A Bishop's Biography: Eusebius of Caesarea and *The Life of Constantine*

James Corke-Webster

1. Introduction: The History of the *Life*

The *Life of Constantine*'s fame guarantees Eusebius of Caesarea a place in a *Handbook on Ancient Biography*. And he certainly deserves that place. But it is earned less on the basis of this text - which in fact makes no claim to be a *bios* – and more from a collected oeuvre that witnesses a consistent and innovate use of the biographical genre. The *Life*, in progress in the late 330s and possibly incomplete at his death in 339, represents the end of Eusebius' authorial career. But Eusebius' first tentative step on that fertile literary path was an *Apology* for his intellectual forbear Origen of Alexandria, undertaken together with his mentor Pamphilus of Caesarea while the latter was in prison, and the sixth book of which Eusebius wrote alone (written 308-310; see *HE* 6.33.4; cf. Photius, *Bibliotheca* 117, 118).[1] His first lone enterprise was the lost *Life of Pamphilus* (310-311; see *HE* 6.32.3.) After the subsequent tabular experiments of the *Chronicle*, it was a work of collective biography, *The Martyrs of Palestine*, which provided the narrative bridge to his famed *Ecclesiastical History*.[2] The latter is not easily generically defined, but has been most recently classed as a

[1] The *Defence of Origen* survives only in Rufinus' Latin translation of its first book; see Scheck (2010). For a timeline of Eusebius' literary projects see Carriker (2003: 37-38).

[2] On the chronology of the composition of the *Chronicle*, *Martyrs of Palestine* and *Ecclesiastical History* see in particular Barnes (1980), Louth (1990), and the now largely accepted position of Burgess (1997), though this has been recently questioned by Johnson (2013). On reading *The Martyrs of Palestine* as a prolegomenon to the *Ecclesiastical History* see Corke-Webster (2012).

cross between biographical and national history (DeVore 2013). Certainly it tells its extraordinary tale of early Christianity under Rome via the exploits of its prominent protagonists. Even Eusebius' non-narrative works occasionally employ biographical tropes (Johnson 2004). Though he was no model biographer, Eusebius provide some of the more interesting experiments with the genre to survive from antiquity.

The pervasive influence of biography throughout Eusebius' writings makes it all the more extraordinary that the *Life* is so rarely read in the light of his other biographic literary experiments. This is perhaps because the many undeniably unique features of the *Life* have dominated discussion. The *Life* is extraordinary in both its genre and content and in many ways does stand alone among the extant works of Eusebius and indeed of antiquity more generally. But we can also read it as the culmination of Eusebius' lifelong exploration with biography. Doing so, I suggest, adds an important layer to our understanding of Eusebius' diverse purposes in this Protean text, namely Constantine's relationship with the earlier, episcopal heroes of Eusebius' vision of Christianity.

In large part no doubt because of the historiographical, political and theological importance of its subject, scholarship on the *Life* throughout the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries was concerned above all with its (oft-doubted) authenticity.[3] The stylistic similarity of the text to Eusebius' other works means Eusebian authorship is now rarely questioned, and the genuine nature of the Constantinian documents included in the *Life* has been established

[3] For a summary of the historiography see Winkelmann (1962) and the discussion in Cameron & Hall, 1999: 4-9; for the sceptical position see e.g. Gregoire 1938.

beyond reasonable doubt, largely because of the independent attestation provided by the discovery and identification of *P.Lond* 878 (Jones & Skeat 1954).[4]

Wrangling over the *Life*'s authenticity naturally spawned a discussion of its genre. If the text was not significantly interpolated or otherwise interfered with, its universally recognised oddities, not least its extraordinary combination of biographical, historiographical or panegyrical features, must be otherwise explained. Most scholars now accept Timothy Barnes' argument that the *Life* is a hybrid, a narrative extension of the *History* begun after 324, later converted to a panegyric when Constantine died on 27th May 337 (Barnes 1989 & 1994, rehabilitating the hybrid theory of Pasquali 1910, which had reversed the order of Eusebius' experiment). Many, including Barnes and Pasquali, believe that this genre experiment remained incomplete at Eusebius' death in 339 (though this is more regularly questioned).[5]

As part of this genre analysis, close attention has been paid, in particular by Hall (1993a & b) to the *Life*'s (modified) reuse of the *History* (see also Drake 1988; Cameron & Hall 1999: 13-24). But the questions asked have more often been of source and form rather than content and meaning. This was because at stake was the *Life*'s reliability for historical purposes. The status of our main source for Constantine, and the perspective of its author,

[4] Pietri 1983 also demonstrates the similarities between the documents cited in the *Life* and those preserved elsewhere (and their divergences from Eusebius' own style). For continuing skepticism see Elliott 1991.

[5] E.g. Cameron 1997; Cameron & Hall 1999:1, 29-30; Williams 2008: 35-36. Drake 1988 suggests instead that the *Life* was begun much later in 335.

were considered necessary prerequisites before discussing, for example, the nature of Constantine's conversion, the sincerity of his faith and the extent of his "religious" policies.

This historical focus has left literary questions relatively neglected. It is only now that the dust has settled on these questions of form that attention is turning to the question of exactly how Eusebius wrote to achieve his context-specific goals. The influence of traditional panegyric on the *Life*'s picture of Constantine has received some attention, notably by Storch 1971.[6] But scholarship on the influence of previous biographical writing has been less abundant, in part because of a relative lack of obvious parallels.[7] Averil Cameron's (1991:53) observation that the *Life* was understudied as a literary text, has thus been reiterated by Claudia Rapp (1998: 686), and again recently by Peter Van Nuffelen (2013: 133).

