that this is political: the background is Theodosius II's Visigothic treaty in 382, which brought peace both to Balkan farmers and to Visigoths settled within the empire, who became farmers. Finally, P. asks whether the fragmentary *Oration* 33, which opens with sermonizing on the debasement of the terms *basileus* and *hypatos*, was a pre-

ude to praise of a trueborn (i.e. philosopher-) *basileus*, currently *hypatos*, namely Constantius II in 360. These studies further demonstrate the subtlety and precision of rhetorical targets and locate Themistius and Gregory of Nazianzus side by side as proponents of Hellenic *paideia*, if not in religious persuasion.

Patricia Cox Miller's 'Strategies of Representation in Collective Biography', the centrepiece and pivot of the volume, develops her earlier work on biography in late antiquity. Plutarch, Philostratus and Diogenes Laertius provide the background against which are juxtaposed and contrasted the anonymous *Historia Monachorum* and Eunapius' *Lives of the Sophists*. In the fourth-century biographers a new emotional, personal and religious tone emerges: the biographers are personally involved with their subjects, Eunapius as one of the Neoplatonic philosophers of whom he writes and the anonymous author of the *Historia Monachorum* through the hardships he underwent in interviewing his subjects. Pre-fourth-century biographers pick out both similarity and difference in order to pinpoint individual characteristics, although each has distinctive organizational principles. But with Gregory of Tour's *Lives of the Fathers* (not studied closely here) a new ideal of sameness enters Christian biography, since its subjects all participate in the same Christian holiness; hence diversity becomes pointless. Although probably not written in response to one another, the *Historia Monachorum* and Eunapius are aligned on different sides of a 'war of biography' (Averil Cameron's phrase) in the late fourth century, in which Christians and Neoplatonists vie in defining the authentic human being. The *Historia Monachorum*, a first attempt at collective Christian biography, jettisons classical patterns for a selective and repetitive anecdotal style, in which stories—often connected with miracles—are interchangeable between subjects, since they instantiate the single 'angelic life' which underlies all. This text substitutes the qualities of a particular lifestyle for the distinctiveness of individual lives, its subjects ever aspiring towards the goal of Christ-like life which it would be blasphemous actually to achieve. Eunapius, by contrast, emphasizes the divinity at the centre of his personalities, their Neoplatonic souls seeking to link the divine in themselves to the divine cosmos. So sameness is a guiding principle here too, most striking in the case of the Christian Prohaeresius, the 'most divine' icon of Hellenic holiness whose Christianity is virtually ignored. Like the author of the *Historia Monachorum*, Eunapius is also anecdotal, his tales often centred on ritual activities, but for him Hellenic *paideia* is crucial, and his subjects have actually achieved the transformation sought by the monks, their souls having passed beyond bodily confines. Cox Miller describes her study as an attempt to pinpoint the shift from biography to hagiography: its broad compass offers an attractive handle to newcomers to this voluminous material.

Glen Bowersock ('The Syriac Life of Rabbula and Syrian Hellenism') follows Cox Miller in the view that late-antique biographers aim to provide a model or icon for the inspiration of future generations, but unlike the *Lives* in her collections, the narrative of Rabbula is traditional and complete: birth, life and career, death. B. demonstrates the important evidence for contemporary Syrian Christianity embedded in this text, which encompasses both the high-class pagan circles of Iamblichus' native Chalcis—also Rabbula's home town—and the specialized world of the Christians: Rabbula encounters in the desert monks whose communities are described as *xenoi*, and later himself assumes the role of spiritual bridegroom of Christ.

Brief survey can but touch on the many interlocking themes of this volume, of which the shift from interest in individual life to lifestyle, the centrality of *paideia*, the desire to provide models for behaviour, parallel developments in Neoplatonic and Christian biography (in defining the holy man, for example), the need to understand texts in context before using them as evidence, are merely among the more prominent. Hägg and Rousseau are unduly conscious in their introduction of the piecemeal way in which collections of essays are generally used. The level at which individual contributions are pitched is inevitably uneven, but this is most certainly a volume which I would warmly recommend to anyone wishing to take initial steps in comprehending common elements in a dauntingly large, difficult and disparate corpus of material.

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Rhiannon Ash, *Ordering Anarchy: Armies and Leaders in Tacitus' Histories*. London: Duckworth Press, 1999. 246 p. ISBN: 0715628003.

