PART II

Myth, History, and the Elusive Holy Man: Two Approaches

CHAPTER FOUR

Eusebius' "Life of Origen": Faces of History

Eusebius of Caesarea devoted most of Book 6 of his *Ecclesiastical History* to a biographical account of his theological hero, Origen of Alexandria. This report contains most of what is known about Origen's life.[1] Though its anecdotal elements do not give us the visual characterization of a Zeno eating green figs and basking in the sun,[2] we might imagine that Origen affected the long hair, beard, and wrinkled forehead of any self-respecting philosopher of his day.[3] This image is evoked by the philosophical pretensions of Eusebius' biography, which casts the Christian theologian Origen in the stereotypical guise of a Hellenistic holy man.

It is ironic that it should have suited Eusebius to depict the life of his mentor within a framework whose literary and ideological conventions served in some respects to mute Origen's identity as a Christian. For it was Origen's fervent desire to be considered a *vir ecclesiasticus*, a man of the Church whose acts as well as his thoughts proclaimed him a Christian in good standing.[4] Eusebius certainly agreed with Origen's portrait of himself

1. Additional facts and fantasies concerning Origen's career are found in the following works: Pamphilus *Apologia pro Origene*; Gregory Thaumaturgus *Panegyric*; Jerome *De viris inlustribus* 54 and 61; *Epistles* 33 and 44; Photius *Bibliotheca* 118; Epiphanius *Panarion* 64; Porphyry *Contra Christianos*.

2. Diogenes Laertius 7.1–160.

3. In *The Cynic* 1, Lucian of Samosata gives a portrait of the typical philosopher: "Why in heaven's name have you the beard and long hair, but no shirt? Why do you expose your body to view, and go barefooted, adopting by choice this nomadic, antisocial and bestial life? Why unlike all others do you abuse your body by ever inflicting on it what it likes least, wandering around and prepared to sleep anywhere at all on the hard ground?" Compare Eusebius *HE* 6.3.9–12.

4. "For my part, my desire is to belong to the church, and not to be called by the name of some heretic, but by the name of Christ, and to carry this name which is blessed on earth; my

as a churchman *par excellence*, and would probably have concurred with those admirers of Origen who thought him not simply a *vir ecclesiasticus* but worthy of comparison with the apostles and prophets.[5] However, Eusebius' biography was not written solely to secure Origen's status within Christian circles. It was also directed at pagan outsiders, with the purpose of establishing Origen's credentials as a thinker worthy of the attention of the philosophical community at large. Hence, while Origen's identity as a Christian is maintained, his eminence derives from those characteristics that define his universal appeal.

Like his contemporary biographers, Eusebius composed his biography with a desire to personify certain revered philosophical and theological precepts. As we have seen, in the Graeco-Roman period the philosophic or religious sage was the enigmatic figure who embodied these precepts, and although his historical accoutrements changed according to the bias and historical circumstances of his various biographers, his idealistic demeanor persisted with few alterations.

In Eusebius' case, the ideal of the sage is imposed on Origen, and to some extent the facts of the churchman's life form a kind of historical clothing for the model Eusebius develops. Thus a stereotype is given the flesh and blood of an historical figure, and as a result the life idealized is infused with a mythic quality that enhances its cross-cultural appeal. Origen, then, appears as a larger-than-life figure able to transcend the confines of his historical Christian identity by taking on the traits of the Hellenistic "divine" philosopher: ascetic, virtuous, and full of wisdom.

This biography is a complex piece of work that cannot be evaluated adequately from a single perspective. It addresses two different communities and attempts to be faithful to two major orientations. The first orientation can be interpreted as a polemical schema directed to Origen's detractors in the Christian community, who were attacking his theological orthodoxy, and to those in the pagan community who were questioning his philosophical integrity. The second appears as a creative apologetic effort to promote unity among the persecuted Christian communities by establishing Origen as a rallying figure, a contemporary "saint," and to present

wish, both in my acts and in my thoughts, is to be a Christian and proclaimed as such by men." (Ego vero, qui opto esse ecclesiasticus et non ab haeresiarchae aliquo, sed a Christi vocabulo nuncupari et habere nomen, quod benedicitur super terram, et cupio tam opere quam sensu et esse et dici christianus.) Origen *Homilies on Luke* 16.1. Origen often referred to himself as a man of the Church. See *Homilies on Joshua* 9.8; *Homilies on Leviticus* 1.1

5. Pamphilus *Apologia pro Origene*, praef.

Origen as an example of a perfect amalgam of pagan and Christian virtues, a kind of proselytizing propaganda to waning paganism. Though the combination of these two schemes in a single literary work might seem paradoxical at first, the tradition of biography writing to which Eusebius was heir provided the thematic conventions that made possible the weaving together of the many faces of Origen that Eusebius presents.

Swaddling Clothes

Tales: Legend or History?

Scholarly commentary on Book 6 of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* has not been consistently acute regarding the church historian's ideological stance. Eduard Schwartz, the first scholar to attempt an exposé of the motives behind the entire *History*, found it to be more "ein kirchliches und politisches Pamphlet" than history in the strict sense of the term.[6] In his monumental 1909 critical edition of the *Ecclesiastical History* Schwartz pointed specifically to the biographical character of Book 6, which he thought demonstrated clearly the "apologetic tendencies" of Eusebius' historical efforts.[7] According to Schwartz, Eusebius was the "unqualified partisan" of Origen whose biographical defense of his hero, especially concerning Origen's Alexandrian ecclesiastical situation, resulted in a distorted historical perspective.[8] Although Schwartz's volumes pointed the way to critical examination of Eusebius' portrait of Origen, much of the scholarly work that followed took scant notice of the significance of Schwartz's "Eusebian Origen." In his *Origène, sa vie, son oeuvre, sa pensée* (1923), Eugene de Faye treated Eusebius' biographical evidence erratically, being sometimes sympathetic to his portrait of Origen and sometimes critical. So, for example, when assessing the childhood stories of the biography, de Faye doubted "on the grounds of common sense" that the youth was already allegorizing Scripture and charged Eusebius with a little historical "embroidering"; yet he stated in the same context that "one cannot doubt that he (Origen) was a remarkable child."[9] Obviously de Faye believed that an historical reality underlay Eu-

6. *PW* 6[1], col. 1423, s.v. "Eusebios," by Eduard Schwartz.

7. Eduard Schwartz, *Eusebius: Die Kirchengeschichte*, *GCS* 9, 3 vols. (Berlin: J. C. Hinrichs, 1909), 1:31.

8. Ibid., p. lxvii.

9. Eugene de Faye, *Origène, sa vie, son oeuvre, sa pensée*, 3 vols. (Paris: Éditions Ernest Leroux, 1923), vol. 1: *Sa Biographie et ses Écrits*, p. 6 and n. 1.

sebius' handiwork here, though with regard to the Eusebian Origen as martyr and ardent Christian he was more consistently critical.[10]

The major interpretations of Origen's life that followed did not exercise even a moderate skepticism. Both René Cadiou, *La Jeunesse d'Origène* (1935), and Jean Daniélou, *Origène* (1948), accepted the biography with few, if any, reservations. Daniélou, for example, stated that Eusebius' notion of the worthiness of "even the facts from (Origen's) very cradle" "nous inquiète un peu," yet he accepted the substance of the childhood stories as not simply true but "precious" information.[11] In a similar way he regarded Eusebius' inclusion of the young Origen's encounter with an Antiochene heretic as part of an "apologetic intention," but thought that consistent orthodoxy was characteristic of Origen just the same.[12]

This acceptance of Eusebius' vision of Origen the "Wundermensch" is not to be attributed only to the efforts of French Catholic patrologists to undo Justinian's condemnation of Origen and Origenist theology, for F. J. Foakes-Jackson, a British contemporary of Daniélou and Cadiou, was equally uncritical in his *Eusebius Pamphili, A Study of the Man and His Writings* (1933). In recent years, however, scholars have become increasingly suspicious of the degree of Eusebius' historical detachment, especially where Book 6 is concerned. A remark by Henry Chadwick is indicative of the "Schwartzian" perspective of his approach: "Whenever Eusebius depends on no more than hearsay and oral tradition, his authority is not higher than that of any reasonably conscientious gossip-writer."[13] Foremost among these recent studies on Book 6 are a series of articles by R. M. Grant, which focus primarily on Eusebius' historical subterfuges; a study of Alexandrian and Caesarean legends about Origen by M. Hornschuh; and two works by P. Nautin, an analysis of Origen's letters and a biographical study of Origen. Their insights will be discussed in the course of my own treatment of the "Life of Origen."

Unfortunately it is impossible today to write a true "life" of Origen. We have already seen that the historical facade of biographies of holy men was an intentional artifice; historical data were used to ground an ideal portrait in "real" life, and sources were cited to create the guise of history. Eusebius

10. Ibid., pp. 8–17.
11. Jean Daniélou, *Origène* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1948), p. 21.
12. Ibid., pp. 23–24.
13. Henry Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 67.

was no different from his fellow biographers, and what he has given us in his "Life of Origen" is a series of character impressions that follow a vague chronological order and may or may not have some claim to historical veracity. Our problem is whether one can discern a real Origen in all of this. What we know of Origen from his own writings tends to support the conclusion that from time to time the shadow of Origen that haunts the biography may actually be a faithful reflection of the man himself (for example, the materials concerning ascetic practice and martyrdom). At other times, however, the shadow seems to be simply that, a figment of Eusebius' biographical imagination (for example, the childhood stories and materials pertaining to orthodoxy).

The idea that Eusebius' portrait sometimes possesses real substance and sometimes does not is what makes his biography interesting for research into the dynamic of biography writing. Historical information independent of Eusebius' story frequently enables us to see through his idealizing obfuscations and thus to expose in a uniquely detailed manner how biographical portraits were crafted. Two issues will dominate this chapter: one concerns the extent to which we can know the historical Origen; the other concerns the Eusebian Origen and the materials, both historical and imagined, used to create him.

