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A COMPANION TO
**LATE ANTIQUE
LITERATURE**

EDITED BY SCOTT MCGILL
AND EDWARD J. WATTS



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**A COMPANION TO LATE
ANTIQUE LITERATURE**

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PART ONE

LATE ANTIQUE
LITERATURE BY LANGUAGE
AND TRADITION

Introduction

Scott McGill and Edward J. Watts

This volume presents a set of essays highlighting the richness and creativity of late antique literature. Our description of that literature will surprise far fewer readers today than it would have throughout most of the twentieth century. A consensus existed then, especially in the Anglophone world, that late antique texts were generally derivative, uninteresting, and reflective of decline across the Mediterranean. Indeed, with a few exceptions (notably Augustine), late antique literature was largely dismissed if acknowledged at all.

The declinist approach that reigned in the twentieth century and relegated late antiquity to the dusk before the Dark Ages has not yet disappeared. But it has widely given way to responses that shed the old prejudices – however inscribed they remain in school curricula – and recognize the quality, interest, and value of late antique literature.

Late antiquity was an extremely productive time in literary history. A great amount of Greek and Latin texts in prose and verse survives from the mid-third to the early seventh century, the period upon which this book centers. Alongside that work, moreover, stand large corpora written in Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, Georgian, Pahlavi, Arabic, and a host of other regional languages. Taken together, the surviving literature from these centuries exceeds the sum total of surviving texts from the Mediterranean during the preceding millennium.

Late antique literature was also profoundly innovative. It was marked by modes of productive reception in which authors updated and transformed what came before them and by the emergence of new subject matter, new genres, new settings for literary production, new textual functions, and new

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reading practices (see Herzog 1989, p. 33). As a result, late antiquity has much to tell us about the dynamics of literary history: how the cultural past creates, and is created by, what succeeds it, and how traditions are endlessly in movement as they flow through the manifold channels of reception. What is more, late antique literature is an indispensable witness to a period of seismic cultural changes. The corpus of texts, with its huge size and variety, sheds much light on the late antique world across vast swaths of territory and across linguistic, religious, and class lines.

The chapters comprising this volume give an overview of the literature of late antiquity, while also providing a selective account of its reception history. The book centers on Greek and Latin texts; these were, of course, predominant in the literary culture of the late Roman Empire, which is the primary focus of this *Companion*. But the volume also expands to include literature in other languages. This reflects the multicultural and polyglot world of late antiquity, in which the literature of Greek- and Latin-speaking Romans was situated among and interacted with the texts of different kingdoms and peoples. The period was a time when a broad range of Greek and Latin texts crossed political, linguistic, and cultural borderlands into the emerging and vibrant vernacular literatures of the Mediterranean, the Caucasus Mountains, the Iranian Plateau, and the Arabian Peninsula. To get a more developed sense of the literature of the period, it is therefore crucial to break free of the Greek/Latin binary and to encompass a broader range of languages and traditions (Humphries 2017).¹ The creative energy of late antiquity can only be appreciated when the extent of its reverberations are recognized.

Late antique literature demands, too, that we be flexible with the binary classical/Christian. Late antiquity represented one of the great transitional eras in literary history. Its authors, especially but not exclusively those working in Greek and Latin, were trained to appreciate classical forms and rhetoric, and many developed great familiarity with the works of classical authors. This training deeply influenced both their conception of literature and the sorts of projects they undertook. While established classical genres and literary models often framed the work that late antique authors undertook, these men and women were not at all stuck in or constricted by the past. Instead, late antique authors recast the classical inheritance to create texts that reflected contemporary tastes and needs and that fit with new cultural and historical developments. Foremost among those developments was the rise of Christianity into a culturally and politically dominant force. The literature that accompanies the emergence of Christianity as a privileged religion in the Roman world represents a significant late antique innovation. Christian authors remade established genres and specific textual models from the classical past, but they also departed from that past by responding to a

separate authoritative tradition comprising the Scriptures and other Christian writings while producing texts in styles and for settings and uses with no precedent in classical culture. Christian literature thus lies both within and outside of the classical tradition; organizations of knowledge and of cultural history in which the classics stand on one side and Christianity on the other are entirely inadequate to deal with that body of material (Elsner and Hernández Lobato 2017, pp. 3–6).

The chronological limits of the late antique world cannot be precisely defined. We have chosen to center the volume on the period between the middle of the third century and the roughly first third of the seventh century. The boundaries we have set require both some explanation and some flexibility. The mid-third century represents a significant point of demarcation between the literature of the high Roman Empire and the literature that begins to emerge in the fourth century. While it is true that some authors like Plotinus, Cyprian, and Bardaisan stand astride this divide, most of the major developments we want to consider in Greek and Latin as well as in the various vernacular literatures take distinctive turns in the later third and early fourth centuries. To give just three examples, these years saw the flowering of Syriac poetry, the emergence of several new forms of Christian literature, and an expansion in the texts treated and approaches utilized by exegetical commentators.

It is also clear that many of these literary developments reach a natural end point in the first decades of the seventh century. This is the case with Greek poetry, for instance, whose last late antique representative is George of Pisidia, and is essentially true of Latin poetry, despite the history of Visigothic verse. There are also distinct and dramatic breaks in the Greek medical, philosophical, and astrological commentary traditions. Likewise, after Theophylact Simocatta and Isidore of Seville in the first third of the seventh century, there will be no major authors of Greek or Latin historiography active for more than a century. Admittedly, the date has less meaning in some areas, including Syriac and Coptic literature, and little significance at all in Persia. Still, the dramatic decrease in surviving Greek and Latin literature written after ca. 630 means that most of the essays in this volume do not understand late antiquity to extend beyond the first half of the seventh century.

While our chronological boundaries are relatively well demarcated, our definition of literature is a capacious one. The modern restriction of the word to creative works, particularly poetry, drama, and prose fiction, is alien to antiquity (Goldhill 1999; Vessey 2012, 2015), and we follow convention in the field of classical studies in applying the term to an array of texts that today would be classified differently. “Literature” is in our formulation a broad rubric, and it covers a wide range of textual means, both written and

oral, through which individuals in late antiquity represented, organized, and understood the world around them. We recognize that the line between the literary and the nonliterary/subliterary is sometimes uncertain. We acknowledge, too, some restrictions in our approach: For the most part in this book, the category “literature” comprises only texts to which authors and textual communities assign value that separates them from the purely functional and the disposable. This includes school exercises, which, even when they were throwaway student efforts, belonged to literate culture and were designed to train the young to attain some level of rhetorical skill. Those exercises can also be placed within the bounds of literature for the same reason that texts like technical treatises and laws can be: They defy attempts to classify them as nonliterary because they possess features, notably linguistic self-consciousness, representational strategies, rhetorical characteristics, and intertextual ties to authoritative textual models, associated with the literary. Intertextuality is, in general, another important marker of literature in our formulation. Literary works operate within or against (at times multiple) discursive systems with different histories; they belong to and participate in diachronic fields of marked textuality, including when they update and remake that inheritance. Paraliterary and metaliterary compositions – e.g. commentaries, epitomes, and handbooks, all of which are characteristic of late antiquity – are not separate from the literary, moreover, but are extensions of it.

A broad examination of the textual resources that were transmitted and transmissible in late antiquity provides an expansive view of literary production in the period. The essays gathered in the volume examine the forms, histories, characteristics, audiences, and functions of many different kinds of late antique literature. In the process, contributors demonstrate how modern analytic techniques developed primarily for a narrower band of literary forms can be applied productively to a wider group of texts.

The volume is organized into three sections. In Part One, the chapters consider the processes through which the literary outline of the ancient world was expanded as more authors began working in a broader group of languages. The chapters in this section present the diverse linguistic literary histories of the period, and they connect literature to currents in political, religious, and cultural history throughout the later Roman, Sasanian, and Arab worlds. Collectively, the bodies of literature reveal varied and sustained sets of literary projects through which authors over vast territories used literature to deal with topics and to articulate worldviews within and, at times, across the cultures of the late antique world.

The second and longest section of the volume considers a wide range of late antique literature. It is organized around the concept of a literary form. The concept includes genres, which are fluid and dynamic in late antiquity:

An important characteristic of late antique literature is the way in which authors pushed against and beyond inherited generic conventions and develop new variations on traditional genres (including by combining them) or new genres altogether. But “form,” as we are using it, is a more elastic term than “genre.” By “form” we mean a body of texts linked, sometimes in a broad sense, by formal properties, subject matter, method, tone, or function (or some combination of these). The texts might lie within or across genres, or they might lie outside of the traditional, recognized generic matrix. The category “form” provides a balance of coherence and flexibility, and it enables the section to cover a very wide amount of material. A clear sense of the variety and vitality of late antique literature emerges from the chapters. Contributors analyze the sets of characteristics that define the different literary forms and the ways that the forms reveal a distinctive late antique culture of literary experimentation and growth.

The final section of the volume considers the reception of late antique literature. It is, of course, impossible to deal exhaustively with the subject. The chapters instead examine particular epochs, as well as major individuals, in the reception history of late antiquity. Contributors consider the transmission of late antique texts, the interpretation of them in the respective ages, and the resonance they enjoyed. The chapters show how the literature of the period now known as late antiquity was made and remade over the course of its long and varied history. There are many late antiquities that emerge during its reception; with the past as our guide, we can expect that there will be many more in generations to come.

