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Form and Meaning

The Vita Constantini and the Vita Antonii

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The *Life of Constantine* and the *Life of Antony* were written, without pressing the details, not much more than twenty years apart. The latter, highly contentious though it is, is regarded by all as the paradigm of a saint's life. The former has so far defied description. I assume here that its author was Eusebius of Caesarea, and that while it was edited for public consumption, probably very soon after Eusebius's death in 339, it has not been substantially interpolated or falsified.[1] Much debate surrounds its literary form, whether biography, panegyric, or history, or some kind of combination. T. D. Barnes has recently revived (and reversed) the thesis of Giorgio Pasquali according to which it began as a panegyric and ended as a kind of documentary history; on Barnes's view it is the other way round—it started as a continuation of the *Ecclesiastical History* soon after 325, but changed its form as Eusebius later turned to writing a panegyric in the emperor's last years, and still more as Constantine's life came to its end.[2] There are problems with this view and with its detailed exposition, as I have argued at length elsewhere.[3] Suffice it here to say that I believe the work to be a hybrid, because I believe that Eusebius was a literary pioneer here, as he was also in the *Ecclesiastical History* and the *Chronicle*. The *Life* is certainly neither a conventional imperial panegyric, nor a history, nor yet a biography as we might currently understand the word. There may well have been successive alterations to the work. But Eusebius knew what he was doing, as can be seen from the immensely detailed and careful way in which he has used, picked apart, and manipulated his earlier account of some of the same events in Constantine's life from the *Ecclesiastical History* and turned them in the *Life* into something different yet related.

1. See Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* (= *VC*) in the critical edition by Winkelmann, *Eusebius Werke*, vol. 1: *Über das Leben des Kaisers Konstantin*.

2. Barnes, "Panegyric, History and Hagiography in Eusebius's *Life of Constantine*"; id., "The Two Drafts of Eusebius's *Vita Constantini*."

3. See Cameron, "Eusebius's *Vita Constantini* and the Construction of Constantine," with more detailed discussion and references on some of the points made here; the form of the *Life of Constantine* is also discussed in Wilson, "Biographical Models."

Though it may help to elucidate some of the individual elements, Barnes's attempt to identify every sentence and section in the *Life of Constantine* as belonging to the "panegyric" or the "documentary history" has the signal disadvantage of obscuring the many interesting questions that remain to be asked about the work taken as a whole. In pointing out the similarity between the *Lives* of Constantine and Antony, each of which has been so puzzling to generations of scholars, it will be best to do so without prejudging the issue of the literary form of the *Life of Constantine*. One must also take care to avoid the danger of jumping to conclusions based on a title (εἰς τὸν βίον) not Eusebius's own. I should also emphasize that I am referring throughout only to the Greek *Life of Antony*.[4] Nevertheless, the comparison offers some food for thought for anyone interested in the development of Christian biography.

At first sight, the two works seem very different, yet perhaps they are not so far apart as they appear. Without venturing into the thorny territory of Athanasian authorship[5] one can nevertheless begin by remembering that Athanasius and Eusebius were not in fact unknown to each other. Athanasius not only knew Eusebius, naming him among the group of his own enemies associated with Eusebius of Nicomedia; he even cites his work. Part of the backdrop to the later stages of the *Life of Constantine*, in turn, is Eusebius's consciousness of the danger presented to men of his own persuasion, and (as he saw it) to the Constantinian settlement, by the recall of Athanasius from exile after Constantine's death. The *Life of Constantine* is, as we have it, a Mirror for Princes, the princes being the sons of Constantine; Athanasius, exiled at the Council of Tyre, to which the *Life* tendentiously refers (*VC* 4.41), is one of those from whose dangerous seductions the princes are to be dissuaded. The *Life of Antony*, not surprisingly, takes a diametrically opposing view, with its clear messages

4. See Athanasius, *Vita Antonii* (= *VA*) in the critical edition by G. J. M. Bartelink, *Athanase d'Alexandrie: Vie d'Antoine*.

5. See below and Rousseau, "Antony as Teacher in the Greek Life," chapter 4 of this volume.

of the superiority of the holy man to the dictates of the imperial will, and of Antony's heroic opposition to Arianism, exactly the issues on which Eusebius might be thought to have taken his stand.

