Tamar Rotman, *Hagiography, Historiography, and Identity in Sixth-Century Gaul. Rethinking Gregory of Tours*, Social Worlds of Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages Series, Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2022, pp. 196

This book, based on the author's PhD thesis defended in 2019 at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, aims to change the way historians approach Gregory of Tours' hagiographical corpus. Rotman argues that Gregory's collection forms a comprehensive "ecclesiastical history", which was carefully designed by Gregory to shape a common "Gallo-Christian identity" in his readers from Merovingian Gaul.

Rotman's argument is divided into four chapters. In the first one, Rotman sets the stage by briefly describing the life of Gregory of Tours and his five hagiographical works. She also touches on the question of Gregory's autohagiography, that is, how the bishop of Tours wrote about himself and his relatives[1]. For Rotman, this serves as a good example of the goal Gregory set in his hagiography, which extended beyond the promotion of a specific saint's cult.

Rotman continues to build on this premise in the second chapter of her book. She focuses on all the mentions of saints from outside of Gaul made by Gregory in his hagiography. Rotman skims over the Italian saints and pays particular attention to the Eastern ones. She observes a "strong Syrian connection" (p. 92): most saints in the group mentioned above hailed from this region. Rotman asserts that this was probably a testament to the various people of Syrian origin who visited and lived in Gaul during Gregory's time, as well as the hagiographical knowledge-sharing among soldiers and envoys travelling between Syria and Gaul. However, Rotman points to the lack of any evidence for the cult of most of these Eastern saints in Gaul. She concludes that Gregory had other reasons for including the Eastern saints in his books than the promotion of their veneration. She suggests considering the role those saints play in Gregory's general narrative across all of his hagiographical work.

The third chapter is thus devoted to Gregory's hagiographical corpus as a whole, which, as Rotman argues, should indeed be treated as a single entity. According to Rotman, historians have long overlooked the value of Gregory's hagiographical writings in contributing to historical knowledge. At best, they have nit-picked, concentrating on one or two particular stories, while disregarding the broader vision Gregory had for the entire corpus. In Rotman's view, the three compilations Gregory of Tours wrote on various saints, that is, the *Glory of the Martyrs* (hereinafter: GM), the *Glory of the Confessors* (GC), and the *Life of the Fathers* (LF), should be read in parallel to Gregory's *Histories*. The GM corresponds in this model to the first book of *Histories*, the GC to the subsequent three, and the LF to the books five to ten. Jointly, Gregory's works are considered by Rotman to be the bishop of Tours' own version of the *Ecclesiastical History* by Eusebius of Caesarea. Rotman proposes that Gregory,

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[1] Rotman develops this idea in the article *For Future Reference: the Auto-Hagiography of Gregory of Tours*, "Revue Bénédictine", 134, 2024, pp. 81–107.

like Eusebius, sought to use the history of the Church to define the boundaries of orthodoxy and, above all, to forge a new identity for his Christian readers.

With the establishment of Gregory as an author of the ecclesiastical history, Rotman reaches the final point of her argument in the fourth chapter. She maintains that through the choices Gregory made when constructing his narrative – i.e., which saints to include and how to describe them – the bishop of Tours sought to respond to the identity crisis of the post-Roman world of Merovingian Gaul. According to Rotman, Gregory aimed to develop a new Gallo-Roman identity by confronting it with two crucial communities of "others". First among these groups were the inhabitants of the Iberian Peninsula, who followed the Homoian creed (here referred to as "Arians"). In Rotman's view, Gregory juxtaposed them with those living in the Merovingian kingdoms to show the orthodoxy of the Gallo-Roman faith. This orthodoxy was corroborated by the second group of "others", mainly, the Eastern Christians, the first to accept the teachings of Jesus. To Rotman, Gregory achieved this confirmation by including accounts of miracles performed in the East by the Eastern saints. These, however, in no way surpass those done by Gallic saints in their homeland, which Gregory is very keen to document. Thus, Gregory, in Rotman's eyes, assures all subjects of Merovingian kings that their orthodoxy in the Catholic faith binds them together. This way, Gregory both filled the identity void created by the collapse of the Roman Empire and established a new, shared cultural identity for the diverse people who inhabited Gaul during this period.

