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10

Strategies of Representation in Collective Biography

Constructing the Subject as Holy

PATRICIA COX MILLER

INTRODUCTION: RELIGIOUS DIMENSIONS OF COLLECTIVE BIOGRAPHY

> [Eusebius] would shine out like a bright star, with a light like the sun's; such were the ease and charm that glittered in his words. (Eunapius, *VS* 474)[1]

> [Abba Or] looked just like an angel . . . and his face was so radiant that the sight of him alone filled one with awe. (*HM* 2.1)[2]

Whether they drew upon the solar imagery of the celestial spheres of Neoplatonism or the ornithanthropic imagery of the beings populating the heavens of Christianity, the writers of the biographical collections that this chapter discusses—the *Vitae philosophorum et sophistarum* of Eunapius and the *Historia monachorum* by an anonymous author—were concerned to emphasize the (often literally) scintillating qualities of the subjects of their biographical sketches.[3] They did not analyze character so much as present it in striking images, using

1. Eunapius, *Vitae philosophorum et sophistarum*, ed. Boissonade, trans. Wright, in *Philostratus and Eunapius* (= *VS*). I have used Wright's translation but have made frequent, often extensive, revisions.

2. *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*, ed. Festugière, trans. Russell, *Lives of the Desert Fathers* (= *HM*). I have made some revisions to Russell's translation.

3. I have borrowed the term *ornithanthropic*, which functions nicely to designate the imagistic quality of angels, from Elliott, *Roads to Paradise*, 172, who in her turn is quoting Victor Turner, *Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969; repr. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977), 253.

a "pictorial idiom" that John Matthews has described as "the peculiarly expressionistic manner" of the fourth century.[4] Part of Matthews's characterization of Ammianus Marcellinus's history is relevant to these collections as well:

> In Ammianus, the portrayal of character as found in biography, whether erudite or philosophical, has been further subjected to an imagery of public display and theatre . . . consistent with an age in which "instant" visual and ceremonial communication have come increasingly to dominate the relations between government and governed, and in which the word of authority is increasingly domineering, relying more on the stirring of emotions than on rational exposition.[5]

The vividly visual and emotional aspects of the portrayal of character are evident, not only in the biographical sketches themselves, but also in the prologues of the two collections, in which the authors write about the process of biographical writing itself. Visually, Eunapius asks his readers to imagine the men about whom he writes as a "crop," using an organic metaphor suggestive of his view that these men represent the fruit of philosophical virtue (*VS* 454; 455).[6] The author of the *Historia monachorum* uses both arithmetic and civic images, explaining that his work is based on seeing the "boundless numbers" of men whose "way of life" (πολιτεία) he will describe (*HM*, pro. 10); here he is perhaps drawing on the convention that the monks had made the desert a city.[7] As we shall see, these authors also convey a sense of emotional involvement both with the process of writing and with the objects of their looking and, further, both use specifically *religious* images to describe what the biographical gaze sees.

These two aspects of the writing of biography, religion and emotion, were briefly noted by Arnaldo Momigliano as part of what he described as "the transformation of biography in the fourth century."[8] Religion, he argued, is connected with the transformation of the portrayal of character, character that was conceived earlier as "the experience of the interchange between individual ambitions and political circumstances" and was later replaced in fourth-century biographies by "mystical experiences and contacts with divine beings."[9] Although individual biographies establishing the "holiness" of particular men had been written prior to the fourth century—for example, Philostratus's *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* and Porphyry's *Lives* of Plotinus and Pythagoras[10]—Momigliano's point holds true for collective biographies in terms of a new interest in representing character in terms of religious values. The other aspect of transformation, emotion, enters biographical writing because "to be a creditable biographer of a holy man one had to claim close personal knowledge. There was a need of intimacy with a holy man. The biographer mediated the intimacy between saint and reader by asserting the intimacy between saint and biographer."[11]

Already in their prologues, these collections bear witness to the changed conditions in which biography was written, and these changes are evident in the ways in which these authors characterize the impetus, the motives, and the experience of biographical composing. On the topic of religion, the author of the *Historia monachorum*, for example, states succinctly, "I have truly seen the treasure of God hidden in human vessels," which, he goes on to say, "I did not want to keep secret, hiding something beneficial for the many" (*HM*, pro. 3). This author indicates explicitly that he has undertaken his writing not only to remember and honor his subjects, but also to edify those who are beginners in the kind of religious life that these subjects exemplify (*HM*, pro. 12). In large part, in fact, this author's collection is a record of his *own* edification, as he himself says; much of the narrative is presented as his face-to-face conversations with the men whose stories he would ultimately write (*HM*, pro. 2; 12).[12] The roles of reli-

4. Matthews, *Roman Empire of Ammianus*, 460.
5. Ibid., 460–61.
6. On the four "crops" of philosophers envisioned by Eunapius, see Penella, *Greek Philosophers and Sophists*, 36–38; on Eunapius's view of the virtue (ἀρετή) of these philosophers, see *VS* 453; 455.
7. For πολιτεία, a term for citizenship or daily life as a citizen (here, a citizen of the desert), see *HM*, pro. 2; 13. For the convention of monks making the desert a city, see Athanasius, *VA* 14 (*PG* 26: 865B); Jerome, *Ep.* 2.1 (*PL* 22: 331); *Ep.* 3.4.2 (*PL* 22: 334).
8. "Ancient Biography and the Study of Religion," 1987, 176.
9. Ibid.
10. On Philostratus, see Francis, *Subversive Virtue*, 83–130; see also Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity*, 17–44, on biographical paradigms of the holy man, and 102–33 on Porphyry.
11. Momigliano, "Ancient Biography and the Study of Religion," 177.
12. The *HM* is presented as the record of travels undertaken by the author and his companions in C.E. 394 to visit ascetics living along the Nile River and its tributaries, from Lycopolis in upper Egypt to Nitria, some fifty miles south of Alexandria. Recent scholarship regards the journey as authentic; see Ward, "Introduction," *Lives of the Desert Fathers*, 4–5, and Schultz-Flügel, *Tyrannius Rufinus Historia Monachorum*, 7–8.

gion and intimacy in the writing of biography are here very closely tied together.

Interestingly, in his epilogue this author gives dramatic flair to his revelatory project of providing "a testimony for the perfect" (*HM*, pro. 12). In the "expressionistic manner" noted by Matthews, he regales the reader with a detailed account of the ordeals that he and his companions endured as they observed the men who became the subjects of the author's collection: hunger and thirst, "marshy ground full of thorns and prickles," swamps, and floods are followed by robbers, a capsized boat, hailstorms, and finally by lunging crocodiles (*HM*, ep. 1–13)! Many of these brief stories of physical trials are glossed with passages from the Psalms and Job, whose cries for salvation—"Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink" (Ps. 69.14)—intensify the emotional tone of the narrative. Setting side by side these "great dangers" and the seeing of "wonderful sights," that is, the subjects of the collection themselves, the concluding passage of the epilogue functions to give the reader a retrospective frisson regarding the writing of biography (*HM*, ep. 14).

In his own way, Eunapius was no less emotional and, as will be seen, no less religious, in his evocation of his experience as a biographer. He confesses that, despite all the thought and care that he lavished on his project in an attempt to write a complete and definitive account, "I fell short of my ambition" (*VS* 455). Nevertheless, he interprets this experience of disappointment positively, and in an emotionally erotic language that is fittingly reminiscent of passages from Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*—I say "fittingly" reminiscent because of the virtually canonical, even "scriptural," status of Plato's dialogues in the Neoplatonic circles of the fourth century and because of the central role that *eros* played in the specifically Iamblichean, religio-theurgic form of Neoplatonism to which Eunapius subscribed.[13] Eunapius remarks about the process of writing his biographical collection:

13. See Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul*, 8, on the scriptural status of Plato's writings for fourth-century Platonists; see ch. 11 for a discussion of the role of *eros* in Neoplatonic philosophy; see also Fowden, "Pagan Holy Man," 34–35, for a discussion of Plato as a prototype of the "divine man" of late ancient paganism, whose philosophy was considered to be a mystery into which one could be initiated. For a discussion of Eunapius's life, as well as his Neoplatonism, see Penella, *Greek Philosophers and Sophists*, 1–19.

> I have had the same experience as those who are madly and feverishly in love. For they, when they behold the beloved and the adored beauty of her visible countenance, bow their heads, too weak to fix their gaze on that which they desire, and dazzled by its rays. But if they see her sandal or chain or earring, they take heart from these and pour their souls into the sight and melt at the vision, since they can endure to see and love the symbols of beauty more easily than the beauty itself; thus too I have set out to write this narrative. (*VS* 455)

Using the simile of the lover, Eunapius describes his narrative enterprise in terms that are not only erotically emotional but also aesthetic; his biographical sketches are to be read as "symbols of beauty" that evoke beauty itself, the philosophical tradition to which his subjects belonged. The role of intimacy, as indicated by Momigliano, is relevant here as well, since Eunapius was himself a link in the "golden chain" of the Platonic philosophers whose lives he narrates, and he could trace his lineage through his teacher Chrysanthius back to the godlike Iamblichus and beyond to Porphyry, Plotinus, and ultimately, of course, to the divine Plato.[14] Additionally, like the author of the *Historia monachorum*, Eunapius was personally acquainted with many of the men who became the subjects of his biographical sketches. In some of these sketches, the warmth of personal connection, even devotion, that Eunapius's narratives convey illustrates well the intimacy between saint and biographer needed to mediate that same intimacy between saint and reader.[15]

The language of Eunapius's next statement brings out a further religious dimension of his project. Remarking that he has tried not to omit anything that he learned in the course of his research, he says, "I made obeisance at the doorways and gates of truth, and I have transmitted this to those in the future who either wish to hear or have

14. See Fowden, "Pagan Holy Man," 34, for the Neoplatonic adoption of the Homeric image of the golden chain (*Il.* 8.19), and see *VS* 457 for Eunapius's use of the image to describe Porphyry; for Eunapius's placement of himself in this chain, see *VS* 458 plus his remark at 461: "so wondrous a thing was the philosophy of Iamblichus, extending and reaching down from that time even to our own day."

15. See especially the warmth and love evident in Eunapius's description of his teacher Chrysanthius in *VS* 500–505; at 503, Eunapius says that he studied with Chrysanthius every afternoon: "in this period the teacher never grew weary of instructing his devoted admirer, while the task was like a holiday festival for him who received his teaching."

the power to be guided towards what is most beautiful" (*VS* 455). The verb that Eunapius has used to describe his action at the gates of truth, προσκυνήσαντα, is often used to designate ritual practices: falling down and worshipping the gods, or doing reverence in sacred places.[16] His language here reinforces the religious tone of the allusions to Plato in the previous passage and adds a ritual gloss to his understanding of his narrative endeavor. His readers are invited into the collection as though they were entering a sacred space.

The authors of both collections, then, have presented their work as biographers in emotionally charged rhetoric drawn from their respective religious traditions, and both have expressed the hope that readers will benefit from the lives that they depict. The fact that each has an intensely personal stake in the process of writing such a collection is already clear from their introductory remarks, and this personal engagement continues in the biographical sketches themselves. Before analyzing the specifics of character portrayal in these collections, however, I would like to turn again to the general theme, the transformation of culture as seen in Greek biographies of the fourth century, which has already been touched upon in the discussion of the new religious and emotive qualities of the two collections under discussion, and to ask specifically about changes in the writing of collective biographies.