We are now at a time of reengagement, which has brought much late antique literature back from the brink of scholarly extinction and has led to considerable reevaluation of late antique texts and literary culture. This volume is an attempt to further those developments. Our strong wish is that the book will help scholars and students to understand late antique literature on its own terms. This, in turn, will enable them not only to know better the world of late antiquity but also to appreciate more deeply ways in which literary creativity can be expressed.

NOTE

1. Circumstances beyond the editors' control made a chapter on Jewish literature impossible. On that literature, see Fergus Millar, Eyal Ben-Eliyahu, and Yehuda Cohn, eds. (2013), *Handbook of Jewish Literature from Late Antiquity, 135–700 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

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CHAPTER ONE

Greek

Scott Fitzgerald Johnson

Greek in late antiquity is not easily categorized. It was a language of empire, a language of philosophy and theology, a marker of identity, a language of routine daily life and commerce, and, above all, a language with symbolic power for both the literate and illiterate in the language. Greek in late antiquity was a heritage language due the literary legacy which characterized it in the period, but it was also, in linguistics terms, a “prestige” language, a status signaled by the innumerable translations made out of Greek into all the early Christian languages, such as Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Ethiopic, Armenian, Georgian, Arabic, and Old Church Slavonic. As such, Greek held an innate value for speakers of other languages, who, over the course of late antiquity, developed their own claim on the language and, in certain cases, their own distinctive brands of Greek literacy and pedagogy. Thus, Greek in late antiquity took on a sociocultural role distinct from the literature written in it. This chapter investigates that sociocultural role and draws attention to the symbolic value of the language as a marker of identity in the period.

This sociocultural role was never divorced from the literature written in Greek both before and during late antiquity. The relationship between the two categories was perpetuated by the premium placed on Greek in the Roman educational system, especially in the eastern Mediterranean (Marrou 1956; Cribiore 1999, 2001; Too 2001; Van Hoof and Van Nuffelen 2015; Kaster 1983, 1988; Watts 2006). In other words, Greek was valued for the intellectual and literary riches to which it offered its readers access, in a similar manner to how it is still taught in university Classics departments today. Education allowed for advancement in society and participation in a much

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larger intellectual and social world than merely the local, where the quotidian language was often not Greek. The rhetorical training embedded in late Roman education was especially valuable, as in earlier centuries, for gaining public office and engaging literate society (Brown 1992; Quiroga Puertas 2013; Webb 2009).

The many Greek letter collections from the period, moreover, attest to Greek – paralleled, of course, by Latin – as a medium of intellectual communication across the late Roman Mediterranean (Neil and Allen 2015; Gillett 2012). Late antiquity is justly famous as a period of self-reflective correspondence, and many letter collections seem to have been drawn up by the authors themselves or at least by their immediate circles. This was the case for the Christian monastic founder Pachomius (Choat 2015) and the bishop Isidore of Pelusium (Evieux 1997), for example, as much as it was for the pagan orator Libanius (Bradbury 2004). Libanius’s collection reveals not just a skilled letter writer but also how his voluminous correspondence coincided with the real-world movement of Greek students and teachers throughout the eastern Mediterranean. Libanius’s letters thus reflect the evolution of Roman patronage networks within the late antique school system. One letter (*Ep.* 1098), to the Jewish patriarch Gamaliel in Jerusalem, concerns Gamaliel’s son, who studied Greek rhetoric with Libanius at Antioch after having studied with Libanius’s former pupil Argeios at Caesarea or Berytus (Beirut) (Stemberger 2014, p. 32).

At the same time, levels of Greek literacy varied considerably, and the language was often used as a blunt instrument at the barest functional level (Bagnall 2011). The key difference between the late antique role of Greek and our modern pedagogy of “classical Greek” is that these low-level exchanges in late antiquity were very much still Greek-in-use, even if they are formulaic and unsophisticated by comparison to the literary Greek we teach and prize today. This has certainly always been the case in the history of Greek – it was and remains a living language, after all – but for late antiquity we are privileged to have a marvelous record of these low-level exchanges, a record that does not survive for, say, classical Athens in the fifth century BCE (Horrocks 2010). Mountains of papyri from late Roman and early Byzantine Egypt attest voluminously to quotidian Greek.

The Egyptian papyri similarly attest to the near constant interaction between Greek and Coptic (Bagnall 2011, pp. 75–111). As its own medium of literature and exchange, Coptic developed alongside and in relation to Greek. Sociolinguistics of late antique Egypt is a vibrant field, and none of its researchers today would allow for one of the languages, on a cultural level, to be divorced from the other (Cribiore 2007; Papaconstantinou 2007, 2008, 2010; Bagnall 2009; MacCoull 1988, 2013). To put it differently,

“the Greek of Egypt” is not a real category for cultural study; instead, we should think about Greek in terms of what roles it was used for in tandem with the roles Coptic played at the same time (and these roles shifted over the course of late antiquity). This axiom is true for all of the many varied linguistic contexts in which Greek was taught and used (Johnson 2015a), yet it does not preclude the delineation of characteristic features of Greek in a given locale, such as Egypt (Gignac 1976; Fournet 1999).

Because Greek was the medium of theological exchange, it held a special value for the highest-stakes debates in late antiquity. There was a venerable legacy of Greek among Christians since, as everyone knew in the period, the New Testament was written in Greek and the first churches were all Greek-speaking (Porter and Pitts 2013a, 2013b; Karrer and Vries 2013). The same was largely true for the Old Testament, since the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible made by Jews in the Hellenistic period, was the dominant version of the Old Testament in earliest Christianity (Aitken and Paget 2014; Rajak 2009). All the indigenous early Christian communities translated the Bible into their own languages early in their history; such translations were, indeed, markers of their own Christian identity. But it was never forgotten that these were translations, and knowledge of the original Greek of the Bible, where available, was prized.

There has been a vibrant discussion in recent scholarship over why exactly Greek became the language of theological debate. Was it because Greek was venerated as the language of the Bible? Or was it a practical question, because Greek was the medium of power and law (the *Rechtssprache*) in the eastern Mediterranean under Rome (Millar 2006b; cf. Johnson 2015a, esp. pp. 8–17)? The technical terminology of Christian doctrine that developed over the course of the seven ecumenical councils, from Nicaea I (325) to Nicaea II (787), and in the numerous theological treatises emerging around and fueling these councils was hard won and could not be relinquished easily. But was institutional inertia the main driving force? I return to this question below, though suffice it to say that the relationship between this Greek technical terminology and Greek as the language of empire is complex.

Of course, theologians were not the first to coin technical terms and formulae in Greek. Philosophy had a long history of working out its logical and argumentative apparatus in Greek. Systematization of philosophy – Neoplatonism, in particular, but also Aristotelianism – was a trend characteristic of late antiquity across many genres and in several centers of intellectual endeavor. (See the “Ancient Commentators on Aristotle” series, ed. Richard Sorabji [<http://www.ancientcommentators.org.uk>]; Sorabji 2004; Gerson 2010; Falcon 2016.) The overlap of philosophical, legal, and rhetorical schools in the East – in Alexandria (Watts 2006), Gaza (Johnson 2015a,

pp. 31–35; Downey 1958; Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky 2004, 2006), Berytus (Hall 2004), Athens (Cameron 1969; Watts 2006), and Constantinople (Wilson 1996, pp. 28–60) – reinforced the above-mentioned value of Greek for social advancement through education while at the same time encouraging the attachment of value to the charisma of specific philosophical teachers and schools at these centers. Porphyry’s important output, not least the editing and publication of Plotinus’s *Enneads*, provided an indispensable educational tool in Greek, which was subsequently translated into Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and other languages (Johnson 2013; Magny 2014; Brock 1988, 1989b). Greek became, over the course of late antiquity, a type of holy language for Greek philosophy because of the canonical works expressed in it, such as Plotinus, Aristotle, and, of course, Plato himself, especially his later “cosmological” dialogues (the *Timaeus* above all) (Baltussen 2008; Tarrant 2007–2013). Translations by scholars like Calcidius (fourth century) into Latin and Jacob of Edessa (seventh century) into Syriac became standard in their own milieux but never existed wholly without reference to Greek (Magee 2016; Romeny 2008). Indeed, the eagerness with which Syriac Christian scholars repeatedly went back to the Greek originals for their Syriac and Arabic translations of philosophical and medical treatises shows the continued notional value of the language, even after the texts were readily available in other (albeit less accurate) translations (Brock 1983, 1991, esp. 2004). In the Latin West this direct access to Greek for philosophical work seems to have been lost after John Scotus Eriugena and even well before him in some quarters (Jeauneau 1987, pp. 85–132; Herren and Brown 1988).

Bringing these two strands together, I would emphasize that Greek was also the medium of disputation between Christians and Neoplatonic philosophers. This was already in evidence at the time of Origen’s *Contra Celsum* (248 CE), but in the sixth century, in the context of the vibrant commentary movement on Plato and Aristotle, many different thinkers engaged one another at a highly technical level in the medium of Greek. The literary debates between Simplicius, John Philoponos, and Cosmas Indicopleustes in Justinianic Alexandria are perhaps a high water mark of this type of engagement (Baltussen 2008; Anastos 1946, 1953; Pearson 1999; MacCoull 2006). It is clear that formal public debates also occurred regularly, sometimes modeled on the literary debates but also providing inspiration for literature that created imagined disputations from whole cloth (Cameron 2014). Connected to this technical literature are the many magical/theurgic (Burnett 1996; Noegel, Walker, and Wheeler 2003; Lewy 1978), numerological (Kalvesmaki 2013), and astrological (Hegedus 2007; Magdalino 2006) treatises produced by both Christians and Neoplatonists

(and others) in the period and shared across religious affiliation. These are evidenced by surviving treatises on such subjects but also in many papyri and casual inscriptions in Greek, often on moveable objects like incantation bowls, from throughout the eastern Mediterranean. Many of the Greek incantations are paired with other languages. A trilingual anti-demonic amulet in the Ashmolean Museum (Oxford, UK) dating to the fifth century contains inscriptions in Greek (the nonsensical “magic words”), Aramaic (anti-demonic incantation), and Hebrew (prophylactic psalm attributed to David), all apparently written by the same scribe (Bohak 2014, pp. 249–50). Thus, like other languages, Greek sometimes possessed magical properties, even if it never rose to the level of being a mystical divine tongue bearing a metaphysical code in its very structure, as did Hebrew, Arabic, and in some cases Latin.

