Alexander C. Murray (ed.): A Companion to Gregory of Tours. Leiden/Boston: Brill 2018 (Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition 63). XVIII, 667 p. € 234.00/$ 312.00. ISBN: 978-90-04-30676-9.

Almost fifteen years after *The World of Gregory of Tours* was published,[1] Brill has published a new volume that examines the history of Gregory of Tours and his time from various perspectives. Indeed, Gregory of Tours is among the most popular late antique and early medieval authors. His extensive corpus of writings – mostly the *Ten Books of Histories* and the *Miracula* – provides scholars with copious evidence for their investigation of the history of the Merovingian Period, and Gregory's unique literary style keeps scholars intrigued. His rich narratives reveal plenty of information about the social, religious, political, and religious history of sixth-century Gaul and the early medieval West. Being, at times, the sole source for specific events makes Gregory an essential and irreplaceable source. Yet, as the volume in question demonstrates, Gregory was not alone, and we have additional written and material evidence that shed light on the period and on Gregory himself. It is not surprising, then, that we keep seeing new studies about Gregory of Tours, his works and his time, and the last two decades witnessed many such studies. The *Companion to Gregory of Tours* offers a collection of articles that were written by some of the most prominent scholars of Gregory of Tours, the Merovingian period, and the early Middle Ages. Thus, the *Companion* serves as an excellent starting point to anyone who is interested in Gregory and wishes to deepen his or her understanding of this sixth-century Merovingian bishop and historian. The volume contains sixteen chapters that are separated into six parts and an appendix of geographical and genealogical maps. Each of the six parts of the volume examines Gregory and his works from a different angle, and thus the book can provide a wide range of perspectives on Gregory of Tours. The *Companion* covers three major themes: the biography of Gregory of Tours (part 1), the historical context of his time (parts 3, 5), and his works (parts 2, 4, 6). In what follows, I will discuss the book according to these three themes instead of following the book's chronology.

1 K. Mitchell/I. Wood (eds.): The World of Gregory of Tours. Leiden/Boston/Köln 2002 (Cultures, Beliefs, and Traditions 8).

BIOGRAPHY

Before one can delve into the works of Gregory of Tours, it is necessary to know who this person was, and this is precisely the purpose of the first part of the *Companion* (*Gregory and His Circle*, chapters 1–2), which examines the history and biography of Gregory. It begins with a chapter by Martin Heinzelmann, "Gregory of Tours: The Elements of a Biography" (7–34), in which Heinzelmann looks into the autobiographical accounts found in Gregory's works and aims to explain their role within Gregory's narrative. Throughout his works, Gregory shares auto-biographical information, which helps scholars today to reconstruct his biography, just like Heinzelmann is doing in this chapter. Even though such a reconstruction is possible, Heinzelmann argues that Gregory did not include autobiographical accounts in order to lay the grounds for his future biography. Instead, says Heinzelmann, it was merely a literary mechanism that helped Gregory to depict "an ideal society that is the Church of Christ" (34). His biography was only a portion of the grand history of Merovingian Gaul, which he depicted in his books. Gregory, indeed, might have had this purpose in mind, but when it comes to this author, one must remember that his writings usually had more than one goal, and it is possible that he also aimed to lay the grounds for the biography that would be written after his death. Whether or not one agrees with Heinzelmann's argument, there is still a lot to learn from this chapter, which allows the reader not only to get to know Gregory's biography but also to have a glimpse into his sophisticated and multi-layered approach to text and history. A different approach to Gregory's biography appears in the next chapter, in a paper written by Michael Roberts, "Venantius Fortunatus and Gregory of Tours: Poetry and Patronage" (35–59). Roberts examines the biography of Gregory from the perspective of his relations with his close friend, the poet Venantius Fortunatus. The analysis of the role of poetry in the relationship of the two shed some light on Gregory's characteristics, and it offers a fresh angle on the history of both authors.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In order to better understand Gregory of Tours and his works, it is necessary to contextualize the author within broader contexts and perspectives, and this is precisely what Part 3 (*Institutional and Material Setting*, chapters 6–8) and Part 5 (*Gregory and the Political World of the Sixth Century*, chapters 12–14) do.