COLLECTIVE BIOGRAPHY AS A LITERARY GENRE

In the imperial era, the major extant Greek collections of biographies prior to the fourth century are Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, Philostratus's *Lives of the Sophists*, and Diogenes Laertius's *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*.[17] When considering what makes these collections a cohesive

16. Eunapius uses this verb twelve times in the course of the *Vitae* (see Avotins and Avotins, *Index*, 204–5). In each instance but one (*VS* 461), the verb connotes religious reverence or worship of a philosopher, goddess, or emperor. For example, when an oracle's pronouncement appears miraculously inscribed on his hand, Aedesius "reveres" his hand (*VS* 464); the teaching of Sosipatra, whose words are regarded as oracles, is "revered," and after she returns from her mysterious initiation into secret religious rites by daimonic figures, she is "reverenced" by her father (*VS* 468; 469); the goddess Hekate is "revered" in her temple (*VS* 475); Oribasius is "worshipped like a god" among the barbarians (*VS* 499); a crowd "reveres" or "kisses" the feet of Prohaeresius and licks his breast "as though he were a statue of a god" (*VS* 489). These uses underscore the religious and ritualistic connotations of this verb.

17. Porphyry also wrote a history of philosophy, which concluded with Plato; however, only his *De vita Pythagorae* remains from this work.

group compared with the collections of the fourth century, it is useful to ask: what is a collection? One contemporary theorist, Susan Stewart, has suggested that "the collection marks the place where history is transformed into space," and this is so because the collection "seeks a form of self-enclosure" by adopting principles of organization and categorization that create "a new whole that is the context of the collection itself."[18] A collection is different from mere accumulation because "the collection is not constructed by its elements; rather, it comes to exist by means of its principle of organization."[19]

Furthermore, there is a "play between identity and difference" in "the collection organized in accordance with qualities of the objects themselves. To group objects in a series because they are 'the same' is to simultaneously signify their difference. In the collection, the more the objects are similar, the more imperative it is that we make gestures to distinguish them."[20] Consider, for example, Samuel Pepys's principle of ordering his library:

> [He] arranged and rearranged his library, [and] finally classified his books according to size. In double rows on the shelves the larger volumes were placed behind the smaller so that the lettering on all could be seen; and in order that the tops might be even with each other, this neat collector built wooden stilts where necessary and, placing those under the shorter books, gilded them to match the bindings! Subject and reference-convenience were secondary in this arrangement, except insofar as the sacrosanct diary was concerned, and this, which had been written in notebooks of varying size, Mr. Pepys, reverting to reason, had bound uniformly so that its parts might be kept together without disturbing the library's general arrangement-scheme.[21]

Here the principle of organization—size—preserves sameness; yet difference is emphasized as well, because the collector made sure that the titles that distinguished the books from one another could all be seen.

While not, perhaps, as obsessive as Pepys, the collectors of the imperial era also had principles of organization and categorization that display the authors' formal, rather than historical, interest in the lives

18. Stewart, *On Longing*, xii, 152–53.
19. Ibid., 155.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.

that they assembled in the space of their collections. Focusing for the moment on Plutarch, but with some attention to Diogenes Laertius and Philostratus as well, I would like to discuss the formal principles of these earlier collections in order to provide a basis for discerning what is distinctive in the collections of the fourth century.

The most obvious organizational principle of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* is parallelism itself, which is a principle of order that subordinates actual historical relationships to the more formal interest in the setting of comparable lives side by side. Plutarch's collection is a self-enclosed space for the comparative analysis of the character of notable political figures. His famous distinction between narrative history and biography is consonant with the formalism of his project; since he is interested in character, what he will offer is the telling detail that reveals "the signs of soul" more readily than grand actions on the stage of world history (*Alexander* 1.2).[22] In the next passage, his comparison of his selective method with that of the portrait painter reinforces this formal view of his own task, to endow with form or fashion into a pattern (*Alexander* 1.3).[23]

The focus in the *Parallel Lives* on a type of man, as well as the use of the strategy of parallels, suggests an interest in sameness, but in fact Plutarch is just as interested in difference. A good example is the opening of the parallel biographies of Demosthenes and Cicero, where Plutarch lists the many ways in which the lives of the two men were genuinely parallel and remarks, "If there should be a competition between nature and chance, as between artists, it would be difficult to decide whether the one made the men more alike in their characters, or the other in the circumstances of their lives" (*Demosthenes* 3.3–4). The comparison of the two men that concludes the two biographies, however, belies the apparent mimetic artistry of nature and chance and shows the two to have been different indeed (*Demosthenes and Cicero* 1–5).

In his treatise *De mulierum virtutibus*, Plutarch wrote what one recent interpreter has called "a kind of programme for the parallel lives."[24] There he remarks: "In fact, there is no better way of learning

22. See also *Galba* 2.5, *Fabius Maximus* 16.6, and the discussion by Pelling, "Plutarch's Adaptation," 142–43.

23. The verb that Plutarch uses to describe his portrayal of the lives of his subjects by means of signs is εἰδοποιέω.

24. Stadter, "Plutarch's Comparison of Pericles and Fabius Maximus," 156.

the similarity and difference of male and female virtue than by putting lives beside lives and deeds beside deeds, just as if they were works of art. The virtues take on certain differences—peculiar colors, so to speak—because of the underlying habits, bodily constitution, food and way of life" (243 B-D).[25] This is suggestive of the impetus of the comparative strategy of the *Parallel Lives*, in which Plutarch works by comparison and contrast to reveal the "peculiar color" that virtues (and sometimes vices) take in each parallelism.[26] The function of the pairs is to underscore difference, a point that will become important when we turn to consider fourth-century collections.

Collecting different examples of virtue was important to Plutarch because his biographical project was an overtly moral one; the *Lives* were to function as ethical guides for his readers, and indeed for himself, as he says, "using history like a mirror, and somehow improving and moulding my own life in imitation of their virtues" (*Aemilius Paulus* 1.1)[27] His interest in types did not block his interest in the telling detail, because specificity was crucial to a complex understanding of virtue and vice. Further, despite what some have seen as the static quality of his treatment of character, a recent study has argued persuasively that in some of the *Lives* Plutarch developed a more nuanced understanding of character, "a middle ground of noble but not pure virtue" that fell "between crass vice and the pure philosophical virtue," and it is certainly the case that τύχη, fortune or chance, was allowed a role in many of his explorations of character.[28] Such allowances for the possibility of change mark another facet of Plutarch's interest in difference and will also be an important factor in tracking transformations in the writing of biographical collections in the imperial period.

The formal aspect of Plutarch's collection, then, can be imagined as a self-enclosed space in which a series of parallel lives provides the framework for a play of similarities and differences. By contrast, the principles by which Diogenes Laertius's collective biography is or-

25. Trans. ibid., 156.

26. See the discussion in ibid., 156–57. Plutarch's use, again, of an artistic simile to describe the basic principle that underlies his collection is an apt illustration of Stewart's point that "the collection marks the place where history is transformed into space"—here, the "space" alluded to is that of the artist's canvas.

27. Trans. Pelling, "Plutarch's Adaptation," 143.

28. Brenk, *In Mist Apparelled*, 176–81; see also Russell, "On Reading Plutarch's Lives," 81–86.

ganized are overtly spatial and linear. The *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* uses categorization by geography in its division of the origin and development of Greek philosophy into two major schools, one Ionian and one Italian (*Vit.* 1.13; 8.1).[29] Each of these spatial divisions is further subdivided in terms of successions of teachers and pupils; in other words, this collection is dependent upon a formal principle of linearity in its construction of a διαδοχή that allows the reader to plot philosophical relationships through time.

A recent characterization of Diogenes Laertius's work—that he produced "a gallery of memorable philosophers"[30]—is apt in this context, since the self-enclosed space of his collection is like an art gallery with two main wings, each of which has rooms filled with portraits arranged according to intellectual affiliation. Thus within the overall structure of differentiation, there is a principle that supports sameness, and this is further underscored by the fact that many of the individual biographies follow a standard format: an account of the philosopher's ancestry; his education, training, and travels; his founding of a school; his character, mannerisms, temperament, and habits, usually illustrated with anecdotes and pithy sayings; important events of his life; description of his death; details of chronology; works and doctrines; documents like letters; and addenda.[31]

However, even though there are formal structures of organization within the major division of the collection that emphasize sameness, Diogenes Laertius was as interested in difference as Plutarch. The fact that his collection focuses on a type, the philosopher, and even that "types within the type" can be discerned in terms of lines of philosophical filiation from teacher to student, did not prevent Diogenes from presenting a collection in which each sage had "his [own] brand of wit and wisdom."[32] In fact, Diogenes' interest in the kind of detail that makes a life distinct shows itself in the wealth of anecdotes and apothegms that not only fill out most of the biographies in his collection but also overshadow the doxographical sections.[33] His collection is a good example of the premise that, "in the collection, the more the objects are similar, the more imperative it is that we make gestures to distinguish them."[34] Compared with the numbing repetitiveness of the doxographies and lists of works, his colorful characterizations have a sparkle that no typology could dim.

29. There is also a third group composed of "sporadics" like Heraclitus who belonged to no specific school; see *Vit.* 8.91.
30. Momigliano, "Ancient Biography and the Study of Religion," 172.
31. This schema is adapted from Dillon and Hershbell, *Iamblichus: On the Pythagorean Way of Life*, 11–12; it is a summary of the findings of Delatte, ed. and comm., *La vie de Pythagore de Diogène Laërce*, 54–63.
32. Momigliano, "Ancient Biography and the Study of Religion," 173.
33. See Mejer, *Diogenes Laertius and His Hellenistic Background*, 3–4; 91–92.

Turning to Philostratus, one encounters a collection devoted to yet another type of man, the sophist, and yet another formal principle of organization, temporality. Philostratus's work is based on a distinction between an "ancient sophistic" founded in the fifth century B.C.E. by Gorgias and concerned with philosophical themes, and a "second sophistic" founded by Gorgias's younger contemporary Aeschines and concerned with historical themes (*VSoph.* 1.481). His real interest, however, lay not so much in exploring the difference between these two kinds of rhetoric as in establishing an historical pedigree for the sophists of his own era—hence his insistence that the Second Sophistic was "second" and not "new" (*VSoph.* 1.481).[35] Despite this introductory interest in rooting the present in a tradition, Philostratus does not in fact find real historical continuity in the rhetorical movement that he wishes to discuss; between the time of the putative founder, Aeschines, and the sophist Nicetas in the first century (a gulf of almost four centuries), only three sophists are named, and these are dismissed as having had "no skill either in invention or in the expression of their ideas" (*VSoph.* 1.511). As Momigliano remarked, "Philostratus is unable to give real predecessors to his contemporary heroes."[36] This aspect of Philostratus's collection coheres with the theoretical view that "the collection replaces origin with classification, thereby making temporality a spatial and material phenomenon."[37] Collections have a tendency to become autonomous worlds.

Contrasted with Diogenes Laertius, who depicts "a world of the past which can still appear meaningful and coherent," the world Philostratus describes is "a world of the present which is all show and no substance."[38] What Philostratus creates in his collection is a world of attention that celebrates in encyclopedic form the intellectual movement of the second century, which he named "the Second

34. Stewart, *On Longing*, 155.
35. For discussion, see Bowersock, *Greek Sophists*, 8–9.
36. "Ancient Biography and the Study of Religion," 174.
37. Stewart, *On Longing*, 153.
38. Momigliano, "Ancient Biography and the Study of Religion," 174.