Certain genres thrived in Greek during late antiquity, while others fell into disuse (Cameron 1992, 2006). Poetry became an area of vibrant experimentation (Agosti 2012). Nonnos of Panopolis (fl. ca. 430) was the author of the longest epic poem to survive from antiquity, the *Dionysiaca*, and he also wrote a fascinating paraphrase of the Gospel of John in epic verse (Accorinti 2016). Nonnos’s style was very influential and was imitated by a number of poets, some of whom wrote on classical themes and others on Christian (Whitby 1994; Agosti 2001). Poets such as Synesius of Cyrene wrote in a more hymnic or lyrical mode, mixing classical and religious material (Bregman 1982), while George of Pisidia in the seventh century employed verse for varied genres, including panegyric and biblical commentary (Whitby 1995, 2014). Eventually, classicizing, quantitative verse fell out of fashion, and in its place came liturgical poetry. Romanos the Melode, originally from Emesa in Syria, produced dozens of *kontakia* in Constantinople during the reign of Justinian (Maas 1906; Grosdidier de Matons 1977). These poems served as verse homilies, mostly on biblical subjects, and are written in complicated syllabic meters. Romanos’s style was itself developed from Syriac verse models, and Romanos shares many interpretative strategies with Ephrem the Syrian (Maas 1910; Brock 1989a).

Like poetry, historiography was an area of innovation and expansion. Histories in the classical mode continued to be written in Greek throughout the fourth to sixth centuries and into the seventh, though several texts survive only in fragments (Blockley 1981). The sixth century, with major histories by Procopius and Agathias, was the apex of this tradition (Cameron 1970, 1985). Contemporary with late classicizing history came a new genre of ecclesiastical history, inaugurated by Eusebius of Caesarea (Johnson and Schott 2013). Eusebius had many continuators: Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret in the fifth century and Evagrius Scholasticus in the sixth (Allen

1981; Whitby 2000). While these were narrative church histories, they followed chronology very closely. Building on the work of Julius Africanus, Eusebius also demonstrated an interest in the chronicle, another popular historical genre in late antiquity (Mosshammer 1979). Later texts such as John Malalas's *Chronicle* (Jeffreys, Jeffreys, and Scott 1986), the *Chronicon Paschale* (Whitby and Whitby 1989) and the *Chronicle* of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor (surviving in Syriac; Greatrex, Phenix, and Horn 2011) demonstrate the continued interest in literary models established in the fourth century. In the course of the seventh century Greek historiography slowed to a trickle, even as Syriac historiography, based partly on Greek models, thrived outside of the empire (Debié 2015).

Biography was another rich area of Greek literature in late antiquity (Hägg and Rousseau 2000; Williams 2008). Biographical texts were written about holy men and women, bishops, emperors, and other worthy subjects (Efthymiadis 2011–2014). Perhaps more than any other literary mode, biography in late antiquity intersects with fictional writing (or the modes of “fictionality” and “fictiveness,” in the terms of De Temmerman 2016). Much work has been done to show how the influence of the Greek novel and the early Christian Apocryphal Acts stimulated the writing of biography in a hagiographical mode (Johnson 2006), and it has been argued that the longest and most complex Greek novel, Heliodorus's *Aithiopika*, is indeed from the fourth century (Bowersock 1994). The lines between narrative fiction, biography, hagiography, and panegyric were frequently blurred in experimental literary texts throughout late antiquity (Cameron 2000). Formal, public panegyric has survived less in Greek than in Latin, but evidence exists that it was vibrant (Whitby 1998), and the corpus of Procopius offers competing examples of both panegyric and invective in connection with the life and deeds of Justinian (Cameron 1985). Certain related genres, such as miracle collections and apocalypses, took on a major role in shaping the Greek imagination around the supernatural and the end of the world (Talbot and Johnson 2012; Garstad 2012).

The recognized late antique modes and genres, such as poetry, historiography, and biography, are familiar from literary histories of the period. Less well known are the instances of Greek language and literary culture outside of the Roman sphere. Beginning before and continuing into late antiquity, Greek inscriptions in Bactria and Central Asia show the continued influence of Alexander's conquests in those regions (Millar 2006a). The “Throne of Adulis” in the Axumite Kingdom of Ethiopia, meanwhile, described by Cosmas Indicopleustes in the sixth century, retained a lengthy Greek inscription; it is one of numerous multilingual inscriptions on Ethiopian *stelai* from late antiquity (Bowersock 2013). At the end of our period, Theodore of

Tarsus (ca. 602–690), a native Greek speaker, became Archbishop of Canterbury and established the study of Greek among English clergy (Lapidge 1995). Despite the clear value of Greek for multilingual exchange throughout the Roman Empire and, indeed, far beyond it, no comprehensive study of Greek in multilingual environments has been produced that would complement the important work done on Latin for the whole of the classical and medieval worlds (Adams 2003, 2007, 2013; Adams, Janse, and Swain 2002; Mullen and James 2012; Mullen 2013).

Indeed, it is through the interactions between languages that one can glimpse the social role of Greek, a role which shifted over time in different communities. This role was often linked to translation, as noted above. Greek into Syriac is one well-studied vector that provides ample evidence over many centuries for gauging the place of Greek (Brock 1982, 1983). In general, the trend in Syriac in late antiquity was toward greater Hellenization in translation. This is notable because Syriac continued to thrive as a literary language throughout the medieval period and was never in danger of losing its role in the liturgies and thought of the Syriac churches. The movement toward Hellenization provides an indication that Greek theological terms held their own value after the fifth century and that the post-Chalcedonian theological arguments were often taking place with Greek as the *lingua franca* (Brock 1989a).

To take the example of the Bible, the Old Testament Peshitta had been translated very early (second century) into Syriac directly from Hebrew, perhaps with the Jews of Edessa doing some or most of the translating (Weitzmann 1999). In very few places does it show any interference from the Septuagint (Brock 1995, pp. 34–36). However, from the late fifth century on, the trend among Syriac (especially Syrian Orthodox) translators was to ape the Greek version: thus, the so-called Philoxenian (ca. 507/508) and Harklean/Syro-Hexaplan translations (ca. 616), made by Syrian Orthodox scholars, follow the Greek very closely, even to the point of imitating its word order and producing awkward Syriac in the process. This was a revisionist project, which feared that the standard, idiomatic translation of the Peshitta was being misused or misunderstood (by dyophysites, either “Nestorian” or Chalcedonian). This occurred even though, for the Old Testament, the Peshitta translation was very early and had been made from the original Hebrew. The desire to return *ad fontes* to the Septuagint, itself a translation, demonstrates the value of Greek for theological argument among non-Greek communities well into the seventh century.

Many ante-Nicene and Nicene-era Greek church fathers were translated into Syriac, and the availability of Greek theological and monastic texts in Syriac compares closely with what was available in Latin in late antiquity

(Brock 1995, p. 37). The habit of revising earlier translations for the sake of accuracy to the Greek occurred also for theological texts: the corpus of Pseudo-Dionysius was translated first by Sergius of Reshaina (d. 536), within a few decades of its composition in Greek, and this translation was revised by Phokas of Edessa at the end of the seventh century (Brock 1995, pp. 39–40). Philosophical and medical literature in Greek was highly prized by Syriac translators, and the “translation-movement” project at the court of Abbasid Baghdad was almost completely the work of Church of the East (aka “Nestorian”) translators (Troupeau 1991). Thus, translations of Aristotle, Porphyry, and Galen were translated from Greek into Syriac before being translated from Syriac into Arabic (Brock 1989b; Brock 2004). The *Categories*, for example, were translated multiple times into Syriac: the earliest in the sixth century, then revised in the early eighth century by Jacob of Edessa, and then again in the ninth century by Hunayn ibn Ishaq, one of the premier translators under the Abbasids. Therefore, in a period when the philosophical commentary tradition had ceased in Constantinople – the seventh and eighth centuries – the Greek tradition was being actively cultivated by Syrian Orthodox and Church of the East translators outside the Byzantine Empire.

This brings us back to the question of what forces promoted the value of Greek in late antiquity. By 700 the Byzantine Empire had seemingly given up its hopes of returning the eastern provinces to its fold (Haldon 2016). Yet the interest in Greek remained strong, and even intensified, in areas under Islamic dominion, where Arabic was increasingly the language of commerce and administration (Hoyland 2004). Indeed, some of the most prominent Greek writers of early Byzantium, such as John of Damascus and Cosmas the Melode, came from outside of the Byzantine Empire, but are today firmly considered Byzantine writers who contributed substantially to the development of late antique Greek literature. Was the motivating factor imperial, i.e. that these writers wanted their works read by Greek readers within the empire?

