

particular Greek idiom and selecting the one most appropriate to the context...' (191). The jewel in the crown, to my mind, is Burton's short appendix on Jerome's translation technique. In it, Burton manages to demonstrate quite persuasively that Jerome's Vulgate translation of the Gospels is often more literal (and consequently less comprehensible) than that of his Old Latin models, although he claimed otherwise.

No doubt scholars in the future will question some of Burton's conclusions (especially the one regarding the common source of the three synoptic Gospels). Nevertheless, Burton's book is an extremely important discussion of a fascinating and complex subject, and it deserves a very warm welcome indeed. Furthermore, Burton's clarity, acumen and blessed brevity, are to be applauded.

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Doron Mendels, *The Media Revolution of Early Christianity. An Essay on Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History*. Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1999. x + 270 pp. ISBN 0 8028 4610 6.

The idea of comparing the procedures of ancient writers to those of journalism is not new, whether in relation to the distortions of Julius Caesar, or even the 'artful' reporting of Thucydides (to take the title of a well-known book of some decades ago). But here we have something different, far more sustained and thoroughgoing, and also more arresting. First, this study of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* (*HE*), by the distinguished Jerusalem historian Doron Mendels, achieves sustained concentration, from beginning to end, on the way history is created and communicated, over a wide front. Mendels casts an acute and experienced eye over the processes of selectivity, distortion, manipulation, dramatization, in short, at the way this writer produces news. Second, Mendels takes the bold and adventurous step of putting this enterprise within a theoretical framework which may be somewhat surprising to classicists. He has read extensively in the relatively new discipline of Media Studies and harnesses in a particularly relevant way concepts and language current in this branch of the broader enterprise of Cultural Studies, which addresses itself to analysis of the press (whether tabloid or broadsheet) and television (or for that matter radio) — not, it seems, always clearly differentiated by researchers — as well as the world of advertising. Third, in dealing with a work of history which not only records but is itself a constructive part of a major transformation in society and religion, he has chosen a subject for which this approach is especially apt and fruitful. Even those who dislike Eusebius find it hard to avoid viewing the history of early Christianity in the historian's terms. And fourth, in writing about the growth of the Church, so dependent on active propagation and brilliant communication, that is to say on the entirely new and successful idea of a mission, Mendels has been able to shed light on the entire historical process of the conversion of the Roman Empire, not just on his chosen author.

The advantage of Mendels' systematic importation of modern categories is that it directs attention to fundamental aspects of Eusebius which are very much in need of serious study and have been hitherto surprisingly under-explored. Many commentators have offered observations on Eusebius' invention of a new form of historical narrative, designed to suit an entirely new kind of subject — something which the church historian himself announces at the opening of the work and elsewhere in it. Arnaldo Momigliano, in a justly famous article of 1977, highlighted the historian's innovations, especially in the use of documentary material. Less sympathetic voices, from Burckhardt on, have roundly accused Eusebius of dishonesty. But, even though no reader can be unaware of their presence, there has been surprisingly little study of the rhetorical, persuasive and sensationalizing aspects of Eusebius' narrative. Familiar terms like 'rhetoric', 'propaganda', 'pathos', 'biographical sketches', 'mixed audience', 'the outside world' appear little if at all in Mendels' analysis. Instead we have 'publicity', 'marketing', 'media events', 'personalization',

'normalization', the 'network of communications', 'advertising', 'diversity', and the 'inner and outer public sphere', which may seem less tired and more thought-provoking. In a world preoccupied with 'spin' it is, one might argue, right to take a fresh approach to these matters. An introductory chapter sets the stage for this style of analysis. After reading one or two of the substantive chapters, readers will feel reasonably at home with it, though perhaps still a little startled when the talk turns to matters such as 'mediatized political discourse' or 'inculturation'. Overall, we have no doubt that the approach will engage students and be welcomed by lecturers who have felt uneasy about sidelining so major a text but equally uneasy about Eusebius' capacity to come across as tediously overstated and repetitive, except in the smallest of doses. From the point of view of this readership, it is a pity that certain allusions to technical matters, such as the so-called lapsi (Christians who had succumbed to pressure in the persecutions: 162), remain unexplained, and a degree of knowledge is assumed. This is no doubt a consequence of the book's commendable concision. But perhaps, too, Mendels, like his subject, expects a certain 'diversity' in his following.

