Introduction

> I believe that my working on this project is of the highest importance, because I am not aware of any among the ecclesiastical writers up to this point who has devoted his attention to this kind of writing. I am hopeful that it will be found very useful by those enthusiastic about the valuable learning contained in historical writing.
>
> Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.1.5–6

The written history of early Christianity began as its first age was drawing to a close. In the early fourth century, Eusebius of Caesarea declared himself the first Christian historian. Three centuries had passed since the carpenter's son met his early end in Jerusalem, and one of the two rulers of the known world, the vast span of the Roman Empire, had recently converted to the religion built on his teachings. Eusebius was looking back on the stuttering birth of a religion: on a mass of different Christianities evolving across the Empire, jostling for position with other provincial religious sects, voluntary associations, and organisations, and struggling under the routine violence of Roman provincial life. Gathering together the diverse sources available to him, Eusebius began to compose a narrative of Christian development, the first since the author of *Luke–Acts* in the New Testament had put down his pen. At some points Eusebius worked to stitch together materials he had inherited, at others he wrote freely in his own words. The resulting ten-book work, the pioneering *Ecclesiastical History*, is the foundational account of the early life of the world's largest religion. It remains our prime source for early Christian history and continues to mould, directly and indirectly, most work on that topic.

Perhaps unsurprisingly then, Eusebius' *History* has been short of neither readers nor comment. But those readers have until recently asked a relatively narrow range of questions. For most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, scholarship on Eusebius kept returning to the

interrelated issues of his reliability and his relationship to the first Christian emperor, Constantine.[1] The two issues were seen as related, since Eusebius' good faith in recording events was assumed to be inversely proportionate to his intimacy to the converted emperor. Broadly speaking, there were two schools of thought.

First, Edward Gibbon, so often the touchstone for modern discussion, here too established a critical attitude to Eusebius that would linger through much of the three centuries that followed. Gibbon expressed doubt that the accounts in the *History* of the persecutions of Christians in particular could be trusted, since their author was writing under Constantine:

> I cannot determine what I ought to transcribe, till I am satisfied how much I ought to believe. The gravest of ecclesiastical historians, Eusebius himself, indirectly confesses that he has related whatever might redound to the glory, and that he has suppressed all that could tend to the disgrace, of religion. Such an acknowledgement will naturally excite a suspicion that a writer who has so openly violated one of the fundamental laws of history has not paid a very strict regard to the observance of the other; and the suspicion will derive additional credit from the character of Eusebius, which was less tinctured with credibility, and more practised in the arts of courts, than that of almost any of his contemporaries.[2]

Such worries about the value of Eusebius' historical writing were only exacerbated when scholars considered another text of Eusebius, his *Life of Constantine*, the biography-cum-eulogy of the emperor. An interest in that text, rather than the *History*, prompted Joseph Burckhardt's damning indictment of Eusebius as 'the first historian of antiquity dishonest to the bone', which is now rather better known than Gibbon's parallel concern over the *History*.[3] Neither soundbite, however, quite matches Franz Overbeck's cutting dismissal of Eusebius as 'stylist to the emperor's theological wig'.[4]

[1] What follows is not a comprehensive survey of the vast scholarship on Eusebius. I consider only modern works and aim only to provide a sense of shifting attitudes, via the most prominent commentators. For a survey of earlier work, see Marie Verdoner, *Narrated Reality: The* Historia Ecclesiastica *of Eusebius of Caesarea*. Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity 9 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011), 4–8. I omit as well much theological commentary on Eusebius.

[2] Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 2 vols. (London: The Folio Society, 1984), vol. II, 197.

[3] Jacob Burckhardt, *Die Zeit Constantin's des Grossen* (Leipzig: E. A. Seemann, 1853 [repr. 1898]), 326. Such accusations surfaced even in antiquity, though they did not necessarily affect the reception of the *History*; see e.g., Soc. *HE* 1.pr.

[4] Franz Overbeck, *Werke und Nachlaß. Band 6.1: Kirchenlexicon Materialien: Christentum und Kultur*, ed. Barbara von Reibnitz (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1996), 246.

