A 12th-century liturgical book of the Dalmatian port-town, Kotor (in present day Montenegro) has been edited and analysed from many perspectives by Richard F. Gyug. The second part of the volume contains the full text and musical notations of the manuscript, which is currently preserved in Sankt Petersburg, with a bibliography and indices at the end. The first part, modestly entitled an introduction, is a substantial monograph which consists of three thematic units. The first review the medieval history, political and cultural relations of the Latin rite communities of the eastern Adriatic coast, southern Dalmatia. The second is a traditional philological introduction on the physical characteristics, origin and date of the codex. The third part is the most voluminous one as it provides a detailed analysis of each liturgical chapter of the book: the choice and arrangement of lessons, pontifical services (so-called ordines) and also touches upon non-liturgical data, sermons and legal documents.

The author is a well-known expert of the field both for his interest in the Dalmatian area and for his competence in the interrelations of medieval society and liturgy. His present work is based upon more than 20 years of research.

The Kotor Pontifical connects several challenging research topics. Liturgy was one of the most prevalent means of self-expression and social interaction within pre-modern Europe. However, past centuries have been characterised by the gradual separation of religious and secular affairs, as a result ceremonial life has become more and more centralised and rigid, apart from the coeval tendencies of culture and society. In this context, exploring liturgy as the outcome of a creative process which constitutes and expresses identity is a novelty; and is so despite the fact that this approach does not deny that rituals are primarily defined by tradition and continuity.

The geographic scope is also interesting in its own right. Dalmatia is a borderline on the liturgical map of medieval Europe, one that is difficult to classify even in broad terms. While being a frontier of both western and eastern (Serbian or Byzantine) Christendom, its most striking peculiarities indicate a Beneventan influence; nevertheless, it was also affected by other mighty traditions it came into contact with such as Norman Sicily and Southern Italy, the Hungarian Kingdom or Venice.

The genre of the book is problematic, too. Contrarily to hard-structured liturgical actions, i.e. the Mass and the Divine Office, wherein a repertory of changeable items is adapted into an unchanging structure thus enabling a somewhat mechanical comparison, the rites included in a pontifical are soft-structured and more variable. No general principles, methods, or research tools have yet been laid down for their analysis; furthermore, the theoretical framework of such research is yet to be outlined. Albeit many ceremonies can be differentiated on local or institutional grounds, defining themselves as the custom of a single diocese, abbey or religious order, Pontificals became progressively internationalised from an early time, as their owners, the bishops, were no longer attached to the same diocese and cathedral for their lifetimes.

The history, policies and cultural context of medieval Kotor and its southern Dalmatian environment is an arresting read. Beyond the compelling amount of information, these chapters introduce all factors that may have been taken into account during the formation of the liturgy and identity of Kotor. The historical review serves as a foundation for the liturgical analysis that reasonably considers these factors as possible sources of the creation of a new and independent Dalmatian liturgical identity.

Following this approach, the main principle of the liturgical analysis is that the Kotor Pontifical is similar to a charter of this identity, one that cannot be deduced from any other extant tradition. Gyug deeply understands and highlights the momentum of creativity, to which the related books, texts, melodies and gestures provided not a model but simply raw
material. This perspective that considers medi-
Ave liturgical uses as genuine redactions of
herited elements might prove very operable
and inspiring in future research.

Indirectly, the Kotor manuscript is also in-
terpreted within the history of its genre. The
estimated time of its creation, around the year
1166, was the last moment when a Pontifical
could still hold a regional character. Compar-
isons with its closest parallel, the Dubrovnik
Pontifical – still at least 100 years younger –
are illustrative. While certain elements clearly
indicate a Dalmatian continuity, it is also ob-
vious that the tendency of „internationalisa-
tion“ slowly prevailed.

The book holds special merit in founding its
statements on a detailed but synthetic eval-
uation of liturgical evidence instead of non-
liturgical information, data arbitrarily cited
out of context, or historical generalities. As
a result, these chapters provide an excellent
starting-point and a recent bibliography for
the study of any ordo in the pontifical, not just
the manuscript in its own right.

