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Geoffrey Grossus, *The Life of Blessed Bernard of Tiron*. Translated with an introduction and notes by Ruth Harwood Cline. Medieval Texts in Translation Series. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2009. xxxiv + 177 pp. Maps, bibliography and index. \$24.95 (p) ISBN 978-0-8132-1681-2.

Review by Scott G. Bruce, University of Colorado at Boulder.

Translating medieval Latin texts into English is always a laborious task. It presupposes more than a casual proficiency in Latin, absorbs endless hours that could be spent on other scholarly endeavors, and requires the translator to have the historical and literary expertise to contextualize their translation with a learned introduction and other scholarly apparatus. It is almost always a thankless task as well. Despite the considerable specialization necessary to undertake such translations, many history faculties and most university administrators have little notion of how to evaluate or appreciate them as significant contributions to scholarship. They are neither original nor analytical and therefore they do not rank alongside traditional monographs and articles as benchmarks of academic achievement. For this reason alone, most medievalists shy away from undertaking a translation project until later in their careers, when—tenure-clad—they can pursue longer and more ambitious research agendas. This is unfortunate, because translations of medieval source materials are incredibly valuable, especially for undergraduate students who do not yet have the language facilities to engage with premodern primary source materials firsthand. For this reason, books like the one under review are always occasions for some celebration.

Ruth Cline's translation of Geoffrey Grossus' *Life of Bernard of Tiron* (written c. 1147) is particularly welcome because it draws attention to an important religious figure, Bernard, Abbot of Tiron (c. 1046-1116). His presence loomed large in the tumultuous decades around the year 1100, when adherents to traditional forms of cloistered life faced challenges from those swept up in new currents of religious enthusiasm that found expression in broad reinterpretations of the monastic vocation. As Geoffrey's *vita* makes clear, Bernard's career embodies many of these tensions. He was at various times a monk, prior and abbot of a cenobitic community, but he was also a restless individual who retreated from his obligations to inhabit remote forests and craggy islands as a hermit. He argued unsuccessfully before Pope Paschal II to keep the abbey of Saint-Cyprien independent from the encroachment of the Cluniacs. Thereafter, he adopted with enthusiasm the vocation of a wandering preacher in northern Europe in the company of Robert of Arbrissel, the founder of Fontevault, and Vital of Mortain, who would establish the Order of Savigny. In 1109, with the support of the crusading noble Rotrou II, Count of Perche, Bernard founded the monastery of Tiron to the west of Chartres. This religious community would enjoy considerable success after Bernard's death in 1116 as the motherhouse of a congregation of dozens of reformed Benedictine abbeys and priories that survived until its dissolution during the French Revolution.

Cline's translation of Geoffrey's lively text is for the most part very clear and easy to read. Students will find many memorable tales of adventure in Bernard's eclectic and wayward career. The *vita* provides some vivid examples of the perils facing wandering monks and preachers in this period: pirates figure prominently in Bernard's retreat to Chausey Island in the English Channel (pp. 35-42); boorish

rustics mistake the abbot and his coarsely attired companions for Saracens “who had come through underground caves to spy on them” (p. 78); and the holy man received death threats from married priests and their wives when he preached clerical celibacy among them (p. 57). It is also refreshing that this hagiographical text portrays the great Burgundian abbey of Cluny as an antagonist. Cluny is widely regarded as the paragon of Benedictine monasticism in this period, evident most clearly in the spread of its influence to affiliated religious houses. Geoffrey’s text provides an excellent example of resistance to Cluniac intrusion.

Unfortunately, the reader receives little guidance from Cline’s introduction and notes to the text. While the introduction does provide some general information on Geoffrey Grossus, the sources and structure of the *Life of Bernard*, and the career and legacy of its subject, it is deficient in several ways. The most striking omission is the lack of any sustained discussion of the genre of hagiography, its purpose and tropes, and—most importantly in a translation that students will use—the challenges and limitations of this genre as an historical source. It is not enough to say that “the *vita* must be cited selectively as a primary source” (p. xvi). There is a vast literature on this topic and some orientation toward it would certainly have helped readers who are new to this genre and its pitfalls. In general, the introduction is very brisk and suggests only a superficial acquaintance with the current historiography of eleventh- and twelfth-century monasticism. In one case (p. xxii, n. 30), Cline cites an unpublished conference paper that she presented in 2007; it is unclear how this benefits the reader. All told, this is the weakest part of the book. It is a shame that Cline did not take as her model the excellent introduction to Paolo Squatriti’s translation of *The Complete Works of Luidprand of Cremona*, published in the same series. [1]

In addition, many of the notes to the translation are disappointing as well. One example must suffice: the term *miles Christi* (“soldier of Christ”) appears numerous times throughout Geoffrey’s work, but when it first appears in the prologue Cline relates in a note, without any supporting evidence, only that “Benedictine monks considered themselves to be soldiers of Christ” (p. 6, n. 7). This is both self-evident and unhelpful. Moreover, it misses an important point that Geoffrey is reinforcing throughout the *vita*. Medieval readers would have immediately recognized the author’s allusion to the episode in Sulpicius Severus’ widely read *Life of Martin of Tours*, where the young Martin refused to fight in the army of Emperor Julian (361-363) with the words “I am a soldier of Christ; I am not allowed to fight.” [2] By overlooking the significance of this allusion, Cline fails to comment on the typology of sanctity that Geoffrey is employing to mark out his saintly subject as a new kind of Saint Martin, who during the fourth century preached in the very same vicinity as Bernard and likewise retreated from time to time to a hermitage for quiet contemplation.

These criticisms aside, many teachers will find Cline’s translation useful in the classroom. It makes available a little known text that offers a dynamic point of view on the religious currents coursing through twelfth-century Europe. Geoffrey’s *Life of Bernard of Tiron* is unlikely to find a place in broad surveys of western civilization or the Middle Ages, because it is unlikely to unseat the Investiture Controversy, the First Crusade or the torrid affair of Abelard and Heloise, long the staple sources for the history of the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries. Rather, this translation will be of most use to those teaching upper-division courses or seminars on the long twelfth century, where their students can read it alongside Bruce Venarde’s excellent *Robert of Arbrissel: A Medieval Religious Life* and other translations of contemporary source materials. [3]

NOTES

[1] *The Complete Works of Luidprand of Cremona*, translated with an introduction and notes by Paolo Squatriti, Medieval Texts in Translation Series (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007).

[2] Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* 4.2: “Christi ego miles sum; pugnare mihi non licet.” in *Sulpice Sévère: Vie de Saint Martin*, ed. Jacques Fontaine, 3 vols., Sources chrétiennes 133-35 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1967-69), vol. 1, p. 260.

[3] *Robert of Arbrissel: A Medieval Religious Life*, edited by Bruce L. Venarde, Medieval Texts in Translation Series (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003).

Scott G. Bruce
University of Colorado at Boulder
bruces@colorado.edu

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