Another appealing feature of the book is the frequent and explicit use of contemporary analogies. Some are drawn from the Jewish experience, such as the Nazi elimination of Jews from the public sphere (80), or the standardized formats of reports of terrorist attacks in the Israeli press. Others come from events and phenomena universally familiar: Tiananmen Square, the press accounts of modern 'cults' which are characterized by a notable lack of attention to the content of their teaching (140), and, eventually and maybe unavoidably, the marketing of Coca Cola. Some allusions have already dated: Margaret Thatcher's image has faded and she means nothing to the young (165), while there is a deep irony in reading today about the transformation of the PLO from a terrorist organization to a respectable political body. Such references are bound to grow old, but this is no reason not to develop these enlivening and instructive parallels, which in fact also serve to validate the application to a remote period of a form of analysis specifically designed to handle modernity.

But there is more than that in this study, for it contains a great deal of learning lightly worn and concisely presented (as well as a very helpful bibliography). Mendels reveals how Eusebius' text actually works, what are the benefits of the way it is organized, how material that would have been relevant is skated over, while, on the other hand, particular stories are blown out of all proportion. We acquire a new appreciation of the episodic nature of much of the narrative, the deliberate obfuscations in the handling of time. Furthermore, the media approach takes us to the heart of Eusebius' construction of history, allowing detailed study of all the central phenomena in the rise of Christianity, from martyrdom accounts which dwell on the horrific as an efficient means of publicity, through the benefits of defining and castigating heresies (without explaining their teachings adequately), to the function of reports of church councils as consolidating authority but also as integrative devices, and finally to the Christian mission itself. A short concluding chapter takes us to the Constantinian edicts and the 'triumph', not, here, of Christianity, but of 'Christian publicity'. There are excellent brief investigations, within the chapters, of specific topics such as canonicity, while selected sections of Eusebius' long work are put under the microscope, some of them well known, like the martyrdom of Polycarp, and some less so. One teasing question which arises is whether the Roman reader's exposure to the horrors of games in the amphitheatre and extreme punishments, as well as to so many bloody battlefields, might mean that the sensationalism of some of the martyrdom narratives would have had less immediate impact on its original readers than we might at first sight suppose.

The *HE* takes the story back to the beginning, with Jesus, and on to Eusebius' own day, in the manner of Josephus' *Antiquities*. Clearly, then, much of the content is not exactly 'breaking news', or even 'news' at all. But Mendels makes a good case for subsuming a work like this under that category, for the processes involved can in both cases be defined as creating stories which are deemed intensely relevant, and presenting them so as to make the maximum instant impact, what

would popularly be called 'packaging' them. Whether he is equally justified in the sharp distinction he repeatedly makes in this respect between Eusebius on the one hand, and Thucydides, Polybius, Livy or even Josephus on the other, is perhaps questionable. The contrast is repeatedly drawn (21, 39, 69, 107, 150, 175 n. 36, 176) but with the occasional contrary suggestion that the approach adopted here might nevertheless have some application to ancient historiography more generally. The result is that a somewhat static impression of those writers is conveyed, and that Mendels seems to espouse, in spite of his novel approach, a fairly traditional view of objectivity and of the possibility of comprehensiveness in a narrative. Mendels did not need to commit himself to this position in order to demonstrate that Eusebius was a revolutionary writer, for that emerges clearly enough without the comparisons.

Mendels also suggests that *HE* is in a genre of writing completely different from anything else that Eusebius himself produced. This may be sustainable, but the claim invites further discussion, especially of the *Vita Constantini*, the nature and historicity of which have been put under the microscope in recent years, by Averil Cameron's studies among others. It may be hoped that Mendels will return to this question on another occasion, as well, perhaps, as drawing into the picture the techniques deployed by Josephus, of whom Eusebius was such an avid reader. Meanwhile, he may be congratulated on achieving a highly original and thought-provoking study which is both instructive and enjoyable.

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