THOMAS HÄGG AND PHILIP ROUSSEAU (eds.), *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); xii plus 288; hardback: ISBN 0520 220676, $US50.00/£30.00.

This collection offers both less and more than its title might imply. It is not (and nor does it claim to be) a general survey of all the late antique texts that might be considered within the overlapping categories of biographical and panegyric writings. Nor do the different articles that make it up in any way demonstrate a uniform approach to those texts that have been chosen for consideration. Yet it is that very variety in method and argument that makes the collection valuable. The lack of overall synthesis allows the contributing scholars to cover a range of ancient authors and their works, and also to go beyond those texts, to relate their arguments to themes highly important to any study of Late Antiquity.

The Introductory chapter gives a useful survey of these general themes. As the editors observe, both biographical and panegyric works are highly ‘sophisticated’ texts, and it is overly simple ‘to regard panegyric as less reliable, because of its professed aim to praise, and to think of biography as (ideally) more historically based’ (4-5). Instead, with all such works one must consider the strategies of rhetoric and representation that an author may use, and at the same time the factors that must influence such a writer, notably ‘the ideals imposed upon them by literary convention and audience demand’ (18-19). At the same time, the editors emphasise that these texts represent important evidence for the ‘Christianization’ (21) of classical culture in the transitional period of Late Antiquity. Through such writings we may seek to trace the transition from ancient to Christian Hellenism, a process marked by the emergence of new models, by the transformation of old genres, and by an ongoing dialogue between Christians and pagans that ‘was made possible only because the figures and ideals represented, not just a common vocabulary, but also shared beliefs and ambitions’ (21). All of the diverse contributions to this collection relate in some form to one or more of these themes.

The difficulties raised by the literary analysis of biographical and panegyric texts receive their strongest statement in the contribution of
Averil Cameron (ch.3), in her discussion of two of the most debated texts of the fourth century, the *Life of Antony* attributed to Athanasius, in a sense the model Christian biography, and the ‘hybrid’ *Life of Constantine*. Noting that both Constantine and Antony are presented through the same hagiographical means (75-79), Cameron argues that in approaching the *Life of Constantine*, a work most often referred to as a historical source, ‘rather than judge the *Life* as if it were a sober attempt at an objective history of Constantine, we should read it as the life of a holy man, with the difference, of course, that this holy man is also an emperor’ (82). As she strongly maintains, such texts cannot be used as ‘innocent histories’ (83) of the individuals they describe. ‘The real Constantine lies beyond the text of [his] *Life* ... [and] it is difficult to say where, if anywhere, the “real” Antony lies’ (83).

Frederick Norris’ analysis of Gregory of Nazianzus’ *Funeral Oration to Basil of Caesarea* (ch.6) reinforces the need for caution. Norris emphasises that this text must be read as a source for Gregory as well as a source for Basil (140), and he highlights the interplay in the oration of ‘subtext and text, Gregory’s reputation and Basil’s honour’ (149). Even amid the panegyric, Gregory is prepared to criticise Basil, both in order to defend himself and to express his personal ideals, notably regarding Christian Hellenism, as will be discussed further below. Norris is still able to conclude that the *Oration* is ‘a fairly reliable source for Basil’s life’ (155), but it is very much a source that requires careful study. And the work of Robert Penella (ch.10) on the private encomiastic orations of Themistius comes to a similar conclusion. In Themistius’ *epitaphios* to his father, in his defence of his urban prefecture, and in a rhetorical exercise in praise of agriculture, each time ‘*encomium* accomplishes more than merely praising its subject’ (201). Such orations may seem trivial, but as Penella observes, these texts testify once more to the importance, flexibility and complexity of biographical and panegyrical writings in Late Antiquity (206).

Other contributions to this collection demonstrate a more positive approach to our texts. At the end of his discussion of the image of the teacher in the *Life of Antony*, Philip Rousseau (ch.4) concludes that ‘the hero of the *Life* is recognizably the man who appears in Antony’s letters’ (104-5), and therefore argues that the *Life* itself ‘may provide
REVIEW

no less assured an access to the monk’s own view of himself” (106). And in the final contribution G.W. Bowersock makes a similar claim. In his discussion not of a Greek text but of the Syriac Life of Rabbula (bishop of Edessa, died 435/6), Bowersock criticises the previous study by Peeters in 1928, who ‘tried to discredit virtually everything’ (256), and seeks to demonstrate that ‘the Life of Rabbula is a faithful record ... The author has painted an image of the saint in a realistic landscape’ (269).

However, there are difficulties with this extremely positive approach. Bowersock carries his rejection of scepticism too far, most obviously in his assertion that the detailed description of Rabbula’s renunciation of his property as ensuring that ‘his investment [in heaven] would be protected with profit accruing’, suggests in turn that ‘investments were familiar to the pagan Rabbula, and language of this kind could reflect his own account of his actions’ (265). Rousseau’s argument that the Life of Antony ‘may well at times reflect his [Antony’s] own assessment’ (106) seems likewise open to question. The potential historical value of such hagiographic texts is not in doubt, but Cameron’s final verdict on the two Lives she considers merits wider application. All these works ‘need to be considered, not as “sources”, but as texts’ (86).