Sophistic" and of which he was a member. He did not himself invent this movement so much as create a literary space in which its most prominent members could be assembled and some of their main achievements narrated.[39]

In Philostratus's collection, each biography has a "sameness" based on the individuals' shared profession. Playing on the quotation above, "show" *is* the "substance" of each, and Philostratus's repetitious commentary on each sophist's rhetorical style and charm produces a certain tedium in the reading that sets up an expectation of "more of the same" as one moves from biography to biography. However, Philostratus has taken care to introduce difference into his biographies as well. In terms of formal composition, "no two *Lives* show the same method of treatment, a variety that may have been designed."[40] While the failure to be consistent in compositional style and presentation might seem "exasperating" to a modern reader,[41] this formal kind of variety is matched by the way in which Philostratus uses anecdotes and especially quotations of conversations and pithy sayings and retorts. These function to embed the individual sophists in a personalized context of social and political interaction; here too, as in the collections of Plutarch and Diogenes Laertius, there is a play between sameness and a sense of difference, the latter conveyed by the sort of gossipy detail that Philostratus clearly relished.[42] He was not interested in analyzing character or making moral judgments, but he *was* eager to show that his sophists were "characters"; hence his interest in the temperament, the quirks, and the habits of the "personalities" who gave rhetorical performances, and in the technical proficiencies and deficiencies that distinguished one performer from another.

COLLECTIVE BIOGRAPHY IN THE LATE FOURTH CENTURY

It should be clear by now that "to ask which principles of organization are used in articulating the collection is to begin to discern what

39. See Bowersock, *Greek Sophists*, 10, for a discussion of modern scholars' vindication of Philostratus's view that the Second Sophistic was a significant movement.
40. Wright, "Introduction" to *VS*, xiii.
41. Ibid.
42. See Bowersock, *Greek Sophists*, 15: "His information came to him directly, either from his own teachers or from others who had known the great sophists of the second century. . . . This is reporting at first hand."

the collection is about."[43] Further, when the principle of organization generates objects that are "the same"—whether they are philosophers, sophists, or politicians—there is a simultaneous drive to show how they are "different." How do these qualities of the collective biographies written in the imperial Roman era prior to the fourth century compare with the collections of the fourth century?

An intriguing angle on one answer to this question emerges in a passage from the prologue of Gregory of Tours's *Vita Patrum* (late sixth century). Ruminating on the title of his collection, Gregory says,

> Some ask whether we ought to say "Life" of the saints or "Lives." Aulus Gellius, however, and many other philosophers prefer to say "Lives." For the authority, Pliny, in the third book of his *Art of Grammar*, states: "The ancients spoke of 'Lives' but the grammarians do not think that the word 'life' has a plural." Therefore, it is plainly better to say "Life" of the Fathers than "Lives," because, although there is a diversity of merits and miracles, nevertheless one life of the body nurtures all men in the world. (*PL* 71.1010)[44]

With his conviction that the collection exemplifies a "life" rather than "lives," Gregory has in a single stroke both defined hagiography and demonstrated its difference from the earlier collections considered thus far. If the fathers share a single life, it is because the subjectivity of holiness is the focus of the biographer, for whom the "diversity" of the particularities of their existences is only important insofar as it serves the ideal of sameness.[45] Further, the center of the personality is no longer human but divine; thus comparison of individuals is not only pointless but impossible. There is no longer an interplay between type and individual or between sameness and difference; rather, any real sense of difference between individuals evaporates to the extent that each one exemplifies the subjectivity that is the heart of the collection's interest.

43. Stewart, *On Longing*, 154.
44. Trans. Elliott, *Roads to Paradise*, 5–6.
45. *Subjectivity* is a term used in a variety of contemporary critical theories to describe a "self" not as an autonomous source of meaning but rather as a construct, the product of systems of cultural convention. The discourses of a culture not only set limits to how a self may be understood but also provide models or paradigms that are used to classify or represent that culture's understanding(s) of "selfhood." In this chapter, *subjectivity* does not connote the personal attitudes, moods, and opinions of an individual; rather, it refers specifically to religious and philosophical constructions of the self that present idealizations of human identity.

Gregory's thought about the appropriateness of designating a group of biographies as a single "life" is a real insight into the dynamic operative in the writing of hagiography. I argue that this "hagiographical impulse"—that is, the change in focus from "lives" to "life"—guided the writing of collective biography in the fourth century and accounts for the distinctive qualities of these later collections when compared with their predecessors.

By the late 390s, when both the *Historia monachorum* and Eunapius's *Vitae* were written,[46] the composition of individual biographies of men and women who were considered holy—whether ἅγιος in Christian terms or θεῖος in pagan terms[47]—was well under way. Averil Cameron has coined a memorable phrase to describe the seeming explosion of competing exemplary figures in this period with her suggestion that "Christian and Neoplatonic rivalries could seem to be expressing themselves in a war of biography."[48] If it was a war, however, it was one in which each "side" may have influenced the other; the *Historia monachorum* was the first attempt (that we know of) by a Christian author writing in Greek to produce collective biography, while, as several scholars have suggested, Eunapius's *Vitae* may have been intentionally composed as a pagan hagiographical counterpart to individual biographies of Christian holy men.[49] What we shall see, in any case, is that the hagiographical impulses of these two collections are indicative of a struggle for the power to define the authentic human being.

A preliminary issue involves intent: what are the overt indications in these collections that a model of human identity that is different from another is being constructed? First, Eunapius. Care has to be taken when evaluating his view of Christianity. As fragments extant from his *History* show, he was capable of moral critiques of pagans

46. For the *HM*, the *terminus post quem* is provided by the mention of the death of the emperor Theodosius I (in C.E. 395) in 1.64; see Schulz-Flügel, *Tyrannius Rufinus Historia Monachorum*, 17, 46–47, where the (largely uncertain) date of Rufinus's translation of the *HM*—possibly before C.E. 399 or between C.E. 401–405—gives a *terminus ante quem* for the Greek text. See Penella, *Greek Philosophers and Sophists*, 9, for the dating of Eunapius's *VS* to the fall or winter of C.E. 399.

47. See Bowersock, *Hellenism*, 16–17, for a discussion of the pagan distinction between ἅγιος (used of gods and sacred places) and θεῖος (used of people); Christians used θεῖος to designate the saintliness of persons as well as gods.

48. Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, 145.

49. See Alan Cameron, "Paganism and Literature," 14; Lim, *Public Disputation, Power, and Social Order*, 68; Momigliano, "Pagan and Christian Historiography," 81.

and Christians alike, a fairness in historical judgment stemming from his main themes, traceable to Plutarch, that "an evil nature inevitably surfaces and that good men are corrupted by circumstance."[50] Similarly, in the *Vitae* his philosophers, all pagan but one and all having lived under Christian emperors, are shown as men of *paideia* whose traditionally based wisdom is a reason for persecution but also for imperial recognition.[51]

What is not in question, however, is Eunapius's dislike of monks, especially those associated with Theophilus, bishop of Alexandria at the time of the destruction of the Serapeum in C.E. 391. For a pagan like Eunapius, the Serapeum was so sacred a place that it had infused the whole city of Alexandria with religion (*VS* 471). For here was a temple where the devoted worshipper could see the lips of the statue of Serapis illuminated by a sunbeam, so that, as Rufinus reported, "it seemed to the onlooking people that Serapis was being greeted with a kiss by the Sun" (*HE* 11.23).[52] Eunapius calls the monks whom he associates with the destruction of the Serapeum "the polluted ones" and compares Theophilus with the mythic Eurymedon, commander of the Giants who made war on the gods (*VS* 472).[53] He is even more scornful of the monks who came to live in the desecrated sacred places of Alexandria and Canopus:

> Then they brought into the holy places the so-called monks, men in appearance [ἀνθρώπους μὲν κατὰ τὸ εἶδος] but swine in their way of life, and they both permitted and themselves performed openly thousands of unspeakable indignities, thinking it pious, however, to show contempt for things divine. For at that time whoever wore a black cloak and wished to behave disgracefully in public had the power of a tyrant, to such a height of virtue had mankind come. (*VS* 472)[54]

Eunapius criticizes not only what he perceives the monks to have done to pagan religion and holy places but also one aspect of the

50. See Sacks, "Meaning of Eunapius' History," 63.

51. For examples of men of *paideia* sought after by emperors, see *VS* 465–66 (the philosopher Eustathius) and *VS* 478 (Maximus and Priscus); for persecution, see *VS* 478–81 (Maximus) and 498 (Oribasius); for discussion, see Penella, *Greek Philosophers and Sophists*, 118–28.

52. Trans. Trombley, *Hellenic Religion and Christianization*, 1: 132.

53. For the destruction of the Serapeum as well as the contemporaneous attacks on the temenos of Isis at Canopus, see ibid., 1: 22–23; 129–30; Trombley's reference to "Theophilus' liquidation gangs" (p. 23) is an apt characterization of Eunapius's view.

54. Trans. Blockley, *Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire*, 2: 81.

monks' own religious practice, the veneration of martyrs. According to Eunapius, martyrs were not only false gods, they were dead men who had once been criminals and slaves:

> For they [the monks] collected the bones and skulls of criminals who had been put to death for numerous crimes, men whom the law courts of the city had condemned to punishment, made them out to be gods, haunted their sepulchres, and thought that they became better by defiling themselves at their graves. "Martyrs," the dead men were called. (*VS* 472)

The sharpness of Eunapius's characterization of the cult of martyrs is understandable in the context of two particular Christian practices. The first, which Eunapius refers to later in the passage above as the transformation of temples into tombs, was the demolition or conversion of pagan temples to churches or martyria (*VS* 473).[55] The second was the demotion of pagan gods, including such major divinities as Artemis of Ephesus, Aphrodite of Gaza, and Serapis of Alexandria, to the status of demons.[56] As the Christian historian Theodoret observed about the activities of the monk Thalaleios at a temple in Gabala, the "ancestral folly" of pagan worship was exposed as Thalaleios "abolished the temenos of demons and raised a great precinct to the splendidly victorious martyrs, substituting the divine dead for the falsely named gods" (*HR* 28.5).[57] As far as Eunapius was concerned, this perspective did not constitute the kind of "beholding with the intellect" that he was concerned to represent, but was, rather, the result of looking with "deceptive eyes of the body" (*VS* 473).

Eunapius concludes his negative profile of the monks with a reference to the sorrow that "men who have intelligence" (τοῖς νοῦν ἔχουσι) felt over the destruction of the temples (*VS* 473). This invocation of νοῦς, an important feature of Neoplatonic psychology and metaphysics, as characteristic of the type of person that Eunapius admires provides a telling contrast with the monks, who are human only in appearance.[58] For men who have νοῦς are men of *paideia* understood as Hellenic culture and spirituality, and they embody an ideal that the monks have flouted in their attacks on pagan holy places and in the anti-civic nature of their worship of "criminals and slaves."[59] This passage of the *Vitae* offers the most explicit indication of Eunapius's focus on contrasting types of subjectivity.