Just as it seemed appropriate to Eusebius to begin his biography of Origen with "swaddling-clothes tales," so it seems fitting to begin this study with the same stories, for they establish the thematic structure of the entire biography. A word of caution is in order, however: though the childhood tales may be examples of Eusebius' lack of historical reserve, they may also be taken as practical applications of statements on literary portraiture that Eusebius makes in his *Against Hierocles*.

In *Against Hierocles*, a critique of Philostratus' biography of Apollonius of Tyana as divine man, Eusebius takes issue not with the idea of biographical eulogy itself but only with what he considers to be the extreme divinization of Apollonius.[14] Eusebius would prefer to see Apollonius portrayed as "a human wise man" (*sophon tina ta anthrōpina ton tuanea gegonenai hēgoumēn*) which Eusebius considers him to have been. Philostratus' interpretative fault is described as "overleaping the bounds of humanity and transcending philosophy."[15] A few chapters later, Eusebius makes two intriguing statements that reveal his own canon concerning the integrity (the believability)

14. Eusebius *Contra Hieroclem* 5.
15. Ibid.

of biographical data. Discussing the juxtaposition of the legend (*mūthos*) of Apollonius' divine nature with the story (*logos*) that certain teachers taught him how to converse with the gods, Eusebius states: "If then he was of a divine nature, it follows that the story of his teachers is spurious. On the other hand if the story was true, then the legend was false, and the account [*graphē*] of his divine nature is not true [*ouk alēthēs . . . gegonenai*]."[16] Here Eusebius appears to be contrasting two kinds of statements, one an historical statement on the part of Apollonius' teachers, the other a transhistorical assertion of Apollonius' divine nature. Yet he actually treats *logos* and *mūthos* as though they were categories of equal value; their transposition must prove one to be false, the other true. The important point is that if *mūthos* can be false, it can also be true. Now *mūthos* as a literary category dealt with likelihood rather than certainty in history. As in the evaluation of historical sources in Book 6,[17] so also here truth is relative, or probable, rather than absolute.

Less than half a chapter later the question of accurate evaluation is still on Eusebius' mind: "I am however quite ready to accept all that is probable and has an air of truth about it [*tois eikosi te kai alētheias echomenois peithomenos*], even though such details may be somewhat exaggerated and highly colored out of compliment to a good man; for it seems to me that they can be admitted and believed [*pista kai paradektea einai moi dōkō*], as long as they are not only full of prodigies and nonsense [*mē mona ta teratōdē kai lērou plea*]."[18] Here Eusebius has linked "the likely" with "the true," "the admissible" with "the believable." The probable in history is worthy of belief; this justifies and makes legitimate the use of hyperbole in panegyric. Since this entire discussion occurs in the context of a critique of a biography, Eusebius' comments are tantamount to a declaration of creative license in biography in which the credibility of historically probable data is affirmed. Based on what he says here, I think Eusebius would equate good biography with panegyric, whose interpretative detail passes beyond the pale of credibility only when incongruous or overly teratological material is related as fact.[19]

Eusebius' theoretical musings on the historical boundaries of biographi-

16. Ibid., 11. 17. See chapter 3, pp. 64–65. 18. Eusebius *Contra Hieroclem* 12. 19. See Eusebius' statement in *Contra Hieroclem* 32: "There are a thousand other examples then which we may select from the same books, where the narrative refutes itself by its very incongruities, so enabling us to detect its mythical and miracle-mongering character."

cal characterization are not intended to rule out the presence of the divine in the human, however. Eusebius finally describes the "bounds of humanity," which he has accused Philostratus of "overleaping" in his divinizing portrait of Apollonius, in chapter 6 of the *Against Hierocles*. Here Eusebius discusses the proper status of nature in cosmic terms: the entire universe is limited and sustained by laws imposed by "the all-wise will of providence," which has decreed for every kind of created being its proper place and order. Ultimately it is the divine providence that prohibits transgressions of natural limits. After giving examples from the animal world (such as the fish which cannot transgress his watery limit and live on land), Eusebius turns to man. Man must respect both physical and spiritual limits: just as he cannot fly, so also he cannot by his own effort ascend to spiritual heights beyond his natural capacity (which is described as fortifying one's soul with philosophy). However, the rule of divine providence (*logos . . . theias pronoias*) allows for man to hope that "some one may come to help him from aloft from the paths of heaven, and reveal himself to him as a teacher of the salvation that is there." In other words, providence allows for a divine nature to associate itself with men because providence, being good, desires to illumine the human soul.

Thus far this is a rather curious discussion, for Eusebius, while trying to indicate the natural limitations of human ability to comprehend the divine, seems to confuse the illumination of the soul by providence with the sending of an illuminator. It is not yet clear whether the "teacher" to whom he refers is an actual figure (Christ) or the gift of spiritual understanding. The concluding portion of the chapter clarifies the ambiguity and is easily one of the most important indications of Eusebius' ideas about the divine-human relationship. I will quote it in full:

> The controller of this universe [one of the names for providence in this discussion] . . . will dispatch the most intimate of his own messengers from time to time, for the salvation and succour of men here below. Of these messengers anyone so favored by fortune, having cleansed his understanding and dissipated the mist of mortality, may well be described as truly divine, and as carrying in his soul the image of some great god. Surely so great a personality will stir up the entire human race, and illuminate the world of mankind more brightly than the sun, and will leave the effects of his eternal divinity for the contemplation of future ages, in no less a degree affording an example of the divine and inspired nature than creations of artists made of lifeless matter. To this extent then human nature can participate

in the super-human; but otherwise it cannot lawfully transcend its bounds, nor with its wingless body emulate the bird, nor being a man must one meddle with what pertains to demons. (*Against Hierocles* 6)

At first this passage appears to be a description of the God-man, Jesus Christ, whom Eusebius has described in an earlier chapter in terms of the lasting effects of his divinity as well of the image of the teacher. In the passage just quoted the teacher that humans can hope for is a messenger whose "eternal divinity" is contemplated by succeeding generations. However, the context of the passage just quoted puts the exclusive identification of this messenger with Christ in doubt.

The entire chapter is intended not to develop a Christian theory of ultimate human divinity but rather to show why Philostratus' portrait of Apollonius is unacceptable. The nature of the holiness attributed to Apollonius is ill-conceived and arrogant because it passes beyond what is possible for the soul to attain, even with the help of providence. Eusebius then sets forth his notion of the "bounds of humanity" (which he also calls in the same chapter the "bounds of divinity"). Jesus may in fact be the ultimate messenger, but Eusebius is here describing a succession of human messengers ("dispatch[ed] . . . from time to time") whose saintly lives ("cleansing understanding and dissipating mortality") show how human nature participates in the superhuman. The intimate messenger is thus a human being whose purified soul bears the image of God, and whose teaching ("the effects of his eternal divinity") survives him. This passage is not about the saving effects of the incarnate redeemer. Its referent is instead a type, the human teacher of salvation, whose greatness of soul demonstrates the outer limits of human ability to relate to the divine as well as to relate the divine to others. What Eusebius has described is a pattern of human divinity; and the man whose life evinces this pattern is the kind of man one memorializes in a biography. At this point Eusebius' literary-critical ideas on probability in history assume their full significance, for the biographer's creative license is legitimate only when he is describing, or "fleshing out," the correct pattern.

That Eusebius has found an exemplar of this pattern becomes clear in the early chapters of his "Life of Origen." In the *Ecclesiastical History* 6.2.4, Eusebius states that the young Origen, a would-be martyr, was preserved from death by "divine and heavenly providence." Four times more in the first four chapters, Eusebius points specifically to a divine power that both

saves and protects his hero: in 6.2.13, Origen the impoverished orphan is "found worthy of divine aid"; in 6.3.4, Origen the supporter of martyrs is saved from pagan fury by the "divine right hand"; in 6.3.5, the zealous Origen is saved from heathen plots "again and again" by "this same divine and heavenly grace"; finally, in 6.4.2, Origen is again preserved against a mob attack by "the will of God." In these passages Eusebius has marked out a definite pattern for the relationship between his hero and providence. Providence is the benevolent force that sustains the hero's life, allowing him to teach and to encourage martyrs. Here Origen is shown in an intimate relationship to providence while he at the same time is "teaching salvation" (whose end in this context is martyrdom). Already, then, the life of Origen begins to conform to the pattern that Eusebius has described in *Against Hierocles*: Origen is "a messenger, favored by providence, who stirs up the human race" (both pagan and Christian) by his teaching.

This pattern is not, however, dependent upon providence acting as a *deus ex machina*, simply interceding at critical moments to ensure the hero's continued existence. Origen is not being pictured as a puppet moved by the whims of divine grace. As Glenn Chesnut has shown, Eusebius rejected the pagan notions of fortune and fate as the determining factors in human existence. In his view, they denied the "logos-structure in history."[20] For Eusebius history had both meaning and direction, both of which were supplied by the Logos, "the rational structure of the cosmos."[21] In a general sense, this rational structure is what Eusebius meant by providence, which was responsible for natural laws or limits.