Just before reaching the conclusions of her book, Rotman adds a brief eight-page-long excursion into the possible points of reference to her reasoning. These are the two other hagiographical collections composed roughly at the same time as Gregory's, mainly the *Dialogues* by Pope Gregory the Great and the so-called *Martyrologium Hieronymianum*. Rotman then assures her readers that both Gregory of Tours and Gregory the Great strived to achieve the same goal, but does not elaborate on that thought since "the *Dialogues* has received much scholarly attention" (p. 159). She chooses to focus on the less-known *Martyrologium Hieronymianum* instead. Again, she assumes that the anonymous author(s) of this calendar of saints' feast days wished to form a new universal Christian sense of self in place of the shattered Roman identity.

What I find as the biggest flaw in Rotman's general reasoning is its dependence on the selective use of primary and secondary sources. Rotman states numerous times (pp. 6, 8, 9, 16–17, 21, 56, 93, 167) that Gregory's hagiographical corpus did not garner significant scholarly interest, especially in comparison to the number of inquiries made into Gregory's *Histories*[2]. Be that as it may (after all, most subjects in history deserve more attention from historians), one has to be careful when making such claims. In the case of Rotman, her insistence on the novelty of her research is troubling for two reasons.

Firstly, Rotman appears to consider only part of Gregory's hagiographical corpus. For starters, she completely disregards the text Gregory wrote about the miracles of Apostle Andrew[3]. Granted, this is not the most important of Gregory's works, but not mentioning it

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[2] Rotman follows here the claims made recently by other scholars, cf. e.g. D. Shanzer, *So Many Saints – So Little Time… The* Libri Miraculorum *of Gregory of Tours*, "Journal of Medieval Latin", 13, 2003, pp. 19–60.

[3] Gregorius Turonensis, *Liber de miraculis beati Andreae apostoli*, ed. M. Bonnet, MGH SS rer. Merov. 1, 2, Hannover 1969, pp. 371–396. Gregory himself does not list it among his works, nor is it listed in Gregorius Turonensis, *Historiarum Libri X* (hereinafter: *Historiae*) 10.31, ed. B. Krusch,

at all, while claiming to be the only scholar analysing Gregory's hagiographical corpus in its entirety, is by all means puzzling. Even more inexplicable than the absence of *Miraculi Andreae* is the way Rotman fits in her narrative the five books Gregory composed on the miracles of Martin of Tours and Julian of Brioude (to which Rotman consequently refers to as *Virtutibus Sancti Martini* and *Virtutibus Sancti Juliani* – the use of the ablative in place of the nominative appears very strange). She does address these five books in the first, introductory chapter (pp. 33–38), but then seemingly forgets about them altogether and stops making references to them. The only exception is p. 108, where in the middle of a paragraph she suddenly tries to fit the miracles of Martin and Julian into her model, but then readily admits that "and yet, these two works are more complex", and leaves the reader with this unsatisfactory comment. Thus, out of eight books of miracles (nine if one were to include the miracles of Andrew), Rotman utilises only three: the GM, the GC, and the LF. In addition, the only contemporary work that she compares to Gregory's corpus is the abovementioned *Martyrologium Hieronymianum*, disregarding other late antique Gallic texts that interweave historiographical and hagiographical perspective and could offer valuable insight – most notable points of reference would be probably Gennadius of Marseilles' *Lives of Illustrious Men*, the anonymous the *Life of the Jura Fathers*, and equally anonymous the *Life of the Abbots of Agaune*, as all three future stories about multiple people[4].

Secondly, Rotman seems to have overlooked much of the academic work on the subject of her studies. A rudimentary list of the most important omissions was already provided in Ian Wood's review of Rotman's book[5]. Wood noticed significant gaps in Rotman's bibliography, particularly regarding German and French academia. To me, however, the even more surprising absentee is Albrecht Diem, who publishes mainly in English[6]. For Rotman's study, the most useful would be Diem's paper on Gregory of Tours himself, especially his discussion on the LF, not in the least because it partially reinforces Rotman's proposition that Gregory wanted to appeal with his work to all inhabitants of Merovingian Gaul, no matter their social or ethnic status[7].

