

THE OMISSION OF St. MARTIN OF BRAGA IN JOHN OF BICLARO'S *CHRONICA* AND THE THIRD COUNCIL OF TOLEDO

Alberto Ferreiro

University of California, Santa Barbara

St. Martin of Braga and the *Chronica*

One of the principal sources for the Iberian Peninsula in the sixth-century A.D. is the *Chronica* of John of Biclaro. As is characteristic of the chronicles of the Iberian Peninsula in Visigothic Spain, beginning already in the fifth century with Hydatius, it is brief. Yet it offers a great deal of information on major events and of the people, both secular and ecclesiastical, that greatly influenced Spain in this era⁽¹⁾.

Even so, the *Chronica* is by no means a detailed account of events or of illustrious people⁽²⁾. The one omission that has puzzled scholars has been that of St. Martin of Braga. Claude W. Barlow commented that, "For some reason, which cannot now be determined, Johannes Biclarensis failed to mention one of his most illustrious contemporaries, st. Martin of Braga"⁽³⁾. Julio Campos made the following observations in order to explain the omission: (a) Galicia was not part of the Gothic realm at the time the *Chronica* was penned (b) John of Biclaro was intent on narrating primarily the general background, at least for that which concerned the peninsula, of Visigothic history, and finally (c) He only mentioned the ecclesiastics that he knew personally⁽⁴⁾. Although basically in agreement with Campos this study will present further arguments in order to explain the absence of St. Martin of Braga.

The first matter to consider is the intent and focus of the *Chronica*. It is clear that John of Biclaro was determined not to narrate a general history of the Iberian Peninsula. Instead, the chronicle concerns itself with the Visigoths primarily, and reaches its apogee with the official conversion of that people under Reccared at the Third Council of Toledo. Or as Lewis Thorpe has succinctly said, "It describes happenings from a Visigothic viewpoint. John of Biclaro gives a short account of the reign of Leovigild, King of the Visigoths in Spain, and of the first years of the reign of his son Reccared"⁽⁵⁾.

The Sueves are only mentioned when they figure into the general history of the peninsula, at least from John of Biclaro's viewpoint. That being the consolidation of the entire peninsula not only politically and territorially under Vi-

sigothic rule, but above all else, the conversion of all the peoples to Catholicism and the eradication of Arianism. The Visigoths were for John of Biclaro the successors of Rome in Spain⁽⁶⁾ The Sueves have a very limited role in the *Chronica*, however⁽⁷⁾.

The *Chronica* covers the years between 567 and 590 and is well after the conversion of the Sueves in the 550's under the pastorate of Martin of Braga. The first event mentioned in the *Chronica* concerning the Sueves is the accession of King Miro (570-582) after Theodomir⁽⁸⁾. Although Martin was still active in Galicia during Miro's reign, with whom he carried a lively correspondence, John of Biclaro was not concerned with the church history of that region. A careful scrutiny of the *Chronica* and of the ecclesiastics mentioned therein confirms this. Miro seems only mentioned because it was during his reign that Leovigild achieved some successful military campaigns in Galicia⁽⁹⁾ Pablo Alvarez Rubiano has correctly observed that, "Por su crónica desfilan reyes y príncipes, papas y obispos, destacando las personalidades más eminentes de su época...entre los eclesiásticos, las de San Leandro y Eutropio, que animaron con su sabiduría el famoso Concilio III toledano"⁽¹⁰⁾. Of the ecclesiastics mentioned in the *Chronica* none are from the Suevoic kingdom. The following is a comprehensive list of the Iberian clerics found therein (the page number is from the *MGH* edition used in this article):

1. *Donatus abbas monasterii Servitani* mirabilium operatur clarus habetur (p. 212).
2. *Mausona Emeritensis ecclesiae episcopus* in nostro dogmate clarus habetur (p. 213).
3. *Iohannes presbyter ecclesiae Emeritensis* clarus habetur (p. 215).
4. *Novellus Complutensis episcopus* clarus habetur (p. 215).
5. *Eutropius abbas monasterii Servitani* discipulus sancti Donati clarus habetur (p. 217; for another reference see p. 219).
6. *Leander Hispalensis ecclesiae episcopus* clarus habetur (p. 217; for another reference see p. 219).
7. *Quidam ex Arrianis, id est Siuma episcopus et Segga*, cum quibusdam tyrannidem assumere cupientes deteguntur; convicti Siuma exilio truditur et Segga manibus amputatis in Gallaeciam exul transmittitur (p. 218)⁽¹¹⁾.