Rhiannon Ash has performed a great service for the field of classical historiography in her recent book, *Ordering Anarchy: Armies and Leaders in Tacitus' Histories*. Because the narrative of the *Histories* is often thorny, scholars have most often bracketed questions of style in favour of historical content, following Syme's assessment that the *Annals* is the more 'mature' work and therefore historiographically richer. Ash's analysis sweeps the cobwebs from this particular attic, as she gives careful attention to the narratological details with which Tacitus constructs portraits of the armies and leaders in the civil war of A.D. 69. Her effort lends greater coherence to the narrative as a whole, and in its thematic focus advances our understanding of the text be-

yond the frontiers staked out by Wellesley, who seeks to provide a ‘plain narrative’ of the ‘dark corners into which only a dim light penetrates from feeble candles’ (*The Long Year A.D.* 69: xi). Wellesley’s light, consisting of the background information he feels necessary to make sense of the text, is indisputably useful, but Ash illuminates it from within. And although she does not argue for it herself, one of the things I find most attractive about this book is its latent suggestion that if the *Histories* dissembles sketchiness as part of an overall scheme, it is possible that the apparent randomness of the extant texts—i.e. the difficulty of ascertaining the relationship between the minor works and the historiographical ones—also represents a larger conception of the significance of historiography for imperial ideology.

That having been said, a certain problematic also suggests itself. *Ordering Anarchy* is at heart a narratological study, and as such assumes a certain theory of representation for which it does not argue. Ash’s general technique is to compare Tacitus’s treatment of an event with others’, or to highlight Tacitus’s allusions to the tropes and themes of his predecessors. For example, her conclusion about the *Histories*’ portrait of the Flavians—that it weakens Vespasian by showing that his power rests on Titus’s loyalty, and by depicting Domitian already as a tyrant—rests on comparisons between Titus and Germanicus, coupled with Suetonius’s remarks about the former’s popularity with the soldiers at the fall of Jerusalem, and between Domitian and Sallust’s Sulla. This methodology sketches out the arena, but it does not bring out the combatants. Ash indicates the void in her frequent description of people and events as ‘unsettling’ or ‘disturbing’ without going on to reason why. In fact the whole book is a preliminary to answering this question, which is exactly the right one to ask Tacitus, and exactly the most difficult to answer. The fact that the narrative unsettles us is a sign that something is wrong, like the ominous music in *Jaws* that frightens us when the screen only shows us a girl enjoying a moonlit swim. We have to delve deep to find the problem, and when we do, it isn’t just a big scary shark; it involves corruption and dissonance as the heart of a small seaside town. In other words, to return to Tacitus, perhaps it isn’t the events he narrates that are of interest, but the relationships between them; not the allusions he makes to other authors, but the kinds of connections he makes with them.

Another example: Ash argues that Vespasian looks weak because he has fraternised excessively with his soldiers, picked up their mentality, and believes in omens; similarly, Germanicus was popular with the soldiers and ended up the victim of curse tablets and other magic trinkets under the floorboards. But is Tacitus’s point about superstition only about the character of the commanders in question? The obvious similarity between the two is that both are contenders for power (even if Germanicus does not actively seek it out). The obvious difference is that Germanicus dies and Vespasian

does not. In fact Vespasian is granted success unprecedented since Augustus. Perhaps the concept of *superstitio* also concerns the changing relationship between belief and power as the principate changes hands. If so, Tacitus does not narrate it directly, because to do so would be to make open a historical change that happens unconsciously. He tells us more in the manner of a joke that has an enigmatic punchline; or a Freudian slip. To take Tacitus at face value is to look into an empty arena, or a mirror. You see nothing, or you see what you want to see.

The book is organized quite simply, according chapters to the pairs of combatant armies (Galbians and Othonians; Vitellians and Flavians) and to military leaders (Galba and Otho; Vitellius; Vespasian, Domitian and Titus; Antonius Primus). Ash also provides an introductory chapter in which she reviews the civil war narratives of Caesar, Appian, and Cassius Dio as comparanda for Tacitus's. Setting the *Histories* against its literary backdrop is of course an important part of the study, but in isolating this chapter Ash gives neither the comparanda nor Tacitus's use of them much context: she locates common themes in all three of the predecessors, such as a lack of individuation in the portrayal of the armies, and she notes that the latter two historians stereotype soldiers as fickle where Caesar does not, but comments neither upon the significance of these in the tradition of civil war narrative itself, nor on that of the difference between the tradition and the *Histories*. So, for example, Ash notes that Tacitus's Othonian soldiers are not fickle and that this is surprising, given the fact that they did not have a Julius Caesar to write a flattering account of them, but then does not explore whether Tacitus has chosen a Caesarian trope, and if so, why and to what effect. It would perhaps have been a better choice to integrate the observations of the first chapter into the narrative, as Ash has done on several occasions with other examples and intertexts.

The chapters are laid out very regularly, with introduction, body, and conclusion, which is always a boon in scholarly writing and I thank Ash for it. In each, she focuses sharply on the characterization of armies and leaders and its significance for the development of the war. Each chapter is fairly self-contained, providing a useful study of its own material, but rarely making connections with other chapters to give some sense of Tacitus's larger narrative project. This would be difficult to do, given the brave task Ash has set herself: combining military history with narrative analysis. Nevertheless, this book represents an intelligent and straightforward study of the proverbial 'riddle wrapped in an enigma'.