The one significant exception to this oversight is Eusebius' apologetic use of a Moses typology (perhaps dependent on Philo's *Life of Moses*). In Books 1 and 2 of the *Life* especially Eusebius presents Constantine's life as echoing the threefold breakdown of Moses' – as a boy in a hostile court, as triumphant liberator and as lawgiver. Michael Hollerich (1989) argued that this served an apologetic purpose, including the sanctioning of Constantine's military killing that might otherwise have fallen foul of Christian ethics.

[6] Storch identified in particular the fourfold scheme whereby all success and benefit derive from divine favour, bestowed as a reward for piety, indicated in military victory and producing peace and unity in the realm. See earlier Pasquali 1910, and more recently the brief summary in Cameron & Hall 1999: 29-33.

[7] See e.g. Williams 2008 on the *Life* as part of a category of "Christian biography" distinct from the classical tradition as exemplified by, for example, Xenophon, Suetonius, Plutarch. Johnson 2004: 255 however does suggest Plutarch as a model for Eusebius.

Claudia Rapp (1998) argued that Moses provided a prototypical leader combining political and spiritual authority, and in the same year Anna Wilson suggested that Eusebius employed Moses to argue for a cooperative relationship between church and state. Sabrina Inowlocki (2007) argued subsequently that Eusebius was appealing to the implicit ambiguity of Moses in ancient tradition; Michael Williams (2008: 25-57) that he wished to root Constantine in sacred rather than secular history. Finn Damgaard (2013) has argued that the impetus for the comparison came from Constantine himself – who focused on Moses' political and military side - but that Eusebius appropriated it to his own ends, to argue for the benefit of Constantine's sons that good kingship was based not on mere descent but on godliness.

It is to this budding investigation of Eusebius' careful construction of a model image of Constantine that I propose an understanding of his wider biographical oeuvre can contribute. To illustrate this I will focus on an aspect of the *Life* that has garnered attention throughout the history of scholarship, namely the representation of Constantine as a bishop. The *Life* contains two such explicit assimilations The first and more famous comes near the end, when Eusebius quotes Constantine's own words to those bishops with whom he was dining, which included Eusebius himself, that '"You are bishops of those within the Church (εἴσω τῆς ἐκκλησίας), but I am perhaps a bishop (ἐπίσκοπος ἂν εἴην) appointed by God (ὑπὸ θεοῦ καθεσταμένος) over those outside (τῶν ἐκτὸς)"' (*VC* 4.24.1). In the second and less commonly discussed, but I shall argue the more important, Eusebius writes that the emperor, 'like a universal bishop (οἷά τις κοινὸς ἐπίσκοπος) appointed by God (ἐκ θεοῦ καθεσταμένος) convoked councils of the ministers of God' (*VC* 1.44.1) to deal with disturbances within the church.[8]

[8] Translations of the *Life* from Cameron & Hall (1999).

These two occurrences bookend the *Life*. They have also always been at the centre of scholarly discussion. Their oddity meant they formed part of the case against the *Life*'s authenticity (Winkelmann 1962: 236-238; Seston 1947). They have also been seen as the early exemplars of caesaropapism (see e.g. Decker & Dupuis-Masay 1980), as I discuss in more detail below. And it was an attempt to better explain these passages that prompted Rapp's (1998) seminal elucidation of the Moses typology. Since Moses was a key model of the combination of secular power and religious authority for Jews and pagans alike, Rapp demonstrates that the passages are not outliers but fit the overall parallel between Constantine and Moses.

I suggest that these key phrases can again push forward our thinking on the *Life*, especially in the light of increasing attention recently paid to Eusebius' skills as writer and editor rather than merely as compiler.[9] The "episcopal equivalency" has too often been read in isolation from Eusebius' wider oeuvre. In particular, it is extraordinary that so little attention has been paid to what exactly being a bishop meant for Eusebius. The key to understanding these two hugely influential phrases lies precisely in reading the *Life* as the conclusion to Eusebius' life long experimentation with biography.

2. Bishops in the *History*

[9] See Hollerich (1999), Kofsky (2000), Inowlocki (2006), Schott (2008), Morlet (2009) Verdoner (2011) and Johnson (2013). The increasing attention paid to Eusebius' writing is evidenced in two recent edited collections, Inowlocki & Zamagni (2011) and Johnson & Schott (2013).

Eusebius' *Defence of Origen* and *Life of Pamphilus* both heroicised significant churchmen of Christianity's past. What these texts had done for individuals the *Martyrs of Palestine* did for a local collective and the *Ecclesiastical History* for a network stretching geographically across the Empire and chronologically back to three centuries previous. Most prominent among the *History*'s protagonists are its bishops - their lives are the struts on which Eusebius' church is built and their interconnections the glue that hold it together. But Eusebius was not simply recording the deeds of great men long gone. He used these mini-biographies as an opportunity to construct and propose his own model of Christian authority to a new Christian generation in the early 4th century. It is here we find clues as to what Eusebius meant in assimilating his emperor to episcopal authority.

Eusebius' model of Christian leadership in the *History* is threefold. First, Eusebius' ideal bishops are intellectuals.[10] Their authority is based on textual criticism, rooted in detailed analysis of scriptures and evidenced in speeches, treatises and letters. Second, these intellectual qualities are not reserved in an ivory tower but put to work in the wider world, dedicated to pastoral care and defence of the Christian community against heresy and schism. Third, Eusebius' bishops act not in isolation but as part of an Empire-wide network of fellow clerics connected by constant epistolary contact who support and regulate each other.[11]

[10] This contrasts sharply with the picture that emerges from independent sources. See for example Rapp (2005: 179): 'Beyond functional literacy, the church did not attribute much importance to the level of education of its bishops. Indeed, it did not foster the foundation of educational institutions, analogous to today's seminaries, with the specific purpose of training future clergy.'