A sense of differing models of human subjectivity can be discerned in the *Historia monachorum* as well. Indeed, its tendency to show disregard for the traditional culture and learning that gave to pagan men of *paideia* a "shared imaginative landscape" is evident in several of its anecdotes.[60] Rather than claiming the ideal type of the philosopher for Christianity as Theodoret did when he asserted that the monks were better philosophers than the philosophers (*Cure* 12.19–37, esp. 26), the author of the *Historia monachorum* adopts a more combative tone. For example, the eminent Evagrius is introduced as a "wise and eloquent man" (ἄνδρα σοφὸν καὶ λόγιον) who "often went down to Alexandria and refuted the philosophers of the Hellenes [τῶν Ἑλλήνων τούς φιλοσόφους] in disputations" (*HM* 20.15). In this passage, the "ancient magic of Greek words," the λόγοι so central to the rhetorical culture of late ancient learning,[61] is appropriated for a Christian monk, who turns his eloquence against a faceless group, "the philosophers." In this brief anecdote, *paideia* seems to be both affirmed and denied, yet the affirmation of secular wisdom in fact works to hollow out its traditional cultural significance.

This somewhat ambivalent attitude to learning appears again in a story about another monk, Theon, of whom the *Historia monachorum* reports that "by grace [χάριτι] the man had learned three languages and was able to read in Greek, Latin and Coptic" (*HM* 6.3).[62] On the one hand, Theon's learning is regarded as a charism; but on the other,

55. See *VS* 471, where Eunapius discusses the destruction of the temple of Serapis as the fulfillment of an oracular pronouncement by one of his philosophers, Antoninus. On the Christian practice of converting temples to their own use, see Trombley, *Hellenic Religion*, 1: 108–47.

56. See Trombley, *Hellenic Religion*, 1: 99–108.

57. Trans. ibid., 1: 107.

58. On the role of νοῦς in Iamblichean Neoplatonism, see Shaw, *Theurgy*, 70–72; 88–97; 147–48.

59. On Eunapius's view of Hellenism as a "spiritual force," see Penella, *Greek Philosophers*, 144–45; Fowden, "Pagan Holy Man," 37. Bowersock, *Hellenism*, 9–12, discusses the use of the term *Hellenic* to mean "pagan." Brown characterizes "the sharpness of the challenge . . . summed up in the persons of the monks" in terms of their subversion of "a cultural and political monopoly": "[t]he monks could utter the *gros mots* that broke the spell of *paideia*" (*Power and Persuasion*, 72–73).

60. For the characterization of *paideia* as a "shared imaginative landscape," see Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, 41.

61. See ibid., 30 (whence the quotation) and 50 for a discussion of the importance of λόγοι. See also p. 73: "It was a commonplace of Christian polemic that the church had brought to the Roman world a wisdom and a moral code that had previously been the fragile acquisition of, at best, a few great minds."

62. On the contrast between worldly education and "the new *paideia* of desert ascetics," see Burton-Christie, *Word in the Desert*, 56–61.

his manner of learning "by grace" sweeps away both "the master-pupil relationship that had ensured the continuity and the characteristics of the 'Civilization of *Paideia*'" and "the patient re-creation, in every generation, of the 'collective memory'" upon which the rhetorical culture of late ancient pagans depended.[63] And in any case, what really attracted the author about Theon was not his learning but his ascetic practices, his miracles, and his companionship with wild animals—not, perhaps, the kind of activities for which multilingual erudition would be needed. One is reminded of another Christian man of *paideia*, the monk Arsenius, who had once been tutor to the sons of the emperor Theodosius I. It was reported of him that "one day he consulted an old Egyptian monk about his own thoughts. Someone noticed this and said to him, 'Abba Arsenius, how is it that you with such a good Latin and Greek education, ask this peasant about your thoughts?' He replied, 'I have indeed been taught Latin and Greek, but I do not know even the alphabet of this peasant'" (*AP*, Arsenius 6).[64]

Pagans are present in the *Historia monachorum* primarily by their absence. The few scattered references to pagans that the text does include all begin by defining them negatively; they function as the "other" against which monks can be shown to possess superior qualities. In contradistinction to the monks, pagans are never given names, even when individual pagans appear as actors in an anecdote. When pagans appear in groups, for example, they are presented in one case in a negative religious light as participants in a "demonic cult of idolatry" who parade around the countryside with their idols in a state of madness; in another case, they are described in social terms as lower-class "riff-raff" whose only purpose in life seems to be to taunt a monk (*HM* 8.24–26; 19.2). This is a typological strategy similar to that of Eunapius's religious and social references to (unnamed) monks and contributes to the discourse of division that underlies the interest of both collections in recommending a particular form of subjectivity, in part at the expense of another form.

63. The quotations are from Brown, "Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity," 9–10, and *Power and Persuasion*, 40. On the importance of circles and institutions of education and scholarship in paganism and particularly in Neoplatonism, see Fowden, "Pagan Holy Man," 38–48.

64. For discussion, see Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, 73; Burton-Christie, *Word in the Desert*, 58.

When pagans appear as individuals in the *Historia monachorum*'s anecdotes, they fare no better: one is a flute-player notorious for indecent behavior; another steals vegetables; yet another, characterized as "the champion of the pagans," is described as "fierce and savage" (δεινός τις καὶ ἄγριος) (*HM* 19.3; 10.34; 8.36). The state of being ἄγριος, savage or wild like an animal, is repeated in another anecdote, this time of a group of pagans (*HM* 19.9). The use of this adjective with its bestial and uncultivated connotations expresses well the "other," the negative type of human being against which monks, "a real army of angels" at the opposite end of the human spectrum, are implicitly being defined (*HM* 8.19).

But there is more to these cameo appearances of pagans than this. If the kind of ascetic discourse in which the *Historia monachorum* participated depended on "strategies of negation and exclusion" in order to define itself against both human and demonic "others," it was also a discourse of *in*clusion,[65] and here the strategy of the *Historia monachorum* differs from that of Eunapius's *Vitae*. For in each instance in which pagans appear in this text, they are all converted to Christianity through the intervention of a monk (*HM* 8.29, 37; 10.33–34; 19.3–5, 8–9). In fact, in one of the stories of mass conversion reported in the *Historia monachorum*, the author states that "many of them [i.e., the former pagans] entered monasteries and are still living there today" (*HM* 8.29). The pagans are not only converted but become monks themselves. In terms of constructing forms of subjectivity, the *Historia monachorum* appears as the more aggressive of the two collections, in that it not only presents a model of human identity but also shows how that model transforms its own "other" into itself.[66]

REPETITION AND OTHER LITERARY TECHNIQUES IN COLLECTIVE BIOGRAPHY

Indications of an awareness of competing models of human identity can thus be found in both of the collective biographies under consideration here. In spite of this, however, I would refrain from charac-

65. For a discussion of this way of viewing ascetic discourse, see Averil Cameron, "Ascetic Closure and the End of Antiquity," 157. On the importance of demonology in the ascetic definition of the self, see Valantasis, "Daemons."

66. See Markus, *End of Ancient Christianity*, 16 and passim, for an overall argument regarding the absorption of the secular into the sacred in late ancient Christianity, which Markus connects specifically with the "spread of an ascetic mentality."

terizing these works as overtly polemical in their overall intent and would prefer to place them in the context of the following comment by Averil Cameron: "What was taking place in late antiquity in intellectual and imaginative terms was surely a competitive process of system construction, a persistent impulse towards definition."[67] From the "key methodologies" that she finds at work in this process—metaphor, imagination, narrative, and categorization—I would choose two, metaphor and narrative, as particularly relevant to the "system construction" that I see as basic to the collective biographies studied here, and I would like to develop them in a way that will be relevant to an investigation of the means by which each collection presents its own distinctive vision of subjectivity.

In the earlier tradition of writing collective biographies, as I have suggested, formal principles of organization allowed for a play of sameness and difference. Subjects were classified according to types—politicians, sophists, philosophers—but within the types there was room for exploration of differences in character, talent, intellectual affiliation, and so on. In the late fourth-century collections of Eunapius and the author of the *Historia monachorum*, however, such a play of sameness and difference is no longer a distinguishing mark of the formal properties of the collections. This is so because the type, whether philosopher or monk, has been assimilated to an ideal of human identity itself. The individual lives that make up the collection have been so overwhelmed by the signifying power of this new sense of what constitutes a "type" that the former interest in real difference fades.

In other words, the formal principle that organizes these collections is a principle of repetition that has altered the "feel" of what a collection is and that guides the way in which individuals are represented. The impulse to repeat and so reinforce the features of this identity underlies the formal compositional technique of these collections. As Umberto Eco remarked about James Bond thrillers, the pleasure of these texts is their sameness.[68] Further, redundancy is reassurance; part of the delight for the reader who experiences the repetitions of such texts is the fact that they make familiar the qualities

67. "Ascetic Closure," 156.
68. Eco, "James Bond," 96, quoted in Elliott, *Roads to Paradise*, 7–8.

of what is exemplary. If the same biographical profile is repeated often enough, differences in detail are no longer distracting.

When the interest of a collection is in depicting human identity by means of its exemplars, the result is a parade of metaphors each of which tells essentially the same "story."[69] That is, each part of the whole that is the collection functions as a metaphor of the whole. A contemporary literary theorist, W. J. T. Mitchell, has recently coined a term, *hyper-icon*, that captures the specifically *pictorial* function of such metaphors and in addition indicates their function vis-à-vis the religious ideologies that are the center of our two collection's interest. Hyper-icons—like Plato's cave—are pictorial images in which theories of knowledge are condensed. In particular, they play a central role in figurations of theories of the self and human identity. As Mitchell remarks, "In their strongest forms, [hyper-icons] don't merely serve as illustrations to theory; they picture theory."[70]

From this perspective, the individual "lives" that make up the *Vitae sophistarum* and the *Historia monachorum* can be seen as a series of icons that function as anthropological images, repeatedly picturing understandings of human identity in such a way as to bring out the religious vision of the collection as a whole. This view of the role of the individual units of such collections also helps to reestablish the integrity of the formal principle of composition of hagiographical collections, repetition itself. When viewed as a literary strategy in the service of religious anthropology, "la teinte monochrome," as Hippolyte Delehaye called hagiographical repetitiousness, takes on a more interesting hue.[71]

69. On redundancy, see Elliott, *Roads to Paradise*, 75. She utilizes Edmund Leach's concept of redundancy, which he derived from information theory, "where a high level of redundancy makes it easy to correct errors introduced by noise (interference)." Leach used this theory to explain the repetitive nature of myth, but his comments are applicable in the present context as well: "Now in the mind of the believer, myth does indeed convey messages which are the Word of God. To such a man the redundancy of myth is a very reassuring fact. Any particular myth in isolation is like a coded message badly snarled up with noisy interference. Even the most confident devotee might feel a little uncertain as to what precisely is being said. But, as a result of redundancy, the believer can feel that, even when the details vary, each alternative version of a myth confirms his understanding and reinforces the essential meaning of all the others" (*Genesis as Myth*, 9).
70. Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 49. (For clarity, I have hyphenated the term, whereas Mitchell does not.)
71. Delehaye, *Passions des martyrs*, repr. 1966, 223.

Turning now to specific analyses of these texts, and focusing overall on the presence of the "hagiographical impulse" in each collection, I shall discuss the *Historia monachorum* first, and then Eunapius's *Vitae sophistarum*. The analyses that follow deal primarily with metaphor and narrative technique and are organized around two theses: first, that the formal aim of the two collections in representing subjectivity correlates with the similar way in which each handles lives as metaphors, and, second, that the different kinds of religiosity that underlie the exemplary subjectivity of each collection can explain the narrative techniques that each uses.

