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Leadership, Social Cohesion, and Identity in Late Antique Spain and Gaul (500–700): edited by Dolores Castro and Fernando Ruchesi, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2023, 282 pp., €124.00, ISBN 978-94637-2595-8

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This volume's express aim is to add to discussions of post-Roman leaderships, identities, and social cohesion, particularly in terms of cultural structures and institutions in Gaul and Iberia. After an introduction that sets out this goal, co-editor Dolores Castro begins by examining how bishops used charity as a tool of legitimation and power. Using hagiographical sources from Iberia, and a few comparisons from Gaul, she convincingly argues that bishops used charity to include and exclude, and to position themselves a intercessors between earthly and spiritual within a landscape they controlled. In addition to emphasizing their usefulness as protectors and mediators, this tactic helped them justify paying attention to such worldly concerns like financial management; good charity could not happen without access to wealth.

Michael Kelly's chapter suggests he would disagree. He begins by stating that it is part of a monograph in progress that proposes Visigothic Catholicism functioned "as secular ideology and not as a religion," because it was committed to late antique interests in wealth and power rather than "radical Christian truth" (64). The chapter then explores what Visigothic intellectuals thought made someone human. The evolution of their thought was influenced by difficulties eliminating dissenters within the church, the wider Monothelitism crisis, and antagonism between Toledo and Rome. During the seventh century, he claims, they came to define humanity as being faithful and honoring oaths, and thus saw Jews as "inhuman" because they were outside the Christian faith. One weakness of this argument, though, is that Kelly sometimes elides the term "inhumanum" with "immanum," meaning wicked (e.g., 74). How all this relates to Visigothic Catholicism as secular ideology also remains unclear.

By contrast, Alex O'Hara illustrates how worldly and religious concerns could indeed be compatible by applying cultural anthropology studies on ritual and social cohesion to Merovingian interest in monastic foundation. Columbanian monasticism provided the aristocracy with an avenue for accessing religious authority outside episcopal spheres of power, and a penitential system that resembled familiar models of gift giving. The ritual of monastic foundation helped bind the aristocracy as a class, created a group identification differentiated from others, activated coalitional thinking, and allowed demonstration of both piety and support of the Merovingians (by copying what kings did). Elite gifts to monasteries were part of a reimagined spiritual economy that was not just political and economic, but also religious.

Returning to Iberia, Meritxell Pérez Martínez links the fortunes of cities and bishops in Tarraco in the fifth through seventh centuries. Drawing on both written and material sources, she demonstrates that Tarraco remained a key port and political center for most of this period, and the bishop an important ally for controlling it and the surrounding province. Pérez Martínez argues that this shows the Visigoths deliberately preserved the late Roman social fabric and had minimal impact on Tarraconensis during conquest. Centralization in the seventh century

necessarily diminished Tarraco's role, yet according to the author, it preserved "Roman identity" – seemingly defined as urban and Mediterranean – to the end.

How power operated on a local level also concerns Pablo Poveda Arias in the next chapter. Focusing on legal sources, he traces how different types of leaders in the Visigothic kingdom could both cooperate and compete with each other simultaneously ("coopetition"). In the fifth century under kings based in Toulouse, bishops like Sidonius worked with secular counterparts in order to survive, despite rivalries and distrust. In the sixth century, the Visigoths promoted cooperation, possibly because they needed bishops' help controlling Iberia. Here we can see parallels with Pérez Martínez's bishops in Tarraco. By the mid-seventh century, though, Visigothic kings felt free to enact laws diminishing bishops' role and placing them under the oversight of secular leaders.

Co-editor Fernando Ruchesi turns our attention to military groups and the mechanisms by which they cohered under their leaders. Both the Merovingians and the Visigoths adapted Roman strategies and symbols from their time as *foederati* to keep control of their soldiers. These included the use of violence, display of symbols, exempla, persuasion, participation in military campaigns, shared hardship and spoils, and fostering a warrior identity. Ruchesi systematically addresses each of these (as applicable) from a leadership lens, then a social cohesion lens, with many examples. He also demonstrates that social cohesion need not be imposed from above; sometimes peers took the initiative on their own.

In the final chapter, Christian Stadermann seeks to re-evaluate the reasons for the Visigothic king Euric's tough stance against Catholic bishops. He agrees with modern commentators that Euric's ban on consecration of new bishops and exile of some existing ones was politically, not religiously, motivated, but finds their reasoning too speculative. A careful analysis of the limited sources leads him to conclude that we cannot assume all bishops came from the senatorial aristocracy, and thus that Euric was trying to quell that class' resistance. However, the absence of episcopal communication outside the kingdom at this time, coupled with the return of exiles after Euric made peace with the Roman Empire, suggests he was concerned about imperial and papal interference in Visigothic politics via bishops and that he wanted to pressure his enemies to negotiate by starving the church of leadership.

Overall, like most edited collections, this volume is mixed in terms of quality and topics. Its greatest contributions as a whole are to diversifying what is studied and how. It has met its cross-Pyrenees comparative goal well, with coverage of both Merovingians and Visigoths, and the Visigoths in both Gaul and Iberia. Some chapters provide explicit comparisons and others do not, but the reader can easily draw their own comparisons by reading the chapters together. A variety of types of leaders, from bishops to counts and military to royal, appear in this collection. Regional diversity matters here too; by not focusing only on important centers like Toledo and Tours that tend to dominate Visigothic and Merovingian studies, this volume helps broaden our picture of these kingdoms. If we want to understand how they functioned on the ground, we need to pay more attention to places like Tarraco and Toulouse. Specialists in either

kingdom, or in other parts of the early medieval Mediterranean, will find much useful food for thought here for future comparative and de-centralizing work.

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