Eusebius recognized, however, that the harmony of history seen in cosmic terms often appeared as a disruptive and random chain of "accidents" when seen in human, historical terms. In order to maintain human history within the benevolent order of the cosmos, Eusebius saw a special providence at work alongside the more general, sustaining providential order. Chesnut argues as follows: Since, according to Eusebius, accidents (the things which happen to us, seemingly as a result of forces beyond our control) "take place in accordance with nature, and the course of natural events is prescribed by the laws of nature contained in the Logos, this means that a sort of general providence specifies the *general* possibilities within which the events of history are allowed to unfold. But there is also a 'special' provi-

20. Glenn F. Chesnut, Jr., "Fate, Fortune, Free Will and Nature in Eusebius of Caesarea," *CH* 42 (June, 1973): 168.
21. Ibid.

dence, because at every historical conjuncture God also chooses exactly which *particular* set of concrete events is going to take place within the manifold set of abstract, purely formal possibilities laid out by the Logos. That is, in every historical conjuncture we see God's providence arranging the *symbebēkota* (accidents) into whatever order (*taxis*) he wishes."[22] In Eusebius' view, providence orders and arranges specific sequences of human events (Chesnut calls it "divine manipulation of the accidents of history")[23] in order to reveal divine purpose and meaning. Providence not only sustains human life according to natural law but actually provides a "life pattern" in a very specific historical sense. Thus in Origen's life the preserving functions of providence that Eusebius delineated were not miraculous interventions in specific historical circumstances but rather evidence of the providential plan for Origen's life. In fact, as Chesnut points out, miracle did not play an important role in Eusebius' historical compositions, and with good reason. Miraculous intervention is erratic intervention, which counters the idea of providence's pervasive cosmic control. "Appeal to the miraculous has never been a good theological device for getting a continuous divine presence in human history."[24]

The idea of a general and a specific providence helps explain how Eusebius conceives of a pattern of human divinity. General providence, responsible for natural law, provided that within the "bounds of humanity" some men may reach the outer limits of those bounds—that is, an intimate association with divinity for the benefit of other men. Providence in the specific sense provided the precise historical conditions within which that specially chosen man operated. Origen, one of those "specially chosen," as Eusebius' frequent mention of providence shows, did not live a life punctuated by miracles that occur just in the nick of time; rather, the very fabric of his life depended upon providential blessing as well as providential control over the historical accidents that affected him.

It must be noted, however, that the sway of providence does not cancel human freedom or free will. Eusebius held to a Platonic psychology of the most extreme kind: the rational soul was completely at variance with the irrational "body."[25] The successful psyche must will the irrational body's

22. Ibid., p. 174. 23. Ibid. 24. Ibid., pp. 173–74, n. 37.

25. Ibid., p. 178. Pertinent in this regard is Eusebius *Contra Hieroclem* 42: "The universe is ordered by the divine laws of the providence of God that controls all things, and the peculiar nature of man's soul renders him master of himself and judge, ruler and lord of himself. . . .

subjection and turn toward the divine (a feat helped greatly by living the ascetic life).[26] In its turning, however, the psyche finds help because by a process called synergism, providence works with and cooperates with the human will.[27] Providence in this sense does not ride roughshod over free will but cooperates with the psyche that has turned in the right way. Eusebius' portrait of Origen provides a good example of this providential dynamic. Origen's breast enshrined a divine spirit (providential blessing); the events of his life showed specific providential ordering; he lived the ascetic life, characterized by an abundance of zeal (proper psychic control over the irrational); and, as Eusebius specifically stated, he enjoyed "the cooperation of the divine power" (synergism: *sunairomenēs autō dunameōs theias*) *as a result of* the manner of his life.[28] The effects of providence on the life of the holy man are thus far reaching. Yet, as Eusebius' biography of Origen shows, the proper human response is a necessary feature of the providential process.[29]

Eusebius' picture of the holy man who works within a providential framework helps explain why the hero of his biography is cast in the god-like, rather than the son-of-god, mold. Providence ensures that the pattern of life, even for a "teacher of salvation," is acted out within fundamentally human, historical limits. Eusebius' divine man is not one who floats freely in some ontological category between God and man; he is, on the contrary,

---

within our control is everything which comes into being in accordance with our will and choice and action, and these are naturally free, unhindered, and unimpeded. But such things as are not in our control are weak and servile, restrained and alien to ourselves; for example, our bodily processes and external objects which are both lifeless and destitute of reason, and in their manner of existence wholly foreign to the proper nature of a reasonable living creature."

26. See *Contra Hieroclem* 42: "As for things which are in our control, each one of us possesses in the will itself alternative impulses of virtue and vice. . . . for the motives on which we act the responsibility lies not with destiny nor fate, nor with necessity. It lies with him who makes the choice."

27. Eusebius *Praeparatio Evangelica* 6.6.45, quoted and discussed by Chesnut, "Fate, Fortune, Free Will and Nature in Eusebius of Caesarea," p. 180.

28. Eusebius *HE* 6.3.7.

29. In his biography, Eusebius insists upon the zeal, boldness, and eagerness of the boy blessed by possession of a divine spirit. See *HE* 6.1, 6.2.3–6, 6.2.9, 6.2.15, 6.3.5–8, 6.3.10–11. Presumably Origen's "excessive zeal" is his response to his gift. He also, of course, turns his psyche properly by following an ascetic lifestyle: *HE* 6.3.6–7 and 6.3.10–12.

located in specific situations that disclose the meaningful direction of history by providence. For Eusebius the life of the holy man reveals a divine *telos*. Thus the kind of divine man portrayed by Philostratus did not, indeed could not, exist for Eusebius. His philosophy of history ruled out fate and necessity as determining factors in human existence. As he clearly stated in one of the concluding chapters of *Against Hierocles*, the doctrine that sees "destiny and the Fates" as the controlling cosmic forces destroys human responsibility for goodness as well as for evil. The divine man who was "a mere toy in the hands of the Fates" was not for Eusebius a very impressive figure.[30] He argued forcefully that Apollonius' wisdom and virtue, as well as his attempts to preach and communicate those qualities, were pointless, for his hearers were fated to be virtuous or wise whether Apollonius spoke or not.[31] But the culmination of his critique was the most damaging, for it destroyed the basis of the Philostratean divine man's uniqueness: none of Apollonius' achievements or characteristics was truly his; destiny alone, who "whirled him idly around," can take credit for this wise man's philosophical and "self"-disciplined life.[32] Eusebius' critique of the son-of-god model adhered to by Philostratus is devastating because it shows that when human responsibility is lacking, there is no pattern of human divinity.

We have seen that, in Eusebius' thinking, there was a specific pattern of human divinity with definite historical boundaries that prevented extreme forms of divinization. Within those boundaries, however, there was great descriptive flexibility, especially for the biographer who attempted to portray a particular man as an exemplar of the pattern. As Eusebius himself stated, the biographer was free to use exaggeration in developing his portrait so long as he maintained at least the semblance of historical truth.

With regard to the stories that Eusebius used to introduce Origen's character in his biography, one might well ask what were the standards governing his own exaggerations. We have already seen how Eusebius used the idea of providential guidance to distinguish Origen's special holiness from that of an Apollonius or a Pythagoras by establishing him within a general type. But the specifics of his characterization (those "compliments" that we would call historical fantasy rather than probable data) were marshaled in favor of two major themes: Origen the ascetic scholar and Origen the orthodox teacher. These themes are introduced in the "swaddling-clothes tales," and they form the ideal standards around which Eusebius' detailed portrait

30. Eusebius *Contra Hieroclem* 41. 31. Ibid. 32. Ibid.

revolves. Both the thematic structure as well as the detailed information supporting it stem from the biographer's creative license, wherein ideal portraits were developed out of "probable" historical data.

The most unusual of the childhood stories does not fit in Eusebius' schema of themes but in fact underpins them all. This is the story in *EH* 6.2.10–11, where Origen's father Leonides kisses his son's breast "as if it was the temple of a divine spirit." Earlier I stated that this story functions as a revelation of the theocentric nature of the philosopher. It is this holy status that justifies Origen's idealistic demeanor throughout the biography and permits the biographer's embellishments and glosses on his personal history. Thus the meaning of this story deserves some further attention.

Recent interpreters of Eusebius' biography have not given much attention to this story of the "divine spirit," perhaps because their objectives have been for the most part historical. In his latest study, Pierre Nautin dismisses the entire section in which the story appears (*EH* 6.2.7–11) as oral tradition: "Cette tradition ne mérite aucune confiance, car personne, à l'époque d'Eusèbe, ne pouvait prétendre avoir connu Origène à cet âge."[33] Because his interest is in historical fact only, Nautin disregards what Eusebius took very seriously, that is, the attempt to frame in historical terms the transcendent quality of his hero's character.[34] Unlike Nautin, Manfred Hornschuh and Robert M. Grant do not dismiss the story but take it to be part of Eusebius' attempt to Hellenize Origen. Both agree that Eusebius' picture of Origen as a temple of a divine spirit comes directly from the *theios anēr* of popular religious expression, a figure whose lofty spiritual capacity was a conventional trait.[35] But neither discusses the story in detail.

Ancient admirers of Origen tended to corroborate Eusebius' impression of the man, though without recounting this story. Jerome, who had certainly read the *Ecclesiastical History* and in fact based much of his biographical notice on Origen in his *On Illustrious Men* on Eusebius' biography,[36] did not mention the story. In that work, however, Jerome made an interesting remark. Speaking of Origen's impressive erudition, he credited him with an

33. Pierre Nautin, *Origène, sa vie et son oeuvre* (Paris: Éditions Beauchesne, 1977), p. 35.
34. See chapter 3, pp. 58–60. This is one of those sections in the biography whose "historicity" Eusebius "proves" by the use of *mnēmoneuousin*.
35. Robert M. Grant, "Early Alexandrian Christianity," *CH* 40 (June, 1971): 134 and "Eusebius and his Lives of Origen," p. 12; Manfred Hornschuh, "Das Leben des Origenes und die Entstehung der alexandrinischen Schule," *ZKG* 71 (1960): 5–6.
36. Jerome *De viris inlustribus* 54. See Nautin, *Origène*, pp. 215–19, for text and commentary.

"eternal genius" (*immortali eius ingenio*). This remark is interesting because it sees Origen as the possessor of a surpassing, divine excellence and because this quality is attributed to him in the context of a discussion of his wisdom, a context like the one Eusebius provided for his own story about Origen's divine spirit. Jerome also complimented the mature Origen by calling him the greatest Biblical commentator[37] as well as the greatest master in the church after the apostles.[38] Further, in one of his letters Jerome stated that Origen was "*from his childhood* a great man."[39] It is intriguing to think that this remark was an allusion to Eusebius' report of Origen the "wunderknaben" and that Jerome thus accepted that report as an historically valid one. But whether this is true or not, certainly Jerome's statements testify to the tenacity of Origen's reputation for greatness.