This selectiveness of Rotman's book is also evident in what amounts to the most valuable part of her book, namely the discussion of different Eastern saints in Gregory's hagiography. For some reason, which she does not share with her readers, Rotman does not analyse all saints from the East who made their way to Gaul and acted there through their

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MGH SS rer. Merov. 1, 1, Hannover 1951, pp. 535–536; nor in idem, *Liber in gloria confessorum* (hereinafter: GC), *praefatio*, ed. B. Krusch, MGH SS rer. Merov. 1, 2, p. 298.

[4] Gennadius Massiliensis, *De viris illustribus*, ed. E. Cushing Richardson, Texte und Untersuchungen 14, Leipzig 1896; *Vita Patrum Jurensium*, ed. F. Martine, SCh 142, Paris 1968; *Vita Abbatum Acaunensium*, ed. E. Chevalley, in *La mémoire hagiographique de l'abbaye de Saint-Maurice d'Agaune*, ed. E. Chevalley and C. Roduit, Cahiers Lausannois d'Histoire Médiévale 53, Lausanne 2014.

[5] I. Wood, [Review of Rotman], *Hagiography, Historiography, and Identity*, "Early Medieval Europe", 31, 2023, pp. 342–344.

[6] Rotman cites only once one Diem's article in a footnote among few other papers listed as "further reading on early medieval hagiography" (p. 18, fn. 19), but clearly makes no use of it (the paper in question is A. Diem, Vita Vel Regula*: Multifunctional Hagiography in the Early Middle Ages*, in *Hagiography and the History of Latin Christendom, 500–1500*, ed. S. Herrick, Leiden 2019, pp. 123–142).

[7] A. Diem, *Gregory's Chess Board: Monastic Conflict and Competition in Early Medieval Gaul*, in *Compétition et sacré au haut Moyen Âge: entre médiation et exclusion*, ed. P. Depreux, F. Bougard, and R. Le Jan, Turnhout 2015, pp. 165–191.

relics. Stephen and John the Baptist are perhaps the most clear omissions, mainly because they both play a significant role in Gregory's writings; it seems to reflect their prominence in the sixth-century Gallic ecclesiastical landscape. Among other places, Stephen is present in Gregory's GM, where Gregory mentioned the renovation of the saint's oratory located near Tours[8]. When it was revealed that no relics could be found beneath the altar there, Gregory sent his servant to collect Stephen's relics deposited at Tours' cathedral. The fact that Gregory had the relics of this particular saint readily available points to the popularity of his cult.

John the Baptist appears to be of special importance to Gregory's contemporaries as well. In the GM, for example, Gregory told a story of the Gallic woman who travelled to the East to collect John's bodily relics, which she then kept in the church of her native village[9]. The acts of the Council of Agde held in 506 testify even more clearly to John the Baptist's prominence. They specify the feasts which must be celebrated in cities and parishes and not in rural oratories. Among them is the feast of Saint John, who is the only named saint[10].

Both Stephen and John are thus examples of Eastern saints who were venerated in Gaul, which runs contrary to Rotman's claim that most Eastern saints present in Gregory's writing received no cult in Gaul (pp. 64, 67, 72, 74, 76, 82, 91, 169). Furthermore, I would be anxious to repeat after Rotman that the Eastern saints whose presence in Gaul is only attested in Gregory's corpus were indeed not venerated there. One must keep in mind how scarce our evidence from Merovingian Gaul is if we exclude Gregory's writings. Many accounts of the veneration of different saints were probably not preserved[11].

In addition, I am unsure what constitutes, for Rotman, proper evidence for the significance of a particular saint in Gaul. A good example here is Rotman's discussion on Vulfilaicus, who climbed a column near Trier to imitate Simeon Stylites. Rotman argues (on p. 91) that the famous Syrian stylite was never venerated in Gaul[12]. If one reads Gregory's account carefully, however, it is evident that Simeon is a widely known saint in Gaul. The bishops who approach Vulfilaicus immediately recognise that he is trying to emulate Simeon; this much seems also to be clear for Gregory[13]. In addition, Gregory appears to have assumed that his

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[8] Gregorius Turonensis, *Liber in gloria martyrum* (hereinafter: GM) 33, ed. B. Krusch, MGH SS rer. Merov. 1, 2, pp. 58–59.

[9] Idem, GM 13, pp. 47–48.