Emphasis is laid on the manuscript as a
physical object, an approach that is only par-
tially accounted for by the editor’s interest
and expertise in paleographical and codico-
logical matters. He does not overlook that the
book is more than an aid for performing rit-
ual. It is a representative of all episcopal func-
tions as to the liturgy, its interpretation and
regulation, preaching, juridical activity, and
above all a symbol of the bishop’s authority.
A susceptibility to living celebration can be
observed in the perspicuous layout of the or-
dines and especially in the transcription of all
musically notated items which have not been
neglected, contrary to the practice of several
other editions of liturgical texts.

As highlighted above, research into episco-
pal rites faces many difficulties. Unsurpris-
ingly, not even this pivotal work could avoid
some of these. Namely, the methodology be-
hind Gyug’s outstanding studies is somewhat
casual. His selection of sources is regional, i.e.
focused on southern Italy and Dalmatia. This
source material is augmented by documents
from other areas however the latter are se-
lected in a haphazard way. Nevertheless, this
eventuality is properly balanced by the sheer
amount of evidence from which statistically
relevant conclusions are drawn. More prob-
lematic is the fact that different approaches
are employed incongruently while comparing
sources and rites. Examples can be found in
the selection and arrangement of liturgi-
cal items, nonverbal gestures, the phrasing
of some rubrics, or micro-philological facts
(small textual variants). While these are all in-
formative they behave differently in the pro-
cess of transmission and reworking. This in-
congruence can also be apprehended in the vi-
ualisation of results in tables some of which
are difficult to understand.

Presumably, these shortcomings should not
be deduced from deficiencies of thorough-
ness and method but rather from a humble
forbearance from theorizing and unfounded
hypothesizing. E.g. a number of the de-
tailed analyses indicate a relationship be-
tween the Kotor ordines and two particu-
lar groups of sources, one being Old Span-
ish (or Mozarabic), the other English liturgy.
The summaries do not examine these con-
nections in detail, most probably due to the
lack of direct evidence in surviving sou-
thern Italian Pontificals. However, one must
take into account that the historian of the
liturgy is often faced with phenomena that in
later, well documented periods are peculiar to
the Iberian Peninsula but can sporadically be
found in Italy, too. It is probably this „proto-
Mediterranean“ layer that can be observed in
the Kotor Pontifical. Futhermore, if Norman
sources are not interpreted within a Norman-
Sicilian but within an Anglo-Norman domain
– to which the Norman traditions of Sicily
and southern Italy are only an offset – it is an
established hypothesis that texts which have
only survived in English sources may still
have been available in the Mediterraneum of
the 12th century.

As for the crushing apparatus of sources: a
great portion of it serves only to burden the
critical edition. Since, despite considerable
losses, a large number of liturgical books have
remained extant and they are linked in sev-
eral ways based on the nature of their con-
tent, citing all these within the frame of an
apparatus is by no means informative. Such
items ought to be listed in dynamic databases,
not in printed editions; in their current form
they more illustrate the erudition of the editor,
which is beyond dispute, than provide genuine information. It should also be noted that the sources of the system of lessons – contrary to the ordines – were selected mostly on genetic, not geographic or typological grounds, i.e. sources of an earlier origin were preferred. In this respect Gyug is slightly uncritical towards mainstream 20th century approaches which he surpasses in other respects.

The single truly objective deficiency of the volume is the quality of the Latin text therein. Naturally, a reviewer who was originally trained a classical scholar may be oversensitive, nevertheless a grammatical proofreading would have been desirable. There are already minor lapses in the Latin texts quoted in the introduction. However, in the edition itself one cannot distinguish between the failures of the editor and those of the original. The main text of the edition is pointlessly faithful to the manuscript: obvious errors and misspellings are meticulously reproduced while the critical apparatus corrects only some – and not the worst – of them.

The monographic introduction by Richard F. Gyug is a pioneering work both on the analysis of episcopal ceremonies and on the genesis of local liturgical customs. It brings the Dalmatian coast into the scope of Latin liturgical history and highlights the coherence of its tradition. The text edition leaves a little to be desired but this is outshone by the pleasure that a hardly accessible source has become studiable through its means. The reviewer is indebted to and sympathises with his elder colleague as he has come to similar experiences and conclusions over the last decade when analysing an 11th-century Pontifical, the MR 165 codex preserved in the Metropolitan Library of Zagreb, a charter of the creation of the Hungarian liturgical use.