Another kind of testimony from antiquity, which again corroborates the spirit of Eusebius' story about the divine spirit without mentioning the story itself, is an *hommage* written for Origen by one of his students in the Caesarean catechetical school.[40] This *hommage* was included in the *Apology* that Eusebius and Pamphilus wrote on Origen's behalf, and it expresses clearly Eusebius' own opinion.[41] The student speaks of Origen in superlatives: he possessed a "wise foresight truly divine" concerning the character of his students,[42] and his teaching was so compelling that his students sat transfixed "like men bewitched" by the power of his words, which he spoke with "a kind of divine authority."[43] But Origen was not simply an inspired teacher, for according to this student he was a "*theios anthrōpos*"[44] who, while he seemed to be a man, had actually "gone beyond the human condition to a better state in his ascent to the divine."[45] Obviously this student's testimony corroborates Eusebius' own vision of Origen's divine nature; perhaps it was this kind of witness that provided the impetus for his own anecdote.

37. Jerome, "Prologue" to his translation of Origen's *Homilies on the Song of Songs*: "Origenes, cum in ceteris libris omnes vicerit, in Cantico Canticorum ipse se vicit." *Origène: Homélies sur le Cantique des Cantiques*, ed. Dom Olivier Rousseau (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1966), p. 62.
38. Jerome, "Preface" to his *Onomasticon*: "Origenem quem post apostolos ecclesiarum magistrum nemo nisi imperitus negabit." Jerome, *Works*, ed. D. Vallarsi, 2nd. ed., 3:3.
39. Jerome *Ep.* 84.8 (italics mine).
40. The *hommage* is the *Oration to Origen* whose traditional ascription to Gregory Thaumaturgus has recently been disputed. In *Origène*, pp. 81–86, Nautin suggests that it be attributed to one of Origen's students, Theodore.
41. Socrates Scholasticus *Historia ecclesiastica* 4.27.
42. *Oration* 1064A. 43. Ibid., 1069D. 44. Ibid., 1072B.
45. Ibid., 1053C.

One feature of Eusebius' story merits closer scrutiny: it concerns human possession of a *theion pneuma* that is enshrined in the breast. For confirmation of his idea that a holy spirit could dwell in a man, Eusebius could look both to Scripture and to popular religious beliefs. The *Wisdom of Solomon* 7:27–28, for example, states that wisdom "enters into holy souls age after age, and makes them God's friends and prophets, for nothing is acceptable to God but the man who makes his home with wisdom." Paul's first letter to the Corinthians makes this notion of indwelling quite explicit: "Do you not know that you are God's temple, and that God's spirit dwells in you?"[46] In another passage, he identifies the spirit of God with the spirit of Christ, an explicit Christian explanation of indwelling that Eusebius has not followed.[47] Scripture also showed that it was the human heart that provided the holy pneuma's dwelling place. Again Paul's letters provide the clearest testimony: "God has put his seal upon us and given us his spirit in our hearts as a guarantee."[48] The idea that the heart was the seat of a holy spirit was not restricted to the Judaeo-Christian tradition, as a collection of aphorisms called the *Sentences of Sextus* demonstrates.[49] Several of these popular Pythagorean maxims express the conviction that the wise man is holy, and that the mind is a holy temple of God.[50] Philosophers also adhered to this idea: in his biography of Moses, Philo stated that the prophet's mind "was set up in his body like an image in a shrine,"[51] and Porphyry asserted that although "the

46. 1 Cor. 3:16; see also 1 Cor. 6:19: "Do you not know that your body is a shrine of the indwelling holy spirit, and the spirit is God's gift to you?" For a detailed discussion of the idea of spiritual indwelling in antiquity see G. Verbeke, *L'Évolution de la doctrine du pneuma du Stoicisme à S. Augustin* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1945).
47. See Rom. 8:9: "You are on the spiritual level if only God's spirit dwells within you; and if a man does not possess the spirit of Christ, he is no Christian."
48. 2 Cor. 1:22. See also Gal. 4:6.
49. For a discussion see Chadwick, *Sentences of Sextus*, pp. 4–9.
50. Sextus 450: "The mind of the wise man is a mirror of God"; 394: "Know what God is; perceive the mind [*nous*] in you"; 46a: "The pious mind is a holy temple of God"; 35: "Being select, you have something in your constitution which is like God; therefore treat your body as a temple of God." It is interesting to note that Philo, one of Eusebius' favorite authors, echoes Sextus 35 in his *De opificio mundi* 137, where he says that the human body is a "sacred temple devised for the rational soul," which man must "carry in his mind as the most godly of images [*to theoeidestaton*]."
51. Philo *De vita Moisis* 1.27.

divine is present everywhere and in all men, only the mind of the wise man is sanctified as its temple."[52]

Clearly Eusebius has made use of a rather widespread cultural attitude toward the holy man and his spirit, yet he failed to make explicit the specifically Christian identification of this holy indwelling pneuma with Christ. I think that this part of the story is an instance of the double focus—and perhaps the double appeal—of Eusebius' characterization of Origen as holy man. The child whose breast enshrines a holy spirit could be admired by pagan and Christian alike, since Eusebius' image was supported by popular maxims as well as by Pauline statements about the spirit.

It is interesting to note that the father's act in kissing the child's breast is also dependent upon a cultural convention. In pagan literature, it appears that kisses were bestowed out of familial love, as a mark of honor, and as an act of worship.[53] When the kiss was a mark of honor, it was given on the hands or breast.[54] As an act of worship, the kiss was of course a sign of reverence, though in pagan practice it was statues, temple steps, and cultic objects, not people, that were kissed.[55] In Christianity the holy kiss seems to have played two roles: one was the liturgical or eucharistic kiss attested to in Paul's letters and in later Patristic writings; the other was a means of venerating martyrs.[56] Eusebius' story of the father's kiss is thus not a specifically Christian rendering of the act but is rather an account that draws upon pagan practices of honoring wise or virtuous men and venerating holy objects. His father's holy kiss shows that Origen's divine spirit merited such cultic recognition and veneration.

We have seen that Eusebius' conception of a divine spirit dwelling in a human breast was certainly not a unique conception, since pagans subscribed to this idea as well as Christians. What *is* unique is Eusebius' expression of the idea within a specific historical setting, a scene from Origen's

52. Porphyry *Ad Marcellam* 11.

53. *Theological Wordbook of the New Testament*, s.v. "*Phileō*," by Gustav Stählin, pp. 119–23. See also Karl-Martin Hofmann, *Philema Hagion* (Gütersloh: Verlag C. Bertelsmann, 1938), pp. 74–76.

54. Stählin, "*Phileō*," p. 121; Petronius *Satyrion* 91.9: "I kissed his breast full of wisdom."

55. Stählin, "*Phileō*," p. 123, and Hofmann, *Philema Hagion*, pp. 74–83.

56. Stählin, "*Phileō*," pp. 139, 142, gives quotations citing the eucharistic kiss in Justin *Apology* 65.2 and in Tertullian *De oratione* 18. Hofmann, *Philema Hagion*, p. 139, cites passages indicating the kissing of martyrs: Tertullian *Ad uxorem* 2.4; Eusebius *Martyrs of Palestine* 11.20 and *HE* 6.3.4, where Origen himself gives martyrs the holy kiss.

childhood. Though it is not possible to find the origin of the story itself, it is significant that Eusebius has made the anecdote central to his exposition of Origen as divine man. Its function in the biography is not only to clothe Origen's holy spirit with historical dress but also to justify the divinizing view of Origen's entire career. To that career we now turn, beginning with the theme of Origen as ascetic scholar.

The Faces of Origen

As one might expect, Eusebius' vision of Origen's childhood did not produce anecdotes relating the normal, playful activities of a young boy. In this respect Eusebius was no different from other biographers who, while they showed a concern to depict the holy man's passage through life's stages like other men, seem to have avoided the creation of scenes that could not be used to reveal the hero's numinous qualities in a serious way. In fact, out of all the biographies discussed in earlier chapters, there is only one childhood story that does not have a revelatory function. This is Porphyry's anecdote about Plotinus' refusal to be weaned until his eighth year, a curious story that reflects Porphyry's almost desperate search for information about Plotinus' past in the face of his mentor's adamant refusal to supply it.[57] The only biographical works that do contain pictures of the hero as a child at play are New Testament apocryphal books like *The Infancy Story of Thomas*, and even here Jesus' childish pranks are simply vehicles for miraculous displays. The accomplishments of the mature holy man have been read back into his childhood.

The technique of reading back, or extending the *akmē*, has also been used by Eusebius, but unlike the apocryphal writers he has produced a somber rather than a playful child in keeping with his theme of asceticism. The childhood story introducing the biographical theme of Origen the ascetic scholar pictures the young boy laboring ceaselessly at studies both secular

57. Porphyry *Vita Plotini* 3. E. R. Dodds uses this story to make a connection between Plotinus' mysticism and Freudian theory: "so prolonged a refusal to grow up would seem to be significant. It would fit Freud's suggestion that mystical experience, with its sense of infinite extension and oneness with the Real, may represent a persistence of infantile feeling in which no distinction is yet drawn between 'self' and 'other.'" *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1970), p. 91, n. 2.

and divine, attending the latter with his usual "excessive zeal" and plumbing the scriptural depths for allegorical meaning.[58] The story provides an obvious entrée to the mature scholar's literary achievement, but it is also an indication of the man's ascetic bearing, for in this story Eusebius describes Origen's education twice as "training," an *askēsis* that dominates the hero's entire life.[59] In no other book of the *Ecclesiastical History* does Eusebius use the word *askēsis* and its cognates so frequently; in fact, almost every occurrence of the term is located in the "Life of Origen." In this story, the training is linked with the study of Scripture; Eusebius is giving *askēsis* a Christian context and a Christian interpretation. As the biography progresses, however, Eusebius does not maintain the specifically Christian context of Origen's *askēsis*. The Christian ascetic Origen whom we meet as a child appears later in a more ambiguous ascetic guise.