Both works are self-conscious in the extreme. Their form makes reference, even if not explicitly, to other established genres. The vaunted "simplicity" of Antony, who is presented as rejecting education and then conversing with pagan philosophers and exchanging letters with emperors, is not simplicity in any objective sense; rather, the description is a term of art;[6] it claims for him moral truth over its supposed opposite, the "deceit" of philosophers and the worldly wise. This contrast already had a long history in Christian writing, from St. Paul onwards, and is a prominent theme in the Apocryphal Acts and the Ps. Clementine *Recognitiones*. It has its complement in the *Life of Constantine* in the theme of Constantine's alleged ignorance of the truth, brought up as he was away from the piety of his father and in the court of Diocletian. Nor is the *Life of Constantine* any less apologetic a work than others in Eusebius's oeuvre—it is as apologetic, for instance, as the *Praeparatio Evangelica*, where Eusebius is at pains to refute the claims of Porphyry. Indeed, Constantine is portrayed in the *Life* as Moses in just such a way as to overturn the arguments whereby Porphyry had claimed Moses for the pagan side. The emperor is deliberately cast in the guise of sage and prophet, not only like Moses, but also like the pagan wonder-worker Apollonius of Tyana, whose *Life* Eusebius knew and wished to answer.[7] The pagan Hierocles, indeed, had made good use of Philostratus's *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* as a counterpart to the Christian Gospels.[8] Moreover, Eusebius already knew how to apply the biographical model to Christian use; he had previously attempted a model Christian *Life* in the section on Origen in book 6 of the *Ecclesiastical History*, where, as part of his apologetic aim, he had presented Origen as a Hellenistic divine man and sage.[9] In turn, the Greek *Life of Antony*, whether

6. On *VA* 2 (Antony's call to the ascetic life), see Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert*, 46–47; on "simplicity," see Rubenson, "Philosophy and Simplicity," chapter 5 in this volume, and Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, 79, 95–96, 112–13.

7. For the *Contra Hieroclem*, see Hägg, "Hierocles the Lover of Truth and Eusebius the Sophist" (doubting that Eusebius is the author); Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 71.

8. See Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 164–67; Bowersock, *Fiction as History*, 96–97, 110–11.

9. Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 69–101.

Athanasian or not, aims to subvert pagan and classical models. Antony discourses in classic fashion and is presented as a familiar type of late antique, though not necessarily Christian, holy man. But like Constantine, Antony is also seen in the light of scriptural prototypes—Moses, Jacob, Elijah, Elisha, and Job.[10] T. D. Barnes dismisses the possibility of Athanasian authorship,[11] but the *Life of Antony* is in fact a sophisticated composition fully compatible with the theological and political concerns of Athanasius.[12] Each of these *Lives* presents problems of formal analysis; but in both, however it is classified, the literary form makes clear reference to existing, and far from artless, literary exemplars. The form is inseparable from the meaning or the message; in the sixties phrase, "The medium is the message."

This becomes clearer if we look at some of the elements that the two works share and have in common with others before and after them. This way of reading the text is more familiar in the case of the *Life of Antony* than in that of the *Life of Constantine*, whose vast bibliography considers it mainly in terms of its reliability or otherwise as a historical source for Constantine, or in relation to its authenticity, or as a repository of Eusebian political theory or church-state relations. Yet the two works in fact deconstruct in similar ways.

Take the theme of "simplicity," for example. Antony rejects the world of culture for the desert, and there attains enlightenment; he then teaches the wise, including emperors and philosophers. Similarly, Constantine has to learn the identity of his father's god, and, like Moses, to have the details of true religion explained, even after God has sent him a sign in the form of the vision of the Cross.[13] Both Constantine and Antony come to knowledge gradually, through signs and trials, but then they are each able to direct and instruct others through their discourses. The "true" learning of the spirit is contrasted with mere school cleverness.[14] Constantine miraculously ar-

10. See *Vie d'Antoine*, ed. Bartelink, 48–51.

11. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 240, n. 64, with Louth, "St. Athanasius and the Greek *Life of Antony*."

12. For some arguments about Athanasian theology in the *Life*, see Louth, "St. Athanasius." For bibliography and for the history of the problem, see *Vie d'Antoine*, ed. Bartelink, introduction, and Rubenson, *Letters of St. Antony*, 126–32.

13. *VC* 1.27, 32; Constantine does not know the identity of his father's god (1.27) and to interpret it, he has to summon Christian clerics, who explain who it was that appeared to him in his dream of Christ and who the God who sent his vision is.