Perhaps it would have been better to have these two parts together. Part 3 looks into the institutional construction of the Merovingian kingdoms. Alexander C. Murray's chapter, "The Merovingian State and Administration in the Times of Gregory of Tours" (191–231), explores the secular administrative system of the Kingdom – the regional and the central one – its roles and hierarchy. Murray does so by using evidence found in Gregory's works and elsewhere: in legal texts, formulas, canons, and diplomatic communication. Accordingly, Murray also introduces the various sources that one can use to examine Merovingian history. Yitzhak Hen's contribution, "The Church in Sixth-Century Gaul" (232–255), focuses on the development of the Frankish Church from an administrative perspective. Hen explains the effects of the transformation of the Roman world on ecclesiastical institutions and discusses the roles played by the clergy and the tension between the two major authoritative powers at that time, the secular and the religious one. Gregory was a bishop and a descendant of a Gallo-Roman senatorial family, and he experienced this tension during his career. Hen's paper helps to situate Gregory in this complex religious and political context. Finally, Part 3 concludes with a chapter by Patrick Périn, "Landscape and Material Culture of Gaul in the Times of Gregory of Tours According to Archeology" (256–277), in which he uses archeological evidence to reconstruct the social history of the people living in sixth-century Merovingian Gaul. Périn does so by looking into the urban and rural landscapes, thus providing a more vivid picture of the period. One significant aspect that binds together all the chapters in this section is the integration between various types of primary sources, which provides a better and more comprehensive understanding of the history of Gregory of Tours and the Merovingian Kingdoms in his time. From a methodological perspective, and assuming that students of all levels are among the targeted audience of the *Companion*, this section serves as an excellent example of the importance of using a wide range of sources for the study of history, and particularly for the study of early Merovingian history.

The historical discussion continues in Part 5 (*Gregory and the Political World of the Sixth Century*, chapters 12–14), and it broadens the perspective offered in the previous section. If the chapters of Part 3 discuss the social and political life in Merovingian Gaul from an institutional point of view, then Part 5 delves into the politics itself, looking both on domestic and foreign affairs.

Stefan Esders examines in his chapter, "Gallic Politics in the Sixth Century" (429–461), the political developments that occurred during Gregory's lifetime, giving special attention to all the tensions between the Merovingian kings and their struggles over the throne(s). Esders describes the dependence of and the tension between the Church in the kingship and explains Gregory's position in this situation. In a way, Esders's contribution completes the picture drawn in the chapters written by Hen and Murray in Part 3. The contributions of Simon Loseby and Roger Collins turn to the foreign policies of the Merovingians. In his paper, "Gregory of Tours, Italy, and the Empire" (462–497), Loseby follows Gregory's accounts about Italy in the *Histories* and his hagiographical corpus. This is a brief survey, but it gives the reader a glimpse into the role played by Italy, the Vandals, and the Lombards in Gregory's narratives and in the Merovingian relations with the Byzantine Empire. Moreover, Loseby uses this discussion to trace how information reached Gregory and to discuss Gregory's perception of the past, and more precisely – the Roman history of Italy and Gaul, his theological views, and his literary strategies. Gregory selected which narratives to record, and the things he left out were not necessarily omitted due to his lack of knowledge or sources. It was a conscious decision to choose what to tell so that it will reflect Gregory's worldview. In the next chapter, "Gregory of Tours and Spain" (498–515), Roger Collins examines Gregory's depictions of Spain under Vandal and Gothic rule, and like Loseby, he does not limit himself to the *Histories*. Collins's discussion of Gregory's sources, how he used them, and the fact that many times he did not disclose them emphasizes the caution in which Gregory's works should be treated by scholars today. The contributions by Loseby and Collins are also part of a recent trend in Merovingian scholarship that investigates the Merovingians in broader Mediterranean perspectives.[2]

