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**Stefan Rebenich, *Jerome*. London: Routledge, 2002. Pp. 211. ISBN 0-415-19906-9. \$14.95 (pb).**

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The series 'The Early Church Fathers' published by Routledge makes available key selected texts of important Christian authors of late antiquity. The latest volume in this useful collection is an anthology of the works of St. Jerome. One may wonder whether it is possible to give a representative image of such a prolific author as Jerome within the compass of a mere 200 pages. Stefan Rebenich (R.) has succeeded in this difficult task, and the book is an excellent introduction to the life and works of this important Father.

R. shows Jerome in many of his numerous roles, as novelist, theologian, chronographer, epistolographer, satirist, biographer, biblical scholar, literary historian, translator, controversialist, threnodist, and ascetic expert. Each of these roles is illustrated by means of a short fragment (of mostly just a few pages, with a maximum of twelve). This central part of the book (74 pages) is preceded by a brief, but instructive introduction in six chapters (59 pages), and followed by an extensive bibliography, notes, and index (74 pages).

The introduction sketches Jerome's life and the development of his oeuvre. The basic pattern here is that of his many travels, from Stridon to Aquileia, to Antioch and Chalcis, Constantinople, Rome, and finally Bethlehem. Although this introduction may seem conventional at first sight, as it takes the author's biography as its starting point, it does not wish to reduce the analysis to one of 'life and works' or to restrict itself to easy judgements of Jerome's character (nasty as it often is) and his unpleasantly ambitious and polemical nature. Instead, R. consistently attempts to connect the elements observed in Jerome's works with more general social phenomena and with the communicative function the works have had. The writings are, in other words, not seen as the unique reflections of an isolated person, but as parts of a wider communicative pattern. In this manner they appear to reveal much about 4th century Christianity.

R. states his basic point clearly at the end of his introduction: 'Later generations venerated him as a trilingual theologian and praised him as an ascetic virtuoso. But he has also been attacked as a person of weak character and extremely nasty temper and as the spiritual seducer of aristocratic women. Yet, Jerome should also be understood as a provincial parvenu who made a brilliant career as a Christian writer. His literary talent, his ascetic self-invention, a strong feeling for self-promotion, many innovative writings, and an extraordinary command of languages enabled him to succeed at last as a literary exponent both of the ascetic movement and of Nicene orthodoxy, as a biblical scholar, and as a mediator between eastern and western theology. Jerome is thus a remarkable example of social mobility and intellectual achievement in the Christian society of late antiquity.' (p.59)

The general picture of Jerome given in the introduction includes some provocative corrections of the traditional image partly created by Jerome himself. For example, the image of his early

stay as a hermit scholar living in a barren cell in the desert clearly stands in need of revision. R. shows that Jerome lived at an estate thirty miles from Antioch (at Maronia) in the company of copyists and supported by wealthy friends. Jerome wished to promote himself as a secluded scholar and hermit, but the evidence produces a more nuanced image.

Likewise, Jerome may well have exaggerated his mastery of Hebrew (R. does argue that his knowledge of Hebrew must have been more extensive than that of his contemporaries, but still doubts his fluency, suggesting Jerome may have been able to read and understand Hebrew only as much as Aramaic). His expertise in rendering Hebrew texts seems to have relied partly on the hired assistance of Jewish scholars. To many readers who are familiar with handbook knowledge of Jerome rather than with recent scholarship on him, such notions may be surprising or even shocking, but R. never appears to criticize Jerome merely for the sake of debunking and he regularly also expresses his admiration for the Church Father.

Some of the selected fragments seem unexpected as well. As in other volumes of the series, the editor has left out the best known texts, on the ground that these are more or less readily available. So, one will not find the *Vita Pauli* here, nor letters 22 or 108, but some less well known texts, such as the preface to the Chronicle of Eusebius, the preface to the Vulgate version of the Pentateuch, letters 1 (to Innocentius), 15 (to Damasus), 31 (to Eustochium), 40 (to Marcella), 127 (to Principia), and 128 (to Pacatula), the life of Malchus, and the invective 'Against Vigilantius'. The item mentioned last here shows Jerome at his worst as a mean and insulting polemist. Since this too is an aspect of Jerome, it is no more than fair that R. has included such a fragment.

The general approach of Jerome as a man of his time and a conscious author who uses his writings for specific, extra-textual aims is maintained also in the introductions to the fragments. A case in point is the first text, letter 1 to Innocentius, which contains a rather unlikely miracle story about a pagan female martyr. In his comments, R. does not restrict himself to the usual questions of credibility or the sources of the story, but points to the functions of the letter, both as an encomium for one of Jerome's patrons and as a demonstration of the writer's literary talents. In both respects, it may be said to have furthered Jerome's cause as a professional writer, who was dependant on support by others. In another short piece, letter 31, Jerome thanks Eustochium for sending him bracelets, doves and cherries, gifts of which he describes the allegorical meaning. R. opposes the older view that Jerome is 'a salon confessor in the style of the abbés in the reign of Louis XIV', and rather argues that the exchange of sophisticated gifts and cultivated letters of thanks was part of the social interaction between the writer and his rich patron, and so merely observes the traditional standards of communication within the elite (p.79). This does not necessarily make Jerome seem more sympathetic (to the reviewer he remained thoroughly dislikable in nearly every portion of the book), but it does enable readers to get a better understanding of these texts.

The book presents a varied and balanced picture of Jerome, which seems well up to date with present scholarship on this Father. The editor's command of literature on Jerome also shows in the bibliography, where the items considered as essential introductory reading are highlighted. This is a welcome service to the reader that certainly deserves to be imitated by other anthologies and textbooks.

R.'s excellent introduction to Jerome will render good service to university courses in patristics, particularly for students who do not read Latin. In addition, it can be recommended

for every serious library of classics. It is to be hoped that the high standard of the series will be maintained in the volumes to come. If ancient Christian authors are approached in such ways, they will remain relevant to a wider readership than one of specialists only