14. For the vocabulary used for this contrast in Antony's debate with the philosophers, see Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 256–57.

rives at the word on which all can unite at the Council of Nicaea; Antony can instruct pagans in their own philosophical terms (*VC* 3.3; *VA* 72–80).[15] In neither case is the "simplicity" or the ignorance real, or at least not for long. Its function in the text is to provide a foil for the enlightenment that both achieve, and through which each is able to teach and enlighten others.[16]

Again, demons: Antony is plagued and tormented by demons, but learns to overcome them and cast them out, for the demons are part of the scenario of ascent and enlightenment.[17] They appear in many other authors and were destined to become a classic motif in Greek ascetic works. But Constantine, too, is surrounded by demons, in the shape of pagan gods in the temples and idols, which he removes or destroys, and in the form of his enemy Licinius, who is depicted as the writhing serpent in the picture on the imperial palace (*VC* 3.3; Eusebius does not allow us to miss the allusion). The tetrarchs, Eusebius says, "enslaved . . . all their subjects to the deceits of evil demons" (1.13.3). Demons stir up dissent and division in the Church (*VC* 1.45.2; cf. *VA* 9, "the enemy who despises the good"), and the building of Constantine's Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem triumphs over "the whole tribe of demons" (3.26.1; cf. 26.3, "the demon Aphrodite"). Both Constantine and Antony are subjected to trial and are able to surmount it with God's help. In both works, pagan oracles (the "oracles of the Greeks"; *VA* 33), defended by Porphyry in his work *On Philosophy from Oracles*, are the token and abode of demons.[18] In the *Life of Constantine*, as in Eusebius's *Tricennalian Oration*, the pagan gods in their oracular abodes are both demons and "dead idols," who make no protest when Constantine's men carry them off and strip their treasure (*VC* 3.26.3; 57; *LC* 7.13; 8; 9.8).

There are signs and wonders in the *Life of Constantine* just as there are in the *Life of Antony*. Chief among them is the vision of the Cross, added by Eusebius to his earlier account of the same campaign, on

15. For tendentious reasons, Eusebius does not go into detail.

16. Cf. Rubenson, *Letters of St. Antony*, on Gnostic and Origenist enlightenment in Antony's thought, and on the theme of ascent (Brakke, *Athanasius*, 217–26). Teaching by Constantine is a main theme in the *Life*, both in the reporting of his letters and edicts, and in its own right in the anecdotal material about Constantine and his court in bk. 4.

17. References: *Vie d'Antoine*, ed. Bartelink, 54–56; see also Brakke, *Athanasius*, 218–21; Louth, "St. Athanasius," 507–8; Daniélou, "Démons de l'air dans la Vie d'Antoine." Demons are a main theme of Antony's first major address: *VA* 17–43.

18. The true oracles are the Scriptures: *VC* 1.38.4; 3.1.4, 3.

which the narrative is otherwise heavily dependent, and quite different in nature, location and timing from any earlier story told by Lactantius or the Latin panegyrists. Constantine sees a vision of a Cross of light, with the words "In this conquer," while somewhere on the campaign southwards through Italy, but before reaching Rome; it is followed by a dream in which Christ appears to him and orders him to construct a cross-shaped standard. The narrative here departs drastically from Eusebius's otherwise very close dependence on his own earlier version at *HE* 9.[19] Constantine is not claimed to be a healer of the sick, as Antony frequently is. But like Antony he is a healer of disputes and of men's error, bringing the medicine of God's truth, an image that the emperor explicitly uses in his dealings with the Donatists.[20] For Eusebius, he is also marked out, not merely by his vision and dream, but also by other signs: "[H]e is the only one to whom God gave convincing proofs of the religion he practised by the benefits of every kinds which were accorded him."[21] In the vision story, and the campaign against Licinius that follows it in the narrative, Constantine's behavior and experience are explicitly patterned in Eusebius's account on those of Moses when he sees God, receives the Law, and is told how to construct a tabernacle; so Constantine constructs his standard by divine teaching and builds a tabernacle on his military campaign so that victory will be granted by God.[22] The hero is protected by God and taught by him through signs so that he can in turn lead others to the truth.[23]

Teaching and debate are, in both works, the essential processes by which this education is imparted.[24] Antony is presented as teacher in long discourses on demons and with the pagans (*VA* 16–43; 74–80); he is much in demand for his teaching and advice, and his letter to the emperors is cited as an example of his wisdom.[25] He does not concentrate solely on his own spiritual well-being, but gains control

19. *VC* 1.28 f.; see Hall, "Eusebian and Other Sources in Vita Constantini I."

20. Optatus, *App.* 9; see also *VC* 2.59, 66, cf. 3. 64.1, 2.68.1.

21. *VC* 1.4.

22. *VC* 1.30–32; 2.7–12, esp. 12, on the tabernacle that Constantine constructed and used both on his campaign against Licinius, and, according to Eusebius, on his last campaign against the Persians (4.56).