[10] *Pascha uero, Natale Domini, Epiphaniam, Ascensionem Domini, Pentecosten et Natale sancti Ioannis Baptistae, uel si qui maximi dies in festiuitatibus habentur, nonnisi in ciuitatibus aut in parrociis teneant*, Concilium Agathense, c. 21, ed. Ch. Munier, in *Concilia Galliae a. 314-a. 506*, CCSL 148, Turnhoult 1963, pp. 202–203. Gregory also mentions the celebration of John the Baptist's feast in the book about miracles of Saint Julian of Brioude, Gregorius Turonensis, *Liber de passione et virtutibus sancti Iuliani* 47, ed. B. Krusch, MGH SS rer. Merov. 1, 2, p. 133.

[11] Moreover, as Paweł Nowakowski's book on late antique Anatolian hagiographical landscape suggests, even if one does have access to the plethora of literary sources about many different saints from the given region, the bulk of the cultic activities of its inhabitants appears to have been addressed only to the selected few saints and these are the very cults that are most visible to the present-day historians. See P. Nowakowski, *Inscribing the Saints in Late Antique Anatolia*, Journal of Juristic Papyrology. Supplements 34, Warszawa 2018, pp. 312–313.

[12] Although Rotman, risking contradicting herself, suggests at the same page that Gallic bishops, and likely Gregory too, wanted to "control the cult of Simeon", which would mean that there was a cult of Simeon in Gaul that had to be controlled in the first place.

[13] Gregorius Turonensis, *Historiae* VIII.15, pp. 382–383.

reader would be acquainted with this saint as well, because he did not explain in his text who Simeon Stylites was. Gregory's testimony to Simeon's apparent popularity in Gaul can be corroborated by the account overlooked by Rotman, that is, the anonymous life of Saint Genevieve of Paris, written around the 520s. In there, Simeon Stylites wishes Genevieve to keep him in her prayers, which shows that he had already been acting as a potent point of reference for some time before the period in which Gregory lived[14]. What I want to argue, therefore, is that one does not have to look for evidence of exact acts of veneration to attest to the saint's popularity. Gregory likely included at least some accounts of Eastern saints in his writings because his readers were interested in hearing stories about saints with which they were already familiar. They should not necessarily be considered, as Rotman insists, a part of Gregory's greater narrative.

Moreover, even if one were to accept Rotman's premise that the saints from the East mentioned by Gregory were not venerated in Gaul, I would be wary of accepting Rotman's claim that Gregory used the Eastern saints solely to construct an "ecclesiastical history" and, in effect, forge a new Gallic identity. Or rather, what Rotman proposes is, in my opinion, a one-faceted answer, whereas a multitude of different factors could be at play simultaneously. There are hints in the book that Rotman herself would also be open to other possibilities[15]. Sadly, she never explores them further, and they disappear altogether when Rotman offers her final assessment of Gregory's hagiographical corpus. Concerning the overall argument that Gregory envisioned his *Libri miraculorum* as "ecclesiastical history", it seems to me that Rotman, in some respects, overinterprets the evidence and, in others, merely reinvents the wheel.

One cannot deny that there is a certain coherence to Gregory's writings. Indeed, it has been proven that Gregory worked hard to achieve this consistency by constantly rewriting and reconciling his varied narratives till his death[16]. On the other hand, it is quite clear that Gregory never fulfilled this goal (if absolute cohesion was truly his objective). For every instance of order in Gregory's books that Rotman provides, one can find examples of the exact opposite. For Rotman's argument, the key is her claim that the GM, the GC, and the LF follow a chronological structure and should be read in a strict sequence as one consistent narrative that corresponds to the chronology of the ten books of *Histories* (pp. 107–108). Hence, the GM, for example, relates to the first book of *Histories* in Rotman's model, and both works recount the history of Christianity's very beginnings. However, even a cursory examination of the GM falsifies this claim. Chapter 74 tells the story of Sigismund, who was killed in 523 and whose cult developed roughly during Gregory's lifetime[17]. Chapter 75 is devoted to the Theban legion, whose members were allegedly martyred by the end of the third century, but Gregory did not share the story of their martyrdom, instead focusing on some contemporary miracles[18]. To complicate the GM structure even further, a few chapters later, in chap-

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[14] *Vita Genovefae virginis Parisiensis* 27, ed. B. Krusch, MGH SS rer. Merov. 3, Hannover 1896, p. 226.

[15] For example, she rightly points out (on p. 72) that Gregory could have wished to introduce in some cases a new cult in Gaul, one that was previously unknown.