The answer depends on a combination of factors. Throughout late antiquity, both before and after Chalcedon, and before and after the Arab Conquests, Greek remained a prestige language for theological, philosophical, and literary (e.g. verse) writing. There was never a time, however, when it was not surrounded by writing in other languages. The church of Jerusalem in John of Damascus’s day, for example, was producing texts in Christian Palestinian Aramaic, Arabic, and Georgian at the same time John was writing his massive corpus in Greek (Johnson 2015a, pp. 58–88). Most scholars think John himself was fluent in Arabic and may have known a dialect of Aramaic as well, which only further emphasizes that John’s choice of Greek

was intentional (Griffith 2011). I would suggest the affiliation of the Palestinian monasteries with the Chalcedonian faith was one primary factor. For comparison, St. Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai, also Chalcedonian and thus under the Patriarch of Constantinople, retains one of the finest libraries of early Byzantine Greek manuscripts in the world (Mango 2011). At the same time, all the other early Christian languages are present there too, in great numbers, and the colophons of these manuscripts make it clear that several of them originated in Mar Sabas monastery near Jerusalem (according to tradition, the home of John of Damascus). Greek thus retained a prestige for certain writers even when other languages were flourishing in the same locations at the same times and, importantly, when Greek was not the language of daily life. Coptic largely replaced Greek in Egypt in the immediate aftermath of the Arab Conquests, a transition that occurred earlier and more completely than it would in Aramaic and Arabic contexts (Papaconstantinou 2012, Johnson 2015a, pp. 36–58).

I return, therefore, to the pedigree of Greek as a language for the communication of ideas. That is not to say that Syriac or Armenian, for instance, were not also vehicles for conceptual writing: they certainly were, and their literary histories are remarkable on their own terms, quite apart from Greek. However, the affiliation of Byzantium with Greek, from the time of Justinian on, provided a touchstone for Christian writers of all stripes, both within and outside the empire itself, and often under a different (Arabic-speaking) imperial power. This was the imperial influence, even if clearly not related to the borders of the Byzantine Empire. Entangled with the imperial influence is the fact that a rich Christian literary corpus, since the beginning, had been produced in Greek and had, importantly, provided the toolkit of concepts and terminology that allowed the writers of late antiquity the ability to interact with a heritage that went back to the New Testament. The association of the church with the Roman Empire from the time of Constantine further solidified the authority of this corpus. Additionally, the apparatus of argument in late antiquity, for the Christians as much as for the Platonists, was founded on received and accepted philosophical and logical writings in Greek from pre-Christian times. And likewise, on top of all this, the characteristic conservatism of liturgy and the increasing value of biblical translations from the Greek, especially in monastic and school contexts, reinforced the primacy of the language. Thus, the circles that perpetuated the use of Greek in late antiquity were in many ways strikingly different from those of the earlier Roman world yet nevertheless remained just as pivotal for the emergence of new forms of thought and new vectors of exchange in late antiquity.

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CHAPTER TWO

Latin

Ian Wood

Over the course of the fourth to sixth centuries Latin literature changed fundamentally, if not absolutely. The shift can be related to the broader shifts in religion, politics, and society, including Christianization; the failure of the Western Roman Empire; the development of the so-called successor states, with their different patronage systems; and a change in schooling. In the fifth century the core curriculum was based on what is now referred to as the *trivium* (grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music) (Marrou 1969). This division of education into the so-called seven liberal arts can be found in the *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* of the fifth-century African jurist Martianus Capella (Shanzer 1986), although the actual term *quadrivium* seems to have been coined in the sixth century by either Boethius (d. 524) or Cassiodorus (d. ca. 585), while *trivium* first appears in the Carolingian period. Both Augustine (d. 430) and Paulinus of Pella (d. post 461) refer to this traditional education. Already by the early sixth century, however, such an educational system was in decline, even though one can find some evidence for rhetorical schools in a number of cities, including Milan (for which we have the evidence of Ennodius of Pavia [d. 521]; Kennell 2000), in the post-Roman period. What evidence we have for schooling in the seventh century suggests that it was largely in the hands of the clergy: There was certainly some religious education at a parish level (we hear of children learning the psalms), and there are indications that episcopal households could act as educational centers. (Riché 1976.) So, too, could the courts of kings, although exactly what was taught,

and how it was taught, is unclear. Essentially, the urban education system of antiquity ended in the fifth and sixth centuries.

Equally important for the changes in Latin literature was the removal of the imperial court, which had served as a focus for certain types of public oratory, notably panegyric, while the collapse of the senatorial aristocracy removed an additional source of patronage and, indeed, of audiences and circles of literary production. Certainly the courts of the kings of the early medieval West could still function as foci for literary production, and literature could still be produced in aristocratic households (Hen 2007). But while some of this literature looked back to the traditions of oratory and letter writing that had been central to the imperial aristocracy of the fifth and sixth centuries, of much greater significance was the production of religious texts, and not least of works of hagiography. An ideal guide to the learning of educated Christians at the end of the sixth century may be found in Cassiodorus's *Institutions of Divine and Secular Learning* (Halporn and Vessey 2004).

A further complication was linguistic change. Although late antiquity saw the production of a number of grammar books, notably those of the fourth-century Donatus and the sixth-century Priscian, the Latin language – like any language – changed. There were sound changes and shifts in orthography, as well as changes in prosody and meter, with accentual meter replacing the stress patterns of classical poetry, and with rhyme coming to be increasingly prominent. As a result, the language of a seventh-century text seems radically different from that of a cultivated author of the fourth century, but what we might regard as proto-Romance was, in fact, the Latin of the day (Grandgent 1907; Wright 1982; Banniard 1992).

When considering the changes in literary production over the late antique period, it is useful to examine individual genres, although as we will see, there is considerable overlap between some forms of literary production. We will begin with the most official forms (panegyric and oratory in general). After a brief glance at philosophical writing, we will turn to poetry (which overlaps with panegyric) and epistolography (which overlaps with poetry, and occasionally with panegyric). Thereafter, we will look at history writing and at its relationship with what is sometimes called pseudo-history and with hagiography.

2.1 Panegyric and Secular Oratory

In many ways the fourth century was the golden age of panegyric (Whitby 1998; Rees 2012). Although the genre was not new, developments in imperial and senatorial public display from the reign of Diocletian (284–305)

onwards provided a context for the delivery of extremely elaborate praise speeches, initially in prose, although, by the beginning of the fifth century, also in verse. Thus, assumption of major office, including the imperial title, as well as the consulship, together with important anniversaries, provided an excuse for the public delivery of a panegyric. These were more than simple laudatory exercises, in that they also functioned as works of justification, explaining public policy or the political position of the individual being lauded. The most significant collection of prose panegyrics is that known under the title *Panegyrici Latini*, made in the reign of Theodosius I (379–395) by Pacatus, which gathers together a sequence of 12 panegyrics, covering the century from 289 to 389, from the days of the Tetrarchy down to the compiler's own offering (Nixon and Rodgers 1994). The collection was prefaced by Pliny's panegyric to Trajan, which served as a model.

Among other panegyrics of the late fourth century there are the orations of Symmachus, the first of which is addressed to Valentinian I (364–375), and Ausonius's *Gratiarum Actio* offered to Gratian (375–383) in 379 for granting him the consulship (Lolli 2006). Symmachus's flowery style, the so-called *stylus pingue atque floridum*, was thought particularly apposite for such formal addresses. The tradition of prose panegyrics continued into the fifth century, as can be seen in the fragments of that of Merobaudes for the *magister militum* Aetius (d. 454) (Clover 1971), and it even lasted into the sixth. Another fragmentary panegyric is that addressed by Cassiodorus to the Ostrogothic king Theodoric (493–526), who is also the subject of an extensive work by Ennodius of Pavia (Rohr 1995), although there is some doubt as to whether this was delivered as a spoken oration.

Equally characteristic of the public literary scene was the verse panegyric, which in the opening years of the fifth century became the dominant form of public address as a result of the works of Claudian, acting as the mouthpiece for the *magister militum* Stilicho (d. 408) (Cameron 1970; Schindler 2009, pp. 227–309). Claudian's verse panegyrics were highly elaborate allegorical exercises, which could even include discussion between the Olympian gods. Indeed, there is no hint of Christianity in his work, despite the fact that the audience by this time was almost entirely Christian; he himself, however, is described as a pagan by both Orosius (d. post 418) and Augustine. Claudian's verse panegyrics provided the model for Sidonius Apollinaris (d. ca.489), in the sequence of public poems addressed to the emperors Avitus (455–456), Majorian (457–461), and Anthemius (467–472), which he composed in the middle of the fifth century (Harries 1994; Watson 1998). Sidonius seems to have had no immediate successor in the West – a lacuna which can no doubt be explained by the collapse of the imperial court, although Sidonius himself did write a poem in praise of the Visigothic king Euric (466–484).

In Constantinople, however, the Latin verse panegyric was clearly still in vogue in the second half of the sixth century, as can be seen from the *In Laudem Iustini*, written in praise of Justin II (565–574) by the African poet Corippus (Cameron 1976, Schindler 2009). But even in the West, verse that was inspired by the tradition of panegyric did continue in the immediately post-Roman kingdoms. At the very end of the fifth century Dracontius (d. 505) wrote his *Satisfactio ad Gunthamundum*, as a plea for pardon for some unspecified political crime (Conant 2012, pp. 141–148). In the second half of the sixth century the Italian Venantius Fortunatus (d. ca. 600) wrote a considerable amount of verse for formal occasions at the Frankish courts of Merovingian kings, including praise poems and an epithalamium (George 1992, 1995; Roberts 2009). Fortunatus wrote in a style that has been described as “jeweled” (Roberts 1989, esp. pp. 138–142, 151), a variant of the earlier *stylum atque floridum*. He would seem to have learned his skills in Justinianic Ravenna.

