

Yorick Schulz-Wackerbarth: *Die Vita Pauli des Hieronymus. Darstellung und Etablierung eines Heiligen im hagiographischen Diskurs der Spätantike*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2017 (Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 107). XVI, 283 S. € 59.00. ISBN: 978-3-16-155100-0.

Jerome's three *Lives* of Paul, Malchus, and Hilarion are widely acknowledged by those who have read them to be literary gems: varied, rich, baffling, and amusing, they challenge commonly-held assumptions about hagiographical literature. Despite the resounding impulse which they gave to the tradition of writing monastic biography in the Latin language and beyond, they are not easily integrated into mainstream accounts of late antique literature. The earliest and formally most experimental of the three, the *Life of Paul the First Hermit*, is the least obscure; yet since the 1953 commentary by Philip Charles Hoelle,¹ no full-scale interpretative monograph has been devoted this work – until now.

In his book Yorick Schulz-Wackerbarth presents a thorough study of this multifaceted text. Although it is guided by a single question – what is the 'ideal of a saint' ('Heiligenideal') presented in this text? –, it gives a very full account of the work's argumentative and narratological structures and its most relevant intertexts in pursuit of such theological insights. The brief introduction ("Hinführung", 1–9) begins with a survey of scholarly views on the historicity – or otherwise – of Jerome's shadowy subject. Against the entirely skeptical views of Hermann Weingarten and Ferdinand Cavallera,² others, including most recently Stefan Rebenich, assume that the *Life* contains a kernel of truth which came to Jerome through oral traditions.³ However, the possibility of such influences does not itself establish Paul's historicity: there is no way of deciding whether Jerome's informants were reliable, nor of the degree to which he might have transformed their material (it is clearly dangerous to use the fantastical elements, such as a centaur and a faun

1 P. C. Hoelle: *Commentary on the Vita Pauli of St Jerome*. Diss. Univ. Ohio 1953.

2 H. Weingarten: *Der Ursprung des Mönchtums im nachkonstantinischen Zeitalter*. In: *ZKG* 1, 1877, 11–35, 545–574; F. Cavallera: *Paul de Thèbes et Paul d'Oxyrhynque*. In: *Revue d'ascétique et de mystique* 7, 1926, 302–305.

3 St. Rebenich: *Der Kirchenvater Hieronymus als Hagiograph. Die Vita Sancti Pauli primi eremitaie*. In: K. Elm (ed.): *Beiträge zur Geschichte des Paulinerordens*. Berlin 2000 (Berliner historische Studien 32 = Ordensstudien 14), 23–40.

encountered by Antony in the desert, to establish that the rest of the account is truthful). While Schulz-Wackerbarth subscribes to the now established theory that we cannot know whether and to what extent Jerome was able to base his account on received traditions or even on historical facts, this prudent agnosticism is not upheld with absolute consistency throughout the book. In two places he speaks of Jerome's 'knowledge' of certain aspects of Paul's life and career (125: "Vermutlich mag Hieronymus tatsächlich nicht viel über die erste Lebensphase des Paulus gewusst haben", and 148: "Zwar mag Hieronymus tatsächlich nur wenig über diese Lebensphase des Paulus gewusst haben"): these formulations suggest that there *was* something to be known, in contradiction to more cautious statements elsewhere. However that may be, the ultimate point of the introduction is to frame a more pertinent question: what is it about the *Life of Paul* that made it credible as an account of a saint in the eyes of (some of) the author's contemporaries and later generations?

Stepping back from traditional historical approaches, Schulz-Wackerbarth in the first chapter (10–32) offers a discussion of 'Grundlagen' ('fundamentals'), namely the definitions of 'Heiligkeit' ('sanctity'/'holiness') and 'Hagiographie'. The disciplinary entanglements of the term 'Heiligkeit' are well brought out, with a clear separation of anthropological 'inductive' and theological 'deductive' approaches. Even though the pioneering work of Émile Durkheim is only cited at second hand,⁴ the author sensibly concludes that sanctity, whatever it might be in itself, can only be analysed as a product of discursive practices – including the practice of hagiography, which is helpfully defined as a mode of writing which not only documents but also *produces* the perception of sanctity (17). Schulz-Wackerbarth addresses the old chestnut whether or not hagiography is a 'genre' by developing Marc Van Uytenghe's argument that it is, rather, a form of discourse.⁵ On the subject of hagiography itself, the account is lucid and well-informed; but I am concerned that hagiography is set off slightly too neatly from the 'genre' of biography, which remains essentially defined along the lines proposed by

4 É. Durkheim: *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse. Le système totémique en Australie*. Paris 1912.