[11] I have discussed Eusebius' treatment of Christian leadership in the *Ecclesiastical History* in chapter 3 of my doctoral thesis (Corke-Webster 2013). I argue there that Eusebius

I will take as a case study Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria for seventeen years (*HE* 7.28.3) in the mid-3rd century, and one of the stars of Eusebius' *History*. First, his intellectual credentials are put front and centre. He had been educated as part of the hermeneutical tradition associated with the catechetical school of Alexandria, under Origen of Alexandria (*HE* 6.29.4). He later inherited that school from Heraclas, another pupil of Origen, before becoming bishop of the city (*HE* 6.35.1). He produced a lengthy bibliography including not just letters but treatises and commentaries (*HE* 6.46.1-6; 7.24.3; 7.26.1-3). His letters provide comfort (e.g. *HE* 7.22.1-10) as well as repair schism (e.g. *HE* 7.21.1).

Second, it is only via his intellectual capacities, specifically the text critical, that Dionysius can defend the community. When Nepos, a bishop of Egypt, goes astray in his teaching Dionysius notes that it is precisely because Nepos has written down and published his errors, and is therefore leading 'simpler brothers (τοὺς ἁπλουστέρους ἀδελφοὺς)' (*HE* 7.24.5) astray, that the orthodox bishop must engage with him in detail and refute him on intellectual grounds (*HE* 7.24.4-5; see similarly 7.7.1).[12] This Dionysius does, via three straight days of detailed engagement with Nepos' erroneous tome (*HE* 7.24.7-9). This is the pattern of Dionysius' activity throughout - bishop Xystus in Rome, for example, is saved from error by Dionysius' in depth engagement (*HE* 7.9.6), and the Novatian controversy - at least in part - by Dionysius' discursive missives (*HE* 6.45.1-2).[13]

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inherited his model of intellectual authority from the 3rd century thinker Origen of Alexandria, but moulded it to better fit his own 4th century circumstances.

[12] Translations of the *Ecclesiastical History* and the *Martyrs of Palestine* my own.

[13] For Dionysius' writings' rhetorical qualities see Miller 1933.

Third, Dionysius does not act in isolation. Eusebius emphasises how his intellectual activities, particularly against heretics, are endorsed by other clerics (e.g. *HE* 7.7.4-5). He engages in an extensive epistolary correspondence, sending letters for pastoral, anti-heretical and anti-schismatic purposes (*HE* 6.44.1-6; 6.46.3-5; 7.2.1; 7.4.1; 7.5.3-6; 7.6.1; 7.7.1-7.9.6; 7.11.2-25; 7.20.1; 7.27.2). In the Nepos case discussed above Dionysius does not work alone but summons the surrounding elders and teachers (*HE* 7.24.6). He also takes a prominent role in a number of the key 3rd century synods that achieved consensus often only thanks to his direct involvement (e.g. *HE* 6.46.3). This is true even when he was too ill to attend in person but writes instead (*HE* 7.27.1-7.30.17), and subsequently authors the official letter after the council (*HE* 7.30.3). Dionysius is a model of clerical authority for Eusebius – an academic born of a rigorous exegetical training school and grown into a supporter and defender of the community, bound by literary ties into a community of like-minded clerics all marshaling the Christian community with skills rooted in Scripture. Such was the ideal Eusebian bishop.

3. The Emperor as Bishop

Close attention to neglected aspects of the *Life* reveals that Eusebius consistently presents Constantine according to this model. Constantine's mental prowess for example is much emphasised from the start. In keeping with most ancient biography little attention is paid to Constantine's youth. As part of the Moses typology we are told how he was raised in the court of tyrants (e.g. *VC* 1.12). Eusebius tells us that even in his youth he was 'granted highest honour among them' (*VC* 1.19.1). Most discussion of this has focused either on the apparent fudge in stating Constantine's age (e.g. Barnes 1982: 39-42; Elliott 1987: 425-427), or on Constantine's presence at Diocletian's right hand on their tour of Palestine (since this

was the first occasion Eusebius himself encountered the emperor who would so capture his attention). But the neglected characterisation that follows is equally interesting:

> In handsome physique and bodily height no other could bear comparison with him; in physical strength he so exceeded his contemporaries as even to put them to fear; he took pride in moral qualities rather than physical superiority, ennobling his soul first and foremost with self-control (σωφροσύνῃ), and thereafter distinguishing himself by the excellence of his rhetorical education (παιδεύσει λόγων), his instinctive shrewdness (φρονήσει τ' ἐμφύτῳ) and his God-given wisdom (τῇ θεοσδότῳ σοφίᾳ) (*VC* 1.19.2).

Nor does Constantine simply bear the traditional youthful education of the average elite Roman.[14] Eusebius is clear that intellectual interests stayed with him beyond his formative years. After his famed visions of the cross and of Christ Constantine summons Christian experts, who explain to him Christ's coming and his incarnation. But Constantine 'now decided personally to apply himself to the divinely inspired writings' (*VC* 1.32.3). That this is the exegetical education familiar from the *History* is confirmed by the detail that the Christian authorities summoned are 'those expert in his [God's] words' (*VC* 1.32.1). It is precisely such text-based research which defines Constantine's own academic prowess. At home, Eusebius notes, the emperor 'would take the books in his hands and apply his mind (προσανεῖχε τὸν νοῦν) to the meaning of the divinely inspired oracles' (*VC* 4.17.1) even to

[14] Eusebius does not place as much emphasis on Constantine's education at the hands of his parents as he does for Origen of Alexandria in the *History*. But Constantine's mother is praised for her wisdom (*VC* 3.42.1) and Constantine learnt about Christian piety from his father (*VC* 1.13; 1.16-17; 2.49).

the extent of staying up all night in study (*VC* 4.29.1). This is an intellectual emperor, dedicated to that same text criticism that forms the backbone of the *History*.