ICONS OF THE ANGELIC LIFE IN THE *HISTORIA MONACHORUM*

Students of the *Historia monachorum* and allied collections such as Palladius's *Lausiac History* and Theodoret's *Historia religiosa* have frequently noted that the individual units of the collections are biographical sketches that often omit conventional biographical data like ancestry, place of birth and death, main achievements, and so on.[72] In literary terms, they have been described as "a free-ranging style of cameo portraits" in which "a single incident would often suffice for the author's purpose."[73] Insufficient differentiation among the subjects of the individual sketches of these collections has also been noted; for example, R. M. Price remarks about Theodoret's collection that it is "magnificent as a series of stories, but feeble as a series of portraits . . . to the point where most of the stories, accidental details aside, would equally fit most of his holy men."[74]

Another perspective different from the modern view of the "insufficient differentiation" in these collections is offered by Theodoret himself and can provide a useful gloss on the perspective of the *Historia monachorum*. In the prologue to his collection, Theodoret offers what is in effect a defense of selectivity as compared to completeness in biographical writing: "We shall narrate only a little of the life and actions of each man, and shall represent the character of the whole

72. See, e.g., Rubenson, *Letters of Saint Antony* (1995), 177 (on the *HM*); Canivet, *Monachisme syrien*, 69; Harvey, *Asceticism and Society*, 34–37; Miller, "Desert Asceticism," 143–44.

73. Harvey, *Asceticism and Society*, 34–35.

74. Price, tr. and intro., *Theodoret of Cyrrhus: A History of the Monks of Syria*, xv.

life through these few indicators" (ἀλλ' ὀλίγα τῶν ἑκάστῳ βεβιωμένων ἢ πεπραγμένων διηγησάμενοι, καὶ διὰ τῶν ὀλίγων τοῦ παντὸς βίου τὸν χαρακτῆρα παραδείξαντες) (*HR*, pro. 8). The part thus stands in a metaphorical relationship with the whole. This is a significant statement, because it means that, just as each individual biographical sketch of the collection functions as a metaphor of the whole, so also each anecdote within the individual sketches functions equally metaphorically to signify the life of a given biographical subject. Even the pretense of completeness is no longer necessary.

Unlike Plutarch's careful explanation of his selective method, which leaves the grand stage of history and focuses instead on the personal gestures that reveal the "signs of the soul" that make an individual unique,[75] Theodoret's method aims at displaying the single human identity that underlies his selections. Thus the different "graces" that are represented all have a single source in God. Appealing to 1 Corinthians 12.8–10, Theodoret lists these graces—words of wisdom, the ability to heal, working miracles, prophecy—a list that amounts to a description of the repertory of ascetic deeds that are repeatedly ascribed to various subjects in his and like-minded collections (*HR*, pro. 8). What looks to the modern eye to be poor portraiture is from the ancient perspective a testimony to the repeated instantiation of what Theodoret says that he is recording: "a life . . . that has emulated the way of life in heaven; we sketch the forms of invisible souls" (*HR*, pro. 3).

This distinction between "life" and "way of life" is found also in the *Historia monachorum* and is a crucial feature of this collection's use of individual biographical sketches as metaphors for the form of human subjectivity to which the text as a whole is devoted.[76] The concept of human identity that underlies the *Historia monachorum* implies a life lived in ever closer approximation to the paradigm of Christ himself. This is what the text describes as "the angelic life" (ἀγγελικὸν βίον); in the prologue, it is formulated as follows: "I saw there [in Egypt] many fathers living the angelic life as they continued to advance in the imitation of our Savior God" (*HM*, pro. 5). Powerful claims are made on behalf of the men who exemplify this form of

75. See n. 22 above.

76. The same distinction can also be found in the *VA*, whose title in Greek, Βίος καὶ πολιτεία, reflects the distinction made in the prologue, where the author states that he is giving an account of Antony's "way of life" (πολιτεία); see *VA*, pro. 3 (*PG* 26: 837A).

subjectivity: "[T]hrough them the world is sustained and through them also human life [ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη ζωή] is sustained and honored by God" (*HM*, pro. 9).

What the text actually describes, however, is not the βίος of these men but rather their "way of life," their πολιτεία, a term that is used consistently throughout the text to designate what is conveyed by the anecdotes that form each individual unit of the collection. The "way of life" is the form in which paradigmatic "life" itself is expressed in human terms. In other words, what I have called "the hagiographical impulse" transforms conventional biographical presentation by substituting for it qualities of a "way of life" that signify the underlying conception of human identity itself. It is in this sense that the individual units are biographical. A full account is no longer needed when the characteristics of a particular individual's life are metaphors that signify a subjectivity whose paradigm is divine.

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE IN THE *HISTORIA MONACHORUM*

What these icons of the angelic life essentially do is to picture the presence of Christ as "the root of the self" in the form of biographical anecdotes.[77] The narrative techniques of the *Historia monachorum* are consonant with this vision of subjectivity. For example, although the text as a whole is presented as the record of an intensely personal journey undertaken by the author, who emphasizes repeatedly his seeing and looking at the monks,[78] there is no physical description of these men. Instead, the reader's gaze is directed away from characteristics that would mark the monks as "personalities" and so detract from their function as signifiers of a subjectivity that they all share and that represents the highest religious potential of human nature. Thus, for example, when the author of the *Historia monachorum* writes about Ammon and his group of monks in the Thebaid, what he

77. The quotation is from Brown, "Saint as Exemplar," 13; see also Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, 144–46 for a discussion of "the fact that Christian mythology was built on biography" (p. 145) and p. 123 for the characterization of fourth-century hagiography as "the continual reworking and reenactment of idealized Christian biography, the pattern of Christian truth in action."

78. See, e.g., *HM*, pro. 3, 5, 7, 10; 8.48; 8.50; 10.1; ep. 1. On the function of the gaze in ascetic reporting, see Miller, "Desert Asceticism," 137–43.

chooses to report is that they "eat with their faces veiled" (*HM* 3.1). No features that would distinguish these men as individual characters are given. Most striking are the well-known descriptions of individual monks as looking like angels with radiant faces or being like angels in serene stillness (*HM* 2.1; 4.1; 6.1; 8.19). The dazzle that substitutes a divine luminosity in the place of human features in the faces of these men is part of the pictorial idiom that this collection uses as it presents human lives as metaphors of the angelic life.

Another feature of the narrative strategy of the *Historia monachorum* that guides the reader's interest toward the "life" that is signified by the biographical subjects' "way of life" is its spareness of form in narrative historical terms. The subjects are not situated in detailed sociocultural contexts. Additionally, there is little chronology apart from such vague markers as "not long before," "once," "earlier," "afterwards," and so on. Instead, the biographical sketches present their exemplary figures as though they were in an extended "middle" that takes the form of anecdotes that follow one another rapidly in a staccato-like fashion with little or no expository prose to weave them together as a continuous narrative. This disjointed style, however, creates a sense of restless motion and activity that is matched by the contents of the anecdotes themselves.

The anecdotes in this collection are primarily stories of action. As the author explains in his prologue, such "acts of power" (δυνάμεις) are directly connected to the relationship of the monks' way of life with Christ. He favors stories about performances of miracles of many kinds: exorcisms, healing the sick, defeating threatening animals, discerning the secret thoughts of others, raising the dead, walking on water—the list is long. He also favors stories in which the monks are pictured as the recipients of miraculous acts: they are fed by angels or otherwise receive miraculous food, they are granted instant knowledge of languages and the Scriptures, and in one exceptional case a monk is even taken for a visit to Paradise.[79] The other major form of anecdote features monks speaking in the first person, either telling stories about other monks (e.g., *HM* 8.14; 9.5–11; 10.3–12.16), or in

79. The index to Russell and Ward, *Lives of the Desert Fathers*, provides a convenient categorization of the various types of miracles and charisms present in the collection. For the visit to Paradise, see *HM* 21.5–12 (Macarius).

active conversation with others (including the author and his companions) as teachers (e.g., *HM* 1.22–62; 2.7–10; 8.16–23; 16.1–2).

The sense of movement conveyed by the way in which the anecdotes are assembled is thus matched by the contents of the anecdotes, whether the activities pictured by them are performative, as in the case of miracles, or dialogical, as in the case of conversations and teachings conveyed by direct quotation. The formal and material aspects of this collection's insistence on action deserve to be underscored because they are indicative of the understanding of religious anthropology that underlies the vision of the text.

The ideal of the angelic life is rooted in a form of spirituality that is heavily dependent on forward motion. Recall the author's statement that "living the angelic life" entails advancing steadily or continually going forward in the imitation of Christ (*HM*, pro. 5). As Robert Kirschner has noted, "the Christian holy man conforms to a highly specific model" because "his vocation is pre-eminently an imitation of Christ."[80] And, while I agree with his estimation that "[d]own to every detail of his being, the holy man is a divine revelation,"[81] it is important to remember that the form of subjectivity to which the *Historia monachorum* is devoted is dependent on a mimetic dynamic in which "the ascetic is constantly progressing but never arrives."[82] As Abba Poemen said about Abba Pior, "[E]very day he made a new beginning" (*AP*, Poemen 85).[83]

The ascetic is in constant motion, because he is called to ever more perfect imitation of Christ; but he never arrives, because a claim of perfect imitation would constitute a blasphemous claim to be fully divine. Thus to the statement of one interpreter that ascetics like those in the *Historia monachorum* cherished the conviction "that they were

80. Kirschner, "Vocation of Holiness in Late Antiquity," 112.
81. Ibid., 120.
82. Harpham, *Ascetic Imperative*, 43.
83. A particularly poignant story that makes the same point is told about the deathbed scene of Abba Sisoes: "The old men asked [Abba Sisoes], 'With whom are you speaking, Father?' He said, 'Look, the angels are coming to fetch me, and I am begging them to let me do a little penance.' The old man said to him, 'You have no need to do penance, Father.' But the old man [Sisoes] said to them, 'Truly, I do not think I have even made a beginning yet'" (*AP*, Sisoes 14). The same point is made by *HM* in a more discursive form in the teaching passages; see, e.g., *HM* 1.22–28; 8.14–15. See also Athanasius, *VA* 16–18, for yet another example of the topos of "a new beginning every day." (I thank Tomas Hägg for this last reference.)

recovering in their life in the desert a small taste of paradise," I would add, "with the emphasis on *small*."[84] Geoffrey Harpham has given a concise explanation of this phenomenon:

> The illusion that one had reached an ideal or perfect identification with Christ the Word was the most notorious and insidious of temptations, slamming the door closed at the very moment when one had proven oneself worthy of entering. Hence asceticism, the discipline of the essential self, is always defined as a quest for a goal that cannot and must not be reached, a quest with a sharp caveat: "seek but do not find."[85]

This theological perspective on the necessity of forward motion suggests that the subjectivity that lies at the heart of the *Historia monachorum* is a form of religious anthropology that views the subject as an "emergent person" or as an "evolving subject" in motion toward a divine paradigm.[86] In other words, both in its literary form and in its contents, the *Historia monachorum* is a collection whose view of human identity is based on a religious anthropology that features an ethic of perfectibility. Overall, then, this text is a specifically ascetic witness to the "persistent impulse towards definition in late antiquity,"[87] and its use of metaphor and narrative technique are well suited to its version of human identity.