5 M. Van Uytenghe: s.v. Heiligenverehrung II (Hagiographie). In: *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* 14, 1988, cols 150–183; a more extensive treatment is offered by the same author in: s.v. Biographie II (spirituelle). In: *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum Suppl.* 1, 2011, cols 1088–1364.

Friedrich Leo.⁶ It would have been profitable to engage with more recent scholarship on biography: for example, Tomas Hägg's monograph *The Art of Biography* invites a similar conclusion about the essence of ancient biographical literature as Schulz-Wackerbarth (channelling Van Uyttinghe) offers for hagiography:⁷ that each biography's form is fundamentally determined by the individuality of its subject (cf. 23: "vielmehr müsse Hagiographie als Begriff *sui generis* gesehen werden, der einzig von seinem *Gegenstand*, Heilige, Heiliges und Heiligenverehrung, bestimmt werde"). To me, for one, it is not clear from Schulz-Wackerbarth's analysis why 'holiness' must be treated in a fundamentally different way from the virtues of other biographical protagonists.

Chapter 2 (33–92) offers a very rich and detailed overview of the structure of the *Life of Paul* and the various patterns in play here. The analysis is supported by helpful diagrams of various complexity, for example on the relationship between narrated time ('erzählte Zeit') and narrative time ('Erzählzeit') on 40 (unfortunately, this contains a small factual error: the *Life* has it that Paul dies at the age of 113, not that he spent 113 years as an anchorite *after* leaving his parental home at the age of 16). Schulz-Wackerbarth makes excellent use of earlier treatments like those of Herbert Kech and Alison Goddard Elliott, and he engages critically with Susan Weingarten's argument that the *Life* is structured in groups of three as a supposed expression of Jerome's 'trinitarian' thought patterns.⁸ The third part of the chapter contains a detailed discussion of the *Life*'s problematic chronology. The inconsistencies detailed here made me wonder if they could perhaps be part of the text's strategy to present itself as realistic – after all, it would be comparatively easy to create a non-contradictory timeline for a fictional character, whereas it is generally much harder to remember the exact days on which something happened in reality, especially in the distant

6 F. Leo: Die griechisch-römische Biographie nach ihrer literarischen Form. Leipzig 1901.

7 T. Hägg: *The Art of Biography in Antiquity*. Cambridge 2012.

8 H. Kech: Hagiographie als christliche Unterhaltungsliteratur. Studien zum Phänomen des Erbaulichen anhand der Mönchsviten des hl. Hieronymus. Göttingen 1977 (Göttinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik 225). A. G. Elliot: *Roads to Paradise. Reading the Lives of the Early Saints*. Hanover (NH)/London 1988. S. Weingarten: *The Saint's Saints. Hagiography and Geography in Jerome*. Leiden/Boston 2005 (Ancient Judaism & Early Christianity 58).

past. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the *Life's* addressees, both Paul of Concordia, who received the work accompanied by Jerome's *Letter* 10, and the unnamed aristocrats chastised for their lavish lifestyle in the text's final chapter, as well as its original historical readership, whose high social status can be extrapolated from the exaggeratedly erudite and flamboyant style of the work.