Earlier I pointed out that imitation was an important feature of the holy philosopher's asceticism; his ascetic lifestyle not only attracted students but also provided those followers with a pattern or model for their own lives.[60] But the holy men themselves were imitators. They too looked back to exemplars of the ascetic-philosophical life. Apollonius, for example, took Pythagoras as his model, and Plotinus looked back with veneration to both Socrates and Plato.[61] Origen, however, was unabashedly Christian in his choice of model. Although in *Against Celsus* he noted the virtue evident in the lives of Socrates and Pythagoras, he emphasized the fact that they were simply men, and that the models they established were inadequate for centuries-long influence.[62] Origen's own model was Jesus, whose "message of salvation and moral purity was sufficient to prove his superiority among men."[63] The following passage from his *On First Principles* shows clearly Origen's acceptance of Jesus as ascetic model: "so, too, should each one of

58. Eusebius *HE* 6.2.7–10.

59. The two passages in this story are as follows: "*tais theiais graphais ex eti paidos enēskēmenos*"; "*tois hierois enaskeisthai paideumasin.*"

60. Chapter 2, pp. 25–28. On Origen as a model-provider, see Eusebius *HE* 6.3.13: "And by displaying proofs such as these of a philosophic life to those who saw him, he naturally stimulated a large number of his pupils to a like zeal, so that, even among the unbelieving Gentiles and those from the ranks of learning and philosophy, some persons of no small account were won by his instruction."

61. Philostratus *Vita Apollonii* 1.7; Porphyry *Vita Plotini* 1.2.

62. *Contra Celsum* 1.3, 1.29, 3.66, 4.97, 6.8 (virtues of Socrates and Pythagoras); 1.64, 3.68 (Socrates and Pythagoras only men).

63. Origen *Contra Celsum* 2.40.

us, after a fall or a transgression, cleanse himself from stains by the example set before him [Christ's example], and taking a leader for the journey proceed along the steep path of virtue, that so perchance by this means we may as far as is possible become, *through our imitation of him*, partakers of the divine nature."[64] Otigen also speaks of faith in Christ, his model, as a spiritual circumcision of the heart and body and often refers in a mystical way not simply to imitation but to a kind of union with "Dominus meus Iesus Christus."[65]

In his own writings, then, Origen declared Christ to be the model for his own ascetic life. Eusebius, however, did not present a consistent picture of Origen's *imitatio Christi*. In fact in the chapter following the childhood *askēsis* story, Eusebius presents Origen as an imitator of Socrates, albeit in an oblique way. In *EH* 6.3.7, Eusebius states that Origen's conduct revealed "the right actions of a most genuine philosophy" and that the maxim "as was his speech, so was the manner of his life" could be fittingly applied to him. This maxim is an allusion to (and an interpretation of) a statement made by Socrates in the *Republic*, a statement that became a proverb among the Greeks, as Seneca noted. Cicero, who also attributed the statement to Socrates, showed by his discussion that the proverb took its meaning from an ascetic context: the man whom this maxim characterized was a model of Stoic (or later Pythagorean) asceticism, the dispassionate sage with a balanced disposition of soul.[66] By applying this popular Socratic maxim to

64. Origen *De principiis* 4.4.4 (italics mine). The following passage from *De principiis* 4.4.10 is also pertinent in this regard: "The marks of the divine image in man may be clearly discerned, not in the form of his body, which goes to corruption, but in the prudence of his mind, in his righteousness, his self-control, his courage, his wisdom, his discipline, in fact, in the whole company of virtues; which exist in God essentially, and may exist in man as a result of his own efforts and his imitation of God."

65. Origen *Homilies on Genesis* 3.6 and especially 3.7, where Origen quotes with approval Paul's statement in Gal. 6:17, "I bear on my body the marks of Jesus." See Louis Doutreleau, trans. and ed., *Origène: Homélies sur la Genèse*, Sources chrétiennes, no. 7 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1976), pp. 142–43, n. 1, for several examples of Origen's use of the phrases "*my* Lord" and "*my* Christ." Origen's mystical Christocentrism and his theology of the image of Christ have been the subject of several studies. See, among others, Henri Crouzel, *Origène et la 'connaissance mystique'* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1961) and *Théologie de l'image de Dieu chez Origène* (Paris: Aubier, 1956) and F. Bertrand, *Mystique de Jésus chez Origène* (Paris: Aubier, 1954).

66. Plato *Republic* 400D. See Seneca *Ep.* 114.2: "here is a phrase which you are wont to notice in the popular speech—one which the Greeks have made into a proverb: 'Man's speech is just like his life.'" Cicero's comments are in his *Tusculanae Disputationes* 5.47.

Origen, Eusebius has created for his readers an Hellenic Origen, a man whose daily conduct was characterized by harmony of soul. As we have seen, this was exactly the picture that Porphyry and Iamblichus presented in their biographical descriptions of Pythagoras' ascetic bearing.[67] Again, one can discern in Eusebius' biography a double focus—a combining of traits that results in a Janus-faced Origen, at once Christian and Hellenic, at least in the revered Socratic sense.

It must be noted, however, that the Christian "face" tends to dominate the portrait of Origen as an ascetic, for soon after alluding to the Socratic image, Eusebius describes exactly what Origen's philosophical life was like. It was a literal *imitatio Christi* in terms of specific gospel passages. "And above all he considered that those sayings of the Savior in the Gospel ought to be kept which exhort us not to provide two coats nor to use shoes, nor, indeed, to be worn out with thoughts about the future."[68] The extremes of Origen's asceticism are attributed to his literal rendering of scripture; it is an image that does not accord either with Socratic balance or with Origen's own vision of his *imitatio*, which emphasized not a physical but a spiritual pattern of activity.

The issue of Origen's literal-minded asceticism also appears in Eusebius' story of his hero's self-castration. In the *Ecclesiastical History* 6.8.1–3, Eusebius states: "At that time, while Origen was performing the work of instruction at Alexandria, he did a thing which gave abundant proof of an immature and youthful mind, yet withal of faith and self-control. For he took the saying, 'There are eunuchs which made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake,' in too literal and extreme a sense, and thinking both to fulfil the Savior's saying, and also that he might prevent all suspicion of shameful slander on the part of unbelievers (for, young as he was, he used to discourse on divine things with women as well as men), he hastened

67. See chapter 2, p. 29.

68. Eusebius *HE* 6.3.10. In this respect it is interesting to consider one of Origen's remarks in his *Homilies on Luke* 25.3, where he wistfully compares the rough clothing of John the Baptist with "we who live in the city among crowds and pursue elegance in clothing, food and housing." Eusebius' vision of Origen the barefooted, ill-clothed ascetic philosopher was simply a vision, a part of his biographical image-making. A further indication that Origen himself was rather divorced from real ascetic or monkish desert life of the kind Eusebius had in mind is his allegorization of "life in the desert." For him the desert life signified the adoption of a spiritual attitude. See *Homilies on Luke* 11.4 and the comments by Henri Crouzel *et al.*, trans. and eds., *Origène: Homélies sur S. Luc*, Sources chrétiennes, no. 87 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1962), p. 192, n. 1.

to put into effect the Savior's saying, taking care to escape the notice of the greater number of his pupils." Here Eusebius has given two explanations for what he calls Origen's "rash act": one involves a literal reading of Matthew 19:12; the other pertains to the sage's self-control in sexual matters.

The second explanation seems unconvincing in light of a section in *Against Celsus*, in which Origen implies that sexual continence is not meritorious if sexual activity or desire have been rendered physical impossibilities.[69] When Origen writes about chastity and speaks disparagingly about our "sensible nature" and the "futility" of our bodies, he does so in the Pauline sense of bodily life as a sinful affliction that we must endure.[70] However, the early history of modes of celibacy in the church shows that self-castration was an ascetic option, though the practice was officially condemned at Nicaea and by the fourth-century Apostolic Canons.[71] Like Origen, the church decided that forced chastity was without moral value.

Eusebius' other explanation, that of Origen's scriptural literalism, is equally suspect. One of Origen's predecessors in Alexandria, the Gnostic teacher Basilides, interpreted Matthew 19:12 as a classification of male celibates into three groups: those who have a natural revulsion from women; those who practised the ascetic life to provoke the admiration of others; and those who remained celibate in order to pursue the work of the church without domestic distractions.[72] Basilides did not, apparently, take the word "eunuch" in a literal sense. Origen also refused to accept the literal meaning of the passage. In his *Commentary on Matthew*, Origen quotes with disapproval the maxims in Sextus that state that castration is preferable to impurity[73] and states firmly that "one must not believe in them [that is,

69. Origen *Contra Celsum* 7.48.

70. Ibid., 7.49–50. See also Origen *Selections on Genesis* 8.58 and *Contra Celsum* 4.40 for the theory that the "coats of skins" with which Adam and Eve were clothed after their fall were in fact bodies.

71. See Chadwick, *Sentences of Sextus*, p. 111. The first canon of Nicaea prohibited those who had been mutilated from being ordained; the twenty-third Apostolic canon condemned castration as a rebellion against providential order, since the body is a God-given gift. For early Christian references concerning castration see R. P. C. Hanson, "A Note on Origen's Self-Mutilation," *Vigiliae Christianae* 20 (June, 1966):81–82.

72. Basilides quoted by Clement of Alexandria *Stromateis* 3.1.

73. Origen was referring to the following maxims in *Sextus*: No. 13: "Every member of the body that would persuade you to be unchaste cast away; for it is better to live chastely without the limb than to live for destruction with it"; No. 273: "You see men cutting off and casting away parts of their bodies in order that the rest may be strong; how much better to do this for the sake of chastity."

other exegeses] since they have not understood the meaning of the Holy Scriptures concerning these matters. For if self-control was listed among the fruits of the spirit with love, grace, patience and the rest, one must rather bear the fruit of self-control and one must preserve the male body given from God."[74] In opposition to his biographer, then, Origen rejected the literal exegesis of the passage.