John of Biclaro mentions only bishoprics and monasteries that lie well within the Visigothic realm, those being: the monastery "Servitanus" and the bishoprics of Emeritensis, Complutensis, and Hispalensis. Of the Suevoic monasteries and bishoprics we are told nothing at all. John of Biclaro apparently systematically selected the information to be included in the *Chronica*.

Julio Campos believes that John of Biclaro mentions only Clerics that the bishop of Gerona knew personally, for example, John and Masona of Emerita⁽¹²⁾ Although this is correct, more fundamental it seems to us is the fact that John of Biclaro did not intend to narrate the church history of the Sueves. The Second Council of Braga, which convened in 572, and which falls well within the years that the chronicler covers, does not even get a single reference. It seems unlikely that John of Biclaro had no knowledge of it, nor of St. Martin of Braga. The prelates that are mentioned at length are Leander, bishop of Seville

and Eutropius, abbot of the monastery Servitanum, both very instrumental in the conversion and transition of the Visigoths to Catholicism. Leander played a decisive role not only in the conversion, but also at the Third Council of Toledo, where he delivered a lengthy homily⁽¹³⁾

In the chronicle it is king Reccared and Leander of Seville, not Martin of Braga, who are given due credit for converting and uniting the Iberian Peninsula under one monarchy and faith. On account of the subjugation of the Suevic realm by the Arian King Leovigild, neither the Sueves nor Martin of Braga could share in the ultimate triumph of Orthodoxy over Arianism. This is especially true, since Martin of Braga had already died when the unity was effected in 585. John of Biclaro intentionally emphasized the role of king Reccared and Leander in the successful abolishment of Arianism. To have given credit to anyone else would have undermined this most important point, and would have also depicted a distorted account of the events surrounding the conversion. John of Biclaro believed Reccared to be God's instrument to convert the peoples of the peninsula. At the Third Council of Toledo the bishops gathered in unison proclaimed that Reccared had been chosen by God to lead all the peoples of Spain to Orthodoxy⁽¹⁴⁾. The Sueves figure only in this event as part of the general conversion of the Iberian Peninsula during the reign of king Reccared and made official by him at the Third Council of Toledo. The missionary labor of St. Martin of Braga is not to be underestimated, nor is it here undermined by the events of 589, so long as one considers it within its proper historical context.

Martin of Braga and the Third Council of Toledo

The absence of the bishop of Braga in the Third Council of Toledo has also been enigmatic. E.A. Thompson, in a recent study, has set forth the problem, "The voluminous minutes of the Third Council of Toledo, which met in 589, although they include more than one reference to the conversion of the Sueves, pass over Martin in complete silence"⁽¹⁵⁾. A careful scrutiny of the minutes of the council, especially its reference to the Sueves, reveals that this complete silence of Martin of Braga is not all that enigmatic. In fact, there is no reason whatsoever that the minutes should mention Martin at all. The text in question reads as follows:

Not only the conversion of the Goths is found among the favors that we have received, but also the infinite multitude of the Sueves, whom with divine assistance we have subjected to our realm. Although led into heresy by external fault, with our diligence we have brought them to the origins of truth⁽¹⁶⁾.

Throughout the minutes of the council there are three things that are repeatedly stressed: (a) the conversion of the Arian Visigoths to Orthodoxy (b) the conversion of all the peoples of the peninsula, and (c) the unity of the faith

and its subsequent triumph over Arianism. The last element is found especially in the homily that Leander of Seville delivered at the council⁽¹⁷⁾.

The text in question is referring to the conversion of Reccared in 587 and, naturally to the Third Council of Toledo, which made the conversion official in 589 for the entire Visigothic kingdom. But what about the Suevic conversion? To what conversion is the council referring to, to the one in the second half of the sixth-century, or is it speaking of another?⁽¹⁸⁾ Herein is where our problem lies and where it can perhaps be resolved.