Panegyric was, of course, only one genre of public oratory: In addition to his oration for Valentinian, Symmachus wrote a number of speeches, most famously the third *Relatio* (384), which argued for the restoration of the Altar of Victory to the Senate House (Barrow 1976). Also close in kind to panegyric and to epithalamia, marking imperial or aristocratic marriages, were funerary orations. Among the most significant of these were those delivered by Ambrose, bishop of Milan (374–397), for Valentinian II (375–392) and for Theodosius I (Liebeschuetz 2005). These, of course, were both laudatory and, at the same time, religious. As such, they point to the strong connection between secular and religious oratory.

2.2 Sermons

The fourth and fifth centuries were as much a golden age for the composition of sermons as they were for the composition of panegyric. Some of the finest preachers had been trained as rhetors, among them both Ambrose and Augustine (395–430), as well as the late fifth-century religious teacher Julianus Pomerius. Although we tend to understand sermons as essentially spiritual, there is no doubt that congregations in the fifth and sixth centuries appreciated them as rhetorical exercises (Maxwell 2006, pp. 1–64) and were stirred to strong emotion by them (Brown 2000, p. 248, on Augustine). The sermons of Caesarius of Arles (502–542) in the early sixth century were highly regarded and survive in large numbers, although many of those that are now attributed to him were either attributed to Augustine or are anonymous in the manuscripts (Klingshirn 1994, pp. 9–10). Other Gallic sermons

of the late fifth century are preserved in a collection known now as that of Eusebius Gallicanus, which seems to include works by a number of ecclesiastics, including Faustus of Riez (Bailey 2010). We know that Avitus of Vienne (d. 518) compiled a volume of sermons for the ecclesiastical year, some of which have come down to us, while others of his sermons, intended for specific occasions, notably the dedication of churches, were preserved among his letters (Wood 1986, 2014). That his sermons were assessed as oratorical displays is clear from the fact that in one of his letters he has to defend himself from the charge leveled by a fellow bishop of having wrongly stressed a syllable in the course of his preaching.

Of course, the theological content of a sermon was ultimately more important than its oratorical qualities. Sermons, indeed, overlap with full-blown works of theology. A number of the most important theological works of Gregory the Great (590–604), including the commentaries on Ezekiel and those on Job, were delivered as homilies. Drawing a line between literature and theology is thus extremely difficult – and not just with regard to homiletic writing. Augustine’s works are particularly challenging in this respect. It is useful, here, to remember Sidonius’s description of the library of his friend Ferreolus. The section closest to the seats intended for men included works that were distinguished by their eloquence, despite the difference of their subject matter and opinions: The authors shelved together are named by Sidonius as Augustine, Varro, Horace, and Prudentius, as well as Origen, in Rufinus’s translation – although he does note their varying doctrinal positions. The section closest to the seats intended for the women, by contrast, is described as holding the religious works. Apparently Origen and Augustine were valued by Ferreolus for their style more than their content.

2.3 Philosophy

Even nowadays it is possible to make a connection between Augustine and Varro, given the attention paid to the philosopher by the bishop of Hippo in the *City of God*. Just as one needs to note the overlap between panegyrics and sermons, so, too, one needs to remember that theology and philosophy were overlapping categories. Augustine’s *Cassiciacum Dialogues* belong firmly to the work of late antique philosophical thought.

Philosophy was to be found not only in the theological works of the fifth century. In addition to Martianus Capella, whose *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* constitutes an allegorical guide to the liberal arts, there is Macrobius’s commentary on the *Dream of Scipio*, which offers a philosophical and especially Neoplatonist reading of the cosmos (Cameron 2011, pp. 269–270).

A century later Boethius wrote the last of the great philosophical works of antiquity, the *Consolation of Philosophy*, while imprisoned in Ravenna in 524, awaiting execution on the orders of the Ostrogothic ruler Theodoric the Great. Although this is the most famous of Boethius's works, his output reflected the full range of learning noted by Martianus Capella, with volumes on music, arithmetic, and commentaries on Aristotle. In addition, he was the author of a number of short theological treatises dealing with Trinitarian questions (Chadwick 1981; Marenbon 2003, 2009).

2.4 Secular Verse

Although the late antique period can be seen as a golden age of panegyric and, indeed, of homiletic writing, its poetry tends to be less highly regarded, being unfavorably compared with both the Augustan Age of Virgil and Ovid and the Silver Age of Statius. Yet the verse of the period is not insignificant. We have already noted the verse panegyrics of Claudian and Sidonius. Claudian also left an incomplete poem on the *Rape of Proserpine*. Another substantial mythological work, the *Orestes*, was composed in the Vandal kingdom around the year 500 by Dracontius (Díaz de Bustamente 1978; Bureau 2003). Post-Roman North Africa, indeed, seems to have been a center of poetic production, much of it – including some of Dracontius's work – slight in scale (Kay 2006). A significant number of the poems collected in the *Latin Anthology* appear to have been written in late fifth-century Africa, among them the often risqué poems of Luxorius. Africa after the fall of the Vandals provided the setting for the last substantial secular, albeit not mythological, epic, Corippus's account of the campaigns of John Troglita against the Moors (Gärtner 2008).

The best-known secular poems of the period, however, are not substantial epics but rather works, often smaller in scale, that treat rather more mundane themes. Toward the end of the fourth century Ausonius, for instance, wrote works on his family, in the *Parentalia*, and on the professors of Bordeaux, where his own rhetorical career had begun, as well as his most famous poem, the *Mosella*, describing and musing on the landscape of the river valley (Green 1991, Sivan 1993). The contemporary landscape is also central to one of the most significant large-scale secular poems of the early fifth century, Rutilius Namatianus's now-fragmentary account of his journey from Rome, where he had been city prefect, to his homeland in Gaul, in 416 – the *De Reditu Suo* (Wolff 2007; Malamud 2016). Although the world that Rutilius describes is one that had recently suffered from the passage of the Visigoths, the gloss that he puts on the situation is one of imminent renewal,

ordo renascendi (Matthews 1975, pp. 329–376). It is unfortunate that the concluding books of the poem are lost, since they would have shed more light on the literary circles of Gaul, which at this time provided an audience for the one surviving late antique theatrical work, the *Querolus*, which deals comically with the problems facing a minor aristocrat of the period (Lassandro and Romano 1991).

2.5 Religious Verse

A contemporary of Rutilius, also belonging to the senatorial aristocracy – indeed even more socially distinguished – was Paulinus of Pella, the grandson of Ausonius. His great poem, however, while concerned with recent events, is religious in orientation. The *Eucharisticos* is Paulinus's thanksgiving to God for his survival, despite the disasters of the early fifth century that had led to his losing almost all his inheritance – which he narrates in some detail (McLynn 1995). Other poets of the period, writing perhaps slightly before Paulinus, also took as their subject matter the state of Gaul following the invasions of the Vandals, Alans, and Sueves, followed by the arrival of the Visigoths. Among the poems is the *Commonitorium*, ascribed to bishop Orientius of Auch, which, like the *Carmen de providentia Dei*, is sometimes attributed to Prosper of Aquitaine, turns the crisis into a springboard for spiritual exhortation (Marcovich 1989; Gillett 2003, pp. 138–143; Fielding 2014).

Perhaps the most influential of the Christian poets was the Spaniard Prudentius, who died ca. 413. Already in the early 380s he had written an attack on Symmachus's appeal for the return of the Altar of Victory to the Senate House (Tränkle 2008). In the long term the work that would have most impact was the *Psychomachia*, an allegorical text describing the conflict between vice and virtue. For historians of late antique spirituality, however, his *Peristephanon*, a collection of verses on Christian martyrs, and most especially Spanish martyrs, has provided more insights, illustrating the application of poems and hymns to the growing cult of the saints (Roberts 1993) – something that can also be seen in the poetry of Paulinus of Nola (d. 431). The tradition would continue throughout the fifth and sixth centuries and finds one of its most extended illustrations in the poetic *Life of Martin* by Venantius Fortunatus (Roberts 2002).

The main body of large-scale Christian poetic works from the period, however, is made up of versifications of the Bible, which both paraphrase and comment on the text (Herzog 1975; Nodes 1993; Green 2006). The earliest of these, Juvenius's versification of the Gospels, dates to the Age of

Constantine (McGill 2016). A second poetic version of the Gospels, the *Carmen Paschale*, was composed, probably in Italy, by the rhetor Sedulius in the first half of the fifth century (Springer 1988, 2013). A century later Arator, a north Italian protégé of Ennodius of Pavia, penned his versification of the Acts of the Apostles.

The New Testament seems to have attracted poets rather more often than did the Old Testament. The first major versification of the Heptateuch is ascribed to a fifth-century Gallo-Roman known to us as Cyprian (though some prefer simply to talk of the Heptateuch Poet). At the end of the fifth century Dracontius, alongside his other poems, wrote an account of the Creation in his *De Laudibus Dei* (Tizzoni 2012). At almost exactly the same time, and perhaps influenced by Dracontius's example, Avitus of Vienne set about versifying Genesis and Exodus, or rather, in the case of Genesis he versified one of Augustine's commentaries on the biblical book (Wood 2001). In addition to five substantial poems on the Old Testament, Avitus wrote a lengthy verse work in praise of chastity, which largely revolves around the piety of women of his own family.