Scholarly opinion on the historical nature of this story has been divided. Hanson, for example, saw no reason to doubt the story and felt that Origen's later exegesis in his *Commentary on Matthew* represented a change of opinion.[75] Chadwick, on the other hand, thought that the story was "malicious gossip" passed on thoughtlessly by Eusebius.[76] However, what is interesting about this story is not its historicity,[77] which Origen's own testimony makes dubious, but rather that Eusebius used it as a vehicle to characterize Origen. The story seems to establish two major aspects of Eusebius' image of Origen's asceticism: the first is that his ascetic practice was Christian, based this time not on *imitatio Christi* but on a fervent acceptance of the Savior's words; the second is that his ascetic practice emphasized the self-control characteristic of all good Greek philosophers. Again the two-dimensional focus of the biography is clear.

Eusebius makes a direct link between Origen's asceticism and his life as a scholar in the following way. He describes as part of Origen's *askēsis* a day-and-night routine of teaching and studying.[78] This passage seems to fit admirably Eusebius' idealization of Origen as a zealous devotee and propagator of Christian truth, giving his entire life to his pursuit. However, this aspect of Origen's *askēsis* may be due not simply to Eusebius' image-making

74. Origen *Commentary on Matthew* 15.3.

75. Hanson, "A Note on Origen's Self-Mutilation," p. 82.

76. Chadwick, *Sentences of Sextus*, p. 68. See also Grant, "Eusebius and his Lives of Origen," pp. 15–16.

77. This legend was repeated by Jerome *Ep.* 84.8 and by Epiphanius *Panarion* 64.3.9–13, where one can see an amplification of the story: "They say that this Origen had something in mind against his own body. For they say that he cut off his penis in order not to be troubled by sensual pleasure nor to burn with passion in bodily movements. But others tell another story, that he contrived to apply a drug to his genitals to dry them up, on the ground that he discovered an herb which was efficacious as far as regards the memory." Interestingly, in Epiphanius' version the notion of a literal reading of Scripture has disappeared, but the connection between asceticism and the philosophic life (self-control; memory) has been not only retained but reinforced. For a discussion of this passage in Epiphanius see Nautin, *Origène*, pp. 210–11.

78. Eusebius *HE* 6.3.9, 6.8.6, 6.15.

but possibly to Origen's own view of himself. For there is extant a letter fragment in which Origen, describing his relationship with his patron Ambrose, paints a scholarly ascetic picture of his own daily routine:

> The holy Ambrose . . . supposing that I am a zealous worker and utterly athirst for the word of God, convicted me by his own zeal for work and passion for sacred studies . . . for neither when we are engaged in collating can we take our meals, nor, when we have taken them walk and rest our bodies. Nay, even at the times set apart for those things we are constrained to discourse learnedly and to correct our manuscripts. Neither can we sleep at night for the good of our bodies, since our learned discourse extends far into the evening. I need not mention that our morning studies also are prolonged to the ninth, at times to the tenth, hour.[79]

Even though this text stems from an apologetic interest of Origen's, it provides an interesting perspective on Eusebius' image of Origen, if indeed, as Nautin has proposed, Eusebius did use this text (or a fragment of it from the *Apology*) as a source for his biography. For Eusebius sees Origen's ascetic zeal as an essential feature of his character, welling up out of his scriptural and scholarly devotion. Yet Origen's view of his own strict routine shows another's zeal, that of his patron Ambrose, as the motivating force behind his ascetic regimen. In this context, Origen's own words at least show him as a more human figure, needing encouragement to sustain rigor. Yet, if Nautin is correct in assuming that Origen himself was pleading a specific case, and defending his innocence concerning documents published (and ideas thought?) at the instance of an overzealous Ambrose, we still have not touched the real Origen but are left simply with two idealized versions of an ascetic life whose historical provenance remains a mystery.

Even though Origen's early scholarly training was connected to asceticism in Eusebius' introductory childhood story, Origen's actual activities as teacher and scholar form a separate theme, that of Origen the schoolman. The first issue of interest here is Origen's philosophical-religious training.

79. English translation quoted in H. J. Lawlor and J. E. L. Oulton, trans., *Eusebius: The Ecclesiastical History and the Martyrs of Palestine*, 2 vols. (London: SPCK, 1927–28), 1:213f; Greek text quoted in Pierre Nautin, *Lettres et écrivains chrétiens des II^e^ et III^e^ siècles* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1961), p. 251. In the discussion in this work as well as in *Origène*, pp. 39–41, Nautin has proposed that this letter fragment, preserved in part in Pamphilus' *Apology for Origen*, was originally part of an apologetic letter to Pope Fabian in which Origen defended his orthodoxy in part by blaming Ambrose's zeal in publishing texts without Origen's approval or knowledge.

Apart from the pious legend of the father's formative influence on the child's Christian training, what can we glean from Eusebius' biography? The only point of historical importance is his note on Origen's period of study with "the teacher of philosophy," Ammonius Saccas.[80] A figure almost completely shrouded with mystery, Ammonius seems to have been as much a "great shadow"[81] for Eusebius as he is for modern historians.[82] Eusebius introduces Ammonius by quoting a passage from Porphyry's *Against the Christians* in which the great pagan commends Origen's Greek training only to deplore his fall into "barbarian recklessness."[83] According to Porphyry, Ammonius was originally a Christian, having been "nurtured" (*anatropheis*) in Christian doctrine by his parents, whereas Origen was a Greek, "educated" (*paideutheis*) in Greek philosophy, whose embrace of Christianity was a dire apostasy. As one commentator has shown, the contrasting parallel that Porphyry drew between *anatropheis* and *paideutheis* is important: "the *paideia* stands higher than the *anatrophē*; because of that, the growth of Ammonius, who attained *paideia* in spite of his Christian *anatrophē*, is the more admirable, and the falling away of Origen, who was already acquainted with Greek *paideia*, the more to be disapproved."[84] To combat this picture of an apostate Origen, Eusebius takes a position opposing Porphyry's. He affirms Origen's training under Ammonius but counters Porphyry by asserting both Origen's and Ammonius' Christian upbringing and lifelong faithfulness to that tradition.[85] Whether in the heat of controversy, out of ignorance, or with an apologetic desire to defend Origen's Christian integrity, Eusebius has painted a picture of Ammonius which is certainly erroneous. Whatever his *anatrophē* may have been, Ammonius was not a Christian teacher but a Platonizing or Neopythagorean master.[86]

80. Eusebius *HE* 6.19.6–10.

81. E. R. Dodds, "Numenius and Ammonius," *Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique* 5: *Les sources de Plotin* (Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1960), p. 32.

82. The most judicious detailed treatment of Ammonius is that of Dodds, "Numenius and Ammonius." In a section dealing with "Ammonius the Protean," Dodds discusses, and largely dismisses, scholarly reconstructions that have viewed Ammonius as an Indian missionary, a Pythagorean ecstatic, and an heretical Christian theologian. Dodds himself feels that Ammonius belonged to the Platonic camp and bases his supposition on Ammonius' student Longinus' statement to that effect in a passage quoted by Porphyry in his *Vita Plotini* 20 and on a passage in Nemesius *Of the Nature of Man* 2.12 which contrasts Numenius, a Pythagorean, with Ammonius "the master of Plotinus" (the latter being an undoubted Platonist). Unfortunately, Ammonius wrote nothing, nor were his lectures recorded. Even Dodds' assiduous handling of the material does not move beyond Ammonius' shadow, and the attempt of Henri Crouzel (in "Origène et Plotin élèves d'Ammonius Saccas," *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* 57 [1956]: 193–214) to reconstruct Ammonius' philosophy from points of agreement in the thought of his two most famous students is highly questionable, since it ignores the students' individual creativity and in any case produces only philosophical generalities to which any Platonically oriented thinker would have subscribed.

83. Eusebius *HE* 6.19.5–8.

84. W. C. Van Unnik, *Tarsus or Jerusalem?* trans. George Ogg (London: Epworth Press, 1962), pp. 32–33.

What is intriguing about the Ammonius issue is not so much Eusebius' historical mistake, though it is suggestive of an apologetic motive, but rather his failure to pursue the issue of Origen's Greek erudition, which was the context for the Ammonius discussion. Eusebius seems to be treading a fine line concerning this issue, for on the one hand Origen's identity as a *Christian* scholar is emphasized,[87] while on the other hand his understanding of, in fact his devotion to, Greek learning is also clearly affirmed.[88] In Eusebius' opinion, Origen managed to combine the best of both worlds, yet there is reason to doubt whether Origen really achieved or even aspired to the "happy medium" suggested by Eusebius' biography.

As the height of his praise, Eusebius makes the following statement about Origen's philosophical acumen:

> And numbers of the heretics, and not a few of the most distinguished philosophers, gave earnest heed to him, and, one might almost say, were instructed by him in secular philosophy as well as in divine things. For he used to introduce also to the study of philosophy as many as he saw were naturally gifted, imparting geometry and arithmetic and other preliminary subjects, and then leading them on to the

85. Eusebius *HE* 6.19.10.

86. See Grant, "Early Alexandrian Christianity," p. 139. Note that Porphyry, too, was mistaken in part of his account. Though we know from Eusebius (*HE* 6.2.7 and 6.2.15) that Origen studied the usual Greek scholastic curriculum, we also know that his *anatrophē* was Christian, not pagan. The idea that Origen was born and raised a Christian is based on the fact that his father, Leonides, was martyred during the Severan persecution in 203, a persecution apparently aimed primarily at Christian converts. See W. H. C. Frend, "Open Questions Concerning the Christians and the Roman Empire in the Age of the Severi," *JTS*, N.S., 25 (October, 1974): 333–51. Origen himself stated in his *Homilies on Ezekiel* 4.8 that his father, to whom he did not refer by name, had been a martyr for the faith. (In *Origène*, pp. 31–32, 208, and 414–15, Nautin states that the identification of Origen's father with the Alexandrian martyr Leonides is legendary.)

87. See especially Eusebius' attempt at an exhaustive list of the master's scriptural works in *HE* 6.15–17, 23–25, 31–32, 36.