2 E.g. the contributions in: A. Fischer/I. Wood (eds): Western Perspectives on the Mediterranean. Cultural Transfer in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, 400–800AD. London 2014; S. Esders/Y. Fox/Y. Hen/L. Sarti (eds): East and West in the Early Middle Ages. The Merovingian Kingdoms in Mediterranean Perspective. Cambridge 2019; S. Esders/Y. Hen/P. Lucas/T. Rotman (eds): The Merovingian Kingdoms and the Mediterranean World. Revisiting the Sources. London/New York 2019.

THE WORKS OF GREGORY OF TOURS

The third aspect that the *Companion* examines is the works of Gregory of Tours, his literary style, and his authorial decision, and three sections in the *Companion* discuss Gregory's works from various perspectives. Part 2 (*Composing the Works*, chapters 3–4) offers discussions about the composition and language of Gregory's historiographical and hagiographical works; Part 4 (*Religious and Literary Perspectives*, chapters 9–11) focuses on the literary and authorial decisions made by Gregory; and, finally, Part 6 (*Post Mortem*, chapters 15–16) investigates the transmission and reception of Gregory's literary corpus over the years, from the early Middle Ages to modern times. Thus, the collection of papers in these three sections allows the readers to deepen their understanding of Gregory as an author.

Alexander C. Murray's contribution, "The Composition of the *Histories* of Gregory of Tours and Its Bearing on the Political Narrative" (63–101), opens Part 2 and discusses at length the chronology of the composition of Gregory's famous *Ten Books of Histories*. Richard Shaw continues the chronological discussion and focuses on the miracle collections of Gregory of Tours. In his chapter, "Chronology, Composition, and Authorial Conception in the *Miracula*" (102–140), Shaw argues that Gregory never really finished writing his *Miracula,* and he was continuously reworking the collections, until his death. Shaw attempts to use the chronology in order to explain the purpose of composing the hagiographical corpus, and he argues that Gregory did not have one coherent vision for his *Miracula*. The problem with Shaw's argument is that most of it relies on Gregory's prefaces to his works and not on their actual content, their audience, use, or even their literary context. Nevertheless, Shaw's analysis gives a glimpse into Gregory's intellectual process, and it is an interesting read. Part 2 concludes with Pascale Bourgain's contribution, "The Works of Gregory of Tours: Manuscript, Language and Style" (141–188), which offers a lengthy discussion on the different manuscripts in which Gregory's works survived during the Middle Ages and an in-depth analysis of Gregory's Latin.

Part 4 (*Religious and Literary Perspectives*, chapters 9–11) continues the discussion in Gregory's works, and it contains three chapters that discuss some of Gregory's authorial and literary decisions. Martin Heinzelmann's second contribution, "The Works of Gregory of Tours and Patristic Tradition" (281–336), demonstrates some literary models Gregory used in his works, that show how well-educated Gregory was and that he knew of a variety of

literary traditions. Heinzelmann focuses on Patristic tradition and uses it to discuss various theological concepts to which Gregory relates in his writings. This analysis emphasizes that it is crucial to read Gregory's works in the rich cultural, religious, and literary contexts in which they were produced. The chapter by Joaquín Martínez Pizarro, "Gregory of Tours and the Literary Imagination: Genre, Narrative Style, Sources, and Models in the *Histories*" (337–374), discusses other literary genres and models that inspired Gregory, influenced his work, and helped him to create his personal multilayered and unique style. Pizarro's contribution echoes his previous studies about Gregory of Tours,[3] and here, too, he offers an excellent literary approach to the works of Gregory of Tours. Part 4 concludes with a chapter by John K. Kitchen, "Gregory of Tours, Hagiography, and the Cult of the Saints in the Sixth Century" (375–426), in which he looks into a specific theme found in Gregory's writings – saints and their cults. By using Gregory's hagiographical works and accounts, Kitchen discusses the physical and spiritual role of saints in Frankish society and demonstrates how one can use hagiographical records to reconstruct social history. Part 4, then, exhibits the importance of literary perspective for the study of Gregory of Tours, his character and his works.