Chastity, or rather virginity, was also the subject of one of Venantius Fortunatus's major, and most extended, religious poems, the *De Virginitate*, written for his patroness and friend, Radegund, the ascetic founder of the monastery of the Holy Cross at Poitiers. Like other of Fortunatus's poems, this proved a model to later generations, providing inspiration in particular for the late seventh-century Anglo-Saxon poet Aldhelm.

2.6 Letter Writing

Avitus and Venantius Fortunatus bring us to another of the major genres of late antique literature: letter writing (Sogno, Storin, and Watts 2017; Müller, forthcoming). Of course, the writing and preservation of letters was well established in the classical period, and, indeed, Pliny's letters were often regarded as a model, both as individual pieces and as a collection. The fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries can be seen as a major period of letter writing, and, as in the case of panegyric, the flowery style could be appropriate. There are the obvious collections, especially those of Symmachus and Sidonius Apollinaris, the latter of whom looks back specifically to both Symmachus and Pliny.

The early sixth century boasts a remarkable number of collections of letters. The best known is the large collection of Cassiodorus's official correspondence, the *Variae*, compiled during the author's enforced sojourn in Constantinople in the middle of the sixth century (Bjornlie 2013). Closer in kind to the collection of Sidonius are those of Ruricius of Limoges (d. ca. 510) (Mathisen 1999),

Avitus of Vienne (Wood 1993; Shanzer and Wood 2002), and Ennodius of Pavia (Kennell 2000). Equally, from the end of the sixth century, there is the collection of occasional verses made by Venantius Fortunatus, the majority of which are, in fact, verse letters (Williard 2014). Covering the whole of the period from the late fifth to the late sixth century there is the multi-authored collection known as the *Epistolae Austrasicae* (Barrett and Woudhuysen 2016). This tradition of letter writing lasted into the seventh century, with the letters of Desiderius of Cahors (d. ca. 655) (Mathisen 2013). Many of these letters contain little information of significance: Their main purpose seems often to have been the cultivation and maintenance of networks of friendship, and, indeed, they are frequently described as letters of *amicitia*. As such, they have been central to the reconstruction of fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-century groups of families and friends.

All these letters have been interpreted in the light of the Sidonius collection, although in fact some of them differ significantly. Unlike the collections of Symmachus, Sidonius, Cassiodorus, or Fortunatus, those of Avitus, Ruricius, and Ennodius are not authorial. They were put together from archive collections, some perhaps as early as the sixth century, but others, including those of Ennodius, Desiderius, and the *Epistolae Austrasicae*, in the eighth and ninth centuries, which is when the letters of Pope Gregory the Great (590–604) were organized into a *Register*. Some groups of letters that have been presented as collections (most notably the *Epistolae Arelatenses Genuinae*) were, in fact, only put together in the nineteenth century (Wood, forthcoming).

The question of when and how these letters were gathered together is an important one, because it suggests that the interpretation of them as exercises in friendship radically underestimates their range of functions. Some letters undoubtedly were regarded as models for the exercise of friendship and also as models for epistolary style. One small group of seventh-century letters, of Frodebert of Paris and Importunus of Tours, is even preserved alongside the Formulary of Sens in a Paris manuscript (Walstra 1962; Shanzer 2010; Hen 2012). Other letters, however, have very different functions and were preserved in collections of theology and canon law. They thus have much in common with early collections of papal letters, like the *Collectio Avellana*, which was apparently put together in the late sixth century (Viezure 2015). The prose works of Avitus present a good example of the range of genres to which letters can be assigned. They seem to have survived in the archives of the Church of Vienne, where they were consulted to create several different collections; and they include a sizeable number of letters that can readily be compared with the epistolary output of Sidonius (who may indeed have been his uncle) and that appear alongside political pieces, which can be best

described as mini-panegyrics, as well as short theological treatises. In addition, the archive, and the earliest known collection made from it, included sermons for special occasions, which would not have been appropriate for the author's *Homiliary*, a collection of sermons for the standard feasts of the year. Thus, in talking of the significance of letters among the output of late antiquity, we should be aware that the genre is concerned with far more than the topic of *amicitia*, which has most attracted historians.

2.7 History Writing

Sidonius wrote letters, panegyrics, and also masses for the church, although these have not survived. He refused, however, to write an account of the war in Gaul with the Huns in the time of Attila (*Ep.* 8.15.1–2). That he should have been invited to write such a work is a reminder that the senatorial aristocracy had been involved in the production and edition of historical works. Symmachus is known to have undertaken the preparation of a new text of Livy (*Ep.* 9.13). Ammianus Marcellinus's great history would seem to have had an aristocratic, probably even a court, audience, to judge from the fact that the Greek rhetor Libanius had heard of the success of his public readings (Fromara 1992). His judgment on the strengths and weaknesses of individual emperors and generals was thus addressed to the most influential levels of society.

The same can be said of some of the other historical works of the period, including the two historical epitomes, the *De Caesaribus* of Aurelius Victor, who was even appointed governor of Pannonia Secunda by the emperor Julian in 361 (Bird 1994), and the *Breviary* of Eutropius, who, while not personally so distinguished, was nevertheless appointed *magister epistolarum* by Constantius before 361 and *magister memoriae* by Valens in 369 (Bird 1993). The *Historia Augusta*, a collection of imperial biographies purporting to have been written by several authors in the third century, but, in fact, the product of a single forger in the second half of the fourth century, would seem to belong to this same world (Thomson 2012). Historians and their audiences, thus, were drawn from the world of imperial bureaucrats and from the aristocracy – although Ammianus Marcellinus's earlier career had been as a soldier. Not surprisingly, like panegyric, history was intended to carry a political message.

It is worth noting that the *Historia Augusta* is not the only forged history to have been in circulation in the fourth century, although other examples are not usually categorized as histories. Thus, the story of Troy, which was thought of as historical, saw a remarkable revival in late antiquity. It seems to

have been in the fourth century that an abridged version of Homer in Latin, known as the *Ilias Latina*, composed probably in the first century, attracted attention (Scaffai 1982). In addition, another version of the fall of Troy, the *Ephemeridos* of Dictys of Crete, was translated into Latin, apparently in the fourth century (Yavuz 2015). Among the works that would prove most popular in later generations is the *De Excidio Troiae* ascribed to Dares of Frigia, but which was apparently a late antique forgery (Yavuz 2015; Clark, forthcoming). Exactly when Dares's text was written is unclear, nor is it known whether it was based on a Greek original. The Latin text opens with a letter supposedly from Cornelius Nepos to Sallust, announcing the discovery of the work. As a forgery it bears some comparison with the *Historia Augusta*.

Another figure who would seem to have been associated with the senatorial classes was Filocalus, the calligrapher who created the so-called *Calendar of 354*, a compilation that brought together information on the Caesars, the consuls, and the urban prefects of Rome, alongside the bishops and martyrs of Rome, and attached that information to what is now called a World Chronicle, and a Chronicle of the City of Rome (Salzman 1991). Whereas the epitomes of Aurelius Victor and Eutropius, as well as of the *Historia Augusta* and the *Res Gestae* of Ammianus, look back to classical history writing, part of the Filocalus compilation belongs to the traditions that were gaining popularity in Christian circles. Filocalus himself was closely connected to Pope Damasus and, it would seem, to the pious senatorial matron Melania the Elder.

2.8 Christian History and Hagiography

Christian historical writing, of course, goes back to the Bible, but what was perhaps the historical work to have most influence was the *Chronicle* compiled by Eusebius of Caesarea in the reign of Constantine (306–337), which was subsequently translated and extended by Jerome (d. 420) (Burgess 1999; Burgess and Kulikowski 2013). Unlike the prose narrative of Ammianus (which drew its literary inspiration most obviously from Tacitus), Eusebius's *Chronicle* was rather a vast annalistic compilation, providing a remarkable synchronization of events in the various empires past and present, each set out in its own column. Although annalistic (in other words, comprising short entries detailing the major event or events in each year) and thus extremely terse in nature, it provided an interpretation of world history through its choice of information and by gradually whittling down the number of empires in existence, until only the Roman Empire remained, thus highlighting its position in Providential History. Most chronicle writing in the early Middle

Ages followed the model of Eusebius, often transcribing the Eusebian text as translated by Jerome, with minor alteration, and then continuing the annalistic scheme. Thus, the Eusebian scheme was continued by Prosper of Aquitaine (d. ca. 455) and Hydatius of Tuy (d. 469) in the fifth century, by Marcellinus Comes (d. 534), Cassiodorus, and Marius of Avenches (d. 596) in the sixth, and by Isidore of Seville (600–636) in the seventh (Muhlberger 1990; Croke 2001; Burgess and Kulikowski 2013; Wood 2010, 2015).

This, however, was not the only pattern followed by historians and, especially, by historians writing in the post-Roman kingdoms. Thus, Victor of Vita in late fifth-century North Africa wrote a *History of the Vandal Persecutions* (Moorhead 1992; Merrills 2011) and Cassiodorus a (now lost) *History of the Goths*, which served as a point of departure for Jordanes in Constantinople in the middle years of the sixth century, as he interrupted his *Historia Romana* to write his *Getica* (the *Gothic History*) (Christensen 2002). In subsequent decades Gregory of Tours (573–594) set about writing his *Ten Books of Histories* (Heinzelmann 2001; Reimitz 2015). These used to be classified as “Barbarian histories” because at first sight each one focused on a particular barbarian group (Goffart 1988). In recent years it has rightly been observed that they do not have a great deal in common, and that each of the so-called Barbarian histories follows a different pattern, although most of them have a strong religious bent. For Victor of Vita the main focus is obviously the Catholic Church and the persecution that it faced in Vandal Africa. For Gregory of Tours the church is also the center of attention, much more so than the Franks.