Another strand of scholarship, however, placed rather more faith in Eusebius. So Frederick Foakes-Jackson, for example, provided a sharp riposte to Gibbon:

> In a very unjust attack, in which Eusebius is blamed for omitting to describe the corruption of the Church after a long interval of peace, Gibbon accuses our historian of misrepresenting the facts and only recording what was to the credit of Christianity. A perusal, however, of the somewhat obscure rhetoric at the beginning of the eighth book of the *History* will effectually silence such an imputation.[5]

For Foakes-Jackson, Eusebius was an honest historian, endeavouring to provide a representative picture of the church in the face of practical difficulties, not least the availability of evidence at the time he wrote. Eusebius made mistakes, but he did not deceive.[6] Foakes-Jackson did not deny that intimacy with Constantine that led Gibbon, Burckhardt, et al. to condemn Eusebius.[7] So his positive evaluation of Eusebius' good faith could only be achieved by drawing a distinction between the *Life* and Books 8 to 10 of the *History*, whose increasingly panegyrical tendencies he acknowledged, and Books 1 to 7, where he located Eusebius' real historical value.[8]

These two opposing attitudes to Eusebius and his *History* coexisted through the twentieth century.[9] They reached both their pinnacle and their climax in the scholarly dispute between Robert Grant and Timothy Barnes in the 1980s. Grant, on the one hand, offered the most sophisticated version of the critical stance. In a series of articles, he teased out Eusebius' techniques of historical composition in the *History*, often comparing Eusebius' presentation of events with that preserved by independent evidence. Grant concluded, again citing Eusebius' idealisation of Constantine, that 'Eusebius can never be trusted if contradicted by a more reliable witness, hardly ever even if not contradicted'.[10] Summing

[5] Frederick Foakes-Jackson, *Eusebius Pamphili, Bishop of Caesarea in Palestine and First Christian Historian: A Study of the Man and His Writings* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons Ltd, 1933), 41.
[6] Foakes-Jackson, *Eusebius Pamphili*, 69.
[7] Foakes-Jackson, *Eusebius Pamphili*, 3; 136.
[8] Foakes-Jackson, *Eusebius Pamphili*, 98.
[9] The position that favoured Eusebius' reliability was aided – given the importance of the *Life* to assessments of the reliability of the *History* – by the demonstration via independent papyrological evidence, in Arnold H. M. Jones and Theodore C. Skeat, 'Notes on the Genuineness of the Constantinian Documents in Eusebius's *Life of Constantine*', *JEH* 5.2 (1954), 196–200, that Eusebius' quotation of documents in the *Life* was reliable.
[10] Robert M. Grant, 'Early Alexandrian Christianity', *ChHist* 40.2 (1971), 133–44; at 142; see too Robert M. Grant, 'The Uses of History in the Church before Nicaea', *Studia Patristica* 9.2 (1972), 166–78; Robert M. Grant, 'The Case Against Eusebius: Or, Did the Father of Church History Write History', *Studia Patristica* 12 (1975), 413–21.

up the *History* as a whole, he did not mince his words: it 'contains a judicious mixture of authentic record with a good deal of suppression of fact and occasional outright lies'. Grant's careful discussion laid bare the mechanisms by which Eusebius constructed the *History* as a highly coloured picture of the past.[11]

Timothy Barnes' seminal *Constantine and Eusebius* offered a radically different picture. As its title hints, Barnes' great insight was to question the universal assumption of intimacy between Eusebius and Constantine. By divorcing the two – pointing to Eusebius' provincial position in Caesarea and arguing that the two met at most four times, and never necessarily one-on-one – Barnes banished the spectre of the court theologian.[12] This was ground-breaking. Freed from his undeserved reputation as an imperial lackey, in Barnes' hands Eusebius emerged more strongly than ever as an independent biblical scholar and an honest, if not altogether successful, historian. The *History*, by extension, emerged as a largely reliable source for Christian history. Rather like that of Foakes-Jackson, Barnes' position involved a separation of Books 1 to 7 from Books 8 to 10, this time more formally, via a theory of multiple editions.