Like Dionysius and the other bishops of the *History*, Constantine's learning is not limited to private study but is evidenced in his extensive publications. Commentators have long noted the emphasis in the *Life* on Constantine's own letters. Fifteen are quoted verbatim (*VC* 2.24-42, 46, 48-60, 64-72; 3.17-20, 30-32, 52-53, 60, 61, 62, 64-65; 4.9-13, 35, 36, 42) but Eusebius refers to at least a further eight (*VC* 2.23; 3.6, 22, 23, 51, 58, 59; 4.52). Constantine, like Dionysius and the *History*'s other heroes, is a man of letters. Constantine writes other genres too, including orations - Eusebius famously promises to append to the *Life* Constantine's speech 'To the assembly of the saints' (*VC* 4.32.1) - and treatises (e.g. *VC* 4.55.1).[15] Such output is characteristic of the Eusebian Constantine: 'He also wrote countless other things of the same kind, and composed a great many letters. In some he gave instructions to bishops about what affected the churches of God; but on occasion he also addressed the congregations themselves' (*VC* 3.24.1). And in a reference laden with parallels to the *History*'s lists of episcopal outputs, Eusebius even promises a collection of Constantine's output (*VC* 3.24.2).[16] Constantine thus fits the model of literary leader established in the *History*.[17]

[15] For the most recent edition of the appended *Oration to the Saints* see Edwards (2003).

[16] Compare the references to Dionysius' works (*HE* 6.46.1-6; 7.24.3; 7.26.1-3) referenced above or Eusebius' collection of Origen's works (*HE* 6.36.3)

[17] The *Life* makes no explicit link with for example Marcus Aurelius, in line with its overall tendency not to compare Constantine with such classic heroes of late antique panegyric (see e.g. Williams 2008: 49-50).

As with Dionysius and his episcopal peers, Constantine's learning is celebrated not for its own sake but for the benefit it brings to the wider community. Constantine is both a teacher and a defender of that community against schism. He is repeatedly described as a teacher. He educated not only his own sons (*VC* 4.52.1, both verbally and via letter) but also acts as 'a tutor (διδάσκαλον)' (*VC* 4.18.1) to the praetorians and the rest of the military (*VC* 4.18.3; 4.19.1). His writings 'are full of helpful instruction (παιδεύσεώς… ὠφελείας πλήρεις)' *VC* 3.59' and he 'used persuasion (ἔπειθέ) and pleading (ἀπελογεῖτο) in what he wrote to them'. When Constantine spoke many flocked to hear his philosophy, in which 'he would seem to be initiating the audience with deep awe in the inspired doctrine (τὴν ἔνθεον διδασκαλίαν)' (*VC* 4.29.2). And in a striking parallel with Origen, another Christian intellectual of the *History*, Constantine is a Christian intellectual whose superiority non-Christian philosophers are prepared to admit (*VC* 4.55.2; cf. *HE* 6.18.2; 6.19.12). But the point is broader. Constantine's learning underlies his entire approach to government: 'he thought that he ought to rule his subjects with instructive argument (λόγῳ παιδευτικῷ), and establish his whole imperial rule as rational (λογικήν)' (*VC* 4.29.1). Like Eusebius' other bishops, Constantine's imperial oversight is built upon his intellectual capacities.[18]

Similarly, Constantine employs his intellectual and literary skills to defend the boundaries of the Christian community. Much of the *Life* concerns Constantine's correction

[18] In the *Ecclesiastical History* Eusebius' evidences an uneasy attitude to asceticism, but praises it when it is moderate, intellectual and intended to provide immediate benefit to the Christian community. Eusebius' brief mention of Constantine's own asceticism as enabling him to intercede with God in service of his 'unsleeping care for the general welfare (τὴν ὑπὲρ τῶν κοινῶν φροντίδα)' (*VC* 2.14.2) is reminiscent in particular of the description of James the Just Eusebius had taken from Hegesippus (*HE* 2.23.5-6).

of the church's disunity and schism. Like Dionysius, Constantine is ready and willing to convene his fellow ministers to solve perceived problems of unity. Indeed one of the programmatic statements of his acting like a bishop recalls just such a convocation when 'when some were at variance with each other at various places' (*VC* 1.44.1). More significant is his role once these gatherings begin – as Eusebius presents him he is not a mere organizer but an active participant: 'He did not disdain to be present and attend during their proceedings (ἐν μέσῃ δὲ τῇ τούτων διατριβῇ), and he participated in the subjects reviewed (κοινωνὸς τῶν ἐπισκοπουμένων ἐγίνετο)' (*VC* 1.44.2). In engaging in attempts to establish church unity Constantine is engaging in standard episcopal practice.

But more than this, just as in the *Ecclesiastical History* it is precisely Constantine's intellectual skills that render him effective. At the Council of Tyre, schism among the Egyptian churches is solved by a synod mobilised by Constantine (*VC* 4.41.1-3) that 'the Emperor personally vitalised (ζωπυρῶν) with his own intellectual effort (τῇ αὐτὸς αὐτοῦ διανοίᾳ)' (*VC* 4.41.4). As with the letters circulated by significant participants like Dionysius after synods of the *History*, so such documents are here authored by Constantine (e.g. *VC* 3.17; 3.22). In fact in some cases Constantine is writing to denizens of the same heresies with which the church's intellectual clerical leaders had dealt in preceding centuries (*VC* 3.64.1). The *Life* records how Constantine by means of direct intellectual and literary engagement 'removed the divisions (τὰς διαστάσεις ἐκποδὼν ποιησάμενος) and brought the whole Church of God into harmonious concord (ὑπὸ σύμφωνον ἁρμονίαν)' (*VC* 3.63.1; see too 3.66.1). Constantine, like Dionysius and the *History*'s other churchmen, leads through a superior understanding built upon their intellectual engagement with Scripture.

