



# Early Christian Biographies: Lives of St. Cyprian, St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, St. Anthony, St. Paul

*Pontius, Paulinus, Possidius, St. Athanasius, St. Jerome, Ennodius, St. Hilary*

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Most readers are quite likely to have some basic information about St. Cyprian (d. 258), St. Ambrose (ca. 339-397) and St. Augustine (354-430). Fewer readers are likely to be equally informed about St. Anthony (251?-356), St. Paul the Hermit (d. ca.340), St. Hilarion (ca. 291-371) and St. Epiphanius (438/439-496/497). Perhaps hardly any reader is acquainted with the holy monk Malchus, presumably a contemporary of St. Jerome (ca. 342-420) and son of a tenant farmer near Nisbis.

Most of the saints' lives presented here, though the volume is entitled *Early Christian Biographies*, belong in reality to quite another category, hagiography. The primary requisite of this genre is to serve a religious purpose: edification. Herein hagiography differs considerably from a modern critical biography which demands historically verifiable events and accounts. Nevertheless the account of Malchus, as it is presented in this volume, is unique. St. Jerome writes: "Drawn by curiosity I approached the man and inquired with eager interest if there were any truth in what I had heard. He related the following story" (p. 288). If we may take St. Jerome at his word, the *Life of Malchus* could well be an autobiography. In any event, many generations have come to look upon these accounts as classics.

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