23. For the theme of providential guidance, see Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 80.

24. Also in *V. Apoll.*; and cf. the wise man's παρρησία. Origen presented as a teacher: Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 90, 100.

25. Brakke, *Athanasius*, 213–14, plays down this side of Antony too far; it is not in fact incompatible with his presentation in terms of "simplicity."

of his own desires in order to impart wisdom and direct others; his desert sojourns prepare him for encounters with outsiders and for necessary visits to the city in order to instruct the authorities and the people. He is conscious of his role as an exemplar to others, and is seen by them as a spiritual mentor. In the *Life of Constantine*, the depiction of the emperor as teacher is one of the more striking features, even if presented with a certain ambiguity, for Eusebius admits that he did not always manage to persuade his hearers.[26] Constantine would preach to his court, to their curiosity and embarrassment, his discourses taking the form of sermons about conversion and the likelihood of divine punishment for those who did not mend their ways. His letters, quoted or translated by Eusebius, like those preserved in the anti-Donatist *Appendix* of Optatus, or Constantine's own *Oration to the Saints*, are as much moral and personal harangues as statements of imperial policy. They show him as motivated by a powerful sense of duty and mission, and in no doubt as to his responsibility to lead others in the same direction. Constantine feels a divine calling to rescue the empire from tyranny, so that "the human race, taught by my obedient service, might restore the religion of the most dread Law" (*VC* 2.28.2).[27] His famous remark that he considered himself the "bishop of those outside" is interpreted by T. D. Barnes as a quip;[28] but it is admiringly reported by Eusebius and shows the emperor's sense of his own role as teacher. I doubt whether Constantine had much sense of humor. He is equally serious about his handling of Church councils and about his role at the Council of Nicaea, after which he writes to the churches to inform and instruct them of its decisions.[29]

Both Antony and Constantine address themselves to pagans. Antony debates with them directly, and the *Life* envisages an audience of pagans as well as Christians.[30] The same is probably true of the *Life of Constantine*, written for a cultivated audience much like the

26. *VC* 4.29; Constantine's zeal for the instruction of others lasted to the end of his life: 4.55.

27. Constantine's letters relating to the Donatist controversy, preserved in Optatus's *Appendix*, display this sense of personal duty and mission already in the months after his victory in 312.

28. *VC* 4.24, on which see Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 270.

29. *VC* 3.17–20; final address to the departing bishops: 3.21; letters to those not present: 3.22.

30. *VA* 94; asked for by western monks: *pref.*

courtiers who listened to the emperor's sermons.[31] It is claimed that Antony allowed "Greeks" (i.e., pagans), to come to him for healing, and that they were often converted as a result (*VA* 70). In the *Life*, Constantine's mission to pagans is to lead them from error; in this he is likened to Moses, who brought his people from slavery; so Constantine freed the empire from the tyrants and led it to the truth of the faith (*VC* 1.12, 26, 38–39). He also debates the superiority of Christianity over paganism; he writes in his letter to the East about the error of polytheism and the false oracles that issue forth from the tripods of Apollo (2.50). It is also his duty to overthrow idols, and Eusebius records the destruction of temples (few, admittedly) in this vein; the Cilician Aesculapeum, "the vaunted wonder of the noble philosophers," was razed to the ground (3.56.2), and the destruction of shrines "everywhere" "might well be regarded, he says, as among the Emperor's greatest achievements" (3.57, 3.68.1).[32] In practical terms, Constantine could not outlaw paganism and did not try; but, like the *Tricennalian Oration*, the *Life* nonetheless presents him in the guise of one who overthrew idolatry. The building of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher at Jerusalem, for example, represents not only the honoring of Christ's tomb but also the overthrow of paganism; the site was first cleared of a temple that had been built there after the Jewish war under the influence of demons (*VC* 3.26.1), and that was the home, as Eusebius puts it, of "the impure demon Aphrodite," "a terrible and truly genuine tomb" (3.26.3). Later, and implausibly, he claims that Constantine purged the new city of Constantinople of "all idol-worship, so that nowhere in it appeared those images of the supposed gods which are worshipped in temples . . . nor feasts of demons" (3.48.2).

Orthodoxy—even if conceived of from opposing positions—is a major concern of both *Lives*. The *Life of Antony* is preoccupied with the attack on heresy and schism, especially Arianism. Antony has no converse with Melitians or Manichees and is angered by any mention of Arians (*VA* 68–69, 89);[33] he comforts his fellow monks when

31. For which see *VC* 4.29; his discourses included denunciations of polytheism. He prescribed a monotheistic prayer for his non-Christian soldiers (4.19), enjoined Sunday observance on all, and had his own household run by Christian clerics (4.18).