Finally, like his episcopal predecessors in the *History*, Eusebius' Constantine does not act in isolation but as part of the collective clergy. Eusebius notes how at councils 'he took his seat among them as if he were one voice among many' (*VC* 1.44.2; see too 3.10.5). Constantine also works collectively, as at Nicaea where Eusebius recounts how 'The Emperor listened to all, without resentment, and received the proposals with patient flexibility (σχολῇ τ' εὐτόνῳ); he took up what was said by each side in turn, and gently brought together (ἠρέμα συνήγαγε) those whose attitudes conflicted' (*VC* 3.13.1; see also 3.21.4) until consensus is achieved (in this case in part through his linguistic proficiency). This collectivity is characteristic of his behavior in all spheres of life. Bishops accompany him on campaign (*VC* 1.42.1; 2.4.1-2; 4.56.2-3) and hold established positions in his court (*VC* 2.63, see too *VC* 1.56.1). The more famous of the explicit statements of episcopal equivalency occurs while Constantine is dining with bishops (*VC* 4.24.1), a phenomenon referenced elsewhere too (*VC* 1.42.1; 3.15.1-2; 4.46). Indeed Constantine calls himself 'your fellow servant (ὁ συνθεράπων ὑμῶν)' (*VC* 2.69. 2; see too 3.12.5; 3.17.2). He is a bishop ostentatiously among bishops.

Eusebius' picture of Constantine is made in the mould he had already constructed in his *History*. Among his many attributes Constantine counts all of those that elevated the church's leaders over the last three hundred years. He is naturally intelligent and possessed of a scholarly drive that leads him to immerse himself in Christian texts and teachings until he has himself become the teacher. Like his episcopal predecessors he puts his learning to good purpose, educating those around him and protecting the Christian community. His prominence at councils is according to Eusebius based not simply on his authority as emperor but upon his capacity to practically contribute to the discussions therein. In his

characterisation of the emperor his biographer has thus made him in nature and deed as much a bishop as those episcopal heroes who fill the pages of his valorizing *History*.

4. Emperors as Bishops (and Bishops as Bishops)

We can now return to the explicit assimilation of Constantine's role to that of a bishop. Scholarship has here veered between strong and weak interpretations. The former is most famously represented by Petersen (1935), who articulated the view that Eusebius here validated a model of caesaropapism, that in turn proved the foundation for much later political theology (see Sansterre 1972 for a more moderate position).[19] More recently consensus has downplayed these comments. Barnes (1981:270) and Cameron and Hall (1999:320) all note that the more famous of the phrases (*VC* 4.24) is a remark uttered at a dinner party: 'he let slip the remark (λόγον ἀφῆκεν) that he was perhaps himself a bishop too (ὡς ἄρα καὶ αὐτὸς εἴη ἐπίσκοπος), *VC* 4.24.1' and the comparison, both in that phrase and in that of Constantine that follows, is made in the optative rather than the indicative mood. These scholars thus agree that it is better read as a casual equivalency than a formal assertion of status.

It is certainly true that no explicit assimilation of religious and political authority is being made here. And without an invitation to that episcopal dinner party one can only speculate as to whether Constantine's original comment was intended as gentle humour, flattering self-deprecation or a barbed promise of imposition. But to obsess over that would miss the more immediate opportunities offered to us by the other explicit episcopal

[19] For a survey of the modern development of the concept of caesaropapism see Dagron (1996: 290-322).

equivalency in the *Life*. That at the *Life*'s end was in the voice of Constantine, but that at its start was entirely in Eusebius' (*VC* 1.44). Thus whatever Constantine's original intention, Eusebius has appropriated and deliberately included the idea.[20]

Clues to how Eusebius' intended the phrase are found in the changes he makes, and the context in which he embeds it. Most noticeably, Eusebius has changed Constantine's phrase *tōn ektos*.[21] Most scholarship agrees that Constantine was here referring to those within the Empire but not part of the Christian church (see e.g. Cameron & Hall 1999:320).[22] And Eusebius used the phrase *tōn ektos* similarly elsewhere the *Life* (e.g. *VC* 2.23.2). But his framing of the quotation from Constantine indicate a desire to appropriate the episcopal equivalency in a more universal sense. Before reporting Constantine's comment Eusebius discusses Constantine's actions to ban idolatry, pagan sacrifice etc 'for all those under

[20] While I agree with Dagron 1996: 146-148 that Eusebius' is seeking to qualify the meaning of the phrase, and certainly not proposing any institutional sense to the words, Dagron's suggestion that Eusebius has deliberately muted the title 'universal bishop (κοινὸς ἐπίσκοπος)' ignores the fact that the phrase is Eusebius' own, and is not used in the version of the phrase in Constantine's voice (*VC* 4.24.1).

[21] Since the 16th century there has been debate over whether to take *tōn ektos* as the genitive plural of *hoi ektos* or *ta ektos* (see the history see Seston (1947:127). Most scholars now follow the latter position, but for recent advocates of the former see Farina (1966: 312-319); and Dagron (1996: 370).

[22] Contra. Fowden (1993:91), who suggests Eusebius desire to interpret this as a reference to Rome's subjects overlies Constantine's intention to refer to nations beyond the Empire's borders (and acknowledging the likely lack of consensus on the meaning of the phrase [n. 59]).

Roman rule' (*VC* 4.23.1) and afterwards frames it with the line 'In accordance with this saying, he exercised a bishop's supervision (ἐπεσκόπει) over all his subjects' (*VC* 4.24.1). Most importantly, when it came to his own appropriation of the explicit episcopal equivalency, he replaced *tōn ektos* with the qualifying adjective *koinos*, changing 'bishop of those outside' to 'universal bishop' (*VC* 1.44.1). This all suggests that Eusebius intended to change the way in which this phrase was read.