Of these two heavyweights, Barnes' portrait proved the more influential. The relative neglect of Grant's thesis has, I suggest, been due to the poor reception of his monograph on Eusebius (as opposed to the articles referenced above). The work of both Barnes and Grant coincided with a period of intense effort dedicated to establishing the dating of the *History*, and in particular the number and sequence of editions in which it was published, which we will consider in Chapter 2. For some, this was motivated by a desire to trace the evolution in Eusebius' thought over time, via the changes he made. Both Barnes and Grant were heavily involved in the former project, but they disagreed over whether the second task was possible. Grant's 1980 monograph, *Eusebius as Church Historian*, was the most comprehensive attempt to accomplish it.[13] Barnes comprehensively

[11] Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, ed. Robert A. Craft and Gerhard Krodel, trans. a team from the Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins (London: SCM Press, 1972 [orig. 1934]), attempted a similar deconstruction earlier, but the details of his critique were much criticised; see e.g., Daniel J. Harrington, 'The Reception of Walter Bauer's *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* during the Last Decade', *HThR* 73 (1980), 289–98; and Thomas Robinson, *The Bauer Thesis Examined: Geography of Heresy in the Early Church* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988).

[12] On the interactions between Eusebius and Constantine, see Timothy D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 266; on the honesty of his scholarship, see 140–41. Barnes noted deficiencies in Eusebius' historical writing, but assigned them to his working method (suggesting, for example, that Eusebius left spaces in his dictation for scribes to fill).

[13] Robert M. Grant, *Eusebius as Church Historian* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980). See also Robert M. Grant, 'Papias in Eusebius' Church History', in Paul Lévy and Etienne Wolff (eds),

refuted that attempt.[14] It was in large part this that led to the hegemony of Barnes' views on Eusebius more generally over the next thirty years, and to the relative neglect of Grant's insights about Eusebius' careful and misleading writing.

Barnes' work has been of great significance in studies of Eusebius. In particular, his separation of Constantine and Eusebius remains seminal. But it has had the unfortunate consequence of promoting uncritical use of the *History*. Removed from Constantine's shadow, Eusebius was widely treated as a largely reliable conduit of earlier material.[15] A consensus on the *History* emerged, which acknowledged some Eusebian selection and editing but essentially affirmed its reliability and continuing value for reconstructive history. Harold Attridge and Gohei Hata's 1992 *status quaestionis* collection of essays, *Eusebius, Christianity and Judaism*, is indicative, since its interest in Eusebius stemmed from a desire to reconstruct the realities of Christian history. We read in its introduction,

> Eusebius had interests and biases, and his history was designed to serve various apologetic ends. He also had his blind spots, ignoring or slighting vast segments of the early Christian world. Nonetheless, his work remains essential reading for any student of Christian origins.[16]

The essays in this volume almost all either use the *History* as a source for reconstructing Christian history or use other evidence to supplement its picture. In that, they echo all earlier commentary, since all the approaches delineated above were fundamentally concerned with Eusebius' reliability, though differing in their judgement of it. Up until this point, there was almost no consideration either of Eusebius' agency as author or of the nature of his project in the *History*.

This was in large part due to the universal denigration of Eusebius' capacities as a writer. If the *Life* was the work that impacted on readings of the authenticity of the *History*, it was two other writings, the *Preparation for the Gospel* and *Proof of the Gospel*, which moulded scholarly attitudes to Eusebius' style. Both works are filled with extensive quotations from earlier

Mélanges d'histoire des religions offerts à Henri-Charles Puech (Paris: Presses universitaires, 1974), 209–13.

[14] Timothy D. Barnes, 'Some Inconsistencies in Eusebius', *JThS* 35.2 (1984), 470–5. The attempt to trace Eusebius' changing thought has largely been abandoned, though see William Tabbernee, 'Eusebius' "Theology of Persecution": As Seen in the Various Editions of His Church History', *JECS* 5.3 (1997), 319–34.

[15] Barnes did not consider Books 1–7 of the *History* apologetic, in part because he dated them early, to a period where apologetic was less necessary. See Chapter 2 for detailed discussion.