[16] See R. Shaw, *Chronology, Composition, and Authorial Conception in the* Miracula, in *A Companion to Gregory of Tours*, ed. A.C. Murray, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition 63, Leiden 2016, pp. 102–140.

[17] Gregorius Turonensis, *Gloria martyrum* 74, p. 87.

[18] Ibidem 75, pp. 87–88.

ter 79, Gregory shared the story of "heretic's wickedness" with no indication of its time and place. All the more unexpectedly, this section contains no mention of even a single saint[19].

That being said, the lack of a coherent overarching plan does not exclude that Gregory's works should be read jointly, or that they resemble in some form Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*. Naturally, we should analyse all of Gregory's works to get a proper perspective. As I mentioned above, I do hold Rotman accountable for not thoroughly utilising half of Gregory's texts. And Gregory's prose is akin to that of Eusebius in some ways, simply because they were both members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy with somewhat similar upbringing and education. Not to mention that Gregory readily admits his indebtedness to Eusebius' works[20]. To prove that resemblance, one does not really need to demonstrate that Gregory wrote from a Christian bishop's perspective (sic!) (pp. 153–158)[21].

With equal reservation, I treat Rotman's claim that the *Libri miraculorum* were composed by Gregory to respond to the "identity crisis of the post-Roman period" (p. 129). Rotman seemingly takes this crisis for granted, even though there is no explicit mention of it in any of Gregory's books. The only proof that Rotman appears to offer in this regard is that Gregory mentioned his family's senatorial rank (p. 147), completely ignoring that this is Gregory's standard phrase of introducing someone of noble origin[22]. Again, Gregory indeed sought to influence his readers through his writings, and he was likely also interested in forging a new Christian identity that could encompass all members of the Merovingian society. But this is something we already know[23]. Moreover, Rotman disregards the multi-ethnic landscape of Gregory's corpus, consisting not only of Gallo-Romans and Franks, but also of the likes of Burgundians, Lombards, and even mysterious Taifals[24]. On the other hand, in her analysis of Gregory's use of the word "Romanus" (pp. 145–147), Rotman appears to overlook the possibility (which looks pretty likely to me) that Gregory was referring to the city of Rome, rather than the Roman Empire. Gregory's faith was "Roman", i.e., orthodox, because this was the faith of the bishop of Rome. Gregory's respect for Rome and its bishop is evident in his account of the journey of deacon Agiulf from Tours to Rome and back. Characteristically of Gregory, the narrative about this trip is scattered between multiple works[25]. The paragraph in the LF seems particularly interesting in the context of Rotman's study, because Agiulf claims to have visited in Rome "the tombs of the Eastern martyrs"[26]. That Roman martyrs are referred to by Agiulf as "Eastern" is, by all means, puzzling. Unfortunately, Rotman does not comment on this passage.

In conclusion, while Rotman's overall argument appears intriguing, I find that most of its bolder elements are guilty of overinterpreting the source material, especially when one considers the significant gaps in Rotman's analysis. Leaving those more audacious claims

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[19] Ibidem 79, pp. 91–92.

[20] Gregorius Turonensis, *Historiae* I, *praefatio*, p. 5.

[21] The sentence, "Gregory could have described this episode in many different ways, but he chose to do so from a Christian point of view" (p. 155), reads as particularly absurd.

[22] See, e.g. Gregorius Turonensis, *Liber vitae patrum* (hereinafter: VP) 6.4, ed. B. Krusch, MGH SS rer. Merov. 1, 2, p. 233; idem, *Historiae* VI.39, VIII.39, X.31, pp. 309–310, 406, 534.

[23] For example, from Diem's paper cited above, see fn. 7.

[24] Gregorius Turonensis, VP 15.1, p. 271; idem, *Historiae* V.7, p. 204.

[25] See idem, *Historiae* X.1, pp. 477–481; idem, GM 82, pp. 93–94 (*caput orbis urbs Roma*); and idem, VP 8.6, p. 246.

[26] *Orientalium martyrum sepulchra*, idem, VP 8.6, p. 246.

aside, what remains hardly introduces anything new to our understanding of Gregory of Tours' oeuvre. This, in itself, is not necessarily a bad thing, as corroboration remains vital in research, regardless of the field, including historical research. In this respect, albeit limited, Rotman's book should be considered a success.

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