

## REVIEW

### THE SHADOW OF THE GIANT: READERS OF EUSEBIUS

Michael Hollerich, *Making Christian History: Eusebius of Caesarea and His Readers*. Christianity in Late Antiquity 11. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021. Pp. xi + 316. Hardback, £73.00. ISBN 978-0-520-29536-0.

Eusebius of Caesarea is commonly known as ‘Father of Church Historiography’. This reputation goes back to Eusebius’ authorship of his *Ecclesiastical History*, an account of the first three hundred years of Christian history from the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth to the reign of emperor Constantine. The *Ecclesiastical History* was, at the same time, the first of its kind and deeply rooted in tradition, an innovative amalgam of a variety of literary genres of Graeco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian roots. While this act of innovation has long been the subject of intensive study, its historical legacy has usually been taken for granted; the list of *Ecclesiastical Histories* that were written over the following centuries spoke for itself. Several important questions remained unanswered: Just how exactly did these church historians engage with the Eusebian model? And what influence did Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History* exert on those later historians who did not explicitly pen works of church historiography? In short, how does Eusebius’ legacy in ‘western historiographical thought’<sup>1</sup> actually manifest? Michael Hollerich’s *Making Christian History* is the first systematic attempt to address this question, tracing roughly 1700 years of reception history across an impressive number of ancient and modern languages.

Hollerich divides his book into seven chapters. While Chapters 2 to 7 treat the reception of Eusebius’ historiographical oeuvre within various cultural settings in a (roughly) progressing chronological order, Chapter 1 (1–46) represents a thorough introduction to the literary project of Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History* itself. Hollerich establishes Eusebius as a transitional figure born into a church at peace, raised and trained in the scholarly circles of Caesarea Maritima, and with only limited outlook on the full consequences of the cataclysmic transformations that were taking place during his lifetime. The

<sup>1</sup> Translated from the original French of E. Prinzivalli, ‘La genre historiographique de l’Histoire ecclésiastique’, in S. Morlet and L. Perrone, edd., *Eusèbe de Césarée. Histoire ecclésiastique. Commentaire, Tome 1: Études d’introduction (Anagōgē)*, (Paris, 2012) 88–111, at 111.

short overview of Eusebius' diverse literary productions that follows deserves credit for stressing the Jewish intellectual environment in which Eusebius was brought up. Next, Hollerich introduces what he calls Eusebius' 'theo-political vision', which he identifies as a central pillar of the *Ecclesiastical History*. According to Hollerich, there are four elements to this 'theo-political vision': the *oikonomia* of the *logos*, Platonic metaphysics inherited from Origen, anti-Jewish apologetics interpreting Christians as the true Israel, and the concept of sacred kingship in the service of divine will. The influence of Eusebius' 'theo-political vision' on later authors forms a recurring theme throughout the book. Hollerich then turns to Eusebius' *Chronicle*, explaining its tabular format and preparatory role for crafting the *Ecclesiastical History* with which it shares its providentialist agenda. A short overview of the current scholarly positions on the *Ecclesiastical History*'s hypothesised production in multiple staggered recensions, its generic make-up, and its literary purpose follow. Hollerich next describes its five key themes: the apostolic succession, Christian teachers, heretical innovators, the suffering of the Jews, and persecution and martyrdom. The chapter is concluded by short portraits of Eusebius' most influential predecessors—Hegesippus, Julius Africanus, and Flavius Josephus.