32. The removal of temple treasures by Constantine's officers is also a major theme of the *Tricennalian Oration*.

33. But Antony is accused of agreeing with the Arians himself, and he goes to Alexandria to clear himself: *VA* 69.

they are dismayed at Arian success, telling them that the Arians are inspired by demons and the devil, and as senseless as mules, and that their power will soon pass. On another occasion, he writes to reprove an official who was pro-Arian and anti-orthodox; the man is bitten by a horse and quickly dies (82, 86).[34] But Constantine, too, is presented as the guardian of orthodoxy—not without some difficulty, as Eusebius has to confront the issue of his own equivocal behavior before, during and after the Council of Nicaea, and the later apparent reversal of imperial policy toward Arius and his supporters; characteristically for Eusebius, and for hagiography generally, he chooses the technique of omission.[35] In the *Life*, Constantine is the peacemaker in the Church; disputes are attributed to the working of the spirit of envy, otherwise the devil. The emperor is shocked by dissension, which can only be the result of "envy" (*VC* 2.61.2), and which he takes as a personal calamity (2.63), and works to bring back peace in the Church. He calls the disputes in Africa "an intolerable madness" caused by "ill-considered frivolity" (2.66.1). The quarrels in Egypt disturb the emperor's own equanimity: "Give me back, therefore, peaceful days and undisturbed nights, so that I too may still have some pleasure left in the clear light and happiness of a quiet life" (2.72.1). Constantine's letter to the Council of Tyre exiling Athanasius, which is quoted by Eusebius, gives the bishops full authority to deal with the matter and asks them to relieve his own anxiety and restore the blessing of peace (4.42.5). This was particularly sensitive, in that Athanasius and others had been recalled from exile after Constantine's death and before the final stages of composition of the *Life*.[36] Eusebius has his own agenda, as doubtless does the original author of the *Life of Antony*. Yet in presenting their subjects in this tendentious way, both writers lie at the start of a long hagiographic

34. Heresy and schism in the *VA: Vie d'Antoine*, ed. Bartelink, 59–61.

35. Eusebius had gone to the Council of Nicaea under condemnation by a church council for Arian sympathies. In his account, the doctrinal issues discussed at Nicaea are passed over as quickly as possible in favor of extended treatment of the dispute about the date of Easter (*VC* 3.5, 14, 17–20); a letter from Constantine to Arius and Alexander is reported at 2.64–72, but Arius's name is avoided in the main text. The reason for the Council of Tyre, which exiled Athanasius for his support of Nicaea, is given as "the spirit of envy," to which the Arian controversy had also been ascribed (4.41; 2.61).

36. For detailed discussion, see Cameron, "Eusebius's *Vita Constantini*."

tradition, in which it was the undoubted role of the holy man or saint to resist and overcome wrong belief and to proclaim the truth.

Both Constantine and Antony are deferential to the Church, and their zeal for orthodoxy is combined with respect for the Church's institutions and its bishops.[37] Their obedience to God's call is also emphasized (*VA* 3, 66); when they are given signs, they recognize what they must do. Like Moses, Constantine has to be taught by God; but, like Moses also, he obeys.

The physical appearance of a Christian hero is one of the ways in which his special role can be discerned. Thus Antony's face is bright and shining with cheerfulness (67).[38] His strength survives into old age, despite the rigors of his asceticism, and he is healthier and more energetic than those who have not engaged in austerities (93). Similarly, when seen by Eusebius at the Council of Nicaea, Constantine looked like a heavenly angel of God, shining with brightness (*VC* 3.10.3), and his outward appearance seemed to Eusebius to testify to the radiance of his soul (10.4). In his last years, his body was still "sound and unimpaired, free from any defect and more youthful than any young man's" (4.52.4); he surpassed Alexander the Great in the length of his life and the size of his empire (1.7). The Greek *Life* of Antony describes him on his return from his ascetic withdrawal as being like a mystic initiate (*VA* 14);[39] again, Constantine is seen by Eusebius in the same light, especially at his baptism: "Constantine was initiated by rebirth in the mysteries of Christ, and exulted in the Spirit on being given the divine seal" (*VC* 4.62.4).[40]

Just as the holy man as teacher leaves behind him the legacy of his influence, so the two *Lives* themselves offer models for imitation.[41] Thus Antony taught his fellow monks and bequeathed both a literal inheritance in his sheepskins and cloak and his instructions about his burial, and a spiritual legacy in the form of his teachings and example, especially his instruction in the ascetic life and his warnings against heresy (*VA* 91); Constantine left behind his own mausoleum,

37. See Brakke, *Athanasius*, 245–48. For the *VC*, see, e.g., 2.65.2; 3.60.2; 3.20.1.

38. Cf. Prov. 15.13, and David at 1 Sam. 16.12, and see Louth, "St. Athanasius," 506.

39. Noted by Barnes, "Angel of Light," as a difference between the Greek and the Syriac versions, the latter having him look like an angel; see also Louth, "St. Athanasius," 508.