ICONS OF NEOPLATONIC HOLINESS IN EUNAPIUS'S *VITAE SOPHISTARUM*

If the "embodied angels" of the *Historia monachorum* are maintained "in a fluid human state"[88] in both literary and ideological terms, what of the philosophers in Eunapius's collection? To move from the "old men" of the Egyptian desert to the cultivated philosophical circles of the eastern Mediterranean would seem to entail a major leap of imagination, and, in terms of differing social and political contexts, it does. Yet to the extent that *paideia*, one of the terms that

84. Burton-Christie, *Word in the Desert*, 232.
85. Harpham, *Ascetic Imperative*, 43.
86. I owe these phrases to Valantasis, "Constructions of Power," 801.
87. Averil Cameron, "Ascetic Closure," 156.
88. This phrase is from Valantasis, "Daemons," 53.

marked the identity of Eunapius's philosophers, had taken on religious overtones, expressing a "metaphysical exaltation of cultural values . . . invested with a kind of sacred radiance that gave it a special dignity of a genuinely religious kind,"[89] this move is not so radical. Philosophers no less than monks could be subjected to the metaphorizing process that forms part of the hagiographical impulse of biographical writing in the fourth century. Certainly, Eunapius had no doubt that "to master *paideia* was to embark upon the pagan vocation of holiness."[90]

Just prior to the extended simile of the biographer as lover (referred to at the beginning of this essay), in which Eunapius suggests that his work should be read as a record of "symbols of beauty," he refers to his literary predecessors (*VS* 454–455). Sotion and Porphyry wrote about early philosophers, and Philostratus filled in the gap between them by writing the lives of sophists. In the same sentence in which he refers to Philostratus, Eunapius states that "no one has recorded accurately the lives of the philosophers" (*VS* 454), seeming to imply that he is carrying on the project of Philostratus, although not for the same time period.[91] Contemporary scholarship has indeed viewed Eunapius's collection as "a conscious continuation of Philostratus."[92]

In my view, however, Eunapius's work is a very different kind of collection from that of Philostratus. In the first place, the title of his collection, "lives of *philosophers* and sophists," indicates that something has happened to the typological structure of his putative model. As Momigliano pointed out, "it was no longer possible to evaluate a Sophist simply in terms of his technical abilities. . . . The very category of Sophist has lost precise significance."[93] Furthermore, there is

89. Marrou, *History of Education in Antiquity*, 101.

90. Kirschner, "Vocation of Holiness," 106.

91. See Penella, *Greek Philosophers and Sophists*, 36: "[Eunapius] seems to imply that there have been four major philosophical crops; the philosophers down to the time of Plato, the philosophers from that time down to Sotion's time, the philosophers from Sotion's time down to Porphyry's time, and the philosophers from Porphyry on (i.e., those who are discussed in his own *Lives*)."

92. Momigliano, "Ancient Biography and the Study of Religion," 175; Penella, *Greek Philosophers and Sophists*, 17, has a brief but undeveloped reference to "Eunapius' model Philostratus." The same assumption is implicit in the volume of the Loeb Classical Library that includes the work of both Philostratus and Eunapius under the common title, *Lives of the Sophists*.

93. "Ancient Biography and the Study of Religion," 175.

only a feeble attempt by Eunapius to be inclusive in his assembly of the lives of the "crop" of philosophers and sophists with whom he is dealing.[94] He was not celebrating a movement characterized by a biographical type that admits of variation and difference as was Philostratus; rather, Eunapius constructed a "purified genealogy" that was designed to emphasize the divinity that lay at the center of the personalities of the subjects he assembles.[95] I think Eunapius's simile of the philosopher as symbol of beauty should be taken seriously as an indication of "the impulse towards definition" that defines his work as a collector. As in the *Historia monachorum*, the type has been assimilated to an ideal of human identity that is religious.

Specifically, the hagiographical impulse that guides Eunapius's collective biography and underlies its principle of repetition is the "religio-theurgic *sophia*" of Neoplatonism associated with Iamblichus.[96] Eunapius begins his collection with brief biographical sketches of Iamblichus's two predecessors in the Neoplatonic lineage, Plotinus and Porphyry. While he notes that Porphyry's biography of Plotinus is so complete that no one could add to it, what he chooses to say on his own account is revealing: "Altars in honor of Plotinus are still warm, and his books are in the hands of educated men, more so than the dialogues of Plato" (*VS* 455). Later reference to the learned Plotinus as possessing a soul with heavenly qualities reinforces the essential concordance between *paideia* and the divine nature of the men who embody it that will dominate Eunapius's presentation of his subjects (*VS* 456: Πλωτῖνος τῷ τε τῆς ψυχῆς οὐρανίῳ . . .). The presentation of Porphyry that follows the note on Plotinus contains some biographical detail, but the main focus is on Porphyry's wisdom, especially his "godlike discourses" and the depth and range of his knowledge, and on his religious practices, especially his practice of theurgy, his reception of an oracle, and his casting out of a demon (*VS* 457).

These two sketches already begin to reveal the basis for the principle of repetition that characterizes the interest of the collection as a whole: it is the theurgical view of the highest goal of human nature, its transformation to divine status. For the theurgist, every human

94. See Penella, *Greek Philosophers and Sophists*, 134–41, on "Themistius and other missing persons."

95. For the idea of "purified genealogy," see Lim, *Public Disputation*, 60.

96. Penella, *Greek Philosophers and Sophists*, 50.

soul was the receptacle of the gods, and the goal of every soul was to join what was divine in itself to the divine cosmos of the gods.[97] Eunapius views his philosophers and sophists as exemplifying this transformational process. While he describes himself as the beneficiary of the theurgical lineage of Neoplatonic teachers, Eunapius does not discuss the tenets of theurgical philosophy in his collection. However, his frequent use of the term θεῖος and cognates to describe his philosophers and especially his use of θαῦμα and cognates (over fifty times) to describe the wondrous qualities of these figures and the marvel that they provoke in others is certainly suggestive of an essentially theurgical view of their attainments.[98]

If the first two sketches give a sense for the kind of portrayal that is to follow, it is the third biographical sketch, that of Iamblichus, that provides the catalyst for the rest of the collection, and it does so in two ways. First, it implicitly sets up the careful crafting of lineage (which in part entails a strategy of exclusion) that guides the narrative interest of the collection, and, second, it exemplifies the way in which Eunapius utilizes anecdotes in order to portray his subjects as icons that function as anthropological images.

To the first point: as Robert Penella has pointed out, when Eunapius presents Iamblichus as the next in the Neoplatonic lineage after Porphyry, he "does not explicitly contrast the religio-philosophical orientations of the two philosophers."[99] There is no mention, for example, of Iamblichus's pointed critiques of Porphyry in the *De mysteriis*, particularly regarding what he viewed as Porphyry's misunderstanding of theurgy.[100] Instead, "he conveys a sense of the philosophical continuity that stretches from Plotinus through Porphyry to Iamblichus and beyond."[101] Where he does find difference between the two—a difference in literary style (*VS* 458)—it seems incidental to the overall *Tendenz* of the collection, which is to portray "the many roots and springs of philosophy" that had their

97. See Shaw, *Theurgy*, 5, 84–85, 110–11. See also Lim, *Public Disputation*, 59: "Increasingly [in the fourth century], a true philosopher was someone whose primary claim to consideration was divine inspiration." See also Fowden, "Pagan Holy Man," 37–38.

98. See *VS* 461 and 500 for Eunapius's place in the lineage he describes; for his use of θεῖος, θαῦμα, and cognates, see Avotins and Avotins, *Index*, 110–12.

99. *Greek Philosophers and Sophists*, 46.

100. See Shaw, *Theurgy*, 84–85 and passim.

101. Penella, *Greek Philosophers and Sophists*, 46–47.

source in the teaching of Iamblichus (*VS* 461); these are the philosophers that form the "purified genealogy" referred to earlier.

The philosophers who interest Eunapius and receive lengthy anecdotal treatment are all in some way tied to Iamblichus, mostly by direct academic filiation: Aedesius, Sopater, and Eustathius were students of Iamblichus, and Maximus, Priscus, and Chrysanthius were students of Aedesius. Sosipatra and her son Antoninus are included in this group by association as the wife and son of Eustathius. Eunapius thus presents a kind of "family tree" of Neoplatonists, and their interconnectedness is not only materially but also formally indicated by the narrative technique of Eunapius's approach to biography, in which stories about many of these figures are interpolated into the biographical sketches of others. This is, however, a family tree that has been carefully pruned. As Robert Penella has persuasively demonstrated, there are "missing persons," like the eminent Themistius and Eusebius of Myndus, and they are missing because they did not adhere to the specifically theurgical brand of Neoplatonism associated with Iamblichus and his followers.[102] In the present context, these omissions constitute a strategy of exclusion that underlies the principle of repetition that I see at work in Eunapius's collection.

A similar attempt to establish affiliation with Iamblichean Neoplatonism appears to have guided the way in which Eunapius presents the sophists in his collection. These men were not philosophers, but Eunapius is careful to associate them somehow with the Iamblichean tradition. Ten sophists are included, but only two receive significant narrative treatment. First is Julian of Cappadocia. In the first sentence of his sketch of Julian, Eunapius is quick to inform the reader that he "flourished in the time of Aedesius," one of the main figures in the transmission of theurgical Neoplatonism (*VS* 482). Furthermore, Julian is described in Neoplatonic terms as one who was able to comprehend "true beauty"; the numbers of his students and their devotion to him, described in religious terms (σεβαζόμενοι), is reminiscent of the description of Iamblichus's relationship with his students; and his house is described as resembling "a holy temple having the scent of Hermes and the Muses" (*VS* 482–83).

Apart from these descriptive passages that serve to connect this

102. Ibid., 134–39.

sophist with the religious identity that guides the collection, the one anecdote that Eunapius tells about Julian, concerning legal action brought by a rival group of students against Julian's students, serves not so much to characterize Julian as to provide a vehicle for the eloquence of Prohaeresius, pupil of Julian and Eunapius's teacher, who reduces the crowd to "a mystic silence," a clear religious reference (*VS* 484). Prohaeresius is the figure accorded the longest biographical sketch in the whole collection. Significantly, he was Christian, but Eunapius's only reference to this fact is very oblique: referring to the emperor Julian's ban on Christians holding chairs of education, Eunapius reports that "Prohaeresius was shut out of the field of *paideia* because he *seemed* [ἐδόκει] to be a Christian" (*VS* 493).[103]

Otherwise, Prohaeresius is described in pagan terms. He is compared with a famous historical figure from the classical past (Peisistratus) and with figures from Greek mythology (Geryon and Hermes); he is said to have a "daimon" and to be under the guidance of divine providence; he consults the hierophant of Eleusis (*VS* 488; 487; 486; 489; 493). Overall, Eunapius's view is clear: this man "surpassed the ordinary human type" and deserved the title, "the most divine Prohaeresius" (ὁ δὲ θειότατος Προαιρέσιος) (*VS* 492; 486). The force of the hagiographical impulse is perhaps clearest in this portrait of Prohaeresius, whom Eunapius presents as an icon of Hellenic holiness. The collection's formal interest in ideology has overshadowed the depiction of difference to such an extent that Prohaeresius's Christian affiliation is virtually erased as the repetition of one narrative detail after another connects the identity of Prohaeresius with the form of subjectivity that the whole collection delineates. Even in the presence of actual difference, sameness prevails.