[16] Harold W. Attridge and Gohei Hata (eds), *Eusebius, Christianity and Judaism*. Studia Post-Biblica 42 (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 15.

authors, and this citational habit provoked a broader dismissal of Eusebius' compositional ability (in line with wider derogatory approaches to late antique aesthetics). This pejorative judgement had an old pedigree. In the ninth century Photius damned Eusebius with faint praise, remarking archly, 'His way of speaking is in no way pleasant or brilliant. But he is a much-learned man' (*Bibl.* 13). Almost all scholarship of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries followed Photius' lead. So Foakes-Jackson, in what is virtually a paraphrase of Photius, remarked, 'It will appear that Eusebius is anything but an agreeable writer, though his erudition would be remarkable in any age'.[17] He expanded further:

> Considering his singular life, full of stirring experiences, he seems to have been a dull laborious man constantly reading, and making extracts, which he lacks ability to present in an interesting form. Nevertheless, he is an invaluable guide, and his *History*, if it cannot be read with pleasure, can at least be studied with profit.[18]

Foakes-Jackson thus tended to view Eusebius as 'rather a compiler of extracts than a writer of history', a judgement echoed on the continent by Eduard Schwartz.[19] More recently, Andrew Louth's introduction to Geoffrey Williamson's popular translation of the *History* persists in warning that 'such writing is enormously valuable to have, though tedious to read'.[20] This widely shared dismissal has meant a neglect of Eusebius as author, including his engagement in the literary culture of the elite, Greek-speaking Roman world.

In recent years, however, as part of the steady rehabilitation of much classical literature and gradual increase in appreciation of the distinctive style of late antique literature,[21] Eusebius' writings have experienced a renaissance.[22] This has coincided with a desire to afford more attention to the neglected works of an author whose corpus spanned well beyond the narrow corner traditionally studied, namely the *History*, the *Life*, and the

[17] Foakes-Jackson, *Eusebius Pamphili*, xiv; and *passim*. [18] Foakes-Jackson, *Eusebius Pamphili*, 73.

[19] Eduard Schwartz (ed.), *Gesammelte Schriften*, 5 vols. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1938 [orig. 1908]), vol. 1, 110–30.

[20] Geoffrey A. Williamson, *The History of the Church: From Christ to Constantine*. Penguin Classics (London: Penguin Books, 1965 [repr. 1989]), xiii.

[21] Michael Roberts, *The Jeweled Style: Poetry and Poetics in Late Antiquity* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), responding to the art historical insights of Hans P. L'Orange, *Art Forms and Civic Life in the Late Roman Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965). See too the review article, Averil Cameron, 'Redrawing the Map: Early Christian Territory after Foucault', *JRS* 76 (1986), 266–71.

[22] This has been helped, I think, by a more general appreciation for ancient editing and organisation. See e.g., Jason König and Tim Whitmarsh (eds), *Ordering Knowledge in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge/New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007), at, e.g., 28–30.

In Praise of Constantine. A well-rounded understanding of Eusebius, it has recently been argued, can come only from studying his entire oeuvre, in which narrative history is the exception rather than the rule. Exciting new studies have now begun to appear – first on Eusebius' biblical commentaries,[23] then on the *Preparation* and *Proof*,[24] and now on Eusebius' minor works too – *Gospel Questions and Solutions*, for example, or *On Biblical Place Names*.[25] As these studies have accumulated, Eusebius' skill as an author has become abundantly apparent. This rich array of work has revealed an equally rich range of skills, and a writer capable of subtlety and sleight of hand in equal measure.

This new age in Eusebian scholarship has yet, however, to make much headway in studies of the *History*.[26] There have been isolated studies of select sections, notably the mini-biography of Origen that dominates Book 6, which remain some of the best scholarship on the *History*.[27] Worthy of mention too in this regard are two treatments of Eusebius' *Martyrs of*

[23] Michael Hollerich, *Eusebius of Caesarea's Commentary on Isaiah: Christian Exegesis in the Age of Constantine*. Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999).