The third chapter (93–244), which addresses Paul's holiness, has five sections and represents more than half of the bulk of the book. It takes relatively little account of the observations made in the second chapter: there is hardly any further discussion of Antony's journey (except for 108–113 and 246, where it is discussed primarily as a function of the comparison of the two men); the focus is, instead, on those parts of the text which characterise Paul himself, directly rather than indirectly. Paul is discussed as a hermit, and compared to his literary predecessor Antony; the dearth of information about his origins is interpreted as assisting the focus of the holy parts of his life, especially in old age; the emphasis on Paul's excellent education is contrasted with its rejection by Athanasius' Antony; his flight from persecution is contextualised both in literary and historical terms, and analysed as an event where the saint's will coincides with external necessity; and his stay in the desert is interpreted as a type of martyrdom. In this last part Schulz-Wackerbarth provides a new and convincing reading of the lurid accounts of the two martyrdoms presented in the third chapter of the *Life*, where one Christian is tortured by being smeared with honey and pursued by flies, and another by being tied down to a bed in a beautiful garden and forcibly seduced by a prostitute. As Schulz-Wackerbarth rightly observes, these tortures can be read not only as analogous to the physical discomfort and sexual abstinence endured by Paul as a desert ascetic; but, more importantly, by presenting martyrdom as a form of spectacle which degrades the readers to voyeurs, the *Vita* argues for the moral superiority of desert asceticism, which avoids such disgraceful thrills. In this regard, too, Paul is thus presented as better than Athanasius' Antony, who yearned for traditional martyrdom. Schulz-Wackerbarth is alert to the meta-textual effects of the second torture scene in particular; but when he writes of "die unverkennbare Intention des Hieronymus, die Leser/innen mit seiner Erzählung zu fesseln" ("Jerome's unmistakable intention to enthrall [literally 'to shackle' (!)] the readers with his narrative", 232), he elects not to exploit the verbal connection established here between his metaphor and the literal shackling of the martyr by his

torturers – which would align Jerome with the latter. One scholar whose work would have been helpful in sharpening this point and in further bringing out its implication is Virginia Burrus. Her emphasis in *The Sex Lives of Saints* on the dynamics of desire in the text – Paul’s, Antony’s, the readers’ – could also have helped to bridge some of the gap between chapter 2 and the rest of the book.⁹

The conclusion (245–250) essentially builds on the third chapter, arguing that Paul represents a developmental rather than a static model of sanctity, as well as one free from real and emotional conflicts. An opportunity is missed through the decision not to integrate this argument with the results of the second chapter: the structural analysis given there could usefully have been connected with the later arguments. Antony as a Hieronymian character has now been relegated to the sidelines, and despite the arguments in the first chapter on the relational nature of hagiographical (and other) forms of discourse, his importance as an experiencer and mediator of Paul’s holiness is being minimised.

The bibliography suggests to me the need for more conversations between German- and English-writing scholars. I found several pertinent works of which I had been unaware (though I will not admit which ones they are), and at the same time I missed some titles which I consider to be the bread and butter among English-language studies of Jerome’s *Lives*, including the works on the *Life of Paul* by Timothy D. Barnes, Gerlinde Huber-Rebenich, and Michael S. Williams.¹⁰ Derek Krueger’s *Writing and Holiness* might have been a valuable point of reference for the discussion of hagiography as a religious practice.¹¹ Works in other languages, especially Italian and French, are also presented.

The book is well-produced, with clear tables and diagrams, generous indexes, and few infelicities of presentation. In the extensive Latin quoted I did notice

9 V. Burrus: *The Sex Lives of Saints. An Erotics of Ancient Hagiography*. Philadelphia 2004.

10 T. D. Barnes: *Early Christian Hagiography and Roman History*. Tübingen 2010 (Tria Corda 5); G. Huber-Rebenich: *Hagiographic Fiction as Entertainment*. In: H. Hofmann (ed.): *Latin Fiction. The Latin Novel in Context*. London 1999, 187–212; M. S. Williams: *Authorised Lives in Early Christian Biography. Between Eusebius and Augustine*. Cambridge 2008.

11 D. Krueger: *Writing and Holiness. The Practice of Authorship in the Early Christian East*. Philadelphia 2004.

a number of errors, typographic and otherwise, though the proportion is minor. Most serious is the use of the back-formation “das *ops paternarum*” (singular, rather than the correct plural “die *opes paternae*”) as the supposed nominative of the genitive *opum paternarum* (“paternal riches”) found in the text, and “das *affinium suorum*” as a nominative singular governing a genitive, instead of the correct plural “die *affines sui*”, both on 135. More quotation of Latin would have been helpful for the discussion of different translations and interpretations of a key passage on 185–188, which is never given in full. Overall, however, this is a serious, detailed, and wide-ranging treatment of a seminal late antique text which has much profit to offer the reader and amply deserves its place in this prestigious series. If, as I have argued, some questions remain open, the book provides an excellent starting point for further discussions.

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