88. *HE* 6.19.1–2, 11–15.

systems which are found among the philosophers, giving a detailed account of their treatises, commenting upon and examining into each, so that the man was proclaimed as a great philosopher even among the Greeks themselves.[89]

Although Eusebius has not supplied the details of Origen's philosophical learning (for example, *which* systems did he expound, and why?), certainly the general impression of this passage is unmistakeable: Origen was an immensely erudite scholar in the Greek philosophical tradition. Origen himself, however, gave a more somber reason for his philosophical teaching. In his *Homilies on Jeremiah*, Origen said that in fact he often had to cloak his Christian identity with Greek erudition because some of his pagan acquaintances were so hostile to Christianity that an explanation of its principles had first to be undertaken in the guise of traditional philosophy.[90] While this confirms Eusebius' idea that Origen was learned in things Greek, it also suggests that Origen viewed his own exposition of philosophy as an apologetic and proselytizing tool, not as proof of his standing as an intellectual virtuoso. Further, as Nautin has shown by an artful reading of Origen's comments on preaching, Origen did not distinguish between the roles of preacher and teacher.[91] The role of the master was to convert, that is, to move the student's soul.[92] And true conversion was effected, not by studying philosophy, but by reading the Scriptures both old and new, inscribing their words on one's heart, and modeling one's life on their examples.[93]

The vision of education as conversion, expressed by the mature Origen,[94] is confirmed at least in part by the eulogy written by one of his students.[95] Noting that in his relations with students Origen showed not only "grace and gentleness" but "persuasion and force" as well,[96] the student praises

89. Eusebius *HE* 6.18.2–3.
90. Origen *Homilies on Jeremiah* 20.5.
91. Pierre Nautin, "Origène Prédicateur," in *Origène: Homélies sur Jérémie 1–11*, ed. Pierre Nautin, Sources chrétiennes 232 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1976), p. 152.
92. Origen *Homilies on Jeremiah* 20.6.21 and especially 19.14.108, where Origen states that one who explains the words of a prophet prophesies himself. The task of the modern teacher/prophet is "to teach, to denounce, to convert" (ibid., 15.2.8).
93. Ibid., 4.6.18.
94. Nautin, "La Date des Homélies," in *Origène: Homélies sur Jérémie*, pp. 15–21, dates the Jeremiah homilies between 241 and 244.
95. See chap. 4, n. 4 above.
96. *Oration* 1069C.

Origen for attending to his students' souls.[97] Inspired by the Holy Spirit and by "the saving Logos," Origen led his students to contemplate true divinity.[98] In a statement that closely parallels Origen's own idea of the prophet-teacher, the student reported about his teacher that "everything he said had its source, in my opinion, in a communication with the divine spirit: the same power is in fact necessary to those who prophesy and to those who hear the prophets; and no one can hear a prophet unless the same spirit which prophesied in him gives him the meaning of his words."[99] These comments, reflecting so well what Origen himself wrote in his *Homilies on Jeremiah*, give us what appears to be a genuine reflection of the man himself.

However, Origen the prophesying magister, who once lamented that "very few people are enthusiastic about rational thought,"[100] was not in the habit of plunging his students directly into divine studies. As his student describes it, Origen's school in Caesarea had a "ladder" arrangement, whose first rungs were occupied by an elementary scholastic curriculum ("all the sciences," e.g., geometry and astronomy).[101] Next came every conceivable kind of philosophy (except that which was atheistic), followed finally by study of the Scriptures themselves.[102] The student describes this curriculum as a kind of dialectic, whose aim was first to pattern and train the intellect, but ultimately to lead to an understanding of "God and his prophets."[103]

In his Caesarean school, then, Origen did not emphasize the study of philosophy but regarded it as a propaedeutic tool. This is not the picture suggested by the sections in Eusebius' biography dealing with Ammonius and with Porphyry's comments on Origen's philosophical being. For in order to refute what he conceived to be Porphyry's calumnies, Eusebius showed Origen teaching Greek philosophy for its own sake, a practice not characteristic of the mature magister. However, if the mature Origen was decidedly Christian in his teaching and preaching, there is evidence that

97. Ibid., 1061C. 98. Ibid., 1093D, 1072A, 1080A. 99. Ibid., 1093D.
100. Origen *Contra Celsum* 1.9. 101. *Oration* 1077C. 102. Ibid., 1077B–C.
103. Ibid., 1077B, 1088A–C, 1093B. See Origen *Contra Celsum* 6.10: "There are some people to whom we preach only an exhortation to believe, since they are incapable of anything more; but with others we do all we can to approach them with rational arguments by questions and answers." For a discussion of the school in Caesarea see Henri Crouzel, "L'École d'Origène à Césarée," *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique* 71 (January–March, 1970): 15–27. Eusebius' only comment on the organization of Origen's Caesarean school occurs in *HE* 6.30: "Origen instilled into them a passion for philosophy and urged them to exchange their former love for the study of divine truth."

suggests that as a young man he was in fact intoxicated by pagan learning, though this issue too is treated ambiguously by Eusebius.

The nature of Origen's Alexandrian teaching activities is unfortunately clouded in Eusebius' biography by two kinds of apology. The first stems from an apologetic motivation of Eusebius' that results in arguments very different from, in fact diametrically opposed to, the arguments raised in conversation with Porphyry's charges. Again Ammonius is relevant, for in crafting his portrait of Origen the Alexandrian teacher, Eusebius is extremely reticent about the precise character of Origen's introduction to a teaching career and about the content of that teaching. Because Eusebius' overriding concern in this section is to show Origen as the most prominent successor in the Alexandrian catechetical school, he emphasizes the Christian aspects of Origen's scholastic activity. The second kind of evidence comes from portions of one of Origen's letters that Eusebius has preserved, a letter in which Origen felt compelled to defend his Greek erudition by showing its role as a complement to his Christianity.

Eusebius approached the issue of Origen's entry into a teaching career with a story about the youth's fate after his father's martyrdom. *EH* 6.2.12–15 is one of the narratives in which Eusebius demonstrated the guidance of providence over Origen's life. Whereas earlier, providence acted through his mother to save him from early martyrdom, here providence acts through a wealthy Alexandrian patroness, who provides the youth with "welcome and refreshment." Eusebius does not explain in historical terms the reason for this offer of shelter. Yet he notes that the patroness also had living with her "as her adopted son" a noted heretic whose skillful speech attracted "very great numbers, not only of heretics but also of our own people" to hear his teachings. Eusebius uses the story to make a point about Origen's youthful orthodoxy: in spite of his house-mate's fame, Origen would not even pray with him, so great was his loathing of heresy. But this story can bear more than one interpretation, for Eusebius appends to this story a rather curious passage: "His father had brought him forward in secular studies, and after his death he applied himself wholly with renewed zeal to a literary training, so that he had a tolerable amount of proficiency in letters; and, not long after his father's perfecting, by dint of application to these studies, he was abundantly supplied, for a person of his years, with the necessaries of life."[104] This is certainly a roundabout, if not evasive, way of stating that Origen's early career as a teacher was not in fact

104. *HE* 6.2.15.

Christian but secular. But it is also a way of diverting attention from the young Origen's early association with heterodox Christianity, especially if, as Nautin has surmised, Eusebius is depending here on Origen's apologetic letter, part of which was a defense of his youthful, somewhat suspect attachment to a wealthy patroness who apparently surrounded herself with the "bright young men" of Alexandria regardless of their "orthodoxy."[105]

Eusebius' desire to emphasize the Christian aspects of Origen's teaching profession is also clear in his account of Origen's school in Alexandria. Unfortunately for modern historians, he gives two conflicting explanations to account for Origen's position as a Christian instructor. The first, in *EH* 6.3.1–2, implies that Origen assumed the task of catechesis as a result of the approach of "some of the heathen to hear the word of God." This occurred during the Severan persecution, when the catechetical post was vacant. In this version of the story, Origen's first teaching experience was that of proselytizing, and Eusebius has depended on erroneous (or foreshortened) dating to show Origen's secular career as simply a brief prelude to his "real" teaching activity,[106] which is depicted as being crowned by the number of Origen's students who achieved martyrdom.[107]

The second explanation for Origen's Christian teaching role, in *EH* 6.3.8–9 and 6.6.1, is dependent upon Eusebius' vision of a continuing Alexandrian catechetical school with an unbroken succession of teachers, a real *diadochē* beginning with Pantaenus and followed by Clement and Origen. In this view, the school was part of the ecclesiastical establishment, and its head held his position by appointment of the bishop. Thus the second explanation is that Origen was actually appointed by the bishop Demetrius to head the school and that only when he received this appoint-

105. This is Origen's letter to Pope Fabian. See chap. 4, n. 79 above. In "Das Leben des Origenes und die Entstehung der alexandrinischen Schule," p. 7, Hornschuh does not doubt that the young Origen associated with a famous heretic. He regards Eusebius' inclusion of this story as an occasion to mount an apologetic defense—in other words to revise history in the light of his own convictions concerning his hero: "This story serves Eusebius as the occasion to submit to proof Origen's irreproachable ecclesiastical views, and to give proof of Origen's firmness against all temptations. The motif of dangers and temptations, which the hero endures and in which his virtue and superiority are proven, is typically legendary."

106. See the article by T. D. Barnes, "Origen, Aquila, and Eusebius," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 74 (1968): 313–16, which proves that if Origen was sixteen years old when his father died in 201/202 (*HE* 6.2.12), then he was older than seventeen (*HE* 6.3.3) when he started his proselytizing-teaching activity during the reign of the prefect Aquila, whose office did not begin until 205/206.