The two major sophists, then, are made to conform to the ideal that organizes the collection. The very brief treatment of the remaining eight sophists is part of what I referred to earlier as the "feeble inclusiveness" of Eunapius's collection, yet even these eight are brought into the interconnected field of the figures that "bubble forth" from Iamblichus and that Eunapius regards as exemplary. All of them are in some way connected with the Neoplatonic circle that is the focus

103. On Julian's ban, see Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*, 84–85; see also the full discussion of Neoplatonic conceptions of *paideia* which formed the context of Julian's own ideas in Athanassiadi, *Julian*, (1992), 121–60.

of narrative attention, whether by association with the emperor Julian (the Neoplatonic hero of Eunapius's *History*), by association with Prohaeresius as rivals, or as a relative of one of the philosophical theurgists.[104] Of the remaining figures treated by Eunapius, the rhetorically minded physicians whose presentation he describes as a "digression," only one really captures Eunapius's narrative interest, and this is Oribasius, associated with the emperor Julian as his physician and described by Eunapius as a man whose medical art in imitation of the god Asclepius led him "as far as it is possible for a human being to progress towards the imitation of the divine"; indeed, "among the barbarians he was worshipped like a God" (*VS* 498). Even the "digressions" fall under the spell of the hagiographical impulse, which shows itself in these biographies in repeated indications of the replacement of character with divinity as the core of personality.

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE IN EUNAPIUS'S *VITAE SOPHISTARUM*

If the biographical sketch of Iamblichus is the catalyst for the construction of this "purified genealogy" in which philosophical sameness provides the basis for inclusion in the collection, the anecdotal treatment of Iamblichus's "life" can be seen as paradigmatic of Eunapius's narrative technique in the entire collection. As an examination of the anecdotes about Iamblichus will make clear, Eunapius is no more "complete" in narrative biographical terms than the *Historia monachorum*. In fact, in his *History*, which was itself influenced by the genre of biography, Eunapius rejects the use of chronology as a technique of narrative organization, because it induces the writer to include too many extraneous details that "spoil the nourishing and beneficial part of the feast of history." "This is not the way to play the flute," he remarks, and continues: "What do dates contribute to the wisdom of Socrates or the acuity of Themistocles? Were they great

104. Libanius and Himerius are both associated with the emperor Julian, and Acacius is presented as a rival of Libanius (*VS* 494–495; 497); Epiphanius, Diophantes, Sopolis, and Parnasius are presented as rivals of Prohaeresius; additionally, Epiphanius and Diophantes were also students of Julian the Sophist, as was Prohaeresius (*VS* 493–494); Nymphidianus was the brother of the famous Maximus (*VS* 497). For discussion, see Penella, *Greek Philosophers and Sophists*, 94–117.

men only during the summer? Rather, both alike exhibited and preserved their virtues and their skills repeatedly and continually."[105]

This rejection of dates as distractions from a proper view of character, based on viewing qualities that are "repeatedly and continually" evident, reads like an articulation of the "literary program" that underlies Eunapius's collective biography, in that it relies heavily not on chronology but on anecdotes that repeatedly instantiate an ideal of human identity.

The biographical sketch of Iamblichus is dominated by three anecdotes, all of them strikingly visual. In each anecdote, Iamblichus is placed in the company of his group of students, who function essentially as an audience for what Eunapius calls "the forceful demonstrations" of Iamblichus's "divine nature" (*VS* 458). Even the descriptive narrative passage that introduces the first of these anecdotes is indicative of the aura of the sacred that infuses the figure of Iamblichus. Eunapius says that "as they drank their wine he used to charm those present by his conversation and filled them as with nectar" (*VS* 458). Here Iamblichus is pictured as dispensing the drink of the gods to his students. This picture of Iamblichus is an appropriate introduction to the first anecdote, in which the students tell Iamblichus about a rumour they have heard: "A rumour has reached us through your slaves that when you pray to the gods you soar aloft from the earth more than ten cubits; that your body and your garments change to a beautiful golden hue; and presently when your prayer is ended your body becomes as it was before you prayed, and then you come down to earth and associate with us" (*VS* 458). Here the levitating, golden-hued Iamblichus is presented as a god, as though in demonstration of the theurgical view that "the theurgist was simultaneously man and god; he became an icon and *sunthema* [divine symbol or "signature"] in the same way as other pure receptacles."[106] As Iamblichus himself wrote, one aspect of theurgy can be described as "taking the shape of the gods" (*De myst.* 184.8).

105. The quotations from Eunapius's *History* are all from fr. 1, in Blockley, *Fragmentary Classicising Historians*, II.9. See Sacks, "Meaning of Eunapius' History," 57–59, for a view of Eunapius's history as "a moralistic pattern filled with simplistic characterization" (p. 59). See also Alan Cameron, "Paganism and Literature," 11: he suggests that Eunapius's "contempt for chronology" was a negative comment on the Christian chronicles being written in his time.

106. Shaw, *Theurgy*, 51.

Although he reports that Iamblichus laughed off this rumor as untrue, Eunapius himself does not appear to reject it by the very fact of narrating it, and in any case he goes on to report two "forceful demonstrations" of this figure's divine nature. In the first, Iamblichus's superhuman power of perception is shown when he discerns that a corpse has recently been carried on the path that he and his followers were taking; this capacity for spiritual discernment is noted again later in the collection, when Iamblichus is said to have the ability to "see with the mind" (τῷ νῷ θεωρεῖν) (*VS* 473).

The third anecdote leaves no doubt that what is being narrated is religious power in iconic form. In this anecdote, Iamblichus and his group are at two hot springs, one named "Eros" and the other, "Anteros." Iamblichus puts his hand in the first spring, utters brief formulaic words, and brings forth a boy with golden hair. The students, understandably "struck with amazement," follow their teacher to the next spring, where the same performance produces another boy, this one with dark hair. These boys, personifications of Eros and Anteros, cling to Iamblichus "as though he were their father" until Iamblichus restores them to the springs (*VS* 459). This anecdote depicts theurgy in action, with its fundamental aim of eliciting what is divine in the human soul in order to unite it with its responsive counterpart in the divine world.[107] The portrayal of Iamblichus being "embraced," as it were, by the divine figures of Eros and Anteros witnesses to the process of theurgic νόησις understood as "the act of a god knowing itself through the activity and the medium of the soul."[108] Furthermore, since "Iamblichus maintained that noetic contacts with the gods were more erotic than intellectual," his calling forth of these two figures in particular seems philosophically appropriate.[109] If one recalls Eunapius's simile describing his own work as biographer as that of a lover, as well as his frequent invocation of νόησις as characteris-

107. Ibid., 122–26.

108. Ibid., 121.

109. Ibid. See Shaw's comment on this anecdote in Eunapius: "We need not concern ourselves about the veracity of this fabulous tale to appreciate its iconic truth. Perhaps no better image for the theurgist could be portrayed than this: Iamblichus himself, seated by an overflowing stream, invokes its *Eros* and having called it out, joins it—through his own body—to its responsive *Anteros*. All theurgy did the same: situated in the stream of generation, the theurgist invoked the *eros* of this stream to awaken the *anteros* hidden in his soul; in the hieratic moment of joining the divine to the divine the theurgist himself became a creator" (p. 126).

tic of his subjects, the theurgical orientation of his collection begins to come into focus.[110]

When compared with the way in which the *Historia monachorum* uses anecdotes to portray a subjectivity whose exemplars are "emergent persons," Eunapius's handling of anecdotes in the *Vitae sophistarum* tends to portray a subjectivity whose exemplars are "finished products." I have emphasized the theurgical orientation of the biographical sketch of Iamblichus as paradigmatic of the whole collection, because Eunapius is fond of telling anecdotes in which ritual activities convey the divine status of his subjects, a status that is repeatedly invoked further by uses of the term θεῖος. He is also fond of indicating the oracular and prophetic qualities of his subjects. However, although Eunapius's individual sketches are like those in the *Historia monachorum* in that they function as metaphors that repeatedly exemplify the subjectivity of holiness that Eunapius is presenting, there is nonetheless a difference between the two collections in terms of narrative structure. While the *Historia monachorum*, as we have seen, does not embed its anecdotes in discursive or descriptive passages, and does not give physical descriptions of its subjects, Eunapius's *Vitae* does both, and I think this difference can be traced to the differing forms of religious subjectivity that underlie the two collections.

In discussing the features of Eunapius's collection that make it distinctive when compared with the *Historia monachorum*, I shall concentrate on the philosophers and sophists to whom Eunapius devoted the most narrative "space," since the very length of such portraits suggests that these were in Eunapius's view exemplars par excellence. I shall deal briefly with Eunapius's anecdotes, as well as some of his most pointed descriptions of his subjects' divinity, and then with the way in which they are embedded in narrative. My interest lies in exploring the particular way in which Eunapius, like the author of the *Historia monachorum*, has revised the rules of representation in such a way that sameness, and not a play of sameness and difference, dominates his activity as a writer of collective biography.

Anecdotes devoted to ritual activities as well as statements about divinity are prominent in the sketches of Aedesius, Maximus, Chrysanthius, Sosipatra, and Antoninus. Often the anecdotes are

110. See Avotins and Avotins, *Index*, 156–57, for references to νοῦς and its cognates.

connected with oracles. Aedesius, for example, once prayed to an oracle and received its response in a dream-appearance of the god. Awakening and "spellbound with awe," but unable to catch the precise words of the god, Aedesius discovered that the back of his left hand was covered with writing (*VS* 464). The divine words were inscribed on his body, surely a stunning ritual indication of what Eunapius later calls "the divine qualities of his soul" (*VS* 474).

Aedesius's student Maximus is pictured as being himself an oracle: all who listened to him "acquiesced in what he said as though it came from the tripod of an oracle, such a charm sat on his lips" (*VS* 473). An accomplished theurgist, Maximus is described by Eunapius as possessed of a voice "such as one might have heard from Homer's Athena or Apollo" (*VS* 473). The anecdote about his ritual activity, in which he invites a group to witness his animation of a statue of the goddess Hecate, making it smile and laugh and kindling the torches in her hands (*VS* 475), is clearly designed to evoke the atmosphere of the marvelous that surrounds such figures—and this in spite of the fact that later in his narrative Eunapius is critical of Maximus's arrogance once he became a member of Julian's court (*VS* 477). And, when he narrates the story of Maximus's arrest and execution in connection with a political conspiracy, Eunapius notes that it was "just as though in the person of Maximus they were punishing some god" (*VS* 480).[111]

Eunapius presents his revered teacher Chrysanthius as having "equal perfection in every branch of every type of wisdom, and was an adept in every branch of divination. Hence one might have said of him that he rather saw than foretold future events, so accurately did he discern and comprehend everything, as though he dwelt with and were in the presence of the gods" (*VS* 500). Although he reports no anecdotes that picture Chrysanthius's theurgical activity, he notes in two other passages his teacher's devotion to divination and his "passionate absorption" in such ritual activity (*VS* 474; 500). He remarks further about his teacher that "his kinship and affinity with the gods

111. For discussion of the so-called "THEOD oracle plot" at Antioch in C.E. 371–72 in which Maximus was involved, as well as imperial legislation against sorcery, see Trombley, *Hellenic Religion*, 48–72; see also Penella, *Greek Philosophers and Sophists*, 68–74. Penella notes that "despite [Eunapius's critique of] Maximus's and Priscus's blemishes, which serve to enhance Chrysanthius [Eunapius's teacher], Eunapius's representation of them is, in general, favorable and appreciative" (p. 71).

was so unceremonious and familiar that he had only to place the garland on his head and turn his gaze upwards to the sun, and immediately deliver oracles which, moreover, were always infallible and composed after the fairest models of divine inspiration" (*VS* 504).

