

and verse sermons. The present work, a revision of the author's doctoral thesis, attempts to contextualize Ephrem's work in the theological politics of his era. Shepardson argues that Ephrem, geographically situated on the borders of the Christian Roman Empire, first in Nisibis and then in Rome, had a mission to promote the tenets of the Council of Nicaea, and that this included attacking the "Jewish" beliefs of subordinationist Christians by identifying them with God's rejected People. Thus, Ephrem tells us more about the Christianity than the Judaism of his time.

Shepardson's thesis is generally convincing, and comparison with the anti-Arianist polemic of Ephrem's Greek contemporaries Athanasius, Chrysostom, and the Cappadocians tends to support her argument. This reviewer's only quibble would be that apart from pages 32–33, citations from Ephrem's hymns are presented textually as prose. This obscures their genre as sung poetry and thus their impact on the audience, though Shepardson does refer to "liturgical anti-Jewish rhetoric" (158). It would also be interesting to speculate on the legacy of such hymns once their anti-Arian purpose had been forgotten and they were known only in written form and by the clergy and monks who would surely have thought they were directed only at Judaism.

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Authorised Lives in Early Christian Biography: Between Eusebius and Augustine. By **Michael Stuart Williams**. Cambridge Classical Studies. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. xii+262 pp. \$99.00 cloth.

What did it mean, for fourth-century biographers, to present a Christian emperor or holy man not only as imitating the heroes of the Bible—Moses, Elijah, even Christ himself—but as re-enacting in his own life episodes from the history of salvation narrated in scripture? What does these authors' apparent confidence in their ability to capture such re-enactments in their texts imply as to their conceptions of scripture, literature, time, and God? On what grounds did one contemporary, Augustine, come to reject any claim to parity between the Christian literature of his own time—including biography—and Christian scripture, even as he rejected the notion that God's saving plan could be read off the events of human history, much less discerned in the rise of a Christian Roman empire? These are the big questions raised, and to some extent answered, in Michael Stuart Williams's elegantly written book.

Williams takes as his subject the development of Christian biography across the mid- to late fourth century, when the genre hovered on the edge of becoming hagiography, but could still include such oddities as Eusebius's *Life of Constantine* and Augustine's *Confessions*—the works that bracket the present study. In framing his topic, Williams has made several striking choices, which give his book much of its distinctive character. First, he includes only Christian biographies; yet late antiquity produced a trove of non-Christian biographies as well, with interesting resonances with works studied here. Fourth-century Christian culture could not yet stand apart from the classical civilization in which all of the writers Williams studies were formed. Even Eusebius was a reader of Philostratus's *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, and a serious one at that (as Averil Cameron points out, "Eusebius' *Vita Constantini* and the Construction of Constantine," in *Portraits: Biographical Representation in the Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire*, ed. Mark J. Edwards and Simon Swain [Oxford: Clarendon, 1997], 164–66: an article cited by Williams [30 n. 21 *passim*], though he does not discuss this element of Cameron's presentation). Second, Williams's focus on literary issues—which already excludes historical context much beyond the lives of the authors he discusses—narrows further, to the point that even the texts he interprets lend little of their flavor to the book. Instead, works as diverse as Gregory of Nyssa's *Praise of Basil* and Jerome's *Life of Hilarion* are boiled down to the conceptions of textual authority that they imply, in relation to their appropriation of biblical narrative for their heroes' life stories. What is gained in clarity of conception does not entirely make up for what is lost in nuance and texture.

Third, and most important of the choices that frame this study, is its sequence of topics, from Eusebius's *Life of Constantine*, to Gregory of Nyssa's *Praise of Basil* and *Life of Moses*, to the *Life of Anthony* attributed to Athanasius and a series of ascetic lives by Jerome, to the *Confessions*. The movement is not a natural one. Not only is it not even chronological: more importantly, the sequence begins in the East, with Greek authors, but ends in the West, with a Latin writer whose access to Greek was limited and whose impact on the Greek tradition, in turn, was negligible. Why not follow the continued development of Christian biography in Greek, with writers like Theodoret of Cyrrhus (for whom Williams reserves some brief but tantalizing remarks)? And if the Latin West, then why Augustine, who seems to be a dead end for the nascent tradition of Christian biography? Why not, for example, St. Martin's biographer, Sulpicius Severus, on whom Williams has written a forthcoming article? True, Derek Krueger has covered some of the same ground on the Greek side (*Writing and holiness: the practice of authorship in the early Christian East* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press], 2004), as Williams is well aware, but there is surely more to be said, there and on the Latin side.