The historical writings of Victor and Gregory are closely allied to the biographies of saints, and, indeed, Gregory wrote almost as much hagiography as history. Already in the third century accounts of martyrdom were set down, among the earliest being the passion of the African virgin Perpetua (Berschin 1986; Bremmer and Formisano 2012; Cooper 2013, 105–130). Such accounts, revolving around the arrest, interrogation, and execution of the martyr, became increasingly popular and continued to be written long after the period of persecutions; many of the later acts concerned fictitious saints, who were invented to justify, promote, or explain a saint cult. They were often composed in the context of ecclesiastical conflict, as in the case of a substantial number of *acta* produced in Rome in the early sixth century. They were frequently short and, on occasion, were composed to be read on the feast day of the martyr. Usually they are anonymous, although some, for instance that of St. Maurice and the Theban Legion, written by Eucherius of Lyons (d. ca. 449), were written by ecclesiastics with a fine sense of rhetorical style.

With the end of the persecution hagiographers also began to write about saints who had not died as martyrs. Whereas the martyr acts were concerned

largely with the assertion of Christianity, the lives of confessors had a rather broader range of concerns, promoting particular styles of asceticism, episcopal practice, or attachment to specific theological positions. The first life of a confessor to have a major impact was that of Antony, written by Athanasius of Alexandria in ca. 360, but already translated into Latin by Evagrius of Antioch before 374. This initiated a vogue for the writing about the desert fathers, both in the lives of individual saints, and also in collections of anecdotes about the holy men of Egypt (Harmless 2004). Among Latin writers Jerome contributed to the hagiographical literature of the desert with his, at least partially fictional, lives of Hilarian, Malchus, and Paul the First Hermit (Bastiaensen 1994), while John Cassian (d. 435) set out his knowledge of the desert fathers as a model for the ascetic life in his *Conferences* and *Institutes* (Stewart 1998).

Hagiography of the desert fathers, together with an interest in the Holy Land, which emerged as a focus for pilgrimage after the days of Constantine and, more particularly, after the journey to Jerusalem undertaken by his mother Helena (d. 330), led to the development of a further literary genre: the travelogue concerned with visits to the holy places. The earliest of these was that of the Bordeaux pilgrim, composed in 333. This was followed in the 380s by an account written by a woman known to us as Egeria. Among several later accounts is that of the so-called Piacenza pilgrim, dated to the 570s. Descriptive writing about the Holy Land, admittedly largely secondhand, would continue through into the eighth century (Hunt 1982; Wilkinson 2002).

The West could scarcely boast a desert setting as could Egypt, Syria, and Palestine. It could, however, boast ascetics, most notably Martin of Tours (d. 397), who, although he ended his life as bishop of Tours, was initially an ascetic and a monastic founder. His life by Sulpicius Severus became one of the cornerstones of Western hagiography (Stancliffe 1983). It was followed by Sulpicius's *Dialogues*, written in large measure to show that Martin was the equal of the desert fathers. The *Life of Martin* was followed by a number of other hagiographical works devoted to Western ascetics and monastic founders, notably a cluster of lives concerned with the island monastery of Lérins and, from the early sixth century, a substantial tripartite life, the anonymous *Life of the Fathers of Jura* (Martine 1968).

Monks and abbots, however, did not provide the dominant material for hagiography in the fifth- and sixth-century West, although there was something of a resurgence of monastic hagiography in the seventh century. Rather, the major texts tended to be devoted to the lives of bishops. Among the earliest, and the most influential, were Paulinus's *Life of Ambrose*, written in 422, and Possidius's *Life of Augustine* (written before 439). Both of these are regularly cited as models by later hagiographers. Also of considerable importance is the *Life of Germanus of Auxerre*, written ca. 480 by Constantius, a priest of

Lyons, at the request of his bishop, Patiens, but addressed additionally to Sidonius Apollinaris (Thompson 1984). Among significant episcopal lives from the first half of the sixth century there are that of Fulgentius of Ruspe by Facundus and that of Caesarius of Arles, written by Cyprian of Toulon together with a number of friends. From the second half of the century there is a sizeable collection of lives penned by Venantius Fortunatus (Collins 1981).

Although not exactly hagiography, there is also the collection of papal lives known as the *Liber Pontificalis*. The first group of these apparently belongs to the very late fifth century. Subsequently lives were added, albeit somewhat spasmodically. Rather than presenting the popes as saints, the collection was rather more concerned with their rulership of the Roman Church, with the result that in certain respects the lives are closer to imperial biographies than the hagiography of saints (Davis 2000).

By the sixth century literature was unquestionably associated primarily with the church and with Christian religion. So, too, learning was increasingly dominated by the church, with the result that it ceased to be associated with centers of court or aristocratic influence – it is notable that the fifth and sixth centuries saw the first surviving literary works to be composed by Britons in the British Isles, the *Confessio* of Patrick (Howlett 1994) and the *De Excidio Britonum* of Gildas (George 2009) while Spanish authors like Hydatius of Tuy made their careers in the land of their birth rather than gravitating toward the Mediterranean (Burgess 1993). The collapse of the urban school did not mean that the skills of the grammarian or the rhetor were entirely lost, although written Latin came more and more to reflect everyday usage, rather than the artificial language of the rhetorical schools. The classics were not entirely forgotten; indeed the earliest manuscripts of most classical texts come from the Merovingian and, more particularly, the Carolingian world. Classical narratives survived, although not always in ways that Virgil would have recognized, as one can see from the forgery ascribed to Dares of Phrygia. Above all, the requirements of the new Christian and sub-Roman world were different from those of the Empire, and even of the late Empire, and this is reflected in the literature.

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CHAPTER THREE

Syriac

John W. Watt

Syriac literature flourished throughout late antiquity, especially in its homelands east of the Euphrates. The extant literature is almost entirely Christian, and the adoption of Syriac as the preferred literary medium by Christians in that region no doubt contributed to its widespread use, although it is likely that it, or one or more closely related Aramaic dialects, was also employed by other religious groups. It is only in the fourth century, particularly in the writings of Ephrem Syrus, that we can see a form of Christianity clearly differentiated from movements such as Marcionism and Manichaeism, and even in the early fifth century, in the text known as the *Doctrine of Addai*, a “proto-orthodox” group still appears to be battling for supremacy against competing movements and claiming apostolic foundation for itself in Edessa. Whether or not some Syriac texts prior to the fourth century should be categorized as Christian often depends, therefore, on how tightly one draws the boundary in relation to these groups that were later rejected, as well as on difficulties of interpretation inherent in the texts themselves. In the subsequent period, the rejection of the Council of Chalcedon in favor of a miaphysite Christology by the majority of Roman Syrians, and the independent development in the Persian Empire of a dyophysite Christology that did not recognize Chalcedon, led to a theological, in addition to an institutional, division between the West Syriac and East Syriac Churches (and the Greek Orthodox) and their writers. Although in Christology the thought of the two Syriac churches clearly diverged, admiration not only of Ephrem but also of some major Greek theologians, particularly Gregory of Nazianzus, was nevertheless common to both.

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3.1 Biblical Commentary

Biblical interpretation was an important part of Syriac literature throughout late antiquity. While not exactly a commentary, the *Diatessaron* of Tatian, the harmonized narrative created from the four Gospels, is nevertheless a striking literary creation derived from the Bible. Whether it was first created in Greek or Syriac, and whether in Rome or the East, is still open to dispute, but its influence in the Syriac-speaking area is unquestioned, even though the complete Syriac text is not extant (Petersen 1994). The earliest Syriac version of the individual Gospels is that known as the Old Syriac, extant in two fifth-century manuscripts. While translated from a Greek text, the version also made use of the *Diatessaron*. The Old Syriac Gospel text probably originated in the third or early fourth century, and the translators knew (at least parts of) the Syriac version of the Old Testament later known as the Peshitta (the “Simple” version), which may be as early as the second century. It was translated from the Hebrew by many translators, among whom were probably both Jews and Jewish converts to Christianity.

Biblical commentary in the stricter sense begins with the exegetical writings of Ephrem (d. 373). His fame rests primarily on his poetic works, but he also wrote extensively in prose. Commentaries are attributed to him on Genesis, Exodus, the *Diatessaron*, Acts, and the Pauline epistles, but the latter two are extant only in Armenian. The contents and literary character of the three extant Syriac works are varied, but in the main they may be said to offer notes on the text or to offer explanations of a fairly simple theological nature of the passages which most interested him. For example, in Genesis he is particularly interested in the primal history. In the story of Adam and Eve, he explains at some length the command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as a test of the use of their free will, but much of the later narrative of the book he passes over with little or no comment. Many comments in the two Old Testament commentaries appear to be taken, probably indirectly and orally, from Jewish sources. In the commentary on the *Diatessaron*, however, there are some longer lyrical passages in which his more sophisticated symbolical theology, well known from his hymns (considered below), is given full rein (Griffith 2003).