Clairvoyance, prophecy, and oracular speech are also characteristic of Sosipatra, who is repeatedly described as a goddess. Presented in religious terms as having "bacchic and frenzied speech," she was taught, says Eunapius, by mysterious figures that her father believed to be "gods in the likeness of strangers" (*VS* 467–470). As Penella has noted, Sosipatra's son Antoninus carried on his mother's "religio-theurgic style," devoting himself to the "secret rites" of the gods in Canopus and acquiring fame for his prediction of the destruction of the Serapeum, which Eunapius describes as having gained "the force of an oracle" (*VS* 471).[112]

Anecdotes and other indications of theurgical activity and outright declarations of divinity such as these are embedded by Eunapius in discursive narrative passages that make reading his collection a different experience when compared with reading the *Historia monachorum*. There is no staccato-like movement in the *Vitae sophistarum*. Rather, Eunapius writes long descriptions of the grace, elegance, and charm of his subjects' speech and writing, as well as the effect that they have on their students. He emphasizes the heights of wisdom to which they have ascended, tellingly comparing three of these figures with Socrates.[113] He also provides some description of the political affairs in which some of his philosophers engaged; this is a feature of his text that functions to indicate the traditional role that philosophers filled in the exercise of power and conveys the sense of "old-world integrity" that Eunapius wants his reader to see in his subjects.[114]

These descriptive passages convey the status that his subjects hold as purveyors of *paideia* at its classical best. This kind of description is crucial to Eunapius's view of the essential alignment of *paideia* with Neoplatonism seen as a spiritual force. However, in compositional terms, the formal effect of these narrative passages is one of static portrayal, especially since the descriptions of erudition and eloquence are very general and repetitive.[115] Additionally, there is very little attention paid to technical aspects of philosophical or sophistic style as in Philostratus's collection, and there are very few of the long quotations from speeches that also mark the earlier collection. Eunapius has adopted a third-person style of narrative description, and this formal aspect of his collection coheres, I believe, with his tendency to present his figures as "finished," rather than as constantly in mimetic motion toward an ideal paradigm like the monks of the *Historia monachorum*.

112. Penella, *Greek Philosophers and Sophists*, 59.

113. *VS* 462 (Sopater); 492 (Prohaeresius's threadbare cloak and practice of going barefoot echo Plato's picture of Socrates in the *Symposium* 220A–B); 501 (Chrysanthius characterized as "the Platonic Socrates come to life again").

114. On the relationship between *paideia* and power, see Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, 35–70; for the quotation, see p. 67.

This "finished" quality is also carried in Eunapius's physical descriptions of many of his philosophers and sophists as larger-than-life figures who have transcended the confines of mortal bodies. Mimesis of a personal paradigm of divinity played no role in Iamblichean Neoplatonism, since there was no "person" to imitate. The goal, rather, was "to take the shape of the gods," as Iamblichus wrote in his *De mysteriis* (184.8). Further, as Eunapius notes in his prologue, he is offering his biographical sketches "for those who have the power to be guided towards what is most beautiful" (*VS* 455). Each person must exercise his own δύναμις in order to achieve the transformation that theurgy aimed to effect. Also, even though Eunapius can write about the students of Iamblichus that they "hung on to him as though by an unbreakable chain" (*VS* 459), the master-pupil relationship as Eunapius presents it functions more to establish lineage than it does to establish the "intensity of face-to-face loyalty" that was basic to the personalized mimetic dynamic operative among the monks of the *Historia monachorum*.[116]

In the Iamblichean form of Neoplatonism, "the body-as-tomb, 'riveted to the soul by sense experience' (*Phaedrus* 83d), became the vehicle through which the soul found its proper limits, thereby 'saving itself' and 'becoming liberated while still in a body.'"[117] It is in this philosophical context that Eunapius's physical descriptions of

115. Penella, *Greek Philosohers and Sophists*, 32, notes briefly that "some of [Eunapius's] sketches are little more than static portrayals or notes"; my point here is different.

116. The quotation is from Brown, "Saint as Exemplar," 10. For discussions of monastic interest in personal relationships, especially of the master-disciple variety, see Gould, *Desert Fathers on Monastic Community*, 17, 27, 37–46, 63–69, and Rousseau, *Ascetics, Authority, and the Church*, 19–32.

117. Shaw, *Theurgy*, 26; Shaw is quoting from Iamblichus, *De mysteriis* 41.10.

his subjects assume their significance for his overall project. Like the luminous Iamblichus, whose body during prayer is different from a mortal body, several of Eunapius's subjects are described as being similarly godlike in their persons. So, for example, Alypius is described as being very short; but, as Eunapius notes, "even the body *that he seemed to have* was really all soul and intelligence; to such a degree did the corruptible element in him fail to increase, since it was absorbed into his diviner nature" (*VS* 460). We have already seen the hand of Aedesius covered with divine writing. There is also the case of Antoninus, who "*seemed* to be human"; indeed, "he made rapid progress towards affinity with the divine, despised his body, freed himself from its pleasures, and embraced a wisdom that was hidden from the crowd" (*VS* 471). Chrysanthius, too, "was so completely emancipated from human weaknesses that, although a mortal, he was all soul . . . his body was so light in its movements that it would take a genuine poet to describe to what a height it rose aloft" (*VS* 504).

The "anatomy of visible holiness" that Eunapius employs is elsewhere evident, for example in his physiognomical description of Maximus's "winged eyes" that reveal "the agile impulses of his soul" (*VS* 473).[118] Perhaps most astonishing of all of Eunapius's physical descriptions, however, is his portrayal of his teacher Prohaeresius not only as larger-than-life—"he seemed to stand nine feet tall"—but as a statue (*VS* 487). At one point, an audience that has heard Prohaeresius speak "licked his breast as though it were the statue of some god" (*VS* 490).[119] Literally larger than life, Prohaeresius is best understood as a statue, and he is so far "beyond the measure of the human" that, as a statue, he is ritually adored by his audience (*VS* 492).

All of these descriptive passages point toward an understanding of religious subjectivity that is fundamentally aesthetic. Eunapius's subjects are like finished works of art. And, given the "aesthetic aspect of *paideia*," which is revealed in Eunapius's collection by his references to beauty of speech and physical form as well as by his understanding of his subjects as "symbols of beauty," this is not surprising.[120] In his study of the marble shield portraits from late ancient Aphrodisias, which may have decorated the philosophical school there, R. R. R. Smith describes one of these sculptures, a portrayal of an old philosopher. "This portrait," he observes, "was designed to represent an inspired, visionary philosopher, a man of the spirit, an impassioned thinker of divine thoughts." He describes the expression of the portrait as one of "an overriding intense, beatific spirituality."[121] This is a "panegyric in marble"[122] that is the counterpart in stone to what I would describe as the "literary statues" presented by Eunapius. His anecdotes of transformative theurgical activity, his ascriptions of divine nature, the narrative evocations of *paideia*, plus his physical descriptions all work to depict his figures as aesthetic religious icons who have achieved the transformation that the monks of the *Historia monachorum* pursue but necessarily never reach.

118. For the phrase, "anatomy of visible holiness," as well as a discussion of Eunapius's use of physiognomy, see Lim, *Public Disputation*, 58–59.

119. See also *VS* 492: a crowd "marvelled at his physical beauty and great stature, while they gazed up at him with an effort as though to behold some statue or colossus."

CONCLUSION

What I hope to have demonstrated in this essay is one aspect of the "translation" of Greek culture across temporal boundaries in late antiquity. In the literary world of the early imperial era, collective biography was a well-established genre. Focusing on the formal properties of these collections in order to provide a basis for comparison with collections written in the fourth century, the period in which Christianity emerged as a major player in late ancient culture, I have discerned not only a "translation" of culture in terms of the enduring appeal of a literary genre but also a "transformation" of culture in terms of the changes that this literary genre underwent.

Briefly put, this change can be described as a shift from biography to hagiography. Implicit in the perspective that has guided my discussion of Eunapius's *Vitae philosophorum et sophistarum* and the *Historia monachorum* is the view that religion played a fundamental role in this shift. Initially piqued by the largely unexamined but nonetheless confident assumption by several modern interpreters that Eu-

120. See Athanassiadi, *Julian* (1992), 189–91; 206–7 for a discussion of the "aesthetic aspect of *paideia*." For Eunapius's many references to beauty, see Avotins and Avotins, *Index*, 121.

121. Smith, "Late Roman Philosopher Portraits," 145.

122. Ibid.

napius was writing "pagan hagiography," I decided that a comparison of Eunapius's work with a "real" hagiography written in the same period might produce interesting results. Comparison of the two fourth-century texts both with each other and with their literary predecessors provided the key to the position that has guided this discussion: that is, that a fundamentally religious view of subjectivity accounts not only for the changes in what constitutes a collection per se but also for the differences in the rhetoric of each collection, rhetoric being understood here in the loose sense of "characteristic means or ways of expression."[123]

The most fundamental transformation to which Eunapius's *Vitae* and the *Historia monachorum* testify as collections is the loss of the concept of "type" as a meaningful category for the comparative evaluation of individual persons; but this "loss" is also a gain. By assimilating the type to religious convictions concerning human identity itself and at its best, Eunapius and the author of the *Historia monachorum* have provided eloquent testimonies to the powerful—and colorful—role that religious anthropology played in reshaping the ways in which human life was imagined in late antiquity.

123. Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, 13.

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11

The Syriac Life of Rabbula and Syrian Hellenism

G. W. BOWERSOCK

In 1865 J. J. Overbeck published for the first time the text of a manuscript in the British Museum that is the only surviving witness to a hagiographic account of the life and achievements of a fifth-century bishop of Edessa, Rabbula.[1] The manuscript, written in Syriac on parchment, displays an estrangelo hand that is generally agreed to date from the sixth century. Since Rabbula died in 435 or 436, this manuscript is relatively close to the bishop's own time, and the lack of any contamination from Theodoret's biographies of Syrian ascetics, the Φιλόθεος ἱστορία produced in 444/5, has led some to believe that the work was written very soon after Rabbula's death. Whatever the precise date of composition, this life is remarkably free from the legendary accretions that mark the lines about Rabbula in the Greek biography of Alexander Akoimētos, who is there credited with converting the future bishop of Edessa from the paganism in which he grew up. The life of Alexander also survives in a single manuscript but from the tenth or eleventh century, and its late date suggests that its substance may be a confection put together well after the Syriac life of Rabbula.[2] The Syriac life makes no mention at all of Alexander.

The Syriac text has been reprinted a few times directly from Overbeck's transcription, and it appears in an abridged form in the chrestomathy that concludes Carl Brockelmann's still indispensable *Syrische Grammatik.* It has attracted remarkably little attention from histori-

1. Overbeck, ed., *S. Ephraemi Syri Rabulae Episcopi Edesseni Balaei Aliorumque opera selecta,* 159–221. I am grateful to the participants in the Bergen colloquium, and in particular to the two editors of this volume, for comments on this chapter. Christopher Jones, who was among those present in Bergen, has done me the great service of commenting helpfully on several drafts, both before and after the colloquium.
2. De Stoop, ed., *Vie d'Alexandre l'Acémète* (*PO* 6, fasc. 5).

GREEK BIOGRAPHY AND PANEGYRIC IN LATE ANTIQUITY