40. *VC* 4.62.4.

41. Brakke, *Athanasius*, 258–62.

where he was to be symbolically buried with the apostles (*VC* 4.58),[42] and according to Eusebius, he miraculously lived on in his sons as though he were still alive (1.1; 4.71). The death of the hero is an important element in such *Lives*, and the deaths of Constantine and of Antony are recounted with solemnity and emphasis on their exemplary and edifying nature; of Antony it is said that "even his death has become something imitable" (*VA* 89). Constantine's death, with its antecedents and his obsequies, occupies a substantial part of the final book of the *Life* (*VC* 4.61–75). Both subjects know when their death is approaching. Constantine's illness is followed by baptism, which is far from being, as has so often been wrongly assumed, a late and therefore hesitant or calculating decision, but quite the opposite, namely, the culmination of his presentation as a Christian hero; after it, he puts away imperial pomp and the military action on which he was engaged and devotes his mind wholly to God (4.62–63).

More than the *Life of Antony*, the *Life of Constantine* is generally read as a historical text, and it is often blamed for its lack of honesty and reliability. The debate as to its literary form is generally conducted in terms of genre (rhetorical panegyric or history) rather than purpose. But as always, Eusebius has a lesson in mind, and that has overridden questions of genre, just as it has dictated the manner and style of writing. Rather than judge the *Life* as if it were a sober attempt at an objective history of Constantine, we should read it as the life of a holy man, with the difference, of course, that this holy man is also an emperor. Read in that way, it is far closer to the *Life of Antony* and subsequent Christian *Lives* than it has usually seemed.

Pagan *Lives* such as Philostratus's *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* or Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* have received a vast amount of attention in recent years, certainly enough to make certain common characteristics clear.[43] They tend (like the *Lives* of Constantine and Antony) to reflect fluid situations, whereas the later form of hagiography soon developed a more clear-cut shape, even with variations of level and type. In the works that I have been considering, the hero is an individual,

42. Unfortunately, there is a lacuna at this point, but it is clear nevertheless that Eusebius describes the mausoleum, not a church; see Mango, "Constantine's Mausoleum and the Translation of Relics."

43. These are usefully summarized in Anderson, *Sage, Saint and Sophist*. See Cameron, *Rhetoric of Empire*, chs. 2 and 3; Bowersock, *Fiction as History*; Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*.

on the edge of change—not necessarily an outsider, but by definition one who does not quite fit society's mold. In order to exert influence (it is preferable to avoid the much abused term "power"), he undergoes some kind of training and discipline, from which he emerges the more potent. He is marked out for his role by special signs, which have to be interpreted and explained. He has an impact on others, by teaching or example, or by signs, or all of these. Wisdom, or special knowledge, is a main characteristic, and need not be (perhaps is usually not) wisdom of the conventional sort; hence the emphasis on "simplicity" pitched against worldly wisdom or cunning.

A common manifestation of the holy man's special knowledge is a formal debate (like Antony's, or like Constantine's interventions in doctrinal disputes) with allegedly wise opponents; Simon Magus is already one of these.[44] Despite ostensible appeals to simplicity, speeches, discourses, and letters are common ways of employing rhetoric to display the holy man's superiority; all of these are prominent in the *Lives* of Antony and Constantine, and indeed the many documents in the latter take the form of letters from the emperor, highly personal in tone. Miracles, healing, or at least special tokens are also required, as is the display of holiness. The hero has clients, or followers, for his role is to teach and to influence, and he has to overcome opponents or enemies, for what is at stake, and what is disputed, is authority. Hence the emphasis on orthodoxy and on the refutation of paganism.

These *Lives* are not innocent histories; they are didactic and apologetic works. The author of the *Life of Antony* is artful and sophisticated in his themes and his argument, and so is Eusebius in the *Life of Constantine*. If the latter could not quite squeeze Constantine into a mold of spirituality, he could and did present him as special, marked out for all to see by God's tokens and signs. Eusebius may already have been working on the *Life* when he delivered the *Tricennalian Oration* in the emperor's presence in Constantinople;[45] the two works are superficially different, but in fact extremely close in vocabulary and ideas, and we can be sure that the message of the *Life* was quite deliberate, even though it is expressed in more concrete terms. That

44. For further discussion, see Edwards, "Epilogue: Biography and the Biographic," and see also Cameron, *Rhetoric of Empire*, 94–96.

