

Antje Klein: Die Chronik des Victor von Tunnuna (ca. 565). Eine Chronik und ihre Geschichte(n). Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag 2023 (Roma Aeterna 12). 585 p. € 98.00. ISBN: 978-3-515-13380-7.

This may seem like a very large book to devote to what is a quite small chronicle, but the scale is appropriate, in that Victor's work has not previously received the degree of scholarly attention it deserves, and which it is accorded in this study, which derives from its author's 2021 Dissertation in the Evangelisch-Theologische Fakultät of the University of Vienna. Victor's *chronicle* covers a relatively short period, from 444 to 566/567, and in its very limited manuscript tradition, it is part of a chain of such texts that combine to form a World Chronicle, extending from the Creation to the year 589. The other components consist of an abbreviated text of Jerome's Latin translation and continuation of the *chronicle* of Eusebius of Caesarea, a version of the further continuation by Prosper of Aquitaine that extends to 445, and finally, following Victor, there comes the *chronicle* of John of Biclarum, a Spanish abbot and later bishop of Gerona.¹ Of these components, it is the last of them, which is also the shortest in both length and chronological coverage, that has always attracted the most interest.

This is largely due to its importance as a source for the history of the Visigothic kingdom in the Iberian Peninsula at the time of its conversion from Arian (or Homoian) to Nicene Christianity, and therefore of the important reign of the Gothic king Leovigild (569–586), who militarily and politically unified most of the peninsula after a period of royal weakness; a process that in itself helped necessitate a theological unification, which this king is seen as resisting. It was formally achieved early in the reign of his son Reccared I (586–601) at the Third Council of Toledo in 589, with which John's *chronicle* concludes. As his work also served as a source for the historical writings of his much younger contemporary, Isidore bishop of Seville (died 636), John has long been regarded as the prime source, at least from a Hispanic perspective, for these crucial events, gaining him much greater attention than Victor, whose *chronicle* has also been criticised for being too concerned with theological disputes at the expense of military and political ones.

1 C. Cardelle de Hartmann (ed.): *Victoris Tunnunensis Chronicon cum reliquiis ex Consularibus Caesaraugustanis et Iohannis Biclarenensis Chronicon*. Turnhout 2001 (Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina 173A), pp. 27*–38*.

In comparison with that of John, Victor's *chronicle* has been unfairly neglected, and, additionally, so too has the wider compilation in which both feature. It has never been edited as a whole, and the sole medieval manuscript that contains it has yet to be digitised.² As is clearly brought out in this book, while the detailed testimony of Victor's own work is of remarkable interest, his wider purpose in writing and the historical and ideological influences on him can best be understood in the context of the compilation of chronicles that he himself made, and which was subsequently both extended and preserved by John of Biclarum. It could be added that John's acquisition in Constantinople in the late 570s of a manuscript of Victor's *world chronicle* was not a casual choice, and that he selected Victor's work to continue because it so well suited his own purposes. It is also no coincidence that Victor's *chronicle* ends with the accession of Justin II, while the other text John brought back to the Visigothic kingdom from his stay in Constantinople was the panegyric on Justin II by the African rhetor Corippus. Justin repudiated several features of his predecessor's legacy, and his accession promised a change in imperial theological preferences and their enforcement.

What little can be said of Victor's life comes from his own work, although thanks to his continuation by John of Biclarum he was included by Isidore of Seville in his *De Viris Illustribus*, along with John himself.³ Unlike his treatment of the latter, on whom he was better informed, Isidore was unable to add anything beyond what he deduced from Victor's *chronicle*. That Victor was the bishop of a see in one of the North African provinces and still alive in 566/567 seem incontrovertible. When he was born and how much longer he lived are unknown. That he suffered periods of exile for his resistance to Justinian's attempt to condemn the three theologians, whose defence became a touchstone of orthodoxy for much of the African episcopate is clear from brief mention in his *chronicle*, but the location of all of them is debatable. Even the identity, location and correct way of spelling the name of his episcopal see have been disputed. The form of its name used here, Tunnuna, has only recently been established, thanks to the most recent critical edition of the text in which its identification with Tunis has also been shown to be

2 MS Madrid, Biblioteca de la Universidad Complutense, Fondo histórico 134, on which see note 1 above.

3 C. Codoñer Merino (ed.): El "De viris illustribus" de Isidoro de Sevilla. Estudio y edición crítica. Salamanca 1964 (Theses et studia philologica Salmanticensia 12), p. 147 (Victor) and p. 151 (John).

wrong.⁴ Carmen Cardelle de Hartmann's edition of the text and her discussion of several issues such as these represents the starting point for the book under review here, which in its final part augments it with the first German translation of Victor's work.

The early years of his life were led under Vandal rule. While the Catholic episcopate was by then being subjected to less stringent treatment by the Vandal kings, the memory of how their predecessors had been persecuted, as they saw it, remained strong and continued to influence the outlook of clerics such as Victor, even after the kingdom itself had been eliminated in the conquest of the African provinces by the East Roman or Byzantine emperor Justinian I (527–565) in the mid 530ies.