[24] Arieh Kofsky, *Eusebius of Caesarea against Paganism*. Jewish and Christian Perspectives 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2000); Sabrina Inowlocki, *Eusebius and the Jewish Authors: His Citation Technique in an Apologetic Context*. Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 64 (Leiden: Brill, 2006); Aaron P. Johnson, *Ethnicity and Argument in Eusebius'* Praeparatio Evangelica. Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); and Sébastien Morlet, *La 'Démonstration évangélique' d'Eusèbe de Césarée: étude sur l'apologétique chrétienne à l'époque de Constantin*. Collection des études augustiniennes. Série antiquité 187 (Paris: Institut d'études augustiniennes, 2009).

[25] R. Steven Notley and Ze'ev Safrai, *Eusebius, Onomasticon: The Place Names in Divine Scripture. A Triglott Edition with Notes and Commentary*. Jewish and Christian Perspectives (Leiden, Brill, 2005); Claudio Zamagni, *Eusèbe de Césarée: Questions évangéliques. Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes par Claudio Zamagni*. Sources chrétiennes 523 (Paris: Éditions du cerf, 2009).

[26] Note though Lorenzo Perrone, 'Eusebius of Caesarea as a Christian Writer', in Avner Raban and Kenneth G. Holum (eds), *Caesarea Maritima: A Retrospective after Two Millennia*. Documenta et Monumenta Orientis Antiqui 21 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 515–30; at 520–21, expressing disappointment with the neglect of Eusebius' literary novelty, and suggesting partial exceptions to the traditional condemnation of it, including the final three books of the *History*.

[27] See Patricia Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man*. Transformation of the Classical Heritage 5 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983), at, e.g., 18; Simon Swain, 'Biography and Biographic in the Literature of the Roman Empire', in Mark J. Edwards and Simon Swain (eds), *Portraits: Biographical Representation in the Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 1–37; Adele Monaci Castagno (ed.), *La biografia di Origene fra storia e agiografia. Atti del VI Convegno di Studi del Gruppo Italiano di Ricerca su Origene e la Tradizione Alessandrina*. Biblioteca di Adamantius 1 (Villa Verucchio: Pazzini, 2004), including, in particular, Christoph Markschies, 'Eusebius als Schriftsteller: Beobachtungen zum sechsten Buch der Kirchengeschichte', 223–38; and Joseph Verheyden, 'Origen in the Making: Reading Between (and Behind) the Lines of Eusebius' "Life of Origen" (HE 6)', in Sylwia Kaczmarek and Henryk Pietras (eds), *Origeniana Decima: Origen as a Writer. Papers of the 10th International Origen Congress, University School of Philosophy and Education 'Ignatianum', Krakow, Poland, 31 August–4 September 2009*. Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 244 (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 713–25.

Palestine, an account of the sufferings of his fellow Palestinians in the 'Great Persecution' of 303–13, which once formed part of the *History* (see Chapter 1).[28] But treatments of the *History* as a whole have been rare. Telling, for example, is its deliberate omission from the 2011 edited collection of Sabrina Inowlocki and Claudio Zamagni, which seeks to draw together the recent gains of Eusebian studies in order to offer a new portrait of Eusebius as a writer.[29]

Recent book length treatments of the *History* can in fact be counted on one hand. Monika Gödecke's 1987 *Geschichte als Mythos*, which reads the *History* as constructing an apologetic 'mythology' for his audience, was ahead of its time, but its insights have not been followed up in any systematic way.[30] Doron Mendels, in his controversial 1999 study of the *History, The Media Revolution of Christianity*, suggested that Eusebius acted like a modern news editor, selecting and manipulating his sources to tailor stories to his readers. While the acknowledgement of Eusebius' careful narrative construction and audience-awareness was welcome, the media thesis was untenable, as we shall see.[31] Erica Carotenuto produced a valuable study on Eusebius' method of quotation.[32] Finally, Marie Verdoner's *Narrated Reality*, approaching the *History* from a narratological perspective, contains a large number of insights, but by focusing on the text as text loses sight of Eusebius himself and his context.[33]

A new, full-length treatment of the *History*, which pays proper attention both to Eusebius' long-neglected skills as editor and writer and to his historical context, is thus pressing. It is this that this book, and the doctoral thesis from which it stems, attempt to provide. Since I began my doctoral