45. See Drake, "What Eusebius Knew."

message overall is one of authority and victory. Both works are pervaded by the imagery of trophies and signs that Eusebius uses for the Cross, the token of Constantine's victory and a theme shared by Athanasius and by the *Life of Antony*.[46] This is also why the *Life*'s account of the Holy Sepulcher focuses on victory and resurrection, rather than on the suffering represented by Golgotha.[47] Contrary to the currently fashionable view,[48] Eusebius has not deliberately ignored the discovery of the True Cross (which, given his eagerness to promote Constantine's claims, would have been odd indeed), but focused his attention on the symbol of victory represented by the site of the resurrection. The *Life of Constantine* and the *Life of Antony* alike are highly political works;[49] but they also present *Lives* of exceptional and exemplary individuals. In writing about them, both Eusebius and Athanasius (the likely author of the *Life of Antony*) are endeavoring to create "narrative worlds," or "social discourse,"[50] that is, to present their subject in their own lights for the persuasion of others.

The two *Lives* belong in a chain of related writings. Eusebius seems not to have been particularly well read in classical works, though he had evidently had the essentials of a rhetorical education and certainly knew the component parts of a standard imperial encomium. The fact that Eusebius's style is florid and hard to translate is a further sign of the rhetorical pretensions displayed in the work's elaborate preface; in fact, Eusebius is a rhetorician through and through. Nevertheless, he is not particularly worried about whether his work is termed a history or "acts." While he calls it ἱστορία, he also appeals to a different tradition by referring to the πράξεις of great men, and though he does not describe his work himself as a *Life*, he does locate it in that tradition by his use of Plutarch.[51] He certainly gave some thought to the nature of biographical writing in relation both to Origen and to Constantine.[52] He had inherited access to the library of Origen, and he was equally familiar with authors such as Philo and Clement.[53] But he was also conscious of pagan claims made for rivals to Jesus, and of pagan attempts to appropriate the Mosaic tradition. He had already tried an exemplary *Life* replete with divine signs and tokens, in his portrayal of Origen, whom Porphyry had also criticized; now, decades on, he had had plenty of time to reflect on another and ponder the religious and historical implications, as well as having experienced the political shifts of the later years of Constantine's rule and the months after the emperor's death. He does not venture to compare Constantine directly with Jesus in the formal rhetorical introduction to the *Life*, but he does so explicitly in the peroration;[54] the comparison is also there in his section on Origen, and the thought is present indirectly in the main body of the *Life of Constantine* through the comparison with Moses.[55] Providing a refutation of Porphyry and other pagan writers was a major preoccupation of his, whether he was dealing with oracles, Moses, or the *Life of Apollonius*, and it is still very much alive in the *Life of Constantine*.

Neither of the two *Lives* makes close or overt reference to similar works as literary models, not least because they both wish to set up a Christian alternative.[56] But they share very many of the basic elements I have outlined. Could the Greek *Life of Antony* possibly itself be an answer to the *Life of Constantine*? If Athanasius was the author, the idea is neither impossible nor ridiculous, though there is no direct evidence for it. If he was not the author, he was still very close to Antony, the monks, and the *Life*, and the work can only have been written by someone with intimate knowledge of his concerns.[57] The

46. Louth, "St. Athanasius," 507; the sign of the Cross as a talisman: *VA* 35; against demons: *De inc.* 29, 50; see Brakke, *Athanasius*, 222. Differences between the Greek and Syriac versions: Louth, ibid.

47. *VC* 3.25–40.

48. For which see, e.g., Drake, "Eusebius on the True Cross"; Rubin, "The Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Conflict between the Sees of Caesarea and Jerusalem."

49. For Athanasius "correcting" other or earlier views of Antony in order to present him as a model for his own views, see Brakke, *Athanasius*, 203.

50. Ibid., 202.

51. Notably at *VC* 1.10, on which see Mortley, *The Idea of Universal History from Hellenistic Philosophy to Early Christian Historiography*, 175–81; Cameron, *Rhetoric of Empire*, 54. Eusebius uses the Plutarchan motif of drawing or painting a picture of his subject.

52. Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 75, referring to his "musings on the historical boundaries of biographical characterization."

53. For the connection, see Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius*, 81–104.

54. *VC* 4.72.

55. For Origen, see Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 86. Antony and Jesus: *Vie d'Antoine*, ed. Bartelink, 52.

