

DOI: 10.18778/2084-140X.09.38

KAZIMIERZ GINTER, *Wizerunek władców bizantyńskich w Historii kościelnej Evagriusza Scholastyka [The Image of Byzantine Emperors in Evagrius Scholasticus's Ecclesiastical History]*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2018 [= *Byzantina Lodziensia*, 35], pp. 337*.

Kazimierz Ginter, the author of the present-ed book – published as part of the prestigious *Byzantina Lodziensia* series – is a theologian and historian affiliated with the Institute of Liturgical Studies at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross in Rome. His interests include the relations between the Church and the state in the late Antiquity, particularly in the territory of Byzantium.

This publication is based on the doctoral dissertation supervised by Maciej Salomon and defended in 2006 at the Jagiellonian University. Kazimierz Ginter's primary goal was to recreate and analyze the image of Roman emperors emerging from Evagrius Scholasticus's account *Ecclesiastical History* (p. 11). The researcher explains that he analyzed this source on two levels (p. 12). The first relates to the direct description of the emperors: their physical appearance as well as their strong and weak points. The second dimension included an indirect description based on an interpretation of the events which, according to Evagrius, could have resulted from the politics of individual rulers. Simultaneously, Ginter is aware that the image of the emperors presented in *Ecclesiastical History* is encumbered by the subjective approach of the author, including his personal sympathies and dislikes (p. 13). In the next section of the preface, the researcher provides an overview of the structure of his book and the applied method of comparative analysis of the source texts (p. 13–17).

The first part of the monograph is devoted to Evagrius and his work (p. 21–79). It starts

with a presentation of the current state of research on *Ecclesiastical History* (p. 21–24). Next, he examines the information on the biography of the author (p. 24–28). Subsequently, the researcher offers a thorough analysis of the factors that could have determined Evagrius's worldview (p. 28–49). He believes that the religious environment of Antioch, where the historian lived having completed his studies, played a role in this respect. Ginter also observes that the disputes surrounding the reception of the Council of Chalcedon in the East were not without significance (p. 29–40). Evagrius's reading of select religious works, whose list the researcher tries to reconstruct, was another key factor (p. 40). The author of the monograph also makes a connection between Evagrius's classical education and his later views (p. 41–46). The latter indeed makes multiple references to authors who represented the Hellenic tradition and wrote about Roman history. Ginter further examines the writer's local cultural circle (p. 46–48). The researcher is struck by the fact that *Ecclesiastical History* omits references to the Syriac-language culture, although it thrived at the time (p. 47–48). He believes that, contrary to common opinions, Evagrius spoke Syriac on a daily basis (p. 48).

A substantial section of the first part of the book is devoted to *Ecclesiastical History* itself (p. 50–79). It informs us that the events described in this source begin in the 430s and end in the 590s (p. 50). The researcher also explains why some other scholars recognize this work

* This text was created as part of the project financed from the funds of the National Science Centre, Poland, granted under decision no. DEC-2018/31/B/HS3/03038.

as reliable and objective (p. 50–51). He agrees with their views although he observes that Evagrius's use of Chalcedonian and monophysite sources does not comport with his objectivism (p. 51–52). Ginger further analyzes the literary background of *Ecclesiastical History*, referencing the texts used by the author and other works from the epoch, which he treats as comparative material (p. 54–68). These include other *Ecclesiastical Histories*, chronicles, hagiographies, and panegyrics. This approach allowed for showing the figure of Evagrius in a broader historiographical context. Subsequently, the researcher illustrates the views of the authors whose works, according to him, influenced the historian's idea about a perfect ruler (p. 60–79).

Part two offers a detailed analysis of *Ecclesiastical History* through the lens of how the Byzantine emperors were depicted in the book (p. 81–272). It begins with Evagrius's views on Constantine the Great (p. 81–84). Ginter concludes that according to the late-Antiquity historian, that emperor was a key figure in the history of the Church and had the features of an ideal ruler (p. 84). The scholar moves on to discussing the image of emperor Theodosius II painted on the pages of *Ecclesiastical History* (p. 85–107). An analysis of the source text leads him to believe that Evagrius considered this ruler to be a pious man, guided by the good of the Church, and a fighter against paganism and Nestorius's heresy (p. 106–107). He also held the emperor's wife, Eudocia, in high esteem. According to the scholar, the way Evagrius presented Theodosius's successor, Marcian (p. 107–133), and his accomplishments suggests beyond doubt that the historian was a Chalcedonian (p. 132). Nevertheless, based on numerous fragments in which he references the accusations made against the emperor, Ginter suspects that the author did not avoid contacts with the circle of Monophysites (p. 132–133). Regardless of that, in *Ecclesiastical History*, Marcian was also portrayed as a perfect ruler. Further considerations are devoted to Leon I (p. 133–142). The scholar remarks that Evagrius's portrayal of this ruler is rather obscure and rudimentary. The author focused predominantly on his pro-Church activities.