107. *HE* 6.4–5.

ment did Origen cease to "teach letters"—only then did he give up his secular teaching. This abandonment of secular studies is related by Eusebius in rather drastic terms: Origen "disposed of all the volumes of ancient literature which formerly he so fondly cherished."[108] Even if this last statement stems ultimately from Origen's apology,[109] its dramatic effect was certainly not lost on Eusebius, who followed it with an account of the stringent "philosopher's life" Origen began to lead, a link between his teaching and his asceticism. What seems odd is that the abrupt abandonment of the philosopher's course of study, if not its attendant lifestyle, fits better with Eusebius' first explanation of Origen's turn to Christian teaching, which deemphasized the scholastic nature of Origen's "conversion" in favor of a proselytizing-teaching venture.

In any case, what we know of Origen's Alexandrian period does not support the notion of an abrupt turn away from philosophy. It is possible that Eusebius' reliance on Origen's own apology was a means of avoiding the issues that prompted his hero's self-defense in the first place. For in fact parts of Porphyry's comments on Origen, which Eusebius so vigorously refuted, were true: Origen *did* "play the Greek"; he *was* conversant with the Platonic and Pythagorean philosophers; and he *did* use "the figurative interpretation, as employed in the Greek mysteries, and applied it to the Jewish writings."[110] Two of Origen's Alexandrian works attest to the truth of those statements: *On First Principles*, whose fourth book is an elaborate defense of the use of allegory to interpret Scripture; and *Miscellanies*, which also promoted allegory and used Platonic language to interpret scriptural ideas.[111]

108. *HE* 6.3.9.

109. Nautin, *Origène*, pp. 39–40.

110. Porphyry *Contra Christianos*, quoted in Eusebius *HE* 6.19.8.

111. On Origen's *Stromateis*, see Robert M. Grant, "The *Stromateis* of Origen," in *Epektasis: Mélanges patristiques offerts au Cardinal Jean Daniélou*, ed. Jacques Fontaine and Charles Kannengiesser (Paris: Éditions Beauchesne, 1972), 285–92; Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition*, pp. 71–72; and Nautin, *Origène*, pp. 293–302. Jerome's comment on Origen's *Stromateis* is instructive: "Origen wrote ten *Stromateis*, comparing the views of Christians and philosophers with one another and confirming all the doctrines of our religion out of Plato and Aristotle, Numenius and Cornutus" (*Ep.* 70.4). As Chadwick pointed out in *Early Christianity and Classical Culture*, p. 97, Origen was aware of his innovative stance. In *Homilies on Leviticus* 1.1, 7.4–5, and 13.3, he refers to critics who characterized his allegories as subjective, fanciful interpretation. In his *Homilies on Jeremiah* 20.8, Origen, sympathizing with the prophet, asked, "If it gets me into trouble when I teach and preach, why do I not rather retire to the desert and to quiet?"

Further, as Robert M. Grant has shown, Alexandrian Christianity was not the monolithic entity described in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*. In fact what Alexandria nourished during most of the second century was a luxuriant variety of Gnostic sects, and even those teachers who did not associate themselves directly with Gnosticism, that is, Pantaenus, Clement, and Origen, were like their Gnostic brethren strongly influenced by Neopythagorean and Middle Platonic ideas. Origen's own school in Alexandria was organized along Pythagorean lines, with an emphasis on philosophical studies that were not simply "preliminary" (as Eusebius says) but rather part of the core curriculum.[112]

So Origen was a Christian teacher with a truly philosophical approach; this seems to have been the reality behind Eusebius' confusing explanations. Most modern scholars have accepted this general picture, but in trying to unwind the tangled skeins of Eusebius' accounts, they have emphasized different aspects of the Eusebian portrayal. Grant's approach, as we have just seen, attempts to fill in presumed lacunae in Eusebius' report, pointing out his deliberate omission of information that might damage Origen's credibility as a Christian teacher. Like Grant, M. Hornschuh finds apologetic motives lurking behind Eusebius' school account, but he criticizes especially the first explanation, finding that Eusebius has crafted the accounts of Origen's proselytizing and his martyr-students in favor of his Christian vision of the *theios anēr*, in which the hero triumphs over political adversity.[113] Hornschuh has also doubted both that the school was a formal institution and that its leadership constituted a *diadochē*. For these arguments he is dependent upon a seminal essay by Gustave Bardy,[114] which showed that the Alexandrian teachers were freewheeling theological masters whose followers constituted more a society than a school. Bardy showed further that there was no Alexandrian *diadochē*, since it is highly doubtful that Origen studied with Clement, and in any case, as Hornschuh demon-

112. Grant, "Early Alexandrian Christianity," pp. 135–40.

113. See Hornschuh, "Das Leben des Origenes und die Entstehung der alexandrinischen Schule," pp. 9–15, for the detailed argument. On p. 13, Hornschuh states a telling argument: "If one considers, in conclusion, that around 202 Septimius Severus forbade the conversion to Christianity altogether by an edict, it is highly unlikely that during the persecution in Alexandria a Christian institute was flourishing, which had no other duty than to train pagans for admission to the Christian church."

114. Gustave Bardy, "Aux origines de l'école d'Alexandrie," *Recherches des sciences religieuses* 27 (1937): 69–90.

strated, until the rise of Demetrius as bishop, the spiritual leaders of the Alexandrian Christian community had been a group of presbyter-teachers who maintained their positions by force of intellect and personality,[115] not by official ecclesiastical sanction.[116]

Eusebius' portrait of Origen as Christian teacher fails for two reasons: his own explanations are conflicting, and, as scholars have shown, they are not true to the historical situation. Further, his desire to emphasize Origen's Christianity in a scholastic context conflicts with his pride in Origen's Greek and ascetic accomplishments. What Eusebius' biography lacks is a sustained account of Origen the churchman, which would certainly have been an easier way to suggest his orthodoxy. For at least in his Caesarean period, Origen's homiletic output was prodigious, and there were times when he preached every day.[117] Origen himself once stated that "throughout the period of this mortal life we are dependent on the sacramental, external forms of Bible and Church; secondary as they may be, they are an indispensable vehicle."[118] This clear affirmation of churchmanship was bolstered by moving treatises such as *On Prayer* and *On Martyrdom*, which firmly attest to his piety and zeal.

Perhaps part of the problem was that the context of Eusebius' ideal Origen, in fact the ideal of the holy man itself, was not ecclesiastical but philosophical. Eusebius seems to have placed himself in the uncomfortable position of explaining how a *theios anēr* could be orthodox. Ironically, what we can surmise about the historical Origen in his Alexandrian phase seems to fit the picture of the holy man rather well. That is, at least in his early career, Origen really did wear the Janus mask, combining two worlds, the Greek and the Christian, with flair. He was a philosophical maverick, operating in a heterodox, creative theological climate. But in his Caesarean period, he was more Christian in the ecclesiastical sense, combining scholastic activity with church duties. Perhaps Eusebius' biographical difficulties grew out of his attempt to impress his ideal on the whole of Origen's life. Had he been more sensitive to the nuances in Origen's life history, he might have been able, for example, to counterbalance the radical youth with the more conservative older man. Yet biography was from its inception characterized by its single-minded vision of its subjects, and in this respect Eusebius' biography does not differ from other biographies of holy men. Historical distortion, whether intentional or not, was seemingly an inevitable by-product of the biographical dynamic. Further, Eusebius' own addition to the vision of the holy man, namely providential guidance, served mainly to enhance biography's rather free treatment of history. For Eusebius was clearly aware of criticisms of his hero, especially concerning the issue of orthodoxy, yet how could divine providence nourish a Greek-minded heretic? Thus was Eusebius moved to separate the faces of the Janus mask, highlighting and then obscuring *both* the "pagan" *and* the "orthodox" Origens when it suited his own apologetic purposes.

It is with these points in mind that one can begin to understand the conflicting features of the biography discussed in this chapter. For Eusebius, Origen was truly a cultural hero, a "man for all seasons." Depicting his hero as a Christian holy man involved two main procedures. One was to show Origen's command of virtues admired by his (and Eusebius') contemporaries regardless of religious antagonisms or commitments. This was the philosophical Origen, a figure developed in the biography by emphasizing ascetic and spiritual character traits. The other procedure was to show Origen's command of virtues respected in his own tradition. This was the Christian Origen, who appears primarily in scholastic and martyr-related situations. As we have seen, Eusebius did not succeed in showing how these two figures were one; the Origen of the biography, like the Origen of history, is Janus-faced, yet he does not integrate the two worlds in which he is shown to participate. The Origen whom Eusebius has created is at times almost unrecognizable in instances when historical evidence throws light on Origen's sometimes shadowy career and personality. But Eusebius' task was not a quest for the historical Origen. Like that of other biographers, his goal was to create a convincing portrait of a magnificent man by capturing in prose the ideals which that man represented.

115. Hornschuh, "Das Leben des Origenes und die Entstehung der alexandrinischen Schule," pp. 198–205. See also E. W. Kemp, "Bishops and Presbyters at Alexandria," *JEH* 6 (1955): 125–42.

116. Note that Demetrius' displeasure with Origen, which resulted in his official condemnation by the Alexandrian church establishment, had nothing to do with Demetrius' jealousy over Origen's scholastic fame, as Eusebius states in *HE* 6.8.4–5. In fact his excommunication was due to his ordination to the presbyterate in Palestine, an act that disregarded episcopal authority and jurisdiction. See Eusebius *HE* 6.8.5 and 23.4; W. Telfer, "Episcopal Succession in Egypt," *JEH* 3 (1952): 1–13; and Nautin, *Origène*, pp. 103–105.

117. Crouzel, ed., *Origène: Homélies sur S. Luc*, p. 79.

118. Origen *On Prayer* 5.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE
CLASSICAL HERITAGE
Peter Brown, General Editor

I
Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity
by Sabine G. MacCormack

II
Synesius of Cyrene: Philosopher-Bishop
by Jay Alan Bregman

III
Theodosian Empresses: Women and Imperial Dominion
in Late Antiquity
by Kenneth G. Holum

IV
John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality
in the Late Fourth Century
by Robert L. Wilken

V
Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest
for the Holy Man
by Patricia Cox

PATRICIA COX

Biography in Late Antiquity

A QUEST FOR THE HOLY MAN

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS

Berkeley Los Angeles London