Exactly how is revealed by attention to context. Just before, Eusebius notes that Constantine aided not just the poor and needy of the Christian community, but 'apart from them (τούτων δ' ἐκτὸς) showed himself compassionate and beneficent to those outside (τοῖς ἔξωθεν) who approached him' (*VC* 1.43.1).[23] The reference there is again to non-Christians. Eusebius then begins the next chapter (in which the episcopal equivalency is found) by

[23] I note too the intriguing parallel here with one Seleucus, whose martyrdom is described by Eusebius near the climax of *The Martyrs of Palestine*. The Christian Cappadocian soldier Seleucus is introduced in terms similar to the military emperor Constantine as excelling in physical characteristics but more importantly in moral ones (*DMP[RP]* 11.21; cf. *VC* 1.19.2). And Eusebius then notes that like a bishop and steward (ἐπίσκοπός τις οἷα καὶ φροντιστὴς) he cared for destitute orphans and unsupported widows and those worn out by poverty and sickness, and in the manner of a father or guardian (πατρός τε καὶ κηδεμόνος δίκην) took onto himself the labours and miseries of all those cast aside (τῶν ἀπερριμμένων ἁπάντων)' (*DMP[RP]* 11.22). The episcopal equivalency here is based on the willingness and capacity to care for others. And in the passage preceding that same equivalency for Constantine, when describing his aid for the weak (*VC* 41.3-43.3), Eusebius notes explicitly his care for orphans (who 'he cared for in the father's stead (ἐν πατρὸς ἐπεμέλετο χώρᾳ)' (*VC* 1.43.2)), widows and the poor (et al.).

broadening the recipients of that compassion with universal language: 'Towards all people in general (Κοινῶς) he was such a man' (*VC* 1.44.1; further cognates are found in 1.44.2 and 1.44.3). But he then notes that 'to the church of God he paid particular (ἐξαίρετον) personal attention' before immediately making the episcopal equivalency that Constantine was 'like a universal bishop'. In other words, Eusebius begins with Constantine's behaviour towards non-Christians, for which the episcopal equivalency had originally been used, but then segues into a discussion of Christians, and repeats the episcopal equivalency at that point. And specifically, he repeats it for in the context of Constantine's interaction with other bishops.

This is the key to Eusebius' motivation here. After the statement of episcopal equivalency Eusebius describes Constantine's behaviour at church councils. In particular, we read that as he took his seat he 'dismissed his praetorians and soldiers and bodyguards of every kind, clad only in the fear of God and surrounded by the most loyal of his faithful companions' (*VC* 1.44.2). Eusebius presents Constantine as explicitly laying aside his military protection when intervening among bishops. He has instead his fear of God, a phrase demarking the characteristically Christian (and interestingly also used of the other Christian emperor in the *History*, Philip the Arab; see *HE* 6.34.1).[24] The point is about the nature of Constantine's authority. Eusebius indicates that Constantine's authority here comes not because of his imperial office – which he sets aside at the door in the symbol of his guard – but because of his own episcopal authority. Eusebius takes such great pains to demonstrate

[24] This is the phrase's only appearance in the *History* in Eusebius' auto-composition; two others occur in his lengthy quotation of the letter relating the suffering of the Lyons martyrs (see *HE* 5.1.48; 5.2.4). Eusebius uses it of Constantine elsewhere in the *Life* (see also *VC* 3.10.4) and related phrases appear as self-descriptors in quoted documents of Constantine (*VC* 2.26.2; 2.55.5).

how Constantine fulfills the criteria of a Christian bishop because his authority at councils is precisely as bishop rather than as emperor.

The episcopal equivalency is thus evidence of Eusebius trying to define the terms of the new Christian emperor's engagement with bishops. That is not, it is important to note, the same thing as Eusebius imagined as court theologian, legitimising Constantine's usurpation of religious authority. Such a model lies behind both the concept of caesaropapism, and the pernicious view of Eusebius as Constantine's episcopal lackey that have long dogged his legacy.[25] But such views forget the chronology here. As discussed above, the *Life* was written at the end of Constantine and Eusebius' lives. It is thus a retrospective – Constantine has already summoned councils, sat at them and intervened in their decisions. Eusebius' picture is a response to Constantine's actions, not the basis for them. It is an attempt to define and delimit the nature of Constantine's past (heavy-handed) interventions in church matters. His ingenious solution was to suggest that the legitimation for such actions was not Constantine's imperial authority, but his demonstration of precisely those skills that legitimated other bishops acting so.

The motivation for such this picture is clear if we consider the *Life*'s audience. Averil Cameron (1997; restated Cameron & Hall 1999: 3) has suggested that the *Life* was written primarily for Constantine's three sons after the turbulent twists and murderous turns of their succession in summer 337, to ensure that they continued with policies beneficial to the church. This position has received widespread support. We can now take this a stage further. Eusebius' definition the legitimation for Constantine's interaction with the church is a

[25] Most famously expressed by Burckhardt (1853:326)'s uncompromising dismissal of Eusebius as 'der erste durch und durch unredliche Geschichtsschreiber des Alterhums'.

suggestion to the princes that their involvement with bishops must be on the same basis as their father's – by virtue of demonstrable episcopal qualities rather than their imperial inheritance. Eusebius is thus shoring up the authority of the Christian church he had worked out so carefully in the *Ecclesiastical History*.

There are more far-reaching consequences too. While Cameron is certainly correct that the *Life* is targeted at the petulant princes, they do not I suggest represent the extent of Eusebius' ambition. The *Life* would have had a wider circle, even if only within the court in which it circulated, including elite Christian clerics.[26] Such an audience would fit with that of the *Ecclesiastical History* (Verdoner 2010), which had presented models of authority for an elite Christian audience, with clerics prominent among them (e.g. *HE* 10.1-2). The same, I suggest, is true of the *Life*; indeed Eusebius intimates as much twice at the *Life*'s start (*VC* 1.3.4-1.4.1).[27]

[26] A court delivery is suggested by Cameron & Hall 1999: 33-34, noting the *Life*'s elevated style, its debts to biblical and panegyric models, its likely audience of mixed pagans and Christians, and comparing the similarly elite, mixed audiences of *Panegyrici Latini* 5 (8) and the *In Praise of Constantine*. A wider court circulation is suggested too by classical publication models, which involved gradually widening concentric circles of copying and acquisition in elite communities; see Starr (1987).