Chapter 2 (47–87) is dedicated to Eusebius' Greek successors of the fifth and sixth centuries CE. The chapter begins with a brief overview of the Greek manuscript tradition of the *Ecclesiastical History* before shifting to a discussion of Rufinus of Aquileia who wrote a translation and continuation of Eusebius' work in Latin. While this shift to discussing a Latin author sounds surprising, Hollerich has good reasons for including Rufinus in this chapter. Rufinus' continuation not only presented one of the main sources for the succeeding Greek church historians but was also closely entangled with the Greek work of Gelasius of Caesarea—although the precise nature of this work remains hotly debated among contemporary scholars. After touching on the 'Eunomian' Philostorgius, Hollerich delineates the ways in which Socrates of Constantinople, Sozomen of Gaza, and Theodoret of Cyrrhus each grappled with the Eusebian model while facing the revelation that the alignment of the Christian church and the Roman empire did not mean the ultimate fulfilment of divine providence. The chapter is closed off with a discussion of Evagrius Scholasticus. These portraits of Eusebius' successors are well balanced and mostly thoroughly researched. In fact, the entire monograph excels with its extensive learnedness and the humility with which Hollerich acknowledges previous scholars on whose work his own assessment relies. As Hollerich repeatedly stresses, his own portraits of individual authors often rest on seminal studies in the various subfields. While Hollerich succeeds in supplementing these with more detailed studies, this necessarily means that other voices that may have brought further nuance, are not considered. The two central

monographs of Hartmut Leppin and Theresa Urbainczyk are missing.<sup>2</sup> And, where Hollerich's assessment of Socrates as a 'Royalist' would have been challenged by the work of Luke Gardiner (esp. 67),<sup>3</sup> the idea that Sozomen followed Socrates in dividing his books according to imperial reigns (68–9) has been complicated by the work of Ulrich Gotter.<sup>4</sup>

The following three chapters cover the reception of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* throughout the Middle Ages. The most substantial is Chapter 3 (88–140) which considers the non-Greek East, that is the Syriac, Armenian, and Coptic traditions. Hollerich sees the development of church historiography in these regions as shaped by Christian communities' self-affirmation in the face of schism and subjecthood to non-Christian overlords. The shorter Chapters 4 and 5 (141–70 and 171–90) treat the Latin West and Byzantium respectively. For the West, Hollerich asserts that the writing of church historiography was an expression of the process of ethnogenesis which he traces through the Anglo-Saxon, Frankish, Norman, and Holy Roman book culture. In the case of both the non-Greek East and the Latin West, the evolution of church historiography conflicted with Eusebius' original vision of a universal Christian church. For Byzantium, Hollerich identifies a strong continued legacy of Eusebius' historiographical model, albeit mostly via intermediary sources. The material covered by Hollerich in these three chapters is expansive and often allows only for cursory glimpses of authors and their work. Hollerich nevertheless attempts to include brief highlights on the Doctrine of Addai, Michael the Syrian, *Movsēs Xorenac'i*, Bede, Orderic Vitalis, John Malalas, George Syncellus and Theophanes as well as Nicephorus Callistus Xanthopulus.

In Chapters 6 and 7 (191–237 and 238–73), Hollerich guides the reader through Eusebius' reception in the West from the early modern to the postmodern period. The first half of Chapter 6 follows the rediscovery of Eusebius in the original Greek amid the humanist interest in the recovery of lost information to the weaponisation of the *Ecclesiastical History* in the Age of Reformation. The case studies include John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*,

<sup>2</sup> H. Leppin, *Von Constantin dem Großen zu Theodosius II. Das christliche Kaisertum bei den Kirchenhistorikern Socrates, Sozomenus und Theodoret.* (Göttingen, 1996); T. Urbainczyk, *Socrates of Constantinople: Historian of Church and State*, (Ann Arbor, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> L. Gardiner, 'The Imperial Subject: Theodosius II and Panegyric in Socrates' Church History', in C. Kelly, ed., *Theodosius II: Rethinking the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2013) 244–68; id. 'Intimations of a Massacre. Thessalonica, Theodosius I and Self-Ironization in Socrates Scholasticus' *Historia Ecclesiastica*', *Studies in Church History* 49 (2013), 29–41.

<sup>4</sup> U. Gotter, 'Rechtgläubige—Pagane—Häretiker. Tempelzerstörungen in der Kirchengeschichtsschreibung und das Bild der christlichen Kaiser', in S. Emmel, U. Gotter, and J. Hahn, edd., *From Temple to Church. Destruction and Renewal of Local Cultic Topography in Late Antiquity* (Leiden) 44–90, see esp. 68–70.