[28] Erica Carotenuto, 'Five Egyptians Coming from Jerusalem: Some Remarks on Eusebius' "De Martyribus Palestinae" 11.6–13', *CQ* 52.2 (2002), 500–6, demonstrates that Eusebius constructs an anecdote in chapter 11 of the *Martyrs* using recycled material from earlier in that text and Origen's *On First Principles*. Joseph Verheyden, 'Pain and Glory: Some Introductory Comments on the Rhetorical Qualities and Potential of the *Martyrs of Palestine* by Eusebius of Caesarea', in Johan Leemans (ed.), *Martyrdom and Persecution in Late Ancient Christianity: Festschrift Boudewijn Dehandschutter*. Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium 241 (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 353–91, does not go so far, but nevertheless highlights the rhetorical aspects of the *Martyrs*.

[29] Sabrina Inowlocki and Claudio Zamagni (eds), *Reconsidering Eusebius: Collected Essays on Literary, Historical and Theological Issues*. Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 107 (Leiden/Boston, MA: Brill, 2011); the omission of direct treatment of the *History* is justified at ix–x.

[30] Monika Gödecke, *Geschichte als Mythos. Eusebs Kirchengeschichte*. Europäische Hochschulschriften 23, Theologie 307 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1987).

[31] Doron Mendels, *The Media Revolution of Early Christianity: An Essay on Eusebius's Ecclesiastical History* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999).

[32] Erica Carotenuto, *Tradizione e innovazione nella Historia ecclesiastica di Eusebius di Cesarea. Istituto italiano per gli studi storici* 46 (Naples: Istituto italiano per gli studi storici (il Mulino), 2001).

[33] Verdoner, *Narrated Reality*.

work in 2009, further promising steps have been taken in this direction, as attention has returned to the *History*. Sébastien Morlet and Lorrenzo Perrone have embarked on a multi-volume commentary on the *History*, though as yet we have only the first, introductory volume.[34] A further edited collection on Eusebius, Aaron Johnson and Jeremy Schott's 2013 *Eusebius of Caesarea: Traditions and Innovations*, contains a number of pieces on the *History*.[35] Johnson's introduction to Eusebius, published the next year and the best study of Eusebius as an author yet written, contains a highly illuminating chapter on the *History*.[36]

What follows is not a comprehensive study of Eusebius, or even of the *History*. It is, rather, an attempt to answer the question of how and why that author wrote this text. Eusebius' appetite for quotation and his regular discussion of other writers allow us to trace the influences upon his writing, and thus to situate his innovative picture of early Christianity within broader intellectual trends in early Christianity. At the same time, however, Eusebius, like all early Christian thinkers, must be rooted in his Graeco-Roman context. The *History* partakes of its non-Christian as much as its Christian milieu. In what follows, I am thus ultimately trying to reveal the *History* as the work of a particular author, at a particular time, in a particular intellectual tradition, and within 'the classical world' more widely.

My aims in writing this work have been threefold. First, I believe that Eusebius deserves a place in the canon of exciting and innovative authors to whom all students of the classical world should be introduced, and the *History* deserves a reputation as one of the most surprising, entertaining, and impressively constructed writings of classical antiquity. Second, as the watershed work that straddled the transitional period that saw early Christianity and the world in which it was embedded mutually transform, Eusebius' *History* provided the model not only for the narrative histories of Christianity that followed but also for Christianity itself. And finally, it is only, I believe, by understanding Eusebius' own aims, techniques, and debts in his project of narrating Christian history that we can properly begin to tease out the realities of Christian experience that lie hidden behind it.

[34] Sébastien Morlet and Lorenzo Perrone (eds), *Eusèbe de Césarée. Histoire ecclésiastique. Commentaire, Tome 1: Études d'introduction. Anagôgê* (Paris: Éditions du cerf, 2012).
[35] Aaron P. Johnson and Jeremy M. Schott, (eds), *Eusebius of Caesarea: Traditions and Innovations*. Hellenic Studies 60 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).
[36] Aaron P. Johnson, *Eusebius*. Understanding Classics (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014).