This final choice Williams explains in his introduction, writing that “for Augustine, at least by the time of the *City of God* . . . it was unacceptable for contemporary authors to feel capable of adding to sacred history . . . This book therefore aims to provide, at the very least, a coherent account of the context in which this attitude of Augustine’s was able to develop” (22). That is to say, this is really a book interested in Augustine’s thought about scripture, history, and God’s inscrutability, topics taken up in chapter 5, “The End of Sacred History.” Because Augustine was the author of the *Confessions*, as well as the *City of God*, and because the *Life of Anthony* plays such a pivotal role in his conversion—the narrative and spiritual crux of the *Confessions*—Williams has chosen to approach these aspects of Augustine’s thought via a study of Christian biography.

Against this background, Williams begins from the premise that for fourth-century writers, there loomed a “narrative gap” separating “late antiquity” or “the late Roman empire” from the world of the Bible. But as he himself eventually concludes, this decisive rupture between a “biblical” and a “modern” period was felt acutely only by Augustine—and only in his mature work at that. Here Williams cites, but perhaps does not follow far enough, Peter Brown, who writes, for example, “What is more surprising is the manner in which a remote past was held to be immediately available to late classical men” (“The Saint as Exemplar in Late Antiquity,” *Representations* 2 [1983]: 3). For the others Williams studies (and for the later Greek and Latin hagiographical traditions), the gap between Christian present and biblical past was easily closed, and it was precisely the saints who made this possible. Only for Gregory of Nyssa does Williams present explicit evidence that biblical figures might threaten to seem inaccessibly distant; and even here, the objections that Gregory anticipates—and seems to think easily dismissed—apply to the Old Testament patriarchs and Moses (61–62). The same problems would not arise in relation to New Testament figures, who lived under the very Roman Empire later ruled by Constantine.

In his conclusion, in many ways the most satisfying part of the book, Williams expands on this sense that late antique Christians did not, in general, view the biblical past as sharply distinct from their own time, and that this closeness to the scriptures found one of its most characteristic expressions precisely in Christian biography. Pausing briefly on Theodoret of Cyrillus’s *Historia Religiosa*, he writes that, for Theodoret and the culture he represents, “[God’s] actions could be as easily recognised and interpreted [in the present] as if the Bible were playing itself out once again in the world of late antiquity . . . [and] this new sacred history . . . was safely recorded and interpreted in contemporary Christian writings” (223–24). Augustine, that is, was the anomaly, with regard to the cult of the saints and the practice of hagiography as in many other respects. By contrast, for most late antique Christians the reenactment of key

moments of biblical narrative in the written lives of heroic contemporaries implied an open-endedness to scripture, inviting the reader to aspire to a similar heroism, which might allow him or her, as Williams puts it, “to join the ranks of authorised lives” (235).

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Landscape with Two Saints: How Genovefa of Paris and Brigit of Kildare Built Christianity in Barbarian Europe. By **Lisa M.**

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The reader must take the apparently whimsical title quite seriously. The book does not deal with the Irish saint Brigit or the French saint Genovefa (hitherto Geneviève) but rather with the impact that devotion to them made upon the landscapes of northern France and eastern Ireland in the early Middle Ages. Bitel focuses on the *realia* that survive from those periods but occasionally on what does not survive since many buildings or sites she refers to now lie in ruins; some lay in ruins even in the Middle Ages.

Why do the buildings carry such weight? “Once Germanic itinerants came through town gates, the city’s built environment would cast its Christianizing, romanizing spell upon the barbarians and make them human. This was the most lasting legacy of northern colonization by Mediterranean people: the notion of civilization as a process marked visibly” (16). These sentences encapsulate the author’s approach. Many church historians would argue that Christianity was the most lasting legacy or perhaps the introduction of Greek and Roman learning and ideas, but Bitel does not back down from this premise: Genovefa and Brigit carry less importance than the effects of their cults upon the local landscapes. Their faith also carries less importance; on two occasions (31, 37) the author speaks of how “Christians had invaded Gaul.”

Interpretative questions aside, Bitel has done a fine job. She begins with Paris before Genovefa, focusing on pagan Paris, touching first on the pagan structures and then on the Christian fondness—à la mode Martin of Tours—for bashing pagan statues and replacing them with Christians ones. She does not waste space trying to find tenuous links between a pagan cultus and Genovefa’s (anonymous) hagiography, but she does focus on the importance of Genovefa’s discovery of the body of Saint Denis, which in turn led to the construction of a shrine to the saint and thus to a growing Christian impact in Paris, a city that grew in importance as a capital of one of the sixth-century Merovingian kingdoms.