56. For recent summaries of views on the literary form and models of the *VA* 62–67: Rubenson, *Letters of St. Antony*, 126–32; id., "Christian Asceticism and the Emergence of the Monastic Tradition."

57. On Athanasius and asceticism, see Kannengiesser, "Athanasius of Alexandria and the Ascetic Movement of His Time"; Rubenson, *Letters of St. Antony*. For limited contact between Athanasius and Antony himself, see Brakke, *Athanasius*, 203–5. For further discussion of the possible relationship between the two works, and for the politics of the years after Constantine's death, see Cameron, "Eusebius's *Vita Constantini*."

"real" Antony is as difficult to recover as the real Constantine.[58] His allegedly unlettered spirituality is a fine foil to Athanasius's sophistication, but is probably as one-sided a presentation as the Constantine of Eusebius's *Life*.

I have used the title "Form and Meaning" for this chapter, and to that I now return. It is possible to exaggerate the importance of identifying a literary form either for the *Life of Constantine* or for the *Life of Antony*. Each partially fits various genres, but not completely; each is a work in its own right. The form and the meaning, in fact, are inseparable. This does not mean that we should give up the attempt to discern recognizable genres in either the *Life of Constantine* or the *Life of Antony*. It would be helpful to know whether Eusebius consciously followed rhetorical handbooks, or whether the *Life of Antony* owes anything to pagan *Lives*. But neither work is a mechanical copying of textbook rules. Both are innovative, and the innovation in each case consists precisely in the creative adaptation and translation of existing patterns to new needs. I believe, with Pasquali, Winkelmann, Barnes and others, that Eusebius worked on the *Life of Constantine* over some time, and that its form changed as he went on; I do not, however, believe that there were two separable and distinct drafts, cobbled together, each with a discrete literary form, such that they can be clearly distinguished in the present text. The real Constantine lies beyond the text of the *Life*. As for Antony, the *Life of Antony* combines harangue, ideology, and narrative to such an extent that it is difficult to say where, if anywhere, the "real" Antony lies. That does not mean that in either case the search should be given up as entirely hopeless. But what I am advocating, finally—or rather, at this particular stage in our research—is that both *Lives* need to be considered, not as "sources," but as texts.

58. Brakke, *Athanasius*, 201 (not Athanasius's intention to describe the historical Antony); Rubenson, *Letters of St. Antony*; Dörries, *Vita Antonii als Geschichtsquelle*.

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4

Antony as Teacher in the Greek *Life*

PHILIP ROUSSEAU

My chief intention in this chapter, as its title suggests, is to show that at least parts of the Greek *Life* present Antony as an active master of disciples: not simply as an exemplar worthy of imitation, either by those who knew him or by readers of the text, but rather as one who taught, in ways familiar to "philosophical" or neo-Pythagorean pedagogues of the age.[1] I shall then reflect on how one might relate such an argument to issues of authorship and textual reliability. Finally, and more briefly, I shall compare the Antony of the *Life* with the impression gained from the letters attributed to him.

THE YOUNG ANTONY

Let us begin, therefore, with the text. It is necessary to examine first the account of Antony's own formation, since (as we might expect) it sets the tone for the whole biography.[2] In the opening chapter, famous statements are made: Antony was brought up in a Christian way (χριστιανικῶς) and did not learn "letters" (γράμματα)—partly, at least, because he did not wish to mix with other children (1.1–2).[3] Here the author is preparing his readers for an allusion to Jacob in Genesis 25.27, where, like Antony in the *Life*, the future Israel is called ἄπλαστος, "unaffected," because he withdrew from the sin-

1. Some have found it hard to defend the literary unity of the work: "None of the many different models suggested has been able to explain the entire structure of the *Vita* in a convincing manner" (Rubenson, *Letters of St Antony* [1990 (all page citations below are to this edition)], 130; see also Barnes, "Angel of Light or Mystic Initiate?" 367–68). For assistance in settling some textual difficulties, my thanks to Vivienne Gray and Georgia Frank.

2. Heussi, *Ursprung*, pp. 87–100, thought the account unconvincing; but see Hertling, "Studi storici," 23–24. The Syriac is another matter: see Abramowski, "Vertritt die syrische Fassung die ursprüngliche Gestalt der Vita Antonii?" 52.

3. References to the *Life* are placed in parentheses within the text. My translations are based on *Athanase d'Alexandrie: Vie d'Antoine*, ed. G. J. M. Bartelink.

GREEK BIOGRAPHY AND PANEGYRIC IN LATE ANTIQUITY