The text says that by this official act —the council— “*Nec enim sola Gothorum conversio*”, but that the Sueves have also been brought to Orthodoxy. When Reccared says that the Sueves were “*quam praesidio coelesti nostro regno subiecimus*” he meant the conquest of the Sueves in 585 by Leovigild, his father⁽¹⁹⁾. Politically and territorially the Suevic kingdom was then dissolved and incorporated into the Visigothic realm ⁽²⁰⁾ Reccared then adds that “*Alieno licet in haeresim deductam vitio.*” This statement clearly refers to Leovigild and his attempt to uproot Orthodoxy, not only in Galicia, but in the entire peninsula, and to establish Arianism as the official religion. At one point during his reign he went so far as to call an Arian council ⁽²¹⁾ The text ends with “*nostro tamen ad veritatis originem studio revocavimus*”. Reccared credits himself for bringing back the Sueves to Orthodoxy after a brief lapse into heresy on account of an “external misdeed”, his father Leovigild. The council is therefore not referring to the earlier conversion of the Sueves. What is spoken of is a re-conversion- an official one- in 589 on account of the Third Council of Toledo ⁽²²⁾ For this reason Reccared had every reason to pass over the bishop of Braga in complete silence.

Conclusion

The omission of St. Martin of Braga in the *Chronica* cannot be considered an error of neglect or lack of knowledge on the part of John of Biclaro. The objectives of the chronicle, the political consolidation of the peninsula under Visigothic rule and the official conversion of the Visigoths and Sueves to Orthodoxy at the Third Council of Toledo, do not require that the bishop of Braga should be mentioned. Since Martin had no direct role in these events, it is not at all surprising that John of Biclaro did not refer to him. Furthermore, the Suevic realm was a vestige of the past and no longer relevant to the future of the peninsula. The political and religious development resided in the hands of the Visigoths. John of Biclaro was aware of this and made a conscious effort to emphasize this throughout.

As for the second omission we can conclude with the following remarks. The minutes of the council proclaim the unity of the Iberian Peninsula under the auspices of the Visigoths. The text accentuates this timely event by mentioning the Orthodoxy of the Visigoths and Sueves, but, above all, the complete extinction of Arianism at the Third Council of Toledo. The council is not speaking about the conversion of the Sueves that was effected during the pastorate of Martin of Braga ⁽²³⁾