Matthias Flacius Illyricus' *Magdeburg Centuries*, and Cesare Baronio's *Annales Ecclesiastici*. The second half traces the continued impact of confessional readings of Eusebius into the Republic of Letters. While the works of Joseph Scaliger and Gottfried Arnold attempted to liberate the *Ecclesiastical History* from such partisan use, Hollerich demonstrates that the influential edition and translation by the scholastic Henri Valois contain a French Catholic bias which can be attributed to Valois' financial sponsorship by the French crown and church. Chapter 7 begins with a chronological rundown of the various editions and translations of the *Ecclesiastical History* that have seen the light of day since the nineteenth century (Hollerich restricts himself to translations in English, German, and French). Hollerich then dives into the secular and religious reception of Eusebius in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This includes discussions of Walther Bauer's and Robert Wilken's new historical approaches, Elizabeth Clarke's promotion of literary theory, and Jeremy Schott's and Andrew Jacobs' postcolonial re-evaluations on the one side and, on the other, the bitter conflict between Carl Schmitt and Erik Peterson over the place of political theology in the wake of national socialism and current conservative criticism of secularism. Hollerich finishes with a deeply personal reflection on the place of ecclesiastical history in the future of a global, and variously challenged Christianity.

This is an important book. Hollerich impressively succeeds in offering a first, systematic assessment of the more than seventeen centuries of reception history of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*. The breadth of scholarship amassed in this book (the bibliography encompasses twenty-six pages) is truly remarkable, as is its intellectual ambition of straddling so many different cultures, languages, and periods. While this is a must-read book for Eusebian scholars, it must also be highly recommended to anyone working on the field of late-antique and medieval historiography, reception history or the history of classical and theological scholarship. The clear structure of the book further makes it easily accessible to expert and non-expert readers alike. The chapters can be read separately while, at the same time, there is sufficient cross-referencing to maintain the cohesiveness as a monograph. The theme of Eusebius' 'theo-political' vision and its manifold reception which flares up across most chapters would perhaps have benefitted from more consistent consideration to effectively serve as a red thread. To students, the richness of references to modern scholarship offered by Hollerich allows easy access to any of the many side-aspects covered by this ambitious book; it is therefore exceptionally well suited for teaching purposes.

This same ambition also takes its toll. The sheer breadth of the field covered by Hollerich in less than three hundred pages naturally makes it impossible for all its aspects to be treated with the same level of detail. With some notable exceptions—see the lists of authors above—the engagement with most source material is restricted to short outlines rather than in-depth

treatment and, as a result, remains descriptive rather than analytical. At times, Hollerich's methodological focus further seems somewhat diffuse. While the book is dedicated to the reception of the *Ecclesiastical History*, some subchapters focus exclusively on the reception of Eusebius' *Chronicle* (or, to a lesser degree, the *Vita Constantini*). In these cases, Hollerich considers both direct and indirect influences by the Eusebian model. In other instances, he excludes authors from his investigation because their works do not seem to fall within the boundaries of the genre of church historiography, a questionable decision given the generic mixture and continued fluidity of church historiography in particular and late-antique literature more generally. This leads, at times, to seemingly arbitrary decisions in the selection of the included material: while the *Continuatio Antiochensis Eusebii* and Gregory of Tours' *Historiae* appear to have been excluded on the grounds of being too chronographic and too biographical respectively (55–9 n. 31 and 145), the *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* treated in Chapter 3 is a collection of 113 lives (134–6) and the four works selected for Chapter 5 are exclusively chronicles (173).

This nitpicking should not distract from the utmost value and quality of this book. By bringing diverse sources into conversation that previously have not been studied together, Hollerich impressively demonstrates the great potential that lies in the study of Eusebius' reception history. There is no doubt that this book will inspire more research on the legacy of Eusebius' entire historical oeuvre—this includes the *Ecclesiastical History* as well as the *Chronicle* and the *Vita Constantini*—in the future.

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