The sixth and final part of the *Companion* (*Post Mortem*, chapters 15–16) examines the reception of Gregory of Tours and his works in later periods. It contains two papers: one written by Helmut Reimitz ("The Early Medieval Editions of Gregory of Tours' *Histories*", 519–565), and another by John J. Contreni ("Gregory's Works in the High Medieval and Early Modern Periods", 566–581). Reimitz examines the transmission of Gregory's *Histories* from the seventh century onwards and its reception and editions in different types of written records, such as the six-books version of the *Histories*, Fredegar's chronicle, and Hilduin's *vita* of Saint Denis. Gregory was not always the most reliable source. However, he was still considered as a religious and historical authority figure when it comes down to Merovingian history, and medieval authors used his *Histories* and adjusted them so they would reflect their current vision of society. And, in a way, what was true for medieval scholars and historians remains the same for modern ones. Contreni's contribution, which concludes the volume, continues where Reimitz stops.

3 J. M. Pizarro: A Rhetoric of the Scene. Dramatic Narrative in the Early Middle Ages. Toronto 1989; Idem: Images in Texts. The Shape of the Visible in Gregory of Tours. In: Journal of Medieval Latin 9, 1999, 91–101.

He discusses the reception and use of all of Gregory's works (his *Histories*, hagiographies, and other minor works) in the High Middle Ages and through the early modern times (15th-17th centuries), demonstrating that Gregory kept being considered an important source and authority for the early Merovingian period. To some extent, Reimitz' and Contreni's contributions justify the entire volume: Gregory of Tours was, and he still is one of the most important sources for the study of the early Merovingian period and its cultural, religious, social and political history. His significance lies within his unique literary style, his perception of history, his relations with ecclesiastical and secular agents, and the fact that his writings survived throughout the middle ages until our days.

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All in all, the *Companion to Gregory of Tours* provides a wide range of perspectives on Gregory of Tours and offers a rich introduction to this author and his world as a companion should do. The chapters of the book successfully summarize most of the aspects of the current scholarly discourse. Moreover, reading through the *Companion* reveals that even though Gregory of Tours and his writings received plenty of scholarly attention over the years, there are still plenty more angles to explore his writings, the history they record, and his role as bishop, author, historian, and hagiographer. Perhaps the strength of this extensive volume is that each chapter raises new questions, and even scholars who are quite familiar with Gregory of Tours and the history of his period can use this volume to contemplate further and rethink their understanding of Gregory. There is, however, one problem in the book: the lack of diversity among its contributors. Among the sixteen chapters of the volume, fifteen were written by well-established male scholars (some of them contributed more than one chapter), even though there are plenty of female scholars who could have contributed to this volume and offer their own perspective on Gregory of Tours and the history of his time. A companion such as this one does not only summarize the main themes and topics in the study of Gregory of Tours, but it also introduces to its audience the names of some of the major scholars who study the subject. In a way, the table of content is also a referral list from which one can learn about the most popular research trends in the Gregorian scholarship and its leading voices. Therefore, it is crucial to be aware of and give voice to a more diverse group of scholars. After all, this can only benefit the scholarly discussion,

enrich it, help make it more profound, and encourage men, women, and non-binary people to be a visible part of their academic sphere.

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Empfohlene Zitierweise

Tamar Rotman: Rezension zu: Alexander C. Murray (ed.): A Companion to Gregory of Tours. Leiden/Boston: Brill 2018 (Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition 63). In: Plekos 22, 2020, 277–284 (URL: http://www.plekos.uni-muenchen.de/2020/r-murray.pdf).