After Ephrem, extended biblical commentary in Syriac is known in two works of Philoxenus of Mabbug: one on Matthew and Luke, the other on the prologue to John. Since neither of the two is preserved intact, some caution is advisable in their overall characterization, but the contrast with Ephrem is nevertheless quite striking. They are sophisticated theological treatises expounding a miaphysite Christology, intended to win readers to the miaphysite cause and to counteract the exegetical writings of the

dyophysites Diodore and Theodore. While that on Matthew and Luke, preserved only in fragments, appears to oscillate between extended theological expositions of the author's key Christological passages (e.g. Luke 2:52) and only brief comments on the others, the enormous commentary on the prologue of John is devoted exclusively to that alone. Philoxenus considered Ephrem's Christological terminology too inexact, and also found fault with the existing translations of the New Testament and the Creed, as a result of which he commissioned fresh ones. The expression "put on a body," for example, found in the current Syriac version (the Peshitta) of Hebrews 5:7 and 10:5 and of the Creed, and used frequently by Ephrem, was considered by Philoxenus to open the door to "Nestorianism" and replaced in later versions by more exact terms ("embodied," "enfleshed") (de Halleux 1963). Ephrem and Philoxenus are the two most notable Syriac biblical commentators of late antiquity, but from the fifth century we also have a commentary on Ecclesiastes by John of Apamea and an elaboration on the Joseph story in the form of an epic poem by Balai. Biblical interpretation, if not commentary as understood in the schools, is found in much Syriac poetry, not only in Balai and anonymous works, but most notably in the works of Ephrem and Jacob of Serugh.

3.2 Poetry

Unlike Philoxenus's concern with exact Syriac terminology and its correspondence with that of the Greek, Ephrem's linguistic usage is allusive, his thinking metaphorical and symbolic, and his most favored literary form the poetic. Theology expressed and advocated through poetry is the most striking aspect of Syriac within late antique literature, and its two greatest poets, Ephrem and Jacob of Serugh, are generally thought to have been only lightly if at all affected by Greek philosophy or rhetoric, though recently some studies have argued for a stronger Greek influence on the former than has generally been supposed (Possekkel 1999). Although the corpus of Ephrem's poetry is the most impressive known in Syriac, it was not the earliest. The *Odes of Solomon*, a group of 42 short poems preserved virtually complete in Syriac, have been variously ascribed to the first, second, or third century, and their original language is thought to be either Syriac or Greek. While some passages are suggestive of a Christian origin, much of their material remains difficult to interpret (Lattke 1999–2005). Bardaisan of Edessa (154–222) is known to have written poetry in Syriac, though he also understood Greek, but none of his poetry has survived. Some of Ephrem's theological poems were composed for the express purpose of combating Bardaisan's teaching,

so it is possible that Ephrem was to some extent inspired to write theological poetry by the example of Bardaisan.

Syriac poetry from Ephrem onwards (but not the Syriac form of the *Odes of Solomon*) is distinguished by a regulated syllable count. Ephrem employed two forms: the *madrasha* (*hymnus*), composed of stanzas in which the lines may or may not have the same syllable count, but in which the pattern remains constant throughout the entire piece; and the *memra* (*sermo*), not structured in stanzas but composed of couplets with the same syllable count throughout, which in Ephrem's case is always 7 + 7. Ephrem spent most of his life in Nisibis, but when it was ceded to the Persians, he moved to Edessa. He was a vigorous advocate of Nicene Christianity and opponent of those who adhered to the doctrines of Bardaisan, Marcion, or Mani. His poetry was very influential in later Syriac Christianity and even inspired imitations in Greek. Today he is admired principally for the richness of his poetic imagery and the imaginative use he made of it in his theological and spiritual teaching (Brock 1992; Murray 2006). A good example of his method is his *madrasha De fide* 82, where contemporary ideas about the pearl are presented as a symbol of the nativity and life of Christ (Brock 2013).

Two smaller poetic corpora are attributed to writers from the early fifth century, Cyrillona and Balai, although it is not certain that all the individual pieces stem from them. Their content and their form are quite varied. The six in the former group are mostly theological or biblical, but one concerns an incursion of the Huns (ca. 396). The latter comprises a number of short poems on ecclesiastical or liturgical matters and also an epic poem, in 12 *memre*, on the biblical Joseph. Their true author is disputed; Ephrem has been proposed, which is consistent with their 7 + 7 meter, but the attribution to Balai has also been defended. They present a striking meditation on the Joseph story, not without some similarities with Jewish interpretations and elaborations of the biblical narrative, and have also been thought to exhibit acquaintance with Greek rhetorical practice (Phenix 2008). A larger body of material is attributed to Narsai (d. ca. 502), consisting of several *memre* each on the Creation, Old Testament topics, Gospel parables, church sacraments, and feasts, and the three principal theologians particular to the East Syriac Church, namely, Diodore, Theodore, and Nestorius (Brock 2009). Narsai also has been thought to be familiar with some Greek rhetorical practice (McVey 1983). A considerable amount of anonymous poetry (*memre*) on biblical themes also probably belongs to the fifth or sixth century.

The outstanding Syriac poet after Ephrem is Jacob of Serugh (d. 521). He produced a vast number of *memre*, in the 12-syllable meter, as well as a small number of *madrashas*. Unlike Ephrem, he was little concerned with combating "heresy" or establishing a particular "orthodoxy." While opposed to the

Chalcedonian Christological formula, he did not make his opposition a theme of his poems, and in some of them he even appears to have been influenced by the works of Theodore, which will probably have been a result of his education at the strongly dyophysite School of the Persians in Edessa. His poems are mostly on biblical and ecclesiastical themes, including liturgical feasts and portraits of various saints (Kiraz 2010).

3.3 Theology

From the foregoing it will be evident that much theological, spiritual, and paraenetic literature in Syriac exists in poetic forms. Even the great poets, however, also composed such literature in prose. Six prose homilies survive from Jacob's hand, and theology in prose comes, too, from that of Ephrem. From him two discourses (*memre*) and a letter are extant in artistic prose, while in normal prose we have, in addition to his biblical commentaries (above), works against Bardaisan, Marcion, and Mani. Two other significant series of such works come from the fourth century. One is a set of 23 *Demonstrations* attributed to Aphrahat (or in some manuscripts to a Jacob), whose identity is unknown but who must have been a significant figure in the church in the Persian Empire. The *Demonstrations* fall broadly into two groups. The first deals with various aspects of Christian life (e.g. "Faith," "Love," "Prayer," "Humility"), and one, on "The Children of the Covenant," has received particular attention on account of its significance for the study of early Syriac asceticism. The second appears to be directed to Christians who were attracted by Judaism or by some Jewish practices and is devoted to subjects such as "Circumcision," "The Sabbath," "The Distinction between Foods," and "The Peoples Who Have Replaced the People." This second group may have arisen at a time of persecution (the subject of *Demonstration* 21) of Christians in the Persian Empire, and it has been thought to reflect the differing positions of Christians (pro-Roman) and Jews during Persian–Roman hostilities. An interesting feature of the collection is that the first 22 *Demonstrations* form an alphabetic acrostic of the letters of the Syriac alphabet. Roughly contemporary with Aphrahat, and also from an unidentified author within the Persian Empire, is another paraenetic work entitled (by its modern editor) *Liber graduum* (Book of Steps). The "steps" refer to the ascetical ascent to the heavenly city, marked by two broad stages. The "Upright" observe the "lesser commandments" marked by charity; the "Mature" or "Perfect" the "greater commandments" characterized by the imitation of Christ (Juhl 1996; Heal and Kitchen 2014).

The outstanding theologian of the following century was Philoxenus of Mabbug (d. 523). His miaphysite Christology found expression in his biblical commentaries, in numerous letters, in a number of short discourses, and in two substantial works: Ten *memre* “On one of the Holy Trinity was embodied and suffered,” and Three *memre* “On the Trinity and the Incarnation.” His concern for precise Syriac terminology modeled on the Greek has already been noted, together with his belief that disdain or indifference to this in Syriac opened the door to false doctrine. An extensive set of discourses on the ascetic life picks up the binary division known from the *Liber graduum* and was widely read in monastic circles. Like Jacob of Serugh, Philoxenus had been educated at the School of the Persians in Edessa, and although (like Jacob, but more forcefully) he rebelled against the Christological doctrine advanced there, it may be that it was there that he came across the writings of Evagrius of Pontus and perhaps also learned something of the rudiments of Greek (Aristotelian) philosophy. His works display knowledge not only of Evagrius’s ascetical teaching but also of his cosmological system in the form of the common Syriac version of the *Kephalaia gnostica* (de Halleux 1963, Michelson 2014). He was, however, opposed to the more radical form of Evagrianism expounded by Stephen bar Sudhaili, against which he warned in a letter to two priests, Abraham and Orestes, who had been in contact with Stephen. Stephen was the author of *The Book of the Hierotheos*, or at least of what has been considered by some scholars to be its first layer, clearly indebted to Evagrius’s writings. The attribution to Hierotheos, the alleged teacher of “Dionysius the Areopagite,” connects it with the Pseudo-Dionysian corpus and may be part of a second layer, perhaps stemming from Stephen’s disciples. The doctrine concerns the ascent of the mind to the divinity and the eschatological unification of all (Pinggéra 2002).

3.4 Biography and Hagiography

Our information about the lives of significant authors is limited by a lack of genuine biographies, but some of them are the subjects of hagiographical accounts. As is well known, hagiography is not the same as critical biography but is nevertheless related to it and also to panegyric. It does not necessarily provide reliable historical information about a figure but may illuminate instead the cultural and ideological concerns of the hagiographer who praises his subject’s saintliness. In the case of Ephrem, there is a biographical tradition stemming probably from the sixth century, which is now extant in late manuscripts exhibiting three recensions. It is not a reliable source for his life,