PART I

CHAPTER 1

Eusebius, of Caesarea

Introduction

Eusebius of Caesarea failed to introduce himself at the start of his *History*. One of antiquity's most impressive polymaths – bishop, academic, theologian, antiquarian, storyteller, pioneer, travel guide, politician, and heretic – Eusebius has found his most lasting fame as a historian. Most of those who know his name associate it with the ten-book narrative that traces the rise of the church, from the tentative missionary ventures of the apostles in the first century to the conversion of the emperor Constantine in the early fourth. Such was Eusebius' enthusiasm for the task, however, that the *History* skips any initial pleasantries and launches straight into a list of the topics to be covered. It is perhaps because of this initial reticence that, as we saw in the Introduction, most readers of the *History* have not focused on its author's techniques of writing. But, as with any writing, a full understanding of the *History* requires an understanding of its author – of his experiences, of the times through which he lived, of the places and environments in which he did so, and of his other writings. It is these that we will consider in this chapter.

We do meet Eusebius, somewhat obliquely, a little later in the preface to the *History*. This encounter comes in the simultaneous form of an apology and a boast, as Eusebius considered the origins and probable reception of his work:

> But my writing begs the gentle judgement of well-minded men, conceding that to fulfil this undertaking perfectly and completely is beyond my ability, since I am at this point the first to adopt this purpose and try my hand at going down, so to speak, this lonely and unworn (*erēmēn kai atribē*) way. I pray that I will have God as a guide (*hodēgon*), and the power of the Lord as a colleague (*synergon*); at any rate, I am utterly unable to find among men even the exposed traces (*ichnē gymna*) of previous voyagers down the same

> path, except slight hints (*smikras . . . prophaseis*) through which they have, each in their own way, left behind partial accounts (*merikas . . . diēgēseis*) of the times through which they have travelled, offering up from afar their voices like beacons and crying out from on high as if from an exposed place and out of a watchtower, directing us in what way we must walk and steer (*euthynein*) the course of this writing (*tēn tou logou poreian*) straight and danger-free. Having gathered (*analexamenoi*) as many things, then, as we thought would profit the proposed project from among the recollections here and there in these same authors, and having plucked (*apanthisamenoi*), as if from literary meadows (*logikōn leimōnōn*), suitable passages from those collectors (*syngrapheōn*) of long ago, I will try to embody them in a historical direction (*hyphēgēseōs historikēs*).[1] (*HE* 1.1.3–4)

This indirect introduction to our protagonist is rather appropriate. Biographical information on Eusebius is thin on the ground, and any portrait must be pieced together from the odd mention in the writings of others and from contextual information in his writings. Moreover, we meet here not Eusebius *per se*, but Eusebius as author, and as author in comparison with other authors. His initial claim to singularity may be one reason that the *History* has been so often read in isolation, but in fact it demands the exact opposite. For a start, another of Eusebius' works, the *Prophetic Selections*, begins with this same plucking metaphor. The *History* thus immediately reminds us that it was part of Eusebius' wider oeuvre, and that, in order to be properly understood, it must be read as such.

Moreover, Eusebius immediately qualified this claim to singularity by recognising the existence of predecessors.[2] That ambivalence is, I suggest, important. A proper understanding of Eusebius as author depends on simultaneously delineating his diverse influences and teasing out where and how he moves beyond them.[3] And, in fact, this very passage is itself a hint about both the identity of those previous authors and Eusebius' simultaneous tradition and innovation. The flower-gathering metaphor, for example, could hardly have been better chosen as a nod to a deep classical heritage. It can be traced back to Plato's *Ion*, where the foundational philosopher described how lyric poets claimed to 'bring songs to us from honeyed springs (*krēnōn melirrutōn*), plucking (*drepomenoi*) from

[1] Greek text from Gustave Bardy, *Eusèbe de Césarée. Histoire ecclésiastique.* Sources chrétiennes 55 (Paris: Éditions du cerf, 1952–8 [repr. 3:1967]). Translations my own throughout.

[2] Comparison with predecessors is widespread in ancient historiographical prefaces; see Justin Lake, *Prologues to Ancient and Mediaeval History: A Reader*. Readings in Mediaeval Civilisations and Cultures (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013); Lake does not include Eusebius.

[3] The twin claim to tradition and innovation was characteristic of ancient historiography; see John Marincola, *Authority and Tradition in Ancient Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 12–19; 217–57.