[27] See in particular Van Nuffelen (2013), building on Francis (2003) for the suggestion that the *Life* is the last image in a series of images of the divine cascading from God down to us. Thus participating in the increasing use of visual imagery of late antique biographical writing, it establishes a likeness of Constantine that also bolsters the text's own authority as part of a cascade of images from the divine. More generally on Eusebius' apologetic use of biography see Johnson (2004).

Close attention reveals that there is material in the *Life* that quite clearly has an audience other than the three princes in mind. For example, when discussing tragedies in Antioch that unsettled the populace and split the church into factions, Eusebius notes that Envy 'perhaps hoped that the emperor would himself change his attitude to us in irritation (ἀποκναίσαντα) at our troubles and disorders (ταραχαῖς τε καὶ ἀκοσμίαις)' (*VC* 3.59.1). This seems an obvious warning to the church that their failure to achieve harmony risks alienating their imperial benefactors. Similarly Finn Damgaard (2013: 118) has suggested that Eusebius' use of Mosaic imagery invokes not just Moses but his troublesome Israelites too, and thereby serves as a warning to Christian bishops about their divisive behaviour.

Written for such an audience, the assimilation of Constantine to the great bishops of the church's past acquires a slight edge. The celebration of Constantine's success in the episcopal role contains an unspoken question about other bishops' capacities to fulfill the role. As we have seen, prominent among Constantine's episcopal triumphs is his repeated success in bringing unity to the church. This is at one point claimed as a quality unique to him:

> The parts of the common body were united together (ἡνοῦτό) and joined in a single harmony (ἁρμονίᾳ συνήπτετο μιᾷ), and alone the Catholic Church of God shone forth gathered into itself (εἰς ἑαυτὴν συνεστραμμένη), with no heretical or schismatic group left anywhere in the world. For this great achievement also, among those that ever were, only the Emperor who cared about God could claim responsibility (μόνος τῶν πώποτε τὴν αἰτίαν ὁ τῷ θεῷ μεμελημένος βασιλεὺς ἐπεγράφετο) (*VC* 3.66.3).

Eusebius' language here makes clear that Constantine's achievement here is the unity he achieved. But his unique success is of course a reminder that other bishops have demonstrably failed to achieve it. Many of Constantine's triumphant successes at synods stem from the clergy's failure to achieve and maintain harmony (e.g. *VC* 4.41.1). That failure to had long been a concern for Eusebius. Here again comparison of the *Life* with Eusebius' earlier biographical efforts is instructive. A discontent with Christian leaders' persistent fragmentation in the *History* seeps through what is otherwise a picture of universal harmony when Eusebius suggests that the tetrarchs' persecution (303-313) was in part a divine punishment for the church's fall into division (*HE* 8.1.7). The *Life*, which envisages a similar audience,[28] contains I suggest the same festering unease.

Eusebius' own experiences between the publication of the *History* (final edition 326; see Burgess 1977) and the *Life* can only have exacerbated his concerns. Eusebius had been formally condemned by an Antiochene synod in early 325 before the Council of Nicaea later that year, and the Nicene position to which he eventually acquiesced stands in a not unproblematic relationship to his own theology. Interestingly, it had been Constantine's intervention that had resolved matters in Eusebius' favour, as Eusebius reports in a letter to his congregation (recounted in Athanasius, *Defence of the Nicene Definition* 35). The decade since Nicaea had arguably been more divisive for the church than any before it, and had seen an increasing rivalry between Eusebius and anti-Arians like Anthanasius of Alexandria and Marcellus of Ancyra (Barnes 1981: 224-244). In the latter case it was again Constantine who

[28] Indeed Eusebius' *Onomasticon* is also addressed to Paulinus, and the *Preparation for the Gospel* and *Demonstration of the Gospel* are both addressed to another bishop, Theodotus of Laodicea. I owe David DeVore for this observation.

Eusebius' credited with the downfall of Marcellus, who had explicitly targeted Eusebius (*CM* 2.4.31). Moreover, at least as Eusebius tells it, it was again Constantine who sided with Eusebius when he was proposed, unwilling, for the Antiochene episcopacy (*VC* 3.60.1-3.62.3). Eusebius had experienced first hand the church's continuing infighting, and the potential benefits of imperial intervention.

It is possible therefore that the *Life* contains not just a warning for Constantine's sons, but one for Eusebius' fellow clerics too, that a failure to achieve consensus opens the door for imperial intervention. That is not to say that Eusebius is opposed to imperial involvement in church affairs. Again, Eusebius' earlier biographical experiments are helpful, testifying as they do to a long-held belief in the fundamental compatibility of Christianity and Rome. In the *Ecclesiastical History* good Roman emperors had always protected and even supported Christianity (see e.g. *HE* 2.2.1-2.2.3; 3.33.1-4; 4.8.6-4.9.3; 4.12.1; 4.13.1-7; 7.30.19); Constantine's positive intervention in church affairs was simply a natural extension. And Eusebius' own recent experiences, as shown above, might well lead him to be sympathetic to the intervention of a sympathetic emperor in the affairs of the church, especially one he could represent as being on his side.