NOTES

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1. John of Biclaro, *Chronica MGH A.A. XI*, pp. 207-20; *MPL 72*: 863-70; Julio Campos, *Juan de Biclaro, Obispo de Gerona. Su vida y su obra*. Madrid, 1960; Pablo Alvarez Rubiano, "La Crónica de Juan Biclarense. Versión castellana y notas para su estudio." *Analecta sacra tarraconensia* 16 (1943) 7-44.
 2. Julio Campos notes that, "Pero resulta extraño que entre ellos no recuerde al monje San Millán, celebre por sus virtudes y milagros, que murió en 574, ni a San Martín Dumicense", *Juan de Biclaro*, p. 58.
 3. "The Literary heritage of Spain, 350-600 A.D." *Folia* 1 (1946) p. 108; E. A. Thompson in a recent study has expressed the same bewilderment, "But what is little short of amazing is that the excellent John of Biclaram, whose chronicle covers the years 567-90, never breaths his name, says nothing at all about him, fails to mention his death in 579, and might even seem never to have heard of him," "The conversion of the Spanish Suevi to Catholicism," *Visigothic Spain: New approaches*. (ed. Edward James) Oxford, 1980. p. 89. Julio Campos rejects the idea that John of Biclaro had never heard of Martin, *Juan de Biclaro*, p. 58.
 4. Campos, *Juan de Biclaro*, p. 58. I made some preliminary remarks on the 'omission' in my article, "The Westward Journey of St. Martin of Braga." *Studia monastica* 22 (1980) 243, note 2.
 5. Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*. London, 1974. p. 37.
 6. Eustaquio Sánchez Salor, "El providencialismo en la historiografía cristiano-visigótica de España" *Anuario de estudios filológicos* (Cáceres) 5 (1982) 184.
 7. See my article, "The Sueves in the *Chronica* of John of Biclaro". *Latomus* (in press).
 8. In provincia Gallaeciae Miro post Theudemirum Suevorum rex efficitur *MGH A.A. XI*, p. 212.
 9. Leovegildus rex in Gallaecia Suevorum fines conturbat et a rege Mirone per legatos rogatus pacem eis pro parvo tempore tribuit *MGH A.A. XI*, p. 214.
 10. "La Cronica de Juan Biclarense", p. 14.
 11. The following are the ecclesiastics mentioned in the *Chronica* who are not Iberian.
 - 11.1. Dominus Helenensis ecclesia episcopus clarus habetur (p. 213).
 - 11.2. Post Iohannem Romanae ecclesiae Benedictus ordinatur episcopus: praefuit annis III (p. 213).
 - 11.3. Post Benedictum Romanae ecclesiae Pelagius iunior ordinatur episcopus: praeest ann. XI (p. 215).
 - 11.4. Uldida episcopus (p. 218).
 - 11.5. Sancto Alexandro (p. 219).
 12. *Juan de Biclaro*, p. 58.
 13. J. Vives; T. Marín Martínez; G. Martínez Díez, *Concilios Visigóticos e Hispano-Romano*. Madrid, 1963, pp. 139-44; *MGH A.A. XI*, p. 219.
 14. Cui a Deo aeternum meritum nisi vero catholico Recaredo regi? Cui a Deo aeterna corona nisi vero orthodoxo Recaredo regi? Cui praesens gloria et aeterna nisi vero amatori Dei Recaredo regi? Ipse novarum plebium in ecclesia catholica conquisitor. Ipse mereatur vecaciter apostolicam meritum qui apostolicum implevit officium. Vives, *Concilios*, pp. 116-17.
 15. "Conversion of the Spanish Suevi", p. 89.
 16. Nec enim sola Gothorum conversio ad cumulum nostrae mercedis accessit, quinimmo et Suevorum gentis infinita multitudo, quam praesidio coelesti nostro regno subiecimus; alieno licet in haeresim deductam vitio, nostro tamen ad veritatis originem studio revocavimus. Vives, *Concilios*, pp. 110.
 17. *Idid.*, pp. 139-44; see also Isidore, *Historia Gothorum MGH A.A. XI*, pp. 288-89.
 18. Some scholars believe that the conversion took place around 550 during the reign of king Chararic. For others, it was under the reign of king Ariamir—who presided over the First Council of Braga in 561— sometime between 558 and 561. For a discussion on this pro-

blem see the interesting remarks of Thompson, "Conversion of the Spanish Suevi", pp. 83-92.

19. Of interest is that Reccared regarded this event Providential. The Sueves were overpowered by an Arian ruler, who not only imposed Arianism in the newly conquered region, but undoubtedly suppressed the Orthodox. Yet the incorporation of the Sueves into the Visigothic realm facilitated their re-conversion during the reign of Reccared. This most likely was in Reccared's mind when he made this statement at the council. See the bishop's declaration at the council in note 14 above.
20. John of Biclaro reports that, Leovegildus rex Gallaecias vastat, Audecanem regem comprehensum regno privat, Suevorum gentem, Thesaurum et patriam in suam redigit potestatem et Gothorum provinciam facit, *MGH A.A.* XI, p. 217; see also *MPL* 72: 867.
21. Leovegildus rex in urbem Toletanam synodum episcoporum sectae Arrianae congregat et antiquam haerese[m] novell[is] errore emendat, John of Biclaro, *MGH A.A.* XI, p. 216; *MPL* 72: 866. The Arian council took place in the twelfth year of Leovigild's reign, that is, before he subjugated the Sueves. The latter occurred in the seventeenth year of his reign. The Arian council demonstrates the intense adherence that Leovigild had for Arian Christianity.
22. The idea of a reconversion under the auspices of Reccared is found in the *Chronica*: Reccaredus primo regno sui anno mense X catholicus deo iuvante efficitur et sacerdotes sectae Arrianae sapienti colloquio aggressus ratione potius quam imperio converti ad catholicam fidem facit gentemque omnium Gothorum et Suevorum ad unitatem et pacem revocat Christianae ecclesiae. sectae Arrianae gratia divina in dogmate veniunt Christiano. *MGH A.A.* XI, p. 218; consult also p. 219.
23. See my article, "The Missionary Labors of St. Martin of Braga in 6th century Galicia". *Studia monastica* 23 (1981) 11-26.