Ginter proposes a hypothesis according to which the historian's attitude was influenced by negative accounts of other authors (p. 142). The subsequent emperor whose image was recreated in the presented book is Zenon (p. 142–159). According to the researcher, *Ecclesiastical History* depicts this emperor as a tyrant. However, he points out that when discussing religious issues, Zenon's reign was presented by Evagrius rather neutrally (p. 159). Ginter observes that the description of Anastasius's rule is rather problematic (p. 159–186). On the one hand, Evagrius considers the religious stance of the emperor as little less than heresy. On the other, he is willing to acknowledge some of Anastasius's military achievements (p. 185–186). Regarding the figure of Justin I, the scholar recapitulates that Evagrius's attitude towards this emperor is completely neutral (p. 186–193). Although Justin was a firm supporter of the Council of Chalcedon, he did not garner any more sympathy for it in the eyes of Evagrius. This leads Ginter to believe that the religious motif was only one of the factors that determined the historian's characterization of a given figure (p. 193). The image of Justinian I is a different matter (p. 194–227). This is the only ruler whom Evagrius condemns, which is expressed by sending him to hell after death. According to the researcher, there are several factors that influenced the historian's negative attitude towards this emperor. These include: imposing high taxes on landowners, a gradual collapse of Antioch, and the Aphthartodocetae edict recognized in *Ecclesiastical History* as heresy (p. 226–227). Justin II was also portrayed in a negative way (p. 227–240). Ginter believes that in this case, the emperor's mental illness and the defeat in the war with Persians sufficed to portray him in a bad light. This might also have been an expression of solidarity with patriarch Anastasios II, who was in conflict with the emperor. In either case, the image of Justin II that emerges from *Ecclesiastical History* does not deviate from the accounts of other authors. The researcher believes that emphasizing the promiscuous lifestyle of the emperor might have been the result of recognizing him as a tyrant. Lechery was one of the canonical


accusations brought against tyrannical rulers. Ginter concludes that the historian approached the portrayal of the next emperor, Tiberius, in a very pragmatic way (p. 240–250). He did not describe the ruler's religious politics towards the Monophysites, which was marked by tolerance. Since he wrote about him soon after his death, he preferred to emphasize his generosity and military successes. Ginter remarks that the fact that Tiberius adopted the name Constantine at the coronation had a symbolic meaning for Evagrius. It signified the beginning of a new era in the empire's politics following the failed reigns of Justinian I and Justin II (p. 249–250). According to the researcher, Maurice is presented by the author of *Ecclesiastical History* as an ideal leader (p. 250–272). His policies are portrayed as a series of successes and his figure as a defendant of Christianity. Simultaneously, he overlooks the emperor's defects, such as greediness (p. 271–272).

The subsequent pages include a recapitulation, which concludes the book (p. 273–284).

The monograph also features a list of abbreviations (p. 321–326) and indices: of people (p. 327–333) and geographical and ethnic names (p. 335–337).

The presented publication not only enriches our knowledge about Evagrius Scholasticus and the environment in which he wrote but also offers an interesting overview of the history of the Byzantine empire in the 5th and 6th centuries. Kazimierz Ginter draws original conclusions and confronts them with popular formulations. Furthermore, he often debates common views. I am confident that this extremely interesting monograph will be embraced by the broad scholarly community, and will contribute to further discussion about the evolution of ecclesiastical historiography in the East.

Andrzej R. Hołasek (Łódź)*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0673-510X>

Translated by Katarzyna Szuster-Tardi

* University of Łódź, The Waldemar Ceran Research Centre for the History and Culture of the Mediterranean Area and South-East Europe *Ceraneum*