The crux for Eusebius though was the basis and manner of such intervention. Both statements of Constantine's episcopal equivalency contain the same qualification that Constantine is like a bishop 'appointed by God (ἐκ/ ὑπὸ θεοῦ καθεσταμένος)' (*VC* 1.44.1; 4.24.1). That might originate in Constantine's own wish to validate his decision making upon bishops; we might compare the evolution of his conversion narrative to provide him with direct contact with Christ, rather than indirectly through episcopal interpretation (see Van Dam 2012). But Eusebius' insistence that Constantine was a bishop by action (rather than just

by claim) asserts instead that such episcopal intervention was legitimate not for just any emperor, but only if and when based on the criteria of episcopal authority Eusebius himself had delineated in the *History*. A final phrase used by Eusebius during his own appropriation of the episcopal equivalency makes clear these priorities.

> Then such as he was able to be prevailed upon by argument (τῇ κρείττονι γνώμῃ πειθηνίους) and adopting a calm and conciliatory (εὐσταθῆ τε καὶ ὁμογνώμονα) attitude, he commended most warmly, showing how he favoured general unanimity, but the obstinate he rejected (τοὺς δ' ἀπειθῶς ἔχοντας ἀπεστρέφετο). There were even some who spoke harshly against him, and he tolerated them without resentment (ἔφερεν ἀνεξικάκως), with a gentle voice (ἠρεμαίᾳ καὶ πραείᾳ φωνῇ) bidding them to behave reasonably and not be contentious. Some of them respected his rebukes and desisted, while those who were past curing and could not be brought to a sound mind he left in the hands of God, being unwilling himself to devise anything whatever to any person's hurt (*VC* 1.44.3-1.45.1).

This passage well demonstrates Eusebius' twin priorities. The advantage of the emperor's intervention is his ability to delineate between competing sides, and his ability to reject and rebuke 'the obstinate' – those in the church who in its past and its present threatened to mar its unity, who were always Eusebius' main concern. Eusebius' imperial bishop is capable of achieving that consensus which had eluded the bishops proper throughout the church's history. But Eusebius again suggests that Constantine's successful interaction with bishops be on the basis of argument. This insistence on Constantine's interactions with bishops as equals may be stretching the truth somewhat; Constantine's own

letters seem rather more forceful (see e.g. *VC* 4.42.3-4). But that only makes more obvious Eusebius' own insistence that an emperor's touch when dealing with bishops be light.

5. Conclusion

The *Life* is an extraordinary example of ancient biography. This is in part because of its strange hybrid nature. But it is also, I argue, because it represents the culmination of a lifetime's exploration in the biographer's art, and I have suggested that there is more to be gleaned by reading it alongside Eusebius' approach to his subjects in his earlier works. The *Life* certainly gives us an emperor in line with much earlier panegyric, and one that picks up the Moses typology of Philo's *Life of Moses* and runs with it. But it is also the final stage in Eusebius' musings on the role of the bishop in the Christian community. In recording and appropriating Constantine's own passing claim to episcopal equivalency Eusebius fits the new Christian emperor to the model of church leadership he had carefully constructed in his *History*. His Constantine demonstrates the intelligence of an academic cleric, and employs it as would the ideal bishop in pursuit of the pastoral support of the Christian community and the shoring up of its boundaries. And he does so in communion with other bishops. But by painting a picture of an emperor doing so more successfully than those bishops or their predecessors of the preceding three centuries had done, Eusebius was also perhaps issuing a warning about such bishops' behaviour. What we have in the *Life* then is Eusebius' implicit endorsement of what it was by now clear would be inevitable imperial oversight of episcopal activity. Indeed Eusebius celebrates the emperor's intervention in church affairs, if nothing else for the good of the church (and himself). But by characterizing Constantine's involvement at church councils as he has, Eusebius was also attempting to carefully define

the terms of that engagement. Eusebius is clear that an emperor's involvement with the church must be not as dominant emperor but as (more) effective bishop.

Further Reading

For a general introduction to current thinking on Eusebius see Johnson (2013). The best translation of the *Life* is that of Cameron and Hall (1999) with excellent introduction; there is also a more recent French translation by Pietri & Rondeau (2013). Both use the edition of Winckelmann (1975 [rev. 1992]) which is unsurpassed. For early concerns over the *Life*'s authenticity, see Gregoire (1938), Seston (1947), Winckelmann (1962) and Jones and Skeat (1954). For the debate over genre, see Pasquali (1910), Barnes (1989) & (1994), Cameron (1997). On the relationship of the *Life* with the *History* see Hall (1993a & b) and Drake (1988). On Eusebius' access to earlier materials more generally see Carriker (2003). On the *Life* and caesaropapism see Dagron (1996) and De Decker & Dupuis-Masay (1980). For the influence of panegyric on the *Life* see Storch (1971). On Eusebius' use of a Moses typology see Hollerich (1989), Rapp (1998), Wilson (1998), Inowlocki (2007), Williams (2008) and Damgaard (2013). On the *Life*'s construction of its own authority see Van Nuffelen (2013).

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Author Biography (James Corke-Webster)

James Corke-Webster is a Lecturer in Ancient History at the University of Durham, having previously lectured at the University of Edinburgh. His PhD is from the University of Manchester, and was completed while a Fulbright Scholar at the University of California, Berkeley. His research concerns the tensions between literary complexity and social reality in narratives of the high and late Roman Empire. He has published a number of recent articles on early Christian historiography, martyr literature, and novelistic texts, and is currently writing a book on Eusebius of Caesarea’s *Ecclesiastical History*.

Abbreviations (not in Liddell & Scott)

HE = Historia ecclesiastica
VC = Vita Constantini
DMP[RP] = De martyribus Palaestinae (recensio prolixior)
CM – Contra Marcellum

Key terms

bishop
Caesarea
caesaropapism
Constantine
Ecclesiastical History
episcopacy
Eusebius
imperial biography
intellectualisation
Life of Constantine
The Martyrs of Palestine