Thanks to such graphically descriptive but also deliberately programmatic works as the *Historia Persecutionis* of Bishop Victor of Vita, intended to encourage imperial intervention against the Vandal kingdom, it might be assumed that its speedy conquest by Justinian's generals between 533 and 534 would have been warmly welcomed.⁵ To any such view Victor's *chronicle* is a necessary antidote, as the ensuing theological conflict over what are known as The Three Chapters is the main theme of his work; one that is enhanced by his inclusion, in his own *chronicle* and those he selected to precede it, of earlier theological disputes and the effect they had on the relations between secular rulers and the Church, with particular focus on those of the former who promoted what from Victor's perspective were heretical doctrines. This dispute, long neglected, has begun to attract more scholarly interest, though this did not include any significant re-evaluation of Victor's contribution to it prior to the publication of Antje Klein's book.

Thus, emperors who supported Monophysite theology in the aftermath of the Council of Chalcedon and the Arian Vandal kings are implicitly presented by him as the equivalent of Justinian in his attempts to impose the acceptance of his condemnation in 543/544 of the so-called Three Chapters:

4 Cardelle de Hartmann (ed.): *Victoris Tunnunensis Chronicon* (note 1), pp. 95*–102*.

5 See most recently P. Sarris: *Justinian. Emperor, Soldier, Saint*. London 2023, pp. 181–214; also: D. Shanzer: *Intentions and Audiences: History, Hagiography, Martyrdom, and Confession in Victor of Vita's *Historia Persecutionis**. In: A. H. Merrills (ed.): *Vandals, Romans and Berbers. New Perspectives on Late Antique North Africa*. Aldershot 2004, pp. 271–290.

the specified writings of three fifth-century eastern theologians, who had been staunch defenders of the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon of 451. The attack on them was seen as a challenge to the authority of the council itself, and was resisted in Africa above all as such, resulting in punishments being inflicted on several leading bishops, including Victor. So, his *chronicle* was no dispassionate historical composition, but instead one of several controversial texts composed to glorify and justify defiance of the imperial theology and to place the sufferings of those who resisted the emperor in a long tradition of persecution by the state and heroic resistance to it, going back to the martyrs of the earliest days of the church in the Roman Empire. Victor saw himself and those other African clerics who were exiled by Justinian in precisely this context, along with their predecessors punished by the Vandal king. It was for the suitability of this central theme that John of Biclarum chose to continue the *African chronicle*; although bringing his own narrative to a triumphant conclusion, with the conversion of the Visigothic king Recared in 587 and that of his kingdom at the Third Council of Toledo in 589.

The genesis and purpose of the *chronicle*, and each of the themes briefly described above is thoroughly explored in this book in a succession of four substantial chapters, preceded by an introduction (pp. 13–23) and followed by a concluding discussion (“Eine Chronik und ihre Geschichte(n)”, pp. 484–496), the German translation of the text (pp. 497–520), and an impressive and useful thirty-five-page bibliography (pp. 521–556). The sequence begins with Chapter Two (“Eine Chronik und ihre (Vor-)Geschichte”, pp. 24–94), which provides a valuable background history of, firstly, the Vandal kingdom, the conflicts between the Arian kings and the Nicene episcopate, and secondly of the Three Chapters Controversy, its origins and its African dimension. The next two chapters, Three (“Der Text der Chronik und seine Geschichte”, pp. 95–197) and Four (“Zum Gerüst der erzählten Geschichte”, pp. 198–229), focus on the *chronicle* itself, covering a range of essential topics, such as its date of composition, sources and transmission, but with an important section devoted to the question of its chronology, examining six examples in detail. This is valuable in its own right, but also has significance for the *chronicle* of John of Biclarum, which raises several chronological difficulties, and a common answer may be found for the problems of both. This brief account of the contents necessarily omits many other points of detail carefully examined in the book, making it an essential

aid to the better understanding of both the *chronicle* and the period it describes.

The study of the written evidence, so well conducted here, could be reinforced by the archaeological study of a several sites in the former Vandal provinces, which suggest that the opposition to Justinian's attempts to impose his theological compromise was more than just a literary debate, conducted largely by an ecclesiastical elite. A survey of urban fortifications constructed by the imperial governors in the decades following the replacement of the Vandal monarchy could indicate that they were intended less to protect the civil population of the towns than to provide strongholds for the garrisoning forces, as for example at Timgad in Algeria or Dougga in Tunisia. This was despite considerable emphasis, both in textual sources such as Procopius and in surviving contemporary inscriptions, on the imperial defence of such settlements from raids by the Mauri, the indigenous tribes of the adjacent mountain regions. Likewise, a major programme of new church building and the restoration of existing ones, partly to erase the memory of Arianism, favoured designs from Constantinople or the eastern provinces rather than local traditions and included features indicative of liturgical practices not previously followed in Africa. In other words, the newly established imperial regime, however much it presented itself as a liberation, was in several ways culturally alien and possessing the character of an occupation.

In conclusion, this can only be described as an impressive and valuable book. Its author's scholarly interests may be primarily theological, but this is a case in which a theological dispute, one once regarded as obscure and of minor interest, is the manifestation and at the heart of a much wider and more complex cultural clash extending across the Mediterranean, and in which a work of historiographical character can play a role as important as any theological treatise in powerfully presenting the arguments of one side. This book is thus essential for the understanding of both the Three Chapters controversy in its wider dimensions and of the history of Byzantine Africa.

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