With regard to the other central theme of this collection, the interaction of pagan and Christian culture and the emergence of Late Antique ‘Christian Hellenism’, the differing approaches of different scholars can again be marked. Gillian Clark (ch.1), in her analysis of Porphyry’s On the Life of Plotinus and the Order of His Writings and Iamblichus’ On the Pythagorean Way of Life, rejects outright the ‘Christian triumphalist’ tendency to read these Neoplatonic biographical works either ‘as a response to Christian challenge or as models of holiness that Christians sought to rival’ (29). Instead, Clark sees these works as one aspect of an ‘internal Neoplatonist debate about the relationship of human beings to God, and therefore about the way they should live’ (30). For her, the real value of these texts is that they reveal differences ‘not just between pagan and Christian, but between pagan and pagan ... detailed study of philosophic lives brings out the variety of pagan asceticism’ (45-6). By contrast Mark Edwards (ch.2), who also discusses Porphyry’s Life of Plotinus, concludes from
Porphyry’s presentation of his divine master that the *Life* should therefore be best described as ‘a Neoplatonic gospel’ (67). Rather than rejecting Christian influence on Porphyry, Edwards notes the parallels between this text and the Gospel of John, and while not all his ‘parallels’ are equally convincing, this argument emphasises the potential ‘common themes and elements ... influences or models’ (69) between pagan and Christian writing in Late Antiquity.

Other articles in the collection, beginning with Samuel Rubenson’s discussion of the Christian biographies of the fourth century (ch.5), concentrate more directly on ‘the larger question of the transformation of classical culture by the early Church ... how Greek *paideia* came to be replaced by Christian education’ (115). Whereas Rousseau emphasised Antony as a teacher debating with pagan philosophers on their own terms (96-98), Rubenson presents Antony as a simple (115) and even illiterate man (135), and argues that this complete rejection of classical *paideia* in the *Life of Antony* should then be contrasted to the *Lives* written by Jerome, in which this *paideia* and Christian asceticism are ‘harmonized’ (123), and by Gregory of Nyssa. This contrast is overdrawn, with Antony’s simplicity exaggerated and very little discussion of Jerome’s own famous struggles to ‘harmonize’ Christianity and classical literature in his own life. But Rubenson is correct that these various works do reflect an ongoing debate among the Christians of this period on the proper attitude to classical education. And as he observes, it is striking that the first references to a ‘purely Christian *paideia*’ (135) should occur in the *Life of Macrina* and the *Life of Pachomius*, ‘the two biographies of saints not belonging to the traditional world of Greek culture, the biographies of a woman and of a Copt’ (136).

The three articles that concern Gregory of Nazianzus’ *Funeral Oration to Basil of Caesarea* return to the same theme. As Norris observes, one of the purposes of the oration is to present a synthesis of classical culture and Christianity (144-5), a synthesis that was more important to Gregory than to Basil (155). The articles of David Konstan (ch.7) and Jostein Børtnes (ch.8) then expand on a specific aspect of Gregory’s adaptation of traditional culture, the ‘rhetoric of friendship’. Konstan contrasts Gregory of Nazianzus’ *Funeral Oration to Basil* with that of Basil’s brother Gregory of Nyssa (162). Whereas
the latter utterly omits any reference to Basil’s home and family, including himself, Gregory of Nazianzus places a much higher emphasis on ‘human ties’ (171), and Konstan concludes that ‘Gregory’s attitude toward friendship, like his style in rhetoric, had roots in his admiration for classical learning’ (177). Børtnes reinforces this argument, observing that Gregory drew on the language of Plato’s *Symposium* to express his ‘spiritual friendship’ with Basil, but he also goes further, to emphasise how Gregory ‘transforms the Platonic heritage’ (184). For in contrast to the original Platonic model of friendship between master and pupil, ‘the friendship between Gregory and Basil is construed, not in terms of submission and hierarchy, but in terms of equality’ (187).

This ‘transformation of culture’ in the fourth century is also the focus of Patricia Cox Miller (ch.10), in her discussion of ‘changes in the writing of collective biography’ (214). Miller argues that, whereas the early collections of lives compiled by Plutarch, Diogenes Laertius and Philostratus sought to distinguish the individual identities of their subjects, Eunapius’ *Lives of Philosophers and Sophists* and the anonymous *Historia monachorum* are organised by a ‘principle of repetition’ and ‘sameness’ (228). The βίος (‘life’) of the specific individual is less important than the model πολιτεία (‘way of life’) that the author wishes to present, be it the model of the Christian holy man (231-2) or the Neoplatonic philosopher of the school of Iamblichus (237). For Miller, ‘this change can be described as a shift from biography to hagiography’, for ‘religion played a fundamental role in this shift’ (249). The two models reflect a ‘struggle for power to define the authentic human being’ (222), the disregard for traditional culture visible in the *Historia monachorum* against Eunapius’ men of Hellenic cultural *paideia* (224-5). Thus the collective biographies both demonstrate one aspect of the ‘translation’ and ‘transformation’ of Greek culture, and also reflect an ongoing dialogue between Christians and pagans in the fourth century, two themes that are central to the value of *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity* as a whole.

David M. Gwynn
Keble College, Oxford